



Articles

Sex Role Orientation and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction: A Study in Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between sex role orientation and relationship satisfaction in Turkish dating couples. Seventy dating couples completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Relationship Assessment Scale and a demographic information form. The results indicated that while perceived sex role orientation of the partners was related to relationship satisfaction, actual sex role orientation of the partners was not related. That is, individuals who perceived their partners as androgynous reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction than the other perceived sex role classifications. The results were discussed in terms of earlier studies, sample characteristics and bias in close relationships.

Keywords: sex roles, relationship satisfaction, Turkey, dating

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The traditional cultural norms expect sexes to experience their romantic relationships differently due to the common assumption that men and women have distinct personality traits. Men are expected to be independent, assertive, achievement oriented, aggressive, competitive and dominant which facilitates the role of wage earner. On the other hand, women are expected to be nurturing, sensitive, selfless and emphatic which are related with the roles of motherhood (Basow, 1992). These traits which are associated with men are labeled as masculine whereas the traits that are associated with women are labeled as feminine. The concept of sex role orientation is about masculinity and femininity. In other words, it is related with individuals' endorsement of personality traits considered appropriate for the sexes (Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993; Winstead & Derlega, 1993).

According to gender stereotypes, masculine men and feminine women should be attracted to each other (Basow, 1992). However, most of the researchers who investigate the relationship between gender roles and relationship satisfaction demonstrate the importance of feminine and/or androgynous traits for both sexes. For example, Antill (1983), found that the happiness of the spouse depended on the partners' femininity and speculated that happiness in relationships depended on feminine personality traits like sensitiveness. Cooper, Chassin, and Zeiss (1985) investigated this issue with dual working couples. Consistent with the other findings, they found that androgynous individuals (who have both feminine and masculine personality traits) maintained the greatest satisfaction. Juni and Grimm (1993) investigated the same issue on a metropolitan New York sample. They demonstrated that femininity was associated with marital satisfaction for both men and women, whereas masculinity was related to

marital satisfaction for men only. Kurdek and Schmitt's (1986) sample consisted of married heterosexual and cohabiting gay and lesbian couples. Consistent with the literature, their findings showed the importance of femininity or the combination of femininity and masculinity (androgyny) in maintaining satisfying relationships within the sample. Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, and Fitzpatrick's (1994) sample was dating couples and they found that perception of a partner as feminine was related to relationship satisfaction for both sexes. Langis, Sabourin, Lussier, and Mathieu (1994) searched the same issue with married couples and demonstrated that women's femininity or expressiveness and men's instrumentality and expressiveness were related with marital satisfaction. Moreover, women who ascribed both masculine and feminine traits to their husbands were satisfied with their marriages. On the other hand men, who attributed only feminine traits to their wives, were more satisfied. Similarly, Zammichieli, Gilroy, and Sherman (1988) found that couples that are composed of androgynous partners reported higher marital satisfaction.

In summary these findings have shown the importance of femininity and / or androgyny in maintaining relationship satisfaction. The researchers generally emphasize the importance of feminine (or expressive) personality traits more than masculine (instrumental) traits for explaining these results (e.g. Antill, 1983). Miller, Caughlin, and Huston (2003), showed the processes that are responsible for the association between expressive (feminine) traits and marital satisfaction in their longitudinal study. They found two factors for explaining this association. First, as the other researchers suggested, expressiveness lead partners to engage in more affectionate behaviors. Second, in line with the research showing the positive link between positive illusions and relationship satisfaction (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), expressiveness prompted to form idealized images of the partner and enhanced relationship satisfaction.

Some researchers emphasize the importance of masculine (instrumental) traits about this issue. For example, Bradbury, Campbell, and Fincham (1995) showed the significance of husbands' endorsing masculine traits in determining the marital quality in their longitudinal study. Curun (2006) found masculinity as a predictor of marital satisfaction as well as femininity with a sample of married couples in Turkey.

Based on the literature reviewed, the aim of this study is to replicate the above mentioned studies with a sample of dating couples. Moreover, since very few studies did gather data about partners' actual traits and perception of these traits (e.g., Langis et al., 1994) both the perceived and the actual sex role orientation of the partners are examined in the present study in order to assess whether there is a significant difference between this perception and reality in influencing happiness.

Lastly, this study is performed within a different cultural framework, namely Turkish culture which might affect the variables of the present study. As Langis et al. (1994) states that a traditional society might encourage its people to be sex typed whereas a liberal society might be more tolerant. Turkish culture differs from many Western cultures in some dimensions. Firstly, it is accepted as a collectivist culture although it cannot be regarded as collectivistic as a whole. As is well known, collectivists' behaviors are shaped by their concern about wider collectives, whereas individualists concern about only themselves or close others (Göregenli, 1995; Kuşdil, 1991). Moreover, it is classified as a feminine culture which involves modesty, tenderness, interest in the quality of life (Hofstede et al., 1998).

In the light of the literature the hypotheses are stated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals, whose actual partners are androgynous or feminine, will report higher levels of relationship satisfaction than those whose partners possess the other sex role classifications (masculine, undifferentiated)

Hypothesis 2: Individuals, who perceive their partners as androgynous or feminine, will report higher levels of relationship satisfaction than those whose partners possess the other sex role classifications (masculine, undifferentiated)

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample was composed of 70 dating couples (70 men and 70 women), who were currently students in various departments of Middle East Technical University and Hacettepe University. The age range of the sample was 18-32 with a mean of 21.9. Most of the participants were from highly educated families. 75.7% of the participants' mothers and 86.4% of the participants' fathers had high school or university degrees. 42% of the participants were living with their families, 1.4% were living with their relatives, 12.9% with their friends, 28.6% were living in student dormitories and 5.7% of the participants were living with their dating partners. In terms of relationship duration, 33.6% of the participants were together with their partners 0-6 months, 9.13% were together 6-12 months, 27.9% were together 12-24 months and 28.6% were together for more than 24 months. The average time they spent together was 6.36 hours in a day and 5.67 days in a week. Most of the participants did not expect to marry their current partners; only 36.4% of them did so. 58.6% of the participants were sexually involved with their current partners. All the participants came from cities or metropolises of Turkey.

The members of the couples were seated separately and they completed the questionnaires independently. Most of the participants received extra credit for their participation in the study.

Measures of the Study

Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) — The BSRI, which was developed by Bem (1975), is used to measure the participants' masculine and feminine traits. The inventory was composed of 60 adjectives in which 20 are feminine, 20 are masculine and 20 are neutral adjectives that can be attributed to both sexes. While taking the BSRI, respondents were instructed to indicate how well each adjective describes themselves and their partners on a 7-point format ranging from 1 (never true for me) to 7 (always true for me). Kavuncu (1987) revised the BSRI for use in the Turkish culture. Kavuncu's (1987) assessment on the structure and convergent validity of the scale showed that BSRI is a valid and a reliable instrument for Turkish culture.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) — The RAS, which is assessed on a 7 item Likert type-scale, measures relationship satisfaction specifically in romantic relationships (Hendrick, 1981). Respondents evaluate the items on a 7-point scale, which ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Items 4 and 7 were reverse scored. Higher scores indicate higher levels of satisfaction. The scale was developed by Hendrick (1981). He found that RAS was a valid and a reliable instrument. For this study, the scale was translated into Turkish by the researcher and two other judges. Then, factor analysis and reliability analysis were performed. Consistent with the original version, factor analysis resulted in one factor with an eigenvalue over 1 and explained 52% of the variance. The alpha coefficient was found to be .86. The scale was accepted as a reliable instrument for the purpose of the present study.

Demographic Information Form — In the demographic information form, participants provided information about their ages, parents' education level, their birth place, and the place in which they are actually living. Furthermore, partners gave information about how much time they shared together on a daily and weekly basis, their expectations about the future of their current relationship and whether they were involved in sexual intercourse with their partners.

Results

In this section, the association between partner's sex role orientation (both the actual and perceived) and relationship satisfaction is investigated. Before carrying out univariate ANOVAs, couples' sex role orientations were calculated by using the BSRI's median split of classification. Then, the data matrices for interdependent dyads were composed. By using the matrices, actual sex role orientation of the partners were determined. Accordingly, four groups were composed for both actual and perceived sex role orientation of the partners: masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated. Means and standard deviation of these groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Actual and Perceived Sex Role Orientation of Partners

	<i>Actual Sex Role Orientation</i>			<i>Perceived Sex Role Orientation</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Masculine	5.86	.70	27	5.96	.67	33
Feminine	5.98	1.07	27	5.86	.97	32
Androgynous	6.04	.95	36	6.42	.65	32
Undifferentiated	5.90	.69	36	5.48	.94	33

After the groups were formed, first a univariate analysis of variance was performed for the actual sex role orientation of the partner (feminine, masculine, androgynous and undifferentiated) as independent variables and relationship satisfaction as a dependent variable (Table 2).

Table 2

Univariate Analysis of Variance Summary for Actual Sex Role Orientation of the Partners

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Between groups	3	.60	.20	.266
Within group	122	92.02	.75	
Total	125	92.62		

As shown in Table 2, the result of the analysis was insignificant suggesting that four groups did not differ on the measure on relationship satisfaction ($F(3, 122) = .266$).

Finally, the same analyses were performed for individuals' perceived sex role orientation of the partners (feminine, masculine, androgynous, undifferentiated) as independent variables and relationship satisfaction as a dependent variable (Table 3).

As shown in the Table 3, the result was statistically significant ($F(3, 126) = 7.121, p < .05$). In order to assess group differences among relationship satisfaction, The Tukey Cramer test was performed (Hovardaoğlu, 2000). The results demonstrated that there were significant differences between perceiving the partner as androgynous

Table 3

Univariate Analysis of Variance Summary for Perceived Sex Role Orientation of the Partners

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Between groups	3	14.39	4.80	7.121*
Within group	126	84.88	.67	
Total	129	99.28		

* $p < .05$.

($M = 6.42$) and masculine ($M = 5.96$, $q = 3.28$, $p < .05$), between partner as androgynous ($M = 6.42$) and feminine ($M = 5.86$, $q = 4$, $p < .05$), between perceiving the partner as androgynous ($M = 6.42$) and undifferentiated ($M = 5.48$, $q = 6.71$, $p < .05$) and between perceiving the partner as masculine ($M = 5.96$) and undifferentiated ($M = 5.48$, $q = 3.4$, $p < .05$). However, there were no significant differences between perceiving the partner as masculine ($M = 5.96$) and feminine ($M = 5.86$, $q = .71$), and between perceiving the partner as feminine ($M = 5.86$) and undifferentiated ($M = 5.48$, $q = 2.71$). In addition, participants who perceived their partner as androgynous reported the highest level of relationship satisfaction than the other categories ($M = 6.42$).

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between sex role orientation and relationship satisfaction with a sample of Turkish dating couples. Both the partners' actual and perceived sex role orientations were involved in the study. Since the literature has emphasized the importance of androgyny or femininity on relationship satisfaction, it was considered that individuals whose actual partners were feminine or androgynous would maintain the most satisfying relationships. Furthermore, the same expectations were generated for individuals' perception of the partner. The results concerning the perception of the partner confirmed the hypothesis. Individuals who perceived their partners as androgynous reported the most satisfying relationships as compared to the other groups. However, the results were insignificant concerning the actual sex role orientation of the partner, suggesting that the four groups did not differ on the measure of relationship satisfaction.

The findings as to the perceived sex role orientation of the partner were consistent with the literature on the importance of androgyny in maintaining satisfying relationships (e.g., Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986). By involving both expressive traits (like being affectionate, warm, understanding) and instrumental traits (like assertiveness, leadership, and willingness to take risks,) perception of androgyny facilitated higher relationship satisfaction for individuals. Here, the question of why partners' androgyny, but not only femininity was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction can be raised based on the findings of the present study. One possible answer may be that different sex role categorizations may be functional for different kinds of relationships that involve different aims. As presented earlier, feminine traits like emotional support, nurturance and sensitiveness might have helped to create intimacy, which is an essential variable in close relationships (e.g., Antill, 1983; Lamke et al., 1994). However, in some relationships – like dual working couples – partners should live up to the expectations of multiple roles. By possessing both instrumental and expressive traits, androgynous individuals could maintain more satisfying relationships (Cooper et al., 1985). Partner's androgyny might have been more functional for the present study because of its sample characteristics. This sample was composed of college dating couples in which most of them were together not more than two years. Also most of the participants did not expect to marry with their current partner. Thus, probably most of their aim was to share a good time. Since masculine dating behavior involves

making reservations, picking up tickets for events, deciding where and when to go to eat, masculine traits might allow the couples to have a good time (DeLucia, 1987). So, by having both masculine traits, which might have aided to share a good time, and feminine traits, which might have smoothed the progress of intimacy, androgynous individuals might have made possible the most satisfying relationships for their partners in the present study.

Langis et al.'s (1994) study was the one of the few studies that analyzed both the actual data and the perception of the partner. According to their results women who saw themselves as feminine or expressive were satisfied with their marriages, whereas men's satisfaction was related to both instrumentality and expressivity. Moreover, the results for the perceived sex role orientation revealed that men's marital satisfaction was related to attributing feminine qualities to their wives. On the other hand, women's satisfaction was related to attributing both the feminine and masculine traits to their husbands. In summary, the results of this study demonstrate the similarity between the actual and perceived data.

In the light of these results another possible discussion question may be why the only significant result was about the perceived, not the actual sex role orientation of the partner. This question may be answered depending on the biases that people experiences in their relationships. Kenny and Acitelli (2001) showed that individuals are both accurate and biased while perceiving the other in close relationships. Moreover, biases are found stronger for the relationship measures. Moreover, Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) investigated the similar issue – bias in close relationships – named positive illusions. They showed that participants who idealized their partners beyond their actual attributes, reported more happiness, greater relationship satisfaction, fewer conflict and have more stable relationships. In addition, the researchers revealed that this was due to the projection of one's own peculiarities to his/her partner. Thus, for this sample, it might be speculated that individuals who perceived their partner as androgynous might have idealized their partners as having both expressive and instrumental traits. Moreover, this may be due to projection of their own traits to their partners. Moreover, Miller, Caughlin, and Huston (2003), found that expressive (feminine) individuals' idealizing their partners, in other words experiencing positive illusions lead them maintain more satisfying relationships. Perhaps the subjects who perceived their partners as androgynous and experienced higher level of relationship satisfaction have more expressive (feminine) personality traits which led them to idealize their partners as androgynous individuals. Thus, in later studies researchers can investigate the link between individuals own sex role and perception of his/her partner's sex role.

Another discussion point of the study is the results' similarity with the Western literature. As mentioned in the introduction part, Turkish culture has different peculiarities from Western cultures which might affect the dynamics of close relationships. The similar results can be explained depending on the sample characteristics. The sample was university students which are leaving in a relatively liberal atmosphere. Thus in later studies the researchers can replicate the same issue in more traditional regions of Turkey. Another explanation for the similarity of the results can be the universal characteristics of human needs in close relationships. Perhaps, in all cultures people, who are satisfied, perceive their partners as having both instrumental and feminine traits.

Limitations of the Study

Most of the limitations of the present study come from sample characteristics. Comparing couples' satisfaction depending on their demographic characteristics (i.e., relationship duration, involving sexuality or not) might be good in understanding the topic better. However, although the sample consisted of couples with different demographic characteristics, it was not possible to perform such a comparison due to the small sample size. In the future researchers can replicate this study with a large sample that will enable to compute such a comparison. Furthermore,

this sample is composed of college dating couples who are living in a relatively liberal atmosphere when comparing with the whole Turkish culture. For that reason, in the future new research can be needed which will compare the couples coming from more traditional sub cultures and college couples.

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