Predictors of women's sex role attitudes across two cultures: United States and Japan

ATSUKO SUZUKI
Department of Sociology, Faculty of Letters, Keio University, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108

The English Form of the Scale of Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes (SESRA) was administered to 238 American women after the original Japanese Form was developed and administered to 420 Japanese women. The multiple regression analyses suggest that the most important common predicting variables of sex role attitudes for American and Japanese women are education (p<.01 and p<.0001 respectively) and professional/managerial work (p<.01 and p<.001 respectively). A highly educated woman with a career-oriented professional/managerial job is most likely to have an egalitarian sex role attitude. Moreover, an American woman with a job (clerical/semi-professional/self-employed: p<.05) tends to have a more egalitarian sex role attitude than a woman without one. However, for Japanese women, there is a significant difference in their sex role attitudes between women who hold a career-oriented professional/managerial job and all other women, with or without a job. For Japanese women age (p<.05, negative correlation) serves as another, but weaker, predicting variable. Fertility (p<.05) and income (p<.05, negative correlation) are the parallel subordinate predicting variables for American women.

Key words: a cross-cultural comparison, American and Japanese women, predicting variables of sex role attitudes, education, professional/managerial jobs, the Scale of Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes (SESRA).

The present research aims to both compare and contrast the sex role attitudes of contemporary Japanese and American women and elucidate the socioeconomic and demographic variables in predicting attitudes toward men and women's sex roles. For this purpose, the Japanese Form of SESRA (the Scale of the Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes) was administered to Japanese respondents and the English Form to American respondents. The validity and reliability of these Forms have been previously tested and determined (Suzuki, 1987; Suzuki, 1991; Suzuki, In press).

In this paper, American and Japanese women's predicting variables of sex role attitudes are compared because cross-cultural designs help us distinguish what is common to human beings from what is specific to particular groups of them (Osgood, May, & Miron, 1975). American and Japanese women are of two culturally distinct societies, yet both societies are highly developed capitalist countries. Moreover, the modern life styles of Japanese women have become increasingly similar to those of American women (Robins-Mowry, 1983). It is likely that some commonalities as well as differences will be found between the sex role predicting variables of American and Japanese women. These commonalities may hold true not only for those women but also for contemporary women in any industrial coun-
try. The results of cross-cultural research on various topics indicate that there is ample evidence of cross-cultural similarities which outweigh cross-cultural differences (e.g., Lonner, 1980; Williams & Best, 1982).

The Relationships of Sex Role Attitudes to Demographic Characteristics

The demographic variables in predicting sex role attitudes often reported are: (1) sex; (2) education; (3) work experience; and (4) age.

Sex
Although both men and women have become less traditional in their sex role attitudes over time in Japan and the U.S. (e.g., Akiyama, 1990; Mason & Lu, 1988), with minor exceptions (e.g., Quarm, 1983), women are reported more egalitarian than men in their sex role attitudes (e.g., Akiyama, 1990; Azuma & Ogura, 1984; Bankart, 1985; Cherlin & Walters, 1981; King & King, 1985; Martin, Osmond, Hesselbart, & Wood, 1980; Mason & Lu, 1988; McBroom, 1987; Nelson, 1988; Osmond & Martin, 1975; Thornton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983). This is also true for men and women in other countries where the research was done (e.g., Haworth, Povey, & Clift, 1986; Joesting, 1982; Rao & Rao, 1985; Tomch, 1981; Tomch & Gallant, 1984). It may be safely said that sex is one of the most important variables in predicting sex role attitudes.

Education
Past literature already shows that education is one of the most significant variables in predicting sex role attitudes. All authors who examined the relationship of education to sex role attitudes reported that a high educational level was strongly related to liberal sex role attitudes, that is, the higher the education, the more egalitarian the attitudes (e.g., Mason, Arber, & Czajka, 1976; Mason & Lu, 1988; Rosenberg, 1984; Suzuki, 1987; Suzuki, In press; Tallichet & Willits, 1986; Thornton & Freedman, 1979). It is not clear, however, whether people with higher education are more liberal because their educational attainment has the effect of constructing egalitarian sex role attitudes, or whether more liberal people have higher education. Only one study examined the causal relationship between sex role attitudes and educational attainment (Thornton et al., 1983). Its findings were that educational attainment affected the formation of sex role attitudes but was not affected by the attitudes. More research is needed to know the causal relationship.

Work Experience
It can be said from past literature that work experience or employment has one of the most consistent and strongest relationships to sex role attitudes. Working women have lower attitudinal sex role traditionalism than women who have not been employed (Dowdall, 1974; Dreyer, Woods, & James, 1981; Kamiko, 1979; McBroom, 1987; Tallichet & Willits, 1986; Thornton & Freedman, 1979). Beckman and Houser (1979) reported that (1) women with professional jobs held more favorable attitudes toward the women's liberation movement than did women with nonprofessional jobs and (2) women with longer employment were less traditional on the issues of sex role attitudes. They argued that this pattern of results suggested that sex role traditionalism and employment status were closely associated.

Although strong relationships have been found in the relationships between sex role attitudes and employment status, the direction of causality between attitudes and employment status has not been elucidated. It is not clear whether attitude affects employment status, or whether employment status affects attitude, whether the relationships are bi-directional, or whether there is no relationship. Among
the few studies of causal direction of sex role attitudes and employment, the following are representative ones. Thornton et al. (1983) found evidence of reciprocal effects of sex role attitudes with female labor force participation. They reported that work experience not prior to marriage but after marriage strongly influenced the sex role attitudes of the mothers and the amount of time mothers spent in the labor force is important in determining sex role attitudes. Malm found from her data that employment has a small effect on sex role attitudes; that is, behavior affects attitude, but no reciprocal causation was found (1978). Huber and Spitze (1981) also found that wives' employment strongly affected sex role attitudes. Bielby and Bielby (1984) found that employment behavior was not affected by sex role attitudes. To get the right answer for the causality, we need more research on work, work motivation, attitudes, and behavior in general.

Age
Although few studies have paid attention to this factor, the results show that egalitarian sex role attitudes had a negative correlation with age. Younger people are more liberal than older people (e.g., Bankart, 1983; Brogan & Kutner, 1976; Mita, 1985; Morgan & Walker, 1983; Nelson, 1988; Thornton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983). These studies mainly compare the students with their parents or adolescents with adults.

The results of the research on the sex role attitudes of three generations of women are that students are the most liberal, grandmothers the most conservative, and the mothers in the middle—a little more conservative than their daughters (Dambrt, Papp, & Whitmore, 1984; Slevin & Wingrove, 1983; Thornton et al., 1983). It should be reasonable to think that younger people adopt more egalitarian sex role attitudes because they have been brought up in a more egalitarian social atmosphere, educated in less traditional ways, are more sensitive to social trends than adults are, and have less cohort succession effects.

Methods

Sample Survey
The American and Japanese samples were chosen from two regions which have similar geographic, historical, political, and industrial characteristics: the State of Massachusetts in the United States and Kanagawa Prefecture in Japan. The ages of the subjects in this research project ranged from 20 to 79 in both countries.

The English questionnaire was distributed or sent to 600 American women who belonged to either a non-profit organization for women, administrative offices in a university, or career development programs in the spring of 1988. The answer rate was 40% and the final sample size was 238 (Table 1). The Japanese questionnaire was sent to 600 women who were either alumni of three local public high schools or members of two communities in the spring of 1987. The answer rate was 70% and the sample size was 420 (Table 1).

Questionnaire
The questionnaire consisted of the following two parts: (1) the Scale of Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes and (2) demographic, socioeconomic, and psychographic variables: age, education, occupational status, marital status, fertility, income, race, religion, and a future work plan. Race and religion were asked only of American respondents.

The Scale of Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes
The measurement instrument used in the present research is the Scale of Egali-
Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes (SESRA). SESRA was originally developed in Japan and measures the degree of egalitarianism in one's sex role attitudes (Suzuki, 1987; Suzuki, In press). Egalitarianism is defined as a belief in the equality of men and women as individuals. Sex role attitudes mean an individual's beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women. High scorers are regarded as egalitarian in their sex role attitudes, while low scorers are considered traditional.

The scale consists of 40 items. They are to be rated on a Likert-type five-point scale (from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5). The minimum total score is 40 and the maximum total score is 200. For the 15 items that have inequalitarian descriptions, the scoring is reversed. The scale has four domains or role categories: (1) marital domain (14 items): attitudes toward marriage and matrimonial life (e.g., "Domestic chores should be shared between husband and wife"); (2) parental domain (8 items): attitudes toward having a child/children, children's education and child-rearing (e.g., "Boys and girls should have equal opportunity in education"); (3) vocational domain (12 items): attitudes toward women's employment (e.g.,...
“whether married or not, for purposes of independence, women should work”); and (4) social domain (6 items): attitudes toward general egalitarian values in society (e.g., “More emphasis should be placed on the equality of men and women in society at large, and not just in the home”).

Analyses

In order to find the variables which are strongly related to sex role attitudes, stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed. The dependent variable was the total score of SESRA and the independent variables were: age, educational attainment and length of time in the labor force.

In addition, there were the following dummy variables: fertility (children=1, no children=0), housewife (=1, all others employed=0), clerical/service work (=1, all others=0), semi-professional/administrative work (=1, all others=0), professional/managerial work (=1, all others=0), self employed/family enterprise (=1, all others=0), unknown and students (=1, all others=0) and work at home (=1, all others=0). Among the dummy variables for occupations, housewife was used as the reference category and was not entered into the analyses.

Results

Table 2 presents the results of the regressions.

American women. The resulting multiple R (multiple correlation coefficient) was .495, R square (coefficient of determination) was .245, and F(10, 191)=6.204: p<.0001. The variables which were significantly related to the score of SESRA were: education, clerical/service work, semi-professional/administrative work, professional/managerial work, self employed/family enterprise, fertility, and income.

Japanese women. The resulting multiple R was .448, R square was .200, and F(11, 351)=7.990: p<.0001. The variables which were significantly related to the score of SESRA were: education, professional/managerial work, and age.

Education. It appears that education was the most significant variable related to sex role attitudes in common between American (p<.01) and Japanese (p<.0001) samples. The higher the education, the more egalitarian the sex role attitudes. This result confirms the results of the past studies.

Occupations. The second significant common variable for American (p<.01) and Japanese women (p<.001) is professional/managerial work. Among Japanese women, those in professional/managerial work had more egalitarian sex role attitudes than others. However, there was not a significant difference in the sex role attitudes of housewives and those with jobs other than professional/managerial occupations. Among American women, working women are more egalitarian than housewives toward men’s and women’s sex roles. These results also parallel the results of past studies which show that working women have lower attitudinal sex role traditionalism than women who have not been employed.

Age. Age shows a weak negative correlation with sex role attitudes and turns out to be one of the predictors of sex role attitudes of Japanese women (p<.05). A young woman tends to be more egalitarian in her sex role attitude.

Fertility and income. Other predicting variables for American women are fertility and income (p<.05). Fertility has a weak correlation and income does a weak negative correlation with sex role attitudes. A woman with a child/children tends to have a more egalitarian sex role attitude than a
Egalitarian sex role

Table 2

Regression of sex role attitudes of American and Japanese women on
demographic and family characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>American</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>S. E.</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>S. E.</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>.221**</td>
<td>1.478</td>
<td>.246****</td>
<td>2.191</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Profession, manager work</td>
<td>.475**</td>
<td>4.535</td>
<td>.259***</td>
<td>5.176</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical, service work</td>
<td>.318*</td>
<td>4.814</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>3.564</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-prof, admin. work</td>
<td>.301*</td>
<td>4.626</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>4.405</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-emp, fami. enterprise</td>
<td>.151*</td>
<td>8.411</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>7.573</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-3.831E</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>-.165*</td>
<td>.951</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertility</td>
<td>.204*</td>
<td>2.454</td>
<td>-.102</td>
<td>2.964</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.176*</td>
<td>1.512</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>1.869</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length in labor force</td>
<td>-.155</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td>.583</td>
<td>.921</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown and students</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>5.161</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>8.641</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at home</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>5.774</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>6.585</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.734</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>multiple R</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td></td>
<td>.448</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td></td>
<td>.200</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$F(10,191)=6.204****$ $F(11,351)=7.990****$ $* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, **** p<.0001.$

A woman with lower income is more egalitarian in her sex role attitude. So far, only few attention has been paid to the relationships between sex role attitudes and child-rearing, fertility, and income, and the literature remains inconclusive (Dreyer et al., 1981; Mason et al., 1976; Mason & Lu, 1988; Morgan & Walker, 1983; Suzuki, 1987; Tallichet & Willits, 1986; Thornton & Freedman, 1979).

Conclusions

The data and the analyses of the present study suggest that variables which were most strongly related to sex role attitudes of American and Japanese women in common were education and professional/managerial work. A highly educated woman with a professional/managerial job is most likely to have an egalitarian sex role attitude. These commonalities between those two societies which are culturally so different may also hold true among the contemporary women in any industrial country.

As for Japanese women, however, egalitarian sex role attitudes are closely related only to having a professional/managerial job which is career-oriented. In Japan, many fewer women pursue careers than in the United States, therefore they seem to have more egalitarian sex role attitudes than women without careers. American women with professional/managerial work have more egalitarian sex role attitudes than other working women, yet working women in general are more egalitarian in their sex role attitudes than non-working women. We can infer that among American women, egalitarian sex role attitudes are more prevalent than among Japanese women, so there is not as big a difference between career-oriented professional/managerial women and other working women in America as in Japan.

In addition to these strong sex role predicting variables, a few more weak variables were also found. One of them is age for Japanese women, that is, a younger woman is more egalitarian in her sex role
attitude. However, this study does not find that age is a predicting variable for American women's sex role attitudes. The likely explanations are: (a) the skewness of the American sample and (b) the prevalence of egalitarian sex role attitudes among American women in general. The American sample consisted of many young and highly educated women, but the non-young women were also highly educated. This might have affected the results. Also, it might be true for American women that the egalitarianism in sex role attitudes have prevailed so much that age does not affect the attitudes significantly. The weak predicting variables for American women are fertility and income. A woman with a child/children tends to have a more egalitarian attitude. Moreover, a woman with lower income tends to have a more egalitarian sex role attitude. As we have only little literature, more studies of these variables are required before we come to any coherent conclusions.

Further studies are needed not only for validation of the present findings but also for the development of the cross-cultural research on sex roles. What are needed are: (a) Research on male sex role attitudes and (b) longitudinal research in order to elucidate the direction of causality between sex role attitudes and predicting variables.

Finally, it is important to consider the effect of the skewness of the samples on the results of the present research. The findings cannot necessarily be generalized to the total population of American and Japanese women because each sample was collected in a restricted area. Also, the American response rate was low, many of the respondents were working women with a high education, and they tended to be younger. It is highly possible that there was a self-selection of more egalitarian types in this study. These women might represent one of the more liberal subgroups of all American women. So, we can infer that American women might be less egalitarian and less individualistic than the sample and that American and Japanese women share more similarities in their predicting variables of sex role attitudes.

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