

MARRIED COUPLES' SEX ROLE AND PERCEIVED FRIENDSHIP RELATIONS

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The preponderance of studies on friendship relations have used samples of single respondents of varying ages (Bryne, 1969; Bryne, 1971). Few studies have examined friendship relations among married couples. Exceptions include Babchuk's and Bates' (1963) and Babchuk's (1965) friendship research on middle-class couples. These researchers were interested in the relative influence of husbands and wives in the selection and maintenance of friendship relations. Extensive interviews with husbands and wives in both studies revealed a male dominance theme. Husbands and wives agreed that husbands are mainly responsible for the initiation and maintenance of friendship relations. In a similar study, Simon, Crotts, and Mahan (1970) examined only wives' perceptions of the role each spouse plays in the initiation and maintenance of friendship relations. Incongruous with the earlier studies, these authors report a female dominance theme. The wife, rather than the husband was perceived to be more active in selecting and maintaining the couple's friends. These contradictory findings raise questions concerning the roles played by husbands and wives in friendship activities. We will reexamine the relative influence of each spouse in friendship selection and maintenance.

One possible explanation of these contradictory findings would be to focus on the interval of time between the studies. While this time interval is not overwhelming in the 5-to-8-year interval, evidence suggests that the sex role orientations of men and women were indeed changing during this period (Arafat & Yorburg, 1976). Traditionally, the male has been viewed as the marriage partner enacting assertion, competence, and rationality. The female has been viewed as the marriage partner enacting submission, dependence, and subjectivity. Generally, research has substantiated these stereotypic sex roles for husbands and wives within the marriage (Poloma & Garland, 1975; Pleck, 1975). However, Arafat and Yorburg (1976) report that the "blurring of status and role differences between men and women" has become increasingly visible with the rising economic and educational opportunities for women and the changing values in

childrearing practices. Additionally, they note that these changes were ultimately responsible for the emergence of the new women's movement in the United States in the mid-1960's which further served to reinforce "a decline in the degree of sex-typed role conceptions, a decline in male dominance, and a decline in the traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity" (Arafat & Yorburg, 1976, p. 23).

These changing sex role definitions within marriage provide one plausible explanation for the contradictory findings presented earlier. Babchuk's and Bates' research was conducted in the early to mid-1960's; both studies were prior to the advent of the women's movement (Freeman, 1973). Simon's, Crott's, and Mahan's research was conducted in 1970; the women's movement was four years strong.

It should be noted that if changing sex role orientation is to be taken as a possible reason for the difference in perceptions of who, husband or wife, is more active in friendship formation and maintenance, then the perceptions of both husbands and wives should have changed. This is evident since we know that changing sex role orientations have not been limited to women (Arafat & Yorburg, 1976). However, it will be recalled that Babchuk and Bates (1963) and Babchuk (1965) interviewed both husbands and wives. Quite possibly, then, any shift which may have occurred during the time interval between studies may have been among wives only. If this were the case, though, we would expect to find only sex differences in the perceptions of the roles husbands and wives play in friendship selection and maintenance. Women would perceive wives as more active while men would still perceive husbands as more active. To control for this possibility, any investigation of the relationship between sex role orientation and couples' perception of friendship activities must necessarily control the sex variable.

SUBJECTS

The subjects for this study were 61 white married couples containing 122 paired respondents sampled in a southern metropolitan area. The subjects' ages ranged between 18

and 49 with a median age of 27. Sixty-seven percent of the couples reported both spouses gainfully employed and 33 percent reported only the husband working outside the home.

BEM SEX ROLES INVENTORY

Sex role orientation was assessed using the Bem Sex Roles Inventory (1974). This inventory consists of 60 personality characteristics, each scored on a scale from one never or almost never true, to seven always or almost always true. The 60 item scale divided into three subscales: (1) masculinity, (2) femininity, and (3) social desirability.

Masculinity and femininity scores are computed by calculating the average weight for the 20 designated items (Bem, 1976). By dichotomizing masculinity and femininity scores at the median, four types of individuals can be identified: (1) masculine; above the median on masculine and below the median on feminine; (2) feminine above the median on feminine and below the median on masculine; androgynous above the median on both masculine and feminine; and (3) undifferentiated, below the median on both masculine and feminine. For purposes of this study, sex role orientation was subsequently dichotomized to reflect the enactment of traditional or nontraditional roles. Females sex-typed feminine and males sex-typed masculine were designated as traditional. Females and males who were cross-sex-typed, androgynous, or undifferentiated were designated as nontraditional.

SELECTION OF FRIENDSHIP RELATIONS

Patterns in friendship selection and maintenance were identified by questioning respondents about the roles played by husband and wife in initiating and maintaining friendships. Specifically, the following four questions were asked:

- (1) In your opinion, who plays the most active role in the maintenance of friendship relations (self or spouse)?
- (2) Who would be most likely to initiate a friendship with another couple (self or spouse)?
- (3) Who would be most likely to initiate a friendship with another individual (self or spouse)?
- (4) Who would you say has the most friends (self or spouse)?

For purposes of analysis, the response alternatives "self" or "spouse" were appropriately recoded to "husband" or "wife".

DATA COLLECTION

Participants for this study were solicited through students enrolled in an upper division sociology course. The participants were told that the purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding of friendship relations. Husbands and wives were asked to complete the instrument independently of each other in order to avoid biasing each other's responses. Due to the fact that all distributed questionnaires were followed up, the return rate was 94%.

LOG-LINEAR ANALYSIS

Since the goal of this research was to identify the underlying structure among a set of dichotomous categorical variables including sex, sex role, and "husband" or "wife" responses to the four friendship items, log-linear analysis was performed (Everitt, 1977; Knoke, 1975). Given the present statistical problem where all variables, including the dependent variable, are dichotomous, one statistical technique which would seem appropriate is the chi squared statistic. However, log-linear analysis extends the chi squared statistic in such a way as to allow determination of "which variables and interaction terms must be included to explain parsimoniously" (Zahn & Fein, 1974, p. 5). The best fitting model is obtained by statistically comparing improvements in fit between lower order and successively higher order models, calculated as the difference in likelihood ratio chi square values. The best fitting model was obtained by comparing the following hierarchical models: (a) no sex or sex role effects, (b) sex effect, (c) sex role effect, and (d) sex and sex role effects. If none of these models are deemed a good fit, the saturated model, interaction of sex and sex role, is taken to be the best fitting model.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the raw data for each of the friendship items by sex and sex role. Several alternative log-linear models were fitted to these data. These models are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 1: RESPONSES TO FRIENDSHIP ITEMS BY SEX AND SEX ROLE:
(Figures are percentages)**

<i>Friendship Perception</i>	(N)	Role: Sex:	Nontraditional		Traditional	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
Husband maintains friendship	(122)		12.3	4.9	10.7	13.9
Wife maintains friendship			12.3	13.9	12.2	14.8
Husband initiates, couples	(118)		10.2	5.9	9.3	11.9
Wife initiates, couples			14.4	11.9	18.6	17.8
Husband initiates, individuals	(120)		10.8	5.8	14.2	17.5
Wife initiates, individuals			13.3	12.5	13.3	12.5
Husband has more friends	(120)		12.5	5.8	17.5	17.5
Wife has more friends			12.5	12.5	10.0	11.7

**TABLE 2: LOG-LINEAR FIT OF HUSBAND-WIFE RESPONSES
BY FRIENDSHIP, SEX, & SEX ROLE**

Model assuming 2-way interaction between <i>sex & sex role for Table 1 data</i>	Likelihood Ratio <i>Chi squared</i>	df	p*
<i>Active in Friendship Maintenance</i>			
(A) Friendship	4.12	3	.25
(B) Friendship-Sex Difference, (A) - (B)	3.91 .21	2 1	.14 .66
(C) Friendship-Sex Role Difference, (A) - (C)	3.93 .19	2 1	.14 .67
(D) Friendship-Sex, Friendship-Sex role Difference (A) - (D)	3.69 .43	1 2	.05 .81
<i>Initiates Friendship with Couples</i>			
Friendship	.68	3	.88
<i>Initiates Friendship with Individuals</i>			
(A) Friendship	4.19	3	.24
(B) Friendship-Sex Difference, (A) - (B)	4.19 .00	2 1	.12 1.00
(C) Friendship-Sex role Difference, (A) - (C)	1.22 2.97	2 1	.54 .09
<i>Most Friends</i>			
(A) Friendship	6.34	3	.10
(B) Friendship-Sex Difference, (A) - (B)	5.56 .78	2 1	.06 .39
(C) Friendship-Sex role Difference, (A) - (C)	1.84 4.50	2 1	.40 .04

*The probability coefficient associated with the Chi squared Likelihood Ratio is interpreted the same way as the goodness-of-fit test. The higher the probability and the lower the Chi squared value, the better the fit of the model to the observed data. When no simple model can be described as a good fit, the best fitting model is determined by taking the difference between Likelihood Ratio and the associated probability is interpreted as improvement in fit, which would be significant here if it exceeded .10.

On the question of friendship maintenance (Q1), Model A proposes no sex or sex role effect. This model does not fit the data well ($X^2(3) = 4.12$; $p = .25$). The higher order Model B which includes a sex effect does not significantly improve the fit (X^2 for (A) - (B) = .21; $p = .66$). Additionally, neither Model C, sex role effect nor Model D sex and sex role effects improves this fit. Since no lower order model adequately describes the data, the interaction of sex and sex role is taken to be the best fitting model. This interaction becomes readily apparent from the frequencies in Table 1. Specifically, traditional males and nontraditional females perceive wives to be the most active in friendship maintenance, while nontraditional males and traditional females perceive no differences between husbands' and wives' involvement in friendship maintenance.

On the question of who is most likely to initiate a friendship with another couple, Model A proposes no sex or sex role effect. As can be seen in Table 2, this model provides a good fit to the data ($X^2(3) = .68$; $p = .88$). Therefore, there is no need to posit a sex or sex role effect. The frequencies in Table 1 reveal that males and females, traditional, and nontraditional alike agree that wives are more likely to initiate "couple" friendships, a finding which is consistent with that of Simon, Crofts, and Mahan (1970).

Regarding the perception of who is most likely to initiate "individual" friendships, the best fitting model (see Table 2) proposes a sex role effect (X^2 for (A) - (C) = 2.97; $p = .09$). That is, traditional perceive husbands and nontraditional perceive wives as more likely to initiate friendships with individuals.

Regarding the perception of who has the most friends (Q4), the best fitting model proposes a sex role effect (X^2 for (A) - (C) = 4.50; $p = .04$). As in the case of friendship initiation with individuals, traditional perceive husbands and nontraditional perceive wives as having the most friends.

DISCUSSION

This research has examined the relation between sex role orientation and roles husbands and wives play in friendship formation and maintenance. While there were no sex differences in the perception of friendship activities, sex role orientation was related to all but one of

the four friendship areas examined here. In the initiation of "couple" friendships, sex role did not influence the perception of who was more active. In effect, both husbands and wives, traditional and nontraditional agreed that wives played the more active role. This finding is in accord with that of Simon, Crofts, and Mahan (1970) suggesting that in the case of "couples" friendships, a shift in the perception of who is most active may have occurred. However, this shift cannot be explained by sex role orientation, and what other factors may have been operating are not readily apparent.

In the remaining three friendship areas examined herein, sex role orientation does appear to play an important role. First, the perception of who is most active in friendship maintenance varies with both sex and sex role orientation of the spouse. In particular, nontraditional females and traditional males perceive wives to be the most active in friendship maintenance while nontraditional males and traditional females perceive husband and wives as equally active in friendship maintenance. It is interesting to note that these first two polarized groups (i.e., nontraditional females and traditional males) give credit to the wife. Just why this is so cannot be determined from the present data. Quite possibly, though, these groups respond with "wife" for different reasons. The traditional male may view such activity as falling within the domestic realm and therefore as a responsibility of the female. The nontraditional female may view such activity as an assertion of her independence and increasing dominance and therefore her responsibility. Similarly, we can only speculate as to why nontraditional female, like the traditional male, may view these friendship maintenance responsibilities as in the domestic realm and therefore be more active in them. However, since she is also the marriage partner enacting submission and dependence she may be unwilling to view herself as dominant in any friendship area, thus suggesting an egalitarian response. The nontraditional males may perceive husbands and wives and equally active since he may be less likely to perceive "self" as dominant and more willing to share such friendship "responsibilities" with spouse even in the domestic realm.

Second, both individual friendship formation and the perception of who has the most friends

were related to sex role orientation. That is, traditionalists perceive husbands and nontraditionalists perceive wives to be dominant in these two friendship areas. The importance of sex role orientation in explaining responses on these items most clearly demonstrates the male and female dominance themes. Traditional males and females support the male dominance theme. Whereas nontraditional males and females lean toward the female dominance theme. It is notable that such clear sex role orientation effects occurred in the two areas which seem to suggest "individual" rather than "joint" activities.

Sex role orientation affects the roles husbands and wives play in friendship formation and maintenance. While past research did not differentiate between the initiation of friendships with "individuals" and "couples", our results differed in these two areas. Perhaps, sex role orientation only affects areas of individual activity rather than joint activities such as "couple" friendships because those friendships are more firmly entrenched in traditional marital roles.

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This study suggests that gay women and their beliefs are as varied and unique as any other woman's beliefs. Lesbians consider themselves to be women, and that being lesbian is not a replacement of femininity, but merely an elaboration of it.

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