Attitudes towards gender stereotypes on career pathways

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INTRODUCTION

Our career aspirations and choices we make, beginning from VCE and onwards, shape our lives immaculately. Career patterns are influenced by a variety of forces, and one these is gender stereotypes. In theory virtually all careers and all levels of careers should be available to both males and females. However this availability may or not be perceived as realistic. Our attitudes towards whether such gender stereotyping influences our career choices can vary dramatically, and that is what we will be understood through this study.

Attitudes can be defined as an evaluation of an attitudinal object. Additionally there is a Tricomponent of Attitudes Model which states that there are three components of an attitude: affection (relating to emotions), behaviour (relating to actions) and cognition (relating to beliefs).

Several similar case studies have been undertaken such as the influence of gender, sex-role attitudes, and cognitive complexity on gender-dominant career choices (by Vincent Harren in 1979). This research had identified that gender significantly predicted choice of gender-dominant majors and occupations.

Another study is The effect of gender-role stereotyping on the career aspirations and expectations of pre-adolescent children of high intellectual ability (by Carillon Purvis in 1967). This study showed that both genders generally confirmed to the traditional beliefs regarding gender-roles for themselves and for their opposite sex counterparts, however the female groups tended slightly more towards androgynous attitudes than the male groups. A 3rd study that conducted more recently, in March 2014 by Just Different. They conducted surveys and results showed that the majority (84%) agreed that stereotypes influence young people’s career choices by creating stereotypical gender roles.

The previous studies don’t explicitly look at adolescents whom into their latter schooling year. We have undertaken this study to particularly explore the attitudes among high school students doing VCE whom are generally beginning to understand their interest aspirations. The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of VCE students with regard to their career pathway choices and the extent to which their aspirations/expectations are influenced by tradition male/female stereotypes.

It was hypothesised that each gender will equally confirm that previously existing stereotypes have an influence on career pathways.

METHOD

Participants:
- Total 32 participants: 16 females and 16 males
- All aged between 15 to 17 years old
- All attend a single sex school.

Participants chosen with convenience sampling

Procedure:
1. The researcher, using convenience sampling, contacted 32 students, 16 male and 16 female to undertake the online survey, with gender being the independent variable.
2. Upon approval, participants were required to fill out a statement of consent form (to follow ethical standards) prior to participating in the survey.
3. The participants completed the 10 survey questions which aimed to measure their attitudes (dependent variable).
4. The researcher calculated reversed the lie detector style questions to ensure common numbering in the results and calculated the mean (averaged results for each question and each single participant’s data).
5. The survey data was analyzed and collated in the form of visual interpretations such as table and graphs.

RESULTS

The participants of male gender averaged 2.6, which shows they favor towards the negative side. The highest value is 3.1 and the lowest is 1.9, showing a range of 1.2. The females however, overall averaged a more negative attitude towards gender stereotypes on career pathways, with a value of 2.2. The highest of 3.2 and a lowest of 1.3, displaying a range of 1.9.

DISCUSSION

After completing this investigation, our hypothesis that both genders will equally confirm that stereotypes have an influence on career pathways was not clearly sufficiently proven. Our experiment showed that overall, both genders believed that gender stereotypes mostly do not influence career pathways. Portrayed by the negative attitudes shown in our results. For example, the statement ‘your career should be determined based on your gender’ had the lowest value of 1.3. Similarly, the statement ‘I feel inspired when I see a woman in a traditionally male-gendered role’ had a more negative attitude than males (rating of 2.6). Thus showing that among VCE, psychology students, there was clear disproval of the hypothesis and denunciation of gender stereotypes.

Vincent Harnen’s paper in the Journal of Counselling Psychology about the Influence of Gender, Sex-Role Attitude, and Cognitive Complexity on Gender-Dominant Career Choices. It was found that gender significantly predicted choice of gender-dominant majors and occupations. Which is again contrary to our results of the likert scale. The study stated that the most influential predictor of gender-dominant career choices is gender. Also that women gravitate towards female-dominant fields and men towards male-dominant fields. The statement from their survey, “I would not let my gender determine the job I apply for,” indicated that 26 of the 32 participants would not allow their gender to influence what field of occupation they seek. Showing further contrast with our experiment.

However, several potential extraneous variables may have arisen in the duration of our study and hence influenced the data/results. Firstly the convenience sampling technique used to gather participants for our surveys could have influenced our results. As all the participants were chosen from single-sex schools this could have an impact on their opinion about gender stereotypes and their attitude to future aspirations. Attending to single-sex schools might have developed their mostly negative attitudes towards gender stereotypes on career pathways. Another extraneous variable has arisen by having studied majority of participants from two select-entry highly ranked public schools in Melbourne (Melbourne High School and The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School) and few participants from Presbyterian Ladies College (private school). Also the small variations in year level and age could have been an issue, with uneven numbers of each.

In order to achieve a future experiment in the future, a larger sample size could be used to provide more accurate and comprehensive results regarding attitudes towards gender stereotypes in career pathways. Also a more extensive and accurate sampling technique should be used in the future, such as stratified random sampling. Which would ensure that there were an equal number of students from each year level and age.

Throughout this experiment, all ethical standards were followed and abided by. Despite surveys being conducted online, every participant was required to fill out a consent form stating their rights and agree to participate in the experiment at their own will. We ensured that all participants results were recorded anonymously. We were unable to brief and debrief prior to and after the survey due to the online factor. However, some details of the supervisor were provided in the consent form for any questions or queries.

The results of our experiment are not able to be generalized over the total population, as there was an uneven number of students from each year level. Also because of the type of school the participants attended (public/private) was even. Thus, we cannot generalize our results on the population of VCE students and would have to conduct more accurate and extensive research to make a more complete generalization.

REFERENCES


