Real Men Don’t Eat Quiche: Discrepancy Between Automatic and Deliberate Gender-Expressive Choices in Men

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Everyday items are imbued with gender associations. We examine how such gender associations influence the decision-making of men and women. We find that men, but not women, are more likely to choose gender-congruent options than gender-incongruent options when they have more cognitive resources available. Furthermore, men’s, but not women’s, executive function is impaired after making choices from choice sets containing both masculine and feminine options relative to making choices from sets containing all same-gender options. These findings suggest that men, but not women, attempt to regulate their choices of gender expressive items as a means to maintain their gender identity.

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checks indicated that the instructor for the control group had communicated additional messages, compromising the results. Therefore, the control group was dropped from further analysis.

A repeated measures analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was conducted using message condition as a between subjects factor. We expected to observe an increase in intrinsic motivation from $t_1$ to $t_2$ for the group that received intrinsic messages, and not for the group that received extrinsic messages, and the opposite effect for extrinsic motivation. If the overjustification effect occurred, we further expected the intrinsic motivation of both groups to drop from $t_2$ to $t_3$, after the receipt of the reward. Our results for the intrinsic messages group were slightly different but theoretically consistent. From $t_1$ to $t_2$, the intrinsic messages group did not change their intrinsic motivation, but their extrinsic motivation decreased significantly. From $t_2$ to $t_3$, after the reward was administered, the intrinsic messages group’s extrinsic motivation increased significantly, consistent with the overjustification effect. However, this increase returned their level of extrinsic motivation to approximately what it was at $t_1$, suggesting that there may have been some mitigating effect of the messages.

The results for the extrinsic messages group, however, were less clear. From $t_1$ to $t_2$, the extrinsic messages group did not significantly change their extrinsic motivation, but their intrinsic motivation increased significantly. The most plausible explanations for this counter-intuitive result was the crash of the economy that took place while the experiment was in progress. The changing economic circumstances, combined with publicity regarding the needs of local food banks in the area, may have influenced the results. It should also be noted that both groups exhibited a very high level of intrinsic motivation to start, suggesting that the results may also reflect a ceiling effect. After the receipt of the reward, however, they experienced the drop in intrinsic motivation associated with the overjustification effect, which again returned them to approximately the same level of intrinsic motivation that they began with at $t_1$. This again suggests that the messages may have in some way mitigated the overjustification effect, but not in the intended manner.

In order to overcome these limitations, a second study was planned and will be conducted in May. The second study involves university alumni donations. A single instructor will be responsible for the intrinsic and extrinsic message group, mitigating possible instructor effects. The second study should provide additional insights into the effects of message framing on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to donate.

References

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Consumers often purchase products to signal desired identities to their self and others (e.g. Belk 1988; Wernerfelt 1990; Berger & Heath 2007). This paper examined how gender identity considerations affect product choice. What occurs when men and women must choose between a personally appealing, gender-incongruent item and a less appealing, gender-congruent item? Are there gender differences in why certain products are chosen?

Much research has displayed that men and women are faced with pressures to conform to standards set forth by gender norms (e.g. Crocker et al. 1998). Building on research showing that individuals often regulate their impulses in accordance with norms and expectations when they have sufficient cognitive resources to do so (Shiv, Fedorikhin & Nowsis 2005), we posit that individuals will similarly regulate their choices of gender-expressive items. That is, we posit that the availability of cognitive resources will increase the likelihood that individuals choose gender-congruent items that conflict with their automatic preferences.

It is further proposed that men might be more motivated than women to regulate their choices of gender expressive items. This is based on research which has suggested that women and men might face different motivations to conform to gender norms. For instance, women might be more motivated to conform to gender norms when occupying traditional male roles, such as management leadership positions, due to devaluation of women that exhibit “masculine” traits in such roles (Eagly et al. 1992), while men, on the other hand, might be more motivated to conform to gender norms in attempts to maintain their gender identity, due to heightened psychological consequences of gender role deviation for men relative to women (e.g. O’Heron & Orlofsky 1990). Our propositions were supported in three experiments.

**Experiment 1: Food Choices**

Experiment 1 tested the hypothesis that resource availability would affect choice patterns for products which could be used to signal one’s gender identity. Specifically, Experiment 1 examined how gender associations of food items affect the choices of men and women.

Participants made 16 choices from pairs of food items descriptively listed on a menu. For each pair of items provided, subjects chose the food option they most preferred. Each pair consisted of a masculine dish and a feminine dish. The gender of the dish was manipulated through ingredients (e.g. a masculine dish might contain bacon whereas a feminine dish might contain red wine sauce) and food...
descriptions (e.g. a masculine dish might be described as “hearty” whereas a feminine dish might be described as “luscious”). All subjects were asked to assume that the nutritional content for each item within a pair were roughly equivalent. Participants were randomly assigned to complete this task under high or low cognitive resource availability.

Consistent with our predictions, an ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between gender and cognitive load on menu item choice, $F(1,162)=6.14, p <.05$, and that male (but not female) choices were significantly different between cognitive load conditions $F(1,160)=13.51, p <.01$. Males in the high load condition (M=.559, SD=.24) chose significantly more (less) feminine (masculine) dishes than males in the low load condition (M=.379, SD=.19), $F(1,160)=13.51, p < .001, d=.83$. In contrast, females in the high (M=.641, SD=.21) and low (M=.630, SD=.18) load conditions did not differ in their choices $F(1,160)=.05, p=.82, d=.06$.

**Experiment 2: Product Shape**

The purpose of experiment 2 was to provide convergent evidence for the role of cognitive resources in gender choice in a different domain.

Building on recent perceptual research which displayed that certain geometric shapes connote affective meaning (e.g. Aronoff 2006), it was hypothesized that angular objects better portray masculine concepts (e.g. aggression) whereas rounded objects better portray feminine concepts (e.g. warmth). Participants were shown a series of two products side by side from twelve different product categories (e.g. beds) and asked to choose the item that they most preferred between the two. For each pair of items there was one option with predominantly rounded features and another option with predominantly angled features (pretests confirmed that the rounded items appeared more feminine and the angular items more masculine). Participants were randomly assigned to complete this task under high or low cognitive load.

Consistent with our proposition that men would be more likely to regulate their choices given sufficient cognitive resources, an ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between gender and cognitive load on product choice, $F(1,273)=4.226, p <.05$, and that male (but not female) choices were significantly different between cognitive load conditions, $F(1,271)=5.85, p <.05$. Males in the high load condition (M=.477, SD=.18) chose significantly more (less) rounded (angled) products than males in the low load condition (M=.400, SD=.16), $F(1,273)=7.72, p <.01, d=.45$. In contrast, females in the high (M=.511, SD=.17) and low (M=.514, SD=.14) load conditions did not significantly differ in their choices, $F(1,273)=11, p =.74, d=.02$.

**Experiment 3: Resource Depletion**

The third experiment was developed to provide evidence that the previous results were due to greater gender identity concerns for men (relative to women). It was posited that men would show greater signs of depletion following choices made from a mixed gender choice set (relative to an all-masculine choice set) whereas women would show no difference in depletion between a mixed choice set and all-feminine choice set.

Participants completed two choice tasks similar to experiments 1 and 2 (i.e. food and shape choice tasks) before completing an anagram task designed to measure ego depletion (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, and Tice 1998– Experiment 2).

Consistent with our hypothesis that males, but not females, would be particularly depleted by choosing between masculine and feminine options, the interaction between choice sets and gender was significant, $F(1,150)=4.08, p <.05$. Planned contrasts for this interaction indicated that males who received mixed gender choice sets (M=5.04, SD=3.86) solved significantly fewer anagrams than males who received masculine choice sets (M=7.45, SD=3.68), $F(1,150)=5.66, p <.05, d=.64$. Further, there was no difference in the number of anagrams solved for females who received mixed gender choice sets (M=6.73, SD=3.96) and females who received feminine choice sets (M=6.52, SD=3.68), $F(1, 150)=.02, p=.90, d=.05$.

**References**


