Context
Who am I in relation to work and the job that I do?

Gender stereotypes and occupational choice in 14-16’s.

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Results
Young people self-stereotype using masculine/feminine gender referents and match themselves to jobs that are stereotypically appropriate for a chosen profession on Feminine-Type, and likewise for Masculine-Type. As predicted there was a clear intergender difference in the degree to which the incumbent seeks a match for their sextype or biological sex. However when restrictions are imposed, occupations consistent with sex type are chosen over occupations consistent with biological sex.

Aims
The purpose of this study explores further the role of gender stereotypes in job/occupational preferences relative to biological sex of young school-aged people and evaluates Gottfredson’s theory of job sex type and job prestige as fundamental choice constraints over personal interests.

Gottfredson’s Theory of Vocational Choice
Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumcision and Compromise (1981; 1996; 2005) maintains that children begin by considering jobs firstly in terms of their masculinity/femininity characteristics (sextype) closely followed by their social desirability (prestige). It is only later in their development that children start to differentiate jobs according to their personal interests. This developmental progression is, according to the theory, played out in vocational choice. Using sextype and prestige criteria first, and then personal interests, individuals are said to rule out successively more sectors of work as unacceptable for someone like themselves, a process called CIRCUMSCRIPTION. Those occupations that are left constitute a Zone of Acceptable Alternatives from which the individual will ideally choose a job or career. For example, a young boy will circumscribe ‘masculine’ jobs with high prestige value (e.g., lawyer, doctor, engineer, entrepreneur) as potential jobs/careers before selecting a job against personal interests (e.g., interest in biology) with the potential to compromise (e.g., biology teacher). However, with added CONSTRAINTS-COMPROMISE is likely to be required whereby the individual relinquishes his/her most preferred alternatives (based on ability levels, resource limitations) for more ‘acceptable’ jobs/careers. In doing so, it is predicted that individual’s will opt for work in a different field of personal interests (e.g., engineering) within their social space rather than compromise on either prestige or sextype (e.g. an interest in biological sciences might otherwise be accepted to do, would be unacceptable to do).

Critical Reflection
One of the problems with Gottfredson’s theory is the objectivity in which jobs are described as masculine/feminine in their sex type (i.e., in terms of preponderance) or as high or low in prestige outside of individual’s job perceptions. Moreover, there is a black box assumption underwriting the view that the young people cognise their sextype preferences in a meaningful way, it is possible for self-concept to be subject to self-to-prototype matching principle as a means of understanding the psychology behind the ‘circumscription’ process. This study addresses this problem within a distinctly psychological framework.

Hypotheses
H1: There is a relationship between the degree to which an individual self-identifies with a male/female stereotype (masculinity/femininity assumptions) and their tendency to choose occupations for which they perceive incumbents to possess such stereotypic traits.

H2: Sex-type (as defined by identification with male and female stereotypes) will play a more important role in vocational choice than the perceived sex role of the occupation.

H3: Gender stereotypes will play a more important role in occupational choice than either interests or prestige.

Sample
10 young people participated in a pilot study. After methodological refinement, 74 student participants (52 male and 22 female, mean age 16 yrs) from 6 different secondary schools (2 co-ed, 2 male only and 2 female only), participated in an interview study on work preferences with both head teacher and parental consent.

Procedure
Group administered written tasks and one-to-one card sort task (full details available from the first author):

Written Tasks
Measured personal sex type preferences and job perceptions, occupational interests using the Career Pathfinder (based on Holland’s 6 interest types), and perceived prestige of jobs using a 4-item scale using Hecksch et al’s (1989) method referring to education, pay, status and power criteria.

The Card Sort
Invited participants to play out the circumcision and compromise process using an adapted version of Blanchard & Lichtenberg’s (2003) method. Participants rate occupations against sex ratio statistics (male, female, neutral), prestige using established status scales (high, mid, low) and interest type (data, people, enterprise, resources, ideas, artistry using Hecksch et al’s (1989) method). Participants circumscribed the cards according to occupations they would find it acceptable to do, would be uncertain about doing it and unacceptable to do. They were also asked: “If you could have any occupation there is, what would it be?” This stage finished the Zone of Acceptable Alternatives.

Compromise: participants chose the occupation they would most likely do from each of the three categories, creating 3 conditions of compromise: compromise (unrestricted), low compromise (acceptable but not personal favourite) and high compromise (unacceptable).

Analytic Strategy
Correlation analysis (personal sex type with sex type of job/occupation across three conditions of compromise (no, low, high)).

Repeated measures ANOVA and t-tests (with Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons) across three conditions of compromise (no, low, high) with self-to-prototype matching scores as dependent variables. The absolute difference between self-ratings and their ratings of jobs was calculated. The optimum score was zero, indicating a perfect match. Those absolute values were then transformed into z-scores, to allow comparison across the three scales (sex type of job, prestige, interest classifications).

References

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