

Editorial to Part I “Revisioning, Rethinking, Restructuring Gender at Work: Quo Vadis Gender Stereotypes?”

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Abstract

The papers in this Special Issue Part I “Revisioning, Rethinking, Restructuring Gender at Work: Quo Vadis Gender Stereotypes?” focus on the current state of gender inequality, particularly stereotypes. We present studies showing that differences in gender stereotypes still exist, confirm disadvantages for women in male-dominated roles and sectors and when the employment sector is not specified, but also disadvantages for men in female-dominated roles and sectors. In contrast to this general trend, one paper in Part II of this Special Issue found a preference for women over men as job candidates in their study. Incongruence emerged as a striking common theme to explain these gender differences, whereby some studies focused on the perceived incongruence from the *actor's* perspective and how external factors contribute to these perceptions, whereas others looked at the perceived incongruence from the *observer's* perspective. We summarize the papers and briefly discuss the key points of Part I at the end of this editorial.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Despite some progress and positive developments toward gender equality, gender equality is far from being achieved—neither in societies more generally nor in the workplace specifically. For example, while women represent half of the workforce and are, on average, better educated than men (Catalyst, 2021), they are still more likely to work part-time, hold the majority of childcare and household responsibilities, and remain underrepresented in managerial positions (Catalyst, 2021). Women and men remain restricted by the existing gender roles and gender-based expectations in society and organizations (Braun et al., 2017; Hentschel et al., 2018; Hernandez Bark et al., 2014; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Triana et al., 2019). This effect is reinforced when children (even potential ones) are involved (Bear & Glick, 2017; Gloor et al., 2018; Junker

et al., 2020; Steffens et al., 2019): Men receive a fatherhood bonus (e.g., improved career opportunities and salaries), whereas women experience a motherhood penalty (e.g., poorer career opportunities and salaries).

However, several recent developments in the workplace and in society's conceptualization of gender might influence gender equality and how gender is perceived at work. First, the increased digitization offers new challenges but also opportunities for employees. Second, gender has primarily been studied and perceived as a binary concept, which does not accurately reflect gender in today's world. Third, an increasingly diverse workforce highlights the importance of taking the intersections of various marginalized identities into account when battling discrimination. Fourth, albeit not yet being present when announcing this call for papers for the special issue “Revisioning, Rethinking, Restructuring Gender at Work,” the COVID-19 pandemic

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has been omnipresent since early 2020 and has substantially affected individuals' working and private lives, with potentially long-lasting consequences for gender equality and gender stereotypes. These developments require new empirical approaches and an assessment of the status quo of gender equality at work, studies of its underlying mechanisms, and ways to foster gender equality. This Special Issue aims to get a more conclusive understanding of the current situation, its underpinnings, and possible directions of change to re-think gender at work.

The articles included in this Special Issue follow several common themes. The papers in Part I focus on the current state of gender inequality, particularly stereotypes, while those in Part II emphasize the factors contributing to gender stereotypes.

In Part I, we present studies showing that differences in gender stereotypes still exist (Gartzia, 2022), confirm disadvantages for women in male-dominated roles and sectors (Henningsen et al., 2022) and when the employment sector is not specified (Gloor et al., 2022; Hernandez Bark et al., 2022), but also disadvantages for men in female-dominated roles and sectors (Sczesny et al., 2022). In contrast to this general trend, one paper in Part II of this Special Issue found a preference for women over men as job candidates in their study (Niedlich et al., 2022; Study 1). Incongruence emerged as a striking common theme to explain these gender differences, whereby some studies focused on the perceived incongruence from the *actor's* perspective and how external factors contribute to these perceptions (Henningsen et al., 2022; Meeussen et al., 2022), whereas others looked at the perceived incongruence from the *observer's* perspective (Gloor et al., 2022; Hernandez Bark et al., 2022; Nett et al., 2022; Raymondie & Steiner, 2022; Sczesny et al., 2022).

The papers in Part II of the Special Issue share the aim of understanding individual factors determining whether observers are more or less likely to discriminate against women and men (Baldner et al., 2022; Süssenbach & Carvacho, 2022) and the boundary conditions that make gender stereotypes more or less salient (Dray & Sabat, 2022; Kahalon et al., 2022; Klysing et al., 2022; Nicholson et al., 2022; Niedlich et al., 2022; Obioma et al., 2022).

Below, we summarize the papers in the corresponding Special Issue part in which they appear. We briefly discuss the key points of Part I at the end of this editorial. We jointly discuss the key takeaways from the whole Special Issue and the potential for future research building on the included papers in an overall discussion section in Part 2 (Junker et al., 2022).

2 | AT THE CORE OF IT: GENDER ROLES OF WOMEN AND MEN

Gartzia (2022) presents five studies examining perceptions of agency (i.e., being seen as competent and competitive) and communion (i.e., being seen as caring and warm) of women and men. In all studies, men were ascribed less communion than women—both by themselves and by others. However, agency ascriptions were similar for women and men in self- and other-ratings—except for Study 3, in

which men scored higher in the agency than women. The effect sizes for men's lower communion were high (Cohen's d from 0.53 to 0.60) and stable across different organizational settings (e.g., banking sector), roles and measures. However, these differences decreased with increasing managerial level: Female and male top managers were not perceived to differ in communion. Overall, this study is in line with findings confirming changes in the desirability of stereotypically feminine traits in the workplace and in leadership roles (Kark et al., 2012) and of the female gender role (increasing in agency) but not the male gender role (for instance not increasing in communion; Eagly et al., 2020; Lopez-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2011; Wilde & Diekmann, 2005). These gender roles are not only of descriptive value but also affect individuals' behaviors and careers, as the following papers in this Special Issue show.

3 | THE ACTOR'S PERSPECTIVE: UNDERREPRESENTATION DUE TO A LACK OF APPEAL

Meeussen et al. (2022) focus on the actor's perspective to better understand women's underrepresentation in leadership roles. In line with previous research, for instance, by Schuh et al. (2014), the authors propose a lower willingness of women to sacrifice other aspects of their lives for making a career. They further argue that perceptions of stronger gender discrimination and lower perceived fit with leadership positions contribute to a lower expectation of being successful as a leader and, in turn, predict an (un)willingness to sacrifice. Their assumptions were largely confirmed across two studies among surgical consultants and veterinarians in the United Kingdom. Importantly, the diverging gender proportions in the two samples—with women being underrepresented among surgical consultants but overrepresented among veterinarians—mirror findings of gender inequality in leadership positions irrespective of sectors (for instance, Gartzia, 2022). As the authors argue, even the seemingly internal factor of lower willingness to sacrifice is driven by external factors, and these factors are the structural barriers that need to be removed.

Henningsen et al. (2022) present multisource, time-lagged data on the underrepresentation of women in university leadership, focusing on academic deans in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. They argue that assuming a dean's role is a step toward becoming a leader in higher university management, of which less than 20% are women. They propose that both observer and actor mechanisms explain this circumstance. First, based on gender stereotypes, stakeholders might be more likely to recommend men than women for the deanship. Second, men might find deanship more appealing than women (self-selection bias). The authors show that job appeal and recommendation for deanship were both associated with the ambition to become deans. The authors found no gender differences in the likelihood of being recommended for the deanship. However, there was evidence for self-selection bias: The perceived representation of female deans in the faculty and women's stronger

endorsement of communal career goals (which were seemingly incongruent with the dean role for women) reduced the appeal of such a position, in turn affecting women's ambitions to become deans. Conversely, men more strongly endorsed agentic career goals that were seemingly congruent with the dean role, making such positions more appealing and, in turn, increasing men's ambitions to become deans. Thus, highlighting the presence of other women in deanship positions and the communal aspects of such positions might reduce these self-selection biases.

4 | THE PERCEIVER'S PERSPECTIVE: GENDER ROLES AND FIT ASSUMPTIONS AFFECT CAREERS

Yet, not only individuals' choices contribute to gender inequality but also gender-biased perceptions (Zheng, Kark, et al., 2018; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). Gloor et al. (2022) focused on women and the incongruence between being a parent and being a committed employee. They argue that motherhood stereotypes apply even to women who are not (yet) mothers. The possibility of parenthood already suffices to trigger discrimination in selection situations: Managers perceive childfree women as "risky employees" when they are of typical childbearing age—a phenomenon termed the "maybe-baby-effect" (Gloor et al., 2018). The authors found support for this effect in both a field study and an experimental setting. If women want to mitigate this maybe-baby risk perception, they must actively emphasize job commitment or communicate that they are not interested in having children.

Incongruence between the gender role and the occupational role was also the basis for Nett et al.'s (2022) study. They replicate the well-known "think manager—think male" phenomenon in a German sample, showing that little has changed since Schein's (1973, 1975) studies on the topic: Individuals still see more overlap between the male gender role and the leader role than between the female gender role and the leader role. Complementing this finding, they also examined and found evidence for a "think scientist—think male" phenomenon, such that there is seemingly more overlap in the images of the typical scientist and the typical man compared with the typical woman. Further analyses revealed that the "think manager—think male" phenomenon is grounded in higher congruence between the stereotypes of managers and men, whereas the "think scientist—think male" phenomenon is grounded in higher incongruence between the stereotypes of scientists and women. The authors argue that this is one explanation for the continuing gender disparity in science in Germany. In addition, combining these two findings might help explain the continuing gender imbalance in higher academic positions (i.e., on the professorial and dean levels), mirroring the findings by Henningsen et al. (2022).

Hernandez Bark et al. (2022) examined the impact of personal initiative as well as gender on different evaluative dimensions (e.g., perceived competence, hireability, likeability) in two experimental studies with scenarios of simulated job interviews in a personnel

selection context. They proposed that although personal initiative should relate to positive evaluations in general, this might not be the case for women applicants as personal initiative might be seen as incongruent to the female gender role. The authors further assumed that perceived agency and communion mediate the relation between personal initiative and the applicant's evaluation. Based on role incongruity, high agency should relate to lower evaluations for women applicants, and high communion should relate to lower evaluations for men applicants. Overall, the two studies point to the positive effects of personal initiative on personal evaluations and further reveal perceived agency and communion as mediating mechanisms. In line with previous research (e.g., Heilman, 2012; Williams & Tiedens, 2016), the authors also find evidence for the proposed backlash effect for agentic women on likeability (see Zheng, Kark, et al., 2018; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). However, thereby contributing to research on the consequences of men's role incongruence (e.g., Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010), the studies also show backlash effects for communal men on likeability. There were no further interactions of the applicant's gender and agency and communion, respectively, on the other evaluation dimensions.

Backlash effects due to gender role incongruence were also the focus of Raymondie and Steiner's (2022) study which further shows that incongruence does not only affect women but more generally contributes to gender inequality for women *and* men. The authors examined how displaying counter-stereotypical emotions affected the evaluation of women and men leaders in a French sample. They operationalized counter-stereotypical emotions based on incongruence with the respective gender role: Anger was assumed to be counter-stereotypical for women leaders, and sadness as counter-stereotypical for men leaders. They used an avatar to display the leader's emotions in a 2 (leader gender: female vs. male) × 3 (leader emotion: anger, sadness, or neutral)-between-subject design. In general, leaders were rated higher in trust, leader-member exchange (LMX i.e., the relationship quality between leader and follower) and effectiveness if they displayed a neutral emotion rather than anger or sadness. Displaying counter-stereotypical emotions related to lower evaluations for both women and men leaders. In particular, women in leadership roles were rated lower in trust, LMX, and effectiveness when showing anger instead of sadness. Any emotion displayed, whether congruent (anger) or incongruent (sadness) with the male gender stereotype, resulted in poorer evaluations for male leaders. These results hint in the direction (a) that showing a dominance-related emotion (anger) triggers backlash effects for women leaders, whereas showing any emotion violates the masculine gender role expectation and induces backlash effects for men leaders. This is interesting considering the prior findings of Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008), which showed that men who expressed anger in a work context were attributed higher status than men who expressed sadness. In contrast, women who displayed anger were rated lower and were conferred lower status, regardless of their actual status (e.g., woman trainee or a woman CEO). Furthermore, women's emotional reactions were attributed to intra-personal attributes (e.g., "she is an angry person"). Men's emotional reactions were perceived as related to external factors and, thus, more legitimate. The current study

may suggest that, at least in the French culture, there may be less tolerance in our days for men leaders' anger displays.

Sczesny et al. (2022) examined why men are underrepresented in childcare work. They proposed the perceived incongruence between the communal qualities needed in such a role and the male gender role as one explanation for this underrepresentation. The authors tested their assumptions in an online experiment, in which they varied gender (women vs. men) and personality traits (communal vs. agentic) of people interested in childcare work and how this affected the perceived suitability for this occupation. They found significant main effects, such that the communal candidate was rated as more suitable for childcare work than the agentic candidate. The woman candidate was rated as more suitable than the man candidate. However, they did not find differences in ascribed likeability and trustworthiness. The gender difference in ascribed suitability was driven by lower ascribed childcare competence to men than women, but not by a higher perceived risk of child abuse.

5 | DISCUSSION

Taken together, the studies in this first part of the Special Issue show that women and men still differ in their communion, but not in their agency—both in self-reported and other-reported ratings (Gartzia, 2022). This is in line with other research that shows that the female gender role has changed and is expected to change more in the future compared to the male gender role (Eagly et al., 2020; Kark et al., 2012; Lopez-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2011; Wilde & Diekmann, 2005). Further, gender roles still contribute to disadvantages for women in the workplace—due to self-limiting behavior and self-selection bias (Henningsen et al., 2022; Meeussen et al., 2022) or due to gender-stereotypical expectations of women wanting children (Gloor et al., 2022). Further, gender roles influence perceptions of incongruence (Nett et al., 2022), and women and men who are not congruent to their respective gender role experience backlash effects (Hernandez Bark et al., 2022; Raymondie & Steiner, 2022; Sczesny et al., 2022).

But is this always the case? Or are there individual factors and boundary conditions that affect and modulate the effects of gender roles? These questions will be addressed in the second part of our Special Issue (Junker et al., 2022).

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