

SECTION I: THE WOMEN'S JOURNAL, CONTINUED

SEX ROLES:

An Added Dimension to Script Theory



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New doors of understanding can be opened by looking at sex roles as just another form of scripting instead of as inherent qualities. The material out of which scripts are made is formed as ego states develop (Levin, 1974, Schiff, 1975). Sex roles as cultural aspects of personal scripts can be seen in the functioning of every ego state.

It is often difficult to help people solve emotional problems concerning cultural messages, especially because the therapist usually has similar messages also. An awareness of how cultural messages are transmitted and maintained in each ego state can be a first step to liberation from their influence.

NATURAL CHILD SEX ROLE SCRIPTING

"The Natural Child is the cornerstone of our entire personality; on it rests our basic life position or our existential belief. This foundation of all our moods and feelings is formed as our Natural Child

ego state develops during the first six months of life outside the womb.

It seems pretty clear from the experiences of grown-ups "cathecting young" and from considerable research that our basic self identity and our basic life position are transmitted to us through feeding and stroking transactions in the first six months of life.

Sex is a primary status factor: it is first announced at birth in response to, "Is it a boy or a girl?" Later, infants may be stroked in terms of their sex. Boy babies are often stimulated and handled more vigorously than girls. Their early handling may support their later seeing themselves as sturdy and active, while girls' fragility is supported.

Parent-infant feeding transactions often reinforce different "Don't be adequate" injunctions for both boys and girls. "He's a tough little guy," is communicated by not giving boys what they need as soon as they cry. "She's such a tiny, fragile little thing," is communicated to girls by anticipating what they need even before they cry. Girls are often responded to more quickly than boys.

The result is aggressiveness as a male trait and passivity as a female trait. It is the beginning of sex roles as part of cultural scripting: in the cradle, boy infants begin training to have traits of the master class (aggressiveness) and girls are trained in the corresponding trait of the subject group (passivity).

LITTLE PROFESSOR SEX ROLE SCRIPTING

At about six months of age our Child ego state stretches out like a fresh sprout generating a new leaf through a new part of our self. The emergence of the Little Professor as a cathectable ego state is marked by our ability to initiate transactions by some other means than crying.

As exploratory babies we still need feeding and stroking: we will need food and strokes as long as we are alive, for these are Natural Child needs-basic survival needs. How these basic needs are affected by the new ability to do things, and what is allowed to do is greatly influenced by our sex in this culture. Our basic motivation, ability to initiate, and to make sense of the world plus the responses of our environment, create our sex role scripting around doing things.

Cultural scripting affects exploratory babies so that they learn to find out, "How am I supposed to feel? How am I supposed to act?" instead of "How do I actually feel? How do I want to act?" because they are taught to engage in behaviors other people expect in order to get strokes. And what other people expect is usually for them to "act like a boy" or "act like a girl" rather than to "act how they feel" or "act on their needs."

Older people teach exploratory adaptations to infants through transactions. Mastery requires the ability to tolerate frustration, but people often hurry to aid a girl toddler who is frustrated. They soothe her immediately and may do it for her. Boys are often left frustrated for much longer so they learn it's easier for them to give up asking for support than it is to try and get support. So girls learn to do by eliciting the aid of someone else, and boys learn to do by giving up support and doing it alone.

Because Parents are usually inhibited by their own sex role scripts they may want

their children to express what their own scripting does not allow them to do. So a boy child may be set up to express the aggressive urges of his mother and a girl child may be set up to express the passive urges of her father. A boy's desire to please mother may cause him to decide to become an achiever who sacrifices his needs. A girl's desire to please her father may cause her to decide to give up wanting to achieve in order to get what she needs. She may learn to take care of others as she is rewarded for 'giving dolly a bottle' while the little boy is mastering aggressive traits. As a grown up, he may be the 'doer' out in the world and she may be the one who maintains the doer's supply lines by taking care of him.

ADULT EGO STATE SEX ROLE SCRIPTING

The energizing of a whole new ego state begins around age one and a half to two. It marks the birth of the ability to think in the grown-up sense-to make interior connections between the blister on the finger, the word "hot" and the burner on the stove.

Sex role scripting subtly influences how and when the Adult ego state is used. Generally, girls perceive the female sex role to encourage intuitive, or Child level thinking, and boys perceive the male sex role to encourage rational and logical thinking, or Adult level thinking. So girls "birthing" their Adult may decide to rely on instincts rather than logic, while boys the same age may decide to rely on Adult logic rather than Child instincts. Because an air of fragility and less physical strength is associated with the female sex role, girls often keep their urges to push and pull and test their strength hidden as they sit still and play quietly.

Because an air of power and greater physical strength is associated with the male sex role, boys often emphasize their urges to push and pull and test their strength as they go in for rugged activities and test noisily. The importance of girls' efforts to become separate is frequently diminished by their environment so it may be easier for girls to stay symbiotic. Boys' efforts to become separate are often treated with more importance than necessary by their environment so it may be difficult for boys to get dependency needs met. Girls are more frequently rewarded for tidy behavior while boys may be allowed to make messes without loss of stroking. Girls may be encouraged to stay dependent and use their thinking capacities to take care of others, while boys may be encouraged to become independent and use their thinking capacities to deal with the world outside the jionic. Girls become "smart enough to get a mail"; boys become "smart enough to stay one-up on other boys."

ADAPTED CHILD SEX ROLE SCRIPTING

A new part of our Child ego state develops as a result of a unique developmental predicament. For the first time as children we are not just one "self" but two selves-Child and Adult. We want to *find out*, "*Which of these is me, or are they both me?*" We begin making connections between our Child world of sensations and our Adult world of logic and reason. 'fire connections take the form of adaptations based on "How am I going to survive, given these two worlds?"

Children make decisions about "Who am I" in sexual terms. They come to some decision about what it means to be a boy or girl in terms of basic OKness, getting needs met, dealing with feelings, having the ability to do things, and the ability to think.

Being a boy may mean acting tough and scary, being able to take pain or dish it out, keeping a hard exterior as a way of dealing with feelings, being able to do things, thinking about how to win fights, and not thinking about how to take care of self or others. It may mean deciding to act better, smarter, and stronger than girls. It may be motivated by a castration fear. "I may have been born a boy but if I don't act like I've got balls pretty soon *I won't* have any." This is the four year old's logic.

Girls may decide being a girl means acting fragile, scared, and easily made uncomfortable like the princess in the story, "The Princess and The Pea." Girls may decide not to do things independently but to be the helper of others who are doing things, and to think about how to be coy, cute, pretty and not think about how to deal with the larger world. It may mean a decision to never look smarter than men, to never trust men, or to trust only men.

PARENT EGO STATE SEX ROLE SCRIPTING

Children's developmental energy next lures to creating the last element of personality, the Parent ego state. The formation of Parent will complete the ego state structures of personality with recipes of how to do things. This development of personal technology and its moral system-how to eat, how to get strokes, how to add and subtract, how to read, how to make people mad, how and when to love, as well as how to tell right from wrong-creates Parent structures which can help the Child ego state solve problems.

Latency-age children want to learn about sex especially from same-sex peers, because it is impossible to learn about how to be a boy from a girl or how to be a girl from a boy. However, cultural pressure to be heterosexual is usually so severe as to

prevent children from doing what they need to do with same sex peers so they can develop into healthy heterosexual beings in adolescence.

Children "birthing" Parent learn banal ways of getting along in the larger world, such as "Stand in line, Wait your turn, and Don't touch each other." They often learn to substitute material things, gadgets, for people-contact. They often learn that taking and giving orders are the ways of relating to others. They may learn to compete with their friends for the goodies life has to offer. They may become fixed into goal-orientation as a way to survive, thus giving up the richness of exploratory activity. Almost all of them learn to adapt to external reality: to conform to authority rather than to develop their independence.

They learn skills which are consistent with their genital equipment rather than those consistent with their needs: boys learn bread-winning while girls learn bread-baking. They learn sex appropriate appearances, behavior, and values rather than structures which meet their needs. Boys learn to play with guns and be rugged and tough: girls learn to play quietly, look pretty and sit still. Boys are groomed to become the creators and controllers, girls become the sustainers and the controlled. He learns to argue always, she learns not to. Boys learn to go after what they want, girls to look pretty and wait for it to come into their vicinity. So boys learn to be aggressive and girls learn to be passive. They both learn that what they boy is defines what "normal" is, so that aggression, a master class trait. n normal (OK), and passivity, a subject group. trait, is abnormal (not-OK).

ADOLESCENT SEX-ROLE SCRIPTING

Rapid physical changes mark the onset of adolescence--almost old enough to go to war, arid still too young to vote. Teenagers

may flip rapidly between dependence and independence. Peer relationships develop primary importance over family relationships. Rapid body changes have a major effect oil peer and family relationships as teenagers work out totally new ways of relating as sexual people.

Where previous developmental stages were concerned with developing a new aspect of personality, adolescence is concerned with developing the ability to create a totally new personality through procreation.

Girls may be given cultural responsibility for regulating and controlling sexual contact and may he defined as only wanting sex in order to become pregnant but otherwise not having a sex urge. Girls may feel they are encouraged to resist their sexuality and so may develop an "1 won't" attitude about sex, becoming more arid more resistive to the approach of a possible partner. Girls, fearing pregnancy and social ostracism, may learn to be the "no sayer."

Injunctions girls may receive include:

- Be appreciative but challenging (don't give in too easily);
- Be vulnerable but protect yourself;
- Be smart enough to get a man but hide your intelligence (act manipulatively);
- Be desired by all but interested in only one. -
- Be sophisticated but naive;
- Be sexy but stay a virgin.

Boys may be given a free reign front responsibility around sexual contact or prevention of pregnancy. They may he encouraged to see their sexual urges as so strong (grandiose) as to be difficult for them to control. Boys may learn to wheedle, appease, and catch girls in a moment of weakness.

SUMMARY

Messages boys receive may include:

- Take care of girls as the way to deal with sexuality;
- If you're going to mess around don't get her pregnant:
 - Play around but don't get caught (trapped);
 - Be strong, be cool (don't show feelings, except sexual ones);
 - It's OK to have sex, but don't get involved.

Cultural scripting may teach such adaptations as boys learning to look big and masterful while girls learn to look small. Adaptation to "ideal" size differences among the sexes can lead to all sorts of postural difficulties as well as feelings of inadequacy.

Cultural scripting may also teach that the only strokes that count are between sexual partners: Strokes between men and men don't count and strokes between women and women don't count. All needs may become channeled into sexual behavior in an attempt to get them met, resulting in crooked behavior: acting seductive, coy, ewe, and manipulative, or bold, strong, aggressive and powerful, instead of just acting according to feelings.

Cultural messages encourage a division of responsibility based on sex: girls will decide what to do about how the kids will be raised and what they will eat and what their home environment will be. Boys will decide what political party they will join and where they will go on vacation and who they will relate to socially. Often, male values are given more importance than are the values of females.

REFERENCES

A summary of this material can be found in:

Levin, P, *Becoming the Way We Are: a transactional guide to personal development*, 1974.

Schiff, J. et al. *Cathexis reader*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1975

Sex roles as part of personal scripts predetermine behavior and limit options for getting needs met and for experiencing the full richness of life. It is not necessary to invent a new model to replace sex roles. Growing beyond sex roles can be accomplished by the same methods effective in changing any other aspect of personal scripts: 1) recognition of the pattern; 2) motivation to change through discomfort; 3) cathecting to the age of the Child who made the decision; 4) re-decision; 5) catching up on development.

It is healthier to change than to live under the oppressive effect of sex roles.