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A COMPARISON OF THE CONCEPT OF THE FEMALE
ROLE AS HELD BY WOMEN IN NEW YORK
CITY WITH THAT OF WOMEN
IN THE MIDWEST

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Psychology
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Sylvia Decker
November, 1972

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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November 28, 1972
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history there has been a universal tradition that the differences between the sexes are reflected in the character of male and female as well as in their physical structure. The attributes have been seen as complementary, not only in men and women, but in all things. Events in nature and history have been explained by this universal principle. In Taoism, for example, the two principles, the Yin and the Yang, the feminine and the masculine, are parts of a unity. The feminine principle embodies all that is calm, dark, cool, passive, and receptive. The masculine principle embodies everything active, light, warm, and generative.

The traditional concept of the family also embodies the idea of basic differences in the character of the sexes and assigns distinctly different roles to men and women. Much of the scientific literature on the family mentions this distinction of roles, indicating a division of labor between male and female. In general, the male is said to have an instrumental role, spending much of his time outside the family (Parsons and Bales, 1955). He is oriented toward achievement, functional roles, delay of gratification, individual responsibility, autonomy, rationality, and an absolute morality based on authority (Parsons, 1955). What one does or what one becomes determines one's personal worth.

The female, on the other hand, has an expressive role, attending to the personal well-being of the family members and taking primary responsibility for the socialization of the children (Parsons and Bales, 1955). She functions in the expressive mode, being more interested in

feelings, self-exploration, experiencing the self and others, intimacy, encounter, and the perception of sensations and images. She is, in general, concerned with nurturance, and her morality is more personal, interpersonal, and relative. She tends more to measure personal worth by the quality of one's being.

Karl Stern (1965) reviews the long history of this belief in the differences in the character of the sexes and points out that today, for the first time, this idea has come to be regarded as superstition, and we now reject even the possibility that anatomical differences may express psychological complementariness.

The rapid social changes of the last few decades have modified sex roles and created many new opportunities for women. The industrialization and urbanization of society, the increased availability of services, the production of work-saving appliances, and the development of effective contraceptives have all had dramatic impact on the lives of women and on the roles which are open to them. Because there are new choices open to them, new strains and tension exist. Inconsistencies between self-expectations and social expectations, between traditional attitudes and new realities, and between the dominant values of society and the values ascribed to women have produced contradictory practices and emotional conflicts for many women.

The formal education of women in their early years has probably resulted in "cultural discontinuities" in women's expectations of their female roles (Benedict, 1938). Girls are trained in the same academic subjects, in the same classrooms as boys and are in competition with them throughout their early years. The values of a male-dominated

society (achievement, delay of gratification, autonomy, etc.) are emphasized in the classroom.

At the same time, however, there are subtle pressures on young girls to accept the traditional roles of wife and mother (Parsons, 1942). While girls are expected and encouraged to compete with boys in school, they are discouraged from entering into competition with them in the job market. David McClelland's (1952) findings concerning the relationship between achievement motivation and independence training, Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1960) studies showing differential treatment of the two sexes in childhood, and Matina Horner's (1969) finding of a 'motive to avoid success' among women all point to the likelihood that the treatment of little girls discourages the development of their intellect and their need to achieve in a male-dominated society.

Karen Horney (1967) argues that the standards by which the value of male and female characteristics are judged is not neutral. The skills, talents, and contributions of women tend to be undervalued compared to those of men. Our society is achievement oriented and the traditional female role of nurturance and fulfillment through fostering the fulfillment of others does not result in high achievement by prevalent standards. There are many conflicts which arise in cases when women take several roles simultaneously, or consider several roles (Kluckhohn, 1954; Parsons, 1942; Winch, 1952). Mirra Komarovsky (1946) shows that although girls are prepared by the current combination of academic and social training, for either the career girl or the homemaker role, they come to see them as mutually exclusive. The same woman may, however, make a good

mother, housewife, and member of a "masculine" profession, all at one time or at different times in her life. (Myrdal and Klein, 1956).

[Anne Steinmann, head of the Male Female Role Research (MAFERR) Foundation, has conducted a series of studies of the concept of the feminine role, with particular attention to the potential conflict between the nurturing (expressive) aspects of women's personality and the achieving (instrumental) aspect. She has attempted to test the hypothesis that "women share a common set of life values despite differences in nationality, socio-economic class, ethnic or racial background, level of education, and occupational status". (Steinmann, 1969). She has also been concerned with the masculine concept of the feminine role, both the ideal and the actual. Since, as Cooley (1927) pointed out, we are often influenced not by what people think of us but by what we think they think, Steinmann has also asked women how they think men would respond to the inventory she uses.

The first of these studies (1963) compared the views of a group of 51 college girls in a New York City suburb with the views of their mothers and fathers concerning the role of women. The Fand Feminine Role Rating Inventory (Fand, 1955) was revised to determine: (1) the mothers' and daughters' own opinions; (2) the opinions they believed the ideal woman would express; (3) the opinions they believed the average woman would express; and (4) the opinions they believed would be expressed by the ideal woman as men conceive of her. The daughters also responded as they believed their mothers would like them to and as they believed their fathers would like them to. The fathers responded as they believed the average women in our society would respond and also as their ideal woman would respond.

The most important results were:

(1) While the daughters' and mothers' own opinions, the opinions they attributed to their ideal, and the opinions they attributed to the average woman were in fairly close agreement, being balanced between nurturing elements (other-oriented) and outward-achieving elements (self-oriented), both mothers and daughters believed that man's ideal woman would see her role as being far more nurturing and other-oriented.

(2) The fathers' responses indicated that their ideal woman was, in fact, not more other-oriented, but actually came close to the mothers' and daughters' own opinions and those attributed to the ideal and average woman.

A later study (1966) reported results much like those described above. Again Steinmann used the Inventory of Feminine Values, administering it to a total of 827 women, made up of undergraduates, business women and professional women, and to 423 men, including undergraduates, professionals, and artists.

In 1964-65 Steinmann began to compare American women with women in other countries. She combined the results of the inventory to seventy-five female undergraduates in a large metropolitan college in the New York City area (1964) with results from a larger group of women in the New York City area, and (1964) compared these combined results with results from groups of middle-class women in two South American cities. The study indicated that the South American women were more other-oriented than the North American and that there was more difference between the North American women's own concept of her role and that which she attributed to men's ideal, (her own concept was more self-oriented).

In a later study (1969) Steinmann provided a more detailed analysis of the differences between North and South American women. She concluded that an important area of agreement between the self-concept and women's ideas of men's ideal was in the relative status of husband and wife, with the submission of the wife being clear in both North and South American groups. She found, however, an area of conflict in the realms of children and self-achievement, with South American women being more other-oriented than the North American women.

Steinmann also presented (1968) comparisons of the data from her North American subjects with those from seven European and Asian countries. These studies included both male and female subjects. She found the same discrepancies that she found in her North American families in the first studies: women's own self-concept and that which they attribute to men's ideal woman are quite different, also that men's concept of the feminine role is not what women believe it to be, but is closer to women's own self-concept. She offered several possible explanations for this: lack of communication, confusion among men because of changing beliefs, projection of their feelings on the part of women, and ambivalence on the part of men.)

Although data were collected from a large number of North American subjects and these subjects were born in all parts of the United States, all of them were at the time of their participation living in the New York City area. In none of the studies cited was there a comparison of areas within a single country, i.e. the United States. Anthropological and sociological studies suggest that regional differences in values do exist. It seems likely that the results obtained in New York might not

accurately reflect the attitudes of the United States as a whole. The faster pace, overcrowding, proximity to many great educational and cultural institutions, and other circumstances which put them in the forefront of social change might be expected to create differences in attitudes from the Midwest where the pace is slower, there is more space, and less crowding, etc.

Before it is possible to draw many conclusions about differences between women in the United States and women from other countries it is necessary to see if significant differences exist within the United States. If they do, there is reason to modify the conclusions that the null hypothesis of Steinmann drew from her international studies.

If such differences do exist within the United States, then the results of the administration of the Inventory to women in the Midwest, as compared to New York, should show more unanimity between women's own views of their role and their ideas about how men view their role, that is, more other-oriented in their own self-perception, and with less difference between the self-perception and the men's ideal forms of the inventory.

II. HYPOTHESES TESTED

This study addressed two main questions. First: to what extent is the concept of the feminine role held by women in the Midwest similar to that of the women in the New York area. Secondly: to what extent is there congruence in the way the Midwest women see their role and the way they believe men see it.

Specifically, to answer the first question, comparisons were made: (1) among the three New York samples of undergraduates used by Steinmann

(1969); and (2) between the Midwest sample and each of the New York samples to see which of the New York samples most closely approximated the Midwest sample.

The second question was examined by means of item by item comparisons of the two forms of the test administered to the Midwest sample.

III. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population studied consisted of female undergraduates in an urban university in the Midwest between the ages of 17 and 22. The sample included 50 women selected on the basis of availability from psychology classes, the purpose being to choose a sample similar to the three groups of undergraduates studied in New York for which data were available. These samples were: Public University undergraduates (N=96); Private College (moderate) (N=51); and Private College (expensive) (N=68).

IV. THE INSTRUMENT

The Inventory of Female Values, designed by Dr. Alexandria Botwin (A. B. Fand, 1955) of San Francisco, California, and revised by Steinmann (now titled the Maferr Inventory of Female Values), was used to investigate the subjects' concepts of the feminine role.

The Inventory consisted of 34 statements, each of which expressed a particular value or value judgment pertaining to women's activities or attitudes. The subject was asked to indicate her agreement or disagreement with each statement on a five-point scale ranging from "completely agree" (+2), to "completely disagree" (-2), through a midpoint (0) of "I have no opinion".

Seventeen of the items expressed a family or other-oriented point of view, while the other seventeen statements represented the attitudes of a more outward-achieving woman, one who considers career satisfactions or independent achievement outside the home more important. A woman who chose other-oriented responses entirely would have a total score of -68. A woman who chose outward-achieving responses entirely would have a score of +68.

Two forms of the Inventory were used. The first asked subjects to express their own feelings. We will refer to this as the Self-Perception or SP form. (Also called Form A by Steinmann.) The second form asked subjects to respond as they believed men would want women to respond. This will be referred to as the Men's Ideal or MI form. (Form C). The order of the items was different in the two forms to aid in avoiding the effects of a response set. A woman examiner administered both forms, as in Steinmann's studies.

V. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The question of similarity among the Midwest and New York samples will be considered first. The differences between the three New York samples were tested by analysis of variance against each of the other New York samples to see if they differed significantly. The results of the two forms of the test were analyzed separately, the results of each form for each group being compared with the results from the same form for each other group. Differences in variability were tested by F tests between each pair of New York samples.

F's and t's were computed for the Midwest sample and each of the New York samples remaining after the combining of groups to test

differences between means and to determine whether the variances of the groups are equal. To answer the question of which New York sample most closely approximated the Midwest sample a Z was computed using the Midwest sample as the score tested against each of the New York samples, using the New York means and standard deviations. A likelihood ratio was then computed using the normal curve ordinates for the obtained Z scores.

The second question, that of congruence between the self-perception and the men's ideal forms of the test, was examined by means of the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks procedure to determine which of the 34 items contributed most to the differences found in the Midwest sample between the two forms of the test.

A personal data form was administered to all subjects to provide demographic information for future use should it be needed for matching the sample.

VI. RESULTS

Table I shows Ns, means, and standard deviations for all four groups of undergraduates; the Midwest sample, the New York public university undergraduates, the New York undergraduates in a moderately expensive private college, and the New York undergraduates in an expensive private college.

TABLE I
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON THE MAFERR INVENTORY OF FEMALE VALUES
 FOR MIDWEST RESPONDENTS AND THREE NEW YORK SAMPLES

	Self-perception form			Men's ideal form	
	n	X	s.d.	X	s.d.
Midwest	50	5.2	11.64	-21.6	14.06
N.Y. Public	96	1.0	11.38	-20.3	14.67
N.Y. Private (mod.)	51	-1.5	9.92	-17.4	14.41
N.Y. Private (exp.)	68	-5.8	11.13	-22.8	14.17

Homogeneity of variance was tested by means of Bartlett's test. The chi-square was not significant for either form SP ($\chi^2 = 3.215$) or form MI ($\chi^2 = 1.74$).

The results of the analysis of variance for form SP ($F = 7.66$) indicate that differences significant beyond .01 do exist among the three New York groups. The analysis of variance for form MI did not produce significance, the computed F of 2.06 is slightly smaller than the tabulated F of 2.33 for the .10 level. From these results it appears that there are significant differences in the variability of the three groups, at least on form SP, and they cannot be combined but must be individually compared with the Midwest sample.

These individual comparisons were made by means of the t test for a difference between two independent means and the F test for homogeneity of variance. The results of these tests are shown in Table II.

TABLE II
RESULTS OF t TESTS OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEANS AND F TESTS
OF VARIABILITY

	t		F	
	SP	MI	SP	MI
Midwest-N.Y. Pub.	2.10*	.52	1.05	1.08
Midwest-N.Y. Priv. (mod.)	3.12**	1.48	1.38	1.05
Midwest-N.Y. Priv. (exp.)	5.21***	.46	1.10	1.01

* significant at the .05 level
 ** significant at the .01 level
 *** significant at the .001 level

The tabulated critical values for t for df 120 are: .05, 1.98; .02 level, 2.36; .01 level, 2.62; .001 level, 3.73. Therefore it appears that the Midwest mean for form SP is significantly different from all three New York means, but the Midwest mean for form MI is not significantly different from any of the New York means.

Likelihood ratios were computed from the normal curve ordinates of Z scores computed for the New York samples, using the Midwest sample as a mean. These indicate that, for form SP, the New York sample from a public university is most like the Midwest sample, and for form MI, the New York sample from an expensive private college is most like the Midwest sample, but only very slightly more so than the public university group.

The results of the F tests indicate that it is safe to assume that all these groups come from the same population as the Midwest sample.

None of these results approaches significance and it appears that the variances are approximately equal.

When we consider the first question to which this study was addressed, these results lead to the following conclusions:

1. There are significant differences among the three New York samples indicating that their concepts of the feminine role differ and they should not be treated as having come from the same population.

2. The concept of the feminine role as reflected by the SP form of the Inventory held by women in a public university in the Midwest is significantly different from those held by women in a public university in the New York City area, in a moderately expensive private college in the New York area, and in an expensive private college in the New York area. However, when considering the results of form MI we conclude that the concept of men's ideal woman held by all these women is much the same, with no significant differences among them.

3. The Midwest sample's self-perception is most like that of the New York public university undergraduates. The Midwest sample's perception of man's ideal woman is most like that of the expensive private college sample.

While the results obtained suggest that the Midwest sample does differ from the others as predicted, the difference is in the direction opposite to that expected. It was expected that Midwestern women would display more unanimity among their beliefs in the two forms of the test than the New York women's responses showed. Instead, a wider spread between the two means was found for the Midwest women than for the New Yorkers, with the mean on the SP form being significantly more self-

oriented for the Midwest sample, while the mean on the MI form is not essentially different.

The Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test, a procedure which is applicable to related samples such as these, was used to test the differences found between forms SP and MI for each of the thirty-four items on the inventory. Table III gives the results of this procedure. The numbers of the items given here are those used on form SP of the inventory. It was found that all thirty-four items produced differences significant at the .001 level. Clearly, differences among them as to their ability to discriminate between the two forms of the test are minor. However, an examination of the rankings in Table III reveals several groupings of items. The six items at the head of the list, those which produced the greatest differences between the two forms of the test, can be classified as dealing with the personal submissiveness of the wife in the marriage relationship. These items, number 24: "A wife's opinion should be as important as the husband's opinion.", number 33: "A woman's place is in the home.", number 19: "It is up to the woman to make the marriage work.", number 17: "Single women need personal success, but all a married woman needs is her husband's success.", number 13: "Marriage and children should come first in a woman's life.", and number 7: "A woman should get married even if the man does not measure up to all her hopes.", all deal with the idea of the subordination of the woman's ideas, feelings, and needs to those of the husband, the family, and the marriage itself.

TABLE III

ITEMS RANKED ACCORDING TO Z SCORE FOR DIFFERENCES DETERMINED BY
WILCOXON MATCHED-PAIRS SIGNED-RANKS TEST

Item no.	Z	Item no.	Z
24	6.16	29	5.57
33	6.16	28	5.56
19	6.11	32	5.52
17	6.10	2	5.41
13	6.06	21	5.40
7	5.93	23	5.38
20	5.87	31	5.38
30	5.86	12	5.32
18	5.82	15	5.27
34	5.82	16	5.11
26	5.80	1	5.02
11	5.76	10	4.95
3	5.68	8	4.61
25	5.68	9	4.56
4	5.65	14	4.55
27	5.61	6	4.19
22	5.57	5	3.74

Scale is available from Maferr Foundation, Inc., 199 E. 58th St., New York, N. Y. 10022.

In general, then, it appears that the greatest conflict experienced by women between their perception of their role and their perception of what men expect of them has to do with this area of the need to submit to the superiority or authority of the husband or to the needs or demands of the children or of the marriage itself. It is interesting, however, that there are several items near the end of the list that might seem to belong to this group, but which produced smaller differences. Perhaps items 21, 1, 10, 9, and 6 failed to show larger differences because they were less controversially stated or were too obviously anti-feminist to be taken seriously even by the imaginary males whose responses the subjects gave.

It is especially interesting that item number 6, which seems to be a perfect expression of the conflict represented by the differences found in the responses to the items at the top of the list, is at the bottom of the list, producing the least difference between the two forms of all but one of the 34 items. An inspection of individual responses to this item reveals that, for both forms, there was a spread of responses across all five possibilities, but most were clustered around the middle of the scale. Although their responses to other items indicate that they feel a conflict between what they want themselves and what they believe men expect of them, they are either unaware of this conflict or do not interpret this statement as an expression of this conflict.

Items number 20: "A working mother can get along as well with her children as can a mother who stays at home.", number 30: "A woman should have interests outside the home.", number 18: "I would not get married if I had to give up what I really believe in order to get along with

another person.", number 34: "I would rather be famous, admired and popular throughout the nation than have the constant affection of just one man.", number 3: "A woman who works cannot possibly be as good a mother as the one who stays home.", and number 25: "My main interest is to raise normal, well-behaved children." deal with somewhat the same theme, the submission of the woman's personal desires to the desires of the family but are stated a little more generally, less specifically indicating a submissive personal relationship.

Items number 26: "How I develop as a person is more important to me than what others think of me.", number 11: "I like listening to people better than talking.", and number 4: "I would like to do something that everybody knows is important.", which rank about the same as the previously discussed group, seem to deal more with the personal development of the woman without particular concern for the relationship between husband and wife.

Of the next nine items, seven are concerned with the personal development, achievement, or personal relationships outside the marriage (or at least not specifically within the marriage) of the woman. These items, number 28: "The greatest satisfaction in life comes from what you do yourself.", number 32: "Modern mothers should bring up their boys and girls to believe in absolute equal rights and freedom for both sexes.", number 2: "I usually pay no attention to other people's feelings.", number 23: "I can put myself in the background and work hard for a person I admire.", number 12: "I argue with people who try to give me orders.", number 15: "I worry about what people think of me.", and number 16: "I express my ideas strongly." all produce less difference than items at the

beginning of the list. It may be that this is because they do not deal directly with the husband-wife relationship, but are more generally stated and might be interpreted to apply to relationships with other people or activities not concerned with the marriage relationship itself. Items 21: "The greatest help a wife can give her husband is to encourage his progress.", and number 31: "I am sure that what a woman gains from marriage makes up for the sacrifices.", which also fall in this range, again suggest submissiveness, although not as explicitly as do items number 24 or number 33 or the others at the top of the list. Perhaps these women see less conflict with men's wishes in their ideas about outside achievement than in their ideas about submissiveness within the marriage relationship as expressed in the items in the first group.

The remaining items would seem to fit with one of the groups above, but for some reason are not as effective as others in discriminating between the two forms of the test.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that although there are significant differences between the Midwest sample and Dr. Steinmann's New York subjects, there are major similarities which substantiate her claim that women of varying backgrounds do share specific values regarding feminine roles. Her studies have covered subjects of many different cultures and lifestyles, yet her data indicate that the general pattern of differences between women's perception of their role and their perception of men's ideas about women's role occurs in about the same magnitude and in the same direction in all of the groups she has studied. The means and the

standard deviations of the Midwest sample and the undergraduates studied earlier are very much alike. As Steinmann points out (1968), on form SP all 19 of her samples had means within nine points of the zero midpoint in a possible range of -68 to +68, and 13 of the samples had scores within five points of the midpoint. On form MI, all 19 means fell within a range of -8.5 to +23.0, with 12 of them falling between 15.0 and 23.0. The Midwest sample means also fall within those ranges. Nevertheless, there are significant differences among the four samples of undergraduates tested here, indicating that it may be unwise to conclude that the self-perception of the feminine role of these women is similar.

It is not clear from this research what may be causing these differences. It appears that the Midwest sample's self-perception is oriented more toward outward-achieving elements than are the New York samples' self-perceptions. The four samples seem to share a belief that man's ideal woman would be much more nurturing and other-oriented than their own self-perceptions. Since it was expected that women in the Midwest would see their role as more other-oriented and less outward-achieving-oriented than women in New York, these results are surprising. It is possible that one explanation might lie in the fact that the New York women were tested in 1964 and 1965, while the Midwestern women were tested in 1972. The Women's Liberation Movement has had a great deal of publicity in the years between these studies and has had great impact on women's ideas about their roles. This 'consciousness raising' might well have caused an increased spread between the women's self-perception of her role, and her idea of man's ideal woman, with most of the change being in her own perception of her role.

Another possibility is that undergraduates in the Midwest may be more vocationally oriented than those in New York. The greatest differences were found between the Midwest sample and the sample from an expensive private school, where students might well be less interested in training for a career than in getting general academic exposure or in going along with others because it is the thing to do. It is not possible to conclude from this study what factors are responsible for differences that were found.

Dr. Steinmann has indicated that she has done some studies recently using Midwestern college students as subjects. It would be useful to compare those results with these, and also to compare these results with more recent data from students in the New York City area to see if their ideas have changed in recent years as a result of Women's Liberation Movement publicity.

Steinmann has done some analysis of responses to individual items, but has not done so for her undergraduate subjects separately. Therefore, the results of the Wilcoxon procedure used here cannot be compared with her analysis. It might be valuable to make such a comparison to look for differences between various cultural groups and also for changes over time as the ideas about the feminine role which are held by both women and men are subjected to pressures for change.

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