Androgyeny: Another Look

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The reconceptualization of sex role classification to include psychological androgyeny is presented. An explanation of this concept is followed by a summary of related research and a critique of instruments which purport to assess sex role orientation. The implications of the results of sex role research for athletics as well as future directions in such research are discussed. The discussion centers on the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the theoretical construct of androgyeny to the athletic setting.

The role of females in sport is changing from that of cheering spectators to aggressive participants. Because aggressiveness has not been a traditional feminine attribute in American society (Duquin, 1978), it is important to compare the sex role orientation of female athletes with that of other females and male athletes. In the past, such comparisons have been based on the traditional perspective regarding sex role orientation which is that feminine and masculine attributes are found on opposite ends of a continuum (Constantinople, 1974). Recently, such comparisons have been based on an alternate theoretical perspective embodying the concept of androgyeny which is that individuals should possess and display both masculine and feminine attributes (Bem, 1974; Spence & Helme- reich, 1978). The feasibility of the instruments which purport to assess sex role orientation, however, as well as the practicality of the concept of androgyeny have not been fully explored.

The following discussion will include a comparison of the two theoretical perspectives on sex role orientation. This discussion is followed by a brief survey of the instruments frequently used to assess androgyeny. The feasibility and utility of further research pertaining to relationships between sex roles and athletic involvement also is explored. In this paper, sex roles refer to behavioral expectations associated with masculinity (M) and femininity (F), whereas gender refers to physical classification, that is, male or female. Sex typing refers to the categorization of males and females according to their behaviors and/or scores on instruments purporting to assess sex role orientation.

Traditional Perspective

Psychologists and psychiatrists frequently have included the attainment of biopsychological equivalence as part of their definition of a mentally healthy person (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1972;
Foushee, Helmreich, & Spence, 1979; Kaplan, 1976). According to this theory, the ideal male should be sex typed as masculine (M), whereas the ideal female should be feminine (F). The theory is based on the traditional assumption that certain qualities such as being gentle, soft-spoken, and gullible are inherently female, whereas other traits such as being forceful, analytical, and self-reliant are exclusively male. Thus, roles as well as individuals have gender.

Tied to the biopsychological equivalence theory is the assumption that sex role attributes are bipolar, that is, on opposite ends of a continuum (Foushee et al., 1979). In the absence of an M quality, an F quality is assumed; similarly, a person could be sex typed as M or F but not both. For example, a person who is thought of as being sensitive, which is an F trait, would also be assumed to be noncompetitive, another F trait. Most personality tests include an M-F scale based on this bipolar theory (Constantinople, 1974).

Competitive sport has frequently been considered a male domain and therefore has been sex typed as M. Such traditional M sex role attributes as competitiveness and aggressiveness are usually associated with involvement as a participant in sport (Duquin, 1978). Female athletes, especially those in team sports, are invariably classified as M (Harris & Hall, 1978; Williams, 1978). Some have contended that this perceived mismatch between role and gender has resulted in a masculine stigma being placed upon or felt by female athletes (Bird & McCullough, 1977; Sage & Loudermilk, 1979; Snyder, Kivlin, & Spreitzer, 1975).

The Concept of Androgyny

Recent developments in personality theory have led some psychologists to redefine the sex roles which a mentally healthy person should possess. It has been suggested that such a person should be sex typed as androgynous (A); that is, the person should possess and display both M and F sex role attributes (Bem, 1974, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The appropriateness of the M and/or F attributes for a particular situation is important, for the exhibition of an M or F trait should depend on the situation, not one's gender. Moreover, M and F traits within this alternative theoretical perspective are considered to be orthogonal, that is, independent of each other. Consequently, a person could be both sensitive and competitive contingent upon the behavior called for by the situation.

Assessment of Androgyny

Bem (1974) constructed a 60 adjective checklist, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), to assess androgyny, defined as an equal balance between M and F traits. The BSRI consists of 20 M adjectives and 20 F adjectives interspersed with 20 neutral adjectives. The subject rates each adjective on a scale from 1 to 7 to indicate to what extent the adjective describes him or herself. He or she receives an average score for each of the two scales. A ratio for the difference between means is calculated for each person. Somewhat arbitrary cutoff points are then established by which to classify people into sex role orientation categories according to the value of each person's $t$ ratio. Table 1 displays the cutoff points originally suggested by Bem.

To ensure content validity, Bem selected adjectives based on the results of value judgments made by college students. Those adjectives which were rated as being significantly more desirable for one sex than for the other
Table 1
Sex Role Classifications by the Subtractive Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of ( t ) ratio(^*)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( t \leq -2.025 )</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-2.025 &lt; t &lt; -1)</td>
<td>near masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-1 \leq t \leq 1)</td>
<td>androgynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 &lt; t &lt; 2.025)</td>
<td>near feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(*t \geq 2.025)</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^*\) \( t \) ratio for the difference between an individual subject’s means on the two scales.

\(^{\text{a}}\) \( p \leq .05 \), using a two-tailed test with 38 df.

Table 2
Sex Role Classifications by the Median Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F(^a)</th>
<th>M(^b)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>above</td>
<td>below</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below</td>
<td>above</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above</td>
<td>above</td>
<td>androgynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below</td>
<td>below</td>
<td>undifferentiated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{\text{a}}\) Score relative to feminine median

\(^{\text{b}}\) Score relative to masculine median

were selected for inclusion in either the M or F scale. The neutral adjectives served as a social desirability scale. Construct validity was confirmed by factor analysis (Gaudreau, 1977; Wakefield, Sasek, Friedman, & Bowden, 1976) and other methods (Luessenheide & Vandever, 1978). Bem (1974) also found high intercorrelations between adjectives within each scale.

Spence and Helmreich (1978) criticized Bem’s subtractive method (calculating the difference between the M and F means), because an individual who scored as A could either be high in both M and F traits or be low in both. They asserted that an androgynous person should be one who scores high on both scales, whereas one who scores low on both scales should be classified as Undifferentiated (U). They devised a Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) to assess sex role orientation. Its structure is somewhat similar to that of the BSRI but has a different classification method. Subjects are classified as A only if their scores on both the M and F scales are above the median. Table 2 shows the resultant classifications.

When Bem (1977) rescored the original BSRI data using the median method, she found a great deal of overlap between her original categories and the new ones. Downing (1979) found a significant difference between the categories formed by the subtractive and median methods, whereas Myers and Lips (1978) found no such difference. The median method, however, seems to embody the meaning of the concept of androgyny more so than the subtractive method. Therefore, the majority of the investigators have used the median method of classification developed by Spence and Helmreich (1978).

Current Research Results

A survey of recent literature on sex role orientation suggested that A females as compared to F females were less affected by fear of success (Major, 1979), less traditional, less inhibited, and
less restrained in setting occupational and educational objectives and in sexual behavior and attitudes (Jones, Chernovetz & Hansson, 1978). In contrast to these findings, F females have been found to be lower in self-esteem and intellectual competence and to be more conventional and constrained by sex roles than their A female counterparts (Holahan & Holahan, 1979; Jones et al., 1978; Major, 1979; Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

The research findings concerning M and A males are less clear. Androgynous males have shown a greater degree of self-esteem, self-disclosure, neurosis, and anxiety than M males (Babl, 1979; Bem, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). On the other hand, Jones et al. (1978) reported no differences in intellectual competence between the two groups. Furthermore, M males have been found to have few liabilities and limitations (Jones et al., 1978), to be high in self-esteem (Bem, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) and to show little or no anxiety after a sex role threat (Babl, 1979).

Members of both sexes have indicated that they would like to behave in a more masculine, that is, instrumental, fashion (Kenworthy, 1979). The greater the degree of F of the female, the greater her desire to attain instrumental traits; whereas the greater the masculine orientation of the female, the more competent and secure she felt (Jones et al., 1978). Garnets and Pleck (1979) found that androgyny was associated with high self-esteem only if an individual's ideal sex role attributes for persons of the same sex as him or herself were androgynous.

**Sex Role Orientations of Athletes**

Several investigators have attempted to study sex roles in athletics using the BSRI or PAQ. Spence and Helmreich (1978) surveyed college athletes and nonathletes using the PAQ and the Work and Family Orientation (WOFO) Scale. They reported that the modal category for males was the M category (34%). The majority of female athletes were classified as A (39%) or M (31%). Male athletes were not surveyed as a separate group, making comparisons difficult. The sex role orientation of female athletes was obviously different than that of female nonathletes.

The WOFO Scale was used to assess achievement motivation and aspiration. The scale consists of items dealing with Work Orientation such as, “It is very important for me to do my work as well as I can even if it isn’t popular with my co-workers”; with Mastery such as, “I would rather learn fun games that most people know than a difficult thought game”; with Competitiveness such as, “It is important to me to perform better than others on a task”; and with Personal Unconcern with such items as, “I worry because my success may cause others to dislike me.” Results from the WOFO Scale indicated that female athletes scored significantly higher in competitiveness than the groups of male and female college students. The athletes also showed a significantly greater concern than female students about the opinions of others. The female athletes were the only group for whom the correlation between competitiveness and personal unconcern was $r^2 = -.29, p < .05$, implying that females who were more competitive were also more concerned about the effects of their success on the attitudes of others.

The relationship between sex role orientation and physical activity-related variables has been shown to be non-significant in a few studies. For example, sex role orientation was not significantly related to the activity level of females (Rumrich, 1977), to athletic status (Jennings, 1977), to a coach’s skill rating of...
basketball players (Fontaine, 1977), or to attitude toward women and gender preference of college students for tennis instructors (Miller, 1978).

Other investigators have examined the sex typing of those involved in sport. Duquin (1978), Spence and Helmreich (1978), and Myers and Lips (1978) found that the modal sex role category for female athletes was the A classification, whereas that of male athletes was the M category. Female athletes who were classified as A or M tended to score higher on achievement and self-esteem measures than their F and U female counterparts. Rumrich (1977) noted that the majority of inactive females were sex typed as F or U.

The cited research indicates that the percentage of A female athletes is greater than that of A male athletes. This could be explained by the fact that females seem to be more motivated to acquire M traits because these are highly valued in our culture (Bem, 1976). Instrumental qualities have a high priority in the sport and career worlds. Thus, females may need the instrumental traits to succeed in these worlds more than the males may need the expressive qualities (White, 1979). Does sport participation enhance the development of A traits or are A females more likely to be drawn into sport than F females? Such questions need to be answered before sport can be used for androgyny training for females.

**Critique of the Instruments and Scoring Procedures**

Although the concept of androgyny in itself may be worthwhile, conclusions based on the data generated by the administration of the BSRI or PAQ are only as good as the instruments themselves. The subtractive method of scoring seems to run counter to the concept of androgyny and was critiqued in an earlier section. Although the median method is more in concert with the concept of androgyny than the subtractive method, it does obscure relative differences. Those who score close to the median are indistinguishable from those who score far above it. Furthermore, because 50% of the subjects must score below the median for their group on any scale, then theoretically a maximum of 50% of the population could be androgynous, whereas the other 50% would then be undifferentiated. If androgyny is valuable, then is this desirable, or does it reflect a weakness in the scoring method? One could, of course, maintain the same median score over a period of years so that conceivably movement from one category to another is not restricted. In addition, classifications of behavior as either M or F may also change over time, necessitating new items and new medians.

Androgyny is based on the concept of behavioral flexibility. Is it possible that the scales used to assess androgyny reveal only traits subjects possess but which are not necessarily the ones they display? Could someone be classified as androgynous and yet act primarily in a F manner? Because neither the BSRI or PAQ define the situation to which the items apply, it is possible that an individual's sex type classification is not static. For example, a male may be domineering and aggressive in the gym yet be submissive at home. The validity of the results may be increased if the situation to which the items apply were specified.

Furthermore, investigators who use these instruments should be aware that the validation of sex role orientation scales as well as related research have mainly involved middle class American college students. According to White (1979), these students are in the "nesting" stages of life, a time when sex
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Differences are greatly accentuated. Few studies have involved individuals younger than 18 and older than 30. These issues, as well as others, such as the determination of an optimal score for each scale, pertaining to methodology should be considered by investigators who wish to work with the concept of androgyny in athletics.

The Concept of Androgyny Revisited

On the assumption that sex-typing procedures are accurate, what priority should be placed on androgyny-related research? First, attention should be focused on the F female because she scored lowest on most of the investigated variables. This may be the female who drops out of sport, which explains why Hall (1978) could find no evidence of role conflict in elite female athletes. Can the F female be taught to be more flexible in certain situations so that she would become andrognous? Perhaps sport participation could help her develop and display instrumental qualities.

An androgynous female athlete may also have problems. How does she fare once her athletic career is over? Kenworthy (1979) asserted that although androgyne should be the goal of therapists who work with females, at times the A female is a social anomaly. In addition, the stability of sex role classifications has not been investigated. Conceivably, if a female athlete is socialized into androgyne through sport, she could also be socialized into another sex role classification once her athletic career is finished.

The M male, on the other hand, seems to be at no disadvantage in terms of societal values (Kaplan & Bean, 1976) because masculine traits are desirable in American society (Jones et al., 1978). The research concerning A males in this society is equivocal. Are these the males who drop out of sport?

According to Duquin (1978), sport has room for the display of expressive qualities. The research involving male athletes indicated that the majority of these athletes are sex typed as M (Duquin, 1978; Harris, Note 1; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). What would happen to sport if the majority of male athletes became androgynous? Would male coaches allow this to happen? Who would teach and model these expressive qualities? If, 7 years after Title IX, the modal category for female athletes is the A classification, is it possible that these athletes may increasingly value the instrumental qualities of sport roles so that in another 10 years most of them would be classified as M?

Is the concept of androgyny important, or is it a way to avoid placing the M stigma on achieving competent females and to give them a different label? Androgyne in itself does not eliminate sexism or necessarily change the values placed on sex differences related to strength and power. It is important to foster the notions expressed by the theoretical perspective of androgyne which suggest that behavior should be flexible, nonstereotypic, and situationally specific and appropriate. Biopsychological equivalence should be an outmoded standard for mental health.

The emphasis in the future, however, should be on a transcendence of androgyne so that no such items as M or F adjectives exist. This means that if androgyne became the goal for males and females eventually traits would no longer be labeled M or F, because both males and females would display these behaviors. The BSRI and PAQ would be obsolete. On the other hand, such transcendence may not be possible because sex role differentiation seems to exist in many cultures.
Bakan (1966) and White (1979) suggested an emphasis away from any type of sex role classification to a focus on competencies. They contended that the healthy adult needs certain communal and agentic competencies to cope with different situations. Agentic competencies should be used when one is dependent on self to meet a goal, whereas communal competencies are to be used to meet goals in conjunction with others. The mentally healthy adult would possess and display a high level of both sets of skills. The emphasis is on coping instead of on traits which may be sex typed and/or negative.

Researchers studying sports should develop instruments which focus on behaviors needed by athletes, regardless of gender, to cope successfully with a variety of sport-related situations. Some sports may require a display of more agentic than communal skills, whereas the reverse may be true in other cases. Because females have not participated in sport to the extent that males have, female athletes may have the most learning to do. This idea is based on the assumption that those in leadership positions can define the necessary behaviors needed for success in athletics. For example, instead of requiring an athlete to be aggressive, we must define what actions are considered to be aggressive. The philosophical debate would then center on the desirability of each of these behaviors without regard to gender.

The main value of the androgynous concept is that it forces the elimination of the biopsychological equivalence theory. The androgy nous concept, as operationalized by the BSRI and PAQ, should be transcended by an emphasis on situationally specific behaviors without any regard to gender or M and F attributes. Sport researchers should focus upon behaviors and skills rather than on attempting to link certain variables to sex role orientation and to sex type athletes accordingly. A label does not enhance an athlete's performance, whereas certain behaviors may.

REFERENCE NOTE


REFERENCES


Major, B. Sex-role orientations and fear of success: Clarifying an unclear relationship. Sex Roles, 1979, 5, 63-70.


