

## Sex Differences in the Interpersonal Behavior of Married Couples

Michael L. Barnes and David M. Buss  
Harvard University

We sought to identify and predict the major ways in which males and females differ in interpersonal behavior. Self and observer act reports were used to assess performance frequencies of 800 acts in a sample of 93 married couples over a three-month period. Although numerous sex differences were found with respect to each data source, only 69 acts showed significant sex differences across both data sources. Subsequently, these 69 acts were factor analyzed separately for the two data sources in order to identify the major dimensions of sex difference. Four clear and comparable factors emerged from the two analyses: Coercive-Manipulative, Communal, Flashy Attire, and Initiative. Standard masculinity-femininity scales were used to predict composites based on the factor loadings. The California Psychological Inventory Femininity scale correlated highly with most composites for the total sample, suggesting considerable predictive power in identifying dimensions of sex difference. The Spence-Helmreich Extended Personality Attribute Questionnaire scales correlated strongly with the factor composites within sex, but less so for the total sample. Results are discussed in terms of strategies for assessing sex differences in interpersonal behavior, alternative foci of convenience for different masculinity and femininity scales, and the use of multiple data sources to transcend single-source limitations.

Differences between males and females have long been of interest to psychologists, as well as to sociologists, anthropologists, and economists. Sex differences historically have been linked to such diverse phenomena as role assignment (e.g., division of labor), social participation (e.g., exclusive men's clubs), child rearing, and social identity. Indeed, sex is the clearest biological typology in human populations, and the presence of this typology has led to some of the most intense political activity in the past two decades.

Because of its importance, thousands of studies have been conducted on male-female differences and volumes have been written to distill the themes of these studies (e.g., MacCoby & Jacklin, 1974; Tyler, 1965; Willerman, 1979). Two themes have consistently emerged from this vast literature: Males tend to be more instrumental, whereas females tend to

be more expressive (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Buss, 1981; Carlson, 1971). In spite of these common themes, there is still much disagreement about the major ways in which males and females differ in interpersonal behavior (cf. Block, 1976).

In the past decade, interest in sex differences has increased dramatically. The traditional concept of bipolar masculinity-femininity has been challenged (Bem, 1974; Constantinople, 1973; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974), and novel reconceptualizations have emerged (Wiggins & Holzmuller, 1978). The notion of androgyny, reflecting in the same individual features of both masculinity and femininity, attained notoriety, accrued several self-report instruments (Bem, 1974; Spence et al., 1974), and drew criticism (e.g., Locksley & Colten, 1979; Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979). The individual constructs of masculinity and femininity were themselves fractionated into smaller, more unidimensional components (e.g., Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979). But in spite of the voluminous conceptual and empirical work devoted to scaling and researching these newer constructs and to examining sex dif-

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Michael L. Barnes, who is now at the Department of Psychology, Yale University, P.O. Box 11A Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-7447.

ferences within specific domains (e.g., empathy: Hoffman, 1977; influenceability: Eagley, 1978; aggression: Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977), relatively few studies have been devoted directly to a broad-gauge strategy of identifying how the sexes differ in their naturally occurring interpersonal behavior.

Assessing the major interpersonal dimensions along which males and females differ poses substantial conceptual and methodological difficulties. First, one needs a relatively comprehensive taxonomic system from which behaviors can be sampled. Without such a system, the study may contain gaps in coverage, and therefore neglect areas within which sex differences might occur. Second, one needs methodologies that are not narrowly tailored to specific subdomains. Experimental laboratory settings tend to be suited for assessing more delimited behaviors within circumscribed areas. Techniques for assessing everyday naturally occurring behaviors would be better suited for this assessment task. Third, data emerging from a single source may contain biases peculiar to that source. Obtaining convergence from alternative data sources provides a firmer basis for drawing conclusions about sex differences.

The purposes of this study were to identify and assess the dimensions of interpersonal behavior along which male and females differ, and to evaluate the predictability of these behavioral dimensions from standard masculinity and femininity scales. Wiggins's (1979) circumplex model of the interpersonal domain was chosen as a relatively comprehensive system from which to sample behaviors, and self and observer act reports as methods for assessing these behaviors (Buss & Craik, 1983, 1984).

We chose for study eight points representing every other point on the circumplex model: dominant, calculating, quarrelsome, introverted, submissive, ingenuous, agreeable, and extraverted. Within each category, 100 acts were nominated by independent panels. In the main study, frequencies of act performance were assessed by two sources: self and spouse-observer retrospective act reports within a 3-month time period (see Method section).

The purposes of our investigation may be summarized as follows: (a) to identify and

assess the major dimensions of sex difference in interpersonal behavior within a systematically sampled set of 800 specific acts, using two independent data sources (self and observer); (b) to evaluate a set of standard masculinity and femininity scales by the extent to which they adequately predict these dimensions; and (c) to examine whether the scales that are successful in predicting sex differences are also successful in predicting these domains of act performance within sex.

#### Preliminary Studies: Act Nominations

Several samples of subjects participated in the act nomination stage. The first consisted of 75 undergraduate students who provided act nominations for the category of dominance (see Buss & Craik, 1980). Thirty-seven undergraduates provided nominations for submissiveness (see Buss & Craik, 1981). The remaining act nominations obtained from independent samples for this study were for the following categories: quarrelsome ( $n = 79$ ), agreeableness ( $n = 83$ ), calculating ( $n = 76$ ), ingenuous ( $n = 78$ ), extraverted ( $n = 78$ ), and introverted ( $n = 79$ ). Each participant received a sheet with standard act nomination instructions. We subsequently reduced the eight lists of acts by eliminating redundancies, "non-act" statements (e.g., adjectives), general tendency statements (e.g., "she tends to exercise a lot"), and statements considered too vague to constitute observable acts.

#### Main Study: Identifying Interpersonal Sex Differences

##### *Method*

##### *Subjects*

One hundred eighty-six individuals composing 93 married couples participated in the main study. We obtained subjects by placing newspaper advertisements and flyers throughout the larger Boston area. Both the advertisements and the flyers indicated that a study was being conducted with married couples and that personal feedback and a small sum of money would be given as a token of appreciation for participation.

##### *Materials*

*Self-reports of act performance.* The retrospective self-report of act performance was obtained through two forms with 400 acts each, intermingled from the eight

categories. The instructions were as follows: "The following pages contain 400 human acts beginning with act (1) to act (400) [or act (401) to act (800)]. For each act, please indicate how often you have performed it (if at all) *within the past three months*." A 3-month time frame was chosen to allow for a sufficient number of the acts to have occurred.

*Spouse-observer reports of act performance.* In order to obtain an independent assessment of act performance, the spouse of each participant completed a parallel act report form on which they reported spouse's performance of each of the 800 acts. Instructions were similar to those for the self-report of act performance (see Buss, 1984).

*Masculinity and femininity scales.* The predictor scales included the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) Femininity scale (Gough, 1957/1964) and the Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ; Spence et al. 1979) scales: M+ (socially desirable masculinity), F+ (socially desirable femininity), MF (bipolar masculinity and femininity), M- (socially undesirable masculinity), Fva- (feminine verbal aggressiveness), and Fc- (feminine unmitigated communion).

### Procedure

Data gathering for the main study occurred in two sessions, separated by several days. Each session lasted about three hours, although the time needed to complete the materials varied across individuals. In the first session, participants completed the Self Act Reports. In the second session, participants completed the Observer Act Reports. Each couple was separated for the duration of the testing session to prevent discussion of the forms. Refreshments were provided, and subjects were encouraged to take breaks to mitigate fatigue.

### Results

#### *Sex Differences in Act Composites and Specific Acts*

To assess sex differences within each of the eight interpersonal categories, we computed 16 *t* tests, 8 for the S data (self-reported frequencies) and 8 for the O data (spouse-reported frequencies). These frequencies were computed (e.g., for dominance) as the proportion of the total acts performed that were dominant. Only the quarrelsome act category showed significance across both data sources—for S data,  $t(175) = 2.92, p = .004, r = .22$ ; for O data,  $t(175) = 2.14, p = .03, r = .16$ —with women scoring higher than men across both data sources. Women also showed significantly greater submissive act performance, but only with the O data source,  $t(175) = 2.16, p = .03, r = .16$ . Thus sex differences in interpersonal behavior were not generally found in the categories stereotypically associated with sex roles (e.g., dominant-

submissive), and were found in the opposite direction of the stereotype for quarrelsome acts. These findings suggest that the a priori category system was not sensitive in detecting the major dimensions of sex differences in interpersonal behavior.

We performed *t* tests at the act level for each of the 800 acts for both the S and the O data sources. Of these 1,600 *t* tests, 311 were significant ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed), 151 for the S data and 160 for the O data. To reduce chance findings, a dual criterion was adopted for data reduction: An act had to show significant sex differences across both data sources in order to be considered further. A total of 69 acts showed significant sex differences in the same direction across both data sources. Of these, 23 showed higher performance frequencies for males and 46 showed higher performance frequencies for females.

#### *Factor Analysis of Acts That Show Sex Differences*

These 69 acts were submitted to independent factor analyses (varimax rotation) for each data source. Four clear factors emerged from each data source. The four factors were highly congruent for the two sources, with the same acts loading highly on corresponding factors.

The highest loading acts for each factor are shown in Table 1 along with the respective factor loadings for the S and O data. The first three factors consisted exclusively of the acts that females performed more frequently than males; the fourth factor consisted entirely of acts that males performed more frequently than females. The first factor, labeled *Coercive-Manipulative*, is characterized by hostile, critical, demanding, and antagonistic actions. Factor 2, labeled *Communal*, is described by kind, thoughtful, considerate, and generous acts. The third factor, labeled *Flashy Attire*, consists of acts of wearing flashy or seductive clothing. And the fourth factor, consisting of acts for which male performance was more frequent than female performance, is called *Initiative* and embodies themes of enterprise and agency. Implications of these four factors for taxonomies of sex differences are explored in the Discussion section.

*Factor Composites*

We computed composites based on the factor loadings, using unit weighting. In Table 2 we show the alpha reliability coefficients and the validity coefficients as represented by the correlations between composites based on the self and observer data sources. Internal consistency reliabilities are adequate for the Coercive-Manipulative, Communal, and Flashy Attire composites, and somewhat lower

Table 1  
*Top Five Acts and Factor Loadings on Four Interpersonal Factors of Sex Difference*

S loading	O loading	Act
Factor 1: Coercive-Manipulative		
.57	.64	I cried in order to get my way.
.56	.62	I persuaded him to do something he didn't want to do.
.60	.56	I gave him the "silent treatment" when I was upset.
.57	.56	I criticized him/her about his/her behavior.
.48	.52	I told him/her which item to purchase.
Factor 2: Communal		
.74	.61	I cooked dinner for the group.
.65	.67	I served a fantastic meal.
.37	.53	I visited someone who needed company.
.36	.55	I wrote a letter to an old friend.
.41	.43	I took the back seat when the three of us set out on the journey.
Factor 3: Flashy Attire		
.81	.81	I wore seductive clothes.
.78	.78	I dressed in "sexy" clothes.
.79	.73	I wore sexy clothes to impress someone.
.66	.72	I wore a sexy outfit to the dance.
.41	.51	I dressed in flashy clothes.
Factor 4: Initiative		
.45	.57	I helped a stranger with directions.
.54	.48	I helped a friend with a difficult assignment.
.51	.43	I initiated a conversation with the stranger.
.47	.46	I took the initiative in the sexual encounter.
.50	.41	I walked alone at night.

Table 2  
*Reliability and Validity of Factor Composites*

Factor	# Acts	Alpha reliability	Validity: self × observer <i>r</i>
Coercive-Manipulative	18	.83	.67*
Communal	11	.76	.60*
Flashy Attire	5	.85	.66*
Initiative	16	.62	.44*

Note. Reliabilities are based on composite of self and observer acts (i.e., on twice the number of acts shown).

\*  $p < .001$ .

(.62) for the Initiative composite. Validity coefficients mirror this trend: They are strikingly high for the first three factors, and somewhat lower for the Initiative composite, although all four validity coefficients are significant beyond the .001 level.

*Predicting Factor Composites From M-F Scales*

Next, we sought to test the power of extant masculinity and femininity scales in predicting interpersonal dimensions of sex difference. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the correlations between the CPI Femininity and EPAQ scales and the four factor composites for the total sample, and for males and females separately.

The results shown in Table 3 for the total sample suggest that the CPI Femininity scale is the most powerful, particularly in predicting Coercive-Manipulative (.55), Communal (.37), and Initiative (-.46) act composites. The EPAQ scales show generally lower total sample correlations, although the striking correlation between EPAQ Fva- and the Coercive-Manipulative act composite (.50) provides robust validation for that scale. The Flashy Attire composite is not predicted well by any of these masculinity and femininity scales for the total sample.

How good are these scales at predicting these "masculine" and "feminine" interpersonal composites within sex? Table 4, in which we show these correlations for the male sample, suggests that only the EPAQ Fva- scale retains its predictive power for the Coercive-Manipulative composite,

Table 3  
*Predicting Factor Composites of Sex Difference From M and F Scales: Total Sample*

Scales	Coercive- Manipulative	Communal	Flashy Attire	Initiative
CPI Femininity	.55***	.37***	.08	-.46***
EPAQ M-F	-.39***	-.29***	.05	.35***
EPAQ M+	-.35***	-.06	.08	.18*
EPAQ F+	.17*	.32***	.08	-.21**
EPAQ M-	.00	-.20**	-.01	-.07
EPAQ Fva-	.50***	.19*	-.05	-.40***
EPAQ Fc-	.19*	.14	-.06	-.09
EPAQ (M+) + (F+) (androgyny)	-.10	.20**	.11	-.04
EPAQ (M+) - (F+) (bipolar)	-.34***	-.24**	.00	.34**

Note. CPI = California Psychological Inventory; EPAQ = Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

$r(168) = .34, p < .001$ . The CPI Femininity scale does not predict any of the act composites significantly for the male sample.

Table 5, in which we show the parallel results for the female sample, replicates the predictive power of the EPAQ Fva- scale for the Coercive-Manipulative composite,  $r(168) = .34, p < .001$ . In addition, the composite of EPAQ M+ and F+, reflecting an androgynous sex role orientation (Ozer, 1981), significantly predicts Communal acts for the female sample,  $r(168) = .32, p < .01$ , as does the EPAQ F+ alone,  $r(168) = .26, p < .05$ . The CPI Femininity scale does not show much predictive power within the female sample.

### Discussion

Before discussing the implications of this study, we note several conceptual and methodological limitations. First, and perhaps most important, the spouse-report data source provides only a limited confirmation of the sex differences emerging from the self-reported act frequencies. Although spouses are clearly well-informed observers, there are limitations imposed by role, and by the interpersonal behavior to which one's spouse has access. In future studies, researchers could fruitfully obtain reports from a broader sample of observers, including friends, other family members, and perhaps work colleagues.

A second limitation is that the sex differences obtained here may only apply to differences between males and females who are

married. Although most persons in Western culture eventually marry (Price & Vandenberg, 1980), sex differences found in the population of unmarried persons may not coincide with those found in this study. The sex differences emerging from this study, however, are potentially more generalizable than studies in which college students have been the sole participants, insofar as married couples form a larger percentage of the general population than do college students. In future studies, researchers could test the generality of sex differences found here.

A third limitation pertains to the specific methods used to assess interpersonal behavior: frequencies of acts reported by actors and spouse-observers. These methods do not necessarily reveal the intensity with which each act is performed, nor do they indicate whether the same act carries similar meaning for different individuals. In addition, some acts may be more salient or may carry more information about an individual than may other acts. Surface equivalence between the sexes in act endorsement does not necessarily imply underlying construct equivalence (cf. Locksley & Colten, 1979).

In assessing the major domains of behavior within which sex differences occur, one may use two strategies: one tightly focused and the other wider ranging. The narrow-gauge strategies offer the possibility of in-depth documentation of the existence of sex differences, and of the specific manifestations within a delimited domain. In contrast, the broad-gauge strategies offer a more comprehensive

Table 4  
*Predicting Factor Composites of Sex Difference From M and F Scales: Male Sample (N = 86)*

Scales	Coercive- Manipulative	Communal	Flashy Attire	Initiative
CPI Femininity	.18	.07	-.07	.04
EPAQ M-F	-.12	-.01	.26*	.01
EPAQ M+	-.18	-.14	.17	-.05
EPAQ F+	.07	.14	.01	.08
EPAQ M-	.13	-.13	-.07	-.27*
EPAQ Fva-	.34**	-.11	-.11	-.20
EPAQ Fc-	-.01	.01	-.11	.23*
EPAQ (M+) + (F+) (androgynous)	-.09	.02	.12	-.02
EPAQ (M+) - (F+) (bipolar)	-.17	-.14	.10	-.11

Note. CPI = California Psychological Inventory; EPAQ = Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

scan of the topography, yielding larger features across a wider terrain. The strategy used in this study was of the broad-gauge variety: use of a relatively comprehensive taxonomy of the interpersonal domain and assessment of 800 specific acts to sample widely from that domain.

In addition, two relatively independent data sources—self and observer—were used to assess performance frequencies of each of the 800 acts. Use of the somewhat conservative dual criterion—that sex differences on each act had to be statistically significant for both data sources—lends credibility to the obtained results and suggests that what has emerged transcends the particulars of any single data source.

Compared with the richness of Wiggins's (1979) circumplex, the sex differences that emerged from the application of this conservative dual criterion may seem pallid. At least two possibilities may account for these results. One is that the limitations imposed by the data sources (self and spouse) and the stringency of the criteria may both operate to underestimate the complexity and richness of existing sex differences. Alternatively, researchers in previous studies, limited by using a single data source, may have overestimated the number of ways in which males and females differ. Resolution of these alternative implications must await studies in which a broader range of data sources is used. But because so few researchers use more than a single data source, the findings obtained here may have greater robustness than findings

emerging from studies limited to a single data source.

A primary goal of this study was to explore the major dimensions along which males and females differ in terms of interpersonal behavior. Acts in which female performance was greater than male performance formed three separate factors: Coercive-Manipulative, Communal, and Flashy Attire. A single factor, Initiative, captured most of the acts for which male performance was greater than female performance. One may conclude that there are at least four domains of sex difference in the interpersonal behavior of married couples, and that these domains do not correspond precisely to published taxonomies of sex difference.

Interestingly, these four dimensions provide a depiction of sex differences that is both similar to and different from existing formulations and factor solutions. For example, several researchers (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Block, 1973; Buss, 1981; Carlson, 1971) have found that females exhibit more communal and expressive behavior than do males. But the use of emotional behaviors such as crying, nagging, and refusing to speak (Factor 1) puts a different cast on the dimensions of expressiveness in that it seems to lack the communal connotations typically associated with that dimension. Finally, the initiative dimension (Factor 4) seems clearly related to the instrumental factor found frequently to characterize males more than females (Bakan, 1966; Block, 1976; Carlson, 1971; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

Table 5  
*Predicting Factor Composites of Sex Differences From M and F Scales: Female Sample (N = 86)*

Scales	Coercive- Manipulative	Communal	Flashy Attire	Initiative
CPI Femininity	.21*	-.04	-.19	-.12
EPAQ M-F	-.20	-.07	.15	.20
EPAQ M+	-.37***	.18	.14	.21
EPAQ F+	-.07	.26*	-.02	-.15
EPAQ M-	.17	-.16	.12	-.25*
EPAQ Fva-	.34***	-.03	-.24*	-.15
EPAQ Fc-	.07	.01	-.15	-.05
EPAQ (M+) + (F+) (androgynous)	-.39**	.32**	.08	.04
EPAQ (M+) - (F+) (bipolar)	-.19	-.04	.09	.23*

Note. CPI = California Psychological Inventory; EPAQ = Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Another primary goal was to examine the predictive power of several extant masculinity and femininity scales in forecasting these dimensions of sex difference. The CPI Femininity scale had the highest correlations with these composites for the total sample, suggesting that this is the scale of choice in predicting sex differences. The CPI Femininity scale, however, did not predict well these domains within sex. Instead, the EPAQ scales performed this within-sex function more adequately, particularly in the case of the Fva- scale in predicting Coercive-Manipulative acts for both sexes, and the F+ scale predicting Communal acts for the female sample. One may conclude that there are no all-purpose scales in this domain, and that each has a delimited range of application.

What are the implications of these findings for the study of sex differences? First, these results suggest that conceptions of sex difference based on stereotypic masculine and feminine attributes, or based on self-concept alone, may not correspond to actual sex differences in interpersonal behavior. Second, scales successful in predicting dimensions of behavior in which males and females differ may not be appropriate for predicting within-sex differences in these same domains. This suggests that behavioral differences between males and females are not necessarily equivalent to variation in "masculine" or "feminine" behaviors within a single sex. Finally, because some sex differences were found only with self-reports and others only with spouse-observer reports, researchers in future studies

should use at least two data sources so that obtained sex differences transcend single source limitations.

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