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Perceived interference between work and family life and adherence to gender stereotypes

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Abstract

This study is part of the implementation of a professional equality program between women and men for territorial agents of Rheims' council (France). Therefore, the aims of this research was (1) to explore the meaning of the concept of professional success for these agents; and (2) to assess the perception of certain factors that may be constraining or enabling the career, namely the adherence to gender stereotypes (male-instrumental and feminine-relational), as well as the perception of interferences between work and family.

Keywords: social representation; gender stereotypes; work and family life.

Introduction

Under the law, discrimination on the basis of the criterion of sex is prohibited. But, although the legal barriers to equality between men and women should be lifted today, there are still horizontal disparities (between jobs) and vertical ones (in terms of hierarchy) of the distribution of gender in work organizations (Fortino, 2002). Thus, this research is part of the implementation of a professional equality program between men and women for Rheims Council of workers. The aims of this study were (1) to explore the meaning of the concept of professional success for workers; and (2) to assess the perception of certain factors that may be constraining or enabling the career, namely the adherence to gender stereotypes (male-instrumental / feminine-relational), as well as the perception of interferences between work and family life.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Social categorization, sex and gender

The process of social categorization is either the creation of a category by grouping similar items and differentiating dissimilar elements, and the allocation of an element in an appropriate category by assimilation and contrast. Here, categorization refers to the social group whose typical traits are stereotypes (Salès-Wuillemin, 2007). Thus, the distinction between sex and gender must be clarified. The concept of "sex" refers to a biological construction: we are biologically male or female. Gender, unlike sex, is a social construct defined by gender stereotypes. Moreover, there is a cross-cultural constant in Western culture: the social dominance of the masculine principle, defining the "differential valence of the sexes" (Héritier, 1996; Bourdieu, 1998). Bem's model

(1974) distinguishes two independent dimensions of gender stereotypes: the expressive orientation (female role) and the instrumental orientation (male role). Thus, in professional life, gender stereotypes operate in conjunction with other categorizations such as sex, hierarchical level (or status) and job type (Cejka, Eagly, 1989).

1.2. Private and professional life articulation

Nowadays, in France, men have a higher average of professional working time than women, but if we take into account professional and domestic work time, then, women, who have children, work 62 hours per week while men have an average of 54.5 hours in the same situation (Lourel, Guégen, 2007). This suggests that centrality of work in the spheres of life is not approached in the same way if the person is a man or a woman. The question is then to know if men and women can project themselves in the same manner in their professional life, independently of being a man or a woman, with the same professional opportunities. The theory of social representations may shed light on these queries.

1.3. Professional success' social representation

A social representation (SR) is an organization of socially constructed views, on a particular object, resulting from a social communication set, to "control" the environment depending on symbolic elements belonging to member of a social group (Roussiau, Bonardi, 2001). Thus, SR result from social thought; they are modulated and legitimate social practices that is to say, our behaviour (Moscovici, 1961; Jodelet, 1989; Abric, 2001). According to the Central Core Theory (Abric, 1976), social representations are organized around two systems: a central core and a peripheral system. The core is determined partly by the nature of the object and by the relationship between the subject and this object; finally, it is modulated by the value system and social norms existing in the environment. A competitive and liberal business environment, particularly in terms of career advancement, and the sexual division of labour suggest that conflicting issues may exist between different social groups within an organization.

2. Methodology

180 permanent workers of the council of Rheims were met face-to-face in their work place. This sample of the population was drawn according to 3 independent variables (15 workers for each condition):

IV1: Sex (male *vs.* female) in order to observe the effect of sex on the SR of professional success (DV 1), on perceived interferences between private and working life (DV 2), and on gender stereotypes adherence (DV 3).

IV2: Status (High *vs.* middle *vs.* low) High status = workers in charge of management; Middle status = workers with responsibilities, but no management; Low status =

executive workers. Thus, we can observe the effect of workers hierarchical positions on the three dependent variables.

IV3: Branch (Administrative *vs*. Technical); according to the sexual division of work, the administrative branch refers to females, mainly occupied by women, whereas the technical branch refers to males, mainly occupied by men. Thus, we wanted to measure the effect of the type of work environment on the three dependent variables.

We first used Vergès' method (1992) to identify both the content and structure of the social representation of professional success. Based on a verbal free association task, participants were asked to associate five items to "professional success". Then two criteria were used to structure the material obtained: the average rank and the frequency of citation of each item in the population studied. The threshold frequency was determined using binomial law and the threshold rank was fixed on median rank. Thus, we could identify items potentially belonging to the central core (high frequency and low rank). Finally, we compared professional success' SR's of each group to the one of the whole sample in order to identify variations linked to independent variables, most of all in the central core area. To measure interferences between work and family life, we used a short version of the SWING scale (Survey Work-Home Interaction Nijmegen; Wagena, Geurts, 2000), validated in French by Lourel, Warwziniak and Gana (2005), with 22 items assessing 4 dimensions: negative interference of work on home life (-WHI), negative interference of family life on work (-HWI), positive interference of privacy on working life (+HWI), and positive interference of working life on privacy (+WHI). Adherence to gender stereotypes was measured by using the short version of the BSRI (Bem Sex-Role Inventory) validated in French by Fontayne and Sarrazin (2000). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients are satisfactory (SWING: $0.64 < alpha < 0.82$; BSRI: $0.77 < alpha < 0.80$).

3. Results

3.1. Social representation of professional success

On the whole studied population (cf. table 1), a well-structured social representation of professional success can be observed. The cognitive integration is reinforced by the stability of cognitive organization (hapax index = 0.35), which refers to a low inter-individual variability, and thus reinforces the diagnosis of the existence of a SR of professional success in this population (Flament, Rouquette, 2003). Elements are distributed throughout the structure. Most central elements refer mainly to work retributive value in terms of social status (salary, recognition, evolution/ career/ promotion) and self-realization (fulfilment).

Moreover, a comparison of the content of the central core, between groups, shows that for the group of men, SR of professional success is much less convergent in comparison to the whole sample, but inter-individual variability is similar. Social status and self-realization values are represented in equal proportions in the central core. In the women's group, professional success' SR is less consensual than in the whole sample, and inter-individual variations are higher. In the central core, work is mostly associated to social

status (salary, evolution/career/promotion, recognition), followed by self-realization value. In the group composed of higher status agents, SR of professional success is less focused than in the whole sample, with a mild cognitive stability. The core is mainly structured by social status value without direct association to salary (which appeared in the first peripheral area).

The group of middle status workers present the social representation with the highest overall internal variability, and inter-individual variability is medium. The central core of this group is mainly structured around social status value.
In the lower status group, the central core is structured more around social status value. We note that for the first time, life balance appears here in the second peripheral zone, while it appeared in the first one for the other groups.

In the administrative group, professional success' SR shows less internal consistency and higher inter-individual variability than in the SR of whole sample. The central core shows a similar distribution of work values related to social status and self-realization.

In the technical group, professional success' SR has less stability of cognitive organization than in whole sample. However, contents of probable nucleus show similar work values.

Table 1: Social representation of professional success for the whole the sample

	Low rank	*High rank*
High frequency	**Salary** *(108; 3.06)* **Recognition** *(93; 3.09)* **Evolution/Career/Promotion** *(90; 2.82)* **Wellness/Pleasure/Satisfaction** *(75; 2.28)* **Fulfilment** *(72; 2.24)* *Responsibilities (31; 2.81)* *Interest (24; 2.46) Competence (21; 2.90)* *Outcome/Achievement (21; 3.05)* *Investment (13; 2.46)* *Teamwork (9; 2.67)*	*Agreement (43; 3.35)* **Balance privacy – working life** *(32; 3.72)* *Training (30; 3.63)* *Relations events (26; 3.73)* *Social status (22; 3.23)* *Contests (13; 3.54)* *Autonomy (13; 3.69)* *Motivation (11; 3.36)*
Low frequency	*Stability (8; 1.75)* *Enjoying work (8; 2.50)* *Target (8; 2.63) Master (5; 2.40)* *Integration (5; 2.80) Work (4; 1.25)* *Efficiency (4; 1.75) Passion (4; 3.00)* *Availability (3; 3.00)* *Essence (2; 1.50)* *Ambition (2; 2.50) Future (2; 3.00)* *Challenge / Challenge (2; 3.00)* *Choice (2; 3.00)* *Worth (2; 3.00)* *Performance (2; 3.00)*	*Framing (8; 3.8) Diversity (8; 4.13)* *Respect (7; 3.57) Utility (6; 4.00)* *Decision Making (4; 3.75)* *Perseverance (3; 3.33)* *Cross (3; 3.33) Luck (3; 4.00)* *Public Service (3; 5.00)* *Dynamism (2; 3.50)* *Working conditions (2; 4.00)* *Punctuality (2; 4)* *Application (2; 5.00)* *Enthusiasm (2; 5.00)* *Means (2; 5.00) Retreat (2; 5.00)* *Serious (2; 5)*

3.2. Effect of independent variables

Here, we study the simple effect of the different independent variables (sex, status, branch), and the interactions (First-order interaction Sex X Status and Status X Branch) on the dependent variables, based on an ANOVA and a Bonferroni's post-test.

3.2.1. Simple effect of Sex

On masculinity, men show a significantly higher average score on masculinity (4.60 ± .85) than women did (4.19 ± .91).

3.2.2. Simple effect of Status

On masculinity, higher status agents show a significantly higher average score on masculinity (4.60 ± .85) than lower status agents did (4.19 ± .91).

On –WHI, higher status agents perceive significantly more interference from work on private life (7.30 ± 3.37) than middle (5.32 ± 3.71) or lower status agents (4.38 ± 2.85).

On +HWI, lower status agents perceive significantly more positive interferences from privacy on working life (5.92 ± 3.16) than higher status agents (4.53 ± 2.78).

3.2.3. Simple effect of Branch

On +WHI, technical branch agents perceive significantly more positive interferences from work on private life (5.21 ± 2.59) than Administrative branch agents (4.39 ± 2.89).

3.2.4. First-order interaction Sex X Status

On femininity, women of lower status have a femininity BSRI score (5.61 ± .71) significantly higher than men of higher status (5.11 ± .61).

On +HWI, women of lower status perceived significantly more positive interferences from privacy on working life (7.50 ± 2.87) than women of middle (4.80 ± 2.37) or higher status (4.27 ± 2.59) and than men of high (4.80 ± 2.98), middle (5.40 ± 2.97) and low status (4.33 ± 2.63).

3.2.5. First-order interaction Status X Branch

On masculinity, administrative lower status agents present a masculinity score (4.06 ± .97) significantly lower than administrative higher status agents (4.75 ± .70) and technical middle status agents (4.84 ± .84) did. In addition, administrative middle status

workers present a masculinity score (4.13 ± .85) significantly lower than technical middle status agents of the technical branch (4.84 ± .84).

On +WHI, a *t Student* test shows that lower status agents perceive significantly more positive interference from work on privacy than lower status agents of the technical branch did.

4. Discussion and further work

The aim of this exploratory study was to better understand the social representation of professional success for Rheims Council workers according to their sex, status and branch of labour, and the effects on perceived interference between work and private life, and on gender stereotypes adherence.

4.1 We first postulated that sex would affect our three dependent variables (i) producing differences in the social representation of professional success between men and women, specifically giving to women more importance to the notion of private and working life balance than for men, (ii) giving to women more negative perceived interferences between private and working-life, and (iii) showing that women adhered more than men to the female gender stereotype whereas men would adhere more to the male stereotype. This first assumption is globally invalidated. The notion of spheres of life balance appeared similarly in both groups in the first peripheral area. However, we note that the centrality of social status in the group of women is higher than in the group of men (where this notion shared half-space of central core with working life climate value). We assume that women invest more than men the quest for social identity through the acquisition of a statutory position in the professional field, which would counteract the permanence of a social stereotyped role of woman who thrives in motherhood and household management tasks. Thereby, the question is whether these different values reflect inequality of opportunities to access to professional success, or simply differences of goals in career success. This question should be kept in mind during a confirmatory study of professional success' SR on a larger sample of the Council workers including workers of others branches of labour (culture, sport, social, police). The data should also be treated with a confirmatory factor analysis, such as the one developed by the Geneva school, in order to better understand the organization of knowledge, and therefore social behaviours (Michel-Guillou, 2006).

Regarding interferences between the spheres of life, results observed by Lourel et al (2005) were not found here. In our sample, we found no significant difference between men and women. We should note that the method of data collection used with the SWING scale is based on the statement of participants who rate their own perception of interferences between spheres of life. However, nothing guarantees that at this level also, there is no intervention of sexual division of labour or of gender stereotypes normative effect. Thus, we can assume that women may be short-sighted about those factors in order not to feel the injustice of segregation duties that they are victims of.

In terms of gender stereotypes adherence, the hypothesis is partially validated: women did not adhered more than men to femininity whereas men significantly adhered more than women to masculinity. According to the differential valence of sexes, male-instrumental dimension is more valued than feminine-relational one. So, maybe, men would allow them easier to say to adhere to the congruent gender dimension than women would. This can be linked to the observation of the same position of spheres of life balance in men and women professional success' SR: women can be exposed to a social desirability bias that won't allow them to associate easily a notion linked to femininity (so as family life) to professional success which lead to masculinity. Thus, in further work, we should use an implicit method to evaluate the intervention of social desirability bias on responses we collect.

4.2 In the second hypothesis, it was postulated that the status would affect our three dependent variables showing that higher status agents would respond like men did, and on the opposite, lower status agents would respond like women did. This hypothesis is partially validated. The results showed that higher status workers professional success' SR did not include "salary" in the central core area, as it was the case for the group of men. The "salary" item was the most important association in the central core, for middle and lower status agents as it was the case for the group of women. It seems that men and high status agents evaluate their own social status preferentially in terms of recognition than in a financial way, unlike what women and lower status agents did.

In terms of perceived interference between spheres of life, results are opposite to the ones expected. Thus, higher responsibilities in management lead to more negative interferences. On the contrary, an executive work authorizes the perception of more positive interferences. In the same way, the association with the balance of sphere of life appeared in the second peripheral area for the group of lower status agents. Abric (1976, 2001) showed that this area is more in-line with social behaviour. In addition, those agents had few associations with fulfilment value in the central core. Thus, it can be assumed that for lower status agents, work is not an identity provider, so they do not need to invest their professional field in order to achieve, but preferentially they concentrate on private and family-life.

In terms of gender stereotypes adherence, we observed no effect of status on femininity. Higher status agents presented masculinity significantly more than lower status agents. This confirms the superposition of a male model with managerial positions and leadership in this organization (Schein, 2001). Men adhered to masculinity significantly more than women; therefore, it seems that, in this organization, the dominant model is a male model.

4.3 In the third hypothesis, it was postulated that branch would affect our three dependent variables. It was assumed that, as the sexual division of labour, administrative agents would provide similar responses to women, whereas technical agents would provide similar responses to men. This hypothesis is mostly invalidated.

4.4 Finally, for the fourth hypothesis, it was postulated that the three independent variables (Sex, Status, Branch) would have an interaction effect on the three dependent variables. Our results show only interaction of first order. The method of investigation of

the SR used (Vergès, 1992) did not permit the objective evaluation of the interaction effect beyond what we have already established. By cons, we have shown a tendency in terms of interaction between sex and status on femininity: women of lower status showed significantly greater adherence to femininity than men of higher status did. It would probably imply two extremes of a double categorization based on sex and status. This, in line with the model of male domination, thus leaves the prediction that women of lower status have a representation of themselves, which is less conducive to progress in this hierarchical organization. In addition, those women of lower status felt most strongly positive interferences from privacy on working life. Thus, they seem to be motivated by a functional relationship to their work, which would feed a self-realization and fulfilment mainly from the private-life.

Status also interacted with branch on masculinity. Thus, administrative lower status agents have reported masculinity scores significantly lower than administrative higher status agents, confirming in this way the dominance of the male model. In addition, administrative middle status agents adhered significantly less to masculinity than technical middle status agents. This can be linked to sexual division of labour: the technique would be a male domain and the administration would be a female one. However we did not observe this variation on femininity, which maybe due to a social desirability bias related to differential valence of sexes (Héritier, 1996).

To conclude, regarding processes of categorization, it seems that workers preferentially categorized themselves according to their status rather than to their sex or branch. Other researchers have also shown that categorization according to professional status is more powerful than the one based on sex in professional field (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2009). The question that arises is whether it's appropriate to develop equal opportunity to succeed on a male/female dichotomy. Here, gender inequalities are registered at the individual level (women perceived themselves less instrumentals than men), at organizational level (administrative agents perceived themselves less instrumentals than technical agents), and at societal level (the dominant model is male-instrumental).

In fact, even if the twentieth century has been marked by a tremendous step forward for the presence of women in professional field, notably in public sector, it seems that, here too, this breakthrough has taken place mainly in renewing the model of differential valence of sexes, male dominance and sexual division of labour. The continuation of this research should be oriented toward the use of the judges' paradigm, and similarly, research should continue in the field of social categorization in relation to social representations and inter-group relations. The goal would then be to allow agents to overcome gender stereotypes in relation to hierarchical status and to gendered representation of labour in order to improve the working situation of women, enabling them to better participate in social dialogue, while allowing men to invest exclusively female sectors and invest more in family life. Finally, it would simply, but ambitiously, allow the necessary dissociation in categorization processes of the concept of sex from the concept of domination.

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