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Perceived Masculinity and Femininity of Managers and the Feedback Environment

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### Abstract

Past research suggests that the masculinity/femininity of a supervisor plays a role in the effectiveness of his/her leadership in organizations. This study looked into the relationship between the perceived masculinity and femininity of supervisors by employees and the feedback environment. The data for the research were collected from 66 men and 78 women in the United States who were working 20 or more hours per week using Amazon's Mechanical Turk website. The survey was the combination of the supervisor subscale of the Feedback Environment Scale (FES) and a slightly modified version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). Each of the seven dimensions of the Feedback Environment Scale were correlated with the ratings on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire. The results identified a relationship between the perceived masculinity and femininity of supervisors and the feedback environment. It was also discovered that femininity significantly correlated more with the feedback environment than masculinity.

### Perceived Masculinity and Femininity of Managers and the Feedback Environment

Researchers have been looking into the effect that masculinity and femininity have on leadership in the workplace with great interest over the years. As more and more women are entering the workplace in managerial positions, the dynamic between employees and supervisors has changed as well as the opinions toward women as managers (Duehr & Bono, 2006). There is much discussion and research on which qualities, either masculine (agentic) or feminine (communal), tend to make more effective managers. Research suggests a manager possessing androgynous characteristics, a combination of both agentic and communal traits, to be the most effective manager (Dematteo, 1994). Regardless of this finding and similar findings, research has shown that there is a persisting perception that the most effective managers have masculine traits and qualities (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011).

As a manager in an organization, giving feedback to employees is important for the employees as well as the organization. London (2003) explained how feedback can increase employee motivation and help employees discover mistakes they make on their own. The concept feedback environment, developed by Steelman, Levy, and Snell (2004), consists of the contextual elements of the feedback process concerning managers and co-workers. They created a measure that enables organizations to evaluate the state of the current feedback climate of the organization, and make any changes to improve it. Steelman and colleagues (2004) developed the Feedback Environment Scale (FES), a scale shown to be valid and reliable at determining the quality of the feedback environment of an organization.

The current study aims to understand the relationship that the perceived masculinity/femininity of the manager has with the feedback environment. More specifically, this study examines how the perceived masculinity/femininity of the manager is related to each

of the seven facets of the feedback environment. The seven facets of the feedback environment are: Source Credibility, Feedback Quality, Feedback Delivery, Favorable Feedback, Unfavorable Feedback, Source Availability, and Promotes Feedback Seeking (Steelman et al. 2004).

Each of the seven facets of the feedback environment describes a specific aspect of the feedback environment (Steelman et al. 2004). Source Credibility describes how credible employees perceive their feedback source to be. Feedback Quality is how helpful and applicable the feedback is, and Feedback Delivery is how well the feedback is presented. Favorable Feedback and Unfavorable Feedback are how often accurate favorable or unfavorable feedback are presented to the employee. Source Availability is how available a manager is to give feedback to his/her employees, and Promotes Feedback Seeking is the extent that the work environment encourages or supports employees in seeking feedback.

Alongside the supervisor subscale of the Feedback Environment Scale, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire by Spencer and Helmreich (1978) will also be used in this study. The measure was designed to evaluate personal masculinity/femininity. There are 3 subscales within the measure: masculine, feminine, and masculine-feminine. For the purposes of this research, a small change had to be made to accommodate the needs of the project. In the original scale, participants were asked to rate the questions about themselves. Our modified version of the measure instead reads “your supervisor” instead of “you.” None of the actual questions needed to be adapted, only the initial directions for participants. This made it possible to use the measure to identify how masculine/feminine employees see their supervisor and relate it to the employees’ satisfaction with their feedback environment.

I expect there to be relationships between satisfaction with the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of managers. In a study by Willemssen (2002), she examined

the way people see effective managers. By using an open-ended question on a questionnaire asking to describe a successful manager, Willemsen found that people tended to use the pronoun “he” or a gender neutral descriptor most often when describing a successful manager. The results of the other part of the questionnaire given in this study also suggested that people tend to see successful managers as possessing masculine characteristics. A study by Cuadrado, García-Ael, and Molero (2015) showed similar perceptions of successful managers. They found that people rated masculine characteristics as more important than feminine characteristics when considering who an effective manager was. The masculine characteristics were more often attributed to a male manager as well. There is additional research that suggests that successful managers are perceived as not only possessing masculine traits, but also being male. Considering these consistent findings suggesting the tendency of individuals to perceive a successful manager as a man with masculine qualities, I proposed the following:

***Hypothesis 1:*** The more masculine an employee perceives his/her manager, the more satisfied he/she will be with Source Credibility and Feedback Quality.

An article by Moran (1992) discusses which characteristics are normally perceived as more feminine in leadership positions. She explains that someone possessing more feminine qualities is seen as more warm emotionally than someone possessing more masculine qualities. The meta-analysis by Koenig et al. (2011) also spoke to how relational qualities are perceived as feminine qualities. This could possibly mean that the more feminine employers are perceived to be, the more satisfied employees could feel concerning how feedback is delivered and how comfortable they feel seeking feedback. Although research suggests that masculinity is most

important in being perceived as a successful manager, there are specific facets of the feedback environment where femininity could be a better determinant. I predict then, that:

***Hypothesis 2:*** The more feminine an employee perceives his/her manager to be, the more satisfied he/she will be with Feedback Delivery and Promotes Feedback Seeking.

In the study by Cuadrado et. al. (2015), they learned that female participants with female managers tended to rate their supervisors as more effective. Also, they found that the association between male and manager was stronger amongst female participants compared to male participants. These findings seem to suggest that the actual gender of the employee/manager might supersede the perceived masculinity/femininity. To explore this possibility, I proposed that:

***Hypothesis 3:*** Whether or not participants had a manager of the same gender or a manager of a different gender will moderate the relationship between the perceived masculinity/femininity of managers and the feedback environment.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of 66 males and 78 females. Participants needed to be 18 years or older in the United States who worked at least 20 hours a week. There was a monetary compensation of \$.75 provided for participants who took the survey. A validity check was placed in the survey to help eliminate any data that belonged to participants who were not paying attention.

### **Materials**

Electronic versions of the supervisor subscale of the Feedback Environment Scale and the slightly modified Personal Attributes Questionnaire were used in this study. Amazon's Mechanical Turk website was used to access the survey developed from Qualtrics.

### **Procedure**

Participants began the survey by clicking a link from MTurk that directed them to the actual survey on Qualtrics. After participants agreed to the informed consent, they were asked basic demographic questions about their life and their workplace. Next, they took the supervisor subscale of the Feedback Environment Scale (FES) followed by the modified version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). After the last measure was taken by participants, they were given a unique code that enabled them to be awarded the expected monetary compensation through MTurk.

### **Scoring**

The Feedback Environment Scale is scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with the higher the score meaning the participant had more positive perceptions of the feedback environment. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire is



scored by dividing the total 24 questions into 3 separate subscales (masculine, feminine, and masculine-feminine) with 8 questions in each one. The 5 possible answers on each bipolar item have numerical values of 1 through 5. The scores are then summed together within each subscale. The highest possible score on each subscale is 40 and the lowest possible score is 8. Only the masculine and feminine subscales were used for this study.

### **Results**

My first hypothesis was the more masculine an employee perceives his/her manager, the more satisfied he/she will be with Source Credibility and Feedback Quality. Both parts of this hypothesis were supported. For part 1, a Pearson's  $r$  was utilized to assess the relationship. There was a moderate positive correlation between Source Credibility and the perceived masculinity of managers,  $r = .313$ ,  $n = 144$ ,  $p < .001$ . For part 2, a Pearson's  $r$  was utilized to assess the relationship. There was a moderate positive correlation between Feedback Quality and the perceived masculinity of managers,  $r = .356$ ,  $N = 144$ ,  $p < .001$ .

My second hypothesis was the more feminine an employee perceives his/her manager to be, the more satisfied he/she will be with Feedback Delivery and Promotes Feedback Seeking. Both parts of this hypothesis were supported. For part 1, a Pearson's  $r$  was utilized to assess the relationship. There was a strong positive correlation between Feedback Delivery and the perceived femininity of managers,  $r = .728$ ,  $n = 144$ ,  $p < .001$ . For part 2, a Pearson's  $r$  was utilized to assess the relationship. There was a moderate positive correlation between Promotes Feedback Seeking and the perceived femininity of managers,  $r = .656$ ,  $N = 144$ ,  $p < .001$ .

An exploratory analysis was performed on the data after noticing a trend from the Pearson  $r$  correlations that femininity seemed to be more strongly correlated with the feedback environment than masculinity. This pattern was found to be significant. A Fisher  $r$ -to- $z$

transformation was utilized to compare the correlations between masculinity and each of the seven facets of the feedback environment and femininity and each of the seven facets of the feedback environment (see Table 2). The difference was found to be significant with every facet of the feedback environment except for Unfavorable Feedback,  $z = 0.347$ ,  $p = .728$ .

A further analysis was performed on the data after discovering the significant differences with the correlations between masculinity and femininity with the feedback environment. The data was split into two groups: one with only male managers and one with only female managers. A Fisher r-to-z transformation was utilized with each group to compare the correlations between masculinity and each of the seven facets of the feedback environment and femininity and each of the seven facets of the feedback environment (see Table 4 and 6). In the group with only male managers, the difference was found to remain significant with every facet of the feedback environment except for Source Credibility ( $z = -1.81$ ,  $p = .0703$ ) and Unfavorable Feedback ( $z = 0.91$ ,  $p = .3628$ ). In the group with only female managers, the difference was found to remain significant with every facet of the feedback environment except for Unfavorable Feedback,  $z = -0.31$ ,  $p = .7566$ .

My third hypothesis was whether or not participants had a manager of the same gender or a manager of a different gender would moderate the relationship between the perceived masculinity/femininity of managers and the feedback environment. This hypothesis was not supported. A Pearson's r correlation was utilized to assess the relationships for the matched gender and the mismatched gender groups with the feedback environment. A Fisher r-to-z transformation was then utilized to compare the correlations between matched and mismatched gender. No significance differences were found between any of the seven facets of the feedback environment (see Table 7).

### Discussion

After analysis of the data, I discovered that Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Hypothesis 3, however, was not supported. My first two hypotheses pertained to the relationship between specific facets of the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of managers. Hypothesis 3 described a possible moderator of the relationship between the facets of the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of managers. With there being no significant difference with any of the seven facets of the feedback environment between the matched and mismatched groups, it suggests that being the same or a different gender than one's manager has a small effect on how masculine or feminine one perceives him/her to be.

An interesting result was derived from the exploratory analysis that was pursued after noticing a possible pattern in the data. Femininity was discovered to be more strongly correlated with each facet of the feedback environment (excluding Unfavorable Feedback) compared to masculinity. This effect held even when looking at participants with a male or female supervisor. These are surprising findings when considering the direction of past research. Research has shown a successful manager is seen as a man with masculine qualities, even highlighting that masculine qualities are seen as more important than feminine qualities in a manager (Cuadrado et al., 2015). It is possible then, that with feedback specifically, there might be an exception to this perception. Although there are specific facets of the feedback environment that could be expected to correlate more with femininity than masculinity, the facets that seemed extremely likely to be more correlated with masculinity were not. This makes it seem that feedback might be perceived differently from the manager as a whole.

A limitation to this study was the occupations of the participants were not considered. There could be specific occupations that either make the relationships discovered weaker or

stronger. Also, it could depend on what position the person held within his/her occupation. There could be a difference if people are in entry-level positions compared to managers themselves. Another possible limitation was the test used to identify the perceived masculinity/femininity of the managers. Since the PAQ was not designed to be applied in this way, there could have been unforeseen effects on the data that were produced from it. Future research might be able to find and utilize a more relevant test to explore this variable more effectively.

Masculinity and femininity both positively correlated with the feedback environment. This shows that people perceived masculinity and femininity as important in relation to their feedback environment. Since femininity correlated significantly more though, it implies that people tend to be more satisfied with feedback when they also see their manager as more feminine.

With more and more women becoming managers, the landscape of the workplace is changing. The consistent findings that effective managers are perceived as men with masculine qualities could potentially have a negative effect on women applying for and maintaining managerial positions. This study suggests that when it comes to the feedback process in the supervisor-employee relationship, it is possible that these persistent perceptions do not extend to every aspect of a manager. As feedback has the potential to be beneficial to an organization and its employees, the finding that people tend to be more satisfied with feedback when they also perceive their managers as more feminine could have implications in how people see women in management.

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Tables

Table 1

*Correlations between the FE and the Perceived Masculinity/Femininity of Supervisors*

Feedback Environment	Masculinity	Femininity
Source Credibility	$r = .313, p < .001$	$r = .635, p < .001$
Feedback Quality	$r = .356, p < .001$	$r = .646, p < .001$
Feedback Delivery	$r = .191, p = .022$	$r = .728, p < .001$
Favorable Feedback	$r = .240, p = .004$	$r = .679, p < .001$
Unfavorable Feedback	$r = .154, p = .065$	$r = .116, p = .168$
Source Availability	$r = .209, p = .012$	$r = .590, p < .001$
Promotes Feedback	$r = .180, p = .031$	$r = .656, p < .001$

*Note:* These are the correlations between each of the seven facets of the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of the supervisor using the entire sample,  $N = 144$ .

Table 2

*Differences in Correlation Strengths between Masculinity and Femininity with the FE*

Feedback Environment	Masculinity	Femininity	Z-Score	p-value
Masculinity	----	$r = .130$		
Femininity	$r = .130$	----		
Source Credibility	$r = .313$	$r = .635$	-3.63	< .001
Feedback Quality	$r = .356$	$r = .646$	-3.35	< .001
Feedback Delivery	$r = .191$	$r = .728$	-6.33	< .001
Favorable Feedback	$r = .240$	$r = .679$	-5.01	< .001
Unfavorable Feedback	$r = .154$	$r = .116$	0.347	.728
Source Availability	$r = .209$	$r = .590$	-4.05	< .001
Promotes Feedback	$r = .180$	$r = .656$	-5.26	< .001

*Note:* This table describes the results from the test of differences between how much masculinity and femininity each correlated with the feedback environment using the entire sample,  $N = 144$ .

Table 3

*Correlations between the FE and the Perceived Masculinity/Femininity of Male Supervisors*

Feedback Environment	Masculinity	Femininity
Source Credibility	$r = .353, p = .002$	$r = .587, p < .001$
Feedback Quality	$r = .369, p = .001$	$r = .683, p < .001$
Feedback Delivery	$r = .163, p = .164$	$r = .721, p < .001$
Favorable Feedback	$r = .108, p = .361$	$r = .630, p < .001$
Unfavorable Feedback	$r = .184, p = .118$	$r = .034, p = .771$
Source Availability	$r = .218, p = .062$	$r = .594, p < .001$
Promotes Feedback	$r = .138, p = .241$	$r = .650, p < .001$

*Note:* These are the correlations between each of the seven facets of the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of the supervisor using only participants with male supervisors,  $n = 74$ .



Table 4

*Differences in Correlation Strengths between Masculinity and Femininity with the FE*

Feedback Environment	Masculinity	Femininity	Z-Score	p-value
Masculinity	----	$r = .065$		
Femininity	$r = .065$	----		
Source Credibility	$r = .353$	$r = .587$	-1.81	.0703
Feedback Quality	$r = .369$	$r = .683$	-2.67	.0076
Feedback Delivery	$r = .163$	$r = .721$	-4.44	< .001
Favorable Feedback	$r = .108$	$r = .630$	-3.77	< .001
Unfavorable Feedback	$r = .184$	$r = .034$	0.91	.3628
Source Availability	$r = .218$	$r = .594$	-2.75	.006
Promotes Feedback	$r = .138$	$r = .650$	-3.79	< .001

*Note:* This table describes the results from the test of differences between how much masculinity and femininity each correlated with the feedback environment using only participants with male supervisors,  $n = 74$ .

Table 5

*Correlations between the FE and the Perceived Masculinity/Femininity of Female Supervisors*

Feedback Environment	Masculinity	Femininity
Source Credibility	$r = .281, p = .019$	$r = .683, p < .001$
Feedback Quality	$r = .349, p = .003$	$r = .620, p < .001$
Feedback Delivery	$r = .228, p = .058$	$r = .737, p < .001$
Favorable Feedback	$r = .361, p = .002$	$r = .717, p < .001$
Unfavorable Feedback	$r = .134, p = .268$	$r = .186, p = .123$
Source Availability	$r = .183, p = .130$	$r = .611, p < .001$
Promotes Feedback	$r = .211, p = .079$	$r = .670, p < .001$

*Note:* These are the correlations between each of the seven facets of the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of the supervisor using only participants with female supervisors,  $n = 70$ .

Table 6

*Differences in Correlation Strengths between Masculinity and Femininity with the FE*

Feedback Environment	Masculinity	Femininity	Z-Score	p-value
Masculinity	----	$r = .204$		
Femininity	$r = .204$	----		
Source Credibility	$r = .281$	$r = .683$	-3.16	.0016
Feedback Quality	$r = .349$	$r = .620$	-2.09	.0366
Feedback Delivery	$r = .228$	$r = .737$	-4.12	< .001
Favorable Feedback	$r = .361$	$r = .717$	-3.03	.0024
Unfavorable Feedback	$r = .134$	$r = .186$	-0.31	.7566
Source Availability	$r = .183$	$r = .611$	-3.04	.0024
Promotes Feedback	$r = .211$	$r = .670$	-3.45	< .001

*Note:* This table describes the results from the test of differences between how much masculinity and femininity each correlated with the feedback environment using only participants with female supervisors,  $n = 70$ .

Table 7

*Correlations between the FE and the Perceived Masculinity/Femininity of Supervisors between gender matched and mismatched groups*

Feedback Environment	Matched	Mismatched	Z-score, p-value
<b>Source Credibility</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .272$	$r = .374$	-0.58, .5619
Femininity	$r = .604$	$r = .685$	-0.70, .4839
<b>Feedback Quality</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .328$	$r = .374$	-0.43, .6672
Femininity	$r = .635$	$r = .685$	-0.21, .8337
<b>Feedback Delivery</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .172$	$r = .220$	-0.25, .8026
Femininity	$r = .688$	$r = .803$	-1.33, .1835
<b>Favorable Feedback</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .277$	$r = .174$	0.55, .5823
Femininity	$r = .691$	$r = .653$	0.35, .7263
<b>Unfavorable Feedback</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .215$	$r = .037$	0.92, .3576
Femininity	$r = .160$	$r = .010$	0.77, .4413
<b>Source Availability</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .236$	$r = .158$	0.41, .6818
Femininity	$r = .536$	$r = .701$	-1.37, .1707
<b>Promotes Feedback</b>			
Masculinity	$r = .175$	$r = .183$	-0.04, .9681
Femininity	$r = .630$	$r = .699$	-0.63, .5287

*Note:* These are the correlations between the feedback environment and the perceived masculinity/femininity of supervisors between gender matched ( $n = 107$ ) and gender mismatched ( $n = 37$ ) groups.