NEW AGE ROLES*
Are we preparing girls and boys for personal and social change?

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Abstract

This paper suggests that changes in society, particularly Western nations, require us to look at male and female development and youth preparation for future roles from a systems perspective. As indicators of need to use different methods of career guidance, the author cites 1) the narrow range of possibilities from which girls and boys choose; 2) the gap between perceptions and reality; 3) the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotyping and its limiting effects; 4) the growing linkage between work and family roles; and 5) the lack of communication between the sexes about future roles and goals. She suggests that the reality of social change, difficult though it is for some to accept, requires us to more adequately prepare youth for the exponential change which is occurring around the world. She analyzes some of the changes which have occurred and discusses possible consequences for individuals, work, and family.

Introduction

The problems of preparing youth for a new age require that we examine the topic from a systems perspective, from a viewpoint of male and female development and not only women's development. My basic premises are that sex-role issues affect both women and men, that one sex cannot redefine its roles without having a powerful effect on the other, that inequities in development and opportunity begin in the early years, at home, at school, and in the workplace and are reinforced at every stage of development, and that through an understanding of and an openness to change, counselors, psychologists, parents, and educators can help to reduce the barriers to develop-

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ment and expand life options. While there are of course cross-cultural differences related to sex roles, especially in Third World countries, I believe there are a number of common issues in industrialized nations, and it is on these that I would like to focus. I have set forth my view of global trends which support change in another article (Sundal-Hansen, 1981).

A systems perspective can be helpful in many ways, as it allows us to examine the whole and determine how change in one part affects other parts. It means that we need to look at not only counseling women and girls but counseling boys and men, not at work alone but how work relates to family, education, and leisure, not only how people fit into work but to existential questions of work and meaning in life, not only at the individual but at the culture and ways we make decisions both for personal growth and societal need, not only at one-to-one counseling but at systematic developmental career guidance programs through which we can achieve the goals of both individual and societal development. Such a framework also helps increase awareness of the conscious and nonconscious barriers, internal and external, which limit expectations, aspirations, and behavior. Part of this context is the sex-role system, which has a powerful effect on our options. The male role has been defined by work, the female, by family.

The Sex-Role System

The sex-role system is at the core of our cultural norms (Chetwynd and Hartnett, 1978). An understanding of this system is a prerequisite to understanding ourselves, our students or clients, and our society in general. In approaching this topic, it is important to distinguish among several related yet differentiated terms.

Sex-Role System is the network of attitudes, feelings and behaviors which result from the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotyping in the culture. Sex-Role Orientation is the attitudes we hold about masculinity and femininity and masculine and feminine roles while Sex-Role Ideology is a normative view of appropriate behavior for males and females, i.e., a view of what females and males 'should' do.

Stereotypes are the characteristics, habits, abilities, and expectations arbitrarily assigned to people solely on the basis of group membership, regardless of their attributes as individuals. Sex Difference Stereotypes are perceptions of typical characteristics (personality traits, interests, etc.) and behavior of females and males, these represent views of what males and females 'are like.'

Chetwynd and Hartnett (1978) have pointed out that there are three factors which are of major importance to the sex-role system.

1) The assignment on the basis of sex of one of two different series of personality traits, the masculine and feminine stereotype. They are thought of as dichotomies at opposite ends of a continuum (Note how we usually talk about 'the opposite sex'). The male stereotype is one of dominance, aggressiveness, objectivity, and problem-solver, the female stereotype is one of passivity, tenderness, subjectivity, and dependence.

2) The allocation on the basis of sex of different categories considered to be necessary or useful for the sustenance or improvement of living. The division of