Sex Role Socialization and the Development of Achievement Motivation in Black Preschool Children

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The effect of sex role socialization practices on the achievement motivation (Nach) of black preschool children of differing social-class levels was examined. A factor analysis of the Katz Sex Role Socialization Scale revealed several factors. These varied in their effect on two types of achievement motivation. In general, the hypothesis that nontraditional sex role training leads to higher achievement motivation for girls, and that traditional sex role training leads to higher achievement motivation for boys, received support. The importance of treating sex role socialization as multidimensional was stressed.

Patterns of parental socialization are regarded as important factors in the development of achievement motivation. Research has suggested that childhood independence and achievement training are the most salient of these. Thus, children who are taught early to master tasks, and to do so on their own, tend to be higher in achievement motivation, or need for achievement (Nach), than children who do not receive such training (Berens, 1972; Callard, 1968; Carr, 1982; Herman, TerLaak, & Maes, 1972; Winterbottom, 1958).

An examination of the content of independence and achievement training measures reveals a similarity to sex role socialization practices. Parents are more likely to encourage boys than girls to be self-reliant and achievement oriented, a differential treatment consistent with the sex differences

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noted in achievement behavior (Crandall, 1967; Hoffman, 1975; Stein & Bailey, 1973). Although some studies indicate that the distinction in sex role socialization is less apparent among certain ethnic groups, particularly blacks (Ladner, 1971, Lewis, 1975), it would appear even black boys and girls are socialized differently (e.g., Reid, 1982).

In Hoffman's (1975) early examination of the socialization issue, she recognized the importance of establishing a separate self as a critical component of achievement behavior, and she argued that separation is easily accomplished for boys since they have more conflict with the mother. Girls, in sharp contrast, experience too much maternal support and protection, a pattern, Hoffman reasoned, results in low motivation for autonomy and achievement. Stein and Bailey (1973) reached similar conclusions in their critical review. They noted that the major theme emerging from the sex role socialization literature suggested that, for girls, child-rearing practices are often antagonistic to those associated with achievement orientation and related characteristics.

Studies that have explored the origin of nontraditional sex role behavior in the achievement area are also germane. A girl is most likely to develop patterns of achievement striving when her parents practice moderate levels of warmth (Crandall, Preston & Rabson, 1960; Crowne, Conn, Marlowe, & Edwards, 1969; Kagan & Freeman, 1963; Moss, 1967), allow moderate to high permissiveness (Baumrind, 1971; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Herman et al., 1972), make high demands on the child (Crandall et al., 1960) and when they reinforce and encourage achievement efforts (Callard, 1968; Kagan & Moss, 1962). Achievement behavior can also be learned through identification with a mother engaged in a nontraditional achievement-oriented career (Banducci, 1967; Douvan & Adelson, 1966). In essence, the evidence suggests that socialization practices that stimulate achievement striving for girls are closer to male than to female sex role expectations.

While the latter findings are interesting and suggestive, it is important to keep in mind that they were obtained with methodologies not specifically designed to investigate the relationship between sex role socialization and achievement behavior. Moreover, such studies have been conducted almost exclusively with white families. Although there has been considerable attention to race differences in sex role socialization and some speculation about socialization sources of black male and female achievement (e.g., Reid, 1982), these speculations have not been directly tested.

The effect of family social class in mediating the relationship between sex role socialization and Nach is still another issue. There is evidence that sex role socialization tends to vary with social class. Several studies have reported that middle-class families are more likely to be nontraditional in their sex role training, while the opposite trends to be true of lower class families (Biller, 1971; Gould, 1976; Kerckhoff, 1972; Kohn, 1973; Shostak,