Brief Encounters: Impact of Gender, Sex-Role Attitudes, and Partner's Gender on Interaction and Cognition¹

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Research on sex differences in dyadic interactions has largely neglected the effects of sex-role attitudes and has focused on overt behavior to the relative omission of information-gathering and affective responses. In addition to behavioral observations, individuals in same- or opposite-sex pairs completed questionnaires on recall and descriptions of the partners, as well as ratings of liking. It was hypothesized that sex-role attitudes of the participant, his/her gender, and the partner's gender would affect responses. As anticipated, the sex-role-traditional individuals displayed behaviors most consistent with previous research, while sex-role-liberal students exhibited different patterns. Recall and description of the partner were also affected in complex fashion by participant gender, partner gender, and participant sex-role attitudes. Methodological issues were raised, including the possible reactivity of measures of sex-role attitude.

Several studies report sex differences in social interaction. Reviews by Weitz (1976) and Frieze (Note 1) describe sex differences in style of interaction in terms of hypothesized constructs of "affiliation" and "dominance." Thus, women are characterized as showing greater affiliative behavior, while men show greater dominance. For example, eye contact is often defined as a measure of affiliation. Higher levels of eye contact have been reported for females than for males, and for same-sex versus opposite-sex pairs (Aiello, 1972; Argyle & Dean,

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1965; Argyle & Ingham, 1972; Exline, Gray, & Schuette, 1965; Libby, 1970). Interpersonal distance is often taken as a sign of dominance. Women appear to claim less territory than men in a public setting (Edney & Jordan-Edney, 1974). At several different ages, male-male dyads keep greater interpersonal distance than female-female dyads (Tennis & Dabbs, 1975). Mehrabian (1971) summarizes his own and other studies and concludes that "males posturally convey a more potent and dominant attitude than females" (p. 137).

Studies of sex differences in interaction have been limited, however, in two major ways. First, researchers have neglected the impact of sex-role attitudes. Especially during a time of changing beliefs about proper conduct for men and for women, it seems likely that people with liberal and traditional sex-role attitudes interact differently. An emphasis on the unitary biological variable of gender has overshadowed the possible effects of psychological dimensions such as sex-role attitudes. The one study that has included a measure of sex-role beliefs (Weitz, 1976) found that men with liberal sex-role attitudes showed greater nonverbal warmth toward both males and females than did traditional men. Traditional women were warmer than liberal women in interactions with another woman, but did not differ in warmth toward men. Individual differences in sex-role beliefs may have significant impact on interactions with strangers.

A second difficulty with current research on interaction concerns the emphasis on overt behavior, typically nonverbal behavior. Little attention has been given to cognitive and affective aspects of strangers' interactions. It is plausible that women's greater "affiliative" behavior provides greater information about other people. By sitting closer, looking, and talking more, women may be expressing a higher interest in learning about other people. Women are stereotyped (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972) as more "intuitive," "empathic," and "interested in people" than men, and also as more "interpersonally sensitive" (Rubin, Note 2). Although research on this point is scanty, women have been found to be better at "social intelligence," as assessed by ability to remember people's names and faces (Kaess & Witryol, 1955). Rosenthal (Note 3) has found women to be more accurate judges of affect portrayed in films than men. Research is needed to determine whether women are generally more interested or perceptive observers than men, and to link such cognitive skills to sex differences in behavior. Similarly, it is important to know whether presumed "affiliative" behaviors such as interpersonal proximity are associated with greater positive affect or liking for others.

The present study investigated the impact of gender and sex-role attitudes on interaction, information gathering, and liking. The study required a situation in which spontaneous interaction between two strangers could be observed, followed by an assessment of the information they remembered about each other and an assessment of their feelings towards each other. A waiting room provided such a setting. Three types of dependent measures were of interest. First, unobtrusive behavioral observations of proximity, looking, and talking were made during a five-minute period. Secondly, information that subjects acquired during the interaction was assessed by having participants describe their waiting room companion. A free recall essay permitted subjects to describe the companion in their own words, and thus reveal individual differences in preference for how and what to describe about a person. As an additional measure of information gathered, a structured recall task asked standardized questions about the companion to assess accuracy of information retained. Finally, ratings of liking for the companion were collected.

It was predicted that a person's own gender would be a less important determinant of his or her behavior than individual differences in sex-role attitudes. In general, people with more traditional sex-role attitudes were expected to exhibit sex differences in behavior similar to those reported in earlier studies. In contrast, nontraditional men and women were not expected to adhere to sex-typed patterns. It was also expected that the companion's gender would have important effects on how an individual responded; people would behave differently in the presence of a man than of a woman.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 37 male and 37 female students in introductory psychology classes at the University of California, Los Angeles, who received class credit for their participation.

Procedure

Students were scheduled to take part in either a "judgment study" or an "opinion survey." When they arrived at the designated room, students found a note on the door, asking them to enter the "waiting room" and indicating that the experimenter would arrive shortly. Scheduling was arranged so that two students would be in the waiting room simultaneously. However, the subjects understood that they would participate in different studies, and had no expectation of further interaction; 12 male-male pairs, 12 female-female pairs, and 13 mixed-sex pairs were run.

The large "waiting room" contained about twenty chairs arranged around three walls. Two walls had long windows; a third wall had a one-way mirror with a shade drawn to cover three-fourths of the glass.

Students often arrived early and took a seat in the waiting room. As soon as both members of a pair were present, unobtrusive observations were begun by a panel of raters hidden behind the one-way mirror. After five minutes of observation, two experimenters entered the waiting room and escorted each participant to a separate room. So that participants would not confuse the experimenter and the person they had waited with, experimenters were always different in gender from the student's waiting room companion.

After being escorted to another room, each person was asked to complete an unstructured recall task that required describing the person who had also been waiting in the other room. After five minutes the experimenter collected this form and gave the participant a booklet containing structured questions about the waiting room companion, a self-description form, a short sex-role attitude scale, and a brief personal information questionnaire. When these were completed, the subject was debriefed and any questions answered.

Behavioral Observations

Trained observers blind to experimental hypotheses made systematic ratings of students' behavior in the waiting room. For each experimental session there were two raters, one assigned to each participant. Observers recorded where each individual sat in the room, the time that elapsed between the arrival of the first and second participant, and the latency before initiation of conversation. During a five-minute observation period, tape-recorded signals cued the observers to rate for each 10-second segment any occurrence of "looking" or "talking." Looking included visual orientation toward the other person for any duration; talking included any verbal communication whether responded to or not.

Interobserver reliability was computed for a sample of students drawn from both early and later participants in the study. Two raters observed each of 12 students. Average percentages of agreement across each 10-second interval were 93% for looking and 95% for talking. Our impression is that disagreements in coding looking resulted largely from false negatives, where one observer did not code a glance because of its short duration or uncertainty about the direction of focus. Hence, looking behaviors may be slightly underreported.

Unstructured Recall Form

Instructions asked students to "Describe as fully as possible the person who was waiting in the other room with you." Students were given five minutes to write about the other person, unguided by specific questions. A content analysis scheme was developed to code these descriptions into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. Three broad categories emerged.

Physical Characteristics. Many descriptions concerned the person's physical characteristics or appearance. For example:

He was about 6'0". Brown hair that was fairly short and combed backwards slightly. He wore a blue jacket with a fur collar. Black shoes that went above the ankle. He was probably about 20-23 years old; weight about 180.

Nine separate subcategories were coded for mention of the person's gender, race, age, size, hair, facial characteristics, clothing, possessions, or evaluation of physical attractiveness.

Actions. Other descriptions concerned what the person said or did. One subcategory coded *information* exchanged:

She lived up North for most of her life, but now lives at Corona Del Mar near Newport Beach. She has lived there for about a year.

A second subcategory included descriptions of the other person's *behavior* in the waiting room. For example:

He returned my greeting, and returned to his reading. I noticed that after a few minutes he stopped reading and stared at the mirrored wall. He continued to randomly gaze at the walls until I was removed from the room.

Personality. A final class of descriptions concerned the companion's personality or psychological characteristics. For example:

Very reserved but friendly, she gave off the feelings she didn't know really what she was doing there. Somewhat like she didn't want to be there but was doing it simply because she had to.

A single category was used for all types of personality assessments.

Protocols were coded for each mention of each of the 12 content categories and subcategories. Inter-rater reliability was computed for 16 randomly selected protocols. Correlations between ratings of two independent judges ranged from r = .88 to r = 1.00 across the 12 categories, with the mean r = .96.

Structured Recall

A questionnaire asked about specific details of the physical appearance of the waiting room companion. Included were queries about age, hair color and style, eye color, glasses, presence of specific articles of clothing and jewelry, color of clothing, type of shoes, and presence of other possessions. Participants also completed an identical questionnaire about their own appearance that day. The accuracy of students' descriptions of their companion was scored by comparing these descriptions with the person's own self-description.

Liking Ratings

Two 7-point scales (Griffit & Byrne, 1970) assessed students' attitudes toward their companion. One scale measured liking for the partner, and the second scale assessed students' desire to work in an experiment with the other.

Sex-Role Attitudes Questionnaire

A 10-item sex-role attitude questionnaire (Peplau, 1973) was included in the test booklet. Coefficient alpha for a sample of 91 college males and 91 college females is .83. Students indicated on a 6-point scale the extent of their agreement or disagreement with statements such as, "Women could run most businesses as well as men could," or "In marriage the husband should take the lead in decisionmaking." For each subject, a total sex-role traditionalism score was computed, based on responses to all 10 items. The maximum possible score was 60, reflecting the most extreme adherence to traditional beliefs.

RESULTS

Individual participants' responses were examined in a series of $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analyses of variance with factors of Participant's Gender, Participant's Sex-Role Attitudes, and Companion's Gender. Sex-role attitude scores for all participants were split at the median to provide a "liberal" and a "traditional" group. Insufficient sample size prevented further analyses according to type of dyad, such as comparisons of responses of a dyad of two liberal women versus a dyad with one liberal woman and one traditional woman.

Sex-Role Attitudes

As has been found previously (e.g., Peplau, 1973), men were more traditional in their sex-role attitudes than women. The mean sex-role attitude score for men was 33.0 and for women 26.0, t(72) = 3.11, p < .01. Of more interest is the unexpected finding that women's sex-role attitudes appeared to be affected by the waiting room experience. The average sex-role score for women who had had a female companion was 24.4, while the average for women who had waited with a male partner was a more traditional 30.4, t(36) = 12.02, p < .05. For men, the waiting room experience did not appear to affect sex-role attitudes. Men with a male partner scored 33.2, while males with a female partner scored 32.8 - a negligible difference.

	Male companion			Female companion		
	Traditional women (n = 6)	Liberal women $(n = 7)$	Total (n = 13)	Traditional women (n = 7)	Liberal women $(n = 17)$	Total (n = 24)
Distance apart				_		
(in seats)	5.33	4.29	4.77	3.57	3.12	3.25
Looking ^a						
First minute	3.50	4.00	3.77	3.57	2.47	2.79
Total looking	9.50	17.00	13.54	15.14	7.41	9.67
Talking ^a						
Latency before	1.40	10.00	11.00	2.06	00.05	1.7.6
(seconds)	1.40	19.29	11.83	3.86	23.35	17.67
First minute	2.00	3.43	2.77	3.14	1.65	2.08
Total talking	6.83	12.71	10.00	14.29	5.65	8.17
Accuracy of recall (structured items						
correct)	13.33	12.14	12.69	15.57	11.41	12.63
Liking for com-	10.50	10.14	10.31	11 71	10.29	10 71
pamon ⁰	10.50	10.14	10.31	11.71	10.29	10.71

Table I. Women's Sex-Role Attitudes and Reactions to a Companion

^{*a*} Mean number of 10-second blocks in which the behavior was observed.

^bTotal attraction rating on two questions.

Behavioral Observations

Tables I and II present mean values on interaction measures according to student's gender, partner's sex, and student's sex-role attitudes.

Seating distance. As Tables I and II suggest, the results might best be described as the tendencies of "traditional" men to sit far away from male partners and closer to female partners, while "liberal" men showed an opposite pattern. Women displayed little variation as a function of sex-role attitude, but do sit significantly closer to female than to male partners. These results are reflected in a significant interaction of partner's gender and sex-role attitude, F (1, 66) = 4.34, p < .05, and the interaction of participant gender, partner's gender, and participant's sex-role attitudes, F (1, 66) = 5.85, p < .05. To clarify further the mixed-sex condition, it should be noted that the gender of the person already seated did not appear to affect significantly the partner's choice of where to sit.

Looking at Partner. During the first minute of interaction, members of opposite-sex pairs looked at each other significantly more than did members of same-sex pairs, F(1, 64) = 7.58, $p < .01.^3$ Although women in general looked at

³Slight variability in the degrees of freedom resulted from loss of data because of equipment malfunction or omission of questionnaire responses.

	Male companion			Female companion		
	Traditional men (n = 17)	Liberal men $(n = 7)$	Total (<i>n</i> = 24)	Traditional men (n = 6)	Liberal men (n = 7)	Total (n = 13)
Distance apart (in seats)	6.06	2.14	4.92	2.50	6.57	4.77
Looking ^a First minute Total looking	2.29 6.41	3.29 14.57	2.58 8.79	3.50 13.67	3.29 11.86	3.39 12.69
Talking ^a Latency before						
(seconds) First minute Total talking	1.53 2.29 6.41	2.00 3.29 14.57	1.67 2.73 8.79	26.80 3.17 13.67	1.14 2.86 11.86	11.83 3.00 12.69
Accuracy of recall (structured items correct)	14.00	13.71	13.92	12.17	12.57	12.39
Liking for com- panion ^b	9.77	9.29	9.63	11.00	11.00	11.00

Table II. Men's Sex-Role Attitudes and Reactions to a Companion

^aMean number of 10-second blocks in which the behavior was observed.

^bTotal attraction rating on two questions.

their partners slightly more than did men, the effect was not significant, nor were there other main effects or interactions.

When the number of time segments containing instances of looking was totalled for the five-minute observation period, the effect of partner's gender continued to be significant, F(1, 64) = 4.01, p < .05. Individuals looked at same-sex partners significantly less than at opposite-sex companions. There was a significant interaction of sex, condition, and sex-role attitudes, F(1, 64) = 6.40, p < .01. Data in Table I suggest that liberal women spent considerably more time looking at a male partner than at a female partner; the effect was reversed for traditional women. In contrast, sex-role-liberal men looked more at a male partner than did traditional men; but traditional and liberal men did not differ when they interacted with a female partner.

Talking to Partner. Amount of talking was highly correlated with the amount of looking (for all participants, r = .89, p < .001). There were no overall significant main effects for talking in the first minute of interaction. However, a significant complex interaction of participant's gender, partner's gender, and participant's sex-role attitudes, F(1, 64) = 4.46, p < .05, appears to parallel the findings on looking. Table I shows that during the first minute, liberal women talked less with female partners than with male partners; traditional women showed an opposite pattern. Table II shows that liberal and traditional men talked about equally to female partners. But with male partners, liberal men spent more time talking than did traditional men.

In terms of total time spent talking, the major significant effect was an interaction of participant's gender, participant's sex-role attitudes, and partner's gender, F(1, 64) = 8.86, p < .01. The means in Tables I and II reveal a strong tendency for sex-role liberal and traditional men and women to show opposite patterns of conversing with partners. For example, traditional women talked more with female partners than with male partners, while liberal women did just the opposite. Sex-role liberal men, however, talked more to male partners than to female partners, and traditional men showed the reverse pattern.

With respect to the measure of latency in seconds before onset of talking, only the participant gender by sex-role attitudes interaction approached significance, F(1, 64) = 3.02, p < .10. Liberal women tended to be slower than traditional women to converse with *any* partner. Males in general began talking to the partner immediately, with the exception of traditional men interacting with women; these men showed the longest latency of all groups.

Unstructured Descriptions

Overall Number of Descriptions. Table III presents the mean frequencies of usage of descriptive categories by sex of participant and partner's sex. In terms of total number of descriptions, the most notable result was a significant interaction of participant gender, participant sex-role attitudes, and partner gender, F(1, 66) = 4.43, p < .05. With a male partner, liberal men were more descriptive

	Men de	scribing	Women describing		
	$\frac{Men}{(n=24)}$	Women (<i>n</i> = 13)	Men (<i>n</i> = 13)	Women $(n = 24)$	
Physical appearance					
Size	1.25	.92	1.08	.79	
Age	.33	.31	.15	.04	
Clothing	1.08	1.77	1.00	1.88	
Hair	1.42	1.54	1.46	1.96	
Face	.67	.38	.85	.79	
Possessions	.38	.54	.92	1.08	
Attractiveness	.08	.31	.39	.17	
Total	5.21	5.77	5.85	6.71	
Behavior					
Information exchanged	1.75	1.85	2.15	1.04	
Activity of other	.67	.62	.69	1.33	
Total	2.42	2.46	2.85	2.38	
Personality attributes	1.46	1.39	2.39	.88	
Total descriptors	9.08	9.62	11.08	9.96	
Total different categories used	4.63	5.23	6.00	4.92	
5					

Table III. Mean Frequencies of Descriptive Categories

than traditional men, but with a female partner, traditional men were more descriptive than liberals. Females generally did not differ according to their sexrole attitudes. There were no significant main effects of participant's gender nor of partner's gender.

Descriptive Categories. With respect to the number of distinct categories employed, persons with an opposite-sex partner used significantly more types of description than individuals with same-sex partners, F(1, 66) = 4.70, p < .05. In addition, there was an interaction of condition and sex-role attitudes, F(1, 66) = 6.19, p < .05, that reflected stronger differences between liberal and traditional subjects' descriptions for opposite-sex partners. Traditional males and females both used more distinct descriptive categories to portray opposite-sex partners than did their liberal counterparts.

Descriptions of Physical Appearance. In addition to analyses of overall category usage, we were interested in whether men and women noticed or remembered different characteristics of another person. The most frequent type of remarks about the other person concerned physical characteristics. An analysis of physical appearance summary scores revealed no main effects or interactions, although women tended to use more physical descriptors than did men, especially when describing other women.

Considering specific types of descriptions, mention of size was especially common for persons describing male partners rather than female partners, although this effect was not significant. Allusions to the companion's age were rare but were significantly more likely to be made by males, F(1, 66) = 6.09, p < 100.05, regardless of sex of the partner. Mentions of the partner's clothes were common, and were especially prevalent for both males and females describing female partners rather than male partners, F(1, 66) = 5.93, p < .05. Remarks about the companion's hair color, length, and style were among the most frequently noted, and appeared to occur equally in all combinations of partners. Women tended to mention facial characteristics of the partners more than men did, but the effect was nonsignificant. However, women were significantly more likely than men to mention the possessions the partners had brought into the room, F(1, 66) =6.18, p < .05, regardless of the companion's gender. Finally, although spontaneous evaluative remarks about the partner's attractiveness ("a cute face," "he had a nice smile") were coded, they proved to be extremely infrequent. Both men and women tended to write such comments about an opposite-sex partner to a greater degree than about a same-sex partner, F(1, 66) = 3.30, p < .10.

Descriptions of Behavior and Personality. Women were more likely than men to describe their partners' actions during the waiting room period, F(1, 66) =4.71, p < .05. When the categories of "information exchanged" and "activities of other" were combined into a total description of the partner's behaviors, a significant interaction of participant gender, participant sex-role attitudes, and partner's gender emerged, F(1, 66) = 5.13, p < .05. Traditional women described

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more behaviors of female partners than did liberal women; the pattern was reversed for liberal and traditional males with male partners. With oppositesex partners, liberal women and traditional men were more likely to describe the other's behavior.

The category of "personality attributes" included remarks about the companion's observed or inferred traits (such as "easy to talk to," "he looked friendly"). Several borderline significant tendencies were noted in the data. Opposite-sex pairs described more traits than did same-sex pairs, F(1, 66) = 3.14, p < .10. The effect was accounted for by the differences between women interacting with women and women interacting with men, F(1, 66) = 3.01, p < .10.

Structured Recall Questionnaire

The structured recall questionnaire tested memory for specific details of the partner's physical appearance. Responses were coded as correct if they agreed with the individual's own self-description. An overall accuracy score was created by summing the number of correct responses to the 22 questions. Means are reported in Tables I and II. There were no significant main effects of participant's sex or partner's sex. Interestingly, however, there was a strong main effect of sex-role attitudes, F(1,66) = 4.04, p < .05. Traditional subjects displayed greater accuracy than the liberals. The interaction of gender and sex-role attitudes approached significance, F(1, 66) = 3.34, p < .10, and appears to reflect the relatively large discrepancies in accuracy between traditional and liberal women.

Individual item analyses failed to identify specific details of appearance or apparel that were differentially recalled by males or females in both the oppositesex and same-sex conditions.

Liking for the Partner

Measures of liking for the partner and predicted enjoyment of working with the partner yielded highly similar ratings, and so were averaged to create a single attraction score. The only notable effect (see Tables I and II) was a tendency for women to rate their male and female partners about equally, while men tended to rate their female partners more highly than male partners, F(1, 66) = 3.13, p < .10.

Relations Between Behavior and Attitudes

Not surprisingly the amount of verbal and visual interaction in the waiting room was related to subjects' recall of their companions and to their liking of the companion. For all participants, the number of descriptive categories used on the unstructured recall essay was correlated with total amount of looking (r = .40, p < .001) and with the total amount of talking (r = .44, p < .001). The extent of interaction was also related to accuracy of recall on the structured questionnaire, although less strongly (r = .20 for looking, r = .25 for talking, p values < .05). Verbal and visual interaction were also associated with liking for the companion (r = .46 for talking, r = .41 for looking, p values < .001). Unlike the relationship between accuracy of recall and interaction, however, the correlation of liking and interaction has less clear causal implications. It seems probable that one's initial, impressionistic liking for the companion affected verbal and visual interaction, and at the same time the interaction may have increased liking.

While it seems obvious that degree of interaction enhanced accuracy of recall and extent of liking, it should be noted that many subjects were fairly accurate even with only the briefest of glances. For example, many of the participants virtually ignored each other. Using a rather stringent criterion of at least 3 of the 5 minutes without any talking or looking at the partner, fully 40% of the subjects paid minimal attention to their companions. (Thirteen of these minimal interaction subjects were in all-male pairs, 12 in all-female pairs, and 8 in mixed pairs. The groups did not differ on sex-role attitude scores.) "Ignorers" looked at their partners an average of 2.2 of the possible thirty 10-second blocks, while "attenders" looked during 17.3 blocks. Ignorers talked for only 1.3 blocks, while attenders talked for an average of 14.5 blocks.

When the performances of ignorers and attenders were compared, the attenders were found to average 11.2 descriptive elements in their descriptions of the companion, while ignorers used only 7.6. The difference was statistically significant, t (72) = 3.71, p < .001. On the other hand, the two groups did not differ significantly in the accuracy of their responses to structured questions.

Summary

By and large, few sex differences were found. Rather, behavior was affected both by the participant's sex-role attitudes and by the gender of the waiting room companion. Students talked and looked more when paired with an opposite-sex partner than with a same-sex partner. Students also used more categories to describe an opposite-sex partner than a same-sex partner, and made more attributions about an opposite-sex partner's personality. There were, however, no overall differences in accuracy of recall or liking for same- versus opposite-sex partners.

Sex-role attitudes had significant impact on responses. In general, traditional men and women were significantly more accurate in their recall of the partner's appearance than were liberals. There was a consistent pattern for liberal women paired with another woman to talk and look less, be less accurate in recall, and use less variety in unstructured descriptions than did same-sex-paired traditional women. When paired with men, liberal women compared to traditional women interacted verbally and visually to a greater extent and sat closer to male companions. Patterns for liberal and traditional men were less clear. However, when paired with a male, liberal men interacted to a greater extent and sat closer than did their traditional counterparts. When paired with females, traditional men talked more than liberal men and sat closer. Both liberal and traditional men liked female companions more than male companions.

DISCUSSION

A person's behavior in a brief encounter with a stranger is affected not only by his/her own gender, but also by his/her own sex-role attitudes and the gender of the stranger. Students look at and talk more to an opposite-sex stranger than to a same-sex stranger. The greater verbal and visual interaction of persons paired with an opposite-sex stranger may have led to their more detailed descriptions of the companion, compared to persons paired with a same-sex companion. However, a conclusion that students were greatly interested in companions of the opposite sex, or that students disliked or devalued same-sex partners, would be unwarranted. Although students described more personality traits of an oppositesex partner, they did not show greater interest in the companion's appearance. Nor were students more accurate in recalling their opposite-sex partners compared with same-sex partners. Finally, although men tended to like female companions better than male companions, women did not rate male or female partners differently.

As expected, sex-role attitudes appeared to have strong effects on patterns of interaction, and appeared to be more predictive of behavior than gender alone. Many of the results suggested that the sex-role traditional students performed most similarly to men and women of previous studies, whereas sex-role liberals often showed opposite patterns. For example, sex-role liberal men and women sit closer to, look more at, and talk more with *male* partners. This result contradicts previous data indicating greater physical closeness and eye contact for female—female pairs. Students with liberal sex-role attitudes appear less likely to adhere to normative patterns in this dyadic interaction. Especially striking was the extent to which sex-role liberal women look and talk little with other women, and are less accurate and detailed in describing them than are more traditional women. These results for women are similar to those reported by Weitz (Note 4), who speculates that "for at least some women, having liberal sex-role attitudes is associated with less positive feelings for women in general as the embodiment of a denigrated role" (p. 4). Alternatively, liberal women may be attempting to abandon traditional prescriptions to be "socioemotional specialists" and may find this easier to accomplish when interacting with another woman than with a man.

The effects of sex-role attitudes on interaction warrant additional comment. As noted previously, sex-role attitudes are more predictive of behavior than gender alone. For example, rather than stereotyped expectations that women are generally more observant of the partner's appearance than men, sex-role traditionals, regardless of sex, seemed to be more accurate than liberals. Why this may occur is not clear, although it is possible to speculate that sex-role traditionalism fosters a greater emphasis on appearance and dress.

An unexpected but important finding concerns the possible reactivity of sex-role attitude measures. Results indicated that women who waited with and then described another woman scored significantly more liberal in their sex-role attitudes than women who had a male waiting room companion. For men, the gender of the companion was not associated with sex-role attitude scores. The interpretation that these differences did not arise from a failure of random assignment of participants is strengthened by similar results observed by Toder (1974) in an experiment on the effects of sex composition of groups. This pattern suggests that measures of sex-role attitudes may be considerably less stable than has typically been assumed, at least for women. This intriguing finding poses several questions: Are women's sex-role attitudes more susceptible to situational influences than men's? Why do women apparently make each other more liberal? Further research is needed to clarify the process at work here. A key issue is the expectations women hold for the sex-role attitudes of other men and women. Research is also needed to clarify when liberal sex-role attitudes lead women to treat other women in warmer, more "sisterly" ways, and when liberal attitudes encourage women to react more coolly to each other.

This study went beyond typical research on interactions between strangers to explore cognitive variables associated with interaction. Specifically, an effort was made to assess information processing in terms of categories of information noted about another person, and accuracy of recall of information. Previous research has documented women's apparent prowess in certain "social" tasks, and stereotypes have long attested to women's greater "interest in other people." On the whole, this study found few significant sex differences. It was more common for all participants to describe the clothes worn by women and the physical size of men. Women paid more attention to facial features and to the companion's belongings and actions. Men made more mention of age. However, sex differences did not occur in accuracy of recall or in use of many categories of description.

While few dramatic incidents were anticipated in a psychology department "waiting room," the extent to which students went to the opposite extreme of virtually ignoring their companion was striking. Fully 40% of participants

avoided all but minimal visual contact, concentrating instead on reading a book or newspaper, or merely gazing out a window.

Further analyses of the interactions between situation and personality variables in brief encounters are needed. This study suggests that it may be useful to consider cognitive factors such as information processing and attitudes as well as overt behavior. The development of more refined ways to assess information seeking and retention in dyads is an important task. Because of limitations of sample size, the present study, like most other interaction studies (e.g., Weitz, 1976), examined the effects of partner's gender on the individual participant. More complex analyses of dyads as the unit of measurement, considering the characteristics of both partners, would be desirable. Comparisons of different types of dyads (e.g., a traditional man paired with a liberal woman versus with a traditional woman) would be of considerable interest, as would analyses of the effects of partners' specific behaviors on each other.

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