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ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that the dimensions of R. P. Hart's rhetorical sensitivity scale--rhetorical sensitivity, noble self, and rhetorical reflector--would correspond, respectively, to the categories of androgyny, masculinity, and femininity in Bem's Sex Role Inventory. The two instruments were administered to 426 college students (211 men and 215 women). The theoretical hypotheses received mixed support. Rhetorical sensitivity was shared by women with low levels of masculinity, women with moderate femininity, and men with high levels of femininity. Noble selves included women high in masculinity and women high in femininity. Rhetorical reflectors included men high in femininity. Apparently, Hart's rhetorical sensitivity scale is based on communication competence as moderation rather than behavioral flexibility; and it may be biased by the cultural preference for instrumentality. (RL)

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SEX, SEX ROLES, AND RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY

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Communication researchers create instruments to conceptualize and measure effective social interaction. Recently, Hart has offered a specific model,¹ a unique instrument,² and a limited body of research³ on rhetorical sensitivity, a new approach in understanding effective communication. Hart's original treatise had, as its purpose, to define "that type of rhetorical sensitivity which we feel makes effective social interaction manifestly possible."⁵ The researcher argues that an "instrumental" approach offers the most potential for understanding how to facilitate human understanding and effect social cohesion.⁶ The opposite philosophy of communication is labeled "expressive" and is characterized as a position of "openness, expression, flow, and metaphor."⁷ While this second perspective is not directly criticized, it is dismissed as being less useful than the instrumental perspective.

The rhetorically sensitive person is defined as someone who characterizes himself or herself as "an undulating, fluctuating entity, always unsure, always guessing, continually weighing."⁸ This description is similar to the competent interpersonal communicator who is characterized elsewhere as someone who is able to adapt appropriately to situational or environmental variations and changes.⁹ Five characteristics distinguish the rhetorically sensitive person. He or she

- (1) tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition, (2) attempts to avoid stylized

verbal behavior, (3) is ~~characteristically~~ willing to undergo the strain of adaptation, (4) seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for communication, and (5) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multiple form ways.¹⁰

The "rhetorically sensitive" person is contrasted to "noble selves," who see "any variation from their personal norms as hypocritical, as a denial of integrity, as a cardinal sin"¹¹ and the "rhetorical reflector" who has no self to call his or her own."¹²

Demographic data affirms the rhetorically sensitive person, the noble self and the rhetorical reflector. In general, the picture that emerges is that the rhetorically sensitive person is more likely to be male than female, to be rich rather than poor, to be low instead of high in ethnic identification, and to be Republican or independent rather than a Democrat. Noble selves are not distinguished by gender, but are more likely to be Democrats rather than Republicans more likely to be found in the eastern United States, to live in urban rather than suburban or rural areas, to come from less financially secure families, and to prize their ethnic identification. In contrast, the rhetorical reflectors are more likely to be female, old, conservative, non-Jewish, laborers, non-easterners, and churchgoers.¹³

In the same manner that Hart and his colleagues offered a new conceptualization, and consequent measurement, of communication effectiveness, Bem offered a new perspective on psychological sex role. In the development of the Bem Sex Role Inventory,¹⁴ she relied on earlier conceptions of masculinity as a cognitive instrumentality and goal directedness which has a focus on self and getting the job done or the problem solved and femininity as an expressive, supportive, and affective orientation with a focus on concern for others.¹⁵ Bem was among the first to discuss psychological androgyny, or the integration of masculine and feminine attributes. Just as Hart favors the rhetorically sensitive person as more interpersonally effective than the noble self or the rhetorical reflector, Bem suggests that the androgynous person is more psychologically healthy. Empirical validation has recommended androgyny as a desirable sex role outcome for both sexes.¹⁶

Androgynous individuals are "both masculine and feminine, both assertive and yielding, both instrumental and expressive--depending on the social appropriateness of those behaviors."¹⁷ Androgynous persons are more independent from social pressures and more adaptable to varying situations than are others.¹⁸ Sex-typed individuals (masculine males or feminine females) are

more likely than are androgynous or cross-sexed persons (females who score high on masculinity and low on femininity or males who score high on femininity and low on masculinity) to prefer an activity simply because it is stereotypically sex-appropriate. Sex-typed persons are more likely to choose sex appropriate behaviors because they are consistent with internalized sex-role standards and because psychological discomfort results from cross-sexed behavior.¹⁹ The androgynous individual neither feels the pressure to conform nor is he or she limited to a narrow range of experiences. The Lack of conformity pressure added to the wide repertoire of behaviors allows the androgynous person to behave in situationally appropriate ways.

Androgynous persons exhibit specific communication skills. They are rated as highly effective in assertiveness while undifferentiated subjects (persons who are low in femininity and are low in masculinity) were rated as highly inept and socially ineffective; sex-typed groups fell between the androgynous and undifferentiated groups.²⁰ Androgynous and feminine-typed males demonstrated significantly more verbal and nonverbal responsiveness than did masculine-typed males; similarly, androgynous and feminine-typed females showed more responsiveness in an interpersonal setting than did masculine females.²¹ Androgynous individuals demonstrate greater adaptability in their language across situations

than do sex-typed subjects²² and they are more adaptable in their touching behavior.²³ While females report higher total self-disclosure scores than do males, masculine males report lower total disclosure scores than androgynous males and androgynous males do not differ from androgynous females in total disclosure.²⁴ Finally, feminine females report greater communication apprehension than do masculine males; androgynous males do not report significantly different communication apprehension than androgynous females; and androgynous females are less communication apprehensive than feminine females.²⁵

The perspective of a great deal of research on androgyny, including that in communication, is that androgynous individuals excel because they are presumably more flexible and adaptive. To view androgyny from this perspective slips the concept into the same kind of evaluative framework that it replaced. Originally androgyny served the useful purpose of allowing individual to be more complex than permitted by the masculine or feminine dichotomy. Viewing persons as composites of traits replaced this "either-or" perspective. The current tendency to put androgynous subjects competitively against other sex-types simply produces another research melodrama with a slightly different cast of characters.

Furthermore, androgynous persons are not superior in all respects. Androgynous and masculine-typed individuals frequently do not differ significantly from each other, but feminine-typed ~~and~~ undifferentiated persons tend to perform more poorly. For instance, high self-esteem is related mainly to the presence of masculine-typed behavior capabilities and minimally to the presence of feminine-typed characteristics.²⁶ In addition, more stereotypically masculine traits than feminine traits were rated as socially desirable by college students.²⁷ Even on some tasks that were designed to generate stereotypically feminine expressiveness and affection, feminine-typed persons did not perform well.²⁸

A number of explanations have been offered for the seeming superiority of androgyny and masculinity as contrasted with feminine and undifferentiated groups. Females who are high in femininity and low in masculinity may not only be inhibited in behaving instrumentally but expressively as well.²⁹ In other words, the absence of masculinity may represent a behavioral deficit.

A social desirability bias may account for the androgyny/masculinity preference. Feminine-typed women may endorse feminine characteristics because they are expected to respond in this manner, but these characteristics may not really indicate their dominant response dispositions.³⁰ When they are placed in situations that call for nurturance, for instance,

they do not behave in this manner because the behavior has low probability for them.

Finally, a hypothesis of differential social utility has been offered. Feminine-typed expressive behaviors may be less socially effective for a person than are masculine-typed behaviors; consequently, they simply do not lead to positive outcomes as frequently. The superiority of androgyny, following this reasoning, results from the large number of masculine traits that are endorsed, not because the individual is endorsing both masculine and feminine traits.

Masculine values and traits have been reinforced and emphasized in the history of speech communication through the emphasis of power, influence, and persuasion, and only recently has the feminine dimension, with its emphasis on feelings, sensitivity, and concern for others, been given credence.³¹ Hart and his colleagues responded to the cultural bias in favor of instrumentality in their overall theoretical approach, and dismissed the expressive perspective.³² However, the individual dimensions of their instrument, rhetorical sensitivity, noble self, and rhetorical reflector, appear to correspond in their conceptualization to Bem's categories of androgyny, masculinity, and femininity. To discover the relationship between Bem's concept of "psychological

health" and Hart's concept of "communication effectiveness," the following predictions were hypothesized:

H₁: Individuals who are high on androgyny will score significantly higher on rhetorical sensitivity than will individuals who are undifferentiated.

H₂: Individuals who are high on masculinity will score significantly higher on noble self than will individuals who are low on masculinity.

H₃: Individuals who are high on femininity will score significantly higher on rhetorical reflector than will individuals who are low on femininity.

METHOD

Subjects were 426 students, 211 men and 215 women, enrolled in introductory speech communication courses at a large midwestern university. Each subject completed the rhetorical sensitivity scale and the Bem Sex Role Inventory. To help control for order effects, half of the subjects completed the rhetorical sensitivity scale first and half of the subjects completed the Bem scale first.

The rhetorical sensitivity scale is based on the conceptions of the rhetorically sensitive, noble self, and rhetorical reflector given above. The scale allows independent measurement of these three types and subjects are classified as rhetorically sensitive, noble self, or rhetorical reflector. The self-report instrument includes forty items which each offer five likert-type options to the respondents, but the choices are weighted

differentially. Twenty-eight items measure rhetorical sensitivity. For example, a subject responding "sometimes true" to the following items would be scored as rhetorically sensitive: "If you're sure you're right, you should argue with a person who disagrees with you," "If people would open up to each other the world would be better off," and "If a man cheats on his wife, he should tell her." Twenty-four items measure rhetorical reflector. For instance, a subject responding "almost never true" to the following items would be scored as rhetorically reflective: "A supervisor in a work situation must be forceful in his or her communication with subordinates to be effective," "You should tell someone if you think they are giving you bad advice," and "Saying what you think is a sign of friendship." Twenty-four items measure noble self. For example, a subject responding "almost always true" to the following items would be scored as noble self: "When someone has an irritating habit, they should be told about it," "A person who speaks his or her gut feelings is to be admired," and "A friend who has bad breath should be told about it." Twelve items serve as fillers: "An idea can be communicated in many different ways," "When talking to others, you should drop all your defenses," and "No matter how hard you try, you just can't make friends with everyone." Single items on the rhetorical sensitivity scale may measure one dimension of rhetorical sensitivity or may measure two or three of the communication types. Internal and test-

retest reliability as well as criterion-related validity have been reported.³³

The Bem Sex Role Inventory is based on the conception of the sex-typed person as one who has internalized the societal sex-standard of desirable behavior. Social desirability, not differential endorsement, by men and women was used as Bem's standard. The scale allows independent measurement of masculinity and femininity. Subjects are identified as masculine, feminine, undifferentiated, or androgynous. The self-report instrument requests reactions to 60 personality characteristics that are each placed on a 7-point scale. Twenty adjectives describe masculine personality characteristics, e.g., self-reliant, independent; 20 adjectives describe feminine personality characteristics, e.g., gentle, understanding; and 20 adjectives are undifferentiated, e.g., happy, conceited, and serve as fillers. Bem reports high internal consistency, discriminant validity, test-retest reliability, and convergent validity when compared to other measures of masculinity-femininity.³⁴

RESULTS

The data base was comprised of the responses of 426 subjects to the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the rhetorical sensitivity scale. The classification variables were femininity with three levels--low, medium, and high, masculinity with

three levels--low, medium, and high, and sex with two levels--male and female. While the Bem is normally dichotomized, rather than trichotomized, the masculinity and femininity scales were divided into three groups. This trichotomization was a compromise between the typical dichotomization which is wasteful of continual data and performing regression analysis which is difficult to interpret and explain. An analysis of variance in a 3 X 3 X 2 completely randomized factorial design was performed for each of the scores from the rhetorical sensitivity scale--rhetorical sensitivity, noble self, and rhetorical reflector--for all subjects.

A significant difference occurred on rhetorical sensitivity for femininity ($F = 3.26$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .04$), masculinity ($F = 7.29$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .001$), and the interaction of sex and femininity ($F = 3.59$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .03$). A significant difference occurred on noble self for masculinity ($F = 9.44$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .0003$) and for the interaction of sex and masculinity ($F = 5.97$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .003$). A significant difference occurred on rhetorical reflector for sex ($F = 4.95$; d.f. = 1,408; $p < .02$), femininity ($F = 5.09$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .007$), and the interaction of sex and femininity ($F = 6.54$; d.f. = 2,408; $p < .002$).

In each analysis of variance, sex interacted with at least one other variable. As a consequence, subjects were divided on the basis of sex, and analyses of variance in

a 3 X 3 completely randomized factorial design were run for the three scales of the rhetorical sensitivity scale. Table 1 provides the analysis of variance for rhetorical

(PLACE TABLE 1 HERE.)

sensitivity for men which shows a significant difference on femininity. Table 2 provides the analysis of variance

(PLACE TABLE 2 HERE.)

for noble self for men and shows no significant differences. Table 3 provides the analysis of variance for rhetorical

(PLACE TABLE 3 HERE.)

reflector for men and shows a significant difference on femininity. Table 4 provides the analysis of variance for

(PLACE TABLE 4 HERE.)

rhetorical sensitivity for women and includes a significant difference on the dimensions of femininity and on masculinity. Table 5 provides the analysis of variance for noble self

(PLACE TABLE 5 HERE.)

for women which shows significant differences on both femininity and masculinity. Table 6 provides the analysis of variance for rhetorical reflector for women which shows no significant differences.

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A significant difference occurred on femininity for men on rhetorical sensitivity and rhetorical reflector. Tukey's HSD test³⁵ was used to further analyze these differences. Men who are high in femininity are significantly higher in rhetorical sensitivity than are men who are low in femininity (H.S.D. = 2.87; d.f. = 202; observed difference = 4.27) and men who are high in femininity are significantly higher in rhetorical reflector than are men who are low in femininity (H.S.D. = 1.49; d.f. = 202; observed difference = 1.94). Men who are high in femininity are significantly higher than are men who are moderate in femininity on the rhetorical sensitivity dimension (H.S.D. = 2.87; d.f. = 202; observed difference = 3.36) and on the rhetorical reflector dimension (H.S.D. = 1.49; d.f. = 202; observed difference = 1.87).

The significant difference that occurred on both femininity and masculinity for women on rhetorical sensitivity and noble self was also examined with Tukey's HSD test. Women who are high in femininity are significantly lower on rhetorical sensitivity than are women who are moderate in femininity (H.S.D. = 2.32; 206 d.f.; observed difference = 3.98). Women who are high in femininity are significantly higher on noble self than are women who are moderate in femininity (H.S.D. = 2.27; 206 d.f.; observed difference = 3.02). Women who are high in femininity are significantly lower in rhetorical sensitivity than are women who are low in femininity (H.S.D.

= 2.32; 206 d.f.; observed difference = 2.60). Women who are high in masculinity are significantly lower on rhetorical sensitivity than are women who are low in masculinity (H.S.D. = 2.29; 206 d.f.; observed difference = 4.74). Women who are high in masculinity are significantly higher on noble self than are women who are low in masculinity (H.S.D. = 2.22; 206 d.f.; observed difference = 5.44). Women who are high in masculinity are significantly lower than are women who are moderate in masculinity for rhetorical sensitivity (H.S.D. = 2.29; 206 d.f.; observed difference = 4.22). Women who are high in masculinity are significantly higher than women who are moderate in masculinity on noble self (H.S.D. = 2.22; 206 d.f., observed difference = 4.28).

Correlation coefficients were also computed. A negative correlation (-.74) was found between rhetorical sensitivity and noble self, which is consistent with the findings of Hart and his colleagues,³⁶ but represents a smaller degree of relationship. Hart found a clear inverse relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and rhetorical reflection, but no relationship between the noble self and rhetorical reflection scales. In this study, inverse relationships were established between rhetorical sensitivity and rhetorical reflection (-.21) and between noble self and rhetorical reflection (-.29). Regression analysis and factor analysis were also run on these variables and generally confirmed the findings of the analysis of variance that is reported in this article.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical hypotheses received mixed support. The predicted interaction between masculinity and femininity on rhetorical sensitivity was not found. Instead, as women decreased in masculinity, they were shown to increase in rhetorical sensitivity. Women who were moderate in femininity were high in rhetorical sensitivity, while women who were low in femininity were moderate in rhetorical sensitivity; women who were high in femininity were low in rhetorical sensitivity. In addition, men who were high in femininity were high in rhetorical sensitivity.

The two findings--that women low in femininity and that men high in femininity--are high in rhetorical sensitivity add some support to the initial hypothesis. Men who endorse characteristics that are related to the opposite sex and women who refuse to endorse characteristics that are appropriate for their own sex are higher in rhetorical sensitivity. These persons are not endorsing traditionally appropriate characteristics for their own sex and may be exhibiting more behavioral flexibility.

The second hypothesis, that noble self would be related to masculinity, received support for women but not for men. As women increase in masculinity, they increase in noble self. In addition, as women increase in femininity, they increase in noble self. Women who are high in masculinity or high in

femininity score highest on the noble self dimension. The third hypothesis, that rhetorical reflector would be related to femininity, received support for men, but not for women. As men increased in femininity, they increased on the dimension of rhetorical reflector.

Rhetorical sensitivity appears to be a different construct than androgyny although the two have been defined in similar ways. The lack of relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and androgyny does not allow this research to add criterion-referenced validity to the rhetorical sensitivity scale. An examination of the scoring procedures on the two scales suggests a rationale. In order to score high on rhetorical sensitivity, an individual must select the midpoint on a five point scale on twenty-eight items; in order to be categorized as androgynous, a subject must endorse a large number of feminine and masculine characteristics by responding to the end points of a 7-point scale. Previous research suggests that subjects will typically respond to the midpoint or the extremes of scales as a function of factors other than the specific item. For instance, women tend to be less conservative in their completion of scaled items than do men.³⁷ The lack of relationship between androgyny and rhetorical sensitivity might be explained simply as a matter of difference in scale construction.

A related explanation is suggested by the demographic characteristics of rhetorically sensitive individuals. The

rhotorically sensitive person is someone who is low in ethnic identification, more likely male than female, more likely wealthy and Republican. The picture that emerges is someone who is "socially correct." Indeed, it has been suggested that rhetorical sensitivity is a "luxury which comes with acculturation and economic security and finds special favor with those who resist ideological extremes."³⁸ Rhetorical sensitivity may be more of an instrumental artifact than an indicator of effective communication. Moderation, rather than flexibility, appears to be measured by rhetorical sensitivity. This explanation is strengthened by the findings that as women decrease in masculinity, they increase in rhetorical sensitivity and the finding that women who are moderate in femininity are highest in rhetorical sensitivity.

A final explanation is suggested by the content of the items on the rhetorical sensitivity instrument. Virtually all of the items that are coded rhetorical sensitive, noble self, and rhetorical reflector deal with candor or contentiousness, two dimensions of assertiveness according to recent research.³⁹ In other words, the rhetorical sensitivity scale may simply be measuring dimensions of assertiveness rather than competence in interpersonal communication. Rhetorical sensitivity may be measuring a far more narrow construct than that which it purports to measure.

Earlier research which suggested that femininity was dysfunctional received support in this study. Women who were highest in femininity were significantly lower on the rhetorical sensitivity dimension (the preferred mode); women high in femininity were high on noble self (an undesired characteristic); and men who were high in femininity scored high on rhetorical reflector (an undesirable outcome). From this study it appears that persons who are highest in femininity score in the wrong direction on the three dimensions, with the exception of men who score high on femininity and are categorized as rhetorically sensitive.

This study predicted that individuals high in masculinity would score high on noble self and that individuals high in femininity would score high on rhetorical reflector. These results were only partially confirmed. Women who were high in masculinity were categorized as significantly higher on noble self and men who were high on femininity were categorized as significantly higher on rhetorical reflector. In other words, persons who deviate from the norm of accepted sex role categorization also fall into deviant communication categories. Apparently, men who are masculine and women who are feminine are within a larger category of "socially approved" behavior and the "socially correct" nature of the rhetorical sensitivity scale confounds the results.

The rhetorical sensitivity scale and the Bem Sex Role Inventory were examined in this study. The predictions that androgynous individuals would be rhetorically sensitive, that masculine people would rate high on noble self, and that feminine persons would score high on rhetorical reflector were only partially confirmed. Rhetorical sensitivity is shared by women with low levels of masculinity, women with moderate femininity and men with high levels of femininity. Noble selves include women high in masculinity and women high in femininity. Rhetorical reflectors include men high in femininity. The rhetorical sensitivity scale appears to be based on communication competence as moderation rather than behavioral flexibility and may be biased by the cultural preference for instrumentality.

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⁷Ibid., p. 76.

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TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY
FOR MEN

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	p > F
Femininity	653.4	2	326.7	.0027*
Masculinity	137.8	2	68.9	.2686
Femininity X Masculinity	171.6	4	42.9	.5145
Error	11507.3	202	52.2	

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF NOBLE SELF
FOR MEN

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	p > F
Femininity	240.3	2	120.2	.0603
Masculinity	76.1	2	38.1	.5862
Femininity X Masculinity	263.3	4	65.8	.1897
Error	8612.7	202	42.6	

TABLE 3
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF RHETORICAL REFLECTOR
FOR MEN

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	p > F
Femininity	153.6	2	76.8	.0054*
Masculinity	14.6	2	7.3	.026
Femininity X Masculinity	42.2	4	13.0	.5465
Error	2858.2	202	14.1	

TABLE 4
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY
FOR WOMEN

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	p > F
Femininity	579.2	2	289.6	.0006*
Masculinity	955.5	2	477.7	.0001*
Femininity X Masculinity	-45.4	4	-11.4	1.0000
Error	7133.1	206	34.6	

TABLE 5
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF NOBLE SELF
FOR WOMEN

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	p>F
Femininity	331.5	2	165.8	.0076*
Masculinity	1158.8	2	579.4	.0001*
Femininity X Masculinity	-45.6	4	-11.4	1.0000
Error	6795.0	206	32.9	

TABLE 6
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF RHETORICAL REFLECTOR
FOR WOMEN

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	p>F
Femininity	13.5	2	6.7	.5166
Masculinity	7.9	2	3.9	.6818
Femininity X Masculinity	17.9	4	4.5	.7779
Error	2070.4	206	10.0	