

# Differentials in Gender Behavioral Flexibility and Academic Profile of Women in Selected Nigerian States

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## Abstract

Personally traits and characteristics are biological as well as environmental. Gender is a universal dichotomy in any given culture. Strict gender behavioral traits are however believed to produce inhibitions, especially for females, which may lead to inhibitions in achievement and success situations. Mostly importantly, they inhibit females from subjects, careers and specializations which have been stereotypically ascribed to males. However, where there are gender behavioral flexibility traits, there may be no inhibitions as to choice of a career, which may be perceived as a male domain. This could be true especially for females who are of high intellectual promise and for literate backgrounds. This was the reason for this study on university women in Nigeria aimed at finding out the level of stereotypic gender learning they may have and if this relates to the field the women are in. The study showed that more of the women were feminine in orientation among those in the science-based specializations and those in the humanities. The study recommended that, for a state of flux to be in gender stereotype, the foundation should be laid early during the foundational years for not only females but males for societal balancing.

**Keywords:** Biological • Gender • Personality • Specialization • Society

## Introduction

Most societies in the under-developed and developing world still subscribed to the stereotype in profession for women. However, as a result of factors within them or in their background, some women do not tow the stereotype and may feel uncomfortable about it. Such women may be in fields of specialization that are typical. In an earlier survey in Nigeria's higher technical institutions, a death of female lecturers was recorded [1]. In another study, there was a report on the dearth of female lecturers in Nigerian universities [2]. It would therefore seem that in Nigeria, higher level teaching has been ascribed to men. The present study is a step further on the researchers past studies. Using the sex role orientation earlier developed by Mowaiye O [2], the present study was aimed at finding out if the few women in the universities in Nigeria are gender behaviorally flexible, and if those found to be so are more in the science-based or humanity fields.

## Literature Review

Tangri SS [3] investigated the personality characteristics of role innovative college women. He classified the women as role innovators on the basis of their occupational choice in fields hitherto considered inappropriate for the females, for example, fields in which fewer than 30% of those employed were women. It was found that self-descriptions of role – innovative college women tended to be characterized by responses scaled as unconventional, intellectual not too successful and away from the “feminine” position. The profile also emphasized autonomy, self-reliance and the assumption of responsibility for others.

Featherson OJ [4] interviewed seven principals from public schools in Washington to find out what aided their rise. Professionally, she revealed

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that the years of experience in education for the women ranged from eleven to thirty-one. She observed also that women tend to have lengthier careers than males before getting the post. The female principals were said to be risk takers in their career and seemed confident and competent, but also aware that some doubted it.

Skordas MA [5] observed that while the school teaching profession in the United States of America is an occupation dominated by women, the administrative positions such as principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent of school districts are male dominated. Skordas therefore attempted to find out what influence fathers have on the few women in educational administrative leadership positions. He also researched into the middle childhood of the women. The following findings were arrived at:

- Fathers were encouraging supportive and accepting of their daughters decisions and life goals.
- They were confident and academically successful students.
- Eight of the ten women were first born.
- The women were career and goal oriented.

Holt YP [6] made the observation that women were under-represented in many sectors of the American society. She went on to observe, however, that there were some women in positions of authority and that these are typical, by the mere fact that not many women have such positions. Holt therefore wanted to discern the life factor of the female leaders which had contributed to their individual development and their ultimate placement. A descriptive case study of twelve female elementary principals from five districts in Northern California in the United States of America, was conducted. The study according to Holt was affected by the following factors amongst others:

- Those willing to participate.
- Those willing to be interviewed.
- Those not allowed to be interviewed.

Observational notes, personal data, interview tapes were transcribed and analyzed for content to determine commonalities of the respondents. The following conclusions were drawn:

- The female principals had to improve their capability in a position of authority associated with men.
- An ethnic female (one who is not a white American) in the position

of principal had the additional burden of proving that an ethnic was able to do the job.

Factors which aided the females in acquiring high status position included:

- A willingness to take risk.
- Goal orientation and self-direction, traits which cannot be regarded as feminine.

Andrusikiw O [7] tried to look at sex role attitudes of women (and men) who were higher education administrators. The administrators were in top level positions: Presidents, Vice presidents, Provosts, Academic Deans, Deans of Schools and Deans of faculties. There were in all, ninety-eight women and eighty-six men as participants. Percentages, chi-square and the spearman rank order correlation were used for the analysis of data. The findings revealed that women and men in the study were non-traditional in their attitudes towards sex characteristic and sex role images, the characteristics that may have aided the rise of the women.

Bachtold LM and Werner EE [8] studied three generations of women psychologists and found that the women responses to Cattell's 16 (sixteen) personality factor. Questionnaire indicated that they were significantly more aloof, flexible, adventuresome, inner-directed, confident, radical and self-sufficient than non-professional women.

Skordas MA [5] compared the personality characteristics of women mathematicians rated by other mathematicians as creative with a group of women mathematicians not so rated and with a group of creative men mathematicians. The scores of the creative women, it was revealed did not differ significantly from those of the other two groups on measures of cognitive ability. However, in comparison to creative women mathematicians did manifest greater:

- Rebellions, independence, introversion and rejection of outside influence.
- Lack of construction in general attitude and mathematical work.

The creative men were said to have manifested higher dominance, sociability, social presence and self-acceptance than their female colleagues.

Furthermore, women athletes and scientists are said to be more often masculine or androgynous than being feminine or undifferentiated, while masculine and androgynous women are more dominant than others [9,10].

For the purpose of this study, androgynous women are those who are gender flexible in behavior as regards sex role orientation while the feminine women are those stereotypically feminine.

## Methods

The population consisted of the female lecturers in Nigerian Universities. The stratified as well as the purposive sampling procedure was used to select the final sample of 119 women. Women from seventeen universities participated. This was in an attempt to see that the final sample is a good description of the population in spite of the paucity of female lecturers in some of the Universities. The instrument used to determine the level of gender behavioral flexibility was the Sex Role Orientation Instrument of the researcher [2] while a questionnaire was given to the women to indicate their field of specialization. For the purpose of data analysis, analysis of variance was used. The researcher question that guided the researcher was:

Is there any difference in the Sex Role Orientation of females in the science disciplines as compared to those in the arts and humanities disciplines?

## Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the Sex Role Orientation of females in the arts / humanities and science disciplines.

To answer the research question and the subsequent hypothesis, the analysis of variance was used (Table 1).

**Table 1.** ANOVA for the interaction of sex role orientation and academic specialization among female lecturers.

Source	DF	SS	MS	F- Value	F.F
SR	1	24497	24497	152.68	0.0001
SP	1	46.197	46.197	0.29	0.5926
SR & SP	1	63.68	63.68	0.4	0.5299
Error	115	18451.8	160.45	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>43058.6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Alpha=0.05

**Table 2.** Frequency distribution of arts/humanities and science lecturers according to their sex role orientation.

Group	Arts	%	Science	%	Total
A	20	-36	36	-64	55
B	30	-37	36	-53	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>119</b>

A: Androgynous group, i.e. gender flexible in behaviour

F: Feminine group

There was no significant difference between sex role orientation and the area of specialization among the female lecturers. Thus the generated hypothesis is accepted. To find out if there is any significant difference in the frequency distribution contained for the two groups of subjects in science and arts / humanities, the chi-square analysis was applied (Table 2).

The obtained chi-square value of 1.37, which is less than the table value of 3.8 with 1df shows that the difference between the frequency distribution of androgynous and feminine oriented female lecturers in the arts / humanities and science disciplines is not significant.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study do not reveal a significant difference between sex role orientation and the lecturer's area of specialization. This could be because as shown in the literature review, most highly professional; women would have had to cross the hurdle of gender inhibitions to make them gender blind in some situations. A further analysis equally revealed no significant difference in the frequency distribution obtained for the two groups of women under study, although the results revealed that more of the women tended to

be gender flexible in behavior and that there were more feminine oriented females in the arts and humanities areas of specialization fields regarded as feminine than the androgynous individuals. 64% of the androgynous group were also in the sciences, while 53% of the feminine group were in the sciences.

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None.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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