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RESEARCH REPORT

The Exploration of Sex-Role Concepts as They
Relate to Self Concepts, Institutional
Performance, and Institutional Adjustment

By: Mary Alice Conroy, Ph.D.
Staff Psychologist
W/DAPS
FCI, Fort Worth
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ABSTRACT

Recent research on sex-role stereotypes has suggested that in some ways the traditional feminine stereotype may be antithetical to positive mental health. The present study was designed to explore sex-role concepts among residents of FCI, Fort Worth. Specifically, relationships between sex-role concepts and self-esteem and between sex-role concepts and institutional adjustment were examined.

A total of 98 subjects (50% male and 50% female) were selected at random from the FCI population. Each subject completed the Berger Self Concept Scale and the Bem Sex Role Inventory and was rated on adjustment/performance variables by three staff members.

Results indicated that the mean self-esteem score for residents was considerably higher than for prisoners in general and almost as high as for college students. More women held traditional sex-role stereotypes than did men. There was a significant positive correlation between self-esteem scores and masculine self-concepts. However, this was not true for feminine self-concepts, which tended rather to correlate with esteem of others than esteem of self. Masculine sex-roles also correlated with staff ratings of self-confidence. Self-esteem, in turn, was significantly correlated with each of the performance/adjustment variables. Finally, a one way analysis of variance indicated that individuals holding a masculine or androgynous sex-role concept were significantly higher in self-esteem than those with the feminine or undifferentiated image.

In short, findings tend to support other research indicating that the traditional feminine sex-role stereotype is not positively related to good

mental health and adjustment. In response to this, it would be important to foster elements in the self-concept of both sexes relating to such things as assertiveness, independence, and self-confidence. Many times this would involve adding to the behavioral repertoire rather than eradicating undesirable traits. Such an approach would not necessitate additional unique programming. Much could be accomplished by re-examining attitudes in correctional counseling and role modeling.

Considerable interest has recently been aroused in the psychological world about the psychology of women and women's issues in general. Specific investigations have been conducted about the effects of sex-role stereotypes. Literature has generally indicated negative effects of traditional sex-role stereotypes. Studies suggest that such stereotypes assign competence to males, while assigning warmth and expressiveness to females (Broverman, I. K., Broverman, D. M., Clarkson, F. E., Rosenkrantz, P. S., & Vogel, 1970; Clarkson, Vogel, Broverman, I. K., Broverman, D. M., & Rosenkrantz, 1970; McKee & Sherriffs, 1957, 1959; Rim & Aloni, 1969; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, I. K., & Broverman, D. M., 1968; Rudy, 1968-69; Sherriffs & Jarrett, 1953; Sherriffs & McKee, 1957).

Of particular concern was evidence which suggests that competence may not be considered feminine in the traditional sense. Following an extensive review of the literature in 1977, Woolsey concludes:

> Both femininity and individual achievement are apparently "desirable" but mutually inconsistent. . . .women, being social-ized to femininity acquire incompetence. They relinquish the qualities that make for independent, achieving beings. (pp. 66-67).

Achievement and success may thus be considered by some antithetical to true femininity. Past studies have suggested that women may be at least ambi-valent towards success, if not openly avoiding it (Bardwick & Douvan, 1971; Hoffman, 1972; Horner, 1971). Achieving the so called "feminine ideal" may thus involve the adoption of traits incompatible with individual success.

The question arises as to the relationship between sex-role stereotype and mental health or, as it might be termed, positive adult adjustment. In 1970, Broverman et al, found that mental health clinicians describe the mentally healthy adult (sex not specified) very much the same as they describe the

mentally healthy male. However, this description differs markedly from their description of the mentally healthy female. In 1972, Gump found ego strength to be inversely related to the ideal feminine stereotype. In other words, a strong ego appears to be antithetical to the feminine ideal.

Investigators who have examined traditional concepts of masculine and feminine find them to be very different - even polarized (Bem, 1977; Marecek, 1977). The ideal male is typically described by such adjectives as tough, dominant, and fearless; ideal femininity, on the other hand, is characterized as tender, sympathetic, and sensitive. In principle, of course, it is quite possible for a single person to embody characteristics of both the masculine and feminine stereotype. For example, a man might be dominant and fearless, while at the same time sensitive and affectionate. A woman may be warm and understanding and yet possess characteristics of assertiveness and self-confidence. It is therefore possible for an individual to incorporate positive aspects of both masculine and feminine traditions. In an effort to popularize this idea, S. Bem and her colleagues at Stanford have in recent years popularized the theory of androgyny. Specifically, Bem defines androgyny as follows:

> The concept of androgyny (from the Greek andro male, and gyne, female) refers specifically to this blending of the behaviors and personality characteristics that have traditionally been thought of as masculine and feminine. By definition, then, the androgynous individual is someone who is both independent and tender, both aggressive and gentle, both assertive and yielding, both masculine and feminine, depending on the situational appropriateness of these various behaviors. (p. 104)

Theoretically, the adoption of the androgynous sex-role concept has several advantages. Such an individual should be more flexible and more easily adapted to changes in life. The sex-role concept would be independent of stereotypes, and, thus, coping mechanisms available to the individual would not be limited

by tradition. J. Marecek (1977) has expressed strong feelings that an androgynous self-concept is particularly important in contemporary American life. She concludes:

> Androgynous self-concepts are more suited to the life styles that Americans are now adopting and will continue to hold in the future. If this is the case, androgyny is an aspect of positive mental health and is an appropriate goal for psychotherapy. (p. 197)

To date, the majority of psychological literature on sex-role concepts has been directed toward women. Recent statistics indicate that the proportional number of women in the Federal Prison System is steadily increasing. Therefore, at this time it is particularly important to examine variables relevant to their special needs. It is the purpose of the present study to investigate the relationship between sex-role concepts held by individuals and positive mental health in the prison setting. Both mental health professionals and lay people have generally been in agreement that at least adequate self-esteem is a primary factor in positive mental health (Conroy, 1976). Self-esteem, therefore, was utilized as a subjective measure of mental health. In addition to this, sex-role stereotypes were examined in relation to behavioral ratings of institution performance and adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

A total of 100 subjects was selected at random from the resident population at FCI, Fort Worth. Half of the sample was selected from among the male residents, the other half from the female population. From this sample, a total of 98 usable records were obtained.

Measuring Instruments

Each of the subjects was administered two questionnaires: the Berger Self-Concept Scale (see Appendix A) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (see Appendix B). The Berger Self-Concept Scale is designed as a measure of self-esteem and esteem of other people. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is comprised of a list of 60 adjectives. Twenty of these are adjectives assigned to the traditional male stereotype, 20 to the traditional female stereotype, and the remainder considered to be neutral. The male adjectives include such traits as ambitious, self-reliant, independent, and assertive, while the female list covers attributes such as affectionate, gentle, understanding, and sensitive to the needs of others. Each subject is asked to rate themselves on each adjective on a one to seven scale. Each individual receives a score on both the masculine and feminine dimension. These scores are then utilized to classify the sex-role stereotype as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Those in the undifferentiated category are individuals whose scores on both dimensions are so low as to preclude classification into the other three groups. The final instrument was a rating sheet on institutional adjustment devised by the principal investigator (see Appendix C).

Procedures

Each resident in the sample was asked to complete the two questionnaires. Administration was carried out in small groups supervised by an intern, and each participant was clearly informed that his or her participation was voluntary. No names or other identifying data were placed on the questionnaires themselves; however, questionnaires were temporarily included in folders labeled with the resident's number so that they might be matched with the rating sheets. Once the matching took place, all identifying information was then removed.

After the questionnaire data had been gathered, caseworkers, counselors, and supervisors of the participating residents were asked to fill out rating sheets. They were asked to rate each individual on variables of adjustment and performance within the institution.

Descriptive statistics were collected from the Berger Self-Concept Scale and from the BSRI. Then relationships between relevant variables were examined through the use of correlation, stepwise multiple regression analysis, and one way analysis of variance.

RESULTS

The mean self-esteem score for the entire sample was 141.34. When Berger collected his normative data in 1951, he found that the mean self-esteem for prisoners was 128.45, while the mean self-esteem for evening college session students (the highest scoring group) was 142.63.

On the BSRI the median score for masculinity in the sample population was 5.26; the median score for femininity was 4.95. Each of these medians is somewhat higher than for the normative group of Stanford psychology students, where the median for masculinity was 4.89 and the median for femininity was 4.76. From the sample population, nearly one-third (31.9%) were classified as having androgynous self images. Of the remainder, 18.1% had masculine self images, 26.6% feminine images, and 23.4% were undifferentiated. (For a summary of these results, see Appendix D, Table 1.) While 43.7% of the females were in the strongly feminine category, only 32.6% of the males were in the traditional masculine category.

The majority of significant relationships occurred between self-esteem and the results of the BSRI. There was a significant positive correlation between masculinity scores and self-esteem (r = .3110, $p <$ .001). This was not true for femininity scores. However, there was a positive correlation between femininity scores and esteem of others (r = .2057, $p <$ .05). Masculinity scores also correlated positively with self-confidence, as rated by supervisors (r = .2123, $p <$ .05). In addition, self-esteem was found to correlate positively with each one of the performance/adjustment variables (see Appendix D, Table 2).

A one way analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences among sex-role groups in the area of self-esteem (f = 2.87, $p <$ .05).

The mean self-esteem score for individuals with masculine sex-role concepts was 148.35, for those with feminine concepts was 133.72, for those with androgynous concepts, 149.00, and for the undifferentiated group, 133.81. It is clear that those with masculine and androgynous sex-role concepts have significantly higher self-esteem than those with feminine or undifferentiated sex-role concepts.

DISCUSSION

Self-esteem among residents of this institution appears to be considerably higher than among prisoners in general and on a par with individuals in the free world. In addition, the percentage of individuals at this institution with androgynous sex-role concepts,is greater than that of the Stanford University population (which was approximately 25%). This is certainly a positive finding about the residents of this particular institution. However, without further investigation, there can be no assumptions about the causation.

The most salient finding of the present study is the strong relationship between masculine and androgynous sex-role concepts and high self-esteem. This seems to further substantiate Gump's finding that ego strength is inversely related to a traditional feminine stereotype. It also indicates that androgynous individuals (those who can choose and develop traits from both sex-role stereotypes) are also those individuals who hold themselves in high esteem. Further, we find a direct correlation between high self-esteem and successful performance and adjustment in the institution.

Results of this investigation suggest several things in terms of institution programming. It would seem important to foster elements of assertiveness, independence, and self-confidence in both sexes. It is clear from the results that women at this institution are considerably more likely to hold to a traditional feminine stereotype than men are to hold to a traditional masculine stereotype. Working for change in this area does not necessitate eradication of existing behavior, but rather adding to and expanding the behavioral repertoire.

To date, specific, directive programming in this area has not been particularly successful at this institution. It would seem more reasonable to attempt

to integrate some of these attitudes and values into the regular program of correctional counseling. Marecek (1977) directs the following comment to psychotherapists:

> A therapist whose definition of mental health embodies different qualities for men and for women may be operating in terms of a social reality that no longer exists. (p. 207)

This same comment could just as adequately apply to correctional counseling. Why not ask the following questions: Do we fail to reinforce (or perhaps even punish) certain assertive behaviors in women which have traditionally been part of the masculine stereotype? Do we encourage women to try out new behaviors which may be beyond the realm of the traditional feminine stereotype? Have we taken the time to perhaps examine our own attitudes and values regarding male and female behaviors?

Woolsey (1977) stresses the need for adequate role models for both sexes. She indicates that this is particularly important for women since so many feminine role models available are in the more traditional vein. Since staff members often function as primary role models for residents in institutions such as this one, it again leads us to the area of examining staff attitudes toward male and female sex-role concepts. There is possibly the need to model acceptance and even fostering very non-traditional behavior in order to assist in the growth of mentally healthy adults.

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Appendix A

Berger Self Concept Scale

This is a study of some of your attitudes. Of course, there is no right answer for any statement. The best answer is what you feel is true of yourself.

You are to respond to each question on the answer sheet according to the following scheme:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all true of my- self	Slightly true of myself	About half- way true of myself	Mostly true of myself	True of myself

Remember, the best answer is the one which applies to you.

_____ 1. I'd like it if I could find someone who would tell me how to solve my personal problems.

_____ 2. I don't question my worth as a person, even if I think others do.

_____ 3. I can be comfortable with all varieties of people from the highest to the lowest.

_____ 4. I can become so absorbed in the work I'm doing that it doesn't bother me not to have any intimate friends.

_____ 5. I don't approve of spending time and energy in doing things for other people. I believe in looking to my family and myself more and letting others shift for themselves.

_____ 6. When people say nice things about me, I find it difficult to believe they really mean it. I think maybe they're kidding me or just aren't being sincere.

_____ 7. If there is any criticism or anyone says anything about me, I just can't take it.

_____ 8. I don't say much at social affairs because I'm afraid that people will criticize me or laugh if I say the wrong thing.

_____ 9. I realize that I'm not living very effectively but I just don't believe that I've got it in me to use my energies in better ways.

_____ 10. I don't approve of doing favors for people. If you're too agreeable they'll take advantage of you.

_____ 11. I look on most of the feelings and impulses I have toward people as being quite natural and acceptable.

_____ 12. Something inside me just won't let me be satisfied with any job I've done --- if it turns out well, I get a very smug feeling that this is beneath me, I shouldn't be satisfied with this, this isn't a fair test.

_____ 13. I feel different from other people. I'd like to have the feeling of security that comes from knowing I'm not too different from others.

_____ 14. I'm afraid for people that I like to find out what I'm really like, for fear that they'd be disappointed in me.

_____ 15. I am frequently bothered by feelings of inferiority.

_____ 16. Because of other people, I haven't been able to achieve as much as I should have.

_____ 17. I am quite shy and self-conscious in social situations.

_____ 18. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else.

_____ 19. I usually ignore the feelings of others when I'm accomplishing some important end.

_____ 20. I seem to have a real inner strength in handling things. I'm on a pretty solid foundation and it makes me pretty sure of myself.

_____ 21. There's no sense in compromising. When people have values I don't like, I just don't care to have much to do with them.

_____ 22. The person you marry may not be perfect, but I believe in trying to get him (or her) to change along desirable lines.

_____ 23. I see no objection to stepping on other people's toes a little if it'll help get me what I want in life.

_____ 24. I feel self-conscious when I'm with people who have a superior position to mine in business or at school.

_____ 25. I try to get people to do what I want them to do, in one way or another.

_____ 26. I often tell people what they should do when they're having trouble in making a decision.

_____ 27. I enjoy myself most when I'm alone, away from other people.

_____ 28. I think I'm neurotic or something.

_____ 29. I feel neither above nor below the people I meet.

_____ 30. Sometimes people misunderstand me when I try to keep them from making mistakes that could have an important effect on their lives.

_____31. Very often I don't try to be friendly with other people because I think they won't like me.

_____32. There are very few times when I compliment people for their talents or jobs they've done.

_____33. I enjoy doing little favors for people even if I don't know them well.

_____34. I feel that I'm a person of worth, on an equal plane with others.

_____35. I can't avoid feeling guilty about the way I feel toward certain people in my life.

_____36. I prefer to be alone rather than have close friendships with any of the people around me

_____37. I'm not afraid of meeting new people. I feel that I'm a worthwhile person and there's no reason why they should dislike me.

_____38. I sort of only half-believe in myself.

_____39. I'm very sensitive. People say things and I have a tendency to think they're criticizing me or insulting me in some way and later when I think of it, they may not have meant anything like that all.

_____40. I think I have certain abilities and other people say so too, but I wonder if I'm not giving them an importance way beyound what they deserve.

_____41. I feel confident that I can do something about the problems that may arise in the future.

_____42. I believe that people should get credit for their accomplishments, but I very seldom come across work that deserves praise.

_____43. When someone asks for advice about some personal problem, I'm most likely to say, "It's up to you to decide," rather than tell him what he should do.

_____44. I guess I put on a show to impress people. I know I'm not the person I pretend to be.

_____45. I feel that for the most part one has to fight his way through life. That means that people who stand in the way will be hurt.

_____46. I can't help feeling superior (or inferior) to most of the people I know.

_____47. I do not worry or condemn myself if other people pass judgment against me.

_____ 48. I don't hesitate to urge people to live by the same high set of values which I have for myself.

_____ 49. I can be friendly with people who do things which I consider wrong.

_____ 50. I don't feel very normal, but I want to feel normal.

_____ 51. When I'm in a group I usually don't say much for fear of saying the wrong things.

_____ 52. I have a tendency to sidestep my problems.

_____ 53. If people are weak and inefficient I'm inclined to take advantage of them. I believe you must be strong to achieve your goals.

_____ 54. I'm easily irritated by people who argue with me.

_____ 55. When I'm dealing with younger persons, I expect them to do what I tell them.

_____ 56. I don't see much point in doing things for others unless they can do you some good later on.

_____ 57. Even when people do think well of me, I feel sort of guilty because I know I must be fooling them--that if I were really to be myself, they wouldn't think well of me.

_____ 58. I feel that I'm on the same level as other people and that helps to establish good relations with them.

_____ 59. If someone I know is having difficulty in working things out for himself, I like to tell him what to do.

_____ 60. I feel that people are apt to react differently to me than they would normally react to other people.

_____ 61. I live too much by other people's standards.

_____ 62. When I have to address a group, I get self-conscious and have difficulty saying things well.

_____ 63. If I didn't always have such hard luck, I'd accomplish much more than I have.

Appendix B

Bem Sex Role Inventory

*In this inventory, you will be presented with sixty personality characteristics.
You are to use those characteristics in order to describe yourself. That is,
you are to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 7, how true you are to these various
characteristics. Please do not leave any characteristic unmarked.*

*EXAMPLE:*_____*Sly*

Mark a 1 if it is <u>never or almost never true</u> that you are sly.
Mark a 2 if it is <u>usually not true</u> that you are sly.
Mark a 3 if it is <u>sometimes but infrequently true</u> that you are sly.
Mark a 4 if it is <u>occasionally true</u> that you are sly.
Mark a 5 if it is <u>often true</u> that you are sly.
Mark a 6 if it is <u>usually true</u> that you are sly.
Mark a 7 if it is <u>always or almost always true</u> that you are sly.

*Thus, if you feel it is <u>sometimes but infrequently true</u> that you are "sly",
<u>never</u> or <u>almost never</u> that you are "malicious", <u>always or almost always
true</u> that you are "irresponsible"; and <u>often true</u> that you are "carefree",
you would rate these characteristics as follows:*

___3___ *Sly*   ___7___ *Irresponsible*

___1___ *Malicious*   ___5___ *Carefree*

Describe yourself according to the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never or Almost Never True	Usually Not True	Sometimes But Infrequently True	Occasionally True	Often True	Usually True	Always or Almost Always True

_____ 1. Self-reliant
_____ 2. Yielding
_____ 3. Helpful
_____ 4. Defends own beliefs
_____ 5. Cheerful

_____ 6. Moody
_____ 7. Independent
_____ 8. Shy
_____ 9. Conscientious
_____ 10. Athletic
_____ 11. Affectionate
_____ 12. Theatrical
_____ 13. Assertive
_____ 14. Flatterable
_____ 15. Happy
_____ 16. Has strong personality
_____ 17. Loyal
_____ 18. Unpredictable
_____ 19. Forceful
_____ 20. Feminine
_____ 21. Reliable
_____ 22. Analytical
_____ 23. Sympathetic

_____ 24. Jealous
_____ 25. Has leadership abilities
_____ 26. Sensitive to the needs of others
_____ 27. Truthful
_____ 28. Willing to take risks
_____ 29. Understanding
_____ 30. Secretive

_____ 31. Makes decisions easily
_____ 32. Compassionate
_____ 33. Sincere
_____ 34. Self-sufficient
_____ 35. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
_____ 36. Conceited
_____ 37. Dominant
_____ 38. Soft-spoken
_____ 39. Likable
_____ 40. Masculine
_____ 41. Warm
_____ 42. Solemn
_____ 43. Willing to take a stand
_____ 44. Tender
_____ 45. Friendly
_____ 46. Aggressive
_____ 47. Gullible
_____ 48. Inefficient
_____ 49. Acts as a leader
_____ 50. Childlike
_____ 51. Adaptable
_____ 52. Individualistic
_____ 53. Does not use harsh language
_____ 54. Unsystematic
_____ 55. Competitive
_____ 56. Loves children

_____ 57. Tactful
_____ 58. Ambitious
_____ 59. Gentle
_____ 60. Conventional

Appendix C

Adjustment/Performance Rating Scale

DATE:

REPLY TO
ATTN OF:
Mary Alice Conroy, Ph.D.
Staff Psychologist

SUBJECT:

TO:
Case Manager
Counselor
Work Supervisor

As part of a program evaluation research project, we are asking that you complete the rating scale below. We ask that you utilize the rating system to compare this particular resident with the general population with which you work. All ratings will be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only.

Thank you very much.

RESIDENT:_____

REG. NO.:_____

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Acceptance of responsibility.	___	___	___	___	___
Self-confidence.	___	___	___	___	___
Ability to relate to other residents.	___	___	___	___	___
Ability to relate to staff.	___	___	___	___	___
Overall performance.	___	___	___	___	___

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Appendix D

Tables

TABLE 1

Sex Role Concept
by Sex of Resident

	Sex of Resident	
Sex Role Concept	Male	Female
Masculine	15 (15.96)	2 (2.13)
Feminine	4 (4.26)	21 (22.34)
Androgynous	15 (15.96)	15 (15.96)
Undifferentiated	12 (12.77)	10 (10.64)

NOTE: Numbers *in parenthesis indicate percentage of the total sample.*

TABLE 2

Correlation Between Self Esteem
and
Adjustment Variables

Adjustment Variables	SELF-ESTEEM	
	r	*Significance*
Responsibility	.3007	$p < .01$
Self-confidence	.3980	$p < .001$
Relating to residents	.1866	$p < .05$
Relating to staff	.1986	$p < .05$
Overall performance	.2082	$p < .05$

NOTE: All correlations are in a positive direction.

END