

Of Men, Macho, and Marital Violence¹

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Recent evidence suggests that there may be a relationship between marital satisfaction and the sex role identities of the couple. Specifically, couples in which the husband is either feminine or androgynous appear to be happier. Conversely, couples in which the husband is classified as undifferentiated are apparently more dissatisfied. There is some evidence, as well as theoretical speculation, that abusive husbands may be low in femininity, less likely to be classified as androgynous, and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated. This investigation compared the sex role identification of abusive husbands to that of comparison samples of both discordant, and satisfied, nonviolent husbands. The results indicated that batterers were lower in masculinity, less likely to be classified as androgynous, and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated than husbands in either of the comparison groups. Lack of differentiation between the two nonviolent groups suggests the possibility that findings of previous investigations supportive of a relationship between sex role identity and discord, in general, might be artifactual. The theoretical and methodological implications of these findings are discussed.

KEY WORDS: discord; etiology; gender identity; marital violence; sex roles.

INTRODUCTION

Marital discord and dissatisfaction is so widespread as to lead some to question the viability of the concept of monogamous, marital relationships,

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and many others to attempt to unravel empirically the complexities of the dyadic relationship. Although marriage and marital therapy have received a great deal of attention, the dissolution rate remains high as does the dissatisfaction rate among many couples choosing to remain together. In the effort to identify the factors related to marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the sex-role identities of the spouses has received a great deal of recent attention (Baucom and Aiken, 1984; Antill, 1983).

The literature on the relationship between sex-role identity and marital satisfaction has been inconclusive, perhaps due, in part, to the differences in the measures used, the method of scoring, and the nature of the subjects. Most commonly, the Masculinity-Femininity scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI: Hathaway and McKinley, 1967), Baucom's (1976) unipolar Masculinity and Femininity scales, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI: Bem, 1974), and the PAQ (Spence *et al.*, 1974) are employed. Both the BSRI and the PAQ may be scored utilizing the median split method (recommended) or by straight scoring. Finally, some studies employ married couples (Baucom and Aiken, 1984), while others combine married and unmarried couples (Burger and Jacobson, 1979). Samples also differ on degree of discord, with some employing nonclinic samples, while others utilize clinic samples.

Despite these differences, some consensus is beginning to emerge that there is a relationship between sex-role identity and marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The most consistent finding seems to be that androgyny is positively correlated with marital satisfaction, while there is a tendency for members of dissatisfied couples to be undifferentiated. Baucom and Aiken (1984) reported a positive correlation between both masculinity and femininity and marital satisfaction. They suggested, however, that femininity was the more important factor. They also noted that, contrary to Burger and Jacobson's (1979) conclusion, "there were significantly more androgynous persons in the nonclinic sample than in the clinic sample" (p. 442).

On the other hand, there was an increased tendency for clinic subjects to be either sex-role reversed (feminine-sex-typed males and masculine-sex-typed females) or undifferentiated (low in both masculinity and femininity). Androgyny (high in both masculinity and femininity) was least common among clinic samples (Baucom and Aiken, 1984). Similarly, Antill (1983) reported that femininity in both husband and wife (i.e., both feminine and androgynous subtypes) was positively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Although it is now generally accepted as fact that marital violence may be characteristic of more than one third of all marriages (Straus *et al.*, 1980), difficulties in recruiting and studying maritally violent populations have resulted in a dearth of empirical knowledge regarding the nature of

violent marriages and the etiology of marital violence. Consequently, we know even less about the role of sex-role identity in violent marriages than we do about its role in discordant marriages. Further, since none of the studies previously reported mentioned screening for marital violence, it may be assumed that both violent and nonviolent relationships were represented in varying proportion, complicating interpretation of the findings. Recently, LaViolette *et al.* (1984) classified wife-abusive men on the Bem (1974) Sex-Role Inventory. Their results were consistent with those previously reported for discordant relationships: namely, that batterers were less masculine, less feminine, and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated, than a normative group. The fact that results derived from an abusive sample correspond to the results obtained with maritally discordant samples, which have not been screened for violence, suggests the importance of comparing an abusive sample with a nonviolent discordant sample on this dimension. This is to test out two competing theoretical possibilities: (1) that marital discord is related to sex-role identity accounting for similar findings in both violent, and non-violent, discordant groups, or (2) that marital violence is related to sex-role identity and the presence of violent husbands in the unscreened samples utilized in previous investigations is responsible for those similar findings.

Lack of empirical evidence has not impeded the growth of speculation regarding the relationship between sex-role identity and wife abuse. The term "macho," derived from the word machismo, which is defined as "strong or assertive masculinity" (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1975, p. 361), has become a vernacular expression, the definition of which implies strength, aggression, and violence. The notions that violence is stereotypically male and/or that normal sex-role socialization facilitates the occurrence of violence toward women are popular (Roy, 1977; Yllo and Straus, 1980; LaViolette *et al.*, 1984).

Jackson Toby (1966) suggests that violence toward women may be a result of "compulsive masculinity" or the need to deny one's feminine side. Parsons (1947, 1966) similarly proposes that males initially identify with their mothers, but realize that they must become men, not women, when they grow up. Aggression would then be understood as the result of the unconscious need to renounce or deny a natural identification with the mother. Whether violence toward women represents an attempt by the batterer to appear macho or the need to deny his feminine side, these models would lead us to expect abusive men to obtain high scores on masculinity and low scores on femininity.

The current investigation was conducted in order to examine the relationships between sex-role identification and marital violence. Specifically, the sex-role identification of wife abusive men was compared to that of men

in two nonviolent comparison groups: maritally discordant and satisfactorily married. It was predicted that abusive husbands would be the least likely of the three groups to be androgynous and the most likely to be either undifferentiated (as in discordant samples which have not been screened for violence) or masculine as suggested by the above models.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 47 married men from a city of 150,000 in upstate New York. Abusive husbands ($n = 17$) were self-referred to the University Clinic for problems involving marital violence. They participated voluntarily in the research, and although they were offered treatment at the clinic, there was no contingency, expressed or implied. Abusive husbands who did participate were given a fee waiver (with a value of ten dollars) for one session of the Men's Educational Workshop, a psychoeducational group for batterers. Nonviolent, maritally discordant husbands ($n = 12$) and satisfactorily married husbands ($n = 18$) were recruited through a newspaper advertisement offering 10 dollars for participation in a study of marriages. They were placed into the respective groups on the basis of their scores on the Short Marital Adjustment Test (SMAT: Locke and Wallace, 1959) and their responses to the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS: Straus, 1979). The mean age of the 47 husbands was 34.6 years and their mean annual income was \$19,748.

Measures

All subjects completed a questionnaire package which included a number of instruments as well as an extensive demographic survey. Pertinent to the present investigation was the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ: Spence *et al.*, 1974), which requires respondents to rate themselves on a five point scale for each of 24 personal characteristics. The PAQ generates three scale scores: Masculinity (M), Femininity (F), and Masculinity-Femininity (MF). Spence and Helmreich (1978) recommend using a median split method of scoring, and suggest that individuals can be placed into one of four subgroups based on their pattern of scores on the masculinity and femininity scales: Masculine (high M-low F), Feminine (low M-high F), Androgynous (high M-high F), and Undifferentiated (low M-low F). Despite some problems, which include the absence of generally ac-

cepted normative cutting scores, this has become the accepted scoring method. In the present sample, absence of female subjects necessitated the adoption of median cutoffs generated in mixed sex samples. Spence and Helmreich (1978) report medians for both college and high school samples which are similar. They obtained masculinity and femininity medians of 20 and 23, respectively, for their high school sample, and 21 and 23, respectively, for their college sample. Since the age of the sample in the present investigation more closely approximated a college age sample, the cutoffs of 21 and 23 for masculinity and femininity were utilized.

All data were collected as written responses to a questionnaire battery. There were no interviews, forms were anonymous; confidentiality and privacy were assured.

RESULTS

Results of the present investigation demonstrated that abusive husbands were more likely to score low on both masculinity and femininity subscales. Fifty-three percent of the abusive husbands scored low on masculinity, compared to only 17% for both discordant and satisfactorily married men, while only 47% of the abusive husbands scored high on masculinity, compared to 83% of men in each of the nonviolent comparison groups. Even more striking was the finding that 71% of the abusive group scored low on femininity, although this latter finding was mitigated by relatively high percentages for each of the comparison samples (58 and 39% for the discord and satisfactorily married groups, respectively). Similarly, only 29% of the abusive husbands scored high on femininity, compared to 42 and 61% of the discord and satisfactorily married groups, respectively. These results are presented in Table I.

When subjected to χ^2 analysis, only the masculinity scale yielded significant results [$\chi^2 = 7.14$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.01$]. In order to assess the contributions of each group to the significant result, the table was partitioned

Table I. Number of Subjects in Each Group Scoring Above and Below the Median on M and F Subscales of the PAQ

	Masculinity		Femininity	
	High	Low	High	Low
Abusive	8	9	5	12
Discord	10	2	5	7
Satisfied	15	3	11	7

Table II. Number of Subjects in Each Group Classified as Androgynous and Undifferentiated

	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Abusive	2	6
Discord	5	2
Satisfied	9	1

intro three 2×2 tables and each was subjected to χ^2 analysis with one degree of freedom. Abusive husbands were more likely to score low on masculinity, than were husbands in either of the two comparison samples, which did not differ from each other.

Two patterns of scores that have been identified are androgyny (high scores on both masculinity and femininity) and undifferentiated (low scores on both masculinity and femininity). When the present sample is classified by pattern, the abusive group is the least likely to be androgynous. Only 12% of the abusive husbands were so classified compared to 42 and 50% of the discordant and satisfactorily married men, respectively. On the other hand, abusive husbands were the most likely to be classified as undifferentiated. Thirty-five percent of the abusive husbands could be classified as undifferentiated, compared to only 17 and 6% of the discordant and satisfactorily married men, respectively. These results are presented in Table II.

When subjected to a χ^2 analysis, the results confirmed a significant between groups difference [$\chi^2 = 9.13$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.01$]. partitioning the Chi Square supported the conclusion that abusive husbands were less likely to be androgynous and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated than husbands in either comparison group, who again, were not differentiated from each other.

DISCUSSION

Although the prevalence of physical violence among married couples, especially maritally dissatisfied couples, is increasingly recognized, there has been little concerted effort to control for the presence or absence of violence in any, but research specifically focusing on marital violence. It is generally accepted in the marital violence area that comparison samples comprised of nonviolent, maritally discordant couples are essential to the interpretation of any findings (Telch and Lindquist, 1984). Similar precautions are rarely taken in research on marital issues, in general, with the consequence being that it is unclear what component, if any, may be contributed by violent couples or the existence of couple violence within the

sample. The present findings illustrate the danger of such an approach. Abusive husbands were clearly and significantly lower in masculinity, less likely to be androgynous, and more likely to be classified as undifferentiated than either nonviolent maritally discordant or satisfactorily married men. These findings are concordant with those reported by Baucom and Aiken (1984), who did not report screening for the existence of couple violence. It is not unlikely, given the present results, that the significant differences reported in that study were contributed by violent couples.

Since abusive husbands also obtained low scores on femininity, the notion that violence represents an attempt to defend against fears of being overly feminine, as suggested by Toby (1966) and Parsons (1947), was not supported directly, although it might be suggested that low scores on this scale represented a further manifestation of this defensiveness. If such were the case, however, we might have expected defensively high scores on the masculinity scale, which clearly did not occur.

These results are consistent with the concept of defensive masculinity suggested by Carter *et al.* (1984). They suggest that males classified as undifferentiated are without a sex-role identity and consequently adopt a behavior pattern consistent with their conception of what a man should be like. This conception is influenced by society's projection of the macho image, which includes violence. It may also be influenced by violent role models observed in the family of origin. Consistent with this model it has now been repeatedly documented that abusive husbands are significantly more likely than their nonviolent counterparts to have come from violent family backgrounds (Rosenbaum and O'Leary, 1981; Telch and Lindquist, 1984).

The present investigation has several limitations which suggest caution in interpretation of the findings. Our study employed an exclusively male sample, yet the established cutting scores that were utilized were derived from mixed sex samples, the comparability of which to the present sample is uncertain. Although closer in age to the college sample, the present sample was closer in education to the high school sample. Selection of the medians derived from the college sample based on the age similarity, although defensible, is somewhat arbitrary. Further, since small differences in the median employed significantly affect the distribution of the data, the necessity for normative medians derived from larger, more representative samples is emphasized. The comparability of the present findings to those of LaViolette *et al.* (1984), however, is encouraging.

A second consideration concerns the relationship between low self-esteem and the undifferentiated classification. Since it has been established that abusers have defective self-esteem (Telch and Lindquist, 1984; Goldstein and Rosenbaum, 1985), it remains unclear whether the relationship between wife abuse and being undifferentiated is causal or an artifact of the

relationship between low self-esteem and being undifferentiated. In light of the present findings, this question merits further empirical elucidation.

Finally, the present results are correlational and therefore it can only be concluded that there is an association between wife abuse and the sex-role identification of the abusive husband. Etiological conclusions must await further investigation. It should also be noted that the present investigation did not evaluate the sex-role identifications of abused wives or the possibility of specific husband-wife patterns across the three groups. There is some evidence (Antill, 1983) that similarity between spouses may be an important correlate of marital satisfaction, reinforcing the necessity of evaluating both spouses on this variable. Finally, the small size of the present sample restricted the analysis of the data. It might have been noted that although husbands could have been classified into four androgyny subgroups, only the androgynous and undifferentiated categories were subjected to the χ^2 analysis in Table II. Further, less than half of the abusive husbands fell into either of these two groups. The sample size, however, precluded use of a more elaborate analysis.

On the positive side, the present results are consistent with previous research with both happily married couples and maritally violent couples. Satisfactorily married husbands were most likely to score high on femininity, masculinity, and, therefore, to be androgynous. These results are consonant with those reported by Antill (1983) and Baucom and Aiken (1984). Results for abusive husbands replicated those reported by LaViolette *et al.* (1984). Taken together, these findings suggest that sex-role identity may be an important factor influencing marital violence. Inclusion of a nonviolent, discordant sample in the present investigation, and the lack of differentiation between the two nonviolent groups (discordant and satisfied) calls into question the relationship between sex-role identification and marital discord, *per se*. The necessity of including a nonviolent discord sample (and/or screening for violence in discordant samples) in marital research, is again clearly demonstrated.

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