



Vocational interests, personality, and sociosexuality as indicators of a general masculinity/femininity factor[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Several individual difference domains include variables that show substantial sex differences and may be considered indicators of masculinity/femininity (M/F). We examined the structure of gender-related characteristics from three domains (vocational interests, personality characteristics, and sociosexually relevant sexual fantasies) to determine whether a general factor of M/F can be derived even when participant sex is controlled, and if so, which domains and which variables within those domains are the best indicators of that factor. In a sample of 198 undergraduate students, we found strong intercorrelations between indicators of M/F across domains in the combined-sex sample but only weak intercorrelations within sex. The results also indicated that a general masculinity/femininity factor could be obtained, even when participant sex was controlled, and was defined more strongly by personality characteristics and sociosexuality of sexual fantasies than by vocational interests.

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1. Introduction

For several decades, psychologists have attempted to understand and to measure the constructs of masculinity and femininity (see Lippa, 2001, for a review). Several bipolar masculinity-versus-femininity scales were developed in the mid-20th century, using vocational interest items (Strong, 1936), personality items (e.g., Guilford & Zimmerman, 1956), and items representing a wide range of psychological characteristics (Terman & Miles, 1936). In the 1970s, researchers conceptualized masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions, and constructed scales to reflect this conceptualization (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974). More recently, Lippa (2001) has rehabilitated the concept of a single bipolar M/F dimension, and has measured it using vocational interest items that are highly “gender diagnostic”, showing large sex differences. The resulting scales have been largely independent of personality characteristics, even though those latter characteristics also show some sex differences.

In the present research, we examine potential indicators of M/F from three different domains: vocational interests, personality characteristics, and sexual fantasies. We investigate whether these variables define a general factor of M/F and whether that higher-order factor can be recovered even when participant sex is controlled. Previous work by Lippa

(1998) has suggested that M/F as assessed by vocational interests is only moderately associated with personality characteristics, even with those that do show sex differences. Here, we investigate M/F in terms of both of the above domains as well as a third domain in which important sex differences are both expected and observed, namely, that of sociosexuality, which we assess through participants' sexual fantasies. In particular, we examine the question of whether indicators of M/F from each of these three domains will define a general M/F factor, and we compare the three domains in the extent to which they define this factor.

Any given measure of M/F would be expected to show substantial sex differences. But because M/F is also conceptualized as showing wide variation within sexes, it is important to analyze the relations among potential indicators of M/F both with and without controls for participant sex. Valid measures of M/F should be substantially intercorrelated not only because of the effects of participant sex, but also because of an underlying M/F tendency that operates within sexes. In the present research, we examine the extent to which the indicators of M/F from the various domains can define a general M/F factor even when participant sex is controlled.

1.1. Masculinity/femininity of vocational interests

Research has shown consistent sex differences in vocational interests (Johansson & Harmon, 1972), with especially large differences along Prediger's (1982) People–Things dimension (Lippa, 1998; Su, Rounds, & Armstrong, 2009), with women showing more interest in

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people-oriented careers and men showing more interest in things-oriented careers. Because of the large sex differences in these areas of vocational interest, the People–Things dimension can itself be used as an index of masculinity and femininity. Lippa (1998) developed a measure of M/F—the Gender Diagnosticity scale—using a variety of vocational interest items that differentiate men and women, including many items that represent the People–Things dimension. Lippa found that this Gender Diagnosticity scale predicted sexual orientation (Lippa, 2002) and self-ratings of M/F (Lippa, 1991) better than did personality-based M/F scales and was independent of the Big Five personality factors.

Lippa (2005a) analyzed various subdomains of “masculine” and “feminine” vocational interests (e.g., blue-collar realistic, educated realistic, flashy risk-taking, fashion-related, artistic, helping, and children-related) and concluded that these variables defined a single bipolar dimension of masculine versus feminine occupational interests even when data were analyzed separately by sex. Ashton and Lee (2008) re-examined the structure of gender-related occupational interests in a new sample, and found that occupational interest scales did not define a larger factor of masculinity–femininity within sexes and that the gender-related subscales were uncorrelated within sex. In the current study, we further examine the within-sex structure of gender-related occupational interests, and also examine whether these variables are related to other indicators of masculinity/femininity, specifically, personality characteristics and sociosexuality.

1.2. Masculinity/femininity of personality (agency and communion)

Agency and communion have been proposed as fundamental personality traits that differentiate men and women (Bakan, 1966). Agency is exhibited through characteristics such as self-assertion, personal competency, and goal orientation which are viewed as stereotypically male. Communion is exhibited through characteristics such as selflessness, a desire to be at one with others, social–emotional sensitivity, and interpersonal orientation, which are viewed as stereotypically female. Similarly, unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion are considered the extreme, socially undesirable ends of these personality characteristics (e.g., Buss, 1990). Early research was based on the assumption that agentic and communal traits were opposite and bipolar, but subsequent research has suggested that individuals can have both agentic and communal traits (e.g., Block, 1973) and that within sex, correlations between scales measuring agentic and communal traits (or masculine and feminine characteristics more generally) are close to zero (e.g., Bem, 1974). However, the lack of negative correlations between agentic (or masculine) and communal (or feminine) traits in single-sex samples may result from socially desirable item content in both scales which may counteract what would otherwise be a negative correlation between masculine and feminine characteristics (Jackson & Paunonen, 1980). In the present research, we include both socially desirable and socially undesirable variants of agentic and communal traits, so that masculinity/femininity of personality can be examined independent of social desirability.

1.3. Masculinity/femininity of sociosexuality

Sociosexuality (e.g., Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) refers to the willingness to have sexual relations outside the context of an emotionally committed relationship. In the present study, we assess sociosexuality through sexual fantasy preferences. Unlike sexual behaviors, which may be constrained by the preferences of potential partners and by moral considerations, sexual fantasies can provide a relatively pure indication of basic sexual motivations (Ellis & Symons, 1990; Wilson, 1997). Although preferences for sociosexually relevant sexual fantasies have not been used specifically as indicators of masculinity/femininity, research has shown that there are large sex differences in sexual fantasy preferences (e.g., Ellis & Symons, 1990; Hicks & Leitenberg, 2001;

Wilson, 1987). These differences are consistent with evolutionary interpretations of human behavior in which men are expected to be more sociosexually unrestricted than women (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Given that these theoretically expected sex differences in sociosexuality have been consistently observed in empirical research (e.g., Schmitt, 2005), sociosexually relevant sexual fantasy themes are reasonable indicators of masculinity/femininity.

1.4. The current study

The purpose of this study is to examine masculinity/femininity as measured by vocational interests, personality characteristics (agency and communion), and sociosexuality. We investigate whether these domains define a general factor of M/F even when participant sex is controlled. Further, given the use of vocational interests as a proxy measure of M/F in previous research, we will focus especially on the extent to which this construct defines any such general M/F factor. This research builds on previous work by further exploring the measurement of M/F within sex and by evaluating the importance of different aspects of M/F in the definition of a general M/F factor.

We examined two questions: Does there exist a higher order masculinity/femininity factor within each sex, or is this factor merely a function of sex differences? And if this factor does exist within sexes, is it defined strongly by all three domains?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Two hundred students (100 men, 100 women) at a Canadian university participated for course credit or \$20. Data from two male participants were excluded because of obviously fabricated responses. Other data from this sample were used in other studies examining self-objectification (Bogaert, Visser, & Pozzebon, 2015; Choma et al., 2010) and psychopathy (Visser, DeBow, Pozzebon, Bogaert, & Book, 2014; Visser, Pozzebon, Bogaert, & Ashton, 2010). Ages of the 198 participants ranged from 18 to 32 years ($M = 19.80$, $SD = 2.17$).

2.2. Procedure

Participants were tested in small same-sex groups of 3 to 10 in a room where each was seated in a private, curtained enclosure.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Personal Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ)

The extended 24-item EPAQ (Spence et al., 1974), includes three subscales: agency (focus on self), communion (focus on others), and unmitigated agency (extreme focus on self to the exclusion of others). These constructs reflect typically masculine (agency and unmitigated agency) and feminine (communion) characteristics. Participants responded to each item on a five-point scale (e.g., *Not at all Arrogant* to *Very Arrogant*).

2.3.2. Unmitigated Communion Scale (Korabik & McCreary, 2000)

This eight-item scale measures unmitigated communion (the extreme focus on others to the exclusion of the self [e.g., *I find myself getting overly involved in other people's problems*]). This construct is thought to reflect a typically feminine characteristic. Participants responded on a five-point scale (*not at all like me* to *very much like me*).

These four personality scales (agency, communion, unmitigated agency, and unmitigated communion) were treated as subscales of a broader masculinity/femininity personality factor. The general M/F personality scale was computed by finding the mean across the agency and unmitigated agency items, and then subtracting the mean across the communion and unmitigated communion items, such that high scores

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