Personal Definitions of Masculinity and Femininity as an Aspect of Gender Self-Concept

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Abstract:

Analyses of responses to the Hoffman Gender Scale (R. M. Hoffman, L. D. Borders, & J. A. Hattie, 2000) questions "What do you mean by femininity?" (female respondents) and "What do you mean by masculinity?" (male respondents) provided a framework for conceptualizing respondents' personal definitions of these constructs. Implications for counseling, education, and research are discussed.

Keywords: Counseling | Education | Gender

Article:

There is no shortage of instruments designed to assess the constructs of masculinity and femininity; however, it is generally agreed that clarity regarding how these constructs are defined is sorely lacking (Betz, 1995; Constantinople, 1973; R. A. Lippa, 2002; Spence, 1999; Spence & Buckner, 1995, 2000). A tendency to assume that "we all know what we mean" by these terms permeates much of the popular and professional literature alike, despite the acknowledgment that different personal and cultural concepts of femininity and masculinity indeed exist (Hoffman, 2001) and contribute to one's identity as a woman or a man. As Spence and Buckaler (1995) aptly illustrated by the expression "I don't know what good art is but I know it when I see it" (p. 105), one may be unable to easily articulate what masculinity and femininity mean but still remain confident that one can identify these constructs in oneself and others. Counseling professionals and nonprofessionals alike seldom are challenged to explore what these words mean to them personally and thus may inadvertently perpetuate a focus on traditional, stereotypical definitions of these terms that are counterproductive to the need identified by a number of scholars (e.g., Good, Sherrod, & Dillon, 2000; Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000; Kimmel, 2000a) to recognize and promote healthier, more humanistic, and perhaps more personally accurate, conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

The American Heritage Dictionary (1982) defines feminine as "[o]f or belonging to the female sex" (p. 496) and femininity as "[t]he quality or condition of being feminine; womanliness" (p. 496). Masculine is defined as "[o]f or pertaining to men or boys; male" (p. 769); no definition of masculinity appears. The definitions of these terms, although vague, suggest that "femaleness" and "maleness" might be synonymous with "femininity" and "masculinity," respectively. Indeed, this theoretical perspective was presented eloquently by Spence (1985, 1999) and was integral in the development of one of the more recent gender-related instruments, the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000). It is important to understand that conceiving of masculinity

as maleness and femininity as femaleness does not assume an essentialist perspective (i.e., that women, as a group, have personality characteristics that are innate and that those characteristics are different from those that men innately possess). On the contrary, Spence (1985) argued that there are countless combinations of diverse factors that contribute to various women's senses of their femaleness/femininity and various men's senses of their maleness/masculinity. Similarly, Lewin (1984); Ashmore (1990); Blanchard-Fields, Suhrer-Roussel, and Hertzog (1994); and Hoffman et al. (2000) maintained that each female individual must be allowed the latitude to determine what her femininity (femaleness) means to her and each male individual must be allowed the latitude to determine what his masculinity (maleness) means to him.

Despite the existence of this viewpoint, many have difficulty thinking outside the proverbial box when it comes to masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, despite Sandra Bem's (1974) goal of promoting androgyny through her development of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), the fact that the instrument's items are labeled "masculine" or "feminine" unfortunately reinforces the dichotomy that she was trying to challenge.

As Kimmel (2000b) pointed out, meanings of masculinity and femininity vary from one society/culture to another, within any society/culture over time, within each individual over time, and, perhaps most important, among different individuals in one group at one point in time (i.e., within-group variability). Earlier, Kimmel (1987) had noted the interrelationship between definitions of femininity and masculinity and argued that "definitions of masculinity are historically reactive to changing definitions of femininity" (p. 14). Societal standards of femininity and masculinity obviously exist; however, they may or may not be reflected in a woman's personal definition of her femininity or a man's personal definition of his masculinity.

In speaking of "love, tenderness, nurturing; competence, ambition, [and] assertion," Kimmel (2000a, p. 266) remarked "[w]hat a strange notion indeed" that these emotions and qualities "should be labeled as masculine or feminine, when they are so deeply human [italics added], and when both women and men are so easily capable of so much fuller a range of feelings" (p. 266) than gender stereotypes allow. Noting that, unfortunately, the traditionally feminine qualities have been devalued, he further expressed his own sense of insult when an acquaintance could not understand that his conceptualization of his personal masculinity was inclusive of nurturing his young son.

This type of thinking may easily leave counseling professionals as well as individuals with no background in counseling or psychology confused. Spence and Buckner (1995) went so far as to suggest that it might be advisable "for scholars to abolish the nouns masculinity and femininity from their scientific vocabulary" (pp. 135-136). Rather than resort to this extreme, we might instead focus on the diversity in perspectives of what femininity/ femaleness means to various women and what masculinity/maleness means to various men. This study was designed with that aim. The primary purpose of the study was to identify concepts that those definitions might include, allowing for the possibility that one individual's definition of femininity or masculinity might include a variety of components. Additional purposes are discussed as follows.

GENDER SELF-DEFINITION AND GENDER SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Building on Lewin's (1984) assertion that masculinity and femininity tests should assess gender self-confidence, the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000) was designed to measure one's gender self-confidence, which Hoffman (1996) conceptualized as a critical aspect

of one's gender self-concept. Gender self-confidence is defined as the intensity of an individual's belief that she or he meets her or his personal standards for femininity or masculinity. The HGS comprises two seven-item subscales representing gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance. Gender self-definition refers to how strong a component of one's identity one considers one's self-defined femininity or masculinity to be. Individuals with very strong gender self-definition attach a great deal of importance to their femaleness or maleness. Gender self-definition has been correlated with the Feminist subscale of the Theoretical Orientation Profile Scale-Revised (TOPS-R; Worthington & Dillon, 2003). Gender self-acceptance, on the other hand, refers to how comfortable an individual is as a member of his or her gender. Individuals with strong gender self-acceptance view themselves positively as females and as males but do not necessarily view their gender as a critical component of their identity. Gender self-acceptance has been associated with subjective well-being (Hoffman, 2004a) and the Humanistic/Existential subscale of the TOPS-R (Worthington & Dillon, 2003). In addition to its primary purpose, the present study also was designed to explore possible associations between gender self-acceptance and aspects of masculinity and femininity, as well as between gender self-definition and aspects of masculinity and femininity. Accordingly, a secondary purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between individuals' definitions of masculinity and femininity and their subscale scores on the HGS (Hoffman et al., 2000), in an effort to determine what, if any, concepts of masculinity and femininity are associated with levels of gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance.

As constructs relatively new to the literature, gender self-definition's and gender self-acceptance's relationships to other variables remain largely unstudied. The final purpose of this study was to examine participants' HGS subscale scores (measuring gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance) in relation to their assessment of items on the BSRI (Bem, 1974). This was done to identify possible correlations between gender self-definition and a tendency to perceive stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities as one or the other (i.e., masculine or feminine) or a tendency to perceive stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities as simply human (i.e., neutral), as well as possible correlations between gender self-acceptance and these tendencies. All three purposes of the study reflected research questions that were exploratory in nature; thus, no hypotheses were proposed.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 273 women and 98 men in a variety of undergraduate classes and two student-athlete study groups at a moderately sized university in the southeastern United States. Age of respondents ranged from 17 to 46 years (M = 20.45, SD = 4.12, median = 19). The majority of the participants were White/Caucasian (n = 244). Ethnic identity was not reported by 36 participants. A total of 91 identified as African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, or other. (Data were combined because the numbers in each individual ethnic minority category were inadequate for analysis.) Participants included 132 1st-year students, 84 sophomores, 70 juniors, and 49 seniors.

Measures

HGS. The HGS (Hoffman et al., 2000) consists of 14 items on which respondents are asked to rate themselves using a 6-point Likert-type scale with six distinct anchors (1 = strongly disagree,

6 = strongly agree). Separate but parallel forms of the instrument exist for female and male respondents; Form A is worded for female respondents and Form B is worded for male respondents. The HGS contains two 7-item subscales representing gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance. These two factors accounted for 62% of the total variance for both female and male respondents (Hoffman et al., 2000). Factor analyses in subsequent studies using the HGS (e.g., Hoffman, 2004a, 2004b; Lontz, 2000) have resulted in the same items loading on the two subscales as in the original study. The following are examples of items on the Gender Self-Definition subscale: "Femininity is an important aspect of my self-concept" (Form A)/"Masculinity is an important aspect of my self-concept" (Form B) and "Being a female is a critical part of how I view myself" (Form A)/"Being a male is a critical part of how I view myself" (Form B). The following are examples of items on the Gender Self-Acceptance subscale: "I have a high regard for myself as a female" (Form A)/"I have a high regard for myself as a male" (Form B) and "I am happy with myself as a female" (Form A)/"I am happy with myself as a male" (Form B). Scoring of the HGS consists of calculating a separate mean score for each of the two subscales. Subscale mean scores can range from 1 to 6, with higher scores reflecting stronger levels of these constructs. Hoffman et al. (2000) reported coefficient alphas for women of .88 for the Gender Self-Definition subscale and .90 for the Gender Self-Acceptance subscale and, for men, alphas of .93 for the Gender Self-Definition subscale and .80 for the Gender Self-Acceptance subscale. In addition to the 14 items that constitute the two subscales, those completing the HGS also are asked to write a response to the question, "What do you mean by femininity?" (for female respondents) or "What do you mean by masculinity?" (for male respondents). (See Hoffman et al., 2000, for a detailed discussion of the development of this instrument, psychometric data, and the theory in which the HGS is grounded.)

BSRI. The BSRI (Bem, 1974) consists of 60 personality characteristics on which respondents are asked to rate themselves rising a 7-point Likert-type scale with seven distinct anchors (1 = never or almost never true, 7 = always or almost always true). The 20 characteristics that constitute the Femininity scale are stereotypically feminine (e.g., affectionate, gentle, sympathetic); the 20 traits that constitute the Masculinity scale are stereotypically masculine (e.g., dominant, forceful, independent). Twenty additional items are filler items designed to constitute a measure of social desirability (e.g., conceited, conscientious, truthful). Both of the scoring methods suggested by Bem (1981), in the current BSRI manual, result in the respondent's assignment to one of four categories: feminine, masculine, androgynous (high scores on both dimensions), or undifferentiated (low scores on both dimensions). Bem (1981) reported coefficient alphas for the Femininity, Masculinity, and Femininity minus Masculinity scores ranging from .75 to .90. Although the first 30 items of the BSRI constitute a psychometrically improved Short Form of the instrument (L. Lippa, 1985), Bem (1981) recommended use of the Original Form. Despite its many critiques, the BSRI is used frequently in research to identify participants' classifications (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous, undifferentiated). In a review of the BSRI conducted in conjunction with additional research using this instrument, Hoffman and Borders (2001) reported that respondents' classifications differ considerably on the basis of which of the two forms of the instrument (i.e., Original or Short) and which of the two suggested scoring methods are used (i.e., median-split or hybrid). (For purposes of the study reported in this article, BSRI classification was irrelevant, because only the respondent's assessment of BSRI items as masculine, feminine, or neutral, not her or his BSRI classification, was examined.)

Procedure

As part of a larger study that also assessed construct/discriminant validity and psychometric properties of the HGS, all of the participants were asked to first complete the BSRI (Bem, 1974); then go through a listing of the BSRI items and rate each of the 60 items as feminine, masculine, or neutral; and, finally, complete the HGS (Hoffman et al., 2000) as a self-assessment.

The responses to the open-ended question "What do you mean by femininity (or masculinity)?" were entered into a file with no identification information and typed to ensure readability. By using inductive analysis (Patton, 1987), independent reviews of two 50-response samples by the first and second authors yielded 14 categories/themes identified as components of respondents' definitions. The first author and another rater then independently coded 50 randomly selected responses into the 14 categories. In all cases, there was greater than 90% agreement. Specifically, the percentage of agreement for each category was as follows: attractiveness (98%), androgyny (98%), biological sex (100%), forceful/assertive (98%), expressive/relational (98%), gender self-acceptance (98%), gender self-confidence (96%), gender self-definition (98%), not based on stereotypes (92%), opposite sex (100%), personal feelings/a "sense" (98%), sexual orientation (98%), self-reliance (100%), and societal standards (100%). All of the codable responses were then examined for fit into one or more of the 14 categories. Eighty of the 98 men (82%) and 210 of the 273 women (77%) provided codable responses to this question.

TABLE 1 *(Continued)*

Categories, Examples of Responses, and Percentages of Women and Men Who Responded to Each Category

Category and Examples	Percentage	
	Women	Men
Not based on stereotypes, gender self-confidence, and gender self-acceptance		
I think more in terms of being a conscientious human being, I suppose. "Maleness" has many negative connotations in popular society, but I know that I do not fit the negative stereotypes about masculinity. Because I know that I'm comfortable with myself and don't need to worry about slurs against men. (M)		
Androgyny, gender self-confidence, and gender self-acceptance		
It is hard to say these days because of the likeness we have with males. I feel that it is just being secure with yourself as a female and showing confidence. (F)		

Note. The designation in parentheses indicates whether the respondent is male (M) or female (F).

RESULTS

Because many of the participants' definitions of masculinity and femininity included more than one component, responses from the 210 women yielded 386 category entries, and the 80 men provided 133 entries. Table 1 presents the 14 categories, the percentages of men and women who responded to each category, and one or more examples of each category. For the examples given, the designation in parentheses indicates whether the respondent was male or female. Also in Table 1 are some examples of responses that included more than one category.

Categories Most Reflected and Least Reflected in Participants' Definitions

The categories most often reflected in women's responses were biological sex, with 31.4% of the female participants including this component in their definitions of femininity, and expressive/relational, represented by 29.5% of the female participants in their definitions. These categories were followed by societal standards, reflected in 21.4% of women's definitions; gender self-confidence, reflected in 20.5% of women's definitions; and androgyny, reflected in 12.4% of women's responses. Among men, the categories most frequently identified were

forceful/assertive (35.0%) and biological sex (31.3%). These were followed by societal standards (22.5%) and expressive/relational (13.8%).

The categories least often reflected in women's responses were sexual orientation, with only 2.4% of the female participants including this concept in their definitions; self-reliance, represented by 2.9% of the women in their definitions; and attractiveness, reflected in the definitions of 3.8% of the female respondents. The categories least often reflected in men's responses were attractiveness and gender self-definition, each represented in only 1.3% of men's responses.

Relationship Between HGS Subscale Mean Scores and Presence of Category in Definitions

The means of the HGS Gender Self-Acceptance and Gender Self-Definition subscales are presented for each category in Table 2. Thus, for example, the mean of Gender Self-Acceptance subscale scores for women whose responses included an attractiveness component was 5.11, and for men, it was 6.00. The respective means on the Gender Self-Definition subscale were 3.98 for women and 6.00 for men. (Recall that HGS subscale mean scores may range from 1 to 6, based on respondents' ratings from 1 to 6 of each subscale item. Also note that gender self-acceptance and gender self-definition describe the two HGS subscales as well as 2 of the 14 categories/themes that emerged from an analysis of the qualitative data.)

An analysis of variance was used to assess statistically significant differences between the means on the HGS Gender Self-Acceptance and Gender Self-Definition subscales for those whose responses included each category or not, for men and women, and for the interactions. For example, for the sample as a whole (women and men combined), there was a statistically significant difference in the Gender Self-Definition subscale mean scores between those whose responses included a biological sex component (M = 3.74) and those whose responses did not (M = 4.24). Biological sex was the only category for which a statistically significant difference was found. There were no differences between the means for men and women, nor for the interaction between men and women and including or not including the category in their definitions.

In relation to HGS subscale mean scores, there were no significant interactions between gender of the respondent and the presence or absence of each category. Thus, the means on the two subscales did not differ for men or women whose responses either did or did not reflect each of the 14 categories. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in the yes or no responses (see Table 2) between the men and women for HGS Gender Self-Acceptance subscale mean scores across all categories. Thus, there were no relationships between how men described masculinity or women described femininity and their levels of gender self-acceptance.

There were five significant differences on the HGS Gender Self-Definition subscale. First, as reported earlier, men and women whose definitions included a biological sex component scored lower on the Gender Self-Definition subscale (M = 3.74, n = 91) than those whose definitions did not include this component (M = 4.24, n = 199), F(1,286) = 13.27, p < .001. Note that these results relate to both men and women, because there were no interactions with the gender of the respondent.

There were significant differences for four other categories, all of which resulted in a higher mean on the HGS Gender Self-Definition subscale for respondents (women and men combined) whose conception of masculinity or femininity included that category. The four categories were societal standards, F(1,286) = 7.83, p = .010 (for those with this category, M = 4.21, n = 63; for

those without this category, M = 4.05, n = 227); forceful/assertive, F(1, 286) = 7.83, p < .010 (for those with this category, M = 4.57, n = 44; for those without this category, M = 4.00, n = 246); expressive/relational, F(1,286) = 6.58, p = .010 (for those with this category, M = 4.33, n = 73; for those without this category, M = 4.00, n = 217); and opposite sex, F(1,286) = 4.39, p = .037 (for those with this category, M = 4.47, n = 32; for those without this category, M = 4.04, n = 257). Thus, respondents whose definitions of masculinity or femininity included societal standards, forceful/assertive, expressive/ relational, or opposite sex as components had stronger levels of gender self-definition than those whose conceptions of masculinity and femininity did not derive from these areas.

There were statistically significant gender differences on two scales. Women's definitions of femininity included an expressive/relational component (M = 4.26, n = 210) more often than did men's definitions of masculinity (M = 4.02, n = 80), F(1,286) = 4.28, p = .039. Men's definitions of masculinity included a forceful/assertive component (M = 4.26, n = 80) more often than did women's definitions of femininity (M = 4.02, n = 210), F(1,286) = 7.82, p < .001.

Relationship Between HGS Subscale Mean Scores and Perception of BSRI Items as Neutral

The evaluation score, or the number of BSRI items endorsed by a given participant as neutral, was used as an index of the degree of neutrality with which each respondent viewed the 60 items composing the BSRI. For female participants, the average number of items evaluated as neutral was 40 (SD = 15); for male participants, the average number was 39 (SD = 16). For each participant, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated between each of the two HGS subscale scores and his or her evaluation score.

For women, there was a low but significant negative correlation between their evaluation scores and their mean scores on the Gender Self-Definition subscale of the HGS (r = -.18, df= 270, p < .001) but not for their mean scores on the HGS Gender Self-Acceptance subscale (r = .04, df = 270, p > .05). For men in this study, the negative correlation between their evaluation scores and their HGS Gender Self-Definition subscale mean scores also was significant (r = -.28, df = 95, p < .001). Again, as with female participants, the correlation between male participants' evaluation scores and their HGS Gender Self-Acceptance subscale mean scores was not significant (r = .02, df = 95, p > .05). Thus, whereas gender self-definition appears to be somewhat negatively related to female and male participants' evaluations of the BSRI items as neutral (rather than gender-stereotypical), gender self-acceptance appears to be unrelated to such evaluations. Put another way, strong gender self-definition was associated with respondents' assessment of stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities as masculine or feminine rather than as neutral. Gender self-acceptance, on the other hand, was not associated with respondents' assessment of stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities.

DISCUSSION

Definitions of Masculinity and Femininity

For both men and women, biological sex (maleness/femaleness) was a key component of their respective definitions of masculinity or femininity. For women, it was the most frequently identified category; for men, it was the second. This finding supports the view held by Spence (1985, 1999) and Hoffman et al. (2000) that maleness describes masculinity and femaleness describes femininity; again, this does not mean that there are human qualities that are inherently

female or male; maleness/masculinity may mean different things to different men just as women's conceptualizations of their femaleness/femininity will vary.

Although a number of concepts were well represented in the definitions of both women and men, gender stereotypes were evident. For example, 29.5% of the women described their femininity as including a specific expressive/relational component, and 35% of the men described their masculinity as having a forceful/aggressive component. Societal standards also was a recurring component of both men's (22.5%) and women's (21.4%) responses. On the other hand, 20.5% of the women described their femininity as including a gender self-confidence component. This category reflects confidence in meeting one's personal standards for femininity (femaleness) or masculinity (maleness) but is independent of gender-stereotypical thinking. For example, many women who define themselves as feminists might state that they meet their personal standards for femininity (femaleness), and their standards would most likely be incongruent with gender stereotypes. Similarly, 12.5% of female respondents described their femininity as having an androgyny component, which suggests that a combination of stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine qualities was important to their concept of themselves as women. Men's definitions of masculinity reflected some nonstereotypical thinking as well, in that expressive/relational was the fourth most frequently identified out of the 14 categories (13.8%). Overall, it is possible that similar studies conducted in other geographical areas might yield less incidence of gender-stereotypical concepts in one's definitions of masculinity and femininity; the location of this study in the southeastern United States limits its generalizability in this regard.

For both female and male respondents, attractiveness was one of the less frequently reflected categories, ranking 12 out of the 14 categories among women and tied for last place among men. Given the predominantly young age of the sample (median = 19 years), this finding was surprising, especially for young women whose societal value continues to be largely defined by media images of beauty and thinness.

Relationship Between HGS Subscale Mean Scores and Presence of Category in Definitions

Not only was biological sex at the top of the list of categories present in both women's and men's definitions of femininity and masculinity, respectively, it was also the only category negatively correlated with gender self-definition. Thus, both women whose conceptualizations of femininity and men whose conceptualizations of masculinity contained a biological sex component had lower gender self-definition than those whose conceptualizations lacked that component. It is interesting that both women and men whose definitions included societal standards, opposite sex, forceful/assertive, and expressive/relational categories had significantly higher gender self-definition than those who did not conceptualize their femininity or masculinity in those terms. (Recall that opposite sex described responses that reflected "not acting like a man" [for women] and "not acting like a woman" [for men].) Both societal standards and opposite sex are categories that reflect gender stereotypes. Moreover, in this study, men with strong gender self-definition tended to define themselves in terms of their forcefulness/assertiveness, whereas women with strong gender self-definition often defined themselves in terms of their expressiveness and relational qualities. Forceful/assertive and expressive/ relational also are examples of stereotypical conceptions of masculinity and femininity, respectively. This suggests that participants with strong gender self-definition tended to have more traditional, stereotypical conceptions of gender than had those with weaker gender self-definition. The correlation between weaker gender self-definition and biological sex, mentioned earlier, then can be

interpreted to suggest that men who conceived of their masculinity as a reflection of their maleness and women who conceived of their femininity as a reflection of their femaleness were not thinking of their masculinity or femininity in stereotypical ways.

Relationship Between HGS Subscale Mean Scores and Perception of BSRI Items as Neutral

Ballard-Reisch and Elton (1992) and Hoffman and Borders (2001) found that only 2 of the 60 items that make up the BSRI were evaluated by participants in their studies as masculine or feminine; those were the items masculine and feminine. The 58 other BSRI items were identified as neutral by a minimum of 75% of the participants in both studies. The results of the present study suggest that the more that an individual defines self in terms of masculinity or femininity, as evidenced by higher HGS gender self-definition mean scores, the more likely that individual is to perceive these human characteristics stereotypically as masculine and feminine rather than as neutral. The gender self-definition factor was defined by such HGS items as "My identity is strongly tied to my femininity (masculinity)," "When I am asked to describe myself, being female (male) is one of the first things I think of," and "I define myself largely in terms of my femininity (masculinity)." It is likely that many of those who responded more positively to these statements adhered to more stereotypical and less personal notions of femininity and masculinity. It is quite possible that women who emphasized their femininity and men who emphasized their masculinity were, in fact, emphasizing those aspects of themselves that have traditionally been associated with one sex or the other. This possibility is supported by the data previously discussed that indicated that stereotypical views of masculinity and femininity were evident among the participants in this study. Furthermore, as previously discussed, men and women whose definitions of femininity and masculinity reflected the societal standards or the opposite-sex categories had significantly stronger gender self-definition scores than those who did not. The same was true for forceful/assertive and expressive/relational categories. Of all 14 categories, these 4 are most representative of gender stereotypes, enhanced by the findings that men's definitions of their masculinity contained a forceful/assertive component significantly more than did women's definitions of their femininity and that women's definitions of their femininity contained an expressive/relational component to a significantly greater extent than did men's definitions of their masculinity. It is logical that more stereotypically minded respondents would classify fewer BSRI items as neutral, because they would tend to see more items as gender-linked.

No relationship was found between HGS Gender Self-Acceptance subscale mean scores and perceptions of BSRI items as neutral as opposed to gender-linked. Gender self-acceptance is defined by HGS items such as "I meet my personal standards for femininity (masculinity)," "I am secure in my femininity (masculinity)," and "My sense of myself as a female (male) is positive." These items suggest an acceptance of oneself as male or female rather than the definition of oneself as such, and, therefore, responses to these items would less likely be influenced by one's perceptions of femininity or masculinity as found here.

IMPLICATIONS

One of the most salient implications of the findings of this study is the support it lends to the perspective that maleness describes masculinity and femaleness describes femininity (Hoffman et al., 2000; Spence, 1985, 1999) and that men's maleness/masculinity and women's femaleness/femininity need not be defined stereotypically. This was evidenced by the ranking of biological sex as the most frequently reflected category among both women's definitions of

femininity and men's definitions of masculinity. The fact that participants with strong gender self-definition tended to conceptualize their femininity or masculinity in terms of societal standards, opposite sex, forceful/aggressive (predominantly men), and expressive/relational (predominantly women) categories and that weaker gender self-definition was associated with biological sex as a component of women's femininity and men's masculinity further suggests that biological sex did not represent gender stereotypes. Additional implications for counseling, education, and research, as well as limitations of this research, are discussed further in the sections that follow.

Implications for Counseling

Counselors who reinforce the "humanness" of human qualities with their clients, rather than supporting a dichotomy between those traditionally seen as either masculine or feminine, can help clients understand that men can and should access emotions such as their compassion just as women can and should access attributes such as their leadership abilities. Like Kimmel (2000a), who conceptualized his nurturing of his newborn son as an aspect of his masculinity or maleness, counselors can promote male clients' abilities to broaden their own definitions of masculinity and female clients' abilities to expand their personal definitions of femininity. This may be particularly helpful when counseling couples whose limited conceptualizations of what is masculine or feminine have restricted not only their personal self-expression but also their acceptance of their partner's capabilities.

Fischer and Good (1998) cited numerous studies that supported a relationship between men's traditional, stereotypical conceptions of masculinity and undesirable behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics, including high-risk sexual behavior, psychologically coercive behavior, decreased recognition and expression of emotions, date-rape supportive attitudes, and psychological distress. Similarly, in reviewing the literature on power and violence in male-female relationships, Philpot, Brooks, Lusterman, and Nutt (1997) noted that male batterers frequently defined their masculinity or maleness as "being different from and dominant over women" (p. 313). The components of this statement clearly fall into the opposite-sex and forceful/assertive categories, respectively, both of which reflect stereotypical definitions of masculinity. By assessing individuals' personal definitions of their masculinity or femininity, clinicians and researchers may better understand and even possibly prevent certain negative behaviors.

Implications for Education

On a broader and more proactive level, the framework presented in this article might be used in educational settings to provide a focus or resource for cultivation of positive concepts of masculinity and femininity. Good et al. (2000) contended that men and boys need help in developing healthy conceptions of masculinity. Although there has been less focus in the literature on stereotypical or traditional femininity than on stereotypical or traditional masculinity, it has been argued that both stereotypical/traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity are restrictive and permit only limited expression of both women's and men's humanity (Hoffman, 2001; Kimmel, 2000a). Moreover, despite the acknowledgment that there is no one masculinity ideology (i.e., that masculinity varies with culture and time), there is an overwhelming emphasis in the gender literature on a traditional, stereotypical masculine ideology. Similarly, the limited research on femininity ideology (e.g., Tolman & Porche, 1999) reflects an acceptance of oppressive stereotypes associated with being female. Unfortunately,

this emphasis serves to inadvertently reinforce both gender stereotypes. The framework presented here, and the HGS as a whole, can be used in educational settings with adolescents and adults as a tool to facilitate a broader focus that includes exploration of alternative, more positive, conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Facilitation of such discussions among people of all ages is important but may be particularly so among adolescents. Developmentally, this population is continually assessing and, consciously and unconsciously, redefining their identities as females and males. School counselors can play a key role in program development that deals with these issues. Because people of all ages are affected by subtle pressures to develop and maintain gender-stereotypical attitudes and behaviors that devalue both sexes and negatively affect women, men, and society, tools that can function as "antidotes" to such attitudes and behaviors are invaluable.

Facilitating the development of healthy conceptions of masculinity and femininity necessitates challenging widely held beliefs about how women and men should act. As Good et al. (2000) argued, it involves countering advertisers' gender-stereotypical messages that are aimed a t men's and women's insecurities. Systemic change will require individual and community action to promote strategies such as public service announcements and other media actions that espouse positive, healthy ideas about both femininity and masculinity.

Research Implications and Limitations

As noted, many participants in this study did define femininity and masculinity in stereotypical terms. Although a wide array of definitions of femininity and masculinity was revealed, the findings that an expressive/relational component was evident in the definitions of femininity of 29.5% of the women in this study and that a forceful/aggressive component was reflected in 35% of the men's definitions of masculinity suggest that the influence of cultural stereotypes remains active when people are asked to define these terms. In addition to the geographical issue considered earlier, it is also possible that responding to the open-ended question at the end of the instrument, rather than at the beginning, may have hindered participants' attaching a clear meaning to what they perceived they were evaluating in the HGS items. The placement of this question at the end of the scale, thus, may have resulted in a more traditional or stereotypical mind-set while responding to the items. In an effort to enhance the meaning of participants' responses to the HGS items, the instrument has since been revised so that the open-ended question now precedes rather than follows the scale items (Hoffman, 2004a, 2004b).

Another limitation of this study is that participants needed to come up with their own words to describe what masculinity or femininity meant to them. As other research has indicated, this is difficult for even highly educated, articulate individuals (Spence & Sawin, 1985). A possibility that has emerged from this study, however, is the development of another scale that may assist respondents in conceptualizing and clarifying their individual definitions of femininity or masculinity, as well as assessing their beliefs about these constructs. Specifically, three or more exemplars within each of the 14 categories can be provided and respondents asked to indicate their degree of acceptance of the statements. For example, an item in the biological sex category for male respondents could be "Being masculine is being born as a male"; the equivalent for female respondents would be "Being feminine is being born as a female." Such a scale would be a worthwhile addition to assess fundamental beliefs about masculinity and femininity and may serve as a possible moderator in gender-related studies.

In a decade-old assessment of the status of gender-related research, Betz (1995) cited the critical need for solid empirical research to support theoretical concepts such as masculinity and femininity. She challenged researchers to devote much more attention to construct definition, theory development, and measurement. Studies such as this one as well as the one conducted by Hoffman et al. (2000) were designed to answer that call. The challenge continues.

CONCLUSION

The feminist movement resulted in many women redefining what femininity means to them. Likewise, men have been questioning the meaning of masculinity and exploring what it means to them as individuals (Philpot et al., 1997). The framework for conceptualizing and categorizing the definitions that has been presented here may assist in our exploration of these important questions. In so doing, it may serve to broaden our understanding of gender self-concept and the subjective dimension of gender identity.

The need to construct and allow broader definitions of masculinity and femininity (Good, Wallace, & Borst, 1994; Hoffman, 2001; Philpot et al., 1997) is well recognized. On an individual or small-group level, this task is manageable. Creating systemic, lasting change in this regard is a major undertaking, exacerbated by both subtle and blatant pressure to conform to outmoded ideals, minimization of the importance of gender issues, and a belief held by many that gender has been dealt with sufficiently. Yet, as counselors and educators, we must accept this challenge if we truly want future generations to have the freedom to fully express their humanity.

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TABLE 1
Categories, Examples of Responses, and Percentages of Women and
Men Who Responded to Each Category
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Category and Examples	Percentage Women
Attractiveness	3.8
Caring how you look. Taking a lot of time putting on makeup, doing your hair, and picking out what clothes to wear. (F)	
Androgyny	12.4
The ability to combine aggressive leadership with affection and friendship. (M)	
Biological sex	31.4
Being masculine is being born as a male. (M)	
Forceful/assertive	7.6
Being strong with decisions and not backing down from a challenge. (M)	
Dominant over women. (M)	
Expressive/relational	29.5
Nurturing, caring, motherly, loving, caressing, gentle. (F)	
Gender self-acceptance	14.8
Liking myself (as a female). (F)	

Gender self-confidence   20.5
  Confidence and pride in being a man. (M)
Gender self-definition   8.6
  Being true to yourself as a woman. (F)
Not based on stereotypes   8.1
  Acting like yourself, not how different people
    think you should act (as a man). (M)
Opposite sex   11.0
  Masculinity to me is not acting like a female. (M)
Personal feeling/a "sense"   9.5
  I'm not sure how to describe it. It's something I
    just "know" and feel. (F)
  The sense of being female. (F)
Sexual orientation   2.4
  Not acting homosexual in any way. (M)
Self-reliance   2.9
  Being strong and independent. (M)
Societal standards   21.4
  Femininity to me means displaying "social" female
    characteristics. Displaying characteristics
    that are always depicted with the female
    gender. (F)
  The socially constructed norm for women. (F)
  Masculinity is not a self-concept, but rather the
    definition of the term is imposed on us. (M)

  Statements representing more than one category

Expressive/relational and self-reliance
  Femininity is being a strong, nice, caring,
    loving person who can take on any challenges
    that might come before her in a nice cooperative
    way. (F)
Attractive, expressive/relational, and gender self-acceptance
  Strong, handsome, healthy gentleman. He has
    respect for others as well as himself. (M)

Not based on stereotypes, gender self-confidence,
  and gender self-acceptance
  I think more in terms of being a conscientious
    human being, I suppose. "Maleness" has many
    negative connotations in popular society, but I
    know that I do not fit the negative stereotypes
    about masculinity. Because I know that I'm
    comfortable with myself and don't need to worry
    about slurs against men. (M)
Androgyny, gender self-confidence, and gender self-acceptance
  It is hard to say these days because of the

likeness we have with males. I feel that it is
just being secure with yourself as a female and
showing confidence. (F)

Category and Examples	Percentage Men
Attractiveness	1.3
Caring how you look. Taking a lot of time putting on makeup, doing your hair, and picking out what clothes to wear. (F)	
Androgyny	6.3
The ability to combine aggressive leadership with affection and friendship. (M)	
Biological sex	31.3
Being masculine is being born as a male. (M)	
Forceful/assertive	35.0
Being strong with decisions and not backing down from a challenge. (M)	
Dominant over women. (M)	
Expressive/relational	13.8
Nurturing, caring, motherly, loving, caressing, gentle. (F)	
Gender self-acceptance	10.0
Liking myself (as a female). (F)	
Gender self-confidence	7.5
Confidence and pride in being a man. (M)	
Gender self-definition	1.3
Being true to yourself as a woman. (F)	
Not based on stereotypes	10.0
Acting like yourself, not how different people think you should act (as a man). (M)	
Opposite sex	11.3
Masculinity to me is not acting like a female. (M)	
Personal feeling/a "sense"	5.0
I'm not sure how to describe it. It's something I just "know" and feel. (F)	
The sense of being female. (F)	
Sexual orientation	6.3
Not acting homosexual in any way. (M)	
Self-reliance	7.5
Being strong and independent. (M)	
Societal standards	22.5
Femininity to me means displaying "social" female characteristics. Displaying characteristics that are always depicted with the female gender. (F)	
The socially constructed norm for women. (F)	

Masculinity is not a self-concept, but rather the
    definition of the term is imposed on us. (M)

  Statements representing more than one category

Expressive/relational and self-reliance
  Femininity is being a strong, nice, caring,
    loving person who can take on any challenges
    that might come before her in a nice coopera-tive
    way. (F)
Attractive, expressive/relational, and gender self-acceptance
  Strong, handsome, healthy gentleman. He has
    respect for others as well as himself. (M)

Not based on stereotypes, gender self-confidence,
  and gender self-acceptance
  I think more in terms of being a conscientious
    human being, I suppose. "Maleness" has many
    negative connotations in popular society, but I
    know that I do not fit the negative stereotypes
    about masculinity. Because I know that I'm
    comfortable with myself and don't need to worry
    about slurs against men. (M)
Androgyny, gender self-confidence, and gender self-acceptance
  It is hard to say these days because of the
    likeness we have with males. I feel that it is
    just being secure with yourself as a female and
    showing confidence. (F)

Note. The designation in parentheses indicates
whether the respondent is male (M) or female (F).

TABLE 2
Means of HGS Gender Self-Acceptance and Gender Self-Definition
Subscales by Category

	Self-Acceptance Subscale			
	Women		Men	
Category	No	Yes	No	Yes
Attractiveness	5.48	5.11	5.45	6.00
Androgyny	5.48	5.35	5.48	5.14
Biological sex	5.46	5.47	5.39	5.61
Forceful/assertive	5.45	5.66	5.43	5.51
Expressive/relational	5.49	5.41	5.44	5.56
Gender self-acceptance	5.48	5.40	5.48	5.25
Gender self-confidence	5.44	5.57	5.48	5.24

Category				
Gender self-definition	5.46	5.56	5.46	5.57
Not based on stereotypes	5.45	5.58	5.47	5.34
Opposite sex	5.45	5.60	5.46	5.44
Personal feelings/a "sense"	5.47	5.38	5.46	5.36
Sexual orientation	5.47	5.43	5.47	5.29
Self-reliance	5.46	5.45	5.45	5.57
Societal standards	5.45	5.52	5.45	5.68

Self-Definition
Subscale

	Women		Men	
Category	No	Yes	No	Yes
Attractiveness	4.02	3.98	4.24	6.00
Androgyny	4.01	4.05	4.26	4.25
Biological sex	4.15	3.73	4.48	3.78
Forceful/assertive	4.00	4.28	4.00	4.76
Expressive/relational	3.92	4.26	4.18	4.78
Gender self-acceptance	4.04	3.92	4.28	4.06
Gender self-confidence	3.99	4.14	4.29	3.93
Gender self-definition	3.99	4.35	4.27	3.00
Not based on stereotypes	4.05	3.72	4.30	3.89
Opposite sex	3.97	4.41	4.21	4.62
Personal feelings/a "sense"	4.02	3.98	3.25	3.46
Sexual orientation	4.03	3.54	4.27	4.11
Self-reliance	4.00	4.50	4.25	4.43
Societal standards	4.98	4.15	4.24	4.34

Note. HGS = Hoffman Gender Scale. No = HGS subscale mean score for participants whose responses did not reflect the category. Yes = HGS subscale mean score for participants whose responses did reflect the category.

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