**The Face Value of Femininity- An Assessment of the Perceptions of Femininity in the Workplace**

by

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Abstract

      The perception of femininity in the workplace has traditionally been viewed negatively by the general public. While many perceive femininity in the workplace as being unprofessional, changing generational values suggest a dramatic shift in this perception. Conflicting research on the perception of femininity calls for a re-evaluation of the current definition of femininity and of the public's perception of femininity in the workplace in relation to professionalism. A survey of 310 college students at a southeastern university were asked about their perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace in order to understand and predict new trends in generational workplace values. This study investigated the current perceptions of femininity in the workplace in hopes that both workforce educators and business personnel can predict future changes in workplace culture and use this information to create a more inclusive workplace environment.

      The findings of this study indicated that an individual's gender had an impact on if an individual saw femininity in the workplace, that older individuals were less likely to associate femininity with professionalism, that Seniors in college were less likely to assert that males displayed femininity less than females, that being independent and having leadership ability are two of the most important professional traits to individuals, that individuals who did not wish to disclose their gender valued work or family, and that in general college students viewed femininity in the workplace positively.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The cultural climate of workplace environments changes over time. The type of leadership and management in place, the geographic location of the business, and even the kind of work that is done all affect the workplace culture. While some of these factors are frequently associated with the formation of workplace norms and practices, often the idea of femininity is overlooked as being a positive contributor. According to some researchers, the demonstration of femininity in the workplace is essential to being a successful worker (Adamson, 2017; Banchefsky, Westfall, Park, & Judd, 2016; Buddle, 2006; Hehman, Carpinella, Johnson, Leitner, & Freeman, 2014). These authors posit that utilizing femininity in the workplace allows individuals to be more competent and as a result, to better the businesses they work for. While these researchers argue that femininity is beneficial in workplace environments and should be viewed as professional, why is it that the current climate of most workplace cultures views femininity as a negative, unprofessional trait (Banchefsky et al., 2016; Goodman, 2009; Little, Major, Hinojosam, & Nelson, 2015; Maier, 1999)?

As exhibited by several studies (Banchefsky et al., 2016; Little et al., 2015; Maier, 1999), and the development of instruments such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), femininity has traditionally been viewed negatively because it has been considered inferior to masculinity or associated with sexuality. It comes as no surprise that many workplace environments are still embodying the masculine preference and that many workplace cultures across the United States reflect this inclination today (Goodman, 2009). While a masculine work environment may be beneficial for some, the suppression

of one's femininity has been problematic for others. Leadership and office personnel alike have prioritized and favored masculine traits time and again (Ayman & Frame, 2017; Cuadrado, Garcia- Ael, and Molero, 2015; Hakim, 1996). As such, demonstrating more masculine traits while suppressing feminine ones has been instrumental to individual advancement and has dramatically influenced workplace cultures.

As previously stated, many researchers have suggested that the use of femininity in the workplace is often associated with utilizing sexuality or polarizing these actions with that of masculinity (Goodman, 2009; Kimmel, 1987; Paechter, 2006). Employees continually find themselves in situations that require them to mimic masculine traits if they want to be considered professional. While exhibiting specific characteristics of masculinity in a workplace environment can be viewed as being professional in some regard, this study questions the current perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace. The researcher intends to use this information to examine if newer generations are changing the status quo and are seeing femininity as more professional than previous generations in hopes that the future of workplace settings will shift to be more inclusive than in past years.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the current perceptions of femininity in workplace environments. It was to evaluate college students' perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace as either professional/desirable or unprofessional/not desirable. The study aimed to identify the modern-day perceptions of femininity in regards to both preference and professionalism in the workplace as seen by younger generations.

The purpose of this research was also to contribute to a small body of existing literature that describes femininity from the perspective of multiple genders. A majority of the existing research focuses on perceptions of femininity based on sex (mostly women) and relates the concept of femininity with the concepts of sexuality and/or masculinity. As a result, another purpose of this study was to see how multiple genders perceived femininity demonstrated in the workplace, and to gather data that helps identify how individuals perceive femininity without regard to sexuality or masculinity.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What is the relationship between demographics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and perceptions of femininity?

2. What is the relationship between gender and perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic?

3. How do college students view feminine traits in contrast to masculine traits?

4. What is the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings?

5. How is femininity in the workplace viewed by college students?

**Statement of the Problem**

The definition of femininity has long been disputed. The term is most commonly thought of in two respects. The first way femininity is portrayed in research and by the general public is by being synonymous with the term sexuality. Femininity is frequently associated with sexuality when contextualized in workplace environments. While sexuality can be considered a feminine characteristic, the two words are not

synonymous and should not be treated as such. Secondly, the definition of femininity is often treated as a duality of masculinity. In this regard, the concept of femininity cannot exist without masculinity. This dichotomy is problematic because it implies that the term is incapable of existing on its own. That the idea of femininity's existence is dependent upon that of masculinity and as such, is inferior to it. This understanding is problematic because it strips the concept of femininity's autonomy and makes it reliant upon both the existence and understanding of another word. It is because of these haphazard definitions/associations that there is a need for additional research on the perceptions of femininity in the workplace. Previous research has failed to consider the concept of femininity as an independent, desexualized fashion. As a result, additional research is needed so that we may better understand how femininity is genuinely perceived by others.

**Significance of the Study**

Given the fact that a new generation (millennials) will soon be in an age where they could be taking on higher leadership roles within businesses, the findings of this study could prove to be important in the near future. With a new generation coming into positions of leadership, workplace cultures are bound to shift. The values of this new generation will greatly influence workplace norms and culture just as the generations before them have. As such, understanding how millennials perceive femininity is beneficial because it will allow workforce educators to understand better what this shift in culture may look like and how to use this knowledge to educate new employees more effectively.

This study's findings are also of significance because there is little research on femininity in the workplace that does not pertain to sexuality or masculinity. Additionally, a majority of existing research focuses on perceptions of femininity from the perspective of biological sex (typically female). As a result, the results from the following study can aid in contributing to a pool of research dedicated to solely femininity and the workplace from the perspective of all genders.

Finally, the data that was collected in this study can help inform business leaders and employees about what is currently being perceived as professional or desirable in the workplace. This information can then be used to create more effective workforce training materials, update human resource policies, and create a more inclusive workplace environment for all.

## Assumptions

The following assumptions were made prior to the study:

1. That the Bem Sex Role inventory is appropriate for measuring both femininity and masculinity.

2. That survey respondents have a good understanding of the concept of femininity and what it entails.

3. That a majority of college students are also considered members of the millennial generation.

4. That a majority of the respondents have had a job at some point in time.

5. The respondents have answered the survey questions honestly and did not succumb to any internal or exterior pressures that would alter their perceptions.

6. The respondents are representative of the full sample and the full demographic.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations to the study at hand. First, the sample was gathered from one geographic location rather than multiple. This indicates that the findings of this study may not be generalizable on a national or global scale. In reality, these findings may only be indicative of specific regions in the southeastern United States.

Second, this study utilized a convenience sampling technique rather than a random sampling technique. This may have impacted the generalizability of the results, but was necessary to complete the study at hand.

Finally, the study's instrument may be considered a limitation. The instrument took the form of an online questionnaire and was sent out through an online program called Qualtrics. Due to the strict online nature of the instrument, those without access to the internet and an electronic device that can access the internet would have been unable to take part in the study.

**Definitions**

1. Bem Sex Role Inventory- A masculinity/femininity scale that was developed in 1974 to identify an individual's masculine or feminine inherent nature. This instrument is frequently used in studies pertaining to femininity and masculinity.

2. Femininity- "A socially constructed standard for women's appearance, demeanor, and values" (Bordo, 1993).

3. Masculinity- A socially constructed standard for men's appearance, demeanor, and values.

4. Millennial- Individuals born in the United States between 1981 and 2000. This group of individuals is also referred to as "Generation Y" and has experienced and utilized advanced/rapid technological advancements from an early age.

5. Perception- An individual's personal view, understanding, or judgment about a particular topic, concept, or object.

6. Delphi Method- A way of identifying whether there is any consensus in an expert group and clarifying any agreement which exists. This is accomplished through iterative rounds of a questionnaire completed by a panel of experts. The questionnaire contains feedback about the answers given by the same expert panel from the previous round of the questionnaire" (Greatorex and Dexter, 2000, p. 1016).

**Organization of the Study**

The following study is organized into five distinct chapters. Chapter 1 provides insight into the reason for the study at hand, a brief history of the research pertaining to femininity, the significance of the study, and the limitations. Additionally, this chapter outlines the study's research questions and the assumptions the researcher had before conducting the experiment.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature. This review of literature includes information about the definition of femininity, professionalism, research that has addressed the perceptions of femininity in the workplace, the benefits of femininity, and the drawbacks of femininity. Additional information is provided in this section to help illustrate the many facets of the topic at hand and how new research can add to this body of existing knowledge.

The third chapter pertains to the methods that were used to carry out the study. This section describes the instrument that was used (along with its creation), the sample size, and the types of testing that were used to analyze the data that was gathered.

Chapter 4 details the results of the study. In this section, an exploration of the significance of data as well as statistical values is addressed. Tables and figures are used in this section to display the information that was gathered during the study visually.

Finally, chapter 5 serves to address the author's final conclusions and future recommendations for research on the perceptions of femininity in the workplace. This information can be used in future studies to increase yield even stronger results and draw more accurate conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

**Introduction**

The idea that today's world values masculinity is not newfangled. From the time individuals are young, they inherently learn that those who succeed are the ones that demonstrate masculine traits and characteristics. They learn this lesson by observing, learning, and mimicking those around them who exhibit these traits, as they are the ones who are deemed important and/or successful. While everyone wants to be considered successful in their chosen fields, why is it that reaching this goal is contingent upon mastering and demonstrating aspects of masculinity? Silver (2017) appeared to be troubled by this same question when she stated:

> It's a man's world after all. You exist in a world that values and rewards what you call your Masculine Genius: your rational linear, go-go-go, get-it-done, goal-oriented, competitive, will-powered abilities. It is the same world that shames and hobbies your intuitive, meaningful, collaborative, emotional, passionate, spiraling, soulful abilities- your Feminine Genius. (p.8)

Silver helped bring the concept of femininity to the forefront of this conversation by positing that today's world values masculinity and looks negatively upon femininity. Although this idea has been repeatedly supported in several different types of workplaces, why is it that femininity is perceived as being so undesirable and so unprofessional? Many researchers have asked this same question and have addressed this same concern by carrying out studies that explore the different attitudes associated with these concepts (Ayman & Frame, 2017; Banchefsky et al., 2016; Cuadrado et al., 2015;

Hakim, 1996; Little et al., 2015; Maier, 1999). Their findings overwhelmingly indicated that femininity was viewed as not being as important or as desirable as masculinity in the workplace. As a result, demonstrating any inherent feminine trait may put an individual in an uncomfortable position within a work environment.

While these researchers' findings have been instrumental in developing our understanding of the many views pertaining to masculinity and femininity, there appears to be a gap in the knowledge when it comes to its application to the workplace. Based on an extensive review of literature, it became apparent that there is very little information about femininity in the workplace that does not pertain to women. While investigating female femininity in the workplace is most certainly an important exploration, males and transgender individuals who also demonstrate femininity in the workplace are not being included in these discussions. Any individual can demonstrate characteristics of femininity despite their gender, and as such, can be subject to mistreatment as a result. With this being said, the following review of literature serves to illustrate the concepts of femininity and professionalism and link them to the workplace environment without regard to biological sex. While some of the literature is sex-specific, the concepts and beliefs that emerge transcend this tie and become applicable to the general population. By interrelating these topics, society can gain a better understanding of what femininity is, how femininity has traditionally been viewed in the workplace, how femininity is being viewed today, and how individuals view femininity in regards to professionalism.

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**Femininity**

*What Is Femininity?*

Femininity is a term that cannot be simply defined but must be thought of in context with changing times, environments, and norms. It is a socially constructed term that has no single meaning but lends itself to continue being thought of stereotypically as the things women or girls do (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005; Paechter, 2006). According to a study conducted by Hoffman et al. (2005), the term femininity was also frequently associated with the female biological sex, expressive and relational characteristics, societal standards, and gender self-confidence. While most individuals are aware that all women and girls do not think or act the same way as a result of their biological sex, society often used this idea to generalize the actions, appearance, or values of others in relation to female tendencies. This inclination often leads to the definition of femininity being perpetually reflective of the characteristics and values of the dominant female groups in society, rather than of the whole population. Additionally, Hoffman et al. (2005) pointed out that this notion of assuming we know a concrete definition of this term maintains a focus on stereotypical descriptions that do not capture the complexity of its true nature.

*Femininity vs. Masculinity*

The definition of femininity has a fascinating relationship with the definition of masculinity. Since the terms change so frequently, scholars like Kimmel (1987) and Paechter (2006) posited that individuals were left to define these terms in relation to one another. The definitions of femininity that developed as a result of this dependent relationship became problematic because both the terms and their relationship with one another also changed with time. As a result, this changing relationship altered the

definition and understanding of both the individual words and their relationship to one another.

On the other hand, Paechter (2006) asserted that other authors argue that these definitions are not and should not be constructed in relation to one another. These authors caution that having each definition constructed in relation to one another is inaccurate because it implies that both femininity and masculinity are viewed as equals. They posit that in reality, femininity is often seen as the subordinate term and as a result, the relationship between these two terms is more dualistic in nature (Paechter, 2006).

*Hyperfemininity*

Like most things in life, femininity is not exempt from transforming into something a bit more extreme. A more radical manifestation of feminine characteristics or traits has been dubbed "hyperfemininty" by authors like Murnen and Byrne (1991), Van Oosten, Peter, and Boot (2015) and Paechter (2006). According to Paechter, hyperfemininty is a dramatic, glamorized version of femininity that does not reflect the ordinary, day-to-day activities of most women. Murnen and Byrne built on this definition by stating that hyperfemininty's exaggerated adherence to stereotypical feminine roles creates the notion that a woman's success is determined by developing and keeping a relationship with a male, and that her primary value in a romantic relationship is her sexuality. It appears that hyperfemininty paints a grotesque picture of what females should act like, dress like, prioritize, and value (Van Oosten et al., 2015).

Hyperfemininty also suggests that women should expect males to uphold their traditional part in a romantic relationship. As a result, hyperfemininty posits that males should display aggressive, sometimes even forceful initiations of sexual activity (Murnen

& Byrne; 1991). Unfortunately, this extreme form of femininity is often what media outlets choose to show to their audiences. Regardless of the dramaturgical idea of hyperfemininty, women are subject to seeing this idea often and are claiming that they feel like they are not "doing femininity well" because they are not meeting the extreme standards the media set for them (Paechter, 2006, p.255). This feeling of failure and not being feminine enough can lead to both emotional stress and psychological distress.

*Femininity and Sexuality*

While some ways of thinking have relied on considering the terms femininity and masculinity as opposites or as dualities of one another, the idea of femininity has also been considered synonymous with other terms. For example, Goodman (2009) stated that the term femininity is often confused with or attributed to the word sexuality. The author also contended that there have been numerous researchers and authors that have used the words interchangeably. While this interchangeability is not necessarily a negative thing, considering these terms synonymously can be problematic because both words are social constructs within themselves. Thus, over time their definitions will change and will ebb and flow from and into one another making their synonymy contextual. While the definition of femininity shifts over time and differs from person to person, maybe its relationship with the concept of sexuality shifts along with it. Goodman (2009) agreed with this idea and stated that the terms should possibly be considered as part of a single continuum.

*My Definition of Femininity*

Some authors define the term femininity as being related to stereotypical traits associated with females. More specifically, researchers like Lorber (1994), Martin

(2004), West and Zimmerman (2002), and Goodman (2009) posited that femininity is usually defined as the traits, behaviors, and capabilities that are normatively or stereotypically linked with the gender statuses of girl and woman. While I feel that this definition is not inaccurate by any stretch of the imagination, I find that a more concise definition that alludes to the idea of femininity being a social construct may be more helpful to those who are not as well versed in the subject matter. Goodman (2009) utilized a definition of femininity derived from the work of Susan Bordo (1993) that reflects these preferences. She defined the term femininity as "a socially constructed standard for women's appearance, demeanor, and values" (Goodman, 2009, p.15). As such, this will be the definition of femininity that is used in this study. Gabriele Goodman's definition was chosen for this study for two different reasons. First, Goodman's definition was chosen because it embodies the idea that the term femininity itself is a social construct. As such, this accounts for the term's continued change over time. Second, this definition was also chosen because it focuses on three areas that are of particular interest to this study: appearance, demeanor, and values.

*Who Demonstrates Femininity?*

Based on previously discussed information, it comes as no surprise that femininity has been traditionally associated with the female gender. While we often limit our thinking about this topic to women and girls, the reality is that anyone can demonstrate femininity (Hoffman et al., 2005; Paechter, 2006). Femininity does not discriminate based on gender, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. According to Bordo (1993), femininity is a construct that can be demonstrated by anyone at any given time.

Femininity itself is not limited to words or actions, but can extend to what an individual chooses to wear, their values, their goals, and even their style of communication.

Contrary to popular opinion, males demonstrate aspects of femininity. Robinson and Hobson (1978) described how men in their youth are conditioned to portray stereotypical notions of masculinity. The authors pointed out how little boys are encouraged to play with cars, engage in sports, play with military action figures, and the like (Robinson & Hobson, 1978). It is clear that these young men are encouraged to interact with their peers in a way that reflects the gendered-norms for their community. Often these norms lend themselves to playing more roughly with one another and to creating close friendships with other boys that share their interests (Robinson & Hobson, 1978). Despite the common effort to condition boys to assume their gender role from an early age, as males get older there are times that they break from their conditioned masculinity and demonstrate femininity in both their personal and professional lives.

One way that males can demonstrate this femininity is through their wardrobe. Males who wear bright colors such as pink, yellow, purple, or pastel colors can be viewed as more feminine than their peers. According to Damhorst and Reed (1986) and Tan and See (2009), societal standards assert that males should dress in darker or more neutral colors such as blue, grey, or black. The authors posited that these colors have often been associated with a masculine, more powerful projection (Damhorst & Reed, 1986; Tan & See, 2009). However, if a male chooses to wear lighter or brighter colors rather than darker ones, he is demonstrating his rejection of masculine societal expectations and is showcasing his defiance by way of femininity.

On a similar note, males can also demonstrate their femininity by the amount of grooming they incorporate into their daily routine. Cheong and Kaur (2015) reviewed how traditionally males have not concerned themselves with extensive grooming practices unless they were considered metrosexual. Coined by Simpson in 1994 (2002), a metrosexual individual is a young, vain, urban man who is willing to spend money on his physical appearance because he sees his image as being of the utmost importance. Males in today's society are deviating a bit from traditional practices and are showing more of an interest in the grooming industry without claiming to be metrosexual (Cheong & Kaur, 2015). The lack of association with the metrosexual label along with the increased interest in physical appearance is refreshing because it seems to indicate that the perception of self-care may be shifting to embrace a more inclusive gendered population, and that it may also be changing the perception of what it means to be masculine.

Based on the increase of self-care interest it is no surprise that men are taking a greater interest in skincare, beard care, and hair care products than in previous years (Cheong & Kaur, 2015). This increase may be partially attributed to media outlets that are portraying the male self-care trend in their commercials, ads, and television shows. Models and characters portrayed in the media can frequently be seen styling their hair or conditioning their beards in ads and commercials. As a result, it appears that the media is working to re-enforce the notion that males should be taking care of themselves physically, and that the male self-care routine should become a common practice in today's society. Cheong and Kaur (2015) posited that this new trend is interesting because routine grooming and self-care have typically been associated with vanity which in turn, is associated with femininity. Since females have historically felt societal

pressure to appear perfect, these types of products and self- care routines were utilized often. Consequently, the frequency of these seemingly imperative self care routines then painted both women and the concept of self-care as being vain. Despite these historic trends, the new inclination of males taking an interest in their personal appearance goes beyond gender roles and serves to demonstrate how femininity can most certainly cross gender lines.

Aspects of femininity can also be demonstrated by males by way of their personal values. According to the popular Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), males tend to value being forceful, aggressive, and athletic. While the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) measures differences in femininity and masculinity in regards to one's own traits, the simple categorization they use indicates that they perceive males to act one way and females to act another. While these gendered-traits and values may be accurate for some individuals, others may disagree. For example, instead of valuing force, aggression, and athleticism, some males may value more feminine characteristics such as understanding, loyalty, and compassion (Bem, 1974). There is nothing wrong with preferring feminine values over masculine values, but in doing so a male signifies that he is favoring feminine traits and as a result, is exhibiting his femininity.

Finally, males can demonstrate femininity in the way they communicate. While the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) contends that masculinity includes aggression, forcefulness, and assertion, the communication styles of males (or of those who are demonstrating masculinity) do not always have to mirror these ideas. Males can choose to communicate by speaking more quietly, letting others facilitate the conversation, or by choosing to remove themselves from confrontational situations. These ways of

communicating tend to be associated with more feminine qualities but they are being practiced in today's society by males nonetheless.

**Professionalism**

*The Definition of Professionalism*

Much like the term femininity, the term professionalism is also a construct. The definition of the term changes from environment to environment and transforms over time to reflect the needs, desires, and values of a current community or group of individuals. There are several definitions of professionalism that exist today. Many of these definitions vary slightly depending on the professional field that is being discussed and the year the definition was created. Due to a difference in desirable skills in each workplace and the significance of present-day events, the definition of professionalism is ever changing. However, despite these differences some definitional commonalities have emerged over time that help provide a better understanding of what the concept means.

For example, Bachman (2013) proposed that architects viewed the definition of professionalism as addressing five main categories: discipline, occupation, education, organizational membership, and virtue. While this may not be a formal one to three sentence definition, Bachman's way of defining professionalism indicated that a single definition may not be able to encompass all of the components and key concepts that he feels are important. As a result, the author used a list format to individually define the components that make up the definition of professionalism instead.

In terms of professionalism and discipline, Bachman (2013) admitted that a professional must have a large, specialized set of knowledge that has been attained over a long period of time. This knowledge must be reflected on, mastered, and used in service

to help others. The author also stated that occupation was essential to professionalism. He suggested that occupation referred to an individual's specialized skills, principles, and knowledge that are used to distribute visionary services to society and result in profitable returns (Bachman, 2013). This puts a true professional in the role of both obtaining knowledge and using it for a mutual profit. Education was also considered a foundational piece of professionalism in architecture because it ensured that an individual had acquired and maintained the basic knowledge and skills they needed for their profession (Bachman, 2013). By this standard, a professional should have mastered basic knowledge in an educational setting before moving on to acquiring more advanced knowledge. Bachman (2013) also extended the notion that organizational membership indicated professionalism because it allowed an individual the opportunity to partake as an agent of collective member interests and to govern the public. This indicated that professionals should collaborate and contribute to their field by coming together to implement change and order. Finally, the last key factor in an architect's definition of professionalism pertained to virtue. According to Bachman (2013), a professional must have a vision to use their skills to advance the public good. These individuals must have a high regard for ethics, traditions, and share a concern for shared well-being (Bachman, 2013). Although professionalism can not be defined in one or two sentences in this field, the insight these five categories gave to professionalism is just as powerful as a formal definition. Individuals who read this definition know exactly what they need to do to be considered professional. As a result, these clear guidelines can be practiced and mastered by those who desire to go into this field to achieve professional status.

Another definition of professionalism was brought about by John Keane (1974). When it came to advertising, Keane ascertained that professionalism had fifteen individual elements that made up its definition. First, the definition of professionalism in advertising began with unique theory. Unique theory is a "systematically organized and unified body of knowledge depicted by its own set of assumptions, principles, terminology, and procedures" (Keane, 1974, p. 7). According to this idea, a professional must have had the proper knowledge of unique theory and knew how to administer this information accordingly.

Next, professionalism included organization. While it would be helpful if professionals were orderly, the use of organization in this case referred to a formal association that represented those with a shared interest (in this case advertising) (Keane, 1974). This qualification stressed the importance of sharing knowledge and the importance of unity in action. Two more components of the definition of professionalism were entry qualifications and legal representation. These components pertained to passing standard tests or requirements to prove an understanding of basic job-related knowledge and receiving some type of legal recognition for this training such as a license or certificate of completion (Keane, 1974). This type of understanding and proof of understanding was vital to professionalism because it ensured that individuals were competent in their field and that they were capable of meeting national/state standards through their knowledge.

Work discipline and standards of performance were also essential to the definition of professionalism. According to Keane (1974), work discipline referred to continual thoroughness, accuracy, objectivity, and responsibility while standards of performance

referred to the set criteria or measurement used to analyze performance continually. Professionals should have been able to produce quality work continuously and maintain that level of quality by using the standards given to them to ensure excellence every time.

Keane (1974) also referenced independence and commitment in his definition of professionalism. Keane asserted that independence referred to the autonomy an expert had and their ability to distribute expert information to others. He also wrote that commitment referred to a dedication of high performance, ethics, and self-appraisal, and integrity. The inclusion of this information suggested that the definition of professionalism should feature both autonomy and commitment as two of its driving concepts or requirements.

Despite the difference in their professions, both Bachman (2013) and Keane (1974) agreed that the definition of professionalism also included specialized training, codes of ethics, ethics enforcement, self-appraisal or assessment, social responsibility, integrity, and continuing education. This overlap is interesting because it indicates the potential underlying themes that could be universal in regard to the definition of professionalism. Evaluating the similarities between these two definitions helps researchers to better understand the concepts that are the most important to the definition of professionalism.

Finally, Haynes (2012) also examined the definition of professionalism. Haynes' (2012) definition rooted itself on the physical appearance of an individual rather than on a specific profession. Haynes (2012) held that the physical body was symbolic for how/what an individual thought about themselves in terms of their identity. By creating a definition of professionalism that linked physical appearance to self-perception, the

author was indirectly theorizing that the term was related to an individual's personality as well. This is interesting because the definition of professionalism suddenly encompassed both internal and external traits, which appeared more holistic than previous definitions.

Haynes developed her definition of professionalism through the experiences, testimonies, and observations shared by women in the United Kingdom and the United States. Based on her results, Haynes (2012) found that professionalism was not trendy or casual. Instead, she argued that professionalism valued traditional and formal dress because it added credibility to an individual. This finding indicated that the definition of professionalism was related to formal attire and by association (according to the author's hypothesis) a more formal and proper attitude. The relationship between formal dress and professionalism is rather interesting because it prompts one to believe that those who dress casually or trendy may not think of themselves as highly as they should or that they may value new wave ideas more than established practices.

The author also found that professionalism extended itself to relationships with clients. According to Haynes (2012), professionalism meant having long-term, personal relationships with clients. As a result of this commitment to continual client relations, true professionals needed to always look professional (via formal business attire), continue to meet the expectations of clients, establish credibility with them over time, conduct themselves with seriousness, and use appropriate body language. In this particular definition it is clear that professionalism equivocated to continual outreach and relationship-building with clients. It encompassed a balance of both professional demeanor and friendly relationships.

The third finding Haynes reported was about communication. Based on her findings, Haynes (2012) stated that professionalism meant speaking with assertiveness while not coming across to others as overly aggressive. The author cautioned that for women this might be more challenging to do because masculine-natured workplace environments did not necessarily welcome female assertion. In these types of work environments female individuals may have been governed by a different definition of professionalism with respect to communication than males were. While this difference in definition may have seemed unnecessary, it was unfortunately a common practice in workplaces during that time.

Finally, the last finding Haynes (2012) reported about the definition of professionalism was surprisingly tied to fitness. The author held that the women she interviewed provided evidence that tied the definition of professionalism to appearing healthy. The interview responses of the women Haynes conversed with indicated that professional environments did not want their workers overweight or unhealthy looking. Apparently the women who worked in these professional environments were encouraged to be healthy and look like they take care of themselves. Interestingly enough, nothing was mentioned about a need for males to look healthy. Haynes pointed out that these women were expected to dress better than both their clients and their peers when appropriate. This is an interesting idea because it makes one believe that the definition of professionalism is tied to the ever changing concept of beauty. As a result, the idea that the definition of professionalism is affected by social desires is both interesting and concerning.

Based on the definitions of professionalism that have been reviewed, professionalism in the present study will refer to the ability of an individual to demonstrate expert knowledge, commitment to an organization, self-assessment, quality customer service, respect, virtue, and the ability to maintain a respectable physical appearance. A majority of these traits were chosen due to their repetitive inclusion in other definitions of professionalism. The addition of quality customer service was added into the present definition because this idea was referenced as common knowledge in a majority of the literature. Although the idea of quality customer service may appear to be common knowledge to some, its inclusion in this formal definition serves to guide those who are not as familiar with the topic at hand in their thinking and understanding of what is expected of these top-notch professional individuals.

*Characteristics of Professionalism*

Everyone has a different idea about what they consider professional. Different professions may emphasize certain qualities over others, but there continues to be a standard set of traits that are regarded as professional across career fields. Based on her research findings, Dyer (2018) posited that demonstrating professionalism in the workplace meant that an individual must have specialized knowledge, apply this knowledge ethically, and seek to perpetuate and develop this knowledge. This meant that to demonstrate professionalism individuals must have known more than the average employee, must have responsibly used this knowledge, and must have desired to continue to learn more about their chosen career field/place of employment. These individuals both understood and embraced the notion that learning is a continual process. According to this idea, professional individuals must have sought out opportunities to learn more

about what it is they did and use this information to both better themselves and their workplace. Bachman (2013) and Keane (1974) also discussed the need for professionals to have specialized knowledge and act ethically which supported the idea that this characteristic was highly regarded across career fields. The authors held that professionals must be extremely knowledgeable about what it is they do and must morally use this information to help themselves, their organization, and others.

Dyer (2018) also posited that demonstrating professionalism meant operating with similar aims and shared interests. In this case, the goal of an individual's co-workers, supervisors, and the organization as a whole reflected their interests and goals. In this view a professional was continually working towards advancing the mission, values, and goals of the organization that employed them. They were not focused on competition with their co-workers but were more concerned with their ability to operate in accordance with the overall mission of the office. In other words, a true professional was expected to embody the organization's core values and goals. As a result, these individuals became associated with professionalism and were considered loyal to their company.

Finally, Dyer (2018) stated that professionalism entailed engaging in critical reflection and having self-awareness. Bachman (2013) and Keane (1974) were in apparent support of this idea because they both discussed the importance of self-appraisal and self-awareness in their respective fields. The authors reported that an individual needed to be able to reflect on their performance and be able to identify the areas they should be improving if they wished to be considered a professional. Critical reflection in this instance meant that individuals could evaluate and reflect on various problems, situations, or actions with the intent of using that information to promote self

improvement. In the eyes of a professional, merely completing a task or acting a certain way was not enough. They must have critically thought about what took place, evaluated their level of satisfaction with the outcomes, and determined the next steps of action for immediate and future use.

Dyer (2018) also suggested that self-awareness was a crucial element of professionalism. This meant that individuals were aware of and understood who they were, what they wanted, what drove them, and how they felt in certain situations. Achieving self-awareness took a good amount of self-reflection and self-discovery. As such, demonstrating professionalism meant that individuals had a strong sense of self and that they were able to use that understanding to conduct themselves daily and make responsible decisions.

Zafiropoulos (2017) also had some insight when it came to identifying the characteristics associated with professionalism. Zafiropoulos began by stating that to demonstrate professionalism, one must have professional competence. Having professional competence meant that individuals needed to be able to think, act, and communicate like an expert in their given field. This meant that individuals must act in a way that provided exceptional service and interactions to everyone they came into contact with. Professional competence extended to include communication, knowledge, technical skills, and even reasoning. This meant that for one to be professionally competent they must have had an average to above average understating of how to do all of these things rather than just a few of them.

Zafiropoulos (2017) also argued that professionalism included behaving ethically, having integrity, and practicing honesty. Several authors had mentioned this, but these

traits were important aspects of professionalism because they rooted themselves in an individual's intrinsic motivation (Bachman, 2013; Dyer, 2018; Keane, 1974). Making sure that one's actions are ethical can be challenging in a workplace environment if benefits can come from acting unethically. Individuals act unethically for profit when they do things like embezzling money or set a colleague up for failure so they can swipe an available opportunity. While these individuals may appear to get ahead for a certain amount of time, the truth tends to come out and those privileges are then revoked and their professional reputations are left severely damaged. Having integrity and honesty in the workplace is also extremely important to professionals. Zafiropoulos (2017) wrote that true professionalism meant being honest in the workplace. There is a way to be honest without being cruel and as such, one could argue that this balance is important to master when one is trying to establish an appearance of professionalism in the workplace.

Having respect for yourself and others was also claimed to be an essential component of professionalism (Zafiropoulos, 2017). Often individuals may have appeared to respect themselves but did not favor working with certain co-workers within their organizations. Despite their feelings, those who demonstrated true professionalism were able to look past their personal beliefs and respect all of their colleagues equally. When an individual could practice this level of respect it not only indicated that they were a professional, but also said a lot about their character and integrity.

The final piece of professionalism advice Zafiropoulos (2017) stressed in his article was about self-regulation. Self-regulation in this case referred to an employee who was able to undergo a process where they used their knowledge, understanding, and evaluative skill-set to create new action and facilitate change. This action could be

internal or external and did not require a supervisor or colleague telling them explicitly what to do. This idea was very similar to what Dyer (2018), Bachman (2013), and Keane (1974) stated about critical reflection and having self-awareness. All of these skills depended heavily on the ability to evaluate, reflect, adapt, and hold oneself accountable for current and future actions. Self-regulation was an ongoing process that aided in the establishment of professionalism and helped an individual understand more about themselves.

Haynes (2012) and Carr, Davies, and Lavin (2009) took a more external approach and discussed professionalism in regards to image. Based on their study's findings, these researchers posited that formal dress was seen as more professional than casual dress in business settings (Carr et al., 2009; Haynes, 2012). Carr et al. defined formal dress as a suit and/or a suit and tie. According to the authors, this also lead to assumptions about an individual's overall intelligence, credibility, and competence. Individuals who took a more business casual or strictly casual approach to their attire were seen as inferior to those who chose a more formal business attire. We often hear the phrase "dress for success" and based on these findings it appears that if one wants to reach professional status they must take this phrase seriously and make sure they dress more formally every day.

The material of the clothing an individual chooses to wear can also contribute to their professionalism (Carr et al., 2009). Carr et al. argued that clothing that was made out of finer material such as silk was deemed more professional than fabrics that were made out of coarser material such as wool. This finding is interesting because it indicates that professionalism was not reached by merely wearing formal clothing, but that it

extended itself to include proper fabric selection. The authors' findings indicated that an individual should consciously make clothing selections based on what society has deemed desirable. Unfortunately, these socially desirable fabrics typically come with a more expensive price tag. As such, wearing these finer fabrics also serves as an indicator of the socioeconomic status of an individual in the workplace. As a result, this understanding can contribute to both advantages or disadvantages in the workplace depending on the wardrobe of the individual and the preference of the workplace culture.

**Femininity in the Workplace**

*The Beginnings of Femininity in the Workplace*

Traditionally femininity in the workplace has been linked with the idea of women first joining the workforce. Although it is acknowledged that the concept of femininity has changed over time and that it has extended itself to being a non-discriminatory concept, a more in-depth review of the traditional origins of those who demonstrated femininity (females) and the workforce should be examined. This review of literature will allow us to better understand the previous relationship between femininity and the workplace and how that transformation relates to the present-day relationship.

Literature suggests that women began joining the workforce as a result of the labor shortage during World War II (Ashcraft, 1998; Stewart, 1998). According to Ashcraft and Stewart, the shortage of male workers opened up an opportunity for females to enter the workforce and learn the skills and trades their male counterparts were performing daily. While the men were gone fighting in the war, women were called upon by the United States' government to do their part and join in the war efforts back home. Women were inspired by icons like Rosie the Riveter who beseeched women to join the

workforce with her can-do attitude and her inviting catchphrase of "we can do it!". Rosie depicted the idea that women can be more than homemakers. They could be workers; they could be strong; and they could be part of a female community and revolution. Her invitation served to inspire women across the United States who wanted to do more than domestic housework. As a result, women were thought to finally venture to the workplace and begin learning technical skills that continued to keep them coming back for more from that point forward.

While the story of women in the workforce during World War II (WWII) is commonly told as the origin story for female workplace involvement, there is evidence that women were infiltrating the predominantly male workforce globally before World War II. According to Cheseer (2008), women had been members of the Australian workforce before World War II. Chesser shared that women like "Jack Lavell", "Tom Ralph", Violet Wooley, Frances Mardason, Vivian Campbell, and Maud Butler would use the practice of cross-dressing to hide their identities and live out the lives that they so desperately wanted. These women and many others like them would dress and act like men in order to work and make a life for themselves, by themselves. Chesser argued that women were using these disguise tactics as early as the 1890s, which was well before World War II and thus, suggests that women were working long before their familiar WWII origins story suggests. The author declared that women would disguise themselves as men for a variety of reasons. These reasons included: an escape from the sexual perils women faced, higher wages for men, the desire for freedom and adventure, and independence.

Ironically enough, the women who engaged in this type of behavior were often portrayed in a positive light by both the press and their employers. The press reports would often commend these women on how well they were able to demonstrate a manly skill, persistence, intelligence, and courage (Chesser, 2008). This type of positive coverage was rather peculiar since these women were defying gender-roles and societal expectations. Additionally, the employers of these women would also boast about how amusing they were and how admirable their work efforts were. It is without question that these women were working just as hard, if not harder than their male counterparts. The only difference was that as a woman their femininity was valued more by society and in turn being good at these jobs and displaying this type of masculinity was not in accordance with society's expectations.

Another example of women in the workforce can be seen in the early twentieth century in British Columbia. Melanie Buddle (2006) illustrated the practices and challenges of entrepreneurial women during this time. Buddle stated that women were not just working in the early twentieth century, but that they were becoming entrepreneurs as well. Not only were these women working, but they owned and ran their own businesses. These women's businesses ranged in both services and clientele. Contrary to the women Chesser (2008) described in Australia, the women of British Columbia were adamant that they keep their femininity intact. According to Buddle, these women felt the need to prioritize their feminine appearance and to maintain their femininity through their actions. The entrepreneurial women of British Columbia typically geared their services to women and/or would create their business as a result of a feminine skill. Women who developed a business that did not serve solely women or

who did not offer a product as a result of a feminine skill, found it all the more imperative to appear feminine themselves (Buddle, 2006).

This information and the historical account is interesting in comparison to that of the Australian working women. According to Chesser (2016), Australian women were less concerned with owning a business than they were about being a part of one. On the other hand, Buddle (2008) asserted that British Columbian women wanted to both own and run their own business and not work for a man. The stark difference in preference when joining the workforce is rather interesting since both groups of women shared the same social pressures of conforming to femininity. Additionally, the desire for British Columbian women to maintain their femininity as a business owner is rather shocking when one considers the fact that they were breaking into the workforce not as a worker, but as a business owner from the start. These women wanted to maintain their femininity so badly even though they were the ones in positions of power where they could make the rules and set the tone of their environments. These women had the opportunity to exhibit more masculine traits if they so chose, unlike the Australian women who had to cross-dress to work but refused, and instead became arguably more feminine than they were before opening their business.

Clearly women have been a part of the workforce for quite some time. Although these are just a few instances, this goes to show that women have been battling with the ever changing concept of femininity and how this battle has translated into their careers. This juxtaposition of ideology created a reality where women were associated with femininity and as such, their role was to stay at home. On the other hand, men became associated with masculinity and were expected to be in the workforce without question. It

is these practices and assumptions that have lead us to a conflicting present-day

workplace environment. The dance between masculinity and femininity in the workplace

is something that has been explored over time and will now be analyzed in greater detail.

*Femininity in the Workplace Today*

Similar to the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), Mark Maier (1999) described

femininity as the traits or characteristics associated with the female ways of operating.

Maier (1999) posited that present-day femininity in the workplace entailed seeing one's

self as connected/interdependent, motivated by service and a team-first attitude, and

involved making judgments based on personal experience and simply knowing. While

some of these ideas of femininity may sound appealing, they were proposed in stark

contrast to the masculine traits that emphasize independence, advancing in occupations,

and making judgments based on hard evidence. The current researcher believes that

modern day femininity does not have to fit neatly into a standard list or chart as Bem and

Maier propose. Rather, this researcher argues that present-day femininity is a

combination of both feminine and masculine traits. She posits that femininity is unique to

each individual, as their personalities affect their own understanding and display of

femininity.

In addition to these ideas, Maier (1999) also stated that feminine leadership styles

were focused on inclusion rather than action, caring rather than success, and case-by-case

responsiveness to a specific situation instead of impartiality and universal procedures.

While some individuals may see the traits Maier described as demonstrating femininity,

the current researcher argues that all of the traits just mentioned are in fact feminine. It is

her belief that femininity can include both independence and dependence, self-success

and team-success, and both connected and factual decision making. By utilizing lists and common associations of strictly female traits, individuals do a disservice to both the men and women who demonstrate femininity. They try to categorize individuals into groups that polarize their actions rather than believing what researchers have seen time and again; that the definition and understanding of femininity is ever changing. As time goes by the definition of femininity continues to evolve. It is because of this continual change that the current researcher strongly believes that present-day femininity in the workplace is not characterized by any list of common female tendencies. Instead, femininity in the workplace today should be thought of in a way that allows for unique interpretation and acceptance of a wide variety of traits and characteristics.

*The Advantages of Femininity in The Workplace*

The perception of femininity in the workplace can be both a positive and a negative thing. In some career fields being feminine can allow for advantages, opportunities, and even success. In others, demonstrating femininity can be a deterrent and keep individuals from various opportunities, advancement, and even hiring. However, before discussing the potential drawbacks of femininity in the workplace an exploration of the potential advantages of femininity in the workplace should occur. As a result of this exploration a better understanding of the duality of femininity and how different workplace environments both value and dismiss this specific concept may occur.

One workplace that has shockingly shown favoritism towards femininity, for specific candidates, is the political realm. According to a study conducted by Hehman, Carpinella, Johnson, Leitner, and Freeman (2014), female politicians who were perceived

as having a more masculine facial appearance were less likely to receive votes from conservative voters. Thus, female politicians who exhibited a more feminine appearance were more likely to win the conservative vote and do better in the overall election. Hehman et al. (2014) also posited that conservative voters favored traditional gender roles. This information is rather interesting because it alludes to the idea that there are specific instances where appearing feminine may be beneficial to an individual. While conservative voters may not have favored feminine-looking males in an election, they certainly did when it came to women. This indicates that if an individual is in a workplace environment that favors traditional gender roles, adhering to those roles could actually make them appear more favorable to others. In turn, this supports the idea that a female who seems more feminine in this type of workplace will benefit more than a female who appears to be more masculine.

Another researcher that brought the benefits of femininity in the workplace to light is Melanie Buddle. Buddle (2006) discussed how entrepreneurial businesswomen faired in British Columbia during the early twentieth century. Buddle (2006) admitted that although these women created and owned their own businesses and were doing remarkably well, these women and the media alike chose to prioritize their femininity and appearance above all else. While at first this seems somewhat perplexing, the author continued to allude to the fact that these women were prioritizing their looks to ensure their businesses' success and overall survival. If women appeared to be feminine, delicate, and respectable during that time, then their male counterparts would be less likely to perceive them as a threat. In turn, these women would be free to continue in their business endeavors and remain free from male scrutiny.

Buddle asserted that "emphasizing womanliness prevented outright condemnation of entrepreneurial women" (2006, p.89). This statement indicates that these women used femininity to their advantage to ensure their professional survival. If these women had demonstrated or emphasized any form of masculinity while their businesses were thriving, they could have been perceived as a threat to their fellow male businessmen and fallen victim to retaliation. As a result, the use of femininity, in this case, was used in the workplace to maintain a non-threatening appearance and to draw attention away from their success so that they may continue in their business efforts. While the need to use femininity to deter others away from realizing one's success is not ideal, this may be a beneficial practice for individuals who are in similar situations and have no alternative means to navigate this type of environment.

The third benefit of displaying femininity in the workplace relates to employment in a seemingly feminine type of business or career field. Over time society has created the notion that certain types of jobs are done better by specific genders. Thus, today many individuals relate certain professions with being either more feminine or more masculine. As was seen in Banchefshy et al.'s study (2016), occupations like educator were often associated with females while scientific occupations were more commonly associated with males. This does not mean that a female would be any less of a fantastic scientist or that a male would be any less of a phenomenal teacher. However, popular societal ideology depicts educators as needing to be gentle and compassionate. Since women are supposedly all of these things, they are viewed as being the best fit for this profession. As a result, women who want to be educators may be more inclined to get a teaching job than their male counterparts. On the other hand, the perception of males is re-enforced by

society as being factual and data driven so naturally, going into science would be a better suit for them than it would be for a female. While this reasoning may seem completely backward, this stereotypical notion of femininity could actually produce some benefits for women who want to work in a work environment that is related to more feminine roles.

If an individual works in a field that is deemed more feminine by society, their use of femininity in the workplace may serve to re-enforce the idea that they belong there. In traditionally feminine fields like education, beauty, nursing, and fashion, aspects of femininity are often embraced because the nature of the work values these traits. As a result, individuals in these types of environments are more likely to embrace their femininity and use it to impact their careers positively. Since specific organizations and career fields are seemingly built upon aspects of femininity, those who exhibit their femininity may find themselves in a place where they are being perceived as more dedicated to their job, approachable, and can even be offered additional opportunities.

The final benefit of demonstrating femininity in the workplace that needs to be discussed pertains to the utilization of femininity itself. Adamson (2017) conducted research on celebrity chief executive officer (CEO) autobiographies that help bring to light the fact that most present-day work environments have some form of femininity represented within them. More importantly, because femininity is present within these environments, employees feel more comfortable showing their femininity. Showing their femininity allows the employees to better understand and practice balancing this femininity. Adamson's findings signified that CEOs who demonstrated femininity greatly valued learning to balance it with that of masculinity. This is a rather exciting finding because this indicates that the path to business-related success includes expressing both

masculinity and femininity in the workplace. As a result, this means that individuals must embrace their femininity if they want to be successful. While some environments may be less fond of femininity in the workplace than others, Adamson's study supported the idea that the incorporation of femininity in the workplace is instrumental in business-related success. In turn, individuals who not only demonstrate their femininity in the workplace but are actively working towards balancing aspects of it with masculinity are much more inclined to be successful than their peers who either do not embrace femininity or do not acknowledge its benefit.

*The Drawbacks of Femininity in The Workplace*

As previously mentioned, it comes as no surprise that femininity in the workplace frequently manifests itself through appearance. Everything from an individual's hair to their clothing can contribute to others' perceptions about their masculinity or femininity. When individuals dress a certain way, wear specific colors, groom themselves a particular way, or even carry themselves a certain way, others make judgments about both their masculinity/femininity and their ability to do well in a specific work environment (Damhorst & Reed, 1986; Tan & See, 2009). While an individual's appearance should by no means be an indicator of their workability or their potential success in an industry, these preliminary and shallow judgments often lead to assumptions which can in turn either limit or permit opportunity.

Banchefsky, Westfall, Park, and Judd (2016) support this idea with their STEM-based study. Banchefsky et al. (2016) conducted a study that asked fifty-one individuals to make assumptions about the jobs of the individuals represented in eighty photographs. In actuality, all of the individuals who were represented in these photos were

tenured/tenure-track faculty in elite STEM departments across United States universities. The participants in this study were asked to rate each picture on three 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) masculine to feminine, likable to unlikeable, and attractive to unattractive. The participants were also asked to determine the likelihood that the individual in each photograph was a scientist, followed by the probability that they were an educator. Age range estimations were also assigned to the individuals based on the pictures in this study.

Ultimately, Banchefsky et al. (2016) found that having a feminine appearance caused a disservice to the women in this study. The results indicated that women who have a feminine appearance were thought of as not being well suited for STEM-related fields. The participants' responses suggested that a woman's gendered appearance is often used to make assumptions about her career in a way that a man's was not. Additionally, Banchefsky's et al. found that both men and women who were perceived as attractive were seen as less likely to be scientists and were seen as more likely to be non- scientists.

The results of this experiment are significant when considering the different views of femininity in the workplace. Banchefsky et al. (2016) findings indicated that femininity was closely associated with an individual's appearance. Their findings supported the idea that those who portray the physical characteristics of femininity were less likely to be taken seriously or be associated with positions of prestigious intellect (Banchefsky et al., 2016). All of this information is extremely important to consider when thinking about femininity in the workplace in general. The results of this study alluded to the fact that both men and women who physically depict aspects of femininity may have been at a disadvantage at work. Due to their physical appearance, males and females alike

may be mislabeled, seem more or less approachable, and may even be afforded additional opportunities. It is because of studies like this that we can better understand how the perception of femininity can affect both employee treatment and action in the workplace.

Another study related to femininity in the workplace was conducted by Little, Smith Major, Hinojosam, and Nelson (2015). These researchers focused their study on the perception of pregnancy in the workplace and how it affected women's perceptions of themselves and the opinions of others. The popular Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) asserted that familial values were typically associated with the concept of femininity. Individuals who were considered feminine were thought to value anything to do with family above all else, including work. This family-centered belief has been problematic for individuals who work for companies or organizations who do not prioritize that same value. As a result of this conflict in priorities, the individuals who work for these types of organizations and prioritize family can come across as lazy, uncommitted to the job, and overall unprofessional to their peers and supervisors (Little et al., 2015). This negative perception could then jeopardize their job. Now, instead of being able to vocalize that value, imagine being a pregnant woman who visibly shows that familial value daily. This is the premise of the workplace conflict Little et al. explored in their study.

After performing three different studies on the topic at hand, Little et al. (2015) discovered some impressive results that pertained to femininity in the workplace. First, the authors found that the perceptions of pregnant women about themselves did not change but their attitudes about how others perceived them professionally did. These researchers found that pregnant women were so fearful of being perceived negatively by their co-workers and superiors that they would employ tactics such as not asking

supervisors or co-workers for special accommodations, not asking for longer maternity leaves, and maintaining the same pace of work despite doctor's appointments or pregnancy issues to appear committed to their jobs (Little et al., 2015). This indicated that individuals who prioritize family values might feel like they are being ostracized or judged and in turn, will overcompensate in the workplace to prove their worth.

Second, the researchers found that the social identity-based impression management (SIM) strategies used by women did not differ much based on the trimester or the number of times women experience pregnancy (Little et al., 2015). According to Little et al., SIM is the process of strategically influencing others' perceptions of an individual's social identity in order to construct a desired professional image. This means that the tactics and strategies that were used to influence others' perceptions strategically were used consistently by pregnant women despite their trimester or the number of times they have been pregnant. This indicated that when femininity took the form of pregnancy, women felt the need to use SIM strategies to protect their professional reputations. The mere act of being pregnant was considered feminine and as the results suggested, this type of femininity warranted un-presented discrimination. Although the findings of this study pertained to strictly pregnant women, those thought to demonstrate their femininity by prioritizing their familial values in the workplace may experience some of the stigmatization and discrimination that was described in this study.

Finally, the last drawback of displaying femininity in the workplace that will be discussed pertains to the practices and purpose of communication. According to Maier (1999) feminine communication was centered on listening and responding. The purpose of feminine communication was to establish a connection, to signal intimacy, and to

create understanding through discourse. While this is a lovely sentiment and these traits would undoubtedly be worth valuing and including in one's professional skill set, these traits may not be deemed as demonstrating exceptional professionalism in many fields. These characteristics are important to establishing a sound team environment but they do not necessarily lend themselves to advancing the status of the individual that is using them. Individuals who demonstrate these types of skills may be viewed as emotional, focused on relationships over data, and even as off-task. Since most workplaces value masculine traits these types of communication can be deemed ineffective or even inappropriate in specific settings.

*Femininity and Leadership*

Individuals who utilize femininity in the workplace can certainly be in positions of power and leadership within their respective organizations. While Ayman and Frame (2017) stated that traditionally masculinity/males were associated with leadership, anyone is capable of being a leader if coached correctly. Adamson's (2017) study supported the idea of effective non-male leadership, as her research was on the practices and experiences of female CEO's who incorporated femininity into their leadership style. While there was mention of femininity in this research, there was also a common theme that illustrated both the importance and practice of creating a balance between femininity and masculinity. As mentioned previously, this study's data indicated that many CEOs who utilized femininity attributed their success to mastering and balancing it in the workplace. The findings of Adamson's study suggest that femininity should be reclaimed by individuals in the workforce and that learning to balance all the best of femininity, even within masculine environments, can lead to tremendous success.

Other researchers that found femininity beneficial to leadership are Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016). These researchers focused their study on male college students who were involved in extracurricular activities on campus and served as organizational leaders. Although this study was not conducted in a workplace environment, its findings are still applicable to the workforce arena because these individuals belong to a generation that will be assuming leadership positions within the workforce soon enough and will be shaping these environments upon their appointment.

Among their many findings Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016) found that their male sample valued balancing task and relationship building and resisting the masculine/feminine dichotomies. This finding is interesting because these highly effective and respected college leaders thought relationship-oriented action was more important than task-oriented action in three out of four cases. Since relationship-oriented actions are more in line with femininity, this indicated that younger males were not only embracing femininity in their leadership styles but that they were prioritizing it. This finding is significant to the future of the workforce because it could be foreshadowing a shift in leadership styles in the future.

Second, the authors also found that their participants valued rejecting the male/female dichotomy when it came to their personal leadership styles. This is a fascinating finding because as males their demonstration of femininity as a leader could potentially be judged much more harshly than that of a female leader. Being a male and choosing to demonstrate characteristics that are typically associated with females serves as both a bold social statement and a testament to their progressive sense-of-self. The fact that these male leaders did not want to accept or practice a binary way of looking at

masculinity/femininity provided support for a potential change in social attitude. If these are the leaders of tomorrow, it appears that femininity will not be a negative characteristic in the workplace. Rather, as suggested by Adamson (2017) femininity in combination with masculinity will be viewed as an asset to professional leadership.

While some researchers like Ayman and Frame (2017), Adamson (2017), and Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016) alluded to the fact that femininity is in fact a key component of good leadership and professional success, others believe the exact opposite. For example, a study by Cuadrado, Garcia-Ael, and Molero (2015) suggested that some Spanish workers believed that masculine characteristics were more important than feminine characteristics when it came to managerial positions. In other words, the sample in this study collectively believed that managers needed to demonstrate more masculine characteristics and strategies than feminine ones to be considered successful. The researchers also found that more females associated males with managerial positions than they did with females (Cuadrado et al., 2015). This finding was surprising since women are typically the ones thought of as being the most negatively affected by a masculine workforce. Shockingly enough this data indicated that despite these workers' gender they strongly believed that males are more closely associated with managerial status than females.

Hakim (1996) also suggested that demonstrating femininity in specific workplaces could problematic for individuals. Hakim suggested that the workplace environment itself is the determinant of masculine or feminine work rather than the tasks that are actually being performed. With this being said, Hakim proposed that women who displayed their femininity in a masculine work environment were often mentally and

psychologically taxed. Apparently these women were trying to alter the state of their femininity or transform it to better fit their new masculine environment to the point of mental exhaustion. This same idea of physiological exhaustion was also supported by Adamson (2017) when she contended that some female CEO's felt mentally drained from having to continually speak with individuals who had a more masculine way of thinking. Having to continually transform one's femininity in the workplace to effectively lead and communicate is a very mentally exhausting task indeed.

Hakim (1996) also cautioned that displaying femininity in a masculine workplace environment can bring about negativity from co-workers or supervisors which yet again is both exhausting and uncomfortable for an individual. As a result, it is not surprising that in these mentally draining situations females and males alike turn to seek out a same-sex atmosphere in another organization where they can demonstrate their femininity or masculinity more freely (Hakim, 1996).

Finally, research has indicated that female leaders who display femininity in the workplace are ignored by their peers and superiors more frequently than their male counterparts (Ayman & Frame, 2017). Ayman and Frame argued that female task contributions were more likely to be ignored than their male co-workers. This is interesting because this finding was not indicative of the quality of work that the female is producing. Rather, her treatment was based on gender roles and perceived feminine characteristics. Additionally, the authors warned that female task contributions could lead to potentially negative reactions from their peers (Ayman & Frame, 2017). This indicates that even when a female leader did quality work, her results and contributions may have been reacted to negatively merely because they were produced by someone

demonstrating femininity. Regardless of the significance or magnitude of an individual's work, it is clear that in some work environments leaders who demonstrate characteristics of femininity will continue to be viewed as inferior to their more masculine colleagues. This is extremely disheartening because this belief will ultimately only do the organization a disservice, as anyone being treated as subordinate will likely not remain with the organization and will take both their skill-sets and their revolutionary ideas elsewhere.

*The Perils of Demonstrating Femininity in the Workplace*

Sexual harassment is often viewed as a repercussion for demonstrating femininity in the workplace. The standard assumption appears to be that women are subject to more sexual harassment than men and that feminine women are more likely to be harassed than masculine women. Current research is at odds with these traditional assumptions and many studies are being done today to determine if this perceived common knowledge is. Today's researchers are grappling with the idea that rather than gender being the determinant of these acts, it is perhaps one's level of femininity or masculinity (Berdhal, 2007).

*Types of Sexual Harassment*

Despite the controversy, sexual harassment in the workplace does in fact happen. Berdhal (2007) did a wonderful job explaining the many forms sexual harassment can take. Berdhal argued that the most common form of sexual harassment is gender harassment. Gender harassment is a type of hostile environment harassment that is motivated by hostility towards individuals that violate gender ideals rather than by a desire for them (Berdhal, 2007). This type of harassment is clearly based on defiance.

According to the definition, when an individual rejects the gender roles/ideals society has assigned to them due to their genitalia, they can become victims of gender harassment. In this type of situation, the victim is undermined, humiliated, or rejected based on their sex and their lack of complying with gender roles. Stewart (1998) stated that in these situations the victims could be plagued with verbal harassment (comments, sexual jokes, or insults), nonverbal harassment (suggestive noises or gestures, offensive pictures, ogling, etc.), or even physical harassment (unwanted touching). This type of sexual harassment is derived from rejection and hostility rather than desire.

Another type of harassment is pro-quo harassment. Berdhal (2007) described how this type of harassment transpires between a male boss and a female subordinate. In this type of harassment, the male boss is the unwanted aggressor and the female subordinate is the victim. Stewart (1998) supported the idea of this definition without explicitly mentioning gender and added to it that this is a situation where submission to sexual advances or requests is a condition of receiving or keeping a job. The female is in a position of limited power in comparison to her higher-ranking boss. The male in this situation is exploiting his work status and power and is misusing it in the foulest sense to harass another employee inappropriately. In these situations, the female employee may not feel like she has the power to stop her boss, that no one will believe her since she is his subordinate, or that she will lose her job if she seeks help. The power dynamics in this particular type of harassment make the victim feel immobilized even though in truth, they are not.

A third type of sexual harassment stems from the natural-biological model. Berdhal suggested that in this model "sexual harassment results from natural and

inevitable feelings of sexual desire expressed primarily by men towards women because of inherent sex drives and functions" (2007, p.426). This model grounds itself in biologically related ideas and puts the instigation on the male. This can be viewed as problematic because females have inherent sex drives as well, but are not attributed with a sexually-based model or theory to explain their inappropriate and uncalled for actions. Not to mention that males are certainly not always the aggressors in sexual harassment situations. The model at hand almost seems to blame biology for the harassment rather than the individual (primarily men according to the definition). Thus, the model takes the blame away from the individual and explains it away by attributing it to biology.  The lack of individual accountability proposed by this model can be seen as both troubling and problematic to some individuals.

A fourth type of sexual harassment is called hostile work environment. Although many individuals may not think of a hostile work environment as being a form of sexual harassment, the Supreme Court established its legitimacy as a form of sexual harassment back in 1981 (Stewart, 1998). Stewart wrote that a hostile work environment occurs when an individual or group of individuals display behavior that causes a woman or man to very uncomfortable at work, and nothing is done to stop it by those in power. This type of sexual harassment is more pervasive than quid pro quo but is harder to prove (Stewart, 1998, p. 216). According to the author, hostile work environments include but are not limited to: sexual remarks/jokes, staring, suggestive leers, and unwanted sexual touching. Supervisors and employers should be using their power to control the work environment so employees are not forced to tolerate these offensive and abusive conditions. It is when an employer does not intervene and gain control of his/her work environment that these

situations become classified as a hostile work environment and by association, sexual harassment.

Similar to pro quo harassment, the power model of sexual harassment views sexual harassment as a result of economic power. According to Berdhal (2007), this model stemmed from the fact that men have more economic power over women and that this enables them to exploit and coerce women sexually. Although men do not always have more economic power over women, anyone who does can use easily misuse this power. The ability to have a way to pay off individuals or use money as leverage to coerce others in the workplace is both immoral and unethical. The use of money or other desirable commodities should never be used to exploit or coerce anyone. However, unfortunately this type of sexual harassment does exist and as a result, all victims (of any gender) in this situation are left feeling pressured and exploited.

Finally, the last type of sexual harassment we will discuss is attributed to the sex roles spillover theory. This theory proposes "that sexual harassment is a form of sociosexual behavior at work that is guided by the roles of men as sexual agents and women as sexual objects" (Berdhal, 2007, p.426). Like the theories mentioned before it, sex role spillover theory places males in the role of the aggressor and females as objects of exploitation. This theory is based on what society has depicted as the role of males and females with respect to sexuality. It illustrates the types of relationships that are thought to be typical between males and females in the sexual realm but goes a step further into the aggressive and forceful path of harassment.

Some of the common characteristics associated with femininity are yielding, gullibility, and loyalty (Bem, 1974). According to the Bem Sex Role Inventory, those who demonstrated femininity tended to depict these characteristics more frequently than others. When thinking about how these characteristics are viewed in the workplace it is no surprise that those who demonstrate femininity may be at risk of falling victim to sexual harassment. Lynn Bowes-Sperry and Jasmine Tata (1999) posited that targets of sexual harassment may have fallen victim due to their perceived compliance in the situation. Interestingly enough, the characteristics that are attributed to femininity can appear as compliant or supportive of compliancy by others around them.

If demonstrating femininity means that an individual is likely to yield, then aggressors are aware that any sexual harassment advancements made toward them will likely be accepted at some point. Essentially if a feminine individual is likely to yield, it is only a matter of time until they submit to the aggressors wants and desires. Additionally, if being gullible is a characteristic of femininity then aggressors may feel that they can trick a victim into believing he/she is not being subject to sexual or harassment or even more cruelly, that he/she wanted to be the recipient of such action. This idea places the aggressor in a position of power through their use of cunning, lies, and guilt tactics. Finally, while loyalty may appear to be a positive characteristic there is also a potentially harmful side to it. If displaying loyalty is a form of femininity, then an aggressor may select feminine individuals to target because they are perceived as being loyal to the company and/or to their employer. As a result, aggressors may target these specific individuals because they feel that their loyalty to the organization will keep them quiet for fear that telling anyone about the harassment would jeopardize the

reputation of the organization, of their employer, or both. As a result, these individuals feel silenced because their loyal tendencies are telling them to protect individuals' reputations rather than themselves.

Another factor that plays into sexual harassment and femininity in the workplace is the environment. Bowes-Sperry and Tata (1999) argued that workplace environments that have had highly sexualized atmospheres or those that have indicated a tolerance of sexual harassment were more likely to have greater amounts of sexual harassment take place. This piece of information is critical to know for those who display femininity in the workplace because they can better identify if they are potentially placing themselves at risk (more so than others) by keeping a specific job at a particular company. Within these types of settings, the workplace culture is built upon undesirable values. It is perceived as okay to sexually harass another individual because the organization does not value or prioritize personal space, professionalism, and/or consent. These types of environments can be extremely problematic for those demonstrating femininity because the qualities of femininity may make an individual appear delicate. While this is certainly not always the case, displaying femininity in this type of environment and giving off the appearance of being delicate can attract aggressors at an alarming rate. Since aggressors are assertive with their intentions, appearing delicate can lend itself to also appearing weak. As a result, this image can turn those who demonstrate their femininity into victims.

**Conclusion**

After exploring the numerous facets of both femininity and professionalism, many individuals may question how these concepts come together to affect workplace culture

consistently. As the literature suggests, there is in fact a relationship between femininity, professionalism, workplace culture, and perspective. This relationship can be expressed in many ways, one of which is evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of demonstrating femininity in the workplace. This contrast raises the question of whether the use of femininity in the workplace is considered a professional or unprofessional practice.

Since researchers in multiple different career fields have been debating this question for quite some time, individuals who represent multiple different career fields will comprise the sample for this research. Additionally, since a significant amount of research has been published about the previous generations' perspective on the topic at hand, younger generations will make up the sample. This was done in hopes that future workplace attitudes can be better predicted and understood by this study's results. The data that is gathered in this study will help provide greater insight into the potential future attitudes individuals may have in the workplace when they encounter femininity. This exploratory study intends to gain insight into the collective view of femininity in the workplace. Since a noteworthy amount of literature already exists on female femininity experiences and perspective, this study seeks to add to the current understanding by expanding to include information from all different types of individuals, without regard to their biological sex.

Femininity in the workplace and the treatment of those who demonstrate it is a controversial subject that has sparked a great deal of discourse. The construct of femininity is continually changing and as a result, perceptions of its ties to professionalism change right along with it. The following study is undertaken with the

intention of adding to the current knowledge base by expanding to include the

perspective of both upcoming generations and multiple sexes. It is through this

understanding that society can advance their workplace/professional knowledge and can

progress into a future with a more holistic understanding of the society in which they

reside.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

**Introduction**

Due to changing workplace environments and the fact that there is little existing literature on inclusive femininity, there is a need for more data on the perceptions of femininity in the workplace. As many authors have suggested, anyone can demonstrate femininity in the workplace (Bordo, 1993; Robinson & Hobson, 1978). Since femininity is not just demonstrated by females, more information is needed on how femininity is perceived by the newer generations in hopes that society can identify how their leadership will respond to these types of actions. If businesses, workforce educators, and employees alike understand the changing attitudes towards femininity, they can better understand how to conduct themselves in a workplace environment and aid in the establishment of an inclusive atmosphere for all.

In chapter 1 the purpose, problem statement, research questions, definition of terms, significance, limitations, assumptions, and organization of the study were addressed. In chapter 2, a review of the literature was conducted that detailed the definition of femininity, the definition of professionalism, the history of femininity in the workplace, and the current state of femininity in the workplace. It addressed the common perceptions of femininity in the workplace and outlined some of the benefits and drawbacks that are associated with demonstrating it. Chapter 3 comprises nine sections. These sections are dedicated to the methods used to carry out this study and describe the purpose of the study, the research questions, the design of the study, the population and

sample, instrumentation, consent, data collection, data analysis, and a summary of the section.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the current perceptions of femininity in workplace environments. It was to evaluate college students' perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace as either professional/desirable or unprofessional/not desirable. The study aimed to identify the modern-day perceptions of femininity in regards to both preference and professionalism in the workplace as seen by younger generations.

The purpose of this research was also to contribute to a small body of existing literature that describes femininity from the perspective of multiple genders. A majority of the existing research focuses on perceptions of femininity based on sex (mostly women) and relates the concept of femininity with the concepts of sexuality and/or masculinity. As a result, another purpose of this study was to see how multiple genders perceived femininity demonstrated in the workplace, and to gather data that helps identify how individuals perceive femininity without regard to sexuality or masculinity.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between demographics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and perceptions of femininity?

2. What is the relationship between gender and perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic?

3. How do college students view feminine traits in contrast to masculine traits?

4. What is the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings?

5. How is femininity in the workplace viewed by college students?

**Design of the Study**

This study used a descriptive quantitative approach and used a portion of the Bem Sex Role Inventory survey (See Appendix A). The Bem Sex Role Inventory was created in 1974 to identify an individual's inherent nature as being more masculine or feminine (See Appendix C). The instrument features a list of 60 terms that participants are asked to rank from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (almost always true) (Bem, 1974). After assigning values to all 60 terms/phrases, the participants are then asked to fill out the "Inventory Score Sheet" by referring back to their rankings and transferring the scores into the box provided (Bem, 1974). The result is receiving either a higher feminine or masculine score that in turn, indicates one's supposed inherent nature. The Bem Sex Role Inventory has been used in previous research and both validity and reliability have been established since the 1970s.

The researcher used the traits and characteristics listed in the Bem Sex Role Inventory to create two sections of the instrument. The first section of the instrument did not use the Bem Sex Role Inventory traits, but featured three filter questions that served to ensure that all participants who took the survey met the study's three main requirements (eighteen years of age or older, current college student status, and some form of employment experience). The second and third sections of the instrument did in fact use Bem traits. In these sections of the survey, respondents were asked to either rank or categorize Bem traits/characteristics based on their perceived desirability or with their

relationship with either femininity or masculinity. The fourth and fifth sections of the instrument featured statements and Likert scales. Respondents were asked to read each statement and indicate if they "*Strongly Agree*", "*Agree*", were "*Neutral*", "*Disagree*" or "*Strongly Disagree*" with them. The statements featured in section four and five of the instrument were designed based on feedback from Delphi rounds and femininity experts. According to Greatorex and Dexter, the Delphi technique "is a way of identifying whether there is any consensus in an expert group and clarifying any agreement which exists. This is accomplished through iterative rounds of a questionnaire completed by a panel of experts. The questionnaire contains feedback about the answers given by the same expert panel from the previous round of the questionnaire" (2000, p. 1016). To create sections four and five of the survey the researcher presented the Delphi panelists and a separate femininity expert with statements that were repeatedly cited in research about masculine and feminine perceptions in the workplace. The Delphi panelists and the femininity expert examined the statements and gave multiple rounds of feedback, edits, and suggestions. As a result of the three extensive Delphi rounds and expert meetings, the researcher was able to develop the Likert scale charts exhibited in sections four and five of this survey. The sixth and final section of the survey featured demographic questions.

**Population and Sample**

The study consisted of a sample of 329 university students enrolled in a university course during the 2019-2020 academic year. Of the 329 students that were surveyed, 310 were utilized in this study. These students were part of a convenience sample and attended a large university in the southeastern portion of the United States. The participants were required to be enrolled in coursework at the time of their participation

and were expected to receive course credit at the end of their term for their academic efforts. This requirement was upheld by the researcher to ensure that the respondents were current college students by definition and were not auditing or the like.

Additionally, the individuals who participated in this study were all required to be 18 years of age or older. According to the state in which this research was conducted, adult status is legally assigned to individuals at 19 years old, but for surveying purposes 18 year olds are acknowledged as adults as long as the survey is anonymous. As a result, this study was only based on the adult perspective and did not include the views of minors. Finally, all participants in this study must have been employed at some point in their lives. This requirement stemmed from the fact that the researcher wanted to ensure that the perspectives were based on individuals that have witnessed femininity in a workplace specifically, rather than in another setting. The subjects represented in this study all shared the status of adult, college student, and previously and/or currently employed.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary and no compensation was provided for participation. This was a purposive, homogeneous study that placed the perceptions of college students in the role of the dependent variable and the practice of femininity in the workplace as the independent variable.

**Instrumentation**

The online survey used in this study consisted of 39 questions and was broken up into six distinct parts. The instrument itself was inspired by the Bem Sex Role Inventory created in 1974. The femininity/masculinity scale section (Part 2) and the ranking section (Part 3) used characteristics identified in the Bem Sex Role Inventory. This survey was

administered to respondents through Qualtrics, an online survey program and only took about six to eight minutes to complete.

The first section of the survey was comprised of three filter questions that helped the researcher to ensure that only qualified participants were completing the survey. As stated previously, all participants must have been at least eighteen years old, must have been taking college/university courses at the time they were answering the survey, and must have been employed at some point in their life. Since this study seeks to explore the attitudes and beliefs of college students, the current college student status was a necessary requirement. Additionally, since this study looks at femininity in the workplace, individuals must have been employed and/or must currently be employed to provide the workforce-specific information that was desired by the researcher. Finally, although the legal age of consent is nineteen years old for the state in which the research was conducted, the university that oversaw the study acknowledges students who are eighteen years old as being able to give their consent in regards to surveys. As such, participants must have been at least eighteen years old to participate in this survey. There was no maximum age limit set for this study.

Any individual that did not meet these three requirements was asked not to take the survey in two to three different ways. First, if an individual did not meet these requirements they were asked verbally not to take the survey by the researcher before even starting the survey. The researcher went over all of the requirements before the participants had the chance to take the survey. These requirements were discussed in a "Survey Script" (See Appendix B). Second, participants were asked again to not take the survey if they did not meet these requirements on the first page of the survey. These

requirements were written out and underlined on the "Welcome" page of the survey. Finally, if a student took the survey and answered in a way that indicated that they did not meet any of these three requirements, the survey automatically forwarded them to the end and thanked them for their time. The researcher ensured that the survey would do this by changing the settings and "logic" in Qualtrics. Any participant that did not meet all three of these three requirements was omitted from the study.

The second part of the survey consisted of seven femininity/masculinity scale questions. For each question in this section, there was a word or phrase that the participants were asked to evaluate and indicate if it was more masculine (1) or feminine (7) in nature. The questions in this section asked participants to assess the word/phrases: independent, cheerful, loyal, has leadership abilities, understanding, self-reliant, and sensitive to the needs of others. These questions included a seven-point scale where respondents selected the score they found most fitting with respect to the word/phrase being evaluated.

The third section of this survey asked respondents to rank seven characteristics based on their desirability in the workplace. The instructions indicated that the most desirable skills should be listed at the top of the list while the least desirable skills should be listed on the bottom of the list. The seven characteristics that were featured in this section are: independent, cheerful, loyal, has leadership abilities, understanding, self-reliant, and sensitive to the needs of others. Respondents were asked to rank these words/phrases from most desirable (1st on the list) to least desirable (7th on the list) in the workplace.

The fourth and fifth sections of this survey were made up of ten Likert-scale questions. In these sections, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the ten statements. They were also asked to think of the statements in regard to a workplace setting. The answer choices for these sections were represented by a five-point Likert-scale that ranged from "*Strongly Agree*" to "*Strongly Disagree*" (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Some of the statements in these sections included: "I see those who display their femininity as professional," "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing," and "Males display femininity less than females." These Likert-scales have a Cronbach's Alpha of .731 ($a = .731$) which indicates good reliability ($a > .7$). Additionally, Delphi round methods and femininity expert input was used to ensure the validity of this survey. After meeting with the femininity expert and completing multiple rounds of Delphi, the expert panelists that reviewed this instrument agreed that the content and overall design of the survey ensured its validity.

The final part of this survey was dedicated to twelve demographic questions. Questions in this section pertained to and class standing, the respondent's affiliated academic college, gender, race, previous employment history/characteristics, and current employment characteristics. This information was used by the researcher to better understand the population included in the study's sample.

**Consent**

The consent process took the form of voluntary survey submission but was discussed and listed in several places. First, when the researcher visited the classrooms with the intention of distributing surveys, she read a short script that detailed the purpose

of the study, the rights of the participants, and declared that by completing and turning in their survey, they were indicating voluntary consent to participate in the study. Beyond verbally describing consent to the participants before they took the survey, the researcher also included a statement about consent on the first page of the survey. On the survey's "Welcome" page the sentence, " Completion and submission of this survey indicated voluntary consent to participate in the study" appeared bolded. This was done by the researcher to grab the participant's attention and to reiterate that by turning in their survey, they were voluntarily giving their consent to be included in the study at hand.

**Data Collection**

The researcher gathered participants by using a multi-step process. First, the researcher visited the website of the university she was surveying at and found a list of all of the university's college/schools. From this list the researcher visited the website for each academic program within each college/school and looked at their required coursework. After visiting each major's website and looking at each program's required coursework, the researcher confirmed that all students at that specific university were required to take the ENGL 1120 and ENGL 1100 courses to graduate. Since all students at that university were required to take these courses, surveying them allowed for a greater amount of diversity to be represented (in terms of the majors that are represented by the students) in the study. Additionally, the LBAR 2010 plenary course at the same university was surveyed by the researcher as well. This class was surveyed on the final days of data collection to ensure a sufficient amount of undergraduate students were represented in the overall sample. As a result, the ENGL 1120, ENGL 1110, and LBAR 2010 classes were chosen to represent the undergraduate portion of the study's sample.

All of the Fall 2019 ENGL 1110, ENGL 1120, and LBAR 2010 instructor information was gathered from the university's online course catalog. The researcher then contacted each of the instructors teaching these classes in the fall and asked for permission to visit their classes and distribute the survey.

Second, in an effort to include the perspective of graduate students, the researcher compiled a list of all of the academic colleges and schools at the university being surveyed in a Microsoft Excel document. Next, the researcher used a randomization formula in Microsoft Excel to select five of the twelve colleges/schools to seek participants from. She then compiled a new list with all of the masters and doctoral programs that are offered in each of the five colleges/schools. Once the new list of academic programs was compiled, the researcher ran another randomization formula in Microsoft Excel that randomly chose one masters or doctoral program in each of the five selected colleges/schools. When the final five academic programs were chosen and recorded, the researcher visited the university's course catalog again and recorded all of the classes that were being offered in each of the five programs that were selected. From there the researcher contacted each of the course instructors through email and asked permission to visit their classes and distribute the survey to their students. Among many things, this email discussed the purpose of the study and what the researcher was asking of their students. The researcher informed the instructors that they would be given evidence of IRB approval before survey distribution commenced.

Once an instructor confirmed their willingness to allow the researcher to visit their class(es) and distribute the survey, the researcher asked for their preferred date/time of visitation. If an instructor had a preference, the researcher recorded it an Excel file.

The name of the instructor, the class being visited, the number of students in that class, and the time and date the instructor has requested was recorded. If an instructor did not have a preferred time or date for survey distribution, the researcher suggested one via email. When each professor and the researcher agreed on a time and date for survey distribution, their information (the name of the instructor, the class being visited, the number of students in that class, and the time and date of visitation) was recorded in an Excel file. The list the researcher compiled in that Excel file served as the official visitation schedule.

When the researcher visited a class and distributed surveys, she began by thanking the instructor for allowing her to visit their classroom. Next, the researcher introduced herself and read the "Survey Script" to the respondents (See Appendix B). After reading the "Survey Script" the researcher wrote the website's URL on the classroom's dry-erase board. The participants were then asked to go to the website, begin the survey, and to please remain quiet and seated until everyone was done taking the survey. The researcher instructed the participants to give her a thumbs up when they were finished and to feel free to raise their hands if they had any questions while taking the survey. The researcher would then make her way to the front of the room and engage in a conversation with the instructor so both the researcher and the instructor appeared busy and the participants didn't feel watched or uneasy in any way.

Once the researcher compiled a sufficient amount of completed surveys the survey was closed and the data was downloaded from Qualtrics into The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) system for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

After the survey was no longer assessable to the public, the data was exported from Qualtrics to SPSS® for analysis. All IP addresses and locations were deleted from the data set. Any survey responses that indicated an individual's minor status, their unemployment history, and/or a failed college/university enrollment status were removed from the data set as well.

*Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS® computer software. The demographic variables that were subject to a descriptive statistics report were: race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status. Additionally, descriptive statistics were run for every research question and reflected information pertaining to positive femininity views (questions 18-22), the perception of of the masculinity/femininity of a term (questions 4-10), the importance of masculine/feminine terms (questions 11-17), feminine value preferences in workplace settings (questions 23-27), and the overall view of femininity (questions 19, 20, and 22).

*Inferential Statistics*

A multitude of inferential statistic testing was also used to analyze the data. In this study the researcher used Multiple Linear Regression, Frequencies, and Mann-Whitney U tests on the gathered data.

Multiple Linear Regression testing was utilized to examine Research Questions #1 and #4. This type of test was chosen for research question #1 because there were more than two independent variables (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) that were being used to predict the dependent variable (positive view

of femininity). Multiple Linear Regression testing was used for Research Question #4 because it sought to examine how two independent variables (masculinity and femininity) allowed individuals to predict the value of another dependent variable (feminine value preferences in workplace settings).

Frequency testing was used to analyze the data for Research Questions #3 and #5. Frequency testing was used in Research Question #3 because the researcher wanted information about how often a particular feminine or masculine trait was ranked in a specific position during the study. This information provided insight into what quality the respondents deemed most desirable, which then gave the researcher a better idea if the respondents thought masculine or feminine traits were considered to be more desirable in general. Research Question #5 also utilized frequency testing because the researcher wanted to see how many times the respondents chose a response that indicated a positive view of femininity.

Finally, a Mann-Whitney U statistical test was utilized to analyze the data pertaining to Research Question #2. This non-parametric test was used because of the ranking nature of the questions that are affiliated with this research question on the survey. This Research Question called for comparing data between two groups (masculine and feminine) and featured a dependent variable that was ranked by respondents.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the purpose of the study, stated the research questions, detailed the design of the study, described the population and sample, discussed the study's instrumentation, addressed the topic of consent, and reviewed data collection and

analysis methods. The survey and data collection procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and all data was stored securely in an online portal called Qualtrics. The online survey was stored in the researcher's personal Qualtrics account and required a username and password to access the information.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

**Introduction**

The findings of this study and the data pertaining to each of the five research questions are presented in Chapter 4. Beyond frequency and descriptive statistic testing, a variety of other tests were conducted on the data using The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) system. Multiple Linear Regression and Mann-Whitney U tests were also used during this study to analyze participant responses.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the current perceptions of femininity in workplace environments. It was to evaluate college students' perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace as either professional/desirable or unprofessional/not desirable. The study aimed to identify the modern-day perceptions of femininity in regards to both preference and professionalism in the workplace as seen by younger generations.

The purpose of this research was also to contribute to a small body of existing literature that describes femininity from the perspective of multiple genders. A majority of the existing research focuses on perceptions of femininity based on sex (mostly women) and relates the concept of femininity with the concepts of sexuality and/or masculinity. As a result, another purpose of this study was to see how multiple genders perceived femininity demonstrated in the workplace, and to gather data that helps identify how individuals perceive femininity without regard to sexuality or masculinity.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between demographics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and perceptions of femininity?

2. What is the relationship between gender and perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic?

3. How do college students view feminine traits in contrast to masculine traits?

4. What is the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings?

5. How is femininity in the workplace viewed by college students?

**Description of the Survey Contents**

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative approach and was centered on a Bem Sex Role Inventory inspired survey (Bem, 1974). The Bem Sex Role Inventory was created in 1974 to identify an individual's inherent nature as being more masculine or feminine.

The researcher used seven of the traits listed in the Bem Sex Role Inventory to create two out of the six sections of the instrument. The first section of the instrument featured three filter questions that served to ensure that all participants who took the survey met the study's three main requirements (eighteen years of age or older, current college student status, and some form of employment experience). The second and third sections of the instrument asked the respondents to either rank seven Bem characteristics or categorize them based on their relationship with either femininity or masculinity. The fourth and fifth sections of the instrument featured Likert scale charts and asked

participants to respond to a total of ten statements relating to some aspect femininity. The sixth and final section of the survey featured demographic questions.

**Organization of Data Analysis**

A description of the sample is offered in this chapter. This information is used to describe who was included in this study, when the data was collected, who was excluded from the study, and the percentage of useable surveys that were gathered. Demographic information is also included in this chapter. This information was collected through descriptive statistics testing and serves to depict the race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status of the participants.

Following the demographic data, the results of each of the study's five research questions are stated. For research questions 1 and 4, tables are used to depict results from the multiple linear regression testing. In research question 1's results table, the relationship between the demographic characteristics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and the statements "I see femininity in the workplace", "I see those who demonstrate their femininity as professional", I do not associate femininity with professionalism", "Males display femininity less than females", and "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing" are explored. These statements were chosen because they represent having both positive and negatives views of femininity demonstrated in the workplace. In research question 4's results table, the relationship between gender and the statements "Wearing dark colors is more professional than wearing bright colors", "Individuals should value work over family", "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress", "Good conflict-resolution skills require understanding", and "Being a

leader is more important than being a follower" is explored. These statements were chosen because they indicate feminine value preferences in workplace settings.

For research question 2, a table illustrating the results of a Mann-Whitney U statistical analysis test is shown to describe the relationship between gender and the characteristics: independent, cheerful, loyal, has leadership abilities, understanding, self-reliant, and sensitive to the needs of others.

Finally, for research questions 3 and 5, bar charts, pie charts, and tables were chosen to represent the findings. The bar chart that corresponds with question 3 explores how the participants viewed the desirability of seven Bem Sex Role Inventory traits (independent, cheerful, loyal, has leadership abilities, understanding, self-reliant, and sensitive to the needs of others) in respect to one another in a workplace setting (Bem, 1974). Since these traits are either masculine or feminine in nature (as designated/assigned by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), this information was used to determine if the masculine or feminine traits were more desirable in workplace settings. Research question 5's pie charts depict how femininity was viewed in the workplace setting by the participants overall. The results in these pie charts were derived from the data that corresponded to the questions, "I see those who demonstrate their femininity as professional," I do not associate femininity with professionalism," and "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing."

**Description of the Sample**

The sample for this study included undergraduate and graduate students who were enrolled in a university in the Southeastern part of the United States during the Fall 2019-2020 academic year. Participants had to be at least eighteen years of age or older,

receiving course credit at the end of the term, and must have employment experience. These requirements were utilized to ensure that no minors were included in the study, that the participants were actual students at the university being surveyed, and that the participants had been exposed to some form of workplace experience and could answer the questions based on that experience. All data was collected during the Fall 2019 semester. There was a total of 310 (N) participants in this study.

Surveys were distributed using a convenience sampling technique. After completing the multi-step class selection process detailed in Chapter 3, the researcher visited multiple graduate and introductory English and LBAR 2010 classes to distribute surveys. The researcher introduced herself, read the "Survey Script" to the respondents, wrote the website's URL on the classroom's dry-erase board, and led participants to the website during each class visit. The participants would give a thumbs up when they were finished and raised their hands if they had any questions while taking the survey. The researcher engaged in a conversation with the instructor so both the researcher and the instructor appeared busy, and the participants did not feel watched or uneasy in any way.

Once the researcher compiled a sufficient amount of completed surveys, the survey was closed and the data was downloaded from Qualtrics into The SPSS® program for data analysis. Any surveys that did not meet the study's three requirements were eliminated from data analysis. Additionally, any surveys that did not have consistent responses for the first five sections of the survey were also not used in the data analysis.

**Demographic Information**

Demographic information was compiled and is presented for the variables race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status. Based on an extensive review

of literature, all of these variables were thought to potentially influence the respondent's perception of femininity in the workplace.

Table 1 includes the number and percentage of the participants' race in relation to the categories "White" and "Non-White". Out of the 310 surveys submitted, 304 participants chose to answer this question. As a result, this question had a 98.1% response rate from participants. After an initial round of data analysis, it was evident that the participants overwhelmingly identified as white (81.6%). This was consistent with the enrollment profile of the university. Few individuals self-identified in the categories of "Black or African American," "Hispanic," "Asian," "American Indian or Alaska Native," "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander," and "Other" (16.5% total). As such, the variables for each racial category were merged into a new variable that took the seven racial groups and narrowed them down into two categories ("White" and "Non-White"). Six respondents chose not to answer the question about race (1.9%) and proceeded to the next item in the demographics section.

**Table 1**

*Number and Percentage of Respondents' Race*

| Race | N | % |
|------|------|------|
| White | 253 | 81.6 |
| Non-White | 51 | 16.5 |
| No Response | 6 | 1.9 |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N*= 310

The next table, (Table 2) presents the number and percentage of the respondents' self-identified gender. Gender was utilized in this study instead of sex to allow the participants more freedom in self-identification. As a result, this will hopefully contribute to the small body of existing knowledge that aims to identify how gender relates to

perceptions of femininity in the workplace. This question had a response rate of 98.7%, with only four individuals who chose not to answer and to proceed on to the next question.

A majority of the respondents identified themselves as feminine (59%). Another 37.7% of the sample was comprised of individuals who identified themselves as masculine. While there were no individuals who identified themselves as transgender (0%), there were, in fact, two respondents who identified as non-binary (.6%). Four individuals (1.3%) preferred not to disclose their gender while another 1.3% of individuals chose not to answer this question.

**Table 2**

*Number and Percentage of Respondents' Self-Identified Gender*

| Gender | N | Valid % |
|---|---|---|
| Masculine | 117 | 38.2 |
| Feminine | 183 | 59.8 |
| Transgender | 0 | 0 |
| Non-Binary | 2 | .7 |
| I prefer not to say | 4 | 1.3 |
| No Response | 4 | - |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N=* 310

The number and percentage of the respondents' age are listed in the table and figure below (Table 3 and Figure 1). A total response rate of 100% was recorded for this question because it was a mandatory filtering question. This was the first question asked on the instrument and was used to make sure all respondents were at least 18 years of age or older. The participants in this study ranged from 18- 55 years old, with the average age of 22.33 ($M = 22.33$, $SD = 6.972$). The majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 30 (89%), and most of them were 18 years old (31.9%) followed by the second

most popular age, which was 19 years old (15.5%). There was only one individual who identified themselves as each of the following ages: 35, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 52, 53, and 55 years old. In total, these individuals comprised 2.7% of the total sample.

**Table 3**

*Number and Percentage of Respondents' Age*

| Age | N | Valid % |
|---|---|---|
| 18- 22 | 231 | 74.6 |
| 23- 27 | 34 | 10.9 |
| 28- 32 | 17 | 5.5 |
| 33- 37 | 10 | 3.1 |
| 38-42 | 8 | 2.6 |
| 43-47 | 4 | 1.3 |
| 48-52 | 4 | 1.3 |
| 53-57 | 2 | 0.7 |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N*= 310
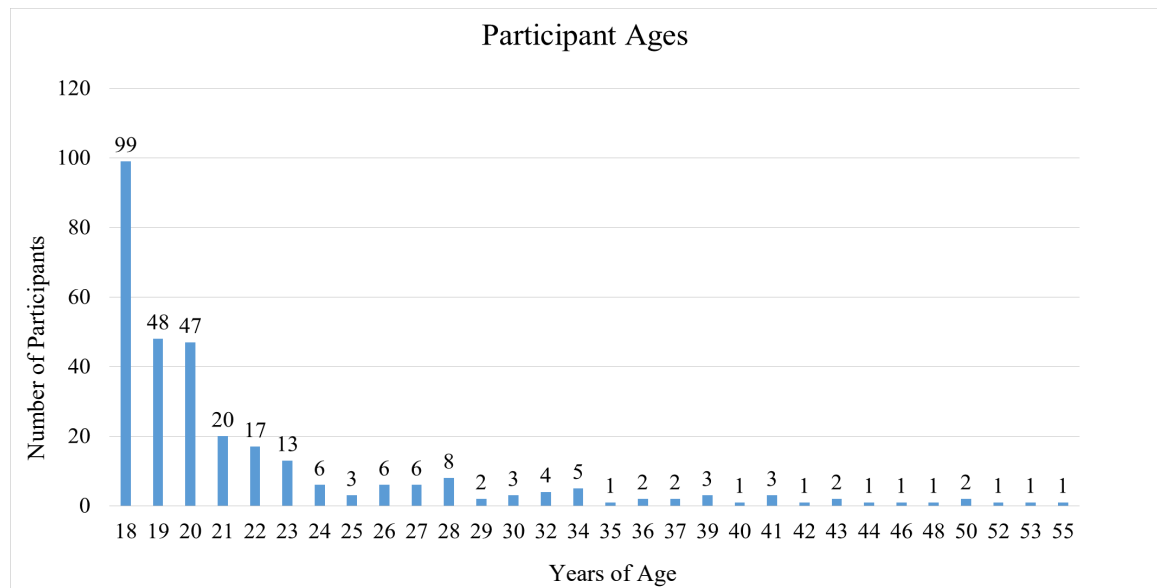


*Figure 1*. Ages of the Participants

*N*= 310

The number and the percentage of the respondents' class standings are presented in Table 4. A majority of the sample identified themselves as a freshman (35.5%). The second largest group represented in this sample was graduate students. There was a total of 74 participants (23.9%) who identified themselves as members of this category. Together freshman and graduate students represented over half of the data that was collected (59.4%). Sophomores and Juniors only comprised 31.3% of the total sample while seniors made up 8.4%. Three individuals chose not to answer this question, totaling the final 1% of the sample.

**Table 4**

*Number and Percentage of Respondents' Class Standing*

| Class Standing | N | Valid % |
|---|---|---|
| Freshman | 110 | 35.8 |
| Sophomore | 47 | 15.3 |
| Junior | 50 | 16.3 |
| Senior | 26 | 8.5 |
| Graduate Student | 74 | 24.1 |
| No Response | 3 | - |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N=* 310

A statistical description of the respondents' current employment status is referenced in Table 5 and Figure 2. Out of the participants chose to answer this question (n=163), 41.3% were working as Part-time employees. Full-time employees comprised 10.3% of the sample, while 1% of individuals identified themselves as a Temporary Employee at the time of data collection. However, 47.4% of the total sample chose not to answer this question. Since a significant portion of the sample chose not to answer this question, this should be taken into consideration when evaluating the generalizability of the charts and figures below in regards to the entire sample that was utilized in this study.

**Table 5**

*Number and Percentage of Respondents' Current Employment Status*

| Current Employment Status | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Part-time Employee | 128 | 41.3 |
| Full-time Employee | 32 | 10.3 |
| Temporary Employee | 3 | 1.0 |
| Not Applicable | 0 | 0 |
| No Response | 147 | 47.4 |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N*= 310
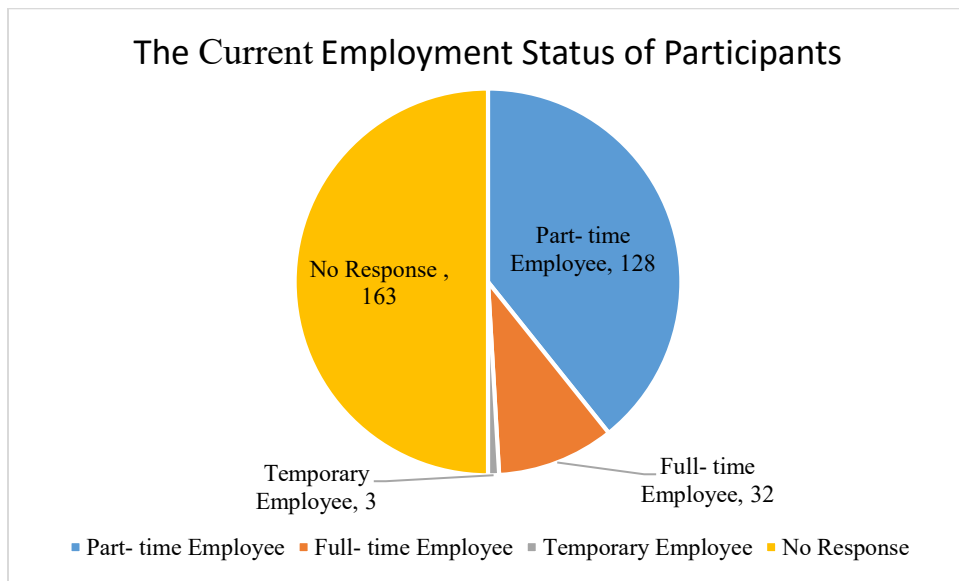


*Figure 2*- The Current Employment Status of Participants

*N*= 310

**Data Analysis**

*Positive Perceptions of Femininity and Demographic Characteristics*

Research Question #1- What is the relationship between demographics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and having a positive view of femininity.

Participants were asked to answer the following demographic questions to aid in answering this research question. Additionally, the positive view of femininity that is

referenced in this research question is based on an evaluation of questions #18-#22 on the survey instrument. Respondents ware asked to read five statements and to select an answer on a Likert scale that ranged from "*Strongly Agree*" to "*Strongly Disagree*" to reflect their opinion. Descriptive Statistics testing and Multiple Linear Regression tests were used on the data that pertained to this research question. The results are indicated in Tables 6 and 7 below.

Multiple Linear Regression was used to test if demographic characteristics significantly predicted positive views of femininity. As shown in Table 6 and 7, it was found that an individual's gender had an impact on if an individual saw those who displayed their femininity as professional, $F(9, 151) = 1.313$, ($p = .009$). Additionally, it was found that an individual's age, $F(9, 152) = 2.083$, ($p = .040$) and gender, $F(9, 152) = 2.083$, ($p = .036$) had a significantly predicted agreement with the statement, "I do not associate femininity with professionalism." The data also indicated that being a Senior in college $F(9, 153) = 2.233$, ($p = .024$) and an individual's race, $F(9, 153) = 2.233$, ($p = .016$) significantly predicted agreement with the statement, "Males display femininity less than females." Finally, it was found that gender had an impact on if individuals saw femininity in the workplace is a positive thing, $F(9, 153) = .693$, ($p = .000$).

Multiple Linear Regression testing was administered to analyze the statement "I see femininity in the workplace" against the demographic variables race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status. No control measures were significant or approached significance in this regression model, $F(9, 153) = 1.729$, ($p = .087$) (Tables 6 and 7).

**Table 6**

*Multiple Linear Regression Results for Perceptions of Femininity and Demographic*

*Characteristics*

| | Race | | Age | | Coefficient Gender | | Employment Status | | Senior | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | β | *SE* | β | *SE* | β | *SE* | β | *SE* | β | *SE* |
| 18.) "I see femininity in the workplace." | . 069 | .169 | -.021 | .012 | -.291 | .149 | .370 | .171 | -.008 | .251 |
| 19.) "I see those who display their femininity as professional." | -.254 | .168 | .009 | .012 | .279 | .148 | -.282 | .169 | -.324 | .247 |
| 20.) "I do not associate femininity with professionalism." | .127 | .232 | -.035 | .017 | -.229 | .205 | .091 | .239 | .551 | .345 |
| 21.) "Males display femininity less than females." | -.423 | .173 | .009 | .013 | .198 | .153 | -.285 | .176 | -.558 | .257 |
| 22.) "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing." | .203 | .170 | .005 | .012 | .174 | .150 | .031 | .172 | -.210 | .253 |

**Table 7**

*ANOVA Results for Femininity and Demographic Characteristics*

|  | N | F | df | $R^2$ | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18.) "I see femininity in the workplace." | 163 | 1.729 | 9 | .092 | - |
| 19.) "I see those who display their femininity as professional." | 161 | 1.313 | 9 | .073 | .009 |
| 20.) "I do not associate femininity with professionalism." | 162 | 2.083 | 9 | .110 | .034 |
| 21.) "Males display femininity less than females." | 163 | 2.233 | 9 | .116 | .023 |
| 22.) "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing." | 163 | .693 | 9 | .039 | .000 |

*The Relationship Between Gender and Feminine/Masculine Perception*

Research Question #2- What is the relationship between gender and the perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic?

Respondents were asked to indicate if a series of seven terms ("independent," "cheerful," "loyal," "has leadership abilities," "understanding," "self-reliant," and "sensitive to the needs of others") was more masculine or feminine in nature. The terms were acquired from the Bem Sex Role Inventory and respondents evaluated the words on a scale from Masculine (1) to Feminine (7). There was a 98.0% response rate for the term evaluation section. Descriptive Statistics testing and a Mann- Whitney U test was used on the data pertaining to this question. The results are indicated in Table 8 below.

After administering a Mann-Whitney U test, the results indicated that there was no significant relationship between gender and the variables independent, cheerful, loyal, has leadership abilities, understanding, self-reliant, and sensitive to the needs of others. Participants did not perceive the term independent to be more masculine or feminine based on their gender (Mdn= 3, *U*= 9326.500, *p* = .053). Results also indicated that an

individual did not perceive the terms "cheerful" (Mdn= 2.50, $U$= 9839.000, $p$ = .229).,

"loyal" (Mdn= 3, $U$= 10565.000, $p$ = .845) or "has leadership abilities" (Mdn= 2.50, $U$=

9747.500, $p$ = .173) to be more masculine or feminine based on their gender. Finally,

participants did not perceive the terms "understanding" (Mdn= 3.50, $U$= 10010.500, $p$ =

.333), "self-reliant" (Mdn= 2.50, $U$= 10608.000, $p$ = .892), or "sensitive to the needs of

others" (Mdn= 3, $U$= 10265.5000, $p$ = .526) as being more masculine or feminine based

on their gender. Although there was not a statistically significant relationship between the

perception of the term "independent" and an individual's gender, this variable was just

outside the significance range ($p$ = .053) and should be noted since it was close to being

classified as such.

**Table 8**

*Gender and The Perception of The Masculinity/Femininity of a Term*

|  | Mann-Whitney U | Z | P |
|---|---|---|---|
| Independent | 9326.500 | -1.938 | .053 |
| Cheerful | 9839.000 | -1.203 | .229 |
| Loyal | 10565.000 | -.195 | .845 |
| Has leadership abilities | 9747.500 | -1.362 | .173 |
| Understanding | 10010.500 | -.967 | .333 |
| Self-Reliant | 10608.000 | -.136 | .892 |
| Sensitive to the needs of others | 10265.5000 | -.634 | .526 |

*College Students' Perception of Desirable Traits in The Workplace*

      Research Question #3- How do college students view feminine traits in contrast to

masculine traits?

      Data was compiled from questions #11- #17 on the survey instrument to answer

this research question. These questions fell within a ranking section where participants

were asked to rank the terms "independent", "cheerful", "loyal", "has leadership

abilities", "understanding", "self-reliant", and "sensitive to the needs of others" from most to least desirable within a workplace setting. There was a 100% response rate for this series of questions. Descriptive Statistics and Frequency tests were conducted on this portion of the data. The results of these tests are listed in Figure 3 below.

A majority of the participants felt that being independent and having leadership abilities were the two most desirable characteristics an individual could have in a workplace setting. The term "independent" ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.905$) was ranked as the most important trait by 36.1% of the participants while the phrase "has leadership ability" ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 3.173$) was also deemed as the most important trait by another 39.4% of the participants. Being cheerful often scored as the second most important characteristic an individual could display in a workplace setting. Participants listed "cheerful" ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.945$) as the second most important characteristic 28.7% of the time. The concept of "loyalty" ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.635$) was deemed the third most important trait by 29.7% of the sample. "Understanding" was often listed as the fifth most important characteristic in a workplace setting, as 29.4% of the participants put the term in the fifth-place slot. The participants followed "understanding" with that of being "self-reliant", ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.701$) and 31.6% of the sample chose this specific ranking. Finally, "sensitive to the needs of others" ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.883$) was deemed the least desirable trait to display in a workplace setting. A total of 45.8% of the sample listed the phrase "sensitive to the needs of others" as the least desirable trait.
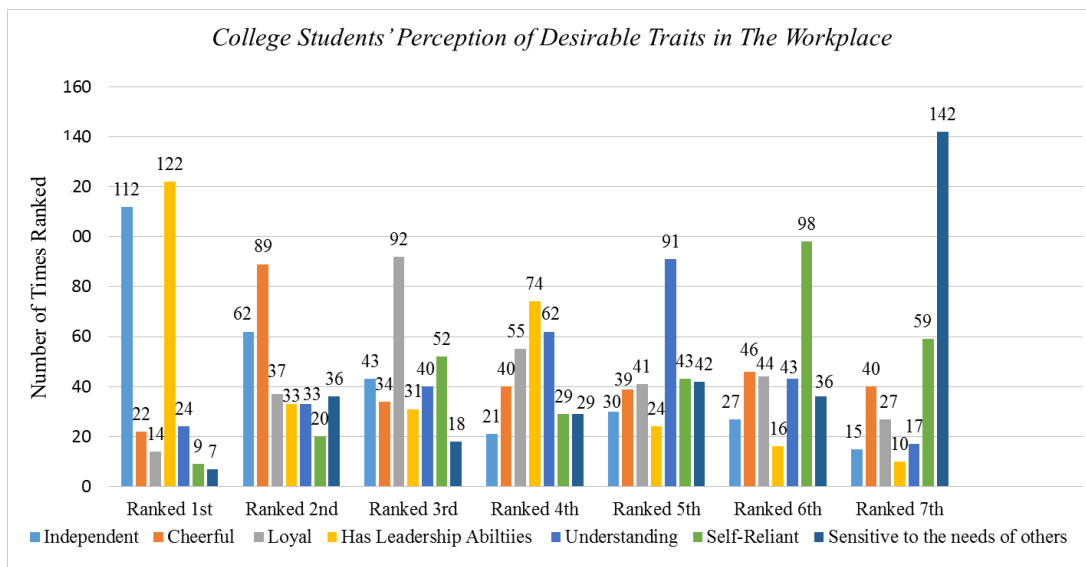
*Figure 3*- College Students' Perception of Desirable Traits in The Workplace

*Gender and Value Preferences in Workplace Settings*

 Research Question #4- What is the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings?

To answer this research question the participants were asked to identify their gender and to rank a series of five statements that pertained to the workplace from "*Strongly Agree*" to "*Strongly Disagree*." The five statements that were included in this section were: "Wearing dark colors is more professional than wearing bright colors", "Individuals should value work over family", "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress", "Good conflict-resolution skills require understanding", and "Being a leader is more important than being a follower". A total of 99% of the respondents completed this section of the survey with only 1% choosing to move on to the next section. Descriptive Statistics testing and Multiple Linear Regression tests were used on the data gathered from these five statements. The results are indicated in Table 9 and Table 10 below.

After reviewing the results of the Multiple Linear Regression analyses on each of the five statements mentioned previously, two statistically significant relationships were

brought to light. First, the analysis showed that gender significantly predicted the

likelihood that individuals believed that they should value work over family, $F(2, 304) =$

3.479, $(p = .009)$. Second, Multiple Linear Regression results also indicated that an

individual's gender significantly predicted the perception that wearing pants was more

professional than wearing a dress, $F(2, 304) = 10.221$, $(p = .000)$. There were no

statistically significant relationships between the statements "Wearing dark colors is more

professional than wearing bright colors" $F(2, 304) = .291$, $(p = .748)$, "Good conflict-

resolution skills require understanding" $F(2, 304) = 1.459$ $(p = .234)$, and "Being a

leader is more important than being a follower" $F(2, 304) = .643$, $(p = .526)$ and gender.

**Table 9**

*Multiple Linear Regression Results for Gender and Workplace Preferences*

|  | Coefficient | |
|---|---|---|
|  | β | *SE* |
| 23.) "Wearing dark colors is more professional than wearing bright colors." | .018 | .121 |
| 24.) "Individuals should value work over family." | -.267 | .102 |
| 25.) "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress." | -.520 | .115 |
| 26.) "Good conflict-resolutions skills require understanding." | .128 | .076 |
| 27.) "Being a leader is more important than being a follower." | -.070 | .125 |

**Table 10**

*ANOVA Results for Gender and Workplace Preferences*

|  | N | F | df | $R^2$ | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23.) "Wearing dark colors is more professional than wearing bright colors." | 307 | .291 | 2 | .002 | - |
| 24.) "Individuals should value work over family." | 307 | 3.479 | 2 | .022 | .009 |
| 25.) "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress." | 307 | 10.221 | 2 | .063 | .000 |
| 26.) "Good conflict-resolutions skills require understanding." | 307 | 1.459 | 2 | .010 | - |
| 27.) "Being a leader is more important than being a follower." | 307 | .643 | 2 | .004 | - |

*College Students' Overall Perception of Femininity in The Workplace*

Research Question #5- How is femininity in the workplace viewed by college students?

Data was collected from three different survey questions to answer this specific research question. Survey questions 19, 20, and 22 were used to analyze a participant's overall perception of femininity in the workplace. These questions were found on a Likert scale. The participants were asked to rank the following statements from "*Strongly Agree*" to "*Strongly Disagree*": "I see those who display their femininity as professional" ($M$ = 2.30, $SD$ = .894), "I do not associate femininity with professionalism" ($M$ = 3.29, $SD$ = 1.220), and "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing" ($M$ = 2.23, $SD$ = .906). The statement "I see those who display their femininity as professional" had a 99% response rate, "I do not associate femininity with professionalism" had a 99.4% response rate, while the statement "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing" had a 99.7%

response rate. Descriptive Statistics and Frequency tests were used to analyze the data for these questions, and the results are depicted in Tables 11-13 and Figures 4- 6 below.

As illustrated in Figure 4, 48% of the respondents who responded to this question indicated that they saw individuals who displayed their femininity in the workplace as being professional. Another 24% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and thus selected the answer choice of "*Neutral*". A total of 17% of the sample indicated that they "*Strongly Agreed*" with the statement and saw those who displayed their femininity in the workplace as professional. A cumulative total of 11% either Disagreed (10%) or Strongly Disagreed (1%) with the statement. In total, over half of the sample (65%) indicated that they perceived displaying femininity in the workplace as being professional. While 24% remained neutral, only 11% of the college students who answered this question viewed displaying femininity in the workplace as being unprofessional.

**Table 11**

*Student Responses to The Statement "I see those who display their femininity as professional."*

| | "I see those who display their femininity as professional" | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | Valid % |
| Strongly Agree | 51 | 16.6 |
| Agree | 149 | 48.5 |
| Neutral | 74 | 24.1 |
| Disagree | 30 | 9.8 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 1.0 |
| No Response | 3 | - |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N*= 310

**"I see those who display their femininity as professional."**
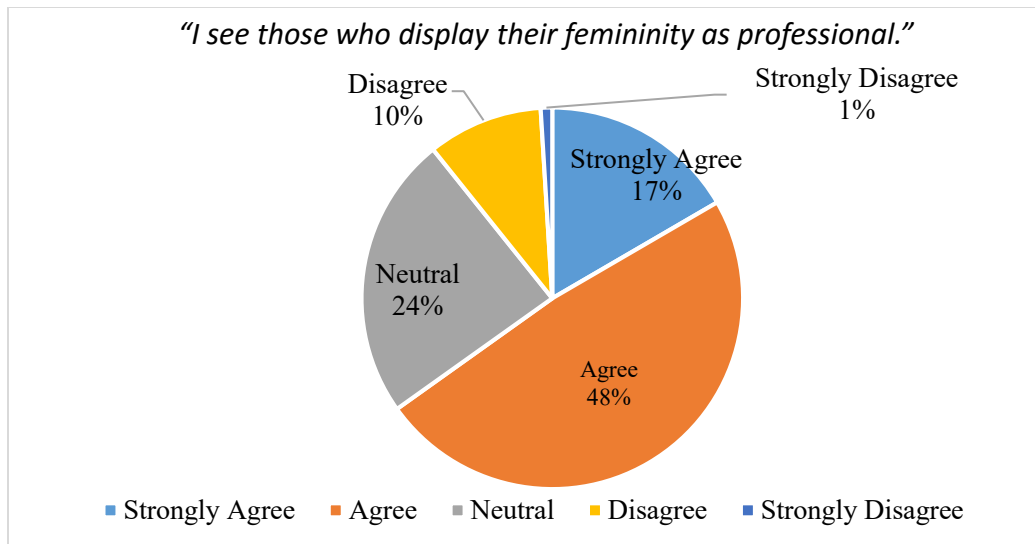
*Figure 4-* "Percentage of College Students Who See Femininity as Professional in The
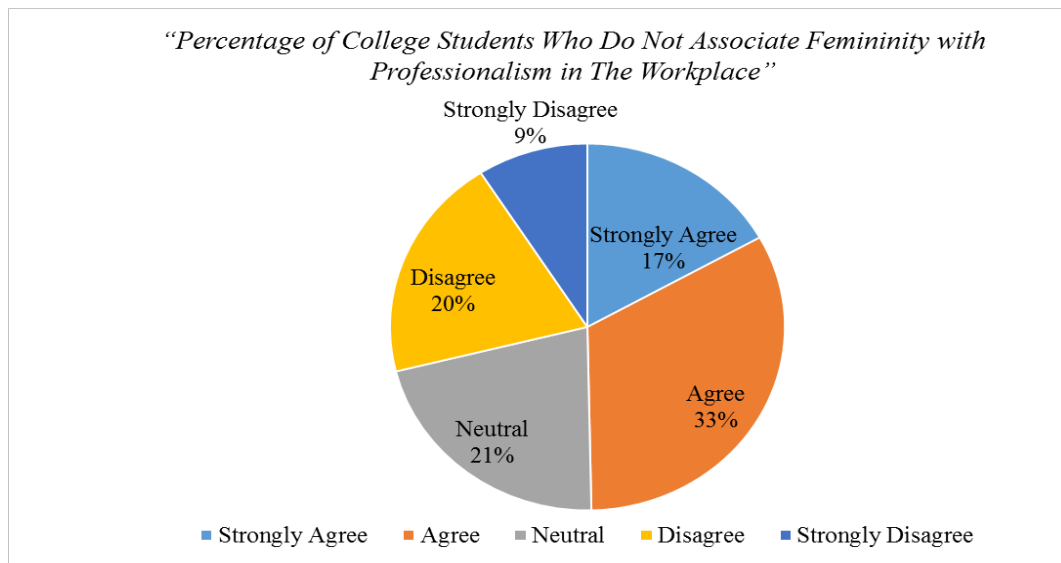
Workplace"

*N*= 307

The data in Figure 5 and Table 12 explore college student responses to the

statement, "I do not associate femininity with professionalism" (*M* = 3.29, *SD* = 1.220).

Results suggested that 33% of the sample "*Agree*" with this statement while another 17%

"*Strongly Agree*" with this statement. As a result, exactly 50% of participants who

answered this question were in agreement that they did not associate femininity with

professionalism. There were 66 individuals (21%) that neither agreed nor disagreed with

this statement. Finally, 9% of the participants who answered this question indicated that

they "*Strongly Disagree*" with the statement while another 20% of the participants

indicated that they "*Disagree*" with the statement. In total, 29% of the respondents who

answered this question answered in a way that suggested that they did associate

femininity with professionalism.

**Table 12**

*Student Responses to The Statement "I do not associate femininity with professionalism."*

| | "I do not associate femininity with professionalism." | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | N | Valid % |
| Strongly Agree | 52 | 16.9 |
| Agree | 101 | 32.8 |
| Neutral | 66 | 21.4 |
| Disagree | 61 | 19.8 |
| Strongly Disagree | 28 | 9.1 |
| No Response | 2 | - |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N* = 310



*Figure 5*- "Percentage of College Students Who Do Not Associate Femininity with Professionalism in The Workplace"

*N*= 308

College student responses to the statement, "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing" (*M* = 2.23, *SD* = .906) are depicted in Figure 6 and Table 13 below. A total of 39% of the respondents that answered this question chose to "*Agree*" with the

statement, and another 23% indicated that they "*Strongly Agree*" with the statement. As a

result, over half of the participants who answered this question (62%) selected categories

that suggested that they viewed femininity in the workplace as a positive thing. A total of

89 participants (32%) chose to select the answer choice of "Neutral." Finally, 5% of the

participants who chose to answer this question chose to "*Disagree*" with the statement

while another 1% chose to "*Strongly Disagree*" with the statement. In total, only 6% of

the participants indicated that they did not see femininity in the workplace as a positive

thing.

**Table 13**

*Student Responses to The Statement "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing."*

| | "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing." | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | Valid % |
| Strongly Agree | 71 | 23.0 |
| Agree | 120 | 38.8 |
| Neutral | 98 | 31.7 |
| Disagree | 16 | 5.2 |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 1.3 |
| No Response | 1 | - |
| Total | 310 | 100 |

*N*= 310
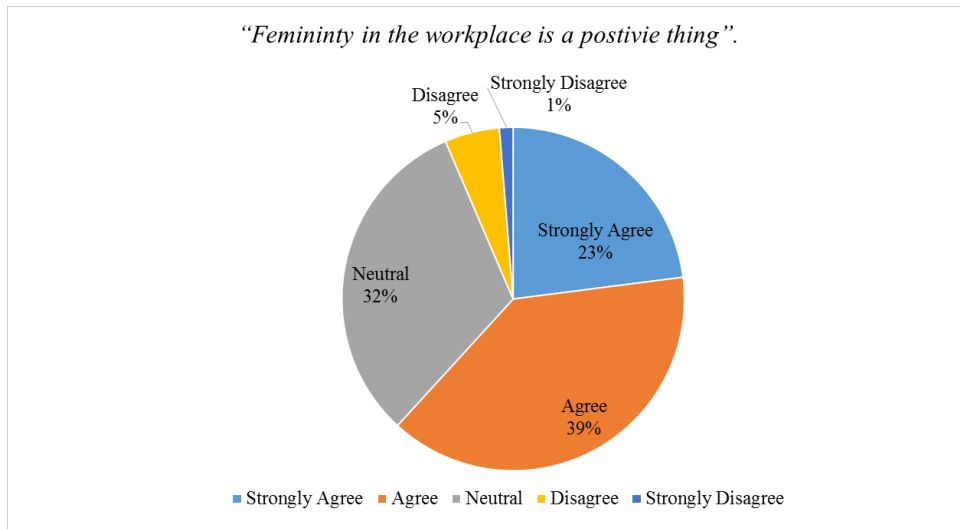
*Figure 6-* "Percentage of College Students Who View Femininity in the Workplace as A Positive Thing"

*N*= 309

## Summary of the Findings

Chapter 4 presented the findings and a statistical analysis of the data that was collected. A total of 310 participants contributed to this data, and this information was analyzed using a series of Descriptive Statistics, Frequency, Mann-Whitney U, and Multiple Linear Regression testing techniques. Participants in this study were current college students who met the study's three requirements of being at least eighteen years of age, being currently enrolled in college/university courses, and had some type of employment experience at the time of data collection. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-55 years old, and over half of the participants identified themselves as feminine (59%). Additionally, over half of the respondents identified themselves as either a freshman or as a graduate student. A majority of the respondents considered themselves white (81.6%) and were considered part-time employees (41.3%) at the time of data collection.

Research question 1 was about the relationship between demographic variables (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and individuals having a positive view of femininity. The results of Multiple Linear Regression testing indicated that there were a few statistically significant relationship present between these variables and an individual's view of femininity. Results indicated that individuals who openly disclosed their gender were more likely to witness femininity in the workplace than individuals who preferred not to state their gender. Next, the older an individual was, the less likely they were to associate femininity with professionalism. Additionally, Senior students in college were less likely to assert that males displayed femininity less than females. Finally, non-white individuals were less likely to think that males displayed femininity less than females.

Research question 2 posed a question about the relationship between gender and the perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic. The results of a Mann-Whitney U test indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and the perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic. However, the variable "independent" was just outside the significance range and should be noted as it was close to being classified as such.

Research question 3 posed a question of how college students view feminine traits in contrast to masculine traits. The results of a Frequency test indicated that a majority of the participants felt that being independent and having leadership abilities were the two most desirable characteristics an individual could have in a workplace setting. Being cheerful scored as the second most important characteristic, while "loyalty" was deemed the third most important trait. The data indicated that "understanding" was often listed as

the fifth most important characteristic in a workplace setting while being "self-reliant" was listed as the six most important trait. Finally, being "sensitive to the needs of others" was overwhelmingly listed as the least desirable trait to display in a workplace setting.

Research question 4 sought to examine the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings. The results of a Multiple Linear Regression testing indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship was present between "Individuals should value work over family" and gender. Individuals who did not want to disclose their gender were more likely to state that individuals should value work over family. Additionally, Multiple Linear Regression results also indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship present between the statement "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress" and gender. Individuals who did not want to disclose their gender were more likely to think that wearing pants was more professional than wearing a dress.

Finally, research question 5 posed the question of how femininity in the workplace is viewed by college students. A majority of the sample saw those who displayed their femininity as professional (65%) and that they perceived femininity in the workplace as a positive thing (62%). Exactly half (50%) of the participants did not associate femininity with professionalism.

This chapter presented the statistical findings of the various statistical tests run on the study's data. Chapter 5 addresses and discusses the implications of these findings in greater detail, as well as how this information can and should be considered by others who wish to carry out the same/similar study. Chapter 5 also provides recommendations for future research and an overall summary of the study at hand.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Introduction**

This study sought to examine college students' perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace. Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the study by providing insight into the reason for the study at hand, a brief history of the research pertaining to femininity, the significance of the study, and the limitations. This chapter also outlined the study's research questions and the assumptions the researcher had before conducting the experiment. Chapter 2 served as a review of the literature. This chapter illustrated the concepts of femininity and professionalism, and linked them to the workplace environment without regard to biological sex. This chapter explored the definition and characteristics of femininity, the meaning and characteristics of professionalism, and the history and current state of femininity within the workplace. Chapter 3 described the design of the study, the design/inspiration behind the survey instrument, the characteristics of the population and sample, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 was dedicated to describing all of the study's findings. It provided an analysis of the data that was collected and a report of the statistical results that were found. A discussion of the testing methods used on the data was also included in this chapter. This discussion was done with regard to each research question as it was presented in the chapter.

This final chapter, Chapter 5, will serve to summarize the findings mentioned in Chapter 4 and to present the author's conclusions based on this analysis of data. This

chapter will also discuss the implications of this study's findings and will outline the author's recommendations for future research.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the current perceptions of femininity in workplace environments. It was to evaluate college students' perceptions of femininity demonstrated in the workplace as either professional/desirable or unprofessional/not desirable. The study aimed to identify the modern-day perceptions of femininity in regards to both preference and professionalism in the workplace as seen by younger generations.

The purpose of this research was also to contribute to a small body of existing literature that describes femininity from the perspective of multiple genders. A majority of the existing research focuses on perceptions of femininity based on sex (mostly women) and relates the concept of femininity with the concepts of sexuality and/or masculinity. As a result, another purpose of this study was to see how multiple genders perceived femininity demonstrated in the workplace, and to gather data that helps identify how individuals perceive femininity without regard to sexuality or masculinity.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used in this study:

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between demographics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and perceptions of femininity?

2. What is the relationship between gender and perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic?

3. How do college students view feminine traits in contrast to masculine traits?

4. What is the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings?

5. How is femininity in the workplace viewed by college students?

**Summary**

Workplace environments morph and transform over time. They are not fixed environments and they change and grow as new individuals, partnerships, policies, procedures, and even products are introduced. While these workplace environments have continued to evolve over the years, the notion of displaying one's femininity within them has consistently maintained its negative perception. As exhibited by several studies (Banchefsky et al., 2016; Little et al., 2015; Maier, 1999) and the development of instruments such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), femininity has traditionally been viewed negatively in these environments because it has been considered inferior to masculinity or associated with sexuality. As a result, it comes as no surprise that the positive perception of masculine traits and the use of masculine characteristics overwhelmingly stifle those of femininity (Goodman, 2009). As a result, society is left with the idea that displaying their femininity could inhibit their success in a workplace environment and that they must rely on adhering to the masculine status quo to excel.

According to some researchers, the demonstration of femininity in the workplace is essential to being a successful worker (Adamson, 2017; Banchefsky et al., 2016; Buddle, 2006; Hehman et al., 2014). These authors posit that utilizing femininity in the workplace allows individuals to be more competent and as a result, to better the businesses who employ them. While these researchers argue that femininity is beneficial

in workplace environments and should be viewed as professional, why is it that the current climate of most workplace cultures sees femininity as a negative, unprofessional trait?

This idea brought about the question of how newer, younger generations could and would perceive displays of femininity in the workplace. Since these individuals will be moving into the workforce and will likely be acquiring positions of leadership within businesses and organizations in the coming years, an analysis of their perception of femininity in the workplace is crucial. The results of exploring their attitudes can be used not only to understand potential shifts in workplace environments but can also be used to help create more diverse and inclusive work environments for all.

This study examined college students' perceptions of femininity in the workplace. It explored these perceptions with regard to the demographic variables of race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status. This study also examined how these variables relate to workplace preferences. Finally, this study sought to explore which traits/characteristics college students found the most desirable in a workplace setting, followed by their perception of these specific traits within themselves. An extensive review of literature, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), Delphi Round exercises, and feedback from a prestigious femininity expert currently teaching the topic at a university in the Southeastern part of the United States all aided in the creation of the survey that was used in this study. The sample for this study was made up of 310 participants that were college students attending a university located in the Southeastern part of the United States. Out of the 329 respondents who answered the survey, 310 were eligible to be used in the study at hand and thus yielded a 94% response rate. Data collection took place

during the Fall 2019 academic semester. Participants completed a 6-8-minute survey and participation was completely voluntary. No incentives or compensation was provided by the researcher.

*Descriptive Statistics*

A majority of the participants in this study were white ($M$ = .83, $SD$ = .374) and identified their gender as being feminine ($M$ = 1.67, $SD$ = .647). The data indicated that the participants were mostly in their early twenties ($M$ = 22.3, $SD$ = 6.972) and were Part-time employees ($M$ = 1.23, $SD$ = .466). In regards to research question #1 and #5, the participants in this study indicated that they saw those who displayed their femininity in the workplace as professional ($M$ = 2.20, $SD$ = .867) and that they considered femininity that was demonstrated in the workplace to be a positive thing ($M$ = 2.23, $SD$ = .906). For research question #3, the data indicated that the terms "independent" ($M$ = 2.79, $SD$ = 1.905) and "had leadership ability" ($M$ = 2.78, $SD$ = 3.173) were deemed as the most important traits by the participants. In research question #4, participants indicated that they thought that individuals should in fact value work over family ($M$ = 4.10, $SD$ = .864). They also indicated that good conflict-resolution skills required understanding ($M$ = 1.64, $SD$ = .643) and that being a leader was not more important than being a follower ($M$ = 2.75, $SD$ = 1.056).

*Research Question #1*

What is the relationship between demographics (race, gender, age, class standing, and current employment status) and perceptions of femininity?

The data suggested that out of the five demographic groups referenced, four provided some form of a statistically significant relationship. Each demographic

characteristic was tested via Multiple Linear Regression against the statements "I see femininity in the workplace," "I see those who display their femininity as professional," "I do not associate femininity with professionalism," "Males display femininity less than females," and "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing."

According to the data, an individual's age, $F (9, 152) = 2.083$, ($p = .040$) and gender, $F (9, 152) = 2.083$, ($p = .036$) had a statistically significant relationship with the statement, "I do not associate femininity with professionalism." The older a participant was in this study, the less likely they were to associate femininity with professionalism. Additionally, individuals who identified their gender as feminine were less likely to state that they did not associate femininity with professionalism. Next, the data indicated that being a Senior in college and an individual's race had statistically significant relationships with the statement, "Males display femininity less than females." The data indicated that Senior students were less likely to assert that males display femininity less than females, $F (9, 153) = 2.233$, ($p = .024$). It also indicated that non-white individuals were less likely to think that males display femininity less than females, $F (9, 153) = 2.233$, ($p = .016$). Finally, it was found that gender had an impact on if an individual saw femininity in the workplace as a positive thing, $F (9, 153) = .693$, ($p = .000$). In this specific study, individuals who identified as masculine thought that femininity in the workplace was a positive thing more so than those who identified themselves as feminine.

*Research Question #2*

What is the relationship between gender and perception of femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic?

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Results of a Mann-Whitney U test indicated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between an individual's gender and the perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic or phrase. This was consistent across all of the terms that were being tested against the variable gender: "cheerful" (Mdn= 2.50, $U$= 9839.000, $p$ = .229), "loyal" (Mdn= 3, $U$= 10565.000, $p$ = .845), "has leadership abilities" (Mdn= 2.50, $U$= 9747.500, $p$ = .173), "understanding" (Mdn= 3.50, $U$= 10010.500, $p$ = .333), "self-reliant" (Mdn= 2.50, $U$= 10608.000, $p$ = .892), and "sensitive to the needs of others" (Mdn= 3, $U$= 10265.5000, $p$ = .526). Although there was not a statistically significant relationship between the perception of the term "independent" and an individual's gender, this variable was just outside of the significance range (Mdn= 3, $U$= 9326.500, $p$ = .053) and should be noted since it was very close to being classified as such.

*Research Question #3*

How do college students view feminine traits in contrast to masculine traits?

The data suggested that for this particular group of participants, being independent and having leadership abilities were the most important traits an individual could have in a workplace setting. A total of 36.1% of the sample ranked the term "independent" as the most important characteristic, while 39.9% listed the phrase "has leadership ability" as the most important trait. The participants indicated that they thought being "cheerful" was the second most important characteristic in this study (28.7%). Being cheerful in the workplace was followed by the third most important trait, "loyalty." The term "loyalty" was ranked as the third most important trait 29.7% of the time. According to the data, the fifth and sixth most important characteristics to participants in

a workplace setting were "understanding" and "self-reliant." The term "understanding" was ranked as the fifth most important trait 29.4% of the time while "self-reliant" assumed the sixth place spot 31.6% of the time. Finally, being "sensitive to the needs of others" ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.883$) was overwhelmingly deemed the least desirable trait to display in a workplace setting. A total of 45.8% of the sample listed the phrase "sensitive to the needs of others" as the least desirable trait.

*Research Question #4*

What is the relationship between gender and feminine value preferences in workplace settings?

The data suggested that gender provided two statistically significant relationships when tested (via Multiple Linear Regression) against the statements "Wearing dark colors is more professional than wearing bright colors", "Individuals should value work over family", "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress", "Good conflict-resolution skills require understanding", and "Being a leader is more important than being a follower". First, the data indicated a statistically significant relationship was present between "Individuals should value work over family" and gender, $F(2, 304) = 3.479$, ($p = .009$). The data suggested that individuals who identified their gender as feminine less likely to state that individuals should value work over family. Second, Multiple Linear Regression results also indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship present between the statement "Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress" and gender, $F(2, 304) = 10.221$, ($p = .000$). The data indicated that self-identified feminine participants were less likely to think that wearing pants was more professional than wearing a dress.

*Research Question #5*

How is femininity in the workplace viewed by college students?

Data was collected from three different survey questions to answer this specific research question. The respondents were asked to rank the three statements on a five-point Likert Scale that ranged from "*Strongly Agree*" to "*Strongly Disagree*." The data was tested via Descriptive Statistics and Frequency testing. The three questions/statements that were tested were: "I see those who display their femininity as professional" ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .894$), "I do not associate femininity with professionalism" ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.220$), and "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing" ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .906$). The results of these tests indicated that over half of the sample (65%) saw displaying femininity in the workplace as being professional, that exactly 50% of the participants did not associate femininity with professionalism, and that 62% of the participants selected categories that suggested that they viewed femininity in the workplace as a positive thing.

**Conclusion**

An analysis of the data resulted in the following conclusions:

*Research Question #1*

1. Results indicated that the older an individual was, the less likely they were to associate femininity with professionalism. This particular result aligns itself with the idea of generational characteristics. Since the age range in this study spanned from 18-55 years old, the generational categories of Baby Boomer, Generation X, Millennial (Gen Y), and Gen Z were all present in the study. The older participants in this study would likely be members of the Baby

Boomer (56-73) generation. According to Gibson, Greenwood, and Murphy (2009), the Baby Boomer generation tends to value more masculine traits in the workforce. These individuals often value competition, leadership, and defending one's own beliefs (Gibson et al., 2009). On the other hand, the younger generations (Gen Y and Gen Z) tend to adopt more feminine traits like being sympathetic, understanding, and loyal. With this being said, the data reinforced the existing research by stating that the older individuals in this study were less likely to associate femininity with professionalism because their definition of professionalism was centered upon that of masculinity.

2. Another finding indicated that individuals who identified as feminine were less likely to state that they did not associate femininity with professionalism. This finding was not surprising since individuals who identified as feminine were more than likely demonstrate femininity. As such, the belief that their displays of femininity were not professional would not be something that they would likely state or support.

3. The data indicated that out of all of the class standing categories, Senior students were less likely to assert that males display femininity less than females. Based on my personal experience teaching older college students, this result could have come about because Senior students tend to be much more experienced and independent in their Senior year than they are in years prior. As most individuals get older they develop a sense of maturity and begin to gain their independence. One way they gain this independence is

though de-indoctrination and by using their acquired critical thinking skills to create their own opinions and make sense of the world around them. As such, by Senior year these skills are typically much more developed than they were in years before. As a result, this group of students may be more likely to reject the common stereotype that males display femininity less than females because they have witnessed or learned otherwise through their own experiences over time.

4. Findings also indicated that non-white individuals were less likely to think that males display femininity less than females. There is a plethora of existing literature on racial oppression that describes how people who identify themselves as being non-white have experienced racism and/or discrimination in multiple settings. One of these settings is that of the workplace. As such, the individuals in this study who considered themselves non-white may have been less likely to think that males displayed femininity less than females because they have experienced the same type of stereotyping that the statement reflects. Perhaps this group of individuals' lived experiences and drive to debunk those stereotypes made them more inclined to answer this question in a way that suggested that males display their femininity as much as, or even more than females.

5. Finally, the results of this study indicated that individuals who identified their gender as masculine were more likely to think that femininity in the workplace is a positive thing than those who considered themselves feminine. It is highly recommend that additional research is conducted in response to

this finding to determine potential factors that would influence this

relationship. However, perhaps those who identified as masculine did not

know the potential repressions from demonstrating femininity in the

workplace and thus, did not see it as a threatening or negative thing. Those

who did demonstrate femininity may have indicated that they saw femininity

in the workplace as being a negative because they knew the consequences of

doing so and in turn, did not think of it favorably.

*Research Question #2*

1. Although there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and

the perception of the femininity or masculinity of a personal characteristic, the *p*-

value of the characteristic "independent" ($p = .053$) was very close to being

considered significant. The data from research question #3 indicated that this

specific characteristic was considered one of the top two most desirable

workplace traits by the participants. Due to this perceived desirability, it is not

surprising that out of all of the seven characteristics tested, "independent" came

the closest to achieving a statically significant relationship. Perhaps with a larger

sample size and more data collected, this characteristic could achieve a statistical

significance in the future.

*Research Question #3*

1. The seven traits that were evaluated in this research question were

"independent," "cheerful," "loyal," "has leadership abilities," "understanding,"

"self-reliant," and "sensitive to the needs of others." According to the Bem Sex

Role Inventory (1974), all of these traits are inherently more masculine or more

feminine. According to the Bem instrument, "independent," "has leadership abilities," and "self-reliant" are all considered masculine characteristics. On the other hand, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) states that the characteristics "cheerful," "loyal," "understanding," and "sensitive to the needs of others" are all feminine traits. With this being said, the respondents surprisingly indicated that a mix of both feminine and masculine traits was most desirable in workplace settings. Although the top two most desired characteristics were both considered masculine ("independent" and "has leadership abilities"), the next two most desirable characteristics were both feminine ("cheerful" and "loyal"). This was a surprising result since quite a bit of research claims that masculine traits are valued more than feminine traits in workplace environments (Banchefsky et al., 2016; Little et al., 2015; Maier, 1999).

*Research Question #4*

1. The data suggested that the participants who identified themselves as feminine were less likely to state that individuals should value work over family. This result reflects the findings of a large portion of gender-related literature (Bem, 1974; Goodman, 2009; Hollis, 2018; Silver, 2017). Those who identify as feminine are most commonly associated with the female sex. As such, the strong history that ties females to familial values is clearly illustrated here. The message that females should prioritize taking care of their families is a social norm that has conditioned society for generations. As a result, the fact that these findings mirrored this conditioned message was not surprising.

2.  The data also indicated that feminine participants were less likely to think that wearing pants was more professional than wearing a dress. Since dresses are commonly associated with being female, and this group of individuals chose to identify their gender as "feminine", wearing dresses may seem professional to this group because they may choose to wear them frequently and feel that they can or do maintain their professionalism while doing so.

*Research Question #5*

1. The data pertaining to two of the three questions used to determine college students' perceptions of femininity in the workplace, in general, indicated that the college students in this sample had an overall positive view of femininity in the workplace. As stated previously, over half of the sample (65%) indicated that they perceived displaying femininity in the workplace as being professional. A majority of the respondents indicated that they either "*Strongly Agree*" or *"Agree"* with the statement, "I see those who display their femininity as professional." Another 62% of the sample selected categories that suggested that they viewed "Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing." While these results are reassuring (because they indicated that perhaps college students are thinking in ways that will help make future workplace environments more inclusive), the participants' response to the statement "I do not associate femininity with professionalism" was a bit troubling. Precisely 50% of the participants who answered this question were in agreement that they did not associate femininity with professionalism. While two of these three questions indicated a clear positive view of femininity, I believe that this last question's results may have been

attributed to the way the statement was constructed by the researcher. Individuals who read the statement "I do not associate femininity with professionalism" could have interpreted it in a way that made them assess if they associated femininity with professionalism often or even instinctually. If the researcher had made sure mention a workpalce setting in the statement initially (Ex: "I do not associate femininity with professionalism in a workplace environment.") there may have been different results. Alternatively, the participants could have been feeling pressure to be politically correct in these statements, which could explain the inconsistency in responses. Either way, additional research should be conducted in an attempt to explain the data pertaining to the question "I do not associate femininity with professionalism."

**Implications**

The results of this study indicate a number of implications for both workforce educators and researchers who wish to carry out similar studies in the future. First, based on the events that transpired during the data collection process, it is my opinion that a definition of femininity should be given to the participants in any femininity-based research that takes place. As the definition of femininity is a construct, individuals may have slightly different definitions of the term which may impact the way they participate or respond in a study. Not providing a definition of the term could impact the results of future studies.

Another implication of this study's findings is associated with workforce educators and the future of workforce training. Due to the statistically significant relationship between various assessments of femininity and an individual's age, gender,

and race in this study, workforce educators should be very mindful of the demographics of the individuals they are training. They should consider how their students' demographics affect the way they view their place of work, and how they think about their actions within that institution. Workforce educators should consider how these demographic characteristics might affect their perception of the concepts of femininity and masculinity and should design a workforce training curriculum that both meets the organizations objective and reflects the potential perceptions of their students.

A third implication of this study pertains to masculinity/femininity scales used by researchers. Researchers need to test any scales they acquire or create that attempt to measure femininity and/or masculinity. Since masculinity and femininity are both constructs, developing tools to measure them can be quite challenging. The current researcher's attempt at creating two femininity scales were successful in the beginning of the survey design process ($a > .7$), but did not prove fruitful in the end. After revisions recommended by a femininity expert were implemented in these two sections, the scales received Cronbach's Alpha scores of .435 ($a = .435$) and .090 ($a = .090$). Since these scores did not indicate good reliability for the sections as a whole ($a > .7$), all tests had to be run one statement at a time rather than all together. As a result, the findings of this endeavor apply to future researchers as they are highly encouraged to utilize a scale that has established reliability.

The final implication of this research is directed towards workplace educators yet again. This study's results indicated that in general, this sample had a positive perception of femininity in the workplace. Since these individuals will be joining the workforce and more than likely taking on leadership roles in the coming years, workforce educators

need to note this positive reaction to femininity. Workforce educators need to use this information during their period of curriculum development to help create a more inclusive workplace atmosphere for all. Since the results did not indicate an overwhelmingly negative perception of femininity in the workplace, I would recommend workplace educators capitalize on this in order to provide individuals with a clearer understanding of what femininity is, and to help create a more welcoming environment where everyone can feel comfortable simply being themselves.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Since the topic of this study was on the subject of femininity within itself, there are several opportunities for future research. The following recommendations are not prioritized in any particular order but would undoubtedly be beneficial to understanding the perceptions of femininity that transpire in the workplace.

1. Longitudinal studies to determine if people's overall perception of femininity change over time.

2. This study focused on the opinions of 310 college students who were attending a university in the Southeastern part of the United States. It is recommended that future research increases the sample size and utilizes a sample that is more representative of either an entire state or a national population to make the findings more generalizable. Individuals could accomplish these goals by collecting data from multiple universities within the same state or by collecting data from universities across the nation.

3. Like many studies before it, this study utilized two five-point Likert Scales that ranged from "*Strongly Agree*" to "*Strongly Disagree*." While it is highly

controversial, it is recommended that future research removes the "*Neutral*" option in Likert Scales. This is suggested so the researcher(s) may be able to understand a participant's fundamental thoughts on femininity better. Often the "*Neutral*" option is used by the participants as a way to avoid thinking more in-depth about the topic, and is used to help them to move on. As such, removing the "*Neutral*" option may prompt participants to think more critically about the issue at hand and may yield more accurate and reflective results.

4. Future research should also take "political correctness" into consideration. Societal norms are currently imploring the prioritizing the act of being "politically correct." This is especially true on controversial topics (like that of demonstrations of femininity in the workplace). As a result, researchers should be mindful of the potential inclination participants have to being "politically correct" and implement measures to control for this.

5. More research is needed on the topic of femininity by itself. Most of the existing literature focuses on the topic of femininity, but consistently relates it to masculinity or sexuality. This idea was mentioned by Goodman (2009) and appeared evident after reviewing the literature. As a result, future research should attempt to define and study femininity not as a dichotomy with masculinity or as an extension of sexuality, but simply as a construct that is worthy of being examined on its own.

6. More research is needed on how gender, not sex, affects an individual's perception of femininity. Most of the current research focuses on sex and as a result, future research that focuses on the concept of gender can help to contribute

to the small body of existing knowledge. Researchers can do this by simply asking an individual to identify the gender or genders they relate with rather than asking for their biological sex.

7. Additional research is also needed that reflects marginalized groups' perceptions of femininity in the workplace. These groups can be based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, etc. A majority of the literature on femininity is given from the standpoint of white females. Since femininity is demonstrated by all genders, races, ethnicities, sexualities, etc., more research is needed that features the perceptions and opinions of the members of today's marginalized groups. Researchers can contribute to this need by specifically limiting their sample to include only members of these groups, or they can even pick one marginalized group from which to draw their sample.

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## Welcome

This survey is designed to examine college students' opinions and attitudes on femininity in the workplace. The information gathered in this study is intended to help indicate potential shifts in future workplace culture and practices. Additionally, this information is intended to promote diversity and inclusion efforts within workplace environments.

If you have already taken this survey, please do not take it again. All participants must be 18 years of age or older to take this survey and must have been employed at some point in their life.

This survey will take approximately 6 minutes. **Completion and submission of this survey indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study**. For information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board (334)-844-5966.

The information you provide will be confidential. The information gained from this survey will only be reported as group data, at no time will your responses be individually reported. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Amanda Ballouk at (678) 296-4071/amb0160@auburn.edu or her dissertation chair, Dr. Maria Witte, at (334) 844-0299/wittemm@auburn.edu.

## Consent

You must be **at least eighteen years old** to take this survey. If you have already filled out this survey, please DO NOT take it again. Your participation is anonymous and your responses are completely confidential. You may also skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

*Please answer the following questions as they apply to you in the present.*

What is your age?

I am taking a college/university class(es) for credit this semester and will be receiving final grades and course credit for these classes at the end of this academic semester.

○ Yes
○ No

Have you ever been employed?

○ Yes
○ No

*Please evaluate each word/phrase below and indicate on the scale if you think the word/phrase*

*is more masculine ("M") or feminine ("F") in nature.*

| | Masculine–<br>1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Feminine–<br>7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Independent | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Cheerful | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Loyal | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Has leadership abilities | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Understanding | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Self-reliant | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Sensitive to the needs of others | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*Please rank the following terms/phrases in order from most desirable in a workplace setting (top of the list) to least desirable in a workplace setting (bottom of the list) based on your own opinion.*

Independent
Cheerful
Loyal
Has leadership abilities
Understanding
Self-reliant
Sensitive to the needs of others

↑
↓

↑
↓

*For the following questions, please indicate* your agreement and disagreement with each statement in the corresponding box. <u>Please read each statement carefully and think about the statements in regards to a workplace setting.</u>

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18.) I see femininity in the workplace. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 19.) I see those who display their femininity as professional. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 20.) I do not associate femininity with professionalism. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 21.) Males display femininity less than females. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 22.) Femininity in the workplace is a positive thing. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*For the following questions, please indicate* your agreement and disagreement with each statement in the corresponding box. <u>Please read each statement carefully and think about the statements in regards to a workplace setting.</u>

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23.) Wearing dark colors is more professional than wearing bright colors. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 24.) Individuals should value work over family. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 25.) Wearing pants is more professional than wearing a dress. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 26.) Good conflict-resolution skills require understanding. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

27.) Being a leader is more important than being a follower.　　○　　○　　○　　○　　○

**Please answer the following questions as they apply to you in the present.**

What is your current class standing?

○ Freshman
○ Sophomore
○ Junior
○ Senior
○ Graduate Student

What academic college or school does your major fall under?

○ College of Agriculture
○ College of Architecture, Design, & Construction
○ Raymond J. Harbert College of Business
○ College of Education
○ Samuel Ginn College of Engineering
○ School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences
○ College of Human Sciences
○ College of Liberal Arts
○ School of Nursing
○ Harrison School of Pharmacy
○ College of Sciences and Mathematics
○ College of Veterinary Medicine

If you were to self-report your gender, which of the following answer choices would you choose to best

describe yourself?

○ Masculine
○ Feminine
○ Transgender
○ Non-Binary
○ I prefer not to say

What type of industry has *most* of your previous employment experience been associated with?

○ Agriculture & Forestry/Wildlife (Example- Farming, Landscape Services, Extermination)
○ Business and Information (Example- Marketing, Retail, Non-Profit Organization)
○ Construction/Utilities/Contracting (Example- Engineering, Contractor, AC & Heating)
○ Education (Example- Child Care Services, Real Estate School, Cosmetology School, Tutoring)
○ Finance and Insurance (Example- Accountant, Insurance, Bookkeeping)
○ Food and Hospitality (Example- Restaurant/Bar, Hotel, Grocery/Convenience Store)
○ Health Services- (Example- Dentistry, Medical Office, Athletic Trainer, Pharmacy)
○ Motor Vehicle- (Example- Car Wash/Detailing, Motor Vehicle Sales, Motor Vehicle Repair)
○ Natural Resources/Environmental- (Example- Conservation Organizations, Land Surveying, Pipeline)
○ Personal Services- (Example- Beauty Salon, Animal Boarding, Fitness Center, Photography, Event Planning)
○ Real Estate & Housing- (Example- Real Estate, Interior Design, Warehouse/Storage)
○ Safety/Security & Legal- (Example- Attorney, Locksmith, Private Investigator, Security Guard)
○ Transportation- (Example- Limousine Services, Taxi Services, Towing, Boat Services)
○ Other

○ Not applicable

What type of employment or internship statuses have you held before?

- [ ] Part- time employee
- [ ] Full-time employee
- [ ] Temporary employee
- [ ] Not applicable

## Did your previous work experience typically have you working alongside more males or females?

- ( ) Males
- ( ) Females
- ( ) Males and females were equally staffed at my place(s) of employment

## Are you currently employed?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

## What type of employment status do you currently hold?

- ( ) Part- time employee
- ( ) Full-time employee
- ( ) Temporary employee
- ( ) Not applicable

## What type of industry are you currently working in?

○ Agriculture & Forestry/Wildlife (Example- Farming, Landscape Services, Extermination)

○ Business and Information (Example- Marketing, Retail, Non-Profit Organization)

○ Construction/Utilities/Contracting (Example- Engineering, Contractor, AC & Heating)

○ Education (Example- Child Care Services, Real Estate School, Cosmetology School, Tutoring)

○ Finance and Insurance (Example- Accountant, Insurance, Bookkeeping)

○ Food and Hospitality (Example- Restaurant/Bar, Hotel, Grocery/Convenience Store)

○ Health Services- (Example- Dentistry, Medical Office, Athletic Trainer, Pharmacy)

○ Motor Vehicle- (Example- Car Wash/Detailing, Motor Vehicle Sales, Motor Vehicle Repair)

○ Natural Resources/Environmental- (Example- Conservation Organizations, Land Surveying, Pipeline)

○ Personal Services- (Example- Beauty Salon, Animal Boarding, Fitness Center, Photography, Event Planning)

○ Real Estate & Housing- (Example- Real Estate, Interior Design, Warehouse/Storage)

○ Safety/Security & Legal- (Example- Attorney, Locksmith, Private Investigator, Security Guard)

○ Transportation- (Example- Limousine Services, Taxi Services, Towing, Boat Services)

○ Other

[                                                                  ]

○ Not applicable


Do you currently work alongside more males or females?

○ Males

○ Females

○ Males and females are equally staffed at my place(s) of employment


What race do you classify yourself as? (Please select all that apply)

☐ White
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hispanic
☐ Asian

- [ ] American Indian or Alaska Native
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] Other

Do you identify as Hispanic?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

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# Appendix B. Survey Script

**<u>SURVEY SCRIT</u>**

**<u>(To read in classes before administering the online survey)</u>**

Good (Morning, Afternoon, or Evening)!

My name is Amanda Ballouk and I am a Doctoral Candidate here at Auburn University. I am currently conducting a study that seeks to examine college student perceptions of femininity in the workplace. You all were chosen for this study because you are current college students. To participate in this study, you **MUST** be eighteen years or older and you **MUST** be a student currently enrolled at Auburn University who will receive course credit at the end of the term. Additionally, to participate in this study you must have some type of employment experience. The information you provide will be confidential and all information gathered will be reported as group data, no individual answers will be reported. The survey will take approximately 6 minutes to complete. **Completion and submission of this survey indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study.** If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact me at (678) 296-4071 or amb0160@auburn.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Maria Witte, at (334) 844-0299 or wittemm@auburn.edu. Thank you for your time.

# Appendix C. BEM Sex Role Inventory

## Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI)

Rate yourself on each item, on a scale from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (almost always true).  When you have completed the inventory, transfer your ratings to the inventory score sheet.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. _____ | self-reliant | | 31. _____ | makes decisions easily |
| 2. _____ | yielding | | 32. _____ | compassionate |
| 3. _____ | helpful | | 33. _____ | sincere |
| 4. _____ | defends own beliefs | | 34. _____ | self-sufficient |
| 5. _____ | cheerful | | 35. _____ | eager to soothe hurt feelings |
| 6. _____ | moody | | 36. _____ | conceited |
| 7. _____ | independent | | 37. _____ | dominant |
| 8. _____ | shy | | 38. _____ | soft-spoken |
| 9. _____ | conscientious | | 39. _____ | likable |
| 10. _____ | athletic | | 40. _____ | masculine |
| 11. _____ | affectionate | | 41. _____ | warm |
| 12. _____ | theatrical | | 42. _____ | solemn |
| 13. _____ | assertive | | 43. _____ | willing to take a stand |
| 14. _____ | flatterable | | 44. _____ | tender |
| 15. _____ | happy | | 45. _____ | friendly |
| 16. _____ | strong personality | | 46. _____ | aggressive |
| 17. _____ | loyal | | 47. _____ | gullible |
| 18. _____ | unpredictable | | 48. _____ | inefficient |
| 19. _____ | forceful | | 49. _____ | acts as a leader |
| 20. _____ | feminine | | 50. _____ | childlike |
| 21. _____ | reliable | | 51. _____ | adaptable |
| 22. _____ | analytical | | 52. _____ | individualistic |
| 23. _____ | sympathetic | | 53. _____ | does not use harsh language |
| 24. _____ | jealous | | 54. _____ | unsystematic |
| 25. _____ | has leadership abilities | | 55. _____ | competitive |
| 26. _____ | sensitive to the needs of others | | 56. _____ | loves children |
| 27. _____ | truthful | | 57. _____ | tactful |
| 28. _____ | willing to take risks | | 58. _____ | ambitious |
| 29. _____ | understanding | | 59. _____ | gentle |
| 30. _____ | secretive | | 60. _____ | conventional |

## Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI)

### Inventory Score sheet
Enter your ratings in the appropriate columns

| Column 1 | Column 2 | Column 3 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | 32 | 33 |
| 34 | 35 | 36 |
| 37 | 38 | 39 |
| 40 | 41 | 42 |
| 43 | 44 | 45 |
| 46 | 47 | 48 |
| 49 | 50 | 51 |
| 52 | 53 | 54 |
| 55 | 56 | 57 |
| 58 | 59 | 60 |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

- Add up your ratings in column 1 and divide total by 20.
- Add up your ratings in column 2 and divide total by 20.
- Add up your ratings in column 3 and divide total by 20.

140