

## The Impact of Maternal Status Attributes on Gender Role Orientation and Success Striving of Female College Students

Tesfaye Semela \*

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### I. Introduction

Ensuring the full partnership of females by removing the barriers hindering their participation in development is a matter of international concern. The idea has been advocated by most developing countries including Ethiopia. For instance, the integration of gender issues in the various sectorial policies (TGE, 1995) indicates the commitment of the Ethiopian Government in that direction. Nonetheless, the problem seems formidable when one thinks of the practical process of removing the barriers of female under-representation. This may be because of the multifaceted nature of the impediments that have economic, legal, political as well as socio-cultural dimensions. Specifically, the influence of the socio-cultural milieu within which females experience a differential socialization beginning from their early years (Hoffman, 1972) have far-reaching implications particularly in traditional societies like ours. It is believed, however, that understanding the impact of the significant agents of socialization on girls plays a vital role in addressing the problem of women under-representation.

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### I. Introduction

Ensuring the full partnership of females by removing the barriers hindering their participation in development is a matter of international concern. The idea has been advocated by most developing countries including Ethiopia. For instance, the integration of gender issues in the various sectorial policies (TGE, 1995) indicates the commitment of the Ethiopian Government in that direction. Nonetheless, the problem seems formidable when one thinks of the practical process of removing the barriers of female under-representation. This may be because of the multifaceted nature of the impediments that have economic, legal, political as well as socio-cultural dimensions. Specifically, the influence of the socio-cultural milieu within which females experience a differential socialization beginning from their early years (Hoffman, 1972) have far-reaching implications particularly in traditional societies like ours. It is believed, however, that understanding the impact of the significant agents of socialization on girls plays a vital role in addressing the problem of women under-representation.

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In particular, the influence of mothers on young women in the learning of gender roles and achievement behavior (Tangari, 1972; Dambrot & Vassel, 1983) helps partly to explain why women have been marginalized.

Locally, however, little has been done to explain the existing gender gap with regard to the impact of the significant agents of socialization. In particular, mothers' status attributes (their level of education and employment status) influence the process of gender role socialization. Most of the few existing studies dwell upon the description of the status of women in different fields; their participation in education (Seyoum, 1986; Genet, 1991), in science and technology (Atsede, 1991), and in educational administration (Ababayehu, 1995) to mention some. Inspired by these and other studies some young scholars have attempted to uncover the existing gender differences. Significant among these include studies of gender differences in academic self-efficacy (Yalew, 1996), mathematics achievement and attitude (Seleshi, 1995), and casual attributions of failure and success (Yalew, 1997). As it is apparent, the majority of these studies have focused on unraveling significant differences between boys and girls. Nonetheless, they do not address the possible differences among females themselves in gender role behaviors and achievement orientations that may arise due to differences in status attributes of the same-gender parent.

However, cognizant of the need to investigate the effect of gender role, some studies recommend a closer look at its influence on boys and girls. For example, Yalew (1996, 1997) endorsed a further scrutiny of gender differences by looking at the impact of gender role stereotyping on academic self-efficacy and causal attribution for success and failure. Thus, the present study is one of such attempts to fill the gap and add to the meager information available on the subject in the Ethiopian context.

In view of this, this study attempts to address the differences among females themselves in success striving and gender role behaviors that claimed to emerge as a result of differences in the mothers' status attributes - the closest role model available to young girls. Furthermore, investigating the problem seems timely since it is believed that the outcome of this study can be useful to draw lessons for policy makers, career counselors and all concerned about women and development as well as research undertakings in the future.

The following paragraphs discuss previous findings on the relationship between maternal status attributes and the daughter's gender role and success striving.

### *1.1 Maternal Education and Employment and Daughters' Gender role*

The attitude that a woman's place is in the house is popular in the Ethiopian tradition. This is true because a man is considered to be the bread winner of the family in most Ethiopian cultures (Alasebu, 1989 cited in Genet, 1991). Such traditional thinking which can be traced as far back as the beginning of religious education (Church and Mosque Education) in Ethiopia negatively contributed to educating women (Seyoum, 1986).

The religious institutions were exclusively dominated by men. However, modern education in Ethiopia has brought about a modest participation of women in education. In quite the same way, the engagement of women in the labor force is a recent phenomenon. However even today the involvement of Ethiopian women in the professions is marginal since the overwhelming majority of them are absorbed in giving informal service in low paid sectors (TGE, 1996; MOLSA, 1996).

As it is indicated, among the advantages of educating women is the impact it has on their daughters' gender role attitude which is assumed to be paramount. In this regard, studies indicate (Helson, 1972; Hoffman, 1974; Betemariam & Hogan, 1996) that compared to those with illiterate and home-staying mothers, those educated and working women tend to have more egalitarian outlook than those who are not working and who are not educated. Furthermore, daughters of better educated and working mothers assume careers traditionally - considered as *masculine*. For example, evidences (Dambrot & Vassel, 1983) reveal that daughters of these women join professions like Engineering, Medicine, Mathematics and other traditionally considered as *masculine* careers. Nonetheless, it is argued that such changes in career orientation are results of socialization. Due to roles assigned based on gender, girls, by and large, imitate their mothers more often than their fathers (Hetrengetone & Parke, 1986) beginning from early years of development which in turn suggests that they take their mothers as role models (Dambrot & Vassel, 1983).

Thus, it appears that mothers' status attributes have a direct impact on their daughters' gender role attitudes.

### 1.2. Maternal Status Attributes and Daughters' Success Striving

The failure of women to fulfill their intellectual potential has been adequately documented. The explanations for these are so plentiful that one is almost tempted to ask why women achieve at all. Their social status is more dependent on whom they marry (Seyoum, 1986; Allassebu, 1989, cited in Genet, 1991) than on what they achieve. Their sense of femininity and how others perceive them as *feminine* is also seriously affected by all the efforts they exert to achieve academic and professional success (Horner, 1972; Hoffeman, 1972; 1974; Ward 1978; Alper, 1973; 1974).

Similarly, the idea that success is not consistent with feminine image seems to get further cross-cultural support if one looks into traditional sayings in many Ethiopian cultures. For example, the following Amharic sayings (Kibreab, 1985; cited in Seyoum, 1986) substantiate the above assertion:

ምንም ሴት ብታውቅ  
በወንድ ያልቅ

*menem set betawek*  
*bewened yaliq*

meaning: however knowledgeable a women may be, it is the man who makes the decision. Similar to the stereotypes against the education of woman, the following depicts the traditional attitude concerning the employment of women:

ሴት ልጅ በግጅት  
ወንድ ልጅ በቸሎት

*set lij bemajet*  
*wend lij bechilot*

meaning: women's place is in the kitchen and men's in the court of law (*translated by Seyoum, 1986*).

Likewise, women are also excluded from decision making among the Oromo, even though much is said about the democratic content of the *Geda* System (Tekeste, 1996). At this juncture, it is important to note that similar to other traditional societies, stereotypic assignment of roles along gender lines seems to be deeply rooted in the Ethiopian culture.

On the other hand, there is a strong evidence to suggest that maternal status attributes influence success striving in females. Specifically, like gender role attitude, the assumption of *masculine* careers, daughters of educated and working mothers are generally achievement-oriented when compared with those with home-staying mothers with little less or no education at all (Edler & MacInnis, 1983; Tangari, 1972).

In other words, since they are daughters of career-oriented and educated women, these female students are expected to assume a career as part of their gender roles (Helison, 1972). Nevertheless, one cannot be conclusive with regard to female success striving particularly in areas traditionally taken as *masculine* domains. In addition, it is argued that masculinity of a mother's profession affects a daughter's success striving in traditionally male domains (Tangari, 1972; Dambrot & Vassel, 1983) such as Management, Law, and Engineering. But this does not necessarily mean that such women do not aspire for *feminine* areas like Language and Humanities (O'Grady, 1978). The underlying reason, according to Horner (1972), is that women hesitate to work towards success in areas dominated by men due to a fear of social rejection or being inconsistent with the traditionally accepted *feminine* image.

In brief, although studies in another context revealed the impact of maternal status attributes on their daughters' gender role attitude and achievement behavior, research on the Ethiopian context is scanty. One that is worth considering is a study by Pankhrust (1991) about the impact of women role-models on young girls focusing on a personal biography. Even though the study demonstrated the role modeling effect of achievement-oriented and egalitarian women, it did not specifically address the impact of women as mothers in affecting their daughters' future career orientation. Hence, it is deemed appropriate to investigate the effect of mothers as role models in the Ethiopian context.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to assess the impact of maternal status attributes on their daughters. Specifically, the study explores the impact of mothers' education and employment status on success striving and gender role attitude of female students in institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia. The focus of this study is on college students because at about this level most young boys and girls are believed to be mature enough to develop a solid career plan and gender role behaviors (Alper, 1974). In addition, there is evidence to suggest

that a fear of success that affects success striving emerges at adolescence and reaches its peak due to the increased gender role awareness in college years (Ward, 1978).

Accordingly, this study addresses the following major research questions:

1. Do girls differ in success striving (FOS) due to differences in their mothers' level of education and employment status?
2. Do college girls differ in gender role attitude due to differences in their mothers' employment status and level of education?
3. Which maternal attribute (mothers' education or mothers' employment status) has a strong impact on college girls success striving (FOS) and gender role attitude?

## **II. Method**

### *2.1 Subjects*

The study involved a random sample of 230 non-first year female students from 14 different fields of study in various institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia - Addis Ababa University (AAU), Awassa College of Agriculture (ACA), Bahir Dar Teachers' College (BDTC), Mekele Business College (MBC), and Jimma Institute of Health Sciences (JIHS). These institutions were selected in order to get representative samples from the different regions in Ethiopia.

Of the 230 students who were supposed to participate in this study, 28 were eventually excluded from the data analysis due to the fact that their responses were either incomplete or unscorable. Thus, appropriate information was compiled on the remaining 202 respondents with a mean age of 20.8 and with a diverse geographical background from major cities, 78.7%; urban, 11.4% (from Awraja capitals) and semi-urban, 9.9% and from different religious groups - Ethiopian Orthodox, 60%; Muslim, 22%; Protestant, 12%; and others 8%.

Generally, on a national level, the total sample is assumed to constitute about 31 per cent of female student population of higher institutions in Ethiopia in 1995-96 academic year.

## 2.2. Instruments

A two page questionnaire which focused on respondents demographic characteristics, reason for choosing the present field of study, mothers' level of education and employment status was administered together with the Gender Role Attitude (SRA) scale and Fear of Success (FOS) inventory.

A Likert-type (ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) scale was used to measure gender role attitude. It was meant to disclose the extent to which female college students were egalitarian or traditional in their gender role orientation. The measure developed was based on the collection of a pool of items related to gender roles. The source for developing the scale included Gump's (1972) Gender Role Attitude (SRA) scale; Manilla's (1972) Gender Role Questionnaire (SRQ) and reviews of existing literature on the Ethiopian reality (Seyoum, 1986; Atsedo, 1991; Genet 1991; Abebayhu, 1995).

Items that were selected included all components of gender role attitudes identified by researchers in the area (Gump, 1972; Manilla, 1972; Seyoum, 1986; Genet 1991). These are: (1) Identity derived from traditional gender roles, (2) women's role as submissive, (3) the need for individual achievement satisfaction, (4) stress on around home responsibilities and duties for children, (5) some relinquishing traditional needs for personal fulfillment, (6) a sense of autonomy and heightened independence, and (7) the family as inadequate to completely fulfill needs.

A representative sample of 30 items was selected from the aforementioned categories of traditional and egalitarian gender roles. The SRA scale was given to eight judges (Graduate students of Psychology and Social Anthropology) to be rated as *appropriate* or *inappropriate* in the Ethiopian context. The items which were judged as appropriate by more than 70% of the raters made up the SRA measure. Finally, a 24 item scale (12 on traditional and 12 on non-traditional egalitarian gender roles) was adopted. The internal consistency [cronbac alpha ( $r_{\alpha}$ )] of the final instrument was found to be 0.81.



Moreover, respondents' success striving was measured by using a dichotomously scored (True or False) Fear of Success (FOS) self-report inventory. The scale was originally developed by Good and Good (1973) with the assumption that an individual with fear success was one who was prone to worry about the possibility of antagonizing others when performance in various types of activities (academic and/or career) was of superior quality. The items were modified to suit Ethiopian subjects. The internal consistency of the FOS measure was found to be satisfactory ( $r_{\alpha} = .78$ ).

### *2.3 Scoring*

The SRA scale was scored for two sub-scales separately. That is, the responses were separately scored for egalitarian and traditional components for a separate analysis of gender role attitude while the FOS inventory was scored based on an answer key provided in the author's manual (Good & Good, 1973).

### *2.4. Method of Data Analysis*

As indicated, the dependent variables in this study were Gender Role Attitude and Success Striving as measured by Fear of Success (FOS) scale while the independent variables were mothers' education and employment status (Mothers' Status Attributes). The data was analyzed employing both qualitative and quantitative procedures. First, percentages were calculated to describe respondents' mothers in terms of their level of education and employment status. Secondly, bivariate and multivariate [Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)] analysis was used to uncover the effects on the independent variables. Finally, differences were tested for statistical significance at  $p < .05$  level. Data entry and analyses were done using SPSS/PC+ software.

## **III. Results**

### *3.1. Description of Maternal Status Attributes*

Before presenting the findings with regard to the major dependent and independent variables, it is important to describe the profile of respondents' mothers' status attributes as a function of their level of education and employment status.

As depicted in Table I, more college girls claimed that they had mothers with primary schooling or higher while very few of them had uneducated mothers.

**Table I. Level of Mothers' Educational Status**

Level of Education	Number of Cases	Per cent
Illiterate	16	7.90
Primary Education	50	24.8
Secondary Education	56	27.7
Diploma	60	29.7
Degree holders	20	9.9
Total	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

On the other hand, about 40 per cent of the respondents reported that their mothers had a college degree or diploma.

**Table II. Mothers' Employment Status**

Employment Status	Number of Cases	Per cent
Employed	82	40.59
Home-staying	27	48.02
Self-employed	23	11.39
Total	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of employment status, college girls with home-staying mothers were more than those whose mothers had government and non-government employment. However, a closer look at the type of profession of mothers of these girls revealed that about 89 per cent of them were engaged in what could be referred to as traditionally *feminine* jobs.

As portrayed in Table III, the majority of respondents' mothers are engaged in occupations like secretarial work, nursing and teaching jobs. However, very

few of them are engaged in areas which are traditionally considered to be *masculine* areas such as administrators, deputy administrators and supervisors.

**Table III. Mothers' Employment Status by type of Profession**

Type of Profession	Number of Cases	Per cent
Secretarial work	30	36.59
Accounting	9	10.98
Nursing	12	14.63
Teaching	22	26.83
Managers/Administrators	9	10.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.2. Results of the Statistical Analyses

As indicated, the major concern of this study is to assess whether or not mothers' status attributes have an impact on success striving and gender role attitudes of their daughters. A one-way analysis of variance was computed to find out whether the differences were statistically significant. First, means and standard deviations of the respondents on Fear of Success Inventory (measure of success striving) and Gender Role Attitude (SRA) scale are presented.

**Table IV. Means & Standard Deviations on FOS & SRA scale by Mothers' Education and Employment Status**

Dependent Variables	FOS*			SRA**			
	n	M	SD	Traditional		Egalitarian	
				M	SD	M	SD
<b>Mothers' Education</b>							
Illiterate	17	14.41	4.37	32.34	5.01	34.41	3.92
Primary	30	13.74	4.23	28.64	5.08	38.86	3.78
Secondary	59	11.43	5.24	25.36	5.13	40.11	4.02
College	79	10.89	4.35	24.37	5.21	42.00	3.83
<b>Mothers' Employment</b>							
Home-staying	97	12.46	4.47	24.12	4.97	39.02	4.87
Self-employed	23	10.52	4.72	24.13	5.11	39.57	5.11
Employed	82	11.34	4.56	23.61	5.32	40.82	4.93

\* Low Scores in FOS indicate higher success striving

\*\* Low scores in traditional sub-scale show more liberal gender role attitude

Table V presents the results of the analysis of variance where FOS is the dependent variable while mothers' employment status and level of education are the independent variables.

According to the results, mothers' education is significantly related to success striving of college girls ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table V. ANOVA for FOS by Mother's Education & Employment Status**

<i>Source</i>	<i>FOS*</i>		
	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Mothers' Education (A)	3	76.74	3.78*
Mothers' Employment (B)	2	48.72	2.04**
AXB	5	44.61	2.11**
<i>Residual</i>	191	20.31	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .10$ ; *df* = degrees of freedom; *MS* = Mean Square

Specifically, a mother's education (Table V) is significantly related to FOS. That is, college girls - whose mothers have better education than the others' - scored less in fear of success (i.e. scored higher in success striving) than those with less educated mothers. Further examination of group means using Scheffee's multiple range test uncovered the difference in the overall *F* test of the main effect of mothers' education. Accordingly, it is attributed to the statistically significant difference between college girls whose mothers are illiterate or who have primary education and those whose mothers have tertiary education. Nonetheless, mothers' employment was not found to be significantly associated even though slight differences are observed in mean FOS score across different categories of maternal employment status.

Similarly, analysis of gender role attitude in terms of traditional and egalitarian components was conducted using a similar procedure. Thus, statistically significant difference was found in both the traditional ( $F = 6.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and egalitarian ( $F = 5.23$ ;  $p < .01$ ) components of the SRA scale due to differences

in the level of their mothers' education. However, employment status of mothers of college girls did not produce statistically significant differences.

In other words, with the increase in the level of maternal education there is a corresponding increase of mean scores on egalitarian items while at the same time a decrease in mean scores in the traditional component of the SRA scale. This implies that daughters with highly educated mothers tend to be less traditional and at the same time more egalitarian in their outlook than those with mothers of low education.

Again, the Scheffee' procedure revealed significant ( $p < .01$ ) differences between college girls with illiterate mothers or mothers who have primary education and those whose mothers have tertiary education, and between those girls with illiterate

**Table VI. ANOVA for Traditional & Egalitarian GRA Items  
Mothers' Education and Employment Status**

<i>Source</i>	<u>Traditional</u>			<u>Egalitarian</u>		
	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Mothers' Education (A)	3	289	6.51*	3	196.95	5.23*
Mothers' Employment (B)	2	49.58	1.12	2	87.32	2.32(ns)
AXB	5	32.91	.74	5	41.86	1.13(ns)
<i>Residual</i>	191	44.39		191	37.62	

\* $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .10$ ; Ms = Mean square; ns = not significant

mothers and mothers with secondary education. That is, girls whose mothers are illiterate or have primary education tend to be more traditional in their outlook than those girls with mothers of secondary or tertiary education. However, college girls whose mothers are illiterate seem to depict no difference when compared with those whose mothers have primary education. Similar to success striving (FOS), statistically significant difference revealed by the Scheffee' procedure among college girls in egalitarian gender role attitude is attributed to higher mean scores obtained by those girls with mothers who have secondary or tertiary education compared to scores of those whose mothers are illiterate or who have primary schooling.

Thus, the results indicate that the level education of mothers' of college girls influences both success striving and gender role attitude more than

employment status. Furthermore, college girls whose mothers have completed secondary or tertiary education tend to be more achievement motivated, less traditional and more egalitarian in their gender role orientation than the others.

### Conclusion

It is evident from the results that mothers' education is significantly ( $p < .05$ ) related to respondents' success striving (fear of success) and gender-role attitude. This finding confirms the results of the previous research (Edler & MacInnis, 1983) and expectations about the positive influence of education. On the other hand, mothers' employment status is not found to be a significant predictor which, however, contradicts similar studies in another culture.

With regard to gender role attitude, increase in the level of maternal education is strongly associated with daughter's less traditional and more egalitarian outlook. In other words, with increased maternal education, college girls appear to be less traditional while at the same time tend to be more egalitarian in their gender role attitudes. This implies that the differences among college girls in their need for individual achievement satisfaction - a sense of autonomy and heightened independence - is influenced by the educational status of their mothers.

Regarding mothers' employment status, no statistically significant relationship was found in both SRA and FOS cases. The first finding seems to be consistent with Helson (1972). However, the present finding has a partial empirical support since other studies claim that the type of the mothers' profession by itself has an impact on the liberal gender role attitude (Dambrot & Vassel, 1983). Thus, the finding is in agreement with Tangari (1972) and Dambrot and Vassel (1983). The fact is that the majority of mothers who are employed in government offices are working in traditionally feminine areas as office secretaries 36.6%, nurses 14%, accountants and related occupations 10.6%, teachers 26.8% (majority of them teaching in primary schools). A very small proportion of those women who are reported to be self employing in small private businesses [most of them 15 (65.2%) claimed to have small shops, groceries and the like] are still implicitly labeled as more *feminine* than *masculine*.

Nevertheless, based on the findings of the present study, it appears difficult to conclude that maternal employment status is not related to both a daughter's success striving and more egalitarian gender role attitude. This may be due to the *femininity* of the mothers' professions that affects success striving (Dambrot & Vassel, 1983) as well as the pervading stereotypic attitudes of the society (Genet, 1991). This assertion seems to get a partial empirical support from a study conducted on a wide sample of Ethiopian female primary school teachers. The finding (Abebayhu, 1995) is consistent with similar studies in different settings and cultures (Gump 1972, Alper, 1975). In other words, a significant majority of the subjects value traditional assignment of roles which favor male counterparts.

In addition, in spite of their mothers' level of education and involvement in the paid labor force, daughters could develop domestic interests or they may have little motivation to achieve (Edler & MacInnis, 1983). This may be because, apart from providing the same sex parent model, females could also be influenced by discriminatory practices both direct and indirect in print media, movies, and TV shows. This has been confirmed by a study (Rahel, 1991) concerning the portrayal of Ethiopian women in print media and TV.

It goes without saying that gender roles are expectations for behavior and attitudes that a particular culture defines for men and women (Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1986). However, sticking to the very traditional way of thinking in the Ethiopian society - a view that does not allow women to go beyond the domestic role of being a house-wife and a mother (Seyoum, 1986; Genet, 1991) - appears to be incompatible with the changing roles of women in the world today. Therefore, in addition to ensuring a fair representation of women at all levels of education, opportunities should be made available for them so that they can take up careers beyond their prescribed territories besides their decisive roles as wives and mothers in a family. This could be done by increasing the awareness of females themselves and the society at large about the negative consequences of gender role stereotyping and at the same time by encouraging females through portrayal of women role models. One simple instance could be mentioned here: empowering girls through the portrayal of positive images of female role models in the mass media.

On the other hand, peers, teachers, the school environment, and significant others have an impact on the socialization of women (Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1986). Hence, next to the family, teachers are influential agents of socialization. However, it is well documented that teachers differentially treat girls particularly in stereotypically masculine school subjects like mathematics and physics and push girls so far as to make *gender appropriate* choices such as home economics and commercial streams (Drucker & Mwalwanje, 1993). This trend seems to persist for years to come in a situation where gender sensitive curriculum and career counseling are non-existent. Thus, introducing such elements in the school system encourages young women to demonstrate their abilities across careers some of which are traditionally considered as the exclusive domains of men.

On the whole, a better understanding of the impact of maternal status attributes on their daughters gender role and success striving could be expounded if future research considers academic success in what is stereotypically referred to as *masculine* and *feminine* fields of study. In addition, emphasis should also be placed on rural-urban disparities.

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\*NOTE: TGE refers to Transitional Government of Ethiopia.