

Should female applicants “man up” for traditionally-masculine fields? Effectiveness of two verbal identity management strategies

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Abstract

Due to gender-based bias, women can be at a disadvantage when trying to enter into traditionally-masculine work contexts (e.g., engineering) and job positions (e.g., top management). The present study examined the effectiveness of two verbal gender presentation strategies that women might be able to use to improve their evaluations in traditionally-masculine hiring contexts: verbalizing agentic traits (describing oneself in terms of stereotypically masculine traits) and gender acknowledgement. In a laboratory study in which participants evaluated either a female or male applicant applying for a traditionally-masculine position (engineering manager), verbalizing one's agentic traits resulted in favorable fit evaluations for the female applicant, but not the male applicant. Further, acknowledging one's gender resulted in negative personal evaluations for both applicants. Our findings suggest that choices applicants make as to how to manage their gender presentation can influence how they are evaluated.

Should female applicants “man up” for traditionally-masculine fields? Effectiveness of two verbal identity management strategies

Women are underrepresented in traditionally-masculine fields (e.g., science and engineering; National Science Foundation, 2011) and in traditionally-masculine positions (e.g., top management; Heilman, 1997). This is partially due to the barriers women face during the selection/hiring processes. Both lab (e.g., Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006) and field studies (e.g., Lyness & Heilman, 2006) have shown that women applying for entry and/or promotion in traditionally-masculine fields receive less positive job-related evaluations than men. Thus, examining effective ways to address gender bias during the selection processes is one way of reducing the overall gender disparities in work environments.

As the employment interview is one of the most prevalent selection tools (Ryan, McFarland, Baron, & Page, 1999), decisions female applicants make as to how they present themselves during employment interviews for traditionally-masculine fields and/or positions could have significant implications for hiring decisions. The present study investigates two verbal strategies (i.e., verbalization of traits, acknowledgement of gender) women can potentially use in order to effectively manage their gender presentation during employment interviews for a traditionally-masculine position in a traditionally-masculine field. In the following sections, we will provide a brief review of the literature supporting each verbal strategy.

Verbalization of Gendered Traits

Traits associated with men and women are often thought of in terms of *agency* and *communion* (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987), respectively. Agentic traits are achievement-oriented, such as independence and assertiveness, whereas communal traits are more relational, such as warmth and supportiveness. Research has shown that people tend to associate men with agentic

traits and women with communal traits, both in terms of how they are described to be (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and how it is prescribed they should be (Rudman & Glick, 2001). For example, men are more likely to be described as and expected to be independent and assertive, whereas women are more likely to be described as and expected to be warm and nurturing.

Research has shown that these preconceptions can directly influence how men and women are perceived and evaluated in the workplace. According to Heilman's (1983; 1995; 1997; 2001) lack-of-fit model, many top leadership positions in organizations (e.g., high-level managers) tend to be associated with agentic traits and thus are perceived as "male" positions. As a result, communal traits do not fit with preconceived notions of what is needed to succeed in those jobs. Supporting the model, when asked to list the qualities of a "successful manager," people tend to list more agentic, as opposed to communal, traits (Powell & Butterfield, 1989; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002). Consequently, women who are more likely to be associated with communal traits are perceived to be less suitable for top leadership positions in organizations than men who are more likely to be associated with agentic traits.

Similarly, according to role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), negative evaluations toward women, especially those in the leadership positions, can emerge when characteristics associated with women are viewed as *incongruent* with the characteristics associated with success in leadership. In a lab study by Garcia-Retamero and Lopez-Zafra (2006), there were lower performance expectations for women applying to a leadership position, compared to male applicants. This sex-based discrepancy was further enhanced when the leadership position was associated more with masculinity (i.e., auto manufacturing), as compared to femininity (i.e., clothing manufacturing). Thus, both lack-of-fit model and role congruity

theory suggest that a woman applying for a position associated with agentic traits is particularly likely to be disadvantaged during selection, because she is associated with communal traits.

One potential strategy for female applicants to preemptively combat bias against them during the selection processes would be to emphasize the fit between their personal characteristics and characteristics of the job for which they are applying. For example, women applying for a traditionally-masculine position could use agentic traits to describe themselves (or to use a colloquial phrase, ‘man up’). Indeed, previous research has shown that female applicants who are seen as having stereotypically masculine interests (e.g., worked summers at a sporting goods store, played basketball) are evaluated more positively for positions in traditionally-masculine fields than women seen as having stereotypically feminine interests (e.g., worked summers at jewelry store, participated in cheerleading; Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988).

It is worthwhile to highlight the findings from recent research showing that, in the modern workplace, certain communal behaviors have become desirable in managerial positions, such as mentoring and communicating (referred to as the “feminization of management”; Atwater, Brett, Waldman, DiMare, & Hayden, 2004). In fact, when examining evaluations of incumbent top leaders, women may be rated more highly than men in overall leadership competence, as they are seen as competent enough to have gotten the traditionally-masculine position despite sex-based discrimination and seen as having a sex-based advantage in communal leadership competence (Rosette & Tost, 2010). However, it should be noted that this advantage was observed in contexts where the woman has already demonstrated past success in a traditionally-masculine position (e.g., Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rosette & Tost, 2010) and is now battling prescriptive stereotypes of how she *should* act, rather than descriptive stereotypes of how she *does* act (Heilman, 2001). In a hiring context for a traditionally-masculine position, the

female applicant has not yet established herself as successful in that particular workplace. Thus, explicitly verbalizing the fit between communal traits and the traditionally-masculine positions may not only be ineffective but also may be disadvantageous.

Acknowledgement of One's Own Gender

Acknowledgement has been put forth as an effective strategy for dealing with the sometimes “awkward” interactions between individuals with and without a *stigma* (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000). A stigma is a personal attribute or characteristic that is devalued in a particular social context based on associated negative stereotypes (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Goffman, 1963). Although being a woman is not a stigma in many social contexts, being a woman *in traditionally-masculine fields or positions* can be a stigma because women still systematically experience negatively biased evaluations in these particular contexts, as described above.

A number of studies have shown that acknowledgment of a stigma can reduce stigma-based discrimination and create a more positive evaluation of the individual (e.g., Hastorf, Wildfogel, & Cassman, 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Singletary & Hebl, 2009). For example, Singletary and Hebl (2009) found that gay and lesbian job applicants (whose orientation was known to the interviewer via a manipulation in the study) received less interpersonal discrimination when they acknowledged their sexual orientation during the selection processes, compared to when they did not acknowledge their sexual orientation. One proposed explanation for positive effects of stigma acknowledgement on evaluations is that acknowledging a stigma signals to others that a stigmatized individual is comfortable with his/her identity and well-adjusted to his/her life situation (Hebl et al., 2000). In employment selection processes, especially for leadership positions, this strategy might be effective as “good leaders” tend to be

thought of as comfortable with themselves (i.e., self-confident) and emotionally well-adjusted (see Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002 for a summary of qualitative research). This suggests that a woman acknowledging her stigmatized gender during the selection processes could be perceived favorably.

However, recent research suggests the effects of stigma acknowledgment on impression formation may only be positive in certain contexts. Stigma acknowledgement may be particularly beneficial for infrequently-encountered stigmas (e.g., physical disabilities) because acknowledgement reduces uncertainty surrounding how to act or what to say to those individuals (Hebl et al., 2000). Accordingly, acknowledgement would not serve this function with stigmatized identities that are frequently encountered (e.g., women). In fact, Hagiwara, Wessel, and Ryan (2012) have shown that acknowledgement of gender made by Sarah Palin, a vice presidential candidate, during a 2008 election speech had no effect on voters' attitudes and that acknowledgement of racial-minority identity (another relatively frequently-encountered stigma) made by President Obama actually had *negative* effects on voters' attitudes. In sum, the research on stigma acknowledgement in general is mixed, with research supporting a positive, negative, and null influence of acknowledgement on impression formation.

The Present Study

The present study examines how two verbal gender presentation strategies (i.e., verbalization of traits, acknowledgement of gender) independently or jointly influence people's evaluations of women applying to a traditionally-masculine position in a traditionally-masculine field. We use an experimental design in which participants evaluate a female or male confederate applying to a traditionally-masculine position. A male applicant was included in the current study to enable us to determine whether these two identity management strategies uniquely

advantage/disadvantage female applicants or they can be also effectively used by male applicants.

According to role congruity theory, male applicants with masculine traits are perceived as better suited for a traditionally-masculine position than male applicants with feminine traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glick et al., 1998), and there is some evidence to suggest that men benefit in job-related evaluations when they appear traditionally masculine (Kwantes, Lin, Gidak, & Schmidt, 2011). Thus, we hypothesized that verbalizing agentic traits during employment interviews would result in more positive evaluations for both female and male applicants (H1). However, as men are typically assumed to be more agentic than women without any identity management, we expect the overall positive influence of verbalizing agentic traits on evaluations to be weaker for male applicants, compared to female applicants. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the relationship between verbalization of agentic traits and evaluations would be stronger for the female applicant (H2). In terms of acknowledgment of gender, we explored whether acknowledging one's own gender has positive, negative, or null influence on people's evaluations of female and male applicants (Research Question 1). We did not make specific predictions because, as discussed above, the results of gender acknowledgment for women have been somewhat mixed. For men, on one hand, gender acknowledgement may be viewed as strange and inappropriate because men are not stigmatized in a traditionally-masculine field. On the other hand, emphasizing being male in a traditionally-masculine field could result in emphasizing "fit" with the domain. Finally, we also explored how verbalizing agency and gender acknowledgement jointly influence people's evaluations of female and male applicants during the interview (Research Question 2).

The present study extends prior research in several ways. First, in prior research, “fit” between personal traits and job characteristics was *implied* by information on a resume created by experimenters (e.g., Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988). While this is relevant when investigating such screening processes, the current study, in contrast, examines the effectiveness of *directly verbalizing* agentic traits in an interview setting. We focus on the employment interview because this is a context (a) that one can reasonably assume involves many self-presentation choices on the part of applicants, and (b) has high-stakes consequences (i.e., hiring; Ryan et al., 1999).

Next, no study to date, to our knowledge, has examined the effects of these two identity management strategies simultaneously. Exploration of joint effects of two verbal strategies on evaluations during the selection processes adds to the literature as well as in terms of “real-world” implications, as the positive effects of “fit” between personal and job characteristics could be either inhibited or augmented by acknowledgement of gender. For example, if gender acknowledgement does indeed create an impression that a female applicant is comfortable with herself, leading to more positive evaluations overall, will that effect be weaker when she has described herself agentially? These questions can be explored with the present experimental design.

Finally, our examination of evaluations includes both qualification evaluations (e.g., job fit, qualification characteristics) and personal evaluations relevant to the job (e.g., personal characteristics, emotional reactions to the applicant). Although research has shown that a woman asserting her agency can be perceived as less warm and likeable (e.g., Bowles and Babcock, 2013; Rudman, 1998; Phelan & Rudman, 2010), agentic-related behaviors such as self-promotion are common in an interview context and have been shown to positively influence ratings of personality (Fletcher, 1990). Thus, we do not make differential predictions for

qualification evaluations and personal evaluations, theorizing that in the context of an interview, verbalizing agency will help personal evaluations as well. Examination of personal evaluations is important both practically and theoretically. First, research has shown that evaluations of personal characteristics can influence evaluations of performance and employability (e.g., Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Cole, Feild, Giles, & Harris, 2009). Investigating both types of evaluations has practical implications, because once we pinpoint how strategies influence interviewers' evaluations, we can use this information to inform and train interviewers how to minimize any bias against female applicants.

Method

Participants

Six hundred and seventy-four undergraduates (46.1% female, age $M = 19.79$, $SD = 2.19$) from a large Midwestern university participated in this study in exchange for research participation credit. Participants were predominantly White (75.5 %), in addition to African American/Black (5.8 %), American Indian/Alaska Native (.4 %), Asian (9.9 %), Hispanic/Latino/a (1.5 %), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (.1 %), Multi-Racial (1.6 %) and Other (2.5 %). Seventeen participants (2.5 %) chose not to provide their race/ethnicity. Thirty-five participants (not included in the 674 participant count) were excluded from analyses due to previous interactions with either of the interviewees ($N = 29$) and experimenters flagging participants who were not paying attention during the experiment session ($N = 6$).

Procedure

This experiment involved a 2 x (Applicant gender: Female vs. Male) x 3 (Verbalization of Traits: Agentic vs. Communal vs. Neutral) x 2 (Gender acknowledgment: Acknowledgement vs. Non-acknowledgement) between-participants design. Prior to a laboratory session,

participants completed a pre-laboratory online survey, which included potential control measures (e.g., hostile sexism, benevolent sexism) and demographic items (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, year in school, and work experience). Other attitude and personality measures were also included in the online survey to mask the nature of the study, but were not used in analyses.

Participants then entered the laboratory sessions at a later date with up to seven other participants. They were each seated at a separate computer and informed that they were going to be watching an interview of a job applicant and then evaluating that applicant. Participants read a job advertisement for the position and then watched a video of the applicant's interview. In the video, for each of the five interview questions, participants first read a question in text and then watched the applicant answering the question. This ensured that participants did not know the gender of the interviewer, which could have systematic effects on participants' evaluations of the applicant. The interview video varied based on the gender of the applicant in the video (male or female), the trait verbalizing condition (agentic, communal, or gender-neutral) and the gender acknowledgement condition (acknowledgement or nonacknowledgement). After watching the interview video, participants were asked to evaluate the applicant by answering items pertaining to qualification evaluations (i.e., perceived fit, qualification characteristics) and personal evaluations (i.e., personal characteristics, and emotional reactions to the applicant). Participants were then debriefed.

Materials

Job advertisement. We chose the job position of *engineering manager* for our experiment, as the manager position meets the criteria for a traditionally-masculine position and the engineering industry meets the criteria for a traditionally-masculine field, both in the

disproportionate amount of male compared to female employees (NSF, 2011) and the view that engineering is a counter-stereotypical field for women (e.g., Rosser, 2003; Steele, James, & Barnett, 2002). To create a realistic job advertisement, we chose three actual job advertisements from a popular online job recruiting website, replacing the real company name with a fake one. The advertisements were edited to be approximately of equal length and in a similar format. We then pilot-tested these three advertisements with a small group of undergraduate students ($N = 30$), asking them questions pertaining to the level of masculinity associated with the position (e.g., *This is a masculine type of job*), the level of femininity associated with the position (e.g., *This is a feminine type of job*), and the level of masculinity associated with the organization (e.g., *This organization probably has more male than female employees*), using a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We used the advertisement which received the highest ratings of both job masculinity ($M = 3.51$; $SD = .72$) and organization masculinity ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .71$) and also had the largest gap between ratings of job masculinity and job femininity ($M_{diff} = 1.24$).

Interview and manipulations. The interview script contained five typical interview questions (e.g., *Why are you interested in working here?*; *Where do you see yourself in five years?*). The manipulation occurred in the fourth question, in which the interviewee was asked to describe her/his strengths (see Table 1). In this question, the videos varied as to how he/she described her/his strengths (i.e., in agentic, communal, or gender-neutral terms) and whether or not the interviewee acknowledged her/his gender. The adjectives used for each of the strengths (i.e., agentic: *analytical, ambitious, assertive*; communal: *compassionate, sensitive, nurturing*; neutral: *reliable, conscientious, and adaptable*) were taken from research which categorized traits in terms of their association with agency, communion, or neither (Bem, 1974; Duehr &

Bono, 2006). We then asked 22 undergraduates to rate these adjectives (interspersed in a long list of adjectives) in terms of how *masculine* and *feminine* they would appear to most people, using a scale ranged from 1 (not masculine/feminine at all) to 5 (extremely masculine/feminine). The mean of the three adjectives intended to be agentic (*analytical, ambitious, assertive*; $M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.12$) was rated significantly more masculine than the mean of both the adjectives intended to be communal (*compassionate, sensitive, nurturing*; $M = 1.67$, $SD = .73$; $t(21) = 7.33$, $p < .01$) or neutral (*reliable, conscientious, and adaptable*; $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.02$; $t(21) = 3.86$, $p < .01$). The mean of the three adjectives intended to be communal ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .97$) was rated significantly more feminine than the mean of both the adjectives intended to be agentic ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.11$; $t(21) = -6.41$, $p < .01$) or neutral ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.11$; $t(21) = -5.06$, $p < .01$).

In order to further ensure that all of the adjectives were seen as positive managerial traits, regardless of the degree of masculinity/femininity, the same 22 participants also rated each of the adjectives in terms of how well they fit what it means to most people to be a “good manager,” on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. As communal traits are often associated with low competence (Fiske et al., 2002), the mean of the adjectives intended to be communal were lower ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .95$) compared to the mean of the adjectives intended to be agentic ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .52$), $t(21) = -2.02$, $p = .06$, and neutral ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .47$), $t(21) = -3.74$, $p < .01$. The mean of the neutral traits were also seen as more positive than the agentic traits, $t(21) = -2.15$, $p = .04$. However, all adjectives were rated above the scale mid-point, indicating that, on average, participants agreed that these adjectives fit with most people’s idea of a high-quality manager.

The male and female confederates playing the part of the job applicant were both in their late twenties and Caucasian. They were both instructed similarly on how to deliver the lines and

maintain a natural and pleasant demeanor during the “interview”. The scripts for the female and male applicant were identical, with the exception of the acknowledgement condition, where the female applicant acknowledged being a “woman in a male-dominated field” and the male applicant acknowledged being a “man working in this field”. The male applicant did not describe his field as “male-dominated” in order to make the interview seem more natural and believable, while still using gender acknowledgement. Although the two applicants were similar demographically and were reading the same script, it is possible that the confederates differed on characteristics not related to the study that could affect overall evaluations. However, the focus of this study is not differences in evaluations between the two candidates (which could be idiosyncratic), but rather differences in the *patterns* of ratings for different identity management strategies between the two candidates. Therefore, exact similitude between the two confederates need not be the goal, but rather standardization of the within-confederate differences between conditions, which was achieved by having the two confederates read the same script.

Measures

Qualification evaluations. The applicant’s qualification was assessed with two measures: perceived fit and qualification characteristics. Fit was assessed using six items regarding applicant’s fit with the position (e.g., *I think that the candidate would do well at this position*) and the organization (e.g., *I think that the candidate will be a great addition to the company*). These items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$). Participants were also asked to rate the applicant on eight different qualification characteristics (i.e., incompetent/competent, unintelligent/intelligent, follower/leader, incapable/capable, unknowledgeable/knowledgeable,

inexperienced/experienced, novice/expert, careless/self-disciplined), using bipolar scales ranging from -3 to 3 ($\alpha = .90$).

Personal evaluations. The applicant's personal characteristics unrelated to job qualification were assessed using two measures: perceived personal characteristics and emotional reactions to the applicant. Participants were asked to rate the applicant on four personal characteristics (i.e., unpleasant/pleasant, unfriendly/friendly, unlikeable/likeable, irritating/nice), using the same bipolar scales ranging from -3 to 3 ($\alpha = .92$). Finally, participants were asked to rate their emotional reactions to the applicant on scales ranging from -3 to 3 ($\alpha = .94$). The seven items asked participants to indicate how the applicant makes them feel: agitated/at ease, angry/calm, frustrated/relaxed, irritated/content, uneasy/secure, anxious/confident, unhappy/happy.

Potential control variables. Participants also completed 22 items from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) concerning hostile sexist attitudes ($\alpha = .82$) and benevolent sexist attitudes ($\alpha = .73$). Items were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Participant gender was also chosen as a potential covariate and was included in the demographic items filled out by participants.

Analytic Strategy

We first conducted descriptive statistics and computed correlations among potential control variables and the four dependent variables (i.e., perceived fit, qualification characteristics, personal characteristics, emotional reactions). Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlations of our dependent variables and control variables. Our initial analysis showed that hostile (but not benevolent) sexism and participant gender correlated significantly with most of our dependent variables and thus were statistically controlled for in the

main analyses. Hypotheses and research questions were tested using hierarchical regression, in which participant gender and hostile sexism were entered in the first step as control variables, followed by the verbalizing traits condition, acknowledgement condition, and applicant gender in the second step, and then followed by all two-way interaction terms in the final step. The verbalizing traits condition was represented using two dummy-coded variables, *agentic traits* and *communal traits*. In both of these variables, the neutral trait condition was the referent condition and coded as 0, with the respective experimental condition (i.e., agentic or communal) dummy-coded as 1. Acknowledgment condition was represented with the non-acknowledgment dummy-coded as 0 and acknowledgement dummy-coded as 1, and applicant gender condition was represented with female as 0 and male as 1.

Results

Verbalization of Gendered Traits

Table 3 depicts the hierarchical regression results for each of our four dependent variables, taken from the last step of the regression equations. Results revealed a significant main effect of verbalizing traits for perceived fit, $b = .28$, $t(645) = 1.97$, $p = .049$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, with participants rating the applicant more favorably when using agentic traits as compared to neutral traits, regardless of the applicant gender, supporting Hypothesis 1. However, this relationship was qualified by a significant interaction between the communal traits dummy-coded variable and the applicant gender, $b = -.41$, $t(645) = -2.44$, $p = .02$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, (see Figure 1). To examine the nature of the interaction, we conducted simple slope tests for each level of applicant gender. The analysis showed that the difference between the communal condition and the neutral condition was not significant for the female applicant, $b = .09$, $t(645) = .60$, $p = .55$, but it was significant for the male applicant, $b = -.32$, $t(645) = -2.18$, $p = .03$. More specifically,

examination of the coefficients suggest that the male, but not female, applicant was perceived to be a worse fit for the position when he verbalized communal traits as opposed to neutral traits.

We also followed up the interaction between the agentic traits dummy-coded variable and applicant gender, as it was trending toward significance, $b = -.31$, $t(645) = -1.89$, $p = .06$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, (see Figure 1). The simple slope tests revealed that, for the female applicant, perceived fit was significantly higher when she verbalized agentic traits than when she verbalized neutral traits, $b = .28$, $t(645) = 1.97$, $p = .049$. In contrast, for the male applicant, there was no significant difference between the agentic and neutral conditions, $b = -.04$, $t(645) = -.24$, $p = .81$. That is, the female, but not male, applicant was perceived to be a better fit for the position when she verbalized agentic traits as opposed to neutral traits. These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 2, as verbalizing agency benefitted the female applicant more than the male applicant.

Verbalizing agentic traits was not related significantly to qualification characteristics, personal characteristics, or emotional reactions. Also, there were no significant interactions between verbalizing traits and applicant gender for these dependent variables. Overall, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were partially supported, such that verbally emphasizing one's agentic traits was particularly beneficial for the female applicant. In addition, emphasizing communal traits was harmful for the male applicant.

Acknowledgment of One's Own Gender

Next, we explored the role of gender acknowledgement in applicant evaluations (Research Question 1). The main effect of acknowledgement was significant when predicting evaluations of personal characteristics, $b = -.39$, $t(645) = -2.27$, $p = .02$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, such that the applicant who acknowledged her/his gender was evaluated more negatively than the applicant

who did not acknowledge her/his gender. There was no significant interaction between acknowledgement and applicant gender.

Interaction between Trait Verbalization and Gender Acknowledgement

There were significant interactions between the communal traits dummy-coded variable and acknowledgement, $b = .44$, $t(645) = 2.03$, $p = .04$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, when predicting evaluations of personal characteristics. Simple slope tests revealed that, for the non-acknowledgement condition, there were no significant differences between the communal and neutral conditions, $b = .10$, $t(645) = .55$, $p = .58$, or between the agentic and neutral conditions, $b = .29$, $t(645) = 1.56$, $p = .12$. In contrast, for the acknowledgment condition, the differences between the communal and neutral conditions and between the agentic and neutral conditions were both significant, $b = .54$, $t(645) = 2.91$, $p < .01$ and $b = .56$, $t(645) = 2.97$, $p < .01$, respectively (see Figure 2). Note that although the interaction between the agentic dummy-coded variable and acknowledgement was nonsignificant, we found a significant simple slope in the acknowledgement condition. It is possible to have a significant simple effect without a significant interaction. In this case, although the relationship between verbalizing agentic traits (vs. neutral traits) does not significantly differ across levels of acknowledgement, the slope between verbalizing agentic traits and personality traits does significantly differ in the acknowledgement condition (Lane, 2013).

We also explored three-way interaction terms between verbalizing traits, gender acknowledgement, and applicant gender, but none of these interactions were significant for any of the dependent variables and are not discussed further. Overall, our findings suggest that acknowledgement had either negative or non-significant effects on evaluations for both the female and male applicants (Research Question 1) and that acknowledgement paired with

verbalization of neutral traits was associated with the most negative personal characteristics evaluations (Research Question 2).

Exploratory Analyses

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of two different verbal gender presentation strategies for women applying for traditionally-masculine positions in traditionally-masculine fields. With tendency toward gender bias (i.e., hostile sexism) and participant gender controlled for, participants felt that a female applicant fit a traditionally-masculine position more when she used agentic traits to describe herself. In contrast, the male applicant was evaluated as less fitting of a traditionally-masculine position when he used communal traits to describe himself. Thus, there are different patterns of findings for female and male applicants in terms of the effect of verbalization of gendered traits. Turning to the effects of gender acknowledgement, both female and male applicants were evaluated more negatively, in terms of personal characteristics, when they acknowledged their gender. This was particularly true if they also used neutral traits to describe themselves. The findings for fit evaluations suggest that applicants' decisions to manage their gender presentation could influence how they are personally perceived during job interviews and that these decisions might influence female and male applicants differently. The pattern of findings for the female applicant supports both the lack-of-fit model (1983; 1995; 1997; 2001) and role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and adds incrementally to these theories by suggesting that directly verbalizing congruent self-information can affect perceptions of congruency. The disadvantage of emphasizing communal traits for the male applicant also provides support for these two models, as the male applicant may have been

assumed to fit the traditionally-masculine position unless he described himself in traditionally feminine (i.e., communal) ways.

The findings from the present study do not seem to support the literature on the backlash effect (Rudman, 1998), which has demonstrated a potential downside to women emphasizing counter-stereotypical (i.e., agentic) traits—that is decreased perceptions of warmth and likability (Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Rudman, 1998). However, our results indicate that verbalization of agentic traits did not relate significantly nor negatively to evaluations related to warmth and likeability (i.e., personal characteristics, emotional reactions). This may be due to the specific context of an interview for a traditionally-masculine position, in which masculine, self-promoting behaviors are the norm and may not result in the same backlash for women as would happen if those behaviors occurred in other work contexts. Although Rudman (1998) found a backlash effect in an interview context, this was not for a traditionally-masculine position, but rather for a partner in a computer game. Further research examining the contextual constraints of the backlash effect will further elucidate this point.

Our findings concerning acknowledgement of gender also add to the existing theory and research (e.g., Hastorf et al., 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Singletary & Hebl, 2009) by suggesting that stigma acknowledgement as a verbal identity management strategy may operate differently in the context of gender than it does with less frequently encountered stigmatized identities, such as physical disabilities. In the present study, gender acknowledgement was associated with more *negative* evaluations of personal characteristics. For personal characteristics evaluations, acknowledgement might have increased the salience of the female applicant's gender, leading to more negative evaluations above and beyond any general tendencies to be sexist. However, this would not explain why the male applicant was also negatively evaluated by acknowledging his

gender, as male acknowledgement would presumably increase perceptions of fit with the traditionally-masculine field. Another explanation could be that gender acknowledgement negatively affects women and men for different reasons. Perhaps female applicants are seen as playing the “gender card” when they acknowledge, whereas male applicants are seen as arrogant or sexist when they acknowledge, both resulting in more negative evaluations.

However, the negative effects of gender acknowledgement on the evaluations of personal characteristics seemed to be mainly driven by the negative reaction to combining gender acknowledgement with verbalization of neutral traits. One potential explanation is that acknowledging one’s gender without providing any other information to make gender acknowledgement relevant might have led participants to feel confused about the applicant’s motivations. That is, acknowledging one’s gender and then describing oneself in a stereotypical way (i.e., agentic for the male, communal for the female) might be seen as emphasizing what one brings to the organization as a stereotypical representative of one’s gender. Conversely, acknowledging one’s gender and then describing oneself in a counter-stereotypical way (i.e., agentic for the female, communal for the male) might be seen as emphasizing one’s uniqueness and separating oneself from the evaluator’s preconceived notions. Acknowledging one’s gender and then describing oneself in a gender-neutral way might be seen as an unrelated gratuitous reference to gender and odd to the evaluator, leading to lower evaluations. Future research examining the motivation of female and male applicants employing gender acknowledgement, as perceived by evaluators, would provide some clarity on this point.

Our results also have practical implications for female applicants in traditionally-masculine fields. Although our effect sizes were relatively small, simulations have shown that even a 1% sex-based advantage in evaluations could lead to a significant gender imbalance over

time (Martell, Lane, & Emrich, 1996). Further, our manipulation was quite subtle (one answer in the middle of an interview), suggesting that even small differences in the way in which an applicant verbally presents her/his gender during an interview can influence how he/she is evaluated. Thus, applicants in traditionally-masculine fields may *indirectly* increase their hiring chances by rehearsing and consciously monitoring how they present themselves. Female applicants may want to emphasize agentic traits and stay away from direct acknowledgement of their gender. Although the focus of this study was on evaluations of women applying to traditionally-masculine positions in traditionally-masculine fields, our findings also provide practical information for male applicants in this context, who may want to stay away from both direct acknowledgement of their gender and verbalization of communal traits.

This is not to suggest that it is the responsibility of applicants to ensure their own equal treatment. We agree with Singletary and Hebl (2009) that research on identity management strategies is not meant to diminish the important role of organizational and public policies to promote equal treatment of job applicants, but rather to focus on ways in which stigmatized individuals may be able to improve evaluative outcomes at the entry stage of their careers in the face of pervasive and persistent identity-based bias. For organizations in traditionally-masculine fields interested in increasing gender diversity, making recruiters aware that selection decisions based on an applicants' inferred personal characteristics or fit with the position/organization could systematically differ based on applicants' gender presentation may be one way to address potential selection bias. However, the effectiveness of such intervention needs further empirical investigation.

Limitations

As stated in the Methods section, we chose demographically-similar confederates in terms of age and race, but it is possible that the female and male confederates (i.e., the interviewees) differed on other characteristics that may affect evaluations, such as attractiveness (Hosoda et al., 2003). Although our goal was to look at differences in the relationships between the use of identity management strategies and evaluations for the female and male interviewee and not the mean differences between evaluations across interviewee sex, future research should measure and control for applicant attractiveness (and other variables that might potentially alter evaluations) in order to make inferences regarding mean sex differences in evaluations.

Simulated interview contexts in laboratory settings, such as the one used in the present study, differ from actual interviews in terms of the characteristics of observers, levels of engagement of observers, the rating task, and accountability. Although studies using student samples can be criticized for the participants' presumed lack of experience in work environments, 89.4 % of our sample had worked part- or full-time within the past year and 46 % were currently employed part- or full-time. Further, past research has indicated relatively little differences in studies related to bias in early employment screening using actual recruiters or college students (e.g., Deros, Ryan, & Nguyen, 2011; Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003), perhaps because of the fact that recruiters are often untrained (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). The use of a videotaped interview rather than actual interview allowed much greater control in terms of consistency in applicant behavior across conditions, as well as the ability to assess and consider prejudiced attitudes of evaluators. Given the move toward technology-mediated interviews (Chapman & Webster, 2003), the lack of face-to-face interaction with actual

applicants is not as limiting a factor as in past research. Lastly, quality laboratory research (with psychological realism and effective manipulations) plays an important role in theory building and inferring causality in organizational research (Colquitt, 2008; Highhouse, 2009).

Conclusions

In traditionally-masculine fields, female applicants are generally disadvantaged. This study drew upon theories of lack-of-fit, role congruity, and stigma acknowledgement to examine the effectiveness of two verbal identity management strategies in ameliorating gender disparities in job interviews. Emphasis of agentic traits led to more positive fit evaluations for a female applicant, and gender acknowledgement led to more negative personal evaluations. Our results highlight the varied success of identity management strategies and the importance of both interviewees' and recruiters' understandings of the effects of these strategies on evaluations during the selection processes

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Endnote

¹ We also conducted exploratory analyses to test for interactions between our manipulations (verbalizing traits, acknowledgement) and our control variables (participant gender, hostile sexism). To explore hostile sexism interactions we conducted four hierarchical regressions (for each of the four evaluation measures) with participant gender controlled for in the first step, followed by main effects variables (verbalizing traits condition, acknowledgement condition, applicant gender, hostile sexism) in the second step, followed by two-way interaction variables in the third step, and three-way interaction variables in the fourth step. For personal characteristics, we found an interaction between acknowledgement, applicant gender, and hostile sexism, $b = -.46$, $t(634) = -2.46$, $p = .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$. Simple slopes analyses indicated that participants high in sexist attitudes viewing a male applicant who did not acknowledge his gender evaluated his personal characteristics more positively, compared to those participants with low hostile sexist attitudes, $b = .51$, $t(634) = 3.70$, $p < .001$. Hostile sexism did not relate to personal characteristics for participants viewing a female applicant in the nonacknowledgement condition, a male applicant in the acknowledgement condition, or a female applicant in the acknowledgement condition. We also found a significant interaction between the agentic dummy-coded variable, acknowledgement condition, and hostile sexism, $b = .59$, $t(634) = 2.55$, $p = .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, with simple slopes analyses indicating that when an applicant acknowledged her/his gender *and* verbalized agentic traits, participants higher in hostile sexism evaluated the personal characteristics of the applicant more negatively than compared to participants low in hostile sexism, $b = -.57$, $t(634) = 2.97$, $p < .01$. For the emotional reactions dependent variable, we found an interaction between applicant gender and hostile sexism, $b = .52$, $t(634) = 2.87$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, with simple slopes analyses indicating that participants high in hostile sexism

reported that emotional reactions to the male applicant were more positive than participants low in hostile sexism, $b = .35$, $t(634) = 2.50$, $p = .01$. For the female applicant, hostile sexism did not significantly relate to the emotional reactions outcome variable.

To explore participant gender interactions, we conducted four hierarchical regressions (for each dependent variable) with hostile sexism controlled for in the first step, followed by main effects variables (verbalizing traits condition, acknowledgement condition, applicant gender, participant gender) in the second step, followed by interaction variables in the third step, and three-way interaction variables in the fourth step. For fit, we found a three-way interaction for the communal dummy-coded variable, applicant gender, and participant gender, $b = .69$, $t(634) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, though none of the simple slopes were significant. However, slope difference tests indicate significant differences between the slopes for female participants evaluating female applicants and female participants evaluating male applicants, $t(634) = -2.00$, $p = .046$. Specifically, female participants rated the fit of a female applicant higher when she verbalized communal traits ($M = 5.56$, $SD = .72$) compared to neutral traits ($M = 5.26$, $SD = .78$), $b = .32$, $t(634) = 1.43$, $p = .15$, and rated the fit of a male applicant as lower when he verbalized communal traits ($M = 5.00$, $SD = .84$) compared to neutral traits ($M = 5.48$, $SD = .68$), $b = -.19$, $t(634) = -1.17$, $p = .25$. Slope difference tests also indicate a significant difference between the slopes for female participants evaluating the female applicant and male participants evaluating the female applicant, $t(634) = -2.10$, $p = .04$, in that male participants evaluated the female applicant as having lower fit when she verbalized communal traits ($M = 5.07$, $SD = .89$) as compared to neutral traits ($M = 5.09$, $SD = .88$), $b = -.27$, $t(634) = -1.21$, $p = .23$. For personal characteristics, we found a significant interaction of applicant gender and participant gender, $b = .86$, $t(634) = 2.42$, $p = .02$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$. The nature of this interaction indicated that female

participants evaluated the personal characteristics of the female applicant ($M = 1.77, SD = 1.08$) higher than the male applicant ($M = .93, SD = 1.21$), $b = -1.14, t(634) = -3.95, p < .01$. There was no significant difference in the personal characteristics evaluations based on applicant gender for male participants. All interaction findings discussed here should be interpreted with caution, as these analyses were conducted post-hoc and are exploratory.

Table 1
Conditions for Study Manipulations

Condition	Content
Acknowledgement for Female Applicant	<i>As a woman in a male-dominated field, my qualities of ...</i>
Acknowledgement for Male Applicant	<i>As a man working in this field, my qualities of ...</i>
Non-acknowledgement	<i>My qualities of ...</i>
Agentic/masculine	<i>... being analytical in my ideas and actions, ambitious in my strategies and plans, and assertive in pursuit of organizational goals are strengths.</i>
Communal/feminine	<i>... being compassionate in all my interactions, sensitive to the needs of others, and nurturing of the talents of others are strengths.</i>
Neutral	<i>... being reliable as a member of a work team, conscientious as to my work obligations, and adaptable to changing circumstances are strengths.</i>

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fit	5.24	.90	(.86)				
2. Qualification	1.35	.91	.66**	(.90)			
3. Personal Characteristics	1.29	1.20	.45**	.54**	(.92)		
4. Emotional Reactions	.80	1.13	.54**	.64**	.74**	(.94)	
5. Hostile Sexism	2.91	.63	-.07	-.10**	-.05	-.08*	(.82)
6. Participant Gender	.53	.50	-.14**	-.11**	-.08*	-.11**	.18**

Note. Alphas on the diagonal. Participant gender was dummy coded with 0 = Female and 1 = Male. * $p < .05$, and ** $p < .01$. Scale ranges: Fit (1 to 7); Qualification, Personal Characteristics, Emotional Reactions (-3 to 3), Hostile Sexism (1 to 5).

Table 3

Regression of Verbalizing Traits, Acknowledgement, Applicant Gender, and Interaction Terms on Applicant Evaluation Variables

Source	Fit			Competencies			Personal Characteristics			Emotional Reactions		
	β	SEB	<i>t</i> -value	β	SEB	<i>t</i> -value	β	SEB	<i>t</i> -value	β	SEB	<i>t</i> -value
<u>Control Variables</u>												
Participant Gender	-.23**	.07	-3.29	-.18*	.07	-2.51	-.15 [†]	.09	-1.66	-.23*	.09	-2.56
Hostile Sexism	-.03	.04	-.80	-.07 [†]	.04	-1.82	-.01	.05	-.18	-.05	.04	-1.20
<u>Main Effects Variables</u>												
Agentic Traits (Ag)	.28*	.14	1.97	.09	.15	.62	.29	.19	1.56	.33 [†]	.18	1.80
Communal Traits (Co)	.09	.14	.60	.14	.15	.93	.10	.18	.55	.20	.18	1.09
Acknowledgement (Ac)	-.06	.13	-.44	-.19	.14	-1.37	-.39*	.17	-2.27	-.33 [†]	.17	-1.94
Applicant Gender (AppG)	.10	.14	.73	-.09	.14	-.62	-.48**	.18	-2.73	-.15	.17	-.89
<u>Interaction Terms</u>												
AgXAc	-.07	.17	-.42	.25	.17	1.45	.27	.22	1.25	.02	.21	.09
CoXAc	.07	.17	.39	.02	.17	.08	.44*	.22	2.03	.13	.21	.61
AgXAppG	-.31 [†]	.17	-1.89	-.21	.17	-1.21	-.42 [†]	.22	-1.93	-.23	.21	-1.10
CoXAppG	-.41*	.17	-2.44	-.30	.17	-1.71 [†]	-.12	.22	-.55	-.22	.21	-1.03
AcXAppG	-.04	.14	-.31	.05	.14	.32	.04	.18	.22	.12	.17	.70

Note. Agentic Traits and Communal Traits are dummy-coded variables with Neutral Traits as the reference group; Participant Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; Acknowledgement: The regression coefficients for acknowledgement on the other dependent variables were also negative, but were nonsignificant (or marginally significant). 0 = no acknowledgment, 1 = acknowledgment; Applicant Gender: 0 = female; 1 = male; [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, and ** $p < .01$.

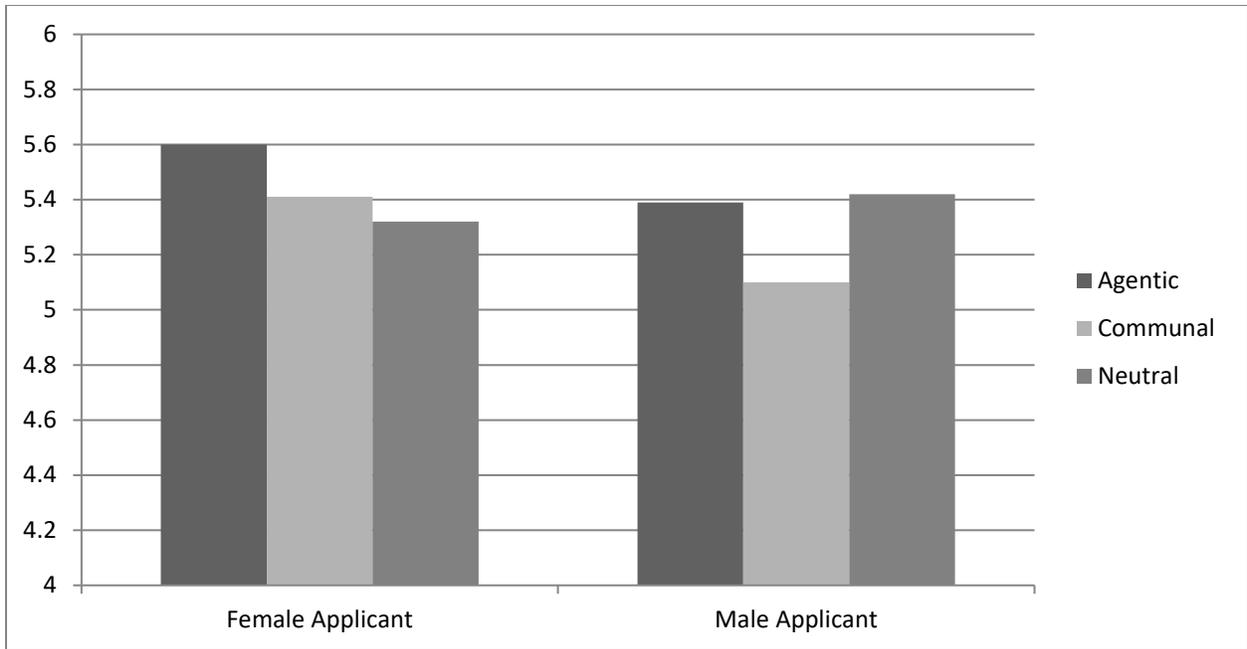


Figure 1. Fit Evaluations by Applicant Gender and Verbalizing Traits Condition

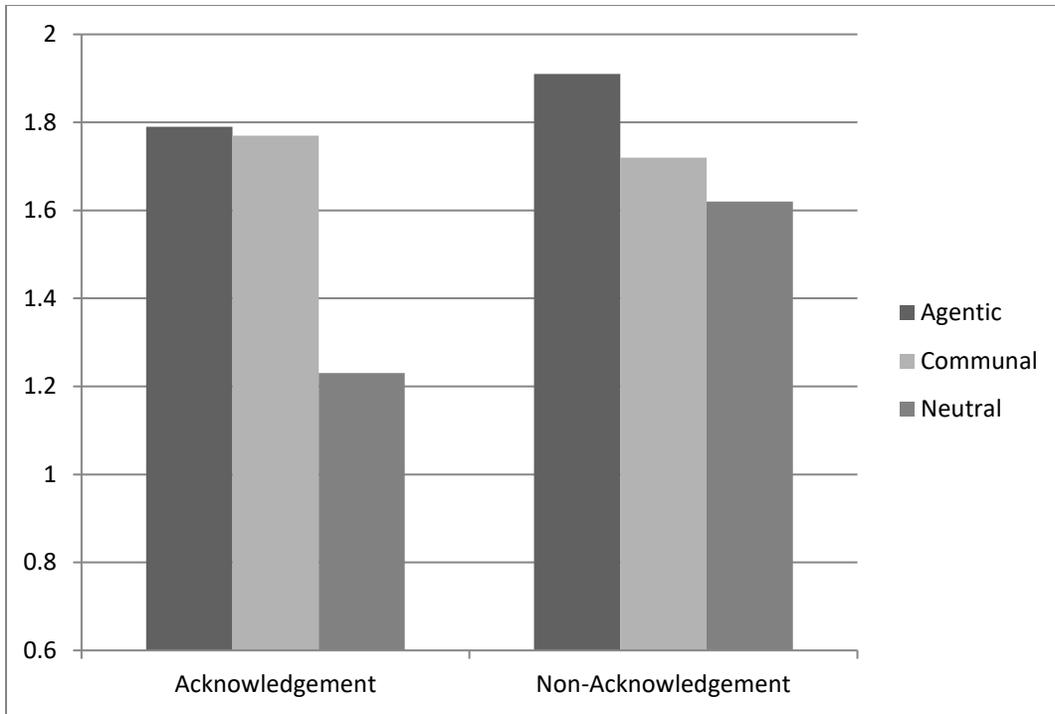


Figure 2. Personal Characteristics Evaluations by Acknowledgement and Verbalizing Traits Condition