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## Recommended Citation

Scherrer, Angela R., "Attitudes Toward the Non-Traditional Male Role" (1990). *Honors Theses*. Paper 309.

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ATTITUDES TOWARD THE NON-TRADITIONAL MALE ROLE

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Running head: Non-traditional Male

\*Senior Honors Thesis submitted for UHON 499 for  
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McKillip, Thesis Director. Submitted: May 11, 1990

## ABSTRACT

Attitudes about the non-traditional male role, defined as participation in housework and childcare, and willingness to accept financial assistance from a woman, were investigated. Sex-role identification (determined by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory) and involvement in a serious relationship with a woman were examined as possible factors influencing attitudes about the non-traditional male role. Two hypotheses were investigated and supported: (1) Men in a serious relationship have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than men not in a serious relationship, and (2) For sex-role identification, feminine men have more positive attitudes about the non-traditional male role than masculine men, and androgynous men have more positive attitudes than either feminine or masculine men. Hours spent doing household chores per week and college class were also correlated with attitudes toward the non-traditional male role.

### Attitudes Toward The Non-traditional Male Role

Modern lifestyles have brought about changes in traditional male and female roles. Traditionally, women have been responsible for childcare and most household tasks, while men have been assigned the role of primary breadwinner within a household or family unit. Changes in society, such as increasing employment of women outside the home and more single-parent families, have led to a need for greater behavioral flexibility from men. It may now be necessary for many men to perform traditionally feminine activities. In more extreme situations, traditional roles may be completely reversed, with the woman becoming the primary breadwinner in a family, and the man taking on a househusband or "Mr. Mom" type role.

The present study was designed to explore the attitudes of college men toward the non-traditional male role, which is defined in this study as participation in household tasks and childcare, and willingness to accept financial assistance from a woman. In this study, sex-role identification as determined by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), and involvement in a serious relationship with a woman, were examined as possible

influences on men's attitudes about the non-traditional male role.

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) was designed to measure the extent to which a person separates himself, or herself, from characteristics that may be considered more appropriate for the opposite sex. Scores on the BSRI place a person into one of four classifications. Classifications are made according to the extent to which the person endorses masculine and feminine personality characteristics as self-descriptive. The classifications are *androgynous* (high on both masculinity and femininity), *masculine* (high on masculinity; low on femininity), *feminine* (high on femininity; low on masculinity), or *undifferentiated* (low on both masculinity and femininity).

Bem has suggested that a narrowly masculine self-concept might inhibit behaviors that are stereotyped as feminine, while a narrowly feminine self-concept might inhibit behaviors that are stereotyped as masculine. An androgynous self-concept might permit a person to engage freely in both "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors.

Russell (1978) determined that fathers' participation in childcare is related to sex-role classification. Russell found that androgynous fathers were significantly more involved in day-to-day care, play

and other interactions with their children than masculine fathers. When combined, androgynous and feminine fathers were more involved than masculine and undifferentiated fathers. Baruch and Barnett (1981) also observed that fathers' participation in childcare was significantly and negatively related to the fathers' perceptions of themselves as stereotypically masculine.

McHale and Huston (1984) found fathers' femininity to be positively correlated with their preferences for being involved in childcare activities. However, this finding is contradicted by the results of Baruch and Barnett (1981), which indicate that fathers' participation was not related to self-perceptions of stereotypically feminine traits.

Perhaps androgynous and feminine fathers participate more in childcare because they have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than masculine fathers. And perhaps androgynous and feminine men will have a positive attitude which extends to include participation in household tasks and willingness to accept financial assistance from a woman, as well as childcare. The present study hypothesized that feminine men would have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than masculine men, and that androgynous men would have more positive attitudes

than either feminine or masculine men.

Men who are involved in a serious relationship with a woman have probably given much more thought to male-female divisions of labor than those who are not in a serious relationship, since a division of responsibilities between a man and woman is much more salient to those men who are in a relationship, especially if they live with the woman. It was hypothesized that men who are in a serious relationship with a woman will have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than men who are not in a serious relationship, resulting from their experience with the give-and-take that occurs within such a relationship.

Two hypotheses were tested in the present study: (1) Men who are involved in a serious relationship with a woman will have more positive attitudes about the non-traditional male role than those who are not in a serious relationship with a woman. (2) Men classified as feminine on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory will have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than men classified as masculine, while androgynous men will have more positive attitudes than either feminine or masculine men.

Other variables examined include number of hours spent performing household chores per week, employment of the man outside the home, employment of the woman outside the home (if a serious relationship exists), living arrangement, experience with childcare, and college class (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student).

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

The participants for this study were 100 male college students at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The students were approached on campus in the library, the student center, and the university dormitories, and asked to fill out a questionnaire. Their participation was voluntary. There were 8 freshmen, 17 sophomores, 30 juniors, 34 seniors, and 11 graduate students. The subjects ranged in age from 18-35 years. The mean age was 23 years.

### *Instruments*

A 12-item Likert scale, *Opinions About Men's Roles* (OAMR), was developed to measure the attitudes men have



toward the non-traditional male role. The scale covered three areas: *participation in housework* (cooking and cleaning), *participation in childcare* (taking care of the physical and emotional needs of children), and *willingness to accept financial assistance from a woman* (partial dependence and full dependence / or woman as primary breadwinner). The OAMR items are illustrated in Table 1. Subjects were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement (A = strongly agree, B = agree, C = neither agree nor disagree, D = disagree, E = strongly disagree). High scores on this scale indicated a positive attitude toward the non-traditional male role. Coefficient alpha was computed to determine the reliability of the OAMR ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), designed to measure the extent to which a person divorces himself from those characteristics that might be considered more appropriate for the opposite sex, was used to measure sex-role identification. The BSRI classifies a person as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated as a function of the difference between his or her endorsement of masculine and feminin personality characteristics.

A 30-item version of the BSRI was included in the questionnaire. The inventory included a masculinity

scale, a femininity scale, and a social desirability scale, each consisting of 10 personality characteristics. Subjects were asked to indicate how well each personality characteristic describes himself, by rating it on a scale from 0 ("Never or almost never true") to 6 ("Always or almost always true"). Each person received a masculinity score (the mean self-rating for all endorsed masculine characteristics), a femininity score (the mean self-rating for all endorsed feminine characteristics), and an androgyny score (a reflection of the relative amounts of masculinity and femininity that the person includes in their self-description). Using median split scores, the respondents were placed into one of four classifications: androgyny (high masculinity - high femininity), masculine (high masculinity - low femininity), feminine (high femininity - low masculinity), or undifferentiated (low masculinity - low femininity).

Schmitt and Millard (1988) determined that the BSRI is a valid instrument for distinguishing between gender-schematic and gender-aschematic individuals. Gender-schematic individuals included those classified as either masculine or feminine, while gender-aschematic individuals are those classified as either androgynous or undifferentiated.

In order to determine the reliability of the BSRI, coefficient alpha was computed separately for the masculinity and femininity scales. Both scores were found to be highly reliable (masculinity:  $\alpha = .87$ ; femininity:  $\alpha = .86$ ).

## RESULTS

### *Involvement in serious relationship and scores on the OAMR:*

Of the 100 college men who participated in the study, 35 were in a serious relationship with a woman, while 65 were not involved in a serious relationship.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed for *Involvement in Relationship x OAMR Scores*. As predicted, a negative correlation ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .034$ ) was found between involvement in a relationship and scores on the OAMR. Men involved in a serious relationship with a woman were found to have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than men who were not in a serious relationship.

Mean scores on the OAMR were calculated for each relationship condition (Involved in relationship = 3.93; Not involved in relationship = 3.73). A high score

indicates a positive attitude toward the non-traditional male role. The mean score for men in a serious relationship was higher ( $t = 2.91, p < .01$ ) than for men who were not in a serious relationship.

*BSRI Scores and OAMR Scores:*

The median split method of classification revealed the median scores (masculinity = 4.3; femininity = 4.2) on the BSRI. A relatively equal distribution of subjects was obtained for each sex-role classification:

Androgynous (n = 27), Masculine (n = 24), Feminine (n = 24), Undifferentiated (n = 25).

The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed for *BSRI Scores x OAMR Scores*. As predicted, a positive correlation ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ) was found between scores on the Femininity scale on the BSRI and scores on the OAMR.

Mean scores on the OAMR were calculated for each BSRI classification (Androgynous = 4.0; Feminine = 3.8; Masculine = 3.5; Undifferentiated = 3.8). A high score indicates a positive attitude toward the non-traditional male role. The results are illustrated in Table 2. An analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect for the femininity scale on the BSRI,  $F(1,96) = 4.09, p < .05$ . Results of the ANOVA also revealed an interaction

for the BSRI femininity scale x OAMR scores,  $F(1,96) = 4.35$ ,  $p < .05$ .

*Household chores and OAMR Scores:*

Another variable, number of hours men spent doing household chores (cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.) per week, was found to correlate with scores on the OAMR. The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed for *Number of hours doing household chores x OAMR Scores*. A positive correlation ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .008$ ) was revealed.

*College class:*

College class (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate student) was also found to be related to scores on the OAMR. The Pearson correlation coefficient for *College Class x OAMR Scores* revealed a positive relationship ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < .000$ ) between college class and the OAMR.

*Other variables:*

No significant correlations were found between scores on the OAMR and employment of man outside the home, employment of woman outside the home (if a serious relationship exists), living arrangement, or experience with childcare.

## DISCUSSION

The data suggest that attitudes of college men toward the non-traditional male role, defined as participation in household tasks and childcare, and willingness to accept financial assistance from a woman, are related to involvement in a serious relationship with a woman, and sex-role identification.

The hypothesis that men involved in a serious relationship with a woman would have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than men who were not in a serious relationship with a woman was confirmed by the data. These findings suggest that the experience of give-and-take that occurs within a relationship, along with the salience of male-female divisions of labor within a serious relationship, may lead to a more positive attitude toward the non-traditional male role for college men involved in such a relationship.

The hypothesis that men classified as feminine on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory would have more positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role than men classified as masculine, and that androgynous men would

have more positive attitudes than either feminine or masculine men was supported. These findings seem to support Bem's suggestion (Bem, 1974) that performance of traditionally stereotyped feminine behaviors may be inhibited by a narrowly masculine self-concept, while an androgynous self-concept may permit a person to freely engage in traditionally stereotyped feminine behaviors, or at least allow them to have a more positive attitude toward the non-traditional male role.

Results indicating that attitudes toward the non-traditional male role become more positive as the number of hours men spend per week doing household chores increases, suggest that experience in performing such tasks may bring about a more positive attitude toward the non-traditional male role. However, these findings may be limited because the number of hours men spent per week doing household chores was determined by self-report. It is suggested that more objective means should be used to determine this factor in future investigations. Further study is also suggested to determine if positive attitudes toward the non-traditional male role may be the cause of, rather than the effect of, the number of hours spent doing household chores per week.

The data also indicate that attitudes toward the non-traditional male role become more positive as the

level of education among college men increases. Perhaps the increasing exposure to liberal ideas that occurs within higher education brings about more positive attitudes toward non-traditional behaviors for men. However, the level of education may be confounded with age, suggesting the need for further investigation.

Further research is needed to determine attitudes toward the non-traditional male role among older generations of men, who grew up among more traditional ideas about masculine and feminine behaviors.



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Table 1

## OAMR Items and Item-total Correlations

1. A husband and wife should take equal responsibility for making dinner for their family. (*PRO - Housework*) (Item-total correlation = .52)
2. A woman is naturally better than a man at comforting a small child that has just had a bad dream. (*CON - Childcare*) (Item-total correlation = .40)
3. A man who stays home as a househusband, while his wife works at a job to support both of them, is just as masculine as a man who is the primary breadwinner for his family. (*PRO - Financial Assistance*) (Item-total correlation = .44)
4. Cleaning the house is a woman's job. (*CON - Housework*) (Item-total correlation = .47)
5. A father should take equal responsibility for getting up to feed an infant in the middle of the night. (*PRO - Childcare*) (Item-total correlation = .29)
6. A real man does not depend on a woman to help him pay the rent. (*CON - Financial Assistance*) (Item-total correlation = .47)

7. If a wife makes dinner for her husband, the husband should wash the dishes. (*PRO - Housework*) (Item-total correlation = .23)
8. If a father and mother both work full time outside the home, and one of their children becomes sick, the mother should be the one to take off from work to stay home with the child. (*CON - Childcare*) (Item-total correlation = .44)
9. A man should not be ashamed if his girlfriend usually pays for their dates. (*PRO - Financial Assistance*) (Item-total correlation = .23)
10. It is unmanly for a man to bake cookies for his kids. (*CON - Housework*) (Item-total correlation = .46)
11. A man who plays dolls with his young daughter is secure in his masculinity. (*PRO - Child care*) (Item-total correlation = .33)
12. I would be embarrassed if my wife earned more money than I did. (*CON - Financial Assistance*) (Item-total correlation = .41)

Table 2

*Median Scores on BSRI and Mean Scores on OAMR*

BSRI Classification	Median Score	Median Score	Mean Score
	FEM BSRI	MALE BSRI	OAMR
Undifferentiated (n=25)	<4.2	<4.3	3.8
Masculine (n=24)	<4.2	> or = 4.3	3.5
Feminine (n=24)	>4.2	<4.3	3.8
Androgynous (n=27)	>4.2	> or = 4.3	4.0