EFFECTS OF INTENSIVE MEDITATION ON SEX-ROLE IDENTIFICATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR A CONTROL MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

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Summary. This study assessed the impact of a 3-month meditation retreat on 15 respondents' self-perceived masculinity and femininity. In hypothesized, male and female subjects, who on pretest perceived themselves to be more stereotypically feminine than normative samples, on posttest reported a significant shift to even greater enhancement of feminine attributes and less endorsement of masculine attributes.

Although there is currently great interest in the application of Eastern and Western self-control strategies to a variety of clinical problems (Shapiro & Ziffren, 1976; Baslin, et al., 1980; Shapiro, 1987), less attention has been paid to the vistas of exceptional psychological health for which these techniques might be utilized (Wash & Shapiro, in press; Nobs, 1972). Previous efforts to develop a model of psychological health integrating both Eastern and Western cultural views suggest that a model may have considerable overlap with masculine and feminine sex-role stereotypes (Isem, 1974, 1977, 1981; Spencer, et al., 1975, 1979). To explore the overlaps, this study assessed the effect of meditation on respondents' self-perceived masculinity and femininity. Although the Eastern traditions emphasize the concept of balancing active, energetic qualities with yielding, accepting, and meditating, retreat emphasizes non-doing, being, and acceptance, qualities similar to the stereotypically feminine attributes. It was hypothesized that a meditation retreat would increase individuals' self-perceptions in a more stereotypically feminine direction and decrease the endorsement of certain stereotypically masculine self-perceptions.

1A detailed report is available on file with Metaphysis Publications, P.O.B. 3513, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017. For Document NAP-09974 send $6.00 for one or $11.50 for ten copies.

2Correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Shapiro, c/o University of California Irvine Medical Center, 101 City Drive West, Orange, California 92668.

3D. Shapiro, E. Peper, M. Hart, & S. Carraro. Toward a four-quadrant model of self-control: passive and active aspects of assertiveness and yielding. (Under editorial review.)

4D. Shapiro, Reliability of a four-quadrant model of self-control: ratings by experts in Type A behavior—psychology. Brit/West psychology, and sex-role psychology. (Under editorial review.)
METHOD
Subjects were 25 individuals attending a 3-mo. meditation retreat where meditation was practiced up to 16 hours a day. The type of meditation was Vipassana, a Buddhist practice, in which the individual focuses primarily on breathing but also attempts to notice precisely other thoughts, sensations, and feelings that become salient. Twelve men and 13 women completed the pretest, about 25% of those attending the retreat. Of this group, 6 men and 9 women also filled out the posttest. This attrition rate was 40%. The mean age for men was 27.3 yr. and for women 33.6 yr. The group was moderately well-educated, and all but one of the subjects who completed both pre- and posttests had had some college. There were a high percentage of unemployed, students, and part-time workers to the sample was highly self-selected.

Subjects were administered the Bem Sex-role Inventory prior and subsequent to the 3-mo. retreat. The Bem inventory asks respondents to rate themselves on a 7-point Likert scale in terms of 40 words defined as socially desirable in contemporary American society. Twenty of these words are stereotypically masculine, 20 stereotypically feminine.

RESULTS
For the 15 subjects, on 20 words designated masculine scores for 13 words decreased while those for 6 words increased from pre- to posttest. On the 20 feminine words scores for 14 increased and for 5 decreased (corrected $\chi^2 = 3.17, p \leq .05$). In terms of specific words, subjects perceived themselves as significantly less independent (a masculine word) and significantly more sympathetic (a feminine word) at posttest ($p \leq .05$). Women also perceived themselves as significantly more compassionate (a feminine word) at posttest ($p \leq .05$). The study provided some support for the initial hypothesis, although its exploratory nature did not permit clarification of why the expected changes occurred on certain words and not on others in the list.

The study also provided additional refinement to the pretest profile of individuals attracted to meditation (Stek & Bass, 1973) in that the pretest means of men and women from this study were compared with Bem's normative scores (Bem, 1974), we see that the women attracted to a meditation retreat were slightly more stereotypically feminine than the normative female sample (this study $M = 5.23$; Bem study $M = 5.01$). The men attracted to the retreat were also considerably more feminine and less masculine in their endorsement of sex-stereotypic words than Bem's normative male sample (this study, masculine $M = 4.36$; Bem study, masculine $M = 4.97$; this study, feminine $M = 5.14$; Bem study, feminine $M = 4.64$). Further, in an interesting cross-sex pattern, women on the meditation retreat had a higher mean score than men on 9 of 20 masculine words, with willing to take a stand significant.