

PSYCHOLOGY AND SEX ROLES

An Androgynous Perspective



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To my son, Jeremy Joshua Kaplan
AGK

To my parents, Mary McGettigan Sedney and Edmund J. Sedney
MAS

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Preface

When psychologists began to study sex roles, they focused on global sex differences, seeking to document the ways females and males differ psychologically. Underlying this approach was the assumption that these differences were a natural outgrowth of biological sex differences. Later, as researchers became slightly more sophisticated, they tried to understand the essence of female and male behavior: psychological “femininity” and “masculinity.” Questions grew to encompass both biological and environmental sources of sex differences; but these questions were framed to suggest that masculinity was the desirable state for males, femininity for females. During the 1970s a major shift occurred. Masculinity and femininity were recognized as socially constructed stereotypes rather than biologically or environmentally determined components inevitably linked with males and females. People could be masculine, feminine, or both masculine and feminine, and psychological masculinity and femininity were to some extent independent of biological sex. Thus, the concept of androgyny was introduced to the psychological literature. Rather than focusing primarily on sex differences, recent researchers have increasingly been exploring the coexistence of femininity and masculinity in one person and the factors that differentiate masculine, feminine, or androgynous people of both sexes.

Psychology and Sex Roles: An Androgynous Perspective is part of this new direction. Building on the notion of androgyny as an *individual* characteristic, we develop androgyny as a *general model* around which issues in the psychology of sex roles can be organized. This androgynous perspective has several key elements. First, in contrast to the masculine bias in much existing research on sex roles, an androgynous perspective stresses the importance of examining both feminine and masculine dimensions. Second, as a holistic concept, it highlights the usefulness of including biological, intrapsychic, and environmental factors in understanding behavior. Third, the consideration of situational appropriateness at the base of androgyny leads to an emphasis on the study of factors that permit flexibility across situations and meaningful choices throughout life. Finally, this perspective acknowledges the relationship between society’s values and the research carried out within that society. None of these elements is unique to androgyny, but all serve as cornerstones of this book.

By using androgyny as an integrating framework, we are expanding its use beyond the definition used by most psychologists. With this framework we hope to avoid the fragmentation that occurs when discrete issues of psychology and sex roles are considered outside a conceptual framework. For the sake of comprehen-

sive coverage, we have included some topics not directly related to androgyny. Further, we have not included *all* possible topics on which androgyny has some bearing. Also, by focusing on androgyny and sex-related issues, we have limited our coverage of other major social considerations such as race and social class. We tried to produce a book that was sufficiently comprehensive yet selective enough that the material could be integrated around the concept of androgyny.

Our choice of androgyny as a central theme does not mean that we wholeheartedly endorse androgyny as the model of the future or the ideal psychological state. To argue that all people should be androgynous is no better than to argue that all women should be feminine or all men masculine. Instead, we use androgyny for the framework it offers, while examining its benefits and limitations within a particular culture.

Psychology and Sex Roles: An Androgynous Perspective was written as an undergraduate textbook and is designed to facilitate classroom teaching and learning. Thematic questions at the beginning of each chapter alert the reader to its major issues; summaries review this material from our perspective. The book requires an elementary knowledge of psychology; a more sophisticated background may enrich one's reading but is not essential. The chapters roughly follow the sequence we have used in teaching courses on the psychology of women and the psychology of sex roles over the past five years. In addition, the four parts of this book parallel the four main sections in Alexandra G. Kaplan and Joan P. Bean's *Beyond Sex Role Stereotypes: Readings Toward a Psychology of Androgyny*; thus the text and the reader can be used in tandem.

Although *Psychology and Sex Roles: An Androgynous Perspective* is primarily intended as a textbook, the nature of the material and the thinking that underlies it extend its usefulness beyond the classroom. The emphasis on the relationship between theory and research and the use of a consistent perspective provide a basis for generating topics that merit further study.

The book is divided into four sections, each with three chapters. The first introduces our perspective. We examine the concept of androgyny as it has been used by psychologists and discuss the ways psychological research—particularly on personal topics such as the behavior of women and men—is affected by the social context in which it occurs. Psychologists were not the first to use androgyny; we also explore its use in other disciplines, specifically religion and literature.

The second section focuses on three components of sex roles in which biology plays a prominent role: the sex hormones, reproduction, and sexuality. We emphasize the interrelationship of biology, psyche, and society as we stress the ways that the meanings and expressions of biological sex differences have been shaped by societal values and expectations. Throughout this section we are alert to the implications that biological sex differences have for an individual's potential for androgyny.

In the third section, we focus on the role of social influences—both within and outside the family—in the development of females' and males' behavior. We consider not only the ways stereotypic behaviors develop, but also potential paths toward the development of androgyny. The combined effects of biological and social influences are again considered when we examine some specific psycho-

logical sex differences and similarities in the cognitive, personality, and interpersonal domains.

Adulthood is the topic of the fourth section. We explore both interpersonal and occupational roles of women and men and the ways that current forces may limit these roles. In the final chapter we consider the factors that influence psychological adjustment for women and men and the role that therapy and self-help groups can play in expanding options.

A word about terminology: there is currently some discussion about the terms *sex* and *gender*; some authors designate the first as the biological term and the second the social term. We use the word *sex* to refer to the biological, psychological, and social aspects of femaleness and maleness, to emphasize their interrelatedness. When we wish to refer to a specific component of sex, we do so with the addition of descriptive words (i.e., biological sex, psychological sex, sexual intercourse, sex role, etc.). We limit the use of the word *gender* to discussions of gender identity, defined as comfort with and acceptance of one's physical body as male or female.

Many people have helped us over the past few years, and we are indebted to them. Joan P. Bean deserves thanks for her role in the early development of this project. Two students, Karen Burgess and Sandra Mandel, have been invaluable for their enthusiastic assistance with detailed bibliographic work and the numerous tasks of translating rough drafts into comprehensible print. Kenneth Bangs, Donna Benoit, Marie Scully, and Gale Storum have also helped with the often unexciting but necessary services in the library and at the typewriter.

Our colleagues and friends have been indispensable, lending us a hand, an ear, or a shoulder. These especially include Barbara Brooks, John Clayton, Edward Kaplan, Charlotte O'Kelly, David Kraft, Stephanie Kraft, Michael Spiegler, Barbara Tinker, and Robert Tinker. We thank Marian Ferguson, our editor at Little, Brown, for both her firm deadlines and her emotional support.

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To one another we would like to say this: Co-authoring the book has not been an unmitigated blessing. There were times when criticism met with resistance and when support was overridden by self-interest. Yet somehow our friendship survived and was enriched by this collaboration. Perhaps the androgyny about which we were writing gave us a model for integrating affect and intellect, support and challenge.

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INTRODUCTION TO ANDROGyny AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

PART



The Nature of Androgyny

1

Before you begin reading this book, take one minute and write down all the traits you can think of that describe the typical American female. Now, take one more minute and write down all the traits you can think of that describe the typical American male. We would guess that, even in this short time, you were able to come up with fairly long lists. If your lists agree with those which appear in the psychological literature (e.g., see Table 1.1) you might have described the typical female as emotional, intuitive, nurturant, sensitive, or dependent. Your description of the typical male might have contained such traits as assertive, independent, rational, competitive, or unemotional. If you compared your lists with those of your classmates, you would probably find that they are fairly similar. You might also notice that none of the traits on your "typical female" list appear on your "typical male" list.

Why can people generate lists of personality traits so easily when they know only the sex of the person? Because we asked you to describe a *typical* man and woman, you had to think in very general terms about traits that are commonly associated with each sex. By doing so, you were drawing on cultural stereotypes of males and females. A stereotype, according to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, is a "simplified and standardized conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group" (p. 1394).

Such "standardized and simplified" conceptions of women and men have regularly been found to exist in contemporary society (Komarovsky, 1950; Lunneborg, 1970; McKee & Sherriffs, 1957; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968). They stem from at least two sources. First is the belief that there is a direct link between personality attributes and sex. By knowing nothing more than someone's sex, it is considered possible to describe a number of characteristics that that person might reasonably be expected to have. Second, men and women are seen as having distinctly different personalities. If, for example, a person is described as being low in feminine-typed traits (e.g., unemotional, not particularly kind or gentle, not warm in relations with others), it is assumed that such a person would be high in masculine-typed traits (e.g., active, independent, making decisions easily; Fouchee, Helmreich, and Spence, 1979). When an adolescent male is exhorted to "be a man," the message is clear: Don't act like a woman.

Return now to your list of traits. Although you were able to make that list, doing so probably left you feeling a bit uneasy, perhaps a bit skeptical. For every "typical"

TABLE 1.1 Stereotypic Sex-Role Items (Responses from 74 College Men and 80 College Women)

<i>Competency Cluster: Masculine pole is more desirable</i>	
<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>
Not at all aggressive	Very aggressive
Not at all independent	Very independent
Very emotional	Not at all emotional
Does not hide emotions at all	Almost always hides emotions
Very subjective	Very objective
Very easily influenced	Not at all easily influenced
Very submissive	Very dominant
Dislikes math and science very much	Likes math and science very much
Very excitable in a minor crisis	Not at all excitable in a minor crisis
Very passive	Very active
Not at all competitive	Very competitive
Very illogical	Very logical
Very home oriented	Very worldly
Not at all skilled in business	Very skilled in business
Very sneaky	Very direct
Does not know the way of the world	Knows the way of the world
Feelings easily hurt	Feelings not easily hurt
Not at all adventurous	Very adventurous
Has difficulty making decisions	Can make decisions easily
Cries very easily	Never cries
Almost never acts as a leader	Almost always acts as a leader
Not at all self-confident	Very self-confident
Very uncomfortable about being aggressive	Not at all uncomfortable about being aggressive
Not at all ambitious	Very ambitious
Unable to separate feelings from ideas	Easily able to separate feelings from ideas
Very dependent	Not at all dependent
Very conceited about appearance	Never conceited about appearance
Thinks women are always superior to men	Thinks men are always superior to women
Does not talk freely about sex with men	Talks freely about sex with men
<i>Warmth-Expressiveness Cluster: Feminine pole is more desirable</i>	
<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>
Doesn't use harsh language at all	Uses very harsh language
Very talkative	Not at all talkative
Very tactful	Very blunt
Very gentle	Very rough
Very aware of feelings of others	Not at all aware of feelings of others
Very religious	Not at all religious
Very interested in own appearance	Not at all interested in own appearance
Very neat in habits	Very sloppy in habits
Very quiet	Very loud
Very strong need for security	Very little need for security
Enjoys art and literature	Does not enjoy art and literature at all
Easily expresses tender feelings	Does not express tender feelings at all easily

Source: From Inge K. Broverman et al., "Sex Role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1972), Table 1, p. 63. Reprinted by permission of the Society for the Study of Social Issues.