The Relationship Between Sex Role Identity and Marital Adjustment

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One hundred forty-four maritally distressed clinic couples and 138 nonclinic couples participated in a study investigating the relationship between individual sex role identity and marital adjustment. Subjects completed Baucom's (1976) masculinity (MSC) and femininity (FMN) scales, and either the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) or the Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS; Locke & Wallace, 1959). As predicted, femininity was related to positive marital adjustment; masculinity was related as well, but perhaps to a lesser degree. Androgyny within a relationship was found to be highly desirable, whereas marriages involving undifferentiated individuals were more likely to be distressed.

A large body of empirical literature has substantiated the importance of masculinity in adaptive psychological functioning (cf. Taylor & Hall, 1982). However, most of these investigations have focused on instrumental and achievement-related aspects of psychological adaptation. Only in the past few years have investigators begun to explore the role of sex role identity in interpersonal relationships, based upon the more recent conceptualization of masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions. Given that femininity appears related to being emotionally attuned and to having an interest

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in interpersonal relationships (Baucom, 1980), femininity may be an impor-
tant factor in intimate interpersonal relationships.

Recently, several investigators have explored two issues regarding sex role identity within intimate relationships, including married and cohabitat-
ing couples. First, researchers have questioned whether persons with certain sex role identities tend to be married to persons with other specific sex role identities. For example, are masculine sex-typed males likely to be paired with feminine sex-typed females? Second, is there a correlation between sex role identity and relationship satisfaction? The results to date are somewhat consistent with regard to the first issue. The findings generally confirm that no particular pairing of sex roles between the partners exist at an above chance level of frequency among married and cohabitating couples (Antill, 1983; Baucom & Aiken, 1984). There has been one exception to this finding. Kur-
dek and Schmitt (1986) studied married, cohabitating heterosexual, and co-
habiting homosexual couples. They also found no significant patterns of sex roles between the two members of a relationship, except for the heter-
osexual cohabitating couples. Within that group, masculine sex-typed men tend to be paired within sex-typed or undifferentiated women, and an-
drogynous individuals tended to be paired with other androgynous persons.

Perhaps the more important issue is whether sex role identity is related to relationship satisfaction. The results, thus far, offer a resounding “Yes.” Most studies have found that femininity is significantly related to higher levels of marital adjustment. For example, Antill (1983), Murstien and Williams (1983), and Kurdek and Schmitt (1986) concluded that couples were happier if at least one partner was androgynous or feminine sex typed (androgynous and feminine sex-typed persons have in common a high score on feminini-
ty). Results have also indicated that masculinity plays a role in marital ad-
justment. Baucom and Aiken (1984) found that both masculinity and femininity were positively correlated with marital adjustment. O'Donnell and James (1978) studied career-oriented couples and found that masculinity alone, or in balance with a high level of femininity, was correlated with posi-
tive marital adjustment for the women. Couples low on masculinity had lower levels of marital adjustment.

Thus a number of investigations point out that sex role identity, par-
ticularly femininity, is related to relationship adjustment. However, these studies have been restricted in two ways. First, due to the large sample size required, often the simultaneous contribution of the males' and females' sex role identities have not been taken into account (Baucom & Aiken, 1984; Burger & Jacobson, 1979; Murstien & Williams, 1983). That is, if four sex roles are considered for each gender (androgynous, masculine sex typed, femi-
nine sex typed, undifferentiated), then 16 couple pairs exist that can be ex-
plored with regard to marital adjustment. By employing a large sample of