

2024

How men's responses to gender-atypical jobs entrench occupational segregation

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
QUESTROM SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Dissertation

**HOW MEN'S RESPONSES TO GENDER-ATYPICAL JOBS
ENTRENCH OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever grateful to the mentors, friends, and family members who have supported me throughout this dissertation and over the course of my PhD program.

First and foremost, I am profoundly grateful to my advisor, Evan Apfelbaum. Thank you for always being the biggest advocate for me, providing all the support, guidance, and affirmation I needed to keep striving and expanding my comfort zone. I cannot express the many ways you have shaped me and molded me into the scholar and person I am today. From you, I learned how to craft my first Qualtrics survey, my first manuscript, my first submission, my first response letter, and my first research talk. You have embodied the agency and confidence that inspires me to remain resilient. Under your guidance over the past years, I became a more confident and self-assured individual, a theoretical and discerning scholar, and a proactive and outspoken researcher. You have been an amazing advisor and advocate, and I hope to be the kind of mentor to my mentees that you have been to me. I have no doubt that our relationship will only continue to grow stronger as I move on to the next stage of my career. Thank you so much!

I also want to express my gratitude toward my dissertation committee members: Kristin Smith-Crowe, Sanaz Mobasseri, and Michael Norton. Your support and guidance have been invaluable to me. Kristin, thank you for always genuinely caring about me. You have given me countless hours of your time and endless support, making me more resilient, empowered, and perseverant. Sanaz, you have always given me the push I needed to take a more critical and theoretical lens of my own work, and I cannot thank

you enough for your willingness to lend an ear, no matter the circumstances. Mike, thank you for your critical eye and insightful feedback. I appreciate your making time to be there for me even when you were incredibly busy. This dissertation would have been possible without you. Thank you all so much, truly!

There are many other faculty members, although not officially on my dissertation committee, who have served as mentors to me. Celia Chui, I feel incredibly lucky to have met you during my PhD journey. From the first time we met, you have seen me, encouraged me, and supported me constantly in my growth. I hope to be the type of collaborator and friend to you that you have been to me. I cannot wait to further advance our cool projects together. I am also grateful for the faculty members of the M&O behavioral lab. Charles Chu, thank you for being a caring and supportive mentor, and Oriane Georgeac, for guiding me step-by-step to polish my research talk. I especially want to thank all of you for your support during a wild job market year. I cannot even begin to express how incredibly grateful and blessed I feel to have all of you behind my back. Beyond these individuals, I am grateful for the remaining members of the Management and Organizations (M&O) department at Questrom. I am immensely grateful, for the knowledge, training, and support I have received.

To my friends, I could not have made it through PhD without you. To my climbing crew, the trust and friendship we built through belaying each other and our countless visits to Shabuzen are treasures I will always cherish. I especially want to thank Joanne Hynn for feeding me, pulling me out of my lows, and keeping me (somewhat) sane. I also thank my wine club. The endless conversations we had over ridiculous

amount of food (and wine) brought joys to my days. I feel so incredibly fortunate to have met and made memories with all of you during my time in Boston.

Last but not least, I am eternally grateful to my family for their unwavering support. To my parents, who have always encouraged me to follow my passion: my mother, for empowering me and always being my biggest supporter through every decision, and my father, my steadfast rock, for fueling my curiosity, prioritizing my education, and imbuing me with strength and wisdom. I am deeply grateful to you both for your never-ending patience, understanding, and love. Inhyuk, you have shown me the true strength of sibling bonds. I am able to pursue my passion here in the U.S. because I know you are taking care of our parents well in my absence. I love you all so truly and deeply.

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on occupational gender segregation has almost exclusively focused on women's experiences (e.g., as targets of discrimination in masculine domains), yet understanding factors that perpetuate men's underrepresentation in traditionally feminine occupations is equally important. In my dissertation, I examine a consequential dynamic early in the job search process in which individuals come to learn that an occupation that fits them is perceived as stereotypically feminine versus masculine. Specifically, I develop and test the prediction that the perceived femininity or masculinity of occupations will exert a stronger impact on men's (versus women's) interest in them, such that men will be less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women. Across six studies ($N = 4,914$), I consistently observed robust evidence for this prediction among diverse samples, including high school students, unemployed job seekers, US adults, and undergraduates, and using experimental and archival methods. I observed this asymmetry after controlling for alternative accounts related to economic factors (e.g., expected salary), suggesting that they alone cannot fully explain men's lack of interest in feminine occupations, as previously discussed in the literature. Further, I consistently observed that men, compared to women, show heightened sensitivity to gender-based occupational

status, and men's greater sensitivity to gender-based occupational segregation explains men's (versus women's) reduced interest in gender-atypical occupations. Notably, an intervention aimed at addressing men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status effectively increased their interest in a traditionally feminine occupation. Though past scholarship suggests that increasing pay is key to stoking men's interest in feminine occupations, this research suggests that targeting men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status may be an underappreciated pathway to reducing gender segregation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The average woman is very pleased if she has any understanding of any such male terrain as the engine of a car, but there are still a good many men around whose claim not to know where to find anything in the kitchen is really a boast about their never demeaning themselves with women's work. Women on the tube are happy to be seen reading City newspaper, but no man would dream of knitting in public as some women do (Richards, 1980, p. 157).

It has been more than four decades since Janet Radcliffe Richards' classic study of feminism, yet her observations continue to resonate. Recently, a faculty member who advises undergraduate students in the medical field shared one telling example. He described a meeting with a male student in which he had begun describing a career path that seemed to match the student's preferences. With each additional factoid, the student's interest grew: close access to patient care, ability to specialize, and strong projected job growth. He was on the edge of his seat, brimming with enthusiasm until the faculty member revealed that the job he had described was that of a nurse practitioner. The student shrank back, and after some deliberation, indicated that he did not find this job particularly appealing and, despite the faculty member's offer to provide more materials, did not want to receive more information about it. In reflecting on this encounter, the faculty member noted that he had experienced many similar conversations with male students over the years, yet this rarely happened with female students he advised.

In my dissertation, I spotlight a highly consequential class of situations during the early job search process, as illustrated by this anecdote, in which individuals come to

learn that an occupation that fits them is perceived as stereotypically feminine versus masculine.¹ My research develops and tests the prediction that men and women respond to this same experience in different ways that may perpetuate occupational segregation. Specifically, I propose that when men learn that an occupation that matches their preferences is perceived as stereotypically feminine (versus masculine), their subsequent interest in it will decline to a greater degree than when women learn that an occupation that fits them is masculine (versus feminine).

In highlighting the role of men's choices, this present research advances a critical yet relatively underexplored narrative that plays an important role in the broader problem of gender inequality. Specifically, the lion's share of scholarship regarding gender segregation—the tendency for men and women to work in systematically different occupations (Reskin and Bielby 2005)—has focused on *women's* experiences and behaviors (e.g., as targets of discrimination, biased perceptions, and gendered expectations, or as the targets for interventions seeking to overcome these obstacles). This focus on women's experiences is of vital importance as women continue to face numerous obstacles when entering male-dominated occupations. However, because both women's *and* men's decisions about which occupations to pursue can perpetuate gender segregation, identifying those factors that drive men's underrepresentation in traditionally

¹ By feminine and masculine, I mean gendered perceptions of occupations that stem from, among other factors, the nature of tasks involved (e.g., occupations involving care vs. physical strength) and the gender composition of employees already in a given field. Though my present focus is on how the discrete gendered signals of masculinity and femininity impact individuals who identify exclusively as men or women, gendered signals vary on a continuum and individuals may hold nonbinary gender identities (Hyde et al. 2019).

feminine occupations is also fundamental to understanding how and why gender segregation persists. This insight is particularly important because men's entrance into stereotypically feminine occupations has not kept pace with women's advancement into masculine occupations (England 2010), and gender equality cannot be achieved if only masculine domains are diversified (Croft et al. 2021).

Importantly, I situate my research regarding these issues in the early stages of the job search process. This period is critical for individuals at a variety of points in their career—for example, graduating students searching for their first job, seasoned professionals considering a mid-career change, or recently unemployed workers looking for new opportunities. Critically, my theorizing suggests that occupational segregation may take root in this early job search process—long before the decision to apply or hire. This is because individuals make path-dependent choices based on their initial interest in masculine (versus feminine) occupations, which then sorts them into longer-term career paths (Kahn and Ginther 2017, Morgan et al. 2001). Moreover, about 4% of workers in the US labor force make a major career change in an average month (Kochhar et al. 2022), further suggesting the critical importance of exploring dynamics in this early period of the job search process.

I predict that the femininity or masculinity of an occupation will have a stronger impact on men's (versus women's) job interest such that men, relative to women, will express substantially lower interest in gender-atypical occupations. Previous research in this arena suggests that economic factors (e.g., lower pay) may explain men's lack of interest in feminine occupations (Block et al. 2019, England et al. 2001). In contrast, my

work highlights the influence of a psychological factor that operates beyond and above these economic considerations. Specifically, I demonstrate that because men, as compared with women, are more sensitive to *gender-based occupational status*—which I define as the respect or esteem afforded by the masculinity or femininity of an occupation—they are less likely to be interested in gender-atypical occupations.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation contains a review of literature relating to gender differences in career choices, men and masculinity, and gendered status hierarchy, as well as the development of the theory and main hypotheses that will be tested. In Chapters 3 – 5, I present the empirical data that were collected to test my hypotheses.

Chapter 3 details one archival data study and two laboratory experiments. Study 1, the archival data study, provides preliminary evidence for the theorized asymmetry in a relevant field setting using a nationally representative survey of Swedish high school students on their interest in stereotypically feminine versus masculine college majors. I then present two laboratory experiments that were designed to seek causal evidence of my main prediction and examine underlying mechanism of the theorized asymmetry. Specifically, Study 2 directly manipulates gendered signals of femininity or masculinity of an occupation to investigate how male and female undergraduate students differentially navigate the prospect of learning that an occupation that matches with their surveyed preferences is perceived as stereotypically feminine or masculine. Study 3 entailed a pre-registered replication of this first experiment with a sample of unemployed job seekers; importantly, Study 3 also finds evidence supporting my theorized underlying mechanism and demonstrate that men’s greater sensitivity to gender-based occupational

status, indeed, is the key factor driving men's (versus women's) lack of interest in gender-atypical occupations.

In Chapter 4, I evaluate the robustness of my predicted effects using modified study designs that enhance both external and internal validity. Specifically, in Study 4, I examine individuals' job interest in familiar occupations that are already heavily gendered (e.g., executive secretary); in Study 5, I frame relatively unfamiliar, future-oriented occupations (e.g., A.I. Ethicist) as either feminine or masculine.

In Chapter 5, I report the experiment that tested the intervention I developed based on my theoretical account, which posits that men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status underlies their reduced interest in feminine (versus masculine) occupations. Specifically, in Study 6, I examine the capacity of an intervention that affirms the esteem and respect of a traditionally feminine job as a means to enhance men's interest in it. Theoretically, Study 6 provides a direct test of the causal chain described in Hypothesis 3 by experimentally manipulating the proposed psychological mediator – sensitivity to gender-based occupational status (Spencer et al. 2005). Practically, Study 6 tests the viability of an intervention that can inform the practices of a wide range of organizations and human resource managers seeking to expand the pool of applicants for traditionally feminine jobs by attracting more men.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the implication of these findings for theory and for practice. I also identify limitation of the current set of studies and point to avenues for future research.

Overall, the work presented herein contributes the existing scholarship on gender

segregation and broader literatures on gender inequality by highlighting men's choices as playing a critical role in the perpetuating occupational gender segregation. Whereas the preponderance of existing scholarship on gender segregation has focused on the barriers women face when they engage with stereotypically masculine occupations, this work demonstrates that men's initial responses to gender-atypicality in occupations during their early job search process may represent an underappreciated force contributing to the gender segregation. Importantly, my findings challenge the longstanding assumptions that men simply choose to not engage with stereotypically feminine occupations primarily due to economic reasons or because these jobs do not align with men's true interests or skills (e.g., Charles and Bradley 2009, Wang et al. 2013). Instead, this work highlights the influence of a psychological factor that operates irrespective of economic considerations. My work suggest that improving economic aspects alone (e.g., by increasing pay) may not be sufficient to attract men into traditionally feminine jobs and that concomitant efforts to address men's underlying sensitivity about how others will view their interest in feminine jobs may be more effective.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Broadening our understanding of gender segregation through a focus on men

In many organizational and societal forums, addressing issues of occupational gender segregation have become synonymous with addressing issues that women face. And, in fact, the vast majority of scholarship regarding occupational gender segregation has been devoted to understanding and rectifying institutional and intrapersonal barriers that impede women's interest, performance, and advancement in stereotypically masculine careers (e.g., Heilman 2001, Bell et al. 2003, Coffman, 2014, Cheryan et al. 2017, Danbold and Bendersky 2019). This focus on women's experiences is of vital importance as women continue to face numerous obstacles when entering male-dominated occupations. However, because both women's *and* men's decisions about which occupations to pursue can perpetuate gender segregation, identifying those factors that drive men's underrepresentation in traditionally feminine occupations is also fundamental to understanding how and why gender segregation persists. This insight is particularly important because men's entrance into stereotypically feminine occupations has not kept pace with women's advancement into masculine occupations (England 2010), and gender equality cannot be achieved if only masculine domains are diversified (Croft et al. 2021).

Additionally, men's interest (or lack thereof) in feminine occupations has important implications for organizations and individual workers alike. Traditionally masculine jobs in areas like manufacturing and construction are shrinking due to globalization and automation (Lawson et al. 2015) whereas jobs in areas like healthcare

and education, which are often perceived to be more feminine, are on the rise (Katz 2015, Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). In fact, the recent economic recession disproportionately affected men precisely because they were concentrated in these declining sectors (Boushey 2009, Sahin et al. 2010). Increasing men's interest in traditionally feminine jobs thus could supplement these significant labor shortages in key health- and service-oriented professions (Goodin 2003, Levanon et al. 2014) and reduce unemployment rates among men. Increasing men's interest in traditionally feminine jobs also could improve organizations' human resource management capabilities by providing employers with access to a larger talent pool. Finally, from the individual perspective, if men opt to pursue a masculine occupation even though their true preferences more closely align with a traditionally feminine occupation, they may do so at a cost to their career satisfaction and well-being (Bosson et al. 2005, Meeussen et al. 2020, Watt 2010), and by extension, to their productivity and commitment to their organization (Nye et al. 2012).

Though emergent scholarship has begun to theorize and call for empirical research regarding men's underrepresentation in stereotypically feminine roles (Croft et al. 2015, Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015, Block et al. 2019), to date, there is little work in this vein. Of the few existing research examining men's underrepresentation in feminine occupations, most has focused on men in the later stages of the job search process, such as experiences of men who have already chosen to enter traditionally feminine occupations (e.g., Evans and Frank 2003; O'Connor 2015) or the potential economic advantages they reap as a result (i.e., glass escalator effect; Williams 1992). Little work has assessed the nature of the barriers that may hinder men from developing interests in

stereotypically feminine occupations in the first place.

In my dissertation, I seek to advance this perspective by focusing on men's choices during their early job search process. I propose that the femininity or masculinity of an occupation more strongly shapes men's (versus women's) interest in it because men, as compared to women, are more sensitive to gender-based occupational status. The present work thus departs from the often-used retort that men do not develop interests in stereotypically feminine occupations primarily because of their lower quality (e.g., in terms of pay; England et al. 2001), and the related idea that men's underrepresentation in feminine occupations is attributable to their voluntary choices to avoid these occupations that offer less attractive economic benefits (whereas women are actively kept out of higher-quality masculine occupations; Block et al. 2019). I argue that signals of masculinity or femininity in an occupation have a stronger influence on men's (versus women's) interest in occupations, and that these effects emerge when there are no differences in pay or other economic considerations.

Theories of job interest and gender

The extent to which individuals find a particular occupation interesting is a critical factor influencing their ultimate career choices (e.g., Dick and Rallis 1991, Morgan et al. 2001, Savickas and Spokane 1999; Round and Su, 2014). It is often during the early stages that individuals exercise the most selection over their desired career paths, paring down many possible avenues to select a few, or even narrow to one. In this early phase of the job search, individuals often rely on self-reflection, assessment, and learning to resolve uncertainty about which occupation they are interested in pursuing

(Heinz 2009, Werbel 2000). Consequently, the early stages of the job search process play a crucial role in sorting individuals into defined career pathways.

But what shapes individuals' interest in occupations in this early phase? Certainly, economic factors such as expected salary or future job growth, among other job attributes, play a key role (Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010, Gianakos 2001, Malgwi et al. 2005). But social factors are important as well (Duffy and Dik 2009, Fitzgerald and Betz 1994). The present research zeroes in on one such social factor: the perceived femininity or masculinity of the occupation in question. Existing theories suggest that the perceived femininity or masculinity can constrain career decisions early in the job search process for both men and women. For example, social role theory (Eagly and Wood 2012) proposes that the historical gender division in labor (i.e., men as the breadwinner and women as caregiver) facilitates the formation of gender stereotypes, which reinforce normative expectations about the types of occupations that are suitable for men and women. Cheryan and Plaut (2010)'s precluded interest theory similarly suggests that individuals face powerful normative constraints that preclude them from developing interests in gender-atypical occupations when there is a lack of perceived similarity between oneself and the "model person" for a field. Additionally, Gottfredson (2002) postulates that gender role socialization leads individuals to categorize occupations on a masculinity-femininity dimension, leading them to eliminate gender-atypical occupations from consideration when developing job interests in order to protect their "public presentation of masculinity-femininity" (p. 91).

Taken together, these theories suggest that gendered normative expectations

powerfully shape career decisions in a way that constrains both men and women from options early in the job search process. Indeed, research shows that both men and women tend to show greater interest in occupations that are typical of their gender (DiDonato and Strough 2013, Evans and Diekman 2009, Liben et al. 2002). However, as I detail in the section to follow, I propose that men have more polarized reactions to the femininity or masculinity of prospective occupations as compared with women, creating an asymmetry in how gender-atypicality affects men's versus women's interest in them.

An asymmetry in how men versus women respond to gender-atypical occupations

Though gendered normative expectations shape the career decisions of men and women alike, I suggest that developing an interest in gender-atypical occupations has become more acceptable for women than for men. Supporting this possibility, Diekman and Eagly (2000) found that stereotypes surrounding women's roles have become more flexible over the past century to include both masculine and feminine traits, whereas stereotypes about men have remained rigid. Related developmental evidence suggests that 8- and 9-year-old children's occupational gender stereotypes are more restrictive for men than for women, such that they readily generate sentences portraying women in both feminine (e.g., nurse, aerobics instructor, librarian) and masculine occupations (e.g., doctor, firefighter, truck driver), but only portray men in masculine occupations (Wilbourn and Kee 2010). Other research similarly documents that college students report believing that it is appropriate for women to pursue both masculine and feminine occupations whereas they believe that men should only hold masculine occupations (DiDonato and Strough 2013).

Mirroring these asymmetric changes in gender stereotypes, differences have also emerged in how women and men perceive themselves. Whereas women have begun to ascribe more stereotypically masculine traits (e.g., dominant, ambitious) to themselves as compared with their female counterparts from previous generations, men have not exhibited similar changes, and have even showed slight declines in their self-ratings of stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., being warm, sensitive; Twenge et al. 2012). Based on these interrelated streams of past work, I theorize that the femininity or masculinity of an occupation will have a more extreme impact on men's (versus women's) developing interest in it. Thus, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Gender will moderate the effect of the femininity versus masculinity of an occupation on job interest. Specifically, the femininity versus masculinity of occupations will have a stronger effect on men's versus women's interest in them, such that men will be less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women.

The implications of status differences between masculine and feminine occupations

Masculinity generally connotes higher status than femininity (Cuddy et al., 2015; Koenig and Eagly 2014; Ridgeway and Correll 2004), and correspondingly, occupations that are perceived as masculine (versus feminine) tend to be regarded as higher status (He et al. 2019b, Oswald 2003). These status differences are often reflected in economic advantages offered by masculine occupations (Crawley 2014). For instance, masculine jobs generally pay more and provide more fringe benefits (e.g., paid time off, healthcare coverage) than feminine jobs do—even after controlling for critical human capital factors, such as education level, level of required skills, and working hours (Cohen and

Huffman 2003, England 1992, England et al. 2001, Hodges 2020). Psychological research further suggests that, even at an implicit level, people tend to associate men with higher salaries more so than women (Williams et al. 2010).

One straightforward implication of the status differences between traditionally masculine and feminine occupations, therefore, is that men have less of a financial incentive to develop interests in gender-atypical occupations than women do. Indeed, at present, this economic perspective is the primary narrative employed to explain men's lack of interest in feminine occupations. While economic factors surely play a role in any job decision, I propose that they provide an incomplete picture of men's reluctance to engage in feminine occupations. They cannot, for instance, explain why unemployed men choose not to enter well-paying feminine jobs in the healthcare industry (Miller 2017).

In the present research, I theorize the presence of an important psychological factor that operates above and beyond these economic factors. I refer to this psychological factor as *gender-based occupational status*, which I define as the esteem or respect afforded by others due to the perceived femininity or masculinity of an occupation. I conceptualize gender-based occupational status as one component of occupational status. Multiple factors are inputs to occupational status (Valentino 2021), including, for example, educational level (McClendon 1976), pay (Bukodi et al. 2011, Duncan 1961), and type of labor (e.g., manual vs. mental; Wrigley 1982). So too is the perceived femininity or masculinity of an occupation (He et al. 2019a, Hodges 2020, Oswald 2003, Valentino 2020). Critically, my theory posits that men are more attuned than women to status stemming from the femininity or masculinity of an occupation—

that they are particularly sensitive to how others will view their fit with an occupation that is perceived as stereotypically feminine versus masculine. I theorize that men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status is one important mechanism underlying men's lack of interest in feminine (versus masculine) occupations. This theorizing departs from the previous research demonstrating that men do not develop interests in feminine occupations primarily because feminine (versus masculine) occupations provide inferior economic opportunities. I argue that the signals of femininity or masculinity in an occupation will have a stronger influence in shaping men's (versus women's) interest in it, and these effects will emerge when there are no differences in pay or other economic considerations.

I derive this prediction from research on precarious manhood, which argues that manhood is more easily threatened than womanhood. According to work on precarious manhood, manhood is an *achieved* status that must be conferred by others. Just as phrases like "be a man" or "man up" suggest, manhood is defined by social proof and requires public displays of masculine behaviors (Vandello et al., 2008). Because manhood requires continuous public validation from other people (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kimmel, 2006), it is considered conditional, tenuous, and thus easily lost (Dahl et al. 2015). This contrasts with womanhood, which is typically viewed as following naturally from biological maturation, and thus once acquired remains relatively stable (Vandello and Bosson 2013), because maintaining womanhood does not require ongoing social proof from others (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). Past research in this arena indeed demonstrates that manhood is easily threatened whereas

womanhood is not. For instance, men tend to report anxiety over their male identity when faced with scenarios like imagining a job loss (Michniewicz et al. 2014), being outperformed by women (Dahl et al. 2015), or being told at they have “feminine” personality (Alonso 2018), whereas women tend not report similar anxiety over their female identity in same scenarios.

Beyond the precarious status of manhood, another central component of manhood is the antifemininity mandate (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Kimmel 2013, Prokos and Padavic 2002, Vandello and Bosson 2013), or the notion that men should actively eschew any traces of femininity in their own preferences or behaviors. For this reason, past empirical research often successfully manipulated gender threats towards men by offering them feedback that their profile is similar that that of a woman’s. By raising the specter of femininity, these work imply that participants are not “real men” and subsequently increase men’s anxiety in regards to maintaining their masculine identity. On the contrary, there is no same dynamic of women needing to stay away from masculinity in order to maintain their status as women. Due to the precarity of manhood and pressures to avoid femininity, I expect that men will be more sensitive to gender-based occupational status than women, and in turn, will express less interest in gender-atypical occupations than women.

I theorize that sensitivity to gender-based occupational status will manifest in two ways. First, I expect that men, as compared with women, will be more apt to view traditionally feminine occupations as lower status than masculine occupations. This prediction is broadly consistent with past research suggesting that men, as a higher-status

group, are more attentive and reactive to status cues than women (Blader and Chen 2011, Marr and Thau 2014, Mitchell et al. 2020) and are more likely to devalue attributes associated with women. For example, men rated the fictitious trait “urgency” was less valuable when they were told that women scored higher than men on it, whereas women rated it similarly valuable regardless of whether men or women scored higher on it (Schmader et al. 2001). Relatedly, compared to women, men tend to perceive feminine (versus masculine) occupations as having less societal worth (Block et al. 2018).

Second, I expect sensitivity to gender-based occupational status to manifest in the tendency for men to experience greater self-presentational concerns about fitting with a feminine (versus masculine) occupation than women will experience about fitting with a masculine (versus feminine) occupation. Consistent with this account are the concerns expressed in Cross and Bagilhole (2002)’s qualitative investigation of men working in feminine occupations: “Well, my friends don’t know what I do even now. [...] I don’t tell ‘em ‘cos it’s a female job. [...] I wouldn’t be as close to ‘em if I told ‘em what I really did for a living. [...] My friends would see me as a low life who can’t get a proper job” (p. 215; see also Miller and Fremson, 2018, for a related account from a male nurse).

In sum, I conceptualize both the tendency to perceive differences in status between feminine and masculine occupations, and the tendency to experience self-presentational concerns about one’s fit with a gender-atypical occupation as two different indicators of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status. Based on this theorizing, I advance the following predictions regarding sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Hypothesis 2a: Gender will moderate the effect of the femininity versus masculinity of an occupation on perceived occupational status, such that men, relative to women, will perceive feminine occupations to be lower status than masculine occupations.

Hypothesis 2b: Gender will moderate the effect of the femininity versus masculinity of an occupation on self-presentational concerns, such that men, relative to women, will experience greater self-presentational concerns about fitting with gender-atypical occupations.

My theorizing further suggests that sensitivity to gender-based occupational status will play a mediating role in explaining why gender-atypicality dampens interest in jobs for men more so than for women. See Figure 1 for full theoretical model.

Hypothesis 3: Men will be less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women because men, relative to women, are more sensitive to gender-based occupational status. Specifically, men will be less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women, because men, relative to women, perceive feminine occupations to be lower status than masculine occupations, and experience greater self-presentational concerns about fitting with gender-atypical occupations.

Insert Figure 1 about here

CHAPTER 3

This chapter details one archival data study and two laboratory experiments. In the archival study, I aim to find preliminary evidence for my main prediction in a relevant field setting. In the subsequent experiments, I establish the causality of my main prediction (Hypothesis 1). Specifically, these experiments examine how the perceived femininity or masculinity of an occupation differentially shape men's and women's interest in it. I also examine the underlying mechanism driving the main effect (Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 3) in these experiments. Below, Study 1 describes the archival data study, and Studies 2 and 3 detail the laboratory experiments where I tested the causal link of my hypotheses.

Study 1: Swedish high-school students' interest in feminine versus masculine college majors

The main goal of Study 1 was to assess preliminary evidence for the main prediction (Hypothesis 1) in a relevant field context. To do so, I identified an opportunity to reanalyze archival data collected by Tellhed, Backstrom, and Bjorklund (2017), which among other variables, measured Swedish high-school students' interest in heavily gendered college majors. Data from this field context were relevant to this present research as students' interest in college majors is strongly indicative of the career paths they ultimately pursue (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, Porter and Umbach 2006, Roksa and Levey 2010).

Method

Participants

Tellhed et al. (2017) recruited a representative sample of 1,327 Swedish senior high school students (650 men, 677 women; mean age = 18.89 years, $SD = 0.05$). The sample size was decided in proportion to the number of 17-year-olds residing in the municipality one year prior to the time of data collection, based on national statistics in Sweden. The data were collected in person where students filled out the survey with pen and paper.

Measures

Interest in feminine versus masculine college majors.

The original survey included various measures (e.g., social belonging and self-efficacy); however, of primary focus for this research were questions regarding students' interest in five heavily gendered college majors in Sweden: engineering (73% men), computer programming (76% men), nursing (14% men), preschool education (8% men), and primary education (24% men). Students rated their interest in studying each of these five heavily-gendered college majors (1 = *not at all interested*; 7 = *extremely interested*). Tellhed et al. (2017) data report interest scores collapsed across two groupings of majors: stereotypically masculine majors (engineering and computer programming) and stereotypically feminine majors (nursing, preschool education, and primary education).

Results

To assess Hypothesis 1, I compared men's and women's interest in stereotypically feminine versus masculine college majors. I conducted a 2 (participant gender: men vs. women) X 2 (gendered association: masculine vs. feminine) mixed analysis of variance

(ANOVA) with gendered association as a within factor. As Figure 2 displays, I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 2,648) = 395.83, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.13$, supporting Hypothesis 1. Male students expressed significantly lower interest in feminine majors ($M = 1.66, SD = 0.94$) as compared with the masculine majors ($M = 3.74, SD = 1.74$), $p < 0.001, d = 1.49$. By contrast, female students found masculine majors ($M = 4.62, SD = 1.22$) and feminine majors ($M = 4.64, SD = 1.11$) similarly interesting, $p = 0.61, d = 0.01$.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

In Study 1, the analysis of archival data from a survey of Swedish high school students' interest in academic majors yielded initial support for Hypothesis 1. Consistent with my theory, the femininity versus masculinity of college majors was more strongly linked to men's than women's interest in pursuing them, with men particularly resistant to gender-atypical majors. Study 1 thus provides preliminary support for Hypothesis 1 in a relevant field setting. At the same time, Study 1 is limited. It cannot assess causality due to the correlational nature of the survey data, and further, it does not provide insight into the theoretical processes at play. Finally, one question is whether the observed effects among a sample of students would extend to adults considering a career path. I address these issues in Study 2.

Study 2: Undergraduates considering a career path

Study 1 provided initial correlational evidence that the gendered signals of femininity or masculinity of an occupation more strongly shapes men's (versus women's) interest in it. However, it is unclear whether it is the masculinity or femininity associated with a particular set of college majors or some other features of these that led to differential interest patterns between men and women. Study 2 sought to address this limitation. In Study 2, I utilize an experiment to conduct a causal test of my main prediction (Hypothesis 1) in the context of undergraduate students' prospective career paths. This context is consequential because undergraduate study is a time when many young adults explore and learn about different career opportunities. It is a gateway experience for many individuals in which gendered association may influence their interest in potential career paths, and ultimately contribute to sorting men and women into different occupations. In Study 2, as well as subsequent experiments, I devised a paradigm that simulates a tool that individuals frequently use early in their job search process to learn what type of occupations best suit them—a career assessment survey (see for example, O*Net Interest Profiler, Strong Interest Inventory, and the Career Beliefs Inventory). In addition to investigating how men and women differentially respond to learning that they fit with a gender-(a)typical occupation, I included an exploratory measure that captured one aspect of their sensitivity to gender-based occupational status: self-presentational concerns.

Participants and Procedure

Participants.

The participants for this study consisted of 437 undergraduate students (192 male, 243 female, 2 non-binary) from a large private university. Participants were invited to the behavioral lab to take part in a study about career development for young adults.

Recruitment occurred in waves over a four-week period. I decided *a priori* to stop data collection when we reached at least 80 participants per condition. Two participants who identified as non-binary were excluded from the analyses, leaving a final sample of 435 participants, including 147 White (34%), 229 Asian (53%), 11 Black (3%), 23 Hispanic (5%), 15 Multiracial (3%), and 10 “other” race (2%) individuals.

Procedure.

After participants arrived and provided consent, they were asked to complete a career development survey that is ostensibly designed to help young adults identify career paths in which they can thrive. I modeled this survey after existing career development surveys that are widely utilized in the early stages of the job search process (e.g., O*Net Interest Profiler). This career development survey asked participants to envision their ideal job and then indicate the importance of a series of 25 job characteristics (e.g., flexibility, social responsibility, achievement orientation) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all important*, 7 = *Very much important*). These job characteristics for this survey were drawn from the organizational culture profile item set used in previous research (O'Reily et al. 1991). After completing the career survey, participants received bogus feedback about the type of occupations that would best suit them along four dimensions.

As Figure 3 displays, all participants were informed that their preferences best align with the type of occupations that are moderately future-focused, slightly team-oriented, and slightly risk-avoidant. Critically, however, participants were randomly assigned to learn that their preferences align with occupations that are perceived as either very masculine or very feminine.

Insert Figure 3 about here

After receiving the feedback, participants responded to two central measures capturing their initial interest in the career path, which assessed how appealing the occupation that octennially fit them is and how interested they would be to gain further information about it. They then completed a measure designed to capture one aspect of their sensitivity to gender-based occupational status, self-presentational concerns. Last, they completed items about their demographic information.

Measures

Job interest

To assess participants' interest in an occupation that embodies the characteristics highlighted in their survey results, they were asked, "How appealing does working in a job with these qualities sound to you?" (1 = *Very Unappealing*, 7 = *Very Appealing*); and "How interested would you be to receive more detailed survey results? (e.g., the specific list of companies/jobs that would fit you well)" (1 = *Not at all interested*, 7 = *Very much interested*). These responses were averaged to form a composite score for job interest (α

= 0.50)².

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status

Self-presentational concerns. To assess participants' self-presentational concerns with how others would view their interest in the occupation that they fit, they were asked, "How comfortable would you be to share the results of this survey with your family and friends?" (1 = *Very Uncomfortable*, 7 = *Very Comfortable*). This measure was reverse-coded such that higher numbers reflect greater self-presentational concerns.

Results

To evaluate differences in how male and female students responded to learning that the types of occupations that would best suit them are perceived as either feminine or masculine, I conducted 2 (gendered job association: masculine vs. feminine) x 2 (participant gender: men vs. women) between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVA). All pairwise comparisons are Tukey-adjusted using the *stats* package in R. See Table 1 for the summary statistics and correlations among all measures.

Insert Table 1 about here

Job interest.

I observed significant main effects of gendered association, $F(1, 431) = 25.04, p <$

² Cronbach's alpha indicated low reliability in this particular study, but I report results using the composite because (a) I theorize them to tap the same construct (*job interest*), (b) they form a reliable composite in all subsequent studies, and (c) I observed the similar patterns of results when we analyzed these two items separately (see Appendix A and B).

0.001, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, and participant gender, $F(1, 431) = 44.34, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.09$, such that students generally expressed greater interest in an occupation when it was described as masculine than feminine, and separately, female students generally expressed greater interest than male students. Most importantly, as Figure 4 displays, I observed a strong two-way interaction, $F(1, 431) = 26.59, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$. Consistent with my predictions, the femininity or masculinity of an occupational had a particularly strong effect on male students than female students. Specifically, male students expressed significantly less interest when they were told that the type of occupations that fits them is typically perceived as feminine ($M = 3.80, SD = 1.45$) than masculine ($M = 4.98, SD = 1.12$), $p < 0.001, d = 0.03$. By contrast, female students expressed a similar degree of interest regardless of whether the type of occupations that fits them was presented as masculine ($M = 5.14, SD = 1.09$) or feminine ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.15$), $p = 1.00, d = 0.89$.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Self-presentational concerns.

I observed significant main effects of gendered association, $F(1, 431) = 39.98, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$, and participant gender, $F(1, 431) = 28.66, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$, such that students generally expressed less self-presentational concerns when they were told that the type of occupations that fits them was masculine versus feminine, and separately, male students generally expressed greater self-presentational concerns than female students. Critically, I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 431) = 36.02, p <$

0.001, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$, supporting Hypothesis 2b. Specifically, male students expressed significantly greater self-presentational concerns when the survey results indicated that the types of occupations that fit them were feminine ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.72$) versus masculinity ($M = 2.42, SD = 1.16$), $p < 0.001, d = 1.17$, whereas female students expressed similar level of low self-presentational concerns regardless of whether they were told that the types of occupations that fit them were feminine ($M = 2.59, SD = 1.47$) or masculine ($M = 2.53, SD = 1.36$), $p = 0.99, d = 0.04$.

Insert Figure 5 about here

Moderated mediation.

I ran a moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes 2013) with 5000 samples and biased corrected 95% confidence intervals to examine whether sensitivity to gender-based occupational status, which is partially captured by the measure of self-presentational concerns in this study, in part, underlies men's (versus women's) lack of interest in gender-atypical occupations. This model tested whether participants' self-presentational concerns (mean-centered) mediated the effect of gendered job association (0 = masculine, 1 = feminine) on job interest (mean-centered) for male students, but not female students (0 = women, 1 = men). Supporting Hypothesis 3, I observed evidence for moderated mediation on self-presentational concerns, *index of moderated mediation* = -0.67, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [-0.97, -0.42]. Specifically, for male students, there was a significant effect of gendered association on job interest through self-presentational

concerns, *indirect effect* = -0.69, SE = 0.12, 95% CI [-0.94, -0.48]. However, for female students, there was no such effect, *indirect effect* = -0.03, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.12]. These results suggest that the tendency for men to be more sensitive than women to gender-based occupational status explains, in part, why men are less interested in gender-atypical jobs.

Discussion

In Study 2, among a sample of undergraduates considering career paths, I observed stark differences in how male and female students respond to the same situation simulating the experience of learning that the type of occupations that fits them are considered stereotypically feminine or masculine. These signals of femininity (versus masculinity) had a strong impact on men's, but not women's, job interest. In the exploratory analysis, men expressed substantially greater sensitivity to gender-based occupational status, which was reflected by their expressing greater self-presentational concerns about the prospect of disclosing their interest in gender (a)typical occupations to close others. I also observed that this greater self-presentational concern, in part, underlies the reason why men were less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women. These results provide initial evidence supporting Hypotheses 1, 2b, and 3. Nevertheless, I also acknowledge limitations that provide further opportunities to evaluate the scope and nature of the process underlying the predicted effects. First, although I observed evidence that self-presentational concerns play explaining why the main effect emerges, it remains unclear what degree another indicator of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status—perceived occupational status—contributes to the

process at play. In addition, one may question to what extent my main results generalize beyond an undergraduate student sample. Study 3 address these limitations.

Study 3: Unemployed job seekers considering a job offer

Study 3 had three core goals. First, I examined whether my predicted effects extend to a sample of adults arguably most motivated to find a job: unemployed individuals who are actively looking for a job. This sample is particularly consequential in the context of an evolving labor market in which the demand for traditionally feminine occupations has been increasing while the demand for traditionally masculine jobs has been declining (Autor and Dorn 2013, Dwyer 2013). If these feminine occupations represent an increasingly large portion of the future occupational landscape, a critical question is whether unemployed job seekers will express an interest in them. The second goal of Study 3 was to sharpen the grasp of theoretical processes at play; namely, whether men, relative to women, are more sensitive to gender-based occupational status (Hypotheses 2a and 2b), which, in turn, underlies their reduced interest in feminine versus masculine occupations (Hypothesis 3). To do so, I included two measures to each captured perceived occupational status and self-presentational concerns—two indicators I theorize to reflect individuals' sensitivity to gender-based occupational status. Lastly, I aimed to rule out the alternative explanation that differential job quality between masculine and feminine occupations underlie the reason why men are less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women. To isolate these processes, I explicitly described the quality of the job in the same manner across conditions, thereby controlling for the alternative possibility that economic factors could explain men's lack of interest in

feminine occupations. I also included exploratory measures of gender identification to examine for whom the hypothesized effects are most likely to emerge. I reasoned the femininity or masculinity of an occupation will particularly likely to influence men who strongly (versus weakly) identify with their gender (i.e., view being a man as integral to their self-concept). Study 3 was preregistered.

Method

Participants.

A custom panel of unemployed US adults who are actively looking for a job from Prolific Academic (Peer et al. 2017) was recruited for this study. Per my preregistration, I recruited 852 participants (404 male, 424 female, 24 non-binary) with the aim of retaining 800 participants post-exclusions. I excluded 24 participants who identified as non-binary and five participants with duplicate IP addresses from the analyses (only the first instance was included in the final sample). These exclusions left with a final sample of 824 participants (mean age = 25.21 years, $SD = 8.00$), including 448 White (54%), 139 Asian (17%), 65 Black (8%), 114 Hispanic (14%), 49 Multiracial (6%), and 9 “other” race (1%) individuals. In terms of the length of unemployment, 15% of participants had been unemployed for less than 5 weeks, 19% between five to 14 weeks, 16% between 15 to 26 weeks, and 50% for 27 weeks or more. In terms of the amount of time they had been actively seeking employment, 29% had been seeking jobs for less than 5 weeks, 34% between five to 14 weeks, 18% between 15 to 26 weeks, and 19% for 27 weeks or more.

Procedure

The same general procedure was employed as in Study 2. Participants first completed the career development survey that was ostensibly designed to help them identify career paths in which they can thrive. They were then randomly assigned them to receive the bogus feedback in which they learned, among other dimensions, that occupations matching their surveyed occupational preferences typically are considered very feminine or very masculine. In order to isolate the impact of the focal manipulation from differential perceptions of economic factors, I included language across all conditions indicating that the quality of the job (e.g., salary) is overall about average for this industry. Participants then indicated their interest in the job. They then completed two measures designed to capture different aspects of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status—the perceived status of the occupation that they fit with and their self-presentational concerns about disclosing this match. Finally, participants completed two manipulation check items as well as demographic items, followed by the exploratory measure of gender identification.

Measures

Job interest.

To assess participants' interest in an occupation that the survey identified as a good fit, participants were asked two questions: "How appealing does working in a job with these qualities sound to you?" (1 = *Very Unappealing*, 7 = *Very Appealing*); and "How interested would you be to receive more detailed survey results? (e.g., the specific list of companies/jobs that would fit you well)" (1 = *Not at all interested*, 7 = *Very much*

interested). I averaged these responses to form a composite score for job interest ($\alpha = 0.72$). I observed the same pattern of results when I analyzed these two items (see Appendix B).

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Perceived occupational status. To assess how attuned participants were to the status of the occupation that they fit with, they responded to the question, “People often differentiate between high status occupations and low status occupations. If you were to rank the job on seven levels from lowest to highest, how would you classify it?” (1 = *Lowest*, 7 = *Highest*).

Self-presentational concerns. To assess how concerned participants were regarding how others would view their interest in the occupation that they fit with, they were asked, “How comfortable would you be to share the results of this survey with your family and friends?” (1 = *Very Uncomfortable*, 7 = *Very Comfortable*). I reverse-coded this measure such that higher numbers reflect greater self-presentational concerns.

Gender Identification.

The strength of gender identification was measured using items developed by Schmader (2002). Participants rated their agreement (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*) with the following four items: “Being a man/woman is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am” (reverse coded); “Being a man/woman is an important reflection of who I am”; “Being a man/woman has very little to do with how I feel about myself” (reverse coded); “Being a man/woman is an important part of my self-image.” I averaged these responses to form a composite score for gender identification ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Manipulation checks.

Participants completed two manipulation check items. First, to evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulation, they were asked: “Based on the survey results, you are a great fit for a job that is perceived as: [masculine/feminine].” Second, to ensure the study effectively controlled for relevant economic factors, participants were asked to evaluate the quality of the job on five dimensions: pay (i.e., salary/wages), hours of work, opportunities for advancement, levels of interest in work, and job security (1 = *Very weak*; 7 = *Very strong*). As preregistered, these responses were averaged to form a composite of perceived job quality ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Results

See Table 2 for the summary statistics and correlations among all measures.

Insert Table 2 about here

Manipulation checks.

First, the majority of participants (97.94%) accurately identified the correct experimental condition (masculine versus feminine), indicating that the focal manipulation was effective. Second, the effect of gendered association on perceived job quality was not significant, $F(1, 822) = 0.18, p = 0.67, \eta_p^2 = 0.000$, indicating, as expected, that there was no perceived difference in economic factors when the job was described as masculine ($M = 4.87, SD = 0.83$) versus feminine ($M = 4.89, SD = 0.05$).

Main measures

Job interest.

I observed a significant main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 820) = 8.28, p = 0.004, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$, such that female job seekers generally expressed greater interest than male job seekers, and a nonsignificant effect of gendered association, $F(1, 820) = 1.58, p = 0.21, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$. More importantly, I observed the predicted two-way interaction, $F(1, 820) = 19.70, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the femininity versus masculinity of an occupation had a particularly prominent effect on unemployed male versus female job seekers. Men expressed significantly less interest when the occupation that fits them was described as feminine ($M = 5.34, SD = 1.13$) versus masculine ($M = 5.77, SD = 0.94$), $p < 0.001, d = 0.41$, whereas women expressed a similar degree of interest regardless of whether the occupation was portrayed as masculine ($M = 5.66, SD = 1.02$) or feminine ($M = 5.88, SD = 1.03$), $p = 0.14, d = 0.21$.

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Perceived occupational status. I observed significant main effects of participant gender and gendered association, $F(1, 820) = 5.27, p = 0.02, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ and $F(1, 820) = 5.05, p = 0.02, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$, such that participants generally evaluated the job as having higher status when it was described as masculine versus feminine, and male (versus female) job seekers generally evaluated the job as having higher status. More importantly, I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 820) = 4.36, p = 0.04, \eta_p^2 = 0.005$, supporting Hypothesis 2a. Specifically, unemployed male job seekers considered the occupation that fits as having significantly lower status when it was

described as feminine ($M = 4.18, SD = 0.91$) than masculine ($M = 4.45, SD = 0.84$), $p = 0.01, d = 0.31$, whereas unemployed female job seekers rated the occupation that fits as similar status regardless of whether it was portrayed as feminine ($M = 4.45, SD = 0.86$) or masculine ($M = 4.46, SD = 0.83$), $p = 0.99, d = 0.02$.

Self-presentational concerns. I observed nonsignificant effects of participant gender, $F(1, 820) = 3.14, p = 0.08, \eta_p^2 = 0.004$, and gendered association, $F(1, 820) = 0.63, p = 0.43, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$. Notably, we observed a predicted two-way interaction, $F(1, 820) = 8.01, p = 0.005, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$, supporting Hypothesis 2b. Unemployed male job seekers expressed significantly greater self-presentational concerns about fitting with a feminine ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.32$) versus masculine job ($M = 2.34, SD = 1.05$), $p = 0.04, d = 0.26$. By contrast, unemployed female job seekers showed no difference in self-presentational concerns after learning that they fit with a masculine ($M = 2.42, SD = 1.19$) versus feminine job ($M = 2.26, SD = 1.17$), $p = 0.52, d = 0.13$.

Moderated mediation.

To examine whether men's heightened sensitivity to gender-based occupational status underlies the tendency for men, relative to women, to express less interest in gender-atypical occupations, I ran a moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes 2013) with 5000 samples and biased corrected 95% confidence intervals, which inputted perceived occupational status and self-presentational concerns as parallel mediators. Supporting Hypothesis 3, I observed evidence for moderated mediation on both indicators of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status (perceived occupational status: *index of moderated mediation* = -0.05, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.12, -0.01]; self-

presentational concerns: *index of moderated mediation* = -0.18, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.31, -0.06]). Specifically, for unemployed male job seekers, there was a significant effect of gendered association on job interest through perceived occupational status, *indirect effect* = -0.06, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.11, -0.02]. However, for unemployed female job seekers, there was no such effect, *indirect effect* = -0.004, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.03]. Similarly, for unemployed male job seekers, there was a significant effect of gendered association on job interest through self-presentational concerns, *indirect effect* = -0.12, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [-0.21, -0.03]. However, for unemployed female job seekers, there was no such effect, *indirect effect* = 0.06, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.15]. These results suggest that the tendency for men to be more sensitive than women to gender-based occupational status explains, in part, why men are less interested in gender-atypical jobs.

Insert Figure 6 about here

Gender identification as a moderator

Overall, the level of gender identification was around the midpoint of the scale ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.49$). I modeled gendered association (feminine = 1, masculine = 0), participant gender (women = 0, men = 1), gender identification (mean-centered and standardized), and all resulting interactions as predictors of job interest. Most relevant to the question of moderation, I observed a significant three-way interaction, $\beta = -0.38$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = 0.01$. See Table 3 for detailed results. As displayed in Figure 7, the stronger men identified with their gender, the less interest they showed in the feminine (versus

masculine) occupation; in contrast, the extent to which women identify with their gender did not influence how much they find gender-atypical jobs appealing.

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Figure 7 about here

Discussion

In Study 3, I employed a particularly conservative and practically meaningful test of my central predictions by examining the robustness of the predicted patterns in a sample of unemployed adults who are actively seeking a job, and obtained significant support for my hypotheses. Specifically, I observed that holding constant job quality, the gender-atypicality of an occupation had a stronger effect on men's versus women's interest in it (Hypothesis 1). Men were less interested in an occupation after learning that it was feminine (versus masculine), yet the corresponding signals of masculinity (versus femininity) did not impact women's interest. This finding suggests that the alternative account—that feminine occupations are of lower quality (or are economically inferior)—alone cannot explain men's (versus women's) relative lack of interest in gender-atypical occupations. Study 3 also sharpened understanding of why and under what conditions this pattern of results emerges. I observed that men were more sensitive to gender-based occupational status than women, such that men (versus women) viewed a stereotypically

feminine (versus masculine) occupation as having significantly lower status (Hypothesis 2a), and that men (versus women) expressed significantly greater self-presentational concerns about fitting into a feminine (versus masculine) occupations (Hypothesis 2b). Further, I observed that men's (versus women's) greater sensitivity to gender-based occupational status, in turn, mediated the tendency for men (versus women) to express less interest in gender-atypical occupations that ostensibly fit them (Hypothesis 2). Additionally, the influence of femininity or masculinity of an occupation was particularly pronounced for men who strongly (versus weakly) identify with their gender.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, I build on insights and results presented in Chapter 3 and further evaluate the robustness of the evidence supporting my hypotheses by examining how men and women respond to learning that they fit with a specific, gendered occupation. In Chapter 3, I consistently observed evidence supporting my hypotheses; however, one potential drawback of Studies 2 and 3 with regard to external validity is that the career survey feedback explicitly signaled the femininity or masculinity of an occupation. I intentionally chose this design because a specific job title (e.g., flight attendant, aircraft mechanic) not only conveys how gendered the occupation is, but also carries an array of other expectations (e.g., required skills). Still, the question remains whether the predicted effects will emerge in response to real occupations that are considered feminine or masculine.

Chapter 4 is comprised of two studies, and the primary goal of these studies was to evaluate the robustness of my predicted effects using modified study designs that enhanced both their internal and external validity. Specifically, in Studies 4 and 5, I inform participants that they are a good fit for a specific occupation: in Study 4, I examine individuals' job interest in familiar occupations that are already heavily gendered (e.g., executive secretary); in Study 5, I frame relatively unfamiliar, future-oriented occupations (e.g., AI Ethicist) as either feminine or masculine. In addition to these efforts to enhance the external validity of these studies, I also attend to the studies' internal validity by refining my measures of job interest and self-presentational concerns to ensure they effectively tap these distinct theorized constructs, and by providing more

specific details about median pay and projected job growth to rule out the alternative explanation that economic factors (e.g., pay) are the main driver of the observed results.

Study 4: Linking the predicted effects to interest in real occupations

The primary goal of Study 4 was to evaluate the robustness of my predicted effects using a modified study design that enhances both external and internal validity. Specifically, in Study 4, I informed participants that they fit with occupations commonly considered to be either feminine or masculine (e.g., flight attendant or aircraft mechanic) rather than presenting the explicit signals of femininity and masculinity employed in Studies 2 and 3. I also sought to enhance the internal validity of Study 4 by including sharper measures of job interest and self-presentational concerns, and by providing more specific details about median pay and projected job growth to rule out the alternative explanation that economic factors (e.g., pay) drive the observed results. Study 4 was preregistered.

Method

Participants.

Eight hundred and forty-eight U.S. adults from Prolific took part in a study about “how people navigate job preferences and choose a career.”³ As preregistered, two individuals who identified as non-binary and eight individuals who indicated they were familiar with the study were excluded from the analyses. These exclusions left with a final sample of 838 participants (424 female; mean age = 37.21 years, $SD = 13.80$),

³ I preregistered to recruit 850 participants, but due to an unknown technical error on the survey platform, only 848 participants completed the study.

including 597 White (71%), 93 Asian (11%), 59 Hispanic (7%), 57 Black (7%), 29 Multiracial (3%), and 3 “other” race individuals.

Procedure.

After providing consent and completing a CAPTCHA question, participants completed the same career development survey from previous studies. In contrast to the feedback employed in these previous studies, participants were randomly assigned to learn that their surveyed preferences indicate that they are a great fit for a specific occupation that is commonly perceived as traditionally feminine or masculine. Specifically, participants learned that they fit with one of four occupations: flight attendant (feminine), executive secretary (feminine), aircraft technician (masculine), or computer systems administrator (masculine). These jobs were chosen based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data and pilot work indicating that these jobs are reliably perceived as either feminine or masculine. Participants were also provided with specific information regarding median pay and projected job growth (see Figure 8) to rule out the alternative possibility that differential perceptions of economic factors between masculine versus feminine occupations drive the results. After receiving the career survey results, participants completed the job interest measure and two indicators of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status, followed by demographic and manipulation check items.

Insert Figure 8 about here

Measures

Manipulation check.

Participants were asked: “Based on the survey results you received, which of the following occupation are you the best fit for? [Flight attendant/Aircraft technician/Executive secretary/Network and computer systems administrator]”

Participants selected one option.

Job interest.

Participants’ job interest was assessed based on their agreement with the following four items: “This job is appealing”; “I think I could enjoy this job”; “This is not a job I want (reverse coded)”; “I would be interested to find out more detailed information about this job” (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*). The first three items were adopted from Gaucher, Friesen, and Kay (2011)’s job appeal measure and the fourth item was carried forward from Studies 3 and 4. As preregistered, these responses were averaged to form a composite ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Perceived occupational status. As in Study 3, the degree to which participants were attuned to the status of the occupation that they fit with was assessed based on their response to the question, “People often differentiate between high status occupations and low status occupations. If you were to rank [job title] on seven levels from lowest to highest, how would you classify it?” (1 = *Lowest*, 7 = *Highest*).

Self-presentational concerns. Participants were asked to imagine sharing their career development survey results with their family and friends and then to indicate their

agreement with three items adapted from the public self-consciousness scale described in Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975): “I would be concerned that they will question my [masculinity/femininity]”; “I would worry about seeming not [masculine/feminine] enough”; “I would be self-conscious about how [masculine/feminine] I would appear” (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*). As preregistered, these responses were averaged to form a composite ($\alpha = 0.95$).

Results

As preregistered, I analyzed the data using a 2 (participant gender: men vs. women) X (gendered association: masculine vs. feminine) between-subjects ANOVA, collapsing participants’ responses to feminine and masculine jobs. The summary statistics and correlations among all measures are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Manipulation check.

The majority of participants (98.93%) accurately identified the job that the career development survey indicated was the best fit.

Job interest.

I observed main effects of gendered association and participant gender, $F(1, 834) = 9.19, p = 0.003, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ and $F(1, 834) = 7.72, p = 0.006, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$. More importantly, I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 834) = 42.26, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$, supporting Hypothesis 1, whereby the femininity (versus masculinity) of an

occupation again had an outsized influence on men's (versus women's) interests. Specifically, men expressed significantly less interest in an occupation they ostensibly fit with after learning that it was feminine ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.79$) versus masculine ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.88$), $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.67$. However, there was no significant difference in women's interest in feminine ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.96$) versus masculine occupations ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.88$), $p = 0.06$, $d = 0.24$ (see Figure 9).

Insert Figure 9 about here

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Perceived occupational status. I observed a significant main effect of gendered association, $F(1, 834) = 38.48$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, and a nonsignificant main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 834) = 1.50$, $p = 0.22$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$. Notably, I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 834) = 5.78$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$, supporting Hypothesis 2a. Unlike Study 2, femininity versus masculinity had some influence on both men and women. Women perceived the masculine occupations ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.06$) as higher status than the feminine occupations ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.11$), $p = 0.03$, $d = 0.24$; however, consistent with my theorizing, men perceived this status divide to be greater (masculine occupations: $M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.92$ versus feminine occupations: $M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.03$), $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.63$ (See Figure 10).

Insert Figure 10 about here

Self-presentational concerns. I observed a significant main effect of gendered association, $F(1, 834) = 14.81, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$, and a nonsignificant effect of participant gender, $F(1, 834) = 0.71, p = 0.40, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$. Importantly, I observed the hypothesized two-way interaction, $F(1, 834) = 59.18, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.07$, supporting Hypothesis 2b. Female participants expressed greater self-presentational concerns about fitting with a masculine job ($M = 1.92, SD = 1.47$) than feminine job ($M = 1.59, SD = 1.17$), $p = 0.04, d = 0.24$. However, consistent with my theorizing, the perceived femininity or masculinity of an occupation had a larger effect on men's self-presentational concerns (masculine occupations: $M = 1.33, SD = 0.76$ versus feminine occupations: $M = 2.36, SD = 1.64$), $p < 0.001, d = 0.83$ (See Figure 11).

Insert Figure 11 about here

Moderated mediation.

Though not preregistered, I explored the same moderated mediation model as in Study 3 to test whether sensitivity to gender-based occupational status mediated the differential effects of the femininity and masculinity of an occupation on job interest for men versus women. I observed evidence of moderated mediation for perceived occupational status, supporting Hypothesis 3. However, we did not observe evidence of

moderated mediation for self-presentational concerns. See Appendix C for detailed results.

Discussion

In the context of real occupations commonly considered feminine or masculine, I again observed strong evidence for my main prediction (Hypothesis 1) and theorizing regarding sensitivity to gender-based occupational status (Hypothesis 2a, 2b). In exploratory analyses, the results from this study supported moderated mediation when considering gender differences in the perceived status differences of feminine versus masculine occupations as an indicator of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status (Hypothesis 3), but not when considering self-presentational concerns as an indicator. In general, the results of Study 3 supported my predictions and demonstrated that the predicted effects were robust to methodological changes implemented to enhance the external and internal validity of my findings.

Study 5: Evaluating our predictions in the context of future jobs

In Study 5, I evaluated my predicted effects in the context of real, future-oriented jobs that have yet to be gendered. Critically, because these future jobs are not considered feminine or masculine, I was able to devise an experiment in which the exact same job (e.g., AI Ethicist) is portrayed as either feminine or masculine. By framing the same job as feminine or masculine, I can isolate the femininity of masculinity of an occupation as a factor, and thus rule out concerns that alternative associations with the particular masculine and feminine jobs utilized in Study 4 influenced my results.

Method

Participants.

Four hundred and twenty-four undergraduate students from a large private university were recruited to the laboratory to take part in a study about career development for young adults. Recruitment occurred in waves over a six-week period. I decided *a priori* to stop data collection when we reached at least 80 participants per condition. I excluded one participant who identified as non-binary. At the end of the first week of the study, I realized 19 participants did not receive survey results due to a programming error; I excluded these participants as well. This left us a final sample of 404 participants (182 male, 222 female, mean age = 19.33 years, SD = 0.88), including 182 Asian (45%), 156 White (39%), 25 Hispanic (6%), 16 Multiracial (4%), 14 Black (3%), and 12 “other” race individuals.

Procedure.

The initial procedure of Study 5 was same as previous studies. After providing consent and completing a CAPCHA question, participants completed the career development survey. Participants were then informed that they are a good fit for a specific occupation—either a workplace productivity specialist or AI ethicist—two real, but unfamiliar occupations that are expected to become common in the future (Deloitte, n.d., Medium, 2019). Importantly, participants were then randomly assigned to the selected occupation to be portrayed as either feminine or masculine. Participants then completed measures of job interest and two indicators of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status, as well as demographic and manipulation check items.

Measures

The same measure of *job interest* ($\alpha = 0.86$) and the same two indicators of sensitivity to gender-based occupational status—*perceived occupational status* and *self-presentational concerns* ($\alpha = 0.90$)—were used as in Study 4.

Manipulation check.

Participants completed the following manipulation check item: “According to the survey results, [job title] is a job that is...” (1 = *Very masculine*, 7 = *Very feminine*).

Results

See Table 5 for the summary statistics and correlations among all measures.

Insert Table 5 about here

Manipulation check.

I observed a significant main effect of gendered association, $F(1, 402) = 2387.00$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.85$, supporting the effectiveness of the manipulation. Specifically, participants perceived the occupation as more feminine when it was framed as feminine ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 0.90$) versus masculine ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 0.97$).

Job interest.

I observed a significant main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 400) = 8.22$, $p = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, and a nonsignificant effect of gendered association, $F(1, 400) = 0.99$, $p = 0.32$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$. Notably, the predicted two-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 400) = 5.16$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, supporting Hypothesis 1. Specifically, men tended to

express less interest in the occupation when it was portrayed as feminine ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.43$) versus masculine ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.38$), $p = 0.06$, $d = 0.36$, though this simple effect did not reach statistical significance. On the other hand, women expressed a similar level of interest regardless of whether the future occupation was portrayed as feminine ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.34$) or masculine ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.29$), $p = 0.93$, $d = 0.08$. These results are notable given that participants were told that they were a good fit for the exact same future-oriented job—merely portraying the job as feminine versus masculine shaped men’s (but not women’s) interest in them.

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Perceived occupational status. I observed a significant main effect of gendered association, $F(1, 400) = 4.14$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, and a nonsignificant effect of participant gender, $F(1, 400) = 4.73$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$. More importantly, the two-way interaction was again significant, $F(1, 400) = 6.59$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, supporting Hypothesis 2a. Men assigned higher status to the future occupation when it was portrayed as masculine ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.19$) than feminine ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.39$), $p = 0.004$, $d = 0.46$, but women perceived the occupation to be of similar status when portrayed as masculine ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.13$) versus feminine ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.04$), $p = 0.99$, $d = 0.02$.

Self-presentational concerns. I observed nonsignificant effects of gendered association, $F(1, 400) = 3.87$, $p = 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$, and participant gender, $F(1, 400) = 1.88$, $p = 0.17$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$. More importantly, I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 400) = 20.07$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, supporting Hypothesis 2b. Men

expressed significantly greater self-presentational concerns when the future occupation was portrayed as feminine ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.77$) versus masculine ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.50$), $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.67$; however, women expressed a similar level of self-presentational concerns regardless of whether the occupation was portrayed as masculine ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.59$) or feminine ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.35$), $p = 0.46$, $d = 0.21$.

Moderated mediation.

Though not preregistered, I again conducted exploratory moderated mediation analyses to examine whether sensitivity to gender-based occupational status mediated the main prediction. As with Study 4, we observed evidence of moderated mediation for perceived occupational status, supporting Hypothesis 3, but did not observe evidence of moderated mediation for self-presentational concerns. See Appendix D for detailed results.

Discussion

Study 5 is noteworthy because it portrayed the same, real future-oriented jobs as feminine or masculine, thereby isolating the femininity or masculinity of an occupation. Results replicated the effects observed in previous studies and largely supported my theorizing. I again observed evidence for the main prediction (Hypothesis 1), predicted effects on sensitivity to gender-based occupational status (Hypothesis 2a, 2b), and observed partial support for moderated mediation in exploratory analyses (Hypothesis 3). Given that many occupations in high demand are not yet gendered (e.g., radiology technician), these findings have important implications for how organizations may formulate their recruitment strategies so as to attract both women and men—an issue I consider further in the General Discussion.

CHAPTER 5

In previous chapters, I found robust evidence that men indeed are more sensitive to gender-based occupational status than women, and this greater sensitivity leads to men's (versus women's) decreased interest in gender-atypical occupations. In this next Chapter, I sought to develop an intervention that can effectively increase men's interest in stereotypically feminine occupations. Specifically, in Study 6, I tested the efficacy of an intervention grounded in my theory, which posits that men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status underlies their reduced interest in feminine occupations. Accordingly, I examine the capacity of an intervention aimed at affirming the esteem and respect of a traditionally feminine job as a means to enhance men's interest in it. Further, to ground this intervention in a consequential setting, I selected a traditionally feminine occupation for which current demand is high due to ongoing labor shortages: nursing (Barrett-Landau and Henle 2014, Haddad et al. 2022). For these reasons, Study 6 has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, Study 6 provides a direct test of the causal chain described in Hypothesis 3 by experimentally manipulating the proposed psychological mediator (Spencer et al. 2005). This definitive test of my theoretical account is important given that moderated mediation analyses fully supported my theoretical account in Study 3, but provided only partial support in Studies 4 and 5. Practically, Study 6 tests the viability of an intervention that can inform the practices of a wide range of organizations and human resource managers seeking to expand the pool of applicants for traditionally feminine jobs by attracting more men. Note that the goal of my intervention was not to portray the nursing profession as less feminine (or more

masculine) as has been the focus of past campaigns (e.g., “Are you men enough to be a nurse?”; Oregon Center for Nursing, 2002). Instead, the focal intervention of this study aimed at affirming the esteem and respect of the nursing profession, based on real accounts (Clarke 2020, Monti 2022, Yavaş and Özerli 2023). To gauge the relative impact of my focal intervention, I also devised a competing manipulation based on previous scholarship suggesting that strengthening economic job factors will boost men’s interest in feminine jobs: I presented men the same feminine occupation as in the other conditions, but with a 20% higher salary and stronger prospects for job growth. Because the main goal of this study was to evaluate whether these interventions have the capacity to increase men’s interest in nursing, I recruited only men to participate in this study. Study 6 was preregistered.

Study 6: An intervention to increase men’s interest in feminine occupations

Pilot Study. Prior to conducting Study 6, I administered a pilot study to evaluate the efficacy of the gender-based occupational status manipulation. In short, this pilot study demonstrated that the gender-based occupational status intervention led men to evaluate nursing as having a higher status occupation ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 0.85$) than they did in a control condition in which no intervention was introduced ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.92$), $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.37$, and further, led men to experience decreased self-presentational concerns ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.48$) compared to the control condition ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.84$), $p = 0.02$, $d = 0.28$. These results supported the effectiveness of my manipulation; thus, I proceeded to administer it in the context of the intervention study. See Appendix E for detailed results.

Method

Participants.

A custom panel of U.S. adults were recruited from Prolific Academic (Peer et al. 2017). One thousand one hundred and three participants took this study.⁴ Per preregistration, I excluded four participants who did not identify as men and 15 participants who reported being familiar with this study. These exclusions left with a final sample of 1,084 participants (mean age = 39.35 years, $SD = 13.50$), including 680 White (63%), 133 Black (12%), 124 Asian (11%), 94 Hispanic (9%), 47 Multiracial (4%), and 6 “other” race individuals.

Procedure.

After providing consent and completing a CAPTCHA question, participants completed the same career development survey from previous studies. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four conditions. There was a control condition in which participants learned that they fit with a traditionally feminine job (i.e., a nurse). There were two treatment conditions in which they similarly learned that they fit with being a nurse, but received an additional intervention that either targeted men’s sensitivity to gender-based occupational status or presented a higher salary and stronger job growth prospects. Finally, there was a benchmarking condition in which participants learned that they fit with a traditionally masculine job (i.e., mechanical technician). See Figure 12.

⁴ I preregistered to recruit 1,100 participants, however, the survey platform allowed 1,103 participants to complete the study.

Insert Figure 12 about here

On the key treatment condition, the *gender-based occupational status* condition, participants were first informed participants that Americans increasingly view nursing as a highly respected and prestigious profession following the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, participants were presented with three brief testimonials, ostensibly written by male nurses, that illustrate the respect they receive as a nurse. Specifically, they read the below:

Surging levels of respect and admiration for nursing

New national data suggests major changes following the COVID-19 pandemic in how Americans view the nursing profession. Americans increasingly view nursing as a "highly respected" and "prestigious" profession, according to recent evidence. Experts believe the pandemic played a role in transforming views of nursing because it highlighted the vital role nurses play in the evolving healthcare landscape.

"I have been a nurse for years, and I have been shocked at the level of respect and recognition from people in my community and social circles after the pandemic."

- Charlie Martin, 27, Denver, Colorado

"I take immense pride in my role as a male nurse, because it earned me a tremendous amount of respect from those around me. The respect I get from my family and friends is next level. I feel like they look up to me."

- Jordan Anderson, 39, Boston, Massachusetts

"I did many things before becoming a nurse - restaurant manager, car salesman, convenience store manager, and etc. Nothing stuck. But now? The respect from other people feels like the validation I was searching for. The respect I've earned from them is priceless"

- Alex Miller, 29, Gainesville, Georgia

In the *better pay/job growth* condition, I presented nursing as having a level of median pay that was 20% higher than in all other conditions and projected job growth as “excellent” (versus “average” in all other conditions). Next, participants responded to the same measure of job interest as in Studies 3 and 4. Lastly, they responded to manipulation check and demographic items.

Measures

Job interest.

The same four-item measures from Studies 3 and 4 were used to capture job interest ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Analysis

As preregistered, the primary focus of the analysis in this study was to assess whether the *gender-based occupational status* or *better pay/job growth* interventions increased men’s interest in becoming a nurse as compared to the control condition. To do so, I employed planned comparisons in which I compared my control condition to each of these two conditions. I treated the masculine occupation condition as a benchmark to gauge the relative magnitude of any positive treatment effects.

Results

Job interest.

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated a significant effect of the experimental manipulation on job interest, $F(3, 1080) = 15.03, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$. Importantly, as displayed in Figure 13, planned comparisons indicated that the focal intervention—*gender-based occupational status* intervention—significantly increased men’s interest in

nursing ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.88$) as compared with the control condition ($M = 3.06, SD = 1.84$) where no intervention was introduced, $t(1080) = 3.26, p = 0.001, d = 0.28$. On the other hand, the *better pay/job growth* intervention (i.e., providing 20% higher median pay and better-projected job growth; $M = 3.00, SD = 1.85$) did not increase men's interest in nursing compared to the control condition ($M = 3.06, SD = 1.84$), $t(1080) = -0.41, p = 0.69, d = 0.03$. Lastly, consistent with the earlier studies, men showed significantly greater interest in the masculine occupation ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.86$) as compared with the feminine occupation in the control condition, $t(1080) = 5.36, p < 0.001, d = 0.45$. Overall, these results support my theoretical account and provide a test of Hypothesis 3. Indeed, they indicate that one important mechanism contributing to men's relatively low interest in feminine occupations is their sensitivity to gender-based occupation status.

Insert Figure 13 about here

Discussion

In Study 6, I employed a large, pre-registered experiment to evaluate the efficacy of an intervention, derived from my theory and the extant literature to increase men's interest in the traditionally feminine occupation of nursing. Nursing is an occupation of particular practical importance given urgent efforts to increase men's representation amid substantial labor shortages and growing demand. I observed that the intervention targeting men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status effectively increased men's interest in nursing as compared with a control condition, thereby reducing the gap

between men's interest in a feminine versus masculine occupation. Notably, the focal intervention targeting men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status was more effective than increasing pay by 20% and portraying a more optimistic picture of projected job growth. By directly manipulating my theorized mediator—sensitivity to gender-based occupational status—the design of this intervention provides direct evidence that sensitivity to gender-based occupational status is an important factor underlying men's lack of interest in stereotypically feminine occupations in the early stages of the job search process (Spencer et al. 2005).

CHAPTER 6

This research pinpoints a consequential phenomenon during the early stages of job search process in which individuals consider occupations that are perceived as stereotypically feminine versus masculine. Across six studies ($N = 4,914$), my dissertation develops and tests theoretical predictions suggesting that the femininity versus masculinity of occupations will have a stronger effect on men's versus women's interest in them, such that men will be less interested in gender-atypical occupations than women. I consistently observed that men show significantly less interest in an occupation that fits them when they learn that it is perceived as stereotypically feminine (versus masculine) whereas women generally show a similar level of interest regardless of whether the job is perceived as masculine or feminine. I observed consistent evidence for this theorized asymmetry among individuals at a range of points in their career—from high school students considering a college major (Study 1) and undergraduates considering a career path (Studies 2 and 4) to unemployed individuals looking for a new opportunity (Study 3) and US adults considering interests in real occupations (Study 5). I also gleaned this evidence from a variety of methodologies, including experiments and archival data analysis.

Furthermore, these results were robust to alternative accounts related to economic factors (e.g., expected salary, future job growth), suggesting that these economic factors cannot fully explain men's lack of interest in feminine occupations as is suggested by extant literatures and public discourse in this arena. Instead, this research identifies men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status as playing a critical mediating role.

Indeed, I consistently observed that men, compared to women, are more sensitive to gender-based occupational status. Specifically, I observed that men, relative to women, perceive a feminine (versus masculine) occupation as having significantly lower status, and experience significantly greater self-presentational concerns about fitting with a gender-atypical occupation. The results of moderated mediation analyses fully supported this account in Study 2, and provided partial support in Studies 3 and 4. The strongest evidence, however, came from a test of this theorized process in the context of an intervention study where I directly manipulated my theorized construct, sensitivity to gender-based occupational status (Study 6). Specifically, I observed that an intervention that addressed men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status successfully reduced the gap between men's interest in a masculine and feminine occupation, whereas an approach centered on providing higher pay and better job prospects did not. These results not only support my theorized account but also demonstrate the practical importance of attending to the psychological barriers that men face when considering traditionally feminine occupations.

Theoretical and practical implications.

My dissertation advances theory and organizational practice in several ways. First, the lion's share of existing scholarship on gender segregation has focused on the barriers women face. This perspective continues to be important, but does not incorporate potentially consequential dynamics among men that also contribute to the enduring challenge of occupational gender segregation. This research highlights one such dynamic in which gender segregation may begin to take root during the early stages of the job

search process. Specifically, I suggest that men's initial responses to gender-atypicality in occupations during their early job search processes may represent an underappreciated force contributing to the perpetuation of gender segregation. It is important to note that men not only found a prospective career that fit them less appealing, but that they were less interested in knowing more about the potentially good opportunity as well when they learned its association with femininity. This suggests that the signals of its gendered aspects were enough to put men off, even before they sufficiently learn about other important aspects of the career path (e.g., job title, daily responsibilities, etc.). Just as the opening anecdote of this paper shows, men—but not women—drastically shift their interests away from jobs deemed to be associated with femininity (versus masculinity). This presents an important implication on when intervention should come into play to increase men's representation in stereotypically feminine occupations.

These findings are especially consequential when understood in the context of evolving changes in the labor market. Globalization, automation, and other factors have contributed to a decrease in demand for occupations in traditionally masculine sectors (e.g., locomotive firers, machine operators) but an increase in demand for traditionally feminine occupations (e.g., health technicians, physician assistants; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). In fact, with few exceptions, the fastest-growing jobs in the U.S. are predominantly female, whereas the fastest-declining ones are predominantly male (Miller 2017, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). These evolving changes in the labor market exacerbate the consequences of men's reluctance to consider traditionally feminine jobs for occupational segregation. Beyond this, if men opt to pursue a masculine occupation

even though their true preferences align with a traditionally feminine occupation, they may forgo potentially successful careers that will bring them satisfaction and well-being (Bosson et al. 2005, Meeussen et al. 2020, Watt 2010), and in turn, impact their productivity and commitment to their organization (Nye et al., 2012). Additionally, at a more macro level, men's decisions in this realm contribute to significant employee shortages in health- and service-oriented professions, which are only expected to grow with increased life expectancy and an aging baby-boomer population.

This research also develops a theoretical process that has not been well-identified in this context. Whereas several lines of previous research lead to the expectation that men are underrepresented in traditionally feminine jobs because these jobs provide inferior economic opportunities or because these jobs do not align with men's true interests or skills (e.g., Charles and Bradley 2009, Wang et al. 2013), my research spotlights the importance of a different factor—men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status. This work suggests that, even after holding constant economic factors of a job that men believe is a good fit with their preferences, they are less interested in pursuing it when it is viewed as feminine (versus masculine). These findings suggest that improving economic aspects alone (e.g., by increasing pay) may not be sufficient to attract men into traditionally feminine jobs and that concomitant efforts to address men's underlying concerns about how others will view their interest in feminine jobs may be more effective.

Importantly, I show that men are not inherently disinterested in feminine occupations, but instead they are concerned about the respect and esteem afforded to

them by others. In fact, in Study 6, I showed that affirming the esteem and respect of the traditionally feminine job of nursing significantly increased men's interest in it. This work thus offers practical guidelines for managers and organizations seeking to design interventions that can effectively support men's emergent interest, and potential pursuit, of traditionally feminine occupations. To date, organizations have sought to attract more men through campaigns that focus on the value of masculinity by framing men who enter these feminine occupations as truly masculine men. For instance, the Oregon Center for Nursing launched the "Are you man enough to be a nurse?" recruitment campaign in which they portrayed male nurses as macho men who possess idealized cultural forms of masculinity. In another recruitment campaign, the American Assembly for Men in Nursing attempted to appeal to traditional forms of masculinity by depicting an image of a male nurse who is also a mountain climber, and how both activities—mountain climbing and nursing—provide him with an "adrenaline rush." In contrast to these lay interventions seeking to make traditionally feminine jobs seem more masculine, this research suggests that it may be more effective to directly target men's underlying concerns regarding the respect and esteem others will afford them should they pursue a feminine occupation. Also, just as some organizations mindful of inclusion-related concerns provide informal opportunities for members of underrepresented groups to meet with individuals who may have similar experiences and concerns, organizations seeking men in traditionally feminine occupations may consider a similar mechanism to address men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status. It may be, for instance, that connecting prospective male job candidates with successful male role models whom

others deeply respect can assuage their concerns, thus removing psychological obstacles preventing them from pursuing such careers.

Finally, I note that this research also contributes to broader literatures on gender inequality. Past work has proposed that progress towards gender equality has been stalled despite decades of efforts to reduce gender inequality, in part, because of largely one-sided efforts to encourage women into traditionally masculine domains, but not vice versa (England 2010). Men's low rate of entrance into traditionally feminine occupations impedes gender equality efforts because it reinforces classic gender stereotypes and the devalued status of these occupations (Croft et al. 2021). This research not only identifies a specific set of concerns among men that may stall efforts to achieve gender equality, but also provides key insights into how to overcome this obstacle. Making use of these insights, and instituting practice that target the diversification of traditionally masculine *and* feminine domains may prove more effective in advancing gender equality efforts.

Limitations and directions for future research

I acknowledge several facets of the current research that represent opportunities for future inquiry. First, although I recruited a variety of samples, participants were cisgender, and for the most part, younger, White individuals. Furthermore, by design, my theorizing and experimental materials only presented discrete gendered signals of masculinity and femininity. Reality is more complex: to fully represent gender requires more than two discrete categories and individuals vary in where they place themselves on a gender continuum (Hyde et al. 2019). Although this research aimed to examine how individuals who identify as men or women respond to the experience of learning that they

fit with occupations that are feminine (versus masculine), it is critical for future research to understand how individuals with nonbinary gender identities respond to the situation described herein. Moreover, it remains unclear how more diverse samples (e.g., in terms of sexual orientation, race, class, age, and parental status), who may have different concerns and intersectional identities, may respond to signals of the femininity (versus masculinity) of an occupation. Because occupations are both gendered and racialized (e.g., Wingfield 2009), it is critical for future work to assess the scope of the primary effects observed in this dissertation. Additionally, this research specifically focused on how men and women respond to jobs that are perceived as either clearly feminine or masculine. It remains unclear where the tipping point is such that men begin responding negatively to jobs seen as feminine. For instance, would men respond to a job that is slightly feminine in a similarly negative way as they respond to a highly feminine job? Lastly, my goal in this research was to focus on a particular dynamic in the context of the early job search process. Thus, it is incumbent on future work to assess the implications of this dynamic for later stages of the job search process in which individuals typically formulated initial interest in the occupation and have more information about the occupation and the organizational context.

Conclusion

The present research demonstrates that men's sensitivity to gender-based occupational status may represent a powerful force contributing to the perpetuation of gender segregation. I offer a new perspective that highlights the different way that men, as compared with women, tend to respond in the early stages of the job search process

when after learning a job that fits them is gender-atypical. The evidence I found in this work suggests that improving economic factors alone may not be sufficient to attract men into traditionally feminine occupations, many of which are currently experiencing acute labor shortages. Rather, organizations may need to invest more intentionally in practices aimed at targeting men's underlying concerns about the respect should they pursue a feminine occupation. It is clear that both women and men will play an important role in the enduring challenge of occupational gender segregation. As feminist icon Gloria Steinem remarked, "I'm glad we've begun to raise our daughters more like our sons, but it will never work until we raise our sons more like our daughters."

TABLES

Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviations, and correlations (Study 2).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	0	1	2
0. Participant gender	0.56	0.50			
1. Gendered associations	0.50	0.50	-0.10*		
2. Job interest	4.79	1.33	0.31***	-0.22***	(0.50)
3. Self-presentational concerns	5.07	1.61	0.26***	-0.27***	0.57***

Note: N = 435 (full sample) 192 (male) 243 (female); Participant gender coded such that 0 = men 1 = women; Gendered associations coded as 0 = masculine 1 = feminine; * p < .05 ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Cronbach's alpha is displayed along the diagonal.

Table 2.
Means, Standard Deviations, and correlations (Study 3).

	M	SD	0	1	2	3	4	5
0. Participant gender	0.49	0.5						
1. Gendered association	0.49	0.5	-0.03					
2. Job interest	5.67	1.05	-0.10**	-0.04	(0.72)			
3. Self-presentational concerns	2.41	1.19	0.06	0.03	-0.49***			
4. Perceived occupational status	4.39	0.87	-0.08*	-0.08*	0.30***	-0.26***		
5. Gender identification	4.39	1.49	-0.28***	0.05	0.10**	-0.02	0.05	(0.85)

Note: N = 824 (full sample) 403 (male) 421 (female); Participant gender coded such that 0 = men 1 = women; Gendered job association is coded as 0 = masculine 1 = feminine; * p < .05 ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Values on the diagonal in parenthesis are alpha reliability coefficients.

Table 3.
Gender Identification as a moderator (Study 2)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Job interest
Gendered association	0.16 (0.10)
Participant gender	0.16 (0.10)
Gender identification	0.13 (0.07)
Gendered association x Participant gender	-0.65*** (0.15)
Gendered association x Gender identification	0.13 (0.10)
Participant gender x Gender identification	-0.06 (0.10)
Gendered association x Participant gender x Gender identification	-0.38* (0.15)
Constant	5.63*** (0.07)
Observations	824
R ²	0.06
Adjusted R ²	0.05
Residual Std. Error	1.02 (df = 816)
F Statistic	7.61*** (df = 7; 816)

Note: * p < .05 ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Values presented are standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Gendered job characteristics is coded as 0 = masculine 1 = feminine; Participant gender is coded as 0 = men 1 = women

Table 4.
Means, Standard Deviations, and correlations (Study 4).

	M	SD	0	1	2	3
0. Participant gender	0.51	0.5				
1. Gendered job association	0.5	0.5	0.06			
2. Job interest	3.41	1.94	-0.10**	-0.10**	(0.95)	
3. Self-presentational concern	1.78	1.34	-0.02	0.13***	-0.05	(0.92)
4. Perceived occupational status	4.1	1.06	-0.05	-0.21***	0.33***	-0.06

Note: N = 838; 414 (men) 424 (women); Participant gender coded such that 0 = men 1 = women; Gendered job association coded as 0 = masculine 1 = feminine; * p < .05 ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Values on the diagonal in parenthesis are alpha reliability coefficients.

Table 5.
Means, Standard Deviations, and correlations (Study 5).

	M	SD	0	1	2	3
0. Participant gender	0.45	0.5				
1. Gendered association	0.48	0.5	-0.08			
2. Job interest	3.87	1.38	-0.14**	-0.05	(0.86)	
3. Self-presentational concerns	2.56	1.58	0.06	0.10	0.06	(0.90)
4. Perceived occupational status	4.34	1.2	-0.10*	-0.10*	0.36***	0.02

Note: N = 404; 182 (men) 222 (women); Participant gender coded such that 0 = men 1 = women; Gendered job association coded as 0 = masculine 1 = feminine; * p < .05 ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Values on the diagonal in parenthesis are alpha reliability coefficient.

FIGURES

Figure 1.
Full Theoretical Model

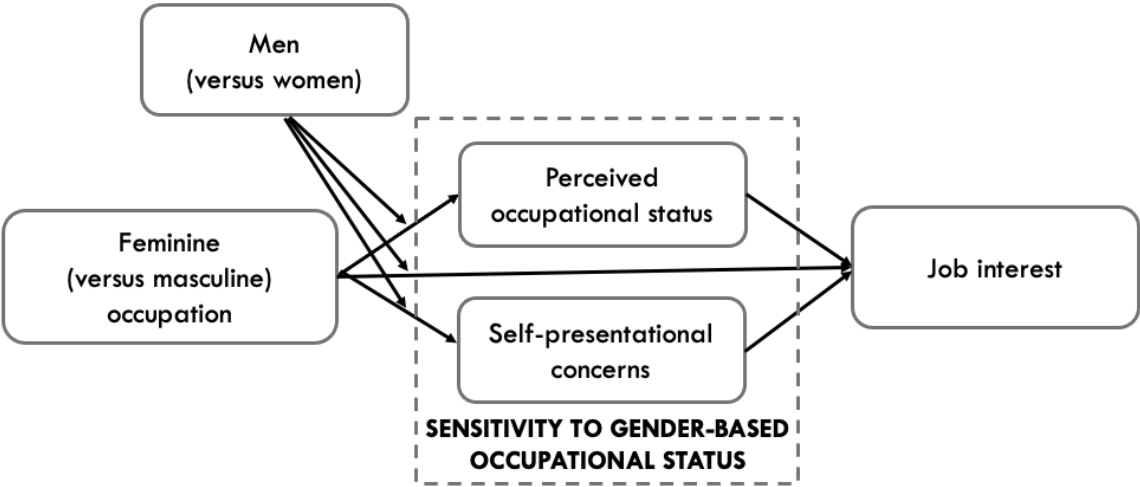


Figure 2.

Interest in academic majors as a function of gendered association and participant gender. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 1).

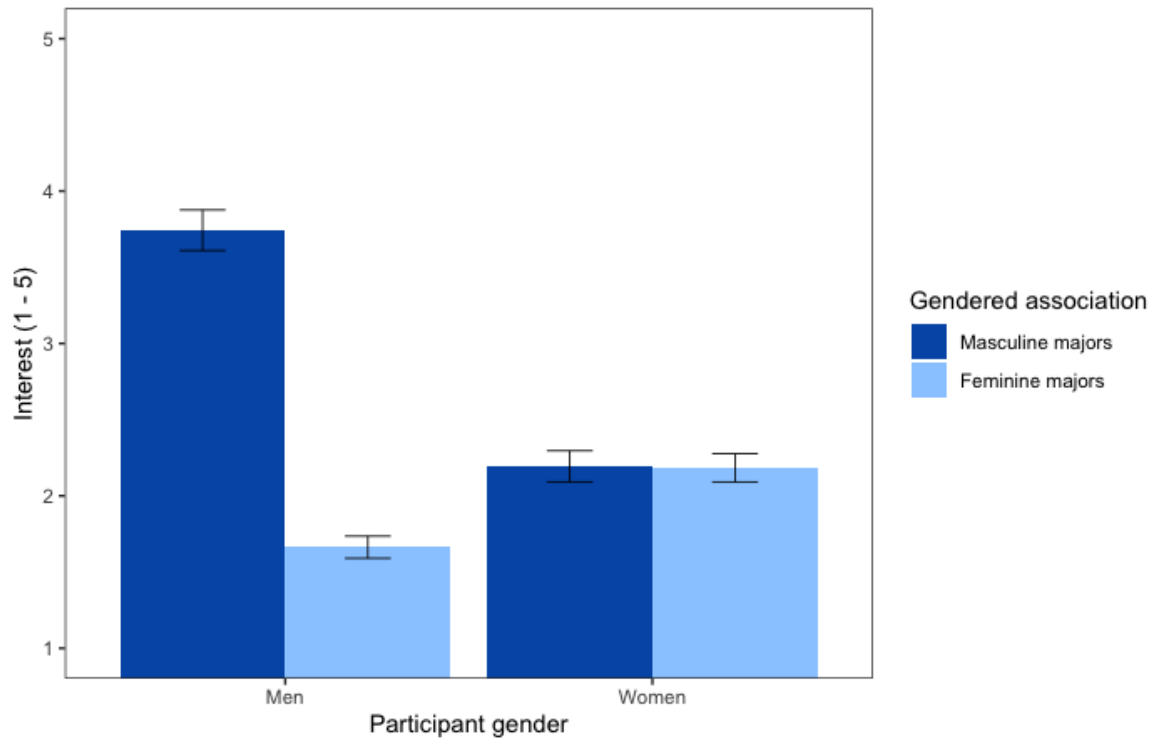


Figure 3.

Bogus feedback provided to participants in the masculine (top panel) and feminine (bottom panel) conditions (Study 2).

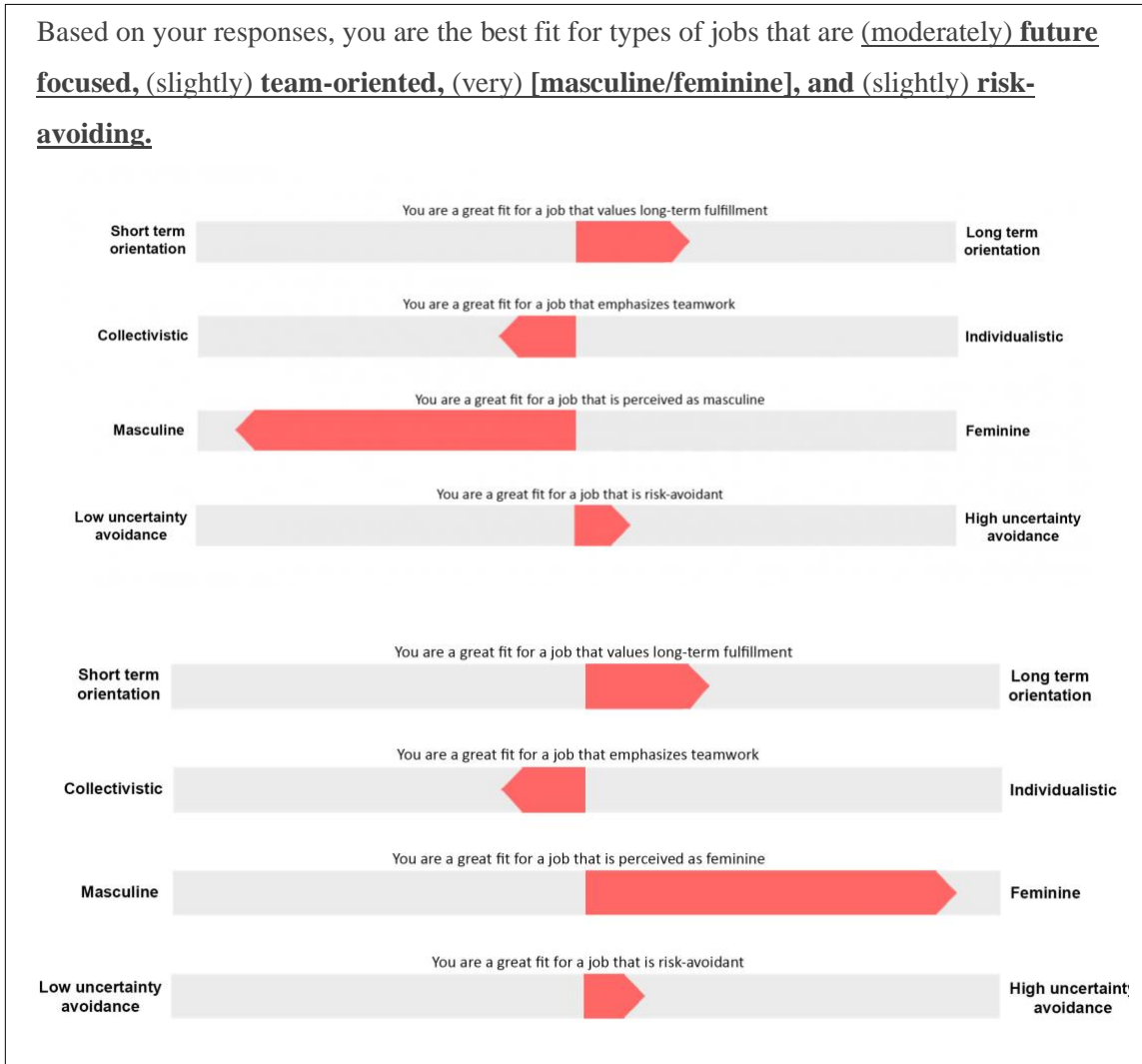


Figure 4.

Job interest as a function of gendered association and participant gender. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 2).

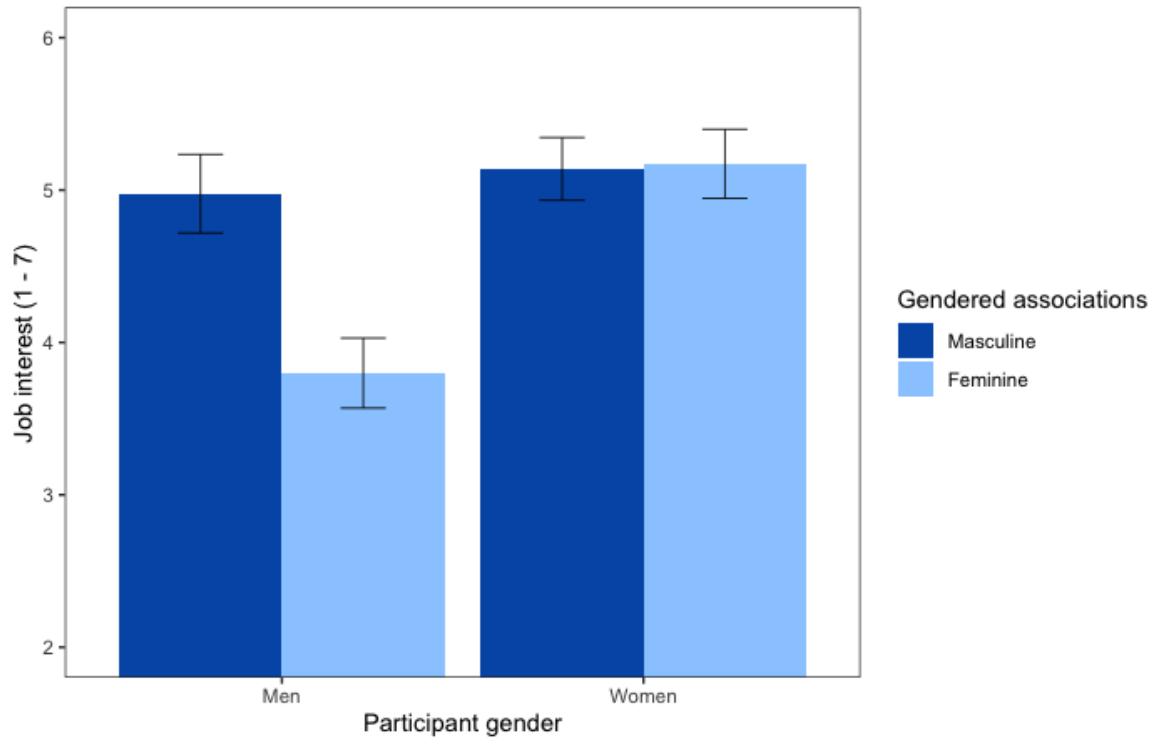


Figure 5.

Self-presentational concerns as a function of gendered association and participant gender. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 2).

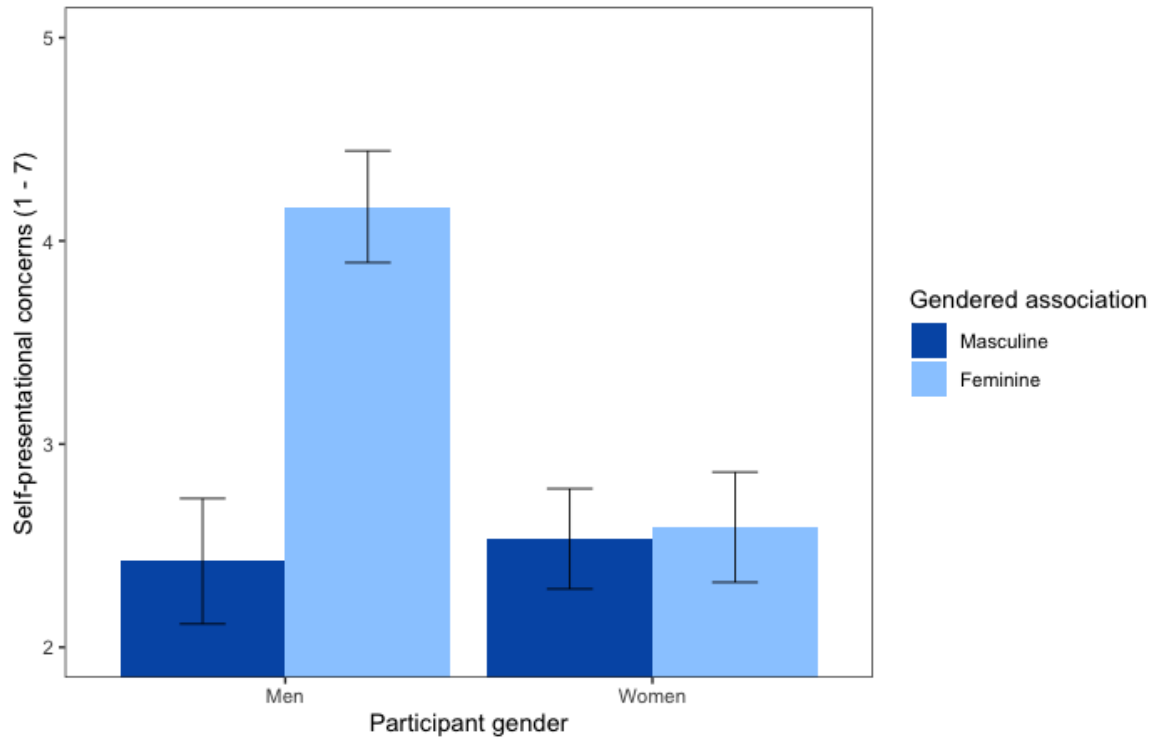


Figure 6.
Moderated Mediation Results (Study 2).

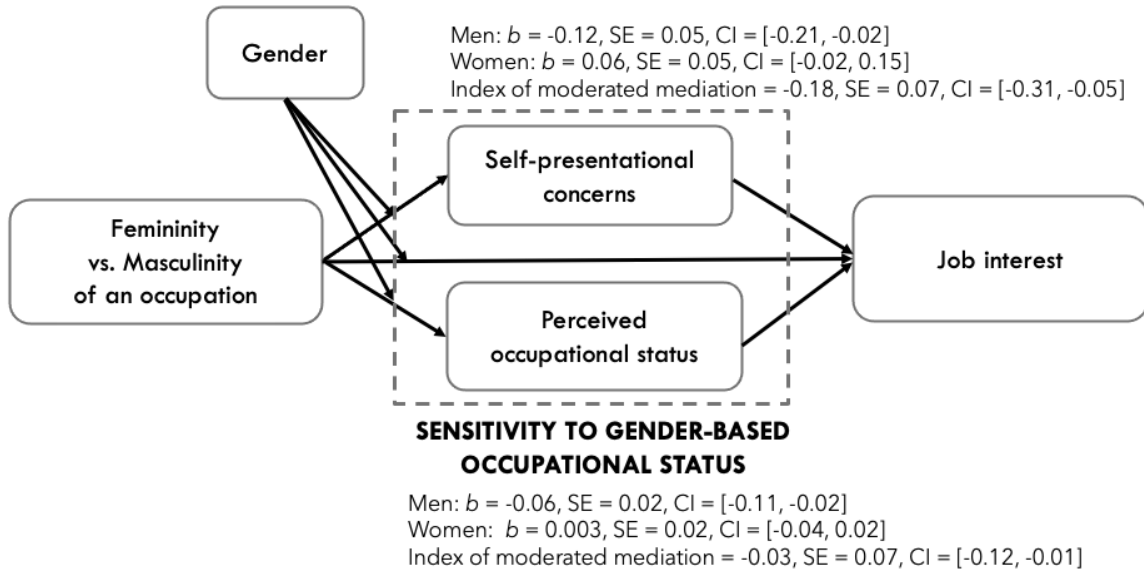


Figure 7.

Job interest as a function of gendered job association, participant gender, and gender identification (Study 3). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. High and low gender identification each corresponds to one standard deviation above and below the mean.

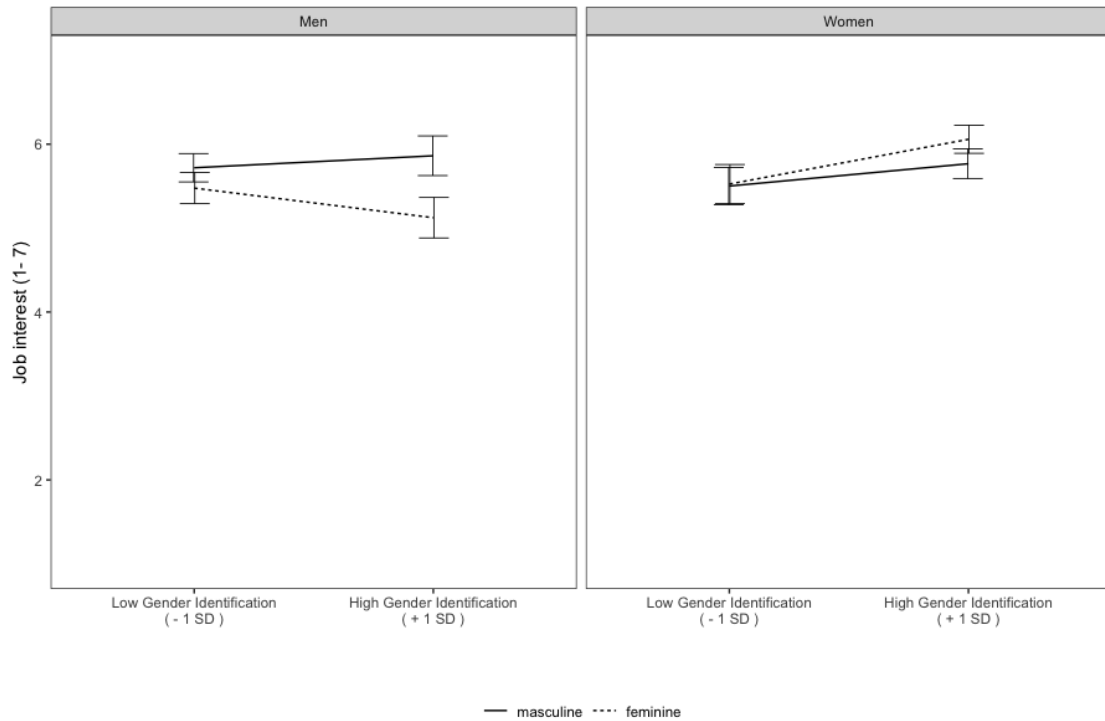


Figure 8.

Bogus feedback provided to participants in the masculine (top panel) and the feminine (bottom panel) conditions (Study 4)

CAREER SURVEY RESULTS

You would be a great fit for jobs that require:

- Strong problem solving skills
- Capable of making decisive judgments
- Attention to details
- Ability to work independently

Occupation(s) that fit your preferences:

Match	Occupation	Median Pay	Projected Job Growth
Best match	Network and computer systems administrator	\$44,225	Average

CAREER SURVEY RESULTS

You would be a great fit for jobs that require:

- Sensitivity to other people's emotional needs
- Supporting and relating with others
- Attention to details
- Helping and being of service to people

Occupation(s) that fit your preferences:

Match	Occupation	Median Pay	Projected Job Growth
Best match	Executive secretary	\$44,225	Average

Figure 9.

Job interest as a function of gendered job association and participant gender. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 4).

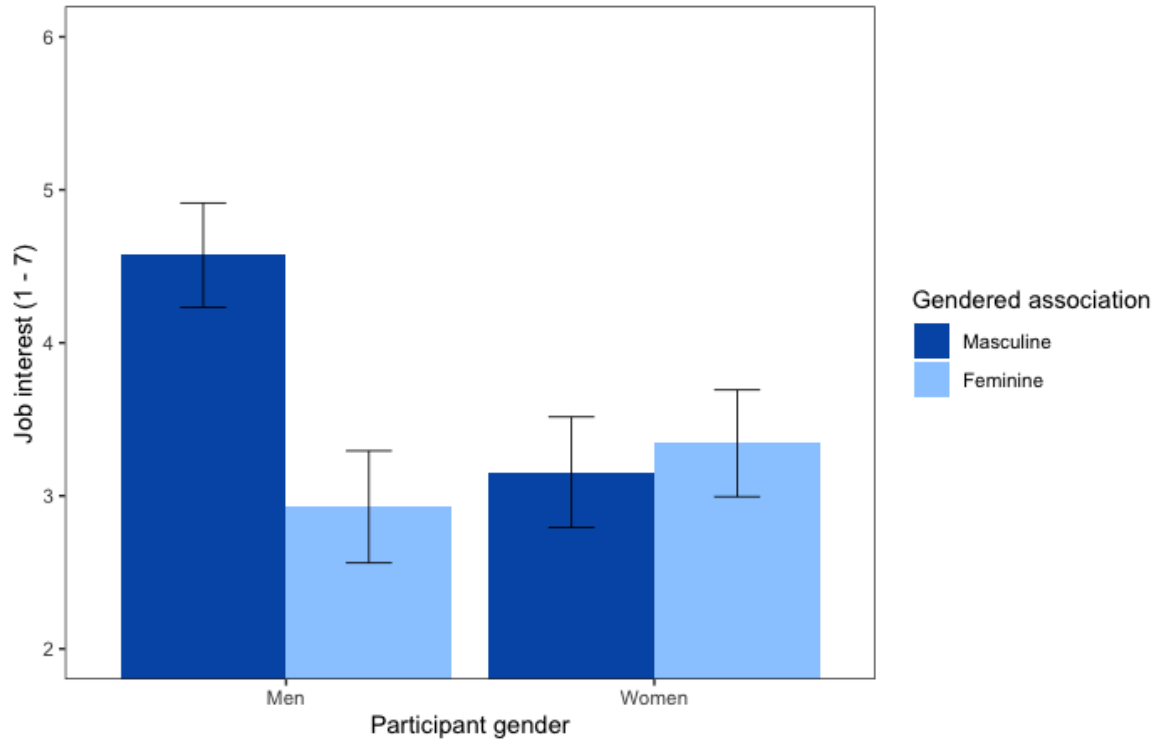


Figure 10.

Perceived occupational status as a function of gendered job association and participant gender. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 4).

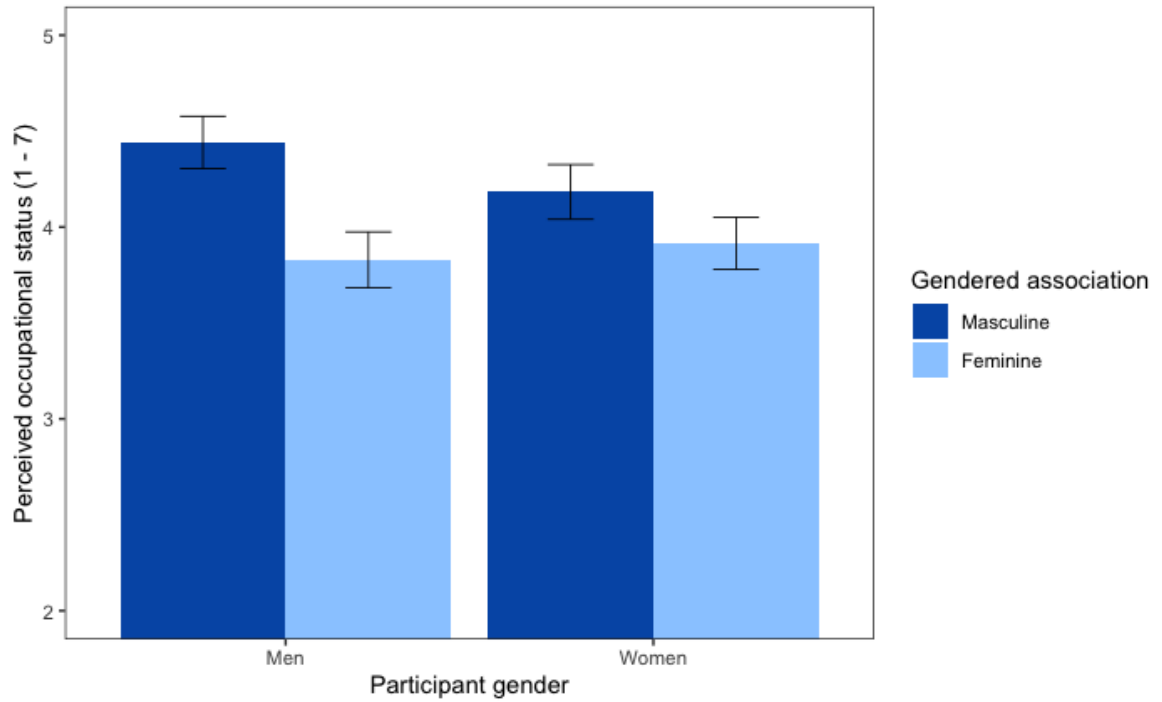


Figure 11.

Self-presentational concerns as a function of gendered job association and participant gender. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 4).

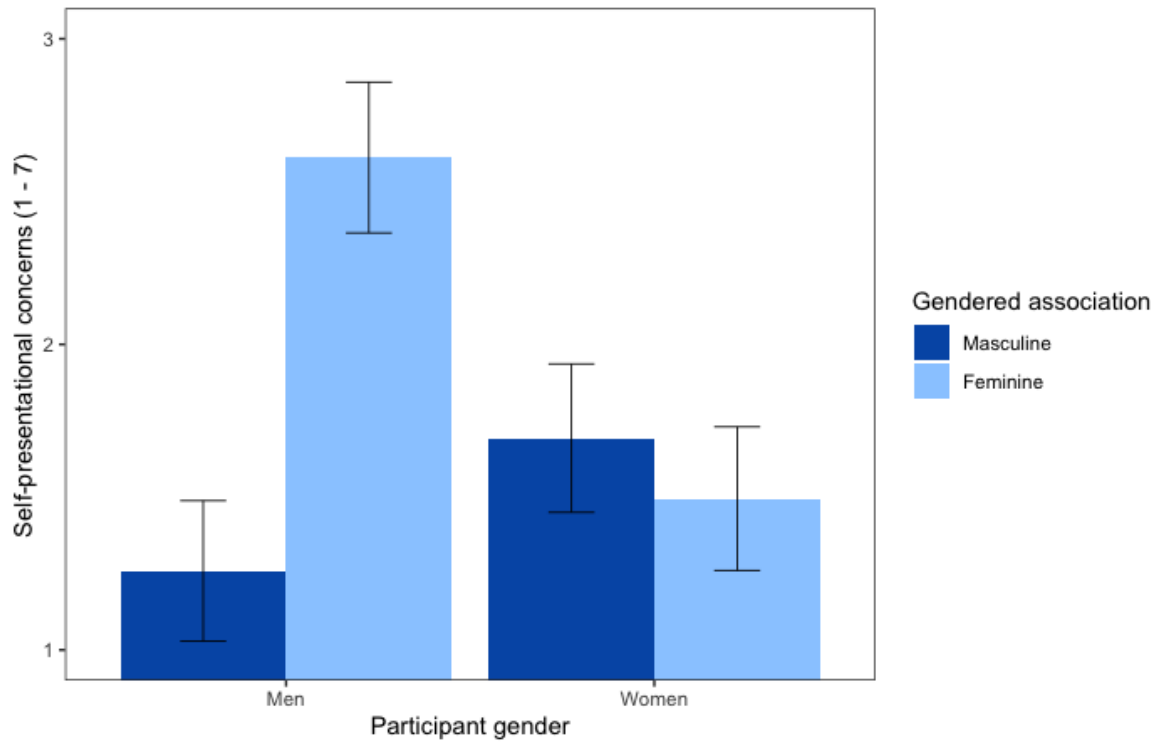


Figure 12.

Bogus feedback provided to participants in the control (top panel), masculine job (middle panel), and better pay/job growth (bottom panel) conditions (Study 6).

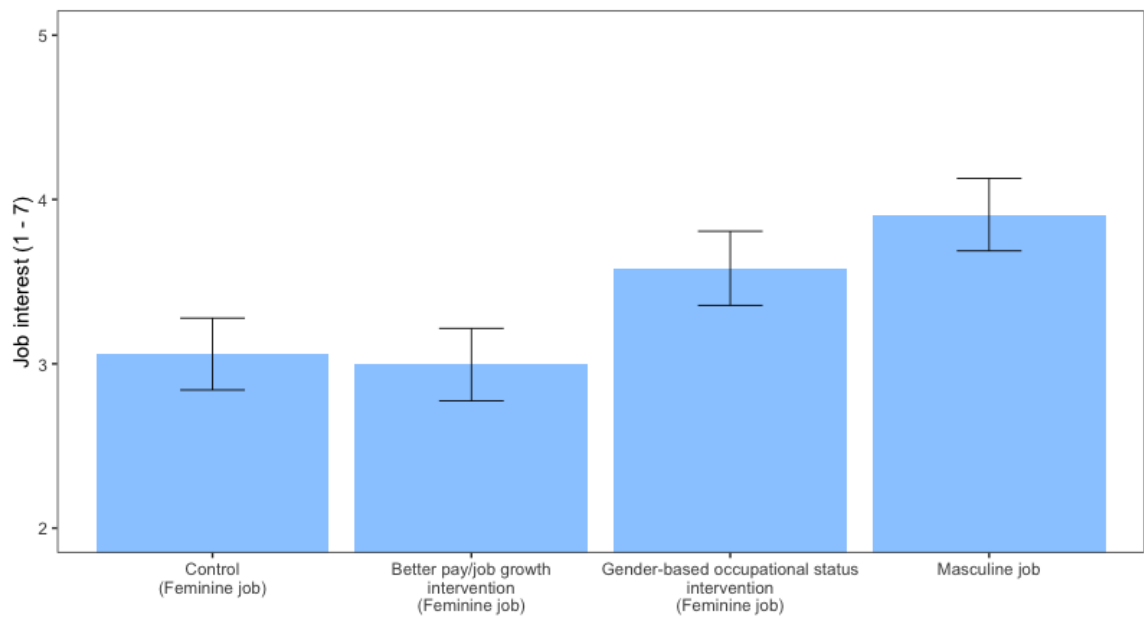
CAREER SURVEY RESULTS			
Occupation(s) that fit your preferences:			
Match	Occupation	Median Pay	Projected Job Growth
Best match	Nurse	\$60,900	Average

CAREER SURVEY RESULTS			
Occupation(s) that fit your preferences:			
Match	Occupation	Median Pay	Projected Job Growth
Best match	Mechanical technician	\$60,900	Average

CAREER SURVEY RESULTS			
Occupation(s) that fit your preferences:			
Match	Occupation	Median Pay	Projected Job Growth
Best match	Nurse	\$73,080	Excellent

Figure 13.

Job interest as a function of experimental condition. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals (Study 6).



APPENDICES

Appendix A. Separate analysis of two measure capturing job interest (Study 2)

First, I assessed participants' job interest based on the question: "How appealing does working in a job with these qualities sound to you?" (1 = *Very Unappealing*, 7 = *Very Appealing*). I observed nonsignificant main effect of gendered job association, $F(1, 431) = 31.87, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.07$, and significant main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 431) = 27.26, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$. Most importantly, I observed a strong two-way interaction, $F(1, 431) = 52.91, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$. Consistent with my theorizing, the femininity versus masculinity of the occupation had a particularly pronounced effect on male students: male students expressed significantly less interest when the occupation that fit them was feminine ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.46$) versus masculine ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.14$), $p < 0.001, d = 1.26$. On the other hand, female students expressed a similar degree of interest regardless of whether the occupation was portrayed as masculine ($M = 4.62, SD = 1.22$) or feminine job ($M = 4.79, SD = 1.16$), $p = 0.73, d = 0.14$.

Second, I assessed participants' job interest based on another question: "How interested would you be to receive more detailed survey results? (e.g., the specific list of companies/jobs that would fit you well)" (1 = *Not at all interested*, 7 = *Very much interested*). I observed nonsignificant main effects of gendered association, $F(1, 431) = 8.16, p = 0.05, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$, and participant gender, $F(1, 431) = 29.51, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$. I observed a marginally significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 431) = 3.63, p = 0.06, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$. Importantly, male students expressed less interest when they were told that the type of occupations that fits them is typically perceived as feminine ($M = 4.31, SD =$

2.03) than masculine ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.77$), $p = 0.02$, $d = 0.39$. By contrast, female students expressed a comparable amount of interest regardless of whether the job type that fits them was presented as masculine ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.57$) or feminine ($M = 5.55$, $SD = 1.68$), $p = 0.97$, $d = 0.06$.

Appendix B: Separate analysis of two measure capturing Job interest (Study 3)

First, I assessed participants' job interest based on the question: "How appealing does working in a job with these qualities sound to you?" (1 = *Very Unappealing*, 7 = *Very Appealing*). I observed nonsignificant main effect of gendered job association, $F(1, 820) = 0.79, p = 0.37, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$, and significant main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 820) = 4.54, p = 0.03, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$. Most importantly, I observed a strong two-way interaction, $F(1, 820) = 22.70, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$. Consistent with my theorizing, the femininity versus masculinity of the occupation had a particularly pronounced effect on unemployed male job seekers: men expressed significantly less interest when the occupation that fit them was feminine ($M = 5.01, SD = 1.30$) versus masculine ($M = 5.49, SD = 1.09$), $p < 0.001, d = 0.41$. On the other hand, unemployed female job seekers expressed a similar degree of interest regardless of whether the occupation was portrayed as masculine ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.16$) or feminine job ($M = 5.59, SD = 1.21$), $p = 0.04, d = 0.26$.

Second, I assessed participants' job interest based on another question: "How interested would you be to receive more detailed survey results? (e.g., the specific list of companies/jobs that would fit you well)" (1 = *Not at all interested*, 7 = *Very much interested*). I observed nonsignificant main effects of gendered association, $F(1, 820) = 1.80, p = 0.18, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$, and participant gender, $F(1, 820) = 8.77, p = 0.003, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$. I observed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 820) = 9.22, p = 0.002, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$. Importantly, male students expressed less interest when they were told that the type of occupations that fits them is typically perceived as feminine ($M = 5.68, SD = 1.33$)

than masculine ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 1.06$), $p = 0.009$, $d = 0.30$. By contrast, female students expressed a comparable amount of interest regardless of whether the job type that fits them was presented as masculine ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 1.14$) or feminine ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.05$), $p = 0.69$, $d = 0.11$.

Appendix C: Moderated mediation analyses (Study 3)

To examine whether men's heightened sensitivity to gender-based occupational status underlies the tendency for men, relative to women, to express less interest in gender-atypical occupations, I ran a moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes 2013) with 5000 samples and biased corrected 95% confidence intervals, which inputted perceived occupational status and self-presentational concerns as parallel mediators. Supporting Hypothesis 3, I observed evidence for moderated mediation on perceived occupational status a mediator, *index of moderated mediation* = -0.18, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [-0.35, -0.03]. Specifically, for men, there was a significant effect of gendered association on job interest through perceived occupational status, *indirect effect* = -0.34, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.47, -0.21]; the effect of gendered association on job interest through perceived occupational status was also significant for women, but to much a lesser degree, *indirect effect* = -0.15, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [-0.27, 0.04]. I did not observed evidence for moderated mediation on self-presentational concerns as a mediator, however, *index of moderated mediation* = -0.04, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.17].

Appendix D: Moderated mediation analyses (Study 4)

To examine whether men's heightened sensitivity to gender-based occupational status underlies the tendency for men, relative to women, to express less interest in gender-atypical occupations, I ran a moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes 2013) with 5000 samples and biased corrected 95% confidence intervals, which inputted perceived occupational status and self-presentational concerns as parallel mediators. Supporting Hypothesis 3, I observed evidence for moderated mediation on perceived occupational status a mediator, *index of moderated mediation* = -0.24, *SE* = 0.10, 95% CI [-0.44, -0.05]. Specifically, for men, there was a significant effect of gendered association on job interest through perceived occupational status, *indirect effect* = -0.23, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [-0.40, -0.08]; the effect of gendered association on job interest through perceived occupational status was also significant for women, but to much a lesser degree, *indirect effect* = 0.01, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.11]. I did not observed evidence for moderated mediation on self-presentational concerns as a mediator, however, *index of moderated mediation* = 0.10, *SE* = 0.1, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.23].

Appendix E: Pilot study (Study 6)

Method

Participants.

Three hundred men (mean age = 40.29 years, $SD = 12.47$) were recruited to take this study from Prolific Academics (Peer et al. 2017). This sample consisted of 199 White (66%), 46 Black (15%), 26 Asian (9%), 19 Hispanic (6%), 9 Multiracial (3%), and 1 “other” race individuals.

Procedures.

After providing consent and completing a CAPTCHA question, participants completed the same career development survey from previous studies. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions. There was a control condition in which participants learned that they fit with a traditionally feminine job (i.e., a nurse). In my key treatment condition, the *gender-based occupational status* condition, participants also learned that they fit with being a nurse, but received an additional intervention that targeted men’s sensitivity to gender-based occupational status. Specifically, I informed participants that Americans increasingly view nursing as a highly respected and prestigious profession following the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, I presented three brief testimonials, ostensibly written by male nurses, that illustrate the respect they receive as a nurse. For instance, one testimonial stated, “I have been a nurse for years, and I have been shocked at the level of respect and recognition from people in my community and social circles after the pandemic”. Next, participants responded to the same measure of perceived occupational status and self-presentational concerns as in Studies 3 and 4.

Results

Sensitivity to gender-based occupational status.

Perceived occupational status. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated a significant effect of the experimental manipulation on perceived occupational status, $F(1, 298) = 10.21, p = 0.002, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$. Importantly, the gender-based occupational status intervention led men to evaluate nursing as having a higher status occupation ($M = 5.09, SD = 0.85$) than they did in a control condition in which no intervention was introduced ($M = 4.76, SD = 0.92$), $p = 0.002, d = 0.37$.

Self-presentational concerns. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated a significant effect of the experimental manipulation on perceived occupational status, $F(1, 298) = 5.80, p = 0.002, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Importantly, the gender-based occupational status intervention led men to experience decreased self-presentational concerns ($M = 2.12, SD = 1.48$) than the control condition ($M = 2.58, SD = 1.84$), $p = 0.02, d = 0.28$.

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