Contrast Effects in the Evaluation of the Male Sex Role 1

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Female subject's personal evaluations of a traditional sex-typed male and a male expressing masculine and feminine interests and activities were influenced by the social context in which information from the two males was received. The subjects listened to the males' prerecorded responses to 10 questions on such topics as car repairs, career opportunities, and romantic interests, and then rated the stimulus persons on several personality dimensions. Subjects listened to the traditional and nontraditional male presented in context, or the traditional male alone or the nontraditional male alone. Consistent with previously reported results, the nontraditional male was frequently rated more favorably than his traditional counterpart. Contrast effects were also observed. That is, the nontraditional male presented in context was frequently rated more favorably than the nontraditional male presented alone. Implications of these findings for research on female therapist–male client relations were discussed.

An extensive body of evidence suggests that a male expressing masculine and feminine characteristics and interests (e.g., androgynous) is a very positive

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social stimulus. Female subjects asked to describe an ideal person or ideal mate frequently described someone with an androgynous sex role orientation rather than someone who was traditionally masculine (Deutsch & Gilbert, 1976; Gilbert, Deutsch, & Strahan, 1978; Kimlicka, Wakefield, & Goad, 1982; McKee & Sherriffs, 1959; Orlofsky, 1982; Ruble, 1983; Silvern & Ryan, 1983). And female subjects asked to evaluate the protocol of a stimulus person (SP) constructed to reflect either an androgynous orientation or a sex-typed orientation frequently rated the androgynous person more favorably (Bridges, 1981; Cramer, Lutz, Bartell, Dragna, & Helzer, 1989; Jackson, 1983; Korabik, 1982; Kulik & Harackiewicz, 1979; Jackson, 1983; Korabik, 1982; Kulik & Harackiewicz, 1979; Lombardo, Francis, & Brown, 1988; Major, Carnevale, & Deaux, 1981; Pursell & Banikotes, 1978).

The expression of masculine and feminine characteristics and interests also can function in a manner analogous to conventional reinforcement (Cramer et al., 1989). Female subjects listening to a masculine male and an androgynous male comment on a number of common social situations evidenced familiar learning effects (e.g., acquisition, partial reinforcement, and delay of reinforcement) when the opportunity to listen to the androgynous male was made contingent upon the performance of a simple switch-pressing response. The pattern of results suggested that the motivation underlying the subjects’ performance was the aversive nature of the characteristics and interests expressed by the masculine male. The subjects’ personal evaluations of the masculine and androgynous males were consistent with the behavioral measures. Across three experiments the androgynous male was rated as favorably or more favorably than his masculine counterpart on several personal dimensions (e.g., appropriateness, likeability, intelligence, adjustment).

In the Cramer et al. (1989) study all of the subjects were exposed to information from the masculine and androgynous males during a 20-minute “conversation.” Therefore, it was possible that juxtaposing the masculine and androgynous male, with the resulting opportunity to compare and scrutinize their responses, could have influenced the subjects’ personal evaluations of the males. The present study served as a conceptual replication of the Cramer et al. work. It was designed to investigate the possibility that information from a masculine male and an androgynous male presented in context compared to the presentation of information from the males individually could affect the subjects’ personal evaluations of the males. The present study served as a conceptual replication of the Cramer et al. work. It was designed to investigate the possibility that information from a masculine male and an androgynous male presented in context compared to the presentation of information from the males individually could affect the subjects’ personal evaluations. Consistent with the previously reported research, we predicted that the androgynous male, regardless of presentation style (in context or alone), would be rated more favorably than his masculine counterpart.

The experimental arrangement also allowed the comparisons of (a) subjects’ personal evaluations of the masculine male presented in context to evaluations of the masculine male presented alone, and (b) subjects’ personal evaluations of the androgynous male presented in context to evaluations of the androgynous male presented alone. As noted above, previous research