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MISPERCEPTIONS AND MISSED EXPECTATIONS

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Women in Work Groups:  
Misperceptions and Missed Expectations

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expectations for sex-typed behavior are not evident at the work group level. However, the discrepancies between self-reported and ascribed femininity and masculinity--the misperception indices--were significantly greater for males, who described themselves as both more feminine and more masculine than work group members perceive them. Males also showed a significantly greater discrepancy between self-reported and desired femininity, or femininity missed expectations index. Again, they described themselves as more feminine than work group members think is appropriate. Additional analysis revealed that supervisors find femininity less desirable than do co-workers. From this it is concluded that males may be subjected to greater pressure than women to conform to conventional sex roles, and that supervisors may be the primary source of this pressure. K

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## Preface

Several theorists have speculated that working women are handicapped by both the external and internal correlates of the sex-role belief system-- that stereotypic attitudes toward women reinforce women's already strong identification with the feminine sex role, which in turn reinforces sex stereotypes (Baruch, 1972; O'Leary, 1974; Putnam & Heinen, 1976; Ruhe & Guerin, 1977). This cyclical process is thought initially to limit women's behavioral repertoires, and ultimately, their salience in the working world.

The Hinsdale-VIA Psychosocial Model of Defeat (HVPMD, Hinsdale, 1976) provides a framework for moving these theories from the attitudinal into the behavioral domain. It describes a series of interpersonal interactions in work groups in which the internal and external correlates of the sex-role belief system become mutually reinforcing.

However, the HVPMD, like other theories in this area, rests on several claims whose validity for working women and men has been virtually untested. Surprisingly, many of the studies cited to explain women's achievement-related difficulties in the working world were not conducted on working populations. Thus, prior to directly researching the model, we decided to test these claims. To what extent, for example, is sex stereotyping evident among working women and men? To what extent are stereotypes accurate or inaccurate? And to what extent is the feminine sex role incompatible with career success, adjustment and achievement?

Answering these questions comprised our first three units of research (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c). In this fourth unit, we turn our attention to investigating the extent to which the working sexes perceive stereotypic expectations among their immediate peers and superiors.

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Our early research efforts aimed at pinpointing the corporate mythology surrounding working women--i.e., widely held beliefs about how working women are and how they ought to be (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978a). It was our reasoning that to the extent that these descriptions and prescriptions differed for women and men, women were exposed to stereotypes with potentially dire consequences for their full integration into the workforce.

What we found was not what we expected: differential prescriptions for the sexes--or sex-role stereotypes--were practically nonexistent. And even though both sexes described women as significantly more feminine--or more warm and expressive--than men, neither sex described them as less masculine, or less competent. Subsequent research, moreover, suggested that the greater femininity attributed to women is not altogether negative. While high masculinity is clearly superior to high femininity in terms of career advancement, certain aspects of the feminine sex role--e.g., compassion, sensitivity, and understanding--also are associated with success in the working world (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b).

In short, at the organizational level, we have been largely unable to unearth major attitudinal barriers to achievement in women--to isolate the kind of collective ideology so frequently invoked to explain working women's failure to approach equal status (Bem & Bem, 1970; 1971; Schein,

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1975; Terborg & Ilgen, 1975). Instead the attitudes of both sexes are remarkably similar, and remarkably egalitarian.

However, at the finest levels of analysis, our data repeatedly have presented subtle indications that a residuum of sexism persists in the working world. For example, even though sex-role stereotyping is greatly diminished in the workforce, male workers do find such qualities as aggression, dominance, and independence less desirable in women than in men (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978a). Men are preferred as co-workers, and the masculine female, though valued by supervisors, is devalued by peers (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b). Finally, many of the specific descriptors of women--e.g., shy, quiet, emotional--are less than wholly flattering, as well as inaccurate (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978c).

These biases against women are admittedly small, given the scope of the research. It is tempting to dispense with them altogether and interpret our more global findings as true indications that women are no longer constrained by conventional sex roles. However, as other investigators have pointed out (e.g., Deaux, 1976; O'Leary, 1977), endorsing traditional prejudices against women is no longer considered a socially desirable response; under nonthreatening circumstances, professed egalitarianism is fast becoming normative. Given this, the small sex differences in our prior research may reflect only the tip of the iceberg.

If indeed this is the case, it is likely, in spite of the absence of system-wide prejudices, that stereotypic beliefs operate at the work group level--that women and men perceive expectations among their peers and superiors that they both do and should remain within the confines of sex-appropriate behavior. Because the perceived expectations of others are powerful shapers of human behavior (Darley, 1976), they might be

expected to have direct impact on the behavior of working women and men. And because high femininity consistently is associated with low status in organizational hierarchies (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b; Good, Kirkland & Grissom, Note 1), they might be extremely damaging to working women.

Accordingly, the primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the descriptive and prescriptive expectations which have been communicated to women in their daily interactions with work group members. The first hypothesis was that male and female workers differentially describe the degrees of femininity and masculinity others ascribe to them and desire of them, and that differences in these descriptions parallel stereotypic definitions of femininity and masculinity.

A second purpose of the study was to investigate an alternative explanation for women's achievement-related difficulties--namely, that their own self-concepts, by virtue of being more feminine and less masculine than men's self-concepts, also are less well-suited to occupational achievement. It has been theorized that, all other things being equal, people tend to engage in work-related behaviors consistent with their self-concepts (Korman, 1970). Thus, to the extent that women's self-concepts incorporate the feminine sex role, they may be handicapped as members of the workforce--even when the conscious desire to succeed is present (Katz & Shapiro, 1976; Schein, 1973).

This alternative approach to women and work, in a phrase, blames the victim instead of the system; it maintains that internal, psychological factors--not external, social factors--limit women's achievement. However, an accumulating body of evidence brings into question the contention that women are to blame for their own less-than-stellar performance in the workplace. Although the early research on sex roles emphasized psychological

differences between the sexes and attempted to generalize these differences to working populations, more recent data indicate that working women more closely resemble working men than they resemble stereotypes of women in general. For example, working women and men display similar needs for achievement, intellectual demands, and self-actualization (Crowley, Levitin, & Quinn, 1973). Both sexes derive their job satisfaction and motivation from comparable sources (Saleh & Lalljee, 1969; Wild, 1969), and with increasing experience and success in the workforce, women acquire the behaviors, interests, values, attitudes, and styles of leadership of successful males (Bartol, 1976; Morrison & Sebald, 1974; O'Leary & Braun, 1972; Ruhe & Guerin, 1977; Sears, Roebuck, & Company, 1974; Fitzpatrick & Cole, Note 2).

The one strong statement made by these studies is that form apparently follows function: where their jobs are involved, women seem to overcome many of the harmful motivational, personality, and behavioral correlates of a strict sex-role identification. In keeping with this new trend in the research, the second hypothesis of the study was that no differences exist in the self-reported femininity and masculinity of working women and men.

At this point, an interesting theoretical issue arises. If both hypotheses hold true--i.e., if despite having equivalent self-concepts, women and men are exposed to stereotypic expectations for who they are and who they ought to be--it follows that women also would consider themselves first, to be more inaccurately perceived by work group members, and second, to fall farther short of work group standards for sex-appropriate behavior. In other words, women would perceive a greater divergence between their self-concepts and the beliefs others hold of them. This issue was the subject of a separate series of analyses designed to

investigate the "misperceptions" and "missed expectations" of working women and men.

### Method

#### Sample

Subjects included 95 male and 95 female Navy enlisted personnel from Norfolk, Virginia, and Orlando, Florida. Their paygrades ranged from E-1 through E-5, with a mode of E-2. They had served in the Navy a mean of 3.2 years. 95.3% had completed high school, and 30.2% had some college. 19.2% were nonwhite. Most of the subjects were single (70.3%); approximately one-fifth (20.8%) were married; and the remainder (8.9%) were divorced or separated. Their ages ranged from 17 to 33, with a mean of 20.2 years.

Subjects were recruited by their respective commands according to their availability for participation in the study. Together, they represented a wide range of scientific, technical, clerical and labor specialties. None was directly engaged in a combat-related position.

#### Instruments

The instrument employed in the study was the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem, 1974), which consists of 20 stereotypically masculine, 20 stereotypically feminine, and 20 neutral traits (see Table 1). Although the BSRI most frequently is employed as a self-report measure, in this study it was used for two additional purposes--to investigate, first, respondents' perceptions of how their co-workers and supervisors think they actually are, and second, their perceptions of how their co-workers and supervisors think they ought to be.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Two versions of the instrument were developed, the "Peer Perception

Questionnaire," and the "Supervisor Perception Questionnaire." For each of the 60 items in the BSRI, subjects were asked to describe, "How I am," "How my co-workers (supervisor) think(s) I am," and "How my co-workers (supervisor) think(s) I ought to be." Each of these three questions employed the 7-point BSRI scale, ranging from "1 = never or almost never true" to "7 = always or almost always true."

#### Procedure

Subjects were convened in classroom settings in groups of 10 to 30, and the two forms of the instrument were randomly administered to equal numbers of males and females. The monitor first provided general instructions on completing the 17 demographic questions preceding the body of the instruments, then asked subjects to complete the questionnaire by describing themselves, how others think they are, and how others think they ought to be. This involved entering the most appropriate number from the BSRI scale in each of the three blanks next to each trait.

Subjects were allotted one hour to complete the task. All subjects finished in advance.

#### Results

Prior to investigation of the study hypotheses, femininity and masculinity scores were computed for each of the three areas of investigation in the two questionnaires. This yielded six scores for each instrument: self-reported femininity and masculinity scores (how I am), ascribed femininity and masculinity scores (how others think I am), and desired femininity and masculinity scores (how others think I ought to be).

All scores were derived according to Bem's (1974) methodology, by averaging data from the stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine traits on the instruments. However, the items "feminine" and

"masculine" were omitted from the analyses to avoid including respondents' subjective definitions of these constructs. The resulting scores are shown in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Two-way analysis of variance was used to test the hypothesis that male and female workers differentially describe the degrees of femininity and masculinity others ascribe to them and desire of them, as well as to investigate overall differences in the data concerning peers and superiors. Accordingly, the two independent variables in this analysis were the sex of the respondent and the two forms of the questionnaire; the two dependent variables were femininity and masculinity. The analysis of variance was conducted first on the ascribed femininity and masculinity scores, and second, on the desired femininity and masculinity scores (see Table 2).

The first set of analyses revealed no significant differences between male and female subjects on ascribed femininity,  $F(1,189) = 2.00, p > .05$ , or on ascribed masculinity  $F(1,189) = 1.24, p > .05$ . It further showed no differences between the peer and supervisory questionnaires,  $F(1,189) = 3.37, p > .05$  on ascribed femininity, and  $F(1,189) = 3.46, p > .05$  on ascribed masculinity. The interaction of the two factors also was insignificant for both dependent variables.

The second set of analyses again showed no differences between male and female respondents on desired femininity,  $F(1,189) = 1.36, p > .05$ , or desired masculinity,  $F(1,189) = 1.37, p > .05$ . However, there was a significant difference in the desired femininity scores between the peer

and supervisory questionnaires,  $F(1,189) = 5.82$ ,  $p < .05$ , although no difference was evident in the masculinity scores,  $F(1,189) = .85$ ,  $p > .05$ , nor was the interaction of the factors significant for either variable.

In Table 2, the direction of the one comparison which achieved significance in this analysis is apparent: peers prefer more femininity than do supervisors,  $M = 4.83$  vs.  $4.58$  for males, and  $M = 5.00$  vs.  $4.68$  for females. Post-hoc  $t$  tests revealed neither of these individual comparisons to be significant,  $t(93) = 1.49$ ,  $p > .05$  for males, and  $t(93) = 1.93$ ,  $p > .05$  for females. The five items whose mean scores most strongly discriminated between the two questionnaires on desired femininity were soft-spoken ( $M = 4.34$  vs.  $3.82$ ), warm ( $5.85$  vs.  $5.35$ ), tender ( $5.27$  vs.  $4.84$ ), childlike ( $1.97$  vs.  $1.56$ ), and shy ( $2.55$  vs.  $2.19$ ).

Analysis of variance also was used to test the hypothesis that no differences exist in the self-reported femininity and masculinity of female and male workers. In keeping with this hypothesis, the analysis yielded no significance on self-reported femininity,  $F(1,189) = .08$ ,  $p > .05$ , or self-reported masculinity,  $F(1,189) = .01$ ,  $p > .05$ . The interaction also was insignificant in both instances. The mean self-reported scores are shown in Table 2.

The femininity and masculinity "misperception indices" were calculated by comparing self-report data to the data on ascribed femininity and masculinity. This was accomplished by finding the sum of the absolute differences between pairs of feminine and pairs of masculine items, then computing average discrepancies. Similarly, the femininity and masculinity "missed expectations indices" were derived by comparing the self-report data to the data on desired femininity and masculinity. Two-way analysis of variance, using the previously described design, was used to isolate

differences on the indices between female and male subjects and between the two versions of the questionnaire.

No significant differences were found on the misperception indices between the peer and supervisory questionnaires,  $F(1,189) = .26, p > .05$  and  $F(1,189) = .15, p > .05$  for femininity and masculinity, respectively. However, this analysis did show significant differences on both indices between female and male subjects,  $F(1,189) = 8.29, p < .01$  for the femininity misperception index, and  $F(1,189) = 6.38, p < .05$  for the masculinity misperception index. In both cases, the mean discrepancy was greater for male subjects,  $M = .79$  vs.  $.57$  for femininity, and  $M = .72$  vs.  $.55$  for masculinity. The variability of scores also was significantly greater for male than female subjects,  $F(94, 94) = 2.38, p < .01$  for femininity, and  $F(94, 94) = 2.43, p < .01$  for masculinity. As with earlier analyses, the interaction of the factors for both variables was insignificant.

Table 2 shows the direction of the discrepancies achieving significance: males described themselves as both more feminine and more masculine than their co-workers and supervisors perceive them,  $M = 4.88$  vs.  $4.61$  and  $4.31$  for femininity, and  $M = 5.22$  vs.  $4.94$  and  $4.67$  for masculinity.  $t$  tests subsequently indicated that all four possible comparisons were highly significant. Supervisors attribute to males both less femininity,  $t(46) = 5.83, p < .001$ , and less masculinity,  $t(46) = 3.94, p < .001$ , as do co-workers,  $t(47) = 3.86, p < .001$  for femininity, and  $t(47) = 4.11, p < .001$ , for masculinity. The five feminine items showing the greatest discrepancies between male subjects' self-reports and the combined ascriptions of work group members were affectionate ( $M = 5.47$  vs.  $4.55$ ), sympathetic ( $5.43$  vs.  $4.70$ ), tender ( $5.26$  vs.  $4.53$ ), understanding ( $6.15$  vs.  $5.44$ ), and warm ( $5.60$  vs.  $5.01$ ). The five masculine items were has leadership abilities

( $\bar{M}$  = 5.66 vs. 4.95), self-sufficient (6.04 vs. 5.40), ambitious (6.01 vs. 5.44), defends own beliefs (6.02 vs. 5.51), and competitive (5.82 vs. 5.32).

Analysis of the missed expectations indices showed a trend similar to the misperception indices. While no differences were found between the peer and supervisory questionnaires,  $F(1,189) = 3.46$ ,  $p > .05$  for femininity, and  $F(1,189) = 1.39$ ,  $p > .05$  for masculinity, a significant difference was evident between the sexes in the femininity missed expectations index  $F(1,189) = 6.38$ ,  $p < .05$ , which was larger for males than for females,  $\bar{M} = .91$  vs.  $.75$ . The masculinity missed expectations indices did not achieve significance,  $F(1,189) = 1.39$ ,  $p > .05$ , nor did the interaction of the factors.

The figures in Table 2 again indicate the direction of males' femininity missed expectations index; men describe themselves as more feminine than they think others believe they ought to be,  $\bar{M} = 4.88$  vs.  $4.83$  for peers and  $4.58$  for superiors. With respect to superiors, this difference was significant,  $t(46) = 2.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . The five feminine items showing the greatest difference between males' self-reports and the desires of work group members were shy (3.55 vs. 2.38), tender (5.26 vs. 4.82), affectionate (5.47 vs. 5.16), sensitive to the needs of others (5.40 vs. 5.68), and warm (5.60 vs. 5.33).

### Discussion

The results of this study clearly fail to support the hypothesis that women and men differentially describe the degrees of femininity and masculinity ascribed to them or desired of them; no significant differences were found in the descriptive or prescriptive expectations the sexes perceive in their work groups. From this it may be concluded that the larger, organization-wide belief in the equality of the sexes is communicated to

women and men in their ongoing interactions with work group members. As a result, the case for relegating sexism to the work group level is greatly diminished.

However, the data do support the hypothesis that no differences exist in the self-reported femininity and masculinity of the working sexes. Both male and female respondents described themselves as androgynous, with slightly more emphasis placed on masculinity than on femininity (see Table 2). Consequently, the self-concepts of the sexes are entirely congruent with the personality of the "masculine androgyn" which emerged from our previous research as the most adaptive personality in the working world (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b).

These findings stand in marked contrast to the many references made to sex-role identification as a major impediment to achievement in women. They further contradict the frequent supposition that widespread attitudinal barriers exist external to women, in their work groups and organizations. Thus, as in our past research, we find little evidence in this study to indicate that working women are limited by the internal or external manifestations of the sex-role belief system.

Instead, all three sets of femininity and masculinity scores--self-reported, ascribed, and desired--show a surprising absence of between-sex differences. Because these scores represent substantial deviations from normative BSRI data (Bem, 1974), they provide additional momentum to the case for form following function in the workplace--for the psychological convergence of the working sexes. Evidently, the working world is such a strong socialization influence that it may supercede even early conditioning into traditional sex roles.

The within-sex consistency in the femininity and masculinity scores also has certain theoretical implications; it suggests that self-perceptions and perceived expectations are mutually reinforcing. Generally speaking, women and men view themselves as androgynous; they believe others perceive them as androgynous; and they believe others consider androgyny a desideratum. Although several investigators have pointed out the reciprocal nature of such internal and external sex-role attitudes, this has always been in the context of stereotypic beliefs reinforcing sex-typed self-images (Baruch, 1972; Hinsdale, 1976; O'Leary, 1974; Putnam & Heinen, 1976; Ruhe & Guerin, 1977). In these data, however, we see the other side of the coin: androgynous self-concepts appear to reciprocate egalitarian expectations.

This seems especially true for women, who are less likely than men to report misperceptions or missed expectations. For men, on the other hand, the picture is more complex. First, male subjects projected larger absolute differences between who they are and how others perceive them; both the femininity and masculinity misperception indices were significantly greater for males. Additional analysis showed the direction of these misperceptions: men described themselves as significantly more feminine and more masculine--or more differentiated--than their peers and superiors view them. While the same trend is evident among females, it is not quite as severe (see Table 2). Moreover, the significantly greater variability found among males on the two misperception indices indicates that they are more inclined than women to believe they are either very well understood or very misunderstood.

Of particular interest in this connection are the five feminine and five masculine traits on which males are most highly misperceived. Seven

of these traits are among those most strongly associated with career advancement, including sympathetic, understanding, warm, has leadership abilities, self-sufficient, ambitious, and competitive (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b). For each of these traits, males' self-reported scores exceeded what they believe others attribute to them. Although this may reflect the well-documented tendency for individuals to rate themselves highly on socially desirable traits (Edwards, 1957), it nevertheless reveals that men consider themselves to be underestimated on some very important qualities.

Men also perceived a significantly larger divergence between who they are and how others believe they ought to be. However, in this instance, only the femininity missed expectations index was significantly greater for men than for women. Again, men's self-reported femininity score exceeded the desired scores; males described themselves as more feminine than others generally consider appropriate. Interestingly, two of the five items showing the greatest discrepancies in this regard--sensitive to the needs of others and warm--are strongly related to career advancement (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b). Thus, males' perceived need to suppress their feminine qualities may not be altogether adaptive.

These findings are consistent with previous data showing that, regardless of their adaptive value, traditionally feminine traits tend to be devalued in males (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b). Apparently, there exists a predisposition--both in work groups and in the system at large--to discourage the development of cross-sex characteristics in men. In short, counterintuitively, the strongest indication of sexism in this study has potentially negative consequences not for women, but for men. It may well be that while the "gentle sex" is now encouraged to be strong, the "strong sex" is not yet encouraged to be gentle.

Additional evidence suggests that this sexism is concentrated among supervisors. First, the desired femininity scores generated from the supervisor data were significantly lower than identical scores from the peer data, revealing that, independent of sex, superiors find femininity less acceptable than do co-workers. This trend dovetails with our prior finding that supervisors are less appreciative of the highly feminine personality than are peers (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b). Second, the difference between men's self-reported and desired femininity scores was significant only in the supervisor data, which probably accounts for males' greater missed expectations index. Thus, supervisors increasingly appear to be disenchanted with femininity in general, and with femininity in males in particular.

On the other hand, our earlier research suggests that co-workers are somewhat disenchanted with masculinity in females (Hinsdale & Johnson, 1978b). Although no corroborative results were obtained in this study, our past efforts certainly raise the possibility that, like men, women experience some pressure to avoid displaying cross-sex characteristics. Clearly, additional research is warranted to investigate if and how these subtle sex differences translate into critical differential reward systems which discourage masculinity in women and femininity in men. Ultimately, these pressures, regardless of their lateral or vertical origins in the organizational structure, might make the masculine androgyn a difficult ideal for either sex to achieve.

Further research also is necessary to determine the generalizability of the results of this study. Like our previous findings, they stand in direct opposition to the mainstream of thought in the research on sex roles. Thus, at the very least, we must begin to question the assumption that

sex is "a variable equivalent to social class in its ability to refine our understanding of human nature" (Douvan, 1976).

Finally, the unexpected finding that men perceive more inaccurate and discriminatory attitudes in their work groups suggests the need for continuing explorations of the masculine experience. In the working world, reverse sexism may be a problem equal to sexism in limiting human potential.

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Table 1  
Items from the Bem-Sex Role Inventory

Masculine	Feminine	Neutral
Self reliant	Yielding	Adaptable
Defends own beliefs	Cheerful	Conceited
Independent	Shy	Conscientious
Athletic	Affectionate	Conventional
Assertive	Flatterable	Friendly
Strong personality	Loyal	Happy
Forceful	Sympathetic	Helpful
Analytical	Sensitive to the	Inefficient
Has leadership abilities	needs of others	Jealous
Willing to take risks	Understanding	Likable
Makes decisions easily	Compassionate	Moody
Self sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt	Reliable
Dominant	feelings	Secretive
Willing to take a stand	Soft spoken	Sincere
Aggressive	Warm	Solemn
Acts as a leader	Tender	Tactful
Individualistic	Gullible	Theatrical
Competitive	Childlike	Truthful
Ambitious	Does not use harsh	Unpredictable
	language	Unsystematic
	Loves children	
	Gentle	

Table 2

## Masculinity and Femininity Scores of Male and Female Subjects

Score	Males	Females
Self-reported masculinity	5.22	5.20
Ascribed masculinity (peers)	4.94	5.11
Ascribed masculinity (supervisors)	4.67	4.83
Desired masculinity (peers)	5.29	5.50
Desired masculinity (supervisors)	5.23	5.33
Self-reported femininity	4.88	4.91
Ascribed femininity (peers)	4.61	4.71
Ascribed femininity (supervisors)	4.31	4.56
Desired femininity (peers)	4.83	5.00
Desired femininity (supervisors)	4.58	4.68

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