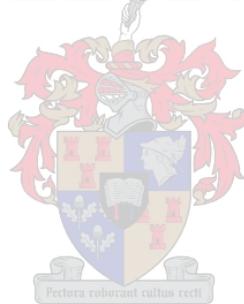


**THE SEX-ROLE IDENTITY, ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE AND
SELF-ESTEEM OF A GROUP OF FEMALE STUDENTS**

ANEL LEONIE SMIT



Assignment presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science (Psychology) at the University of
Stellenbosch

Supervisors: Ms. S. Van Wyk

Ms. W.H. Theron

April 2005

DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own work and have not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree.

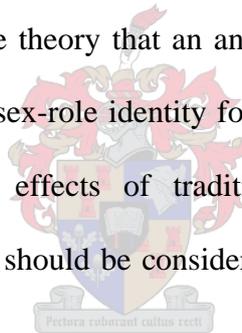
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ABSTRACT

In this study the sex-role identities of 280 female students at Stellenbosch University were compared with regards to attributional style and self-esteem. Three self report questionnaires were used to measure the variables: The Bem Sex-Role Inventory, the Attributional Style Questionnaire and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The results showed that the androgynous sex-role identity group had a significantly more optimistic attributional style and a higher degree of self-esteem than the feminine and undifferentiated groups. The results also showed a significant positive correlation between general attributional style and self-esteem. A pessimistic attributional style and a lower degree of self-esteem have been associated with a wide variety of psychological problems in research literature. The results of this study provide support for the theory that an androgynous sex-role identity might be significantly better than a feminine sex-role identity for the psychological health of women. The researcher suggests that the effects of traditional sex-role socialization on the psychological well-being of women should be considered in the planning of prevention and empowerment programs.



OPSOMMING

In hierdie studie word die geslagsrolidentiteite van vroulike studente by Stellenbosch Universiteit vergelyk met betrekking tot attribusiestyl en selfbeeld. Drie meetinstrumente is gebruik om die veranderlikes te meet: Die Bem Geslagsrolinventaris, die Attribusiestyl Vraelys en die Rosenberg Self-Beeld Skaal. Die resultate toon dat die androgene geslagsrolidentiteit groep 'n meer optimistiese attribusiestyl en 'n hoër selfbeeld het as die vroulike en ongedifferensieërde groepe. Die resultate toon ook 'n betekenisvolle positiewe korrelasie tussen algemene attribusiestyl en selfbeeld. 'n Pessimistiese attribusiestyl en 'n lae selfbeeld word geassosieer met 'n wye verskeidenheid van sielkundige probleme in die navorsingsliteratuur. Die resultate van hierdie studie verskaf ondersteuning vir die teorie dat 'n androgene geslagsrolidentiteit moontlik beter is as 'n vroulike geslagsrolidentiteit vir die sielkundige gesondheid van vroue. Die navorser stel voor dat die effek van tradisionele geslagsrolsossialisering op die sielkundige welstand van vroue in ag geneem behoort te word in die beplanning van voorkomings en opheffingsprogramme.

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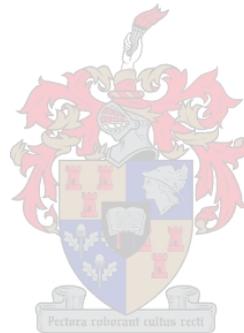


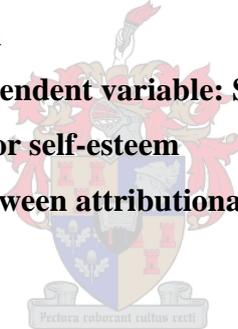
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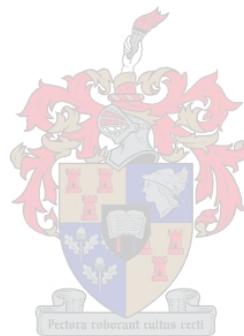
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, MOTIVATION FOR AND AIM OF THE PRESENT STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Motivation

Sex-role identity has been debated and researched extensively. There are certain socially constructed roles and socially learned behaviours and expectations associated with females and males. Women and men are different biologically, but all cultures interpret and elaborate these innate biological differences into a set of social expectations about what behaviours and activities are appropriate, and what rights and resources they possess. The individual's sex-role identity is the result of a sex-typing process where he or she acquires certain psychological characteristics that are considered to be sex-appropriate by his or her culture. According to Bem (1981), sex-role identity is based on four different combinations of masculinity and femininity. A traditional identity refers to the possession of a relatively high degree of femininity in women and a high degree of masculinity in men. In contrast, an androgynous sex-role identity refers to the possession of a relatively high degree of both masculine and feminine characteristics in one individual. Further, an undifferentiated sex-role identity refers to low degrees of both masculinity and femininity in one individual.

In the past sex-role socialization has been seen as a necessary developmental milestone and it was presumed that people would be better adjusted if they conformed to society's stereotypes of sex-appropriate behaviour as much as possible. Today, many people still hold these views, despite the fact that the limitations of traditional, rigid sex-roles have been confirmed by research. Results of these studies point out that rigid sex-typing can become a barrier to the development of women's optimal psychological well being (Baucom, 1983; Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1979; Koopman & Schiff, 1978; Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993).

Little research has been done on sex-role stereotypes and its relation to gender discrimination in South Africa. Regardless of the fact that South Africa is in a transformation process where gender discrimination is prohibited by legislation, it seems that troubling gender relations are only being addressed on a superficial level (Coetzee, 2001). In striving towards gender equality it is important to take into account the effects of gender stereotypes and policies that subtly reinforces deep-seated structures of domination. The ideological status of the system of patriarchy may provide a clue as to why current attempts at transforming gender inequality remains on a superficial level. The patriarchal ideology, where men are considered to be superior to women, have profoundly influenced both Eurocentric and Afrocentric cultures in South Africa (Coetzee, 2001). Patriarchy is a strong ideology in many cultures around the world and its power should not be underestimated in the struggle towards South African gender equality.



The ideology of patriarchy suggests that men and women have to display different characteristics and values that are important in different areas of life. Masculine characteristics are seen as appropriate in the public sphere where the emphasis is on social power while feminine characteristics are more valued in the domestic sphere. In South Africa, women are associated with and valued for certain characteristics like self-sacrifice, nurturance and subordination (Coetzee, 2001). South African women can earn status and respect by conforming to the prescribed feminine roles and characteristics but they will simultaneously subject themselves to male domination and oppressive practices.

South African women have been oppressed for generations and have been kept from liberating themselves by structures of domination, designed to maintain the ideology of patriarchy. Various economic, political, educational and religious measures were employed

to prevent women from gaining power in society. Women had less educational and occupational opportunities than men and they were excluded from decision-making positions in business and politics. This caused economic dependence and increased vulnerability to domestic abuse and sexual harassment. Male domination in South Africa not only impacted on the physical, political or financial well-being of women but also on their psychological health. According to Coetzee (2001) an ideology that is prevalent for an extended period of time can eventually cause even oppressed individuals to internalize this particular way of seeing the world. South African women gradually adapted to their inferior position in our country and they accepted it as a natural consequence of their gender. The outcome of this phenomenon is the tendency to attribute various prejudicial acts towards women to female stereotypes. In accepting these limited views of reality some women may believe themselves to be inferior to men and unable to achieve true equality. Prinsloo (1992) found that traditional sex-role stereotyping have been tenaciously unchanged across cultures in South Africa at the time of his research. He predicted that South African society will move closer to the concept of androgyny and that traditional sex-roles will not be applied as rigidly in the future.

According to Massad (1981) adolescence is the period when the social pressure to conform to traditional ways of being is experienced the most intensely. In a study by Cook and Simbayi (1998), white, South African adolescents exhibited occupational sex-role stereotyping which influenced their ultimate career decisions. From their study it appeared that South Africans still held conservative and traditional views regarding sex-roles at that time which could have limited the psychological development of adolescents. It is therefore important to assess the sex-role identities and repercussions thereof in South Africa at the present time. South Africa's social milieu is changing and there is more focus on equality and human rights. In

the struggle towards gender equality it is important to understand the underlying social structures that might inhibit women to take their rightful place in our society. In the process of transformation of South Africa one should be aware that simple legislative modifications will not necessarily translate into radical systemic change (Coetzee, 2001). True democracy will only transpire if the fundamental structures of gender oppression is thoroughly analyzed and transformed on all levels. The present study will contribute to our understanding of the sex-role identities of South African women and the psychological effects related to it.

In a study done by Lategan and Spangenberg (1993), the impact of sex-role identity and attributional style on the coping abilities of South African adolescents was examined. The findings indicated that androgyny (high levels of both masculinity and femininity) and an adaptive attributional style were positively related to better coping ability when compared to the other sex-role identities. The researchers suggested that an over-emphasis on femininity could be harmful to the proper development of young women's coping abilities. They also recommended that girls should ideally obtain a balanced selection of coping strategies that include both feminine and masculine characteristics. Bem (cited in Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993) hypothesized that individuals with a traditional sex-role lacked a truly satisfying and comprehensive behavioural repertoire. On the other hand, an androgynous individual have a wider selection of behaviours to choose from in any given situation because they incorporated masculine and feminine characteristics. An androgynous individual can therefore be described as an individual who assimilated both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine features in their sex-role identity. This gives these individuals increased flexibility and adaptability because their range of behaviours is not restricted by a traditional sex-role. Research has supported the idea that androgyny correlates with a number of positive attributes, such as higher levels of identity development and self-esteem in college

students (Bem, 1974). These findings suggest that androgynous individuals have a tendency to be psychologically healthier and more adaptable to changing times. Further research suggests that individuals who are undifferentiated in terms of sex-role (low on both masculinity and femininity) tend to be less adaptable and psychologically healthy than other sex-typed individuals (Bem, 1974; Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993).

Other developments in social psychology shifted the focus from biological gender to the sex-role identity of the individual. Sex-role identity as a social construct has been shown to affect the thoughts and behaviour of men and women in many ways. Many women in western society have been socialized in a traditional way that encourages them to develop a low level of masculinity. In a study by Baucom and Danker-Brown (1984), it was found that an individual's sex-role identity, not gender, was the significant factor in determination of susceptibility to learned helplessness. Despite sex, feminine sex-typed individuals and masculine sex-typed individuals were equally helpless and exhibited similar tendencies to learned helplessness than those individuals who possessed androgynous or undifferentiated behaviour patterns. Lee (1986), found that non-traditional women had a more adaptive and self-enhancing pattern of attributions than did feminine sex-typed women.

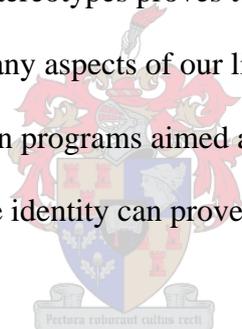
It has been theorized that individuals possess a trait like characteristic known as an attributional style and that women are more likely to possess a pessimistic attributional style (global, stable and internal for negative events), whereas men are more likely to possess an optimistic attributional style – which is global, stable and internal for positive events (Seligman, 1975). Thus, women are theorized to blame themselves for failure and give credit to others for success and men are theorized to blame others for failure and take credit for success. Gundersen and Rozell (1998) conducted a research study that supported this theory

and could explain women's greater tendency to develop learned helplessness. According to the reformulated learned helplessness theory, a pessimistic attributional style is a risk factor for the development of learned helplessness. Several researchers investigated the phenomenon of learned helplessness and all its negative ramifications like depression, anxiety, stress and impaired performance (Kao & Nagata, 1997; Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993; Leunes, Nation & Turley, 1980; Mckean, 1994; Seligman, 1975). Gender as a variable in helplessness has been the focus of much research, although the findings have been ambiguous. Of the studies that have shown sex differences, females have generally exhibited a greater tendency to learn to be helpless (Leunes, Nation & Turley, 1980; McKean, 1994). The results show that women experience loss of control, failure, and punishment in many environments more often than men do. Attributional style was also found to be an important coping resource (Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993) and negative attributions were related to performance deficits and depression (Seligman, 1975). A pessimistic attributional style was also associated with low self-esteem, passivity, illness, and poor achievement (Kao & Nagata, 1997). The attributional style of South Africans has not been investigated by many studies (Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993) and the present study will contribute to research on this topic.

Results from previous studies revealed that androgynous women also possess a higher degree of self-esteem than stereotypically feminine women (Chusmir & Koberg, 1991; Koopman & Schiff, 1978). Low self-esteem has been associated with a wide variety of problems such as anxiety, low academic achievement and depression (Rosenberg, 1965). It is therefore a very important part of almost any psychological intervention. In a study done by Clarey (1985), a resocialization program was implemented with the aim of modifying the sex-role identities of traditionally sex-typed women towards androgyny. According to the researchers, traditional

sex-role identities can severely limit an individual's range of coping mechanisms and ability to be flexible in response to changing circumstances. Results of the study showed that the program effectively modified the sex-role identities of the women towards androgyny and succeeded in increasing their self-esteem in the process. This supports the theory that a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics is beneficial for women in terms of self-esteem. The relationship between the sex-role identity and self-esteem of adolescents has not been explored much in South African research (Mukheiber, 1994). The present study will contribute towards understanding the relationship between these two variables.

South African society at the present time claims to be liberated from traditional gender stereotypes, but the effects of these stereotypes proves to be so deeply ingrained and far-reaching that it is still influencing many aspects of our lives. In developing interventions such as prevention and resocialization programs aimed at the empowerment of women, information on the effects of sex-role identity can prove to be crucial.



1.2 The aim of the present study

The aim of this study is to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the sex-role identity, attributional style and self-esteem of the female participants. It raises questions such as: What is the role that sex-role identity plays in the psychological well-being of the adolescent female? Will persons with androgynous sex-role identities be more likely to exhibit optimistic attributional styles and a higher self-esteem than persons with traditional sex-role identities? What is the relationship between women's sex-role identities and their attributional style as a risk factor for learned helplessness? This study might also highlight possible changes in traditional sex-role stereotypes in South Africa, since the study done by Prinsloo in 1992. Hopefully, this study can contribute towards understanding the psychological consequences of sex-role socialization on South African female adolescents.



CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter theories related to the constructs of adolescence, sex-role identity, attributional style and self-esteem will be discussed to provide the necessary background to the study. An understanding of the theories relating these concepts to aspects of psychological adjustment is necessary if we are to appreciate the impact of sex-role identity on female adolescents. For the sake of concision, the researcher only provided a brief description of a few relevant theories.

2.1 The female adolescent

Because this study focuses on the female adolescent, it is important to understand the psychological significance of the adolescent period-especially in the lives of women. Adolescence is the stage in the human developmental cycle where a transition takes place between childhood and adulthood (Matlin, 2000). During puberty an adolescent is physiologically able to reproduce sexually and for the female adolescent it signals the beginning of menstruation. Adolescence is characterized by intense biological, psychological, and social developmental changes (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998). The biological commencement of adolescence is indicated by the quick acceleration of growth and the early stages of physical sexual development. The psychological onset is characterized by an acceleration of cognitive and personality development. Adolescents are also being prepared for the social roles of young adulthood. Adolescence is usually divided into three periods: early (ages 11 to 14), middle (ages 14 to 17) and late adolescence (ages 17 to 21). These divisions are only arbitrary since each individual's development will vary along the continuum (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998). The start of adulthood is typically associated with

living on your own, finding work, and being in a romantic relationship, although none of these characteristics is necessary for adulthood (Matlin, 2000). Society often does not have clear expectations for the adolescent and this can cause late adolescence to be a period of status uncertainty. In some ways an adolescent may be treated as a child and in other ways they may be treated as adults. They may feel uncertain about their social duties and responsibilities as well as their civic rights and privileges (Rosenberg, 1965). Particularly in the transition to young adulthood, adolescents are faced with challenges of consolidating their identity, exploring career and personal directions, and forming meaningful relationships. The young individuals are expected to deal with stressors more autonomously, with less direct intervention from caregivers or other adults.

Adolescence is not inevitably a period of storm and stress, but can be characterized by a number of typical adjustment problems. Adolescents today are given a greater amount of developmental tasks to negotiate and more difficult decisions to make in a society that changes quickly (Antill & Nicholson, 1981). Adolescents are also maturing earlier than in the past and are expected to be involved in formal education for longer periods. This can extend the duration of adolescence further that will add to its pressure.

Although there are a lot of common characteristics in the problem hierarchies of males and females, they do seem to differ in a few important areas. Girls report more problems than boys generally and show greater concern with interpersonal relations while the boys appear more concerned with finances, educational and vocational issues (Antill & Nicholson, 1981). One potential explanation for the above finding that girls experience more problems than boys can be the stereotypical reluctance of boys to discuss their problems. On the other hand, girls may be experiencing a more demanding adolescence than boys, considering the possible

maladaptive nature of the traditional female sex-role. Femininity has been found to be related to poor ego development, less self-enhancing attributions and low self-esteem (Chusmir & Koberg, 1991; Koopman & Schiff, 1978; Lee, 1986). In contrast, some research studies found that masculinity in males are associated with better adjustment (Antill & Nicholson, 1981; Massad, 1981; May & Spangenberg, 1997). In these studies it was also found that girls adopt an increasingly feminine sex-role as they grow older and experience a decrease in masculinity. Late adolescence is therefore perhaps a good time to measure the formation of a sex-role identity amongst females. In a fast changing and increasingly challenging world it is important to re-evaluate the problems of young people on a continual basis.

2.2 Sex-role identity

2.2.1 Definition



The terms sex and gender have often been used interchangeably as if it refers to the same concept. Sex is a narrow term that refers to innate physiological characteristics relating to reproduction. Gender, on the other hand is a broader term that refers to psychological features and social categories that are shaped by human culture (Matlin, 2000). Sex-role identity and gender identity are two terms that also tend to be used interchangeably. They refer to the personality characteristics attributed to masculinity and femininity. In this study the term sex-role identity will be used in keeping with the use of the word by Bem (1981) in the Bem Sex-Role Inventory.

Sex-typing is the process whereby people acquire certain psychological characteristics that are considered to be sex-appropriate by their culture (Bem, 1993). The collections of

attitudes, personality characteristics, behaviours, self-concepts and preferences that are acquired during the sex-typing process are termed sex-roles. Sex-role identity will then be the result of the sex-typing process. In former research on sex-typing, psychologists viewed masculinity and femininity as either being very different from one another or the opposite from each other (Matlin, 2000). The traditional scales were bipolar, with femininity at the one pole and masculinity at the other. The traditional scale also specified certain ideal standards that determined that females should have scores toward the feminine pole, and males should have scores toward the masculine pole. The traditional sex-role identities are characterized by a high degree of masculine traits in men and feminine traits in women. In the 1970s numerous new methods of assessing sex-typing emerged. The proposition was that femininity and masculinity should be measured on independent scales apart from each other. The best known androgyny measure is the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), which provides scores on a Femininity Scale and on a Masculinity Scale for each person who takes the test. Sex-role identity was then based upon four different combinations of masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1981). Within this framework, a traditional identity refers to the possession of a relatively high degree of femininity in women and a high degree of masculinity in men. In contrast, an androgynous sex-role identity refers to the possession of a relatively high degree of both masculine and feminine characteristics in one individual. The word androgyny is derived from the Greek words for men (andro) and women (gyny) (Matlin, 2000). Further, an undifferentiated sex-role identity refers to low degrees of both masculinity and femininity in an individual (Bem, 1974).

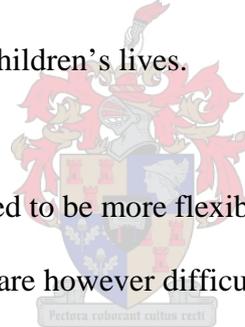
2.2.2 Theories on the development of sex-role identity

There are several theories that try to explain the process whereby an individual's sex-role identity is formed. In this section only a few of the most influential theories will be discussed.

Children begin to learn sex-roles between the ages of three and six years of age when they gradually become aware of how the social environment views the actions of men and women. Lopater and Westheimer (2002) says that it is surprising to see how rapidly children at that age can make conservative generalizations about what is appropriate for men and women. Gender stereotypes can unfortunately promote beliefs about the restricted skills and abilities of boys and girls. Bem (as cited in Lopater & Westheimer, 2002) stressed that the process of learning sex-roles in early childhood may foster the development of adults who feel unconfident when performing tasks apparently done better by the other gender. The consequences of early sex-role learning can be extensive. The educational environment also seems to play an important role in sex-role socialization. Huston (as cited in Lopater & Westheimer, 2002) reported that even in preschool, children are rewarded for behaviour congruent with what is expected for their sex and may be punished for behaviour associated with the opposite sex. This pattern of reward and punishment can also be seen in interactions between parents and their children. Lopater and Westheimer (2002) believe that the family and psychosocial milieu are more significant than biological factors in the development of sex-roles.

Besides the effects of reward and punishment in learning, observational learning can also play a major part in sex-role socialization. According to Bandura and Walters (1963), children gain knowledge of behaviour in social situations mainly through vicarious learning

processes. New responses can be learned as a function of observing the behaviour of others and its consequences without the observer participating in any way. Children continuously observe the behaviour of adults that often conform to traditional sex-role stereotypes. Eventually the behaviour of children will be shaped by these observations and their perceptions of what is considered appropriate for their gender. According to Bandura and Walters (1963), imitation plays an important role in the attainment of conforming behaviour. Children are permitted to observe all aspects of adult life and may acquire complex sex-role behaviour by observation and imitation alone. Bandura and Walters (1963) also states that the mass media are extremely influential sources of social behaviour patterns. Young people are exposed to these models for a great amount of time and it may play a major part in shaping behaviour and modifying social norms. This can cause parents to become relatively less influential role models in their children's lives.



At present, western society is believed to be more flexible in its expectations of men and women. The traditional stereotypes are however difficult to overcome completely. Many parents still try to influence their sons to behave in self-sufficient ways, while they encourage their daughters to be just the opposite. Aggressive behaviour is viewed as more appropriate for boys and compassionate expressions are more acceptable for girls. The question that remains is whether the personal, educational, and work-related achievements women have made in the last few years are reflected in child-rearing customs (Lopater & Westheimer, 2002).

Gender Schema Theory

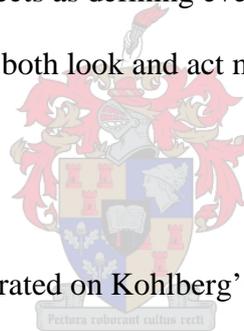
Gender schema theory combines two well-known earlier approaches: the cognitive developmental approach and the social learning approach (Bem, 1993).

The cognitive developmental component

According to cognitive psychologists people acquire schemas from their past experiences (Matlin, 2000). Gender schema theory suggests that children use gender as a cognitive organizing principle or a schema. Bem (1993) proposes that children organize information about the world according to the definitions of masculinity and femininity found in their particular culture. The children will form gender schemas, which include everything they have learnt about gender, and they may then be inclined to act in ways consistent with these gender schemas. Kohlberg's theories about sex-typing coincide with Bem's theory highlighting children's cognitions about gender. Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory proposes that children actively try to understand gender-related concepts and therefore shape their own sex-typing process (Bem, 1993). Kohlberg believed that the first key step in sex-typing is the consolidation of gender identity, in other words a girl's awareness that she is a girl, and a boy's awareness that he is a boy. After children learnt how to label themselves accurately, they will learn how to classify other people as male or female. At this stage they will also begin to have a preference for things that are consistent with their own gender identity. For example, a child who realizes that he is a boy may begin to like masculine objects and activities because it is consistent with his gender identity (Matlin, 2000).

Kohlberg also argued that young children are not passive receivers of the socializing world but are active cognitive-processors trying to understand the nature of the physical and social

environment and their position in that environment (Bem, 1993). They are actively trying to find patterns and regularities in the world with which they can construct social rules and a sense of identity. A young child will spontaneously notice the male-female dichotomy in nature and start categorizing themselves and others in terms of that dichotomy. Young children in the preoperational stage of cognitive development (ages two to seven) tend to be moral realists who treat rules as absolute and universal. These children will treat the male-female dichotomy in the same way and rigidly adhere to the perceived social rules. Kohlberg (as cited in Bem, 1993) also notes that the preoperational child is not able to mentally reverse a perceptual transformation that has been performed on an object. The child is therefore perception-bound or focused on the superficial properties of objects. The young child will treat the superficial properties of objects as defining even if they are not. To a child in the preoperational stage, a person has to both look and act male or female to actually be male or female.



Bem (as cited in Matlin, 2000) elaborated on Kohlberg's description of children's gender-related thoughts and argued that children evaluate their own adequacy in terms of these gender schemas. She also mentions that children may find the male-female dichotomy perceptually and emotionally persuasive because of the gender-polarizing customs of the social community. In the above discussion of gender schema theory the importance of children's cognitions in the sex-typing process have been emphasized. The social learning component of gender schema theory is more focused on children's behaviour.

The social learning component

Gender schema theory suggests that traditional learning principles explain an important part of sex-typing (Matlin, 2000). Social learning theory suggests two important mechanisms for

understanding how boys and girls learn to behave in masculine or feminine ways. The first mechanism is the notion that children are rewarded for sex-appropriate behaviour and punished for behaviour inconsistent with their sex. Children learn many gender related behaviour by trial and error. They are continually aware of their behaviour and the responses it evokes and they will modify it accordingly. The second mechanism describes modelling, a process in which children observe and imitate the behaviour of other people. Children tend to imitate a person from their own gender or anyone who has been rewarded for their behaviour. Children normally emulate real life people as well as characters from films and television. The salience of the role model in the child's life will also determine the extent of the influence he or she has on the child's behaviour. A parent for instance, will normally have a much greater effect on the child's behaviour than a television character.

Although many theorists support gender schema theory in general because it integrates both cognitive and learning approaches, it is unclear how these two approaches can be merged (Matlin, 2000). Do children's schemas about gender develop first or do they construct their gender beliefs from their observations about being rewarded or punished for gender-related behaviour? It is important to understand the sex-typing process if interventions are aimed at changing the formation of traditional sex-role identities.

Although the current researcher recognizes the importance of cognitive organizing principles in the initial acquisition of a sex-role identity, she is of the opinion that social learning has a far greater influence on the development and maintenance of an adolescent's sex-role identity. Clarey (1985) tried to reduce the effects of social learning by implementing a resocialization program aiming to modify women's traditional sex-role identities towards androgyny. The program proved successful and she succeeded in increasing the self-esteem

of the women in the process. Taking a closer look at the sex-role socialization of girls can prove to be even more beneficial than trying to modify their sex-role identities at a later stage.

2.2.3 The relationship between sex-role identity and psychological health

Exploration of the possible relationship between sex-role identity and psychological well-being has been guided by three competing theoretical models. The models have also been used to prescribe an ideal sex-role orientation in order to maximize psychological health. The results of the current study may provide support for one or more of these models which can increase our understanding of what the ideal sex-role identity for women entails.

The congruence model



This model originated from the assumption that masculinity and femininity are opposite ends on a single continuum and mutually exclusive of one another (Whitley, 1983). The notion led to the hypothesis that psychological well-being can only be achieved if a person has a sex-role orientation that is congruent to his or her gender. The congruence model was reformulated after the demonstration of sex-role orientation as a multi-dimensional construct. Under the new model psychological well-being was a result of high masculinity and low femininity in men as well as high femininity and low masculinity in women. The congruence model is founded on the view that compliance to societal norms is a requirement for mental health (Forshaw & Shmukler, 1993).

The androgyny model

This model developed as a result of the emphasis placed on the two-dimensional quality of sex-role orientation and assumes that masculinity and femininity are independent and complementary of each other (Whitley, 1983). The androgyny model suggests that psychological well-being would be enhanced if one has an androgynous sex-role (high degree of both masculinity and femininity in one individual). Androgyny can be conceptualized in two ways: As an additive construct, the androgyny effect would be symbolized by the summation of the effects of its masculinity and femininity components. As an interactive construct, it would have an effect on well-being exceeding the cumulative effect of its components. Most research has been designed to treat androgyny as an additive construct and as a result the interactive effects remain largely unexplored (Whitley, 1983).



The masculinity model

The masculinity model proposes that a person's psychological well-being is a function of the extent to which the person has a masculine sex-role orientation, regardless of gender. In response to the proposed relationship between androgyny and psychological health, the masculinity model postulates that this relationship would be due to the masculinity component in androgyny and that the effect of the femininity component will be insignificant (Whitley, 1983).

If any of these models are to be used with assurance as recommendations for mental well-being, they should be supported by empirical evidence that reflect the correct relation between sex-role and psychological health. Despite the fact that there are studies in the

literature that support each of these models (Chow, 1987; Chusmir & Koberg, 1991; Koopman & Schiff, 1978; Lamke, 1982; Massad, 1981; Whitley, 1983), much more empirical studies is needed to discover the true nature of the construct relationships. The empirical data that support each of these models will be discussed further in the literature study. The results of the present study will also contribute to the body of evidence supporting some of these models.

2.3 Attributional Style

2.3.1 Definition

According to attribution theory individuals are constantly trying to explain the causes of events through attributions. Attributional style is a construct used to describe an individual's inclination to attribute events to specific kinds of causes (Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993). Attribution theory proposes three attributional dimensions in which causes of events can be: internal or external to the self, global or specific in its effect and stable or unstable across time.

Attributional (explanatory) style is a cognitive personality variable reflecting how people explain events that happen to them. Some favour highly general explanations involving the self ("I'm a failure"); they are identified as depressive or pessimistic. Others use circumscribed explanations involving factors outside the self ("It was just one of those things"); they are regarded as successful or optimistic (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978).

2.3.2 Theories related to attributional style

The attributional style construct emerged from the attributional reformulation of the learned helplessness model, which is based on the hypothesis that attributional style influences the nature and extent of helplessness following uncontrollable bad events. The theory of learned helplessness was developed from the animal research of Seligman (1975) where dogs subjected to shock treatment displayed helplessness after they learned that they could not change the outcome. Seligman's first experiment with humans involved an experience of uncontrollability through a loud noise that the experimental group could not switch off. In the second phase of the experiment all the participants were exposed to a controllable aversive stimulus, but the experimental group that were exposed to uncontrollability in phase one, failed to respond in the correct way-they have learned to become helpless (Försterling, 2001).

The image is a watermark of a university crest, likely from the University of Cambridge, featuring a shield with a cross and four lions, topped with a crown and a bird. The motto 'Pectora roburant ciliis cecis' is visible at the bottom of the crest.

Seligman (1975) stated that the learned helplessness effect refers to the fact that animals and humans exposed to uncontrollable negative events in one situation often fail to respond during a similar event in another situation where control is achievable. The learned helplessness hypothesis is based on cognitive learning theory where subjects learn that the outcome of a particular situation is not related to intended responses. According to the original helplessness theory, helplessness manifests in three areas concurrently: behavioural, cognitive and affective. Behavioural consequences can include passivity and procrastination, cognitive effects consist of frustration and low self-esteem while affective consequences usually include depressed mood.

Abrahamson et al. (1978) suggested an attributional framework to address the major theoretical debates arising from the original learned helplessness theory. They suggested that individuals engage in a causal search for the reason of their helplessness. The trigger to the

development of learned helplessness behaviours is the expectation that response will be unrelated to the outcome. Abramson et al. (1978) suggested that it is the attributions made for the experience of uncontrollability that may result in learned helplessness. Mere exposure to uncontrollable bad events is not sufficient to render a person helpless- many people are exposed to uncontrollable bad events, but not all of them develop helplessness. The person must come to expect that future outcomes are also uncontrollable in order to exhibit learned helplessness.

The reformulated attributional learned helplessness theory defines three dimensions of attribution. These dimensions are responsible for different aspects of the expectancy of future uncontrollability and it determines the various symptoms of helplessness (Abramson et al., 1978). The first dimension differentiates between universal helplessness and personal helplessness and illustrates a continuum of attributional style referred to as internality versus externality or simply locus of control. The self-other dichotomy is used to determine where an individual is positioned on this continuum. One individual may believe that noncontingency between response and outcome can be attributed to internal factors and another individual at the opposite end of the continuum may ascribe noncontingency to external factors (McDermott Nelson & Quinless, 1988). For example, an individual who has a personal helplessness style may attribute poor performance on a school examination to lack of intellectual ability and may eventually believe that failure is inevitable. Another individual may attribute similar poor examination performance to external factors such as unfairness of the test content. This person may also feel that failure in the course is unavoidable but this person is said to have a universal helplessness style. Abramson et al. (1978) suggests that a person who exhibits a personal helplessness style is more likely to have a lower self-esteem than a person with a universal helplessness style.

The second dimension consists of an attributional style that occurs along a continuum of global helplessness versus specific helplessness (McDermott Nelson & Quinless, 1988).

Global helplessness assumes that learned helplessness deficits will transpire across a broad range of situations while specific helplessness assumes that the deficits will only occur in a particular range of situations. Attributing uncontrollability to global factors results in helplessness generalized to many other situations, while attributions to specific factors cause the helplessness deficits to be confined to specific situations.

The third dimension entails the consistent occurrence of learned helplessness over time. This dimension consists of a continuum of stable attributions that are generally persistent factors, and unstable attributions which are short-lived or sporadic factors. The attribution foresees the recurrence of the expectations, but the expectation will determine whether the helplessness effects will occur in the first place (McDermott Nelson & Quinless, 1988). An individual's relative placement on these scales will not only determine the helplessness deficits displayed, but will also aid in the prediction of future deficits. According to Abramson et al. (1978), an individual who develops the expectation that outcomes are uncontrollable, are at risk for developing cognitive, emotional and motivational deficits. Various research studies investigated the relationship between learned helplessness and depression, control, self-esteem and stress (Baucom, 1983; Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1979; Danker-Brown, 1983; Mckean, 1994; Meehan & Overton, 1982; Seligman, 1975). Since a relationship between learned helplessness and depression has been found by Seligman (1975), Abramson et al. (1978) theorized that a pessimistic attributional style will cause proneness to depression in an individual. The reformulated model of learned helplessness has preventative implications. People at high risk for depression, in other words people who have a tendency to attribute uncontrollable negative events to internal, stable and global factors, may be identified before the onset of depression. Abramson et al. (1978) suggested

therapeutic techniques that may prevent learned helplessness and resulting depression. Life experiences that teach individuals to expect that they will be able to control the sources of suffering and nurturance in their life should immunize them against the detrimental effects of helplessness. Figure 1 depicts a theoretical model which may be used to explain learned helplessness in humans (McDermott Nelson & Quinless, 1988).

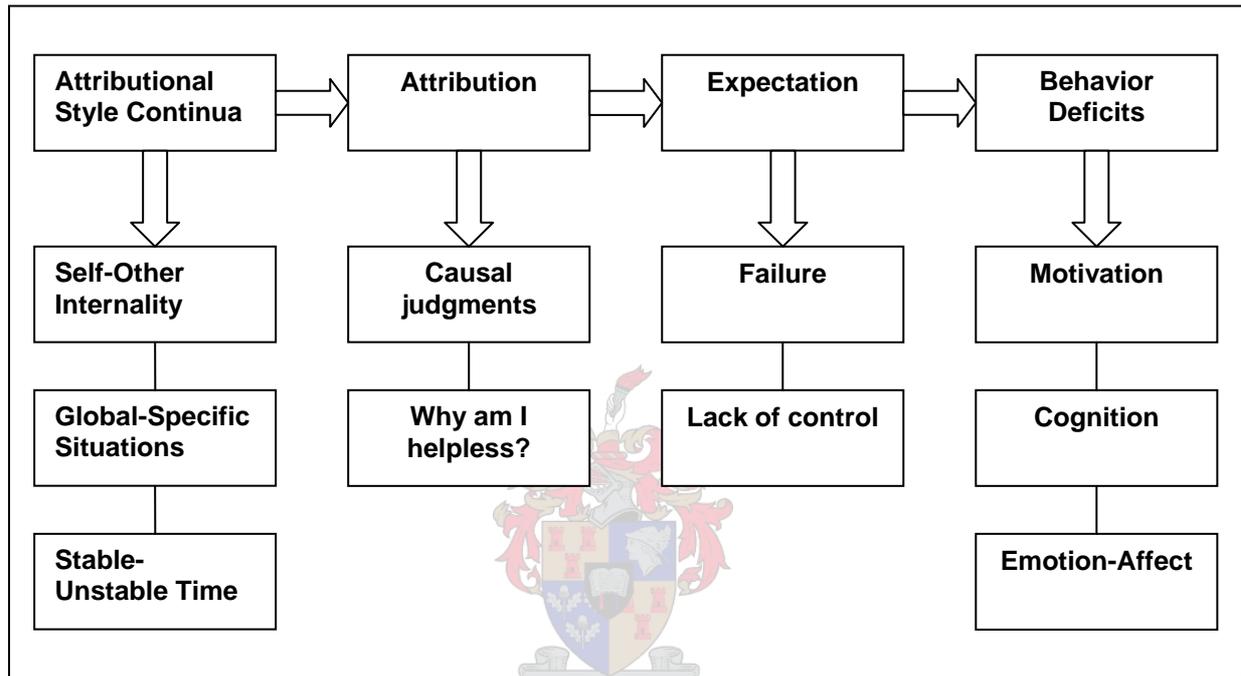
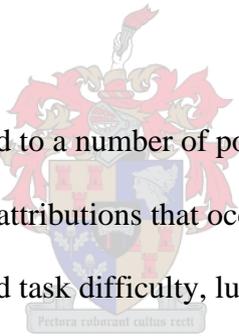


Figure 1 A conceptual model of learned helplessness in humans

Attribution Theory

Weiner's (1985) attribution theory emphasizes the relationship between the causal attributions an individual makes and their motivation to achieve. Weiner's theory is an important theory of motivation and has been used extensively as a research model in social psychology. A fundamental assumption of attribution theory is the notion that it is an individual's explanation of their achievement outcomes that will determine their future achievement motivation. People engage in a search for the perceived causes of events, especially if those events are unexpected. These causal attributions or explanations for outcomes will then form significant motivational beliefs. It is thus an individual's causal attributions for success or failure that will be the driving force behind their subsequent achievement.



A particular outcome can be attributed to a number of possible causal attributions. Weiner identified several well-known causal attributions that occur frequently. Ability and effort is the two most common attributions and task difficulty, luck and interest is also part of the most important achievement attributions. Weiner (1985) further categorized causal attributions by the underlying dimensions common to all causal attributions. The three dimensions are locus of control or locus of causality, stability, and controllability. Every causal attribution has a locus of control which is the source of the attribution. The source of the attribution can be internal, like an individual characteristic, or it can be external to the individual. This dimension can also be related to the emotional reactions following an outcome. If an individual attributes success to ability, an internal cause, it can lead to feelings of pride but if the individual attributes success to an external cause it may lead to feelings of appreciation (Weiner, 1985).

Stability is the second causal dimension which refers to the duration of a causal attribution. Causal attributions can be considered relatively stable or unstable over time. For example, ability can be viewed as a stable characteristic over time whereas effort can be perceived as unstable or varying over time. If an individual attributes their current success to a stable cause like ability, they will be more likely to anticipate future success than when they attribute it to an unstable cause like effort. Each causal attribution is comprised of a combination of the three causal dimensions.

Figure 2 displays Weiner's conceptual model explaining attributional theory of motivation and emotion (Weiner, 1985). In Figure 2 it is the positive or negative causes an individual attributes to an outcome that will begin a motivational sequence. In the model emotions are directly linked to the outcome and displayed as reactions of happiness or frustration and sadness. To determine the reason behind the outcome, the individual will partake in a causal search. Several causal antecedents will have an impact on the causal explanation reached, for example specific information like past history and social comparison. Examples of causal decisions in the achievement sphere would be ability, effort or luck. The causal decision in itself might draw a distinctive affective reaction like surprise. The cause can then be positioned in the dimensional space of locus, stability and controllability. Globality and intentionality can also be potential causal properties. The psychological effects of causal dimensions can also be demonstrated. For example, the stability of the causal attribution will determine the anticipation of future success and result in hopelessness or hopefulness. The globality of the cause will influence expectations across situations and the locus of the cause will affect self-esteem and pride. Controllability will influence social feelings, for example, individual failure can encourage self-directed feelings of guilt or shame depending on whether the causes are controllable or not. Depending on the circumstances, possible emotions directed at other people can include anger, pity or gratitude. Expectancy and affect,

in turn, are then alleged to guide motivated behaviour. The model developed by Weiner does not include all the possibilities and the one-directional linkages can be changed to include a much more complex reciprocal system. Despite this, the model illustrates his attribution theory rather successfully and highlights the importance of attributions in achievement behaviour.

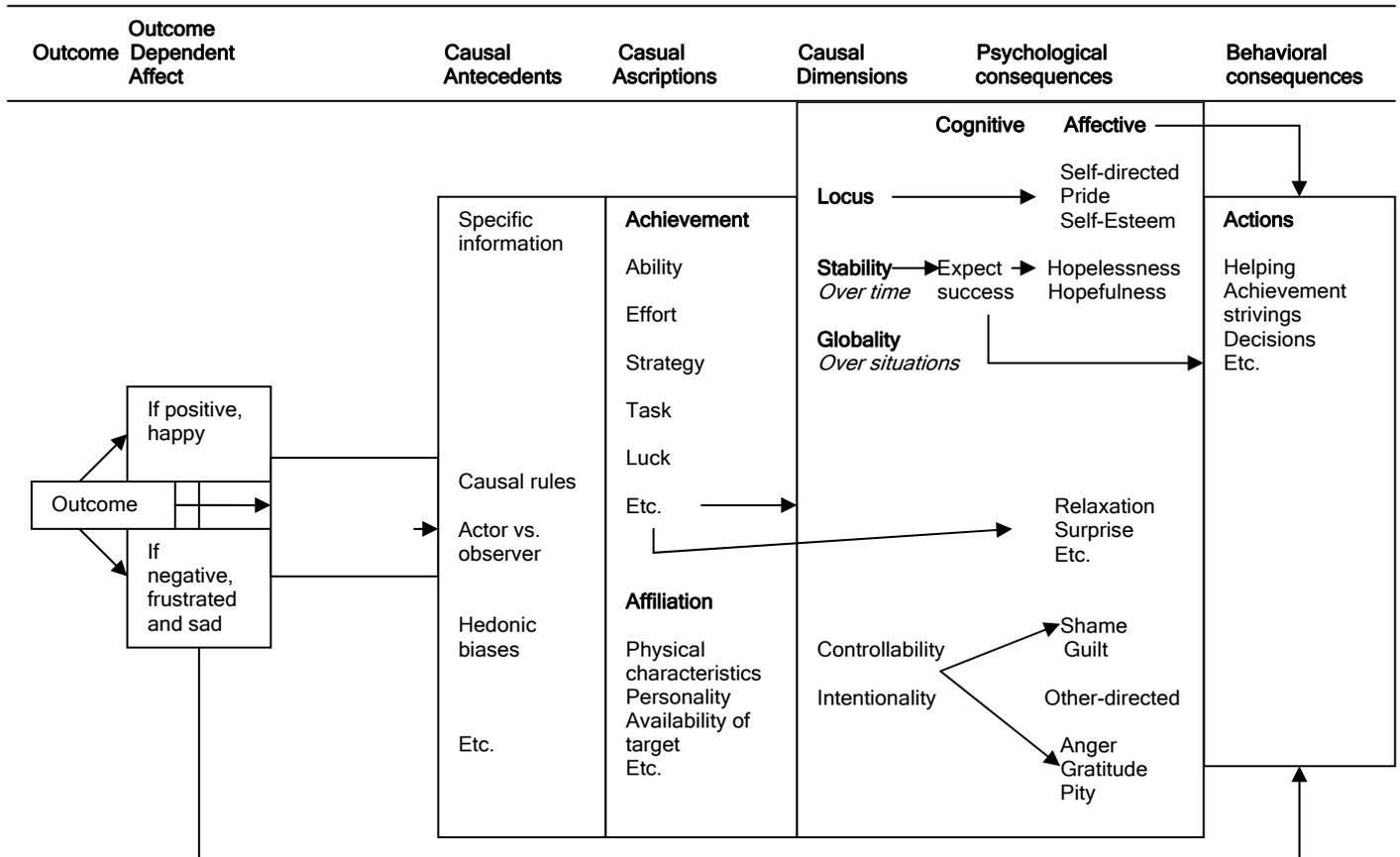


Figure 2 An attributional theory of motivation and emotion.

The theories discussed in this section highlight the significance of attributions in the development of learned helplessness as well as an individual's motivation and achievement behaviour. Some of the research studies highlighted in the literature review point to a link between the sex-role identities of women and the learned helplessness they display. Other research focused more on the relationship between a feminine sex-role identity and deficits in

achievement behaviour. Attributional style is therefore an important variable to measure in the present study if the relationship between these constructs is to be properly understood.

2.4 Self-esteem

2.4.1 Definition

There is much confusion over what is intended by the term self-esteem. The nature of self-esteem has been approached from several different perspectives that complicate the achievement of a general understanding (Reasoner, 2002). From the psychodynamic perspective it is seen as a developmental process and from the cognitive behavioural perspective it is seen as part of a coping repertoire. The humanistic psychologist may focus more on the experiential dimension of self-esteem while the social psychologist may see it as an attitude. Most researchers agree that self-esteem consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components (Reasoner, 2002). The cognitive component involves individual's thoughts about themselves and the incongruity between what they currently are and what they strive to become. The emotional component entails the feelings an individual has when considering this incongruence. Furthermore, behaviours such as assertiveness or decisiveness are evidence of the behavioural component of self-esteem. Another aspect that makes research on self-esteem complicated is the fact that it can vary over time. Global self-esteem refers to one's general overall self-esteem whereas situational self-esteem refers to the everyday manifestations of self-esteem that is subject to change (Reasoner, 2002).

Self-esteem has also been confused with other terms like self-concept, self-confidence or self-efficacy. A clear distinction has to be made between these terms since they are semantically different. Self-esteem is a component of the self-concept and refers to general feelings of self-worth or self-value. Self-concept is defined as the summation of all the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself (Rosenberg, 1965). The self-

concept is theorized to be multi-dimensional and is described as an organized configuration of beliefs about one's self. Self-efficacy on the other hand, is the belief in one's ability to perform certain tasks competently. General self-efficacy is the belief in one's general ability to be competent, whereas specific self-efficacy refers to beliefs about one's capability to perform tasks in specific domains. Self-confidence refers to the belief in one's personal value and probability of succeeding. Self-confidence is therefore a combination of self-esteem and general self-efficacy (Rosenberg, 1965).

The term self-esteem is derived from a Greek word meaning respect for self (Mruk, 1995). The "self" part of the term refers to the values, beliefs and attitudes that we have towards ourselves. The "esteem" part of the word describes the value we give ourselves. In short, self-esteem is the acceptance of oneself at any time during one's life. The National Association for Self-Esteem defined self-esteem as 'the experience of being competent in meeting life's challenges and being worthy of happiness' (Reasoner, 2002, p. 2). According to this definition, self-esteem has a competence component as well as a worthiness component. The worthiness component of self-esteem is linked to whether a person finds meaning and honour in life through dedication to basic moral values. The competence component refers to the individual's belief in his or her ability to achieve success and be effective in decision-making and other mental processes (Reasoner, 2002). These two components and the interaction between them form the essence of self-esteem.

2.4.2 Rosenberg's self-esteem theory

Rosenberg (1965) considered late adolescence to be a particularly interesting time of life to study self-esteem. During adolescence there is a heightened awareness of the self and the individual is confronted with life-changing decisions. When an individual has to face such major decisions, his or her self-image tends to move to the foreground. The adolescent is primarily concerned with questions surrounding his or her identity and vision for the future. Rapid physical and psychological changes in the adolescent also add to the increased awareness of the self. Self-esteem is very important in the lives of young people and Rosenberg (1965) reports that low self-esteem can lead to below average expectations for success in adulthood occupations. The self-esteem of female adolescents is therefore a significant part of their overall psychological adjustment.

Rosenberg (1965) theorized that the self consisted of two parts, identity which refers to cognitive variables, and the self-esteem referring to emotional variables. Identity entails the perception or interpretation of meaning while self-esteem reflects the subjective life of the individual. Rosenberg (1965) also described the self-esteem as a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self. He determined that self-esteem has a self-worth component based on reflected appraisals and an effectiveness component based on observations of the outcomes of one's actions. Reflected appraisals are the way we learn to see ourselves through others eyes. Social comparisons are also an important part of Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem theory. Human beings make positive or negative self-evaluations based on the process of comparing themselves with others.

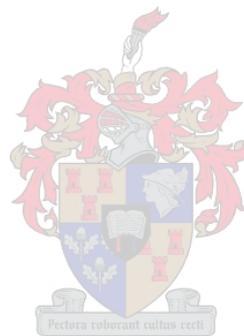
According to Rosenberg (1965), the cognitive modality of the self consists of numerous identities. The amount of identities will depend on the amount of social roles or relationships the individual partakes in. The self will then be a result of social interaction and the nature of

the society in which the interaction takes place. Various social relationships, institutions and communities will affect the character of the self. Self-esteem is a multifaceted, dynamic construct that involves various perceptions, identities and cognitions. Self-esteem is made up of mirrored appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions and identifications based on group association.

Rosenberg (1965) found that a low self-esteem has a considerable impact on psychological functioning and interpersonal behavior. He found that people with low self-esteem are more likely to feel uncomfortable, self-conscious, and inhibited in confident expression. The low self-esteem person constantly fears making mistakes, being humiliated or exposing themselves to scorn. Low self-esteem people consider the self as very fragile, and they are motivated to avoid situations that affect their feelings of self-worth negatively. They are oversensitive and alert to signs of rejection and tend to adapt a defensive approach towards life. They also tend to be more anxious and depressed with a general lack of contentment. Low self-esteem people look for proof of their perceived inadequacy whereas people with high self-esteem are motivated to notice evidence confirming their strengths. High self-esteem individuals attribute their successful outcomes to internal characteristics while low self-esteem individuals contribute success to external influences. Low self-esteem individuals tend to avoid possible risky or embarrassing situations and this inhibits the development of their potential.

The theories discussed in this chapter provided background and definitions for the variables used in the present study. The importance of the adolescent period in the lives of women was highlighted and it provided motivation for the measurement of constructs in the present study during late adolescence. Several theories relating to the development of a sex-role identity was also mentioned. If traditional sex-role socialization proves to be detrimental to the

psychological well-being of females, it is important to understand the processes that lead to the formation of a sex-role identity. Furthermore, three competing theoretical models were discussed in an attempt to explain the relationship between sex-role identity and psychological adjustment. The present study will use these models to explain some of its findings. Attributional style and its relationship to learned helplessness and achievement behaviour was also discussed. These theories stress the importance of an optimistic attributional style, not only in preventing mental illness such as depression, but also promoting the optimal psychological well-being of women. Finally the significance of self-esteem in the overall psychological health of women was discussed to provide motivation for its inclusion in the present study.



CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE STUDY

In this literature study, research on topics related to sex-role identity, attributional style and self-esteem will be reviewed. The review will include research from both South African and other sources, since the amount of South African research on this topic is limited. The current researcher could not find any research on the three variables in combination with each other. Firstly, sex-role identity and its relationship to overall psychological adjustment and self-esteem will be discussed. Secondly the relationship between sex-role identity and achievement behaviour will be reviewed. This is to determine the extent of the influence of sex-role identity on the psychological health and occupational achievement of women. Thirdly the relationship between sex-role stereotypes and gender discrimination is explored to emphasize the disempowering effect traditional sex-role socialization may have on women. Finally, a strong link between sex-role identity and learned helplessness was found in the literature. A discussion of these research studies provided an introduction to the following section on attributional style. Attributional style is the central construct of the reformulated learned helplessness model that explains the dynamics of the development of learned helplessness. Attributional style was also found to be an important aspect of the overall psychological adjustment of women.

3.1 Sex-role identity, self-esteem and psychological adjustment

In the literature, sex-role identity has been investigated across various life domains. It has been used to explain gender differences in mental illness like depression, work-related achievement behaviour and general psychological well-being.

The following studies examined the relationship between sex-role orientation and psychological adjustment or health. Whitley (1983) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 studies that examined the relationship between sex-role identity and self-esteem. The goal of the analysis was to test the descriptive validity of the congruence, androgyny and masculinity models that directed research in this field so far. Although the results of the meta-analysis provided support for the masculinity model, it cannot be inferred that a masculine orientation causes higher self-esteem.

In a study done by Lamke (1982) the relationship between sex-role orientation and self-esteem during adolescence was examined. He found that males and females differ in important ways with regard to the impact of sex-role identity on adjustment and should therefore be assessed separately. Lamke thought it best to employ more than one measure of sex-role identity so as to lessen the possibility of different conclusions being drawn based on measurement disparities. The long and short form of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was used as well as the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The BSRI and PAQ yielded comparable results in terms of sex-role categorization. Surprisingly, masculinity was predictive of self-esteem among females across all three measures of sex-role orientation. Koopman and Schiff (1978) also found that androgynous women had a significantly higher level of self-esteem than feminine and undifferentiated women, but not significantly higher than the masculine women. These findings may indicate support for the theoretical model of masculinity which suggests that it is the masculine component of androgyny that is responsible for better psychological health (Forshaw & Shmukler, 1993).

Massad (1981) proposed that it is the relative dominant position of men in western society that leads to the higher perceived value of masculine traits. Massad (1981) investigated the

relationship between sex-role identity and adjustment in adolescence. Two measures of adjustment were employed including a self acceptance and peer acceptance scale. Peer group acceptance is extremely important during adolescence, especially when alternative sources of support are not available. Among males, traditional sex-typing (masculinity) was associated with higher acceptance scores, while female adjustment was associated with non-traditional sex-typing (androgyny). This may provide support for the androgyny theoretical model when considering the adjustment of females. Adolescent females may therefore be under a different kind of pressure on the one hand, to conform to traditional gender roles, and on the other to move beyond the stereotypes in order to adjust to western society.

In contrast to this, Koopman and Schiff (1978) found that the level of ego development of androgynous women was significantly higher than that of masculine women, but still no higher than the feminine or undifferentiated groups. Koopman and Schiff (1978) speculated that in a society with explicit feminine expectations of women, the masculine women might experience unique cultural conflicts that can interfere with their ego development. Coetzee (2001) also indicated that South African women often feel guilty and ambivalent when they deviate from the gender norms encouraged by the patriarchal South African society. When Koopman and Schiff (1978) compared the combined group of nonsex-typed women (androgynous and undifferentiated) with the sex-typed groups (masculine and feminine), results indicated a significantly higher level of ego development in the nonsex-typed group. These results support the theory that a moderation of one sex-role by the other is required for greater levels of ego maturity.

3.2 Sex-role identity and achievement behaviour

Sex-role identity has also been investigated in an attempt to explain the gender differences found in occupational achievement behaviour. Occupational achievement forms a significant part of the psychological well-being of many women and should be carefully considered as part of empowerment programs. South Africa is currently in the process of ensuring greater gender equality in the workplace. If a feminine sex-role identity hinders women from achieving their optimal occupational potential, it is important to create interventions aimed at addressing these issues. Smit (1988) found that South African women who remain loyal to the traditional sex-roles prescribed by the community reveal achieving styles consistent with their sex-role identities (lower achievement behaviour), while those who deviate from the traditional roles exhibit achievement behaviour congruent to that of men (higher achievement). Chow (1987) contributed towards the testing of Bem's conceptual framework of androgyny among Asian-American women. The results showed androgynous and masculine women had a higher level of occupational attainment while only androgynous women had a higher degree of self-esteem and work satisfaction. Clarey (1985) reached the conclusion that sex-role identity has a significant affect on the way women see themselves and their professional and personal futures. Smit (1988) suggested that it is important to make South African women aware of the obstacles that prevent them from achieving in the labour market, especially in management.

Chusmir and Koberg (1991) looked at self-confidence in relation to sex-role identity among managerial women and men. Androgynous and masculine orientations were linked to high self-confidence whereas a high feminine sex-role orientation without a correspondingly high masculine component was related to low levels of self-confidence in both sexes. The results of this study were consistent with Bem's (1974) observation that androgynous managers

show more flexibility in their management style and can easily call on either form of behaviour depending on the situation. Chusmir and Koberg (1991) reported that female and male managers were alike in various ways, which confirms the premise that it is sex-role identity rather than gender that influences self-confidence. In a study done by May and Spangenberg (1997) the relationship between sex-role orientation and coping ability in South African men with a managerial orientation was examined. Androgynous and masculine participants showed significantly better coping skills than feminine or undifferentiated participants. The conclusion was drawn that since there was no significant difference between the androgynous and masculine groups with regards to coping, both an androgynous and masculine sex-role can serve as a valuable coping resource for men. Chusmir and Koberg (1991) found that managers of both sexes tended to score higher on masculine traits than on feminine traits, which raised the possibility that men and women may believe that masculine attributes are consistent with efficient management. If female managers adopt masculine behaviour for this reason, they may lose their sense of identity as well as the potential value they can add as a diversifying influence. It is important to not try and change women into men, but to help women take their rightful place in society by emphasizing the value of both feminine and masculine characteristics. Lategan and Spangenberg (1993) stated that masculine characteristics like autonomy and determination are very important in assisting young South African women to manage their lives. Despite this, the significance of feminine characteristics like empathy and tenderness should not be underestimated. Through the elimination of sex-role stereotypes, both women and men will be freer to express themselves in which ever way they find best suited.

3.3 Sex-role stereotypes and gender discrimination

Cook and Simbayi (1998) found that South African children are still influenced by occupational sex-role stereotypes in their vocational choices. This can be crucial considering the fact that young people often make career choices based upon this kind of misconceptions. The researchers suggest that these stereotypes are obtained through socialization practices of parents and then reinforced by the media and educational systems. South African women's aspirations and career opportunities were severely restricted by the patriarchal system. For many years black women suffered the discriminatory policies of both the apartheid era and patriarchy within their own cultures. Conservative views within Afrikaans and English communities about the appropriate roles of women also led to the exclusion of white women from most types of employment. It is imperative that the effects of these stereotypes are eliminated so as to provide equal career opportunities and possibilities for men and women. Clarey (1985) attempted to reduce stereotypes by implementing a resocialization program where the goal was to modify the sex-role identity of traditional women towards androgyny. In the process they hoped to increase the self-esteem of the women and re-orientate their career preferences from traditional to non-traditional. Clarey (1985) wanted to help individuals progress from a rigid traditional sex-role identity towards a more flexible androgynous identity that is less reliant on the sex-role for suitable behaviour. The results of the study indicated that the resocialization program was effective in achieving its goals- the women managed to change their conventional sex-role beliefs while still preserving their valued feminine characteristics. A therapeutic strategy like this can assist women to become more flexible and dynamic in a society that changes its demands rapidly.

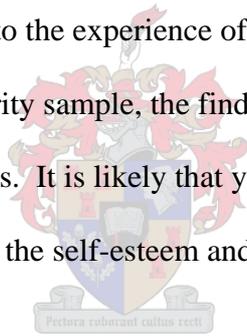
Eccles (1987) focused on the choices women make and the reason for those choices that influence their achievement behaviour. She argued that too much emphasis is placed on the

sex differences in achievement behaviour instead of the individual differences among women. Eccles (1987) theorized that educational and vocational choices are directed by the following: a) expectations for success regarding supposed suitable options, b) the relationship of these options to one's goals, self-identity and fundamental psychological needs, c) the person's sex-role and general self schema, and d) the possible cost involved of investing time in one activity rather than another. Eccles' view differed noticeably from those who attribute gender differences in achievement patterns to women's low self-esteem or pessimistic attributional styles. She legitimized the choices women make as important in their own right, rather than comparing them to a male standard, a process she refers to as the categorization of females as deficient males.

Despite the fact that women's choices may be valuable and legitimate on their own terms, the reality of sex-role stereotypes and gender discrimination in South Africa are still evident. Firstly, it is important to make sure women do have a choice by eradicating discriminatory practices and secondly, freedom of choice can only truly be promoted if societal pressures to conform to traditional role stereotypes are eradicated. Women should be made aware of all the possibilities open to them and if it is their choice, they should be helped to recondition years of socialization. Prinsloo (1992) viewed sex-role stereotypes as a form of prejudice and argued that sexism stems from uncertainty about the functioning of sex-roles in life. The role confusion influences everyone and originated from events like feminist movements, industrialization and technological changes in South Africa during the last three decades. Prinsloo found that traditional sex-role stereotypes remained tenaciously unchanged in South Africa at the time of his study. He agreed that part of the problem of stereotypes is the dichotomized view we often have of reality. We categorize phenomena based upon superficial qualities like skin colour or biological sex and thereby fail to understand the complexity of human nature. Since the study of Prinsloo (1992), there have been no studies

in South Africa to measure possible changes in these sex-role stereotypes. The present study will contribute to this lack of research by indicating whether South African women still have traditional sex-role identities. Ravinder (1987) suggested that sex-role stereotypes cannot be eliminated by reversing sex-roles, but by encouraging the development of sex-role transcendent individuals who do not consider sex-roles to be important or relevant at all.

Verkuyten (1998) investigated the relationship between perceived discrimination and self-esteem among ethnic minority adolescents. The participants who perceived higher levels of discrimination had lower self-esteem and lower perceived social competence. The researchers suggested that perceived discrimination may be related to self-esteem and overall psychological well-being. Perceived personal discrimination can also influence one's sense of control over events and may lead to the experience of helplessness. Although this study was conducted using an ethnic minority sample, the findings may also be valid for victims of gender discrimination and stereotypes. It is likely that years of gender discrimination in South Africa impacted negatively on the self-esteem and general psychological well-being of South African women.



3.4 Sex-role identity and learned helplessness

Curiously, some of the stereotypical feminine characteristics like passivity, dependence and greater emotionality correspond to the qualities of a depressed person. Moore and Rapmund (2000) conducted interviews with depressed South African women and found that many of their personality traits were connected to their psychosocial development instead of their innate characteristics. Carter and Kaslow (1992) argued that traditional feminine women develop a negative view of assertive and self-sufficient behaviour that is reinforced by societal expectations. Women often feel helpless because they think they are incapable of changing their circumstances.

According to the learned helplessness theory of depression, helplessness is an antecedent of depression and individuals who are prone to learned helplessness are also at a greater risk to develop depression. Learned helplessness is associated with the expectance of uncontrollability and results in deficits in various life domains (McKean, 1994). McKean used the two risk factors associated with the development of learned helplessness to assess the behavioural, cognitive and affective effects of helplessness. The two risk factors, expectation of uncontrollability and pessimistic attributional style, were measured with the Learned Helplessness Scale (McDermott Nelson & Quinless, 1988) and the Attributional Style Questionnaire (Abramson et al., 1982). The results of the study indicated that learned helplessness is associated with important deficits in three domains. Students at high risk for helplessness were found to perform more poorly academically (cognitive domain), suffer more dysphoria when confronted with negative outcomes (affective domain) and show more procrastination (behavioural domain).

Leunes, Nation and Turley (1980) used anagram tasks to test the effect of uncontrollability and failure on men and women in a learned helplessness experiment. Females were more likely to develop helplessness effects while males were not affected adversely by exposure to uncontrollable aversive stimuli. The researchers suggested males undergo an intensive socialization process during which self-esteem becomes entwined with the perception of control. Feelings of worth are often associated with persistence when confronted with failure. Men often maintain their belief in their ability to control events and might therefore be less affected by helplessness-induction experiments (Leunes et al., 1980).

In an attempt to explain the higher incidence of depression among women, Baucom and Danker-Brown (1979) investigated the effect of sex-roles on helplessness and depression. They found that sex-roles were an important factor in the etiology of depression and

masculine and feminine sex-typed persons were particularly susceptible to the development of helplessness. Baucom and Danker-Brown theorized that masculine sex-typed persons place greater importance on control and success and might therefore avoid possible helplessness situations in life. The lower rate of depression among men might be a result of structuring their environment in such a way to avoid losing control. Danker-Brown (1983), also found that male gender and high masculinity are associated with preference to control one's environment.

Baucom (1983) investigated women's decisions to regain control in a helplessness-induced experiment. Masculine women chose to control their surroundings whereas low-masculine women chose to avoid control of their environments. After a loss of control experience, none of the feminine women chose to control the subsequent task. If having control is important in preventing helplessness and depression, low masculine women appear to be at risk for the development of depression.



Setton (1981) also discovered that sex-typed persons performed significantly worse than androgynous persons in a learned helplessness induced experiment. They found that feminine sex-typed women were especially vulnerable to societal and internal pressures resulting in depressive features such as passivity, low motivation and low self-esteem.

Abramson et al. (1978) made a distinction between personal and universal helplessness and proposed that personal helplessness infers low self-esteem because these individuals believe desired outcomes are not contingent on their own actions, but on the actions of relevant others.

Meehan and Overton (1982) hypothesized that sex differences found in performance tasks reflected social role expectations rather than actual intellectual differences. To test the hypothesis they investigated the relationship between sex-role identity, learned helplessness

and formal operational task performance. Although the study found no formal operational competence shortfalls for females, the results showed that a feminine sex-role identity combined with a helpless orientation lead to poorer performance in some of the operational tasks.

Baucom and Danker-Brown (1984) studied the relation of sex-role identity and sex-stereotyped tasks to the development of learned helplessness. Low-masculine women were differentiated from the others with their tendency to give up often and quickly on subsequent tasks after failing on a male-stereotyped task. The researchers integrated these findings with the results of their previous research (Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1979) as well as that of Baucom (1983). The integrated results revealed that the androgynous group was the only sex-role identity group that did not show cognitive or motivational deficits following induced failure. This could provide support for the suggested resilience of androgynous women (Bem, 1974). The feminine sex-typed females on the other hand, were the only women who experienced both cognitive and affective symptoms of helplessness after the experiments. The combined results show that feminine sex-typed women are particularly vulnerable to the development of helplessness symptoms.

Harvey and Harvey (1995) found that a lack of power is a common factor in racial and gender inequalities. They proposed a concept called learned hopefulness which is essentially the reverse of learned helplessness. They suggested that learned hopefulness is the process of learning and utilizing problem-solving skills effectively and exercising positive control during different learning experiences. They also found that hopefulness is linked to empowerment and is therefore important in planning psychological interventions. According to Campbell (1998), theoretical models of empowerment and learned helplessness share

many similarities. He suggests that empowerment and learned helplessness might be on opposite ends of a single motivation continuum. Learned helplessness models provide a thorough understanding of the role of attributions and affect in motivation. If these constructs can be combined with empowerment theories, researchers might be able to comprehend and promote empowerment in a more effective way.

3.5 Sex-role identity and attributional style

The reformulated learned helplessness model was developed by Abrahamson et al. (1978) to address some of the problems associated with the original learned helplessness theory.

Initially, the expectation of uncontrollability was considered to be the cause of learned helplessness. Abrahamson et al. suggested that it is the causes an individual attributes to uncontrollable positive and negative events that will determine the development of learned helplessness. A pessimistic attributional style is said to consist of either internal, stable and global attributions for negative events or external, unstable and specific attributions for positive events. A pessimistic attributional style is therefore considered to be a risk factor for learned helplessness which in turn, can result in depression.

Ballard, Bush and Fremouw (1995) compared adult children of alcoholics to children of non-alcoholic parents with regard to depression, self-esteem and attributional style. The findings indicated that the children of alcoholics had significantly lower self-esteem and higher depression scores than the children of non-alcoholics. They were also more likely to have a pessimistic attributional style where they attribute negative events to internal, stable and global causes. Theoretically, a pessimistic or depressive attributional style is more likely in an uncontrollable environment, for example an environment where the child of an alcoholic parent tries to take the responsibility and is unsuccessful.

The failure can aggravate the depressive feelings and low self-esteem resulting in a cycle of depression and pessimistic attributional style.

Attributional style, life events and depression in Japanese students were studied by Kambara and Sakamoto (1998). The diathesis-stress model of depression suggests that depression can be predicted by negative life events and a pessimistic attributional style. Kambara and Sakamoto extended this theory by proposing that depression can also be predicted by positive life events and a non-enhancing attributional style –in other words, the tendency to attribute positive events to external, unstable and specific causes. Self-enhancing people also tend to see positive life events as opportunities to develop their self-esteem which in turn provides a buffer against depression. In the study, depressive reactions were more strongly predicted by the interaction between positive life events and non-enhancing attributional styles than negative life events and pessimistic attributional styles. These results may point to differences in self-serving tendencies between Japanese cultures and some of the Western cultures.



Nurmi (1991) investigated cross-cultural differences in self-serving attributional bias and found that American students use self-serving bias to a greater extent than Finish students. The attributional style of South Africans has not been investigated by many studies (Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993), and it should be kept in mind that South Africa consists of various different culture groups that might influence the findings.

A pessimistic or non-enhancing attributional style was also linked to deficits in achievement behaviour in a number of studies. According to Guest (2001), attributional style is socially learned and is related to feelings of self-confidence in our ability to engage in a task. The attributions we make will affect the effort-performance-reward linkages and help us to persist in specific activities.

Guest (2001) suggests that cognitive behavioural programmes can be developed to modify attributional patterns and increase the inclination to engage in motivated behaviour.

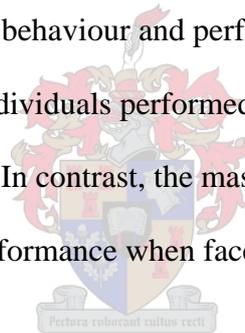
Research studies show that women tend to display pessimistic attributional styles where they make internal and stable attributions for failure while males tend to make external attributions for negative events (Gundersen & Rozell, 1998; Mednick, Murray & Pasquella, 1981; Seligman, 1975). Calhoun, Cheney and Dawes (1974) also found that females were more likely to assume personal responsibility (internal attributions) for failure than males. Breen, Dyck and Volcano's (1979) results confirmed this, and found that females attributed their failure to lack of ability (internal attributions) and their success to the ease of the task (external attributions).

According to Weiner's (1985) attributional theory of achievement motivation, the need for achievement is related to perceived causes of success and failure. Nathawat, Singh and Singh (1997) found that participants with a low need for achievement were more likely to attribute negative events to internal, stable and global causes than people with a higher need for achievement. Attributional theory also states that some people tend to improve their self-esteem by taking credit for successes and evading self-blame for failures. This tendency is called self-serving bias and relates to making internal, stable and global attributions for positive events. In western society masculinity is often equated with ambition which is related to the need for achievement.

Although the above research studies have shown that women tend to employ a more pessimistic explanatory style than men, Martinez and Sewell (2000) found that disabled women possessed more optimistic attributional styles than the persons without disabilities and the men with disabilities. The results were surprising considering the fact that disabilities are associated with passivity and dependence.

The researchers suggested that the sex-role identity and not the gender of the participants might have influenced their explanatory styles. Lee (1986) explored the impact of sex-role identity and sex-typed tasks on attributional patterns for success and failure. She found that the non-traditional women had a more self-enhancing pattern of attributions than the feminine women. The feminine women also did significantly worse on the masculine tasks and were more likely to attribute any success to luck. She suggested that the perceived sex-role inappropriateness of a task might affect the achievement and attributional patterns of women. Bailey and Stein (1973) also suggested that women may be more motivated to achieve in traditionally feminine domains.

Gundersen and Rozell (1998) confirmed the above findings in their research on the impact of sex and sex-role identity on helpless behaviour and performance. They also found that undifferentiated and androgynous individuals performed at their maximum levels when the participants were the most helpless. In contrast, the masculine and feminine individuals experienced more impairment of performance when faced with obstacles.



Gianakos (2000) found that androgynous individuals exhibit strong instrumental and communicative attributes when experiencing work stress and that may cause them to engage more in help-seeking behaviour, positive thinking and direct action methods. Gianakos's data suggests that androgynous persons cope with work stress in ways related to work adjustment and feelings of mastery.

Lategan and Spangenberg (1993) inspected the influence of androgyny on attributional style and coping ability in first year South African students. Androgynous females were found to have significantly better coping skills than other females and androgynous males and females had better flexibility in coping style than all other sex-role groups.

A positive correlation was also found between good coping skills and an optimistic attributional style. Lategan and Spangenberg drew the conclusion that androgyny and optimistic attributional styles can serve as valuable coping mechanisms.

The research studies mentioned in this literature review investigated the impact of sex-role identity on various psychological constructs. As with all other psychological constructs, the relationship between the different variables is rarely uni-dimensional with clear causality. The question concerning the effects of sex-role socialization has however highlighted a few aspects worth exploring further. Support for the masculinity model has been found to compete with the results that support the androgyny model. Despite this, the notion that traditional femininity may be associated with poorer psychological adjustment remained rather consistent throughout these studies.

The South African research studies (Coetzee, 2001; Cooke & Simbayi, 1998; Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993; May & Spangenberg, 1997; Moore & Rapmund, 2000, Prinsloo, 1992; Smit, 1988) did not seem to provide results that were notably different from the other research mentioned. This may indicate that the effects of sex-role socialization on South African women are comparable to the effects experienced by women from other parts of the world. However, much more South African research is needed on these topics and cross-cultural studies should be able to provide information on the comparability of the results.

The process of empowering South African women consists of different dimensions: the enhancement of their psychological health through prevention of illness (for example learned helplessness and depression) and promotion of psychological coping mechanisms (for example higher self-esteem and optimistic attributional styles), the encouragement of freedom of choice and expression through the elimination of sex-role stereotypes and gender discrimination, and the restoration of the balance of power in South Africa through equal leadership. The current study was conducted in the hope of aiding this process by providing information regarding the effects of sex-role socialization on a group of South African women.

3.6 Hypotheses

Research hypothesis (H₁):

Persons with androgynous sex-typed identities possess a more optimistic attributional style than persons with masculine, feminine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities.

Research hypothesis (H₂):

Persons with feminine sex-typed identities possess a more pessimistic attributional style than persons with androgynous, masculine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities.

Research hypothesis (H₃):

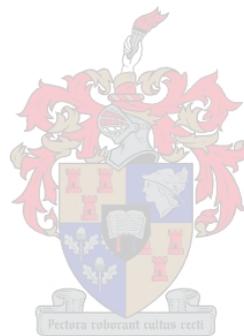
Persons with androgynous sex-typed identities have a higher degree of self-esteem than persons with masculine, feminine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities.

Research hypothesis (H₄):

Persons with feminine sex-typed identities have a lower degree of self-esteem than persons with androgynous, masculine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities.

Research hypothesis (H₅):

Persons with a pessimistic attributional style have a lower degree of self-esteem than persons with an optimistic attributional style.



CHAPTER 4

METHOD

4.1 Participants

The participants in the current study consisted of 280 undergraduate female students from Stellenbosch University. The participants were late adolescents between the ages of 18 and 22. This age group was chosen because the effects of social stressors could be most apparent during this stage in their lives where they are faced with considerable challenges as autonomous individuals. Also, the measuring instruments used in this study, was standardized on student samples, which make the results valid. Stellenbosch University have students from mainly four South African racial groups, namely, White, Black, Coloured and Indian. This study used a convenience sample and the different racial groups were not represented equally. In Table 1 the distribution of the race of the participants are displayed.

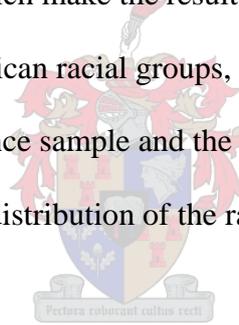


Table 1

Race Distribution of Sample

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	White	254	90.7	90.7	90.7
	Coloured	24	8.6	8.6	99.3
	Black	2	0.7	0.7	100.0
	Total	280	100.0	100.0	

From Table 1 it can be concluded that 90.7 percent of the sample consisted of White persons.

4.2 Questionnaires

Three self-report questionnaires were used as data-collecting tools:

4.2.1 The Bem Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1981)

Sex-role identity is an important construct in this study and the measurement thereof has provoked considerable controversy in the past. A brief discussion about the instrument used to measure sex-role identity would therefore be warranted.

Psychology has at first, conceptualized femininity and masculinity as bipolar ends of a single continuum. This theory left no room for the possibility that an individual can have both masculine and feminine characteristics at the same time. Bem (1974) addressed this problem by developing a sex-role inventory that measured masculinity and femininity as two independent constructs and made it possible to distinguish between individuals who have masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated sex-roles. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) can be distinguished from other masculinity-femininity scales by a number of features. Firstly it includes separate scales for masculinity and femininity with neutral characteristics in between that serve as filler items. Secondly the personality characteristics selected as masculine and feminine were chosen on the basis of society's sex-typed standards of desirable behaviour for men and women. Highly sex-typed scores would therefore not reflect an inclination to respond in a socially desirable way, but rather a specific tendency to describe oneself in accordance to society's standards for men and women. During the development of the scale, people in the American society were asked to judge the different characteristics according to social desirability (Bem, 1974). Although the generalizability of the scale to other cultures is questionable, a few studies confirmed the applicability of the scale to a South African context (Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993; Prinsloo, 1992).

The current validity of the BSRI was also investigated by Holt (1998) to determine if the inventory could still be valid in modern times. Although the inventory was well-constructed, the original adjectives representing stereotypically masculine and feminine gender roles were selected over 20 years ago. Holt (1998) considered the possibility that the BSRI may be outdated in terms of the representations of masculine and feminine gender roles. The findings indicated that although there was a slight change in gender role perceptions, the BSRI still proved to be a valid measure.

The Bem Sex-role Inventory is used to measure sex-role identity and is comprised of 60 personality characteristics. These 60 personality characteristics are divided in three subscales consisting of 20 characteristics each. Two of the subscales are masculinity and femininity scales that each consist of personality traits considered traditionally desirable for either males or females. The items on the third subscale are neutral, nonsex-typed traits. Utilizing a seven-point likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true), subjects are asked to rate themselves according to how well each of the personality characteristics describes him or her. The subjects are then classified as androgynous (high masculine/high feminine), feminine (high feminine/low masculine), masculine (high masculine/low feminine), or undifferentiated (low masculine/low feminine) based upon a median split on both the masculinity scale and the femininity scale.

The Bem Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) was standardized on 816 first-year American psychology students and was compiled to empirically examine the theory of androgyny (Bem, 1981). The inventory showed positive correlations with other tests of androgyny and test-retest reliability coefficients of between 0.76 and 0.94 were found. A Cronbach alpha was computed to assess the internal reliabilities of the BSRI in this sample for the

masculinity scale ([Alpha] = .95) and for the femininity scale ([Alpha] = .92). The Bem Sex-role Inventory is a widely used measure in research on sex-role identity and was also successfully used in South Africa (Cook & Simbayi, 1998; Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993; Prinsloo, 1992).

4.2.2 The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) (Abramson et al., 1982)

The Attributional Style Questionnaire measures individual differences in the use of attributions. Each individual is said to have an attributional style which causes the person to attribute causes of negative and positive events to internal (versus external), stable (versus unstable) and global (versus specific) factors. The questionnaire consists of twelve different hypothetical events (six positive events and six negative events) followed by likert-type questions measuring the attributions for that event. The participants are asked to generate a cause for each of the events themselves and then rate the cause along three attributional dimensions. The participant is also asked to rate the importance of the situation described. The format of the questionnaire does not constrain the causal attributions made by the participants but at the same time allows for simple objective quantification of responses.

The questionnaire was standardized on 130 undergraduate psychology students and was found to have high test-retest reliability coefficients (Abramson et al., 1982). The internal reliability of each subscale was estimated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Respectable alpha coefficients of .75 and .72 were obtained for the composite attributional style scales for good and bad events, respectively. The stability of the questionnaire over a five week test-retest period varied between coefficients of .57 and .7. Abramson et al. (1982) concluded that the questionnaire has considerable construct, criterion and content validity as shown by

research with depressed subjects. Correlations between the three dimensions of internal, stable and global attributions, varied between 0.44 and 0.69.

4.2.3 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (Rosenberg, 1965)

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale was developed as a measure of self-esteem, defined as a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). The original sample was a group of 5024 high school juniors and seniors from 10 randomly selected New York State high schools. It is the most accepted measure of global self-esteem and it is the standard with which developers of other self-esteem measures usually seek convergence (Robinson, Shaver & Wrightsman, 1991). The scale contains only 10 likert-type items which contribute towards ease of administration and scoring.

Fleming and Courtney (as cited in Robinson et al., 1991) reported a test-retest correlation of .82 for 259 male and female subjects with a one week interval. They also reported that SES scores correlated .78 with general self-regard, .51 with social confidence, and .85 with school abilities. This confirms the Robinson et al. (1991) finding that the SES is associated with many self-esteem related constructs. Perhaps the biggest limitation of all measures of self-esteem is their susceptibility to socially desirable responding. Most measures are self-report, and it is difficult to obtain non-self-report measures of such a personal and subjective construct. Also, scores tend to be skewed toward high self-esteem, with even the lowest scorers on most tests scoring above the mean and exhibiting fairly high levels of self-esteem.

4.3 Procedure

Consent for the research project was obtained from the academic registrar of Stellenbosch University. Meetings with the students of nine woman's dormitories on campus were

arranged with the help of the respective house committee members. During these meetings the researcher explained the general purpose and importance of the study to the students. The students were informed that the researcher is investigating women's emotions and characteristics with the purpose of empowerment programs. They were assured of anonymity and asked to answer the questions as honestly and objectively as possible.

4.4 Statistical Methods

The data was entered into the SPSS data editor for analysis. Descriptive statistics were obtained for all the variables and Levene's statistic was used to measure the homogeneity of variance between variables. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to see if there is a significant difference between the four sex-role identity groups with regards to their general attributional style score. Post hoc tests utilizing specific F tests were then performed to see how the androgynous group differed from each of the other sex-role identity groups regarding general attributional style. A one-way analysis of variance, utilizing the total score on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, was done to compare the groups of sex-typed women. In order to compare the self-esteem of androgynous women with the self-esteem with each of the other sex-role identity groups, post hoc tests, utilizing specific F tests was performed. In the same way, a one-way analysis of variance followed by post hoc tests, using first the attributional style scores and then the self-esteem scores, was done to compare the feminine women to the other sex-typed women. To compare the general attributional style of the women to their self-esteem, a correlational analysis was done.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

5.1 General descriptive statistics

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for a number of variables used in the study.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Total Group of Subjects (N = 280)

	Age	Fem	Mas	Self_Est	Comp +	Comp -	A_Style
Mean	19.68	53.32	46.78	312.39	93.24	74.46	18.78
Std. Error	0.07	0.58	0.54	2.63	0.70	0.68	0.92
SD	1.18	9.76	9.07	43.94	11.76	11.34	15.39
Minimum	18	26	18	180	55	38	-17
Maximum	22	78	71	400	126	108	81

The three attributional dimension rating scales associated with each event are scored in directions of increasing internality, stability and globality. Composite scores for positive events and negative events are created by summing the appropriate items. In Table 2 the mean of the composite positive scores ($\bar{X} = 93.24$) were higher than the mean of the composite negative scores ($\bar{X} = 74.46$), which is consistent with the Abramson et al. (1982) finding that good events tend to be explained more internally, stably and globally than bad events.

Table 2 also indicates that the mean of the femininity scores ($\bar{X} = 53.32$) are higher than the mean of the masculinity scores ($\bar{X} = 46.78$) of the sample. Bem (1981) found that females earned significantly higher scores on the femininity scale than on the masculinity scale of the Bem-Sex-role Inventory.

Table 3 describes the distribution of subjects according to the Bem Sex-Role Inventory classification.

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Sex-role Identity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Feminine	110	39.3	39.3	39.3
	Masculine	44	15.7	15.7	55.0
	Androgynous	62	22.1	22.1	77.1
	Undifferentiated	64	22.9	22.9	100.0
	Total	280	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 indicates that the subjects in this sample were mostly classified as feminine (39.3 %) and were least likely to be classified as masculine (15.7 %). This provides support for the validity of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory to measure sex-typing.

5.2 Sex-role identity and attributional style

A one way analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between the four sex-role identity groups with regards to their general attributional style.

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics from the one way analysis of variance procedure.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Attributional Style

	N	M	SD	Std.E	95%		Min	Max
					Lower	Upper		
Fem	110	15.98	15.04	1.43	13.14	18.82	-17	58
Mas	44	22.14	15.20	2.29	17.51	26.76	-3	81
Andro	62	23.79	17.15	2.18	19.44	28.15	-8	70
Undiff	64	16.42	12.76	1.59	13.23	19.61	-5	44
Total	280	18.78	15.39	0.92	16.97	20.59	-17	81

Table 4 indicates that the feminine sex-role identity group had the lowest mean attributional style score ($\bar{X}=15.98$) while the androgynous group had the highest mean attributional style score ($\bar{X}=23.79$) of all four sex-role identity groups.

Figure 3 plots the distribution of attributional style means between the sex-role identity groups.

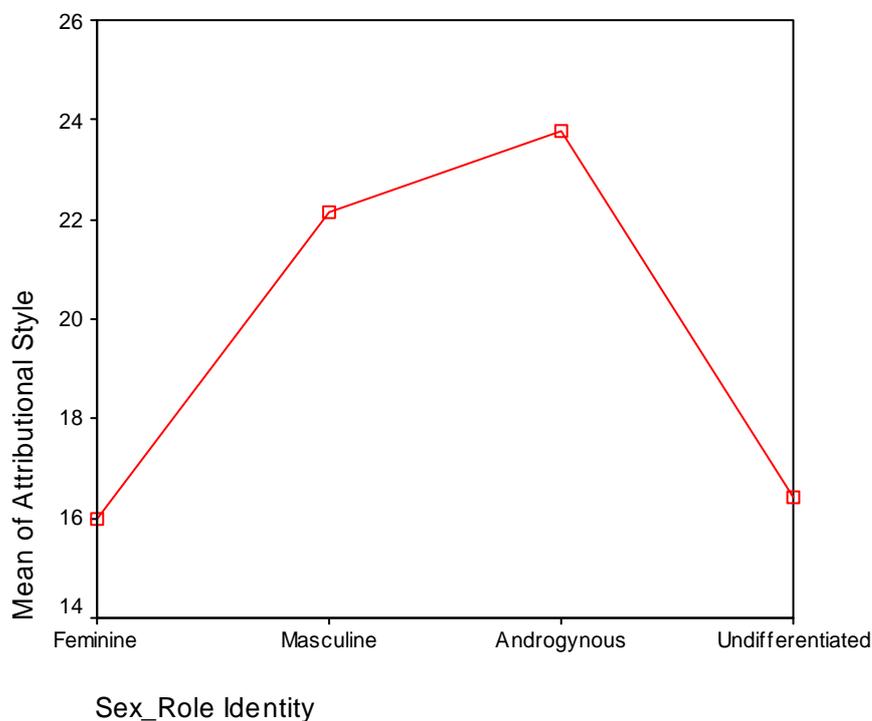


Figure 3 Means plot of attributional style

From Figure 3 it can also be concluded that the androgynous sex-role identity group had the highest mean score while the feminine group had the lowest mean score for attributional style.

Table 5 contains Levene's test statistic used to test the assumption that the variances of the groups are similar. If Levene's test is significant ($p < 0.05$) the variances between the groups are significantly different and an inaccurate F statistic would be likely.

Table 5

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Attributional Style

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.814	3	276	0.145

Table 5 demonstrates that Levene's test statistic is not significant for attributional style ($p > 0.05$), which indicates that the variances between the groups are very similar.

Table 6 shows the main analysis of variance (ANOVA) summary table for attributional style.

Table 6

ANOVA for Attributional Style

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3269.242	3	1089.747	4.789	0.003
Within Groups	62799.029	276	227.533		
Total	66068.271	279			

The significance value in Table 6 gives an indication of the likelihood that an F ratio of that size would occur by chance. If the significance value is less than .05 it is not very likely that the F statistic occurred by chance. This statistic indicates that there was a significant main effect and difference between the sex-role identity groups with regards to their attributional style scores ($F(3,276) = 4.789, p < 0.01$).

A post hoc analysis was then conducted to determine which groups differed from each other.

Table 7 displays the results of post hoc comparisons using attributional style as the dependent variable.

Table 7

Post Hoc Tests using Dependent Variable: Attributional style

			Mean Diff	Std. E	Sig.	95%	
	(I) Sex_Role	(J) Sex_Role				Lower	Upper
Tukey	Feminine	Masculine	-6.15	2.69	0.101	-13.07	0.76
		Androgynous	-7.81	2.40	0.006	-13.96	-1.65
		Undifferentiated	-0.44	2.37	0.998	- 6.53	5.65
	Masculine	Feminine	6.15	2.69	0.101	- 0.76	13.07
		Androgynous	-1.65	2.97	0.945	- 9.29	5.98
		Undifferentiated	5.71	2.95	0.214	- 1.87	13.30
	Androgynous	Feminine	7.81	2.40	0.006	1.65	13.96
		Masculine	1.65	2.97	0.945	- 5.98	9.29
		Undifferentiated	7.37	2.69	0.031	0.46	14.27
	Undifferentiated	Feminine	0.44	2.37	0.998	- 5.65	6.53
		Masculine	-5.71	2.95	0.214	-13.30	1.87
		Androgynous	-7.37	2.69	0.031	-14.27	-0.46
Bonferroni	Feminine	Masculine	-6.15	2.69	0.138	-13.30	1.00
		Androgynous	-7.81	2.40	0.008	-14.17	-1.44
		Undifferentiated	-0.44	2.37	1.000	- 6.74	5.86
	Masculine	Feminine	6.15	2.69	0.138	- 1.00	13.30
		Androgynous	-1.65	2.97	1.000	- 9.56	6.25
		Undifferentiated	5.71	2.95	0.324	- 2.14	13.56
	Androgynous	Feminine	7.81	2.40	0.008	1.44	14.17
		Masculine	1.65	2.97	1.000	- 6.25	9.56
		Undifferentiated	7.37	2.69	0.039	0.23	14.51
	Undifferentiated	Feminine	0.44	2.37	1.000	- 5.86	6.74
		Masculine	-5.71	2.95	0.324	-13.56	2.14
		Androgynous	-7.37	2.69	0.039	-14.51	-0.23
Games-Howell	Feminine	Masculine	-6.15	2.69	0.112	-13.25	0.94
		Androgynous	-7.81	2.40	0.018	-14.61	-1.01
		Undifferentiated	-0.44	2.37	0.997	- 5.95	5.07
	Masculine	Feminine	6.15	2.69	0.112	- 0.94	13.25
		Androgynous	-1.65	2.97	0.953	- 9.92	6.61
		Undifferentiated	5.71	2.95	0.180	- 1.61	13.04
	Androgynous	Feminine	7.81	2.40	0.018	1.01	14.61
		Masculine	1.65	2.97	0.953	- 6.61	9.92
		Undifferentiated	7.37	2.69	0.036	0.33	14.41
	Undifferentiated	Feminine	0.44	2.37	0.997	- 5.07	5.95
		Masculine	-5.71	2.95	0.180	-13.04	1.61
		Androgynous	-7.37	2.69	0.036	-14.41	-0.33

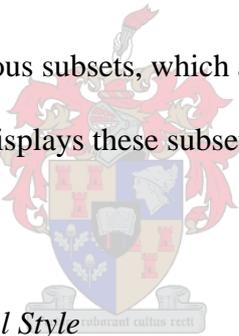
* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

In Table 7 each group of subjects is compared to all of the remaining groups using the Tukey, Bonferonni and Games-Howell statistical procedures. Tukey and Bonferonni's procedure revealed significant differences between the feminine and androgynous group ($p < 0.01$) and between the androgynous and undifferentiated group ($p < 0.05$) with regards to attributional style. The Games-Howell procedure also revealed significant differences between the androgynous and feminine group ($p < .05$) as well as the androgynous and undifferentiated group ($p < .05$). The similar pattern of the Games-Howell tests gave confidence in the results from Tukey and Bonferonni, because even if the population variances are not equal (which seems unlikely given that the sample variances are very similar) the profile of the results still holds true.

Tukey's test also produced homogenous subsets, which are two subsets of groups with statistically similar means. Table 8 displays these subsets.

Table 8

Homogenous Subsets for Attributional Style



		N	Subset for alpha = .05	
Sex_Role			1	2
Tukey	Feminine	110	15.98	
	Undifferentiated	64	16.42	
	Masculine	44	22.14	22.14
	Androgynous	62		23.79
	Sig.		0.101	0.927

The first subset in Table 8 contains the feminine, undifferentiated and masculine groups while the second subset contains the masculine and androgynous group. These results demonstrate that the only groups with significantly different means are the androgynous group when compared to the feminine and undifferentiated groups. Harmonic mean sample

sizes are used in Table 8 to eliminate any bias that might be introduced through having unequal sample sizes.

5.3 Sex-role identity and self-esteem

A one way analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there are significant differences in self-esteem scores between the four sex-role identity groups. Table 9 demonstrates the descriptive statistics obtained from the self-esteem data.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Self-esteem

	N	M	SD	Std. E	95%	Min	Max
					Lower	Upper	
Feminine	110	306.00	46.81	4.46	297.15	314.85	180 400
Masculine	44	320.00	42.86	6.46	306.97	333.03	220 400
Androgynous	62	327.42	38.79	4.93	317.57	337.27	260 400
Undifferentiated	64	303.59	40.45	5.06	293.49	313.70	220 400
Total	280	312.39	43.94	2.63	307.22	317.56	180 400

As can be seen in Table 9, the androgynous sex-role identity group had the highest mean self-esteem score ($\bar{X} = 327.42$), while the undifferentiated group had the lowest mean ($\bar{X} = 303.59$) overall.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the self-esteem means across the four sex-role identity groups.

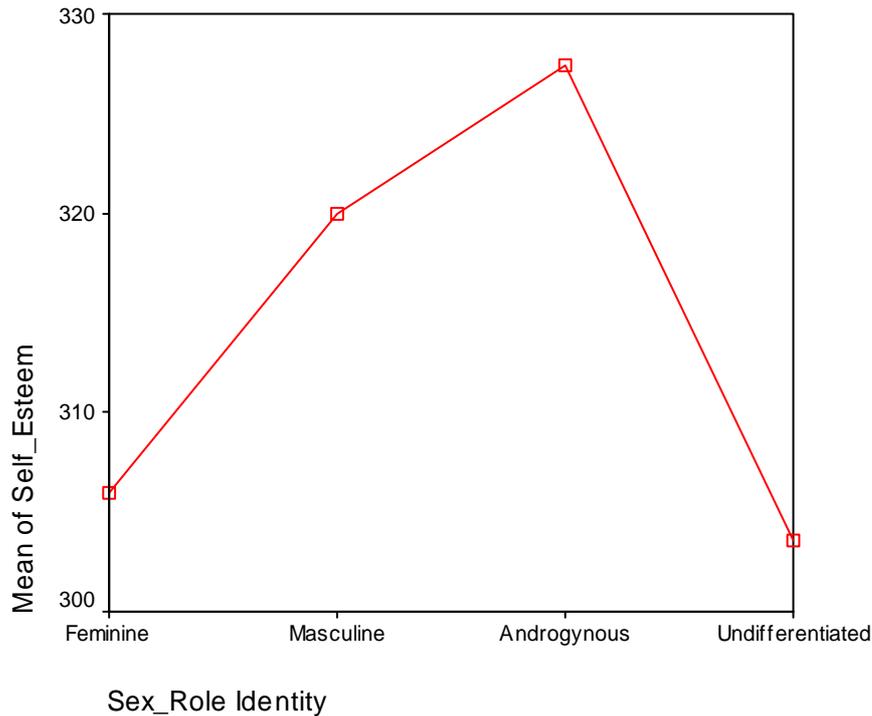
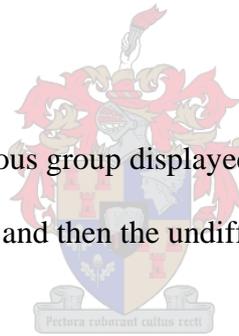


Figure 4 Means plot of self-esteem

According to Figure 4, the androgynous group displayed the highest self-esteem scores, followed by the masculine, feminine and then the undifferentiated sex-role identity groups.



Levene's statistic is displayed in Table 10 and determines whether the self-esteem variances between the sex-role identity groups are homogenous.

Table 10

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Self-esteem

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.464	3	276	0.225

Levene's statistic is not significant in Table 10 ($p > 0.05$), which point to very similar variances between the four groups with regards to their self-esteem.

In Table 11 the summary for the one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure are displayed.

Table 11

ANOVA for Self-esteem

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	25996.251	3	8665.417	4.665	0.003
Within Groups	512700.534	276	1857.611		
Total	538696.786	279			

Table 11 indicates a significant F statistic which points to a significant main effect for self-esteem ($F(3,276) = 4.665, p < 0.01$). This one way analysis of variance determined that there are significant self-esteem differences between the four sex-role identity groups.

To determine how the groups differed from one another, a post hoc analysis was done and the results are displayed in Table 12.



Table 12

Post Hoc Tests using Dependent Variable: Self-esteem

			Mean Diff	Std. E	Sig.	95%	
						Lower	Upper
	(I) Sex_Role	(J) Sex_Role					
Tukey	Feminine	Masculine	-14.00	7.69	0.263	-33.75	5.75
		Androgynous	-21.42	6.84	0.009	-39.00	-3.84
		Undifferentiated	2.41	6.78	0.985	-15.00	19.81
	Masculine	Feminine	14.00	7.69	0.263	-5.75	33.75
		Androgynous	-7.42	8.50	0.819	-29.25	14.41
		Undifferentiated	16.41	8.44	0.210	-5.28	38.09
	Androgynous	Feminine	21.42	6.84	0.009	3.84	39.00
		Masculine	7.42	8.50	0.819	-14.41	29.25
		Undifferentiated	23.83	7.68	0.010	4.09	43.56
	Undifferentiated	Feminine	-2.41	6.78	0.985	-19.81	15.00
		Masculine	-16.41	8.44	0.210	-38.09	5.28
		Androgynous	-23.83	7.68	0.010	-43.56	-4.09
Bonferroni	Feminine	Masculine	-14.00	7.69	0.418	-34.43	6.43
		Androgynous	-21.42	6.84	0.012	-39.61	-3.23
		Undifferentiated	2.41	6.78	1.000	-15.60	20.41
	Masculine	Feminine	14.00	7.69	0.418	-6.43	34.43
		Androgynous	-7.42	8.50	1.000	-30.00	15.16
		Undifferentiated	16.41	8.44	0.318	-6.02	38.84
	Androgynous	Feminine	21.42	6.84	0.012	3.23	39.61
		Masculine	7.42	8.50	1.000	-15.16	30.00
		Undifferentiated	23.83	7.68	0.013	3.42	44.24
	Undifferentiated	Feminine	-2.41	6.78	1.000	-20.41	15.60
		Masculine	-16.41	8.44	0.318	-38.84	6.02
		Androgynous	-23.83	7.68	0.013	-44.24	-3.42
Games-Howell	Feminine	Masculine	-14.00	7.69	0.289	-34.58	6.58
		Androgynous	-21.42	6.84	0.007	-38.50	-4.34
		Undifferentiated	2.41	6.78	0.984	-14.92	19.73
	Masculine	Feminine	14.00	7.69	0.289	-6.58	34.58
		Androgynous	-7.42	8.50	0.798	-28.70	13.87
		Undifferentiated	16.41	8.44	0.196	-5.08	37.89
	Androgynous	Feminine	21.42	6.84	0.007	4.34	38.50
		Masculine	7.42	8.50	0.798	-13.87	28.70
		Undifferentiated	23.83	7.68	0.004	5.69	41.96
	Undifferentiated	Feminine	-2.41	6.78	0.984	-19.73	14.92
		Masculine	-16.41	8.44	0.196	-37.89	5.08
		Androgynous	-23.83	7.68	0.004	-41.96	-5.69

* $p < .05$

Table 12 displays the results of the Tukey, Bonferonni and Games-Howell post hoc procedures. The Tukey and Games-Howell statistics revealed significant differences between the feminine and androgynous group ($p < .01$) and between the androgynous and undifferentiated group ($p < .05$) concerning their self-esteem. Bonferonni's statistic confirmed these results with significant differences found when the androgynous group were compared to the feminine and undifferentiated groups ($p < .05$).

Tukey's test also produced the homogenous subsets displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Homogenous Subsets for Self-esteem

		N	Subset for alpha = .05	
Sex_Role			1	2
Tukey HSD	Undifferentiated	64	303.59	
	Feminine	110	306.00	
	Masculine	44	320.00	320.00
	Androgynous	62		327.42
	Sig.		0.142	0.769

The first subset in Table 13 contains the undifferentiated, feminine and masculine groups while the second subset contains the masculine and androgynous group. These results demonstrate that the only groups with significantly different means are the androgynous group when compared to the feminine and undifferentiated groups.

5.4 Attributional style and self-esteem

A correlational analysis was done to assess the relationship between the general attributional style and self-esteem of the participants. The results of the Pearson product-moment correlation is displayed in Table 14.

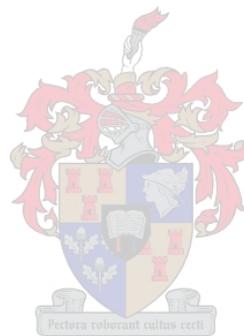
Table 14

Pearson Correlation between Attributional Style and Self-esteem (N = 280)

		Self_Est	A_Style
Self_Est	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.448
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
A_Style	Pearson Correlation	0.448	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It would appear from Table 14 that there is a significant positive correlation between general attributional style and self-esteem ($r = .448$, $p < .01$).



CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The most significant findings that emerged from the present study will be discussed in the following section. Significant differences were found between the androgynous sex-role identity group and the feminine and undifferentiated groups with regards to their attributional style and self-esteem. Furthermore a significant positive correlation was found between the attributional style scores and self-esteem scores of the participants.

6.1 Sex-role identity

The highest proportion of subjects was found to be classified in the feminine sex-role identity group (39 %) which indicates a trend towards a more traditional sex-role identity among the female students. This finding is consistent with Prinsloo's (1992) finding that traditional sex-role stereotyping has remained tenaciously unchanged in South Africa. Despite all the equalitarian developments in both the political and employment sector of South Africa, it seems that traditional sex-role socialization is changing very slowly. This finding is concerning considering the fact that a large body of evidence have associated a feminine sex-role identity with poorer psychological adjustment for women (Baucom, 1983; Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1984; Carter & Kaslow, 1992; Chusmir & Koberg, 1991; Clarey, 1985; Gundersen & Rozell, 1998; Koopman & Schiff, 1978; Lamke, 1982; Lee, 1986; Massad, 1981; Meehan & Overton, 1982; Setton, 1981; Smit, 1988; Whitley, 1983).

Sex-role socialization is a complex process that begins at home and is reinforced by the media and educational systems. Prinsloo (1992) explained that belief systems based on

minor differences between men and women serves to rationalize the perception that men and women have major psychological differences. This might explain the consistent differences found between masculine and feminine stereotypes and the discriminatory socialization of boys and girls. Bem (as cited in Lopater & Westheimer, 2002) theorized that the process of learning sex-roles in early childhood may promote the development of adults who feel unconfident in certain areas of life. Perhaps the assignment of social roles should be based on individual strengths and interests rather than ancient stereotypes. The differential treatment of women and the roles assigned to women and men is a practice much older than the science of psychology and the effects even more far reaching. The patriarchal system in South Africa oppressed women by creating gender stereotypes that reinforced the subordinate position of women in the country. The ideology of patriarchy subtly infiltrated every aspect of South African women's lives. Through decades of conditioning many women have come to accept and even value, the gender roles assigned to them. They have come to view themselves as inferior to men with less power to influence their circumstances. Although South African legislation has been changed to promote gender equality, more focused interventions will be needed to change the underlying psychological structures that continue its disempowering effect on women. In order to promote the empowerment of women from a psychological perspective, a much more profound shift in social structures and thinking is needed.

6.2 Attributional style

The findings regarding the general attributional style of all the participants were consistent with the Abramson et al. (1982) findings that positive events are usually explained more internally, stably and globally than negative events. This tendency is also called self-serving attributional bias and is characterized by an overestimation of the role of internal factors for

success and external factors for failure. Cross-cultural differences have been found in self-serving attributional bias (Kambara & Sakamoto, 1998; Nurmi, 1991). Possible explanations for cross-cultural differences include the difference between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, variations in the need to protect the self-esteem, different coping mechanisms and differences in how individuals cope with the threat of failure.

According to Weiner's (1985) attributional theory of achievement motivation, the need for achievement is related to perceived causes of success and failure. Nathawat et al. (1997) found that participants with a low need for achievement were more likely to attribute negative events to internal, stable and global causes than people with a higher need for achievement. Western society usually place more importance on the characteristic of ambition which is also related to the need for achievement. The sample used in the present study consisted mainly of White persons who can be described as part of an individualistic or western culture. Perhaps it is the influence of western values that lead to self-serving attributional bias. To get a clearer picture of the general attributional style of South Africans, it is important to investigate the attributional style of all the various cultures.

6.3 Sex-role identity and attributional style

The first hypothesis of the present study stated that persons with androgynous sex-typed identities will possess a more optimistic attributional style than persons with masculine, feminine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities. In partial support for the first hypothesis, the androgynous group displayed a significantly more optimistic attributional style when compared to the feminine and undifferentiated groups. This is in concurrence with the findings of Lee (1986), who found that androgynous women had more self-enhancing attributions than feminine women. Gianakos (2000) also found that androgynous individuals exhibit strong instrumental and expressive attributes when experiencing work stress which

improves their adjustment at work. The integrated results of Baucom and Danker-Brown (1979) revealed that the androgynous group was the only sex-role identity group that did not evidence cognitive or motivational deficits following induced failure. An optimistic attributional style has been linked to better coping mechanisms in South African women (Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993), increased motivation and achievement behaviour (Guest, 2001) and less susceptibility to learned helplessness. These findings could provide support for the suggested resilience of androgynous women. Bem (cited in Lategan & Spangenberg, 1993) hypothesized that individuals with a traditional sex-role lacked a truly satisfying and comprehensive behavioural repertoire. On the other hand, an androgynous individual have a wider selection of behaviours to choose from in any given situation because they incorporated masculine and feminine characteristics.

The results of the present study also indicated that although the mean attributional style score of the androgynous group were higher than the mean attributional style score of the masculine group, the difference was not significant. Perhaps it is the high masculine component in androgyny that is responsible for the better adjustment experienced by androgynous women. According to the masculinity model of adjustment, a person's psychological well-being is a function of the extent to which the person has a masculine sex-role orientation, regardless of gender.

The second hypothesis stated that persons with feminine sex-typed identities possess a more pessimistic attributional style than persons with androgynous, masculine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities. The second hypothesis was also partially supported in that the feminine women displayed significantly more pessimistic attributional style scores than the androgynous women. These results were consistent with those of Lee (1986) who found that feminine women have less self-enhancing attributional styles than androgynous women.

Research studies that compared men and women found that women tend to display pessimistic attributional styles more than men and are more likely to assume personal responsibility for failure (Calhoun et al., 1974; Gunderson & Rozell, 1998; Mednick et al., 1981; Seligman, 1975). Perhaps it is the notion that many women still have a feminine sex-role identity that can account for the gender differences found. It is important to consider the role of traditional sex-role socialization when evaluating the gender differences found in achievement or work-related behaviour. For many years white South African women were discouraged to pursue a professional career and conditioned to believe they were destined for the domestic sphere. Careers in nursing, education and secretarial work were the only employment considered appropriate for women. White women's employment patterns therefore mirrored their role in the family. Furthermore, the female characteristics emphasized and valued most in the white culture was humility, submissiveness, nurturance, domestic responsibility and passivity. It is therefore possible that the traditional sex-role socialization of white South African women biased them towards a more pessimistic attributional style. A pessimistic attributional style has also been considered a risk factor for learned helplessness and a number of studies have found that traditional feminine women are prone to develop learned helplessness, relinquish control and develop depressive-like symptoms (Baucom, 1983; Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1979; Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1984; Setton, 1981). Moore and Rapmund (2000) also related the psychological characteristics of depressed South African women to their psychosocial development. They believe that traditional sex-role socialization contribute to women's vulnerability for depression.

The second hypothesis was not fully supported because although the mean attributional style score of the feminine women was the lowest of all four groups, it did not differ significantly

from the masculine or undifferentiated women. This is in concurrence with the finding by Baucom and Danker-Brown (1979) that masculine and feminine individuals are equally susceptible to the development of learned helplessness. According to the androgyny model of adjustment, it is the balance of both high masculine and feminine characteristics that is associated with psychological health.

6.4 Sex-role identity and self-esteem

Further results of the present study showed that androgynous individuals had a significantly higher degree of self-esteem than feminine or undifferentiated individuals, but not significantly different from masculine individuals. Koopman and Schiff (1978) obtained similar results with regards to the self-esteem of women. According to Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem is made up of mirrored appraisals, the process of social comparison, self-attribution and identifications based on associations with groups. The third hypothesis stated that persons with androgynous sex-typed identities have a higher degree of self-esteem than persons with masculine, feminine or undifferentiated sex-typed identities. The hypothesis was therefore not completely supported by these results and merits further investigation.

Whitley (1983) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 studies to examine the relationship between self-esteem and sex-role identity. A high masculine orientation was associated with a higher degree of self-esteem- a finding duplicated by Lamke (1982). Chusmer and Koberg (1991) also found that an androgynous and masculine orientation were associated with high self-confidence, while a feminine orientation was associated with low self-confidence. In contrast to this, the present study found that the self-esteem of the masculine group did not differ significantly from the self-esteem of the androgynous, feminine, or undifferentiated groups. It seems that the findings regarding the masculine group did not indicate whether a masculine

orientation was necessarily better than femininity or worse than androgyny with regards to self-esteem. Massad (1981) found that masculinity was associated with better adjustment for males, but only androgyny was associated with better overall adjustment for females.

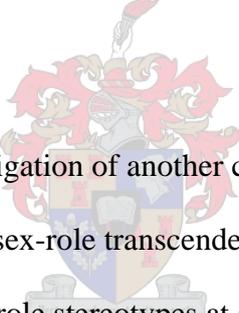
Koopman and Schiff (1978) hypothesized that masculine women might experience unique cultural conflicts that can interfere with their development. Coetzee (2001) also stated that South African women often feel ambivalent and guilty when they deviate from the feminine expectations in the patriarchal South African society. One of the important components of self-esteem is the feelings of self-worth based on the reflected appraisals of others

(Rosenberg, 1965). This could influence the self-esteem of masculine women very negatively because they might feel they ought to be more feminine in order to be valuable.

The present study only provide support for the notion that androgyny might be better than femininity for the adjustment of South African women. As expected from previous research (Chusmir & Koberg, 1991; Koopman & Schiff, 1978; Lamke, 1982), the undifferentiated sex-role identity group had the lowest mean score for self-esteem than all the other groups.

The fourth hypothesis stated that the feminine sex-role identity group will have a significantly lower degree of self-esteem than the androgynous, masculine and undifferentiated groups. The results indicated that the self-esteem of the feminine group was only significantly lower than the self-esteem of the androgynous group. The use of socially desirable traits in sex-role inventories may raise the question of shared measurement variance, since self-esteem inventories also measure the social desirability of the self-concept. It can be argued that social desirability is inherent in psychological masculinity as well as self-esteem and would therefore not be a confounding variable. Self-esteem is thought to be a multidimensional construct and the results of the meta-analysis by Whitley (1983) show that some dimensions of self-esteem might be closer related to sex-role identity than others.

Once again, it seems that the only consistent finding that emerged from this study are the notion that androgyny might be significantly better than femininity for the psychological health of South African women. Although research studies from other parts of the world confirm these findings, more South African research is needed to determine the applicability of these results to our context. Research studies that provide support for the masculinity model, usually view androgyny as an additive construct which is equal to the summarized effects of its masculinity and femininity components. Theoretically, it would then be the contribution of the large positive effect of masculinity that provides the enhancing effect of androgyny on adjustment. The results of the present study did not provide evidence to support this theory. Instead it is suggested that androgyny be viewed in a less simplistic manner where the possibility of an interactive effect over and above the cumulative effect of its components would be considered.



Ravinder (1987) suggested the investigation of another construct called sex-role transcendence. It is suggested that a sex-role transcendent individual is low in sex-role salience and does not internalize sex-role stereotypes at all. Although an androgynous person is said to have a high degree of both feminine and masculine characteristics, the internalization of sex-role stereotypes still causes a high sex-role salience in such an individual. Even the existence of the constructs masculinity and femininity may lead to the categorical, dichotomized thinking that causes so many problems in our society. Rather than developing more categories, the boundaries of existing categories should be broken down to reveal the uniqueness of each individual.

6.5 Attributional style and self-esteem

The findings of the present research showed support for the fifth hypothesis stating that persons with a pessimistic attributional style will have a lower degree of self-esteem than persons with an optimistic attributional style. A significant positive correlation was found between general attributional style and self-esteem and since a higher general attributional style score points to a more optimistic attributional style, it seems that an optimistic attributional style is correlated with a higher degree of self-esteem. This is consistent with Kambara and Sakamoto's (1998) finding that people with a self-enhancing attributional style tend to see positive life events as opportunities to improve their self-esteem. Guest (2001) also found that attributional styles are socially learned and linked to self-confidence. Perhaps it is the internality dimension of attributional style that is responsible for the association with self-esteem. When positive events are attributed to internal causes like intelligence or competence, it can maintain or even enhance the self-esteem of the individual. Attributional theory also states that some people tend to improve their self-esteem by taking credit for successes and avoiding self-blame for failures. Abramson et al. (1978) suggested that individuals who believe that desired outcomes are not contingent on their own actions tend to show lower self-esteem, which is another deficit of learned helplessness. On the other hand, it is also possible that individuals with low self-esteem tend to attribute negative events to internal, stable and global causes. Either way, the correlation between attributional style and self-esteem can be an important consideration during therapeutic intervention.

6.6 Conclusion

The results of the present study propose that further research is needed to examine the influence of traditional sex-role socialization on the psychological health of women. South Africa is in a transition phase where the consequences of past discrimination are closely analyzed with the aim of changing people's lives and learning from the mistakes made. This study suggests that the tenacity of traditional sex-roles should not be underestimated when considering female empowerment. Furthermore, a feminine sex-role identity may be considered a risk factor in a wide variety of psychological problems. Resocialization programs can aid the prevention of mental illness among women and improve their overall psychological well-being. Sex-typing processes in the developing child or adolescent should also be considered carefully to provide all young people with equal opportunities to express their individuality. The present study contributed to the general body of research investigating the relationship between the sex-role identity, attributional style and self-esteem of women. South African research on these variables alone and in combination with each other is very limited. The present study therefore also contributed to our knowledge of these concepts and our understanding of the effects of sex-role socialization on the psychological well-being of South African women. The study also indicated that many South African women may still have traditional sex-role identities despite the apparent changes in our country. A limitation of the present study is the fact the majority of the participants was Caucasian persons. The other South African cultural groups were not represented equally and the findings can therefore not be generalized to all female South Africans.

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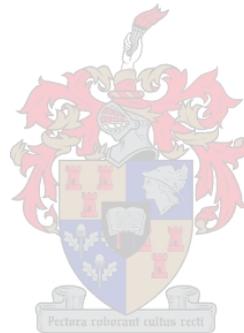
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APPENDIX A

Letter granting permission for the research

