Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
1999, Vol. 77, No. 5, 1004–1010

0022-3514/99/$3.00

Feminized Management and Backlash Toward Agentic Women: The Hidden Costs to Women of a Kinder, Gentler Image of Middle Managers

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Women who display masculine, agentic traits are viewed as violating prescriptions of feminine niceness (L. A. Rudman, 1998). By legitimizing niceness as an employment criterion, "feminization" of management (requiring both agentic and communal traits for managers) may unintentionally promote discrimination against competent women. Participants made hiring recommendations for a feminized or masculine managerial job. Agentic female job applicants were viewed as less socially skilled than agentic males, but this perception only resulted in hiring discrimination for the feminized, not the masculine, job. Communal applicants (regardless of sex) invariably received low hiring ratings. Thus, women must present themselves as agentic to be hireable, but may therefore be seen as interpersonally deficient. Ironically, the feminization of management may legitimize discrimination against competent, agentic women.

Suzanne Edmonds,[1] a sales representative for a large pharmaceutical company, was promoted to acting manager for her region. After a month of performing this role successfully, Ms. Edmonds learned that her promotion was contingent on a favorable evaluation in a new assessment center program, where she would be rated by evaluators while completing simulated managerial tasks. Consistent with the trend toward the "feminization" of middle management, as corporations recognize the value of an inclusive, participatory approach to supervising others (Offerman & Gowing, 1990; Peters, 1988), Ms. Edmonds's performance was rated on both competence and interpersonal sensitivity. Although there was no doubt about Suzanne Edmonds's technical competence, her interpersonal skills were perceived to be grossly lacking. Even though the testimony of peers, supervisors, and clients showed no evidence of interpersonal problems on the job and despite initially mixed ratings of her interpersonal skills during the managerial simulations, the final report of the assessment center evaluators described Ms. Edmonds as autocratic, unsympathetic, and manipulative, resulting in her demotion back to being a sales representative.

Past research has focused on the association of high-status managerial jobs with stereotypically masculine personality traits as a central cause of sex discrimination in hiring and promotion (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995). The prevailing notion has been that women are less likely to be hired than identically qualified men because they are assumed to lack the traits associated with the job (Heilman, 1983). This form of discrimination, based on the descriptive aspects of stereotypes of women (what women are assumed to be like), should be mitigated by the trend toward feminization of management, which increases the match between stereotypes of women and the qualities desired in the job. In other words, for women who fit the conventional communal stereotype, feminized management job descriptions might lessen discrimination. This may not be the case for women who violate stereotypical expectations, however, because stereotypes of women's communality are not simply descriptive, but are prescriptive, suggesting what women ought to be like (Eagly, 1987). Prescriptions act as social norms, and violations of these norms are often punished by others (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). We argue that stereotypes of women's communality are particularly prescriptive (more so than stereotypes of men's agency), and that perceived violations of this prescription can lead to employment discrimination when interpersonal skills become an explicit job requirement. Because women are held to a higher standard of niceness than men, they may be more likely to be punished for perceived violations of these standards. Thus, agentic women may be viewed as competent, but interpersonally insensitive. In our example, Ms. Edmonds's forceful behavior was interpreted as indicating a lack of interpersonal skills; in contrast, a male candidate's undeniably rude behavior during a simulation was dismissed as an aberration by evaluators.

The Communality Prescription and Backlash Against Agentic Women

Unfortunately, simply by acting in an agentic manner, women may be seen as violating the feminine-niceness prescription be-

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This research was partially supported by Grant SBE-9807970 from the National Science Foundation. We thank Richard Ashmore, Alice Eagly, and Tony Greenwald for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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[1] Although the information about Suzanne Edmonds accurately reflects an actual court case, the name is a pseudonym.

cause agency and communion are viewed as opposing (though not completely irreconcilable) traits. Thus, female agency can simultaneously increase perceived competence but decrease likability, in what Rudman (1998) has termed the *backlash effect.* Individuating information suggesting that a woman possesses stereotypically masculine traits can lead her to be viewed as equal in agency and competence to a similarly described man (Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988). At the same time, agentic women risk being viewed as less nice (and less hireable) than identically described men (Rudman, 1998). However, a conceivable moderator of hiring discrimination is the description of the job. If the job is described in masculine terms, the focus may be more on a woman's competence than on her interpersonal skills. For such jobs, the ascription of masculine traits to female applicants is likely to increase their hireability (Glick et al., 1988). In contrast, the perception that agentic women are not nice may elicit hiring discrimination when interpersonal skills are an explicit criterion for the job (i.e., when the job is feminized). As Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, and Rocher (1994) have shown, stereotypes may not be used to judge others (because of social norms) unless the situation permits or encourages it. Thus, stereotyped impressions may not necessarily result in discrimination unless evaluators feel they "have a right" to use the stereotype when judging others (see also Yzerbyt, Leyens, & Schadron, 1997). Feminization of management may operate as a real-world analogue to Yzerbyt et al.'s (1994) social judgeability framework, then. Ironically, indicating that managers should "be nice" may act to legitimate discrimination against agentic women on the basis of their perceived lack of interpersonal skills.

Although men are also stereotyped, the prescriptiveness of gender stereotypes is asymmetrical such that the range of acceptable behaviors—even counterstereotypical behaviors—is often broader for men than for women. For example, male speakers using tentative or assertive speech are equally persuasive, whereas female speakers are more persuasive when they use tentative speech (Carli, 1990), and men are equally likable whether they agree or disagree with an interaction partner, whereas women are liked less when they disagree (Carli, 1998). Indeed, there are a wide range of agentic behaviors that are more influential when men use them, compared with women (e.g., visual dominance, task-oriented leadership, and boasting), yet men do not seem to be penalized on social dimensions for being communal (see Carli & Eagly, in press, for a review). In contrast, agentic women are penalized on social dimensions (Rudman, 1998). These findings suggest that the communality stereotype is more prescriptive for women than the agency stereotype is for men. This is not to suggest that men are not held to prescriptive stereotypes or that acting communal is not costly for men in terms of their perceived competence (see, e.g., Rudman, 1998). Rather, we stress that agency is not a prerequisite for being liked for men, whereas communality may be for women.

Causes of Asymmetry in Prescriptiveness of Gender Stereotypes

The interplay of four factors may account for the particular prescriptiveness of stereotypes about women's communality (as opposed to those of male agency): gender differences in status, men's dependence on women, changes in women's roles, and the favorable social evaluation accorded to communal traits. High-status individuals and groups are more influential in determining prescriptions for behavior, which are typically channeled downward toward lower status individuals or groups to help maintain the inequality that favors the powerful (cf. Jackman, 1994; Jost & Banaji, 1994). In addition, high-status individuals and groups are given much more latitude and may escape punishment even when they break official rules or laws (Goffman, 1956; Jackman, 1994). Men, cross-culturally, tend to have more power and status than women, allowing them to have more influence in dictating prescriptions. It is no accident, then, that a feminine-niceness prescription requires women to express the very traits that reinforce their subordination on a daily basis. Communal traits such as concern for others, emotional expressiveness, and cooperativeness are the traits of deference and subordination. People who enact these traits in interaction allow their partners to exert more power (Ridgeway & Erickson, 1998); as a result, men have a strong incentive to establish these traits as prescriptive norms for women.

This incentive is intensified by men's dependence on women. Glick and Fiske (1999) argue that stereotypes of lower status groups are particularly likely to be prescriptive when the dominant group is dependent on them to fulfill specific subordinate roles. Men are dependent on women for sex, for sexual reproduction, for child-rearing, and as homemakers, all of which give men strong motives to control women's behavior. In the Colonial South, when slave-owning Whites were highly dependent on Black labor, the stereotype of Blacks was highly prescriptive and assigned them the same subordinate traits (e.g., cooperative, deferent) that have always been assigned to women (cf. Hacker, 1951; Jackman, 1994). The Civil Rights Movement in the United States and subsequent changes in status accorded to Blacks, coupled with the fact that Whites no longer see themselves as dependent on Blacks, have facilitated a lessening of the prescription for Blacks to be nice (and deferent). Although women's roles have changed as well, men still depend on women to fulfill supportive roles, and stereotypes of women's communality therefore remain highly prescriptive (cf. Spence & Buckner, in press).

A third reason for the strength of the female-niceness prescription is its usefulness as a subtle, but powerful, counterforce to current social changes. Social and economic forces have led women into the paid workforce, where agentic traits are viewed as necessary, even for relatively "feminine" jobs (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Glick et al., 1995). This adoption of new roles by increasing numbers of women has resulted in women being viewed as more agentic (Spence & Buckner, in press), a trend that people see as continuing in the future (Diekman & Eagly, in press). Because agentic traits are associated with power and status, women's increasing agency poses a challenge to male dominance, but this threat is greatly mitigated as long as women's agency is tempered by continuing prescriptions for communality. As Jackman (1994) notes, dominant groups often accommodate a certain amount of social change in their relations with subordinates while not ultimately relinquishing their power and privileges. Women's demands for equality, combined with economic forces (e.g., the need for a "second" income), have led to such an accommodation—women are generally encouraged to be agentic, provided they remain "feminine" (i.e., communal). Because the highest status, most powerful roles (e.g., high political office or chief executive) continue to be stereotyped as purely masculine in their trait requirements (e.g., Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989), the prescription that women must balance agency and communion helps to exclude

women from these jobs, as the persistence of the "glass ceiling" demonstrates (Carli & Eagly, in press).

Maintaining control over women by emphasizing prescriptions for communality is an effective strategy because it attributes positively evaluated (though low-status) traits to women (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Glick & Fiske, 1996). As a result, women (as well as men) are likely to accept the prescriptiveness of the female communality stereotype, both by following it in their own behavior and by punishing other women who violate the prescription. In fact, female evaluators demonstrate the backlash effect just as strongly as, or more strongly than, male evaluators (Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Rudman, 1998). The sugarcoating of positive evaluation, which Eagly and Mladinic (1989) labeled the "women are wonderful effect," leads many women to accept the niceness prescription, even though it perpetuates their own subordination (cf. Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Consequences for Sex Discrimination

An ironic consequence of the trend toward the feminization of middle management is that by making interpersonal skills an important hiring criterion, this accommodation, which ought to benefit women, may instead only legitimize discrimination against the most competent and ambitious among them. The same qualities that are perceived as "masterful" in men may be perceived as "overbearing" in women. Agentic men may not be perceived as particularly nice (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989), but they do not violate a stereotypic prescription that they ought to be sensitive to others' feelings. Although a woman is likely to be seen as competent when she assumes a masculine style of leadership, she risks being judged as insufficiently communal. In contrast, men who behave in identical ways are judged less harshly on the interpersonal skills dimension (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Stereotyping, however, does not necessarily turn into behavioral discrimination unless the situation allows it (Yzerbyt et al., 1994). The irony inherent in the current trend to make interpersonal skills an explicit job requirement for management jobs is that "difficult" women (i.e., those perceived as competent but not nice) can now be denied a job or promotion on the basis of official company policy.

Overview and Hypotheses

Participants evaluated videotaped agentic or communal, male or female applicants for a computer lab manager position. The computer lab manager position was either masculine (emphasizing the need for agentic personality traits) or "feminized" (emphasizing the need for communal as well as agentic traits). Applicants were rated on dimensions of competence, social skills, and hireability. As in past research, agentic applicants were expected to be viewed as more competent (and hireable) than were communal applicants (Rudman, 1998). The focal hypotheses concerned differences between male and female agentic targets' social skills and hireability ratings. Because agentic women may be viewed as violating the feminine-niceness prescription, we expected these applicants to be viewed as lacking in social skills relative to agentic men, regardless of the job for which candidates were considered. But as stereotyping does not necessarily lead to discrimination unless situational factors legitimate such actions (Yzerbyt et al., 1994), we expected sex discrimination against agentic women in hiring recommendations only when they were evaluated for feminized jobs. Finally, based on the well-established stereotype-matching approach (Heilman, 1983), we expected communal female applicants to be seen as particularly ill-suited for the masculine job as individuating information about these applicants serves to reinforce the stereotype of women as more communal than agentic (Glick et al., 1988; Rudman, 1998). In contrast, discrimination against communal women (as compared with communal men) was expected to be lessened, though not necessarily eliminated, when the job was described as requiring communal as well as agentic traits (thereby creating a closer match between the traits of applicant and job).

Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-four Rutgers University undergraduates (103 men and 131 women) volunteered to fulfill an introductory course requirement (mean age = 20 years). Participants who indicated their ethnicity were predominately White (n = 116) and Asian American (n = 86).[2]

Stimulus Materials

Job descriptions. For the masculine job, the ideal candidate was described as technically skilled, ambitious, strongly independent, and able to work well under pressure. The feminized job description additionally stressed that the ideal candidate must be helpful, sensitive to the needs of new computer users, and able to listen carefully to clients' concerns.

Videotaped applicants. Four applicant videotapes (approximately 5 min long) used in prior research (Rudman, 1998) 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., "Are you by nature a competitive person?" and "Do you like having to perform in a pressure situation?").[3] Two neutral questions (e.g., "Have you traveled much?") were also included. On each tape these questions, written on a blue screen, appeared for 10 s, followed by a full-body view of the applicant seated in an office. Agentic 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 if someone else didn't come through with a story I was responsible for that, too. And I always pulled it off—so well that sometimes I even surprised myself. My supervisors noticed also and were quite complimentary.

Communal applicants spoke more modestly of their skills and accomplishments. For example, they replied to the question above in this manner:

> I wouldn't say that "like" is the best term to describe my feelings in pressure situations. Maybe pressure is necessary sometimes. How-

[2] Sixteen African American participants were eliminated after preliminary analyses revealed race effects and an unequal distribution of these participants across conditions.

[3] The videotapes were known to produce backlash effects in prior research, under conditions in which participants selected computer game partners (Rudman, 1998). Because Rudman previously used multiple (live and videotaped) targets and found similar backlash effects among these, we used only the videotaped targets in the present research.

Table 1
Evaluation of Job Applicants for Masculine and Feminized Jobs

	Masculine job			Feminized job		
Applicant attributes	Male[a]	Female[b]	Effect size	Male[c]	Female[d]	Effect size
Agentic applicants						
Competence	4.09	4.30	−.47	4.12	4.05	.18
Social skills	2.97	2.64	.63	3.24	2.86	.70
Hireability	3.35	3.16	.24	3.47	2.79	.92
Communal applicants						
Competence	2.94	2.73	.44	2.78	2.74	.08
Social skills	3.65	3.62	.06	3.56	3.55	.02
Hireability	2.62	1.93	.81	2.35	2.14	.26

Note. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) represent applicant sex differences, computed by dividing the male and female applicant mean differences by the pooled standard deviation. Conventional small, medium, and large effect sizes for *d* are .2, .5, and .8, respectively (Cohen, 1988).
[a] $n = 21$ for agentic applicants; $n = 29$ for communal applicants.
[b] $n = 30$ for agentic applicants; $n = 32$ for communal applicants.
[c] $n = 31$ for agentic applicants; $n = 31$ for communal applicants.
[d] $n = 32$ for agentic applicants; $n = 28$ for communal applicants.

ever, if it is not necessary I don't put any extra pressure on myself. For instance, in high school I was the editor for the school paper. And it kind of got to me, having to face a deadline all the time. I guess I like writing best when I have lots of time in which to develop my ideas.

Supplementary materials. To enhance the manipulation of applicant personality, participants read a "life philosophy" essay ostensibly written by applicants (prior to viewing the videotape). Agentic applicants' essays emphasized a stereotypically masculine, hierarchical orientation that eschews communal values in favor of self-interest (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"). Communal applicants' essays endorsed an interdependent 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").

Procedure

Two to four volunteers participated in a room equipped with a 25-in. (63.5-cm) monitor and a VCR. Groups were randomly assigned to receive the masculine or feminized job description and to evaluate an agentic or communal male or female 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, he or she 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 ostensibly obtained when applicants were interviewed as potential computer-game partners in an earlier experiment.

Participants then rated the applicants on dimensions of competence, social skills, and hireability. For each index, participant 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 ($\alpha = .89$). Ratings of 10 characteristics (kind, supportive, warm, sincere, helpful, likable, 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 ($\alpha = .88$). Participants also indicated on three scales ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*) the probability that (a) they would interview the applicant for the job, (b) they would personally hire the applicant for the job, and (c) the applicant would be hired for the job. These items were combined to form the *hireability* index ($\alpha = .91$).[4]

Results

Applicant Evaluations

Table 1 depicts participants' evaluations of applicants' competence, social skills, and hireability as a function of applicant, applicant sex, and job type. Our main predictions were that the agentic female (as compared with the agentic male) applicant would, overall, be perceived as lacking in social skills (though not in competence). As a result, she should be less likely to be hired for a feminized management job (which legitimizes discrimination on the basis of impressions about candidates' social skills), whereas we expected the agentic applicants' hireability for the masculine job to be similar. In contrast, we expected the communal female (as compared with the communal male) applicant to be discriminated against more strongly for the masculine than the feminized job. These predictions were tested by 2 (applicant sex) × 2 (applicant attributes: agentic, communal) × 2 (job description: masculine, feminized) × 2 (participant sex) analyses of variance on the competence, social skills, and hireability indexes. For all analyses there were no significant effects involving sex of participants, which is consistent with prior research showing that both male and female evaluators are likely to discriminate against women who violate communality prescriptions (Rudman, 1998).

[4] Consistent with the shifting standards model of stereotypes (e.g., Biernat & Manis, 1994), we also included several objective measures for each dimension. However, the results for these measures paralleled those for the subjective indexes and are not discussed.

Competence index. Results showed the expected applicant attributes main effect, $F(1, 218) > 100.00$, $p < .001$. Overall, agentic applicants obtained higher ratings than did communal applicants (Ms = 4.14 vs. 2.80). No other effects emerged on this measure (all Fs < 3.39, *ns*), suggesting that agentic male and agentic female applicants were perceived as equally competent (see Table 1).

Social skills index. Results showed a main effect for applicant attributes, $F(1, 218) > 100.00$, $p < .001$. Overall, communal applicants were rated higher than were agentic applicants (Ms = 3.60 vs. 2.93). In addition, a main effect for applicant sex showed that, overall, male applicants were rated higher than were female applicants, $F(1, 218) = 7.05$, $p < .01$ (Ms = 3.35 vs. 3.17). These results were qualified by the expected Applicant Attributes × Applicant Sex interaction, $F(1, 218) = 8.39$, $p < .01$. In general, the agentic male applicant was rated as more socially skilled than the agentic female applicant, $F(1, 218) = 12.61$, $p < .001$ (Ms = 3.13 vs. 2.75), suggesting that agentic female applicants were viewed as having violated the prescription of feminine niceness. In contrast, the communal male and female applicants received similar social skills ratings, $F < 1.00$, *ns* (Ms = 3.61 and 3.58, respectively). No other effects emerged on this measure (all Fs < 3.25, *ns*). The Applicant Attributes × Applicant Sex × Job Description interaction was not predicted and was unreliable ($F < 1.00$).

Hireability index. Results showed an applicant attributes main effect, $F(1, 218) = 79.89$, $p < .001$, such that agentic applicants obtained higher ratings than did communal applicants (Ms = 3.18 vs. 2.26). In addition, a main effect for applicant sex occurred, $F(1, 218) = 18.86$, $p < .01$. Overall, male applicants were rated higher than were female applicants (Ms = 2.92 vs. 2.51). These results were qualified by the expected Applicant Attributes × Applicant Sex × Job Description interaction, $F(1, 218) = 7.06$, $p < .01$. The 3-way interaction was decomposed into two 2-way analyses broken down by applicant attributes. The analysis for agentic applicants showed a main effect for applicant sex, $F(1, 218) = 8.69$, $p < .01$, and the predicted Applicant Sex × Job Description interaction, $F(1, 218) = 4.08$, $p < .05$. Simple effects showed that, as expected, the agentic female, in comparison with the agentic male, was discriminated against for the feminized job, $t(61) = 3.68$, $p < .001$, whereas she was not discriminated against for the masculine job, $t(49) = .99$, *ns*. The analysis for communal targets also showed a main effect for applicant sex, $F(1, 118) > 10.31$, $p < .01$, and a marginal Applicant Sex × Job Description interaction, $F(1, 218) = 3.00$, $p < .09$. Simple effects suggested that the communal female, as compared with the communal male, was discriminated against for the masculine job, $t(59) = 3.96$, $p < .001$, whereas she was not discriminated against for the feminized job, $t(57) = 1.02$, *ns*. These results should be interpreted with caution, as the 2-way interaction was weak. Nonetheless, together these findings support our expectation that an agentic female would be more likely to be discriminated against when the job was feminized (i.e., required an applicant who was both nice and able), whereas a communal female would be more likely to be discriminated against when the job was described solely in masculine terms. The effect sizes (Cohen's d) shown in Table 1 indicate that in each case, the effect for hiring discrimination (with male targets preferred over females) was large (i.e., >.80; Cohen, 1988).

Mediation of Discrimination

Did perceptions of agentic applicants' social skills mediate the observed sex discrimination in hiring for the feminized job condition? Regression analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986) showed a pattern of support for the hypothesized mediational effect of social skills on hireability ($n = 63$): (a) applicant sex predicted applicants' perceived social skills ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$) and applicants' hireability assessment ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .01$); (b) social skills predicted applicants' hireability ($\beta = .63$, $p < .001$); and (c) the relationship between applicant sex and hireability decreased when hireability was hierarchically regressed on applicant sex and applicants' social skills ratings ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .13$). (The effect for social skills remained strong, $\beta = .60$, $p < .001$.) 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 (within the feminized job condition; $r = -.09$) ruled out perceived competence as a mediator of hiring discrimination.

The communal female compared with the communal male, faced significant discrimination when evaluated for the masculine job. The mediation of this effect is unclear, however, as applicant sex was not reliably related to perceived social skills ($r = .01$) and was only marginally related to perceived competence ($r = -.21$, $p < .10$). It is possible that gender-status beliefs (not measured) may have mediated the observed hiring discrimination, as masculine jobs are associated with high status (Glick et al., 1995), whereas communal traits (Ridgeway & Erickson, 1998) and women (Rudman & Kilianski, 1999) are associated with low status. Thus, the communal female applicant may have been viewed as doubly low in status (female and communal) and therefore particularly unsuitable for a high-status job, whereas the male communal applicant may have gained in perceived status by being male, despite his communal tendencies.

Discussion

Our primary aim was to examine when perceptions of agentic women as violating prescriptions of feminine niceness would, in turn, result in hiring discrimination. We found that a strongly agentic (i.e., competent and competitive) female applicant was consistently rated as less socially skilled than an identically presented man, irrespective of managerial job descriptions. However, these perceptions only translated into discrimination when the job was feminized, thereby legitimating the use of stereotypical inferences about social skills in hiring recommendations (cf. Yzerbyt et al., 1994). Mediational analysis suggested that devaluation of the female applicant's social skills (and not her competence) was responsible for this sex discrimination effect—the agentic female applicant was discriminated against because she was viewed as not being nice. Unfortunately, the trend toward a kinder, gentler image of managers may only serve psychologically to legitimate backlash against agentic women. Corporations may unwittingly be sanctioning gender discrimination by writing the prescription for feminine niceness into company policy.

The bind that women face was illustrated clearly in the results. Even when they require feminine traits, high-status jobs invariably also require stereotypically masculine competence (Cejka & Ea-

gly, 1999; Glick et al., 1995). Thus, matching men on agency is necessary for women to counteract perceptions that they are insufficiently qualified for high-status jobs (Glick et al., 1988; Rudman, 1998). Although qualified by a weak interaction term, a feminized job description did mitigate discrimination against communal female applicants—communal male and female applicants were viewed as similarly hireable for a feminized management job, suggesting some possible gain for communal women when jobs require feminine as well as masculine traits. But the larger picture shows that, regardless of sex, communal applicants were rated quite poorly and lost out to more agentic applicants for either type of job. Thus, women (and men) applying for high-status jobs must present themselves as possessing agentic traits. However, matching men on agentic traits resulted in social repercussions for the female applicant, which, in turn, led to decreased hireability when the job was described as requiring feminine (as well as masculine) traits.

Because these findings were obtained with undergraduate research participants, suitable caution must be exercised in generalizing the results to actual hiring decisions. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that experimental research with undergraduates has a good track record of revealing moderators and mediators of discrimination among business professionals and in actual employment decisions. For instance, stereotype-matching principles first uncovered with student participants have been confirmed among business professionals (Glick et al., 1988) and the effects of tokenism (being in a numerical minority) have been shown to generalize from laboratory experiments to sex discrimination in actual promotion decisions (Sackett, DuBois, & Noe, 1991).

It is also important to note that it may well be possible for agentic women to avoid the backlash demonstrated here by presenting themselves as highly communal as well as agentic (a type of applicant not included in the current study). This solution may not, however, be simple to enact given that displaying agentic traits is, for women but not for men, interpreted as reflecting a lack of communal concern. The prescription to "be feminine" while simultaneously fulfilling agentic requisites may be a difficult and demanding balancing act akin to driving over rough terrain while keeping one hand on the wheel and the other reassuringly on passengers' backs. The need to pay increased attention to impression management may produce anxiety and self-consciousness that, in turn, depresses task performance (Baumeister, 1989; Riordan, Gross, & Maloney, 1994).

Overall, our results suggest the possibility that the feminization of middle-management job descriptions may not be a boon to working women but instead may reinforce discrimination against the most competent and ambitious among them. Feminized job descriptions may lessen discrimination against women perceived to be communal, but such women (like their communal male counterparts) are not likely to be viewed as serious contenders for management jobs in the first place. For the serious female contenders—those who exhibit agentic traits but may therefore be viewed as violating prescriptions for feminine niceness—feminized job descriptions may only legitimate using unfair and stereotypical perceptions that such women are "difficult" and insensitive as a basis for discriminatory employment decisions.

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Received January 11, 1999
Revision received May 18, 1999
Accepted May 19, 1999 ■