

# **Is God's Call Greater for Men? The Impact of Faith on Women's Perceptions of Success and Failure**

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**Paper Prepared for the Christian Business Faculty Association  
Session on Gender and the Christian Academy  
19<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Virginia Beach, Virginia, October 16-18, 2003**

## **ABSTRACT**

The qualification of what traits are indicative of success and precursors to failure is necessary for those in industry. It is with an understanding of what makes one successful, and what can lead to failure that can assist young workforce enterers in developing a better map and secure a plan for the future. These individuals include Junior and Senior-level status undergraduate students who gain relevant education through the demonstration of excellence in coursework, extracurricular, co-curricular and natural maturation processes. What is missing, in some cases, is an explanation of what traits will assist them in attaining success, and preclude them from success, in an organizational setting. Furthermore, from a Christian worldview, what needs consideration is the student's internalization of which traits are most relevant to a Christian walk and exemplify their faith within their career choices.

The stereotypical precursors of success and failure known in academe and industry relate to attribution theory and locus of control (LOC) (Frieze, Whitley, Hanusa & McHugh, 1982; Rotter, 1966; Wines & Napier, 1992). This research focuses primarily on men's experience (Romero & Garza, 1986) and has excluded the perceptions and experiences of

women. As women gain greater representation within higher organizational positions it is important to identify their unique perceptions of success and failure.

It is with the identification of women's success and failure traits that we as Christ-centered communities might better prepare others for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. The literature that does exist is a secular perspective, which excludes Biblically based principles as a guiding standard for living. As faith-based individuals have different values and morals (espoused and/or practiced) than their secular peers, it is likely that the practice of such values impacts their perception of what makes success and what leads to failure. For women, the common scripture used for association with success is Proverbs 31. Unfortunately, women were not provided undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate opportunities at the time Proverbs was written. The interpretation of Proverbs 31, and how such behaviors are valued, can lead to a "21st Century" exemplification of such godly behaviors in regard to business. As educators, what these Godly values mean in our discipline today could impact how we teach.

The current study investigates the identification and relationship between traits of success and failure. The instrumentation of the study will include parts of Allport's religiousness scale (1967) and previous findings in the literature (Underwood, 1994). "31", the student group of Azusa Pacific University's (APU) School of Business and Management, was the primary sample group for the project.

The study's purpose was to lend insight to students, professors, School of Business administrators, and the Christian education community overall. Additionally, adding to an absent body of research in the academic community, the project was aimed at adding to the knowledge of gender differences in relation to success and failure. The study's purpose was accomplished. There were several significant results obtained through the data analysis.

## **BACKGROUND**

The current study continued the research agenda of a previous line of research. The most recent results of this line of research were reviewed at the ASBBS Conference in Las Vegas, NV in February 2003. It was received with very positive remarks and interests. The Q&A following the presentation resulted in a lively discussion pertaining to next steps. Specifically, this secular group of colleagues expressed a desire to know if religious subculture/s could be a factor in the perception of success and failure within businesswomen. Interest in the subject was high, and discussions regarding the implications for the findings continued throughout the conference.

Within the School of Business and Management at APU, students are currently forming, with a faculty member, a group called "31" (after Proverbs 31). This was the target group for the project. The mission of "31" is "to educate, entertain, exchange and encourage leadership development through friendly and professional dialogue of knowledge required in today's dynamic business environment". As the objective of this

group correlates with the study on several dimensions, they provided initial data for review. As the initial sample group was small (female n=16) an additional coed student group (n=38: female n=18; male n=20) was added to the research. This resulted in a total n=54.

## **PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE**

Women have many different concepts of what defines and makes a woman successful, and conversely, what leads to failure. A previous study on this subject identified specific traits of success and failure and grouped them using multidimensional scaling, resulting in what many refer to as a "perceptual map" (Underwood, 2003). This comparative study analyzed the differences between traits of success and failure based on two ethnic groups, Anglo and Latino.

This current study sought to further the research agenda, not only providing more data on women's perceptions of success and failure, but to also *explore faith as an intervening variable in women's perception of success and failure*. We, as members of Bible-believing and Christ-following institutions continually strive to become more Christ-like in our work, thought, and deed. Our work, then, should model such behaviors and values to not only our female but male students alike. Exploring the identification and difference between faith-based systems is expected to uncover additional findings and groups of comparison.

Within the Christian community there is a continuum of belief systems that impact how we live. It is also a common understanding that based on how "religious" one is impacts what they value and how they demonstrate those values in their choices. This study sought not to evaluate such differences, but rather identify them to better understand women's perceptions of what they strive to accomplish, and also what they avoid. By understanding what these perceptions are, we as a Christian academic body can better address the thought process of the students with whom we interact. Therefore, the current study furthers the research agenda by adding religiousness to the body of literature previously documented (Underwood, 2003).

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM**

The benefits of the study could provide a great benefit, not only to the literature, but more significantly to the development of (young) women. There is very little literature pertaining to success and failure in general (Underwood, 1995). And, more importantly, there is no literature on the specific topic pertaining to gender differences. In fact, at a recent conference, several proceedings and presentations on related topics used data from 1968! The significance of the study is that women, created uniquely from men, may have different motivations for work, and evaluate their success in such efforts differently from their male counterparts.

Women have routinely perceived barriers to their career development (Luzzo & Hutcheson, 1996). Keys (1985) refers to this perception of barrier as sub-conscious awareness of the limitations that often accompany them, which could possibly result in lower expectations of organizational advancement and success aspirations. In lay terms, this barrier is often referred to as the "glass ceiling". Gutierrez (1990) refers to this metaphor as the limited upward mobility of women. This paradigm is that women are still seen by society as not holding the value or worth of men. Although they are expected to integrate into the current structure of the workplace, and have done so successfully, there are definite limitations on their upward mobility within the organization. Women continue to be perceived as "caretaker/mother" and not as "leader" in the workplace (Gutierrez, 1990; Underwood, 1995). From a Biblical perspective, the roles of gender in most workplaces have not been addressed. The absence of scripture pertaining to the topic further substantiates the need for investigation and action as "31" seeks to enact.

Women chose, then, to change their "dreams" so as to minimize rejection, disappointment, and retain a balanced lifestyle. These women have chosen to augment their personal and ideal vocational goals (i.e., selecting less prestigious careers or choosing less satisfying vocational alternatives) in an effort to manage their other responsibilities and roles in life such as mother and wife (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Luzzo, 1996; Valentine, 1999). What is interesting is that although these women perceive such barriers, research shows that women at the completion of a 4-year degree program exhibit higher levels of career maturity (Luzzo, 1996). The research concludes that there is a shift internal LOC to external LOC for women in that these barriers serve as an adaptive purpose by acting as a motivating force for more careful career planning and exploration. Women might make more thoughtful and purposeful choices about their careers in an attempt to manage the glass ceiling as well as accommodate the traditional roles society expects of them.

As academicians in Christian communities we understand how faith impacts our student's choices, and how we as mentors assist them in nurturing their Christian walk. The implications for our students are important as we seek to help these young adults find God's path in their life. The discovery of faith based perceptions of success and failure could provide additional insight to those students trying to make wise life choices. Additionally, using Allport's religiousness scale as part of the design, the discovery of internal and external religious belief systems will provide additional insight. Allport (1967) uses religion as a framework in which people personally practice religion. Over 70 published studies have used Allport's Religious Orientation Scale (ROS). The ROS separates the perception of religion into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is when one's internalized beliefs move them (spiritually) to modify and/or make decisions that are congruent with their belief system. Extrinsic motivation is more utilitarian in that it moves people to use their religion for external purposes, such as making decisions that are in their perception of best interest, instead of seeking God's will in decision making processes.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study was an exploratory, one-shot quasi-experimental design. The population from which the samples were taken included students of CCCU Colleges and Universities. Three sample groups were studied: 1) members of APU's "31" 2) Female International Business Institute Students; 3) Male International Business Institute Students. It used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative methods included the list of traits previously identified in research (Underwood, 1994) and Allport's religiousness scale. Qualitative methods will be used to identify students ("31" members) perceptions of success and failure. As students could have different perceptions of success than those found in previous research, an open-ended measure was used to glean their perspectives. The expectation was that data from the current study would provide a benchmark for further exploration of this research agenda. The hypotheses explored are as follows:

- H1      There will be a significant difference between the sample groups in survey items 1-54.
- H2      There will be a difference between the groups on the faith, success and failure constructs.
- H3      Women and men will have different levels of religiousness.
- H4      There will be a subset of best predictors of success perceptions.
- H5      There will be a relationship between faith and success perceptions.

(\*The questionnaire for the survey performed is available upon request).

## **METHODOLOGY**

For H1, an ANOVA was used to test the differences between the groups.

In order to test H2, all of the items were condensed into three composite scores: 1) faith, prayer and religion; 2) success; and, 3) failure. These composites were tested with an ANOVA so that differences between groups, based on the constructs, could be analyzed.

H3 An ANOVA explored specific differences between and within the sample groups.

H4 A multiple regression was used to predict success perceptions using faith and obstacles as prediction variables.

H5 A Pearson Product Moment correlation was used to measure the relationship between the faith and success variables for H5.

## **RESULTS**

H1: There will be a significant difference between the sample groups.

In nearly every case, the "31" females were significantly different than the male IB students. For example, in Q2, (Life based on religion) female "31" members were more focused on "life based on religion" than their male counterparts. The same holds true for Q5, Q6, Q7, Q24, Q25, Q30, Q32, and Q34. There were three exceptions:

- Questions 20: Females IB students felt “hard work was important to success” as compared to the male IB students. There was not significant difference with the 31 students.
- Questions 26: There was a significant difference between the 31 students and both female and male IB students. Female 31 students felt “creativity was important to success” as compared to the other two.
- Questions 29: The female IB students felt “whining was an obstacle” as compared to the male IB students. No difference was noted with the 31 students and the other two.

Table 1. Questions and significant levels using ANOVA

Question	F	Sig.
Q2: My whole approach to life is based on my religion.	4.376	.018
Q5: I would rather join a Bible study group than a church social group.	3.605	.034
Q6: I have often had a strong sense of God's presence.	4.957	.011
Q7: I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.	5.861	.005
Q20: Hard work is important to my success.	4.745	.013
Q24: Being balanced is important to my success.	5.217	.009
Q25: Being open minded important to my success.	3.574	.035
Q26: Being creative is important to my success.	3.352	.043
Q30: Common sense is important to my success.	3.983	.025
Q32: Being willing to learn is important to my success.	5.352	.008
Q34: Willing to start small is important to my success.	4.920	.011
Q39: Whining is an obstacle to my success.	4.990	.010

H2: There will be a difference between the groups on the faith, success and failure constructs.

This hypothesis was supported. An ANOVA proved significant at ( $F = 5.363, p = .008$ ) for success factors. Using a Tukey post hoc test, "31" females were significantly different than the IB males when it came to success (mean 3.74 to 3.46, respectively). This indicates that the "31" female group answered the questions more positively in the area of success than the IB male group.

H3: Women and men will have different levels of religiousness.

The hypothesis could not be tested. The sample size within the groups was too uneven for comparison (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity, religious affiliation).

H4: There will be a subset of best predictors of success perceptions based on faith or obstacles to success.

This hypothesis was supported. Composite means were developed from the set of questions answered by the participants. Using multiple linear regression, significance was obtained ( $F = 6.405$ ,  $p = .003$  with 17% of the variance accounted for). Faith, prayer, and religion are the best predictors of success perceptions. Obstacles to success were not a significant predictor of success. In other words, individuals that rated faith, prayer, and religion as important factors to success were significant predictors of successful thinking.

H5: There will be a relationship between faith and success perceptions.

This hypothesis was supported. A Pearson Product Moment correlation supports the relationship between faith and success among students ( $r=.409$ ,  $p=.002$ ). With a significance level of .002, it can confidently be stated that there is a significant correlation between the construct of faith (i.e., questions on faith, prayer, and religious perceptions of students) and their perception of success.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings support the research agenda. Success and failure can not only be identified by students, but also the relationship between such is impacted by their belief system. The statement can be made that faith, prayer and religion impact students' perception of success. The lifestyle and practice of the Christian faith is a determining factor in how students view success and how they go about attaining that success. In fact, faith is a predictor of success and correlates with it. The mission of "31" can now be considered a conduit for directing such female students into decision-making processes that integrate their intellect as well as their Christian walk.

Gender differences were found in respect to how faith is practiced as a means of attaining success. This finding supports the literature not only on attribution theory and LOC, but also perceived barrier research. Female students practice a more internalized faith in order to achieve their desired success. This might be an aspect of the subconscious need to "overcome" (a perception that they might be left behind) by demonstrating other skills, like the practice of faith to make up for the perceived advantage of their male peer group. The integration of faith with success was not evident in the male group. Understanding why the male group did not have a relationship, or rather a link, between their personal faith system and concept of success needs to be explored.

As educators we are now faced with an even more challenging agenda: the development of male and female students in light of their gender, religiousness and career aspirations. This raises several questions which are worthy of consideration. Do our gender stereotypes influence how we teach? Are we directing students into those areas which God has gifted them, or rather into positions that fit our gender-based stereotypes and satisfy such students' monetary considerations? Based on the current findings, if we are to prepare students for Christian service in all areas of life, particularly in their careers, then we need to consider and address this study's findings. We as academicians are aware of our responsibility to teach the knowledge within our discipline. But, are we as Christian academicians prepared to teach our discipline in light of our audience's gender, level of spiritual maturity, and the spiritual Call that God is imparting on them?

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