

# WHAT WOMEN AND MEN SHOULD BE, SHOULDN'T BE, ARE ALLOWED TO BE, AND DON'T HAVE TO BE: THE CONTENTS OF PRESCRIPTIVE GENDER STEREOTYPES

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This article presents a four-category framework to characterize the contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. The framework distinguishes between prescriptions and proscriptions that are intensified by virtue of one's gender, and those that are relaxed by virtue of one's gender. Two studies examined the utility of this framework for characterizing prescriptive gender stereotypes in American society (Study 1) and in the highly masculine context of Princeton University (Study 2). The results demonstrated the persistence of traditional gender prescriptions in both contexts, but also revealed distinct areas of societal vigilance and leeway for each gender. In addition, they showed that women are seen more positively, relative to societal standards, than are men. We consider the implications of this framework for research on reactions to gender stereotype deviants and sex discrimination.

Gender stereotypes are highly prescriptive. The qualities they ascribe to women and men tend also to be ones that are required of women and men. For example, the stereotypic belief that women are warm and caring is matched by a societal prescription that they should be warm and caring. Similarly, the stereotypic belief that men are strong and agentic is matched by a societal prescription that they should be strong and agentic. Recent interest in the prescriptive aspect of gender stereotypes has been sparked by two observations: First, gender stereotypes are closely linked to traditional social roles and power inequalities between women and men (Eagly, 1987). A number of researchers have traced this link to the prescriptive component of gender stereotypes and its role in justifying and perpetuating the status quo (Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Second, violations of gender stereotypes are met with various forms of punishment and devaluation, many of which appear to stem from their prescriptive quality (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Indeed, the distinction between the descriptive and prescriptive components of gender stereotypes has proven quite useful for

analyzing real-world cases of sexual harassment and sex discrimination (Burgess & Borgida, 1999).

Of course, interest in prescriptive gender stereotypes among social psychologists is nothing new; almost three decades ago, early studies of sex-role identity provided an initial look at the contents of these stereotypes (Bem, 1974). The studies were designed to develop a trait-based measure of individual differences in the internalization of societal gender prescriptions; as a by-product, they documented the contents of those prescriptions. Bem (1974) asked male and female participants to rate each of a large pool of traits in terms of its desirability for a woman or its desirability for a man. In both cases, she asked them to make these ratings according to what society deemed desirable, rather than according to their own personal opinions. She categorized as feminine traits rated as significantly more desirable for a woman than for a man by both male and female participants; she categorized as masculine traits rated as significantly more desirable for a man than for a woman by both male and female participants. These criteria yielded the 20 feminine and 20 masculine characteristics that appear on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; see Bem, 1981 for a review). Feminine characteristics are: affectionate, cheerful, childlike, compassionate, does not use harsh language, eager to soothe hurt feelings, feminine, flatterable, gentle, gullible, loves children, loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, shy, soft-spoken, sympathetic, tender, understanding, warm, and yielding. Masculine characteristics are: acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defends own beliefs, dominant, forceful, has

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leadership abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong-personality, willing to take a stand, and willing to take risks. These characteristics provide a good representation of prescriptive gender stereotypes, at least as they existed in the early 1970s.

Recent attempts to validate the contents of the BSRI femininity and masculinity scales, using a similar item-selection procedure, have provided evidence for the persistence of these stereotypes. For example, in 1993, Harris (1994) found that 19 of 19 masculine items (excluding the item "masculine") and 16 of 19 feminine items (excluding the item "feminine") met Bem's criteria for inclusion on their respective scales. In 1997, Holt and Ellis (1998) found that all 20 masculine items and 18 of 20 feminine items still met Bem's criteria, although the magnitude of the differences in desirability for a woman versus a man had decreased. In 1999, Auster and Ohm (2000) found that 18 of 20 feminine items but only 8 of 20 masculine items still met Bem's criteria. Interestingly, most of the failures were attributable to male participants only; female participants rated 20 of 20 feminine traits and 18 of 20 masculine traits as differentially desirable for women and men in the expected direction. Moreover, when the investigators rank-ordered traits in terms of desirability, they found that both male and female participants still ranked traits on the femininity scale as most highly desirable for women and traits on the masculinity scale as most highly desirable for men. They took these latter results as evidence for the persistence of traditional gender prescriptions (Auster & Ohm, 2000).

Research on the BSRI thus provides some insight into the contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. In particular, it highlights the continued centrality of traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity. At the same time, this research is based on two assumptions that limit the conclusions we can draw from it. First, it assumes that prescriptive gender stereotypes include only socially desirable qualities. Second, it assumes that a difference in the desirability of a quality for women and men signals that the quality is prescribed for the gender that receives the higher rating. We examine each of these assumptions in turn.

The assumption of social desirability has long been one of convenience more than conviction. Although initial research on sex-role identity focused exclusively on socially desirable traits (e.g., Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975; although see Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972), a second wave of research documented the gendering of undesirable traits (e.g., Antill, Cunningham, Russell, & Thompson, 1981; Bryson & Corey, 1977; Kelly, Caudill, Hathorn, & O'Brien, 1977; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979; Stoppard & Kalin, 1978). These studies identified a set of socially undesirable feminine traits, like gullible and weak, that are more likable, appropriate, and common in women than in men. Similarly, they identified a set of socially unde-

sirable masculine traits, like arrogant and insensitive, that are more likable, appropriate, and common in men than in women.

The question, then, is how to conceptualize the role of these undesirable qualities in societal gender prescriptions. Is one supposed to demonstrate the undesirable qualities associated with one's gender, avoid the undesirable qualities associated with the other gender, or both (see Broverman et al., 1972; Stoppard & Kalin, 1978; Stricker, 1977)? Empirical evidence suggests that the only strong imperative is to avoid the other gender's undesirable qualities. In the most relevant study, Stoppard and Kalin (1978) asked participants to rate feminine and masculine traits that varied in social desirability on one of four dimensions: how obligatory they are, how prohibited they are, the extent to which they are met with approval or disapproval, and how characteristic they are, for both women and men. The results for socially desirable traits were consistent with the findings of Bem (1974) and others. Those that were gender-appropriate received the most extreme, positive ratings (i.e., high ratings of approval and obligation and low ratings of prohibition), whereas those that were gender-inappropriate received significantly less extreme ratings on all three dimensions. The results for socially undesirable traits were parallel. Those that were gender-appropriate received moderate ratings on all three dimensions, whereas those that were gender-inappropriate received the most extreme, negative ratings. These results suggest that societal prescriptions demand the presence of gender-appropriate, desirable traits and the absence of gender-inappropriate, undesirable traits. They also hint that for certain types of qualities—gender-inappropriate, desirable traits and gender-appropriate, undesirable traits—societal standards are markedly more relaxed.

This point brings us to the second assumption—that a trait that is more desirable in one gender is prescribed for that gender. An example will serve to illustrate the logical problem with this assumption. Consider the finding, from our own research and Bem's (1974), that the trait "defends own beliefs" is more desirable for a man than for a woman. One interpretation of this difference is that the societal imperative to defend one's beliefs is especially strong for men. Another, equally logical interpretation is that this imperative is especially relaxed for women. These two interpretations are importantly different, and either or both could be valid given evidence only of a difference in the gender-specific desirability of the trait. Disentangling them requires that we use the desirability of the trait for people in general as a benchmark. If it is more desirable for men to defend their own beliefs than it is for people in general to do so, then this trait is part of what society requires of men in particular. However, if it is equally desirable for men and for people in general to defend their own beliefs, then the trait is not part of the prescriptive stereotype of men. Instead, the lower desirability rating for women reflects a markedly relaxed standard for them.

In light of the foregoing analysis, we propose that traits that differ in their desirability for women and men fall into four different categories for each gender. *Gender-intensified prescriptions* are traits high in general social desirability and even higher in desirability for the target gender. They are the qualities women and men are supposed to have by virtue of their gender and the subject of most earlier research on prescriptive gender stereotypes. *Gender-relaxed prescriptions* are traits high in general social desirability but significantly lower in desirability for the target gender. They are societal standards to which one gender is only weakly held, areas in which one is allowed to fall short. *Gender-relaxed proscriptions* are traits low in general social desirability but significantly higher in desirability for the target gender. They are allowable transgressions of societal standards, the flaws women and men are allowed to have by virtue of their gender. *Gender-intensified proscriptions* are low in general desirability and even lower in desirability for the target gender. They are the mirror image of the intensified prescriptions, the other domain of societal vigilance. We can represent these four categories of traits in a  $2 \times 2$  arrangement, defined by general social desirability (high or low) and the direction in which the target gender deviates from the societal norm (higher or lower). This representation is shown in Table 1.

The present research sought to identify these four categories of traits in prescriptive stereotypes of women and men. In our first study, we asked male and female college students to rate each of a large pool of traits according to its desirability in American society for a woman, a man, and a person. These ratings served as the basis for identification of gender-intensified and gender-relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions. We expected to find considerable, though not complete, overlap in content between intensified and relaxed prescriptions across genders and similarly for intensified and relaxed proscriptions. That is, prescriptions that are intensified for one gender should be relaxed for the other, and similarly, proscriptions that are intensified for one gender should be relaxed for the other. However, we expected many additional prescriptions and proscriptions to emerge as intensified or relaxed for only one gender.

**Table 1**

Categories of Traits that Differ in Their Desirability for Women and Men

Trait valence	More desirable for target gender than for people in general	Less desirable for target gender than for people in general
Socially desirable	Gender-intensified prescriptions	Gender-relaxed prescriptions
Socially undesirable	Gender-relaxed proscriptions	Gender-intensified proscriptions

We also collected ratings of the perceived typicality of each trait for women and for men in American society, to assess the degree of correspondence between the prescriptive and descriptive components of gender stereotypes. We expected correspondence to covary with the strength of the societal imperative attached to the trait, and thus to be highest for prescriptions and proscriptions that are gender-intensified and lowest for those that are gender-relaxed.

## STUDY 1

### Method

#### Participants

Two hundred eight Princeton University undergraduates (104 women, 104 men) participated in this study for pay. The sample included 134 participants who identified themselves as Caucasian, 22 as Asian or Asian American, 15 as African or African American, 14 as Hispanic, and 15 as fitting into another, unspecified category. Their mean age was 20.18 years.

#### Materials

To create a list of traits that varied in gender-appropriateness and social desirability, we began with the original pool of 400 traits rated by participants in the development stage of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1981). After combining synonyms and close synonyms, we were left with 75 generally positive traits that accounted for most of the characteristics described by the original pool. Included among these traits were all 40 of those Bem (1974) included in the BSRI, with the exception of the terms "masculine" and "feminine." To these 75 positive traits, we added 25 negative traits derived from past research on gender-correlated attributes (Bryson & Corey, 1977; Antill et al., 1981).

We used this list of 100 traits to create two questionnaires. The first contained a self-rating task, which was included to familiarize participants with the list of traits. The instructions asked participants to indicate "how well each of the following traits describes you," on a scale from 1 (*very uncharacteristic*) to 9 (*very characteristic*). The list of 100 traits followed. We generated five random orderings of the traits to produce five versions of this questionnaire.

The second questionnaire contained five rating tasks, each with its own set of instructions. In one task, the instructions asked participants to indicate "how desirable it is *in American society* for a man to possess each of these characteristics," on a scale from 1 (*very undesirable*) to 9 (*very desirable*). In a second task, the instructions asked them to indicate "how desirable it is *in American society* for a woman to possess each of these characteristics," on the same 1 to 9 scale. In a third task, the instructions asked them to indicate "how desirable it is *in American society* for a person to possess each of these characteristics," again on

the same 1 to 9 scale. The instructions for all three of these tasks emphasized that we were not interested in their personal opinions about the desirability of each characteristic; rather, we wanted their judgment of how our society evaluates each of these characteristics in the target gender or in general. In a fourth task, the instructions asked participants to indicate "how typical you think each one of the following characteristics is in adult American males," on a scale from 1 (*very atypical*) to 9 (*very typical*). In a fifth task, the instructions asked participants to indicate "how typical you think each one of the following characteristics is in adult American females," on the same 1 to 9 scale. We produced five different versions of this second questionnaire by counterbalancing the order of these five rating tasks and the random ordering of the traits within each task.

At the end of each version of the second questionnaire were two pages of background questions that asked participants to report their age, gender, ethnicity, and family background.

### Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires in groups of 1 to 10. Each participant first completed one version of the self-rating questionnaire and then completed one version of the stereotype-rating and background questionnaire. Together, the two questionnaires took about an hour to complete, and each participant received \$6 in compensation.

## Results

### Categorization of Traits

The primary goal of this study was to identify gender-intensified and gender-relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions for women and men in American society. For each of the 100 traits, we analyzed ratings of desirability for a woman, for a man, and for a person using a 2 (Participant Gender)  $\times$  3 (Target: woman, man, person) analysis of variance (ANOVA), with Participant Gender as a between-subjects factor and Target as a within-subjects factor. For traits that yielded a significant main effect of Target, we conducted *t* tests to compare desirability ratings for each pair of targets. To control for Type I errors, we set the  $\alpha$  level at .01 for each test and, in addition, used the Dunn-Bonferroni procedure to set the  $\alpha$  levels for the *t* tests.

The initial ANOVAs revealed significant main effects of Target for 79 traits. For 72 of the 79, followup *t* tests revealed significant differences between ratings of desirability for a woman and a man.<sup>1</sup> These 72 traits constituted the pool to categorize. For each trait, we examined the *t* tests comparing desirability for a woman and a person; they showed significant differences for 59 of the traits. We divided these 59 traits into those high in general desirability (i.e., those for which ratings of desirability for a person averaged over 5, the midpoint of the scale;  $n = 43$ ), and those low in general

desirability (i.e., those for which ratings of desirability for a person averaged under 5;  $n = 16$ ). We then categorized each trait depending on the direction in which desirability for women deviated from desirability for a person. Traits that were high in general desirability and even higher in desirability for a woman were intensified prescriptions; traits that were high in general desirability but lower in desirability for a woman were relaxed prescriptions; traits that were low in general desirability but higher in desirability for a woman were relaxed proscriptions; and traits that were low in general desirability and even lower in desirability for a woman were intensified proscriptions. The traits that fell into each of these categories and their mean ratings of desirability are shown in Table 2.

We carried out an analogous procedure to identify intensified and relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions for men. For the 72 traits that showed differences in desirability for a woman and a man, we examined the *t* tests comparing desirability for a man and a person; they showed significant differences for 56 of the traits. We divided these 56 traits into those high in general desirability ( $n = 36$ ), and those low in general desirability ( $n = 20$ ), and then categorized each using the same criteria we used for women. The traits that fell into each of these categories and their mean ratings of desirability are shown in Table 3.

As expected, the results revealed a considerable degree of complementarity in the contents of the similarly valenced categories across genders. In particular, on the socially desirable side, they showed a cluster of positive, feminine characteristics that are intensified prescriptions for women and relaxed prescriptions for men, and a cluster of positive masculine characteristics that are intensified prescriptions for men and relaxed prescriptions for women. Similarly, on the socially undesirable side, they showed a cluster of negative, feminine characteristics that are relaxed proscriptions for women and intensified proscriptions for men, and a cluster of negative, masculine characteristics that are relaxed proscriptions for men and intensified proscriptions for women.

At the same time, almost every category included traits that did not appear in the complementary category for the other gender. By far the largest number of these nonoverlapping traits were relaxed prescriptions. Participants indicated that it was less desirable for a woman but not more desirable for a man to be intelligent and mature, to have common sense and a good sense of humor, to be concerned for the future, principled, efficient, clever, worldly, and persuasive, and to defend beliefs than it was for a person to have these qualities. Similarly, they indicated that it was less desirable for a man but not more desirable for a woman to be happy, helpful, enthusiastic, optimistic, creative, and devoted to a religion than it was a person to have these qualities. These results suggest that societal prescriptions for women and men are not simply mirror images of each other, in which the standards intensified for one gender are relaxed for the other. Instead, they are more complex

**Table 2**  
Intensified and Relaxed Prescriptions and Proscriptions for Women in American Society

<i>Intensified prescriptions</i>			<i>Relaxed prescriptions</i>				
	<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>		<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>
Warm & kind	8.30 <sub>a</sub>	7.51 <sub>b</sub>	7.00 <sub>c</sub>	*Intelligent	7.51 <sub>a</sub>	8.14 <sub>b</sub>	8.27 <sub>b</sub>
Interest in children	8.16 <sub>a</sub>	7.00 <sub>b</sub>	6.68 <sub>c</sub>	*Mature	7.38 <sub>a</sub>	7.61 <sub>b</sub>	7.81 <sub>b</sub>
*Loyal	8.06 <sub>a</sub>	7.77 <sub>b</sub>	7.83 <sub>b</sub>	High self-esteem	7.35 <sub>a</sub>	7.87 <sub>b</sub>	8.05 <sub>c</sub>
Sensitive	8.05 <sub>a</sub>	7.13 <sub>b</sub>	6.61 <sub>c</sub>	*Common sense	7.32 <sub>a</sub>	8.04 <sub>b</sub>	8.12 <sub>b</sub>
Friendly	8.01 <sub>a</sub>	7.77 <sub>b</sub>	7.32 <sub>c</sub>	Sense of humor	7.28 <sub>a</sub>	7.82 <sub>b</sub>	7.78 <sub>b</sub>
Clean	7.98 <sub>a</sub>	7.37 <sub>b</sub>	7.05 <sub>c</sub>	*Concern for future	6.97 <sub>a</sub>	7.43 <sub>b</sub>	7.39 <sub>b</sub>
Attn. to appearances	7.89 <sub>a</sub>	7.15 <sub>b</sub>	6.47 <sub>c</sub>	*Principled	6.92 <sub>a</sub>	7.33 <sub>b</sub>	7.45 <sub>b</sub>
Patient	7.84 <sub>a</sub>	7.08 <sub>b</sub>	6.96 <sub>b</sub>	*Efficient	6.86 <sub>a</sub>	7.74 <sub>b</sub>	7.69 <sub>b</sub>
Polite	7.81 <sub>a</sub>	7.40 <sub>b</sub>	7.32 <sub>b</sub>	*Rational	6.84 <sub>a</sub>	7.42 <sub>b</sub>	7.73 <sub>c</sub>
Cheerful	7.80 <sub>a</sub>	7.35 <sub>b</sub>	6.78 <sub>c</sub>	Strong personality	6.82 <sub>a</sub>	7.49 <sub>b</sub>	7.82 <sub>c</sub>
Cooperative	7.63 <sub>a</sub>	7.27 <sub>b</sub>	6.75 <sub>c</sub>	Athletic	6.79 <sub>a</sub>	7.71 <sub>b</sub>	8.27 <sub>c</sub>
Wholesome	7.24 <sub>a</sub>	6.82 <sub>b</sub>	6.22 <sub>c</sub>	*Disciplined	6.78 <sub>a</sub>	7.49 <sub>b</sub>	7.76 <sub>c</sub>
Expresses emotion	7.22 <sub>a</sub>	6.06 <sub>b</sub>	5.48 <sub>c</sub>	*Clever	6.73 <sub>a</sub>	7.47 <sub>b</sub>	7.61 <sub>b</sub>
Spiritual	6.36 <sub>a</sub>	6.08 <sub>b</sub>	5.73 <sub>c</sub>	Self-reliant	6.40 <sub>a</sub>	7.75 <sub>b</sub>	8.18 <sub>c</sub>
*Flirtatious	6.23 <sub>a</sub>	5.70 <sub>b</sub>	5.66 <sub>b</sub>	Defends own beliefs	6.39 <sub>a</sub>	7.41 <sub>b</sub>	7.46 <sub>b</sub>
Excitable	5.79 <sub>a</sub>	5.38 <sub>b</sub>	4.69 <sub>c</sub>	Decisive	6.19 <sub>a</sub>	7.32 <sub>b</sub>	7.92 <sub>c</sub>
				Ambitious	6.09 <sub>a</sub>	7.81 <sub>b</sub>	8.09 <sub>c</sub>
				Business sense	6.07 <sub>a</sub>	7.86 <sub>b</sub>	8.32 <sub>c</sub>
				Leadership ability	6.04 <sub>a</sub>	7.88 <sub>b</sub>	8.24 <sub>c</sub>
				*Worldly	5.87 <sub>a</sub>	6.67 <sub>b</sub>	6.82 <sub>b</sub>
				Willing to take risks	5.87 <sub>a</sub>	7.09 <sub>b</sub>	7.44 <sub>c</sub>
				Persuasive	5.80 <sub>a</sub>	6.79 <sub>b</sub>	7.01 <sub>b</sub>
				Assertive	5.67 <sub>a</sub>	7.40 <sub>b</sub>	7.96 <sub>c</sub>
				Intense	5.44 <sub>a</sub>	6.45 <sub>b</sub>	6.81 <sub>c</sub>
				Competitive	5.18 <sub>a</sub>	7.23 <sub>b</sub>	7.47 <sub>c</sub>
				Aggressive	4.41 <sub>a</sub>	6.16 <sub>b</sub>	6.98 <sub>c</sub>
				Forceful	4.39 <sub>a</sub>	5.89 <sub>b</sub>	6.58 <sub>c</sub>
<i>Relaxed proscriptions</i>			<i>Intensified proscriptions</i>				
	<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>		<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>
Yielding	6.05 <sub>a</sub>	4.31 <sub>b</sub>	3.91 <sub>c</sub>	Rebellious	3.96 <sub>a</sub>	4.79 <sub>b</sub>	5.31 <sub>c</sub>
Emotional	5.73 <sub>a</sub>	4.97 <sub>b</sub>	4.24 <sub>c</sub>	Stubborn	3.46 <sub>a</sub>	4.08 <sub>b</sub>	4.57 <sub>c</sub>
Impressionable	5.43 <sub>a</sub>	4.66 <sub>b</sub>	4.22 <sub>c</sub>	Controlling	3.19 <sub>a</sub>	4.14 <sub>b</sub>	4.87 <sub>c</sub>
*Child-like	4.96 <sub>a</sub>	3.94 <sub>b</sub>	3.33 <sub>c</sub>	Cynical	3.19 <sub>a</sub>	3.84 <sub>b</sub>	4.06 <sub>b</sub>
Shy	4.76 <sub>a</sub>	3.51 <sub>b</sub>	3.05 <sub>c</sub>	Promiscuous	3.02 <sub>a</sub>	3.63 <sub>b</sub>	4.39 <sub>c</sub>
Naïve	4.53 <sub>a</sub>	3.04 <sub>b</sub>	2.41 <sub>c</sub>	Arrogant	2.55 <sub>a</sub>	3.33 <sub>b</sub>	3.82 <sub>c</sub>
Superstitious	4.12 <sub>a</sub>	3.78 <sub>b</sub>	3.48 <sub>c</sub>				
Weak	4.11 <sub>a</sub>	2.12 <sub>b</sub>	1.69 <sub>c</sub>				
Melodramatic	4.10 <sub>a</sub>	3.64 <sub>b</sub>	2.70 <sub>c</sub>				
Gullible	3.99 <sub>a</sub>	2.63 <sub>b</sub>	2.13 <sub>c</sub>				

**Note:** *DW* = mean rating of desirability for a woman in American society; *DP* = mean rating of desirability for a person in American society; *DM* = mean rating of desirability for a man in American society. Means are based on *ns* of 177–204. Within each row, means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly at the .01 level. Traits marked with an asterisk did not show corresponding differences in perceived typicality for women and men.

representations, with distinct areas of societal vigilance and leeway for each gender.

*Differences in Perceived Typicality*

We were also interested in the extent to which differences in the desirability of the traits for women and men were

matched by differences in their perceived typicality. We expected a high degree of correspondence between desirability and typicality differences for intensified prescriptions and proscriptions, and a lower (although still substantial) degree of correspondence for relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions. For each of the 100 traits, we analyzed ratings of typicality for a woman and for a man using

**Table 3**  
Intensified and Relaxed Prescriptions and Proscriptions for Men in American Society

<i>Intensified prescriptions</i>			<i>Relaxed prescriptions</i>				
	<i>DM</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DW</i>		<i>DM</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DW</i>
Business sense	8.32 <sub>a</sub>	7.86 <sub>b</sub>	6.07 <sub>c</sub>	*Happy	7.49 <sub>a</sub>	7.94 <sub>b</sub>	7.94 <sub>b</sub>
Athletic	8.27 <sub>a</sub>	7.71 <sub>b</sub>	6.79 <sub>c</sub>	Friendly	7.32 <sub>a</sub>	7.77 <sub>b</sub>	8.01 <sub>c</sub>
Leadership ability	8.24 <sub>a</sub>	7.88 <sub>b</sub>	6.04 <sub>c</sub>	Helpful	7.12 <sub>a</sub>	7.64 <sub>b</sub>	7.75 <sub>b</sub>
Self-reliant	8.18 <sub>a</sub>	7.75 <sub>b</sub>	6.40 <sub>c</sub>	Clean	7.05 <sub>a</sub>	7.37 <sub>b</sub>	7.98 <sub>c</sub>
*Dependable	8.09 <sub>a</sub>	7.69 <sub>b</sub>	7.67 <sub>b</sub>	Warm & kind	7.00 <sub>a</sub>	7.51 <sub>b</sub>	8.30 <sub>c</sub>
Ambitious	8.09 <sub>a</sub>	7.81 <sub>b</sub>	6.09 <sub>c</sub>	Enthusiastic	6.98 <sub>a</sub>	7.51 <sub>b</sub>	7.37 <sub>b</sub>
High self-esteem	8.05 <sub>a</sub>	7.87 <sub>b</sub>	7.35 <sub>c</sub>	Optimistic	6.90 <sub>a</sub>	7.37 <sub>b</sub>	7.49 <sub>b</sub>
Assertive	7.96 <sub>a</sub>	7.40 <sub>b</sub>	5.67 <sub>c</sub>	Cheerful	6.78 <sub>a</sub>	7.35 <sub>b</sub>	7.80 <sub>c</sub>
Decisive	7.92 <sub>a</sub>	7.32 <sub>b</sub>	6.19 <sub>c</sub>	Cooperative	6.75 <sub>a</sub>	7.27 <sub>b</sub>	7.63 <sub>c</sub>
Strong personality	7.82 <sub>a</sub>	7.49 <sub>b</sub>	6.82 <sub>c</sub>	Interest in children	6.68 <sub>a</sub>	7.00 <sub>b</sub>	8.16 <sub>c</sub>
*Disciplined	7.76 <sub>a</sub>	7.49 <sub>b</sub>	6.78 <sub>c</sub>	Creative	6.65 <sub>a</sub>	7.32 <sub>b</sub>	7.20 <sub>b</sub>
Rational	7.73 <sub>a</sub>	7.42 <sub>b</sub>	6.84 <sub>c</sub>	Sensitive	6.61 <sub>a</sub>	7.13 <sub>b</sub>	8.05 <sub>c</sub>
Competitive	7.47 <sub>a</sub>	7.23 <sub>b</sub>	5.18 <sub>c</sub>	Attn. to appearances	6.48 <sub>a</sub>	7.15 <sub>b</sub>	7.89 <sub>c</sub>
Willing to take risks	7.44 <sub>a</sub>	7.09 <sub>b</sub>	5.87 <sub>c</sub>	Wholesome	6.22 <sub>a</sub>	6.82 <sub>b</sub>	7.24 <sub>c</sub>
*Consistent	7.24 <sub>a</sub>	7.02 <sub>b</sub>	6.84 <sub>b</sub>	Spiritual	5.73 <sub>a</sub>	6.08 <sub>b</sub>	6.36 <sub>c</sub>
Aggressive	6.98 <sub>a</sub>	6.16 <sub>b</sub>	4.41 <sub>c</sub>	Devoted to religion	5.59 <sub>a</sub>	5.87 <sub>b</sub>	5.88 <sub>b</sub>
Intense	6.81 <sub>a</sub>	6.45 <sub>b</sub>	5.44 <sub>c</sub>	Expresses emotion	5.48 <sub>a</sub>	6.06 <sub>b</sub>	7.22 <sub>c</sub>
Forceful	6.58 <sub>a</sub>	5.89 <sub>b</sub>	4.39 <sub>c</sub>	Excitable	4.69 <sub>a</sub>	5.38 <sub>b</sub>	5.79 <sub>c</sub>
<i>Relaxed proscriptions</i>			<i>Intensified proscriptions</i>				
	<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>		<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>
Rebellious	5.31 <sub>a</sub>	4.79 <sub>b</sub>	3.96 <sub>c</sub>	Emotional	4.24 <sub>a</sub>	4.97 <sub>b</sub>	5.73 <sub>c</sub>
*Solemn	5.12 <sub>a</sub>	4.78 <sub>b</sub>	4.45 <sub>b</sub>	Approval seeking	4.22 <sub>a</sub>	4.93 <sub>b</sub>	5.19 <sub>b</sub>
Controlling	4.87 <sub>a</sub>	4.14 <sub>b</sub>	3.19 <sub>c</sub>	Impressionable	4.22 <sub>a</sub>	4.93 <sub>b</sub>	5.19 <sub>c</sub>
Stubborn	4.57 <sub>a</sub>	4.08 <sub>b</sub>	3.46 <sub>c</sub>	Yielding	3.91 <sub>a</sub>	4.31 <sub>b</sub>	6.05 <sub>c</sub>
Promiscuous	4.39 <sub>a</sub>	3.63 <sub>b</sub>	3.02 <sub>c</sub>	Superstitious	3.48 <sub>a</sub>	3.78 <sub>b</sub>	4.12 <sub>c</sub>
Self-righteous	4.35 <sub>a</sub>	4.01 <sub>b</sub>	3.72 <sub>b</sub>	*Child-like	3.33 <sub>a</sub>	3.94 <sub>b</sub>	4.96 <sub>c</sub>
*Jealous	4.07 <sub>a</sub>	3.67 <sub>b</sub>	3.72 <sub>b</sub>	Shy	3.05 <sub>a</sub>	3.51 <sub>b</sub>	4.76 <sub>c</sub>
Arrogant	3.82 <sub>a</sub>	3.33 <sub>b</sub>	2.55 <sub>c</sub>	Moody	2.79 <sub>a</sub>	3.15 <sub>b</sub>	3.29 <sub>b</sub>
				Melodramatic	2.70 <sub>a</sub>	3.64 <sub>b</sub>	4.10 <sub>c</sub>
				Naïve	2.41 <sub>a</sub>	3.04 <sub>b</sub>	4.53 <sub>c</sub>
				Gullible	2.13 <sub>a</sub>	2.63 <sub>b</sub>	3.99 <sub>c</sub>
				Weak	1.69 <sub>a</sub>	2.12 <sub>b</sub>	4.11 <sub>c</sub>

**Note:** *DM* = mean rating of desirability for a man in American society; *DP* = mean rating of desirability for a person in American society; *DW* = mean rating of desirability for a woman in American society. Means are based on *ns* of 177–204. Within each row, means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly at the .01 level. Traits marked with an asterisk did not show corresponding differences in perceived typicality for women and men.

a 2 (Participant Gender) × 2 (Target: woman, man) ANOVA, with Participant Gender as a between-subjects factor and Target as a within-subjects factor. We again set the  $\alpha$  level at .01 for each test. We first consider the results for the 72 traits that differed in desirability for a woman and a man.

*Overlap between desirability differences and typicality differences.* As expected, the majority of traits that were rated as differentially desirable for the two genders were also rated as differentially typical. However, there were exceptions in almost every category (see traits marked with an asterisk in Tables 2 and 3). The majority of these exceptions

were relaxed prescriptions for women. As shown in Table 2, lower desirability did not correspond to lower typicality for 10 of the traits in this category. Relaxed prescriptions for men did not show a similar disjunction between desirability and typicality differences.

*Additional differences in perceived typicality.* A number of traits that did not differ in their desirability for women and men differed, nonetheless, in their perceived typicality. These traits are listed in Table 4, divided on general desirability and whether they were seen as more typical of women or of men. The most striking feature of these results was the large number of desirable traits that were seen as

**Table 4**

Additional Traits that Differed in Typicality for Women and Men in American Society

	<i>More Typical of Women</i>	<i>More Typical of Men</i>
Desirable:	*Concerned for the future	Extroverted
	Has broad interests	Satisfied with life
	Has literary capacity	
	Honest	
	*Intelligent	
	*Mature	
	Open-minded	
	Perfectionistic	
Undesirable:	Self-aware	
	Anxious	Conservative
	Choosy	Forgetful
	Complicated	Lazy
	Materialistic	Prejudiced
	Nosy	Stingy
	Self-critical	Typical

**Note:** Traits marked with an asterisk were rated as more desirable for a man than a woman but more typical of women than men.

more typical of women. These traits were not especially feminine—indeed, three of them (concerned for the future, intelligent, mature) were seen as more desirable for a man. Instead, they were generally desirable traits on which women were perceived to excel. Thus, it appears that women were seen more positively, relative to societal standards, than were men.

### Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with numerous recent demonstrations of the persistence of traditional prescriptive gender stereotypes. The intensified prescriptions and proscriptions for women reflected traditional emphases on interpersonal sensitivity, niceness, modesty, and sociability, whereas the intensified prescriptions and proscriptions for men reflected traditional emphases on strength, drive, assertiveness, and self-reliance. Moreover, the vast majority of these traits showed corresponding differences in the extent to which they were perceived as typical of women and men. Obviously, we cannot infer from this correspondence a causal relation between the prescriptive and the descriptive. Nonetheless, the results indicate that people believe women and men to differ in most of the ways they are supposed to differ.

The same was not true in domains in which gender-related societal imperatives are weaker, at least when it came to the stereotype of women. Many of the relaxed prescriptions for women showed no differences in typicality, and many positive qualities that did not differ in desirability were, nonetheless, seen as more typical of women. In short, women were seen more positively, relative to societal standards, than were men. They were perceived in line

with their traditional feminine role and, in addition, were rated as high as or higher than men on various forms of competence not prescribed for them as women.

An important question to ask about these results is whether they are particular to the population sampled in this study. Our participants were Princeton University undergraduates, not a representative sample of American society by any means. Would the same results obtain with a more representative sample? We believe so. The instructions participants received for rating the desirability of the traits stressed that we were *not* interested in their personal opinions, but rather in their judgments of how society evaluates each of the characteristics. This use of college students as cultural informants has considerable precedent in the literature (e.g., Auster & Ohm, 2000; Bem, 1974; Harris, 1994; Holt & Ellis, 1998). The instructions they received for rating the typicality of the traits asked for their own perceptions of the prevalence of each trait in adult American women and men, and yielded results very similar to studies that have posed these kinds of questions to both student and nonstudent samples (e.g., Diekman & Eagly, 2000). Thus, we have every reason to believe that the results of Study 1 would generalize to more representative samples.

Let us return, then, to the question of why women are perceived to be just as competent as men, even though their gender gives them leeway in this domain. One answer is that they occupy other roles that require competence. Prescriptive gender stereotypes focus on those qualities needed to perform traditional gender roles. As women have moved increasingly into the workplace, they have taken on additional, nontraditional roles. To perform these roles, they need to demonstrate many of the traits that the prescriptive female stereotype deems less important for them than for others—to be highly intelligent, efficient, rational, to have common sense, and so on. However, because they have not entirely given up their feminine roles, they need to demonstrate traditionally feminine characteristics as well. Descriptive stereotypes, as indexed in this study by typicality ratings, reflect this current state of affairs. Women are seen as having the qualities prescribed (and not the qualities proscribed) by their traditional gender roles, and also as having the qualities needed for their nontraditional occupational roles—hence the disjunction between desirability and typicality for relaxed prescriptions. Men, by contrast, do not have competing role demands. The qualities society requires them to have as men are the ones they need to perform the roles they occupy. Therefore, they are under only one set of societal pressures, and demonstrate no disjunction between desirability and typicality (see Diekman & Eagly, 2000, for a similar argument).

But are the traits prescribed and proscribed for women when they occupy nontraditional roles really so different from those mandated by their traditional feminine role? Study 2 sought to address this question by examining the contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes in a traditionally masculine context. The context we chose for this study

was Princeton University. Although Princeton has admitted women for over 30 years and currently has about 50% women in the undergraduate student body, it is still a very masculine place. Moreover, many of the prevailing institutions, norms, and traditions of the university were established during the 220 years before coeducation. Thus, Princeton served as an ideal setting for this study. We asked Princeton undergraduates to rate each of a large pool of traits according to its desirability for a female undergraduate, a male undergraduate, and a person at Princeton. We used these ratings to identify gender-intensified and gender-relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions for students at Princeton. We also collected typicality ratings to assess the degree of correspondence between the prescriptive and descriptive components of gender stereotypes in this context.

## STUDY 2

### Method

#### *Participants*

One hundred twenty-seven Princeton University undergraduates (62 women, 65 men) participated in this study for pay. The sample included 91 participants who identified themselves as Caucasian, 18 as Asian or Asian American, 5 as African or African American, 7 as Hispanic, 1 as Native American, and 5 as fitting into another, unspecified category. Their mean age was 20.02 years.

#### *Materials*

We modified the materials used in Study 1 in three ways. First, we revised the list of 100 traits, eliminating 39 items that were either age- or context-inappropriate (e.g., interested in children) or were insensitive to target gender in Study 1 (e.g., forgetful). In their place, we added an equal number of items that emerged from pilot studies as desirable and/or typical of Princeton women, men, or both. Among these additional traits were fun, spoiled, likable, popular, concerned with grades, career-oriented, socially inept, and able to succeed without effort. The resulting list contained 100 traits appropriate for use with college-student targets.

We also modified the instructions for the five ratings tasks. For the desirability ratings, the instructions asked participants to indicate “how desirable it is at Princeton for a male undergraduate to possess each of these characteristics,” “how desirable it is at Princeton for a female undergraduate to possess each of these characteristics,” and “how desirable it is at Princeton University for a person to possess each of these characteristics,” using the same 1 to 9 scales as in Study 1. The instructions for these three tasks emphasized that we were not interested in their personal opinions about the desirability of each of these characteristics; rather we wanted their judgment of how the culture at Princeton University evaluates each of these characteristics.

For the typicality ratings, the instructions asked participants to indicate, “how typical you think each one of the following characteristics is for undergraduate males at Princeton” and “how typical you think each one of the following characteristics is for undergraduate females at Princeton,” again using the same 1 to 9 scales as in Study 1.

Finally, we eliminated some of the demographic questions used in Study 1 and concluded the second questionnaire with a single page that asked participants to report their age, gender, and ethnicity. In all other respects, the questionnaires were identical to those used in Study 1.

#### *Procedure*

The procedure was identical to that used in Study 1. Each participant completed a self-rating questionnaire and a stereotype-rating questionnaire, and received \$6 in compensation.

### Results

#### *Categorization of Traits*

To identify the gender-intensified and gender-relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions for women and men at Princeton University, we conducted the same analyses as in Study 1. Initial 2 (Participant Gender)  $\times$  3 (Target: woman, man, person) ANOVAs revealed significant main effects of Target for 63 traits. For 56 of the 63, followup *t* tests revealed significant differences between ratings of desirability for a female undergraduate and a male undergraduate.<sup>2</sup> For each trait, we examined the *t* test comparing desirability for a female undergraduate and a person at Princeton; they showed significant differences for 50 of the traits. We divided these 50 traits into those high in general desirability ( $n = 34$ ) and those low in general desirability ( $n = 16$ ), and then categorized each as an intensified prescription, a relaxed prescription, an intensified proscription, or a relaxed proscription for Princeton women, using the same criteria we used in Study 1. The traits that fell into each of these categories and their mean ratings of desirability are shown in Table 5.

We carried out an analogous procedure to identify the traits in each of these categories for Princeton men. For the 56 traits that showed differences in desirability for a female undergraduate and a male undergraduate, we examined the *t* tests comparing desirability for a male undergraduate and a person at Princeton; they showed significant differences for only 14 of the traits. We divided these 14 traits into those high in general desirability ( $n = 7$ ) and those low in general desirability ( $n = 7$ ), and then categorized each as an intensified prescription, a relaxed prescription, an intensified proscription, or a relaxed proscription for Princeton men. The traits that fell into each of these categories and their mean ratings of desirability are shown in Table 6.

The most striking feature of the results was the small number of traits that appeared in any category for Princeton



**Table 5**  
Intensified and Relaxed Prescriptions and Proscriptions for Women at Princeton University

<i>Intensified prescriptions</i>			<i>Relaxed prescriptions</i>				
	<i>DFU</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DMU</i>		<i>DFU</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DMU</i>
Friendly	7.78 <sub>a</sub>	7.47 <sub>b</sub>	7.42 <sub>b</sub>	*Intelligent	7.82 <sub>a</sub>	8.34 <sub>b</sub>	8.11 <sub>b</sub>
Cheerful	7.51 <sub>a</sub>	7.17 <sub>b</sub>	6.70 <sub>c</sub>	*Active	7.61 <sub>a</sub>	7.90 <sub>b</sub>	7.92 <sub>b</sub>
Attn. to appearances	7.42 <sub>a</sub>	7.07 <sub>b</sub>	6.76 <sub>b</sub>	*Competent	7.48 <sub>a</sub>	8.08 <sub>b</sub>	7.90 <sub>b</sub>
Warm & kind	7.42 <sub>a</sub>	6.82 <sub>b</sub>	6.55 <sub>c</sub>	Confident	7.28 <sub>a</sub>	7.89 <sub>b</sub>	7.92 <sub>b</sub>
Approachable	7.32 <sub>a</sub>	6.88 <sub>b</sub>	6.98 <sub>b</sub>	*Articulate	7.27 <sub>a</sub>	7.81 <sub>b</sub>	7.58 <sub>b</sub>
Compassionate	7.24 <sub>a</sub>	6.56 <sub>b</sub>	6.39 <sub>b</sub>	Athletic	7.21 <sub>a</sub>	7.77 <sub>b</sub>	7.89 <sub>b</sub>
Sensitive	7.09 <sub>a</sub>	6.66 <sub>b</sub>	6.46 <sub>b</sub>	High self-esteem	7.17 <sub>a</sub>	7.58 <sub>b</sub>	7.76 <sub>b</sub>
*Agreeable	7.05 <sub>a</sub>	6.72 <sub>b</sub>	6.65 <sub>b</sub>	Strong personality	7.10 <sub>a</sub>	7.52 <sub>b</sub>	7.59 <sub>b</sub>
*Playful	7.05 <sub>a</sub>	6.60 <sub>b</sub>	6.54 <sub>b</sub>	Goal-oriented	6.88 <sub>a</sub>	7.65 <sub>b</sub>	7.59 <sub>b</sub>
Patient	6.85 <sub>a</sub>	6.31 <sub>b</sub>	6.27 <sub>b</sub>	Ambitious	6.76 <sub>a</sub>	7.61 <sub>b</sub>	7.75 <sub>b</sub>
Expresses emotion	5.95 <sub>a</sub>	5.13 <sub>b</sub>	4.96 <sub>b</sub>	Rational	6.74 <sub>a</sub>	7.17 <sub>b</sub>	7.11 <sub>b</sub>
				Career-oriented	6.60 <sub>a</sub>	7.65 <sub>b</sub>	7.64 <sub>b</sub>
				Leadership ability	6.45 <sub>a</sub>	7.70 <sub>b</sub>	7.58 <sub>b</sub>
				Self-reliant	6.39 <sub>a</sub>	7.42 <sub>b</sub>	7.45 <sub>b</sub>
				Decisive	6.29 <sub>a</sub>	7.29 <sub>b</sub>	7.49 <sub>b</sub>
				Assertive	6.26 <sub>a</sub>	7.13 <sub>b</sub>	7.24 <sub>b</sub>
				Willing to take risks	6.08 <sub>a</sub>	6.74 <sub>b</sub>	6.84 <sub>b</sub>
				Business sense	6.03 <sub>a</sub>	7.38 <sub>b</sub>	7.58 <sub>b</sub>
				Succeed w/o effort	5.96 <sub>a</sub>	6.62 <sub>b</sub>	6.62 <sub>b</sub>
				Competitive	5.86 <sub>a</sub>	7.00 <sub>b</sub>	6.95 <sub>b</sub>
				*Over-achieving	5.84 <sub>a</sub>	6.77 <sub>b</sub>	6.59 <sub>b</sub>
				Outspoken	5.62 <sub>a</sub>	6.26 <sub>b</sub>	6.52 <sub>b</sub>
				Aggressive	4.42 <sub>a</sub>	5.76 <sub>b</sub>	6.05 <sub>b</sub>
<i>Relaxed proscriptions</i>			<i>Intensified proscriptions</i>				
	<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>		<i>DW</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DM</i>
Emotional	5.31 <sub>a</sub>	4.59 <sub>b</sub>	4.35 <sub>b</sub>	Intimidating	3.59 <sub>a</sub>	4.61 <sub>b</sub>	4.82 <sub>b</sub>
Yielding	5.06 <sub>a</sub>	3.97 <sub>b</sub>	3.87 <sub>b</sub>	Cynical	3.87 <sub>a</sub>	4.35 <sub>b</sub>	4.46 <sub>b</sub>
Dependent	4.35 <sub>a</sub>	3.86 <sub>b</sub>	3.46 <sub>b</sub>	Domineering	3.19 <sub>a</sub>	3.95 <sub>b</sub>	4.41 <sub>c</sub>
Shy	3.78 <sub>a</sub>	3.21 <sub>b</sub>	2.87 <sub>c</sub>	Stubborn	3.66 <sub>a</sub>	4.45 <sub>b</sub>	4.28 <sub>b</sub>
Naïve	4.18 <sub>a</sub>	3.14 <sub>b</sub>	2.75 <sub>c</sub>	Self-righteous	3.64 <sub>a</sub>	4.23 <sub>b</sub>	4.22 <sub>b</sub>
Gullible	3.78 <sub>a</sub>	3.05 <sub>b</sub>	2.52 <sub>c</sub>	Arrogant	3.03 <sub>a</sub>	4.01 <sub>b</sub>	4.09 <sub>b</sub>
Insecure	3.08 <sub>a</sub>	2.42 <sub>b</sub>	2.08 <sub>c</sub>	Ruthless	2.68 <sub>a</sub>	3.36 <sub>b</sub>	3.68 <sub>b</sub>
Weak	3.07 <sub>a</sub>	1.92 <sub>b</sub>	1.60 <sub>c</sub>	Insensitive	2.70 <sub>a</sub>	3.12 <sub>b</sub>	3.19 <sub>b</sub>

**Note:** *DFU* = mean rating of desirability for a female undergraduate at Princeton; *DP* = mean rating of desirability for a person at Princeton; *DMU* = mean rating of desirability for a male undergraduate at Princeton. Means are based on *ns* of 119–127. Within each row, means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly at the .01 level. Traits marked with an asterisk showed no difference in perceived typicality for Princeton women and men.

men. With the exception of a handful of female-oriented traits, some relaxed prescriptions and others intensified proscriptions, there was close to perfect overlap between what was desirable for a male undergraduate at Princeton and what was desirable for a person at Princeton. The same was not true for Princeton women. Here, the results looked very similar to the results of Study 1. In particular, they revealed a long list of relaxed prescriptions for Princeton women that included being intelligent, competent, ambitious, goal-oriented, and many other qualities critical for success at the university. These traits were not especially desirable for Princeton men; they were simply less desirable for Princeton women. Indeed, there was little overlap be-

tween the complementary categories for the two genders, largely because so few traits appeared in any category for Princeton men.

*Differences in Perceived Typicality*

We were also interested in the extent to which differences in the desirability of the traits for Princeton women and men were matched by differences in their perceived typicality. For each of the 100 traits, we analyzed ratings of typicality for female undergraduates and male undergraduates using a 2 (Participant Gender) × 2 (Target: female, male) ANOVA, with the  $\alpha$  level set at .01 for each test. We first consider

**Table 6**  
Intensified and Relaxed Prescriptions and Proscriptions for Men at Princeton University

<i>Intensified prescriptions</i>			<i>Relaxed prescriptions</i>				
<i>DMU</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DFU</i>	<i>DMU</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DFU</i>		
			*Energetic	7.31 <sub>a</sub>	7.57 <sub>b</sub>	7.60 <sub>c</sub>	
			Enthusiastic	6.74 <sub>a</sub>	7.33 <sub>b</sub>	7.38 <sub>c</sub>	
			Cheerful	6.40 <sub>a</sub>	7.17 <sub>b</sub>	7.51 <sub>c</sub>	
			Warm & kind	6.55 <sub>a</sub>	6.82 <sub>b</sub>	7.42 <sub>c</sub>	
			Creative	6.31 <sub>a</sub>	6.85 <sub>b</sub>	6.81 <sub>b</sub>	
			Concerned w/image	5.80 <sub>a</sub>	6.23 <sub>b</sub>	6.29 <sub>b</sub>	
			Idealistic	5.61 <sub>a</sub>	6.03 <sub>b</sub>	6.05 <sub>b</sub>	
<i>Relaxed proscriptions</i>			<i>Intensified proscriptions</i>				
<i>DMU</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DFU</i>	<i>DMU</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>DFU</i>		
Domineering	4.41 <sub>a</sub>	3.95 <sub>b</sub>	3.19 <sub>c</sub>	*Melodramatic	2.99 <sub>a</sub>	3.72 <sub>b</sub>	3.85 <sub>b</sub>
				Shy	2.87 <sub>a</sub>	3.21 <sub>b</sub>	3.78 <sub>c</sub>
				Naïve	2.75 <sub>a</sub>	3.14 <sub>b</sub>	4.18 <sub>c</sub>
				Gullible	2.52 <sub>a</sub>	3.05 <sub>b</sub>	3.78 <sub>c</sub>
				Insecure	2.08 <sub>a</sub>	2.42 <sub>b</sub>	3.08 <sub>c</sub>
				Weak	1.60 <sub>a</sub>	1.92 <sub>b</sub>	3.07 <sub>c</sub>

**Note:** *DMU* = mean rating of desirability for a male undergraduate at Princeton; *DP* = mean rating of desirability for a person at Princeton; *DFU* = mean rating of desirability for a female undergraduate at Princeton. Means are based on *ns* of 119–127. Within each row, means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly at the .01 level. Traits marked with an asterisk showed no difference in perceived typicality for Princeton women and men.

the results for the 56 traits that differed in desirability for female and male undergraduates.

*Overlap between desirability differences and typicality differences.* As in Study 1, most of the traits that were rated as differentially desirable for the two genders were also rated as differentially typical (exceptions are marked with an asterisk in Tables 5 and 6). Again, most of the exceptions were relaxed prescriptions for Princeton women. Given that this category included the qualities most critical for success at the university, the absence of typicality differences for some of these traits is not surprising.

*Additional differences in perceived typicality.* Many traits that did not differ in their desirability for female and male undergraduates differed, nonetheless, in their perceived typicality. These traits are listed in Table 7. Again, the most striking feature of these results was the large number of desirable traits that were seen as more typical of Princeton women. These traits were not especially feminine, but instead were generally desirable traits on which women excelled. Here we have still further evidence that women were seen more positively, relative to campus standards, than were men.

### Discussion

The results of this study confirmed our assumption that Princeton is a very masculine place. What was desirable

for a male undergraduate overlapped so extensively with what was desirable for a person at Princeton that there was little evidence of any gender-specific imperatives for men. The exceptions were a small cluster of relaxed prescriptions and another of intensified proscriptions, similar to those identified in Study 1 (given differences in the trait lists used in the two studies). Thus, to the extent that there was any prescriptive stereotype of men in this context, it reflected leeway on feminine strengths and vigilance on feminine weaknesses.

The results for women, by contrast, replicated quite closely the results of Study 1. In particular, the contents of the four categories were very similar (again, given differences in the trait lists used in the two studies). There was a long list of relaxed prescriptions, some stereotypically masculine but many not. This category showed the most divergence between desirability differences and typicality differences. And there was a very long list of positive traits that were seen as more typical of Princeton women than men, though no more desirable for women than men. Taken together, the results suggest that at Princeton, like in American society more generally, women are held to different standards than men—higher social standards and lower achievement standards. This difference in the desirability of achievement is not mirrored by perceived reality, in that women are perceived as equal, and sometimes superior, to men on most achievement-related traits. But even in this highly masculine context, where competence and agency are very desirable and, indeed, are required

**Table 7**

Additional Traits that Differed in Typicality for Women and Men at Princeton University

	<i>More Typical of Women</i>	<i>More Typical of Men</i>
Desirable:	Concerned with grades Cooperative Conscientious Dependable Enthusiastic Generous Hard-working Helpful Honest Humble Likable Mature Open-minded Optimistic Perfectionistic Polite Respectful Self-aware Well-rounded	Consistent Relaxed Sense of humor Traditional
Undesirable:	Anxious Choosy Complicated Materialistic Moody Self-critical Spoiled Superficial	Controlling Detached Lazy Political Self-serving Socially inept

for success, qualities like intelligence, competence, rationality, and ambition are still systematically less desirable for women.

In closing, two methodological features of this study deserve further comment. First, we tailored the trait list used in this study to the target groups—specifically, male and female college students at Princeton. The decision to do so was based on the assumption that gender stereotypes, both prescriptive and descriptive, vary across age groups and contexts. For students to express their stereotypes of Princeton women and men, the trait list needed to include the qualities those target groups are supposed to have and do have, qualities that are particular to their life circumstances. The use of a target-specific trait list enabled us to capture more precisely the contents of gender stereotypes of Princeton students, but compromised our ability to compare gender stereotypes across groups and contexts. Because our primary interest was in the contents of these stereotypes, we opted for the target-specific list (see McHugh & Frieze, 1997 for a discussion of this and related measurement issues). Second, although we have emphasized the context-specificity of this study, we would expect to find similar

results on most college campuses. The importance of agency and instrumentality at Princeton does not stem solely from its historically male status; it is a property of colleges and universities in general. Thus, it is likely that masculine qualities are the norm on most campuses.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous analyses of prescriptive gender stereotypes have focused on the positive traits that individuals are supposed to have by virtue of their gender. In the present research, we broadened that focus to include negative, as well as positive, traits. We also sought to distinguish the traits for which there are especially strong societal imperatives for one gender from those for which there are especially relaxed societal imperatives for the other gender by using the general desirability of each trait as a benchmark against which to compare its gender-specific desirability. This analysis generated four categories of traits for each gender, rather than the single list of prescribed traits generated in earlier research (e.g., Bem, 1981). These categories included the qualities that one should not have, as well as those one should have; they also included the domains of leeway granted by virtue of one's gender. This scheme captures well the complexity of prescriptive gender stereotypes.

Of course, complexity is not, in itself, a virtue; however, in this case, it has the potential to shed light on a number of enduring issues in the study of gender stereotypes. One of these issues concerns reactions to individuals who violate these stereotypes. Research on perceptions of gender stereotype deviants has noted three distinct types of reactions. In some cases, they are assimilated to the stereotype of their gender, and the violation goes unnoticed (e.g., Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993; Madon, Jussim, Keiper, Eccles, Smith, & Palumbo, 1998). In other cases, they are punished for their violation, through negative evaluations, attempts to modify the offending behavior, and social isolation (Butler & Geis, 1990; Costrich, Feinstein, Kidder, Marecek, & Pascal, 1975; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999; Tepper, Brown, & Hunt, 1993). And in a few cases, they are rewarded for their violation, in that they receive more positive evaluations than do stereotype-conforming members of the other gender (Bettencourt, Dill, Greathouse, Charlton, & Mulholland, 1997; see also Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987).

Our four-category framework can help to account for these divergent results. We begin with the assumption that assimilation to the stereotype is the default for minor violations (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996), and thus, most of these are likely to go unnoticed. When a violation is noticed, reactions depend critically on the nature of the traits involved. Violations that involve gender-intensified prescriptions or proscriptions elicit punishment. Women who fail to be nice and interested in children or, worse yet, show signs of being arrogant and controlling are subject to social censure. Likewise, men who fail to be strong and self-reliant or, worse yet,

show signs of gullibility and naivete are also punished. Indeed, we would expect the harshest treatment to go to those who are perceived to defy gender-intensified proscriptions. This type of violation is severe, in that it typically entails both a manifestation of undesirable traits especially proscribed for one's gender and a failure to manifest desirable traits especially prescribed for one's gender. Many examples of the punishment of women in masculine roles seem to fall into this category. For example, Rudman's (1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999) demonstrations of backlash against agentic women involve targets who not only violate feminine niceness prescriptions but also show signs of arrogance.

Violations that involve only relaxed prescriptions or proscriptions, on the other hand, may elicit rewards. Women who are strong and sensible, competent and effective should receive very favorable reactions, so long as they remain caring, modest, and well-groomed (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Similarly, men who are warm and kind, optimistic and creative also should receive very favorable reactions, so long as they remain ambitious, goal-oriented, and decisive. Of course, it is not easy to be competent and effective without offending anyone's sensibilities, nor to be warm and creative without taking one's eye off the instrumental goal. Moreover, women have to perform better than men do to be perceived as competent in the first place (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Foschi, 1996; see Foschi, 2000 for a review), and the same may be true for men to be perceived as warm. But to the extent that violations of gender stereotypes are perceived to demonstrate androgyny, rather than deviance—to the extent that they involve manifestation of desirable qualities in domains of societal leeway—they should be evaluated positively (see Prentice & Carranza, in press, for a more extended discussion).

A second issue for which our framework has implications is sex discrimination. Recent analyses of the role gender stereotypes play in producing sex discrimination have noted that different components of these stereotypes lead to different forms of discrimination, through distinct psychological mechanisms (see Fiske et al., 1991; Glick & Fiske, 1999). For example, Burgess and Borgida (1999) argued that the prescriptive and descriptive components of the female stereotype lead to discrimination of very different types. The descriptive component leads to discrimination through disparate impact, whereby women are assimilated to the stereotype and thus seen as unqualified for stereotypically masculine occupations. The prescriptive component leads to discrimination through disparate treatment, whereby women are devalued or treated with hostility because they violate prescriptions about how women should behave.

Our framework suggests an additional distinction between categories within the prescriptive component. Specifically, it suggests that whereas gender-intensified prescriptions and proscriptions lead to discrimination through disparate treatment, gender-relaxed prescriptions and proscriptions lead to discrimination through disparate stan-

dards. Women in masculine roles, like our Princeton female undergraduates, are not just held to higher (irrelevant) standards of feminine niceness than are their male counterparts; they are also not held to equally high (relevant) standards of agency and achievement. If they show high levels of intelligence, competence, rationality, and ambition, that is good—these qualities are certainly desirable for Princeton women. But if they do not, that is not so bad—not as bad as if Princeton men failed to demonstrate high levels of these qualities. Do these disparate standards constitute discrimination against women? We believe they do. In a context in which achievement is paramount, the leeway given to women on achievement-related traits is no favor. Instead, it reflects “the soft bigotry of low expectations,” to borrow a phrase used by President George W. Bush to describe the treatment of ethnic minority students in the classroom. The fact that Princeton women are perceived as equal or even superior to Princeton men on most of these traits does not render the disparate standards any less discriminatory.

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## NOTES

1. For three of the traits—anxious, extroverted, and playful—main effects of Target were qualified by significant Participant Gender X Target interactions. In all three cases, differences between targets were significant for one gender but not for the other. These traits were eliminated from consideration.
2. For one of the traits—controlling—a main effect of Target was qualified by a significant Participant Gender X Target interaction: The differences between targets were significant for one gender but not for the other. This trait was eliminated from consideration.

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