Path Models of the Relationships of Instrumentality and Expressiveness to Social Self-Efficacy, Shyness, and Depressive Symptoms

Karen S. Hermann¹ and Nancy E. Betz¹,²

This study was designed to examine path models of the relationships of instrumentality, expressiveness, and social self-efficacy to shyness and depressive symptoms in college students. Models indicated strong relationships between social self-efficacy and instrumentality; the relationship of instrumentality to depressive symptoms was mediated by its relationship to social self-efficacy. The relationship of social self-efficacy to depressive symptoms was direct and was also mediated by its relationship to expressiveness. These findings provide new information on how gender role-related personality traits may be protective against depression.

KEY WORDS: social self-efficacy; instrumentality; expressiveness; shyness; depression.

The relationship of gender roles to indices of psychological well-being and healthy functioning has been one of the most important and interesting areas of gender role research. Whether one prefers the terms “masculinity” and “femininity” or the terms “instrumentality” and “expressiveness,” as will be used herein, instrumentality in particular seems to be an essential ingredient for psychological health.

Instrumentality refers to a constellation of personality characteristics traditionally associated with the masculine role. Akin to Bakan’s concept of “agency” (Bakan, 1966), instrumentality includes characteristics of independence, mastery, self-reliance, and assertiveness. Expressiveness, the constellation of characteristics associated with traditional femininity and termed “communion” by Bakan, includes those characteristics related to nurturance, interpersonal caring and sensitivity, and emotional openness. Bem (1974) postulated that the possession of the positive features of both masculinity and femininity, known as “androgyny,” is conducive to adaptive functioning and overall well-being.

Although both instrumentality and expressiveness have been postulated to be related to mental health (e.g., Bem, 1974), empirical evidence is much more consistent for instrumentality. Using scales such as the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974, 1975) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974), researchers have provided evidence that instrumental traits are related to higher self-esteem, general adjustment, and freedom from depression and anxiety (e.g., Cook, 1987; Lengua & Stormshak, 2000; Roos & Cohen, 1987; Whitley, 1984). For example, a meta-analysis by Whitley (1984) demonstrated a strong negative relationship between instrumentality and depression. Roos and Cohen (1987) found correlations of —.40 and —.45 between instrumentality and depression. Russo, Green, and Knight (1993) reported that instrumentality was significantly (negatively) related to depressive symptomatology and also moderated the role of self-esteem in depression, and Marcotte, Alain, and Gosselin (1999) found that, although both instrumentality and expressiveness were negatively related to depression, self-perceived problem-solving abilities mediated the relationship of instrumentality to...
Hermann and Betz

depression. Broderick and Korteland (2002) reported increases in depression with age for children classified as feminine-typed, that is lower in instrumentality.

Other researchers have examined the relationships of instrumentality and expressiveness to the more general concept of well-being, operationalized in a number of ways. Using the short form of the BSRI, Hunt (1993) reported that both instrumentality and expressiveness were related to measures of overall positive affect and life satisfaction and to fewer reported depressive symptoms. Sharpe, Heppner, and Dixon (1995) provided support for a relationship between well-being and expressiveness in adult men. Well-being was operationalized using measures of self-esteem, the Beck Depression Inventory, the Selye Stress Symptom Checklist, the Miller Social Intimacy Checklist, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (the latter two to assess relationship satisfaction). The relationship with well-being was strongest for instrumentality, but expressiveness was importantly related to a component labeled “expressive/emotional well-being” by the authors. Ward (2000) reported that masculinity, though not femininity, was related to self-acceptance in both genders. Woodhill and Samuels (2003) reported that androgynous people and those high in positive femininity reported higher levels on several indices of well-being, including self-esteem and locus of control. Stake (1997) tested an androgyny model to predict well-being, and found that individuals high in androgyny reported higher well-being than did instrumental individuals in situations that required both instrumental and expressive traits. Also, in these dual expectation situations, individuals high in expressiveness reported levels of well-being similar to androgynous individuals and greater than instrumental individuals. Stake (1997) suggested that the importance of expressiveness may have been underestimated because it may be more evident if studied within social contexts.

Paradoxically, instrumentality also appears to be more closely related than expressiveness to variables related to sociability and social confidence/esteem. Because it is expressiveness that is associated with the traditional feminine role, one might expect that people higher in expressiveness would be more outgoing and socially comfortable and confident, yet there is evidence that instrumentality is the stronger predictor. For example, Jones, Chernowetz, and Hansson (1978) reported that women high in instrumentality reported higher levels of extraversion than did women high in expressiveness but not instrumentality. Woodhill and Samuels (2003) found that “social self-esteem” measured by the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) was highest among those classified as positively androgynous or high in positive masculine traits.

Although research in this area uses an array of concepts and measures related to social self-esteem and confidence, it is possible to more carefully distinguish the concept of social self-efficacy. As originally proposed by Bandura (1977, 1997), self-efficacy expectations refer to a person’s beliefs regarding his or her ability successfully to perform a given task or behavior. Thus efficacy beliefs are behaviorally specific—they explicitly address the behavioral, rather than the affective, components of perceptions of the self (see Leary, 1991). Self-efficacy expectations are usually measured using a rating indicating degree of confidence in engaging in the target behavior (though sometimes a yes/no rating of perceived capability is also used). In a study that focused on self-efficacy in cross-sex encounters, Robins (1986) found that instrumentality was related to self-efficacy in this specific social situation but that expressiveness alone was not. Androgynous individuals, however, did report higher self-efficacy, which indicates that expressive characteristics may have played a role in self-efficacy in cross-sex interactions. Similar results were found in a study of self-efficacy in social and nonsocial tasks (Christie & Segrin, 1998), with no distinction made between same-sex and cross-sex interactions. Again, instrumentality contributed to self-efficacy in both the social and nonsocial tasks. A path analysis suggested a causal relationship between the variables, with instrumentality directly affecting self-efficacy for the social task.

Social self-efficacy may have general importance to psychological well-being in that it seems to be protective against depression. Bandura and his colleagues (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999) developed and tested self-efficacy pathways to childhood depression, and they found that perceived social self-efficacy, along with academic self-efficacy, contributed to depression both directly and indirectly through their relationship to the intermediate outcomes of prosocialness, academic achievement, and problem behavior. Smith and Betz (2002) partially replicated Bandura’s finding in a sample of college students, and they showed that social self-efficacy was related to depressive symptoms through its effect on the intermediate variable of shyness. Shyness itself has been shown by many researchers to have significant links with a range of health indices such as depression and loneliness.