Chapter LIV

Gender Role Inventory

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BACKGROUND

We describe a newly developed 14-item inventory designed to measure two dimensions, agency and communion, of gender role self-perceptions. The gender role inventory (GRI-14) emerges as a conceptual and empirical refinement of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1976), offering exceptional utility for electronic-based research while overcoming questions about construct validity and psychometric adequacy inherent in the BSRI.

Since its inception, the BSRI has proven a widely used tool for assessing femininity and masculinity in numerous empirical studies and, to a significant extent, has defined the nature of sex role orientation in the research literature. Despite its popularity, however, persistent questions have arisen over whether the BSRI actually measures what it claims to measure (see, i.e., Choi & Fuqua, 2003; Hoffman & Borders, 2001). A highly consistent pattern emerging across a range of factor-analytic studies, for example, is (1) a single femininity factor and two or more complex masculinity factors, (2) a tendency toward inconsistent item loading across these factors (e.g., over half of the femininity subscale items do not load on the femininity factor), and (3) an unexpectedly low amount of total variance typically accounted for by the primary factors. Concerns such as these, some argue, point to an “initial lack of theoretically defined dimensions of masculinity/femininity measured by the BSRI” (Choi & Fuqua, 2003, p. 884), while others proposed that the BSRI actually measures constructs such as instrumentality and expressiveness (e.g., Bohannon & Mills, 1979; Moreland, Gulanick, Montague, & Harren, 1978).

Balancing both the recognized heuristic value of the BSRI with its demonstrated shortcomings guided our development of the GRI-14. Our conceptual framework is built upon the agency and communion constructs developed by Bakan (1966). Within this framework, with gender role self-perception conceptualized as independent of biological sex, the agentic construct includes characteristics such as goal-orientation, assertiveness, protectiveness, self-activation, and having the urge to master. The communal construct, in contrast, involves characteristics such as selfless-
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