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ABSTRACT

Much of the research on sex bias looks at impressions at a single point in time. However, impressions are often changed as information is accumulated. This study attempted to look at the dynamic nature of impression formation. Impressions of both male and female job applicants were measured before and after subjects had an opportunity to view relevant information about the applicant, and the amount of information used by each subject was recorded. Subjects were 72 male and 85 female volunteers from an introductory psychology course at a large midwestern university. Subjects were given minimal information about a male or female job applicant, and then rated the person on several traits. The traits were summed to form three scales: male sex-typed, female sex-typed, and sex-neutral. Subjects then made a selection decision. They were then allowed to access more information, and change their ratings. The results provided no evidence that the subjects formed stereotypic impressions of the applicant, and no indication of bias against women in the selection decision. There was some indication that subjects rated opposite sex applicants lower than same sex applicants on the trait ratings, but this bias decreased after subjects viewed the positive additional information. (ABL)

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Gender Bias in Initial Perceptions
and Subsequent Hiring Decisions

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Running Head: EFFECTS OF APPLICANT GENDER

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Gender Bias in Initial Perceptions
and Subsequent Hiring Decisions

Abstract

Subjects were given minimal information about a male or female, and then rated the person on several traits and made a selection decision. They were then allowed to access more information, and change their ratings. The results provided no evidence that the subjects formed stereotypic impressions of the applicant, and no indication of bias against women in the selection decision. There was some indication that subjects rated opposite sex applicants lower than same sex applicants on the trait ratings, but this bias decreased after subjects viewed the positive additional information.

Gender Bias in Initial Perceptions and Subsequent Hiring Decisions

Many theorists have argued that categorization processes may negatively affect the evaluation of females applying to traditionally male jobs. Heilman (1983) proposed that selection decisions are made by comparing characteristics of the applicant with characteristics required for the job. Research has found that the characteristics of the typical woman are inconsistent with the characteristics needed to perform traditionally masculine jobs, such as manager (Schein, 1973; 1975). The implication is that women will be seen as less capable of being effective managers.

Research on categorization has found that both social stereotypes and individuating information influence impression formation (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990); however, the research is unclear about exactly how the two types of information are integrated. Some research has shown that people ignore information that is inconsistent with initial impressions (Hamilton, 1979), and often interpret new information in a stereotype-consistent fashion (Schneider & Blankmeyer, 1983). Other research has shown that providing inconsistent individuating information will readily overcome stereotypic impressions (Locksley, Borgida, Brekke & Hepburn, 1980; Locksley, Hepburn & Oritz, 1982).

The ability of individuating information to change initial impressions may be determined by the relationship between the categories involved. If "manager" and "woman" represent distinct categories, then the initial impression of someone as a typical woman should inhibit recategorization as a manager, even when presented with manager consistent information. However, if "woman manager" is a subcategory of the more general category of "woman", then it should be relatively easy to readjust the initial impression to incorporate the inconsistent information, therefore allowing recategorization to occur.

Extant research provides support for the existence of a "female manager" subcategory. Heilman, Block, Martell and Simon (1989) found that managers were seen as dissimilar to the typical female, but very similar to female managers. Dion and Shuller (1990) found that women who preferred the title "Ms." were described as different than the typical female, but quite similar to a manager.

Research on selection decisions tends to find bias against women when little information is available, but no bias when relevant information is provided (Tosi & Einbender, 1985). One criticism of this research is that, unlike real world decision makers, subjects were provided with a list of relevant information, and did not have to actively search for information.

Branscombe and Smith (1985) evaluated how people search for information when making a hiring decision and found that more information was requested when evaluating a female applicant.

Much of the research on sex bias looks at impressions at a single point in time. However, impressions are often changed as information is accumulated. The present study attempted to look at the dynamic nature of impression formation. Impressions of both male and female job applicants were measured before and after subjects had an opportunity to view relevant information about the applicant, and the amount of information used by each subject was recorded. It was hypothesized that initially, when only minimal information was available about the applicant, trait ratings would reflect sex stereotypes, and hiring decisions would be biased against women. However, when additional information was made available, we expected subjects to use this information, thereby negating the effects of stereotypes. Subjects rating the female applicant were expected to require more information to overcome their initial impressions, since seeing the applicant as a woman is inconsistent with seeing her as a manager. Also, since the presence of schema-inconsistent information should increase processing of that information, subjects rating the female applicant should spend more time thinking about the information and have

better recall for this information than subjects rating the male. Some research indicates that people will use causal attribution to account for expectancy-incongruent information (Deaux, 1976). Subjects may attribute the success of the female manager to luck or effort rather than ability (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Feather & Simon, 1975). If subjects spontaneously generate causal attributions when they encounter expectancy-incongruent information, these attributions should be more easily accessed, allowing them to respond more quickly to the attribution questions than subjects who had not previously thought about causal factors.

Hypotheses

- H1: Applicants will initially be rated higher on stereotype-consistent traits, but not after subjects have viewed relevant information.
- H2: Initial hiring decisions will favor the male applicant, but there will be no difference on the final decisions.
- H3: Subjects evaluating a female applicant will seek out more information than those evaluating a man.
- H4: Subjects evaluating a female applicant will process the information more thoroughly, leading to better recall for the information.

- H5: Subjects evaluating a female applicant will spend more time thinking about the information than subjects evaluating a man.
- H6: Subjects evaluating a female applicant are more likely to engage in attributional processing, and therefore will have faster response times to attribution questions.
- H7: Subjects evaluating a female applicant are less likely to attribute the applicant's success to ability, and more likely to attribute the applicant's success to effort or luck.

Method

Pretest

The first pretest was used to equate the male and female stimulus person. 35 undergraduate students rated pictures of five men and seven women. Two pictures were chosen that did not differ significantly on attractiveness, friendliness, likability, age, and intelligence. In addition, the male picture was seen as significantly more masculine, professional, and possessing more leadership ability. Although there was no significant difference on ratings of managerial ability, the male was rated higher. This, combined with the higher ratings on leadership and professionalism indicated that the subjects should be more likely to hire the male.

A second pretest was used to verify that the trait dimensions used in the study differentiated between male and female stereotypes. Fifty-two subjects were asked to rate men in general, women in general or a successful middle manager on 9 traits. The nine traits were chosen based on research by Schein (1973, 1975; Brenner, Tomkiewicz & Schein, 1989; Schein, Mueller & Jacobson, 1989) and replications of that research (Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989; Massengill & Di Marco, 1979) as characteristics associated with managers. Three of the traits represented masculine characteristics (Aggressive, Leadership Ability, Emotional Stability), three represented feminine characteristics (Aware of the Feelings of Others, Intuitive, Helpful), and three were not associated with men or women (Intelligent, Competent, Persistent). ANOVAs were performed on each trait, and significant results were investigated further with a Duncan Multiple Range Test. Two of the feminine traits (Aware of Feelings and Intuitive) were rated significantly higher for a woman than for a man, and the third (Helpful), while not statistically significant, was in the right direction. Two of the masculine traits (Aggressive, Leadership Ability) were rated significantly higher for a man than for a woman, and the third (Emotional Stability) was in the expected direction. Only one of the neutral traits showed a significant difference, with men being rated as

more persistent than women. Since the results were generally in line with the previous research, the nine traits were used in the main study.

Subjects

Subjects for the main study were 72 male and 85 female volunteers from an Introductory Psychology course at a large midwestern university.

Procedure

Subjects were run by one of two experimenters (one male, one female) in groups of eight or less. All instructions and materials were presented by a computer, except for the picture and the initial information. Subjects were presented with a picture of a man or woman, and various information typically presented on a job resume (see Appendix). Subjects were asked to review the information and then rate the individual on the 9 traits. The traits were summed to form three scales: male sex-typed, female sex-typed, and sex-neutral. While the internal consistency of these scales was low (ranging from .45 to .58), the scales were retained due to the fact that they were chosen a priori to represent masculine, feminine and sex-neutral managerial characteristics.

Subjects were then given a job description for a middle manager position and asked to answer five questions assessing the applicant's qualifications for the job: hiring recommendation, confidence in

recommendation, salary recommendation, job assignment (number of subordinates assigned to applicant), and need to monitor (frequency of performance appraisal). Subjects were informed that additional information was available about the applicant's performance at a previous job, and they could access as much of this information as desired. Pretest results indicated that all information described the behavior of a good manager. Subjects then had the option to look at additional information, change the trait ratings, or make a final hiring decision.

After the final hiring decision, final ratings on the 9 traits were collected, and subjects were asked to rate the extent to which the applicants previous success was due to ability, luck, effort, and task difficulty. Subjects were then asked to recall as much of the additional information as they could. A short (12 item) reading speed task was then presented. Speed on this task was used to control for individual differences in the analysis of time spent looking at information. Finally, demographic information was collected and subjects were debriefed.

Results

Trait Ratings

The trait ratings were analyzed using a 2x2x2 repeated measures MANOVA, with Applicant Sex and Subject Sex as between subject factors and Time of Rating (before vs. after viewing information) as a within subject factor¹. The results are summarized in Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the trait, hiring, and information search variables are provided in Table 2. Correlations are provided in Table 3.

The analysis revealed a main effect for Time, indicating that the applicant was rated higher on all three trait scales after the subjects had viewed the additional favorable information. An additional analysis tested whether information search influenced the trait ratings by regressing the Time 2 ratings onto information after partialling out Time 1 ratings. This analysis indicated that amount of information was positively related to change on the masculine ($b = .22$, $t = 2.94$, $df = 144$, $p < .01$), feminine ($b = .20$, $t = 2.76$, $df = 144$, $p < .01$), and neutral traits ($b = .23$, $t = 3.45$, $df = 144$, $p < .001$).

The MANOVA revealed no main effect for either Subject or Applicant Sex. However, there was a significant Time x Subject x Applicant interaction. Subjects rated applicants of the same sex higher

than applicants of the opposite sex on the feminine trait scale. While same-sex applicants were initially rated higher ($F=8.82$, $df=1,143$, $p<.01$), no significant difference was found on ratings made after viewing the additional information ($F=1.04$, $df=1,143$, n.s.). One other significant interactions suggest that the information had a greater impact on female subjects than male subjects for the masculine and feminine traits.

These results provide little evidence of stereotyping in initial impressions. Male applicants were not rated higher on masculine traits, and only female subjects saw the woman applicant as more feminine. Although the expected bias was not found, there was support for the hypothesis that biased initial impressions would dissipate when subjects have the opportunity to look at relevant information about the applicant.

Hiring Decisions

A 2x2x2 repeated measures MANOVA was used to analyze the five hiring decision variables. Subject Sex and Applicant Sex were between subject factors, and Time was a within subject factor. The results are summarized in Table 4.

The hiring decision ratings were all significantly higher after viewing additional information. Regression analysis was used to test whether amount of information influenced change in the hiring ratings by regressing

Time 2 ratings onto information after partialling out Time 1 ratings.

Amount of information was positively related to change of ratings on the hiring recommendation ($b = .20$, $t = 2.45$, $df = 144$, $p < .05$), salary recommendation ($b = .17$, $t = 2.51$, $p < .01$), job assignment ($b = .20$, $t = 2.85$, $p < .01$) and need to monitor ($b = .11$, $t = 1.98$, $p < .05$), but was not significantly related to change in confidence in the hiring recommendation ($b = -.01$, $t = -0.11$, n.s.).

No significant main effects or interactions involving Subject Sex or Applicant Sex were found for the hiring recommendation, or confidence in that recommendation. For the salary recommendation, female subjects recommended a higher salary than male subjects, although the difference was only marginally significant. A Subject Sex X Applicant Sex interaction was found for the job assignment. Subjects tended to assign more subordinates when they were the same sex as the applicant. A marginally significant three-way interaction indicates that the male applicant was rated lower by female subjects than by male subjects on the initial decision, but this difference disappeared after viewing the information. The opposite pattern was found for the need to monitor the applicants' performance. A Subject X Applicant interaction indicates that subjects recommended less frequent performance appraisals for opposite-sex

applicants. The three-way interaction indicates that this bias in favor of the opposite-sex increased after viewing the information.

Information Search

Subjects looked at an average of 8.15 pieces of information about the applicant. However, there was considerable variability in the amount of information accessed ($sd=5.04$). The amount of information accessed by subjects was analyzed using a 2 (Subject Sex) \times 2 (Applicant Sex) ANOVA. No significant main effects or interactions were found. It is possible that any effect of applicant sex was obscured by the large individual differences within each condition. An additional analysis looked at whether subjects chose to look at any information. Only 9 of the 158 subjects looked at no information, but 8 of these were in the male applicant condition. A Fisher Exact Test indicated that this difference was significant ($p = .013$). Thus, this analysis provided only weak support for the hypothesis that subjects would need more information to overcome the stereotypical initial impression of the female applicant.

An analysis was performed to determine whether subjects spent more time thinking about the information for the female applicant. An ANCOVA on the average time spent looking at the additional information, controlling for reading speed, revealed that applicant sex had no significant

effect ($F=0.00$, $df=1,142$). This result does not support the hypothesis that the information about positive managerial characteristics would be more difficult to integrate with the impression of the female applicant.

Recall of Information

A 2x2 ANOVA was performed to determine the effects of Subject and Applicant Sex on the proportion of the additional information that could be recalled. Since subjects viewed different amounts of information, the analysis was based on the proportion of the items recalled relative to the total number of items viewed by that subject. The proportions were then transformed to stabilize the variance (Kirk, 1982). As hypothesized, the percent recall was higher for subjects evaluating the female applicant ($F=4.03$, $df=1,143$, $p<.05$). However, the percent of recall may be affected by the amount of information accessed. After controlling for the amount of information, the effect of applicant sex became nonsignificant ($F<1$).

Causal Attribution

A MANOVA on the four causal attributions revealed main effects for applicant sex ($F=2.33$, $df=4,140$, $p<.05$) and subject sex ($F=3.90$, $df=4,140$, $p<.01$). Contrary to the hypothesis, luck was seen as more important for men than women applicants ($F=7.24$, $df=1,143$, $p<.01$).

Applicant sex had no effect on attributions of ability, effort, or task difficulty. The subject sex effect indicates that female subjects saw ability as more important ($F=10.35$, $df=1,143$, $p<.01$) and luck as less important ($F=5.90$, $df=1,143$, $p=.02$) than male subjects, regardless of the sex of the applicant.

Response time in answering the first attribution question was used to test whether subjects had already formed attributions. If subjects had formed attributions while reading the information about the applicant, these attributions should be more easily and quickly accessed than attributions by subjects who had not previously thought about causal factors. Only the response time on the first attribution (Ability) was used because answering this question should cause all subjects to engage in attributional processing, eliminating differences in accessibility on later questions. An Applicant Sex x Subject Sex ANOVA showed no effect for applicant sex, but female subjects responded faster than male subjects ($F=3.87$, $df=1,143$, $p<.05$). The fact that the first attribution rating was much slower than the average of the other three (11.33 seconds versus 6.96 seconds) indicates that subjects probably had not engaged in causal attribution until specifically asked.

Discussion

The results indicate that people will seek out substantial amounts of information to use in making selection decisions, and this information will influence the evaluation of both male and female applicants. This is consistent with previous research which has found that selection decisions are influenced more by qualifications than by gender (Olian, Schwab & Haberfeld, 1988).

The study found little evidence of sex stereotyping or bias in the selection decision. Applicants were not rated higher on sex-consistent traits, even when only minimal information was provided. A possible explanation for this result is the amount of information initially provided to the subjects. Although it was intended to represent a minimal amount of information, it was more than has been presented in some previous research. For example, indicating that the subject has a relevant college degree was used as the information-rich condition in Heilman (1984). In the current study, the degree used (marketing) was not directly related to the position (middle manager), but may have been similar enough that the woman was initially classified as a business woman rather than just as a woman. This raises an important question about the generalizability of the research on information and sex bias. If stereotypes can be overcome

simply by telling the rater that the applicant has a college degree and job experience, one may question whether this effect has any relevance to actual business decisions, where there is likely to be even more relevant information available. Of course, the impact of this minimal information may be due to the use of college students as raters. Actual managers may require more information before making a decision. Further research needs to investigate the amount of information required to overcome stereotypes in managerial samples.

The results do not support the hypothesis that information about managerial characteristics would be more difficult to integrate with initial impression of a female applicant. Subjects did not access more information, spend more time viewing information, or have better recall for information about a female applicant. In addition, there was no evidence that subjects engaged in causal attribution to account for the information.

The initial ratings indicate that the traits attributed to the female applicant were not consistent with the "typical woman" category (i.e., she was rated high on both masculine and feminine traits). Therefore, it was not possible to investigate the change from the woman category to the manager category. However, the fact that she was not categorized as a typical woman indicates either that initial impressions are not formed

solely on the basis of sex or that these impressions can easily be changed to accommodate inconsistent information.

Footnotes

1. Because the hypotheses predict change due to information, 9 subjects who accessed no additional information were excluded from the analysis of the trait ratings, hiring decision, and recall variables. These subjects were included in the analysis of information search.

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Appendix

Initial Information Provided About Applicant

Name: Chris Johnson

Age: 29

Marital Status: Married

Education:

9/80 - 5/84 University of Akron

Bachelors Degree in Marketing

GPA = 3.35

Work Experience:

Current National Office Supplies, Inc.

Marketing Division

9/80 - 5/84 Work study job in campus cafeteria

University of Akron

6/78 - 8/80 Shoe World (a retail shoe store)

Activities:

College: University of Akron Marketing Club

High school: Varsity Swim Team

Table 1

Repeated measures MANOVA and ANOVAs on trait scales.

	MANOVA ^a		MASCULINE ^b		FEMININE ^b		NEUTRAL ^b	
	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2
Applicant Sex (A)	0.37		0.33		0.14		0.17	
Subject Sex (S)	0.16		0.05		0.14		0.05	
A x S	2.24*	.05	0.83		5.82**	.04	0.26	
Time (T)	92.95***	.67	253.03***	.64	90.31***	.39	106.57***	.43
T x A	0.21		0.50		0.14		0.46	
T x S	3.45**	.07	9.05***	.06	5.10**	.03	1.82	
T x A x S	3.99***	.08	0.81		3.87**	.03	1.75	

^adf=3,137

^bdf=1,143

Note: * p<.10. ** p<.05. *** p<.01

Table 2
Means for dependent variables by experimental condition.

Rater Sex	Ratee Sex	Time	N	Dependent variable								
				Masculine traits	Feminine traits	Neutral traits	Hiring decision	Confidence	Salary	Job assignment	Need to monitor	Information search
Male	Male	Before	32	10.16 (2.49)	11.25 (2.02)	11.91 (1.65)	3.81 (0.64)	3.91 (0.82)	2.22 (1.01)	2.72 (0.77)	2.34 (0.79)	8.16 (5.23)
		After	32	12.38 (1.60)	12.21 (1.79)	13.34 (1.23)	4.69 (0.47)	4.47 (0.72)	3.06 (1.16)	3.31 (0.90)	2.56 (1.04)	
Female	Female	Before	35	10.03 (2.12)	10.23 (1.72)	12.14 (1.78)	3.60 (0.77)	4.00 (0.84)	2.34 (0.84)	2.03 (0.86)	2.57 (0.88)	6.86 (5.21)
		After	35	12.31 (2.01)	11.74 (1.77)	13.06 (1.70)	4.43 (0.61)	4.57 (0.56)	3.00 (0.94)	2.94 (1.08)	2.97 (1.07)	

(table continues)

Dependent variable

Rater Sex	Ratee Sex	Time	N	Dependent variable								
				Masculine traits	Feminine traits	Neutral traits	Hiring decision	Confidence	Salary	Job assignment	Need to monitor	Information search
Female	Male	Before	36	9.27	9.78	11.83	3.75	3.83	2.56	2.14	2.55	8.78
		After	36	12.86 (1.68)	12.19 (2.13)	13.28 (1.99)	4.64 (0.69)	4.61 (0.70)	3.00 (1.16)	3.28 (1.10)	3.17 (0.88)	8.73 (4.92)
Female	Female	Before	44	9.93	10.69	11.98	3.60	3.96	2.33	2.62	2.49	8.73
		After	44	12.96 (1.91)	12.33 (1.95)	13.59 (1.70)	4.84 (0.37)	4.67 (0.52)	3.36 (0.93)	3.51 (0.82)	2.69 (0.95)	8.73 (4.92)

Note: Standard deviations are given in parentheses.



Table 3

Correlation Coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. APPLICANT SEX	-									
2. SUBJECT SEX	0.02	-								
3. MASCULINE T ₁	0.06	-0.13	-							
4. MASCULINE T ₂	0.06	0.14	0.43	-						
5. FEMININE T ₁	0.00	-0.12	0.38	0.23	-					
6. FEMININE T ₂	-0.02	0.06	0.32	0.56	0.42	-				
7. NEUTRAL T ₁	0.07	-0.03	0.58	0.43	0.33	0.29	-			
8. NEUTRAL T ₂	0.06	0.11	0.32	0.70	0.23	0.54	0.55	-		
9. HIRE T ₁	-0.11	-0.01	0.21	0.06	0.04	-0.01	0.13	0.05	-	
10. CONFIDENCE T ₁	0.07	-0.03	0.06	0.32	-0.03	0.08	0.06	0.29	0.01	-
11. SALARY T ₁	-0.04	0.09	0.03	0.07	0.07	-0.00	0.19	0.13	0.37	0.15
12. JOB ASSIGN T ₁	-0.06	0.01	0.12	0.05	0.16	0.09	0.04	0.05	0.37	-0.01
13. NEED TO MONITOR T ₁	0.04	0.03	0.03	-0.04	0.03	0.10	0.15	0.06	0.23	-0.08
14. HIRE T ₂	0.05	0.19	0.21	0.47	0.14	0.35	0.25	0.55	0.200	0.25
15. CONFIDENCE T ₂	0.09	0.08	0.24	0.37	0.04	0.35	0.20	0.31	0.10	0.42
16. SALARY T ₂	0.00	0.15	0.03	0.27	0.01	0.16	0.13	0.27	0.12	0.19
17. JOB ASSIGN T ₂	-0.02	0.11	0.07	0.28	0.13	0.26	0.07	0.25	0.12	0.03
18. NEED TO MONITOR T ₂	-0.02	0.05	0.02	0.08	0.08	0.12	0.16	0.14	0.14	-0.07
19. INFORMATION	-0.06	0.11	0.01	0.26	-0.07	0.17	0.10	0.31	-0.22	0.01

(table continues)

Table 3. (cont.)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
11. SALARY T ₁	-								
12. JOB ASSIGN T ₁	0.38	-							
13. NEED TO MONITOR T ₁	0.37	0.10	-						
14. HIRE T ₂	0.18	0.12	0.08	-					
15. CONFIDENCE T ₂	0.19	0.08	-0.04	0.49	-				
16. SALARY T ₂	0.60	0.23	0.12	0.41	0.33	-			
17. JOB ASSIGN T ₂	0.28	0.51	0.09	0.34	0.22	0.54	-		
18. NEED TO MONITOR T ₂	0.29	0.07	0.77	0.14	0.03	0.27	0.30	-	
19. INFORMATION	-0.08	-0.09	-0.17	0.24	0.01	0.15	0.16	-0.03	-

Table 4
ANOVA on the Effect of applicant sex, subject sex and time on hiring decision variables.

	MANOVA ^a	η^2	Hire ^b	η^2	Confidence ^b	η^2	Salary ^b	η^2	Job Assignment ^b	η^2	Need to Monitor ^b	η^2
Applicant Sex (A)	0.67		1.22		0.97		0.12		0.34		0.01	
Subject Sex (S)	0.61		0.94		0.09		3.00*		1.10		0.51	
A x S	5.19***	.10	2.60		0.01		0.31		10.89****	.07	3.90**	.03
Time (T)	68.70***	.60	188.40***	.57	120.17***	.46	125.19***	.47	119.69***	.46	41.94***	.23
T x A	0.49		0.95		0.07		0.00		0.04		1.03	
T x S	1.04		1.99		2.13		1.24		2.56		0.79	
T x A x S	3.55***	.07	1.71		0.12		1.41		3.15*	.02	7.04***	.05

^adf=5,139

^bdf=1,143

Note: * p<.10. ** p<.05. *** p<.01.

Figure 1

Interaction of Applicant Sex x Subject Sex x Time on trait ratings.

