DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 094 304 CG 009 112

AUTHOR Orcutt, James D.; Inmon, Rebecca R.
TITLE The Impact of Student Activism on Female Sex Role Attitudes: Longitudinal and Cross-Sectional Perspectives.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 19p.; Presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting (Montreal, Canada, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Activism; College Students; *Feminism; Longitudinal Studies; Sex Differences; *Sex Role; *Social Attitudes; *Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on two issues related to changing attitudes toward the female sex role among college students. First longitudinal analyses are presented in an attempt to document the fact that sex role attitude change has occurred during the past decade of student activism. A five-item scale of attitudes toward the female role used in 1961 by Kenneth Kammeyer was administered in 1973 to 1,096 undergraduates at a large state university. Comparisons of responses by single women in these two studies provide evidence for a dramatic shift from "traditional" to "modern" attitudes toward the female role in recent years. Second, cross-sectional analyses of the 1973 data attempt directly to relate this "modernization" of sex role attitudes to the impact of student activism. Female and male respondents are both increasingly likely to hold "modern" attitudes toward the female sex role as their reported level of past participation in student protest activities increases. However, the relationship between protest participation and sex role attitudes is significantly stronger among women than among men. Women in the highest category of protest participation overwhelmingly reject "traditional" attitudes toward the female role. These findings are highly consistent with previous discussions of the special impact of feminist activism on the attitudes of college women during the late 1960's and early 1970's. (Author)

# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ACTIVISM ON FEMALE SEX ROLE ATTITUDES: LONGITUDINAL AND CROSS-SECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES



James D. Orcutt

Florida State University

Rebecca R. Inmon

Florida State University

Prepared for the 1974 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal.

# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ACTIVISM ON FEMALE SEX ROLE ATTITUDES: LONGITUDINAL AND CROSS-SECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

American campuses have settled into a strange and unexpected peace after a turbulent decade of student activism. However, this outward calm should not be taken as a signal of return to the status quo of the 1950's; the protest movement has left its mark on the attitudes and behavior of contemporary youths. Although the full and lasting impact of the student protest movement will not be known for years, we can at least begin to ask, "what has changed?"

This paper focuses on one important area of change which is commonly associated with the student protest movement: transformation of attitudes toward the female sex role. To be sure, the "sexual revolution" of the past decade represents the continuation of long-term social, economic and demographic trends that began around the turn of the century (Skolnick, 1973: 188-191). Historians of the women's liberation movement are also quick to point out that major sources of feminist activism existed outside of the student movement (Freeman, 1973; Hole and Levine, 1971). In the late 1960's and early 1970's, however, college campuses became increasingly important as centers for feminist activity as the student movement shifted its attention away from other issues. On the campuses, activists have concentrated especially on breaking down traditional conceptions of the female sex role through "consciousness raising." Freeman observes that while the approach of these young activists "seems mired in introspection, ... it is in fact creating a vast reservoir of conscious feminist sentiment which only awaits an appropriate opportunity for action" (1973:809).

This argument suggests that feminist themes in the student protest movement should be found to have produced significant changes across the past decade in collegiate attitudes toward the female sex role.

To date, most statements regarding recent changes in female sex role attitudes have been impressionistic in nature. The few empirical studies in this area have provided little evidence of change. Epstein and Bronzaft (1972) compared a 1970 sample of freshmen women to a 1965 sample on a single question relating to their plans "fifteen years from now." A slightly higher proportion of the 1970 sample expected to be a "married career woman with children" (48% versus 42%). Although the authors interpret this difference as "a strong trend away from the 'traditional' and towards the 'modern' role of women among students" (1972: 672), their data do not justify this dramatic conclusion. In fact, the 1965 sample was somewhat more likely than the 1970 sample to desire a career without children (7% versus 4%). More recently, Mason and Bumpass (1973) attempted to detect shifts in female sex role attitudes through age cohort analysis of a 1970 national sample of ever-married women. They found no clear differences between women under 30 and women over 30 on a variety of sex role attitude items.

This report will attempt to provide more adequate evidence of change in attitudes toward the female sex role, particularly as a function of student activism. Results will be presented from a 1973 replication of Kenneth Kammeyer's 1961 investigation of "modern" and "traditional" sex role attitudes among college women (1964; 1966; 1967). The twelve year interval between Kammeyer's investigation and this replication spans the

crucial decade of student activism. To supplement longitudinal inferences regarding the impact of student activism on female sex role attitudes, this report will also present cross-sectional data from the 1973 study directly relating students' personal involvement in protest activities to their sex role attitudes.

## Methodology

Kammeyer's 1961 data (see especially 1966) was obtained from 209 usable questionnaires returned from a random sample of unmarried females attending the University of California, Davis. These questionnaires included a five item Guttman scale of "attitudes toward feminine role behavior," which is presented in Table 1. These items followed a Likert type response format of agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat and disagree. Modifying Komarovsky's (1946) distinction between "feminine" and "modern" role types, Kammeyer constructed his items so that agreement would indicate a "traditional" sex role attitude and disagreement a "modern" sex role attitude.

In the replication reported here, Kammeyer's five items were included on questionnaires administered to undergraduate students attending Florida State University (F.S.U.) during Spring Quarter 1973. Questionnaires were distributed and completed during regular meetings of 23 different classes in the four major undergraduate divisions at F.S.U., Arts and Sciences, Education, Business and Social Welfare. Although this sample of classes was not drawn randomly, it was purposively selected to obtain a broad cross-section of the regular undergraduate enrollment in the major college divisions and at all class levels.[1] Usable questionnaires were obtained

from 1,096 undergraduates, 96.8% of the eligible students (which excludes graduate students and repeaters from other classes) attending class on the day of administration. In addition to the sex role items, these questionnaires also included items on the respondent's personal participation in protest activities.[2]

## Results

### Longitudinal Comparisons

In comparisons of the results of the 1973 F.S.U. study with Kammeyer's findings (1966), the analyses are restricted to single females in the F.S.U. sample who completed the sex role items (N=430). Table 1 presents the five sex role items and the percentages of single females in each sample who selected the "traditional" response, i.e., either agreed or agreed somewhat.

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(Insert Table 1 here)

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This table shows substantially lower percentages of agreement with each of the sex role items in the 1973 sample than in the 1961 sample. Using the 1961 data as a baseline, the longitudinal decreases in agreement with these items range from -34.5 percent to -65.6 percent, with an average decrease of -48.0 percent. All differences are highly significant statistically. The pattern in these data is clear, consistent and highly indicative of a strong trend away from "traditional" sex role attitudes among unmarried college women over the past decade.

Table 1 also reveals that these five items follow the same rank order by percentages of agreement in the 1973 sample as in the 1961 sample.

Kammeyer, in fact, found that these items formed a Guttman scale with a Coefficient of Reproducibility of 0.93 within his sample of single females (1964; 1966). To determine the extent to which scalability replicated in the 1973 data, a Guttman scale analysis was carried out using the data from single F.S.U. females. Consistent with Kammeyer (1964: 297), all items were uniformly dichotomized between agreeing responses and disagreeing responses. A Coefficient of Reproducibility of 0.86 was obtained in this analysis. For a replication of an attitude scale spanning twelve years, a coefficient of this magnitude must be considered remarkably good. Despite extreme marginal percentages for two items in the F.S.U. data, the minimum marginal reproducibility of the scale was actually slightly lower in these data than in Kammeyer's data (0.73 versus 0.75).[3] This analysis suggests that the dimension of female sex role attitudes measured by Kammeyer's scale has remained relatively cohesive through time, despite a major shift of attitudes along that dimension toward the "modern" direction.

Since the results of the scale analysis of the 1973 data reasonably approximate Kammeyer's results, a final comparison between the two studies was attempted by using the scales to classify respondents as either "traditional" or "modern" in their general orientation to the female sex role. Kammeyer (1964) assigned respondents to these categories according to Guttman scale types. Females who agreed with items 1, 2 and 3 at least were classified as "traditional" (see Table 1). Those who agreed at most up to item 2 on the Guttman scale were classified as "modern." In the absence of information on Kammeyer's method of assigning error types to scale types, an attempt was made to approximate his classification with two

types of estimates. Both estimates handle the sex role items as a summated scale rather than a cumulative (Guttman) scale. Kammeyer's classification should be most closely approximated by assigning 1973 respondents to the "traditional" category when they agree at least with any three items, the same number of items used as Kammeyer's cutting point. However, a second, conservative estimate was also applied to the 1973 data by setting the cutting point for the "traditional" category at agreement with at least any two items. This latter estimate, of course, requires agreement with one less item than was the case in Kammeyer's study and will tend to overestimate the relative proportion of "traditional" females in the 1973 sample.

Given these estimates of Kammeyer's classification, the total proportions of single females holding "traditional" and "modern" sex role orientations can be compared across the two studies. Also, Kammeyer (1964) breaks down these categories by class level of the respondents, permitting more detailed comparisons between the two samples. These data are presented in Table 2.

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(Insert Table 2 here)

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Again, the data in Table 2 provide clear and compelling evidence of a general shift over time toward a "modern" orientation in female sex role attitudes. In the case of 1973 estimates based on a cutting point of three or more items (the closest estimate), extremely large differences in sex role orientations between the two samples appear at each class level as well as in the total percentages. Whereas substantial majorities of the 1961

females fall in the "traditional" category at nearly all class levels, no more than approximately one-fourth of the F.S.U. females are similarly classified at any class level by this first estimate. Even the conservative F.S.U. estimate (cutting point of two or more items) produces clear differences between the two samples. For both F.S.U. estimates, the total proportion of "modern" females exceeds that of Kammeyer's sample beyond the .001 level of statistical significance. It should be noted that both samples are consistent in showing a tendency for college seniors to be somewhat more "modern" than women at lower class levels. Perhaps "modern" sex role attitudes become particularly salient among single females anticipating graduation and entrance into the job market.

Overall, these longitudinal comparisons provide convincing documentation of dramatic change in attitudes toward the female sex role among single college women during the past decade. A major contention of this paper, of course, is that the increasing "modernization" of female sex role attitudes is closely tied to the more general pattern of activism and change brought about by the student protest movement. To provide more direct support for this argument, we shall turn now to cross-sectional data from the 1973 study on the relationship between sex role attitudes and student activism.

## Cross-sectional Analyses

As was mentioned earlier, the questionnaires administered at F.S.U. included a list of ten protest activities and asked respondents to check the activities in which they had personally participated. A general index of Personal Protest Activity was constructed by placing respondents in

the following ordinal categories according to the number of activities they checked: (1) Non-Protest (no activities checked); (2) Low Protest (1 activity checked); (3) Moderate Protest (2-3 activities); (4) High Protest (4 or more activities) (see footnote 2).

The entire F.S.U. sample (excluding missing data cases) was used to examine the relationship between the index of Personal Protest Activity and attitudes toward the female sex role. Particularly important in this analysis are cross-sectional comparisons between female and male respondents. Literature on the women's liberation movement has pointed to considerable resistance to feminist activism and goals among males in the student protest movement as well as among males in general (Firestone, 1971; Freeman, 1973). Therefore, we expected that males would not only hold more "traditional" attitudes toward the female sex role than females, in general, but that the relationship between Personal Protest Activity and sex role orientation would be weaker among males than among females. Table 3, then, presents the relationships between protest activity and sex role orientation (conservative estimate) by sex of respondent for the total F.S.U. sample.

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(Insert Table 3 here)

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Table 3 shows that Personal Protest Activity is related to sex role orientation for both females and males. The percentages of respondents holding a "modern" orientation increase steadily and significantly as degree of protest activity increases. However, this relationship is particularly striking in the case of females. Among Non-Protest women, a majority are

classified as "traditional" in sex role orientation by the conservative cutting point (54.7 percent). In sharp contrast, over 90 percent of the High Protest women fall into the "modern" category (91.9 percent).

Table 3 also gives clear testimony to greater "modernism" in sex role attitudes among females than among males. The overall difference between the orientations of females and males is highly significant ($p < .001$). A gap exists between female and male attitudes at all levels of protest activity; but this gap is widest within the High Protest category. Even though the High Protest males show the greatest support for "modern" attitudes toward the female sex role among males in general, they lag considerabley behind the High Protest females and slightly behind even the Moderate Protest females. A much closer tie between Personal Protest Activity and sex role orientation is evident among females than among males. As indicated by the ordinal measure of association gamma, this relationship is twice as strong among the college women in our sample (.406 versus .203, see Costner, 1965).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Taken together, the longitudinal and cross-sectional data presented in this report lend considerable empirical substance to recent discussions of changing attitudes toward the female sex role. The replication of Kammeyer's 1961 study provides for the first time clear evidence for the trend toward "modernism" which has generally been assumed to have occurred over the past decade. The magnitude and consistency of differences between the 1961 and 1973 data should leave little doubt that this change is "real" and not a methodological artifact. The evidence appears to justify the conclusion that

a major qualitative shift has occurred from a "traditional" orientation to a "modern" orientation to sex role attitudes among the majority of college women.

Given the descriptive fact of change, however, the reasons for this transformation of sex role attitudes still remain problematic. In our cross-sectional analyses, we attempted to provide some support for the argument that students' involvement in the recent period of social protest was one of the central factors in this change. The data presented here can only address this question at a time when campus protest activity is in a stage of quiescence. However, respondents' reports of their personal histories of protest participation do show the expected relationships with attitudes toward the female sex role.

Most revealing, perhaps, are the differences between females and males vis a vis protest activity and sex role orientation. Sex differentials in the F.S.U. data are quite consistent with accounts of how feminist activism emerged from the more general context of the protest movement (Freeman, 1973). Young females active in the broader protest movement were encountered by a male activist "establishment" which was disinterested and often hostile toward feminist goals. The line of continuity between the student protest movement and the feminist movement on campuses was carried through by these female activists in the face of and in reaction to resistance among male activists. An especially strong relationship between protest involvement and sex role orientation among females in 1973 bears witness to this continuity. The overwhelming rejection of "traditional" sex role

attitudes by activist females in this study is a conspicuous reminder of Freeman's vision of a rising "reservoir of conscious feminist sentiment" among young women.

## Footnotes

[1]We have reason to believe that neither biases in our sample nor differences between the respective populations at F.S.U. and U.C. Davis can be seriously considered as alternative explanations of the replicational results presented below. Compared with F.S.U. undergraduate enrollment parameters for Spring Quarter 1973, our sample slightly over-represents males (52.8% versus 49.7%). Although our sample under-represents the proportion of seniors in the F.S.U. student body (23.5% versus 31.8%), data presented below indicates that senior females are more likely to hold "modern" sex role attitudes than are those at lower class levels. Our sample, therefore, may tend to under-estimate the extent of sex role "modernism" at F.S.U. in 1973.

We also compared our sample to data kindly made available by Dr. Morgan Lyons from a telephone survey based on a random sample of the Spring 1973 F.S.U. student body. Distributions from these two samples are very similar with regard to sex, marital status and religion. Particularly relevant to the present study, 14.7 percent of our sample classify themselves as "conservative" politically versus 15.3 percent "right of center" in Lyons' study and 29.1 percent of our sample classify themselves as "liberal" or "leftist" versus 34.7 percent "left of center" in Lyons' sample. If anything, our sample shows slightly less liberalism than Lyons' sample.

A second important issue, of course, is differences between the student populations at F.S.U. and U.C. Davis. We would expect a state university in the "Deep South" of Northern Florida to be generally more

conservative than a state university in Northern California. This difference should work against the chances of finding greater "modernism" in sex role attitudes at F.S.U. relative to U.C. Davis. In sum, the detectable biases in our F.S.U. sample and the probable differences between the F.S.U. and U.C. Davis student bodies suggest that the results of our replication may in fact present a conservative measure of the degree of change toward "modern" sex role attitudes across the decade of student activism.

[2]Respondents were presented with the following list of protest activities and were asked to check all activities in which they participated while in high school and college: (1) marched in a demonstration; (2) picketted; (3) boycotted classes; (4) sat-in; (5) attended protest rally; (6) wrote letter expressing political opinion; (7) went to hear radical speaker; (8) belonged to radical student organization; (9) worked in a political campaign as an act of protest; (10) contributed small amounts of money to the student protest movement.

[3]Although these criteria speak well for a replication of Kammeyer's Guttman scale characteristics, our data do not meet rigorous standards on these and other criteria which would justify use of these items as a Guttman scale in the present analysis. As we indicate below, these items were treated as a summated scale rather than as a cumulative scale.

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Table 1. Percentages of Single Females Agreeing with Feminine Role Behavior Items by Sample and Percentages of Difference Across Samples

| Items | Sample: Kammeyer 1961 | Sample: F.S.U. 1973 | Difference Percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Item 1. In marriage the major responsibility of the wife is to keep her husband and children happy. | 87% | 57% | -34.5% |
| Item 2. One of the most important things a mother can do for her daughter is to prepare her for the duties of being a wife. | 74% | 40% | -45.9% |
| Item 3. In marriage, the husband should make the major decisions. | 62% | 33% | -46.8% |
| Item 4. For a college girl, social poise is more important than grade point average. | 32% | 11% | -65.6% |
| Item 5. English is a better major for a college girl than economics. | 17% | 9% | -47.1% |

*Proportional differences between samples are significant at $p < .001$ for all items.

Table 2. Percentages of Single Females Classified as Traditional or Modern in Female Sex Role Attitudes by Class Level and by Sample with Two Different Cutting Points for the F.S.U. Sample*

| Sex Role Attitude | Freshman | Sophomore | Junior | Senior | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kammeyer 1961: Traditional Agrees on at Least Three Items** | | | | | |
| | Class Level | | | | |
| Traditional | 57.8% | 61.2% | 72.9% | 52.5% | 60.3% |
| Modern | 42.1% | 38.7% | 27.0% | 47.5% | 39.7% |
| Total % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total N = | (83) | (4[illegible]) | (37) | (40) | (209) |
| **F.S.U. 1973: Traditional Agrees on at Least Three Items** | | | | | |
| | Freshman | Sophomore | Junior | Senior | Total |
| Traditional | 26.5% | 24.5% | 25.9% | 12.3% | 23.7% |
| Modern | 73.5% | 75.5% | 74.1% | 87.7% | 76.3% |
| Total % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total N = | (147) | (102) | (116) | (65) | (430) |
| **F.S.U. 1973: Traditional Agrees on at Least Two Items** | | | | | |
| | Freshman | Sophomore | Junior | Senior | Total |
| Traditional | 51.0% | 49.0% | 46.6% | 40.0% | 47.7% |
| Modern | 49.0% | 51.0% | 53.4% | 60.0% | 52.3% |
| Total % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total N = | (147) | (102) | (116) | (65) | (430) |

*Proportional differences between samples for totals are signigicant at $p < .001$ for both cutting points.

Table 3. Percentages of Total F.S.U. Sample Classified as Traditional or Modern in Female Sex Role Attitudes by Degree of Personal Participation in Protest Activities and by Sex*

| Sex and Sex Role Attitude | Degree of Personal Protest Activity: Non Protest | Low Protest | Mod Protest | Hi Protest | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Female** | | | | | |
| Traditional | 54.7% | 47.9% | 32.1% | 8.1% | 46.0% |
| Modern | 45.3% | 52.1% | 67.9% | 91.9% | 54.0% |
| Total % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total N = | (274) | (96) | (84) | (37) | (491) |
| | $X^2$ = 36.45, 3 df, sig. p .001 | | | | |
| | Gamma = .406 | | | | |
| **Male** | | | | | |
| Traditional | 60.3% | 60.2% | 55.4% | 34.7% | 56.1% |
| Modern | 39.7% | 39.8% | 44.6% | 65.3% | 43.9% |
| Total % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total N = | (277) | (113) | (92) | (72) | (554) |
| | $X^2$ = 16.12, 3df, sig. p<.025 | | | | |
| | Gamma = .203 | | | | |

*"Traditional" agrees with two or more sex role items.