Persistence and Change in Sex-Role Stereotypes

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Persistence and change in sex-role stereotypes were examined by replicating in 1978 a study of sex-role conceptions published by Sherriffs and McKee in 1957. Results suggested that in many particulars sex-role stereotypes have changed little over the intervening two decades. Respondents of both sexes continued to view men as more forceful, independent, stubborn, and reckless than women; and women continued to be viewed as more mannerly, giving, emotional, and submissive than men. On the other hand, many changes in sex-role conceptions were also found to have occurred. Especially for female respondents, results suggested that stereotypes have changed in the direction of greater favorability toward women and less favorability toward men. The relevance of these findings to the psychological understanding of social change is discussed.

Researchers and theoreticians have found the concept of sex-role stereotype useful in clarifying our understanding of both differential social evaluations of men and women (e.g., Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Kravetz, 1976; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968; Whitley, 1979) and of differences in the behaviors and self-concepts of men and women (e.g., Biaggio & Nielsen, 1976; Spence,

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Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975). Given the large amount of debate, discussion, activism, and legislation relating to sex-role change in the last decade, it is relevant to assess the extent to which stereotypic conceptions of the two sexes have changed in recent years.

The degree to which there has been consistency or disparity between current and past sex-role conceptions has been addressed in a small number of research reports (Broverman et al., 1972; Neufeld, Langmeyer, & Seeman, 1974; Ruble, 1983; Williams & Bennett, 1975). However, these studies tend not to provide comprehensive evidence regarding similarities and differences between past and present stereotypic descriptions of men and women. Weaknesses of prior studies of changes in stereotypes include (1) comparison of nonidentical measures at the two time periods studied (Rosenkrantz et al., 1968), (2) measurement of narrow as opposed to broad sets of traits (Neufeld et al., 1974), and (3) use of dissimilar respondents at the two points in time (Williams & Bennett, 1975). Williams & Bennett (1975), for example, compared results of Sherriffs and McKee's (1957) study of stereotypes assessed using Sarbin's adjective check list at the University of California at Berkeley with their own more recent data collected using Gough's adjective check list at Wake Forest University. Because of the different locales and instruments used in the two studies, it is unclear to what extent the differences and similarities in their results are due to use of differing measuring devices or of subjects drawn from populations differing in ideology or sociodemographic characteristics independent of the time dimension.

The present study directly addressed each of these issues. We conducted an exact replication of one part of the research reported by Sherriffs and McKee in 1957. As they did, we used Sarbin's 200-item adjective check list. We employed identical instructions with a similar student group at the same university at which the original research was conducted. We also employed the same statistical tests used in the original research. Our goal was to more clearly delineate consistencies and changes in sex-role stereotypes over the two decades subsequent to Sherriffs and McKee's study.

**METHOD**

**Subjects**

The present study was conducted in 1978. As in Sherriffs and McKee's (1957) research, 50 female and 50 male subjects at the University of California at Berkeley were studied. Respondents in the earlier study were