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Gender stereotypes in contemporary Swedish society: Does gender still matter?
An investigation of prescriptive stereotypes, self-views in gendered traits and evaluation of role (in)congruity.

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Abstract

The present study aimed to further investigate the current state of gender stereotypes and their function in Swedish population in a two-fold way: Primarily by investigating the content of prescriptive stereotypes (how people should be) in relation to people's self-views in gendered traits, and secondarily by investigating how people who behave stereotypically and counter-stereotypically are perceived and evaluated in Sweden today. Results supported the existence of a strong traditionally gendered prescription but also revealed a self-prescription discrepancy such that participants' self-views in gendered traits were found to be less gender stereotypically pronounced. Nevertheless, women tended to comply more strongly to their gender norms than men. Regarding perception and evaluation of role (in)congruity, results did not support neither the existence of devaluation for the role incongruent behaviors nor the existence of a preference for the role congruent behaviors as manipulated through descriptions of fictitious agents exerting stereotypically agentic or communal orientation. This finding may indicate that gender stereotypes do not operate as they used to in determining people's perceptions but should also be interpreted with consideration to the study's limitations. Despite this finding, the fact that prescriptive stereotypes seem to be strongly gender stereotypical is still concerning, since prescriptive stereotypes set the stage for prejudice and bias, and the self-ideal discrepancy can yield serious consequences for the individuals. Thus, this study seems to add some valuable knowledge to the investigation of the current state of gender stereotypes in Sweden and also raises a variety of intriguing questions for future research.

Keywords: prescriptive stereotype content, self-views in gendered traits, agency, communion, self-prescription discrepancy, role congruity, role incongruity, devaluation.

Introduction

There is no doubt that a great deal of progress towards gender equality has been already made in Sweden; In the race towards gender equality Sweden seems to hold the reins: Sweden is not only considered nationally and internationally a world-leading country in terms of gender equality (Towns, 2002), but is also ranked among the most equalitarian countries on many aggregated measures (Warner, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2021). Thus, gender equality seems to justifiably constitute one of the most essential parts of the country's national representation and brand (Jezierska & Towns, 2018; Towns, 2002). To that end, an important question arises: If Sweden is indeed an equalitarian country, does that mean that gender stereotype content and its consequences may be significantly reduced in Sweden today?

The answer to this question may not be as straightforward as expected; The truth is that despite the country's superiority on gender equality matters, Sweden is still highly characterized by vertical and horizontal gender segregation, and women and men are still overrepresented in specific social roles (Statistics Sweden, 2020). This is important since gender stereotypes are considered to derive from role occupation in the division of labor (Eagly, 1987, 1997) and through their function and consequences, can -subsequently- be essential barriers to the goal of full gender equality; Gender stereotypes can, for instance, impair women's career advancement by leading to gender bias in employment and promoting decisions or by leading women to self-limiting behavior (e.g., Heilman, 2012; Peus et.al., 2015), and indeed, recent research indicates that gender stereotypes still exist in Sweden today (Gustafsson et.al., 2019), and that they still prescribe how people should be and act based on their gender group membership (Renström et.al., manuscript). Thus, a closer inspection of gender (in)equality in modern Swedish society implies that despite the country's strong equality discourse, Sweden may still be far from a gender equal society and therefore more research on gender stereotypes, their function, and their consequences, is still needed.

For that reason, the present study aims to shed some additional light to the current state of gender stereotypes in Swedish society in a twofold way; Primarily by further exploring the content of prescriptive gender stereotypes (how women and men should be based on their gender categorization) and in relation to women's and men's self-views in gender stereotypical traits, and secondarily by investigating how women and men who behave stereotypically (role congruently) or counter-stereotypically (role incongruently) are perceived and evaluated in Sweden today. The former aims to add some valuable knowledge

to the investigation of the content of gender stereotypes and the degree to which they tend to become internalized, while the latter aims to further explore how strongly gender stereotypes may still operate to determine people's perceptions of others in modern Swedish society.

Gender stereotype content

The social role theory

According to social role theory gender stereotypes derive from the observation of the different distribution of social roles among women and men in the division of labor (Eagly, 1987, 1997; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Social role occupancy leads to generalizations of typical for each gender characteristics (how women and men typically are), which constitutes the basis of gender stereotypes that subsequently function as shared expectations of gender-based behavior and lead to the attribution of specific characteristics to women and men (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006; Eagly & Wood, 2012). According to the theory, the characteristics that constitute the basis of gender stereotype content fall into two core dimensions; agency (traditionally associated with masculinity) and communion (traditionally associated with femininity) (Dulin, 2007; Eagly & Wood, 2016). Since women traditionally occupied social roles related to caring of others (e.g., homemaker, nurse), the content of women's stereotypical behavior traditionally entailed the communal characteristics that are required by these social roles (e.g., being kind, caring, and compassionate). On the other hand, since men traditionally occupied social roles related to power and leadership, men were traditionally attributed with the agentic characteristics required by these roles (e.g., independent, competent, and assertive). Even though today the different distribution of social roles among women and men may not be as evident as in the past, women and men are still overrepresented in specific social roles, a fact that -based on the theory's assumptions- can still explain the maintenance of gender stereotypical characterizations in modern society.

The role congruity perspective: descriptive vs prescriptive stereotype content

The content of gender stereotypes does not only involve descriptive beliefs about women and men (how women and men typically are), but also prescriptive beliefs regarding how women and men should be. The content of descriptive stereotypes entails the likelihood that women and men possess certain traits, while the content of prescriptive beliefs adds an evaluative

aspect in gender stereotypical behaviors by designating the value of gender stereotypical traits (e.g., women should be communal) (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006).

Role congruity theory (Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002) extends social role theory by focusing on this evaluative aspect of gender stereotypes and how role congruent behavior, and more importantly, how role incongruent behavior is treated in society. Role congruity theory claims that when observed behaviors match the presumed characteristics of women and men and the demands of their social roles, people are socially rewarded for their role congruent behavior. However, when people act in role incongruent ways, they are devalued. Thus, stereotypes take the shape of injunctive norms of both what women and men should do (prescriptive stereotypes) and what women and men should not do (proscriptive stereotypes) (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Deviations from such normative behavioral standards can be indeed harshly penalized (for a review see Rudman & Fairchild, 2004); Specifically, stereotype violation has been associated with anger and moral outrage (Rudman & Glick, 2008), prejudice and bias against women in career climbing contexts (Heilman, 2001), backlash effects, dislike, and negative evaluations (Heilman, 2012; Phelan et.al., 2008; Rudman, & Glick, 2001; Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Rudman, et.al., 2012). The derogation seems to be more evident when women behave in counter-stereotypical ways than when men behave in role incongruent ways (Rudman, et.al., 2012).

Even though agency and communion constitute the core dimensions of both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes, the processes through which descriptive and prescriptive stereotyping operates may be quite different. Descriptive stereotyping has a probabilistic nature (e.g., women are more likely than men to be caring) that can be discarded with the acquisition of relevant information (Gill, 2005); Indeed, previous studies have shown that behavioral information can deter gender stereotyping (e.g., Bodenhausen et al., 1999; Fiske et al., 1999). However, prescriptive stereotypes function like social norms, like acceptable or even desirable standards of behavior based on group membership. Thus, information may not be enough to undercut this kind of stereotyping (Gill, 2005). Some studies further support this claim by providing evidence that prescriptive stereotypes are more pervasive and foster bias against role incongruent behaviors even under conditions that deter descriptive stereotyping (Gill, 2005; Luzadis et.al., 2008).

Nevertheless, the main body of research on gender stereotypes has focused on descriptive stereotype content and provides evidence that at least the female stereotype

content has changed over time: changes in social roles have led to changes towards higher agency (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). However, little change has been reported in the male stereotype content and in the perception of women's communion whereas women have undergone a greater role change than men (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Additionally, recent research indicates that it may be exclusively the content of descriptive stereotypes that has changed over time as a result of the observation of advances in role segregation, while prescriptive stereotypes have remained relatively stable (Zehnter, et.al, 2018). This finding indicates that prescriptive stereotypes may indeed follow different change mechanisms than the descriptive (Zehnter, et.al, 2018) and renders the need for more research on prescriptive stereotypes, their function, and their processes, imperative.

Thus, when it comes to the contemporary content of gender stereotypes, evidence from the relevant literature is complex and inconclusive. Undeniably, some progress towards gender equality has been already made in modern society with the increasing entry of women in previously male dominated roles and the increasing participation of men in the household and childrearing. However, role segregation is still quite evident in most western countries, a fact that further justifies such complex results. Despite the complexity of gender stereotype content in modern society, there is ample evidence in the literature that agency and communion are still the core dimensions of both descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes and continue to exert influences on people's lives (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Wood, 2016; Hentschel et.al., 2019).

Self-stereotyping

Even though gender stereotypes primarily shape stereotypical conceptions of how other people are or should be in society in general, they can also be used to characterize oneself (Bem, 1974). Gender conceptualization is an essential part of the socialization process that takes place in early childhood (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998); Indeed, previous research indicates that children learn about their gender categorization and how to behave in gender appropriate ways from their immediate environment at a very young age (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Bussey & Perry, 1982; Fagot, 1978; Leaper, 2000). Such social learning continues to exert influence later in life and perpetuates the existence of gender stereotypes in society (Hentschel et.al., 2019). Thus, gender stereotypes can also become internalized standards of behavior and subsequently essential parts of people's identities and self-concepts (Ruble & Martin, 1998; Wood & Eagly, 2015).

Nonetheless, to date only little research has compared the use of stereotypes in characterizing self and others and much of this research was conducted several decades ago (Allen, 1995; Hentschel et.al., 2019; Martin, 1987; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968; Spence and Buckner, 2000), while -to my knowledge- only one study has focused on the relation between prescriptive stereotype content and self-view in gendered traits (Renström et.al., manuscript). In these studies, a discrepancy between other-characterizations and self-characterizations has been found such that self-characterizations tend to be less gender stereotypically pronounced. However, research has also shown that women's and men's self-views in gendered traits may still differ in stereotype consistent ways (Bem, 1974; Hentschel et.al., 2019; Spence and Buckner, 2000). Hence, a more detailed investigation of people's self-views in gendered traits, might be extremely important for further understanding how gender stereotypes may still influence people's lives, especially if we take into consideration that both gender stereotype compliance and deviation might yield serious consequences for the individuals.

If gender-typed characteristics become internalized, they can potentially impact the behavioral choices and experiences of both women and men in ways that are consistent with the ideal for each gender societal norms (e.g., Bem, 1981; Wood & Eagly 2010, 2012, 2015; Yang & Merrill, 2017). To that end, stereotyped expectations can even shape an individual's goals and actions (Evans & Diekman, 2009), and the underlying reasons for such actions may even go undetected. On the other hand, deviation from the ideal -for each gender- societal standards of behavior may not only yield- as already discussed- serious consequences in the form of social penalties for the members of stereotyped groups but the self-ideal discrepancy may also lead to negative emotions about the self (Higgins, 1987), or even self-limiting behavior (e.g., Heilman, 1983). Hence, how people should be, based on their gender group membership, and how people actually are, becomes an extremely important question that has not yet received much attention in the relevant literature and therefore constitutes an essential starting point for more research on gender stereotyping.

The paradox of Swedish society

Gender equality in Sweden has a long history of policies and government interventions (e.g., the establishment and expansion of the anti-discrimination law, the establishment of father's leave) and undeniably, such efforts have reduced gender differences in Swedish society and justifiably have positioned Sweden among the most equalitarian counties in many

international comparisons (Warner, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2020). In fact, research on cross-national differences in gender roles and stereotypes confirms Sweden's superiority on gender equality matters (Kling et.al., 2017), while studies investigating gender differences in Sweden often provide further confirmation for a shift towards gender equality (e.g., Carlsson et.al., 2014; Eriksson & Lindholm, 2007).

Yet, numbers are still disappointing: 67% of women still work in female dominated occupations and 66% of men still work in male dominated occupations (Statistics Sweden, 2020), and people seem to overestimate women's and men's performance of non-traditional roles in Swedish society (Gustafsson et.al., 2019). Sweden is also characterized by high vertical gender segregation, which is even larger in Sweden than in many other European countries (Ellingsaeter, 2014), and even though Swedish fathers tend to participate more in childrearing than in the past, it is still more common for women than men to take parental leave (Statistics Sweden, 2020).

The truth is that even Sweden, a world leading country in terms of gender equality, is still far from a gender equal society, a fact that is also reflected in research; Recent studies report differences in perceptions of competence between boys and girls (Tellhed, & Adolfsson, 2018), as well as gender differences in ability beliefs and career goals (Tellhed et.al., 2018). Although previous research on dynamic stereotypes provides evidence for a shift in gender stereotype content in Sweden (since women are perceived as more agentic than in the past), women are still perceived as more communal than men and more communal than agentic (Gustafsson et.al., 2019), while an ongoing study of prescriptive stereotypes in Swedish population indicates that gender stereotypes may still prescribe how people should be and act based on their gender group membership (Renström et.al., manuscript). Additionally, women report that they still perceive high pressure to conform to feminine norms (especially beauty norms) although covertly in order to avoid the risk of being seen as superficial or non-equal (Kling et.al., 2017).

Thus, the paradox of Swedish society arises; In accordance with the national brand and women's increased occupancy of previously male-dominated roles some progress towards gender equality has indeed been made in Sweden. However, Sweden is still highly characterized by gender segregated occupation and gender differences in many domains, while Swedes seem to underestimate such gender differences (see Gustafsson et.al., 2019). The truth is that regardless of the progress, there is substantial evidence in the literature that

"remnants" of gender stereotypical behaviors still exist (e.g., Gustafsson et.al., 2019; Renström et.al., manuscript) and therefore more research is still needed for increasing the understanding of how gender stereotypes might still operate to determine people's lives in modern Swedish society.

Overview of the current research

The current research constitutes a part of an increased effort to obtain a more concrete picture of the current state of gender stereotypes and the way they may still operate to influence people's perceptions of others in Sweden today. Through this study I intend to focus on prescriptive (how women and men should be) instead of descriptive gender stereotype content (how women and men typically are), since prescriptive gender stereotypes, as already argued, seem to be more tenacious, and their violation seems to yield more serious consequences for the members of stereotyped groups.

Based on Sweden's strong equality discourse and the numerous efforts to reduce gender inequality, it may be logical to assume that the content of prescriptive stereotypes will have changed in Sweden today. However, as already discussed, Sweden is still highly characterized by gender differences in vertical and horizontal segregation in the labor market and in domestic work, and recent findings reveal the maintenance of gender stereotypical views in Swedish population (Gustafsson et.al., 2019; Renström et.al., manuscript). Thus, regarding the content of prescriptive stereotypes and self-views in gendered traits in this study, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: The prescriptive stereotype content (as rated only by participants of the corresponding gender) will still follow traditional gendered patterns such that men's prescription will entail more agency than women's and more agency than communion, and women's prescription will entail more communion than men's and more communion than agency.

H2: Gender stereotypes will have been to some extent internalized and therefore participants' self-views in gendered traits will also follow traditional gendered patterns where women see themselves as more communal than men and rate themselves higher on communion than agency and men see themselves as more agentic than women and rate themselves higher on agency than communion.

Nonetheless, as already discussed, previous studies on gender stereotypical self and other views also indicate the existence of a discrepancy between self and other characterizations (Allen, 1995; Hentschel et.al., 2019; Martin, 1987; Renström et.al., manuscript; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968; Spence and Buckner, 2000). For that reason, and for obtaining a more concrete picture of the current state of gender stereotypes in Sweden, I also intend to compare women's and men's self-views with the prescriptive stereotype content as an effort to further explore if and how men's and women's self-characterizations differ from their characterizations of the ideal societal standards of behavior for their gender group.

Moreover, a secondary aim of this study is to explore how women and men who behave stereotypically (role congruently), and counter-stereotypically (role incongruently) may be perceived and evaluated in modern Swedish society, in an effort to examine how strongly gender stereotypes may still operate to influence people's perceptions of others in Sweden today. Following the assumptions of role congruity theory, that role congruent behavior may be rewarded, while role incongruent behavior is devalued, participants in this study will be asked to read four short descriptions/statements of fictitious agents (both women and men) described in stereotypically communal or agentic terms, to evaluate them in terms of liking and to indicate the degree to which they would like to be like each of them.

It should be mentioned here that previous research has mostly focused on specific roles (e.g., context of work and job application) for the evaluation framework (e.g., Phelan et.al., 2008; Rudman, & Glick, 2001), while I intend to focus on diffuse gender roles, as an effort to explore how people perceive and evaluate others based on broad gender expectations that are related to societal conceptions of being male and female in the context of society in general (Diekman, & Schneider, 2010). Thus, based on evidence about the persistence of gender stereotype content in Sweden and the assumptions of role congruity theory, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3a: Participants' evaluation of others in terms of liking will be less favorable for the role incongruent behaviors, especially for the agentic female agent compared to the agentic male agent and subsequently for the communal male agent compared to the communal female.

H3b: As a result of gender stereotype content, a within gender preference for the role congruent behaviors is also expected such that women would prefer to be like a communal agent more than being like an agentic agent while men would prefer to be like an agentic agent more than being like a communal.

Method

Procedure

The study was conducted exclusively online. All the information and measures were presented in Swedish. Participants were recruited through various Swedish social media groups and pages with an invitation to follow a link to the online survey. The data were collected via the online survey tool Qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com/). Participants started the survey by reading the information about the research identity and by giving their informed consent. This part entailed general information about the study's objectives without revealing the importance of gender. After giving their consent participants were presented with sociodemographic questions (age, gender, educational level and field, occupational status, number of years living in Sweden and ethnicity measured through an open optional question), the manipulation (descriptions of fictitious agents exerting stereotypically communal or agentic behavior/orientation), and the measures of stereotype content (prescription and self-view). The manipulation was followed by a control question ("What factors do you think aimed to affect your perceptions of these people?"), which aimed to control whether gender was made too salient for the evaluation, possibly leading to suspicion of the true intention of the study and biased responses. Most of the participants did not seem to suspect the importance of gender for the evaluation and focused specifically on the description of each orientation (communal vs agentic). From the total sample (N = 296), only 16 participants suspected that gender was possibly an essential part of the evaluation.

Participants

The total sample consisted by 296 participants, 176 women, 116 men and 4 people who identified themselves in other ways. Due to the focus of this study and the small number of participants who indicated their gender as other, these four participants were excluded from the final sample. Of the remaining 292 participants, 88% (n = 257) was born and raised in Sweden and 12% (n = 35) was not born in Sweden but were living in Sweden at least for the last five years. From those 35 that were not born in Sweden, 13 still identified themselves as Swedes in the ethnicity question. Regarding educational level, 48.9% had completed secondary school, 29.5% had obtained a bachelor's degree, 12.9% a master's degree, 7.9% some kind of vocational training, and only 0.7% had obtained a doctoral. Although the vast majority of participants (82,4%) were students (the remaining 17.6% had some kind of

employment or were on parental/sick leave), their educational field varied greatly and their age ranged from 18 to 39, with a mean age of 24.33 years (SD = 5.69).

Materials

Experimental manipulation (evaluation of communal and agentic orientation): The manipulation consisted by four brief descriptions/statements of people described in stereotypically masculine (agentic) or feminine (communal) terms and was presented in the very beginning of the survey. The descriptions/statements were based on the life philosophy essays that were used as supplementary materials in Rudman, & Glick (2001), but they were presented in Swedish. The translations from English were done by the supervisor and were back-translated by another researcher fluent in Swedish and English (see Appendix A for the English versions and Appendix B for the Swedish versions).

For the manipulation, a 2 x 2 within subjects' design was used (target gender: man/woman, orientation: agentic/communal). Two slightly different descriptions were used for each orientation (two for the communal and two for the agentic), as an effort to reduce any potential effects on the results because of the specific phrasing of a particular orientation. Thus, each participant was presented with four different conditions 1. woman with agentic orientation, 2. man with communal orientation, 3. woman with communal orientation, 4. man with agentic orientation. To avoid a direct comparison between the different conditions, each condition was presented in a separate page and participants did not have the opportunity to go back to the previous page once they had pressed the next button. The gender of each agent was manipulated through typical Swedish names (at least eight for each gender). To that end, a between subjects' randomization was also used as an effort to interchange between the different Swedish names (and to reduce any potential name bias on the results), to change the order of the conditions, and to interchange the gender of each agent among the different statements because of their different phrasing. For each condition participants were asked to evaluate each agent in terms of liking and to indicate the degree to which they would like to be like each of them, in a Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Measures of stereotype content: The items used for assessing gender stereotype content are based on social role theory (Eagly, 1997), previously tested, and used by Diekman & Eagly (2000). The original scale includes items referring to male and female stereotypical characteristics that are divided in three different components: personality, cognitive, and physical. High internal consistency has been reported for each of these components in the

original studies (α = .84-.92) as well as in a recent study conducted in Sweden (α = .74-.91) (Gustafsson, et.al., 2019). For the purpose of the present study, I used a slightly different version of the original measure that is also used in an ongoing international project (Towards Gender Harmony project: https://towardsgenderharmony.ug.edu.pl/) aiming to explore the content of gender stereotypes in 40 countries and among them, in Sweden (Renström et.al., manuscript). This version focuses on the personality dimension of the original measure entailing 24 agentic and 24 communal positive and negative personality traits. For the purpose of the present study, I used only the positive traits of this scale (12 communal and 12 agentic) since the content of proscriptive gender stereotypes was not a part of this study's objectives. The choice of this version was based on the study purpose and the higher reliability reported for each dimension (communal/agentic) in Swedish population (α = .83-.95) (Renström et.al., manuscript). The list of the communal traits in both English and Swedish can be found in Appendix C and the list of the agentic traits can be found in Appendix D.

Thus, **for assessing the prescriptive stereotype content** participants were asked to rate each of these communal and agentic traits for their corresponding gender on "How desirable it is for a woman/man in your society to possess each of the following traits" in a Likert scale from 1 (not at all desirable) to 7 (very desirable). Both dimensions of the scale (communion/agency) showed similar reliability results as those found in previous studies (α = .91 for the communal dimension and α = .90 for the agentic dimension).

For assessing participants' self-views in gender stereotypical traits participants were asked to rate the same traits but this time to indicate "How much each trait describes you" in a Likert scale from 1 (does not describes me at all) to 7 (describes me very well). Both subscales also showed great reliability for the self-views in this study (α = .86 and α = .84, for the communal and the agentic subscale, respectively).

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the Law (2003:460) on Ethics of Research Involving Humans. In line with the regulations, all participants gave their informed consent before starting the survey. They were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and that they had the right to withdraw at any point. They were given the opportunity to contact the researcher at any time before, and after the survey, and they were informed that their data will be treated with confidentiality. Additionally, in the beginning of the survey they were informed about the study's general aim, without disclosing the

importance of gender (participants were told that the study aimed to explore the social perceptions of others and the self in general). Nevertheless, participants were debriefed about the true intention of the study once having participated. The data were only analyzed at a group level and were only available to the researcher and the supervisor. Finally, the study did not yield any potential negative consequences for the participants.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Prior to conducting any main analyses, univariate outliers were screened for by using boxplots for each of the variables of interest and two outliers were detected. After a closer inspection, it seemed that these two participants had a specific pattern of response in all measures (same extreme value) and therefore they were excluded from further analyses. The normality of the data was checked using Histograms and Q-Q plots, and no particular issues with normality were found. Additionally, there were no missing data. Thus, the main analyses were conducted in a total sample of 290 participants (174 women and 116 men). All descriptive statistics including scale ranges, means and standard deviations of all the variables of interest are displayed in **Table 1**, for the total sample and for male and female participants separately.

Main analyses

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that the prescriptive stereotype content (as rated only by participants of the corresponding gender) would still follow traditional gendered patterns such that men's prescription would entail more agency than women's and more agency than communion and women's prescription would entail more communion than men's and more communion than agency. To test this, I ran a 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA. The repeated measures ANOVA had the type of trait (agency, communion) as repeated factor and participants' gender as between subjects' factor (since each participant rated the prescriptive stereotype content only for their corresponding gender). No significant main effect of type of trait was found and agency (M = 5.42, SD = 1.14) was rated similarly to communion (M = 5.48, SD = 1.12) in the overall prescription ratings. Nevertheless, there was a significant interaction with participants' gender $F(1, 284) = 77.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$. The interaction was due to significant gender differences in the prescription ratings of both agency and

communion. Women's prescription entailed more communion (M = 6.01, SD = .78) than men's (M = 4.95, SD = 1.26) and more communion than agency (M = 5.10, SD = 1.20), while men's prescription entailed more agency (M = 5.73, SD = .91) than women's (M = 5.10, SD = 1.20) and more agency than communion (M = 4.95, SD = 1.26). Thus, the first hypothesis was confirmed: the desired views of women and men as rated by participants of the same gender, still seem to follow gender-stereotypical patterns in Sweden today. **Figure 1** displays the results for women's and men's prescription of communion and agency.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated that stereotypes will have been to some extent internalized and therefore participants' self-views in gendered traits will also follow traditional gendered patterns where women see themselves as more communal than men and rate themselves higher on communion than agency and men see themselves as more agentic than women and rate themselves higher on agency than communion. To test whether participants' self-views on agency and communion still follow traditional gendered patterns, I ran a 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA for the self-ratings with type of trait (agency, communion) as repeated factor and participants' gender as between subjects' factor. Results showed a significant effect of type of trait $F(1, 287) = 29.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, where overall self-ratings on agency (M = 4.85, SD = .89) were lower than self-ratings on communion (M = 5.29, SD = .87). There was also a significant interaction with participants' gender $F(1, 287) = 18.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. The interaction was due to a significant difference between men and women in their self-ratings of communion, where men rated themselves lower (M = 4.93, SD = .84) than women (M = 5.52, SD = .80). Nevertheless, the self-ratings on agency did not differ significantly between participants' gender (M = 4.86, SD = .91, for men and M = 4.84, SD = .87, for women) and men did not really differentiate between communion (M = 4.93, SD = .84) and agency (M = 4.86, SD = .91) in their self-ratings. However, women still rated themselves higher on communion than agency (M = 5.52, SD = .80 and M = 4.84, SD = .87, respectively). Thus, the second hypothesis received mixed support: women ascribed more communion than agency to the self, while men did not really differentiate between agency and communion in their self-ratings. Additionally, women and men differed in their self-ratings only on communion. Women's and men's self-ratings on agency and communion are shown in **Figure 2**.

Table 1

Scale ranges, Means and Standard Deviations (SD) for the total sample and for female and male participants separately.

|	Scale range	Total		Women[a]		Men[a]	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Evaluation variables:							
Evaluation Q1: Liking							
Agentic Woman [b]	1-7	4.22	1.61	4.17	1.55	4.26	1.72
Agentic Man [b]	1-7	3.73	1.55	3.64	1.48	3.88	1.65
Communal Woman [b]	1-7	5.89	1.15	5.98	1.13	5.76	1.17
Communal Man [b]	1-7	5.94	1.07	6.06	.97	5.76	1.18
Evaluation Q2: Being Like							
Agentic Woman [b]	1-7	3.81	2.01	3.74	1.94	3.93	2.12
Agentic Man [b]	1-7	3.29	1.92	3.14	1.79	3.52	1.65
Communal Woman [b]	1-7	4.94	1.66	5.18	1.58	4.59	1.71
Communal Man [b]	1-7	4.99	1.63	5.17	1.46	4.72	1.82
Prescription							
Agency	1-7	5.42	1.14	5.10	1.20	5.73	.91
Communion	1-7	5.48	1.12	6.01	.78	4.95	1.26
Self-view							
Agency	1-7	4.85	.89	4.84	.87	4.86	.91
Communion	1-7	5.29	.87	5.52	.80	4.93	.84

[a] referring to participants' gender, [b] referring to the target gender (gender of the agent of each statement/description)

Exploratory: prescription vs self-rating

To explore the potential discrepancy between women's and men's prescription and self-ratings on agency and communion, I ran two separate 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA's, one for agency and one for communion. Both models had the self and prescription ratings as repeated factor and participants' gender as between subjects' factor (reminder: women and men rated the desirable traits only for their gender such that women rated the desirable traits for women and men the desirable traits for men). Results showed a significant effect of target (self vs prescription) for agency $F(1, 284) = 53.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, where self-ratings ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .89$) were lower than the prescription ratings ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.14$). There was also a significant interaction with participants' gender $F(1, 284) = 15.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. The interaction was due to the fact that men made a greater difference between self and
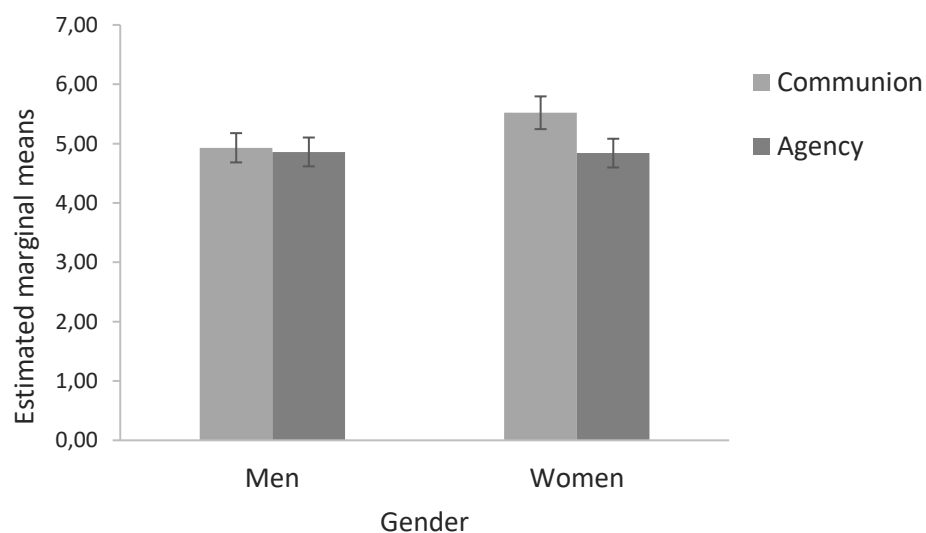
Figure 1

Estimated marginal means for men's and women's prescription of communion and agency.
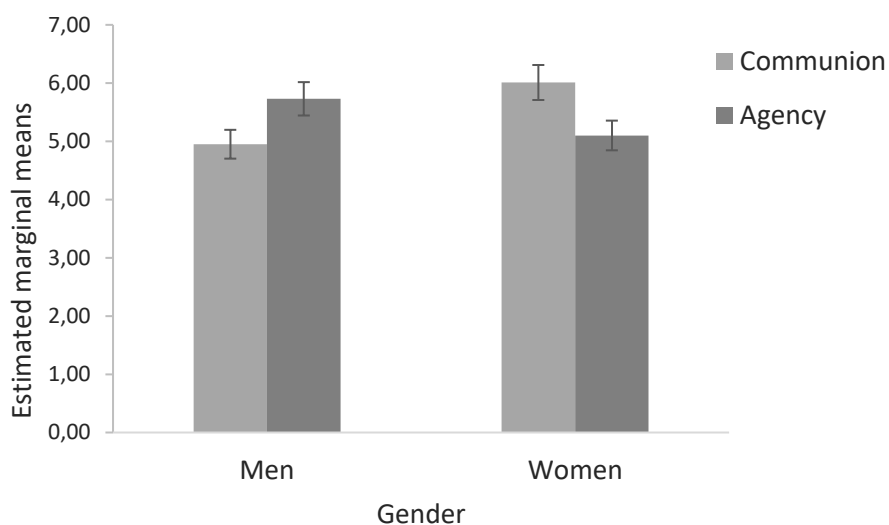
Note. Error bars signify 95% confidence interval.

Figure 2

Estimated marginal means for men's and women's self-ratings on communion and agency.
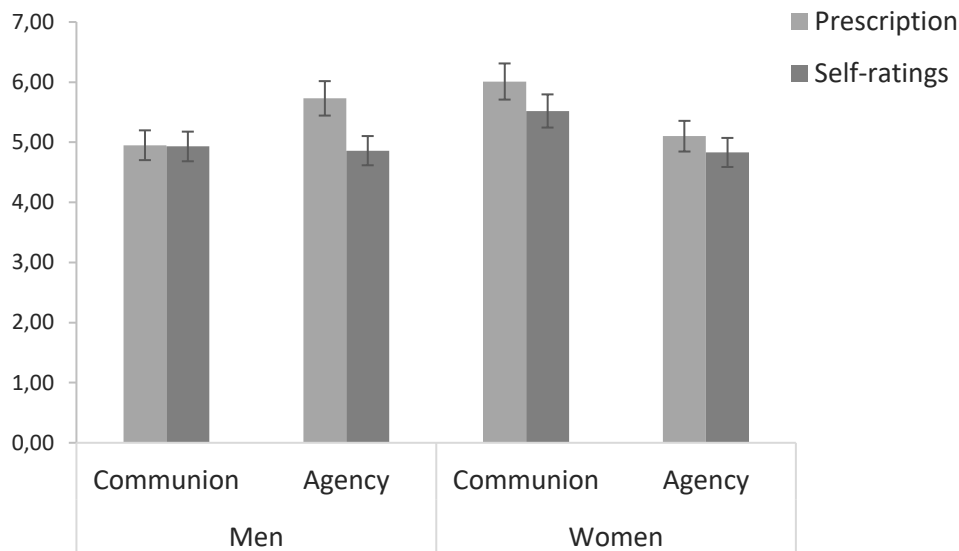

Note. Error bars signify 95% confidence interval.

prescription ratings than women on agency; Men viewed themselves as far less agentic (M = 4.86, SD = .91) than their prescription (M = 5.73, SD = .91), while women saw themselves as slightly (although significantly) less agentic (M = 4.84, SD = .87) than their prescription (M = 5.10, SD = 1.20). Results showed a significant effect of target (self vs prescription) also for communion $F(1,284) = 13.24$, p <.001, η_p^2 =.04, where ratings of prescription were also higher (M = 5.49, SD = 1.12) than the self-ratings (M = 5.29, SD = .87). There was also a significant interaction with participants' gender, $F(1,284) = 13.23$, p <.001, η_p^2 =.04. Further investigation of the interaction revealed that women made a greater difference between self and prescription ratings on communion. Women rated themselves as less communal (M = 5.52, SD = .80) than their prescription (M = 6.01, SD = .78), while men rated themselves as communal (M = 4.93, SD = .84) as their prescription (M = 4.95, SD = 1.26). Hence, it seems that both women and men made a discrepancy between self-ratings and prescription ratings on agency. However, men did not really differentiate between prescription and self-ratings on communion. Additionally, the discrepancy for women was greater on communion than agency and vice versa for men. The self vs other discrepancy for both women and men is visualized in **Figure 3**.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis intended to explore how people who exert communal, or agentic orientation are perceived and evaluated in contemporary Swedish society. Therefore, stated that (**H3a**) participants' evaluation of others in terms of liking will be less favorable for the role incongruent behaviors, especially for the agentic female agent compared to the agentic male agent and subsequently for the communal male agent compared to the communal female. To test this, I ran a 2 x 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA for the evaluation question 1 (EQ1 = "how much do you like this person?") with target gender (woman/ man) and trait (agency/communion) as repeated factors and participants' gender as between subjects' factor. A significant but small main effect of target gender was found $F(1, 288) = 16.21$, $p <.001$, η_p^2 =.05 such that overall female agents were rated higher (M = 5.05, SD = 1.38) than male agents (M = 4.83, SD = 1.30). A significant main effect of type of trait was also found $F(1,288) = 364.72$, $p <.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .55$ and the effect size was large. This effect indicated that communion (M = 5.92, SD = 1.11) is more "likable" trait than agency (M = 3.97, SD = 1.58). The effects were qualified by an interaction between target gender and type of trait $F(1,288) = 21.70$, $p <.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Significant differences between target gender and trait were found

Figure 3

*Estimated marginal means for prescription vs self-ratings on agency and communion for men and women separately.*

Note. Error bars signify 95% confidence interval.

only on agency, where the agentic woman was rated higher (M = 4.22, SD = 1.61) than the agentic man (M = 3.73, SD = 1.55). However, no significant differences between target gender and trait were found on communion (M = 5.89, SD = 1.15 for the communal woman and M = 5.94, SD = 1.07 for the communal man). Participants' gender interacted significantly only with type of trait $F(1, 288) = 4.56$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, although the effect size was small. Overall, men rated agency (M = 4.07, SD = 1.68) more favorably than women (M = 3.91, SD = 1.52), while women rated communion more favorably (M = 6.02, SD = 1.05) than men (M = 5.76, SD = 1.18). These results did not support the existence of negative evaluation for the role incongruent behaviors. In contrast with the expectations, the agentic woman was rated more favorably than the agentic man and no significant difference in liking was found between the communal woman and the communal man. Nevertheless, women still rated communion more favorably than men and men still rated agency more favorably than women. The results for the first evaluation question are visualized in **Figure 4**.

Additionally (**H3b**), as a result of gender stereotypes, a within gender preference for the role congruent behaviors was also expected such that women would prefer to be like a communal agent more than being like an agentic agent, while men would prefer to be like an

Figure 4

Mean values for the evaluation question 1 ("How much do you like this person?") in the total sample (both women's and men's responses).
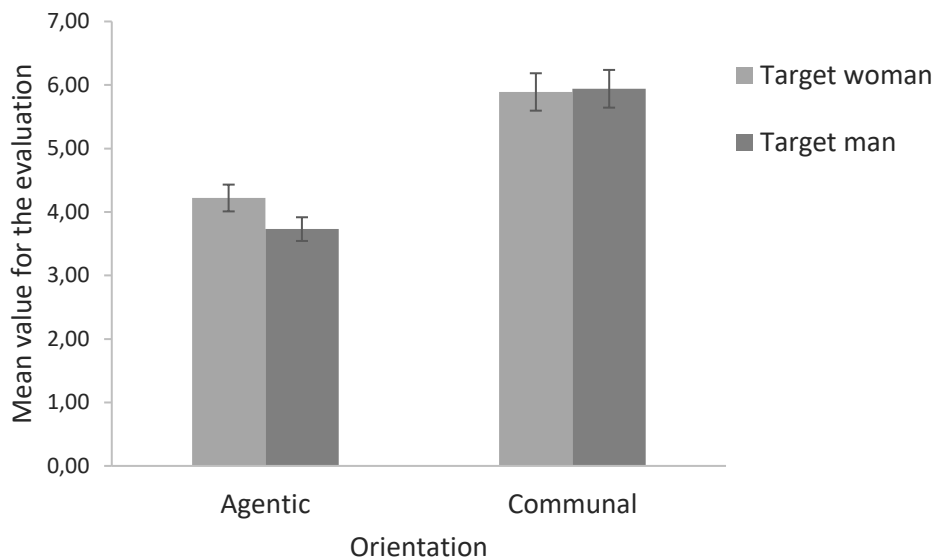

Note. Target gender refers to the gender of the agents of the descriptions/statements and not to participant gender. Error bars signify 95% confidence interval.

agentic agent more than being like a communal. To test the potential preference for the role congruent behaviors, I ran a 2 x 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA for this evaluation question (EQ2 = "How much would you like to be like this person?"), as I did for the evaluation question 1 (EQ1), with target gender (woman/ man) and trait (agency/communion) as repeated factors and participants' gender as between subjects' factor. Both target gender and trait were significant $F(1,288) = 8.89$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ and $F(1, 288) = 87.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$, respectively. There was a main effect of target gender such that overall female agents were rated more positively (M = 4.38, SD = 1.84) than male agents (M = 4.14, SD = 1.78). There was also a main effect of type of trait such that communion was rated higher (M = 4.97, SD = 1.65) than agency (M = 3.55, SD = 1.97). The effects were also qualified by an interaction between target gender and type of trait $F(1,288) = 18.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. The interaction was due to the fact that the agentic male agent was rated less favorably (M = 3.29, SD = 1.92) than the agentic female agent (M = 3.81, SD = 2.01), while the communal male agent (M = 4.99, SD = 1.63) was rated similarly to the communal female agent (M = 4.94, SD = 1.66). Additionally, agency for both female and male agents was rated less favorably than communion, but the difference was greater for the male than the female agents. Participants'

gender interacted significantly only with type of trait $F(1,288) = 8.00$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The interaction showed that the female participants preferred communion (M = 5.18, SD = 1.52) more strongly than the male (M = 4.66, SD = 1.77), while male participants preferred agency (M = 3.73, SD = 2.11) more strongly than the female (M = 3.44, SD = 1.87). However, both male and female participants preferred communion over agency, but the preference for communion was greater for the female than the male participants. Target gender did not interact significantly with participants' gender and there was also no significant three-way interaction among target gender, trait and participants' gender, a fact that indicates that target gender did not really influence participants' preferences on agency and communion. Thus, the final hypothesis was not confirmed. Regardless of the gender of the agent, both female participants and male participants preferred more strongly to be like a communal agent over an agentic. However, women's overall preference for communion was greater than men's and men's overall preference for agency was greater than women's. Results for women's and men's preferences of agency and communion are displayed in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5

Mean values for the preference of the agentic vs communal orientation for male and female participants separately.
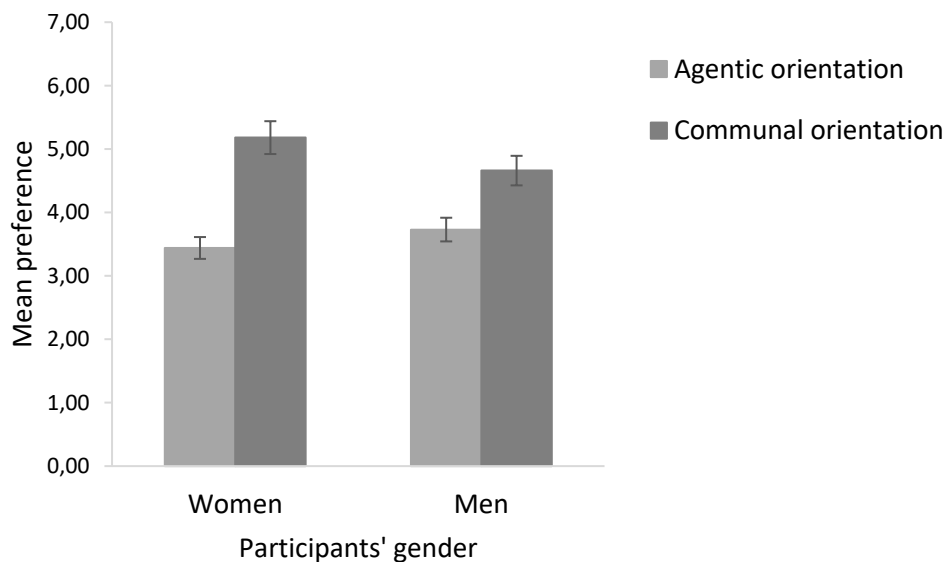
Note. Error bars signify 95% confidence interval.

Discussion

The present study intended to further explore the current state of gender stereotypes in Swedish society in a two-fold way; On one hand, through investigating how people perceive that they should be, based on gender group membership (prescriptive stereotype content), and in relation to how they actually are (self-view in gendered traits) and on the other hand, through exploring how role congruent behavior and, especially how role incongruent behavior is perceived and evaluated in modern Swedish society. Only little research on gender stereotyping has focused on prescriptive stereotype content and even less research has encountered the prescription vs self-view perspective for investigating gender stereotypical characterizations (Renström et.al., manuscript). Additionally, to my knowledge, this is the first attempt to assess the potential reaction to gender stereotype compliance and deviation in Swedish population. Hence, the present study intends to contribute to previous research by increasing the understanding of some aspects of gender stereotypes that have not yet received much attention in the relevant literature or have not yet been thoroughly investigated in Swedish population.

Prescriptive stereotype content

The first hypothesis referred to the content of prescriptive stereotypes, as perceived and reported by participants of the corresponding gender and was expected to follow traditionally gendered patterns. Results confirmed the hypothesis; Women's and men's prescriptive stereotype content followed a strong traditionally gendered pattern: the female stereotype content entailed more communion than agency, while the male stereotype content entailed more agency than communion. Additionally, men's prescription entailed significantly more agency than women's, and women's prescription entailed significantly more communion than men's.

These results are consistent with the prescriptive stereotype content reported in an ongoing study conducted in Swedish population (Renström et.al., manuscript). This strong traditionally gendered prescription may not be surprising, since as already discussed and in accordance with social role theory's assumptions, the overrepresentation of women and men in specific social roles leads to the maintenance of gender stereotypical characterizations, and although role segregation has been to some extent abated in Swedish society has by no means been eliminated. However, social role theory also suggests the ability of gender stereotypes to change in line with the advances in role segregation, a fact that does not seem to be reflected

in the prescriptive stereotype content found in this study, which not only seems to follow strong traditionally gendered patterns but is also more gender stereotypically pronounced than the descriptive stereotype content previously reported in Swedish population (Gustafsson et.al., 2019). It is worth mentioning here that the traits used in these studies were not exactly the same, and therefore this discrepancy may be also due to the use of slightly different traits for capturing agency and communion.

Nevertheless, a difference between prescriptive and descriptive stereotyping has been also reported in previous research (Gill, 2005; Luzadis et.al., 2008; Zehnter, et.al, 2018) and has been attributed to the different nature of prescriptive stereotyping; Because prescriptive stereotypes function as behavioral standards that people must uphold in order to avoid been sanctioned, they may follow different change mechanisms than the descriptive (Zehnter, et.al, 2018), and therefore the observation of changes in social roles may lead to slower changes in the prescriptive stereotype content (Diekman et.al., 2010). Although this different nature of prescriptive stereotyping might provide a more plausible explanation for the strong traditionally gendered prescription found in the present study as well, much work remains to be done before a full understanding of such findings.

Importantly though, the prescriptive stereotype content is still strongly gender stereotypical in Swedish society, a fact that is concerning, since prescriptive stereotypes set the stage for prejudice and bias. For that reason, future research should further attempt to distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive stereotypes and to shed some additional light to the underlying reasons of the pervasiveness of prescriptive gender stereotyping as well as its consequences.

Self-views in gendered traits and relation to prescriptive stereotype content

Contrary to the expectations, the second hypothesis was only partially supported: women's and men's self-views in gendered traits did not seem to follow a similarly traditional gendered pattern; Women and men differed in their self-views only on communion, and women ascribed significantly more communion to the self than men. Additionally, women seemed to comply more strongly to their gender norms than men, since they rated communion higher than agency, while men rated agency and communion similarly in their self-views. Nevertheless, the comparison between prescription and self-views indicated that both women and men made a discrepancy between self and prescription ratings in the sense that both adhered less to traditional gender stereotypes in their self-views. Previous research has also

found a discrepancy in the self vs other views when it comes to gender stereotyping (Allen, 1995; Hentschel et.al., 2019; Martin, 1987; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968; Spence and Buckner, 2000). However, in most of the studies focused on self-views in gendered traits, women's and men's self-characterizations still tended to differ in stereotype consistent ways (e.g., Bem, 1974; Hentschel et.al., 2019; Spence and Buckner, 2000), a fact that has not been fully supported through the present study. Nevertheless, these results are consistent with those reported in an ongoing study in Swedish population (Renström et.al., manuscript).

Hence, results overall showed that women and men adhere less strongly to traditional gender stereotypes when describing themselves than when reporting the ideal for their gender societal standards of behavior. This finding is in line with previous research which has also shown that gender stereotypes are less likely to be used when characterizing the self (e.g., Hentschel et.al., 2019) for which several explanations can be offered; For instance, people have access to accurate information and clear behavioral cues when judging the self, information that cannot be equally accessible when people make assumptions about what is considered appropriate behavior in society in general. Additionally, societal changes have greater immediacy and importance for the self and therefore their impact may be more accurately reflected in people's self-characterizations (Hentschel et.al., 2019), leading potentially to less gender stereotypical self-views. Importantly though, this discrepancy between prescription and self-views might have- as already discussed- serious consequences for the individuals. For that reason, future research should focus more on this discrepancy and the potential consequences of such strongly gender stereotypical prescriptions as those reported through the current study.

Interestingly, although women's and men's self-views were found to be less gender stereotypically pronounced than their prescription, they seem to be in line with the descriptive stereotype content recently found in Sweden (Gustafsson et.al., 2019). This similarity may be related with the fact that both descriptive stereotypes and self-views in gendered traits are more sensitive to information and observation of changes in roles (than prescriptive stereotypes), but also challenges the idea that people are more apt to use gender stereotypes when they characterize others than when they characterize the self. Thus, this similarity is partly unexpected since it is inconsistent with previous studies and theories explaining the differential use of gender stereotypes in the self and other perspectives; For instance, attribution theory (Jones & Nisbett, 1987) claims that people are more prone to attribute others' behavior instead of their own behavior to stable personality traits, while construal

level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) suggests that psychological distance promotes abstraction from individuating information, and therefore facilitates stereotyping. If-contrary to the expectations- there is indeed a similarity in the use of gender stereotypes in self and other perspectives in modern Swedish society, then there is also a need for research that further explores the underlying reasons for this similarity.

Another interesting finding is that women, who have experienced a greater role change than men, viewed themselves in a more gender stereotypical way than men in this study. This gender difference is consistent with a previously reported tendency for men to be less gender stereotype-bound and for women to be more gender stereotype-compliant in their self-characterizations (e.g., Hentschel et.al., 2019) and should be further investigated through future research. However, it has been argued in the literature that communion, which is the basis of the female stereotype content, may be seen as a trait more closely related to the category woman and possibly as more closely related to biological factors (McPherson et.al., 2018) and therefore, it may be a trait difficult to gain or "lose" because of societal changes. If that is true, it could explain why women's self-views are still more gender stereotypically pronounced than men's even though women have undergone a greater role change than men in modern Swedish society.

Hence, these results raise a variety of intriguing questions for future research and further highlight the imperative need for more research on gender stereotyping and the complicated processes involved in prescriptive, descriptive gender stereotyping and people's self-views in gendered traits.

Evaluation of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical behaviors

To my knowledge this is the first attempt to explore how role congruity and role incongruity may be perceived and evaluated in the broad societal context (instead of the context of a specific role), and in Swedish population. For that reason, it is difficult to compare this study's results with previous research.

Despite the strong traditionally gendered prescriptive stereotype content found in the present study, results did not support the hypothesis for a less favorable evaluation (in terms of liking) of the role incongruent behaviors as manipulated through descriptions of women and men exerting stereotypically agentic and communal orientations in the societal context. Regardless of the gender of the agent, communion was rated more favorably than agency by both male and female raters, a fact that is in line with previous research indicating that

communion is valued more than agency in the other perspective (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Nevertheless, even though role incongruity did not seem to elicit a negative reaction, women still rated communion more favorably than men, while men still rated agency more favorably than women.

The most optimistic interpretation of these results could be that the numerous efforts to reduce gender inequality in Sweden may have indeed been fruitful, indicating that gender stereotypes may not operate as strongly as they used to in determining people's perceptions of others in Swedish society; If that is true, it may mean as well that the consequences of gender stereotypes and their violation may be reduced in Sweden today. Although research focused on gender bias and backlash effect is scarce in Sweden, a previous study aiming to test for backlash effect in the recruitment process, found no indication of gender bias in a real life setting of job interview invitations (Carlsson et.al., 2014), a fact that further supports this assumption. Additionally, this interpretation is in line with Rudman et.al. (2012), who have argued that the backlash effect, can be reduced through educating people about gender equality matters, cultivating equalitarian motives and in general increasing public awareness about gender stereotypes and their consequences. Yet concluding -based on such limited evidence- that people's perceptions of others are less subjected to gender bias and therefore that the consequences of gender stereotypes and their violation are indeed reduced in Sweden today may be arbitrary.

Although similar inconsistencies regarding the existence of backlash effect have been also reported in other studies (Balachandra et.al., 2019; O'Neill & O'Reilly, 2011; Steffens & Mehl, 2003; Steffens et al., 2009; Weichselbaumer, 2004), such results do not necessarily mean that the consequences of gender stereotype violation do not exist or that they are too weak to be relevant, especially if we take into consideration that gender bias (especially the prescriptive) can be very subtle and therefore difficult to be detected (Luzadis et.al., 2008). Hence, a potentially more plausible explanation of this study's results, may relate with the method used to assess the potential existence of devaluation for people who behave counter-stereotypically in Swedish society; The manipulation may not have been subtle enough to avoid socially desirable responses or sensitive enough to capture the complexity of people's reactions to gender stereotype compliance and violation, especially, in real-life situations. Additionally, the focus on the broad societal context for the evaluation framework, might have led to an excessively general evaluation setting, to assure that participants really engaged to the described behaviors and that they really noticed role incongruity. Therefore, it is

possible that role incongruity would have been more obvious in the context of a specific role instead of the broad societal context used in this study.

Another unexpected finding was the fact that the agentic male agent was rated less favorably than the agentic female agent. One potential explanation might relate to the polarized way the descriptions of each orientation were presented in conjunction with the broad societal context used for the evaluation framework; Even though gender stereotypes still exist in Sweden, women and men in real life hardly ever fit or are supposed to fit to such polarized descriptions today. And even if specific traits are considered more desirable for a particular gender, they may still be valued differently based on the context where they appear. For example, possessing agentic traits and exerting a stereotypically masculine orientation may be "justifiable" in the context of a specific role where such traits are considered necessary. However, exerting an agentic orientation in the context of society might be seen as an effort to overpower others, a fact that has serious consequences for other people or other groups of people in society.

Therefore, it is possible that such polarized description of a man in exclusively masculine terms, and his placement in the context of society in general instead of the context of a specific role, corresponded blatantly to a traditional gender stereotype that is not only outdated in Swedish society, but may even pose a threat to the numerous efforts to achieve gender equality through female empowerment. In the light of these efforts, it may not be surprising that female agency is seen and evaluated more positively than male agency in the societal context in Sweden today. However, it would have been interesting to see if these results would be the same in the context of a specific role for the evaluation framework.

Additionally, since it has been argued in the literature that communion might be seen as more closely related to the category woman and to biological factors (McPherson et.al., 2018), it is also possible that the existence of some communal traits (e.g., niceness) is automatically and unconsciously inferred for women in the societal context, even if they are described in exclusively agentic terms. For that reason, an agentic woman may still be more "likable" than the equally agentic man. Nevertheless, only future research can support this assumption.

Finally, the expectation for a within gender preference for the role congruent behaviors was not confirmed through this study. Indeed, in line with the female stereotype content, women preferred more strongly to be like a communal agent over an agentic, but

men also preferred communion over agency. Interestingly, even though the male stereotype content prescribes agency as extremely important, men in this study did not prefer to be agentic. These are interesting findings not only because they are inconsistent with the male stereotype content, but also because they are inconsistent with previous evidence indicating that agency is more important than communion for the self (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Nevertheless, results still revealed a gendered pattern in participants' responses, as women overall rated communion more favorably than men and men rated agency more favorably than women. However, both men and women preferred communion over agency. Again, the polarized description of agency, the broad context of the evaluation framework and the potential social desirability of participants' responses might partly explain this finding. On the other hand, it is possible that such findings are indeed the result of progress indicating that gender stereotypes do not function as strongly as they used to in determining people's lives.

All in all, this is the first attempt to assess how people perceive and evaluate others based on their gender categorization and to examine the potential devaluation for the counter-stereotypical behaviors in Swedish society and since there is no suggested independent measure for assessing the derogation that derives from gender stereotypes and their violation it cannot be inferred with certainty that such findings reflect exclusively potential methodological inadequacies. To the contrary, such findings highlight the importance for more research on this matter, research that will try to overcome some of the previous methodological limitations and will shed some additional light to the consequences of gender stereotypes and their violation in modern Swedish society.

Limitations

The results reported in this paper should be considered in the light of some limitations. First, this study may be subjected to selection bias; An online survey that is conducted through social media, cannot fully capture a representative sample of the population since individuals not always have access to internet, social media, or membership to the specific groups that I succeeded to find, and the sample consisted mainly by students. However, conducting an online survey also offers faster and wider rates of participation especially in the Covid-19 era and therefore for the purpose and scope of this research, it was preferred.

Moreover, results regarding the prescriptive stereotype content should be interpreted with consideration to the fact that prescriptive stereotypes were rated only by participants of

the corresponding gender. Although some studies indicate that women and men may differ in the degree to which they engage in gender stereotyping because societal changes have differential implications on them (Levant, 1996; Twenge, 1997), more recent evidence indicate that men and women are equally likely to characterize others in gender stereotypical terms (Heilman, 2001, 2012). Thus, because women and men live in the same world, it seems that there is a consensus on gender stereotype content regardless of the evaluator's gender identity. A similar consensus has been also reported in recent studies in Swedish population (Gustafsson et.al., 2019; Renström et.al., manuscript), and is further supported by the fact that the prescriptive stereotype content found in this study- although rated only by participants of the corresponding gender- is in line with the one reported by both female and male raters in an ongoing study (Renström et.al., manuscript). Therefore, this limitation may not be a major issue when interpreting this study's results. Nevertheless, future research should probably assess gender stereotype content through both female and male raters.

Furthermore, it should be noted that this study measured prescriptive stereotype content in a specific time point. Although this method aligned with the study's purpose to explore the current state of gender stereotypes in Sweden, it cannot reflect potential changes in prescriptive stereotype content that may have occurred over time; Even though it is argued through this study that prescriptive stereotypes are still strong traditionally gendered in Sweden today, it is impossible to know whether and how they may have changed over time. Hence, future research may also explore the dynamic aspect of prescriptive stereotype content for increasing our understanding of its processes and function.

Additionally, a recent study (Hentschel et.al., 2019) indicated the importance of using a multidimensional framework for assessing gender stereotypes by providing evidence that measuring different elements of agency and communion separately might be more revealing of the current state of gender stereotypes and especially, the gender differences in people's self-views in gender stereotypical traits. Although I do not claim that the way I chose to assess gender stereotypes in this study was inadequate, this may be an important insight for future research.

Finally, the method I used to assess the evaluation of role (in)congruent behaviors has also some drawbacks. First, experiments have a sterile setting, which on the positive side allows for high control of confounding information. However, this sterile setting may also constitute the evaluation setting too context free to provoke real-life reactions. Additionally,

as already discussed, it is possible that the broad societal context used for the evaluation framework in this study, rendered the descriptions used in the manipulation too generic to assure that participants really engaged to them and that they really noticed role incongruity.

Furthermore, the way through which the statements were presented (within subjects' design) and the way through which gender was manipulated could made the comparison between women and men blatant in participants' eyes, leading potentially to more socially desirable responses. However, social desirability cannot explain why the agentic male agent was rated significantly lower in likability than the agentic female agent; If participants had suspected the true intention of the manipulation and wished to appear as more gender equalitarian, then it would make more sense to rate both agents similarly. Additionally, when participants were asked to indicate their thoughts regarding the manipulation, very few of them indicated that gender was an important aspect of the evaluation.

Even though the decision of using a within subjects' design for the experimental manipulation in this study served the scope and timeline available for completing this thesis project (since a between subjects' design would probably require access to a bigger sample size to assure that the study would not end up underpowered), future research should probably use a between subjects' design in order to avoid biased responses. Future research should also avoid using names for making gender salient in the evaluation since the use of gender linked names has been connected in the literature with a potential name bias resulting from the fact that names are associated with different levels of perceived attractiveness, competence, and age (Kasof, 1993). Although in this study I used at least eight female and male names as an effort to reduce the potential effect of name bias in my results, it is possible that it still influenced my findings.

Conclusion

Although the generality of the current results must be established by future research, the present study provided clear support for a strong traditionally gendered prescriptive stereotype content in Swedish population. This finding indicates that despite Sweden's strong equality discourse, gender stereotypes still prescribe how people should be and act based on their gender group membership. However, people's self-views in gendered traits did not seem to follow a similarly traditional gendered pattern; Both women and men adhered less to their gender stereotypes in their self-characterizations. These are important findings since

prescriptive stereotypes set the stage for prejudice and bias, while the self-ideal discrepancy can also yield serious consequences for the members of stereotyped groups. Nevertheless, women tended to conform more strongly to their gender norms than men, a fact that should be further explored and explained through future research. Finally, role incongruity -as conceptualized and measured through this study- did not seem to elicit a negative reaction, and participants in this study did not seem to prefer the role congruent behaviors as was expected. This may indicate that gender stereotypes do not determine people's perceptions of others as strongly as they used to in modern Swedish society. However, these findings should be also considered in the light of this study's limitations. To that end, although this study provides some valuable evidence for the current state of gender stereotypes in Sweden, its most important contribution may be that it raises a variety of intriguing questions for future research. Hence, future research should extend these results and shed some additional light to the function and consequences of gender stereotypes and their violation in contemporary Swedish society.

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Appendix A

English versions of the evaluation descriptions/statements

Communal orientation 1

(Name) is compassionate and sensitive. She/he is very cooperative and devoted to other people. She/he values particularly human relations in her/his life. Her/his view: "To me, life is about being connected to other people. I feel full when I have people to care for in my surroundings and a real sense of accomplishment if I can help someone out".

Communal orientation 2

(Name) is empathetic and caring. He/she believes that everything can be achieved through cooperation, and he/she is truly dedicated to his/her family and friends. What he/she values most in life is to have genuine connections to other people. His/her view: "To me, life truly matters when you are surrounded by people, and you are truly connected to them. To me, success is about supporting others".

Agentic Orientation 1

(Name) is a competitive, ambitious person that wants to be in charge. She/he is independent and confident in her/his everyday life. Her/his view about life can be summarized in the following sentences: "Basically there are two kinds of people in life: achievers and non-achievers. My goal is to be an achiever, the type of person who gets to be in charge and make the decisions".

Agentic Orientation 2

(Name) is a driven person. He/she is self-assertive, autonomous and likes competition in his/her life. His/her view about life can be summarized in the following sentences: "In life people are divided to those who lead and those who follow. I aim to be a leader, the person who sets the path and has control over the situations."

Appendix B

Swedish versions of the evaluation descriptions/statements

Communal orientation 1

(Namn) är medkännande och känslig. Hon/han är mycket samarbetsvillig och hängiven till andra människor. Hon/han värderar speciellt mänskliga relationer i livet. Hennes/hans livssyn: "För mig handlar livet om att vara förenad med andra människor. Jag känner mig fulländad när jag har människor att bry mig om i mina omgivningar och känner mig verkligt fulländad om jag kan hjälpa någon".

Communal orientation 2

(Namn) är empatisk och omtänksam. Han/hon anser att allt kan uppnås genom samarbete och är verkligen hängiven till sin familj och vänner. Det han mest värderar i livet är att ha genuina kontakter med andra människor. Hans/hennes livssyn: "För mig är livet mest betydelsefullt när jag är omgiven av människor och känner mig verkligt anknuten till dem. För mig är framgång att stötta andra".

Agentic orientation 1

(Namn) är en tävlingsinriktad, ambitiös person som vill bestämma. Hon/han är oberoende och trygg i sitt vardagliga liv. Hennes/hans livssyn kan summeras i följande meningar: "Det finns två typer av människor: de som strävar uppåt och de som inte gör det. Mitt mål är att sträva uppåt, att vara den typ av person som bestämmer och fattar beslut".

Agentic orientation 2

(Namn) är en driven person. Han/hon är självsäker, autonom och gillar konkurrens i livet. Hans/hennes livssyn kan summeras i följande meningar: "Livet är uppdelat i de som leder och de som följer. Jag siktar på att vara en ledare, den person som leder vägen och har kontroll över situationer".

Appendix C

List of the communal traits in English and Swedish

English version	Swedish version
compassionate	medkännande
helpful to others	hjälpsam
sympathetic	sympatisk
understanding of others	förstående
sensitive	känslig
soft-hearted	ömsint
aware of others' feelings	medveten om andras känslor
cooperative	samarbetsvillig
devoted to others	hängiven till andra
trusting	godtrogen
warm	varm
supportive	stödjanded

Appendix D

List of the agentic traits in English and Swedish

English version	Swedish version
English version	**Swedish version**
decisive	beslutsam
ambitious	ambitiös
competitive	tävlingsinriktad
competent	kompetent
confident	självsäker
has leadership abilities	ledarförmåga
efficient	effektiv
determined	bestämd
courageous	modig
active	aktiv
capable	duktig
independent	oberoende