In A Different Mode: Masculine Styles of Communicating Closeness

Julia T. Wood
Christopher C. Inman

A number of contributors to Journal of Applied Communication Research have demonstrated communication research and theory can inform practical conduct in sundry situations. Less addressed has been the pragmatic potential of research to reform its own practice. Believing research is ideally self-reflexive, we apply principles of scholarly inquiry to evaluate knowledge about gender and communication in close relationships. We document a prevalent bias that favors feminine styles of relating, characterized by verbal, emotional disclosure, and that devalues activity-focused modes empirically more associated with masculinity. We then trace the presence of this bias in textbooks on gender and communication and interpersonal relationships, and we suggest teaching that relies on a non-inclusive model of intimacy may misguide students' communicative expectations and interpretations and may misdirect practical conduct in friendships and romantic relationships. Finally, we return to existing scholarship to extract information about masculine styles of experiencing and expressing closeness as a starting point for more inclusive research and teaching about gender, communication and human relationships.

Last fall a classroom exchange prompted us to reconsider and, ultimately, to revise our thinking about gender and communication in close relationships. We launched a discussion of this topic by summarizing key findings from over 40 years' research: In general women have more intense and emotionally rich friendships than men; women prioritize personal talk in close relationships, while men emphasize doing things; and women generally talk about feelings while men tend to be less self-disclosive.

"Are you saying men don't express feelings or know each other personally?" interrupted a running back on the school team.

"Yes, the research indicates generally men are less emotionally and personally revealing than women," we agreed.

"But what about what we learn in doing things together? Maybe we don't come right out and say stuff like 'I care about you' or 'I'm feeling scared' or 'I need support,' but we communicate it in other ways, and we take care of each other." When asked to explain, he offered two examples. "When I've got the ball, and I'm running, and the other team's trying to smash me, my buddy's blocking to help me get through. He's there for me. Or like when my girlfriend walked out. I didn't have to tell the guys how bad I felt. They knew, and they hung in with me."

"But that's not the same as really talking about what you're feeling and how you're hurting," responded a young woman student.

"You don't have to come right out and tell friends you're hurting. The guys knew I felt bad, and they helped me out by taking my mind off things and hanging out with me," he persisted.

As conversation continued, other male students offered examples of how men develop close ties and support each other, while female students insisted that doing things together is no substitute for "really personal communication." As we listened, we were struck by disparity between consensual scholarly reports on men's relationships and our male students' perceptions of the depth in their friendships. In this essay we trace the process of rethinking precipitated by the foregoing incident and describe the revisions it prompted in our perspective on gender and close relationships.

We contend research and textbooks on relationships manifest a non-inclusive view of closeness in...
which feminine preferences for verbal disclosures are privileged, while masculine tendencies toward instrumental activity are devalued. To support this claim, we demonstrate that feminine styles are generally equated with intimacy in scholarship and textbooks on gender and interpersonal communication. We then argue the greater legitimacy accorded to feminine forms of relating impairs theory and research, teaching, and interpersonal conduct. Finally, we delineate masculine modes of achieving and expressing closeness that combine with feminine styles to define a more inclusive range of ways humans create and participate in close relationships.

THE FEMININE BIAS IN SCHOLARSHIP ON CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Scholarship consistently portrays women as the "intimacy experts." Careful inspection of scholarship, however, suggests this opinion may result from circular logic in which concepts, methodologies, and interpretations that reflect feminine, but not masculine, ways of interacting yield the unsurprising finding that women exceed men in creating and sustaining closeness.

The 1960s and 1970s: Foundations of Scholarship

Apart from a few isolated reports of sex differences, there was a dearth of research on gender and communication until the 1960s. Beginning then and continuing through the 1970s a number of studies established basic themes that continue to reverberate in present day research, teaching, and popular beliefs. Particularly noteworthy were pioneering books by Komarovsky (1964), Janeway (1971), Bernard (1972), Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), Lakoff (1975), Miller (1976), and Chodorow (1978).

Reflecting diverse disciplinary heritages, this cadre of scholars identified general differences between men and women that originate primarily in structural features of culture, providing an early clue that biology is not the foremost cause of dissimilarities between the sexes. While Janeway and Miller traced the effects of marginalized status on women's identities and options, Chodorow emphasized family psychodynamics, especially the mother-child relationship, in reproducing masculinity and femininity. Bernard and Komarovsky highlighted discrepancies between women's and men's experiences of marriage, and Lakoff and Maccoby and Jacklin identified behavioral differences resulting from gender-differentiated socialization. Common to this early work was the observation that women engage in intimacy by talking about personal topics while men tend to emphasize shared activities and practical assistance. From the outset, however, these differences were translated into the qualitative judgment that women's behaviors are the behaviors that facilitate intimacy.

Augmenting theoretical work of this era were more limited empirical investigations, which initiated an equation between intimacy and feminine preferences for verbal, disclosive interaction. Altman and Taylor (1973) designated self-disclosure as the defining feature of intimacy, and others followed suit by measuring closeness primarily or exclusively by how much personal disclosure transpired between people (Booth, 1972; Lyness, 1978). Personal communication became virtually isomorphic with closeness, or affection. In their widely cited study of intimacy, Wills, Weiss and Patterson (1974) reported that one husband complied with researchers' instructions to increase "affectional behaviors" toward his wife by washing her car. Totally disregarding the possibility that washing a car might be a valid expression of affection, the researchers concluded "this raises concern about the subjects' [husbands'] abilities to discriminate instrumental from affectional behaviors" (p. 810).

This first generation of research promulgated what became a mainstay in thinking about gender and relationships: Women, more than men, prioritize disclosive communication, which is the crux of intimacy; therefore, women are better at intimacy than men (Crawford, 1977; Douvan & Adelson,
1966; Hodgson & Fischer, 1979; Kon & Losenkov, 1978; Levinger, 1964; Lowenthal & Weiss, 1976; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1975). Men were judged less adept at intimacy, because they failed to emphasize the personally disclosive talk characteristic of women's relationships.

Not only were women dubbed intimacy experts, but men were alternately pitied and chided for their alleged shortcomings. What Swain (1989) would later label the "deficit view of men" was incubated in the 1960s and 1970s. While Komarovsky (1964) bemoaned men's incapacity to share, Douvan and Adelson (1966) reported adolescent males are less interested in and less competent at friendship than females. Echoing this, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) proclaimed girls' friendships more intimate than those of boys. Going further, Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) argued women's greater tendencies to disclose personal information and feelings made them more "emotionally mature" and "interpersonally competent" than men. Seeking to remediate men, Pleck and Sawyer (1974) urged men to develop women's communication skills, e.g., empathy, self-disclosure, and emotional expressiveness. Emblematic of the emerging indictment of men's ways of interacting was the title Balswick and Peek (1976) gave their widely read article: "The Inexpressive Male: A Tragedy of American Society."

The 1980s: Second Generation Research

Several especially influential studies extended initial findings about women's and men's behaviors in close relationships. Maltz and Borker (1982) reported children's games are sex-segregated and cultivate discrete orientations toward interaction. They concluded that boys' games (baseball, football) are structured by external rules, definite goals, and competitive principles, which teach boys to assert themselves, gain and hold attention, and vie for status in hierarchical relationships. In contrast, games more typical of girls (house, school) are emergently organized by communication, emphasize process over results, and require cooperation, all of which incline girls toward verbal, collaborative, responsive interaction. Confirming earlier work, a feminine proclivity for verbal interaction was found again. A thorough survey of research on heterosexual relationships led Peplau and Gordon (1985) to conclude "women of all social classes appear to view verbal self-disclosure as a more important component of intimacy than do men" (p. 262).

Also consistent with earlier work was reliance on a feminine ruler to measure intimacy. Consider, for example, Caldwell and Peplau's (1982, p. 75) classic study, predicated on an a priori definition of an "intimate friend" as someone with "whom one can confide about feelings and personal problems." Equating intimacy with communication demonstrably more associated with women than men, this research de facto assured its finding that women's friendships would be more intimate than those of men! As feminine criteria for closeness went unchallenged, women's friendships were regularly described as closer than men's, and women's verbal, emotional style was advanced as the model for intimacy (Bell, 1981; Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987; Clark & Reiss, 1988; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Winstead, 1986).

Also continuing was derogation of men's inadequacies, elaborating the "male deficit model" inaugurated in the 1970s. Mazur and Olver (1987) for example, claimed "men, . . . feel threatened by intimacy and impose structure onto interpersonal situations in order to defuse intimacy" (p. 553). Williams (1985) bluntly disparaged men's friendships as "lacking in mutual self-disclosure, shared feelings, and other demonstrations of emotional closeness which are thought to characterize women's friendships" (p. 588). Joining the chorus, Bell (1981) declared, "American men have long been able to deal with the inanimate objects of the world more easily than with other human beings . . . interpersonal worlds have never been highly valued by men" (p. 405). In a sequel to his lament for men's "stunted emotional development," Balswick (1988) authored The Inexpressive Male: A Tragedy of American Society. Men continued to be advised to learn how to relate "effectively," i.e., to be verbally and emotionally expressive. Aukett, Ritchie, and Mill (1988) advocated teaching men to
communicate feelings with friends, while Tognoli (1980) counseled men to be more emotionally and verbally expressive, and Cohen (1983) bid men to liberate themselves from their repressed feelings.

During the 1980s, a few researchers began to question the assumption that men were incapable of or incompetent at closeness. In Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in Our Lives, Rubin (1985) argued men's friendships are based on nonverbal bonding while women's grow out of verbal intimacy, thus suggesting there are distinct, gender-linked styles of connecting. Extending this, Sherrod (1989) critiqued the feminine ruler for intimacy, noting that "each sex generally defines and enacts friendship differently. Consequently, research that relies on a single method to assess intimacy in both sexes may not necessarily tap the same experiential dimension in each sex" (p. 165). He also suggested women's greater disclosiveness "does not necessarily indicate that men's friendships are less intimate than women's; rather, it suggests that men in general may not express intimacy through self-disclosure" (p. 168).

Concurring with Sherrod, Swain (1989) contested interpretations of data, arguing that while men generally engage less in verbal disclosures than women, disclosiveness is not the exclusive measure of, or means to, closeness. Studying men's friendships, Swain identified a "closeness in the doing - the sharing of interests and activities" (p. 77) that typifies close masculine ties. Cancian, too, (1987) observed, "men are not as uninolved and unskilled in love as the feminine perspective suggests. There is a distinctive masculine style of love . . . but it is usually ignored by scholars and the general public" (p. 78). Yet claims of a masculine style of intimacy went largely unheeded as the majority of work during the 1980s continued to insist verbal disclosures were the crux of closeness.

The tendency to privilege feminine approaches to intimacy was invigorated by an emerging trend to value, or revalorize, women and their activities. In an effort to counter myriad ways in which women have been marginalized, trivialized, and devalued in Western society, many feminist scholars sought to highlight strengths of activities, values, and behaviors associated with women. Undoubtedly one of the most influential works in this genre was Carol Gilligan's In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (1982). Arguing that women had been excluded from the data upon which theories of moral development were erected, Gilligan studied women's moral decisions. She reported women operate from a perspective that prioritizes responding to others' needs and showing care, a morality distinct from respecting rights and being fair, which she claimed is characteristic of men. Gilligan portrayed women's morality as rigidly oppositional and superior to that of men in its greater focus on relationships (Scott, 1986; Wood, 1993a).

Ignited by feminist scholarship's recovery and valuing of women, other work in the 1980s championed women's ways of building and sustaining relationships. Schaef (1985), for instance, observed that when "a woman often insists that she feels unloved[,] the man then counters with a recitation of all the things he does for her. . . . He is being the perfect White Male System lover" (p. 147), which is hardly complimentary since Schaef declared "I like to think of the White Male System as analogous to pollution" (p. 5). Another highly influential book was Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), which drew on Gilligan's work to depict women's epistemology as characterized by concern for others, relationships, and interpersonal responsiveness. Revalorist work fortified the already pronounced propensity to regard women as more concerned about relationships and more skilled in creating closeness than men.

The 1990s: The Contemporary Scene

Current research on gender, communication, and interpersonal relationships is vigorous and substantial and seems receptive to reflecting on long standing assumptions that have guided inquiry. Researchers are beginning to ask about similarities between women and men, a focus that attenuates
the ensconced emphasis on differences. In addition, there are embryonic efforts to elucidate masculine modes of creating and sustaining relationships, which might revise how we define closeness itself and what we include within the concept (e.g., Gaylin, 1992). While the decade is yet too young to have a body of research comparable to that of prior periods, several studies suggest trends. A recent summary of friendship (Wright & Scanlon, 1991) laudably cautions that differences identified between men’s and women’s friendships focus on a narrow set of qualities in which there is a bias for expressive behaviors. This echoes Wright’s (1988) earlier criticism that researchers have tended to overinterpret gender differences in friendship.

Consistent with Wright’s insights is Paul and White’s (1990) reconsideration of research on intimate relationships in adolescence. They question the widely advanced contention that men’s tendency to disclose less than women necessarily means men’s relationships are less intimate and suggest “a careful analysis of the meaning of the construct ‘intimacy’ is called for” (p. 386). This recommendation underlines the circularity we identified in the bulk of research on close relationships: When closeness is defined exclusively or primarily by typically feminine behaviors such as self-disclosure, it is pregiven that women will be found more skilled than men. A more inclusive view is suggested by Jones’ (1991) recent study of contributors to satisfaction in friendship. While noting gender-based differences, Jones emphasized “self-disclosure and trust, and the positive affective characteristics associated with companionship . . . are the most important enhancers of friendship satisfaction for young adult women and men” (p. 182). We endorse this emerging recognition and valuing of characteristically masculine ways to conceive, create, and participate in close relations.

THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOLARSHIP ON PEDAGOGY

Interested in the pragmatic implications of feminine models of closeness in scholarship, we asked whether this bias reverberates in pedagogy. If teaching promotes feminine styles of interacting and ignores and/or disparages masculine ones, then it misrepresents the gamut of human ways to enact closeness and distorts students’ understandings. To gain insight into whether feminine models of relationships inhere in teaching, we reviewed textbooks on gender and communication as well as two particularly popular ones on interpersonal communication. Our survey indicated the feminine bias in research is present in textbooks, which we presume harmonize with what is taught. Reflecting trends in research, textbook discussions of relationships tend to dichotomize masculine and feminine orientations and to privilege the latter.

Since gender and communication was not established in many curricula during the 1970s, it is unsurprising that only one general textbook on gender and communication appeared in that decade: Eakins and Eakins’ Sex Differences in Human Communication (1978). As the title suggests, this early text emphasized differences in men’s and women’s communication. Reflecting the feminist strategy of assimilating into traditionally male domains, Eakins and Eakins focused on encouraging women to adopt masculine communication styles to be effective in public and professional settings. Intimacy and friendship received scant coverage, not even appearing in the index. In one brief section the authors reported research in which “talk tended to be specialized according to sex, with the preponderance of instrumental, getting-the-job done speech coming from males and most of the expressive, supportive talk coming from females” (p. 73). In dichotomizing instrumental and expressive activities, the authors imply concrete help is not supportive.

During the 1980s courses in gender and communication increased, enlarging the market for textbooks. Paralleling trends in scholarship, textbooks of this decade segregated genders and attached unequal value to masculine and feminine styles of communication. Usually masculine style was deemed the ideal to which women were urged to conform. We will not discuss the male-as-standard model since it has been incisively criticized by others, and it is oblique to our focus. In the arena of intimacy, however, feminine communication was presented as the exemplar, and men were judged
inadequate by a feminine ruler.

Consistent with tendencies we earlier documented in research, texts frequently portrayed women's friendships as more intimate, women's styles of communicating as "better," and emotional expressiveness and disclosure as definitive of intimacy, while largely ignoring shared activities and mutual assistance in relationships. Consider, for example, Bate's (1988) comment on "men's apparent lack of intimacy through friendship," since "for men, then, friendships provide predictable companionship through activities and talk about those activities. For women, friendship serves to provide a human connection" (p. 180). This implies "human connections" cannot arise out of shared activities and togetherness not linguistically mediated. Similarly, in the first edition of her textbook, Pearson (1985) contended "sharing yourself is particularly important in the establishment of a close personal relationship" and asked whether "you self-disclose openly and honestly? Do you express your thoughts and feelings" (p. 302)? These questions reflect a feminine model that recognizes only certain ways to create and express closeness.

The tendency to equate closeness with feminine styles of interacting continues unabated in gender and communication textbooks of the 1990s. In one recent edition (Stewart, et al., 1990), readers are informed that women and men display "differences in the disclosure patterns that lead to intimacy [emphasis added]" (p. 119) and that "personal disclosures," focus on "personal and family matters . . . closely related to 'self,'" while "disclosure among men generally focuses on . . . current events, sports, money, and music" (p. 120). Elaborating these differences, Stewart et. al. state "females describe a deeper level of intimacy (as measured by amount and type of self-disclosure)" (pp. 121-122). Having equated self-disclosure with intimacy, the authors recommend "men should strive to share their feelings more openly with their close friends and spouses" (p. 141). What concerns us about such advisories is not that men are encouraged to engage in behaviors that may be uncustomary for them; it is a lack of parallel suggestions such as "women should strive to share activities with friends and spouses and show care in instrumental ways." The imbalance in valuing masculine and feminine styles seems biased and limiting.

Writing in 1992, Basow asserts "males tend to have more numerous but less intimate same-sex friendships . . . boys' greater use of physical contact . . . interferes with the development of intimacy" (pp. 204-205). Lamenting the "poor quality of men's friendships," Basow goes on to allege that "the lack of emotional sharing in many male same-sex friendships means many males do not receive maximum benefits from friendship - the relief of being able to release feelings with someone else and receive support" (p. 207). This may explain why Basow claims "male same-sex friendships are less intimate and more activity based than female same-sex friendships" (p. 212), thereby suggesting intimacy cannot grow out of activities. Again, we note no complimentary concern for women's lesser tendency to experience the "maximum benefits" possible from closeness born of shared activities.

While generally balancing coverage of feminine and masculine communication, Pearson, Turner, and Todd-Mancillas (1991) give preference to a feminine model of intimacy. After demonstrating women self-disclose more than men, the authors suggest perhaps "self-disclosure is simply more important to women than men. By implication [emphasis added], one would also conclude that relationships are more important to women than men" (p. 177). Later they note "conventional wisdom suggests that women are more skilled than men at these expressions of intimacy . . . female-female relationships are more involved and deeper than male-male friendships . . ." (pp. 194-195), which leads them to recommend "communication skills such as listening, empathy, openness, self-disclosure, assertiveness, and clarity" (p. 209) as assistance for troubled marriages. Ironically, when discussing one case in which males are more verbal and emotional than women, men's acumen is impugned: Men's tendency to say "I love you" earlier than women is explained by suggesting "women are more capable of discriminating between love and other related emotions" (p. 198). The logical conclusion is that men generally don't express emotions, and when they do, they're misreading their own feelings!
Reflecting the pervasive equation between intimacy and expressive talk, Arliss (1991) states "research indicates female friendships are both more exclusive and more emotionally committed than male friendships" (p. 188) given the "weak ties" that typify male friendship" (p. 191). She advises women to learn masculine modes of friendship, yet undermines the style's legitimacy by presenting masculine friendships as an alternative to serious engagement, rather than a different way of being close: They are "less intimate and less demanding . . . usually enjoyable, short-lived, and nonthreatening . . . do not call for high levels of self-disclosure, nor its reciprocal - trust" (p. 191).

To get a sense of whether a feminine model of closeness also informs textbooks in interpersonal communication, we reviewed two that enjoy particularly high adoption, which suggests many faculty find them sound. Representative discussions of intimacy in these two books echo themes in research and gender textbooks. Brehm (1992, p. 205) emphasizes disclosure, because "our willingness to tell another person about our most intimate thoughts and feelings may be one of the clearest indicators of how we really feel about our relationship with that person." Brehm continues to overlook behaviors other than personal talk might facilitate intimacy in discussing "men's lack of emotional responsiveness" (p. 214), men's "fear of intimacy" (p. 366), and "the difficulty men face in forming emotionally significant friendships with other men" (p. 367). Given this view of intimacy, it is not surprising that Brehm's discussion of therapeutic interventions highlights communication skills to improve abilities to talk about feelings (pp. 380-382). To further demonstrate men's ineptness at intimacy Brehm recalls Wills et al.'s (1974) classic study. After reporting one man showed affection by washing his wife's car, Brehm echoes Wills et al.'s judgment that this was instrumental, not affectional. She faults the husband for not understanding what affection is by noting "husbands may have had some difficulty discriminating between affectional and instrumental behaviors . . . . This husband believed that washing his wife's car was a perfectly good way to communicate his affection for her" (p. 162). Such a favor is an expression of affection to someone who perceives mutual assistance as a way to build and show closeness. Yet this insight is obscured by a conception of intimacy that a priori excludes masculine orientations.

As a second example consider the highly popular textbook by Adler, Rosenfeld, and Towne (1992), now in its fifth edition. In Interplay the authors inform readers "self-disclosure is a good measure of the depth of a relationship" (p. 263), which may explain their progressive model of friendship "maturity" in which early features such as shared activities give way to confidentiality as a friendship matures: "Relationships . . . that are particularly strong," the authors claim, "require clear communication between the two people involved. Each must be willing to express needs, feelings, and wishes" (p. 275). The centrality of self-disclosure to intimacy recurs, as in a reference to "the obvious [emphasis added] fact that, in order to stay healthy, relationships need to be nourished by self-disclosure" (p. 299). In discussing gender differences in friendship the authors cite research showing "men are more likely to talk about less personal topics, such as current events, sports, money, and music" (p. 277) and "men are more willing to share superficial [emphasis added] information about themselves: Work, attitudes, and opinions. Conversely, females are more willing to reveal personal feelings" (p. 308). Diversity in what is considered "personal" or "superficial" is eclipsed by equating "personal topics" with ones discussed more frequently by women.

Our review of research on gender and interpersonal communication and a more limited survey of textbooks yield three conclusions. First, gender and communication in close relationships is a rapidly expanding zone of scholarship and teaching. Second, differences between women's and men's communication have been and remain a primary focus in research and textbooks. Finally, despite occasional critical voices and some suggestion of change in recent research, the corpus of scholarship and even the most current textbooks evidence a persistent partiality toward feminine ways of experiencing and expressing intimacy. Modes of caring more typical of masculinity generally have been either disparaged as "emotionally immature," leading to calls for rehabilitating men, or positioned entirely outside of what counts as closeness, implying men don't care about real intimacy.
and/or do not grasp what it entails.

In questioning the privileging of feminine patterns of intimacy we are not suggesting these are not valuable, for clearly they are. Our misgiving is informed by feminist scholars' argument that any theory that excludes groups of people and their experience is partial and, therefore, misrepresents what it describes and explains. Gilligan (1982) predicated her work on the claim that in systematically excluding women's conceptions of morality, theories of human development were false in their partiality. While Gilligan and other feminist scholars focus on recurrent marginalization or exclusion of women, underlying this specific focus is the more basic premise that exclusion itself is objectionable.

The feminine bias that infuses conceptions of closeness seems to us to promote significant problems for theory, pedagogy, and practice. First, disregarding or devaluing masculine ways of achieving and expressing closeness obscures appreciation of a range of behaviors, attitudes, and values that potentially contribute to human attachments. Relatedly, concepts, methodologies, and interpretations that assume a feminine model of intimacy distort the meaning of masculine inclinations toward friendship and romance. By extension, to the extent that research and instruction affect practice, devaluing masculine orientations invites misunderstandings between relational partners and judgments of masculine individuals as, by definition, deficient. To transcend these limitations, we excavated from research insights into the nature and meaning of masculine ways of experiencing and expressing closeness in the hope of enlarging our overall understanding of human relationships. What follows is our summary of existing research on masculine styles, which we have incorporated into our teaching to offer more inclusive instruction on gender and communication in friendships and romances.

**MASCULINE MODES OF CLOSENESS: AN INITIAL DESCRIPTION**

Given entrenched emphasis on differences, it seems prudent to begin by noting similarities between women and men. Scholars generally concur that both masculine and feminine persons value and seek close relationships, and both want connections to be meaningful, validating, and satisfying (Cancian, 1987; Jones, 1991; Mazur, 1989; Reisman, 1990; Riessman, 1990; Sullivan, 1953). While men and women alike desire relationships and agree on some of what makes them satisfying, they tend to differ in the means by which they pursue and express closeness.

Given scant and scattered research on men's orientations toward closeness, we enter this discussion with some trepidation. Nonetheless, it seems a starting point in understanding this perspective might clarify what we do and do not know and direct attention to dimensions and possibilities of relationships obscured by a feminine ruler. The information we present is intended to augment, not replace existing recognition of feminine styles of interacting. Respect for both feminine and masculine orientations encourages more inclusive pedagogy and stimulates further study to clarify and extend current knowledge. We now summarize existing insight into masculine ways to create and express closeness.

**Masculine Paths to Closeness**

Sherrod (1989) notes that "each sex generally defines and enacts intimacy differently" (p. 165); yet, unlike the majority of researchers who have identified differences, he argues this "does not necessarily indicate that men's friendships are less intimate than women's" (p. 168). Among those who have studied men's friendships on their own terms, i.e., without imposing a feminine model, there is virtually unanimous agreement that sharing activities and exchanging favors are primary ways to create closeness.

Sharing joint activities seems central to how men create and recognize closeness. Duck (1988) points to "clear evidence that . . . men appear to regard intimacy as being embodied in joint activities,
while for women the specific activity that signals intimacy is sharing of information, feelings, secrets, and insights into oneself (p. 80). Others concur that men use shared activities, rather than personal talk, to develop feelings of closeness (Cancian, 1987; Paul & White, 1990; Reissman, 1990; Reissman, 1990; Swain, 1989). Engendered preferences, often dubbed "being versus doing," have been translated widely into judgments that expressive communication constitutes intimacy, while joint activities are dismissed as impersonal. Yet this interpretation has been rendered without serious consideration of how closeness might be actively promoted by shared experiences.

Recognizing activity as a legitimate means of cultivating closeness yields interesting insights into both marriage and friendship. For instance, realizing doing things is how some people create closeness sheds light on a recurrently noted sexual conundrum in heterosexual relationships. Reissman (1990) explains that "instead of viewing sex as women tend to - as a way to express intimacy already established by talking and sharing - men expected to become intimate with their wives through sex" (p. 46). Other clinicians (Bergner & Bergner, 1990; Schneider & Gould, 1987) echo Reissman in reporting men tend to regard sexual activity as a way to create closeness, while women typically value it following the establishment of intimacy through talk.8

Relying on activities more than words to create closeness is also evident in a masculine orientation toward friendship. While both Tiger (1969) and Rubin (1985) discussed male bonding as a form of closeness that neither requires nor benefits by talk, it is Swain's (1989) research that illuminates how closeness actually arises in shared experiences. More than 75% of the men Swain interviewed cited activities other than talking as their most meaningful experiences with close friends. Through shared activities the men reported they "grew on each other" (p. 77), "show ... appreciation that's nonverbal" (p. 78), create feelings of interdependence, demonstrate affinity, and promote personal development. Rejecting a dichotomy between activities and intimacy, Swain offers compelling evidence of "closeness in the doing" within men's friendships. Interestingly, several of Swain's respondents described talking with women friends as "the lighter side of things" (p. 77), and one indicated women were restricted in their ways of relating with talking being their strong suit, long suit, and only suit (p. 78)! This comment anticipates our consideration of distinctively masculine perceptions about how to express support and closeness.

Masculine Ways to Express Closeness

Just as activities define a masculine path to closeness, so too do they symbolize others care. Men, more than women, appear to regard practical help, mutual assistance, and companionship as bench marks of caring. Several of Swain's (1989) respondents, for instance, pointed to offers of assistance as evidence another man liked them. Reissman's (1990) study of divorced couples revealed most husbands relied on concrete measures of affection, and the absence of instrumental demonstrations made them feel unloved. She concluded that "talk with a spouse is how women think emotional intimacy ought to be realized" (p. 24), while "men want a variety of physical and other concrete demonstrations of intimacy ..." (p. 37). Similarly, Parelman (1979) and Reedy (1977) found men, more than women, valued practical assistance and regarded behavioral deeds as a key gauge of intimacy.

There are also rather consistent differences in masculine and feminine views of what feels supportive in close relationships. Research suggests that while disclosure reduces stress for women, it does not do so for men (Sherrod, 1989; Swain, 1989; Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). Further, existing studies indicate that generally men do not value discussion of feelings and problems nearly as much as concrete assistance and/or activities that distract them from their troubles (Crawford, 1977; Kon, 1981; Kon & Losenkov, 1978; Sharbany, Gershoni, & Hoffman, 1981; Tavris, 1992). Thus, Basow's claim (1992) that "being strong in expressive traits is most conducive to intimate
relationships" (p. 207) imposes a feminine ruler, which fails to measure what nearly half of the human population finds conducive to intimacy.

Within a masculine orientation, the importance of tangible expressions of affection is not a one way street. Masculine individuals seem to recognize and reveal feelings of closeness by doing things for friends and partners as indicated by consistent reports that men want to do things for people about whom they care. Many of Swain's (1989) respondents spoke of "barter" arrangements, "mutual give-and-take," and "helping each other out" in describing close friendships. Similarly, Parelman (1979) and Reedy (1977) reported husbands communicate devotion by doing things for their wives. These findings cast into question the long-standing dichotomy between instrumentality and expressiveness. Within a masculine orientation, material assistance is perceived and experienced as an important way to show caring.

Once we entertained the possibility of a particularly masculine approach to closeness, we found considerable evidence of its existence. With Cancian (1987) and Gaylin (1992), we are persuaded men generally engage in a distinctive style of love. It is a style with its own logic, priorities, and integrity, and it merits attention from scholars and teachers. To persist in dismissing ways of interacting that men seem to prefer and to excel in impoverishes understanding of human connections. Further, teaching an exclusively or primarily feminine view of closeness invites students to misjudge their own and each other's motives, meanings, and communication.

**SUMMARY**

Informed by calls for more inclusive scholarship and teaching, we have critiqued existing conceptions of closeness for being unrepresentative of the breadth of intentions, meanings, and behaviors comprising human intimacy. We demonstrated the bulk of theoretical and empirical scholarship assumes and promotes a feminine model of close relationships and devalues interaction styles more characteristic of masculinity. We then extended our critique to demonstrate a feminine model of intimacy infuses textbooks in gender and communication and seems present in some in interpersonal communication. Finally, we drew on existing research to describe masculine ways to create and express closeness. In summarizing current knowledge, we hope to direct future research toward clarifying behaviors and interpretive tendencies that may typify masculine perspectives on relationships. In addition, we hope our arguments persuade other instructors to develop more inclusive instruction that recognizes and appreciates distinctly valuable ways of establishing and experiencing closeness and, thereby, enlarges awareness of human capacities for building and engaging in relationships.

**REFERENCES**


