



FlashReport

Wimpy and undeserving of respect: Penalties for men's gender-inconsistent success

Madeline E. Heilman^{a,*}, Aaron S. Wallen^b^a New York University, Department of Psychology, 6 Washington Place, New York, NY 10003, USA^b Columbia University, Graduate School of Business, Uris Hall, 3022 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 August 2009

Revised 30 December 2009

Available online 6 February 2010

Keywords:

Gender stereotypes

Gender norms

Norm violation

Impression formation

ABSTRACT

Results of an experimental study varying the sex of the employee and the gender-type of the job demonstrated that men, as well as women, are penalized when they are successful in areas that imply that they have violated gender norms. But the nature of these penalties differed. When depicted as being successful at a female gender-typed job, men were characterized as more ineffectual and afforded less respect than women successful at the same job or than men successful in a gender-consistent position. Women, in contrast, were more interpersonally derogated and disliked when said to be successful at a male gender-typed job. Regardless of these differing characterizations, both men and women successful in gender-inconsistent jobs were reported to be less preferable as bosses than their more normatively consistent counterparts. These results suggest that success, when it violates gender norms, can be disadvantageous for both men and women, but in different ways.

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Introduction

Research has demonstrated that women who succeed in male gender-typed positions are penalized for their success. They are interpersonally derogated and characterized as cold, manipulative, abrasive, pushy and selfish. They also are disliked (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). These findings support the idea that penalties for a woman's success are an expression of disapproval for inferred violation of gender norm prescriptions. The current research is aimed at demonstrating that men, too, are penalized for gender-inconsistent success, but their penalties are different than those for women.

This issue is important for furthering our understanding of the penalties for success effect. Gender stereotypes, in addition to describing the attributes of women and men, denote norms about behaviors that are suitable for each (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Rudman & Glick, 2001). These normative prescriptions designate not only "shoulds" but also "should nots", with behaviors deemed desirable for one sex prohibited for the other. Thus, there is a normative injunction for women to be socially sensitive and service-oriented (communal), and not to engage in the assertive, achievement-oriented (agentic) behaviors associated with men. According to this reasoning, there also should be a normative injunction for men, and it should be the opposite of that for women, with agentic behaviors prescribed and communal behaviors prohibited. Gender norms should constrain men as well as women.

Violations of normative prescriptions arouse disapproval and result in penalties (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Indeed, research has shown that women who behave in a ways typically reserved for men are responded to more negatively than women who behave in a normatively consistent manner (e.g., Brett & Stroh, 1997; Carli, LeFleur, & Loeber, 1995; Flynn & Ames, 2006; Heilman & Chen, 2005). Rudman and her colleagues have termed this negative response to women "backlash" (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001; Rudman & Phelan, 2008), and also have demonstrated negative reactions to men who behave in ways that violate male gender norm prescriptions (e.g., Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, *in press*; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

The findings from these research investigations concern reactions to explicit norm-violating behavior, but they also have implications for reactions to success. To be successful implies having behaved in ways necessary to get the job done. Thus, when the gender-type of a job is inconsistent with the gender of the job incumbent, success implies attributes that violate gender-prescriptive norms. It has been shown that when women are successful at male gender-typed jobs the inference is that they have been highly agentic (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004). Therefore, when men are successful at female gender-typed jobs, the inference is likely to be that they have been highly communal. If the underlying basis of the penalties for success effect is disapproval for gender norm violation, then counter-normative inferences should induce the same reactions as more explicit norm violations, rendering men successful in female gender-typed positions vulnerable to penalties for their success.

Although we are proposing that the same process will bring about penalties for either men or women who have achieved

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: madeline.heilman@nyu.edu (M.E. Heilman).

success in a gender inconsistent job, we are not proposing that the penalties will be the same. It is our belief that inferred norm violators are thought not only to have engaged in counter-normative behavior, but also to be deficient in the attributes that are deemed normatively required for their sex. Indeed, women thought to be successful in areas that are traditionally male have been shown to be viewed in ways that are antithetical to the female stereotype and conceptions of how women should be—they are seen as harsh and socially insensitive. Consequently, men who are thought to be successful in areas that are traditionally female are likely to be viewed in ways that reflect perceived deficits in agentism. We therefore expect them to be characterized in ways that are antithetical to the image of someone who takes charge and gets things done—as wimpy and ineffectual. Moreover, because of these stereotype-antithetical assumptions, we expect that the general response to them will not be dislike (as it is for norm-violating women), but rather will be lack of respect.

The following study tests these ideas. We sought to determine the reactions to men and women who have achieved success working on either a male or a female gender-typed job, with the intention of replicating earlier findings about reactions to women and contrasting them with what we believed would be parallel, but different, responses to men. We expected that whereas women would be penalized by being cast as more interpersonally hostile and less likable, men would be penalized by being cast as more ineffectual and less respected. We furthermore expected that whether successful women and men would be penalized would depend on the sex-type of the job at which they had achieved their success, with penalties occurring only in situations in which success is considered indicative of norm violation. Lastly, because of the disapproval likely to be directed at individuals assumed to violate gender norms, we expected that the successful employees would be found differentially desirable as a boss depending upon the perceived gender fit of the job. When success was gender-inconsistent, we expected both men and women to be found less desirable as a boss.

Methods

Participants and design

Forty-two introductory psychology students (27 women, 14 men, 1 unspecified) participated for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two gender-typed jobs (male or female). All participants reviewed both a male and female employee, yielding a 2 (job gender-type) \times 2 (employee sex) factorial design with repeated measures on the employee sex factor.

Procedure

Participants were told that they would be reviewing employees holding the same position in a large company. They then were presented with a job description summary describing the position and its job responsibilities. This was followed by a brief description of each employee's educational and work background including a section that, using terms such as "consistently outstanding", "stellar performer" and "one of the most valuable employees in the company", indicated that the employee was highly successful. All participants viewed two stimulus employees, one female (Andrea), and one male (James). The descriptive materials for the two stimulus employees were designed to be equivalent but not identical, and each description appeared equally often in each condition. Presentation order of the male and female employees was systematically varied.

Participants completed a questionnaire after reviewing each employee and a final questionnaire containing manipulation checks and demographic questions. They then were debriefed and thanked.

Job gender-type manipulation

The job was Financial Advisor or Employee Relations Counselor for the male and female gender-typed jobs, respectively. Financial Advisors were said to provide financial advice and information to company employees, and were described as needing to be good with numbers and knowledgeable about banking, insurance, accounting, and bond and equity investment. Employee Relations Counselors were said to provide assistance to employees with personal and family problems, and were described as needing to have good people skills, and be knowledgeable about fostering trusting relationships and providing emotional support. Additional information indicated that Financial Advisors were 86% men and that Employee Relations Counselors were 86% women. Both jobs were housed within the same organizational department and paid \$60–75,000. Preliminary work indicated the two jobs to be equivalent in prestige and status.

Dependent measures

The attribute measures were composites of scales, including abrasive, manipulative, selfish, and cold ($\alpha = .82$) for the interpersonal hostility scale, and wimpy, wishy-washy, insecure, spineless and weak ($\alpha = .78$) for the ineffectuality scale. The liking scale ($\alpha = .71$) consisted of responses to three questions, e.g., "How much do you think you would like this individual?", as did the respect scale ($\alpha = .69$), e.g., "How much do you think this is someone who commands respect from others?" Desirability as a boss was measured by a single item, "How much would you want this individual to be your boss?" All ratings were done on 9-point scales anchored by "very much" and "not at all".

Results

Preliminary analyses

As intended, target employees were seen as successful—indicated as "very successful" 93% of the time when male, and 99% of the time when female. Also, our job gender-type manipulation was effective: 93% of participants described the Financial Advisor job as "mostly men" and 86% described the Employee Relations job as "mostly women".

Data analyses

The dependent measures were analyzed using two-way mixed design univariate ANOVAs. To test our hypotheses we conducted intercell comparisons using repeated measures *t*-tests within job-type and independent samples *t*-tests across job-type (all two-tailed). No differences were evident between male and female respondents on any measures, and their data were therefore combined for all analyses. Means for the dependent measures are presented in Tables 1–3.

Penalties for women: interpersonal hostility and liking

Interpersonal hostility

ANOVA of the interpersonal hostility scale indicated a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 40) = 4.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Intercell comparisons indicated that women were rated as more interper-

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