

SEX-ROLE ORIENTATION: EFFECT ON SELF-ESTEEM, NEED
ACHIEVEMENT AND INTERNALITY IN COLLEGE FEMALES

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Summary.—This study investigated the effect of sex-role orientation on self-esteem, *n* Achievement, and internality in 98 college females. Specifically it was predicted that (a) college females possessing a non-traditional sex-role orientation would score higher in *n* Achievement than those possessing a traditional sex-role orientation; (b) no statistical difference would exist in the self-esteem scores of the two groups; and (c) the strength of the relationship between self-esteem and internality would vary for "non-traditional" ($r = .41$) and "traditional" females ($r = .11$). All three hypotheses received support from data of 98 undergraduates.

Although it is generally recognized that socialized sex-role stereotypes with their associated values influence individual self-conceptions, little empirical evidence is available. It is seemingly clear that the pervasiveness of such societally endorsed stereotypes substantially influences individual self-perceptions and affects behavioral responses based on these perceptions (O'Leary, 1974). The present study was designed to determine (a) whether college females with non-traditional standards of femininity would score higher in self-esteem and need achievement than their traditional counterparts and (b) the extent to which such sex-role attitudes would moderate the relationship between self-esteem and internality in college females.

Data were collected to test the following predictions. (1) Although college females with traditional and non-traditional standards of femininity integrate their self-perceptions with the stereotypes and values associated with sex-role attitudes, no difference would exist in their level of self-esteem. This prediction stems from the findings of Korman (1976) which showed that all else equal, individuals select and find satisfying those behavioral roles which maximize their sense of cognitive consistency or balance. It is plausible to anticipate that the extent to which a woman's self-esteem incorporates traditional versus non-traditional stereotypic notions is largely influenced by the degree to which such notions promote her cognitive balance. According to traditional self theory, such an integration of social expectations with personal values is essential to adaptive development (Deutsch & Gilbert, 1976).

(2) Based on a recent review by Stein and Bailey (1973) which concluded that high need achievement (*n* Achievement) is particularly characteristic of

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females who endorse sex-role attitudes which depart from traditional feminine pursuits, it was predicted that college females with non-traditional standards of femininity would score higher in achievement motivation than would their traditional counterparts. (3) The relationship between self-esteem and internality would be greater for college females with non-traditional standards of femininity than for those with traditional standards. This prediction was based on the traditional conceptualization of high self-esteem persons as valuing themselves highly and as seeing themselves as being competent to deal effectively with their environment (Cohen, 1959) and on the work of Fitch (1970) which showed a significant and positive correlation between locus of control and self-esteem.

METHOD

The subjects were 98 undergraduate female students enrolled in an introductory course in management in 1977. During regularly scheduled class sessions all subjects completed the revised Fand Inventory of Sex-role Orientation (Gump, 1972) which purports to measure traditional versus non-traditional sex-role attitudes, Mehrabian's (1969) Achievement Scale for Females, a measure of achievement tendency specifically designed to discriminate high from low achievers, Coopersmith's shortened 25-item version of the Self-esteem Inventory (Self-esteem Institute, 1974), a central measure of self-esteem, and Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Locus of Control Scale, a measure of external control of reinforcement.

The Fand inventory produced both a traditional and non-traditional sex-role orientation score for each subject. These scores were converted to z scores, and for each subject a z -score difference was calculated following a standard procedure outlined by Gump (Personal communication, February 15, 1977). This process produced a composite sex-role orientation score for each subject. The resulting distribution was then divided into "traditional" ($n = 32$, upper third) and "non-traditional" ($n = 32$, lower third) groups ($t_{62} = 14.12$, $p < .001$). Based on this classification, a standard t test for differences between independent means was employed to determine the validity of the study's first and second propositions, i.e., (a) no statistical difference would exist in the self-esteem scores of the two groups and (b) college females possessing a non-traditional sex-role orientation would score higher in n Achievement than would those possessing a traditional sex-role orientation. A Pearson product-moment correlation was computed between n Achievement and I-E scores for both groups to test the study's final proposition that the association between internality would be greater for the "non-traditional" than for the "traditional" group.

RESULTS

In Table 1, as predicted, the data indicate (a) that there was no significant difference between the self-esteem scores of the two groups and (b) that "non-

TABLE 1
SELF-ESTEEM AND NEED ACHIEVEMENT FOR FEMALES

Variables	Traditional Sex-role orientation (<i>n</i> = 32)		Non-traditional Sex-role orientation (<i>n</i> = 32)		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Self-esteem	69.50	20.84	72.25	15.31	-.60
Need Achievement	29.28	11.14	36.34	14.52	-2.18*

**p* < .05, two-tailed test.

traditional" females scored significantly higher in *n* Achievement than did their traditional counterparts. Further, as anticipated, the correlation between self-esteem and internality was significantly and moderately ($z = -1.83$, $p < .05$, one-tailed test) higher for "non-traditional" ($r = -.41$, $df = 30$, $p < .05$) but not for "traditional" ($r = -.11$, $df = 30$) females. Such results suggest that, although the sex-role orientations of college females with traditional and non-traditional standards of femininity are dissimilar, both orientations allow for the expression of a similar degree of self-esteem. Of significance are the results that "non-traditional" college females are more likely (a) to strive for greater achievement and (b) to demonstrate a high association between self-esteem and the tendency to attribute success to their own efforts rather than to external forces.

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