

Acting gender: Actors' experiences of gender role conformity and hopes for their characters

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Abstract

Studies have found that audiences are often presented with characters that conform with traditional gender roles but there to date has been no empirical investigation into these characters from the actors' perspective. We investigated the extent to which actors (n = 318) are required to conform to traditional gender roles in the course of their work and the disparity between their acted and ideal characters. We found that both male and female actors were required to portray traditional gender roles but that men were required to conform with these traditional notions of gender to a greater extent, resulting in the broadcast of a masculinized ideal. Both male and female actors indicated they would prefer to portray characters that conform less with traditional gender roles than their most recent character. Our findings support calls from audience driven research for movement away from the portrayal of traditional gender roles within the arts.

Keywords: actors, gender roles

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Social role theory (e.g., Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000) proposes that distinct gender roles, largely in line with traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, are often imposed on men and women. Within the arts, gender has frequently been portrayed in accordance with traditional gender roles, reflecting the dominant gender system (e.g., Aley & Hahn, 2020; England et al., 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Investigations of how gender is presented in the arts have tended to cite consumer impact as their rationale for study, and for good reason. The way in which reality is presented serves to shape consumer beliefs regarding the personal qualities that are valued by society and can perpetuate the dominant gender system (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004; Signorielli, 2009), even when the setting is clearly fictional (Blackburn & Scharrer 2019). Consistent with their rationale, such studies have generally taken an observational approach assessing the characters presented from the standpoint of the consumer. Typically, this has involved raters using standardized measures to assess characters' gender role conformity (e.g., Diekmann & Murnen, 2004) and coding the observable behaviours and attributes of characters across television, film and literature (e.g., Daalmans et al., 2007; England et al., 2011; Steinke & Tavarez, 2018). There has been little consideration of the characters from the point of view of those whose job it is to portray them: the actors. This study considers gender portrayal in the arts from the actors' perspective.

Research into actors' perspectives of gender portrayal complements audience-driven research findings (e.g., Diekmann & Murnen, 2004; Signorielli, 2009). Furthermore, actors' perspectives are of interest in and of themselves given that acting has the potential alter an actor's perceptions of themselves in line with their character (Brown et al., 2019). If such alteration is towards increased conformity with traditional gender roles, this may serve as an obstacle towards achieving gender equity within the arts and, given the position successful

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actors hold as role models, outside of the arts. In addition, actors are likely to have their own character preferences, which are worthy of consideration.

In what follows, we review the literature surrounding the potential for change to actors' selves in line with traditional gender roles through the course of their work and consider their character preferences. To achieve a view of the current situation and a way forward regarding gender portrayal, within our empirical study we compare gender that actors are required to portray at work (West & Zimmerman, 1987) to their conceptions of themselves and to gender that they would like to portray. To better understand the potentially differing experiences of men and women, we also investigate differences between these two groups. Since people who identify as gender diverse are estimated to represent only between 0.1% to 2% of the population (Goodman et al., 2019), the likelihood of recruiting a large enough number of such actors to enable group comparison is small (Kline, 2005). Therefore, we focus only on the binary categories and formulate hypotheses which distinguish between men and women.

An individual's sense of who they are is not static (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Different aspects of oneself may be active at a given time, often in line with the social – and possibly acted – role being fulfilled, resulting in multiple conceptions of the self across situations (e.g., as a manager, a parent, a spouse). An individual may, for example, view themselves as goal driven and professional when enacting a manager role but more relaxed and informal when interacting with their children. Yet, core aspects of the self, which an individual is likely to consider their fundamentally defining attributes, are persistently active and hence apparent across situations. There is some commonality with regard to core aspects across individuals. For example, what Judge and colleagues (2005) termed Core Self-Evaluations (fundamental evaluations of one's self-worth, control over life events, competence and positivity regarding life outcomes) impact experience and behaviour across samples and situations (Judge et al.,

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2005; 2009; Rode et al., 2012). Similarly, certain motivational aspects of the self-concept including self-enhancement (motivation to see oneself in a positive light) show consistency across contexts for most individuals, although there may be cultural differences (English & Chen, 2007). Yet, there are also individual differences. For example, political identity may be a core part of the self-concept for some individuals but not others (Swann & Pelham, 2002a). That an aspect of the self is of high importance, or core, is signalled by attempts by the individual to seek confirmation of it from others and experiences of inauthenticity when they behave in discordance with it (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004; Swann & Pelham, 2002a; Swann & Pelham, 2002b). Thus, while the less important self-views may vary across situations, core aspects tend to be omnipresent (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Consequently, change to core aspects of the self is associated with enduring alteration to the self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Rubin-McGregor et al., 2022).

Findings from neuroimaging research of deactivation of areas of the brain associated with self-processing suggest that during the acting process the self may be suppressed and substituted by the character (Brown et al., 2019; Meyer et al., 2019). While this substitution may be temporary, and thus similar to situation to situation change, research into simulation induced malleability (SIM; Meyer et al., 2019) indicates that acting may have a lasting impact on the individual beyond the situation in which it is undertaken. SIM refers to the phenomenon whereby simulating a target other leads to information about that other being incorporated into one's conception of themselves and ultimately changing it (Rubin-McGregor et al., 2022). Within experimental studies, simulation has been found to alter individuals' perceptions of their personality, physical appearance and feelings about past experiences (Meyer et al., 2019; Rubin-McGregor et al., 2022). SIM effects have been evident at retesting 48-hours later, after individuals resumed their lives and presumably moved across multiple

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situations (Rubin-McGregor et al. 2022). This indicates protracted change beyond the situation in which simulation occurred and possibly to core aspects of the self.

Since actors often simulate another person for an extended period of time, they are likely more susceptible to the enduring SIM effects, compared to those involved in simulation for the purposes of study. Moreover, the additional persuasive force of reward, whether in the form of positive feedback for fulfilling the role or monetary compensation, and the increased imaginative suggestibility observed amongst actors (Panero et al., 2016) is likely to further potentiate change to the self (e.g., Stajkovic & Luthans, 2001).

Gender role acting and gender role self-concept

The way in which an individual conceptualises their gender, their gender role self-concept, is conceived to be the sum of gender role identity, gender role adoption, gender role preference and part of an individual's general self-concept (Abele 2000; Constantinople 1973; Kachel et al., 2016). In line with wider gender role theory, gender role self-concept and its component parts have been most often conceptualised as varying between individuals along dimensions of traditional masculinity and femininity (e.g., Abele 2003; Becker & Wagner, 2009; Kachel et al., 2016). Investigations have generally involved measurement of traits (e.g., communal versus agentic), role behaviors (e.g., housekeeper vs professional), physical characteristics and wider assessment of core masculinity/femininity encompassing traits, appearances, interests, and behaviors with the latter arguably providing more comprehensive assessment of gender role self-concept due to its coverage of all three components (e.g., Abele, 2003; Kachel et al., 2016; Paek et al., 2011).

There has not, to our knowledge, been any specific investigation into the divergence between actors' gender role self-concept and that which they perceive of the characters they portray. An ever-growing body of research (e.g., Das, 2011; Steinke & Tavarez, 2018) does

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indicate that, across cultures and media, characters portrayed by women and men often conform with traditional gender roles. Within television advertisements, actors are typically cast to enact traditionally gender congruent role behaviours including women performing housekeeping and men undertaking professional responsibilities (e.g., Das, 2011; Paek et al., 2011). Similarly, on primetime television shows male actors tend to portray interpersonal relationships associated with work roles, whereas women portray relationships with a focus on friendship (Lauzen et al., 2008).

Television voice actors seem to face similar characterisations. Within animated shows, male characters tend to be employed in positions of responsibility, exhibiting dominance, bravery, strength and intelligence whilst female characters exhibit dependency, physical weakness, beauty, emotionality and are less likely to be employed in positions of responsibility (Ahmed & Wahab, 2015; Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Baker & Raney, 2004).

Within popular films, a similar trend is apparent. Male actors tend to be cast in roles with greater agency and higher levels of authority, compared to female actors (Sap et al., 2017; Steinke & Tavarez, 2018). The characters men tend to portray are also less likely to be depicted in emotional or primary caring roles, as committed romantic partners or parents, compared to those portrayed by women (Smith et al., 2010; Tanner et al., 2003).

There is some evidence of opportunity for actors to portray characters which are less consistent with traditional gender roles. Indeed, Daalmans and colleagues (2017) found that, although housekeeping and caregiving tasks were equally present for women, female targeted television channels provide greater opportunity for actors to portray gender atypical behaviours. On these channels women actors are more likely to be cast as characters fulfilling professional roles and men as those fulfilling parental roles, undertaking housekeeping and caregiving activities, compared to male targeted channels (Daalmans et al., 2017). In addition, whereas female superhero characters are likely to be portrayed as more emotional,

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concerned about their appearance, likely to ask questions and less likely to express anger, they are equally likely to demonstrate bravery, dominance and leadership, compared to male superheroes (Baker & Raney, 2007). Similarly, in considering the Disney princes and princesses, England and colleagues (2011) found some evidence of movement away from traditional gender themes over time including women undertaking housework, though certain stereotypical themes such as traits of fearfulness and nurturing remained.

Despite this evidence of gender role non-conformity, overwhelmingly the trend does appear to be for actors to be cast into roles largely aligned with traditional notions of their gender. Yet, there is no reason to suspect individuals who pursue a career in acting to hold a highly traditional gender role self-concept. Indeed, both male and female actors differ from the general population in the same way on traits associated with agency and on those associated with community (Digman, 1994; Nettle, 2006). Specifically, both male and female actors perceive themselves to be more traditionally masculine with respect to their ambition and goal focus compared to the general population. In contrast, they perceive themselves as slightly more feminine compared to the general population with regard to their social behaviour (Nettle, 2006). This suggests actors' perception of gender is less constrained by traditional gender role definitions than their general population counterparts. Furthermore, there is not the polarity between male and female actors that would be expected if actors' gender role self-concepts were in line with the roles they seem most likely to be cast into (Digman, 1994; Lauzen et al., 2008; Nettle, 2006). Thus, it appears that divergence between an actor's gender role self-concept and that of the character is likely.

Agentic and communal traits are only one component of gender role self-concept and direct comparison of actors' conceptions of their gender and of the characters they portray has not been undertaken. In this study we investigate this question through assessment of actors self-perceived core masculinity/femininity and that they perceive of the character they

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portray. Given the apparent lack of polarity between male and female actors' gender role self-concept paired with the apparent divergence of male and female television and film characters in line with traditional gender roles, we hypothesise the following.

H1: Women's acted roles will show a stronger association with traditional gender roles than does their personal conception.

H2: Men's acted roles will show a stronger association with traditional gender roles than does their personal conception.

Due to the potential impact on gender role self-concept, it seems problematic if actors have little choice but to portray ill-fitting, gender stereotypic roles, in order to act. This is likely all the more troublesome for actors if they prefer to play characters which are less stereotypic. This is because constraint on behaviour, especially when there is particular preference for a possible alternative, is associated with negative affect including hostility, aggressiveness, and anger (Brehm, 1966; Rains, 2013; Steindle et al., 2015). Indeed, employees who show greater levels of masculinity or femininity than they are comfortable with in the course of their work reportedly experience discomfort and seek out ways to express their gender (e.g., Hall, 1993; Simpson, 2004). Therefore, we also investigate actors' ideal roles. There is no viable reason to expect actors, either men or women, to want to portray roles aligned with traditional gender roles. Indeed, experience of being cast into ill-fitting gender stereotypical roles and having a gender stereotypical persona imposed upon them has often been reported as problematic for actors (e.g., Cameron, 2021 cited in Sherman, 2021). Therefore, we expect that ideal roles will show weaker associations with

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traditional gender roles than those which actors are typically cast into. Specifically, we hypothesise:

H3: Women's ideal roles will show a weaker association with traditional gender roles than will their acted roles

H4: Men's ideal roles will show a weaker association with traditional gender roles than will their acted roles

Gender differences

We expect both men and women to be cast into roles that are more consistent with traditional gender roles than their own gender role self-concept and to prefer roles that show a weaker association with traditional gender roles. Since to our knowledge there is no existing empirical research into the disparity between actors' gender role self-concept and that of the characters they portray, it is difficult to speculate on whether any disparity between the two varies for men and women. Given the apparent trend for men to be cast to act characters which are consistent with traditional male gender roles and women to be cast to act characters which are consistent with traditional female gender roles, there is no particular reason to suspect greater disparity for either of these genders. Therefore, we expect the disparity between gender role self-concept and acted roles will be similar for men and women.

H5: There will be similar disparity between gender role self-concept and acted roles for men and women

Similarly, due to the apparent divergence between the qualities of male and female characters, in line with traditional gender roles, there is little reason to suspect greater disparity between acted and ideal roles for men and women. We therefore expect equal

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disparity between the characters that men and women have acted and those they would ideally like to portray.

H6: There will be similar disparity between acted and ideal roles for men and women

Method

Context and sampling strategy

The aim of this study was to investigate characters from the point of view of those whose job it is to portray them: the actors. Given that identifying as a member of a profession is a key determinant of work-related behaviour and experience (e.g., Beijaard et al., 2004; Molleman et al., 2010), our sampling strategy was to survey individuals with enough acting experience to complete our measures who self-identify as actors. In addition, acting is likely to impact a diverse range of people who fulfil the role of ‘actor’ (Meyer et al., 2019; Panero et al., 2016) and the credentials of an ‘actor’ are not static, making further sample restriction problematic.

Indeed, increased focus on authenticity, by those who make casting decisions, has meant that formal training is not always a prerequisite for being an actor (Atkins, 2017; Lehman, 2022). In addition, concern from funders and production companies about viewing figures (Budzinski, 2021) has resulted in the segue of celebrities, such as stand-up comedians, and social media personalities, into the acting profession. Furthermore, the rise of casting platforms such as Starnow and the Mandy network have enabled individuals to secure work as an actor without an agent, training, previous experience or union membership. Also, due to the popularity of acting as a profession, actors may have significant gaps between paid jobs and may accept unpaid work for the perceived advancement opportunities (Del Negro, 2021). Thus, the distinction between amateur and professional is somewhat blurred, the title ‘actor’ is used extensively, and people with varying credentials portray characters fulfilling the role of ‘actor’.

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Consequently, casting platforms including those marketed for professional actors, such as Spotlight, have broadened their criteria regarding who can list as an actor. As of 2022, Spotlight defined an actor as a person with either one featured role, two professional credits, one year of approved training or none of these if they are recommended by a party member of one of Spotlight's approved professional organisations (Spotlight, 2022). Criteria for membership in actors' unions are similarly broad. Equity, the union for performers and creative professional in the UK, grants membership if an individual can prove they have either earned at least £500 in the entertainment and performing arts industry, undertaken work on an Equity contract project (regardless of payment amount) or is a member of an FIA-affiliated union (Equity, 2023). Similarly, to be recognised as an actor and gain membership as such by Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), individuals are required only to have had one day of employment in a principal or speaking role (SAG-AFTRA, 2023).

Reflecting the importance of professional identity, the varying credentials of those who fulfil the role of 'actor' and the broad criteria used in the industry, in order to gain as comprehensive a view as possible of the experiences of those who portray characters, our inclusion criteria were set to enable similar diversity and breadth. Our criteria were that, in addition to being aged 18 or over, participants must self-identify as an actor and have acted in at least one role which they could describe in enough detail to complete the measures (which effectively excluded supporting artists). In addition, they had to aspire to act again and have enough dedication to being an actor that they had preferences for their future roles.

Participants

Participants were recruited through the researchers' personal accounts, professional actors' groups and casting groups on Facebook and Twitter, and from the researchers' personal

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networks. Potential participants were invited to take part in a study investigating “some of the ways in which actors see themselves, the roles that they play and those that they would like to play” and were provided with a link to an anonymous, Qualtrics questionnaire. Our preregistered minimum target sample size was 280 (140 men and 140 women) and we sampled for a given time frame (four months). We received 318 full responses within the data collection period. Of these, 40.4% ($n = 129$) identified as male, 55.5% ($n = 177$) as female and 0.3% ($n = 1$) preferred not to specify. As we expected and as informed our hypothesis development, only a small number of respondents 3.5% ($n = 11$) identified as non-binary or third gender. Therefore, subsequent analyses which relied on gender groupings included only participants who identified as male or as female. Thus, our sample exceeds Kline's (2005) recommendation for multigroup SEM (100 per group). We conducted a post-hoc power analysis for the one-sample t -test (H1-H4), assuming 80% power, a two-tailed test at $\alpha = .05$, we were able to detect relatively small effects for both men and women (respectively: Cohen's $d = .25$ and Cohen's $d = .21$). For H5-H6, the post-hoc power for analysis for a two-sample t -test, yielded a weak to medium effect (Cohen's $d = .35$), assuming 80% power, a two-tailed test at $\alpha = .05$ and the lowest group size ($n = 129$).

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 86, with a mean age of 40.9 years ($SD = 16.4$). Of the sample, 0.3% ($n = 1$) reported no formal education, 1.6% ($n = 5$) secondary school until age 16, 15% ($n = 46$) secondary school until age 18, 47.2% ($n = 145$) undergraduate university education, 27% ($n = 83$) postgraduate university education and 8.5% ($n = 26$) non-university higher education as the highest level of education they had completed. With regard to nationality, 48.2% ($n = 148$) of participants reported they were British, 36.8% ($n = 113$) American, 2.6% ($n = 8$) of mixed nationality, 1% ($n = 3$) Australian, 0.7% ($n = 2$) each German, Irish and Italian, and 0.3% ($n = 1$) each Canadian, Caribbean, Dutch, Mexican, Moroccan, New Zealand and Ukrainian while 6.8% ($n = 21$) preferred not to specify.

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The majority (59.2%) were working as actors in a professional capacity, i.e. they were paid for their last role. For their last role, 41.3% (n = 124) acted in a drama, 31.7% (n = 95) a comedy, 7.7% (n = 23) in a horror/thriller, 4.3% (n=13) each in science fiction and action, 4% (n=12) in a musical, 1.7% (n = 5) in a pantomime, 1.33% (n = 4) each in a commercial and ‘dramedy’ and 4.3% (n = 13) another genre. Of the sample, 44.8% (n = 137) indicated that their performance would predominantly be broadcast/viewed in a theatre or other live venue, 21.2% (n = 65) on television, 18.0% (n = 55) online, 13.1% (n = 40) in a cinema or other public broadcasting venue, 0.69% (n =2) at a private venue, 0.3% (n =1) on the radio and 2.0% (n = 6) did not specify.

Measures

To measure gender role self-concept, we used the Traditional Masculinity-Femininity (TMF; Kachel et al., 2016) scale. The TMF comprises six items that assess gender role identity, gender role adoption and gender role preference with a seven-point response scale (1= very masculine, 7 = very feminine). Items included ‘Traditionally, my interests would be regarded as...’ and ‘Traditionally, my behavior would be regarded as...’. Nascimento et al (2019) found the TMF to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$) and a stable factor structure across cultures.

To assess the gender role self-concept of characters perceived by the actors who portray them, minor adaptations were made to the TMF items to reference ‘the character’. Using the seven-point TMF response scale, participants were asked to respond regarding the character they “last portrayed/portray”. Example items included ‘Traditionally, the character's interests would be regarded as...’ and ‘Traditionally, the character's behavior would be regarded as...’

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Similarly, to assess the gender role self-concept of characters that actors would like to portray, these adapted TMF items were used. Using the seven-point TMF response scale, participants were asked to respond regarding the type of character they “would ideally like to portray”. Example items included ‘Traditionally, my ideal character's interests would be regarded as...’ and ‘Traditionally, my ideal character's behavior would be regarded as...’.

Analysis Strategy

Since a high score on the TMF indicates high femininity (high gender role typicality for women) and a low score indicates high masculinity (high gender role typicality for men), to facilitate comparison between men and women, the TMF data was recoded so that a high score similarly denoted high gender role typicality for all participants. Specifically, ratings by the male actors were reverse coded (one was recoded as seven, two as six, three as five and so on). Thus, after recoding, a high TMF score denoted high levels of gender role typicality in relation to self, most recent acted and ideal role for both men and women. In order to evaluate H1 to H4, difference scores were calculated and within-group comparisons undertaken via one sample *t*-tests.

Next, to assess the validity of undertaking the between-group comparisons required to test H5 and H6, we used multigroup SEM to evaluate measurement invariance (e.g., Sass & Schmitt, 2013). The proposed model is in Figure 1. We compared configural, weak (metric), strong (scalar), and strict invariance. In line with Little’s (2013) criteria, we sought to compare the difference between men and women in the form of Cohen’s (1988) *d* scores and graphically, and hence test the hypotheses only if we were able to establish strong or strict invariance. As the items of the TMF use an ordinal response format we opted for Robust Maximum Likelihood Estimation (Li, 2016). We made comparisons based on information criteria (AIC/BIC), with lower scores indicating better fitting models. As a rule of thumb,

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differences of over 10 units in these information criteria can be interpreted as overwhelming support for one model over another (Burnham & Anderson, 2002, 2004).

In terms of absolute fit, the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were primarily used to assess how well the proposed model fit the data. Models were deemed to have a good fit if the TLI and CFI were in the range of $\geq .90$ – $.95$ and the RMSEA was $\leq .06$ – $.08$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). It was noted, however, that RMSEA is sensitive to sample size, estimator, factor loading and indicator number (Kenny & McCoach, 2003; McNeish et al., 2018), and therefore this criterion might need to be relaxed. While our initial decisions on absolute fit were based on CFI, TLI and RMSEA, given the sensitivities of RMSEA, we also consulted GFI and SRMR. Based on our sample size ($N > 100$), models were deemed to have good fit if GFI was $\geq .93$ and SRMR was $\leq .08$ (Cho et al., 2020).

For the six hypothesis tests, we corrected for multiple testing via adjusting for the false discovery rate (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995), we denote these p values via p_{adj} . All analyses were conducted in R 4.2.1 and SEM was conducted with the ‘lavaan’ package (Beaujean, 2014; Rosseel, 2012). Our analysis document can be found at https://osf.io/8f9n6/?view_only=c47025f3d6c64e18866b4958b3373e3f. This also contains supplementary analyses and additional fit metrics.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

Results

Gender role disparity: within-group comparisons.

Men and women rated themselves, their most recent role, and their ideal role as more gender typical than the midpoint of the scale (Table 1). This indicates some conformity with traditional gender roles by actors in their everyday lives (self-ratings), desired in their

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working lives (ideal role ratings), and experienced in their current working lives (acted role ratings).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

To test H1 and H2, the difference between ratings the self and the most recent role was calculated and a one sample *t*-test was run for men and for women. The results demonstrated that women's most recent role was not rated as significantly more gender typical than themselves ($M = 0.07$; $t(176) = .592$, $p_{adj} = .585$, Cohen's $d = 0.04$). Thus, H1 is not supported. In contrast, men rated their most recent role as more gender typical than themselves ($M = 0.69$; $t(128) = 7.33$, $p_{adj} < .0001$, Cohen's $d = 0.65$). Therefore, H2 is supported.

To test H3 and H4, the difference between ratings of the most recent role and the ideal role was calculated and, again, one sample *t*-tests were run for women and men. Supportive of H3 and H4, both women and men reported their ideal roles to be less gender typical than their recent roles (respectively: $M = -0.58$; $t(128) = 5.17$, $p_{adj} < .0001$, Cohen's $d = 0.455$; $M = -0.43$; $t(176) = 3.62$, $p_{adj} = .0006$, Cohen's $d = .272$). Interestingly, men's ideal roles did not significantly differ from themselves ($M = 0.11$; $t(128) = 1.42$, $p = .159$, Cohen's $d = 0.125$), but women's ideal roles were less gender typical than themselves ($M = -0.36$; $t(176) = 5.34$, $p < .0001$, Cohen's $d = 0.40$).

Gender differences

The initial model, with three constraints imposed, showed acceptable fit on the robust TLI, CFI, GFI and SRMR and improved fit overall, compared to an unconstrained model (original model: robust CFI: .876; robust TLI: .856; robust RMSEA: .112; GFI: .955; SRMR: .069; model with constraints: robust CFI: .921; robust TLI: .906; robust RMSEA: .091; GFI: .967; SRMR: .069; $\Delta AIC = 191$, $\Delta BIC = 168$). The constraints imposed were the covariances

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between the TMF items: Ideal_1 and Ideal_2, Role_1 and Role_2, and Role_1 and Role_6 (Figure 2). The model demonstrates that for men most items loaded well (.7 or higher) on their hypothesised latent constructs with the exception of Self_6 (.55) and Role_6 (.64). For women, all items loaded well (.7 or higher) on their hypothesised latent constructs with the exception of Ideal_1 (.68) and Ideal_6 (.68). In both men and women, the intercorrelations between the three latent constructs of gender typicality ('Slf', 'Rol', 'Idl') were of similar strength (Figure 2). In both men and women, the correspondence between the actors themselves and their ideal roles were greater than between themselves and their most recent role and between their most recent role and their ideal role (Figure 2).

Moving from configural to weak (metric) to strong (scalar) invariance, the increasingly restrictive models showed further improved fit, but our model no longer improved when we moved from strong to strict invariance (see Table 2 for a summary of the results). Both AIC and BIC thus favour a model with strong invariance. This model is a good fit in terms of TLI, CFI, GFI and very close in terms of SRMR (robust CFI: .919, robust TLI: .914; GFI: .965, SRMR: .081). Since RMSEA is sensitive to sample size (robust RMSEA: .087), we settled on this model rather than trying to improve fit further. Figure 2 shows the final model.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Given that strong invariance is demonstrated it follows that men's and women's mean scores are on the same measurement scale and can therefore be compared on the latent means. The latent means are not directly interpretable so, while the tests are based on the latent means, we also report the results graphically and calculate Cohen's *d* scores. Figure 3 shows that men did not significantly differ from women in gender typicality ratings of themselves ($t(272.67) = 1.92, p = .055, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.22$).

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

Figure 4 shows that men reported playing more gender typical roles than women did ($t(302.07) = 6.05, p < .0001, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.68$). Figure 5 shows that women desired playing less gender typical roles than men did ($t(269.48) = 6.34, p < .0001, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.74$).

To test H5 and H6 directly, we created difference scores based on the latent means. Men indicated moderately greater disparity between their most recent role and themselves ($M = 0.69, SD = 1.07$) than women did ($M = .07, SD = 1.48, t(303.3) = 4.34, p_{adj} < .0001, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.48$). That is, men indicated an increased requirement to adapt towards traditional gender norms in the course of their work compared to women. Thus, H5 is not supported. However, in line with H6, men and women did not significantly differ from one another in the disparity between their recent role and their ideal role ($t(299), p_{adj} = .585, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.06$). Interestingly, women's ideal roles were less gender typical than themselves ($M = -0.36, SD = 0.90$), and this divergence was significantly larger than men's ($M = 0.11, SD = 0.88, t(275) = 5.64, p < .0001, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.66$).

Discussion

This study considered gender portrayal in the arts from the actors' perspective. Given the potential for detriment to actors from portraying gender that is incongruent with either their gender role self-concept or acting preferences (Rains, 2013; Rubin-McGregor et al., 2022), we compared gender that actors are required to portray at work (West & Zimmerman, 1987) to their conceptions of themselves and to gender that they would like to portray. To better understand the potentially differing experiences of men and women, we also sought to identify any gender differences in these respects. Our results indicate a desire amongst actors

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to act gender differently to how they were required to do so in their most recent job and incongruence for male actors between their gender role self-concept and that of their most recent character. Consequently, there appears to be greater risk of change to male actors' gender role self-concepts through the acting process (Rubin-McGregor et al., 2022).

However, there is risk of negative affect for both male and female actors as a result of unmet character aspirations (e.g., Rains, 2013).

Surprisingly, given earlier findings which imply similar conformity of male and female characters with traditional gender roles (e.g., Sap et al., 2017; Steinke & Tavarez, 2018), the gender differences evident in our sample indicate greater requirement for men to conform with traditional gender roles in the course of their work. Indeed, men and women indicated they are equally gender conforming in their everyday lives, with both reporting they consider themselves more gender typical than a gender-neutral anchor. Despite this, men's acted characters were reportedly more gender role conforming than women's. Furthermore, men's acted characters were more gender role conforming than men identify, while women's were not. This may be reflective of some shift in the social gender system specifically regarding how women are perceived and hence represented (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Spence & Buckner, 2000). Indeed, our findings indicate some improvement, specifically in how women are represented, since previous research was undertaken. That is, female characters which are more consistent with how women identify and less consistent with traditional gender roles.

Given the nature and timing of our findings (relative to much of the previous research) and power of social exchange in triggering shift in social norms (Centola et al., 2018; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), we suggest the viral #metoo movement could be a likely driving force of any such change. Indeed, the movement, which was championed by women in the arts after much of the previous research was undertaken, placed pressure on the

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industry to cease viewing women as sexual objects and encouraged women to speak up in situations that subjugate them (Quan-Haase et al., 2021).

Alternatively, rather than shift in the social gender system, our findings may be reflective of a shift in the gender makeup of the creative industries. Indeed, activism such as the 50/50 initiative has placed pressure on the creative industries to increase the number of women, particularly in positions of power, in the industry (Ofcom, 2021). Given that men tend to view women in more traditional terms than women do themselves (Spence & Buckner, 2000), it seems highly possible that a knock-on effect of higher numbers of women decision makers is an increasingly progressive portrayal of women characters. Whether our findings reflect industry, societal or other shift, since men's characters are more gender role conforming than women's, the result in our sample is that, across men and women, characters are skewed to the masculine end of the spectrum, potentially resulting in the promotion of a masculine ideal (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004).

Despite the gender difference we found in self - character congruence, both men and women report a desire to act characters which differ from their most recent one towards lower conformity with traditional gender roles. For men, this would achieve congruence with their reported gender role self-concept and for women greater incongruence. Since the magnitude of desired change from the most recent character is not significantly different for men and women, we argue men and women likely do not desire different endpoints (congruence with the self versus incongruence with the self for the sake of reduced gender role conformity). Rather, we suggest this indicates that the most recent role acts as an anchor impacting conceptions of the ideal to what seems possible or realistic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) and hence both men and women indicate a similar desire for reduced gender role conformity in their characters. Indeed, lack of concern with similarity to the self makes sense given the actors' 'job description.'

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Overall, our results imply that, while achieving their aspirations may unknowingly cause change to their gender role self-concept, actors place importance on movement towards traditional gender role incongruity. We suspect change to the social gender system could underlie our findings: it is likely that social change has made actors aware that they can, and perhaps should, aspire to portray characters which do not occupy the extremes of masculinity and femininity. Importantly, actors' aspirations for their characters are in line with calls for changes to the way men and women are presented in the arts by those concerned with audience wellbeing (e.g., Diekman & Murnen, 2004), thus strengthening the case for movement away from the portrayal of traditional gender roles.

Limitations and directions for future research

There are a number of limitations in the current study which are important to consider when interpreting the results. First, though we consider our methodological approach well-suited to testing the hypotheses, given it is actors' perceptions that are of interest, we acknowledge that self-report measures are associated with some weaknesses (cf. Kagan, 2007). Furthermore, although we speculate, our methodological approach does not allow us to be certain of either what drives actors' apparent desire for traditional gender role atypicality or the increased requirement for male actors perform traditional gender roles. Future research might undertake interviews with actors and other industry experts to determine the key drivers.

Also, since we were unable to achieve a large enough sample of actors who do not identify as male or female, we acknowledge we are unable to provide a complete picture of actors' experiences and aspirations. Furthermore, this lack of available data reproduced the structure of the gender binaries within our research. Future studies might seek to investigate the experiences of third gender and other gender actors.

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Next, though our focus was on gender, we acknowledge that individuals who identify as a given gender differ in their experiences as a result of their broader interconnected social categorization (Cooper, 2016). Future research might therefore investigate the role of intersectional identities in shaping actors' experiences and aspirations for their characters. Given initiatives within the creative industries to be more inclusive of individuals of varying social class, age and ethnicity, these identities and how they intersect with gender might be of particular interest (e.g., Ofcom, 2021).

Finally, even though, the channels we used to recruit actors are quite far reaching and we achieved sufficient statistical power to undertake our analyses, there are some actor groups that are less likely to be included. Most notably, very successful actors may not have had the time to participate in our study. Given the caliber and influence of some of the actors who shared our study advertisement on social media, however, there is a reasonable likelihood that our sample includes at least some highly successful individuals. Since very successful actors are more likely to be allowed the opportunity to shape their characters, future research might compare the gender role conformity of characters played by these and less established actors. Additionally, it might prove fruitful to investigate other potential determinants of character gender role conformity such as characteristics of the production team, director and differences in line with genre.

Implications

The practical implications of our results are, most notably, that if actors' career aspirations are to be realised, professionals involved in shaping characters (writers, producers and directors, often driven by the requirements of funders) could focus on developing characters which conform less to traditional gender roles than actors currently appear required to portray. Our results indicate that particular focus is required on the characters portrayed by men. However, considering the risk of change to the self, this may provide

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further challenges, at least for women who currently appear to experience congruence with their characters (Meyer et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems that if actors are to achieve their character goals, time is needed for actors to ‘de-characterise’ after their performance (Rubin-McGregor et al., 2022). That is, to psychologically move away from their character and back to themselves.

We recognise that the fulfilment of actors’ aspirations will often necessarily be secondary to appealing to audience appetites and ensuring a profitable production. That is, perhaps with the exception of actors with a large enough audience draw to make their involvement in a project profitable enough that they can negotiate editorial control and shape characters or those who can do so because they are established enough in a given project to afford them leverage. Therefore, aspiring actors need to be aware that the characters which may be available to them may not currently be in line with their preferences, in contrast those actors with leverage might consider using this to afford change. Since productions often rely on external funding and seek recognition through industry awards, awarding bodies, especially those run by actors unions, could be instrumental in enabling the development of characters that match actors’ aspirations. That actors’ desired change appears to be in the best interest of the audience as well (Diekman & Murnen, 2004) should provide further drive for such incentivisation. Audiences might also be encouraged to promote change by voting with their viewership for productions that feature characters which conform less strongly with traditional gender roles.

Theoretically, our study demonstrates the enduring impact of gender roles in popular culture, particularly with regard to men. Importantly, our findings also demonstrate that the pace of change may differ for men and women; we found evidence of greater progress towards atypicality in the portrayal of women, as compared to men. Our results demonstrate how a knock-on effect of this difference in pace is a skewed portrayal of gender. In this case,

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as a result of women's characters being more similar to them and less gender typical, and men's more dissimilar and more gender typical, the portrayal of gender is skewed towards the masculine, resulting in the broadcast of a more masculine ideal (Diekman et al., 2000).

Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first quantitative investigation into the gender portrayal from the actors' perspective. We find there to be greater requirement for male actors to portray gender differently to how they identify and to conform with traditional gender roles in the course of their work but that both men and women desire lower gender role conformity in their characters, compared to that which they most recently acted. The effect of the difference between men and women and their characters appears to be a masculinisation of gender portrayed by actors and therefore the communication of a skewed masculine ideal to the audience and the actors themselves.

Importantly, actors aspirations for their characters appear to be in line with calls for change from those concerned with the impact of portraying traditional gender roles to the audience (e.g., Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019; Diekman et al., 2000) and hence strengthens the case for change. Consequently, we argue that development of characters that conform less with traditional gender roles is needed in the arts. Yet, we caution that, due to the potential for change to actors' self-concepts through acting characters which differ from themselves, actors require time to 'de-characterize' after they have completed their work.

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Table 1

Judgments of gender typicality of self, role and ideal. p values and Cohen's d based on a one sample t -test against midpoint of scale ($\mu = 4$).

	Men					Women				
	M	SD	$t(128)$	p	Cohen's d	M	SD	$t(176)$	p	Cohen's d
Self	5.16	0.90	14.54	<.0001	1.28	4.97	0.92	13.99	<.0001	1.05
Role	5.85	1.13	18.50	<.0001	1.63	5.04	1.48	9.32	<.0001	0.70
Ideal	5.26	1.05	13.72	<.0001	1.21	4.61	1.02	7.91	<.0001	0.59

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Table 2

Model fit statistics for measurement invariance

	Df	AIC	BIC	χ^2	χ^2 difference	Df difference	p
Configural invariance	258	14744.35	15191.18	648.31	-	-	-
Weak/metric invariance	273	14738.07	15129.05	672.04	18.66	15	2.29
Strong/scalar invariance	288	14728.15	15063.27	692.11	19.77	15	1.81
Strict invariance	291	14779.34	15103.29	749.31	59.06	3	9.31

ACTING GENDER

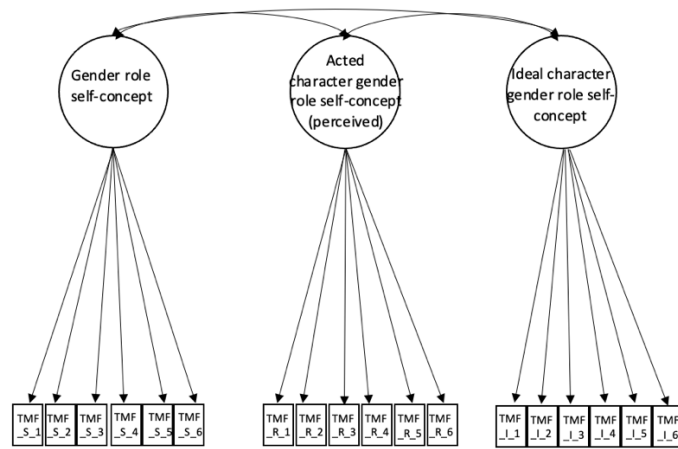


Figure 1: Proposed model for the multigroup SEM model (error variances not drawn).

ACTING GENDER

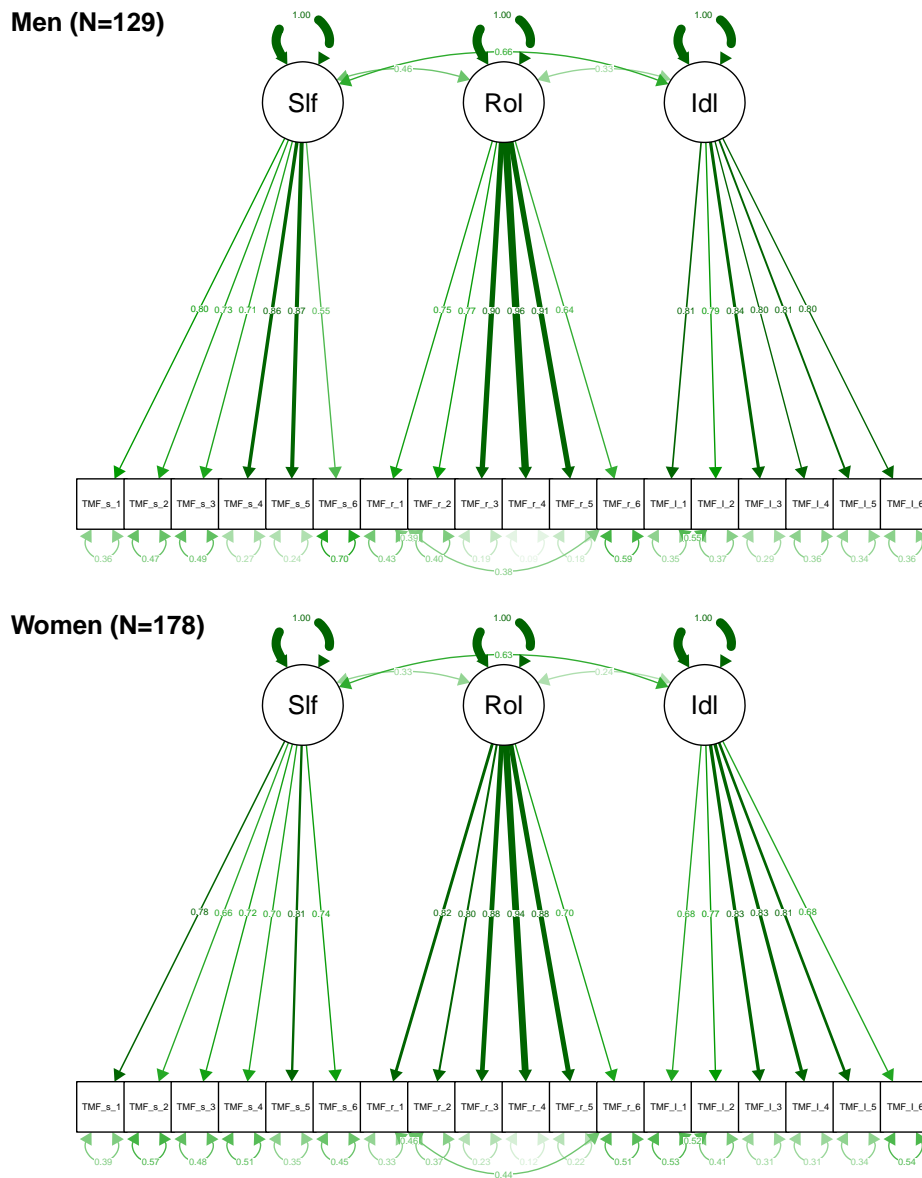


Figure 2: Multigroup SEM model. Slf = gender role self-concept; Rol = most recent acted character gender role self-concept (perceived); Idl = Ideal character gender role self-concept. Constraints were imposed between Ideal 1 and Ideal 2; Role 1 and Role 2; Role 1 and Role 6.

ACTING GENDER

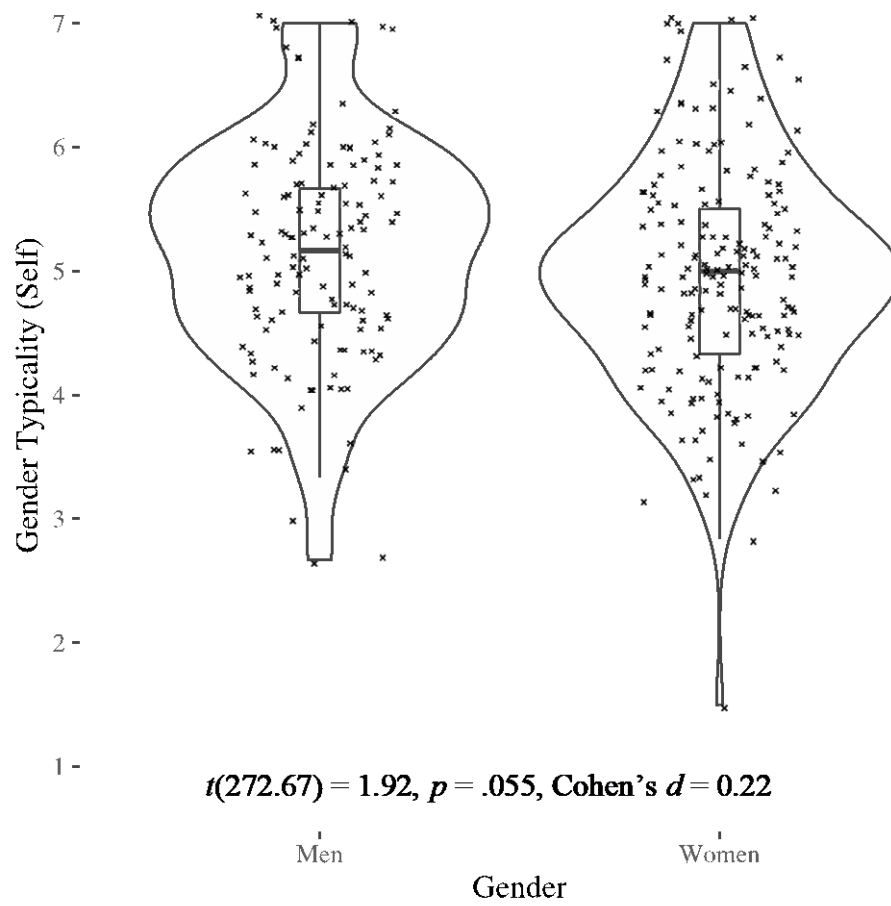


Figure 3: Violin box plot for comparison of men and women's gender role self-concept ratings

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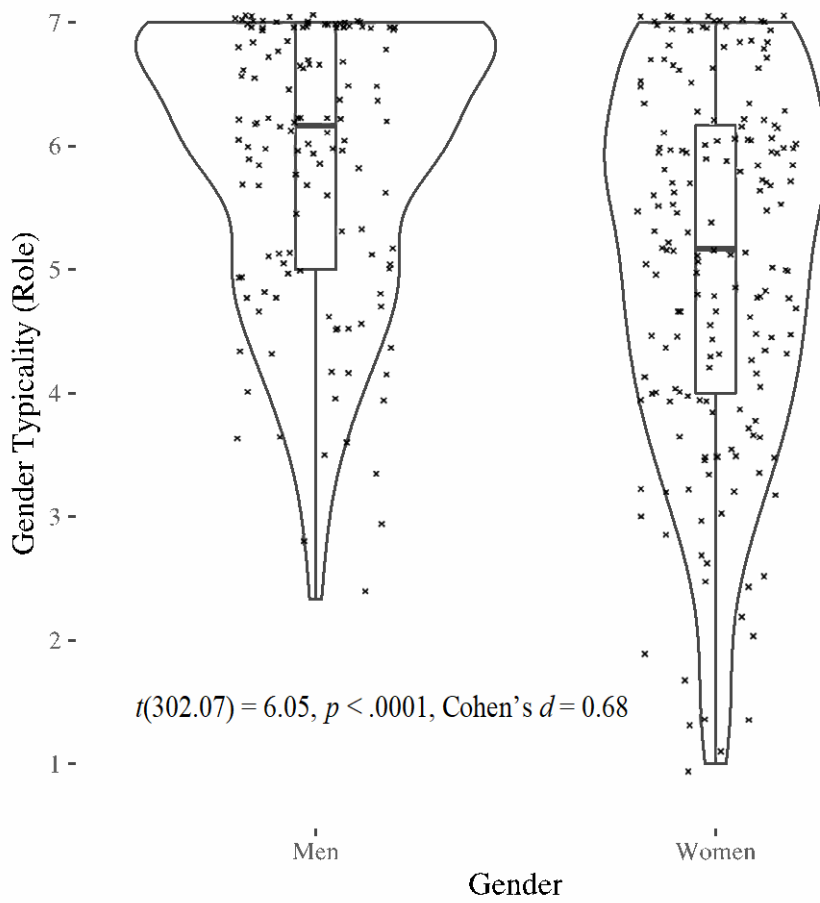


Figure 4: Violin box plot for comparison of men and women's most recent acted characters' gender role self-concept ratings

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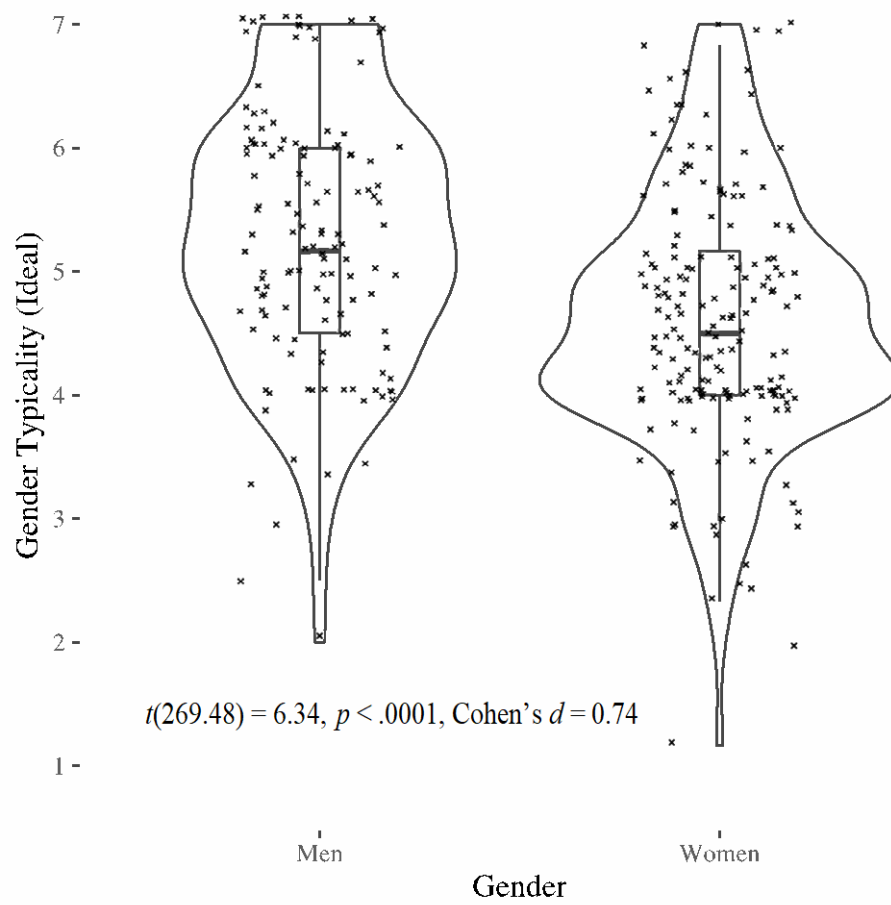


Figure 5: Violin box plot for comparison of men and women's ideal characters' gender role self-concept ratings