

# Role Models in Library Education: Effects on Women's Careers

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## Introduction

IT IS PERHAPS FOOLISH, in the absence of a well-established theory of modeling, for a former student and her professor to coauthor an article on the effects of library educators on women's careers. There are mystical beliefs rampant about the effects of teachers on students, and there is a danger that the importance of teachers as models may be overestimated by those of us who are so closely allied in the educational process; however, we agreed to muster our objectivity and thus embarked on the task of illuminating possible effects. Although the entire effort was shared, Moriearty took major responsibility for surveying students in the University of Wisconsin's master's degree program about women (teachers and others) as role models; and Robbins-Carter concentrated on identifying and synthesizing the literature on role modeling and the place of educators as role models in women's professional development.

## The Concept of the Role Model

*Role model* is a concept related to the broader concepts of identification and reference groups which originated from the field of social psychology. Robert Merton<sup>1</sup> in his classic, *Social Theory and Social Structure* states:

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sociological theory holds that identification with...individuals occupying designated statuses does not occur at random but tends to be patterned by the environing structure of established social relationships and by prevailing cultural definitions.... The *reference individual* has often been described as a *role model*.

Yet as the terms themselves imply, the assumption that these are conceptually synonymous obscures a basic difference in the matters to which they respectively refer. The person who identifies himself with a reference individual will seek to approximate the behavior and values of that individual in his several roles. The concept of role model can be thought of as more restricted in scope, denoting a more limited identification with an individual in only one or a selected few of his roles. To be sure, a role model may become a reference individual as his multiple roles are adopted for emulation rather than emulation remaining confined to the one role on the basis of which the initial psychological relationship was established. Just as roles can be segregated from one another in the course of social interaction, so they can be in the form of reference orientations. Emulation of a peer, a parent [a teacher] or a public figure may be restricted to limited segments of their behavior and values and this can be usefully described as adoption of a role model. Or, emulation may be extended to a wider array of behaviors and values of these persons who can then be described as reference individuals.

Although Merton clearly distinguishes between reference individuals and role models, we did not attempt to draw this precise a distinction in our work. Neither did we delve into the broader area of identification which can bring in such negative connotations as borrowing behaviors which are not integrated into the emulator's own personality. Our definition considers only the positive aspects of role models which are the most typical and popular uses of the concept. A role model thus is an aid in integrating the emulator's own role conception. The role model serves as a referent for the adjustment of aspirations with a view to reality and as a source of clues about actions which result in successful outcomes. It considers modeling as a "contributory factor in the construction of professional identity."<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this article we developed the following definition:

A role model is an individual whose behavior, personal style, or specific attributes are emulated in order to contribute to the development of one's professional identity.

Role models are to be distinguished from mentors and/or sponsors who more actively and intimately engage themselves with beginning professionals in the workplace for the purpose of seeing to it that professionals chosen by them move up in their careers.<sup>3</sup> The article in

which this distinction appears introduces a continuum of personae who engage in sponsoring individuals in their professional development. The authors contend that role models are relatively unimportant in the advancement of women within "male-dominated" professions. The major distinctions are three. The first is the level of intensity in the interaction. In the case of role models, there need not be close personal interaction. The second distinction is that role models can serve without being in the work environment. The third is that in the case of mentors and sponsors it is these individuals who direct or control the interaction, while with role models it is the emulator who controls the relationship.

### **Research Literature on Role Modeling**

The majority of research related to role modeling has been done with children. A smaller segment of the literature deals with older adolescents in the traditional college-age bracket—i.e., eighteen to twenty-one years of age. A relatively small number of studies deal with adult role modeling. The apparent dearth of research about role modeling for adults seems to imply that modeling has its most significant effects prior to adulthood and therefore is more amenable to research at the preadult level; however, it seems compelling to believe that modeling is a useful social interaction whenever one is confronted with a new learning situation. This would seem especially true when one is entering the profession of librarianship which is presently characterized by no accepted prescription for appropriate undergraduate preparation and by harbingers crying out for new/changed/different professional employees to enter the field.<sup>4</sup>

The literature of reference groups and role modeling is extensive and as Theodore Kemper points out, it is "both popular and almost devoid of real theory.... The concepts usually serve only in the worn-out role of *post-dicters*."<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the popularity of the concepts make them useful for most career-oriented people in trying to understand what may be contributing to the development of their career personalities. When provided with the definition of role model, most people can point to one or more role models whom they believe in some way have affected their career development in either a transient (but at the time significant) or more long-term manner. The ubiquitousness of the concept allows for useful contributions to understanding, albeit imperfect.

One factor related to role models—i.e., the gender of the role model—has been rather extensively analyzed in role model studies. Samuel H. Osipow in his chapter, "Career Development of Women," in

*Theories of Career Development* reports on some ninety-seven studies covering all age groups and topics such as the development of work images, motivation to work, achievement motivation, and parental relationships. He remarked: "It is difficult to conduct well-designed studies to test the gender-bias hypothesis...."<sup>6</sup> After reading several dozen research reports including analyses of the effects of the gender of the individuals being studied and the gender of the individuals interacting with the study individuals, we concur that Osipow's remark is well founded. Without regard to design problems, we can conclude from the research reviewed that for *some* individuals their gender identity plays an important part in their career choice. For some individuals the gender of those who acted as role models for them has been an important characteristic in either choice of or effect of the role model. Still, the review of the literature on gender and role models makes us think of the statement attributed to Edward C. Banfield, the renowned urban political scientist. When he was asked what he could conclude after nearly fifty years of studying cities he is reported to have said: "Some do and some don't."<sup>7</sup>

Yet, even Osipow is willing to forward some tentative conclusions which could direct further study. He points out that it may be useful to assume a tripartite typology for women in analyzing their career development, i.e., "the home-maker,...the traditional career-oriented woman, who works, but in a female-dominated or accepted work setting; and the pioneer career woman, who works in a male-dominated field...."<sup>8</sup> He further concludes that among the most significant barriers confronting women trying to implement careers are societal sex-role stereotyping and women's personal value conflicts.<sup>9</sup>

### **Educators as Role Models**

Teachers are natural candidates for role models. The very nature of learning by the student's repeated observation of the teacher, invites the student to select the teacher for a role model. In professional education, especially at the postgraduate level, the teacher as role model introduces an interesting complexity. Except for the case of the clinical or visiting practitioner-instructor, the educator has selected teaching as the profession of choice rather than the profession about which the teaching is focused. The literature of library education admonishes the professor to return periodically to practice or calls for more practitioners to teach.<sup>10</sup> Part of the motivation for such suggestions is undoubtedly an underlying assumption that the teachers are serving as role models (albeit insufficient) for students.

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It is probably true, considering modeling in the broadest sense—i.e., modeling in terms of an integration of both skills and style—that library educators serve most fully as role models only for doctoral students who are considering careers as library educators. Library school administrators teaching administration—and especially academic administration—may also serve as role models in this broad sense. Educators, nonetheless, serve in some capacity as role models for students as they begin the development of their professional identities. This may be especially true in librarianship, as was suggested earlier. The distinction about the degree to which a professional educator may serve as a “proper” model for the professional practitioner may be one that is more easily drawn by professors and practitioners than by students during the time period devoted to their formal professional education. Whether educators in the professions serve more as models for style—i.e., as models for manner and attitude—than as models for skill or knowledge utilization is an interesting question.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, a refinement which will not be analyzed within this article.

The question of whether educators ought to serve as models for their students may be a question of interest to some who wish to better understand the effects of education.<sup>12</sup> There are many who believe that the teacher, like the librarian, should be “neutral”; rather than prescriptive. As this question raises elusive ethical considerations, it too will not be dealt with here.

### **Women Educators as Role Models**

The degree to which the gender of an educator/role model is a salient factor has been submitted to considerable analysis. The results of this subset of the women's career development literature are not different from the broader set. Gender is a statistically significant factor in some studies, but there is insufficient evidence to conclude that gender is a prominent factor in most instances. What follows here are abstracts of five studies that deal with gender of role model and women's careers.

Elizabeth Almquist and Shirley Angrist in their study of factors that distinguish career-salient women from conventional or traditional women concentrated on the “notion that career women are products of broader sex role definitions by focusing on the various role models which may influence their career lifestyle choices.”<sup>13</sup> Based upon previous research, they assumed that career salience for women includes motivation to have both marriage and a career and that a combined role model and reference group framework aids in explaining college women's career aspirations. The data were derived from a longitudinal

study of one class from a women's college and were collected through questionnaire and interview. Ten hypotheses were studied. The most critical of these for this article was: "Career-oriented women will have been more influenced by teachers and persons in a given occupation, and less influenced by family and peers." The study confirmed this hypothesis, and it was found that "career-salient women were more likely to indicate teachers and persons in the occupation as the most important sources of personal influence on their occupational choices...."<sup>14</sup> With regard to gender of the faculty and occupational role models Almquist and Angrist<sup>15</sup> note that they were not exclusively men or women:

It is difficult to ascertain whether these influential persons were exemplars of the possible in combining marriage and career and hence probably female, or if they presented a technical explication of a particular occupational role, in which case the sex of the model is less relevant. Career-salient women with working mothers [a statistically significant characteristic of these women] already had the former, and for them faculty role models provided psychological incentives to select the particular occupation. These incentives include rewards for academic performance of work activity in which the model aids the neophyte in developing a self concept as a person capable of operating in a given occupation.

In this study the authors noted that the career-oriented students were most likely to have majored in departments which had a modest concentration of female faculty while also noting that the highest concentration of non-career-oriented students was in home economics, which had an almost all female faculty. They caution, and rightfully so, that any attempt to explain the relationship between career salience of students and the sex composition of the faculty could not be generalized beyond the study university.<sup>16</sup>

In a two-part experimental study by Susan Basow and Karen Howe they concluded that "females were more influenced by female models in their choices of career than were males....In neither experiment was there a main effect of sex on choices."<sup>17</sup> In both experiments mothers and female teachers had particularly strong effects on females supporting the assertion that female teachers act as important role models for female students. As more males were influenced by male adults, the experiments suggest that gender may be an important factor as students look to their same sex for influence when making career decisions. The females in the experiments also reported that they were equally influenced by male models while the males were not equally influenced by female models.<sup>18</sup>

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Gilbert, Gallessich, and Evans studied the effect of sex of faculty role model on eighty female and seventy-seven male graduate students enrolled full time in a graduate psychology department of a large southwestern university.<sup>19</sup> Among other information studied they analyzed three aspects of the graduate student experience—i.e., stress, competency, and satisfaction—in relation to the students' choice of role model. Regarding choice of role model: "Proportionally more female than male students selected a female role model, and more male than female students a male role model,  $x(1) = 6.19, p < .01$ . Moreover, although only 10% of the graduate faculty was female at the time of the study, 35% of the female students identified a female professor as their role model."<sup>20</sup>

The data in this study support the idea of the importance of same-sex role models in students' professional development. The results indicated that female graduate students with female professors as role models identified themselves as more career-oriented, confident, and instrumental—i.e., effective—than did female students identifying male role models.

The majority of early studies related to gender of faculty role models were done in undergraduate women's colleges. The most recent have concentrated on effects of gender of all groups of potential role models on women who select nontraditional occupations—i.e., traditionally male-predominant fields—such as engineering. In a study of 7664 individuals receiving degrees from the University of Washington between summer 1977 and spring 1978, Lunneborg concluded that "there was no evidence that women or men are more effective role model influences for nontraditional professional women."<sup>21</sup> The results of this study supported other studies:<sup>22</sup>

Nontraditional careers are fostered more by identification with and the emotional support of *both* parents—rather than mother *or* father—in high school, during undergraduate studies, and in graduate school. The nontraditional orientation was fostered by a generally strong supportive milieu in which siblings, teachers, peers, and other adults encouraged as well. Indeed, in graduate school, the peer group, males and females, was the strongest rated influence in this sample.

In general, Lunneborg found that the chief role of faculty members is as motivators; male and female students look to faculty members for perceptions of the faculty's aspirations for them.

In a study by Seater and Ridgeway of 269 college students (112 women, 157 men, of whom 202 were undergraduates and 67 graduate students) they found that only 44 percent of the undergraduate women had found a woman faculty member with whom they identified

although 71 percent thought that such a person would be desirable. "However, the 43 women who were able to find a female faculty role model did have significantly higher degree expectations and were significantly more likely to have plans to enroll in graduate school than were the 55 women who had not found such a model (63% of the women with a female faculty role model vs. 38% without expected to earn a degree of M.A. or higher,  $x = 4.4642$ ,  $p < .02$ ; and 57% with a model vs. 36% without had specific plans to enroll in graduate school,  $x = 3.921$ ,  $p < .05$ )."<sup>23</sup> Seater and Ridgeway<sup>24</sup> concluded from their data a rather startling effect of female faculty as role models:

It appeared that female faculty members functioned more as personal (orientational) others than as role specific significant others for women students. It was as if women students trusted men, in this case male faculty members, to be the final arbitrators of the achievement world, and that only encouragement from them served as a motivator to attempt to succeed. It is likely as well that the achievement-femininity conflict was more effectively assuaged when achievement encouragement came from males.

In the fifth and final study to be related here, Walker, in her study of college freshmen using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (which is a scale measure of attitudes toward women) concluded that exposure to role models—in particular, female faculty advisors—had a significant effect on the women's self-esteem and sex role attitudes.<sup>25</sup>

### **Female Faculty as Role Models in Librarianship at the University of Wisconsin—Madison**

In order to further explicate the question of gender of faculty role models in library education, we undertook a survey of the M.A. degree students in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. In 1981-82 the percentage of female faculty members in the United States as reported in the *Digest of Educational Statistics* was 26.8 percent.<sup>26</sup> In all ranked categories, lecturer through professor, males outnumbered females except in the category of instructor where females held 52.2 percent of the positions. In the tenure-track ranks, assistant professor through professor, females held a diminishing percentage of the positions as rank increased—i.e., 35.5 percent of assistant professors, 21.2 percent of associate professors, and 10.4 percent of full professors.

The case in accredited schools of library and information science in terms of overall percentage of women faculty is considerably different. In 1983-84, sixty-six schools reporting in the Association for Library

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and Information Science Education (ALISE) statistics enumerated 658 faculty members, of which 278 (42.2 percent) were women. In the tenure-track ranks the percentage of women in each rank decreases as rank increases. Females make up 61.4 percent of assistant professors, 35.6 percent of associate professors, and 33.7 percent of professors. In looking at the distribution of women faculty in library science education based on the latest *ALISE Directory*, female instructors comprise the largest percentage teaching in traditionally female-dominated subject areas of children's/young adult librarianship (88 percent female) and school librarianship (84 percent female). Women instructors within the traditionally male-dominated fields of automation and academic librarianship make up 25 percent and 30 percent respectively.<sup>28</sup> Deans and directors are counted in the ALISE statistics as a separate category. Females account for 25.8 percent of this category—i.e., in January 1984, there were seventeen female and forty-nine male deans and directors.

In January 1985 the faculty of the School of Library and Information Studies numbered sixteen, of which five were part-time lecturers. Of the sixteen, nine are male and seven are female. Of the eleven full-time faculty members, seven are male and four are female. The ranks of the faculty are one female assistant professor, one male associate professor, and nine professors, of which six are male and three are female. The school also employs six teaching assistants, four female and two male, who undoubtedly serve as surrogates for faculty role models.

#### **Survey of Students in the University of Wisconsin—Madison School of Library and Information Studies Master's Program**

A short questionnaire (see appendix) containing only seven questions (three of which provide an identity check on program enrollment, credit hours completed, and gender of respondent) was distributed in February 1985 to all students in the University of Wisconsin—Madison School of Library and Information Studies master's-degree program. The purpose of this survey was to gather information on the existence and influence of role models and role model gender in the career choices of "near" professionals—i.e., master's students. This study attempted to test Shapiro, Haseltine, and Rowe's assertion that a role model is a "contributory factor in the construction of professional identity."<sup>29</sup> Since master's students in graduate library schools are professionals "under construction," the authors assumed that if role modeling did influence career choices, these students, who are presently in the process of creating a professional identity for themselves, would be better quali-

fied to answer questions on role models than professionals who would need to revive their memories of this process.

There were sixty usable responses returned from the 112 questionnaires distributed to master's students who had completed at least nine credit hours in the master's program. The nine credit hour limitation insured that students were enrolled in the master's program long enough to meet and evaluate faculty and visiting practitioners. Of the sixty responses, ten were from males and fifty from females. The return rate for the study was 54 percent.

Questions 1-3 on program enrollment, credit hours completed, and gender of respondents provided checks on the population of the survey. Figure 1 lists these questions and a breakdown by gender of each question's responses. Although the ratio of five female respondents to one male appears high, it reflects the gender distribution of school population. Of the 112 possible respondents, 20 were male (50 percent return rate) and 92 female (54 percent return rate). Library Science is definitely a female-dominated field at the master's level.

In which of the School's programs are you enrolled?

60 Master's Student                       6th Yr Specialist Certificate  
 PhD

None of the above (You need not complete this survey, but please return it to box #205.)

How many credit hours have you completed at SLIS? (1 Course usually = 3 credit hours)

1-8                       60 9-18                       19+

Please identify your gender.

10 Male     50 Female

Figure 1. Sex and Enrollment Status

To question 4—"Do you presently have one or more role models who influence your professional development?"—the majority of responses, seven male and thirty-one female, was "yes." Of the twenty-two "no" responses, three were male and nineteen female. Figure 2 illustrates the gender of present role models. Not all affirmative responses included the gender of the role model(s). Male responses indicated that male role models are more numerous than female, but

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that female role models also strongly influence professional development. Female respondents pointed out that female role models have an important influence on their professional development. Male role models influence females as well, but to a lesser extent than female role models influence males. These data do not support Basow and Howe's conclusion that females are more influenced by female role models in career development than are males. This data suggests that the influence of female role models on males is proportionately greater than on females.

Comments made by students who indicated having role models describe the models as being primarily teachers and practitioners. Repeatedly students stated that their role models were exemplars, and that they intended to "follow in their footsteps."

Do you presently have one or more role models who influence your professional development?

21 NO

38 YES—If yes, please explain briefly in what ways this person or persons serves as a role model.

Please include the gender of your role model(s).

First Role Model:  13 Male  23 Female

Second Role Model:  5 Male  18 Female

Figure 2. Sex of Current Role Models

Question 5 asked: "Whether or not you presently have a role model did you previously have a role model who influenced your professional development?" Of the sixty responses, six males and twenty-three females stated that they have had role models influence their professional development in the past. Four males and twenty-seven females reported no previous role model influence concerning professional development. Figure 3 shows the gender of previous role models. Male respondents indicated that previous role models were predominantly male. Responses from women were not as homogeneous as the men's although female role models did outweigh males. Respondents showed no proclivity toward role modeling—i.e., those indicating they presently had role models were no more likely to have had previous role models than those who did not.

Students' comments stressed one factor—the personal involvement of the role model in the student's career. Role models' occupations varied; often the role model was working outside the library studies

Whether or not you presently have a role model did you previously have a role model who influenced your professional development?

31 NO

29 YES—If yes, please explain briefly below in what ways this person served as a role model. Please include the gender of your role model.

13 Male  16 Female

Figure 3. Sex of Previous Role Models

field. However, each was remembered because of the personal encouragement which they gave the student. The transition in role models from the previous role model who provides emotional support to the present role model who provides a standard of behavior can be partially attributed to the maturing process, but it is also partially a result of the students' increased awareness of the requirements of the field. Learning that success in librarianship requires certain behaviors, the students emulate those people who they perceive as being successful.

To question 6—"Do you think it is important for students in professional schools to have faculty who serve as role models?"—of the respondents, forty-two—eight male and thirty-four females—answered "yes." Of the eighteen "noes," two were from males and sixteen from females. See figure 4 for the responses to this question.

Do you think it is important for students in professional schools to have faculty who serve as role models?

18 NO

42 Yes—Explain briefly why you think so.

Figure 4. Importance of Faculty Role Models in Professional Schools

The question on whether or not students in professional schools felt it was important to have faculty role models brought a flood of comments. There are two approaches: (1) faculty provide a special type of professionalism which differs from that of practitioners, and (2) faculty are the first chance a master's student has to observe a professional in library studies. Comments from both sides of the question have a common theme—the idea of faculty role models as a part of the educational process in a master's program. It was believed by master's students responding to this question that faculty role models are not only an important element of their graduate library studies education, but one which is necessary for a thorough education.

## Role Models in Library Education

Question 7 asked if “the gender of an instructor has ever been an important factor in choosing courses.” The majority of responses, ten males and forty-three females, reported that gender had never been an important factor in the selection of courses. Only seven responses, all from females, indicated that gender was a factor in course selection (see fig. 5).

Do you believe that the gender of an instructor has ever been an important factor in choosing your courses?

NO

YES—explain briefly why.

Figure 5. Influence of Instructor Gender on Course Selection

As was the case with question 5, it is the comments which make this question especially informative. Reasons for using gender as a factor in course selection were varied. Empathy and admiration for female faculty members, a need to identify with a female instructor, and reluctance to take a class taught by a male instructor were listed as reasons for selecting a female instructor over a male one.

Students' negative comments provided insight into why this question generated a large number of negative responses. Although no explanation for their decision was requested, many female students offered one. Some students pointed out that choice of instructor was not possible in the master's program at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, because the small number of faculty often did not allow for choice of instructor. In the opinion of these master's students, question 7 should not have been worded to ask if the gender of an instructor has ever been an important factor in choosing courses; rather, in their opinion, the question should have asked if the students *would* use gender of instructor as a factor in choosing courses. Comments indicate that the responses to this question would differ from the responses obtained by question 7.

### Conclusion

Gender appears often as an important variable in career choice. The most pervasive barrier for women in making career choices and in advancing in careers is societal sex-role stereotyping. Consequently many women experience value conflicts when their career choices and desires for advancement do not match societally accepted women's roles. In the past decade, the entire field of career development for women has been particularly volatile, and it is difficult to assume that any study

more than two or three years old is particularly illuminating today. While there is no agreement whether the influx of women in the work environment in both traditionally female and nontraditional careers is making fundamental changes in the fabric of society, there is no doubt that change has occurred. Assuming that role models are indeed important reference individuals for some women at various times in their personal and career development, clearly the available pool of women as role models is expanding. The most relevant questions regarding role models are becoming more refined. For those women for whom role models are significant reference individuals, does gender of model play a significantly different role in traditionally female career choices than in nontraditional female career choices? That is, is it more important for women to have same-sex models in engineering than in librarianship, or within librarianship is it more important for women to have same-sex models in management or information systems design than in children's services or school librarianship?

## Role Models in Library Education

### Appendix

## Role Modeling Related to the Professional Development of Librarians

Please take 15 minutes of your time to read and answer this important survey.

This survey asks questions about the possible importance and influence of role models in the professional development of Librarians. Survey answers will be used in an upcoming article for LIBRARY TRENDS jointly authored by Jane Robbins-Carter and Jill Moriearty. Your answers to this survey will be confidential. Please return the survey form to my mail box # 205 by February 15 1985.

Thank you for your time and assistance in this inquiry into what we believe is an important area of inquiry in our field.

1. In which of the School's programs are you enrolled ?

Master's Student                       6th Yr Specialist Certificate                       PHD

None of the above (You need not complete this survey, but please return it to box # 205.)

2. How many credit hours have you completed at SLIS ? (1 Course usually = 3 credit hours)

1-8                       9-18                       19+

3. Please identify your gender.

Male                       Female

Next page please →

MORIEARTY & ROBBINS-CARTER

The following is one definition of the term role model as related to professions which has general acceptance. Please read this definition and answer the questions below using this definition:

A role model is an individual whose behavior, personal style or specific attributes you emulate in order to contribute to the development of yourself as a professional.

4. Do you presently have one or more role models who influence your professional development ?

NO

YES-If yes, please explain briefly in what ways this person or persons serves as a role model. Please include the gender of your role model(s).

First Role Model:  Male  Female

Second Role Model:  Male  Female

5. Whether or not you presently have a role model did you previously have a role model who influenced your professional development ?

NO

YES-If yes, please explain briefly below in what ways this person served as a role model. Please include the gender of your role model.

Male  Female

Next page please →

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DEFINITION REPEATED FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE

A role model is an individual whose behavior, personal style or specific attributes you emulate in order to contribute to the development of yourself as a professional.

6. Do you think it is important for students in professional schools to have faculty who serve as role models ?

NO

YES-Explain briefly why you think so.

7. Do you believe that the gender of an instructor has ever been an important factor in choosing your courses ?

NO

YES-Explain briefly why.

PLEASE RETURN TO MAIL BOX # 205 BY FEBRUARY 15

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