

## **Occupational Suitability Bias for Full-Time and Part-Time Employment in Sex-Typed Jobs<sup>1</sup>**

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*The present study examines the effects of employment status (full time, part time), job sex type, and job applicant sex upon judgments of occupational suitability. Sixty-three male and 176 female undergraduate students (ranging in age between 17 and 32 years) read a brief vignette describing either a man or a woman. Subjects then rated the occupational suitability of the person for three male sex-typed jobs (plumber, bus driver, cabinetmaker) and three female sex-typed jobs (secretary, telephone operator, hairdresser). In one condition subjects were explicitly told that these jobs were full time. In a second condition subjects were explicitly told that these jobs were part time. Results indicated a sex-congruency bias for both full time and part time employment. However, there was evidence that sex congruency bias is reduced for part-time employment.*

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Research on the sex typing of specific jobs has consistently found that judgments of occupational suitability are biased to favor the "sex-congruent" applicant for which the sex-typed employment is sex role appropriate (e.g., Arvey, 1979; Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988; Kalin, Stoppard, & Burt, 1980; Kalin & Hodgins, 1984; Hodgins & Kalin, 1985). Unfortunately, the research on sex congruency bias has restricted discussion exclusively to full-time employment, although the full-time employment status has not been explicit in the design. This restriction to full-time

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employment has several limitations. First, part-time employment has been excluded by this research. Part-time employment is a vital and expanding section of the contemporary labor force, particularly within the female labor force. In 1989, 15% of the Total Canadian labor force was employed part time, with women comprising 72% of this part-time labor force (Statistics Canada, 1989). It is important, therefore, to also consider the issue of sex congruency bias in part-time employment, especially within the present era of employment equity. By excluding part-time employment, it has not been demonstrated whether full-time and part-time work command the same influences over the incidence of sex congruency bias.

Second, when employment status (full-time or part-time) is not made explicit in relation to a stimulus person description, male stimulus persons are presumed more likely to be employed full time than are females, while female stimulus persons are presumed more likely to be employed part time than are males (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Presumptions based on the specific jobs may generate similar inconsistencies, with most male sex-typed jobs commonly identified as full-time employment (e.g., surgeon) and more female sex-typed jobs identified as part-time employment (e.g., bank teller). Thus, whether employment status is inferred from the applicant's sex or the job sex type, the absence of explicit information about employment status may introduce unintended (systematic) error variance. Moreover, congruency between the presumed employment status of the job and the presumed typical employment status of the job applicant sex may be responsible for the observed "sex" congruency bias rather than the sex type of the job and the sex of the applicant.

The present study addressed these two issues by investigating sex congruency bias under conditions of *explicit* full-time employment and part-time employment. Similar in design to previous studies of sex congruency bias within the person perception paradigm (e.g., Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Glick et al., 1988; Hodgins & Kalin, 1985; Kalin et al., 1980), subjects read a brief description of either a male or female stimulus individual, and made judgments of occupational suitability for a variety of sex-typed jobs requiring either full-time or part-time employment.

The explicit notification of full-time status was intended to limit a controllable source of error variance rather than modify the incidence of sex congruency bias. Because it has not been previously considered, the incidence of sex congruency bias under conditions of part-time employment was not as easily anticipated. Yet the mechanisms proposed to explain sex congruency bias do not incorporate employment status. Therefore, the position adopted for this study was that full-time and part-time sex-typed work should arouse similar *patterns* of sex congruency bias.

Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed for *both* full-time and part-time employment:

1. Sex-congruent job applicants are rated more suitable than sex-incongruent job applicants for sex-typed jobs.

However, by its very nature, part-time employment requires only a partial involvement with the work role. Part-time employees work approximately half as many hours as full-time employees (Still, 1983; Wakefield, Curry, Mueller, & Price, 1987). Thus, the adoption of a sex-incongruent role is not as protracted for part-time employment as it is for full-time employment. The amount of time a sex-incongruent role is occupied may moderate perceptions of sex role inappropriateness. If sex congruency bias does emanate from perceptions of the sex role in/appropriateness of the employment, then the amount of time required in a sex-incongruent job may moderate the incidence of sex congruency bias. If so, then the transitory nature of part-time employment in a sex-typed job may be expected to attenuate the incidence of sex congruency bias. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that

2. Applicants for part-time employment in a sex incongruent job are rated more suitable than full-time employment applicants.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Subjects included 63 male and 176 female undergraduate university students (one subject did not indicate sex:  $N = 240$ , mean age = 20.34, range = 17–34 years).

### *Material/Procedure*

This study comprised a 2 (Subject Sex: male, female  $\times$  2 (Employment Status: full time, part time)  $\times$  2 (Applicant Sex: male, female)  $\times$  2 (Job Sex type: male sex typed, female sex typed) design. Subject Sex, Employment Status, and Applicant Sex were treated as between-subject variables, and Job Sex Type as a within subject variable.

The study was presented to subjects as an investigation of the types of occupational suitability judgments people make based on limited knowledge about a job applicant. Subjects were instructed to read a description of an individual and then assume the role of that person's employment

**Table I.** Mean Ratings of Male and Female Applicant Suitability (and Standard Error in Parentheses) for Full-Time and Part-Time Employment in Male and Female Sex-Typed Jobs

Employment status	Incumbent sex	
	Male incumbent	Female incumbent
<b>Full time</b>		
Male sex-typed job	5.22 (.18)	4.98 (.26)
Female sex-typed job	4.48 (.21)	5.89 (.22)
<b>Part time</b>		
Male sex-typed job	5.34 (.19)	5.06 (.23)
Female sex-typed job	4.89 (.24)	5.83 (.22)

advisor in making several occupational suitability judgments using a 9-point suitability scale (1 = *not at all suitable*, 9 = *extremely well suited*). Half of the subjects were *explicitly* instructed that the set of jobs involved *full-time employment* and half that the jobs involved *part-time employment*. Full-time employment was defined to subjects as work requiring 40 hours of work per week. Part-time employment was defined as work requiring less than 20 hours per week (Still, 1983; Wakefield et al., 1987).

The first name of the stimulus individual was systematically varied within the descriptive vignette to manipulate applicant sex ("Lisa" and "Steve"). Marital status (single or married) and the number of preschool-aged children (none or two) was counterbalanced within each sex of applicant. Finally, every vignette included an identical description of the stimulus individual in terms of several hobbies (playing the guitar, jogging, going to the movies) and traits (intelligent, good-natured).

The listed jobs included three male sex-typed (bus driver, cabinet-maker, plumber) and three female sex-typed (secretary, telephone operator, hairdresser) that were comparable in terms of sex-typing (Census of Canada, 1981;  $M = .88$  and  $.90$ , respectively) and socioeconomic status (Boyd, 1986;  $M = 32.49$  and  $33.27$ , respectively). The jobs selected had self-evident job titles and plausibly involved part-time as well as full-time employment.

## RESULTS

The occupational suitability ratings in each job sex type were averaged to yield a mean job sex-type suitability rating (male job sex type:  $\alpha = .76$  for 3 items with 237 cases; female job sex type:  $\alpha = .68$  for

3 items with 239 cases). Table I contains the mean suitability ratings (and standard errors) for male and female applicants for male and female sex-typed jobs requiring either full-time or part-time employment. Sex congruency bias was operationalized as the two-way interaction (Analysis of Variance) between Applicant Sex and Job Sex-type (Kalin & Hodgins, 1984). The sex congruency bias hypothesis was tested separately for full-time and part-time employment cases.

Results of the analysis for full-time employment cases indicated that the sex-congruent job applicants were rated significantly more suitable than the sex-incongruent applicants [ $F(1, 118) = 20.66, p < .00001$ ].

Results of the analysis for part-time employment cases also indicated that the sex-congruent job applicants were rated significantly more suitable than the sex-incongruent applicants [ $F(1, 118) = 13.44, p < .0001$ ]. Unlike the full-time employment condition, there was a significant main effect for subject sex [ $F(1, 115) = 5.99, p < .05$ ]. The female subjects gave more generous ratings of suitability overall ( $M = 5.49$ ) than did the male subjects ( $M = 4.78$ ). The interaction between subject sex and the sex-congruency bias effect (Subject Sex  $\times$  Applicant Sex  $\times$  Job Sex Type) was also significant [ $F(1, 115) = 4.11, p < .05$ ]. While the male and the female subjects expressed similar patterns of sex congruency bias, the female subjects showed less bias than the male subjects.

Simple effect analyses for Applicant Sex within each job sex-type category were also conducted. Results of this supplemental analysis indicated that while sex-congruent applicants were favored in both job sex types, sex congruency bias was statistically significant only for the female sex-typed job condition [full-time employment  $F(1, 118) = 20.82, p < .00001$ ; part-time employment  $F(1, 118) = 8.60, p < .005$ ].

Given that sex congruency bias was statistically significant only for the female sex-typed jobs analyses for the hypothesis that part-time employment in a sex-incongruent job is rated more suitable than full-time employment was directed toward the female job sex type. In accordance with this hypothesis, the male applicants should have been rated more suitable for part-time employment in the female sex-typed jobs than for full-time employment. Tukey's (ASD) procedure was used to compare mean ratings of applicant suitability between full-time and part-time employment in female sex-typed jobs [Keppel, 1982;  $d_{T(.05)} = 0.40$ ]. This analysis indicated that male applicants were rated more suitable for the female sex-typed jobs under conditions of part-time employment ( $M = 4.89$ ) than under conditions of full-time employment ( $M = 4.48$ ). The female applicants received comparable suitability ratings for both full-time ( $M = 5.89$ ) and part-time employment ( $M = 5.83$ ) in the female sex-typed jobs. Although statistically indeterminate, a comparison

of effect size ( $\Omega^2$ ) for Applicant Sex under full-time and part-time employment in the female sex-typed jobs also suggests that sex congruency bias is less prominent under part-time employment ( $\Omega^2 = .06$ ) than under full-time employment ( $\Omega^2 = .14$ ). However, the three-way interaction between Applicant Sex, Job Sex-type, and Employment status was not significant [ $F(1, 236) = 0.74, p > .05$ ], suggesting that the diminishment of sex congruency bias under conditions of part-time employment (in the female sex-typed jobs) was statistically nonsignificant, despite the more favorable ratings given to the male applicants.

## DISCUSSION

Unlike previous studies of sex-typed occupational suitability, the present study explicitly incorporated both full-time *and* part-time employment status in order (1) to reduce error variance arising from employment status inference, (2) to investigate sex congruency bias under conditions of part-time employment, and (3) to investigate the possible moderating influence of employment status.

Analyses confirmed sex congruency bias for application to sex-typed jobs requiring full-time employment as reported previously by studies for which full-time status was only implicit. The analyses also indicated that sex congruency bias extends to part-time employment in sex-typed jobs. That is, sex-congruent applicants were consistently judged to be more suitable than sex-incongruent applicants for sex-typed jobs regardless of whether full-time or part-time employment was required.

Evidence of sex congruency bias favoring male applicants for male sex-typed jobs, however, was not statistically significant. The absence of a statistically significant sex congruency bias within the male sex-typed jobs is in contrast to previous research that has reported sex congruency bias for both male and female sex-typed jobs (Glick et al., 1988; Hodgins & Kalin, 1985; Kalin et al., 1980). In the present study, the nondiscriminatory occupational suitability judgments made of female applicants for the male sex-typed jobs may represent a more tolerant attitude toward women entering male-dominated (nontraditional) occupations. However, the persistent bias favoring female applicants over male applicants for female sex-typed jobs demonstrates that this more tolerant attitude is inspired by feminist rather than purely egalitarian values. This feminist orientation may reflect the growth of feminist ideals in the general population (McBroom, 1984, 1987), the feminist ideals of this university sample or of university students in general (Kalin & Heusser, 1979; Tilby & Kalin, 1978; Williams & Best, 1990), or the predominantly female composition of the present

sample (74%). A different sample (either from the same or a different population, or one with a different male/female composition) may have evidenced significant sex congruency bias for both job sex types. Indeed, although cross-cultural studies have shown similar occupational based biases (e.g., Friend, Kalin, & Giles, 1979), a sample taken from another nationality may have yielded alternative results depending on their sex role stereotypes and interpretations of job sex-type.

Judgments made about the sex role in/appropriateness of an occupational role was presumed to underlie the expression of sex congruency bias. The transient nature of part-time employment in a sex-incongruent job was expected to result in reduced judgments of sex role inappropriateness, and therefore result in more favorable ratings of applicant suitability. The more favorable ratings of occupational suitability given to the male applicants for part-time employment in the female sex-typed jobs and the diminished effect of sex congruency bias under part-time employment is consistent with this reasoning. However, these more favorable ratings given to male applicants for part-time employment in the female sex-typed jobs was shown to be insufficient to overcome sex congruency bias favoring the female applicants. The female applicants were consistently favored over the male applicants for both full-time and part-time employment in the female sex-typed jobs. Therefore, it would seem that although some consideration of the extent and duration of sex role incongruence may mediate judgments of occupational suitability for sex-incongruent applicants, the perception of sex role incongruency itself is sufficient to preserve any sex congruency bias.

Although sex congruency bias was evident for both full-time and part-time employment, the suggestion that occupational suitability judgments for part-time employment may be less affected by sex congruency bias than full-time employment suggests that part-time employment may become an avenue by which the minority sex applicant may penetrate job sex-type boundaries and gain access to opposite sex-typed jobs. Eventually, part-time sex-incongruent employment may dilute job sex-typing such that sex congruency bias may be nullified, thereby eliminating access boundaries to full-time employment.

Admittedly, there are limitations with the present study that must be recognized. The external validity of the present findings depends on the extent to which such studies based on the "hypothetical person" paradigm using vignette descriptions are representative of the realities of actual employment evaluation situations (Ilgen & Favero, 1985; Nieva & Gutek, 1980). However, studies based on this paradigm need not be condemned over the issue of external validity if they profess only to provide a demonstration a sex congruency bias rather than an estimation of the magnitude

of this bias or manifest discriminatory behaviors in a particular context or population (Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982).

By including job sex type as a within-subject condition, subjects may have become sensitized to this condition in relation to the hypothesis of the study (Greenwald, 1976; Kalin et al., 1980). However, it is not clear as a result of this potential sensitization whether the hypothesized sex congruency bias was supported by ensuing demand characteristics or resisted by the imposition of social desirability influences. In any case, as stated by Dobbins, Cardy, and Truxillo (1988), "subjects' awareness of experimental hypotheses may be a less serious threat to the validity of findings that has been assumed in past research" (p. 557; see also Carlston & Cohen, 1980).

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