

Perceived Sex Role and Fear of Success in Depression of Working Women

Anita Sharma, Chander Prabha and Dalip Malhotra
 Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

In order to predict depression in married working women (N=120), the role of SRO (sex role orientation) and FOS (fear of success) was examined. The main findings point to the following facts that FOS is positively and significantly related to depression, the femininity, masculinity and androgyny are negatively related to depression and vice versa, and the stepwise regression analysis reveals that masculinity explains 15% of variance in depression i.e. low masculinity in women could contribute to depression due to lack of strength of mind and agentic orientation in a working situation and in a male dominated society.

Keywords: Fear of success, Sex-role orientation, and Depression

Women and depression is holding a relationship of much interest over the last two decades. As more and more women enter the work force, they are increasingly exposed not only to the same work environment as men, but also to unique pressure created by multiple roles and conflicting expectations (Nelson & Burke, 2000; Chang, 2002). It has long been observed that women are about twice as likely to become clinically depressed (to have dysthymia or unipolar depression) as are men. These differences occur in most countries around the world (Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994; Wilhelm & Roy, 2003; Ge & Conger, 2003). Questions have been raised about whether these differences stem from some kind of artifact, such as young women in adolescence becoming more willing to report their feelings, but the data do not support this idea (Brems, 1995; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990). What kinds of theories have been proposed that can explain this interesting collection of observations?

One set of theories is biological - for example, suggestions have been made that hormonal factors account for the differences. Studies examining this hypothesis have not been very supportive (Brems, 1995; Nolen-

Hoeksema, 1990; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994). Other biological theories have proposed that among women and men sharing a common genetic diathesis, women are more likely to become depressed and men are more likely to become alcoholic (Davison & Neale, 1996). Research has also addressed the possibility that women are simply more predisposed to depression because of some kind of mutant gene on the X chromosome (of which women have two and men only one). However, research does not support any of these biological hypotheses, leading us to look at social and psychological factors (Carson, Butcher & Mineka, 2006).

One psychological theory has proposed that by virtue of their roles in society, women are more prone to experiencing a sense of lack of control over negative life events (Radloff, 1975). Feminist literature would agree (e.g., Chester, 1972; Bernard, 1973) for it blames the greater incidence of mental problems among women on their lack of personal and political power. Feminists take the position that more women than men become depressed because their social roles do not encourage them to feel competent. Marcek (1975) reported that the higher

incidence rate of depression in women is a response to the powerlessness inherent in the traditional female role. Foder (1974) speculates that sexual stereotyping of women as helpless and dependent, makes them more prone to phobic condition and anxiety. Sex role stereotyping is in fact acquired through socialization practices (Bem, 1975; Kimberling & Quimette, 2002).

Right from birth, girls tend to have increased pressure to assume a feminine sex role, the role of home maker that requires the qualities of sensitivity, warmth and gentleness and if they accept this some what non-assertive, dependent role, they may develop low self esteem and hence may be predisposed to anxiety and depression as high femininity is only required at home and social gatherings but is rejected at work place (Greenhaus & Bentall, 1985). Whereas, high masculinity and less femininity in females make them tomboys and moderate masculinity and high femininity is effective in the office. But, if females are low both on masculinity and femininity, they become undifferentiated and listless thereby breeding depression by lowering their self-esteem. One piece of evidence consistent with this hypothesis is that adolescent girls do perceive competence as a liability and tend to conceal their intelligence. Indeed one study showed a significant positive correlation between IQ and depression in adolescent girls. For boys, by contrast, there was a small negative correlation between IQ and depression (Block, Gjerdecade & Black, 1991).

Horner (1972) suggested that most women have motive to avoid success i.e. disposition to become anxious about achieving success because they expect negative consequences in the form of loss of femininity and fear of rejection. According to Shapiro (1979) fear of success involve anxiety about engaging in sex inappropriate tasks which is culturally oriented. It is a stable latent disposition, acquired early in life as a part of

sex-role socialization (Ohri & Kumar, 1990).

The fear of success will continue to cast its shadows in achievement of women as long as women are feminine in their attitudes (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976) hence will, continue to fall prey to depression until their roles remain ambiguous (Sharma & Malhotra, 2007). In order to nullify anxiety and depression, if the women acquire some agentic orientation i.e. getting the job done, then they become high masculine as well (androgynous). This type of perception is required for leading a healthy and constructive life style (Bem, 1975; Monga & Malhotra, 1994; Prabha, 2008). Obviously, the cultural factors are holding promise to explain depression in women, hence, the present endeavour would examine the role of these factors in unipolar mild disorder in working women in the hilly area.

Method

Sample:

The study consisted of 120 married working women with in the age range of 25-40 years from different fields of occupation. The sampling technique was purposive.

Tools:

Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974): This test was used to measure sex-role orientation. The scale consists of 20 masculine adjectives, 20 feminine adjectives and 20 neutral adjectives with regard to sex which are the filler items. The subjects were asked to indicate on a 7 point scale the degree to which each characteristic describes her. The scale ranges from 1 (Never or almost never true) to 7 (Always or almost always true). The scale gave masculinity and femininity scores. Androgyny score was calculated by the formula $A = (M+F) - (M-F)$ as given by Heilburn and Pitman (1979). Where $A =$ Androgyny, $M =$ Masculinity and $F =$ Femininity

Fear of Success Scale (Zuckerman, Allison, 1976): This test was used to measure

the fear of success. It consists of 27 items to be answered on 7 point scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7). It classifies subjects into high fear of success and low fear of success.

Mental Depression Scale (Dubey, 1993): This test was used to assess the mental

condition of the subjects. The scale consists of 50 statements having two alternative answers "yes" and "no". All the statements are based on the state of mind, when some one is depressed. For yes, 1 mark is given and for No, 0 score is given. Higher the score, greater is the depression.

Results

Table-1: Correlational Matrix for Fear of Success, Sex Role Orientation and Depression (N=120)

	FOS	Masculinity	Femininity	Androgyny	Depression
FOS	X	-.092	.134	-.115	.183*
Masculinity		X	.421**	.503**	-.381**
Femininity			X	.572**	-.240**
Androgyny				X	-.175*
Depression					X

** p < .01

* p < .05

Table-2: Stepwise Regression Analysis of Depression on Masculinity

Variable	Order of Entry	Value of r	Reg. of Coeff.	Beta weight	t	R ²	R ² change	F-ratio
Masculinity	1	-.381**	-.182	-.381	-4.076**	.145	.145	16.610**

** p < .01

* p < .05

The main objective of the present study was aimed at examining the role of SRO (masculinity, femininity and androgyny) and FOS (fear of success) in depression among married working women. The individual raw scores on SRO, FOS and depression were subjected to correlational analysis and are presented in the inter-correlational matrix table (Table-1). The most contributing predicting factor in depression was detected through stepwise regression analysis (Table-II). Table-1 reveals that FOS is positively and significantly related to depression ($r = .183^*$ $p < .01$) and whereas, masculinity, femininity and androgyny have been found to be negatively and significantly related to depression ($r = -.381^{**}$ $p < .01$; $-.240^{**}$ $p < .01$ and $-.175^*$ $p < .05$) respectively. Table-1 further depicts the positive and significant correlations

between masculinity and femininity ($r = .421^{**}$ $p < .01$); masculinity and androgyny ($r = .503^{**}$ $p < .01$) and femininity and androgyny ($r = .572^{**}$ $p < .01$).

Regression analysis (Table-2) indicates that among the predictors of depression, masculinity has emerged as the only significant contributing factor ($r = -.381^{**}$ $p < .01$) in depression. The R² change was found to be .145, hence 15% of variance is contributed by masculinity. But, as it is clear from Table-1, femininity and androgyny have positive and significant correlations with masculinity ($r = .421^{**}$ $p < .01$ and $.503^{**}$ $p < .01$) and negative correlations with depression ($r = -.240^{**}$ $p < .01$ and $-.175^*$ $p < .05$). Thus, the variance to be explained by femininity and androgyny has been accounted for by masculinity in depression.

Discussion

The biological and genetic evidence (Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus, 1994; Brems, 1995; Wilhelm, Roy, 2003; Ge & Conger, 2003) seems to be inconclusive because the scientists failed to study the certain aspects of genetic anomalies and failed to control certain biochemical discharges, hence, the results could not be a clear pointer. The present results throw light on the role of environment in terms of personality development which seems to be important especially the sex roles and fear of success (You & Lee, 1997; Silverstein & Lynch, 1998). The SRO in terms of masculinity shows 15% of variance $p < .01$ i.e. low masculinity is a fertile ground for depression. It can be suggested that lack of masculine and feminine orientation i.e. low androgyny or in other words undifferentiated personality seems to be a powerful aid to depression which indicates a conflict between achievement and affiliated needs. The undifferentiated women lack the will to adjust back and forth in home and office, hence depression results (Cha, 1989; Verma, 2008). High masculinity interms of agentic orientation is required in working situations and femininity is required at home. Thus, sex role orientation sets the stage for depression due to role ambiguity and conflicts (Greenhaus & Bentall, 1985 ; Eom, 1994).

For years, virtually all societies have considered masculinity to be the mark of psychologically healthy male and femininity to be the hall mark of the psychologically healthy female. But, low masculinity and femininity are detrimental for working women and is a breeding ground for depression. In the present results (see table-I), it becomes evident that femininity and masculinity are positively related and are also negatively related to depression. Again, FOS is also related positively to depression. Hence the relationship with depression is circular (Wilhelm & Roy, 2003).

To account for the rest of the variance, the interactional and attitudinal factors may hold the key (Oetzel, 1966; Eagly, 1987; Sharma & Malhrotra, 2007). As such, the undifferentiated women like in the present study seems to be inept in these, hence, depression is the consequence (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). In order to combat depression in the present day world, the following strategies could be used i.e. women should be encouraged (like in the western world) to be independent and develop androgynous personality to deal effectively with problems and shift back and forth in terms of action required at home and working environment (Bem, 1975; Monga & Malhotra, 1994; Prabha, 2008)

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Anita Sharma, PhD is Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla – 171 005. Email: anitahpu@gmail.com

Chander Prabha, is Research Scholar in the Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla – 171 005.

Dalip Malhotra, PhD, Professor and Former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla – 171 005. E-mail: dalipmalhotra@yahoo.co.in

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