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SEX DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS PERSONAL PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Horner (1970) and Fannes (1974) interpreted the higher frequency of fear of success among female students as the result of a conflict between the consequences of academic success and the feminine role. Based on this interpretation, the expectation was formulated that female students will have a less positive attitude towards their personal present and future than their male colleagues. The results did not confirm the expectation. The attitude towards the present, past, and future is more positive among female than male college students.

Horner (1970) found that significantly more female than male American college students expressed a high fear of success or motive to avoid success: 65% of the women compared with only 9% of the men were high in the expression of thematic apperceptive imagery connoting fear of success. The difference between male and female students was highly significant ($p < .0005$). Success in achievement situations provokes anxiety in female college students because such success is expected to lead to negative consequences. For women the most important anticipated negative consequence of success in academic and intellectual areas is the possibility of social rejection, the loss of femininity. Social rejection can also prevent a woman from the fulfilment of her other needs for affection, love, marriage and children (Horner, 1970).

Fannes (1974) partly replicated Horner's study with a sample of Flemish college students. Also in this sample significantly ($p < .01$) more female than male students expressed a fear of success. Only 11.4% of the male students compared with 29.4% of the female students expressed a fear of success in thematic apperceptive imagery. Fannes attributed the high frequency of the motive to avoid success among female students to a conflict between intellectual or academic successes and the social stereotype about female behavior and the female role.

Based on Horner's and Fannes' interpretations of their results we formulated and tested the expectation that the conflict in female college students between academic success or the consequences of that success and the culturally prescribed feminine role will be reflected in a less positive outlook on or attitude towards the personal future and even

towards the personal present, in comparison with the attitude of male college students who do not know that conflict. If a successful academic career is a highly evaluated way for male students to fulfil their social role and if success for female students is in conflict with their role, we expect that female students are less positively oriented towards their future and maybe even experience their present life as less positive than their male colleagues do.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

Subjects were 135 male and 125 female undergraduate students in Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Leuven. They are highly comparable with Fannes' subjects.

PROCEDURE

The attitudes of the ss towards their own past, present, and future were measured with Nuttin's *Time Attitude Scale* (TAS) which is composed of 19 bi-polar pairs of adjectives (Nuttin, 1972). Only the first 15 pairs (see below) were used to measure the attitude towards the past. For the present and the future all 19 pairs were administered.

For each pair of adjectives the ss were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how they spontaneously experience their own past, present, and future. The seven intervals range from very negative to very positive. For the pair 'pleasant - unpleasant', for example, the seven intervals are defined as follows: very pleasant, pleasant, rather pleasant, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, rather unpleasant, unpleasant, very unpleasant.

In preliminary research the positive pole of each pair was determined and got a score 1. The most negative interval scored 7. The neutral middle interval on the seven-point scale scored 4. All the ss first expressed for all the pairs of adjectives how they experience their past, then their present, and in third order their future.

We list now the 19 pairs of adjectives and we indicate the positive pole of each pair: 1. pleasant⁺ - unpleasant. 2. empty - full⁺. 3. threatening - attractive⁺. 4. beautiful⁺ - horrible. 5. cold - warm⁺. 6. accomplished (success)⁺ - disappointment (failure). 7. boring - exciting⁺. 8. light⁺ - dark. 9. hopeful⁺ - hopeless. 10. fast⁺ - slow. 11. difficult - easy⁺. 12. far away - near⁺. 13. important⁺ - unimportant. 14. short - long⁺. 15. externally determined - something of myself⁺. 16. what I am passively waiting for - something that is an active task for me⁺. 17. staying unchanged - always changing⁺. 18. open⁺ - closed. 19. familiar⁺ - unfamiliar.

RESULTS

For each time dimension we calculated the sum of the attitude scores for each s and for each of the two groups. Dividing the sum for the

group by the product of the number of adjective pairs (15 for the past and 19 for the present and the future) and the number of ss in the group gives the mean attitude score of the group. Accordingly, the mean time attitude score can vary from 1.00 to 7.00. We consider as positive the mean scores ranging from 1.00 to 3.50, as neutral the scores within the 3.51 – 4.49 interval, and as negative the mean scores equal to or higher than 4.50. The procedure for dividing this six-point scale is justified by the fact that the original seven-point scale includes three positive and three negative intervals and only one neutral interval.

	past	present	future
males	3.29	3.10	2.86
females	3.11	2.90	2.64
t	2.06*	2.28*	3.09**
df.	258	258	258

TABLE 1. MEAN TIME ATTITUDE SCORES OF MALE AND FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS THEIR OWN PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE * $p < .05$ (wo-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 1 gives the mean time attitude scores of the male and female subgroup for each of the three time dimensions. All the mean scores being smaller than 3.50 suggests that male and female college students do experience their own past, present, and future as positive rather than negative. Contrary to our expectation, however, Table 1 shows that for each of the three time dimensions the mean time attitude score of the female group is smaller than the mean score of the male group. The difference between the male and female group is significant at the .01 level for the future and at the .05 level for the past and the present. Female college students do spontaneously experience their

mean score		past		present		future	
		male	female	male	female	male	female
positive (1 - 3.50)	N	98	94	103	103	121	116
	%	72.6	75.2	76.3	82.4	89.6	92.8
neutral (3.51 - 4.49)	N	32	24	27	15	11	8
	%	23.7	19.2	20.0	12.0	8.2	6.4
negative (4.50 - 7.00)	N	5	7	5	7	3	1
	%	3.7	5.6	3.7	5.6	2.2	0.8

TABLE 2. ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS WITH A POSITIVE, NEGATIVE OR NEUTRAL MEAN TIME ATTITUDE TOWARDS EACH OF THE THREE TIME DIMENSIONS

past, present, and future significantly more positively than their male colleagues do.

Table 2 gives the absolute and relative frequencies of male and female students expressing a positive, negative, or neutral mean time attitude towards their own past, present, and future.

Although the differences are statistically not significant, more female than male students expressed a positive mean time attitude towards their own past, present, and future. The data in Table 2 hence confirm those in Table 1, both being opposite to what was expected.

We can also read from Table 1 that in both groups the mean attitude towards the future is more positive than towards the present, and that the attitude towards the past is the least positive. Table 2 shows that in both groups more ss expressed a positive attitude towards the future than towards the present and that the relative frequency of ss with a positive attitude towards the past is still lower. Male and female college students have a predominantly positive attitude towards their own past, present, and future. The positive attitude is increasing from the past over the present to the future.

A more detailed analysis of the individual data limits however the generality of this result. Indeed, for 42.4% of the female students is the past more positive than the present. For 26.4% is the present more positive than the future and for 25.6% is the past even more positive than the future. For the group of male college students these percentages are respectively 41.5%, 31.11% and 31.1%.

DISCUSSION

We expected on the basis of Horner's and Fannes' results and interpretations concerning the higher fear of success among female college students in comparison with their male colleagues, that female college students would experience their own present and future as less positive than male college students would do. We found however exactly the opposite of what we expected. The mean time attitude score of the female group was more positive than of the male group, for the past, present, and future. Also more female than male ss expressed a positive mean attitude towards each of the three time dimensions.

The ss were asked: "How do you spontaneously experience your past (present, future)?" We do however not know which specific thematic contents of their past, present and future the ss had in mind and did consider when they formulated their attitudes. It may be possible that the expected less positive attitude of female college students towards their present and future is limited to certain aspects of those time dimensions without strongly influencing the global outlook on the personal present and future, which we suppose to be expressed on the Time Attitude Scale.

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Received October 1974