

Is a Woman a Person?

Sex Differences in Stereotyping

The fact that our society has placed greater value on what is considered stereotypically masculine (e.g., independence, self-confidence and ambition) than on what is considered stereotypically feminine (e.g., dependence, passivity and tenderness) can be easily documented (McKee & Sherriffs, 1957; MacBrayer, 1960; Williams & Bennett, 1975). This difference in value is evident even in concepts of mental health as demonstrated by the well-known Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel study (1970). Mental health professionals described a healthy adult male and a healthy adult person in nearly identical ways but a "healthy" adult female was something quite different. Their data revealed a "powerful, negative assessment of women." Further evidence that women and men are not only different but also unequal can be found in the literature on performance evaluation (e.g., Goldberg, 1968; Pheterson, Kiesler & Goldberg, 1971; and Deaux & Emswiler, 1974).

Today, many would argue that the stereotypes are changing or even disappearing. One recent study of college males' concepts of an ideal woman

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(O'Leary & Depner, 1975) revealed a real "Wonderwoman"; she was perceived as more competent, competitive, successful and adventurous than the ideal man as perceived by females. Spence, Helmreich & Stapp (1975) also reported that both men and women are seen as having masculine-valued and feminine-valued traits; only 13 of their 55 traits were sex-specific (valued for one sex but not the other).

Other recent evidence, however, suggests that the stereotypes are alive and well (Der-Karabetian & Smith, 1977). How can this evidence be reconciled? What is the status of sex-role stereotypes today? Are they common? Do both sexes accept (or reject) them? Or are the stereotypes perpetuated predominantly by males? Many feminists would argue that males do perpetuate the stereotypes because of the built-in advantages for them, specifically in terms of power and prestige (Chafetz, 1974; Cox, 1976; Firestone, 1970; Greer, 1971).

This study was designed to examine some of these questions. The main focus of the study was on the relative value placed on masculinity and femininity. Additionally, we were interested in sex differences in the extent of stereotyping and differential valuing of what is stereotypically masculine or feminine. College males and females were asked to describe the Ideal Man (IM), the Ideal Woman (IW) and the Ideal Person (IP) using 24

common behavioral traits. A within-subjects design was used so that the difference scores between the Ideals for each subject could be analyzed. A Q-sort technique was utilized. Subjects were forced to consider the relative value of the traits; it was impossible to rate everything as equally good or important.

While the design was similar to that of the Broverman et al. study (1970), there were several critical differences: (1) subjects were students, not professionals, (2) they described "Ideals" rather than making clinical assessments of "health," (3) a within-subjects design was used, allowing for comparisons for each subject, and (4) a Q-sort technique was used, forcing subjects to consider relative importance. It was also somewhat similar to the Spence, Helmreich & Stapp (1975) study except that subjects considered the ideal male and female rather than the typical male and female, and, even more importantly, they also considered the ideal person. The Ideal Person served as a standard of comparison and thus allowed for a direct test of the prediction of the value placed on masculinity as opposed to femininity (the Ideal Man-Ideal Person as opposed to the Ideal Woman-Ideal Person discrepancy).

The specific hypotheses of the study were as follows. Assuming a general tendency to place greater value on

masculinity than femininity, our first hypothesis was that the Ideal Man and the Ideal Person would be rated as more similar than the Ideal Woman and the Ideal Person. Secondly, we predicted that this effect would be greater for males. This second hypothesis followed from the assumption that the stereotypes work to the advantage of males. The third hypothesis which followed from the same assumption was that males would stereotype more than females, as indicated by larger discrepancies in all comparisons (IM-IW as well as IP-IW). Other recent evidence supports this prediction (Der-Karabetian & Smith, 1977).

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 106 undergraduate students who volunteered to participate for extra credit in their Introductory Psychology courses. There were 32 males and 74 females.

Procedure

Subjects were given 24 cards with one trait on each card. Fifteen of the traits were from Rokeach's (1973) list of 18 instrumental values. Others were added which were particularly stereotyped (e.g., aggressive, confident, intuitive and sensuous). Subjects used a Q-sort technique to sort the 24 traits into seven categories from "Most Important" to "Least Im-

portant" for the Ideal Woman, Ideal Man and Ideal Person. The number of traits to be placed in each of the seven categories were 1-2-5-8-5-2-1 with no ordering within categories. Scoring was based on the category in which the trait was placed; scores ranged from 1 to 7 with "1" indicating most important and "7" indicating least important. For example, all eight traits in the middle category were scored "4." There were two different orders: (1) half of the subjects rated the Ideal Man first, Ideal Woman second and Ideal Person last, (2) half of the subjects rated the Ideal Woman first, Ideal Man second and Ideal Person last.*

RESULTS

Discrepancy Scores

The primary interest was in the various discrepancies between subjects' ratings of the Ideal Woman, Ideal Man and Ideal Person. Total discrepancy scores (IP-IM, IP-IW and IM-IW) for each subject were computed by summing the absolute value of the differences in ratings on each of the 24 traits. To test the hypotheses, the Ideal Person-Ideal Man and Ideal Person-Ideal Woman discrepancies were analyzed by an un-

*Preliminary analyses on all data yielded no significant order effects, thus this factor is excluded from the Results section.

weighted means analysis of variance with repeated measures (Winer, 1962). The means are presented in Table 1.

The first hypothesis was that the Ideal Man and the Ideal Person would be perceived as more similar than the Ideal Woman and the Ideal Person. The IP-IW discrepancy was significantly greater than the IP-IM discrepancy, $F(1,104) = 7.52, p < .01$. The second hypothesis was that this effect would be greater for males. This was supported by a significant interaction, $F(1,104) = 11.64, p < .01$. The third hypothesis was that males would stereotype more than females as indicated by males

having greater discrepancies overall. The sex difference main effect was significant, $F(1,104) = 4.85, p < .05$.

The primary source of all of the significant findings was one very deviant cell: the male subjects' large discrepancies between the Ideal Person and the Ideal Woman. As tested by a Newman-Keuls (Winer, 1962), the discrepancies between the Ideal Person and the Ideal Man were not significantly different for males and females. And for female subjects, the Ideal Person-Ideal Woman discrepancy was not significantly different from the Ideal Person-Ideal Man discrepancy. But, as

TABLE 1

Mean Total Discrepancy Scores			
	Ideal Person- Ideal Man	Ideal Person- Ideal Woman	Unweighted Mean Total Discrepancy Score
Males	15.69	19.63	17.66
Females	14.97	14.54	14.76
Unweighted Means Across Sexes	15.33	17.09	

predicted, for the male subjects, the Ideal Woman was very different from the Ideal Person/Ideal Man. That one cell (19.63) was significantly greater than all other cells ($p < .01$).

In addition to the primary analysis, a separate analysis was done on the Ideal Man-Ideal Woman discrepancies as a further test of the third hypothesis that males would stereotype more than females. This yielded a significant sex difference. The mean for the male subjects (21.19) was significantly greater than the mean for the female subjects (16.57), $t(103) = 3.01$, $p < .005$. That is, males perceived more differences between IM-IW than did females.

The Ideal Person, the Ideal Man and the Ideal Woman

While the focus of the study was on the overall differences that existed, the data on each of the 24 traits allowed us to examine the above findings in terms of the component parts. Specific comparisons of some of the traits helped to clarify and give support to the major findings. T-tests for IP-IM, IP-IW and IM-IW differences were computed for all traits. Because of the number of t-tests computed, these data should be interpreted with caution. However, since they were secondary and supportive analyses only, it was the overall pattern of findings rather than any particular finding which was of interest. Some relatively

consistent and meaningful patterns did emerge which helped to clarify the results of the main analysis.

The overall picture of the Ideal Person served as a standard by which to judge the other findings. Using unweighted means across sexes, the most important (lowest mean rating) traits were loving (2.53), responsible (2.73), broad-minded (3.23) and forgiving (3.33). The least important (highest mean rating) traits were submissive (5.98), aggressive (5.60), sensuous (5.23), emotional (5.05) and intuitive (4.89). All other traits were grouped around the mean ($\pm .5$ standard deviation) due to moderate ratings and/or a lack of consistency. The differences between this Ideal Person and the Ideal Man and Woman were quite revealing. The results were markedly different for male and female subjects, thus they are presented separately.

Males. Males rated the Ideal Woman as significantly more loving ($p < .05$), sensitive ($p < .05$) and sensuous ($p < .01$) than the Ideal Person (who was more courageous than the Ideal Woman, $p < .05$). Similar results were found for IM-IW differences. Males rated the Ideal Woman as more emotional ($p < .05$), forgiving ($p < .01$), loving ($p < .01$), sensitive ($p < .05$), sensuous ($p < .01$) and submissive ($p < .05$) than the Ideal Man; the Ideal Man was more ambitious ($p < .05$) and courageous ($p < .01$) than the Ideal Woman. On the other hand, tests on all 24 traits

yielded no significant differences between the Ideal Person and the Ideal Man for male subjects.

Females. In contrast, there were very few significant differences for female subjects. There were two differences between the Ideal Person and the Ideal Man (the Person was more clean, $p < .05$, the Man more sensuous, $p < .05$). There was only one significant difference between the Person and the Woman: the Ideal Woman was more sensuous than the Ideal Person ($p < .01$). Likewise, there was only one significant difference between the Ideal Man and the Ideal Woman: the Woman was more intuitive than the Man ($p < .05$).

Discussion

All hypotheses were supported. That greater value was placed on masculinity was evidenced by the small discrepancy between the Ideal Person-Ideal Man as compared to the Ideal Person-Ideal Woman. In other words, what is valued in general (Ideal Person) is the same as what is valued in particular for men (Ideal Man) but not women (Ideal Woman). This was especially true for males as predicted; in fact, it was only true for males. From the males' perspective, the sexes are not only different but also unequal. An ideal person is an ideal man; a woman, even an ideal woman, is something else. The stereotypes have not disappeared, at least

for men. It is men who differentiate most strongly overall and men who see women as something other than an ideal person.

That the sexes are not only perceived as different but unequal receives some additional support from the relative rankings of the various traits. The traits which were least important (highest means) were, with one exception, stereotypically feminine--submissive, sensuous, emotional and intuitive (the one exception was aggressive which is stereotypically masculine). It is particularly interesting that there were significant differences between the Ideal Woman and the Ideal Man on each of these "feminine" traits. Although they were not highly valued overall for the IP, IM or IW, males rated the Ideal Woman as significantly more submissive, sensuous and emotional than the Ideal Man. Females did not differentiate on those but did see the Ideal Woman as significantly more intuitive than the Ideal Man.

On the whole, females stereotyped and differentiated much less than males. The few differences that did emerge were insufficient to provide a consistent picture. In contrast, the picture for males seems much clearer. They appeared to see the Ideal Woman in terms of her relationship to them. More than the Ideal Man or the Ideal Person she should be loving, emotional sensitive, sensuous and submissive.

he is someone to love, perhaps, more than someone to respect.

to be ideal in the eyes of men, women may be forced to be some of the very things which men do not value in general, i.e., to become more like an Ideal Woman, on some dimensions, is to

become less of an Ideal Person. Is not this the crux of the problem of female identity (Komarovsky, 1946; Bem & Bem, 1973)? The stereotypes still exist, to the relative disadvantage of women, in the eyes of males. Perhaps one hopeful sign is that at least women do not appear to be buying this view so much anymore.

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