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MASCULINITY-FEMININITY AND ACCURACY OF SEX ROLE ASCRIPTION

JOHN C. TOUHEY
Florida Atlantic University

To examine relationships between masculinity-femininity, presence of same or opposite sex sibling, and accuracy of cross-sex role-taking, 92 male and female undergraduates classified the 20 items comprising Smith's (1968) Masculinity-Femininity Scale according the sex-role characteristics. Femininity and role-taking accuracy were positively correlated among males and negatively correlated among females, but only 1 of the 4 comparisons for sibling effects reached significance. It is suggested that greater role-taking accuracy among feminine scoring-males and masculine scoring-females results from problematic sex-role identification, and the findings are interpreted in terms of stabilizing mechanisms postulated by interpersonal congruency theory.

Keywords: sex role ascription, accuracy, masculinity, femininity.

Many investigators (e.g., Brim, 1958) have reported that children with siblings of the opposite sex are more likely to show personality traits characteristic of the opposite sex than children with siblings of the same sex. Although such findings are frequently attributed to the effects of cross-sex role-taking, there has been little effort to determine whether the accuracy of sex role ascription might be related to the presence of a sibling of the opposite sex or, for that matter, to the existence of cross-sex behaviors and attitudes. In addition, it has not been determined if sibling effects identified among children extend into adulthood. In the present study relationships between three variables: (1) presence of a sibling of the opposite sex, (2) personality characteristics of the participant, and (3) accuracy of cross-sex role-taking were systematically examined.

METHOD

The participants were 92 (47 males, 45 females) college undergraduates recruited at the University of Nevada, Reno. Participants filled out two copies of Smith's(1968) Masculinity-Femininity Scale, a measure comprised of 20 dichotomously scored items, with 10 items keyed for each sex in order to randomize the effects of response sets. Participants indicated their own responses on one scale. On the second copy, participants were asked to designate each item as "more characteristic of males" or "more characteristic of females". Finally, participants reported their own sex and the number and birth order of any siblings.

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Correspondence and reprint requests should be addressed to: John C. Touhey, PhD, Department of Sociology and Social Psychology, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida 33432, USA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To permit a consistent analysis, all items were scored for feminine responses. Table 1 shows the average femininity score and the average number of correct role ascriptions for each sex. As expected, females obtained significantly higher femininity scores than males ($I = 10.09$, $df = 90$,

TABLE 1
AVERAGE FEMININITY SCORE AND NUMBER OF CORRECT SEX ROLE ASCRIPTIONS FOR MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

Measures		*Participants*	
		Males	*Females*
Femininity Score	Mean	7.24	16.73
	SD	3.77	5.09
Correct Ascriptions	Mean	15.80	17.54
	SD	3.48	3.27

$p < .001$). For the number of correct role ascriptions (maximum possible score = 20), females were more accurate than males ($t = 2.42$, $df = 90$, $p < .02$), but both sexes scored well above the level of accuracy expected by chance.

In order to examine the relationship between the personality measure and the accuracy of cross-sex role-taking, product-moment correlations were computed between the two variables. For males, femininity was correlated positively ($r = 0.38$, $p < .01$) with role-taking accuracy. The corresponding correlation for females, $r = -0.35$, ($p < .02$) was also significant and fell in the expected direction. For the analysis of sibling effects, only participants who reported one and only one sibling were considered. Males with a female sibling obtained higher femininity scores ($t = 2.19$, $df = 20$, $p < .05$) than males with a male sibling. Males with sisters also made more accurate role ascriptions than males with brothers, but the difference failed to attain significance. For female participants, the presence of a male sibling was positively related to lower femininity scores and more accurate role-taking, but both differences were nonsignificant. For the analysis of sibling effects, then, all four relationships fell in the expected direction, but only one reached significance. A final analysis, suggested by Brim's findings, compared sibling effects for older and younger siblings; no differences were obtained.

An examination of sex differences and the items comprising the Masculinity-Femininity Scale raises the possibility that the personality measure depends on stereotypic sex preferences in order to distinguish male and female participants. If participants who endorse items characteristic of the opposite sex tend to be more knowledgeable about sex stereotypes, such participants are possibly aware of the discrepancies between their own preferences and

those expressed by a majority of their own sex. Thus, problematic aspects of sex-role identification might account for the greater role-taking accuracies of feminine scoring-males and masculine scoring-females. For the more conventionally scoring participants, however, accurate knowledge of sex-role stereotypes would probably not be as crucial to the maintenance of attitudes and preferences that result from taken-for-granted aspects of sex role identification.

According to the distinction between problematic and the taken-for-granted aspects of sex role identification, it follows that higher-scoring males and lower-scoring females might sustain some difficulty in the effort to maintain, support, and validate sex identities which they believe to be somewhat discrepant with culturally prescribed sex roles. Traditional tactics used to support and legitimate deviant identities might then be used on a limited scale in order to maintain appropriate social distance from others who uncritically accept prescribed sex roles. According to interpersonal congruency theory (Secord & Backman, 1965), participants with more problematic sex-role identification might utilize stabilizing mechanisms such as selective interaction, response evocation and selective valuation in order to attain stable and rewarding social interactions. The selection of friends, romantic partners, and other reference persons, for example, might be biased toward others who explicitly validate the participant's departure from the stereotypic sex role preferences.

Finally, it should be noted that while many investigators have examined the personality and behavioral correlations of femininity scores among males (e.g., Porter, 1962), comparatively little is known about differences between high- and low-scoring females. Although greater accuracy of sex-role ascription seems to occur among individuals who question prescribed sex differences, further studies of masculinity-femininity might determine how such discrepancies are managed.

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