The Relationship Between Sex Role Stereotypes and Requisite Management Characteristics Among College Students

Virginia E. Schein, Ruediger Mueller, and Carolyn Jacobson
Gettysburg College

The relationship between sex role stereotypes and characteristics perceived as necessary for management success was examined among male and female undergraduate management students and compared with results of managers today as well as with those of managers studied 15 years ago. Male management students, similar to their managerial counterparts in the 1980s and 1970s, still adhere to the male managerial stereotype and perceive that successful middle managers possess characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men in general than to women in general. Female management students, similar to today's female managers, no longer sex type the managerial job, a change from the female managers of the 1970s. Implications of these outcomes for undergraduate management education are discussed.

In the early 1970s Schein demonstrated a relationship between sex role stereotyping and characteristics needed for management success. Both male (Schein, 1973) and female (Schein, 1975) middle managers were shown to perceive successful middle managers as possessing characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men in general than to women in general. Such sex role stereotyping of the managerial job can engender the view that women are less qualified than men for management positions, and can impact negatively on the selection and promotion of women into such positions (Schein, 1978).

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In a replication of this research 15 years later, Brenner, Tomkiewicz, and Schein (1989) found that female middle managers no longer sex type the managerial job. They saw some traits necessary for success as more likely to be held by women and others as more likely to be held by men. On the other hand, Brenner et al. found no change in the attitudes of today's male middle managers compared to their counterparts 15 years ago. They continue to believe the characteristics necessary for managerial success are more likely to be held by men than by women.

Given that males still predominate as senior management decision makers (Trafford, Avery, Thorton, Carey, Galloway, & Sanoff, 1984), Brenner et al. point out the importance of maintaining affirmative action programs to ensure women's equal treatment. According to the researchers, “such structural changes have allowed women to advance in spite of stereotypical attitudes. The original attitudes, at least among male managers, persist. If the structural efforts were to be reduced, then we might experience a backsliding to more discriminatory times” (p. 12).

Do today's management students sex type the management position, or do they see men and women as equally likely to possess the characteristics necessary for managerial success? How similar are their attitudes to those of today's managers? The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between sex role stereotypes and characteristics necessary for management success among management students and compare the outcomes to those of managers in the 1980s and managers in the 1970s.

Related research suggests few differences among the groups, at least among males. Dubno (1985) measured managerial attitudes toward women executives among MBA students. Between 1975 and 1983 male MBA students retained consistently negative attitudes toward women as managers. Powell and Butterfield (1986) found that samples of male undergraduate and part-time graduate business students queried in 1976-1977 and in 1984-1985 continued to view the “good managers” in masculine terms. For male management students, therefore, it was hypothesized that successful middle managers would be perceived to possess those attitudes, characteristics, and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men in general than to women in general. Although Brenner et al. (1989) found that female managers no longer sex type the managerial position, the outcomes of prior research on female student attitudes are mixed. Dubno (1985) found that female MBA students held consistently positive attitudes toward women as managers. On the other hand, the female students in the Powell and Butterfield (1986) study, similar to their male counterparts, viewed the “good manager” in masculine terms in 1976-1977 and in 1984-1985 as well. Given the limited and contradictory research evidence, it was hypothesized that female management students would also perceive successful middle managers as possessing those attitudes,