

ASSESSMENT OF SEX STEREOTYPES
WITHIN TASK GROUP SIMULATION

Jerald R. Smith
University of Louisville
School of Business

INTRODUCTION

While considerable rhetoric and research continues on the relative merits of gaming and experiential learning, many academicians involved with these techniques have settled back into a comfortable daily use of a favorite game or experiential device. Only by chance did the writer overhear a remark between two students which lead to this paper. A female student remarked to a male student, "I'll keep all the records and minutes for our team if you guys make all the decisions." Is this type of behavior common? Do the males on a team expect the female(s) to be responsible for that part of the team's duties that is perceived as "women's work?" Do the females on a team succumb to sex stereotyping? If this phenomenon does exist, as educators we need to be aware of this if we ever expect to help eliminate sex stereotyping in business.

LITERATURE REVIEW

If advertising content is any indicator, the business world has not entirely met its responsibility in eliminating sex stereotyping. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) analyzed commercial advertising for the portrayal of women's roles and found that only 9% of the women were portrayed in working roles, compared to 45% for men. In a follow-up study by Wagner and Banos, they found that by 1973 the percentage of women portrayed in working roles had risen to 21%. In a very comprehensive study comparing magazine ad role portrayals over the period of 1959 to 1971, Venkatesan and Losco (1975) also found heavy sex stereotyping. These studies all seemed to suggest four major sexual stereotypes for women:

1. That a woman's place is in the home
2. That women don't make important decisions
3. That women are dependent on men
4. That men regard women primarily as sex objects

Similar findings were made by Dominick and Rauch (1974) upon examining nearly 1,000 prime time commercials on television. How much influence advertising has on attitudes has not been determined but it would appear to be a contributing factor.

Traditional male attitudes concerning female stereotypes has definitely affected the female in the work world. Studies

by Athanassiades (1975) and Dipboye (1975) support the idea that females in business do suffer from prejudicial stereotyping. While stereotyping seems to help females obtain such jobs as sales clerks, it hinders them in such areas as industrial selling (Robertson and Hackett, 1977). A recent survey by the Research Institute of America showed that 81% of the companies surveyed have not hired any saleswomen.

Some insight as to the problem of integrating women more fully into all levels of the workforce can be gleaned from a study of male managers' attitudes toward working women (Bass, Krusell, and Alexander, 1977). The male managers did not feel that women would make good supervisors; this does not appear to be because females were perceived to be less capable than men but rather that the managers felt that other males and females would be uncomfortable with a female supervisor. Bass suggests that societal norms do not sanction the placement of women in dominant positions. Another factor influencing male managers which was brought out in the study was a perceived lack of dependability on the part of women. The respondents felt women were not as dependable as men because of the biological and personal characteristics of women. The data indicated that men who did not work with women had more positive regard for women than the men who did. In addition, managers who had women as peers had more negative reactions toward women working than managers who did not have women as peers. Bass speculates that managers may experience a loss of esteem when women are given positions comparable to their own (e.g., "if a woman can do the job it must not be very important").

Rosen and Jerdee (1974) studied discrimination in assessment of applicants for routine versus demanding jobs (the latter defined as those jobs requiring aggressive interpersonal behavior and decisive managerial action). They found there is much more discrimination against females when the job is perceived as demanding and challenging. A study by Orzeck (1972) concerning stereotypes and expectations showed that males will more often be expected to perform competitively and females will more often be expected to perform cooperatively. If the generalizations of these two studies carry over into role definition in business gaming, serious implications arise as to the assignment of tasks within teams.

What we have at this juncture is a mixture of attitudes and practices concerning stereotypes. The key questions naturally follows: Which perceptions are based on actual versus fictional differences in the sexes? What are the real intellectual and emotional differences between males and females? One of the most comprehensive literature reviews was conducted by Maccoby (1974). The study concluded there are four sex differences fairly well established by research and eight unfounded beliefs about sex differences. They are:

Unfounded Beliefs About Sex Differences

1. Girls are more social than boys
2. Girls are more suggestible than boys
3. Girls have a lower self-esteem than boys
4. Girls are better at rote learning and boys are better at higher cognitive processes
5. Boys are more analytic than girls
6. Girls are more affected by heredity; boys are more affected by environment
7. Girls have less achievement motivation than boys
8. Girls are more auditory; boys are more visual

Sex Differences That Are Fairly Well Established by Research

9. Girls have greater verbal ability than boys
10. Boys excel in visual-spatial ability
11. Boys excel in mathematical ability
12. Boys are more aggressive than girls

(Maccoby, 1974, p. 349)

A study by Croth (1976) of attitudes of college students indicates that seventy percent or more of the responses agreed with the research results reported by Maccoby. The statements which students correctly identified as being unfounded were number 3 (girls have lower self-esteem), 4 (girls are better at rote learning), 6 (girls are more affected by heredity, boys by environment) and 7 (girls have less motivation). The one statement which students correctly identified as true is number 12 (males are more aggressive).

If unfounded beliefs about sex differences are prevalent in the classroom environment where small group (i.e., team) interaction occurs, certain sex role implications might logically follow. For example, if students felt males were more analytic than females, then males would be more prone to take over the decision-making duties and females would be more prone to allow this to happen. If students felt females were more suggestible, male team members might have the notion that they could “run the show” and female team members might feel they should be “followers.” Perhaps adding to this “male as leader” notion is the proven sex difference of male aggressiveness which the majority of students in the Croth study correctly identified as being true. If students relate the trait of aggressiveness with leadership or competitiveness, strong feelings concerning males in leadership roles might result.¹ This attitude, combined with the results of the Bass

¹ It should be noted that the sex difference of aggression appears to be in relation to physical and verbal aggression and it does not mean the same thing as assertion. Croth (1976, p. 333) correctly points out there is a difference. While aggression implies an intent to harm, assertion implies standing up for one’s rights or working toward one’s goals.

study which suggested males do not feel females make good managers, would add to the pressure to select a male as president on a business game team. In tabulating my records for the past six years, I found that on coed teams, nine of ten teams selected a male president! Whether this is a function of sexism or merely the fact that males outnumber females three to one at my school is yet to be determined.

Although sociologists have observed that males and females approach situations in which they have to work with people differently, current research has largely removed empirical support for this proposition. Although researchers continue to observe sex differences in behavior in task-oriented situations, Meeker and Weitzel feel that sex roles might be the result of status processes. "Since men have higher status than women, men are expected to be more competent than women, and it is expected that competitive or dominating behavior is legitimate for men but not for women." (Meeker, p. 91).

One of the problems in this area is that a lack of leadership experience by females perpetuates male dominance of managerial positions. Williams (1976) explains it well: ". . . they have not been given early "boot camp" training. Therefore, they may either lack the self-confidence to take on tough assignments, or they will not have had the chance to prove themselves to their compatriots. Perhaps, more importantly, they may not have had the chance to practice leadership skills in middle level jobs. This theory has direct implications in the classroom in which business gaming is used. If females are, in fact, given the more routine tasks (e.g., secretarial tasks), they will not be getting the "boot camp" training referred to by Williams and any attempt at more difficult assignments on the team could result in less than desired performance. Based on the above sample of the literature, it would appear there is the very real possibility of sex stereotyping by students involved on business game teams. A preliminary study was undertaken by the writer and is described below.

THE SURVEY

A questionnaire was administered to ninety students in two sections of an undergraduate business policy course during the Fall 1977 semester at the University of Louisville School of Business. The major purpose of the inquiry was to determine the extent of sex stereotyping and a secondary objective was to determine the extent of other types of prejudice which may have been involved during the semester. Since 25 students were on all-male teams, these responses were not tabulated. Students were instructed not to sign the questionnaire to assure anonymity and it was administered after the final exam. The questionnaire was pre-tested and certain minor changes were made. The results which are presented on Table I are preliminary findings; however, the proportion of responses to certain statements does indicate a certain degree of sex

stereotyping did occur in this particular instance. Table I lists the statements which students were asked to agree or disagree with along with the number and percentage of students who agreed with the statement. A five point Likert-type scale was used.

DISCUSSION

Not all questions asked were involved with stereotyping but should be of interest to gamers. For example, the responses to statement one indicate the president for a majority of teams was selected on the basis of verbal ability. Is this desirable? Is the best talker the best leader? There is evidence teams were not satisfied with the president they selected (see statement 4). In another area, some students felt it would be beneficial if they switched team duties sometime during the semester (see statement 11). Could a more complete learning experience result if this were the case? These are areas which require more experimentation and research.

In the area of sex discrimination, there is prima facie evidence of sexism in this particular study even if the responses to the questionnaire were not considered. Although the classes consisted of 30% females, of the 24 teams only two (or 8%) had female presidents. However, there is even more solid evidence of sex role stereotyping indicated by the significant number of male responses which were in agreement with statements 2, 3, 7, 8, 9.

Adding weight to the evidence of sexism is the fact that females were carrying a proportionately heavier clerical load for their teams, and worse yet, some females volunteered to do so (see responses to statement 5 and 6). One interesting contradiction in the responses on the questionnaire is shown in statement 12. Although the other responses indicate the presence of sexist attitudes and practices, the vast majority of students did not feel as though sexual prejudice had occurred as only 6% reported sexual prejudice. However this is not surprising as the literature on attitude measurement consistently warns of respondents' desire to make socially acceptable responses (Lemon, 1973).

CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown that in this preliminary study there was sex stereotyping occurring within the business game teams. Whether this is common among students involved in small group decision-making remains to be investigated. The literature in the field indicates the reasons for stereotyping are deeply rooted in the history of civilization. It is not something that can be solved quickly. However, as academicians we need to determine the extent of the problem in our classes and investigate means of eliminating stereotyping.

TABLE I
RESULTS OF
QUESTIONNAIRE ON TEAM ROLES

	Number and Percent of "Agree" Responses		
	Male N= 45	Female N = 20	Total N = 65
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1. The job of president on our team went to the person who seemed to display good verbal skills.	35 (70)	16 (80)	51 (78)
2. If high profits were to determine the winner of a game, it would probably be better if the team were predominately male.	14 (31)	2 (10)	16 (25)
3. Due to the traits a strong president must have, it would be better if a male held this post.	17 (38)	3 (15)	20 (31)
4. There were times during the semester that I thought it would be better if the president were someone else.	22 (49)	5 (25)	27 (42)
5. The female(s) on our team had more clerical tasks than did the male members.	18 (40)	12 (60)	36 (55)
6. One or more females on our team volunteered to do the majority of the clerical tasks.	10 (22)	6 (30)	22 (34)
7. The female members on our team were generally less aggressive than the male members.	8 (18)	3 (15)	11 (17)
8. There are certain jobs on a team which could probably be done better by males.	12 (27)	4 (20)	16 (25)
9. There are certain jobs on a team which could probably be done better by females.	13 (29)	5 (25)	23 (35)
10. The female members of our team usually participated more in team discussions than did the male members.	1 (02)	2 (10)	3 (05)
11. The instructor should require that team members switch jobs about mid-semester. I think there may have been certain prejudices exhibited (either overtly or covertly) toward certain team members because of:	10 (22)	3 (15)	13 (20)
12. Sex	3 (07)	1 (05)	4 (06)
13. Race	1 (02)	0 (00)	1 (02)
14. Style or condition of clothing; or hairstyle	6 (09)	0 (00)	6 (09)
15. Speech (poor grammar, or a distinct geographical or ethnic dialect)	8 (18)	4 (20)	12 (18)

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