Sex Role Orientation and Its Effect on a Woman’s Decision to Parent

Agnes Van Buren

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Sex Role Orientation and Its Effect on a Woman's Decision to Parent

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Agnes Van Buren
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SEX ROLE ORIENTATION AND ITS EFFECT
ON A WOMAN'S DECISION TO PARENT

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Sex Role Orientation and Its Effect on a Woman's Decision to Parent

Agnes Van Buren October 1983 54 pages

Directed by: E.H. Owen, R. L. Miller, and J. O'Connor

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Female undergraduates from a private college on the east coast were surveyed regarding their feelings about having children and were asked to complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Eighty-one percent of the respondents indicated a desire to have one or more children. Nineteen percent responded negatively or were uncertain of their feelings at that time. On the BSRI, 12% were classified as Masculine, 38% as Feminine, 37% as Androgynous, 13% as Undifferentiated. Comparison of the Masculine, Feminine, and Androgynous groups (the Undifferentiated group was excluded from analysis) showed that the proportion of Feminine women indicating a desire to have children was significantly higher than the proportion of Masculine women. The proportion of Androgynous women indicating a desire to have children was significantly higher than the proportion of Masculine expressing that same desire. No difference was found between the proportion of Feminine women indicating a desire to bear children and the proportion of Masculine women indicating that desire.

The high percentage of women desiring children and
the percentages of women in each of the four BSRI classifications was discussed. Explanations were posed for the lack of significant difference between the Feminine and Androgynous groups. Directions for future research were suggested.
SEX ROLE ORIENTATION AND ITS EFFECT ON A WOMAN'S DECISION TO PARENT

While there are numerous studies in the literature which look at variables influencing a woman's decision of how many children to bring into the world, there are very few that focus on the question of whether or not to have children. We know very little about those women who elect to remain childless (Pohlman, 1969; Bernard, 1974; Poston, 1976; Haskell, 1977; Russo, 1979). It cannot be assumed that the literature concerning the number of desired children can be generalized downward from few to none. As Pohlman (1970) states "the psychological difference between zero and one child is much greater than between one and two children" (p. 2).

The point has been made that the lack of research in the area of voluntary childlessness may be due to the reluctance of some researchers to accept the possibility that some people will decide voluntarily to be childless (Poston, 1976). Yet, American society's view of parenthood and nonparenthood is changing. The normative view of parenthood is being re-evaluated (Campbell, 1975; Goodbody, 1977). The feminist movement, the increasing number of women who hold jobs, concern for alternative life styles, and greater awareness of population problems
indicate the increasing appeal of permanent childlessness (Mattissich, 1979).

Further research is needed to begin to understand the psychological aspects of the decision not to be a mother. In this study, the possibility that the decision not to parent is related to a woman's definition of her sex role as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory will be investigated.

In the literature review which follows, the changes in the number of women choosing to remain childless, society's effect on the decision maker, characteristics of childless women, and the decision making process will be examined. The second section will cover psychological androgyny, its effects on behavior, and the Bem Sex Role Inventory. In the third section, the influence of a woman's definition of her sex role on the decision to parent is discussed.

To Parent or Not to Parent

Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980) indicated that childlessness had risen sharply among women under age 35. The proportion of childless women ages 20 to 24 increased from 24% in 1960 to 41% in 1979 for women who were or had ever been married. For women ages 25 to 29 years, the percentage who were childless increased from 13 to 26 percent. This U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980) report noted that:
Although it is not certain at this point in time, it is likely that these large proportions of young married women who are childless result from a decision not merely to delay motherhood, but to remain childless forever (p. 3).

The above is in keeping with the finding that the group of women who reach age thirty without having children will probably remain childless (Poston, 1976).

The numbers of women asserting that they intended to be childless were also rising. For wives ages 18 to 24, 1.3% said they did not want any children in 1957 (Bernard, 1974; Freshnec & Cutright, 1978). In 1971, 3.9% said they did not want children. This 3.9% was an increase of 2.6% (Bernard, 1974). In 1975, 4.4% of the married women in this age group asserted that they did not want any children (Freshnec & Cutright, 1978).

This rise in the number desiring to remain childless can also be seen among college undergraduates. In the years between 1965 and 1970, the rise in the proportion of students wanting no children went from zero to 6% in the College of the Pacific and from 10 to 18% in other colleges (Bernard, 1974). Haskell (1977) sampled college undergraduates and found that 9.6% of the men did not want any children while 17.1% of the women felt that way. These numbers showed an increase over both the 1967 and 1974 surveys (Haskell, 1977).
Those women who consider and/or choose to remain childless did so in the face of negative social sanctions. There is a great deal of cultural pressure on girls and young women to consider motherhood as necessary for personal fulfillment and as necessary to attain adult status (Bendek & Anthony, 1970). Russo (1976) discussed what she calls the "motherhood mandate." She noted that the processes mandating motherhood were based on biology and lack of fertility control. With advances in birth control technology, the inevitability of giving birth has been eliminated. However, social and cultural forces are still strongly in effect.

Veevers (1975) stated:

The dominant cultural definitions of parenthood indicate that wanting and having children are natural and normal behaviors, which constitute religious and civic moral responsibilities and which reflect sexual competence (p. 473).

He noted that the childless are a deviant category: statistically, socially, ethically, and perhaps, psychologically.

Little girls are raised to view themselves as women-to-be. The chief attribute of this role is motherhood (Kaltreid, 1977).

Bendek and Anthony (1970) note that American culture presses many women into motherhood who are not very maternal and perhaps should not be mothers. Kaltreid
(1977) also noted that there exists a distinct group of women for whom childbearing is not a natural choice.

The impact of social pressure upon women cannot be underestimated. In surveying undergraduates and their parents concerning motives for parenthood, Wheeler and Oles (1979) found that many of the respondents listed that the most important reason to have children was to fulfill society's expectations. Many women are pressed into motherhood because they cannot cope with pressure to reproduce (Veevers, 1974).

Society views people who desire to remain childless as deviant. The voluntarily childless are seen as immoral and irresponsible. They are viewed as immature, emotionally unstable, selfish, and involved in an unstable, unfulfilling marriage (Rabin, 1965; Veevers, 1974; Goodbody, 1977). In an experiment done by Jamison (1979), a picture of a woman was shown to college students. Two descriptions were used. The only difference between them was that in one she was described as having been sterilized. Students described the sterilized woman as less sensitive, less typically American, less happy, less well adjusted, less likely to get along with her parents, and less likely to be happy at age 65.

When Veevers (1973a) interviewed 52 voluntarily childless wives, he found that they felt that they had been stigmatized. They believed that they were seen as
abnormal, selfish, immoral, and irresponsible. They were unaware of the number of people who share their belief and felt alone in their decision.

In 1974, Bernard pointed out that in looking at the existing literature one notes that no one explains that women who choose not to be mothers must be strong and autonomous to be able to resist the pressures to mother. Pohlman (1970) had also hypothesized that a woman desiring not to have children would have to be strongly individualistic to withstand the pressure to parent.

The few studies investigating the characteristics of voluntarily childless women seem to support the hypotheses of Bernard (1974) and Pohlman (1970). Lott (cited in Bernard, 1974) found that women who do not want children tend to be both strong and flexible. Kaltreid (1977) noted that those women who choose to remain childless may have an early self-identity as the achieving daughter rather than as the little mother. The voluntarily childless women Goodbody (1977) interviewed tended to have a positive self-image and a high degree of self-esteem. They viewed being childless as growth promoting. Their career played a vital role in their lives and they valued independence, spontaneity, mobility, and individuality. Russo (1979) also found that women who chose childlessness value autonomy and achievement.
Lott (1973) noted that a significant number of spokeswomen for women's liberation view children as a nuisance and a major barrier in the path of gaining fulfillment outside the home. The above is significant in light of the fact that the bearing and raising of children has lost its high position in the hierarchy of accomplishments for women (Movius, 1976).

Though there are numerous factors affecting a woman's decision of whether or not to bear children (Swigar & Lidz, 1978), career commitment seems to be the major one. For a woman committed to her career, children are a detriment. They decrease the amount of time and energy that can be channeled into work (Juhasz, 1980). They may keep her from being able to seriously commit to a career (Lott, 1973). Many of the expectations women have about managing both career and children are unrealistic. It is not always possible to balance career and family without neglecting one or both (Lott, 1973; Movius, 1976).

The path to childlessness is not the same for all women. In an exploratory study, Veevers (1973a) found that there are two distinct paths to childlessness. The first group of women had made a definite commitment (some before marriage) not to have children. Houseknecht (1979) later labeled this group the "early articulators." These women made up one third of the sample of childless women. The more common way to remain childless was
through a series of postponements. Veevers (1973a) delineated the stages of postponement. The first is a postponement for a definite period of time. This stage gradually changes to a more vaguely defined duration. The third stage involves an open acknowledgement of the possibility that they may never have a child. The final stage involves a definite decision, that is sometimes simply a recognition of the fact that they had made the decision to remain childless. Houseknecht (1979) labeled this group the "postponers."

The decision not to have children can occur at various places in a woman's life cycle (Houseknecht, 1979). Veevers (1973b) notes that generally the negative decisions concerning the value of children were made during early adolescence for both "early articulators" and "postponers." Baruch (1976) found that both fifth and tenth grade girls had begun to plan their intended family size and that these were in keeping with their career aspirations. Philliber (1980) found that by the time a woman is at risk of pregnancy, she has ideas about the value of children and appropriate family size. Waite and Stolzenberg (1976) note that childbearing and labor force plans seem to be formed by women before marriage.

Androgyny

The theory of psychological androgyny emerged in the late 1960's and the early 1970's (Block, 1973; Constantinople, 1973; Bem, 1974). The theory proposes
that masculinity and femininity are two independent dimensions rather than opposite poles on one continuum. This theory allows an individual to possess masculine traits, feminine traits, or a combination of both masculine and feminine traits. Individuals also differ in regard to the amount of each trait that they possess. An individual who possesses a high degree of both masculine and feminine traits is said to be psychologically androgynous. These people, according to Bem (1974), are able to exhibit both masculine and feminine behaviors. Which ones are exhibited depend upon what is appropriate in the situation in which the individual is involved.

Those individuals who endorse the personality traits of one sex more than the other sex are described as sex-typed. If an individual of one sex endorses traits of the other sex more than of his/her own sex, this individual is referred to as sex-reversed. Both of these groups of individuals restrict their behavior in keeping with cultural definitions of sex-appropriate behavior (Bem, 1974).

Bem (1974) developed and validated the first scale that treats masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions. The construction of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was based on two theoretical assumptions (Bem, 1974). The first is that the culture has grouped a heterogeneous collection of attributes into two mutually
exclusive categories. Each of these categories is considered more characteristic of and more desirable for one or the other of the two sexes. "These cultural expectations and prescriptions are well known by virtually all members of the culture" (p. 1048). The second assumption is that individuals differ from one another in the extent to which they evaluate their own personality and behavior against these standards of femininity and masculinity (Bem, 1979).

The BSRI contains 60 personality characteristics. These are equally divided into three scales: masculine, feminine, and neutral. Individuals taking the test are asked to use a seven point rating scale to indicate how well each of the 60 traits describes them. The scale ranges from one ("never or almost never true") to seven ("always or almost always true"). The items that comprise the masculine and feminine scales were selected on the basis of ratings by male and female judges as to which traits they considered to be more desirable for one sex than the other. They were not based on differential endorsement by individuals of each sex as other inventories have been, which is in keeping with the theory underlying the construction of the BSRI which defines the sex-typed person as one who is very much in touch with cultural definitions of sex-appropriate behaviors and uses these standards to judge his/her behavior. Ratings by four independent groups of judges yielded these cultural
definitions. For this reason, these definitions are believed to be stable across groups of people (Bem, 1979). As is true of most sex role inventories, only positive socially valued characteristics are included (Kelly & Worell, 1977).

Originally, Bem (1974) used a Student's t ratio of the difference between an individual's mean scores on the feminine and masculine scales. That scoring system yielded three classifications. A person was said to have a feminine sex role orientation if his/her femininity score was significantly higher than his/her masculinity score. If the individual's masculinity score was significantly higher than the femininity score, that person was said to have a masculine sex role orientation. When an individual's two scores were approximately equal, that person was classified Androgynous. Persons classified Androgynous were those who endorsed a high number of both masculine and feminine traits and those that endorsed an equal but low number of both sets of traits.

Because of this combination of high scores on both scales and low scores on both, this subtractive method of scoring had been criticized (Kelly & Worell, 1977). It was noted that the absolute numbers of traits endorsed were not taken into account. Since the Androgynous individual should be able to be more responsive to situations due to a greater flexibility in choosing
behaviors, it seemed that a person who's self-definition restricted both masculinity and femininity could not be classified as Androgynous.

Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975) presented evidence that persons scoring high on both masculinity and femininity also scored high on a measure of self-esteem. Individuals who scored low on both scales also scored low on a measure of self-esteem. The authors proposed that these were two distinct groups and proposed that persons scoring low on masculinity and femininity be designated as Undifferentiated.

Bem (1977) tested the question of whether androgyny is simply a balance of masculinity and femininity or whether high degree of both is required. She found that high masculine/high feminine scorers did not differ significantly on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, the Internal-External Locus of Control Scale, or the Mach IV Scale. She found that they did not differ from each other in her previous study of independence and conformity (1975). She did find that low/low scorers had lower self-esteem scores that did high/high scorers, and that low/low scorers were less nurturant. Based on these findings, Bem (1977) endorsed the distinction between high/high scorers and low/low scorers. Her new scoring system includes the category of Undifferentiated for low/low scorers.
Bern's (1974) psychometric analysis of the BSRI has shown that the masculinity and femininity scales are independent. Independence was also shown by Gaudreau (1977). Bern (1974) also demonstrated that the scale is reliable over a four week period, internally consistent, and uncorrelated with the tendency to describe oneself in socially desirable terms.

Penhazur and Tetenbaum (1979) criticize the BSRI because they feel that Bern has made no clear statements about the aspect or aspects of stereotypes in which she is interested with the exception of dealing only with positive traits. They point out that instead of defining domains of masculinity and femininity and constructing measures for these, Bern chose a strictly empirical approach. This approach does not contribute to the establishment of construct validity. They state that the procedure for selecting traits may have resulted in the inclusion of traits that are less undesirable for one of the sexes than for the other rather than two sets of desirable traits. The authors had 1,464 undergraduates rate the 60 items of the BSRI as to desirability for a man and for a woman. Results of this study showed that overall the traits designated as feminine were less desirable than the masculine ones even for women. Results also indicated that 16 of the neutral items were more desirable for a man than for a woman. They conclude that there is no evidence that the traits on the BSRI
comprise three subsets of masculine, feminine, and neutral traits. They also point out that Bem does not supply the mean ratings for each of the traits. Therefore, it is not possible to be certain if the difference in self-description between males and females is due to self-description on the traits of "masculine" and "feminine." Their study indicates that these two terms account for half of the mean difference between groups.

Locksley and Colten (1979) contend that the attributing of adjectives differently to men or women does not necessarily indicate beliefs about covariates of sex. These adjectives may describe only family and work roles. They point out that research has shown that people ascribe characteristics to people in terms of the roles of the individual. If this is the case, then the content of general sex stereotypes may be nothing more than personality characteristics associated with ideal representatives of adult, sex segregated roles. They point out that sex is a structural feature of many situations in life. These situations are characterized by behavior norms and cost and reward contingencies that differ according to sex. They feel that androgyny theorists do not recognize this fact.

In reply to these criticisms, Bem (1970) first states that the criticism of Pedhazur and Tetenbaum (1979) rests on a misunderstanding of the purpose of the BSRI and the theory underlying it. She points out the
assumptions underlying the theory of androgyny. The first is that the culture has clustered a heterogeneous collection of traits into two groups which are differentially desirable for the two sexes. The second is that individuals differ in the extent to which they utilize these standards of masculinity and femininity. The sex-typed individual utilizes these to a great extent while the androgynous person is less likely to regulate behavior in accordance with them. The BSRI is designed to assess the extent to which the culture's definitions of desirable attributes are reflected in an individual's self-description. She defends the manner in which the traits were selected and points to evidence that the BSRI is indeed tapping widely known cultural definitions as is stipulated by the theory.

Bem (1979) notes the replication of the study done to choose the 60 traits. She points out that 37 of the 40 masculine and feminine items were cross validated. The results for the exceptions were in the predicted direction but reached significance only for female judges. While Bem (1979) admits that the terms "masculine" and "feminine" may be responsible for a large part of the sex differences on the BSRI, she points out that the instrument was designed to investigate within sex differences not between sex differences.

In response to Locksley and Colten's (1979) criticism that it is not possible for an individual to be
completely free from the norms and cost and reward contingencies that are inherent in situations dependent upon an individual's sex, Bem (1979) points out that she agrees with this position. However, she notes that individuals differ in the extent to which gender makes up their cognitive schema for processing information. Individuals of different sex roles differ in this dimension.

Kelly and Morell (1977) point out that the various measures of androgyyny may not be measuring the same thing. They discuss the construction of the BSRI and the Personality Attributes Questionnaire developed by Spence and Helmreich to illustrate their contention. They note that the BSRI has received the most experimental attention and validation closely followed by the Personality Attributes Questionnaire.

In a later study, Kelly, Furman, and Young (1978) address the question of scale (masculine and feminine) comparability across instruments. As in-depth comparison of the scales of the Personality Attributes Questionnaire, the BSRI, and the PRF Andro Scale showed that only 30% of the subjects were placed in the same category by all three instruments. They conclude that although there are relatively high correlations between the three masculine scales and slightly lower between the feminine scales, the median split technique used for classification yields
much different results, an indication that the categories are not empirically sound.

Downing (1979) studied the differences in classification using the t ratio scoring system and the median split technique. She states that the median split technique produces fewer significant results in the predicted direction than the t ratio. She also points to a study done by Murray (cited in Downing, 1979) that found stronger results in the predicted direction using the median split technique. Because of the discrepancy in classifications due to the two scoring systems across experimenters, she suggests a hybrid scoring system.

**Differences Between Sex-Typed and Androgynous Individuals**

By definition, the sex-typed individual is very aware of the culture's definitions of sex appropriate behavior and is motivated to keep his/her behavior consistent with these definitions. These individuals select behaviors and attributes that enhance their desired image and avoid those that are not in keeping with that image (Bem, 1979).

Bem (1975) demonstrated that females who were classified as Feminine on the BSRI (high feminine/low masculine) were less able to act independently when under pressure to conform. When given an opportunity to interact with a kitten, these women displayed low levels of nurturance. In an experiment designed to give the Feminine female a chance to exhibit nurturance in an
interpersonal situation (Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976), these women did exhibit the hypothesized nurturance. The Feminine female also demonstrated a reluctance to perform masculine activities even when performance of these tasks paid more money than feminine or neutral tasks (Bem & Lenney, 1976). When they were required to perform a cross sex task, they felt high levels of discomfort upon completion of the task. If the task was performed in the presence of a male experimenter, they reported that they felt less feminine.

Those females who were sex-reversed (high masculine/low feminine) were able to display independence in the face of pressure to conform but displayed low levels of nurturance with the kitten (Bem, 1975). Masculine females also displayed low levels of nurturance in the interpersonal situation (Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976). When given a choice of performing a feminine task or a masculine task that paid more money, they demonstrated a willingness to perform both types of tasks and did not report discomfort or lack of femininity after completing a cross sex task (Bem & Lenny, 1976).

It was only the Androgynous females who did not display any behavioral deficits. They were able to both act independently under pressure to conform and to be nurturant to a kitten (Bem, 1975). They also displayed nurturance in an interpersonal situation (Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976). When offered a variety of masculine,
feminine, or neutral tasks to perform, they did not display a reluctance to choose cross sex tasks. They were much less likely to report discomfort or feelings of loss of femininity after performing masculine tasks (Bem & Lenny, 1976). These experiments demonstrated that indeed the Androgynous individual seemed to have no need to limit her behavior to those defined as sex appropriate.

Gilbert (1981) noted that Androgynous subjects had better mental health and were better adjusted than Feminine individuals and sometimes better than Masculine ones. Masculine and Androgynous persons tended to be more independent in judgment than Feminine and Undifferentiated individuals. Androgynous people are more dominant with male and/or female peers than Feminine or Undifferentiated (Gilbert, 1981).

Bem (1977) found that Androgynous and Masculine subjects scored higher on a measure of self-esteem than did either Feminine or Undifferentiated subjects.

Abrahams, Feldman, and Nash (cited in Spence & Helmreich, 1980) found that for young women, classification as Masculine on the BSRI was negatively correlated with choosing conventional feminine roles. Feminine classification, however, was positively correlated with choosing conventional roles.

Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, and Rosenkrantz (1972) have demonstrated that there is a
"predictable and systematic relationship between role attitude (specifically, self concept in a sex role content) and concrete sex role behaviors" (p. 73).

Storms (1979), who suggested that the BSRI may measure sex role identity rather than sex role attributes, found that sex role identity, attributes, and stereotypes formed a consistent pattern which was meaningful and coherent. He saw sex role identity as possibly the most powerful and central variable that influenced the development of sex role attributes, in filtering the impact that sex role stereotypes have on the individual and in moderating the influence of situational variables on sex role behavior.

Ginn (1975) hypothesized that an Androgynous person would be more well adjusted and self actualized than either a Masculine or Feminine person. He administered the BSRI and the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) to 75 female undergraduates. He divided them into Masculine, Feminine, and Androgynous groups according to the BSRI scores and performed an analysis of variance for each of the POI scales. His results indicated that Androgynous subjects did not score differently than the other two groups on the measure of self-actualization. The only significant difference between the Androgynous females and the other two groups was their greater ability to accept aggression in themselves and others. Based on this finding, he concluded that his study did
not support the validity of the BSRI as a measure of psychological androgyny (Ginn, 1975).

The Influence of Sex Roles on the Decision to Parent

In an overview of sex roles and fertility, Russo (1979) pointed out that

The implications of the centrality of motherhood to a woman's identity are not sufficiently appreciated by researchers in the field of psychology of women. Motherhood is on a qualitatively different plane than other roles prescribed for women in our society (p. 7).

It was acceptable for a woman to acquire an education and to have a career but only so long as she fulfilled motherhood responsibilities. She noted that feminists were more likely than other women to state that they did not want children and called for researchers to look at personality characteristics of voluntarily childless women (Russo, 1979).

Fox (1977) reasoned that it was logical for a woman's sex role attitude to affect fertility decisions if one realized that the traditional sex role prescription for women was the wife and mother role. If a woman was traditional in her sex role attitude, that attitude would foster higher fertility desires and expectations.

In 1975, Scanzoni presented evidence to show that among never married university students, sex role norms were better indicators of lowered birth intentions than
religion, year in school, or status background. He hypothesized that traditional women would perceive children as rewarding while less traditional women would recognize alternative rewards (career, self actualization). Untraditional views reduced the number of children a woman might bear. He defined this finding as the Feminist-Fertility relationship.

Thornton and Camburn (1979) hypothesized that sex role attitudes and an individual's definition of an acceptable role for women were related to fertility. Results of their study indicated a modest association between the dimensions of sex role attitudes and childbearing. Broverman et al. (1972) cited Davis and Blake (cited in Broverman et al. 1972) as proposing that a critical psychological factor affecting the number of children that a woman had was her acceptance or rejection of the feminine social role in society.

Several studies have shown that women who endorsed traditional sex roles desired more children than those who endorsed less traditional roles. McLaughlin (cited in Fox, 1977) found that nontraditional attitudes toward the female role, career plans, and a commitment to change the status discrepancy between men and women all contributed positively to lower expected family size in high school girls.

Adler (1981) stated that motivation for pregnancy was closely connected to sex role fulfillment. For the woman
with traditional views of the role of women, having a child was a way to establish oneself as an adult. For those with less traditional views, work and career had become a realistic alternative to mothering. This alternative had contributed to lower fertility in some women.

Broverman et al. (1972) found that single women with relatively high "male stereotyped" or "competency" self-concept scores wanted significantly fewer children than women who scored lower on that trait. Supporting Broverman et al.'s (1972) findings, Thompson (1974) found that women desiring two or fewer children usually valued individual goals and economic gains.

The number of children actually borne by a woman had also been demonstrated to be affected by the acceptance or rejection of traditional sex roles. Clarkson, Vogel, Broverman, Broverman, and Rosenkrantz (1970) found that women who hold relatively masculine self-concepts had smaller completed families than those who held feminine self-concepts.

Houseknecht (1979) in her study of childless women found that regardless of the path that they took to childlessness (early articulation or postponements) these women had in common a background that was conducive to the learning of nontraditional sex roles and a subsequent rejection of the traditional role.
Summary. While numerous researchers had investigated the variables that influence a woman to have a large or small number of children, few studies had been focused on the psychological characteristics of those women who intended to remain childless. Yet, the number of these women was increasing significantly.

The traditional role prescription for women was to bear children and cultural pressure was strong to follow that prescription. Some women had children because they could not resist the pressure to do so. In order to resist this pressure, a woman would have to be strong, able to act independently, and have a strong sense of self-esteem.

Research suggested that both Androgynous and Masculine women were able to act independently under pressure and that both groups had a high level of self-esteem. Masculine women, however, exhibited low levels of nurturance in interpersonal situations. Feminine women displayed interpersonal nurturance but were unable to act independently under pressure to conform.

Androgynous individuals did not limit their behavior to that which the culture defined as sex appropriate. Sex typed individuals were acutely aware of what the culture deemed appropriate and were motivated to keep their behavior consistent with the norm. They selected behaviors that enhanced their desired sex role image and avoided those that were not in keeping with that image.
The relationship between traditional and non-traditional sex role self-definition and number of children desired had been established. There was a need, however, for a study that investigated whether or not the decision to parent or not to parent also varied with sex role definition. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate that question. It was hypothesized that the decision of whether or not to have children would be related to an individual's sex role orientation. The individual's sex role orientation was to be assessed via the Bem Sex Role Inventory. It was further hypothesized that women with a Masculine sex role orientation would be more likely to respond negatively to the question of having children than women with a Feminine or Androgynous orientation. Women with a Feminine sex role orientation were hypothesized to be less likely than women with an Androgynous orientation to respond negatively to the question of whether or not to parent.
METHOD

Subjects. Eight hundred female students enrolled at a private, four year college in New Jersey were given the opportunity to participate in the study. Subjects were chosen randomly by computer from the registrar's listing of all students enrolled. The only specifications were that students chosen be female and undergraduate. Respondents were screened by the experimenter to verify that they were between the ages of 17 and 24 and that they did not have any children. All the women were sent (through intercampus mail) a one page letter introducing the experimenter, explaining the nature of the project, and two pages containing instructions, questions, and the BSRI. Of the 800, 296 responded. Thirteen of the 296 were not included due to age and/or the fact that they already had one or more children. Opportunity was given for all subjects to receive feedback after the data had been analyzed.

Instrumentation. Data collection was done via a three page survey (see Appendix A, B, C). Page one (see Appendix A) was the letter of introduction in which the experimenter introduced herself, the purpose of the survey, and a brief description of the study. Subjects were told that they would be asked a question about their
desire to have or not to have children and would be asked to rate themselves on a series of personality characteristics. Subjects were requested to put their name on the top of each page. The confidentiality of their responses was explained, and they were assured that they could respond anonymously if they chose to but that it would not be possible to get personal results if they did choose that option. A third option of using their social security number which would provide some anonymity while allowing for feedback was also offered.

Subjects were asked to complete the survey within three to four days, fold it so that the experimenter's name and campus return address were showing and drop it into any campus mail box.

Page two (see Appendix B) provided spaces for the requested information (name, age, year in school). Following were the instructions "Please put an 'X' next to the statement which best describes your current feelings on the subject of having children" and these four statements:

1. I am sure or fairly sure that I do not want to have any children.
2. I am sure or fairly sure that I do want to have a child (or children).
3. I am uncertain as to whether or not I want to have a child (or children).
4. I already have one or more children.
The directions for the BSRI followed the four statements. The directions requested the student to rate each personality characteristic on the following page in the way that best described herself. She was asked to use a scale from one (Never or Almost Never True) to seven (Always or Almost Always True) to show how true each characteristic was of her. Following the directions was an example using the characteristic "sly."

The BSRI contains both a masculinity scale and femininity scale, each of which consists of 20 personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex-typed social desirability, and 20 neutral characteristics which are filler items (Bem, 1974). In order to classify subjects as Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, or Undifferentiated, the scoring system developed by Spence et al. (1975) and adopted by Bem (1977) was utilized. The median masculinity score of 4.89 and the median femininity score of 4.76 obtained by college students (Bem, 1977) was used to determine high and low scores for each of the scales.

The treatment of masculinity and femininity as two orthogonal concepts was validated empirically, $r = .03$ (Bem, 1974). The test-retest reliability over a four week period was .93 and the alpha reliability was .86. The BSRI was uncorrelated with the tendency to describe oneself in a socially desirable manner ($r = -.06$).
Page three (see Appendix C) provided space for the requested demographic information. Following were the words "Describe Yourself" and the one to seven rating scale showing the verbal equivalent of each of the numbers. Below the scale were the 20 masculine, 20 feminine, and 20 neutral personality characteristics comprising the BSRI. To the right of each characteristic was a box in which the student placed her rating for that characteristic.

Procedure. Surveys were labeled with the student's name and campus address (commuters also have on-campus mail boxes). All 800 surveys were sent on the same day through the inter-campus mail system. Reminder notices asking that the students please complete and return their surveys were sent to all of the subjects seven days later.

The BSRIIs were scored and each subject was classified as either Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, or Undifferentiated. Subjects were also classified with regard to their feelings about whether or not to become a parent (yes, no, or undecided). Subjects were placed in categories with respect to both BSRI and feelings on the question of parenting. To determine if BSRI classification had an effect on the decision of whether or not to become a parent, a chi square test
was used. If a relationship was found between BSRI and
decision to parent, it was planned that paired
comparisons would be used to see if the subjects in any
one sex role classification (with the exception of
Undifferentiated) were more likely than the other two
classifications to say that they did not want to have
children or were undecided.
RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether the decision to have or not to have children was related to traditional or nontraditional sex role orientation as measured by the BSRI. It was hypothesized that women classified as Masculine on the BSRI would be more likely to say that they did not want to have children or were undecided than would women classified as Feminine or women classified as Androgynous. Women classified as Feminine would be less likely to state that they did not to have children or were undecided than would women classified as Androgynous. Subjects classified as Undifferentiated were excluded from analysis.

Data were analyzed using a chi square test to determine if there was an significant difference between groups, and paired comparison tests were used to compare the proportion of women desiring children in each of the BSRI classifications (excluding Undifferentiated) with the other two classifications. Due to the relatively small cell sizes in the No and Uncertain categories, these two categories were collapsed to form the category of Non-yes responses. A 2 (yes or non-yes response concerning the intention to bear children) X 3 (Masculine, Feminine, or Androgynous sex role classification) chi square was
performed on the data. The results of the survey were shown in Table 1. Eighty-one percent of the total number of respondents (including the Undifferentiated category) responded positively to the question of having children. The remaining 19% responded either no or were uncertain. Twelve percent of the respondents were classified as Masculine, 38% as Feminine, 37% as Androgynous, and 13% as Undifferentiated.

The results of the present study showed that the decision to have or not to have children was related to traditional or nontraditional sex role orientation (as measured by the BSRI). There were significant differences among sex role classifications with regard to desire to have children, $x^2 (2) = 16.59, p<.001$. A strength of association measure, the Contingency Coefficient ($C^2$) (Linton & Gallo, 1975), was used to determine how strong the relationship was between the decision to parent or not to parent and sex role orientation. The Contingency Coefficient yields an estimate of what proportion of the variance in the decision to parent or not to parent was attributable to sex role orientation. The theoretical limits of $C^2$ are from zero to one. The practical upper limit is, however, less than one. In the present study, a $C^2$ of .063 indicated that the association between sex role classification and desire to have children is low.
Table 1

Numbers and Percentages of Subjects in the Yes and Non-yes Categories with Regard to Desire to Have Children Classified as Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, and Undifferentiated on the Bem Sex Role Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Androgynous</th>
<th>Undifferentiated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=20</td>
<td>N=96</td>
<td>N=86</td>
<td>N=27</td>
<td>N=229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Yes</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=14</td>
<td>N=11</td>
<td>N=20</td>
<td>N=9</td>
<td>N=54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34 (12%)</td>
<td>107 (38%)</td>
<td>106 (37%)</td>
<td>36 (13%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To describe the differences between groups, the multiple comparison technique Method of Adjusted Significance Levels or Ryan's Procedure (Ryan, 1960) was used. Ryan's Procedure is based upon testing in layers. The highest and lowest sample values are compared first. If they are found to be significantly different, testing proceeds to the next largest difference between sample values. The testing continues until a non-significant difference is found. All pairs remaining in that subgroup are deemed as being not significantly different. The same process is used on remaining subgroups. These tests are done as they would be for a single pair of samples, but the nominal level of significance for the test depends on the number of samples in the group that are being compared. Ryan's Procedure utilizes an experimentwise error rate which yields the probability that one or more of the significantly different findings will be erroneous. The results of analysis in the present study indicated that there was a significant difference between women classified as Masculine and those classified as Feminine \( \chi^2 (2) = 14.83 \). Paired comparison chi squares for Masculine, Feminine, and Androgynous groups are shown in Table 2. As was hypothesized, the proportion of Feminine women indicating a desire to have children was significantly higher than the proportion of Masculine women. Also supported by the analysis was the
Table 2
Paired Comparison Chi Squares for
Masculine, Feminine, and Androgynous Classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifications</th>
<th>Obtained $x^2$ Value</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Tabled $x^2$ Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminine and Masculine</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.76*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androgynous and Masculine</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.54*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine and Androgynous</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*p<.05 that either of these differences is false)
hypothesis that women classified as Androgynous would be more likely to respond positively to the question of having children than women classified as Masculine ($x^2 (1) = 5.81$). The proportion of Androgynous women indicating a desire to have children was significantly higher than the proportion of Masculine women. However, the hypothesis that Feminine women would be less likely than Androgynous women to respond negatively to the question of children was not supported. The analysis indicated that there was no difference between the proportion of Feminine women indicating a desire to have children and the proportion of Androgynous women indicating a desire to have children.
Discussion

The results of the present study supported the theory that the decision to have or not to have children is influenced by sex role orientation. Two of the specific hypotheses were supported. One was not. Masculine women are more likely than Feminine women to respond negatively to the question of having children. They are also more likely than Androgynous women to respond negatively. Contrary to what was hypothesized, women classified as Feminine were no less likely to respond negatively to the question of having children than were women classified as Androgynous.

These results seem to support Bem's (1975) findings that Masculine women are able to display high levels of independence in the face of pressure to conform. This independence along with low levels of nurturance (Bem, Martyna, and Watson, 1976) may account for the relatively high proportion of Masculine women responding negatively to the question of desire to have children. Androgynous women are also able to display high levels of independence but tend to display higher levels of nurturance than Masculine women (Bem, 1975). The present study shows that Feminine women are also more likely to say that they do desire children than are Masculine women.
The desire for children in the Feminine group may reflect the influence of higher levels of nurturance. Feminine women with their relative inability to act independently in the face of pressure to conform (Bem, 1975) and their high levels of nurturance (Bem, Martyna, and Watson, 1976) were expected to be least likely of all three groups to respond negatively to the question of parenting. That expectation held true in comparison with Masculine women. However, Feminine women were no less likely to respond negatively than Androgynous women. In looking for possible explanations for the Androgynous women's responses, it must be noted that while some classifications were more likely than others to respond negatively to the question of children, the group as a whole was very positive about the issue of parenting. Eighty-one percent of the subjects including the Undifferentiated category said "yes" while only 19% responded negatively or were uncertain about having children. It seems that despite other changes in attitudes and behaviors, the "motherhood mandate" (Russo, 1976) is still strongly in effect and childlessness may still be seen as a deviant category. As Russo (1979) point out, motherhood may be on a qualitatively different plane than other roles prescribed for women in our society.

With the motherhood mandate still in effect and the decline in esteem for the role of mother and homemaker, a
new role has emerged for women: Superwoman. She is the woman who successfully juggles both career and family. Her success stories appear in popular magazines and her image is used to sell various products from cigarettes to life insurance. It is the aspiration to the Superwoman role which may account for the Androgynous women being no more likely than the Feminine women to say that they do not believe that they would like to have children. While the Feminine women may be unable or unwilling to resist cultural pressure to parent rather than pursue a career, the Androgynous women with their high level of self-esteem may see no reason why they cannot have both. Future researchers may want to look into the motivations and future plans of these two groups.

The cultural background of the subjects in the present study may have affected the results. All subjects attended an east coast private school which has earned a good reputation for its offerings in the areas of Business and Finance. While the population of the east coast area may be more liberal than some southern states, it is likely to be more conservative than either the New York area or the west coast. More of the students attending Rider College are from middle to upper middle class backgrounds, a fact which may have contributed to their having conservative or traditional viewpoints. With these characteristics of the sample in mind, it is interesting to look at the proportions of subjects in
each of the sex role classifications. Bem (1974) found that subjects were evenly distributed across sex role classifications. Fisher (1979) found that a large portion of her subjects were classified as either Feminine or Androgynous. She attributed the unequal proportions to the nature of her population (most of the subjects were raised in small towns and rural areas of Kentucky and all attended a mid southern university). The present study using a very different population yielded similarly skewed proportions: 12% Masculine, 38% Feminine, 37% Androgynous, 13% Undifferentiated. The present population was more evenly divided, however, between Masculine and Undifferentiated than was Fisher's (1979). Future researchers may want to try to replicate Bem's (1974) studies both in California where they were conducted and in other areas of the country not studied.

Those women classified as Undifferentiated were excluded from statistical analysis in the present study due to the small amount of information available about the group and the nature of that information. It is interesting to note that the Undifferentiated group comprised 13% of the total sample, just 1% lower than the Masculine category. Of the 13%, 75% indicated that they were fairly sure that they wanted to have children. With respect to the desire to have children, the Undifferentiated group is similar to the
women classified in other categories.

While the No and Uncertain categories were collapsed due to relatively small cell sizes, the combining of the categories into a non-yes group is very much in keeping with findings in the literature. As discussed earlier in the present paper, Veevers (1973a) found that a full 2/3 of the women studied remained childless through a series of postponements. They never actively decided not to have a child, rather they recognized at some point that they had indeed remained childless. It is impossible to know exactly what percentage of this uncertain group will remain childless and, therefore, what percentage of the non-yes group in the present study will not bear children. More definitive answers to the questions raised by the present study could be realized by sampling women who are past childbearing age. While it has been shown that by college age women have developed very clear feelings about the question of parenting (Veevers, 1973a; Burach 1976; Houseknecht, 1979), it is not possible to predict how many will be influenced by factors such as marriage (not controlled for in the present study) to change their minds.

Because the present study showed that only 6.3% of the variance in the desire to have children as measured in the present study is attributable to sex role classification, future researchers may want to look at other
factors such as marital status, age, college, major and perceived success in college.
Appendix A

Dear Coed:

My name is Agnes Van Buren and I graduated from Rider in 1979. I am currently working to complete my Master's degree at Western Kentucky University. As you may know, the final step in completing a Master's degree at many schools is a thesis. My thesis is the reason that I am contacting you now. I need your help to complete it.

I am interested in studying the personality characteristics of women in connection with decision of whether or not to have children. To do this, a number of Rider undergraduate women have been randomly chosen and are being asked to complete a short survey. Obviously, you are one of these women. Your responses will play a vital part in the completion of this study.

On the following sheets, you will find a series of personality characteristics upon which I would like you to rate yourself and a question about whether or not you want to have children.

At some point during this semester, I will be holding a meeting with all of the respondents to explain this project in more detail and to give you the results of the study. The meeting date, time, and place will be announced in the Rider News. At that time, I will also be able to give you, individually, information about your responses.

In order to do this, I have requested that you put your name on the top of each sheet. It is perfectly acceptable for you to respond anonymously, simply leave the space blank. It will not be possible, however, to get personal results. You may use your social security number if you want your results but do not wish to give your name. Your responses to these questions are completely confidential. Neither your name nor your answers will be disclosed to anyone. All results will be discussed in terms of the group's responses.
Appendix A (continued)

I realize that a student's life is a busy one and it is difficult to find a few spare minutes. If you could take 10 or 15 minutes, now, to complete this survey for me, it would be very helpful to me in completing my thesis. I will be sincerely grateful to you if you can get your responses back to me in the next three to four days. To return the forms, simply fold them so that my name and the Counseling Center address are showing, staple (or tape) shut, and drop in any campus mail slot.

Thank you so much for your time and help. Watch the Rider News for the meeting date, time, and place.

Sincerely,

Agnes Van Buren
Appendix B

Name ____________________________________________

Age ___________________________ Year in School____________________

Please put an "X" next to the statement which best describes your current feelings on the subject of having children.

_____ I am sure or fairly sure that I do not want to have any children.

_____ I am sure or fairly sure that I do want to have a child (or children).

_____ I am uncertain as to whether or not I want to have a child (or children).

_____ I already have one or more children.

On the next page you will be shown a large number of personality characteristics. I would like you to use those characteristics in order to describe yourself. That is, I would like you to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 7, how true these various characteristics are for you. Please do not leave any characteristics unmarked.

Example: sly

Mark a 1 if it is NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 2 if it is USUALLY NOT TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 3 if it is SOMETIMES BUT INFREQUENTLY TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 4 if it is OCCASIONALLY TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 5 if it is OFTEN TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 6 if it is USUALLY TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 7 if it is ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE that you are sly.

Thus, if you feel it is sometimes but infrequently true that you are "sly", never or almost never true that you are "malicious", always or almost always true that you are "irresponsible", and often true that you are "carefree", then you would rate these characteristics as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malicious</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsible</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carefree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

**DESCRIBE YOURSELF**

1 - Never or almost never true
2 - Usually not true
3 - Sometimes but infrequently true
4 - Occasionally true
5 - Often true
6 - Usually true
7 - Always or almost always true

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliant</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yielding</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Solemn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Willing to take a stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defends own beliefs</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
<td>Tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>Has leadership abilities</td>
<td>Friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>Sensitive to the needs of others</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Truthful</td>
<td>Gullible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shy</td>
<td>Willing to take risks</td>
<td>Inefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientious</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Acts as leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>Makes decisions easily</td>
<td>Childlike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatrical</td>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td>Does not use harsh language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatterable</td>
<td>Self-sufficient</td>
<td>Unsystematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Eager to soothe hurt feelings</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong personality</td>
<td>Conceived</td>
<td>Loves children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Tactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
<td>Soft spoken</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forceful</td>
<td>Likeable</td>
<td>Gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


