Of Men, Macho, and Marital Violence

Alan Rosenbaum

Recent evidence suggests that there may be a relationship between marital satisfaction and the sex role identities of the couple. Specifically, couples in which the husband is either feminine or androgynous appear to be happier. Conversely, couples in which the husband is classified as undifferentiated are apparently more dissatisfied. There is some evidence, as well as theoretical speculation, that abusive husbands may be low in femininity, less likely to be classified as androgynous, and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated. This investigation compared the sex role identification of abusive husbands to that of comparison samples of both discordant, and satisfied, nonviolent husbands. The results indicated that batterers were lower in masculinity, less likely to be classified as androgynous, and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated than husbands in either of the comparison groups. Lack of differentiation between the two nonviolent groups suggests the possibility that findings of previous investigations supportive of a relationship between sex role identity and discord, in general, might be artifactual. The theoretical and methodological implications of these findings are discussed.

KEY WORDS: discord; etiology; gender identity; marital violence; sex roles.

INTRODUCTION

Marital discord and dissatisfaction is so widespread as to lead some to question the viability of the concept of monogamous, marital relationships,
and many others to attempt to unravel empirically the complexities of the dyadic relationship. Although marriage and marital therapy have received a great deal of attention, the dissolution rate remains high as does the dissatisfaction rate among many couples choosing to remain together. In the effort to identify the factors related to marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the sex-role identities of the spouses has received a great deal of recent attention (Baucom and Aiken, 1984; Antill, 1983).

The literature on the relationship between sex-role identity and marital satisfaction has been inconclusive, perhaps due, in part, to the differences in the measures used, the method of scoring, and the nature of the subjects. Most commonly, the Masculinity-Femininity scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personali- ty Inventory (MMPI: Hathaway and McKinley, 1967), Baucom's (1976) unipolar Masculinity and Femininity scales, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI: Bem, 1974), and the PAQ (Spence et al., 1974) are employed. Both the BSRI and the PAQ may be scored utilizing the median split method (recommended) or by straight scoring. Finally, some studies employ married couples (Baucom and Aiken, 1984), while others combine married and unmarried couples (Burger and Jacobson, 1979). Samples also differ on degree of discord, with some employing nonclinic samples, while others utilize clinic samples.

Despite these differences, some consensus is beginning to emerge that there is a relationship between sex-role identity and marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The most consistent finding seems to be that androgyny is positively correlated with marital satisfaction, while there is a tendency for members of dissatisfied couples to be undifferentiated. Baucom and Aiken (1984) reported a positive correlation between both masculinity and femininity and marital satisfaction. They suggested, however, that femininity was the more important factor. They also noted that, contrary to Burger and Jacobson's (1979) conclusion, "there were significantly more androgynous persons in the nonclinic sample than in the clinic sample" (p. 442).

On the other hand, there was an increased tendency for clinic subjects to be either sex-role reversed (feminine-sex-typed males and masculine-sex-typed females) or undifferentiated (low in both masculinity and femininity). Androgyny (high in both masculinity and femininity) was least common among clinic samples (Baucom and Aiken, 1984). Similarly, Antill (1983) reported that femininity in both husband and wife (i.e., both feminine and androgynous subtypes) was positively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Although it is now generally accepted as fact that marital violence may be characteristic of more than one third of all marriages (Straus et al., 1980), difficulties in recruiting and studying maritally violent populations have resulted in a dearth of empirical knowledge regarding the nature of