

## Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes and Backlash Toward Agentic Women

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*In an experiment, job description and applicants' attributes were examined as moderators of the backlash effect, the negative evaluation of agentic women for violating prescriptions of feminine niceness (Rudman, 1998). Rutgers University students made hiring decisions for a masculine or "feminized" managerial job. Applicants were presented as either agentic or androgynous. Replicating Rudman and Glick (1999), a feminized job description promoted hiring discrimination against an agentic female because she was perceived as insufficiently nice. Unique to the present research, this perception was related to participants' possession of an implicit (but not explicit) agency-communality stereotype. By contrast, androgynous female applicants were not discriminated against. The findings suggest that the prescription for female niceness is an implicit belief that penalizes women unless they temper their agency with niceness.*

Women in performance settings face a catch-22. If they enact agentic behaviors to be perceived as qualified for leadership roles, they are rewarded with competence ratings equal to those for agentic men (Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988; Rudman, 1998), but suffer a *backlash effect* in the form of social repercussions. Specifically, agentic women are viewed as socially deficient, compared with identically presented men, which may result in hiring discrimination (Rudman, 1998;

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Rudman & Glick, 1999). Thus, women who strive for leadership positions are in a double bind: They can enact communal behaviors and be liked but not respected or enact agentic behaviors and be respected but not liked. In either case, they risk being disqualified for leadership roles.

Discrimination due to perceived incompetence is based on descriptive gender stereotypes (i.e., what women presumably are). Considerable research has focused on how perceived sex differences (e.g., in intelligence, ambition, and assertiveness) prevent women from being viewed as suitable leaders (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995; Heilman, 1983). The solution seems obvious: To disconfirm gender stereotypes, women should act more like men (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). Unfortunately, women who do so are not liked, because they violate the prescriptive aspect of female gender stereotypes (i.e., what women should be); in particular, that women ought to be communal (i.e., kind, thoughtful, and sensitive to others' feelings). Because women are held to a higher standard of niceness than men, agentic women may be viewed as competent but insufficiently feminine (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Heilman, this issue; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999).

### *The Female Communitality Prescription*

Why must women "be nice"? The potency of the female communitality stereotype may be derived from social-structural causes, including gender status differences, men's dependence on women, and changing gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Ridgeway, this issue). Stable systems of inequality (such as gender relations) are typically maintained through a paternalism in which the lower status group is stereotyped as communal (Jackman, 1994). This stereotype of subordinates' niceness tends to be highly prescriptive, because communal traits are associated with the deferent behavior that dominants demand of subordinates (Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000). Traditional gender relations clearly fit this mode. Women, who are societally subordinate to men, are stereotyped as being nicer (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989) and are more likely to enact subordinate roles that require communal traits (Eagly, 1987).

In addition, men's dependence on women (e.g., for sex, sexual reproduction, homemaking, and child care) creates incentives for men to ensure that women remain deferent, compliant, and willing to enact subordinate roles. As sweet persuasion is more effective than hostility (Jackman, 1994), women are treated benevolently by men and stereotyped as "nice" (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Glick & Fiske, 1996), just as Blacks were once patronized by White slave owners and stereotyped as cheerfully submissive. Thus, the prescriptiveness of the communitality stereotype is buttressed by dominants' dependence on subordinates' cooperation (Glick & Fiske, 1999).

Finally, the communality prescription serves to counteract societal changes that threaten male dominance. As a result of women's increasing movement into the paid workforce, women have started to view themselves and to be viewed by others as being more agentic (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Spence & Buckner, 2000). Although these changes might threaten the status quo, this potential challenge is undermined by continuing prescriptions for female communality (the traits of submission). Despite important social changes in gender roles, sex differences in the endorsement of communal traits as self-descriptive appear to be stable (Spence & Buckner, 2000), and people continue to stereotype women as nicer than men, now and into an imagined future (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Because men continue to depend on women to fulfill domestic and romantic roles that require communal traits, the lessening of prescriptions of feminine niceness is unlikely (Glick & Fiske, 1999), even as women come to be seen as more agentic.

It is not simply the case, however, that women are coming to be seen as having both agentic and communal traits. Spence and Buckner's (2000) data show that changes over the past 20 years in self-perceptions of women's agency have occurred mainly for specific traits (e.g., self-reliant, individualistic, and ambitious) that can be characterized as reflecting agentic competence. By contrast, women continue to rate themselves as lower than men on the agentic traits of competitiveness, decisiveness, aggressiveness, and forcefulness, which can be characterized as reflecting social dominance. The authors conclude that whereas women are now "encouraged to become more self-assertive . . . to face life's challenges rather than being helpless and dependent," they are still "discouraged from advancing their interests at the expense of others or from activities that threaten . . . the well-being of others" (p. 49). In short, sanctions for female competence may now be softened (cf. Hacker, 1951; Spence & Helmreich, 1972), but women are still not allowed to exhibit social dominance, which conflicts with the prescription to be communal. As a result, backlash against agentic women is less likely to be due to perceptions of their competence than to the related inference that such women are dominative (and therefore not communally oriented).

Women, then, remain in a bind. Engaging in agentic behaviors allows them to overcome descriptive stereotypes of lesser competence (Rudman, 1998), but dominative agentic traits, such as being forceful, directive, and competitive, are incompatible with a prescribed communal orientation. Men, who are generally stereotyped as agentic, may not be perceived as particularly nice (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989), but unlike agentic women, agentic men do not violate a stereotypic prescription that they ought to be communal. Although a woman is likely to be seen as competent when she assumes a masculine style of leadership, she risks being judged as insufficiently nice. In contrast, men who behave in identical ways are judged less harshly on this dimension (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

### *Feminization of Management*

Past research on discrimination against women for high-status jobs (e.g., management) has focused on descriptive stereotypes that characterize women as lacking the stereotypically masculine personality traits associated with these jobs (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989). One might suppose that the growing trend toward “feminization” of management, as corporations recognize the value of an inclusive, participatory approach to leadership (Offerman & Gowing, 1990; Peters, 1988; Rosener, 1990), would be a positive development for women, allowing them to be seen as a better fit for managerial positions. Unfortunately, by writing the prescription for female communality into company policy, “feminized” job descriptions may serve only to legitimize prescriptively based discrimination against competent, agentic women. Consistent with this view, Rudman and Glick (1999) found that agentic women were seen as suitable for a management job requiring only agency. Because they were also viewed as less nice than identically presented men, however, agentic women were rated as less hireable when the position was “feminized” (i.e., required interpersonal skills as well as agency). Adding stereotypically feminine traits to hiring criteria may have the ironic effect of justifying discrimination against agentic women, because of their perceived lack of interpersonal skills (backlash).

### *Applicant Moderators: Softening Female Agency*

What, if anything, can agentic women do to overcome backlash? We have argued that agency contains two components—competence and dominance—and that it is primarily dominance that violates prescriptive stereotypes of women’s niceness. Thus, women who present themselves as competent and nice (i.e., not dominative) may avoid the backlash effect. Consistent with this reasoning, Eagly et al.’s (1992) meta-analysis showed that female leaders who exhibit a democratic, participatory style were less likely to receive negative evaluations, compared to those who have an autocratic, directive style. Furthermore, Carli, LaFleur, and Loeber (1995) showed that female speakers were more persuasive and likeable when they exhibited prosocial as well as task-focused behaviors, suggesting that “nice and able” is the route to female social influence (p. 1040; see also Ridgeway, 1978, 1982, this issue). The present research sought to disentangle the agentic traits of competence and dominance to examine whether “softening” female agency might mitigate the expected hiring discrimination effect for a feminized management job.

### *The Role of Implicit Stereotypes*

We also sought to discover whether individual differences among perceivers predict discrimination against agentic women. Because we have emphasized that

prescriptions to be communal are linked to maintaining female subordination, one possibility is that people who endorse sexist attitudes are more likely to believe that women should “be nice.” But this may not be the case. Because beliefs about women’s greater communality assign women favorable traits, people may not view these stereotypes as sexist (in comparison to stereotypes that women are less competent). Thus, both women and men (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989) and sexists and nonsexists (Glick & Fiske, 1996) tend to endorse stereotypes of women’s communality. Sexist men may be more likely to jump to the conclusion that an agentic woman is not nice (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). When faced with direct evidence that a female target has violated the niceness prescription, however, women—who consistently endorse sexist ideologies less than men—tend to react as negatively as men, or even more so (Rudman, 1998).

If stereotypes of women’s niceness are not popularly viewed as sexist, nonsexists may not consciously attempt to counteract this stereotype or the prescription that goes with it (cf. Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991). As a result, the prescription that women ought to be nice may be an implicit belief (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and people who do not consciously endorse conventional gender stereotypes may nonetheless show backlash effects (because of their implicit gender stereotypes; cf. Devine, 1989). As implicit gender stereotypes have been shown to be equally strong among women and men (e.g., Blair & Banaji, 1996; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000), whereas overtly sexist beliefs are not endorsed as strongly by women as by men, the lack of sex differences in the backlash effect is consistent with an implicit-stereotyping explanation. Therefore, we examined the agency-communality stereotype as a predictor of the backlash effect, using implicit, as well as explicit (self-report) measures.

### *Research Objectives*

The present research had three aims. First, we sought to replicate Rudman and Glick’s (1999) finding that discrimination against agentic women is stronger when women apply for feminized, as opposed to masculine, management jobs. Second, by disentangling the two types of agentic traits—competence and social dominance—and constructing applicants who were both nice and able, we sought to eliminate backlash toward agentic women by “softening” them via communal traits (Carli et al., 1995; Eagly et al., 1992; Ridgeway, 1982). If successful, this would show that backlash toward agentic women is not a prescription against competence per se, but for women to be low in social dominance. Third, we examined whether individual differences in implicit, rather than explicit, gender-related beliefs (e.g., gender stereotypes) would account for the backlash effect. We measured the female communality (and male agency) stereotype using the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), as well as explicit self-reports. Although the IAT has generated considerable interest as a

measure of implicit stereotypes (e.g., Blair, Ma, & Lenton, in press; Rudman, Greenwald, & McGhee, 2001; Rudman, Greenwald, Mellott, & Schwartz, 1999), the relationship between IAT-assessed stereotypes and behavior (e.g., discrimination) has been underinvestigated (cf. McConnell & Leibold, 2001). Thus, we were particularly interested in examining the relationship between implicit gender stereotypes and backlash against agentic women.

### *Overview and Hypotheses*

Participants evaluated a videotaped agentic or communal, male or female applicant for a computer lab manager position. Applicants' scripts and supplementary materials were identical for male and female applicants but differed within applicant condition. Agentic applicants were presented as self-promoting and competent (Rudman, 1998). Androgynous applicants were presented similarly but also as interdependent and cooperative (i.e., agentic *and* communal). To ensure that agentic applicants were seen as embracing dominative (as well as competence-related) agentic traits, their supplementary materials revealed a stereotypically masculine "ranking" orientation (a desire to get to the top of the hierarchy even if it means stepping on others' toes). In contrast, androgynous applicants endorsed a stereotypically feminine "linking" orientation, stressing a desire to help others (Sidanius, Cling, & Pratto, 1991). The computer lab manager position was described in one of two ways. The masculine job description emphasized the agentic requisites of the job (e.g., competence), whereas the feminized description added social skills as criteria for success. Applicants were rated on dimensions of competence, social skills, and hireability.

Hypothesis 1 was that, overall, agentic applicants would be perceived as more competent than androgynous applicants, consistent with the link between agency and competence that has been shown in the past (Carli et al., 1995; Rudman, 1998). Hypothesis 2 predicted that backlash would occur. Overall, agentic male applicants should be perceived as nicer than agentic female applicants, because of greater prescriptions for female, compared with male, communality (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). By contrast, backlash should not occur for the androgynous female, who should be viewed as having a similar level of social skills as the androgynous male. Hypothesis 3 was that hiring discrimination against agentic females would be moderated by the job description, emerging only when the job description legitimized discrimination based on the prescriptive stereotype (i.e., was feminized; Rudman & Glick, 1999). By contrast, no differences should emerge for the androgynous applicants, who should be rated as similarly hireable in both job conditions. Taken together, support for these predictions would replicate prior research and also extend it by showing that agentic competencies are more accepted in women when they are softened by the addition of communal traits.

Because feminine niceness prescriptions are likely to be implicit, hypothesis 4 predicted that IAT-assessed stereotypes would predict backlash better than explicit stereotypes. That is, people who automatically associated women with communality (and men with agency) should also view the agentic female as unlikeable and interpersonally deficient. By contrast, explicit stereotypes should be less related to backlash. Support for this prediction would suggest that backlash may be due more to implicit than explicit beliefs about what women are (and should be) like. We also used the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996), because past findings have shown that scores on this measure predict evaluations of career women (Glick et al., 1997).

## Method

### *Participants*

One hundred seventy-nine Rutgers University undergraduates (109 women, 70 men) volunteered to participate in the study to fulfill an introductory course requirement (mean age = 20 years). Seven participants failed to complete the IAT because of scheduling conflicts, resulting in gender beliefs data for 172 participants (105 women, 67 men).

### *Materials and Procedure*

*Job descriptions.* The masculine job was described as requiring a candidate who was technically skilled, ambitious, strongly independent, and able to work well under pressure. The feminized job description included this description but also required helpfulness, sensitivity to the needs of new computer users, and the ability to listen carefully to clients' concerns.

*Videotaped applicants.* Four applicant videotapes employed in prior research (Rudman & Glick, 1999) were used. In each, a male or female applicant responded to six questions, four of which were relevant to the computer lab manager position (e.g., "Do you like having to perform in a pressure situation?"). Two neutral questions (e.g., "Have you traveled much?") were also included. On each tape, the questions appeared on a blue screen for 10 s, followed by a full-body view of the applicant seated in an office. Applicants responded in a direct, self-confident manner, providing examples of accomplishments that cast them in a favorable light. For example, they responded to the question, "Do you like having to perform in a pressure situation?" as follows:

I tend to thrive in pressure situations. For example, in high school I was the editor of the school paper and I had to prepare a weekly column under deadline all the time . . . and I

always pulled it off—so well that sometimes I even surprised myself. My supervisors noticed also and were quite complimentary.

*Supplementary materials.* Before viewing the tape, participants read a “life philosophy” essay (ostensibly written by applicants) so that applicant personality could be manipulated as either agentic or androgynous. Agentic applicants’ essays endorsed a stereotypically masculine, competitive orientation (e.g., “Basically there are two kinds of people, winners and losers. My goal is to be a winner, the type of person who gets to be in charge and make the decisions.”). Androgynous applicants’ essays emphasized a stereotypically feminine, communal orientation (e.g., “To me, life is about being connected to other people. . . . If I can help someone out, I feel a real sense of accomplishment.”).

*The gender stereotype IAT.* The IAT used in this study was adopted from prior research (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). It used 42 stimulus words: 15 female names (e.g., ANN, LINDA), 15 male names (e.g., BRIAN, DAVID), 6 communal-meaning words (communal, attached, cooperative, together, kinship, and commitment), and 6 agentic-meaning words (independent, competitive, autonomous, individual, hierarchical, and self-sufficient).

The five steps of the gender stereotype IAT are as follows:

1. Participants distinguish male and female names by pressing right or left keys on the computer keyboard.
2. Participants similarly distinguish the agentic and communal words.
3. Participants respond to female names and communal words with the left key and male names and agentic words with the right key (combined categorization task).
4. Participants repeat Step 1 but with responses reversed.
5. Participants respond to male names and communal words with the left key and female names and agentic words with the right key (combined categorization task).

The IAT effect is computed by subtracting the mean response latency for performing the *stereotype compatible* task (Step 3) from the *stereotype noncompatible* task (Step 5). Thus, positive difference scores reflect an automatic association between female gender and communality and male gender and agency (i.e., implicit stereotyping). The order in which participants perform Step 3 and Step 5 is counterbalanced across participants (as is key assignment for Step 2). These two combined categorization tasks ( $n = 40$  trials) are preceded by practice blocks ( $n = 20$  trials).

*Explicit gender beliefs.* Participants completed the *gender stereotype index* and the *ASI* (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The gender-stereotype index rated five

communal traits (communal, cooperative, supportive, kinship-oriented, and connected) and six agentic traits (individualistic, competitive, independent, hierarchical, self-sufficient, and autonomous) on a scale from  $-3$  (*more true of women*) to  $3$  (*more true of men*). The index was formed by subtracting mean judgments of communal traits from mean judgments of agentic traits, so that high scores indicate more traditional gender beliefs, yielding a possible range of  $-6$  (nontraditional judgment) to  $6$  (traditional judgment). The ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996) consists of two 11-item subscales that assess hostile sexism (e.g., "Feminists are seeking for women to have more power than men") and benevolent sexism (e.g., "Women should be cherished and protected by men"). Participants rated ASI items on a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. High scores reflect more hostile sexism (HS) or benevolent sexism (BS).

*Procedure.* Participants were recruited for two ostensibly unrelated studies, representing the applicant evaluation and gender-beliefs assessment phases of the experiment. Order in which participants participated in each phase was counterbalanced and did not influence results.

For the applicant evaluation phase, from two to four volunteers participated in a room equipped with a 25-in. (63.5-cm) monitor and a videocassette recorder. Groups were randomly assigned to receive the masculine or feminized job description and to evaluate an agentic or androgynous female or male applicant for a computer lab manager position. Participants were told that the applicant was enrolled in a project designed to improve his or her job interview skills; moreover, she or he was currently an applicant for the university's computer lab manager position. By rating their interest in interviewing and hiring the applicant, participants would "provide investigators with important information regarding the applicant's probable success at obtaining the job." To help with their decision, participants would read an applicant's essay and watch a videotaped interview.

Participants then rated the applicants on dimensions of competence, social skills, and hireability. For each index, participants rated the extent to which characteristics matched their impression of the applicant on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Ratings of 9 characteristics (competent, independent, confident, determined, computer-skilled, analytical, ambitious, competitive, and works well under pressure) were combined with an assessment of the applicant's technical skills ("How likely is it that applicant has sufficient technical skills to perform the job?") to form the *competence* index ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Ratings of 10 characteristics (kind, supportive, warm, sincere, helpful, likeable, friendly, popular, good listener, sensitive to the needs of others) were combined with an assessment of the applicant's social sensitivity ("How likely is it that applicant is willing to listen to and support others in this job?") to form the *social skills* index ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Participants also indicated on three scales ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*) the probability that (1) they would interview the applicant for the job,

(2) they would personally hire the applicant for the job, and (3) the applicant would be hired for the job. These items formed the *hireability* index ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

For the gender beliefs assessment phase, participants were escorted to separate cubicles where they completed the explicit measures prior to performing the IAT. The IAT was administered as in prior research (Rudman et al., 1999; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000).

## Results

### *Applicant Evaluations*

Scores on indexes reflecting participants' evaluations of applicants' competence, social skills, and hireability ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting stronger ratings for each dimension. Table 1 depicts these summary applicant evaluations as a function of applicant traits, applicant sex, and job type. Our hypotheses were tested using  $2$  (applicant sex)  $\times$   $2$  (applicant attributes: agentic, androgynous)  $\times$   $2$  (job description: masculine, feminized)  $\times$   $2$  (participant sex) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on the competence, social skills, and hireability indexes, with appropriate contrasts for testing hypotheses.

*Competence index.* In support of hypothesis 1, agentic applicants were rated as more competent than androgynous applicants,  $F(1, 171) = 6.97, p < .01$  ( $M_s = 4.17$  vs.  $3.97$ ). No other effects emerged, all  $F_s < 2.31, ns$ . These results show the importance of enacting agentic traits to enhance perceptions of competence, for both men and women (Rudman, 1998).

**Table 1.** Evaluation of Applicants for Masculine and Feminized Managerial Jobs

Applicants' attributes	Masculine job				Feminized job			
	Male <sup>a</sup>	Female <sup>b</sup>	Pooled SD	<i>d</i>	Male <sup>c</sup>	Female <sup>d</sup>	Pooled SD	<i>d</i>
<b>Agentic</b>								
Competence	4.05 <sub>a</sub>	4.23 <sub>a</sub>	.45	-.40	4.19 <sub>a</sub>	4.19 <sub>a</sub>	.47	.00
Social skills	3.08 <sub>a</sub>	2.91 <sub>a</sub>	.53	.32	3.18 <sub>a</sub>	2.80 <sub>b</sub>	.58	.66
Hireability	3.11 <sub>a</sub>	3.35 <sub>a</sub>	.95	-.25	3.52 <sub>a</sub>	2.84 <sub>b</sub>	.89	.76
<b>Androgynous</b>								
Competence	4.01 <sub>a</sub>	3.99 <sub>a</sub>	.50	.04	4.06 <sub>a</sub>	3.85 <sub>a</sub>	.50	.42
Social skills	3.26 <sub>a</sub>	2.99 <sub>a</sub>	.61	.44	3.19 <sub>a</sub>	3.08 <sub>a</sub>	.69	.16
Hireability	3.22 <sub>a</sub>	2.98 <sub>a</sub>	.90	.27	3.43 <sub>a</sub>	3.07 <sub>a</sub>	.88	.41

*Note.* Means within condition not sharing a subscript differ significantly at the  $p < .05$  level. Effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) represent applicant sex differences, computed by dividing the male and female applicant mean differences by the pooled standard deviation. High scores indicate male applicants received higher ratings than did female applicants. Conventional small, medium, and large effect sizes for  $d$  are .2, .5, and .8, respectively (Cohen, 1988). For the agentic and androgynous applicant conditions, respectively, the  $ns$  were <sup>a</sup>19 and 24; <sup>b</sup>22 and 16; <sup>c</sup>20 and 25; <sup>d</sup>27 and 26.

*Social skills index.* There was a main effect for applicant sex,  $F(1, 171) = 5.01$ ,  $p < .05$ , such that male applicants were rated as more socially skilled than female applicants ( $M_s = 3.18$  vs. 2.94). In addition, there was a marginal main effect for applicant attributes,  $F(1, 171) = 2.96$ ,  $p < .10$ . Androgynous applicants were rated higher than agentic applicants ( $M_s = 3.14$  vs. 2.99). The expected two-way interaction between applicant sex and applicant attributes was unreliable,  $F = 1.57$ , *ns*. Nonetheless, planned contrasts, shown in Table 1, revealed that the agentic male was rated higher than the agentic female,  $t(171) = 1.99$ ,  $p = .05$  ( $M_s = 3.13$  vs. 2.85). By contrast, androgynous male and female applicants were rated similarly,  $t(171) = 1.40$ , *ns* ( $M_s = 3.22$  and 3.04, respectively). The results of these planned contrasts are consistent with hypothesis 2.

*Hireability index.* There was a marginal main effect for applicant sex,  $F(1, 171) = 3.57$ ,  $p < .07$ , with men rated higher than women ( $M_s = 3.32$  vs. 3.05), but also the expected three-way interaction among applicant sex, job description, and applicant attributes,  $F(1, 171) = 4.40$ ,  $p < .05$ . In support of hypothesis 3, agentic applicants showed a Job Description  $\times$  Applicant Sex interaction,  $F(1, 171) = 7.07$ ,  $p < .01$ . Simple effects showed that the agentic male applicant was viewed as more hireable than the agentic female applicant when the job was feminized,  $t(171) = 2.54$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $M_s = 3.52$  vs. 2.84, respectively). In contrast, agentic male and female applicants were rated similarly when the job was masculine,  $t(171) < 1.00$  ( $M_s = 3.11$  vs. 3.35). For androgynous applicants, no effects emerged, all  $F_s < 2.48$ , *ns*. Thus, androgynous male and female applicants received similar hireability ratings across job descriptions (see Table 1).

These results replicated Rudman and Glick's (1999) findings that an agentic man is viewed as more socially skilled than an agentic woman (irrespective of the job description) and that he is more likely to be hired than she for a feminized management position. The agentic female applicant suffered depressed hireability ratings, but only when the job required someone who was both nice and able (Rudman & Glick, 1999). The effect size for this discrimination was reasonably large,  $d = .76$  (Cohen, 1988).

Our key question concerned whether the backlash effect would be mitigated when the female applicant was portrayed as competent *and* communal. The ANOVA results supported this component of hypothesis 2 by showing that, compared to the androgynous male applicant, the androgynous female applicant did not experience discrimination for either job description. Thus, actively counteracting perceptions that the agentic female is "not nice" can alleviate backlash for feminized jobs.

*Mediation of discrimination.* Rudman and Glick (1999) found that perceptions of agentic applicants' social skills mediated the observed sex discrimination in hiring for the feminized job condition. Coding applicant sex (1 = male and 2 = female),

we sought to replicate this finding, using a series of regressions (Baron & Kenny, 1986). A pattern of support for the hypothesized mediational effect of social skills on hireability was shown ( $n = 47$ ): (1) applicant sex predicted applicants' perceived social skills,  $\beta = -.31, p < .01$ , and applicants' hireability assessment,  $\beta = -.36, p = .01$ ; (2) social skills predicted applicants' hireability,  $\beta = .68, p < .001$ ; and (3) the relationship between applicant sex and hireability decreased when hireability was hierarchically regressed on applicant sex and applicants' social skills ratings,  $\beta = -.16, p = .17$ . (The effect for social skills remained strong,  $\beta = .63, p < .001$ .) Sobel's (1982) test for the significance of the mediation effect was reliable,  $z = 2.41, p < .05$ . These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the sex discrimination found in the feminized job condition was mediated by applicants' social skills assessment. A nonsignificant correlation between agentic applicants' sex and competence ratings ruled out perceived competence as a mediator of hiring discrimination within the feminized job condition,  $r = -.001$ .

### *Gender Beliefs Assessment*

Consistent with Rudman and Glick (1999), perceptions of agentic applicants' social skills mediated sex discrimination in hireability ratings in the feminized job condition. We therefore sought to determine whether individual differences in implicit gender stereotypes would predict the agentic female applicants' social skills ratings (whereas explicit gender beliefs might not). The results below summarize the data for the implicit and explicit measures, show their interrelationships, and examine support for hypothesis 4, a key prediction.

*The IAT effect.* The data for each trial included response latency (in ms) for correct responses and accuracy (i.e., whether participants initially made an error). Data reduction procedures followed Greenwald et al. (1998). Response latencies greater than 3,000 ms and less than 300 ms were recoded as 3,000 and 300 ms, respectively; the first two trials of each block were dropped because of their typically lengthened latencies; and latencies were log-transformed to employ a statistic that has satisfactory distribution of variance for analyses. Analyses revealed relatively low error rates (an average of 6%). Latencies for error trials were included in the aggregate indexes (Greenwald et al., 1998).

The IAT effect was computed as the difference between mean latencies when performing the stereotype compatible versus the stereotype noncompatible task. In general, positive difference scores were expected (and shown), reflecting shorter latencies for stereotype-compatible than stereotype-noncompatible judgments. On average, men and women showed IAT effects of +87 ms and +55 ms, corresponding to effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) for men and women of .59 and .37, respectively. The IAT effect for both male and female participants was greater than zero, both  $t_s > 3.60, p_s < .001$ . IAT effect scores were submitted to an ANOVA, which showed no

significant differences as a function of participant sex, job description, applicant attributes, applicant sex, or the counterbalanced procedural variables, all  $F_s(1, 156) < 3.08, ps > .08$ . As anticipated, men and women showed similar possession of an implicit gender stereotype,  $F(1, 156) = 2.49, ns$ .

*Explicit measures.* In contrast to the IAT data, men scored higher than women on the gender stereotype index,  $t(170) = 2.19 (Ms = 1.65 \text{ vs. } 1.28)$ . Consistent with prior research (Glick & Fiske, 1996), men also scored higher than women on both HS ( $Ms = 2.59 \text{ vs. } 1.98$ ) and BS ( $Ms = 2.84 \text{ vs. } 2.46$ ), both  $t_s(170) > 2.96, ps < .01$ .

*Implicit-explicit correlations.* Table 2 shows the correlations among the implicit and explicit gender belief measures, separately for men (above the diagonal;  $n = 67$ ) and women (below the diagonal;  $n = 105$ ). Correlations on the diagonal (in boldface) are between participant sex and each measure ( $N = 172$ ). Measures were scored so that positive relations were expected among gender belief measures.

As can be seen in Table 2, the relationships among the IAT and the explicit measures were negligible for both men and women, supporting their discriminant validity (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald et al., 1998). Among the explicit measures, women showed the positive association typically found between HS and BS in college samples (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 1996); for men, this relationship was unreliable. Finally, women (but not men) who scored high on BS were more likely to endorse explicit gender stereotypes.

*Correlates of Agentic Female’s Social Skills Assessment*

The principal reason for assessing gender beliefs was to examine correlates of the agentic female applicant’s perceived social skills. Because sex differences could inflate these relations, we report first-order correlations, controlling for participant sex. Hypothesis 4 predicted that implicit, as compared with explicit, gender stereotypes would better relate to the agentic female applicant’s social

**Table 2.** Correlations Among Implicit and Explicit Measures for Male and Female Participants

Measure	Implicit Stereotype	Explicit Stereotype	HS	BS
Implicit stereotype	<b>-.13</b>	-.05	-.01	.03
Explicit stereotype	.13	<b>-.17*</b>	.23	-.06
Hostile sexism	-.10	.16	<b>-.37**</b>	.18
Benevolent sexism	-.05	.21*	.32**	<b>-.22**</b>

*Note.* Correlations between participant’s sex (coded 1 = male, 2 = female) and each measure are reported on the diagonal (in boldface;  $N = 172$ ). Correlations above the diagonal are for male participants ( $n = 67$ ), and correlations below the diagonal are for female participants ( $n = 105$ ). Correlations involving Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism are partial, with each ASI subscale controlling for the other (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

skills ratings. Collapsed across job condition, this hypothesis was supported. The first-order relationship between the agentic female's social skills ratings and the gender stereotype IAT was  $r(45) = -.32, p < .05$ . Thus, people who automatically associated women with communality and men with agency were also likely to view agentic females as interpersonally deficient. By contrast, the comparable correlation between backlash and the explicit stereotype measure was weak,  $r(45) = -.09, p = .54$ . The test of whether these two correlations significantly differed was unreliable,  $t(46) = 1.29, ns$ .

We next analyzed the correlations between agentic female social skills ratings and the implicit and explicit gender belief measures separately by job condition. Table 3 shows the results. The agentic male applicant and hireability ratings were included for comparison purposes. With respect to the agentic female applicant, the top half of Table 3 shows that the gender stereotype IAT negatively covaried with her social skills ratings,  $r(25) = -.49, p < .001$ . In contrast, the explicit measures showed consistently weak relations with this measure. Thus, participants who possessed implicit (but not explicit) stereotypes also rated the agentic female as less socially skilled when she applied for the feminized job. Tests comparing the IAT's association with this rating to each of the explicit measures' correlations were uniformly reliable, all  $t_s > 2.05, p_s < .05$ . By contrast, the IAT was not significantly related to her social skills ratings in the masculine job condition,  $r(20) = -.25, p = .27$ , but neither were the explicit measures. In sum, implicit gender stereotypes were stronger correlates of backlash than explicit gender beliefs in the feminized (but not the masculine) job condition. This is precisely where one might expect to find their influence, given that (1) the agentic woman violated traditional expectancies about female behavior, and (2) the job called for traditionally feminine behavior (i.e., communality). It is noteworthy that the IAT did not correlate

**Table 3.** Partial Correlations Between Agentic Applicants' Ratings and Implicit and Explicit Measures

Measure	Agentic female		Agentic male	
	Feminized job ( <i>n</i> = 27)	Masculine job ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Feminized job ( <i>n</i> = 20)	Masculine job ( <i>n</i> = 19)
Social skills ratings				
Implicit stereotype	-.49**	-.25	-.17	.33
Explicit stereotype	-.07	-.05	.11	.21
Hostile sexism	-.05	-.04	-.08	-.04
Benevolent sexism	.27	-.02	.25	.30
Hireability Ratings				
Implicit stereotype	-.23	-.18	-.18	.48*
Explicit stereotype	-.12	.23	-.32	.38
Hostile sexism	-.03	.13	-.22	.17
Benevolent sexism	.09	.14	.27	.35

*Note.* Correlations are partial, controlling for participant sex. Correlations involving hostile sexism and benevolent sexism are second-order, with each ASI subscale controlling for the other (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

significantly with the agentic female's hireability ratings in the feminized or masculine job conditions (see the bottom half of Table 3). Instead, implicit stereotypes may indirectly affect hiring decisions by influencing perceptions of agentic women's social skills (which mediated hiring discrimination when the job was feminized).

By comparison, the agentic male applicant's social skills ratings were less influenced by this implicit stereotype, suggesting its greater importance for female than male job applicants. Nonetheless, the bottom half of Table 3 shows that implicit stereotypes were related to the agentic male applicant's hireability in the masculine job condition,  $r = .48, p < .05$ . Thus, participants who possessed implicit stereotypes were likely to hire him for the masculine managerial job. This relationship, however, was not greater than that shown for the explicit measure of gender stereotypes,  $t < 1.00$ .

In sum, when the job specifically required interpersonal sensitivity, perceptions of the agentic female's social skills covaried with implicit (but not explicit) associations between female gender and communality and male gender and agency. This finding suggests the importance of automatic gender stereotypes with respect to the glass ceiling. Women who vie for masculine-linked jobs must counteract stereotypes regarding their qualifications by presenting themselves as strong, atypical women (Glick et al., 1988; Rudman, 1998). However, these women are judged less likeable than their male counterparts. As a result, when the job requires a candidate who is both competent and socially skilled, an implicit belief that women should be nice can result in lower social skills ratings and, consequently, hiring discrimination against agentic women. The results suggest that these beliefs are best assessed with automatic methods, most likely because participants were unaware that they possessed these associations or that they applied them to social judgments (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

## Discussion

We sought to illuminate further the reasons why agentic women face a backlash and to show how agentic women might be able to avoid the backlash effect. Replicating past research (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999), an agentic female applicant was rated as less socially skilled and likeable than an identically presented man. She was also viewed as less hireable than her male counterpart for a managerial job, but ironically, only when the job was feminized (i.e., required interpersonal skills), thereby legitimating discrimination based on prescriptive gender stereotypes. Regression analyses suggested that devaluation of the female applicant's social skills (and not her competence) mediated this gender discrimination effect. The findings are interpretable as showing that the agentic female applicant was discriminated against because she was viewed as not nice, whereas the

male applicant's social skills and hireability were less affected by his dominative style.

Going beyond previous research, the research demonstrated both why agentic women face a backlash and how women might avoid the dilemma. Our results suggest that it is a subset of the agentic traits—those related to social dominance (e.g., competitiveness, aggressiveness)—that elicit backlash, because they conflict with the prescription for feminine niceness. Agentic women can avoid the backlash effect by exhibiting only those agentic traits associated with competence (e.g., independent, ambitious) and none associated with social dominance, provided they also display communality. The female applicant who displayed agentic competence *and* communal values was not discriminated against in hiring ratings, irrespective of job description.

This solution, however, is problematic, because it requires appearing to have one subset of agentic traits (competence), but not the other (dominateness). Treading the fine line of appearing competent, ambitious, and competitive, but not at the expense of others, is a tall order, especially for women. To the extent that women have to maintain a “bilingual” impression of themselves (as both nice and able) in order not to be perceived as overbearing and dominant, their situation is more difficult and tenuous in comparison to that of their male counterparts. Further, the need to pay attention to this delicate form of impression management may produce anxieties that, in turn, diminish task performance (Baumeister, 1989; Riordan, Gross, & Maloney, 1994).

### *Backlash and Implicit Gender Prescriptions*

Perceptions of agentic female applicants' social skills mediated hiring discrimination when it occurred. In addition, a female applicant presented as both nice and competent was not discriminated against. These two facts support the notion that backlash against agentic women occurs because of strong prescriptions for women to be helpful, supportive, and interpersonally sensitive (i.e., not dominative), rather than prescriptions against female competence. It is perhaps because feminine niceness is universally perceived to be a good thing, and therefore, stereotypes about women's niceness may not typically be viewed as problematic or even as sexist, that the backlash effect observed in the present research was not influenced by perceivers' sex or explicit forms of sexism. Rather, evidence that implicit stereotypes of women's niceness underlie the backlash effect was provided by the gender stereotype IAT. That is, implicit (but not explicit) associations between female gender and communality and male gender and agency covaried with the agentic female applicant's social skills ratings in the feminized job condition. Thus, individuals who possessed an automatic expectancy that women are nicer than men were more likely to view the agentic female applicant as interpersonally unskilled and unlikeable.

The implicit prescription that women ought to be nicer than men may be a particularly insidious and important force in maintaining inequality between the sexes. Remember that the prescription for communality is reinforced by women's lower status in society. Yet because communal traits are evaluated favorably, those who are subordinated (women) are equally happy as those who are dominant (men) to embrace the stereotypical prescription that women should be nice (cf. Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Rudman, 1998). Women's niceness has direct effects that maintain subordination, such as the tendency to defer to men in interaction (Lakoff, 1990; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000), and the tendency to choose occupations that are less likely to lend women status, resources, and power (Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius, & Siers, 1997). In addition, as we have shown here (and elsewhere; Rudman & Glick, 1999), the niceness prescription may increasingly operate to penalize women who enact an agentic style as high-status jobs become feminized and explicitly require communal traits.

### Conclusion

The situation described by the research results in women's having to fight implicit (i.e., nonconscious) beliefs as they attempt to rise to positions of authority and leadership. The prescription to "be feminine" while simultaneously fulfilling agentic requisites is akin to walking a delicate tightrope, where the consequences of losing one's balance are both social and economic. By placing women in double jeopardy, the mandate to "direct while not being directive" is also costly psychologically and in terms of mental resources (Baumeister, 1989; Riordan et al., 1994). As our research shows, however, failing to "soften" female agency—to explicitly counteract it by projecting an image that is both nice and able—results in backlash. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, individuals who believe women should be nicer than men undermine women's ability to achieve economic parity. If the trend toward feminization of management continues to gain currency within multinational corporations without recognition of this double standard, then women's uphill climb to equality may grow steeper before it becomes easier.

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