Male and female perceptions of liberated vs conventional sex roles

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Recently, much attention has been given to the role of women in society. The conventional role of the housewife-homemaker, existing solely for the needs of her husband and family, has fallen into disrepute in some quarters. At the same time, others have strongly come to the defense of this conventional role of the woman. They have expressed extreme displeasure at those who have accepted a liberated conception of this role. The arguments from both sides have been filled with emotion. Although the most vocal proponents of a liberated female role have been primarily women, some support for this position has been found within the male community. As the arguments have continued for the past several years, it seems that stereotypes of "conventional" and "liberated" women may have developed. At the same time, men supporting each of these positions may also have become viewed in a stereotyped fashion. It was the purpose of the current study to investigate individuals' perceptions of both men and women expressing conventional and liberated views regarding the role of women in society. Further, differences in male and female perceptions of these stereotypes were studied.

SUBJECTS

The Ss in the study were 50 undergraduates at a midwestern university. The 25 males and 25 females ranged in age from 19 to 22, with the mean age being 20.37.

INSTRUMENTATION

In order to investigate this problem, a methodology frequently utilized in interpersonal attraction research (Byrne, 1961) was adapted to yield data regarding person perception. In this methodology, information about an "imaginary stranger" is presented to a S by way of an attitude survey, which the hypothetical individual had supposedly completed. Upon reading the responses to the attitude survey, the S is asked to rate the individual who completed it on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS) (Byrne, 1961). The IJS is a six-item inventory, with each item in the format of a 7-point scale ranging from positive to neutral to negative. The six items related to (1) intelligence, (2) knowledge of current events, (3) adjustment, (4) morality, (5) personal feelings for, and (6) desire to work in an experiment with the individual rated.

The 10-item attitude survey employed in this investigation was specifically designed for the current purpose. Each item was in the form of a 6-point scale. In an attempt to partially disguise the purpose of the study, 5 of the items related to the male-female role, while 5 of them related to topics that had previously been rated as not important (Banikiotes & Banikiotes, 1971). The 5 items relevant to the male-female role had previously shown moderate to high intercorrelations (see Table 1).

These items dealt with (1) the importance of having children, (2) men's adjustment to stress, (3) the aggressiveness of the woman in today's society, (4) men crying, and (5) married women pursuing careers.

PROCEDURE

Each S was presented with four contrived attitude survey protocols, each of which was followed by an IJS on which the hypothetical individual was to be rated. The protocols were contrived in such a way that the extreme categories (1 and 2, or 5 and 6) were answered on the items relating to the male-female role and such that the unimportant items were answered in the neutral categories (3 and 4). Hypothetical individuals were identified by age and sex, with the name being apparently deleted. Age was held constant at 20 and 21, the two ages surrounding the mean of the Ss in the investigation. The four contrived protocols that each S rated were in the following categories: (1) female expressing preference for conventional sex roles (conventional female); (2) female expressing preference for liberated sex roles (liberated female); (3) male expressing preference for conventional sex roles

(conventional male); and (4) male expressing preference for liberated sex roles (liberated male).

ANALYSIS

A two-factor analysis of variance for repeated measures on one factor was computed for each IJS rating category. When significant relationships were observed, the Newman-Keuls procedure was employed to determine where these relationships existed. The .05 level of significance was held critical for all tests made.

RESULTS

No differences were found between male and female Ss in their perception of the individuals in the four contrived protocol classifications for any of the IJS categories. Nor was there any Sex by Protocol Classification interaction for any of the IJS categories. Some significant differences were observed among the contrived protocol classifications as they were perceived by the Ss for three of the IJS categories (see Table 2).

Intelligence

A significant difference ($F = 7.24$) was observed among the contrived protocol categories as they were perceived by the Ss on the basis of intelligence. Liberated females were viewed as being more intelligent than conventional females, conventional males, and liberated males. Liberated males were viewed as being more intelligent than conventional females. No differences were found between liberated males and conventional males or between conventional males and conventional females.

Knowledge of Current Events

A significant difference ($F = 12.62$) was observed among the contrived protocol categories as they were perceived by the Ss on the basis of knowledge of current events. Liberated females were viewed as having a greater knowledge of current events than conventional females and conventional males. Liberated males were also viewed as having a greater knowledge of current events than conventional females and conventional males. No differences were found between liberated females and liberated males or between conventional females and conventional males.

Morality

A significant difference ($F = 3.16$)

Table 1
Item Intercorrelations

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Children		.23	.38	.26	.44
2 Adjustment to Stress			.53	.78	.51
3 Aggressiveness				.48	.81
4 Men Crying					.57
5 Pursuit of Careers					

Table 2
Mean IJS Ratings

	Conventional Females	Liberated Females	Conventional Males	Liberated Males
Intelligence	4.14	5.32	4.44	4.80
Knowledge of Current Events	3.18	5.14	3.60	4.70
Morality	5.30	4.24	5.06	4.26
Adjustment	4.16	4.84	4.20	4.58
Personal Feelings	4.14	4.44	4.30	4.64
Working in an Experiment	4.04	4.40	4.02	4.38

was observed among the contrived protocol categories as they were perceived by the Ss on the basis of morality. Conventional females were viewed as being more highly moral than liberated females and liberated males. Conventional males were viewed as being more highly moral than liberated males. No differences were found between conventional females and conventional males, between conventional males and liberated females, or between liberated females and liberated males.

Adjustment, Personal Feelings,
and Working in an Experiment

No significant differences were observed among the contrived protocol categories as they were perceived by the Ss on the basis of adjustment, personal feelings, or working in an experiment.

DISCUSSION

Both male and female Ss appear to hold the same stereotyped views of those males and females expressing preference for liberated and conventional roles. Whichever IJS category is observed, high similarity in perceptions is found. For an issue that appears to be highly sex-related, this congruence may be thought to be surprising. The possibility is suggested that feelings on the matter of sex roles do not operate along sex lines.

The emerging view of the liberated

woman is one of being highly intelligent and knowledgeable about current events, yet less moral than her conventional counterpart. The conventional counterpart, although being viewed as highly moral, is seen as less intelligent and less knowledgeable about current events. Similar differences existed between the perceptions of the liberated male and the conventional male as did between the perceptions of the liberated female and the conventional female. The former was more intelligent, knowledgeable about current events, and less moral, while the latter was the opposite.

The only difference found between perceptions of males and females espousing the same views was with regard to intelligence. The liberated female was perceived to be more intelligent than the liberated male, despite the fact that the contrived attitude surveys that each supposedly completed were practically identical. This finding appears to be particularly unusual and interesting. Women, for many years, have been striving to reach an equality with men. Here, not only has the liberated female achieved equality with respect to being viewed intelligent, but she has come to be perceived as intellectually superior. One can only speculate at the meaning of this finding. It is a long jump from

being perceived as intellectually superior to achieving equal opportunity and status. It might be expected that being viewed as intelligent would be a positive step toward achieving equality in other more tangible capacities. The opposite result, however, may also occur, should the perceived intellectual superiority serve to be a threat to those presently possessing status.

One factor that was not assessed but which may contribute to the variance observed in the judgments is rater or S characteristics. A large body of literature (Byrne, 1969) has shown the direct relationship between attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction. Further, the importance of the topic on which similarity-dissimilarity is determined has also been found to be highly significant in determining attraction (Banikiotes, 1971; Banikiotes & Banikiotes, 1971). It is possible, therefore, that similarity-dissimilarity concerning the issue of sex role (a topic of importance) may have affected the Ss' ratings on the IJS categories of personal feelings and working with the individual in an experiment. Further work in this area can provide more meaningful information if rater S characteristics are measured.

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