

Self-ratings of Masculinity and Femininity by High School Students

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Introduction

One of the first categories learned by children is that of gender. Not only do we very early learn that we are either a boy or girl but we also learn that others are either male or female. The continued importance of this category can be seen by noting that whenever we see or meet someone the first thing that we note about them is whether they are male or female. Gender, and gender identity—feeling that we are either male or female—are both an all or none phenomenon. This is not necessarily true for other aspects of sex role. For example, we use the terms “masculine” and “feminine” in ways that indicate that these can vary along a continuum, that we can be more or less masculine, and more or less feminine. Originally, research and theorizing assumed that the healthy male would be masculine and the healthy female feminine. Masculinity and femininity were assumed to be at opposite ends of a continuum and it was thought that if one became more feminine that necessarily meant that you were less masculine.

Constantinople (4) has suggested that masculinity and femininity should be considered as two separate dimensions. Further, it has been suggested by Bem (2) that the healthy personality is one that has both desirable masculine characteristics and desirable feminine characteristics. Bem (1), Spence (6), and others have developed a number of paper and pencil inventories asking about the person's self-perception of a variety of personality characteristics that include traits that have been stereotyped as masculine or feminine. A great number of studies have found that there are indeed a large number of college students and other persons who will report themselves to be what has been called androgynous. That is, they have a high amount both of some traits considered ideal for males and some traits considered ideal for females.

Are these tests in fact good measures of masculinity and femininity? Do many people now conceive themselves to be a blend of masculine and feminine? These are examples of questions that are part of an ongoing dialogue in the sex-role literature. The present paper reports on part of a research program concerned with what is meant by masculinity and femininity.

The present paper reports on data from high school students—a sample that is both younger and more representative of the general population. The question we will be concerned with has to do with the extent to which these students see themselves as masculine and feminine.

Methods

Subjects

Four-hundred and ninety-three high school students were given the questionnaire. Data were analyzed for 468 of the subjects who were single, childless, and white. That is, twenty-five questionnaires were eliminated. This included three people who were married, four who were non-white, and three others who were parents; 9 subjects were eliminated because they did not fill out a major part of the questionnaire. In addition, six subjects were eliminated because of a joking response on some part of the questionnaire (e.g., one 17-year-old claimed to be the father of 12 children). Of these 468 subjects (90 males and 105 females) or 195 in total, attended a private, Catholic high school located in Evansville, Indiana, and 273 subjects (131 males and 142 females) were gathered

from a Monroe, Indiana, public high school. Subjects ranged in age from 14 to 19 with a mean age of 16.05. The mean age of the sexes did not differ statistically.

Procedure

One of the two female experimenters administered the questionnaires. Both were undergraduate honors majors in psychology and were doing this as a senior research project. Subjects were informed both verbally and in writing that the project concerned masculinity and femininity, and that their participation was anonymous and voluntary. The private high school students were given the questionnaire during their study hall period, and students from the public high school were given the questionnaire while attending various social science classes.

Subjects were given one of six forms of the questionnaire which resulted from variations in either one of two major parts of the questionnaire.

Part I asked the subjects to rate the degree to which they felt feminine or masculine using ratings ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 7 (always or almost always). These are identical to two items found on the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Half of the orders listed masculinity first and half listed femininity first.

The second part of the questionnaire asked the subjects one of three questions: what they thought made themselves masculine and feminine; what made a male masculine and feminine; or what made a female masculine or feminine. The listing of masculinity and femininity was also counterbalanced. Analyses of these responses will be reported in a separate paper.

All subjects were given the same questions in the third part of the questionnaire. They were asked to report the amount of education completed by their mother and their father, and the amount of education they themselves expected to obtain. Subjects also listed their mother's occupation, their father's occupation, and their own expected occupation. Finally, subjects were asked to report their race and religion.

Results

Table I shows the distribution of ratings for the sexes separately. The most obvious finding is that males rate themselves as masculine, and females as feminine, a finding

TABLE 1. Distribution of Masculine and Feminine Ratings for the Sexes Separately

Females (N = 247)				Males (N = 221)			
Masculine Rating N = 226		Feminine Rating N = 246		Masculine Rating N = 219		Feminine Rating N = 192	
7	0.4%	7	35.4%	7	48.4%	7	1.0%
6	1.3%	6	38.2%	6	26.0%	6	0.5%
5	4.4%	5	11.4%	5	8.7%	5	1.0%
4	11.9%	4	7.3%	4	11.0%	4	6.3%
3	22.1%	3	5.7%	3	2.3%	3	4.2%
2	20.4%	2	2.0%	2	1.8%	2	19.3%
1	39.4%	1	0.0%	1	1.8%	1	67.7%
Mean = 2.274		Mean = 5.841		Mean = 5.945		Mean = 1.594	
Standard Deviation = 1.322		Standard Deviation = 1.257		Standard Deviation = 1.403		Standard Deviation = 1.117	

that is perhaps not surprising. However, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of both males and females make use of the extreme ratings of 6 or 7. The number of those with strong feelings of masculinity or femininity is notably higher than the proportion of people who would be found by self report to be "stereotyped" as masculine or feminine on personality measures of sex

role, such as the Bem Inventory. Results using the Bem typically find that somewhat more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of males report themselves to be what has been called "masculine" or "instrumental," but not "feminine" or "nurturant." That is, they report that they are independent, assertive, aggressive, but not warm, sensitive, and fond of children. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of females report themselves to be expressive and nurturant but not instrumental and these have often been referred to as "feminine" females. Other measures result in different percentages, but none report, on the average, that more than half of the respondents are strongly sex role stereotyped. The percent of males who are noted as androgynous ranges from 19 to 29 and of females from 20 to 33 (5).

How Many Androgynous

A variety of findings like these suggest that males are somewhat more likely to be stereotyped than are females. This means both that they are likely to attempt to demonstrate stereotyped male traits and also that they are likely to avoid ascribing to themselves the characteristics of the other sex. That showed up in these data where 87% of males strongly denied femininity by choosing a 1 or 2 rating while only 59.8% of females—almost 30% fewer—used a 1 or 2 masculine rating. The females were also more willing to choose the higher masculine ratings—18% of females had masculine ratings of 4 or higher while only 8.8% of the males had feminine ratings of 4 or higher.

That is, while both sex-role theorists and psychologists in general now seem to suggest that in some sense one can be both masculine and feminine, this does not seem to be a notion that is accepted by the majority of people in general. For those who believe that it is healthier not to be stereotyped, this may seem to be a disturbing finding. However, before reaching that position, it would be helpful to know more about what the terms masculine and feminine mean to people in everyday usage.

Black, Stevenson, and Villwock (3) noted that, for college students, masculine and feminine are more likely to be interpreted in terms of physical characteristics than personality traits or behavior. Analysis of our present data from high school students is confirming this. That is, the most frequent kind of response used when judging others as masculine or feminine was a physical characteristic—sometimes one that referred to a permanent characteristic such as build or height, or more often some that referred to what we consider changeable physical characteristics such as wearing jewelry or makeup. We investigated whether any of the background variables were related to the ratings. In order to answer this question, a multiple regression analysis was done which included the variables of gender, age, school, order of the ratings, intended final level of education, mother and father education, and whether or not the mother was employed outside the home.

The analysis for the entire population of masculine ratings as affected by all of these variables found two significant predictors. The variable of gender accounted for 64.4% of the variance. There was a smaller but statistically significant effect of order. Specifically, ratings of masculinity were higher when they were done after rating one's femininity than if the masculine ratings were done first.

Analysis of the ratings for femininity found only a major effect of gender with 77% of the variance accounted for by whether the rater was male or female. Because of the overwhelming effect of gender, analyses were also done for the sexes separately.

The analysis of only male responses again found the effect of order upon masculinity. The mean score for masculinity, rated first, was 5.55 while the mean score for masculine ratings done after feminine ratings was 5.83. In addition, there was a difference between schools. Males in the public school gave more extreme scores than those in the Catholic School: that is, they rated themselves as more masculine (6.05 vs. 5.78) and less feminine (1.43 vs. 1.85).

The analysis of female responses showed neither of the above effects. There were

effects associated with the variables of education. Those females who indicated that they expected to obtain at least a college bachelors degree differed from those with lesser aspirations. Generally it is found that those who have more education are less stereotyped. Our findings are counter to this, however. That is, those females who aspired to a bachelors degree or more reported themselves as more feminine (6.09 vs. 5.53) and less masculine (2.0 vs. 2.6). It is of course possible that this will change when they, in fact, are college graduates. This is suggested by the additional finding that those girls whose mothers are college graduates are less likely to report themselves at the extreme of femininity (5.5 vs. 5.9).

The results of this paper suggest that many persons interpret their own masculinity and femininity as being an all or none phenomenon like male or female. This is in contrast to the way these concepts are presently conceptualized by social scientists. Perhaps the explanation for this contradiction is that social scientists do not use the same meaning for these terms as do people in everyday life. One of the important tasks for theorists and those concerned with gender is to determine what it is that these terms mean, both when applied to oneself and when applied to others.

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