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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to analyze perceived real and ideal parenting style and perceived sex-role concept of rural fathers of children 2, 3, and 4 years of age; compare differences in perceived real and ideal parenting style of fathers by demographic factors such as age of fathers, age of child, sex-role concept, economic level, formal education, employment status of spouse, and sex of the child; and offer recommendations for adult parent education programs. The sample consisted of 281 fathers from 14 randomly selected rural school districts in Iowa. Fathering style was measured by using a 48-item instrument, from which five clusters, measured on a continuum, emerged: Growth (awareness of the child's needs ranging from physical to creative self-expression); power (physical control over the child); power (emotional control over the child); laissez faire treatment; and smothering behavior. (Discussion of findings and samples of questionnaire items are included for each cluster.) Since fathers perceived they should ideally be more sensitive to the feelings of the child, accepting of autonomous actions, and involved in decisionmaking, it was recommended that family life education programs be developed with this in mind. Since results were similar to those from a study of urban parents, it was recommended that statewide programs, rather than separate rural and urban programs, be developed. (LMS)

# PARENTING AND PERCEIVED SEX-ROLE OF RURAL IOWA FATHERS



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## INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes of rural fathers, especially those engaged in farming, have centered on work-oriented activities, authoritative behavior, completing a task, and limited interaction with children until they are old enough to assist in farm and outdoor activities. The rural father of the 1970's appears to have greater opportunity to develop and fulfill a parenting style that includes a variety of interactions with their young children. The women's movement has encouraged males as well as females to examine sex-roles to determine ways to break out of traditional personality characteristics that encourage specific behavior.

Research regarding the role and style of rural fathers has been virtually ignored. The limited existing knowledge based on research has been obtained from data involving urban fathers. There is no generally accepted conceptualization of the major dimensions of fathering. Conceptualization of parenting style has been developed primarily through interactions with mothers. Virtually no standardized instruments exist for assessing interactions between fathers and their preschool age children. Considerable information was available in the research literature related to mother-child interaction, but little was found specifically examining the father's role and style. Nash (1965) suggested that researchers have assumed fathers have not been readily accessible to study. Few questions have been directed to study of the father's role because the assumption was made that he served primarily as provider and head of the family. Some of the information collected about the father's role and parenting style has been through interviews with mothers rather than letting fathers share their perceptions. Men have had few opportunities to express their needs, satisfactions, frustrations, and relationships with their children.

In October 1975, the National Advisory Council on Adult Education (1975) issued a position paper titled "The Roles and Responsibilities of Adult Education within Parent/Early Childhood Education." The position paper reflected the emerging awareness and involvement of adult educators in parent education programs. Parents were mentioned collectively throughout the statement. Fathers were recognized as half of the parenting team and as the target of adult educators.

Within the past three years, Iowa home economics extension field staff or county employees and program planning committees have increasingly expressed the need to provide family life education programs for parents, including fathers. Staff have expressed frustration regarding the limited research base and general lack of knowledge about the father. Because of the expressed frustration and interest in further developing parent education programs for fathers as well as mothers, this study was identified. Basically, Iowa appears to retain some of the rural values and because of this, the rural father became the focus of this study.

Objectives for the study were to:

1. Analyze perceived real and ideal parenting style of rural fathers of children 2, 3, and 4 years of age.
2. Analyze perceived sex-role concept of rural fathers.
3. Compare differences in perceived real and ideal parenting style of fathers by their age, age of child, sex-role concept, residence, economic level, attained formal education, employment status of spouse, sex of the child, and age of the father at the birth of the first child.
4. Offer recommendations for adult education programs related to parent education especially for fathers.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

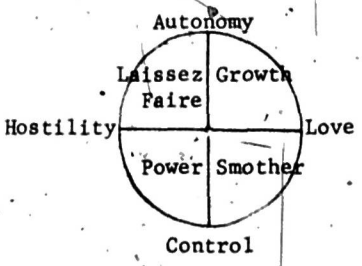
The central focus of the study was the examination of rural fathers parenting style and the influence of sex-role concept on this dimension of masculinity. The framework integrates two distinct models--a parenting style model proposed by Dibble and Cohen (1974) and a sex-role conceptual model developed by Bem (1972). Parenting style refers to positive and negative social behavior with children. Sex-role concepts suggests expectations appropriate for an internalized masculine or feminine standard.

Parenting style refers to positive and negative social dimensions of interaction or behavior with children. Utilizing the maternal model developed by Schaefer and Bell (1958), two dimensions of parenting style will be considered--autonomy-control and hostility-love. Autonomy-control describes a parent's willingness to aid the child in becoming self-directed and able to make decisions through individual interaction. At one extreme is autonomy, the preference for encouraging self-direction; at the other extreme is control, the preference for possessive behavior with the child.

The second dimension describes a parent's feelings for the child. At one pole is hostility, a general lack of concern for the child or even rejecting behavior; at the other pole is love or acceptance, approval, and understanding.

Since every father occupies a place along each continuum, the most realistic way to illustrate the model is to use two continuous lines that intersect each other as shown by Schaefer (1961). This suggests that both dimensions of the parenting style exist simultaneously. A father may be loving and at the same time encourage autonomy.

The intersection produces four quadrants which will be labeled as laissez faire, power, smother, and growth. There are an infinite number of possible kinds of behavior, and usually they can be included in one of the four quadrants.

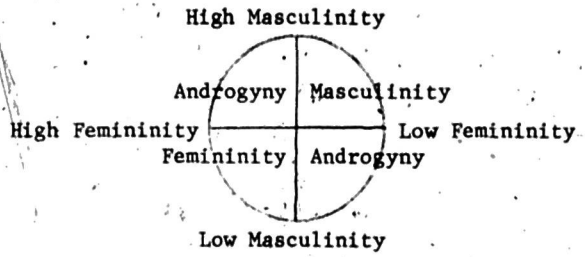



Traditionally, the phenomena of sex-role concept has been defined as bipolar--masculine or feminine. Parsons and Bales (1955) suggested that a person adopts an instrumental or expressive sex-role concept. An instrumental sex-role refers to behavior in which the parent relates the family to society and functions as boss-manager, leader or final judge. Parsons and Bales (1955) defined the expressive sex-role as behavior in which the parent keeps the family running smoothly, functions as a mediator, and is warm and affectionate. This does not allow for the father who might have both instrumental and expressive feelings or wants to be assertive, yet yielding. Bem (1972) introduced a framework that recognizes a person may be androgynous. The androgynous individual remains sensitive to the changing environment and engages in behavior which seems most appropriate regardless of societal stereotype. Two continuums of the sex-role become appropriate--high masculinity-low masculinity and high femininity-low femininity.

High masculinity-low masculinity describes the person's internalized sex-role standards for masculine behavior. At one extreme is high masculinity which has generally been associated with instrumental behavior. At the other extreme is low masculinity, the preference for expressive as well as instrumental qualities. The second continuum describes the person's sex-role standards for

feminine behavior. At one extreme is high femininity which has generally been associated with expressive behavior. At the other extreme is low femininity, the preference for instrumental as well as expressive qualities.

Intersecting the two continuums, Bem (1972) suggested a person may occupy a place simultaneously along each continuum. The intersection produces four quadrants.




## METHOD OF PROCEDURE

### Selection of Instrumentation

Instruments for examining parenting style and sex-role concept were selected through a review of the limited existing alternatives. A Parent's Report developed by Dibble and Cohen (1974) was chosen to obtain information regarding parenting style. Bem's (1974) Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was selected to measure sex-role concept.

The Parent's Report was developed by Dibble and Cohen (1974) in an attempt to further parenting research conceptualized by Schaefer and Bell (1958). Eight positive or socially desirable parental categories and eight negative or socially undesirable parental behavior categories were identified. The eight positive categories included: acceptance of child as person, child-centeredness, sensitivity to feelings, positive involvement, acceptance of autonomy, shared decision-making, consistent enforcement of discipline, and control through

positive discipline. Negative categories included: detachment, intrusiveness, lax enforcement of discipline, inconsistent enforcement of discipline, control through anxiety, control through guilt, control through hostility, and withdrawal of relationship. The report contained 48 operationally defined behavior items which were to be rated by the respondent on a seven-point Likert-type scale. The instrument was divided into two scales: "real" and "ideal" parenting style. The "real" parenting scale asked the parent to rate actual performance with the child. The "ideal" parenting scale rated how the parent thought the ideal parent would respond. The two scales suggested a real-ideal disparity measure.

The Sex-Role Inventory was developed by Bem (1974) to measure androgyny. The individual's androgyny score suggested endorsement of "sex-appropriate" characteristics. Three scales were included in the instrument: masculinity, femininity, and social desirability. Each scale contained 20 personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex-typed social desirability. Based on the difference between traits, selected individuals were characterized as masculine, feminine or androgynous.

## Sampling Plan

The population for the study was limited to fathers who had children 2, 3, or 4 years of age from 14 randomly selected Iowa counties. Within each county, a rural school district was randomly selected for obtaining names of parents with children in the identified age range. The data-producing sample consisted of 281 fathers from 14 rural school districts within the state of Iowa.

## Data Analysis

A frequency count was obtained for each item of demographic data and used to determine general characteristics of persons in the sample.

Intercorrelations among the 48 real and 48 ideal parenting items were computed and then inspected to determine items which correlated with a coefficient of .25 or higher.. Five clusters of highly correlated items were formed. These clusters were further refined by inspecting the rational content of the items and maximizing the reliability of the cluster. The response pattern of the negative correlations in the cluster was reversed to form positive correlations. These reversals were computed to make the items conform to the rational description of high numeric responses to cluster items.

To determine disparity between real and ideal clusters, cluster means were subtracted and a paired t-test analysis was used. Cluster means were obtained for each cluster by summing the checked value of the response pattern for each item in the cluster and dividing by the number of respondents.

To calculate the masculinity, femininity, and androgyny score, the following procedure was used (Bem, 1974). Mean scores were obtained from each subject's ratings of the masculine and feminine adjectives as well as the variance associated with each subject's response pattern.

Subjects were placed in categories of masculine, near-masculine, androgynous, near-feminine, and feminine according to the obtained t-value.

One-way analyses of variance were used to study the association between the dependent variable, parenting or fathering style, and the independent variables, age of father and occupation of father. Two-way analysis of variance was used to determine influences of sex and age of child on parenting or fathering style.

## Findings and Discussion

Respondents were asked to provide information related to demographic characteristics about themselves, their spouses, and families. The largest percentage (40.6) of the 281 respondents were 26 to 30 years of age. The greatest percentage (43.8) of the respondents had a 4 year old child; had from one to two other children (60.1%); had a wife who was not employed (70.8%); were engaged in farming (42.3%); had graduated from high school (89.3%); and were 19 to 25 years of age at the birth of the first child (66.2%).

Fathering style was measured using the original instrument of 48 items (Dibble and Cohen, 1974). To form clusters, items were inspected for intercorrelations of .25 or greater. Visual inspection of the content of the items resulted in rejection of an item when the content was not meaningful. Five clusters of items emerged from 47 of the 48 items. A minus sign preceding an item in a cluster indicates the response pattern was reversed in scoring that item.

Cluster A: Growth

The 11 items in this cluster focus on socially desirable parental categories identified in the original instrument. There is an awareness of the child's needs which range from physical to creative self-expression. The behavior suggests creating a warm, caring environment. The reliability for this cluster was 77. The cluster included the same 11 items which were identified through factor analyses by Cohen, Dibble, and Grawe (1975). Items included:

14. I like this child to do things his/her own way.
15. I encourage the child to tell me what he/she is thinking and feeling.
16. I make decisions with this child.

20. I explain to this child why he/she is being punished.

30. I am aware of this child's need for privacy.

31. I know how this child feels without his/her saying.

32. I let this child help me decide about things that affect him/her.

46. I let this child dress as he/she wants.

47. I can predict how this child will respond or feel about something new.

48. I accept this child's decision even if it is not the way I think.

50. I let this child express his/her feelings about being punished or restricted.

Cluster B: Power I

The seven items in this cluster focus on socially undesirable parental behavior categories. In general, behavior described in this cluster suggests a need to be in command of the environment with limited concern regarding the child's need. The reliability for this cluster was .66. Items included:

9. I speak in a strong way in order to teach this child how to behave.

21. I warn this child about future punishments to prevent him/her from acting badly.

23. I let this child know all I have done for him/her when I want him/her to obey.

25. I use physical punishment.

37. I keep reminding this child of past bad behavior.

39. I let this child know that if he/she really cared, he/she wouldn't do things to cause me worry.

53. I tell this child that I worry about how he/she will turn out because of his/her bad behavior.

Cluster C: Power II

The eight items in this cluster focus on socially undesirable parental categories identified in the original instrument. Power II differs from Power I in intensity. Power II behavior includes rejection of the child especially through emotional experiences and avoidance, while Power I behavior controls the child through physical and less intense emotional interactions. A Power II behavior results in fewer interactions with the child. The reliability for this cluster was .62. Items included:

11. I forget things this child has told me.
12. I avoid talking to this child after he/she displeases me.
27. I prefer going places and doing things without this child.
28. I avoid looking at this child when I am disappointed in him/her.
-29. I enjoy listening to this child and doing things with him/her.
40. I get angry about little things this child does.
41. I lose my temper when this child does not do as I ask.
44. I withdraw from being with my child when he/she displeases me.

Cluster D: Laissez Faire

The nine items in this cluster focus on socially undesirable parental behavior categories and a reversed socially desirable parental behavior category in the original instrument. The behavior tends to be neglecting, indifferent, detached, or deliberately abstaining from specific direction. Generally, the behavior in this cluster suggests limited direction so that both parent and child have difficulty defining boundaries of the environment. The reliability for this cluster was .71. Items included:

-17. I see to it that this child obeys what he/she is told.

18. I ignore his behavior.

19. I forget rules that have been made.

-33. I punish this child for disobeying.

34. I allow things to be left undone.

35. I enforce rules depending upon my mood.

-49. I make clear rules for this child to follow.

51. I change rules.

52. I let myself be talked out of things.

Cluster E: Smother

The 12 items in this cluster focus on socially desirable parental categories identified in the original instrument. This cluster represents a fine line between overindulgence, overprotection, and a loving, growth-producing relationship. Depending on the needs of the child and father, the behavior creates a warm, caring environment or one that inhibits growing independence, creativity, and self-worth. In general, smother behavior suggests the father recognizes his own needs and responsibilities and seeks control of the environment, yet may have difficulty determining standards and expectations. The reliability for this cluster was .77. Items included:

6. I see both the child's good points and faults.

8. I ask others what this child does while away from me.

10. I think of things that will please this child.

13. I tell this child how happy he/she makes me.

22. I feel close to this child both when he/she is happy and when he/she is worried.

24. I check on what the child is doing and whom he/she is seeing all during the day.

26. I give this child a lot of care and attention.

36. I set limits for activities to help this child stay out of trouble.

38. I care about this child even when he/she does less well than I know he/she could.

42. I consider this child's needs and interests when making my own plans.

43. I am unaware of what this child thinks or feels.

45. I like to hug and kiss this child.

Item 7, "I let this child know that I feel hurt if he/she does not do what he/she is told," did not correlate substantially with items in Cluster B and therefore, was not used for further analysis.

Intercorrelations between real clusters were examined. The intercorrelations represented the degree to which clusters measured independent dimensions of real parenting style. Four of the five clusters appeared to be measuring relatively unique or independent dimensions of parenting style. Cluster A--growth and Cluster E--smother appeared to be measuring the same or similar dimensions because 36% of the common variance was accounted for by the same dimension.

Rarely do parents feel they are doing exactly what the child needs, and probably fathers do not feel they deviate extremely from the ideal. The real and ideal scales provided a way to assess the father's norms and deviations from the goals. When using a paired-t analysis to determine real and ideal disparity, all five of the clusters were highly significant. Review of the mean cluster scores suggested ideally fathers perceived they should be more sensitive to the feelings of the child, acceptant of autonomous actions, and involved in shared decision-making than what they currently do. Real and ideal mean cluster scores for the Power I cluster suggested control through physical emotional means was less acceptable and perhaps not used. Fathers perceived

they were less committed to established limits and guidelines than they felt was ideal. Fathers suggested they withdrew or developed a distance more than what they perceived to be ideal. The real mean cluster score for smother was lower than the ideal mean cluster score which suggested fathers perceived they had less involvement with the child than what they perceived would be ideal.

As a result of the sex-role data analyses, about one third of the men were classified as masculine, one fourth near-masculine, one third androgynous, and 8.2% feminine or near-feminine. Respondents who were classified as masculine or androgynous were from 19 to 50 years of age. Of the 95 fathers who were classified as masculine, 55 had a female child and 40 had a male child. Of the 94 respondents whose sex-role concept was classified as androgynous, 42 had a female child and 52 had a male child.

Considering spouse's employment, greater numbers of men who had spouses employed full time were classified as androgynous, while greater numbers of men who had spouses employed part time were classified as masculine. Greater numbers of men employed in clerical and sales, processing, machine trades, bench work, structural work, and miscellaneous occupations were classified as androgynous than were those classified as masculine. Greater numbers of men employed in professional, technical and management, and farming occupations were classified as masculine than were those classified as androgynous. Fathering style and sex-role concept were not significantly related.

Using an analysis of variance to determine influence of age and occupation on fathering style, it was concluded that neither influenced father's perception of parenting style.

When examining the fathering style data, practical significance must be considered as well as the statistical significance. While all of the real-ideal disparity scores were highly significant, the large sample size made small cluster mean differences significant. The mean cluster difference score for ideal and real behavior for Power I was minimal and would not have practical significance. When considering which variables to explore in program development, it would be appropriate to use the clusters that showed the largest differences between ideal and real parenting style.

Fathers were recognizing a gap existed between their real behavior and what they perceived would be ideal. Identifying a gap suggested fathers may have received some subject-matter regarding alternatives for interacting with children which has probably come from a variety of sources not identified with the present study. Adult educators need to carefully study reasons for the gaps and determine content and learning experiences for bringing them together. Programs need to be identified that contain a process as well as content orientation to education.

With the present scoring procedure for Bem's Sex-Role Inventory, there is no distinction between individuals who score high in both masculinity and femininity and those who score low in both masculinity and femininity. The question arises as to which group is really androgynous. Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975) have recently recommended dividing respondents at the median on both the masculine and feminine scales so four classifications are identified rather than the current three. The androgynous respondents would be those who had high masculine and feminine scores while respondents with low masculine and feminine scores would be undifferentiated. With the present study, the statistical analysis was completed before the review was found. Therefore, the decision was made to continue with the existing analysis.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for home economics adult education programs related to parent education especially for fathers were:

1. Build programs on the premise that a gap exists between real behavior and perceived ideal behavior. In the present study, fathers perceived they should ideally be more sensitive to the feelings of the child, acceptant of autonomous actions and involved in shared decision-making. Programs could be developed with emphasis on creating an environment for the child that fosters autonomy, creativity, and shared decision-making. To do this, parents, including fathers, require process as well as content education whereby they evaluate personal needs and analyze the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of the child, and determine alternatives to interact with the child so they feel confident creating an environment that becomes a positive experience for all.

2. Parenting style results of this study were similar to a study conducted with urban parents of twins. Therefore, Home Economics programmers need to consider the idea that urban and rural fathers may indeed perceive parenting style similarly. Rather than expending resources in developing separate or different programs for rural and urban audiences, resources can be channeled or focused on a statewide effort.

3. In this study, 40.6% of the respondents were 26 to 30 years of age, suggesting that the men are in the initial stages of development of occupational and fathering roles. Therefore, programs need to be built on the assumption that the fathering role is assumed by men at the same time they are developing their occupational role (Aldous, 1969). Occupational needs and fathering role may compete for time rather than becoming complementary. Adult education through innovative methods can provide fathers with learning opportunities to adjust to this conflict of interest so they might more readily

determine ways to enhance the quality of time spent with the child. Adult education programs must reach the fathers where they are available so that one additional strain is not placed on an already overscheduled life. Programs can be incorporated into occupational settings, through union structures, and within the home. Programs can be preventive rather than problem-solving and introduced into the family at the time of the first pregnancy.

4. Consider using selected items in the instrument in the teaching-learning environment. Clusters of items could be used for pre and post self-examination. Discussion could focus on items in a specific cluster. Cluster items could serve as a basis for observation of video tapes, films, or actual interactions.

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