

GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPING ON THE JOBS

K. S. Pantileienko, English Teacher, Philology Department

Dnipro State Agrarian and Economic University, Dnipro, Ukraine

Practically all societies have some kind of sex-based division of labour, although the extent of the separation and isolation of women varies considerably from one country to another. Stereotypes concerning appropriate behaviour for women will vary accordingly. Where women are pioneering by assuming managerial and top administrative positions, they are challenging by their very existence long held expectations and stereotypes. Many women, as well as men, prefer not to be the “first” pioneer in developing new careers, new fields, or new roles. The psychological, social, and even economic challenges are many for those women and men who seek innovative roles. A woman who chooses to fill a position previously filled only by men must invent, test, and refine behaviour patterns in entirely new situations, knowing that her colleagues are watching to see whether she will try to be “one of the boys” or will attempt to alter their expectations about behaviour associated with that position. Role models become extremely important here. An individual looks for one or more persons who have similar personal characteristics and who are already in positions similar to those to which the individual aspires. Upwardly mobile men have plenty of examples of men at higher levels and can easily identify with at least a few of them. Pioneering women, however, can find few if any women who are already highly placed in most organizations. At best, an entry level woman finds one or two women at higher levels. She may or may not identify with their role behaviour. Only when a number of women hold high positions in many organizations will entry level women have enough potential role models to find models whose abilities and styles they admire. The lack of female role models in top organizational positions broadcasts a “no entrance” signal to the most qualified and interested women. While some women do respond adventurously, men do not have this additional barrier to confront. Once roles have been destereotyped sexually, both men and women will pursue careers based on their abilities and inclinations, rather than following the paths taken most often by members of their sex. The extent to which top female bureaucrats actually were pioneers and the ways in which they experienced the pioneering role were questions of concern to the researchers.

Being the only or one of very few highly placed women in an organisation brings with it a number of problems which male leaders in those organizations do not have to

face. Isolation is one of these. Most leadership positions are filled by men who are used to relating to women as mother, sister, daughter, or secretary-assistant. Many professional males have never worked with a female colleague. The “token” woman in a top management position consequently must work not only to develop her own style, but must also work to make her male colleagues comfortable with her. She must spend extra effort to communicate with her male colleagues and to be included in their informal activities and discussions. As one or one of a few highly placed women, she is not only isolated but she is also very visible and constantly being watched. Whereas most men entering a job can make a few mistakes that are overlooked, a woman in the same position is under great pressure to perform well every minute. If she makes a mistake, her male colleagues may infer that “women” are inappropriate for the job. If she does well, they are just as likely to conclude that she is exceptional and that most women could not do as well. In the first case, she reflects poorly on the entire group of potential female employees; if she does well, she is separated from “expectations” about women and becomes isolated from her female cohort. The interview schedule attempted to probe how “pioneering” respondents perceived themselves and their job situation in light of these hypotheses.

Still another barrier to advancement for women comes from the disjunction between the passive socialization training for women in most societies and the requirements for advancement that most organizations present. While qualified women do not automatically get the top jobs, they are more likely to be promoted if they express ambition, seek difficult assignments, and speak out on issues. Supervisors who do not consider themselves to be biased against women may still treat women differently from men because of their own expectations concerning women’s ambitions and desires for advancement. Supervisors may (sometimes unintentionally) exclude women employees from developmental opportunities such as travel and attendance at conferences, exclude them from professional networks, pass over women employees when doling out important and difficult assignments, and confine women to secondary or assistant helpmate roles. Worse, women may be treated in a domineering or condescending manner, overprotected or constantly criticized, or subjected to harassment. An ambitious woman must not only do her job well, she must confront any internal reluctance she may have to be aggressive in seeking choice assignments and responsibilities, and must consume additional energy developing strategies to deal with any prejudices her male supervisors and colleagues may have. All of these ideas were hypotheses that the research team sought to test in their interviewing.