

# Think Crisis–Think Female: The Glass Cliff and Contextual Variation in the Think Manager–Think Male Stereotype

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The “think manager–think male” (TMTM) association underlies many gender inequalities in the workplace. However, research into the “glass cliff” has demonstrated that the suitability of male and female managers varies as a function of company performance such that in times of poor performance people may “think female” (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). Three studies examined gender and managerial stereotypes in the context of companies that are doing well or doing badly. Study 1 reproduced TMTM associations for descriptions of managers of successful companies but demonstrated a reversal for managers of unsuccessful companies. Study 2 examined the prescriptive nature of these stereotypes. No TMTM relationship was found for ideal managers of successful companies, but ideal managers of unsuccessful companies were associated with the female stereotype. Study 3 suggested that women may be favored in times of poor performance, not because they are expected to improve the situation, but because they are seen to be good people managers and can take the blame for organizational failure. Together, the studies illustrate the importance of context as a moderator of the TMTM association. Practical and theoretical implications for gender discrimination in the workplace are discussed.

*Keywords:* gender, stereotypes, women, leadership, glass cliff

Despite encouraging statistics suggesting that the number of women in management positions is on the increase (Catalyst, 2009b; United Nations Development Program, 2008), women continue to face a number of significant barriers when trying to climb the corporate ladder (Eagly & Carli, 2007). While women increasingly attain roles in the lower echelons of management, they continue to be markedly underrepresented at senior levels of the management hierarchy (e.g., Catalyst, 2009a; European Commission, 2005). In addition to this numerical gender asymmetry, research has demonstrated that the experience of female leaders is very different from that of male leaders. Female leaders receive less favorable evaluations compared with their male counterparts, even for identical behavior (e.g., Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky,

1992; Kulich, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007). Moreover, many men—particularly male managers—remain skeptical of women’s leadership ability (Sczesny, 2003).

Psychological explanations for such gender-based differentiation have tended to focus on the perceived incompatibility between beliefs about what it means to be a good manager and what it means to be female, which is known as the “think manager–think male” (TMTM) association (e.g., Agars, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Schein, 1973, 1975). Indeed, this persistent association has been identified as one of the key hurdles that female leaders must overcome (Antal & Izraeli, 1993; Wellington, Kropf, & Gerkovich, 2003). Although there is evidence that traditional gender stereotypes continue to impede women’s attempts to climb the corporate ladder (Eagly & Carli, 2007), research has tended to ignore variation in the content of these stereotypes. Indeed, Vecchio (2002, p. 652) argued that such research is “limited due to the omission of contextual dimensions.”

In an attempt to address this gap in the literature, this article examines contextual variations in the TMTM association. Building on work on the “glass cliff” (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007), which has suggested that women are more likely than men to be appointed as leaders in times of poor company performance, we examine the association between managerial stereotypes and gender stereotypes as a function of company performance. In three studies we demonstrate the contextual flexibility of the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions and demonstrate that in times of crisis people may “think female.” In doing

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so we also provide systematic evidence for the role of stereotypes in explaining the psychological processes underlying the glass cliff phenomenon.

### Think Manager–Think Male

Early work into the stereotypes of managers, of men, and of women—and the associations between these stereotypes—was conducted by Schein in the early 1970s. Schein (1973) developed a Descriptive Index that consisted of 92 adjectives and descriptive terms (e.g., creative, intelligent, emotionally stable) and presented it to male middle manager participants, asking them to indicate how characteristic each term was of either (a) women in general, (b) men in general, or (c) successful middle managers. The results demonstrated that male middle managers believed that men were more likely than women to possess the characteristics associated with managerial success. Indeed, of the 92 descriptors used, 60 were seen as characteristic of both managers and men (e.g., aggressive, objective, and forceful). In contrast, only eight descriptors (e.g., understanding, helpful, aware of the feelings of others, and intuitive) were seen as being shared by managers and women. These results were also replicated in a follow-up study with female middle managers (Schein, 1975). This reliable association between managerial attributes and male attributes was encapsulated by Schein in her coining of the phrase “think manager–think male” (TMTM).

However, these managerial and gender stereotypes do not simply *describe* people’s characteristics and behavior. They are also strongly *prescriptive* in the sense that they entail expectations of the way that people should act and thus characterize desirable behavior (Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Sczesny, 2003). As a result, these stereotypes can produce at least two forms of prejudice: (a) less favorable evaluation of the *potential* for women to take on leadership roles compared with men and (b) less favorable *evaluations* of the actual behavior of female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

In the first form of prejudice, the perceived unsuitability of women for such roles is seen to arise from the *lack of fit* between gender and occupational stereotypes (e.g., Heilman, 1983; Kent & Moss, 1994). As Schein (2001) noted, if a managerial position is associated with masculine attributes, then, all else being equal, a female candidate will be seen as less qualified than a male candidate. Stereotype-based evaluations of leaders can also be used to explain differences in the experiences of male and female managers. Eagly et al. (1992) demonstrated that, even when differences in behavior are controlled for, female leaders are evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts. For example, while an assertive male manager is seen as displaying appropriate leadership, a female leader who behaves in the same way is considered unacceptably pushy. As a result of these evaluations, female leaders are often in a “lose–lose” situation. If they conform to the female stereotype they are not seen to be a proper leader. But if they conform to the leader stereotype they are not seen to be a “proper” woman. Violation of either of these stereotypes can then lead to negative evaluations and strong sanctions (e.g., Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 1992; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

### The Importance of Context

Research into the TMTM phenomenon has tended to focus on describing the content of people’s beliefs about men, women, and leaders. However, there is some evidence that such stereotypes may be slowly changing over time (e.g., Duehr & Bono, 2006; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). With the increase in the popularity of transformational leadership (e.g., Bass, 1985), there has been a recognition of the effectiveness of traditionally feminine traits, giving rise to a so-called “leadership advantage” for women (Eagly & Carli, 2003; but see also Vecchio, 2002, 2003). There is also evidence that with women’s increased participation in the workforce, the view of women is changing—especially amongst women themselves (Duehr & Bono, 2006). In line with these ideas, while the TMTM phenomenon is seen to be remarkably durable (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Schein, 2001; Sczesny, Bosak, Neff, & Schyns, 2004), there is some evidence that the effect is attenuating over time, again, especially for women (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schein, Mueller, & Jacobson, 1989).

Although variations in managerial and gender stereotypes have been examined over time, very little research has examined their situational flexibility. This is an important oversight because evidence of contextual flexibility may help to explain why women have increased representation in particular sectors (e.g., healthcare or retail; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2003) or particular roles (e.g., human resources or administration; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2002). Consistent with the idea of flexible leadership stereotypes, there is evidence to suggest that no single prototype of a good leader exists across all situations (e.g., Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Turner & Haslam, 2001). Generally speaking, successful leadership depends on a match between leader characteristics and the features of the situation that a leader confronts. Thus, a particular type of leader may be seen as highly effective in one situation but judged as ineffective in another. Extending such analysis, more recent approaches to leadership have suggested not only that evaluations of leadership effectiveness vary across situations but also that perceptions of what it means to be a good leader are dynamic and context dependent. In particular, this is true of leadership categorization theory (e.g., Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984) and the social identity approach to leadership (e.g., Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2010; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996).

Given that no simple or universal stereotype of leadership is likely to inform perception and action across all situations, it is worth noting that Schein’s (1973, 1975) work into the TMTM association asked participants to describe a “successful middle manager” and as such focused exclusively (if implicitly) on perceptions of managers of successful companies. There is, however, some evidence that what is needed from a leader when all is going smoothly might be very different from what is required or expected in times of crisis or risk (Haslam et al., 2001; Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Meindl, 1993; Pillai & Meindl, 1998). For example, Pillai and Meindl (1998) identified a negative relationship between leader evaluations and perceptions of crisis, such that those who have leadership positions during a time of crisis are more likely to be seen as poor leaders and blamed for being “part of the problem” (Emrich, 1999). In this way, when one thinks of

leaders in a crisis situation, one may not expect them to have, or attribute to them, the same traits as the typical manager of a successful company.

Consistent with these findings, a recent program of research by Ryan, Haslam, and colleagues (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007; see also Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010) has demonstrated that leadership appointments made in a time of crisis are typically very different from those that are made when all is going well. More specifically, archival and experimental work has demonstrated that female leaders are more likely to be appointed in a time of poor performance or when there is an increased risk of failure, and, as such, their leadership positions can be seen as more precarious than those of men (see also Adams, Gupta, & Leeth, 2009; Ryan & Haslam, 2009). Extending the metaphor of the “glass ceiling” and the “glass elevator,” Ryan and Haslam (2005) referred to this phenomenon as the “glass cliff.”

### The Present Research

The phenomenon of the glass cliff suggests that in times of organizational crisis those who are responsible for appointing leaders may not automatically make the TMTM association. Indeed, the increased likelihood of appointing women to leadership roles in these circumstances suggests that in these contexts an alternative association may be in operation. More specifically, in times of crisis, it may be the case that people are more likely to make the association “think crisis–think female” (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Supporting this assertion, there is some evidence that people do look to stereotypes about gender and crisis management to explain the existence of glass cliffs. Research by Ryan, Haslam, and Postmes (2007) demonstrated that when asked to develop their own spontaneous explanations for the processes underlying the appointment of women to glass cliff positions, approximately 16% of women and 10% of men suggested that gender stereotypes played a role. More specifically, individuals suggested that women were chosen as leaders in times of crisis because of their “special” abilities, including the fact that “women always want to help the underdog,” that women “have more skills to balance risk,” and that they “tend to cope with failure more pragmatically than men” (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 190). Indeed, such stereotypes are illustrated by Eleanor Roosevelt’s observation that “A woman is like a tea bag: You never know how strong she is until she gets into hot water” (Ayres, 1996, p. 199)—a statement that implies that women have particular skills that come to the fore in times of crisis.

Consistent with the notion of women as crisis managers, as noted above, in Schein’s (1973, 1975) original studies there were a small number of traits associated with managerial success that participants believed women were more likely to possess than men. Research on crisis management has suggested that some of these traits (e.g., being understanding, intuitive, and creative) are particularly useful in times of crisis (e.g., Eisenback, Watson, & Pillai, 1999; Lalonde, 2004; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Indirect evidence for the variability in the TMTM stereotype can also be seen in the work of Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010). These researchers replicated the glass cliff effect and in doing so demonstrated that while masculine attributes associated with success predicted the appointment of leaders in times of success, feminine

attributes associated with crisis predicted appointments in times of crisis. However, as the research did not examine feminine attributes associated with success and masculine attributes associated with crisis, there has not yet been a systematic investigation of the content of the think crisis–think female association.

To more directly test for the possible existence of a think crisis–think female stereotype, the present article reports findings from three empirical studies. Study 1 extends previous research by Schein (1973, 1975) by examining people’s descriptions of managers of successful and unsuccessful companies and their links to gender stereotypes. Here we hypothesize that while the TMTM association may exist for managers of successful companies, a think crisis–think female association will emerge when examining managers of unsuccessful companies. Study 2 builds on this research by examining this same hypothesis in the context of prescriptive stereotypes. Study 3 moves beyond the content of these stereotypes to examine the circumstances under which gendered traits are seen to be useful in times of crisis. Here we hypothesize that feminine traits will be seen as more desirable when a manager is expected to carry out more interpersonal tasks or take a more passive role but that masculine traits will be seen as more desirable when a more traditional and active management role is specified.

Taken together, the three studies provide evidence for the think crisis–think female association and the circumstances under which this association occurs. Although there are many different ways in which an organization can experience crises (Pearson & Claire, 1998), because we are building on previous work on the glass cliff (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008) and other research into organizational crises (e.g., Probst & Raisch, 2005) throughout this article we have defined crisis and a lack of success as a steadily declining pattern of company performance.

### Prestudy

To establish the masculinity and femininity of the traits in Schein’s Descriptive Index, we conducted a prestudy.<sup>1</sup>

### Method

**Participants.** In total, 99 participants took part in an online survey,<sup>2</sup> all of whom indicated that they had workplace experience. Of these, 42 were under the age of 20, 29 were aged 21–30, 15 were aged 31–40, 11 were aged 41–50, and 1 was aged 51–60 (1 did not specify). There were 75 female and 21 male participants (three did not respond). Most participants were from the United States, and approximately 40% indicated that they were university

<sup>1</sup> Data for the prestudy and Studies 1, 2, and 3 were all collected from the same Internet website (Psychological Research on the Net). The studies were conducted one after another, each advertised under the same study title (“Describing People”). The prestudy and Studies 1 and 2 were conducted within a 1-month period of each other. Study 3 was conducted approximately 6 months later.

<sup>2</sup> The prestudy and the three main studies were all conducted online (rather than in the laboratory or within any particular organization) so that we could access a large and heterogeneous sample of participants with work experience from across a range of industries and organizations (Birnbau, 2004). Moreover, as all studies were collected via the same website, samples are comparable.

students (with workplace experience), with the remainder working in a wide range of occupations, from waiter, to accountant, to attorney. When asked to indicate the seniority of their positions at work on a 4-point scale from *very junior* through to *very senior*, 13.1% reported being very junior, 32.3% were intermediate, 9.1% were senior, and 5.1% were very senior (40.4% did not respond).<sup>3</sup>

**Design, materials, and procedure.** The questionnaire was conducted online and was accessed through a site advertising psychological research (Psychological Research on the Net [http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html]). No incentives were involved, but it was specified that participants must have work experience. Participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions by the online questionnaire software. Of the participants allocated to the masculine condition, 45 completed the questionnaire (10 men and 33 women, two did not respond), and of the participants allocated to the female condition, 54 completed the questionnaire (11 men and 42 women, one did not respond). All received the Schein Descriptive Index containing 92 descriptive terms. Following the method developed by Schein, participants were asked to indicate how characteristic each term was of either “women in general” or “men in general.” Each descriptive term was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not characteristic*, 2 = *somewhat uncharacteristic*, 3 = *neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic*, 4 = *somewhat characteristic*, 5 = *characteristic*). Finally, participants answered some basic demographic questions, including age, gender, a check on whether they had workplace experience, whether they were a student, their occupation, and their seniority. They were then debriefed in full.

## Results

Data consisted of participants’ ratings of how characteristic each trait was of either women in general or men in general. To establish whether each trait was seen to be characteristic of each of the categories, *t* tests were conducted to determine whether the means were significantly above the scale midpoint (i.e., 3), and whether they were significantly different for men and women. Stereotypically female traits included traits that were seen as being characteristic of women, but not men (20 traits, including sympathetic, understanding, grateful, passive, and tactful), and traits that were characteristic of both women and men, but significantly more so for women (15 traits, including creative, talkative, cheerful, and helpful). Stereotypically masculine traits included traits that were seen as being characteristic of men, but not women (15 traits, including aggressive, devious, hides emotion, decisive, and dominant), and traits that were characteristic of both men and women, but significantly more so for men (13 traits, including adventurous, independent, firm, and self-confident). There were also 21 traits that were seen as characteristic of both women and men (including leadership ability, frank, intelligent, competent, ambitious, and logical) and eight traits that were seen as being characteristic of neither women nor men (including uncertain, shy, and bitter). These means were used in Studies 1 and 2 to calculate intraclass correlations and determine the nature of the stereotype associations.

### Study 1

Study 1 was designed to replicate and extend the original Schein (1973, 1975) studies by examining stereotypic associations be-

tween gender and management in times of success and crisis. In line with Schein’s original findings and with subsequent research (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Schein, 2001), we hypothesized that the TMTM association would manifest itself when participants were asked to describe managers of successful companies and that such managers would be seen as more similar to men in general than to women in general (Hypothesis 1 [H1]). However, beyond this, in line with findings from the literature on the glass cliff, we hypothesized that when asked to describe managers of unsuccessful companies, these managers would be seen as more similar to women than to men (H2).

## Method

**Participants.** In total, 72 people participated in the study, all of whom indicated that they had workplace experience. Of these, 32 were under the age of 20, 21 were aged 21–30, 9 were aged 31–40, 6 were aged 41–50, and 3 were aged 51–60 (1 did not specify). There were 49 female and 23 male participants. Most participants were from the United States. Approximately 40% of participants indicated that they were university students (with workplace experience), with the remainder working in a wide range of occupations, from retail service, to teacher, to engineer. When reporting the seniority of their positions at work on a 4-point scale, 18.1% were quite junior, 29.2% were intermediate, 9.7% were senior, and 5.6% were very senior (37.5% did not respond).

**Design, materials, and procedure.** The questionnaire was conducted online and was accessed through the same research site as the prestudy (Psychological Research on the Net). Participants randomly received one of two versions of the Schein Descriptive Index, allocated by the online questionnaire software. Of the participants allocated to the unsuccessful condition, 37 completed the questionnaire (12 men, 25 women), and of the participants allocated to the successful condition, 35 completed the questionnaire (11 men, 24 women). Following the method developed by Schein (1973) and based on manipulations used in previous glass cliff research (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008), participants were asked to indicate how characteristic each term was of either managers from successful companies (a manager from a company that has experienced steadily increasing performance over the past 5 years) or managers from unsuccessful companies (a manager from a company that has experienced steadily decreasing performance over the past 5 years). Each descriptive term was rated on the same 5-point scale used in the prestudy. Finally, participants answered some basic demographic questions, including age, gender, a check on whether they had workplace experience, whether they were a student, their occupation, and their seniority. They were then debriefed in full.

## Results

Data consisted of participants’ ratings of how characteristic each trait was of either managers of successful companies or managers

<sup>3</sup> Across all studies there was a relatively high proportion of participants who did not indicate their seniority. Examination of responses about occupation revealed that some of these nonrespondents were retired, some were currently unemployed, some were self-employed, and some were also studying. Some simply chose not to respond to this question.

of unsuccessful companies. One-sample *t* tests were conducted to determine whether the means were significantly above the scale midpoint (i.e., 3). To examine whether managerial stereotypes are indeed gendered, we listed (see Table 1) the attributes seen to be characteristic of managers of successful and unsuccessful companies as a function of whether they were also seen to be stereotypical of either men or women (i.e., traits that the prestudy determined to be significantly characteristic of one gender and not the other and traits that were seen as significantly more characteristic of one gender than the other). As can be seen from this table, descriptions of managers of successful companies corroborated previous TMTM research. Of the 67 attributes seen to be descriptive of these managers (being significantly characteristic), nine were also seen to be stereotypical of men (including decisive, forceful, and aggressive), but only five were also seen to be stereotypical of women (including intuitive, sophisticated, and neat). However, a different pattern of results was found for descriptions of managers of unsuccessful companies. Here, of the 34 traits seen as descriptive, only two (hasty and quarrelsome) were also seen to be stereotypical of men, while eight were also seen to be stereotypical of women (including fearful, passive, and sympathetic). A chi-square test revealed a significant association between attributes seen as stereotypical of men and characteristic of managers of successful companies and between attributes seen as stereotypical of women and characteristic of managers of unsuccessful companies,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.61, p = .03$ .

Although an analysis of characteristic and gendered traits gives us a flavor of the stereotypes, such an analysis necessarily concentrates on a small proportion of the data. To investigate further the associations between company performance and gender stereotypes and to make full use of all of the data (not just characteristic or gendered traits), intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) were calculated and traditional Pearson's *r* product-moment correlational analysis was performed using the mean values of traits for each condition. ICCs (using randomized groups analysis of variance) are traditionally used to investigate the

TMTM association (e.g., Schein, 1973, 1975; and see Heilman et al., 1989, for a description of the use of these statistics). ICCs are used as an indication of the similarity of the ratings evoked by the various groups, with a high ICC reflecting a similarity of descriptions and a low ICC reflecting difference.

As can be seen from Table 2, in line with H1, overall descriptions of managers of successful companies and men were significantly more similar to each another ( $ICC = .79, p < .001$ ) than descriptions of managers of successful companies and women ( $ICC = .46, p < .05; z = 3.83, p < .001$ ). The TMTM association was apparent for both male and female participants; however, the nature of this association did vary across gender. Male participants tended to see a manager of a successful company as being similar to men ( $ICC = .61, p < .001$ ) and not to women ( $ICC = .09, ns; z = 4.13, p < .001$ ). In contrast, female participants tended to see managers of successful companies to be similar to both men ( $ICC = .81, p < .001$ ) and women ( $ICC = .51, p < .001$ ), but the association was significantly stronger among male traits than among female traits ( $z = 3.76, p < .001$ ).

In partial support for H2, ICCs revealed that there was a significant negative relationship between descriptions of managers of unsuccessful companies and men ( $ICC = -.63, p < .001$ ). Descriptions of managers of unsuccessful companies and women were positively related, although not significantly so ( $ICC = .17, p = .11$ ). Nevertheless, these ICCs were significantly different from one another ( $z = 6.09, p < .001$ ), such that managers of unsuccessful companies had more in common with women than with men. Here, there was also a difference between male and female participants. Female participants tended to see a manager of a unsuccessful company as being similar to women ( $ICC = .22, p < .05$ ) and dissimilar to men ( $ICC = -.59, p < .001; z = 3.79, p < .001$ ). In contrast, overall, male participants did not see managers of unsuccessful companies to be similar to either women ( $ICC = .17, ns$ ) or men ( $ICC = -.11, ns$ ), but the associations were significantly different from one another ( $z = 1.88, p = .03$ ).

Table 1

*Study 1: Attributes Seen to Be Characteristic of Managers of Successful or Unsuccessful Companies and Also Stereotypical of Men or Women*

Attribute	Stereotypical of men	Stereotypical of women
Characteristic of managers of successful companies	Decisive (4.11, 3.98)	Intuitive (3.89, 4.04)
	Dominant (4.11, 4.24)	Sophisticated (3.89, 3.98)
	Feelings not easily hurt (3.97, 3.65)	Tactful (3.83, 3.73)
	Able to separate feeling from ideas (3.97, 3.46)	Neat (3.80, 4.22)
	Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance (3.94, 3.85)	Understanding (3.69, 4.49)
	Forceful (3.81, 3.88)	
	Hides emotion (3.69, 3.90)	
	High need for autonomy (3.69, 3.80)	
	Aggressive (3.63, 4.10)	
Characteristic of managers of unsuccessful companies	Hasty (3.57, 3.41)	Fearful (4.24, 3.88)
	Quarrelsome (3.43, 3.50)	Wavering in decision (4.23, 3.64)
		Nervous (3.91, 3.51)
		Passive (3.80, 3.46)
		Sympathetic (3.73, 4.67)
		Desire to avoid controversy (3.62, 3.55)
		Frivolous (3.49, 3.38)
		Understanding (3.46, 4.49)

Note. Figures in parentheses refer to the mean level of characterizability for managers and for gender, respectively.

Table 2  
*Study 1: Correlations Between Descriptions of Managers of Successful and Unsuccessful Companies and Men and Women in General as a Function of Gender of Participant*

Gender	Successful		Unsuccessful	
	ICC	<i>r</i>	ICC	<i>r</i>
Men				
Overall	.79**	.73**	-.63**	-.34**
Male Ps	.61**	.49**	-.11	-.06
Female Ps	.81**	.74**	-.59**	-.34**
Women				
Overall	.46*	.31*	.17	.14
Male Ps	.09	.05	.17	.09
Female Ps	.51**	.36*	.22*	.19

Note. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; *r* = Pearson's product-moment correlation; Ps = participants.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Consistent with H1 and previous research into the TMTM association, there was a stronger relationship between the stereotypes of the managers of successful companies and men than between those of managers of successful companies and women. These findings suggest that the TMTM stereotype is still clearly in evidence, a finding that resonates with the continuing underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In line with past research demonstrating gender differences in gender and managerial stereotypes (e.g., Duehr & Bono, 2006; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schein et al., 1989; but see Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002), male respondents tended to see managers of successful companies as having masculine traits but not feminine traits, while female respondents saw managers of successful companies as having both masculine and feminine traits—although they placed a greater emphasis on the former.

There was, however, some evidence that the TMTM association was reversed when participants reflected on managers of unsuccessful companies. Here, four times as many feminine traits were seen as characteristics of such managers than were masculine traits. Moreover, there was a significant negative association between managers of such companies and men, suggesting that when individuals think crisis they think “not male.” There was also limited support for the notion that individuals may think crisis—think female, with positive relationships between descriptions of managers of unsuccessful companies and women. However, this tendency was significant only for female participants. This may be due to the fact that, as demonstrated by previous research (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009), women are more likely than men to demonstrate an association between what is managerial and what is female.

In sum, Study 1 provides evidence for the context dependence of the TMTM association. In particular, when people think about crisis it appears that they think “not male.” Such a pattern of results may shed some light on the glass cliff phenomenon in suggesting that, in the same way that stereotypes may lead men to be more likely to be seen as managers of successful companies, stereotypes may also lead men to be unlikely to be seen as managers of

unsuccessful companies. In this way, men may be protected from potentially risky and precarious leadership positions, leaving women to fill such roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

However, this study does not provide conclusive evidence of a think crisis—think female association. One particular shortcoming is that, in replicating the original Schein (1973, 1975) paradigm, it focuses on *descriptions* of men, women, and managers. While a good deal of research has focused on the implications of descriptive stereotypes for the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership roles (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983), our study runs the risk of simply describing the fact that successful managers are men and unsuccessful managers are not men. In this way, the results could be interpreted as simply revealing another way in which the TMTM phenomenon can be expressed. Thus, the TMTM association may manifest itself in two different ways: through men and masculinity (a) being associated with managers of successful companies and (b) failing to be associated with managers of unsuccessful companies. Consistent with this notion, while descriptions of managers from successful companies were predominately positive, descriptions of managers of unsuccessful companies contained a number of negative characteristics, such as being fearful and nervous. Men thus not only have the positive traits related to success, they do not possess those negative traits associated with failure. To address these concerns, and to provide more direct support for the notion of think crisis—think female, we conducted a second study.

## Study 2

Although Study 1 provides clear evidence that the stereotypic descriptions of managers vary as a function of company performance, as noted in the introduction, stereotypes are not simply descriptive but are also highly prescriptive (Heilman, 2001; McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001). The prescriptive nature of stereotypes is particularly important, as people's views about desirable managerial behavior have clear implications for both hiring decisions and leadership evaluations (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002). Moreover, while there can be a clear overlap between descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes (e.g., women are not only described as being warm but are also expected to be warm), descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes are not always aligned. For example, a study by Sczesny (2003) found that while descriptive stereotypes related to leadership and gender were very much in line with previous TMTM work, such associations were attenuated for prescriptive stereotypes, especially for women.

This distinction between description and prescription may be particularly important if we are to understand why women are more likely to be appointed to crisis situations. While the results from Study 1 suggest that both managers of unsuccessful companies and women can be described as fearful, wavering in decision, nervous, and passive, it is unlikely that that such negative traits would also be seen as desirable. Accordingly, this simple examination of descriptive stereotypes does not allow us to investigate what people think managers of unsuccessful companies should be like in times of crisis, or indeed whether women are in fact seen as good crisis managers. For this we need to look at the prescriptive nature of the managerial stereotype (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001).

To investigate the prescriptive nature of managerial and gender stereotypes, Study 2 examined individuals' beliefs about the traits that are desirable for managers in the context of successful or unsuccessful companies. In line with Schein's (1973, 1975) findings, we hypothesized that the TMTM association would manifest itself when individuals were asked to characterize ideal managers of successful companies and that such managers would be seen to be more similar to men in general than to women in general (H3). However, beyond this, we hypothesized that when asked to characterize ideal managers of unsuccessful companies, these managers would be seen as more similar to women in general than to men in general (H4).

## Method

**Participants.** In total, 109 participants took part in this study via the same research website as the prestudy and Study 1 (Psychological Research on the Net). No incentives were involved, but again we did ask that participants have had work experience. Participants had a very similar profile as those in previous studies. There were 57 female participants and 50 male participants (two did not specify). Thirty-one were under the age of 20, 32 were aged 21–30, 22 were aged 31–40, 13 were aged 41–50, 9 were aged 51–60, and 1 was over 60 (1 did not specify). As in Study 1, participants were mainly from the United States, and approximately 20% of participants were university students (with workplace experience), with the remainder working in a wide range of occupations, from clerks, to nurses, to a ombudsman. When asked to indicate the seniority of their positions on a 4-point scale, 20.1% indicated they were quite junior, 35.8% were intermediate, 20.9% were senior, and 5.5% were very senior (17.4% did not respond). Of the participants allocated to the unsuccessful condition, 49 completed the questionnaire (20 men and 28 women, one did not respond), and of the participants allocated to the successful con-

dition, 60 completed the questionnaire (30 men and 29 women, one did not respond).

**Design, materials, and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions where they were asked to rate 92 traits in terms of how desirable each was for either the ideal manager of a successful company, or the ideal manager of an unsuccessful company (on a 5-point scale where 1 = *undesirable*, 2 = *somewhat undesirable*, 3 = *neither desirable nor undesirable*, 4 = *somewhat desirable*, 5 = *desirable*). The manipulation of company success and the traits used were the same as in Study 1. Participants also answered some basic demographic questions, including age, gender, a check on whether they had workplace experience, whether they were a student, their occupation, and their seniority. They were then debriefed in full.

## Results

Data consisted of participants' ratings of how desirable each trait was for either an ideal manager of a successful company or an ideal manager of an unsuccessful company. One-sample *t* tests were conducted to determine whether the means were significantly above the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 3). Table 3 lists the attributes seen to be desirable for managers of successful and unsuccessful companies as a function of whether they were also seen to be stereotypical of either men or women in general (i.e., traits that the prestudy determined to be significantly characteristic of one gender and not the other and traits that were seen as significantly more characteristic of one gender than the other). As can be seen from Table 3, perceptions of desirable traits for managers present quite a different picture from Study 1 and previous TMTM research. Of the attributes seen to be desirable for managers of successful companies, eight were seen to be stereotypical of men (including decisive, assertive, and dominant), and nine were seen to be stereotypical of women (including tactful, sympathetic, and intu-

Table 3  
*Study 2: Attributes Seen to Be Desirable for Managers of Successful or Unsuccessful Companies and Also Stereotypical of Men or Women*

Attribute	Stereotypical of men	Stereotypical of women
Desirable for managers of successful companies	Decisive (4.69, 3.98)	Understanding (4.51, 4.49)
	Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance (4.57, 3.85)	Aware of the feelings of others (4.37, 4.30)
	Feelings not easily hurt (4.51, 3.65)	Tactful (4.33, 3.73)
	Assertive (4.33, 4.10)	Intuitive (4.27, 4.04)
	Not uncomfortable about being aggressive (3.57, 3.61)	Grateful (4.22, 3.86)
	High need for autonomy (3.51, 3.80)	Neat (4.10, 4.22)
	Dominant (3.44, 4.24)	Modest (4.08, 3.79)
	Hides emotion (3.27, 3.90)	Sophisticated (3.92, 3.98)
Desirable for managers of unsuccessful companies	Decisive (4.47, 3.98)	Sympathetic (3.63, 4.67)
	Assertive (4.30, 4.10)	Understanding (4.75, 4.49)
	Able to separate feelings from ideas (4.23, 3.46)	Intuitive (4.60, 4.04)
	Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance (4.20, 3.85)	Tactful (4.60, 3.73)
	Feelings not easily hurt (3.98, 3.65)	Aware of the feelings of others (4.55, 4.37)
	Not uncomfortable about being aggressive (3.53, 3.61)	Grateful (4.38, 3.86)
		Modest (4.18, 3.79)
		Sympathetic (4.15, 4.67)
		Neat (4.15, 4.22)
		Sophisticated (3.85, 3.98)
	Sentimental (3.47, 4.20)	
	Desire to avoid controversy (3.40, 3.55)	

Note. Figures in parentheses refer to the mean level of desirability for managers and characterizability for gender, respectively.

itive). However, a very different pattern of results was found for evaluations of desirable attributes for managers of unsuccessful companies. Here, of descriptors seen as desirable for managers of unsuccessful companies, only six (including decisive and assertive) were also seen to be stereotypical of men, but 11 were seen to be stereotypical of women (including tactful, modest, and sympathetic). Chi-square analysis revealed no significant associations company performance and gender,  $\chi^2(1) < 1, p = .39$ .

ICCs and Pearson’s correlations were calculated to investigate the similarities in the characterization of desirable attributes for managers of successful and unsuccessful companies and descriptions of men and women. As can be seen from Table 4, instead of the traditional TMTM pattern, desirable attributes for successful managers were just as likely to be characteristic of men ( $ICC = .51, p < .001$ ) as of women ( $ICC = .51, p < .001$ ). This pattern was found for both male participants ( $ICC_{men} = .33, p < .001; ICC_{women} = .41, p < .001; z = 0.62, p = .26$ ) and female participants ( $ICC_{men} = .54, p < .001; ICC_{women} = .50, p < .001; z = 0.37, p = .35$ ). However, in line with H4, ICCs revealed that descriptions of desirable traits for managers of unsuccessful companies were more similar to descriptions of women ( $ICC = .62, p < .001$ ) than to those of men ( $ICC = .45, p < .05; z = 1.60, p = .05$ ). This pattern was evident for both female participants ( $ICC_{women} = .64, p < .001; ICC_{men} = .46, ns; z = 1.74, p = .04$ ) and male participants ( $ICC_{women} = .46, p < .001; ICC_{men} = .22, ns; z = 1.83, p = .03$ ).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 2 revealed a different pattern of results from Study 1. When participants were asked to characterize an ideal manager, the TMTM association was no longer in evidence. For successful companies, the ideal manager was associated equally with masculine and feminine traits. In line with patterns reported by Sczesny (2003), such findings suggest a discrepancy between people’s perceptions of the traits that managers of successful companies are seen to have (as revealed in Study 1 and in previous research) and those traits that are seen to be desirable. Indeed, although only five feminine traits were seen to characterize

typical managers in successful companies (Study 1), nine feminine traits were identified as desirable for managers of successful companies (Study 2). In this way, Study 2 demonstrates that it is more desirable for managers of successful companies to display more feminine traits than previous descriptions reveal. While such a finding clearly extends the existing literature on the TMTM association, it is in line with work by Eagly and others that suggests that more feminine traits, such as those associated with transformational leadership, are increasingly recognized as good for business (e.g., Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009).

However, in line with H4, when participants reflected on ideal managers for unsuccessful companies there was direct evidence for a think crisis–think female association. Indeed, under such circumstances, there were many positive feminine traits, such as being intuitive, understanding, and tactful, that were seen to be particularly desirable when a company was performing poorly, and these outweighed desirable masculine traits.

In addition, it is interesting that when people were asked to describe ideal managers, there was much more overlap between what was desirable for successful companies and unsuccessful companies than when simple descriptions were requested. In particular, nine out of the 11 feminine attributes and six of the eight masculine traits overlapped, suggesting that traits that were seen as desirable in times of success were also seen as desirable in times of crisis.

Taken together, the results of Studies 1 and 2 point to an important difference between the descriptive and prescriptive nature of gender and leadership stereotypes. In line with recent work that documents the changing view of women in the workplace (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007; Sczesny, 2003), they suggest that there is a qualitative difference between simply describing the current status quo—with men dominating the upper echelons of organizations—and describing how things ideally should be. These results have positive implications for women climbing the corporate ladder, suggesting that the traits they are seen to possess are just as desirable as traditional masculine notions of leadership.

Moreover, Study 2 begins to shed some light on the processes that may underlie the glass cliff and suggests that traditionally feminine traits, such as being understanding, intuitive, and tactful, may be seen as particularly desirable for a manager when a company is in crisis. However, while Study 2 is supportive of the think crisis–think female notion, it does not reveal why female traits are seen to be useful when company performance is poor. To further explore these underlying processes, we conducted a third study.

**Study 3**

Study 2 demonstrates that when people “think crisis” they do “think female.” However, it is still not clear why feminine traits are seen as more desirable for managers of poorly performing companies. Previous research into the glass cliff has outlined a number of reasons why women may be more likely to confront risky and precarious positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007). Such explanations range from those that implicate factors that are relatively benign (e.g., organizational change) or relatively malign (e.g., ingroup favoritism), as well as those that point to factors that are more inadvertent (e.g., available opportunity) or

Table 4  
*Study 2: Correlations Between Descriptions of Ideal Managers of Successful and Unsuccessful Companies and Men and Women in General as a Function of Gender of Participant*

Gender	Successful		Unsuccessful	
	ICC	r	ICC	r
<b>Men</b>				
Overall	.51**	.52**	.45*	.41**
Male Ps	.33*	.29**	.22	.17
Female Ps	.54**	.55**	.46**	.38**
<b>Women</b>				
Overall	.51**	.45**	.62**	.55**
Male Ps	.41**	.32**	.46**	.37**
Female Ps	.50**	.45**	.64**	.59**

Note. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; r = Pearson’s product-moment correlation; Ps = participants.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .



more overt (e.g., scapegoating). Importantly, it is likely that there are a number of reasons why women are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions when performance is poor, just as there are a number of reasons to hire a leader in such situations (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007). Women may be appointed to leadership in a time of crisis because, as the negative descriptors found in Study 1 suggest, their perceived lack of competence is seen to qualify them only for second-rate opportunities. However, in line with the findings of Study 2, women may be placed in risky leadership positions because they are seen to possess the positive traits that equip them to cope well with problematic situations, and perhaps even turn them around.

As argued in the introduction, it is unlikely that any one leader, or any one type of leader, will be seen as equally suitable across all situations (e.g., Haslam, 2004). Thus, just as we argued that the TMTM association would not necessarily be apparent across situations of varying company performance, we also expect that the think crisis–think female association will not manifest itself in all situations of poor company performance.

To explore these possibilities, Study 3 examined the perceived suitability of men and women for concrete managerial tasks associated with poor company performance. Previous research into the glass cliff has identified a number of things a leader could be expected to do in a time of crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007); however, these have not yet been studied experimentally. An obvious requirement for a leader in a time of crisis would be to help turn things around and improve company performance. This is a particularly onerous task, but one that requires an active role from the leader and the use of more traditional managerial skills and abilities (Kulich et al., 2007). However, leaders could also be expected to manage staff through the crisis (Beyer & Browning, 1999) or to act as a spokesperson to the public or key stakeholders (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993), active roles that have been identified as requiring traits and abilities that are more likely to be associated with women (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Finally, a leader might be expected to take on a more symbolic, and thus more passive, role by weathering the crisis, or even shouldering the blame and taking the fall (Pfeffer, 1977).

It is anticipated that, due to the nature of the gender stereotypes revealed in Studies 1 and 2, men and women may be seen as more or less suitable for a managerial position in times of poor company performance depending on what is required from that manager. More specifically, we hypothesized that feminine traits will be seen as more desirable (than masculine traits) for a management role that requires more interpersonal leadership (managing people [H5a] or being a spokesperson [H5b]) and a more passive role (taking responsibility [H5c] or enduring the crisis [H5d]). In contrast, where a more active (and traditional) management role is required (in turning performance around), masculine traits will be more desirable (H5e).

## Method

**Participants.** In total, 147 participants (79 women and 67 men, one unspecified) took part in the study via the same online research site used in the previous studies (Psychological Research on the Net). Again, no incentives were involved, but we did ask that participants have had work experience. Thirteen participants were under the age of 20, 78 were aged 21–30, 18 were aged

31–40, 14 were aged 41–50, 17 were aged 51–60, and 6 were over 60 (1 did not specify). Approximately 30% of participants were university students (with workplace experience), with the remainder working in a wide range of occupations, from vicar, to teacher, to company director. When asked to indicate the seniority of their positions at work on a 4-point scale, 6.1% reported being very junior, 19% were junior, 28.6% were intermediate, 18.4% were senior, and 7.5% were very senior (19.7% did not respond).

**Design, materials, and procedure.** Participants were randomly allocated to one of five versions of an online questionnaire using the online questionnaire software. In all conditions, the questionnaire described a fictitious international company that was looking to hire a senior manager to take over a poorly performing division of the company. This was illustrated in a graph that clearly showed a sharp drop in the company's financial performance over the past 18 months (based on Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Participants then received one of five descriptions of what would be required from the new manager, based on previous research into the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007). The manager was described as being someone who should either (a) stay in the background and endure the period of poor performance (endure); (b) take responsibility for the inevitable failure of the division (responsible); (c) manage people and personnel issues through the crisis (manage people); (d) be a spokesperson for the division providing damage control (spokesperson); or (e) take control of the division and improve performance (improve).

Following the manipulation of managerial role, participants were given a list of 12 traits and asked to describe the extent to which each trait would be desirable for the new manager (on a 5-point scale: 1 = *undesirable*, 2 = *somewhat undesirable*, 3 = *neither desirable nor undesirable*, 4 = *somewhat desirable*, 5 = *desirable*). These traits included six stereotypically masculine traits and six stereotypically feminine traits, chosen on the basis of the prestudy and Study 2, such that the traits were clearly gendered (i.e., stereotypic of either men or women) and were clearly managerial such that they were above the midpoint for desirability for managers of both successful and unsuccessful companies. The traits were also selected so that they represented the various facets of the gender stereotypes that have been demonstrated in previous research (e.g., Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly & Steffen, 1984), including, for men, those related to strength, dominance, insensitivity, and ambition, and, for women, those associated with warmth, interdependence, weakness, and physical appearance. Thus, the masculine traits used were assertive, feeling not easily hurt, high need for power, adventurous, vigorous, and forceful and were averaged to form a masculine traits scale ( $\alpha = .65$ ). The feminine traits were tactful, neat, grateful, understanding, talkative, and courteous and were averaged to form a feminine traits scale ( $\alpha = .66$ ). Thus, the study had a 5 (managerial role: endure, responsible, manage people, spokesperson, improve)  $\times$  2 (participant gender: male, female)  $\times$  2 (traits: masculine, feminine) mixed-model design, with repeated measures on the last factor. Finally, participants answered some basic demographic questions, including age, gender, a check on whether they had workplace experience, whether they were a student, their occupation, and their seniority. They were then debriefed in full.

**Results**

The data consisted of participants' ratings of how desirable the masculine and feminine traits were for each of the managerial roles. To examine the impact of managerial role and participant gender on the desirability of traits, a 5 (managerial role: endure, responsible, manage people, spokesperson, improve) × 2 (participant gender: male, female) × 2 (traits: masculine, feminine) mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, with repeated measures on the last factor and participant age as a covariate. The analysis revealed a significant interaction between participants' gender and traits,  $F(1, 127) = 9.35, p = .003$ . An analysis of simple effects revealed that, overall, female participants saw feminine traits as more desirable ( $M = 4.05$ ) than masculine traits ( $M = 3.70$ ),  $F(1, 127) = 19.82, p < .001$ , whereas there was no such difference for male participants ( $M_{fem} = 3.90, M_{masc} = 3.90$ ),  $F(1, 127) < 1, p = .87$ .

More importantly, the analysis revealed, as hypothesized, a significant interaction between managerial role and traits,  $F(4, 127) = 3.43, p = .003$ . As can be seen in Figure 1, an analysis of simple effects demonstrated that participants rated feminine traits as significantly more desirable than masculine traits when the manager was required (a) to stay in the background and endure the crisis ( $M_{fem} = 3.92; M_{masc} = 3.63$ ),  $F(1, 127) = 4.33, p = .04$ ; (b) to take responsibility for poor performance ( $M_{fem} = 3.83; M_{masc} = 3.52$ ),  $F(1, 127) = 7.48, p = .01$ ; and (c) to manage people through the crisis ( $M_{fem} = 4.16; M_{masc} = 3.76$ ),  $F(1, 127) = 10.81, p = .001$ . However, there was no significant difference in the desirability of masculine and feminine traits when the manager was required to take on a more active role, such as being a spokesperson,  $F(1, 127) < 1, p = .57$ , or improving company performance,  $F(1, 127) < 1, p = .48$ .

**Discussion**

The above results provide further evidence for the context dependence of managerial stereotypes and in doing so provide insight into the processes that underlie the glass cliff phenomenon. Using a modified methodology, the findings indicate that under

certain conditions of poor company performance people tend to think crisis–think female, such that feminine traits are seen as more desirable than masculine traits. This association was dependent on what was required from a manager. When the manager was required either (a) to manage people through the crisis (H5a), (b) to take responsibility for the poor company performance (H5c), or (c) to stay in the background and endure the crisis (H5d), the think crisis–think female association was in evidence. However, when the manager was expected to be a spokesperson or to actually improve company performance, the think crisis–think female association was no longer in evidence, and indeed there was a (nonsignificant) tendency for masculine traits to be seen as more desirable (H5e).

The results of Study 3 suggest that just as the TMTM association is dependent on company performance, the think crisis–think female association is also dependent on what is expected from a given leadership role. The nature of the findings suggests that women are not seen to be suited for crisis per se. Instead, their anticipated traits are seen to make them more suitable for particular tasks. In line with previous research, gender stereotypes surrounding notions of communality and agency seemed to play an important role here (Rudman & Glick, 2001). When the manager was required to take on a relatively passive role by enduring the crisis or being a scapegoat, there was clear preference for feminine traits. Such a pattern was also in evidence when the manager was required to demonstrate communality by managing people. However, this preference disappeared when the leader was required to fulfill a more agentic role and needed to serve as an active spokesperson or improve company performance.

**General Discussion**

Taken together, the above three studies provide insight into the processes underlying the glass cliff phenomenon and extend research on the TMTM association in four important ways. First, the research demonstrates that over 30 years after it was first reported the TMTM association is still very much in evidence for descriptions of managers of successful companies (particularly among

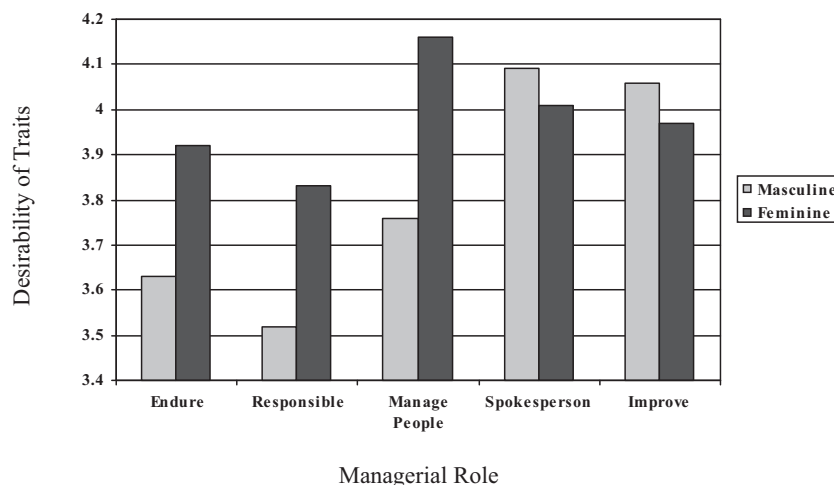


Figure 1. Study 3: The impact of managerial role on the desirability of masculine and feminine traits.

male participants). Yet, second, it is apparent that this association is dependent on context, such that it occurs when companies are performing well, but not when they are performing poorly (where a think crisis–think female association was more in evidence). Third, the research indicates that there is an important distinction between descriptions of managers (which may simply reflect the existing status quo) and prescriptive stereotypes of what is ideal or desirable. Finally, fourth, it is clear that the think crisis–think female association is also dependent on context; in particular, it is dependent on the management role to be performed. In the discussion that follows, each of these contributions is considered in more detail.

### **The Persistence of the Think Manager–Think Male Association**

Results from Study 1 provide a convincing replication of the original TMTM association (Schein, 1973). More than three decades after Schein's (1973, 1975) original studies, when participants were asked to rate how characteristic particular traits were of managers from successful companies, stereotypically masculine traits (e.g., forceful, decisive) were almost twice as likely to be selected as stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., neat, sophisticated). Furthermore, intraclass correlations revealed that what it means to be a manager of a successful company is more strongly associated with what it means to be a man than with what it means to be a woman.

However, in line with more recent research (e.g., Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schein et al., 1989), this association took a different form for male and female respondents. Overall, for male respondents there was a clear association between descriptions of managers of successful companies and masculinity, but there was no such relationship with femininity. In contrast, female respondents described managers of successful companies in terms of both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits, but they too placed greater importance on the former. Although it is heartening to demonstrate that management stereotypes are changing to include more traditionally feminine traits, at least for women, it is important to recognize the stability of these stereotypes for men. This is particularly important given that men continue to dominate decision-making roles within organizations (Catalyst, 2009a), and thus it is more likely that it will be their theories about gender and leadership, rather than women's, that will shape hiring and promotion decisions.

Study 1 also demonstrates the changing nature of stereotypes over time, as the content of both managerial descriptions and gender descriptions were somewhat different from in the original Schein (1973, 1975) studies. Importantly, in line with the rise of transformational leadership and the recognition of a female leadership advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003), traits directly related to leadership (e.g., skilled in business, leadership ability) were seen to be equally characteristic of men and women. Moreover, there was also a recognition that some more feminine traits (e.g., intuitive, understanding, tactful) were descriptive of managers.

### **The Context Dependence of the Think Manager–Think Male Association**

There is thus clear evidence for the persistence of associations between managers of successful companies and notions of mas-

culinity. Nevertheless, the studies presented here demonstrate that success is very much central to this association. When a manager from an unsuccessful company is described, the TMTM association manifests itself differently. Under these circumstances, the results from Study 1 revealed a tendency to think crisis–think “not male,” such that there was a significant negative association between managers of such companies and men.

Although this negative association may simply be an alternative expression of the familiar TMTM association, it goes some way to providing an explanation for the glass cliff phenomenon—the tendency for women to be preferentially selected for leadership roles in times of crisis. Just as the TMTM association may lead men to be more likely to be seen as managers of successful companies, the think crisis–think not male association may lead men to be less likely to be seen as managers of unsuccessful companies. Such stereotypes may offer men potential immunity from the risks associated with leading at a time of crisis, leaving women to occupy such roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Along these lines, there was some limited evidence for a think crisis–think female association, over and above the think crisis–think not male association. Specifically, Study 1 revealed positive relationships between descriptions of managers of unsuccessful companies and women, but this tendency was significant only for female participants.

To understand fully the way in which these stereotypes impact on the perceived suitability of men and women for management positions, it is important to examine not just the overall associations between the stereotypes but also the content of these stereotypes. In Study 1, descriptions of unsuccessful managers were composed of two distinct dimensions. On the one hand, managers of unsuccessful companies were seen in a rather negative light (e.g., as fearful and wavering), suggesting that leaders were blamed for the poor fortunes of their companies (along lines suggested by Meindl, 1993). On the other hand, the studies also indicated that unsuccessful managers were attributed a number of positive traits (e.g., sympathetic and understanding), suggesting that there are distinct characteristics that may be perceived as particularly useful in a time of crisis (e.g., Eisenback et al., 1999; Lalonde, 2004; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

### **The Distinction Between Descriptive and Prescriptive Stereotypes**

There is ample evidence to suggest that descriptive stereotypes related to managers and gender play an important role in the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, the use of the original Schein Descriptive Index runs the risk of simply reproducing descriptions of the existing status quo. The fact that managers of successful companies are more likely to be described in terms of masculine traits may simply reflect the fact that managers of successful companies are more likely to be male. Although the repeated pairing of successful management and masculinity may reinforce gender stereotypes and legitimize the exclusion of women from leadership, it does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the context dependence of the perceived suitability of women for such positions.

A more appropriate examination of the suitability of women for leadership in different contexts was provided by Study 2, in which

the prescriptive nature of management stereotypes was explored. Here a very different pattern of associations emerged. When asked to characterize an ideal manager of a successful company, the TMTM pattern was not in evidence, and both masculine and feminine traits were acknowledged as being desirable. Clearly, then, there is a qualitative difference between describing managers of successful companies and characterizing ideal managers for such circumstances. The former may simply reproduce existing associations between leadership and masculinity due to the fact that men dominate the upper echelons of organizations. Although there is no denying that these stereotypic descriptions can feed into ongoing gender discrimination, the study of prescriptive stereotypes may indicate that change is afoot and that women are increasingly being seen as suitable for leadership positions (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2007). What we have not examined here, though, is the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes. As noted in the introduction, evidence indicates that if women in leadership roles fail to live up to gendered expectations, they can be penalized severely (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The distinction between descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes also has implications for understanding the glass cliff. When describing ideal managers for unsuccessful companies, traditional managerial (and masculine) traits such as forceful and aggressive were no longer perceived to be as important, and instead a think crisis–think female association emerged. Here, the ideal manager for a company in crisis was described in positive terms and possessed more traditionally feminine traits than masculine ones (e.g., understanding, intuitive, and sympathetic). This content was also reflected in correlational data that demonstrated that the ideal manager in times of crisis was more similar to descriptions of the average woman than the average man. This pattern suggests that women may be overrepresented in precarious leadership positions because they have the traits that are seen as necessary in times of crisis. This greater acknowledgment of traditionally “feminine” leadership traits is echoed in recent research into participative or transformational approaches to management (e.g., Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Eagly et al., 2003). Research in this tradition suggests that a transformational approach to management is equally (if not more) effective than more transactional (and more “masculine”) approaches, leading to what some have termed “the female leadership advantage” (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

### Exploring the Think Crisis–Think Female Association

The fact that feminine traits are broadly seen as more desirable in times of crisis does not necessarily imply that the glass cliff phenomenon is simply part of a positive shift toward the acknowledgment of women’s leadership ability. To unpack this issue, Study 3 examined why people “think female” under conditions of poor company performance, with results suggesting that this association depends on what is required from a manager.

In line with assertions of a female leadership advantage, feminine traits (compared with masculine traits) were seen as more desirable when a manager was expected to manage people through the crisis. Such a finding resonates with assertions that women have particular abilities that are suited to crisis management (Ryan et al., 2007). However, the female–crisis association could also be seen to be distinctly disadvantageous to women in other circumstances. This association was also clearly in evidence when the

manager was required to take on a much more passive, and arguably career-damaging, role. More specifically, when the manager was required to simply stay in background and endure the crisis, or become a scapegoat for poor company performance, feminine traits were seen to be more desirable than those that were masculine. These findings are consistent with suggestions that women who are selected for glass cliff positions may be getting set up to fail (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Importantly, though, the think crisis–think female association was not in evidence in all crisis situations. When a manager was expected to improve company performance or to be an active spokesperson for the company—roles that would imply a high degree of agency (Kulich et al., 2007)—masculine and feminine traits were seen as equally desirable. Thus, Study 3 suggests that women are not seen to be suited for crisis per se, a finding that further illustrates the importance of context for gender and management stereotypes. Just as Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that the TMTM association is dependent on company performance, so too it appears that the think crisis–think female association is dependent on quite specific managerial expectations.

### Practical Implications and Future Directions

The fact that this research replicated the TMTM association for descriptions of managers of successful companies suggests that, although women are beginning to break through the glass ceiling, there may be some way to go before the typical manager is not seen in gendered terms. Importantly, though, the present research indicates that there are certain circumstances under which the TMTM association can be reversed. It is therefore clear that there may be ways of addressing the perceived unsuitability of women for managerial roles—either by making salient specific company-based factors, such as performance, or by focusing on what managers should be like rather than what they are like. Indeed, the TMTM association is likely to be dependent on a large range of contextual factors not investigated here, including the specific nature of the managerial role itself (Eagly & Karau, 2002), gender ratios within the company (Kanter, 1977), company culture (Lord et al., 1984), and cross-cultural differences (Schein, 2001). Thus there are likely to be a range of strategies that could be implemented to address this aspect of gender discrimination in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the fact that women are seen to be particularly suited to management responsibilities in the context of poor company performance may have some unfortunate consequences. As research into the glass cliff has revealed, the fact that women are more likely to be seen as suitable to lead in problematic organizational circumstances can mean that they face an uphill battle in a role that leaves them open to potential criticism in the (likely) event of organizational failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). Indeed, even if women are able to turn such situations around, the consequences may not necessarily be positive. As one woman respondent in an online study remarked (Ryan et al., 2007),

I was promoted into a difficult management role (where a previous male manager had failed) with the hope that I would turn it around. When I did, the “reward” was to be moved to another turnaround role—without any additional financial reward or kudos . . . I often wonder if I’m just a fool to accept such challenges. I doubt that the men would.

Further research therefore needs to clarify the role that managerial and gender stereotypes play in glass cliff appointments. Research must also determine whether there are indeed two components of the unsuccessful manager stereotype: a negative component associated with descriptions of managers and a more positive component associated with perceptions of what a manager should be like. Moreover, research needs to be conducted to tease apart the influence that these components exert on the glass cliff phenomenon. Finally, research also needs to determine whether the perception that women are better in times of crisis is actually warranted. Research by Mano-Negrin and Sheaffer (2004) based on self-reports of leadership style suggested that women are more prepared to handle crisis and that their participative style is advantageous in coping with crisis. However, this research was based entirely on self-reports and clearly needs to be supplemented by other forms of evidence.

### Concluding Comments

Taken together, the research presented here provides clear evidence that the TMTM association is dependent on the context in which the management role is embedded. The fact that this association can be broken down (by examining desirable traits or varying company contexts) gives some hope that seemingly pervasive gender differentiation in management may be overcome, especially as women begin to break through the glass ceiling in greater numbers. However, the present research suggests that the qualities that women are seen to possess are often also associated with companies that are failing. As women take on leadership roles there is thus the risk that the TMTM association will be replaced with the potentially discriminatory association of think crisis—think female. Awareness of this possibility encourages us to reflect closely both on the nature of leadership roles that women undertake and on the complexities of the descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes associated with leadership in the world today.

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