

Women's Social Role - How It Relates to Her Self-Concept⁽¹⁾

The author of the study raises the following questions:

1. Does a working woman's self-concept differ from that of a non-working woman?
2. Do working women and non-working women perceive the concept of a "woman's role" differently?
3. Do they perceive differently the conflict surrounding a woman's role and the significance of that conflict?

The experimental group of the study consisted of 50 married women, aged 23 - 45; each had one child or more, and each was a university graduate, working outside the home. To this sample was added a control group of 50 women who did not work outside the home but who were of the same age

and had the same status and education as the working women.

The study consisted of eight chapters, of which the first five presented the objectives of the study, its importance, the various theories regarding a woman's role, her social condition and the different concepts of the ego.

In chapter 7, she discussed the methodology of her work and reported on a preliminary enquiry, in which she had interviewed ten housewives who fulfilled the conditions of the sample. This enquiry revealed two kinds of self-concept among interviewees: the traditional, which limits a woman's role to that of wife, mother and housekeeper; the equalitarian which gives both husband and wife

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equal shares in responsibility without differentiation between male and female.

The marital role as defined by the study included the following activities which may or may not be shared by the couple: authority, housework, child care, personal interests, social activity, upbringing, work and maintenance.

Tests were used to identify the sub-conscious nature of the self-concept, its perception and the role conflict as projected by the subject on the test cards.

Results of the Questionnaire, chapter 8:

1. Concept of the Marital Role

The result showed a difference between working and non-working women's concept of the marital role. The working group believed that the couple should take equal responsibility in maintaining the family.

2. Self-Concept

The results did not give any indices of differentiation between the two groups regarding self-acceptance. The results did show that non-working women have a significantly higher level of social acceptance; it can be concluded that society still regards woman primarily as a wife, mother and housekeeper and secondly as a worker.

3. General Comprehension of the Role

a. The group of working housewives, even those who had the highest level of self-acceptance, revealed a traditional concept of their role. They were dependent, masochistic and suffered from an excess of worries and responsibilities, while their idea of the role itself seemed hazy, diffuse and contradictory.

b. The group of non-working housewives who had the highest level of self-acceptance equally showed a traditional concept of their role: an ambivalent self-image. A deeper analysis proved that this groups possessed a negative, masochistic, dependent ego. The role conflict among them revealed a desire to change their traditional role into an equalitarian one, though they lacked the positive means of change, such as education and capacity for work.

c. The third group was made up of those members having the lowest proportion of self-

acceptance and included both working and non-working women. Three different responses to the question of role concept appeared: traditional, equalitarian and an amalgamation of both. The majority of the members of this group however, had a traditional concept of self.

Just like the role concept, the self-concept of this group took a variety of forms: the positive self, the traditional negative self and the dual or ambivalent, dependent self, all appeared in the results.

Conclusion

The variety and ambivalence revealed in women's self-concept and social role in Egypt reflect the contradictions of social attitudes regarding woman's role. Woman's self-concept tends to be negative and dependent; in some cases it shows a dual nature, i.e. positive – negative. This result carries a close relation between self-concept and role concept. The role conflict appeared in various ways; the general causes of conflict, including the multiplicity of tasks, the rejection of the present status and the desire for change.

Finally, woman's role and its relation to her self-concept are defined through their economic, social and cultural factors. To impose on a woman the roles of childbearing and pleasure-giving tool, as complements to her femininity, constitutes an encroachment on her right to freedom.

On the other hand, a woman who lives from her own work and enjoys personal freedom, while rejecting her female role, may have to face social criticism. She is torn between two options: remaining an enslaved female or changing into a free male. Here the following questions may be raised: are all males free? Doesn't the struggle for freedom include both males and females, though it may be heavier and more demanding on the latter?

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- (1) Summary of an M.A. thesis presented by Kareema Ed-Dassouky, Egypt, published by *Majallatul-Ulum-il-Ijtima'iyya*, (Journal of the Social Sciences), Kuwait University, no. 4, year 10, December 1982, pp. 311-317.