

INFLUENCE OF MASCULINITY-FEMININITY ON ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM AND PEER ACCEPTANCE

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ABSTRACT

Interrelationships among masculinity-femininity, self-esteem, and peer acceptance in black and white adolescents were examined in an effort to replicate the study by Massad (Note 1) with a public school sample. Subjects were 195 public high school students from Tennessee. Each was administered a Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, the Personality Attributes Questionnaire, and the Peer Interaction Rating Scale. Results of these questionnaires were analyzed using self-esteem and peer acceptance as dependent variables. Results were very similar to Massad's except that this public school sample had a somewhat lower mean self-esteem score than his all-white private school sample. Among both males and females, an androgynous identity was associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Additionally, high levels of masculine traits result in high self-esteem score in both sexes. However, high levels of feminine traits result in significantly lower scores of self-esteem in males but not females. Black students had significantly higher levels of self-esteem than did whites. There was no difference in self-esteem as a function of sex. The relationship between masculinity-femininity and self-esteem appears to be different for males than females. Scores of peer acceptance were not influenced by sex, race, or sex-role identity.

Recently it has been suggested that children who experience strong traditional sex typing develop relatively inflexible personalities (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Block, 1973; Hefner, Rebecca, & Oleshansky, 1975; Pleck, 1975). These authors feel that high levels of masculinity, untempered by femininity, create extreme competitiveness, dominance, and insensitivity. Too much femininity, without some influence from masculine traits, results in passivity, dependence and incompetence.

Pleck (1975) as well as Hefner, Rebecca, and Oleshansky (1975) note that one goal of adolescence is the transcendence of traditional sex roles and the ability to function as the situation demands. The transcendence of sex roles is referred to as psychological androgyny and

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may be conceptualized as possession of a high degree of both feminine and masculine characteristics (Bem, 1975; Block, 1973; Fisher & Narus, 1981; Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

While there have been few studies of the relationship between androgyny and self-esteem in adolescents, results involving college students have reported that androgyny, rather than sex typing, leads to better adjustment in adult life. Sex-typed individuals have proven to be less flexible in their behaviors than those who have transcended sex roles (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Flaherty & Dusek, 1980; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975).

The few studies of the relationship between masculinity-femininity and adjustment during adolescence report conflicting results. Spence and Helmreich (1978) found that masculinity and femininity showed a strong positive relationship with self-esteem for both males and females. However, Wells (1980) found that masculinity and self-esteem were positively related in males but not females, and that femininity was positively associated with female self-esteem but negatively associated with male self-esteem in the absence of masculine traits.

Conflicting studies such as those presented led Massad to attempt to relate masculinity-femininity with self-esteem and peer acceptance. He studied upper-middle-class white adolescents and concluded that masculinity-femininity and self-esteem vary as a function of sex. In males, high masculinity was associated with high self-esteem and peer acceptance. Among females, both high masculinity and high femininity were associated with high self-esteem. A balance of masculinity and femininity, particularly a high degree of each, was associated with overall peer acceptance among females. If findings such as these are to be useful, generalizability must be demonstrated beyond the original sample of white, private school students. The present study was designed to replicate Massad's work with a public school sample. It is hypothesized that Massad's findings will be replicated.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 195 students from a 1600-student comprehensive high school serving rural, urban, and suburban areas in Tennessee. One characteristic of the sample which made it more heterogeneous than Massad's was that black students participated. Race was investigated as an important factor because previous researchers have noted that race and sex role do interact (e.g., Schaffer, 1981, p. 296; Smith, 1982). The subjects were from mixed social as well as racial back-

grounds and ranged in age from 14 to 18 with a mean age of 15.5. Permission was granted by the volunteers' parents. Of the total sample, 23 did not complete the Personality Attributes Questionnaire. However, their biographical data and their Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale results were included in the analysis of those data. Complete data were available on 74 males and 98 females, 23 of whom were black.

Instruments

The Personality Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) was used to assess masculinity-femininity because of its reliance on positively valued characteristics to measure both masculine and feminine traits. It has also been found to be appropriate for adolescent subjects (Massad, Note 1).

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers, 1969) was selected to measure self-esteem because of its utility with the age range studied. The Peer Interaction Rating Scale (Massad, Note 1) measured social acceptance by asking subjects to nominate three classmates as most preferred partners for 12 activities.

Procedure

Students were tested in study hall by a female graduate student and a female liaison teacher. The examiners explained the procedure on the day prior to testing when permission forms were distributed. On the day of testing, directions were read aloud, questions answered, and the students were thanked for their assistance.

Using the entire sample, subjects were classified by a median-split into sex-role identity categories. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Classifications of Sex Role					
Personality Attributes Questionnaire					
Male			Female		
	HF	LF		HF	LF
HM	Androgynous	Sex-typed	HM	Androgynous	Cross-sex typed
LM	Cross-sex typed	Undifferentiated	LM	Sex-typed	Undifferentiated
HF - High Female			HM - High Male		
LF - Low Female			LM - Low Male		

RESULTS

Self-esteem (Piers-Harris) and peer acceptance scores were analyzed in two separate 2 (Sex: MvF) $\times$ 4 (Sex Role: HMHF v. LMHF v. HMLF v. LMLF) analyses of variance. There was a significant main effect for sex role when self-esteem was the dependent variable $F(3, 164) = 7.93$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). The means were HMHF = 59.35, LMHF = 53.15, HMLF = 55.81, and LMLF = 50.40. A Scheffé test revealed that the androgynous (HMHF) group had a significantly higher mean self-esteem score than the undifferentiated (LMLF) and female sex-typed (LMHF) groups. Other differences failed to reach significance at the .05 level. There was also a significant sex by sex-role interaction $F(3, 164) = 4.94$, $p = .003$ (see Table 2). The means were male-HMHF = 62.42, male-LMHF = 40.75, male HMHF = 55.97, male-LMLF = 52.24, female-HMHF = 57.82, female-LMHF = 54.80, female-HMLF = 55.22, and female-LMLF = 48.91.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Sex and Sex-Role
When Self-Esteem (Piers-Harris) was the Dependent Variable

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Prob
Sex (A)	47.26	1	47.26		
Sex-role (B)	2351.97	3	783.99	7.93	<.001
AB	1464.53	3	488.18	4.94	.003
Between error	16221.3	164	99.91		

A Scheffé test was conducted and androgynous (HMHF) males were found to be significantly higher in self-esteem than both cross-typed (LMHF) males and undifferentiated (LMLF) males. Other paired comparisons of males, though substantial, were not significant. Androgynous (MHMF) females were revealed to be significantly greater in self-esteem than undifferentiated (LMLF) females. Androgynous females (HMHF) were higher, but not significantly so, in self-esteem than sex-typed females (LMHF) and cross-typed females (HMLF). None of the independent variables was found to significantly influence peer acceptance.

After the scores were computed, it was discovered that no black males fell into the cross-sex-typed males (LMHF) category. For this reason the data were analyzed in two 2 (Sex) $\times$ 2 (Race) $\times$ 3 (Sex role:

HMHF v. HMLF v. LMLF) analysis of variance with self-esteem and peer acceptance as the dependent variables (see Table 3). Additionally, the data were regrouped by calculating median splits within each gender group (see Table 4). Two separate 2 (Sex) x 2 (Race) x 4 (Sex role: HMHF v. HMLF v. LMHF v. LMLF) analyses were conducted with self-esteem and peer acceptance as the dependent variables. In these four analyses the findings were similar to the previous analysis except that a main effect for race was also found to be significant, and the sex by sex-role interactions failed to reach significance (see Tables 3 and 4). Black subjects had significantly higher self-esteem scores than white subjects, $F(1, 156) = 8.72, p = .004$ (Table 4). The means were black subjects = 61.07, white subjects = 54.18. The main effect for sex of subject and the interactions all failed to reach significance. The main effects and interactions for peer acceptance were not significant.

Table 3
Analysis of Variance Summary Table
for Sex - Sex role (entire sample median splits)
and Race when Self-esteem (Piers-Harris)
was the Dependent Variable

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Prob
Sex (A)	344.31	1	344.31	3.69	.05
Sex role (B)	809.23	2	404.61	4.33	.02
AB	125.07	2	62.53		
Race (C)	326.59	1	326.59	3.50	.05
AC	118.56	1	118.56	1.27	.26
BC	135.20	2	63.10		
ABC	183.94	2	91.97		
Between error	11772.6	126	93.43		

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Massad's (Note 1) findings relating masculinity-femininity and self-esteem can be replicated in a public school sample. It appears that an androgynous identity, or the presence of high levels of masculine and feminine traits, is associated with psychological adjustment (self-esteem) in both males and females.

Table 4
Analysis of Variance Summary Table for
Sex - Sex role (within gender median splits)
and Race when Self-esteem (Piers-Harris)
was the Dependent Variable

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Prob
Sex (A)	207.07	1	207.07	2.09	.146
Sex role (B)	797.78	3	265.93	2.69	.05
AB	276.76	3	92.25		
Race (C)	862.50	1	862.50	8.72	.004
AC	143.47	1	143.47	1.45	.23
BC	631.99	3	210.66	2.13	.10
ABC	109.92	3	36.64		
Between error	15435.5	156	98.95		

Males with androgynous identities were significantly higher ($p = < .001$) in measures of self-esteem than either undifferentiated or cross-sex-typed males. Females in the androgynous group had the highest self-esteem of all females and were significantly higher ($p = .015$) on this measure than undifferentiated females. These results were similar for both genders regardless of how the median splits were computed, both by using the total sample or by calculating within gender medians. The findings are consistent with a 1975 study of college students done by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp which reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem in androgynous individuals.

It is apparent from this study that masculine traits continue to relate to self-esteem in both males and females. Masculine traits in females appear to be positively valued. Feminine traits in males, combined with low levels of masculine traits, result in predictably low levels of self-esteem. This finding for cross-sex-typed males (LMHF) is consistent with results reported by Massad.

When compared to the present study, Massad's study of adolescent adjustment and sex-role identity resulted in higher Piers-Harris self-esteem scores for every group. His subjects were from upper-middle-class backgrounds and attended private school. Perhaps the difference in socioeconomic status is responsible for the lower self-esteem scores of the present sample (Edwards, 1974). Although the means differed,

the relative rankings were very similar to those presented by Massad.

Some differences were also found as a function of race. In the present study, black adolescents had significantly ($p = .004$) higher scores of self-esteem (mean = 61.07) than white adolescents (mean = 54.18). While the small sample of blacks in the study makes the findings tentative, the findings are not surprising and are in keeping with the trend described by Porter and Washington (1979) and Hines and Berg-Cross (1981). With the increase of racial pride brought about by the civil rights and black consciousness movements, self-esteem among blacks has risen. Black adolescents have publically expressed pride in their race, have garnered strength through social relationships, church, and family groups, and have, in turn, felt more pride in themselves (Foster & Perry, 1982; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979).

When the subjects were classified according to sex role (see Table 1) there were no cross-sex-typed black males. The subjects were subsequently reclassified by using within-gender groupings. A larger sample of black students probably would have removed the need for regrouping.

The overall results for peer acceptance were disappointing and did not replicate Massad's findings. The total enrollment of the school (over 1600) was so large that many students received no nominations. Any impact due to sex role was diluted by the size of the student body. The results did suggest that socialization pressures have differing impacts on males and females. If this is true, theories of sex-role identity should attempt to address it.

REFERENCE NOTE

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