

Ch. 9. The Role of Gender in Career Development

The chapter sheds light on the actual and perceived differences between men and women in the workplace and society regarding these roles. The authors discuss the historical pattern of women staying home with the man being the ‘breadwinner’ and the implications of this pattern. They share some statistics on what this was then versus today. When this was the norm, it would have been almost impossible for a woman to get a job in a field that had been traditionally considered a man’s job. This chapter demonstrated that society has moved a long way from this distinct role separation as a given norm but continues to have plenty of room to grow. Today, it is far more likely for a woman to be able to gain employment in a traditionally male-dominated occupation. Gender role norms difficulties are also valid for men. The writers give the example of the growing number of stay-at-home dads without the stigma of being weak that was once attached to this pattern. Both of these dynamics (both male and female role reversal) lack full acceptance. There still are (and likely always will be) significant gaps between those who accept the traditional gender role reversal and those who do not accept it. These gaps can lead to pay differences, sexual harassment, hiring practices that lack full unbiased consideration of the actual qualifications of applicants, and other practices that lack equality between the gender roles.

It is interesting to read ideas that people believe to be distinctly one way or the other. However, these roles likely have genetic, environmental, and intentionally learned or taught traits that help shape today's patterns. If speaking with a man trained under the banner of male leadership (dominance) in all areas of life, it is apparent they would not be on board with talks of role equality between the genders. Some people with this mindset believe they base their ideas on Biblical patterns. When these verses are studied (e.g., Ephesians 5:21ff), you see a role where

the man is to be the head of his family (home) but not a dominator of force in his home. The example is as Christ is head of the Church. This pattern shows a pattern of love and compassion and willingness to lay one's life down for another (servitude and sacrifice). Are these role distinctions taught, innate traits, or both? It seems that when we consider females as a group, there are distinct characteristics that separate them compared to males. I do not believe anyone would argue against the idea that females, as a group, are typically more nurturing. Other mammal female groups demonstrate a similar paternal instinct as well. One of the parts that seems to cause significant conflict is those women who simply do not feel this nurturing characteristic. With this being a generalized norm, the ladies who do not have this nurturing characteristic as a primary and distinct trait have traditionally been looked down on for being less of a woman. Ironically, these women are typically forces to be reckoned with in the business world.

I am thinking of two women I know who will help illustrate this question and thoughts on the subject. One of them worked as the CEO of a major US-based corporation. When she had children, her solution was to hire a nanny to take care of her children while she pursued her career. She was very successful with her career and somewhat successful as a mother. The next lady worked for a major pharmaceutical company and became the top salesperson in her division. She was also astoundingly successful in her career path. The difference is this lady had a religious conviction that she was to submit to her husband and be their children's stay-at-home momma. I share this to demonstrate a couple of ideas. One fact is women can indeed be very successful in the business world. As mentioned, these two ladies did not have the traditionally nurturing characteristics. They could give as good as they got when working in a world

dominated by males and male leadership. The second fact is that it is a true dilemma for employers (even when having a lady with little to no nurturing characteristics) to compensate for the reality they may spend large sums of money and time to train a lady to do a job and find that she leaves that job to be a mom.

This illustration should not be evidence of why women should not be in the workforce. It is saying this is a factual dilemma that is difficult to find a resolution to that is beneficial for all involved and does not appear discriminatory. It would be fascinating to see the comparison of work days lost for female employees versus male employees. I suspect more days are lost for women, especially women with children. Some likely see gender role differences as evidence of gender role disparity. In contrast, others see it as a reasonable reality due to traditionally recognized paternal instincts of moms seeking to care for their children.

In teaching Masters students, it will be crucial to help them see the distinct and various ways people see these issues. They must understand the varying viewpoints and be aware of their thoughts. People often believe their perspective on gender roles is correct and either ignore, do not care or are ignorant of the viewpoints that may lead others to draw different conclusions. From an educational perspective, we must help people see these views and allow them the ability to interpret the facts appropriately. It is also necessary for students to be aware of the real and perceived restrictive forces some believe to be holding them back. I often hear Dave Ramsey quote the phrase people use in this regard, such as, "The little man just cannot get ahead." He suggests this myth must be overcome through training to help learn how to grow financially through financial growth principles such as "save like nobody else so later you can give like nobody else." Many areas of life have struggles to overcome through appropriate training and

implementation of those principles. Gender role balance and equality is indeed a problematic struggle, having many nuances that affect both the perception and reality of the matter.