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Current prescriptions of men and women in differing occupational gender roles

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Abstract

The gender roles of masculinity and femininity are considered to be not only descriptive of behaviour, but also prescribe how men and women should behave. To assess the prescriptive nature of gender roles, previous research asked participants to assign masculine (i.e., agentic) and feminine (i.e., communal) traits to men and women of differing occupational roles. The current study sought to establish whether these previous results still apply to contemporary prescriptions of masculine and feminine traits of men and women in different occupational roles (specifically, employee and homemaker roles). Participants (N = 327) completed an online questionnaire, where masculine and feminine traits (as identified by the Bem Sex Role Inventory short-form) were ascribed to men and women of different occupational roles (i.e., employee and homemaker). Compared to previous results, results of the current study differed in fundamental ways that we posit reflect the social changes of women. Results are discussed in relation to both previous research and in response to social change.

Keywords: Gender roles; masculinity; femininity; 21st century

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In 1974, Bem conducted a seminal study where individuals were asked to rate the desirability of 400 characteristics for either a 'man' or a 'woman'. As a result, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was constructed, a scale to measure an individual's masculine and feminine gender roles (Bem, 1974). These gender roles are not only considered descriptive of an individual's traits, but are also prescriptive – they deem how men and women should behave (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). To examine the prescriptive nature of these gender roles, Eagly and Steffen (1984) asked participants to ascribe agentic (i.e., masculine, e.g., as assertive, competitive, and independent) and communal (i.e., feminine, e.g., warm, kind, and supportive) traits to men and women of differing social roles. The aim of the current paper is to once again assess the prescriptions of gender roles, as these prescriptions may have changed in accordance with other significant social changes – in particular the substantial increase of women in the workforce (Catalyst, 2012; 2013; 2014). As gender roles are considered dynamic and change in response to societal changes (López-Zafra, Müller, & Garcia-Retamero, 2012), we contend that a follow-up study is necessary to study the current, contemporary nature of these prescriptive gender stereotypes.

1.1 The Definition and Emergence of Gender Roles

Gender roles are used to define appropriate behavior for men and women (Prentice & Carranza, 2002) and refer to appropriate behaviors, occupations and roles that each sex is expected to engage in (Fischer & Anderson, 2012). A conceptualisation of gender is the distinction of masculine traits and feminine traits (Abele, 2003). Masculine traits are considered to be agency (agentic)-instrumental traits (e.g., active, decisive) and feminine traits are considered to be communal-expressive traits (e.g., caring, emotional) (Abele, 2003). Generally, men are considered to encompass more masculine/agentic traits (e.g., confidence, aggressiveness, self-direction), and women are considered to encompass more

feminine/communal traits (e.g., kindness, concern for others, warmth, gentleness) (Erchull, Liss, Axelson, Staebell, & Askari, 2010). Interestingly, Glick and Fiske (1996) state that the traits associated with each gender role may be conceptualised as complementary, as it appears that the traits of one particular gender role compensate for the deficiency of particular traits in the other gender role. For example, traits ascribed to a woman's gender role, such as sensitivity and compassion, may compensate for the traits men are considered to lack (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Femininity and masculinity may therefore be thought of as related yet distinct constructs (Kasen, Chen, Sneed, Crawford, & Cohen, 2006).

Gender roles are considered to play a prominent role in individual functioning, and are associated with an individual's daily behaviors, self-esteem (Good & Sanchez, 2010) and personal identity (Erchull et al., 2010). The emergence of gender roles can be explained by social role theory (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Eagly & Wood, 1999), which maintains that the division of men and women into different occupational and social roles has resulted in these gender differences. For example, as men have typically occupied more employment and provider roles of higher status than women (Wood & Eagly, 2002), and women have typically occupied more homemaker and lower status roles than men, these roles then became stereotypic of the sexes (Eagly & Wood, 1999). As a result, social role theory suggests that men and women are stereotyped by the characteristics that are required to be successful in their differing roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Additionally, gender stereotypic expectations may both directly and indirectly encourage men and women to engage in behavior expected of their sex (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Thus, gender roles are not only considered descriptive, but also prescriptive in the way that they include an appropriate conduct for women and men (i.e., not only describe characteristics of men and women, but describe how they *should* behave; Heilman et al., 2004). Interestingly, research suggests that stereotypes of women's

communality is actually more prescriptive than men's agency, and women are therefore more likely to experience social backlash for violating these standards (Rudman & Glick, 1999).

1.2 The Dynamic Nature of Gender Roles

Although men are considered to possess higher levels of masculine (i.e., agentic) traits, and women are considered to possess higher levels of feminine (i.e., communal traits), research is starting to show that gender roles are dynamic and are changing with time. For example, meta-analyses show increases in masculine scores (measured by the BSRI) for men and women since the construction of the scale in 1974 (Twenge, 1997). Twenge (1997) states that not only is there a rise, but there is a decrease in difference between men's and women's masculinity scores, suggesting men and women are becoming increasingly more similar regarding these traits. Contemporary research has corroborated this premise of masculinity changing, with studies showing that individuals consider women's gender roles to have changed from past to present, and will even continue to change in the future (e.g., Diekmann & Goodfriend, 2006; Wilde & Diekmann, 2005). In general, research shows that individuals do perceive women's gender roles to be changing more quickly over time than men's gender roles (López-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2012; Wilde & Diekmann, 2005). However, although women are perceived to be taking on more agentic characteristics over time, research rarely found the same effect for men and communal characteristics (e.g., Garcia-Retamero, Müller, & López-Zafra (2011). In fact, Twenge (1997) notes that the rise of equality in BSRI masculinity scores since 1974 has not been accompanied by a rise of equality in BSRI femininity scores. However, there has been a small rise of men's femininity scores since 1974 (Twenge, 1997). Thus, these changing gender roles reflect dynamic gender roles, where stereotypes are shaped by and adapt to social changes (López-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2011). Thus, as women assume more masculine roles in society and men assume more feminine roles, gender roles should adjust accordingly.

However, the change and subsequent rise in women's masculinity has not always been met with favourable outcomes, and in particular women have had to face difficulties regarding employment. For example, "women in performance settings face a Catch 22" (Rudman & Glick, 2001, p. 473). This Catch 22 refers to the general encouragement of women to enact agentic behaviors in occupational settings, provided that they maintain their communal traits (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Eagly and Karau (2002) describe that women face a double standard (i.e., to be perceived as competent they must outperform male counterparts) and also a double bind (i.e., they must enact agentic and communal traits at the same time). Women must overcome professional barriers by "acting like men", but in doing so face negative repercussions for violating their prescribed gender role (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010, p. 187; Phelan et al., 2008). The 'Glass Ceiling' refers to the conundrum women face where the highest status roles are stereotyped as solely masculine in trait requirements, and as such the expectation that women must continue to balance both agentic and communal traits excludes them from these positions (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Indeed, research has shown that when women do display high levels of agentic traits in performance settings, they face a range of negative reactions. Rudman (1998) has labelled this as the 'backlash effect', where women enacting agentic behaviours will experience an increase in their perceived competence, but a backlash of decreased likeability. This backlash effect can be further explained by role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which supposes that positive evaluations are present when a group member's behaviour is congruent with the behaviour that is expected from that group. In sum, when women do express agentic traits to be perceived as competent, they risk social backlash as women are considered to be more communal than men (Phelan et al., 2008). Competent women when compared with competent men are more often deemed taciturn (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). Research has continued to support this claim, showing that agentic women face not only personal backlash,

but also decreased occupational opportunities. For example, Rudman and Glick (1999) found that women who matched men in agentic traits faced more social repercussions than men (i.e., decreased likeability), and as a result this led to decreased hireability (particularly when the job was described as requiring both feminine and masculine traits). Furthermore, women who are viewed similarly competent as their male counterparts experience the most occupational sabotage (Rudman et al., 2012)

Research has shown that when personal occupational success is made explicit, women are deemed far less likeable than men and more interpersonally hostile (Heilman et al., 2004). Heilman and colleagues (2004) also found that successful women are considered far less likeable than successful men when the job is considered in the 'male gender type'. Occupational self-promotion is also considered far more acceptable for men, as self-promotion decreased the social skill ratings of applicants who were women, and even decreased the probability of them being hired (Rudman, 1998). Rudman (1998) also states that women who adopt a direct task-oriented (i.e., agentic) leadership style are evaluated more negatively than men with identical leadership styles.

However, research has suggested that this backlash may be attenuated by the presentation of communal traits. For example, Heilman and Okimoto (2007) show that negativity directed towards women in leadership roles has been lessened when there is evidence to show that these women also possess communal traits, particularly when this communality is indicated by role status (i.e., mother). As a result, Heilman and Okimoto (2007) conclude that the backlash women face in occupational settings occurs only when women are perceived to violate their prescribed gender role. Overall, women face a conundrum when it comes to enacting agentic and communal traits. First, exhibiting low agentic traits is likely to hinder women's occupational success and status equality. Second,

exhibiting only a high level of communal traits will grant some personal respect, but little status (DeWall, Altermatt, & Thompson, 2005).

In 1984, Eagly and Steffen sought to examine prescribed gender role traits to men and women of differing social roles. In their study, individuals were asked to ascribe agentic and communal traits to men and women of different roles, namely employees versus homemakers. Results showed that homemakers, regardless of sex, were ascribed more communal traits than employees. Additionally, there was no significant difference in male and female employee's communal traits, nor was there a significant difference in male and female homemaker's communal traits. However, results did show that employees, regardless of sex, were considered more agentic than homemakers. Interestingly, female employees were considered significantly more agentic than male employees, whereas there was no significant difference in male and female homemaker's agentic traits.

Bosak, Sczesny, and Eagly (2012) sought to re-establish the results of Eagly and Steffen (1984), once again asking participants to ascribe agentic and communal traits to men and women. However, instead of the occupational roles being employed/homemaker (as used in Eagly and Steffen, 1984), Bosak and colleagues used employment for both conditions. This time, occupations differed between female-dominated occupations (such as nurse or social worker) and male-dominated occupations (such as firefighter or law enforcement officer). Results showed that men and women occupying a female-dominated role were judged as significantly more communal, whereas men and women occupying a male-dominated role were judged as significantly more agentic. The authors concluded that prescriptions of agentic and communal traits continue to be affected by occupational roles.

The occupational roles included in Bosak and colleagues (2012), however, were both roles of employment, differing from the roles used in Eagly and Steffen (1984) which were employment/homemaker. As such, we propose that the agentic and communal prescriptions

of male and female employees and homemakers warrant reinvestigation. This reinvestigation is warranted in response to the social changes that have occurred regarding men and women in 'homemaker' roles over the past 30 years. For example, the proportion of Australian women aged 15 years and over who are employed has steadily increased since 1979 (from 40% in 1979 to 53% in 2004; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The current percentage of Australian women in the labour force is 58.4% (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014). Of further interest is that men's employment percentages have also changed, i.e. it decreased from 74% in 1979 to 68% in 2004 (Australian Social Trends, 2006). In fact, the number of Australian stay-at-home fathers has almost doubled in the past decade (Walsh, 2013). Due to these changing social roles of men and women in contemporary society, combined with the premises of dynamic gender roles (López-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2011) and social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 1999), we assume that the agentic and communal traits employee and homemaker men and women were ascribed in 1984 may considerably differ from today.

1.3 Aim and Hypotheses

The aim of this experiment is to reinvestigate how masculine and feminine characteristics are ascribed to different social roles (i.e., employee and homemaker¹). This experiment was interested in whether masculine and feminine characteristics are a function of these social roles, regardless of the sex of the person occupying these roles, or if these traits are still influenced by the sex of the person occupying the role.

On the premise that the particular social role (employee versus homemaker) will generate more stereotypical adjectives, regardless of the sex of the person occupying this role, we propose:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Regardless of the sex, those occupying an employee role would receive higher masculine scores than those occupying a homemaker role

¹ The term homemaker refers to a person who cares for the home and the children (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Although we recognise that contemporarily, the term 'homemaker' may be considered outdated, we chose to use the term in the current study as we did not want to alter the schemas associated with the term 'homemaker'.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Regardless of the sex, those occupying a homemaker role would receive higher feminine scores than those occupying an employee role

In addition, we developed the following hypotheses regarding sex differences (based on the premise that overall men are ascribed more masculine characteristics and women are ascribed more feminine characteristics), as the effects of the sex of the individual occupying this role may still affect stereotypes:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): Men occupying employee roles would be attributed more masculine traits than women occupying employee roles

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Women occupying employee roles would be attributed more feminine traits than men occupying employee roles

Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Men occupying homemaker roles would be attributed more masculine traits than women occupying homemaker roles

Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Women occupying homemaker roles would be attributed more feminine traits than men occupying homemaker roles

2.0 Method

2.1 Participants

An online questionnaire was accessed by 480 potential participants and completed by 327 participants. The sample comprised 72 (22.0%) men and 254 (77.7%) women, with one (.3%) participant not supplying their sex, with a mean age of 33.41 years ($SD = 14.38$) and an age range of 18 – 76 years. The highest percentage of participants' age was 20 years (11%) and 21 years (9.2%). Participants predominantly identified as heterosexual ($N = 298$, 91.1%), with 10 (3.1%) participants identifying as homosexual, 11 (3.4%) identifying as bisexual, four (1.2%) identifying as other, and four participants (1.2%) not supplying sexual orientation information. Regarding current education status, 167 (51.1%) were currently university undergraduate students, four (1.2%) were currently TAFE (i.e., vocational)

students, 64 (19.6%) were currently university postgraduate students, 87 (26.6%) were not currently students, and five (1.5%) did not supply current enrolment status information.

2.2 Materials

The survey comprised three sections: Demographics, employee and homemaker vignettes and the Bem Sex Role Inventory short-form (BSRI short-form; Bem, 1974). In the demographics section, participants were asked to provide information on their age, biological sex, sexual orientation and current enrolment status.

The male employee person vignette read:

Jonathan is a 32 years old. Jonathan's day usually consists of waking up at 6am and arriving at work by 8am. Jonathan is employed at a large marketing firm and spends his days managing teams and communicating with other companies. Jonathan usually finishes work around 5pm and spends his evenings seeing friends, watching television or catching up on work. Jonathan is considered a success in his career.

The female employee vignette read exactly the same, but 'Jonathan' was replaced by 'Louise' (and other necessary pronouns were adjusted).

The male homemaker vignette read:

Jason is a 32 years old. Jason's day usually consists of waking up at 6am and seeing his two children off to school by 8am. Jason is a homemaker, and his day consists of running errands, performing tasks around the house and taking his children to after school commitments (such as ballet and soccer). At night, Jason cooks dinner and spends time with his family. Jason is considered a success as a father and a homemaker.

The female homemaker vignette read exactly the same, but 'Jason' was replaced by 'Haylee' (and other necessary pronouns were adjusted).

Immediately following each vignette the BSRI short-form was provided. The BSRI short-form was chosen for its enhanced validity and reliability over the former full version (e.g., Choi, Fuqua, & Newman, 2009). The BSRI short-form consists of 20 items. There are 10 masculine items (i.e., 'assertive', 'independent', 'strong personality') and 10 feminine items (i.e., 'understanding', 'gentle', 'compassionate'). These items are anchored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Always or almost always untrue, 7 = Always or almost always true).

The BSRI short-form asked participants to indicate the degree to which the traits personally reflected 'Jonathan/Louise' and 'Jason/Haylee' by choosing a number on the scale for each trait. For the employee vignettes, the overall BSRI short-form scale and both the masculinity and femininity scales showed excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92, .93,$ and $.94,$ respectively). For the homemaker vignettes, the overall BSRI short-form scale and both the masculinity and femininity scales showed excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94, .90$ and $.98,$ respectively).

2.3 Design

The design of this experiment was a mixed factorial design, as occupational roles was a repeated measures variables, and sex of the individual presented was an independent measures variable.

2.4 Procedure

Potential participants were approached on and off an Australian university campus and asked to participate in a voluntary, anonymous research project assessing different roles of men and women in society. Potential participants were supplied with the weblink of the online questionnaire should they choose to participate. Participants completed the demographics page and were then presented with their first vignette, which was either an employee scenario or homemaker scenario (scenarios were counterbalanced, 42.2% of participants received the employee scenario first and 57.8% of participants received the

homemaker scenario first). Participants were also randomly allocated to receive male vignettes or female vignettes. Of the participants, 56.3% received male vignettes, and 43.7% received female vignettes. After reading each vignette, participants completed the BSRI short-form. Overall, the online questionnaire took about 20 – 30 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were thanked online and provided with the researcher's contact details should they require any further information.

3.0 Results

3.1 Data Screening

Before running inferential statistics, data was initially screened for missing values, outliers and violations of normality. No traits in the masculine or feminine scales had missing values amounting to more than 5%. Although Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests were indicative of violations of normality, observation of standardised skew and kurtosis values showed no major violations of normality. When univariate outliers were located, results were run with and without inclusion of outliers. As exclusion of outliers did not affect results, outliers were retained.

3.2 Inferential Statistics

For Hypotheses 1, 3a, and 4a, a 2x2 mixed-design ANOVA was run, with sex of the vignette (male or female) as the independent-measures IV, occupation (employee or homemaker) as the repeated-measures IV and masculinity scores as the DV. There was a main effect of occupation, $F(1,325) = 116.09, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .26, \text{observed power} = .99$. In the employee scenario, masculinity ratings ($M = 49.90, SD = 10.97$) were higher than in the homemaker scenario ($M = 43.42, SD = 10.06$). The interaction between sex of vignette and occupation was not significant, $F(1,325) = 1.72, p = .191, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01, \text{observed power} = .26$. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

INSERT TABLE 1

Post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni adjusted) showed that regardless of sex of vignette, individuals of an employee occupation has significantly higher masculinity scores than individuals of a homemaker occupation, $p = .001$.

For Hypotheses 2, 3b, and 4b, a 2x2 mixed-design ANOVA was run, with sex of the vignette (male or female) as the independent-measures IV, occupation (employee or homemaker) as the repeated-measures IV and femininity scores as the DV. There was a main effect of occupation, $F(1,325) = 301.46$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .48$, observed power = .99. In the homemaker scenario, femininity ratings ($M = 54.31$, $SD = 13.00$) were higher than in the employee scenario ($M = 41.71$, $SD = 8.13$). There was also a significant interaction between sex of vignette and occupation, $F(1,325) = 4.45$, $p = .036$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, observed power = .56. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics.

INSERT TABLE 2

Post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni adjusted) showed that regardless of sex of vignette, individuals of a homemaker occupation have significantly higher femininity scores than individuals of an employee occupation, $p = .001$. But, post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni adjusted) also showed that this was located in the employee occupation, with significantly higher femininity scores for female employee vignettes than male employee vignettes, $p = .002$. A visual depiction of the overall results can be found in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1

4.0 Discussion

The aim of this experiment was to reinvestigate how masculine and feminine characteristics are ascribed to the occupational roles of employee and homemaker. It was predicted that regardless of sex, those occupying an employee role would receive higher masculine scores than those occupying a homemaker role. Results supported this hypothesis, as employee men and employee women were considered to be significantly more masculine

than homemaker men and homemaker women. It was also predicted that regardless of the sex, those occupying a homemaker role would receive higher feminine scores than those occupying an employee role. Results supported this hypothesis, as homemaker men and homemaker women were considered to be significantly more feminine than employee men and employee women.

In addition, it was hypothesised that men occupying employee roles would be attributed more masculine traits than women occupying employee roles. This hypothesis was not supported, as results showed no significant difference between employee men's and employee women's masculinity scores. It was also predicted that women occupying employee roles would be attributed more feminine traits than men occupying employee roles. Results supported this hypothesis, as employee women had significantly higher femininity scores than employee men. It was also predicted that men occupying homemaker roles would be attributed more masculine traits than women occupying homemaker roles. Results did not support this hypothesis, as there was no significant difference between homemaker men's and homemaker women's masculinity scores. Finally, it was predicted that women occupying homemaker roles would be attributed more feminine traits than men occupying homemaker roles. This hypothesis was not supported, as results showed no significant difference between homemaker women's and homemaker men's femininity scores.

4.1 Prescriptions of Agentic and Communal Traits to Employees and Homemakers

Previous research that has assessed the prescription of agentic and communal traits to men and women of employee and homemaker roles found that regardless of sex, homemakers were ascribed more communal (i.e., feminine) traits than employees and employees were ascribed more agentic (i.e., masculine) traits than homemakers (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Furthermore, no significant difference was found in employee men's and employee women's femininity scores, and homemaker men's and homemaker women's femininity scores (Eagly

& Steffen, 1984). Finally, although there was no significant difference in homemaker men's and homemaker women's masculine traits, employee women were considered significantly more agentic than employee men (Eagly & Steffen, 1984).

Results of the current study corroborate some of these previous results. For example, the current study also showed that regardless of sex, homemakers were ascribed more feminine/communal traits than employees. Additionally, the current study reported no significant differences between homemaker men's femininity scores, and homemaker women's femininity scores. Finally, the current study found that regardless of sex, employees were ascribed more masculine/agentic traits than homemakers. There was, however, an important difference in the current study. Specifically, results showed no significant difference in masculine/agentic traits ascribed to employee men and employee women; but employee women were ascribed significantly more feminine/communal traits than employee men.

In sum, it appears that there has been no change in ascription of feminine and masculine traits to homemaker men and homemaker women, regardless of the social changes that have occurred, such as the increase of women in the Australian labour force (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014) and the number of stay-at-home fathers almost doubling in the past decade (Walsh, 2013). However, it appears that over time, the prescription of masculine and feminine characteristics to employee men and employee women has changed. When Eagly and Steffen (1984) conducted their study more than 30 years ago, employee women were ascribed more masculine/agentic characteristics than their male counterparts. Perhaps this was a function of the time, as during this era the percentage of women in the workforce was increasing. Possibly due to the still relative novelty of women in the workforce during this time, and the strong association between masculine/agentic characteristics and characteristics associated with employment, employee women were thus

considered to be quite high in these masculine/agentive qualities, relative to their male employee counterparts. Of interest is this apparent change in results, as the current study found no significant difference in employee men's and employee women's ascription of masculine/agentive traits, suggesting that perhaps women occupying these employed roles is no longer a social novelty. Moreover, it might indicate that nowadays employee or employee roles are perceived as normal for women and that women occupying these roles are not perceived as being very masculine or agentive.

However, although the ascription of masculine/agentive traits to employee men and employee women has changed, this has been concurrent with a change in the ascription of feminine/communal traits to employee men and employee women. In particular, employee women are ascribed more feminine/communal traits in comparison to their employee male counterparts, a result that was not shown in 1984. Thus, also this result of the current study seem to support the change in society and the perception that today working women are not perceived as very masculine/agentive, in fact they are still perceived as feminine/communal. These results support López-Zafra and Garcia-Retamero, (2012) and Wilde and Diekmann (2005), who suggest women's gender roles change more quickly over time than men's gender roles. Thus, our results support the suggestions of Rudman and Glick (1999), who propose that although women are encouraged to enact masculine/agentive behaviours during employment, they are still expected to maintain their feminine/communal traits commonly associated with their predominant gender role. Results of the current study support that employee women continue to face an occupational double standard (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002). Due to the increase of women in the workforce in the past 30 years, we propose that differences in the ascriptions of masculine/agentive traits to employee men and employee women have diminished. However, it is due to this increase and the diminishment of differences in masculine/agentive traits that has led to this increase in ascription of

feminine/communal traits to employee women. It appears that masculine/agentive characteristics of employee women is now acceptable (and even expected), but this has been accompanied by an increase of expectations on employee women's communal traits.

An additional consideration is that the diminishment of men's and women's differences in ascriptions of masculine traits is not a product of fading stereotypes, and can be explained by the shifting standards model (Bosak et al., 2012). Specifically, the shifting standards model suggests that evaluations of men and women are not directly comparable, as men and women are judged in relation to their own sex (Biernat, 2003). To explain, Biernat (2003) considers the trait of leadership ability, and suggests that a prominent gender stereotype is that men are better leaders than women. As such, one is likely to judge the leadership ability of women relative to *standards of leadership ability of women overall*, and the leadership ability of men relative to *standards of leadership ability of men overall*. For example, "good for a woman does not mean good for a man" (Biernat, 2003). Research has shown support for the shifting standards model, showing that men and women use these stereotypes to judge performance of others, relative to the standards set for that particular sex (Biernat & Vescio, 2002). As such, the shifting standards model could possibly explain the current results in relation to decreased ascriptions of masculine/agentive traits to employee men and employee women, as these employee women are being judged not in comparison to men, but to the standards for women in general. However, this model does not adequately account for the increase of expectations on employee women's communal traits. If women's traits are judged on the standards for women overall, then it is unclear why an employed woman would be considered to have higher communal qualities, when this role has traditionally been associated with agentive qualities. In sum, the backlash effect (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 1999) remains the best explanation for the increase in ascriptions of employed women's communal traits.

4.2 Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions

A potential limitation of the current study is that there are significant differences between the design of the current study and design of Eagly and Steffen (1984), the study to which results of the current study were most often compared. The current study did not include men and women without occupational information, which would have allowed prevailing gender roles to have been established and included in analyses. In addition, occupation in the current study was a within-subjects variable, which could perhaps have promoted carry-over effects. In addition, Eagly and Steffen (1984) employed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) to assess participant's attributions of masculine and feminine traits to men and women of different social roles, whereas the current study used the BSRI short-form. As such, there is potential that differences in attributions of masculine and feminine traits could perhaps be a function of different measures used. However, the BSRI short-form is considered to be an adequate measure of masculine and feminine traits, producing high internal consistency (Choi et al., 2009). Consequently, a particular strength of the current study is that the internal consistency of the masculine (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) and the feminine (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) scales were higher than the internal consistency for the masculine and feminine scales reported by Eagly and Steffen (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$ and $.84$, respectively). However, it might be of interest for future research to replicate this study using the both the BSRI short-form and the PAQ, as this would eliminate any differences that may be a function of different measures.

We should note that the basis for our results was a survey of Australian participants. One could thus argue that the differences we found in comparison to Eagly and Steffen (1984) may be due not to changes over time but to differences in national cultures. However, if one assumes larger differences in cultures this would, for one, not explain the similarities in some results. Secondly, both the Hostede (1980) study and the more recent GLOBE leadership

study (House et al., 2004) have put Australia and the US in the same cluster with extremely similar scores on the major dimensions of culture.

Despite these limitations, we consider it a strength of the current study to employ a relatively large sample of both student and non-student populations. The BSRI scales and subscales were all highly reliable and the effect sizes of the differences identified were substantial. We thus have confidence in the reliability of the pattern found in this experimental survey and we encourage researchers to build on this in future research in other parts of the world and with a variation in scenarios, also including, for instance, non-for profit versus for-profit work.

Finally, it should be noted that the gender roles of masculinity and femininity do not exist as dichotomised constructs, and a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics reflect a healthy human personality (Kasen et al., 2006). In fact, Bem (1977) extended her original dichotomous classification of gender roles as masculine and feminine by introducing the constructs of androgynous (high masculine traits and high feminine traits) and undifferentiated (low masculine traits and low feminine traits) gender roles. We suggest future research on gender role prescriptions incorporate traits considered to be equally expressed by both men and women, and as such move beyond the implied dichotomy of gender roles by only studying masculinity and femininity traits.

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