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ABSTRACT

Examined was the relationship between personal space and sex roles. Feminine females (N=25), androgynous females (N=25) and masculine males (N=25) viewed a film of male and female approaching stimulus persons in distress and non-distress conditions. Subjects marked the Comfortable Interpersonal Distance Scale at the point where they would prefer the stimulus person to halt. The data, measured in millimeters, were examined by analysis of variance. Distressed stimulus persons were not allowed to approach as closely as were non-distressed stimulus persons. Males allowed the distressed female to approach closer than the distressed male. Sex-typed subjects did not allow the distressed male to approach as closely as the non-distressed male, while androgynous subjects did not make this distinction. (Author)

Distress vs. Non-Distress Approach and the Personal Space of Masculine, Feminine, and Androgynous Subjects

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between personal space and sex-roles. Twenty-five feminine females, twenty-five androgynous females, twenty-five androgynous males, and twenty-five masculine males viewed a film of male and female approaching stimulus persons in distress and non-distress conditions. Subjects marked the Comfortable Interpersonal Distance Scale at the point where they would prefer the stimulus person to halt. The data, distance measured in millimeters, was examined by analysis of variance. Distressed stimulus persons were not allowed to approach as closely as non-distressed stimulus persons. Males allowed the distressed female to approach closer than the distressed male. Sex-typed subjects did not allow the distressed male to approach as closely as the non-distressed male, while androgynous subjects did not make this distinction.

This study investigated the differences in the personal space of individuals with differing sex-role orientations when approached by distressed and non-distressed strangers. Personal space has been defined as that space immediately surrounding one which is felt to belong to oneself. Many variables have been shown to affect personal space including sex, personality characteristics, age, and cultural background of the individual (Evans & Howard, 1973). In the area of sex-role orientation, the concept of androgyny has been given much consideration. Androgyny has been defined as being masculine and feminine, assertive and yielding, instrumental and expressive, depending on the situational appropriateness (Bem, 1974). In several studies, results indicate that androgynous individuals engage in the appropriate behavior at the moment regardless of sex-role stereotypes, while sex-typed individuals are less flexible in situations calling for cross-sex behavior (Bem, 1975). Considering these findings, the following hypotheses were generated: that masculine males, as compared to feminine and androgynous subjects, would not allow a distressed male or female to approach as closely; that masculine males would allow a distressed female to approach closer than a distressed male; and that all subjects would allow non-distressed strangers to approach more closely than distressed strangers.

Method

Subjects

Approximately 210 students enrolled in undergraduate psychology

courses at Georgia Southern College viewed a film of approaching non-distressed and distressed stimulus persons and were administered the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Comfortable Interpersonal Distance Scale (CID).

Scores on the PAQ were used to select 25 feminine females, 25 androgynous females, 25 androgynous males, and 25 masculine males. Data from these persons were utilized in the study. The median age of the selected persons was 19 years.

Materials

The PAQ, a masculinity-femininity-androgyny index developed by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1974) was utilized to select participants in the study. The PAQ is a self-report scale consisting of 55 bipolar items; individuals are classified by it into one of four categories: (1) high masculine, high feminine (androgynous); (2) high masculine, low feminine (masculine); (3) low masculine, high feminine (feminine); and (4) low masculine, low feminine (undifferentiated).

The CID, developed by Duke and Nowicki (1972), measures personal space. An individual imagines himself at the center point of a series of radiating lines and responds to stimulus persons approaching along a particular radius by making a mark where he prefers that person to halt. Distance is measured in millimeters from the center point to the mark on the radius.

A silent motion picture of each of the four stimulus persons was presented; these persons were of college age. A professional drama coach provided direction of the actions and also served as a

judge in equating the attractiveness and the amount of distress exhibited by the actors. The non-distressed and distressed male was portrayed by the same individual in order to control for attractiveness and dress. The non-distressed and distressed female was portrayed by the same individual also. All stimulus persons appeared in the film for approximately 15 seconds each. The distressed stimulus persons were crying, biting the lips, wringing the hands, and shaking the head from side to side. The non-distressed stimulus persons simply exhibited no facial or bodily expression of emotion.

The non-distressed stimulus persons appeared first in the film to preclude possible carry-over of the emotional effect of distress that could result from presenting the distressed stimulus persons first. Half of the subjects viewed the film in the following order: (1) non-distressed female, (2) non-distressed male, (3) distressed female, and (4) distressed male. The other half viewed the film in the following order: (1) non-distressed male, (2) non-distressed female, (3) distressed male, and (4) distressed female.

Procedure

The testing was done in Introductory Psychology classes. The students were told that the experiment was a study of social interaction. The instructions on how to mark the CID were read aloud. The students were then shown the filmed presentation of the four stimulus persons. After the filmed segment of the first stimulus person was presented, the film was stopped and the students marked the CID. After viewing all

four filmed segments and completing a CID sheet for each, the students completed the PAQ.

Results

A 4 X 2 X 2 mixed factorial analysis of variance with repeated measures on the last two variables was performed on the data. The Sex-Role X Affect X Sex of Stimulus Person interaction was significant, F (3, 96) = 3.67, $p < .05$. This significant triple interaction was examined by a series of simple interaction analyses. The only significant simple interaction effect was for the feminine females, F (3, 96) = 3.68, $p < .05$. Feminine females allowed the non-distressed male to approach closer than the distressed male and allowed the non-distressed male to approach closer than the non-distressed female.

The simple, simple main effect (Winer, 1971) of Sex-Role for the distressed female was not significant; however, the simple, simple main effect for the distressed male was significant at the .05 level, F (3, 96) = 3.10. A Newman-Keuls test showed that feminine females, androgynous females, and androgynous males allowed the distressed male to approach closer than did masculine males.

Other simple, simple main effects were significant. Feminine females allowed the non-distressed male to approach closer than the distressed male, F (1, 96) = 10.55, $p < .01$. Masculine males allowed the non-distressed female to approach closer than the distressed female, (F (1, 96) = 6.87, $p < .05$); and allowed the non-distressed male to approach closer than the distressed male, (F (1, 96) = 8.43, $p < .01$).

Androgynous males and masculine males allowed the distressed female to approach closer than the distressed male (F (1, 96) = 18.07, $p < .01$; F (1, 96) = 31.03, $p < .01$, respectively). No other simple, simple main effects were significant.

The Affect X Sex of Stimulus Person interaction was significant (F (1, 96) = 5.05, $p < .05$). In both the non-distress and distress conditions, the females were allowed to approach closer than the males ($p < .01$). The non-distressed female and non-distressed male were allowed to approach closer than the distressed male ($p < .01$).

The main effect of Affect was significant, F (1, 96) = 23.23, $p < .01$. The non-distressed stimulus persons were allowed to approach closer than the distressed stimulus persons. The main effect of the Sex Role factor was not significant; however, the main effect of the Sex of Stimulus Person factor was significant (F (1, 96) = 33.21, $p < .01$). Females were allowed to approach closer than males.

Discussion

The results indicate that feminine females did not differentially distance the distressed male and the distressed female or the non-distressed female and the distressed female; however, they did not allow the distressed male to approach as closely as the non-distressed male. Seyfried and Hendrick (1973) found that women are more attracted to males expressing "masculine" attributes rather than "feminine" attributes. Cripps (1973) found partial confirmation of the hypothesis that target persons who evidence behavior discrepant with sex-role stereo-

types are rated as more disturbed. These studies are supportive of the interpretation of increased distancing for the distressed male because he may be seen as violating masculine sex-role expectations. It may be that the masculine role is more restrictive than the feminine role and that violations of sex-role expectations are deemed more serious for males than females. Hartley (1959) reported that demands to conform to sex-role stereotypes are more stringent for boys than for girls, and Fling and Manosevitz (1972) found that cross-sex behavior was discouraged more in boys than in girls. After reviewing several studies, Hartup and Moore (1963) suggested that more social pressure against inappropriate sex-typing is directed toward boys than girls.

There was no significant difference in the distancing of the distressed female by any of the groups. It may be that distressed behavior is not in violation of the female sex-role, thus no differential distancing is forthcoming.

The hypothesis that the masculine males would not allow the distressed male to approach as closely as would the feminine females, the androgynous females, and the androgynous males was supported. Angrist (1969) cited four elements which comprise sex-roles: label, behavior, expectations of others, and the social location or the situation. The traditional characteristic of suppression of emotion by the male has been mentioned in the literature (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Kagan, 1964). In an attempt to explain why the masculine male kept the distressed male farther away than did the feminine females, androgynous females, and androgynous males, one might

postulate that the discrepancy between the label of the stimulus person (male) and the behavior of the stimulus person (distress) could have caused the masculine male to experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) in the situation. The existence of dissonance is uncomfortable; thus, the person will attempt to alleviate the dissonance. One way to do this is to avoid situations in which the dissonance is increased. It is possible, therefore, that the masculine male may seek to avoid the situation by not allowing the distressed male to approach closely.

In comparing responses to the non-distressed and distressed male, it was found that the feminine females and the masculine males did not allow the distressed male to approach as closely as the non-distressed male. Androgynous males and females did not make this distinction. The interpretation of increased distancing because of violation of sex-role expectations may be feasible for the sex-typed subjects, but what about the androgynous individuals who did not differentiate between the distressed and non-distressed male? Bem and Lenney (1976) have found that sex-typed individuals are more likely than androgynous individuals to avoid cross-sex behavior. Apparently this finding can be extended to the avoidance of those exhibiting cross-sex behavior, at least in this particular case. One might speculate that the androgynous subjects did not perceive the distressed male's behavior as blatantly incongruent with his sex-role, and therefore did not utilize differential distancing.

In comparing responses to the non-distressed and distressed female, it was found that the masculine males did not allow the distressed

female to approach as closely as the non-distressed female. Feminine females, androgynous females, and androgynous males did not make this distinction. It appears that masculine males discriminate between the non-distressed and distressed stimulus persons of both sexes, while feminine females only discriminate between the non-distressed and distressed male. The finding that masculine males discriminate between the non-distressed and distressed stimulus persons of both sexes may be interpreted in terms of a type of defense mechanism behavior. In order to preserve his reputation of aloofness, the masculine male may tend to keep emotion-producing or even "threatening" stimuli farther away. The finding that feminine females did not discriminate between the distressed and non-distressed female is consistent with their nurturant role. On the other hand, the feminine females did not allow the distressed male to approach as closely as the non-distressed male; this may be attributed to the violation of sex-role expectations by the male.

The hypothesis that the masculine male would allow the distressed female to approach closer than the distressed male was supported. Indeed, both the androgynous males and the masculine males allowed the distressed female to approach closer, while the feminine and androgynous females showed no difference as to the distancing of the distressed male and the distressed female. The finding that the males allowed the distressed female to approach closer than the distressed male may be rooted in the cultural definition of the feminine sex-role. Block (1973) found that fathers reported it to be more important to comfort a girl when she was upset than to do so for a boy. Mothers made no such dis-

tinction. Hartley (1959) interviewed boys aged 8 to 11 about the roles of adult men and women. The boys stated that the adult male role was that of protecting women and children in emergencies. The adult females were said to need someone to help them since they were more easily damaged than men.

The finding that the non-distressed female was allowed to approach closer than the distressed female seems to be a function of the significant differential distancing utilized by the masculine males. Although feminine and androgynous subjects also tended to allow the non-distressed female to approach closer, the differences were not significant. Similarly, the finding that the non-distressed male was allowed to approach closer than the distressed male seems to be a function of the significant differential distancing utilized by the sex-typed subjects. Androgynous subjects also tended to allow the non-distressed male to approach closer, although the differences were not significant. Again, the differential distancing by the sex-typed subjects may be interpreted as defensive behavior to maintain their own sex-roles in the face of the sex-role violation by the distressed male. The androgynous subjects may not have perceived the distressed male's behavior as a violation of his sex-role, and thus did not utilize differential distancing. The finding that the distressed female was allowed to approach closer than the distressed male appears to be a function of the significant differential distancing by the males. Androgynous females also exhibited this tendency, although not to a significant extent. Feminine females allowed the distressed male to approach closer, but this tendency was

also not significant. The hypothesis that the distressed stimulus persons would not be allowed to approach as closely as their non-distressed counterparts, was supported, but this finding seems to be mainly the function of differential distancing by the sex-typed subjects. Findings similar to these were reported by Smith (1953) who reported that photographs of people with unpleasant expressions were adjusted by subjects to appear farther away than photographs of people with pleasant expressions. Tolor and Salafia (1971) found that silhouette figures attributed negative characteristics were placed significantly farther from the self than those figures attributed positive characteristics.

Conclusion

There are three fundamental findings of the present study. First, individuals tend to require more personal space when interacting with distressed than with non-distressed people. Secondly, males tend to allow distressed females to approach closer than distressed males. Thirdly, and perhaps of greatest interest, is the tendency for sex-typed individuals to require more personal space in responding to a person exhibiting cross-sex behavior. Androgynous individuals did not make this distinction.

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Appendix

Table 1

Mean Distance in mm Each Stimulus Person was Allowed to Approach

	Non-Distressed B_1		Distressed B_2	
	Female C_1	Male C_2	Female C_1	Male C_2
A_1 Feminine Females	31.24	15.96	35.08	34.84
A_2 Androgynous Females	29.80	23.08	32.16	34.12
A_3 Androgynous Males	19.28	45.80	27.28	48.80
A_4 Masculine Males	11.96	38.52	27.20	55.40

Table 2

Summary of Analysis of Variance

Source of Variation	df	MS	F
Between Subjects			
A (Sex-Role)	3	8.2284	.92
Subj. w. groups	96	8.9225	
Within Subjects			
B (Affect)	1	98.1090	23.23**
AB	3	5.8064	1.37
B X subj. w. groups	96	4.2229	
C (Sex of Stimulus Person)	1	106.3992	33.21**
AC	3	80.5758	25.15**
C X subj. w. groups	96	3.2034	
BC	1	6.4770	5.05*
ABC	3	4.7000	3.67*
BC X subj. w. groups	96	1.2818	

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$