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The Impact of Gender and Sex-Role Orientation on Responses to Dissatisfaction in Close Relationships¹

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Three studies were designed to examine the relationships among gender, sex role orientation, and responses to dissatisfaction in close relationships. Four ways of reacting to dissatisfaction were explored: (a) exit—ending or threatening to end the relationship; (b) voice—activity and constructively attempting to improve conditions; (c) loyalty—passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve; and (d) neglect—passively allowing conditions to deteriorate. Study 1 assessed generalized responses among university students; Study 2 assessed generalized responses among adults residing in the local community; and Study 3 assessed response tendencies among lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual women and men. Greater psychological femininity was consistently associated with greater tendencies to respond to relationship problems with voice and loyalty. However, there was little evidence of a link between level of femininity and tendencies to respond with exit and neglect. Greater psychological masculinity was associated with lesser tendencies toward voice and loyalty, and there was some evidence of a link between high psychological masculinity and tendencies toward exit and neglect. Gender was not consistently related to response tendencies, though there was very weak evidence that in comparison to females, males may be more likely to engage in exit and neglect responses.

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Despite the abundance of theory and research devoted to understanding behavior in close relationships, we know relatively little about the manner in which persons respond to periods of dissatisfaction in their involvements. Social scientists have developed numerous models designed to account for the dissolution of close relationships (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Johnson, 1982; Levinger, 1979), but the goal of most of this work is to describe the manner in which relationships actually terminate. Very little of this work is designed to describe the manner in which couples react to periodic, perhaps reparable, declines in relationship quality. In addition, researchers have explored a variety of highly specific responses to dissatisfaction, including divorce or separation (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976), conflict-resolution style (Billings, 1979; Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Bank, Yoppi, & Rubin, 1976), extrarelationship affairs (Glass & Wright, 1977; Jaffe & Kanter, 1976), self-disclosure processes (Baxter, 1979; Critelli & Dupre, 1978), attributional behaviors (Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978; Orvis, Kelley, & Butler, 1976), and power relations (Peplau, 1979; Raven, Centers, & Rodrigues, 1975). However, this work by and large explored a single mode of reaction and does not simultaneously examine alternative modes of response. Those few investigations that have examined multiple problem-solving behaviors have not done so with the context of a more general typology of reactions to relationship problems. Without a more general typology of responses to periodic dissatisfaction in close relationships, it is difficult to develop a comprehensive theory-based understanding of decline processes.

In response to this deficiency in the literature, Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) developed a taxonomy of responses to declining satisfaction in close relationships that is based loosely on the work of Hirschman (1970). Hirschman described three characteristic ways of reacting to deterioration in economic/political domains: (a) *exit*—ending or threatening to end the relationship; (b) *voice*—actively and constructively expressing one's dissatisfaction, with the intent of improving conditions; and (c) *loyalty*—passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve. Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) performed a multidimensional scaling study of responses to dissatisfaction in ongoing romantic involvements (using both university and community samples), and found that Hirschman's three categories effectively characterize behaviors in close relationships. They also identified a fourth important response to dissatisfaction: *neglect*—passively allowing one's relationship to atrophy. These four categories of response—exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect—thus appear to provide a fairly comprehensive, yet simple, description of the domain of reactions to deteriorating satisfaction in close relationships. The following are examples of behaviors representative of each response category:

exit—formally separating, moving out of a joint residence, thinking or talking about leaving one's partner, threatening to end the relationship, getting a divorce;

voice—discussing problems, suggesting solutions to problems, trying to change oneself or change the partner, compromising, seeking help from a therapist or clergyman, asking the partner what is bothering him/her;

loyalty—waiting and hoping that things will improve, “giving things some time,” supporting the partner in the face of criticism, continuing to have faith in the relationship and the partner, praying for improvement; and

neglect—ignoring the partner or spending less time together, refusing to discuss problems, treating the partner badly emotionally or physically, criticizing the partner for things unrelated to the real problem, just letting things fall apart, chronically complaining without offering solutions to problems.

As is shown in Figure 1, the four problem-solving styles differ from one another along two dimensions: constructiveness/destructiveness and activity/passivity. Whereas voice and loyalty are *constructive* responses that serve to (or are at least intended to) maintain and/or revive the relationship, exit and neglect tend to be relatively more *destructive* to the future of the relationship. Constructiveness/destructiveness refers to the impact of the problem-solving response on the relationship; for the individual, any of the four responses might be equally constructive. Also, exit and voice are *active*

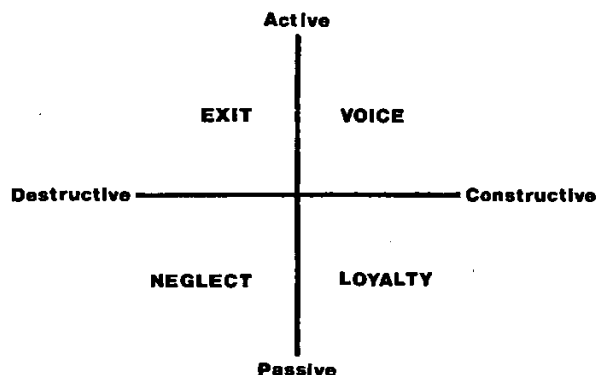


Fig. 1. Exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: A typology of responses to dissatisfaction in close relationships.

behaviors (i.e., the individual is doing something about the problem), whereas loyalty and neglect are relatively more *passive* problem-solving styles. In their most extreme form—complete passivity—loyalty and neglect would be behaviorally indistinguishable. But even in the case of absolute “nonresponses,” the intentions of the loyalist and the neglectful partner differ, and the impact of the two responses on the relationship also differs (i.e., either there is a marked impact, for better or worse, or the impact is very subtle and indirect).

To date, the four response categories—exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect—have been shown to be influenced by a variety of so-called *structural characteristics* of close relationships (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982): Greater satisfaction with a relationship prior to the emergence of problems as well as greater investment of resources in a relationship have been shown to promote constructive responses (voice and loyalty) while inhibiting destructive responses (exit and neglect). And the possession of more attractive alternatives appears to increase the likelihood of active responding [exit (and perhaps voice)] while decreasing the probability of passive responding [loyalty (and perhaps neglect)]. Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986b) carried out a large-scale survey of a more heterogeneous sample to assess the generalizability of this model, and they found further evidence that satisfaction, investments, and alternatives relate to the four response categories as predicted. They also obtained evidence that the constructive responses (voice and loyalty) in fact produce more favorable immediate and longer term consequences than do the destructive responses (exit and neglect).

However, the relationship between *individual-level factors* and tendencies toward exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect has not heretofore been explored. That is, we do not yet know whether tendencies to react to relationship problems in each of these four characteristic fashions is related to stable individual-level qualities. One potentially important individual-level characteristic is sex role orientation. Individual differences in psychological masculinity and femininity have been shown to be very powerful in affecting a variety of social behaviors, including conflict-management style, nonverbal behavior, communication style, self-disclosure behaviors, and the perception of marital roles (Baxter & Shepard, 1978; Hall & Halberstadt, 1981; Hammen & Peplau, 1978; Ickes & Barnes, 1977; Lombardo & Lavine, 1981; Pursell, Banikiotes, & Sebastian, 1981). From this point of view, masculinity and femininity are viewed as independent dimensions: It is possible for an individual to be both psychologically masculine *and* feminine (androgynous), to be neither masculine *nor* feminine (indeterminate), to be highly feminine but not masculine (feminine typed), or to be highly masculine but not feminine (masculine typed) (Bem, 1974; Berzins, Welling, & Wetter, 1978; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974).

Most sex roles researchers and theorists characterize psychological femininity as a communal orientation, one associated with greater interpersonal warmth and a greater concern with the maintenance of interpersonal relations; in contrast, psychological masculinity is generally described as an agentic orientation, one associated with a greater focus on instrumental behaviors (e.g., career, task) than on interpersonal relations (Bakan, 1966; Bem, 1974; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976; Berzins, Welling, & Wetter, 1978; Heilbrun, 1976; Wiggins & Holzmuller, 1981). We might reason that the communal dimension of personality—psychological femininity—should be associated with the constructiveness/destructiveness dimension of the present typology, with highly feminine persons showing greater constructive and lesser destructive problem-solving behaviors. And the agentic dimension—psychological masculinity—should be associated with the active/passive dimension of problem solving, with highly masculine persons engaging in more active and fewer passive responses to dissatisfaction. In support of this line of reasoning, Wiggins and Holzmuller (1978, 1981) found that femininity is associated with Wiggins' (1980) warmth/coldness interpersonal trait dimension (i.e., constructiveness/destructiveness), and that masculinity is associated with his dominance/submission interpersonal trait dimension (i.e., activity/passivity).

Furthermore, research on the behavior and personal attributes of individuals of differing sex role orientations has shown that feminine-typed persons, who should (according to the above hypotheses) be most likely to engage in loyalty, tend to be relatively expressive, affiliative, nurturing, and self-subordinating (Baxter & Shepherd, 1978; Berzins et al., 1978; Flaherty & Dusek, 1980; Zuckerman, DeTrank, Spiegel, & Larrance, 1982). Masculine-typed individuals, who should be the most likely to engage in exit, are more dominant, autonomous, instrumental, and resistant to feelings of helplessness (Baucom & Danker-Brown, 1979; Baxter & Shepherd, 1978; Berzins et al., 1978; Flaherty & Dusek, 1980; Orlofsky & Windle, 1978). Androgynous persons, who should be the most likely to voice, exhibit higher levels of self-disclosure, greater ability to deal with varying situational demands, and higher self-esteem and adjustment (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem et al., 1976; Heilbrun, 1976; Helmreich, Spence, & Holahan, 1979; Lombardo & Lavine, 1981; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975). And interminates, who should be the most likely to behave in a neglectful manner, are the least well adjusted, have the lowest self-esteem, are the most externally oriented, and are the least popular of the four sex role categories (Johnson & Black, 1981; Kulik & Harackiewicz, 1979; O'Connor, Mann, & Bardwick, 1978; Orlofsky, 1977; Orlofsky & Windle, 1978; Spence et al., 1975). Thus, though this evidence admittedly provides only very indirect support for the predictions outlined above, the picture of psychological masculinity and femininity that we obtain from this literature is congruent with the current hypotheses.

A second potentially important individual-level characteristic is gender. In every heterosexual close relationship—and at least in 90% of the close relationships in Western nations are heterosexual—we find one male and one female. Though this statement seems to belabor the obvious, it is important to highlight that gender differences in interpersonal behavior, if they exist, *must* have a tremendous impact on the course of heterosexual involvements. Based on prior research on gender differences in interpersonal behavior, we can characterize the behavior of females, relative to that of males, as showing greater direct communication, a more contactful and less controlling style, a greater emphasis on maintenance/socioemotional behavior, a greater awareness of relationship problems, a desire to confront and to discuss problems and feelings, lesser tendencies toward conflict avoidance, a greater desire for affectional behaviors and a lesser emphasis on instrumental behaviors, and higher levels of intimate self-disclosure (Hawkins, Weisberg, & Ray, 1980; Kelley, Cunningham, Grisham, Lefebvre, Sink, & Yablon, 1978; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Morgan, 1976; Rubin, Hill, Peplau, & Dunkel-Schetter, 1980). Therefore, given the female's generally greater affiliative/communal orientation, it is predicted that in comparison to males, females should evidence greater tendencies to respond constructively and lesser tendencies to respond destructively to relationship problems.

This prediction is advanced despite evidence that females are more likely than males to actually terminate relationships (Hagstad & Smyer, 1982; Hill et al., 1976). Not all relationships terminate, and final termination is but one form of exit (the others being thinking about leaving, threatening to leave, or engaging in other actively destructive responses); there are many ways to exit other than actually ending one's relationship, and actual termination is a relatively low frequency response (relative to other ways of reacting to problems in relationships). Given the large body of literature suggesting that throughout the bulk of a relationship the female is more oriented toward maintenance than is the male, it seems reasonable to expect that in general males will engage in lesser constructive and greater destructive responses. In a sense, the female's greater concern for the affective quality of her relationships—her emphasis on personalism, self-disclosure, and mutual support—makes her automatically more heavily invested in her relationships. Her greater investment thus quite naturally should move her toward the constructive end of the constructiveness/destructiveness dimension.

It is therefore predicted that

1. Level of psychological femininity will be associated with the constructiveness/destructiveness dimension of the present typology, with more feminine persons exhibiting greater voice and loyalty, and lesser exit and neglect;

2. level of psychological masculinity will be associated with the active/passive dimension of the present typology, with more masculine persons exhibiting higher levels of the active responses (exit and voice) and lower levels of the passive responses (loyalty and neglect); and
3. gender will be associated with the constructiveness/destructiveness dimension of the present typology, with females exhibiting higher levels of the constructive responses (voice and loyalty) and lower levels of the destructive responses (exit and neglect) than do males.

Three cross-sectional survey studies were designed to test these predictions. All three studies obtained measures of psychological masculinity and femininity, as well as measures of generalized tendencies to react to relationship problems with exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. Study 1 explored the close relationships of college students; Study 2 examined the relationships of a more heterogeneous adult population; and Study 3 examined the relationships of both heterosexual males and females, *and* those of matched lesbians and gay males (all of whom were currently involved in close relationships). Thus, the three studies, taken together, should provide good evidence, in a wide range of relationships, regarding the relationships among these two individual-level attributes and problem-solving styles.

METHOD

Study 1

Respondents and Procedure. Study 1 employed 140 female and 92 male undergraduates from the University of Kentucky who volunteered to participate in partial fulfillment of the requirements for their introductory psychology classes. Ten to 30 students were recruited for each session of a study entitled "Interpersonal Dispositions." Participants completed (a) the Attitudes Toward Romantic Relationships Questionnaire, comprised of measures of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect; and (b) the Interpersonal Disposition Inventory, comprised of scales to measure psychological femininity and masculinity. The questionnaire also asked for respondents' age and sex. Students completed these materials in 30 to 40 minutes, and were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Questionnaires. The Attitudes Toward Romantic Relationships Questionnaire was designed to measure generalized tendencies to react to relationship problems with exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. The items assessed both behavioral tendencies and generalized beliefs regarding each of the four responses. Respondents noted degree of agreement with each of 30 statements

on 9-point Likert-type scales (1, *don't agree at all*; 9, *agree completely*). The five exit statements tapped generalized behavioral tendencies (e.g., "In the past I have almost always been the one who ended my romantic relationships") and beliefs regarding the exit response (e.g., "It is important that people know when to end a bad relationship"). Voice was assessed by five statements regarding tendencies toward voice (e.g., "If my partner is unhappy I want to hear about it right away, even if it's inconvenient to talk about it at that time") as well as beliefs regarding the efficacy of voice [e.g., "I don't think that romantic partners should try to change one another" (reverse-scored)]. The five loyalty items concerned belief in the appropriateness of loyalist behavior (e.g., "Sometimes when a romantic relationship is in trouble you just have to hang in there and hope and pray that things will change") and reported prior loyalist responses (e.g., "I have seldom considered ending a romantic relationship--I always wait a long time for things to improve before getting really disturbed by problems"). The five statements measuring neglect tapped prior neglectful behavior (e.g., "I must confess that I have occasionally treated my partners badly by ignoring them or saying cruel things") and belief in the advisability of neglect (e.g., "Sometimes when a romantic relationship is in trouble, the best thing to do is to just let things fall apart gracefully"). The filler items were 10 general statements about relationships (e.g., "I fall in and out of love very easily"). A single measure of each response to dissatisfaction was formed by summing the responses for items within each group.

The Interpersonal Disposition Inventory (Berzins et al., 1978) contains true/false items drawn from Jackson's (1967) Personality Research Form. Twenty-nine items measure masculinity (e.g., "I try to control others rather than permit them to control me," "If I have a problem, I like to work it out alone," "I seek out positions of authority," "when I am with someone else I do most of the decision-making") and 27 items tap femininity (e.g., "I like to be with people who assume a protective attitude toward me," "People like to tell me their troubles because they know I will do everything I can to help them," "When I see a baby I often ask to hold him or her," "To love and be loved is of greatest importance to me"). A five-item infrequency scale is used to exclude individuals who seem to respond inaccurately or carelessly (e.g., "I make all my clothes and shoes"). The scale has been shown to be reliable (alphas .60 or higher), valid, and minimally related to socially desirable responding. The femininity and masculinity subscales are relatively independent, and correlate substantially with corresponding subscales from Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory (correlations between .50 and .65). A single score for each subscale was formed by counting the number of items from each set that the participant judged self-descriptive.

Study 2

Respondents and Procedure. The second sample ($n = 102$) was obtained through a mailed survey. The names and addresses of 200 persons (101 males, 81 females, 18 names with initials or nonsex-typed first names) were randomly selected from the Lexington, Kentucky, telephone directory. Each individual was mailed a packet containing a cover letter, the Attitudes Toward Romantic Relationships Questionnaire (same as in Study 1), the Interpersonal Disposition Inventory, a demographic information form (sex, age, race, education, income, nature of present and past romantic involvement, marital status, and number of children, and a stamped return envelope. If individuals' return materials were not received within two weeks, a second set of materials was prepared and mailed in a similar manner, followed by a third mailing. Each of the three covers letters (original and two follow-ups) summarized the purpose of the research, explained how the mailing list was generated, and assured individuals of the anonymity of their responses. The response rate to the first mailing was 37%, the second mailing increased the rate to 56%, and when all third-mailing returns were received the overall response rate was 63% (125 of 200). Twenty-three of the packets were returned with one or more of the questionnaire pages left blank, so the usable response rate was 51%, or 102 out of 200. Six weeks after the final follow-up was mailed, all 200 persons were sent a letter that summarized the results of the study, and the mailing list was destroyed.

Of these 102 usable responses, 47% were male and 93% were Caucasian. The mean age of the sample was about 37, average annual income was around \$21,000, and respondents possessed an average of two and a half years of college education. Sixty-three percent of the participants were married; 22% had never been married; and 15% were divorced, separated, or widowed. Sixty-three percent of the respondents had children (2.28 per family). Eight-three percent of the participants reported that they were currently involved in a romantic relationship. The mean duration of these relationships was 11 years. All participants not currently involved had been at some previous time. These persons had ended their previous involvements, on the average, one and a half years earlier, and had been involved for an average of seven years.

Study 3

Respondents and Procedure. The respondents in Study 3 were 100 undergraduates from the University of Kentucky—22 heterosexual males,

28 heterosexual females, 23 gay males, and 27 lesbians. To be eligible to participate, respondents had to be currently involved in a close relationship of at least three months' duration. All respondents completed a revised Attitudes Toward Romantic Relationships Questionnaire, the Interpersonal Disposition Inventory, and a brief demographic information form. The homosexual sample was obtained by distributing questionnaires at the meetings of a campus-based gay and lesbian organization, and through friendship networks. The heterosexual sample was comprised of undergraduates who volunteered to participate in partial fulfillment of the requirements for their introductory psychology courses. All respondents, homosexual or heterosexual, returned completed questionnaires in stamped, addressed envelopes provided by the investigators. The four samples were approximately matched for age. On average, respondents were 24 years old and had been involved with their partners for about two and a half years.

Questionnaires. The Attitudes Toward Romantic Relationships Questionnaire was revised for use in this study. Items were reworded so that respondents described their actual behavior in their current involvements. Also, several items were added to each set of questions (exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect) in an attempt to increase the accuracy and internal consistency of each set of measures. Some examples of the new response to dissatisfaction items are as follows: For exit—"I sometimes think about ending our relationship" and "If our relationship had serious problems I would try to bow out of it gracefully"; for voice—"I try harder to work out problems between my partner and me" and "I always tell my partner what is bothering me"; for loyalty—"I stand by my partner through thick and thin" and "Our problems generally solve themselves, given enough time"; and for neglect—"Occasionally when I'm upset with my partner I'll sulk rather than confront the issue"; "Sometimes when I'm angry at my partner I'll begin to spend less time with him/her," and "Occasionally, I have caught myself criticizing my partner for things that are unrelated to our real problems." The revised scale was comprised of 47 items—11 to measure exit, 10 for voice, 13 for loyalty, and 13 for neglect.

RESULTS

Reliability of Measures

To assess the internal consistency of the set of items designed to measure each variable, reliability coefficients (alpha) were calculated for each set. The results of these analyses for each study are presented in Table I. The alphas for the femininity and masculinity scales are by and large congruent with

Table 1. Reliability Estimates for All Measures: Studies 1, 2, and 3*

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Psychological femininity	.72	.48	.58
Psychological masculinity	.63	.79	.76
Exit	.49	.56	.77
Voice	.33	.60	.75
Loyalty	.38	.66	.68
Neglect	.65	.36	.77

*Table values are alphas for the set of items designed to measure each construct.

prior research, though that for psychological femininity in Study 2 is not as high as would ideally be desirable. In evaluating the alphas for the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect measures, it should be borne in mind that each category is to some degree multifaceted; for example, though all forms of voice are active and constructive, persons may on some occasions voice by discussing problems, on others try to change their own behavior, and on still others ask a friend for advice about how to solve the problem. Also, there may be individual differences in preference for one mode of voice over others. Thus, the relatively lower reliabilities obtained for the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect measures are not surprising. Also, the modified instrument used in Study 3 yielded consistently higher reliability coefficients. Thus, the reliabilities of the various measures employed in the three studies were judged acceptable.

Impact of Gender, Psychological Femininity, and Psychological Masculinity on Exit, Voice and Loyalty, and Neglect

To test hypotheses regarding the impact of gender, psychological femininity, and psychological masculinity on responses to dissatisfaction, a three-factor (gender by femininity by masculinity) nonorthogonal multivariate analysis of variance (Appelbaum & Cramer, 1974) was performed on the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect measures for each of the three studies. (A median split was performed on the masculinity and femininity measures to divide respondents into high- vs low-masculinity, and high- vs low-femininity groups.) A summary of the results of these analyses is presented in Table II.

Gender. Gender had very little impact on tendencies toward exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. The only statistically significant effect of gender was obtained in Study 3: Consistent with predictions, males exhibited greater tendencies toward exit ($M = 4.07$) than did females ($M = 3.55$). Two additional, marginally significant effects of gender are worth noting: In Study 1, males were marginally more likely than were females to engage in neglect-

Table II. Analysis of Variance Summary Table: The Effects of Gender, Femininity, and Masculinity in Studies 1, 2, and 3^a

	Mult. F	Exit	Voice	Loyalty	Neglect
Psychological femininity					
Study 1	8.55 ^b	6.70 ^b	24.77 ^b	8.29 ^b	1.73
Study 2	3.64 ^b	1.24	8.66 ^b	4.64 ^c	1.77
Study 3	2.62 ^c	0.43	4.53 ^c	7.39 ^b	0.56
Psychological masculinity					
Study 1	4.53 ^b	7.54 ^b	4.74 ^c	5.91 ^c	3.31 ^d
Study 2	7.60 ^b	3.17 ^d	12.25 ^b	8.51 ^b	8.70 ^b
Study 3	1.15	0.01	4.34 ^c	0.02	0.66
Gender					
Study 1	1.45	2.06	0.79	0.12	3.59 ^d
Study 2	1.08	0.13	0.85	1.64	1.60
Study 3	2.10 ^d	3.81 ^c	0.00	1.53	2.90 ^d

^aTables values are the *F*s obtained in three-factor nonorthogonal multivariate analyses of variance for each study. The degree of freedom for the multivariate analyses were: Study 1: *df* = 4,220; Study 2; *df* = 4,91; Study 3: *df* = 4,89.

^b*p* < .01.

^c*p* < .05.

^d*p* < .10 (marginal).

ful behaviors (the respective means were 5.34 and 4.99). This effect was replicated in Study 3, wherein males once again exhibited marginally greater tendencies toward neglect than did females (the means were 4.00 for males and 3.29 for females). Thus, though these findings are consistent with predictions, it should be clear in these studies that gender is only very weakly predictive of response tendencies, with males showing somewhat a greater likelihood of engaging in destructive responses than females.

Psychological Femininity. Mean exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect scores as a function of femininity and masculinity are presented in Table III. It was predicted that psychological femininity would be associated with tendencies to react constructively rather than destructively to dissatisfaction in close relationships. Lower psychological femininity was consistently associated with greater tendencies to react to relationship problems with exit. However, this effect was statistically significant only for Study 1. Greater femininity was consistently associated with greater tendencies toward voice, and this effect was statistically significant in all three studies. Loyalist behavior, too, was associated with higher psychological femininity, and this effect was statistically significant in all three studies. And finally, level of psychological femininity was not significantly related to neglectful behavior in any of the three studies. We thus find that greater psychological femininity is associated with greater tendencies to react to problems in close relationships with constructive responses – voice and loyalty. Psychological femininity is not strongly predictive of the destructive responses of exit and neglect.

Table III. Mean Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect as a Function of Psychological Femininity and Masculinity*

	Low masculinity		High masculinity	
	Low femininity	High femininity	Low femininity	High femininity
Study 1				
Exit	4.61	4.05	4.92	4.51
Voice	6.13	6.66	5.71	6.58
Loyalty	6.15	6.53	5.87	6.26
Neglect	4.41	5.12	5.41	5.24
<i>n</i>	31	73	61	67
Study 2				
Exit	4.96	4.78	5.49	5.06
Voice	5.80	6.77	5.37	5.86
Loyalty	5.00	6.22	5.03	4.96
Neglect	4.20	3.76	4.62	4.49
<i>n</i>	22	31	29	20
Study 3				
Exit	3.85	3.63	3.86	3.77
Voice	7.41	8.04	7.11	7.33
Loyalty	5.57	6.46	6.00	6.16
Neglect	3.55	4.10	3.78	3.56
<i>n</i>	26	25	35	14

*Table values are the means for each measure, each of which is the average of several individual items designed to measure that construct. The possible range for each measure was from 1 to 9.

Psychological Masculinity. It was predicted that psychological masculinity would be associated with greater tendencies to react to problems in relationships in an active manner (with exit and voice) and with lesser tendencies to react in a passive manner (with loyalty and neglect). Consistent with predictions, tendencies toward the exit response were consistently stronger among high-masculinity persons. This effect was statistically significant in Study 1 and marginally significant in Study 2, but it was not significant in Study 3. Voice too, was predicted to be promoted by high psychological masculinity. Instead, we found that stronger voice was evident among *low*-masculinity individuals. This effect was statistically significant in all three studies. Consistent with predictions, in Studies 1 and 2 lower psychological masculinity was significantly associated with greater tendencies toward loyalist behavior. This effect was not statistically significant in Study 3. And finally, though neglect was predicted to be stronger among low-masculinity persons, we instead found that neglectful behaviors were most strongly evident among *high*-masculinity persons. This effect was statistically significant in Study 2 and marginally significant in Study 1, but it was not significant in Study 3. We thus find that psychological masculinity is not associated with the active/passive dimensions of responses to dissatisfaction, but rather to the constructive/destructive dimension; higher psychological

masculinity is consistently predictive of greater voice and loyalty, and it is weakly negatively related to exit and neglect responses.

Other Effects. These analyses also revealed several unexpected interactions. First, in Study 1, masculinity and femininity interacted in affecting neglect responses [$F(1,223) = 3.75, p < .054$]; tendencies toward neglect were weaker among persons possessing both low masculinity and low femininity (indeterminates) than in any other group, and the combination of high masculinity and low femininity (masculine typed) yielded strongest neglect scores. Second, the multivariate effect of the gender by femininity interaction was statistically significant [$Mult. F(4,220) = 4.34, p < .002$]. This multivariate effect was produced by two significant univariate effects—for voice [$F(1,223) = 7.71, p < .006$] and loyalty [$F(1,223) = 4.91, p < .028$]: The impact of femininity on both voice and loyalty was much stronger among males than it was among females; high femininity promoted voice and loyalty among both males and females, but this effect was especially strong among males (i.e., this interaction is an intensification effect). Third, loyalty was significantly affected by the three-way interaction of gender, masculinity, and femininity in Study 3: high femininity more powerfully promoted loyalist responding among high-masculinity males than among low-masculinity males, and more powerfully promoted loyalist responding among low-masculinity females than among high-masculinity females; femininity “matters” for high-masculinity males and for low-masculinity females.

Finally, it will be recalled that Study 3 explored responses to dissatisfaction among both heterosexual and homosexual persons. To assess the influence of sexual preference on responses to dissatisfaction, we performed two nonorthogonal multivariate analyses of variance—a two-factor analysis (gender by sexual preference) and a three-factor analysis (sexual preference by femininity by masculinity) (we could not carry out the full four-factor analysis because to do so would reduce several cell frequencies to numbers lower than 5 per cell). These analyses revealed only one significant effect involving the sexual preference factor: The impact of sexual preference on neglect responses was statistically significant [$F(1,96) = 7.77, p < .006$], with heterosexual females and males exhibiting stronger tendencies toward neglect than lesbians and gay males.

DISCUSSION

These studies provide fairly consistent evidence regarding the relationship between psychological masculinity and femininity and problem-solving styles in close relationships. High psychological femininity was consistently associated with stronger tendencies to react to problems in relationships with

voice (three of three studies) and loyalty (three of three studies). That is, highly feminine persons appear to be especially prone to react to problems in their relationships in a very constructive fashion by either actively attempting to solve problems (i.e., voicing) or by remaining quietly loyal to the relationship, waiting for conditions to improve. However, there was very little evidence for any relationship between psychological femininity and the destructive responses: High femininity was associated with low levels of exit in Study 1, but was unrelated to exit tendencies in Studies 2 or 3. And in Study 1, high femininity significantly inhibited neglectful behaviors among high-masculinity persons, but this two-way interaction was not statistically significant in studies 2 and 3. Thus, consistent with predictions, highly feminine persons exhibited greater tendencies toward voice and loyalty. However, we obtained no evidence of any consistent relationship between psychological femininity and tendencies to react to dissatisfaction with exit and neglect.

High psychological masculinity was associated with greater tendencies to respond destructively and lesser tendencies to respond constructively to problems in relationships. High psychological masculinity was consistently associated with low voice tendencies (three of three studies) and was fairly consistently related to low loyalist tendencies (two of three studies). In addition, there was *some* evidence of a link between masculinity and destructive response tendencies: Highly masculine persons were more likely to engage in exit in Study 1, and were marginally more likely to engage in exit in Study 2. Also, greater masculinity was associated with stronger neglect tendencies in Study 2, and with marginally greater tendencies toward neglect in Study 1. Thus, though we had hypothesized that psychological masculinity would be associated with the activity/passivity dimension of the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect typology, masculinity was instead associated with the destructiveness/constructiveness dimension. Compared to low-masculinity persons, individuals with high psychological masculinity are less likely to react to problems in their relationships constructively with voice and loyalty, and are somewhat (though inconsistently) more likely to react destructively with exit and neglect. Thus, when their relationships become dissatisfying, in comparison to low-masculinity persons, highly masculine persons are likely to engage in behaviors that are destructive to the future of their relationships—they are likely to behave in ways actively or passively detrimental to the future of the relationship (exit or neglect), and are unlikely to engage in maintenance or repair behaviors (voice or loyalty).

It appears, then, that through the acquisition of high psychological femininity, individuals do indeed learn to engage in behaviors that should promote well-functioning close relationship—high-femininity persons are likely to react to problems in their relationships with voice and loyalty,

responses that have previously been shown to produce favorable immediate and longer term consequences in close relationships (Rusbult et al., 1986b). In contrast, the acquisition of high psychological masculinity, and the attendant instrumental orientation to living, appears to actually inhibit adaptive reactions to relationship problems. Furthermore, high-masculinity persons not only exhibit reduced tendencies toward constructive reactions, but they also show some evidence of greater tendencies toward destructive responding. Therefore, though the learning of high-masculinity behaviors *may* be adaptive in domains requiring a very instrumental orientation to life (e.g., career), such behavioral tendencies are likely to be detrimental to the healthy functioning of close relationships.

We also obtained suggestive evidence regarding some interesting interactions among our predictor variables: In Study 1, gender and femininity interacted, femininity more strongly promoting the constructive responses (voice and loyalty) among males than among females. And in Study 3, gender, masculinity, and femininity interacted in affecting loyalist responding, with greater femininity more powerfully promoting loyalty among high-masculinity males than among low-masculinity males, and more powerfully promoting loyalty among low-masculinity females than among high-masculinity females. There is, then, some weak evidence that high-psychological femininity can be especially powerful in encouraging constructive problem-solving behaviors among those who "need it the most" given their general response tendencies—among males (in Study 1) and among high-masculinity males (Study 3). However, these findings should be explored in more detail in future research.

Gender had very little impact on response tendencies. There was very weak evidence that, in comparison to females, males are more likely to react destructively to problems in relationships: In Study 3, males were more likely than females to engage in exit responses, and in Studies 1 and 3 males were marginally more likely to behave in a neglectful fashion. Though these results are weak and inconsistently observed, they are congruent with the findings of Kelley et al. (1978), who characterize the behavior of men and women in close relationships as "the interaction between a conflict-avoidant person (the male) and his partner (the female), who is frustrated by the avoidance and asks that the problem and the feelings associated with it be confronted" (p. 473). In addition, in a study of the problem-solving patterns of couples, Rusbult et al. (1986a) found that women engaged in higher levels of voice and loyalty, and in lower levels of neglect, than did their male partners. These findings provide further support for our characterization of male-female differences in problem solving. However, the reader should bear in mind that though all of the obtained differences between the behavior of women and men suggest that women behave less destructively and (perhaps) more constructively, these differences are typically weak and inconsistently

observed. Clearly, *psychological* masculinity and femininity exert much stronger effects on responses to dissatisfaction in close relationships than does biological gender.

Several strengths and weaknesses of this research should be mentioned. The primary weakness concerns mode of measurement: The results of these three studies are based entirely on self-reported tendencies to react to dissatisfaction with exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect; it is possible that the observed relations were due to male-female differences in response biases or to common method variance. However, the Rusbult et al. (1986a) project employed self-report measures of the sort used in the present investigation, and it obtained good evidence for the validity of such measures (i.e., for the relation between such measures and actual problem-solving style in close relationships). First, respondents' self-reported response tendencies were significantly correlated with partners' descriptions of respondents' behaviors. Second, when respondents' answers to 20 open-ended questions regarding *actual* reactions to relationship problems were coded for degree of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect, actual behavioral tendencies were significantly and substantially related to self-reported response tendencies. And third, the self-report measures to exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect were not substantially related to socially desirable response tendencies. Thus, there is evidence that self-report instruments of the sort utilized in the present investigations *do* tap actual differences in response to dissatisfaction.

The primary strengths of the present investigations are as follows: First, we explored behaviors in a wide range of close relationship—those of college students, those of a more heterogeneous adult population involved in relationships of longer duration, and those of lesbians and gay males as well as heterosexual women and men. Second, we explored both generalized response tendencies in close relationships (Studies 1 and 2) and response tendencies in specific close relationships (Study 3), thus providing greater evidence for the generalizability of these findings. And third, the fact that we have examined the relationships among gender, sex role orientation, and response tendencies in three separate replications (and obtained relatively consistent patterns of findings) suggest that we can regard our findings as relatively more reliable.

Collectively, the findings of the present studies suggest that psychological femininity is associated with tendencies to attempt to solve problems in close relationships in a constructive fashion by engaging in voice or loyalty; individuals with high psychological femininity are more likely to respond to periods of relative dissatisfaction in their relationships in a manner likely to maintain or to revive the relationship. In contrast, high psychological masculinity appears to be downright destructive to the future of relationships; in comparison to persons with low psychological masculinity,

high-masculinity individuals are less likely to engage in voice or loyalty responses, and *may* be more likely to engage in the destructive exit and neglect responses. Furthermore, we obtained only very weak evidence of any link between biological gender and problem-solving styles; there is *some* evidence that males may engage in neglectful responses at somewhat higher levels than do females, but this gender difference was quite weak and inconsistent. Therefore, gender appears to be much less important than psychological sex role orientation in influencing the manner in which individuals react to problems in their relationships. These findings contribute substantially to our understanding of behavior in close relationships, and demonstrate that tendencies to engage in exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect in response to periodic dissatisfaction are influenced not only by structural characteristics of close relationships, but also by individual-level factors.

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