

Tomboys and Dolls: An Investigation of Women and Status

Introduction

United States: When discussing US women's status in society, research distinguishes between women in traditional professions (TP) from those in non-traditional professions (NTP). TP are known as the "pink collar" low-pay professions of nurse, teacher, and secretary which are dominated by women (Howe, 1977). NTP are those higher paying professions dominated by men, e.g. engineers, mathematicians, surgeons, scientists. Generally it is found that women in NTP enjoy higher status and salaries. But they are underrepresented. Women make up 10 percent of engineers, 7 percent of construction inspectors, 2 percent of electricians, and 1 percent of carpenters (Herz & Wootton, 1996), and in the sciences, 15 percent of Ph.D. go to women but only 3 percent of women are on the faculties in universities (Hyde, 1997).

Advocates for women in the United States are trying to understand why more women don't pursue NTP. It has been pointed out, for example, that while American women are thought to have higher status than other women, in fact they have lower percentages in many of these professions than other women in many parts of Europe (Hyde, 1997).

Some have suggested that there are social pressures in US society that discourage women from entering NTP. The social consequences for women are simply too great to compete with men for positions in engineering, mathematics, and the sciences. For example, the unemployment rate for female scientists and engineers is twice as high as men's (National Science Foundation, 1990). In addition, studies of women with advanced degrees indicate that they are at the highest risk for divorce of any group of women.

This finding is supported by an examination of the demographics of women with Ph.D. in the American Psychological Association which revealed that women psychologists were markedly more likely to be single than their male counterparts. Marital status of male psychologists was 87% married and female psychologists 65%

Paradoxically, educated single women enjoy several differences when compared with their married counterparts. Single or divorced women of high status were found to be physically healthier and more educated than

married women. In addition, they were found to have higher status and income often because they were in NTP.

While it may be true that social consequences prevent many women from seeking NTP, there may be other reasons to account for this reluctance. For example, a study by Jackson found that the majority of a sample of US women (> 75%) in NTP identified themselves as tomboys in childhood (Jackson, APA presentation, 1997), suggesting childhood socialization and gender role factors play a role in shaping career paths

There is support for this finding from a study that asked women in NTP to recount childhood play and socialization experiences. They found significant differences from women in TP on several independent variables. Professional business women participated more in competitive sports, reported more male playmates and fewer female playmates, and received different forms of encouragement by fathers than from mothers (Coats & Overman, 1992).

If the preference for NTP is created early in the lives of women, it may be related to the masculine behaviors of the tomboy girl, who identifies with the male gender role, prefers male playmates and has a special relationship with father. The tomboy gender role appears to be unique to US society, however women from other cultures will often recognize themselves as being “boyish girls” (Ukrainian and Estonian samples).

Other Countries: European women enjoy greater participation in NTP and high status. Women in France and Italy receive 21 percent of Ph.D. in Physics and 23 percent are on faculties in universities. Women from Turkey enjoy the same statistics and women in Hungary comprise 47 percent of Physics faculties in their universities(Hyde, 1997)..

Women from countries occupied by the former Soviet Union are faced with a different configuration. Under the socialist state all persons were given access to all professions. Women worked as engineers, medical doctors, construction chiefs, and electricians. However, they did not enjoy high status because salaries were regulated by the state.

In medicine it was possible to achieve higher status by going into surgery. Salaries were higher for surgeons and there was a well-developed practice of receiving “extra money” for better services. This extra money came in

envelopes from families of the patients about to go into surgery. In Soviet times, most surgeons were male and enjoyed a higher standard of living than females who tended to go into the lower status role of general practitioner or family doctor.

Since becoming independent the countries of Ukraine and Estonia differ from their European neighbors by showing a marked decline in women's status and entrance into NTP. Ukraine is still struggling to regain economic security which may explain women's lower status, but Estonia has made great strides towards normalizing their economic base, governance and justice systems. Yet according to national statistics, Estonian women are much more likely to be unemployed than men and because of this, their status has dropped significantly during the nine years of independence.

Since the purpose of this research is to investigate high status women, it may be difficult to use NTP as the only marker for women's status in the newly independent states. However, in an effort to maintain consistency, I will be interviewing subjects in NTP to see whether there are some cross-cultural similarities.

In both Ukraine and Estonia there are groups of women in NTP enjoying high status and it is the purpose of this research to investigate childhood play and socialization processes of those women, to discover the key elements and themes that differentiate them from others. Even though there is no tomboy gender role in these cultures, this study will investigate masculine themes to see if they are present in high status professional women. And finally, these findings will be compared with those gathered from a sample of US women.

Method

Sample: The samples consist of 50 professional women from Ukraine and the US and 21 Estonian professional women. Criteria for sample eligibility include an advanced degree in their field, being in a NTP, and having higher status than women in TP. Subjects hold positions of university professor, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, engineer, architect, building contractor, government minister, and construction inspector, plumbing contractor, university president, dean, road construction company CEO, and many others.

Women's Activities and Achievements Questionnaire (WAA): Subjects were interviewed using the WAA questionnaire developed for the study. The majority of questions covered childhood play activities, school activities, sports, and achievements. Interspersed among the activity questions were theme questions. These were a series of questions designed to identify themes related to masculine gender role identity in girls. They are known as the tomboy questions. (show overhead with the questions):

1. Which parent are you most like in terms of character?
What characteristics do you share?
2. Who did you play with most when you were a girl?
a. Boys b. Girls c. Played alone
3. Is there a concept such as "tomboy" in Estonian culture?
If so please explain its meaning.(boyish girl)
4. Did you ever consider yourself a tomboy when you were a girl?
5. With whom do you prefer working?
6. If gender is not a determinant, what does determine your preference?
7. In your memory, as a girl, were you similar to other girls you knew, in terms of interests and activities, or did you sense you were on a different path than other girls? How were you similar or different?

Other questions from the questionnaire, such as the activity questions were not taken into this analysis.

Results

Ukrainian Professional Women Sample (n=25): The majority of women from Ukraine did not identify themselves as tomboys, nor did they claim to be boyish girls. Yet they fit the profile in every other way. (put up data summary)

- Identified with fathers in terms of character (18/25)
- Played with boys in childhood (21/25)
- Identified with tomboy or boyish girl gender role (5/25)
- Preferred working with men (21/25)
- Were you on a similar or different path? (20/25 different)

The five women who identified themselves as boyish girls had this to say about it:

Its me, intellectual, combinatory skills, high involvement, and activity, search for good partner in communication, dignified, corresponding, friendly relations with boys and girls but had to mind emotional distance and women don't mind this.

She is a masculine girl, trousers, short haircut, looks like a boy, high activity, risky, stands up for herself, and defends herself. When I was a very young girl I was a boy for three years. I called myself Dima and so did everyone else. I had short hair and dressed like a boy. People have told me all of my life that I look like a boy/man even though I am married and have a child.

It's what I am, at 10th form only most hooligany boys were afraid of me, in 9th there was a bully who no one could approach, I grabbed him by his hair and slammed his head into the wall, since then no one has been teasing me.

It's me, a mild version, my life made me an adult early and I had to do everything myself, I had to formulate a plan of how to get money and a life.

She is a leader, persistent, confident, finds way with boys and is popular, physically fit, strong, stands her ground, and stands up for herself. I have more money than other women and am independent even though I am married with children.

In response to the question about similar or different path, there seemed to be two distinct reasons for being different. The first was the early knowledge of superior intellect and interests, while the second revealed a sense of being inferior to other girls and a decision to compensate for that. Here is what the women had to say:

I was an original child and I felt it, everyone viewed me this way, either hated or loved me, teachers and people older than me loved me but not peers, I was very well read and knowledgeable, inventing new games and was interesting to play with but I was always giving, it was

too hard for me to be a friend or accept from others

I studied and earned highest marks, wanted to better myself by studying, parents were more intelligent than others, I helped my mother with her teacher books, and traveled and learned about culture.

I sensed a difference. I was more introverted & wasn't able to be a good mixer like others.

I didn't look like a girl, my world outlook was different, I had no goal to achieve, the process of living moment to moment was most important.

I didn't like noisy games, learned to read at an early age, knew more than classmates.

I was timid and shy, only began using makeup at 39yrs., I was treated like dirt by others and wore spectacles which encouraged me to be different, I was inferior to other girls. Now I feel quite differently.

My mother was my teacher and took me around with her to other cities and cultural events even though we lived in the village.

As a girl I didn't have a dress like other girls so was always different.

Because of my bad life experience, at 6 or 7 years I was already acting and thinking like an adult.

I was very shy, like a shy fish. I have overcome that.

My looks were different because I have some East. blood in me and was teased to suffering. I am disciplined and conciliatory, taking charge, eager to do something, in reaction to this attitude towards me.

There was something that distinguished me from others, others were dreamy fairy tale princesses, I was quite ambitious and serious.

Estonian Professional Women Sample (n=21): This smaller sample shows more women who identify as tomboys than the Ukrainian sample. As with Ukraine, there is no tomboy gender role in Estonian culture, but there is some notion of a boyish girl or boyish behaviors in girls which nearly half of the women recognized in themselves. When asked which parent they resemble in terms of character, more than half of women said father but the next most common choice was both mother and father. Three of the women claimed to be only like mother. The Estonian women in this sample tend to see themselves as complex and multidimensional. When asked to make choices, many of the women claim both or all three of the choices offered to them. This may suggest a more androgynous gender identity for subjects in the Estonian sample.

- Identified with fathers in terms of character (14)
- Played with boys in childhood (7)
- Identified with tomboy or boyish girl gender role (9)
- Preferred working with men (8)
- Were you on a similar or different path? (10 different)

In response to the tomboy or boyish girl question they had this to say:

They are adventurous, sporty, leaders, creative and initiating. In addition, I engaged in more fantasy play than other girls and created play experiences for my friends. I also played alone quite successfully. I loved climbing the highest tree where I would sit and think about my life. Then I would slide down on a rope to the ground. I was absolutely fearless.

My best friend was a girl and together we played with the boys. I am one myself, I loved climbing and played war games. My favorite place was in the forest, running and playing out in nature.

I liked playing with boys and I even looked like a boy. Their games were always so interesting when compared with girls' play.

I am one of those boyish girls and so were my friends. We loved to

climb the trees and play outside games with balls, and didn't like dresses. I still wear pants and don't like dresses. My mother tells to wear them, but I don't. These (pants) are more comfortable for me.

I am one of the boyish girls. I love being outside with my father. He worked with horses and so did I. He plowed the earth and I was with him. He was active and hardworking and so am I.

In Estonia after WWII, there weren't so many men around, they were either in prison or dead and the women, our mothers had to do everything. So my mother did everything like a man and so did I and so did my girl friends. There were rather a lot of "tommyboys" in Estonia, but they didn't call themselves that, they were just girls.

I was a normal girl until I was about 12, then I changed into a self-directed girl who always wanted to be something different. I became an engineer and I've never looked back. My mother was a tomboy like me and gave me direction and encouragement to be whatever I wanted to be. Never any pressure to be a "girly-girl." In fact we made fun of them. My father showed me respect by asking me to help him with engineering problems at his electrical plant.

In response to the question about a different path, they said:

I didn't feel any different as a girl. I was free. But now of course, looking back on my life I see that I was quite different and just didn't know it.

I was basically similar to other girls. We played the same games. However, as I got older, I noticed I was different in some ways, like the fact that I didn't like wearing jewelry.

I was different than other girls because I wouldn't cry or show emotion. I was strong. I was active and they were more passive.

I wanted to play different games than other girls. I had different interests. I wanted to move about and be more active.

Girls like to sit and play with dolls. I never did. I built a doll house and that was the fun of it. I never played with it.

I was different than other girls. I was a model student, read, always wanted a space of my own for solitary play.

I didn't think about it and frankly, I didn't think I was similar to either boys or girls. I was ambitious, my father's daughter, and didn't find many other children who had the same interest as me. I was more comfortable with boys and men, I thought they were more interesting and their activities were one's I liked best.

When I was 12 I realized I was different than other girls and left my girls' group to become a top student and realize my dream. They tried to hurt me at first, but then they learned to accept me. My only friend was rather poor girl who was very smart like me.

I was different. I wanted to decide for myself and couldn't cooperate with girl gangs.

I was different. I wanted to be different all of my life. Being like other girls was so boring to me, so ordinary. I wanted something more and I got it.

United States Professional Women Sample (n=25): US women are quite familiar with the tomboy gender role and 19 members of this sample claimed to be tomboys as children. All of these girls resembled their fathers in terms of character and many of them enjoyed spending time with him in his workshop, went fishing and hunting with him, or rode with him on the tractor while he plowed the fields of the family farm. Some of them were in sibships of all girls. The other sisters were in the house with mother, while this one sister was out with father.

Two other members of the sample resembled their mothers, but in these two cases, mother was the more active and initiating parent. Their mothers were themselves tomboys.

- Identified with fathers in terms of character (19/25)
- Played with boys in childhood (23/25)
- Identified with tomboy or boyish girl gender role (19/25)
- Preferred working with men (13/25)
- Were you on a similar or different path? (21/25 different)

The women had this to say about being a tomboy:

I was a tomboy as a girl. This meant I was a free girl to do what I wanted. I was active and loved being out of doors. I hated dolls and all of my aunts kept giving them to me. They sat on my shelf gathering dust.

I was a tomboy. I went mountain climbing at an early age with my father. I couldn't have any pets when I was a child because of allergies so I turned one of my dolls into a dog and put a collar and leash on her and dragged her everywhere with me.

I was a tomboy. I made things. Once I made a wooden doll house. But the fun was in the making it with Dad. After it was finished, I went on to other activities.

I was a complete tomboy. When I got to Middle School and High School, I didn't know how to use make-up or dress well so I looked at other, more feminine girls and watched how they dressed and used make-up. Once I asked a friend of mine to teach me how to do my hair. I was terrible at doing hair! As hard as I tried I just couldn't seem to get it right.

I never liked to play with dolls as a girl. Whenever I got a doll I would take her little arms and legs off and take her eyes out to see how dolls are made. I was a doll engineer. Much later in life my mother called me to say that there was a box of my dolls in her attic and would I please come to get them. When I went over to her house and opened the box, there were all of those little doll arms and legs, eyes, and eyeless heads staring at me. I had forgotten all about this childhood behavior of mine. I was shocked! I now have two children of my own and neither of them ever did this to any of their dolls.

One of the two subjects who resembled their mother said this about her childhood.

I don't know if I was a real tomboy, but I never liked to play with dolls. I would arrange them on my shelves like they were in the doll museum and I was the museum curator.

When asked whether they were on the same path or a different one, the women had this to say:

I was happy as a child, but it was clear that I was different than other girls. I liked different games and activities and saw other girls as being in cliques and playing at being little women. I wanted to be an astronaut or a lawyer.

When we played fantasy games I always took the masculine role. I played a game about the Thompson family and I was Tommy Thompson. My friend Dorothy was Becky Thompson. I made all of the decisions and solved problems. When I was older I wondered if this was good for a girl to do this. Mainly I liked riding horses and was quite good at it. None of my friends did it. Then, quite unexpectedly my friend Dorothy got a pony of her own. She didn't even like horses! Life just wasn't fair.

I played alone a lot as a child. We lived far from town and I was an only child. I had great fantasies in the woods and fields around my house. When I finally got together with other children, I would organize them into talent shows which I would always win because I was a good singer.

My mother always wanted me to be more feminine, so I felt different because of that. I didn't really know what she wanted. Still don't.

I wasn't interested in make-up clothes, shopping, cooking or any of the things other girls were. I wasn't interested in boys when other girls were. I was hopeless. All I liked was books. I was a great reader and was alone a lot. When I was older I had some girl friends but I wasn't interested in all of the giggling. I was more serious.

My mother was ill a lot of the time, so I had to learn to take care of the house, but I hated it. When she got better and could take over, I was out of there! But I couldn't go anywhere or play after school because I had to go home to help out with my younger brothers. I felt really different.

Patterns and Themes: Emerging from the data are a number of themes which will help women's advocates understand how childhood play and socialization experiences contribute to women's choice of a NTP.

The first is being different. The majority of professional women in the study reported a sense of being different than other girls in childhood. Some of them indicated that they were more intelligent and interested in different activities and topics. Others reported that they were not a part of other girls' groups because they were too shy and introverted. And this barrier was seen as something to overcome in adulthood. The compensatory actions resulted in achievements leading toward NTP.

Most of the women reported being more comfortable with men than women. It was natural for them to seek out careers that were male dominated. Some of the reasons given for preferring male co-workers was that male communication style was more direct and rational, which fit the subjects own interpersonal style.

Risk taking was shared by the majority of subjects which would lead them to try new professions not usually chosen by women in their cultures. This was combined with a demand by the women for high status professions and higher salaries. Since they were more independent than other women they wanted to be able to support themselves without being dependent on their male partners for living standards.

All of the women expressed considerable criticism of "pink-collar" jobs dominated by women. These positions afforded low salaries and status. They had certain feminine gender role expectations associated with them which did not satisfy the tomboy or boyish girls more masculine gender role expectations.

Nearly all of the subjects were willing to sacrifice some measures of security in order to realize their true selves. For example, many of them placed career and family of equal importance in setting goals for the future. Personal goals were very important to them and they were not willing to give them up for family demands. They wanted family to adapt to them.

Discussion

This qualitative study demonstrates that there are childhood play and

socialization factors worthy of further analysis in understanding why women enter NTP in different cultures. The masculine characteristics of the tomboy gender role may influence women's career choice. However, since most women are feminine identified, they may be more unlikely to choose NTP, and may even be uncomfortable working in a profession dominated by men because it asks them to step outside of their identity as feminine women. Therefore, NTP will continue to be chosen by men, who are predominately masculine, and by a small number of tomboy women .

If women's advocates wish to encourage more women to enter NTP, they will want to develop programs for girls that nurture more tomboy-like play activities. In the US, girls' sports programs are one source of these activities. Girls' Hockey, Basketball, and soccer are expanding at a fast pace. These opportunities for girls may do more in directing them into higher status career choices than programs working with adult women.

The Estonian sample appeared to express some differences in terms of socialization experiences of girls. Estonia is a small country and during WWII was occupied at different times by the Russians and the Germans. Many Estonian men died fighting in the war or were imprisoned in Siberia for simply "having too much" of something. Too much land, too much power, too much money, it didn't matter what it was. During their imprisonment which could last five or more years, their wives ran the families. Many of the women in the sample remember having a family of grandmother, mother, and aunts. One subject said that out of 40 schoolmates in elementary school, only eight of them had father's living at home. This created a society of women who had to be strong for their children, had to work to earn a living, and had to solve life's problems as they arose. These strong women passed their strength on to their daughters. Girls having "boyish" qualities were the norm and if a girl couldn't solve problems and be strong, she was teased and ostracized.

Therefore, many Estonian women report being similar to other girls they knew and having "boyish" qualities. They played with boys and girls outdoors, often in the ruins of the cities. They played war more than any other game. This combination of characteristics was not observed in Ukraine which also suffered from the war, and was not present in the US sample. .

Future research must be more structured with representative samples, TP controls, and additional measures of sex role identity and attitudes toward women to verify the importance of the tomboy influence on women's career choice.