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INFLUENCE OF GENDER APPROPRIATENESS OF SEX-ROLE AND OCCUPATIONAL PREFERENCES ON EVALUATIONS OF A COMPETENT PERSON

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that while masculine sex-role preferences are more highly valued, persons holding gender consistent sex-role preferences generally are rated as more attractive. The present study explores the interactive effect of gender consistent/inconsistent sex-role preferences and congruent/incongruent occupational choices on evaluations of a person from varying perspectives. Statistical analysis of the data revealed (1) people holding masculine sex-role preferences are perceived to have a higher motivation to succeed, and to be more competent; (2) from the perspective of friend and potential employee, persons holding gender consistent sex-role preferences are perceived as more attractive; (3) from the perspective of potential employer, there is a tendency for males to prefer employees who hold masculine sex-role preferences, while females continue to prefer gender consistent sex-role preferences.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the women's liberation efforts, a number of traditional sex barriers to employment and advancement by women into more prestigious and powerful positions have been crossed. There also has been a concomitant increase in the number of males seeking employment in positions that were traditionally viewed as feminine pursuits (eg., nursing). To the extent that this shift of vocational roles is likely to continue, it becomes important to know how these persons are likely to be perceived by peers, co-workers, and employers. While job opportunity can be legislated, social acceptance cannot.

An important variable that might be expected to influence employer/employee, as well as social, acceptance is the extent to which males and females maintain the traditional sex-role preferences irrespective of their occupational choice. Broverman et al. (1972), after reviewing the relevant literature, concluded that people do have clearly defined sex-role stereotypes of men and women and further, the characteristics that are ascribed to men are more positively valued than those that are ascribed to women.

A logical question is then, would women be well advised to assume the more positively valued masculine traits. Seyfried and Hendrick (1973) found that while there is a preference for congruence between a person's sex and their sex-role preferences, this preference is moderated by a preference for masculine sex-role attitudes leading these researchers to conclude that there is a greater latitude of acceptance for women than for men with respect to the adoption of sex-role preferences. Subsequent findings by Shaffer and Wegley (1974) indicate that to the extent that females adopt masculine sex-role preferences, they should serve as modifiers or be supplementary to their basic feminine being.

With regard to males, O'Leary and Donohue (1978) found that college students actually rated a feminine male who aspired to a "feminine" occupation (i.e., kindergarten teaching) to be more desirable as a work partner than a masculine male who aspired to a traditionally "masculine" occupation (i.e., business). However, the implications of these data are clouded by the fact that their masculine and feminine occupations differed along a dimension other than masculinity/femininity that could account for the favoritism shown to the feminine

male (i.e., kindergarten teaching may be viewed as more prosocial and less self-serving than a career in business).

In the present experiment, masculine and feminine males were described as aspiring to either a traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine occupation that presumably did not differ in its prosocial implications (i.e., both the masculine and the feminine occupations were positions within a large corporation). Based on the extremely negative reaction to feminine males reported by Seyfried and Hendrick (1973), we predicted that subjects would prefer the masculine to the feminine male on measures of the stimulus person's social attractiveness and desirability as a prospective employee. However, it seemed reasonable to expect that subject's derogation of feminine males might be moderated somewhat on the employee attractiveness measure if the male stimulus person aspired to a traditionally feminine occupation. In this particular instance, it is the feminine male who is likely to be judged as having the interests and attributes that will facilitate job performance.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A total of 160 students, 80 males and 80 females, served as subjects for partial fulfillment of an introductory psychology course requirement. An equal number of subjects by sex were provided with information characterizing either a male or female stimulus person as having either masculine or feminine attitudes, and as having opted for what would be traditionally considered either a masculine or a feminine occupation.

Subjects (Ss) were run in groups of four. Upon arrival they were told they would be participating in a study concerned with assessing the degree of accuracy of impressions of others on the basis of limited information. To increase impact, it was mentioned that law and graduate school admission committees, as well as various corporations, often have to make selections on the basis of very limited information about the candidates, and when incorrect decisions were made, they often prove very costly. Ss were then told that they would receive a small portion of the information about the stimulus person. What was presumably of interest was the degree to which subjects,

evaluations, based on limited information, paralleled the evaluation based on more complete information.

Subjects were then provided with a brief biographical sketch, which was constant across all conditions except for the person's name, either Beverly or Bill Davis, and their occupational preference within the telephone company, either an installer (traditionally masculine) or an operator (traditionally feminine). Manipulation of sex-role preferences was accomplished by providing Ss with a copy of the presumed responses of the stimulus person on a "Social-Emotional Preference Test" which indicated either a masculine or a feminine response on 18 of 20 sex-role related attitudes, e.g., "On a date I would rather not have to decide where to go" (yes = feminine response). Ss then completed an "interpersonal rating form," which included manipulation checks and a number of items assessing the attractiveness of the stimulus person from the perspective of friend, employer, employee, and co-worker.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks and General Impressions: An item, "How appropriate were the person's responses on the Social-Emotional Preferences Test for a member of his/her sex?" was intended as a check on the manipulation of the stimulus person's (SP's) sex-role preferences. The ANOVA on this item produced a disordinal Sex of SP \times Sex-role preference interaction, ($F = 133.41, 1/144$ df on this and subsequent F ratios, $p < .001$), indicating gender consistent responses were thought to be more appropriate. Thus, sex-role preferences were successfully varied.

Analyses of the questions "How appropriate is the person's present job for a member of his/her sex?" and "How appropriate are the person's occupational aspirations for a member of his/her sex?" indicated that the occupational preferences of SP's were successfully varied. As anticipated, subjects' responses to each question produced a disordinal Sex of SP \times Occupational preferences interaction (for present job, $F = 53.66, p < .001$); for future aspirations, $F = 16.79, p < .001$). The pattern of the interaction was identical for both questions: Subjects perceived the occupational preferences of male SP's to be more appropriate if they were masculine rather than feminine, and the occupational preferences of female SP's to be more appropriate if they were feminine rather than masculine.

On an absolute basis, the attempt to portray the SP's as competent was successful ($M = 5.67$ out of 7.00 possible). However, subjects thought that SP's with masculine sex-role preferences were more competent ($M = 5.88$) than SP's with feminine sex-role preferences ($M = 5.46$), $F = 4.46, p < .05$.

Finally, an ANOVA of subjects' responses to the question "How motivated is this person to succeed at a career?" yielded a main effect for the sex-role preferences manipulation, $F = 16.40, p < .001$. SP's with masculine sex-role preferences were judged to be significantly more career oriented ($M = 5.61$) than were SP's with feminine sex-role preferences ($M = 4.70$).

Attraction Measures: ANOVA of Ss ratings of liking of the SP's and of their social attractiveness (as a date, friend, etc.) both produced significant disordinal Sex of SP \times Sex-role preference interactions (for liking of, $F = 22.44, p < .001$; for social attractiveness, $F = 16.23, p < .001$). These interactions indicated that SP's of each gender were rated more favorably when their sex-role preferences were "gender consistent."

An analysis of SP's ratings of SP's attractiveness as a co-worker produced only one significant outcome, a disordinal Occupational preference \times Sex of subject interaction ($F = 11.53, p < .001$), with males indicating a clear preference for working with SP's who favored a masculine rather than a feminine job, whereas females showed an equally strong preference for working with SP who favored a feminine over a masculine job.

Analyses of Ss ratings of SP's attractiveness as a prospective employee and as a prospective supervisor yielded significant Sex of SP \times Sex-role preference interactions (for employee, $F = 14.29, p <$

$.001$; for supervisor, $F = 6.86, p < .01$). These interactions revealed severe derogation of males holding feminine sex-role preferences. From the perspective of the employer, there was also a marginally significant Sex of SP \times Sex-role preference \times Sex of S interaction ($F = 3.19, p < .08$), with males preferring masculine sex-role preferences while females preferred gender consistent sex-role preferences.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the subject's evaluations of the SP's from varying perspectives it was found that Ss indicated greater liking of, and a preference as a friend, supervisor, and potential employee, the stimulus persons with gender consistent sex-role preferences. Each of these interactions reflected a comparable pattern with the feminine male being evaluated least favorably. These results are consistent with Seyfried & Hendrick's (1973) conclusion that while there is a preference for gender consistent sex-role preferences, there exists a greater latitude of acceptance for women than for men regarding the adoption of sex-role preferences.

While the above findings would suggest that people, especially males, would be well advised to maintain traditional sex-role preferences, the triple-order interaction on the item concerned with evaluation of the S from the standpoint of a prospective employer indicates that while females continue to prefer persons who maintain gender consistent sex-role preferences, males show a preference for persons holding masculine sex-role preferences. To the extent that males continue to hold a disproportionate number of supervisory positions, this finding could have important practical implications for women entering the job market. Furthermore, the data suggest that the reason males preferred persons holding masculine sex-role preferences is that persons holding masculine sex-role preferences were considered to be more career-oriented and more motivated to succeed at a career.

Finally, while the present results do not provide a direct test of the proposed alternative explanation of the O'Leary and Donohue (1978) results, the consistent derogation of males holding feminine sex-role preferences across role relationships, regardless of occupational preference, would at least strongly suggest the critical role of the pro-social implications of their traditionally feminine occupation. Furthermore, the present results did not find any support for the possibility that the derogation of males holding feminine sex-role preferences would be attenuated given a congruent occupational choice.

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