

Should Women 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 fields (e.g., engineering) or 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 acknowledgment. In a laboratory study, 674 participants evaluated either a female or a male applicant applying for a traditionally masculine position in a traditionally masculine field (engineering manager). Results showed that 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 female and male applicants. Our findings suggest that applicants' decisions concerning how to manage their gender presentation can influence how they are evaluated and that women seeking entry into traditionally masculine occupations may want to describe themselves in agentic terms and avoid acknowledging their gender.

Keywords

employment discrimination, job applicants, impression management, identity management, sexism

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

Because the employment interview is one of the most prevalent selection tools (Ryan, McFarland, Baron, & Page, 1999), decisions women applicants make regarding how they present themselves during employment interviews for traditionally masculine fields or positions could have significant implications for hiring decisions. The present study investigates two verbal strategies (i.e., verbalization of traits, acknowledgment 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*, respectively (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987). Agentic traits are achievement oriented, such as independence and assertiveness, whereas communal traits are relationship oriented, such as warmth and supportiveness. Research has shown that people tend to associate men with agentic traits and women with communal traits, in terms of both 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,

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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 leadership positions, can emerge when characteristics associated with women are viewed as incongruent with the characteristics associated with success in leadership.

Although both of these theories are referring specifically to leadership roles, evaluations of fit or incongruence are relevant for all women who work in traditionally masculine fields, regardless of their positions or ranks, because women at all ranks in such fields tend to be seen as incongruent or a "bad fit." That is, when in a context where women are in the minority position compared to men, women at all levels will likely be subject to gender-congruent expectations (Kanter, 1977), which will lead to perceptions of incongruence with the male-dominant environment. Research has shown that biased perceptions of women applying for a leadership position are compounded when that position is in a traditionally masculine field. For example, a lab study by Garcia-Retamero and Lopez-Zafra (2006) found there were lower performance expectations for women applying to a leadership position compared to men applicants. This gender-based discrepancy was further enhanced when the leadership position was associated with masculinity (i.e., auto manufacturing) when compared to femininity (i.e., clothing manufacturing). Thus, both the lack-of-fit model and role congruity theory suggest that a woman applying for a leadership position in a traditionally masculine field is particularly likely to be disadvantaged during selection because the position is associated with agentic traits and she is associated with communal traits.

One potential strategy for women 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 women 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 a traditionally masculine position (sales manager) 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 because they are seen as competent enough to have gotten the traditionally masculine position and seen as having a gender-based advantage in communal leadership competence (Rosette & Tost, 2010). However, it should be noted that this advantage was observed in contexts where the woman had already demonstrated past success in a traditionally masculine position (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 in a traditionally masculine field, 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 position may be not only ineffective but also disadvantageous.

Acknowledgment of One's Own Gender

Acknowledgment has been put forth as an effective strategy for dealing with the sometimes "awkward" interactions between individuals with and without a *stigma* (Hebl et al., 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 systematically experience negatively biased evaluations in these particular contexts as we described earlier.

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 (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 acknowledgment on evaluations is

that acknowledging a stigma signals to others that a stigmatized individual is comfortable with his or her identity and is well adjusted to his or her life situation (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000). In employment selection processes, especially for leadership positions, this strategy might be effective because “good leaders” tend to be perceived 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 be positive only in certain contexts. Stigma acknowledgment may be particularly beneficial for infrequently encountered stigmas (e.g., physical disabilities) because acknowledgment reduces uncertainty surrounding how to act or what to say to those individuals (Hebl et al., 2000). Accordingly, acknowledgment 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 acknowledgment of gender made by Sarah Palin, a vice presidential candidate, during a 2008 election speech had no effect on voters’ attitudes and that acknowledgment of racial-minority identity (another relatively frequently encountered stigma) made by African American President Obama actually had negative effects on voters’ attitudes. In sum, the research on stigma acknowledgment in general is mixed, with research supporting a positive, negative, and null influence of acknowledgment on impression formation.

The Present Study

With the present study, we examine how two verbal gender presentation strategies (i.e., verbalization of traits, acknowledgment 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 a male confederate applying for an engineering manager position. A male applicant was included in the current study to enable us to determine whether these two identity management strategies uniquely advantage/disadvantage women applicants or can be also effectively used by men applicants.

According to role congruity theory, men applicants with masculine traits are perceived as better suited for a traditionally masculine position than men 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 masculine (Kwantes, Lin, Gidak, & Schmidt, 2011). Thus, we hypothesized that verbalizing agentic traits during employment interviews would result in more positive evaluations of fit and competency for both female and male applicants (Hypothesis 1). However, because 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 these evaluations to be weaker for men applicants compared to women applicants. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the relationship between verbalization of agentic traits and evaluations of fit and competency would be stronger for the female applicant (Hypothesis 2). Although research has shown that 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), a woman asserting her agency can be perceived as less warm and likable (Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008; Rudman, 1998), creating a backlash effect. Thus, we predict that verbalizing positive agentic traits will decrease evaluations of personal characteristics and emotional reactions (Hypothesis 3).

In terms of acknowledgment of gender, we explored whether acknowledging one’s own gender has a 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 earlier, the results of gender acknowledgment for women have been somewhat mixed. For men, on the one hand, gender acknowledgment 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 acknowledgment jointly influence people’s evaluations of female and male applicants during the interview (Research Question 2).

We included several potential control variables in addressing these hypotheses and research questions: hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and participant’s gender. Hostile and benevolent sexism have been put forth as two belief systems that attempt to justify male dominance over women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997). Although individuals endorsing hostile sexist beliefs ascribe to the idea that men should control women, individuals holding benevolent sexist beliefs ascribe to the idea that men should protect women. As Glick and Fiske (1997) noted, individuals holding hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs may differ in their regard for women (i.e., the former derogates women, the latter has affection toward some women); however, both hold the belief that women are less powerful and capable than men. Hostile sexist beliefs have been shown to relate to negative evaluations toward women applying for a traditionally masculine position (Masser & Abrams, 2004). This same study did not find a relationship between benevolent sexist beliefs and female applicant evaluations; however, we include benevolent sexism as a potential control in our study because benevolent sexism has been shown to relate positively to applicant likability ratings (Good & Rudman, 2010). Participant’s gender was included as a potential control variable because men have been shown to have more negative explicit attitudes

toward women (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Additionally, men and women have been shown to have different reactions to impression management tactics utilized by men and women (Rudman, 1998).

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 (Glick et al., 1988). Although this approach 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) that has high-stakes consequences (i.e., hiring; Ryan et al., 1999). We did find one interview study that examined verbalizing agentic and communal management styles (Phelan et al., 2008); however, the position to which applicants were applying was purposely presented as one that needed both agentic (e.g., be a self-starter) and communal (e.g., be sensitive to others’ concerns), whereas we specifically focus on a position that would be seen as more traditionally masculine than feminine.

Next, no known study to date has examined the effects of these two gender presentation strategies simultaneously. Exploration of joint effects of two verbal strategies on evaluations during the selection processes has both research and “real-world” implications because the positive effects of “fit” between personal and job characteristics could be either inhibited or augmented by acknowledgment of gender. For example, if gender acknowledgment 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? This question and others 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 (e.g., personal characteristics, emotional reactions to the applicant). Investigating both types of evaluations has practical implications because once we pinpoint which interviewers’ evaluations are influenced by strategy use, we can use this information to inform and train interviewers how to minimize any bias against women applicants.

Method

Participants

Participants in our study were 674 undergraduates (46.1% female, age $M = 19.79$, $SD = 2.19$) from a large U.S. Midwestern university who participated in exchange for course credit. Participants were predominantly White (509, 75.5%), with the remainder identifying as African American/Black (39, 5.8%), American Indian/Alaska Native (3, .4%), Asian (67, 9.9%), Hispanic/Latino/Latina (10, 1.5%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1, .1%), Multiracial (11,

1.6%), and Other (17, 2.5%) and with 17 (2.5%) participants choosing not to provide their race/ethnicity. Thirty-five additional participants were excluded from analyses due to previous interactions with one of the interviewees ($n = 29$) and experimenters flagging participants who were not paying attention during the experiment session ($n = 6$). Power analyses indicated that a sample of 674 participants, with an α level of .05, would be sufficient to detect a small effect size of .02 with .80 power.

Procedure

Our experiment involved a 2 (Applicant gender: Female vs. Male) \times 3 (Verbalization of traits: Agentic vs. Communal vs. Neutral) \times 2 (Gender acknowledgment: Acknowledgment vs. Non-acknowledgment) between-participants design. Cell sample sizes ranged from 51 to 62 participants. Prior to a laboratory session, participants completed an online survey that included potential control measures (hostile and benevolent sexism) and demographic items (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 the analyses.

At a later postsurvey date, participants entered the laboratory sessions with up to 7 other participants and 1 of the 10 research assistants whose role was to give informed consent forms, initial instructions, and debriefing forms. They were each seated at a separate computer and informed by a research assistant 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, wearing headphones, watched a video of the applicant’s interview. 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 acknowledgment condition (acknowledgment or non-acknowledgment). 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 because 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 counterstereotypical field for women (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 30 undergraduate students, asking them three questions pertaining to the level of masculinity associated with the position (“This is a masculine type of job”), the level of femininity associated with the position (“This is a feminine type of job”), and the level of masculinity associated with the organization (“This organization probably has more male than female employees”), using rating scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We used the advertisement that 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 in the following order: “Tell me a little about yourself,” “Why are you interested in working here?” “Why should we hire you?” “What do you see as your strengths?” and “Where do you see yourself in five years?” The manipulation occurred in the fourth question concerning strengths. In this question, the videos varied as to how he or she described his or her strengths (i.e., in agentic, communal, or gender-neutral terms) and whether or not the interviewee acknowledged his or her gender. The adjectives used for agentic (analytical, ambitious, and assertive), communal (compassionate, sensitive, nurturing), and neutral (reliable, conscientious, and adaptable) strengths were taken from research that categorized traits in terms of their associations 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 two scales ranging from 1 (*not masculine/feminine at all*) to 5 (*extremely masculine/feminine*). The three adjectives intended to be agentic ($M = 3.54, SD = 1.12$) were rated significantly more masculine than the adjectives intended to be communal ($M = 1.67, SD = .73$), $t(21) = 7.33, p < .01$, and neutral ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.02$), $t(21) = 3.86, p < .01$. The three adjectives intended to be communal ($M = 4.03, SD = .97$) were rated significantly more feminine than the adjectives intended to be agentic ($M = 2.47, SD = 1.11$), $t(21) = -6.41, p < .01$, and neutral ($M = 2.92, SD = 1.11$), $t(21) = -5.06, p < .01$.

In order to further ensure that all 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. Because communal traits are often associated with low competence (Fiske et al., 2002), the adjectives intended to be communal ($M = 3.95, SD = .95$) scored lower than 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 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 20s 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 acknowledgment 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 acknowledgment. Although the two applicants were similar demographically and read the same script, it is possible that the confederates differed on characteristics not related to our study that could affect overall evaluations. However, the focus of our 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 6 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 (incompetent/competent, unintelligent/intelligent, follower/leader, incapable/capable, unknowledgeable/knowledgeable, inexperienced/experienced, novice/expert, and careless/self-disciplined), using bipolar scales ranging from -3 to 3 ($\alpha = .90$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables.

Variable	M	SD	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. α s on the diagonal. Participant gender was dummy coded with 0 = female and 1 = male. Scale ranges: Fit (1–7); Qualification, Personal Characteristics, Emotional Reactions (–3 to 3), Hostile Sexism (1–5).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Personal evaluations. The applicant's personal characteristics 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 (unpleasant/pleasant, unfriendly/friendly, unlikable/likable, and 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 7 items asked participants to indicate how the applicant makes them feel: agitated/at ease, angry/calm, frustrated/relaxed, irritated/content, uneasy/secure, anxious/confident, and unhappy/happy.

Potential control variables. In an online survey taken prior to the experimental laboratory session, participants completed 22 items from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), with 11 items concerning hostile sexist attitudes (e.g., “Most women fail to appreciate all that men do for them”; $\alpha = .82$) and 11 items concerning benevolent sexist attitudes (e.g., “A good woman ought to be set on a pedestal by her man”; $\alpha = .73$). Items were rated 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 completed by the participants.

Results

Analytic Strategy

We first computed descriptive statistics and correlations among potential control variables and the four dependent variables (perceived fit, qualification characteristics, personal characteristics, and emotional reactions; see Table 1). Our initial analysis showed that hostile sexism and participant gender correlated significantly with most of our dependent variables, and thus both were statistically controlled for in the main analyses. Benevolent sexism did not correlate with any of our dependent variables and was dropped from further analyses.

Hypotheses and research questions were tested using hierarchical regressions in which participant's gender and hostile sexism were entered in the first step as control

variables, followed by the verbalizing traits condition, acknowledgment 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. For 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 acknowledgment dummy coded as 1, and applicant gender condition was represented with female as 0 and male as 1.

We also conducted exploratory analyses to examine the potential moderating effects of hostile sexism and participant gender on the association between gender presentation strategies and evaluations. More specifically, 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, acknowledgment 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. 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, acknowledgment 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.

Verbalization of Gendered Traits

Table 2 presents the hierarchical regression results for each of our four dependent variables, taken from the last step of the regression equations. To test for multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics were examined for all predictor variables. All VIF values were under 5, indicating that multicollinearity of the predictor variables was not a serious concern for this data set (Menard, 1995).

Table 2. Regression of Verbalizing Traits, Acknowledgment, Applicant Gender, and Interaction Terms on Applicant Evaluation Variables.

Source	Fit			Competencies			Personal Characteristics			Emotional Reactions		
	β	SEB	t-Value	β	SEB	t-Value	β	SEB	t-Value	β	SEB	t-Value
Control variables												
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
Main effects variables												
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
Acknowledgment (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
Interaction terms												
Ag \times Ac	-.07	.17	-.42	.25	.17	1.45	.27	.22	1.25	.02	.21	.09
Co \times Ac	.07	.17	.39	.02	.17	.08	.44*	.22	2.03	.13	.21	.61
Ag \times AppG	-.31 [†]	.17	-1.89	-.21	.17	-1.21	-.42 [†]	.22	-1.93	-.23	.21	-1.10
Co \times AppG	-.41*	.17	-2.44	-.30	.17	-1.71 [†]	-.12	.22	-.55	-.22	.21	-1.03
Ac \times AppG	-.04	.14	-.31	.05	.14	.32	.04	.18	.22	.12	.17	.70
R ²	.05			.05			.10			.05		

Note. Agentic and communal traits are dummy-coded variables with neutral traits as the reference group; Participant Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; Acknowledgment: 0 = no acknowledgment, 1 = acknowledgment; Applicant Gender: 0 = female; 1 = male.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To test Hypothesis 1, we examined the main effects of verbalizing traits on fit and competency evaluations. 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 the applicant used agentic traits when compared to neutral traits, regardless of the applicant’s gender, supporting Hypothesis 1 for fit evaluations.

To test Hypothesis 2, we examined the simple contrasts between agentic and neutral conditions for the male and female applicant for fit and competency evaluations. Results 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 the 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 wherein verbalizing agency benefited the female applicant more than the male applicant. Verbalizing agentic traits was not related significantly to qualification characteristics.

We unexpectedly found a significant interaction between the communal traits dummy-coded variable and the applicant’s 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’s 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

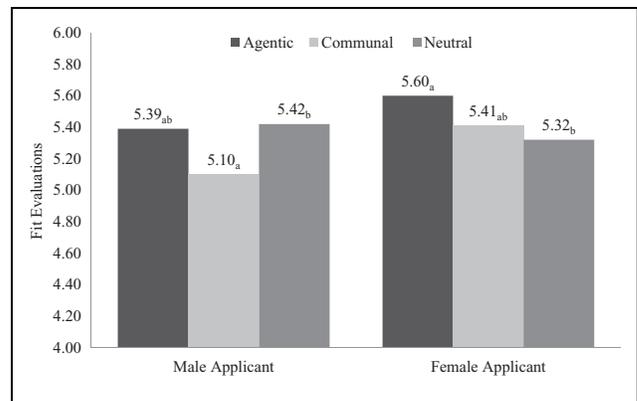


Figure 1. Fit evaluations by applicant’s gender and verbalizing traits condition. Means with different subscripts (within applicant gender) indicate significant mean differences.

the male applicant, $b = -.32, t(645) = -2.18, p = .03$. More specifically, examination of the coefficients suggests 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.

Simple slopes tests on the competency evaluations dependent variable did not reveal any significant differences between the verbalization of agentic versus neutral traits for female and male applicants, failing to support Hypothesis 2. Agentic traits were not related to personal characteristics or emotional reactions, failing to support Hypothesis 3. Overall, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were partially supported, such that verbally emphasizing one’s agentic traits was particularly beneficial for the fit evaluations for the female applicant, and Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Acknowledgment of One's Own Gender

Next, we explored the role of gender acknowledgment in applicant evaluations (Research Question 1). The main effect of acknowledgment 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 his or her gender was evaluated more negatively than the applicant who did not acknowledge his or her gender. There was no significant interaction between acknowledgment and applicant's gender.

Trait Verbalization and Gender Acknowledgment

There were significant interactions between the communal traits dummy-coded variable and acknowledgment, $b = .44$, $t(645) = 2.03$, $p = .04$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, when predicting evaluations of personal characteristics. Simple slope tests revealed that, for the non-acknowledgment condition, there were no significant differences between the communal and the neutral conditions, $b = .10$, $t(645) = .55$, $p = .58$, or between the agentic and the neutral conditions, $b = .29$, $t(645) = 1.56$, $p = .12$. In contrast, for the acknowledgment condition, the differences between the communal and the neutral conditions, $b = .54$, $t(645) = 2.91$, $p < .01$, and between the agentic and the neutral conditions, $b = .56$, $t(645) = 2.97$, $p < .01$, were both significant (see Figure 2). Note that although the interaction between the agentic dummy-coded variable and the acknowledgment was not significant, we found a significant simple slope in the acknowledgment 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 acknowledgment, the slope between verbalizing agentic traits and personality characteristics does significantly differ from zero in the acknowledgment condition (Lane, 2013).

We also explored three-way interaction terms among verbalizing traits, gender acknowledgment, and applicant gender, but none of these interactions was significant for any of the dependent variables and are not discussed further. Overall, our findings suggest that acknowledgment had either negative or nonsignificant effects on evaluations for both the female and male applicants (Research Question 1) and that acknowledgment paired with verbalization of neutral traits was associated with the most negative personal characteristics evaluations (Research Question 2).

Exploratory Analyses

We also conducted exploratory analyses to test for interactions between our manipulations (verbalizing traits and acknowledgment) and our control variables (participant gender and hostile sexism). For personal characteristics, we found an interaction between acknowledgment, applicant gender, and hostile

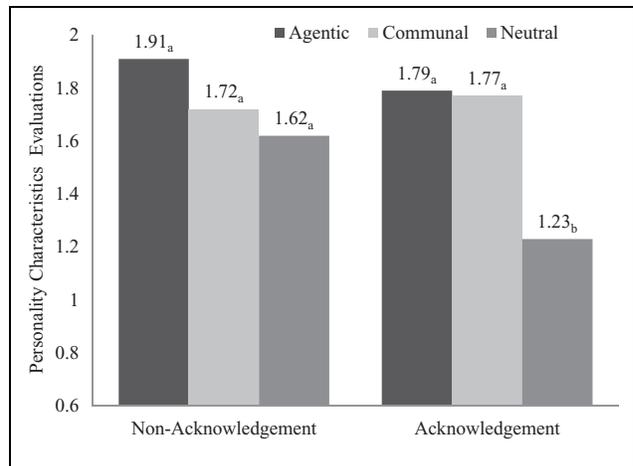


Figure 2. Personal characteristics evaluations by acknowledgment and verbalizing traits conditions. Means with different subscripts (within gender acknowledgment condition) indicate significant mean differences.

sexism, $b = -.46$, $t(634) = -2.46$, $p = .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$. Simple slopes analyses indicated that participants' hostile sexism had a positive relationship with evaluations of personal characteristics for the male applicant who did not acknowledge his gender, $b = .51$, $t(634) = 3.70$, $p < .001$. We also found a significant interaction between the agentic dummy-coded variable, acknowledgment 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 his or her 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 dependent variable of emotional reactions, we found an interaction between applicant's 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.

Finally, we explored participant gender interactions. For fit, we found a three-way interaction for the communal dummy-coded variable, applicant gender, and participant gender, $b = .69$, $t(634) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, although none of the simple slopes were significantly different from zero. However, slope difference tests indicated significant differences between the slopes for female participants evaluating women 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 ($M = 5.26$, $SD = .78$) and rated the

fit of a male applicant as lower when he verbalized communal traits ($M = 5.00$, $SD = .84$) compared to neutral traits ($M = 5.48$, $SD = .68$). 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 ($M = 5.07$, $SD = .89$) when compared to neutral traits ($M = 5.09$, $SD = .88$), whereas female applicants rated the fit of the female applicant higher when she verbalized communal traits, compared to neutral traits.

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 because these analyses were conducted post hoc and are exploratory.

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 in a traditionally masculine field more when she used agentic traits to describe herself. In contrast, the male applicant was evaluated as less fitting of the 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.

The findings for fit evaluations suggest that applicants' decisions to manage their gender presentation could influence how they are 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 (Heilman, 1983, 1995, 1997, 2001) and the 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. Also, although women applicants did not receive more negative evaluations overall for verbalizing incongruent (i.e., communal) information, post hoc analyses suggest that this may depend on the gender of the evaluator, as male participants did evaluate the female applicant as having worse fit when she verbalized communal traits. 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 in a traditionally masculine field unless he described himself in 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 counterstereotypical (i.e., agentic) traits—that is decreased perceptions of warmth and likability (Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Rudman, 1998). Instead, 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 and emotional reactions). This may be due to the specific context of an interview for a traditionally masculine position in a traditionally masculine field, in which agentic behaviors such as self-promotion are the norm and may not result in the same backlash for women as would happen if those behaviors occurred in other work contexts, such as team tasks or meetings. 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, for which communal traits may be valued more than agentic traits. Phelan, Moss-Racusin, and Rudman (2008) also found a backlash effect in an interview for an actual position (lab manager), but stressed the communal needs of the position in the job description, something which is likely uncommon for traditionally masculine positions. Additionally, our exploratory analyses did indicate that for hostile sexists (compared to those low in hostile sexism), the combination of agentic traits and acknowledgment of gender related to more negative personal evaluations, suggesting that preexisting attitudes toward women may be a key variable in the backlash effect. Also, it is important to note that we were only looking at what the applicant was saying and not how they were saying it. That is, a woman verbalizing agency in an assertive way could lead to a backlash effect, but this cannot be tested in this current study. Our confederate interviewees both were instructed to present their lines in a natural and pleasant manner, meaning the verbalization of agentic traits was not delivered with a particularly agentic style. Research examining the contextual constraints of the backlash effect, the potential role of individual difference variables, and the interactive effects of verbal and nonverbal agency will further elucidate this point.

Turning to the effects of gender acknowledgment, 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. These findings for the female applicant add to the existing theory and research (e.g., Hastorf et al., 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Singletary & Hebl, 2009) by suggesting that stigma acknowledgment as a verbal gender presentation strategy may operate differently in the context of gender than it does with less frequently

encountered stigmatized identities, such as physical disabilities. For personal characteristics evaluations, acknowledgment 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 when acknowledging his gender, as male acknowledgment in this context does not constitute stigma acknowledgment (i.e., men are not typically stigmatized in the field of engineering nor in leadership positions) and would presumably increase perceptions of fit with the traditionally masculine field. Instead, acknowledgment was associated with negative personal characteristics evaluations for the male applicant. Further, in our exploratory analyses, acknowledgment even seemed to negate the boost that preexisting hostile sexist attitudes gave to personal characteristics evaluations of the male applicant in the non-acknowledgment condition. Another explanation could be that gender acknowledgment negatively affects women and men for different reasons. Perhaps women applicants are seen as playing the "gender card" when they acknowledge, whereas men applicants are seen as arrogant or sexist when they acknowledge, both resulting in more negative evaluations.

However, the negative effects of gender acknowledgment on the evaluations of personal characteristics seemed to be mainly driven by the negative reaction to combining gender acknowledgment with verbalization of neutral traits. One potential explanation is that acknowledging one's gender without providing any other information to make gender acknowledgment 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 counterstereotypical 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 acknowledgment, as perceived by evaluators, would provide some clarity on this point.

The findings discussed earlier pertain to fit and personal evaluations, as we did not find significant main effects nor interaction effects of our study manipulations for competency evaluations and emotional reactions. The video interview may not be salient enough to elicit a strong emotional response relative to an actual face-to-face encounter. More information about the applicant, such as a resume or observations of their on-the-job performance, might also elicit stronger responses for competency evaluations. Future research

using in-person interviews and/or including a work sample task would test these inferences.

Practical Implications

Our results also have practical implications for women applicants in traditionally masculine fields as well as career counselors. 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 his or her gender during an interview can influence how he or she is evaluated. Thus, applicants in traditionally masculine fields may *indirectly* increase their hiring chances by rehearsing and consciously monitoring how they present themselves. Women applicants may want to emphasize agentic traits and stay away from direct acknowledgment of their gender. Further, career counselors may want to use this information to coach women applicants in these fields on how to more effectively present themselves in gender-incongruent work environments. 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 men applicants in this context, who may want to stay away from both direct acknowledgment 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 creating or maintaining gender diversity, increasing recruiters' awareness 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 with all studies, methodological choices made may have limited some inferences. Although we chose demographically similar confederates in terms of age and race, 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, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 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., Derous, Ryan, & Nguyen, 2012; Hosoda et al., 2003), perhaps because of the fact that recruiters are often untrained (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). However, we cannot dismiss the possibility that a sample using individuals with senior-level hiring experience might lead to different results, as it has been suggested that the current workplace is trending toward valuing communal traits in leadership (Atwater et al., 2004; Rosette & Tost, 2010). 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. Further, 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).

Finally, our experimental context was that of an applicant applying to a traditionally masculine position (i.e., manager) in a traditionally masculine field (i.e., engineering). We purposely created a context in which the stereotypical masculinity of the position was very salient to the participant, as we wanted to explore the effectiveness of verbal strategies in contexts in which barriers faced by women would be the highest. Thus, it is possible that our results would be different if the context was a traditionally masculine position in a traditionally feminine field (e.g., manager in a nursing department) or a traditionally feminine position in a traditionally masculine field (e.g., administrative assistant in a sporting goods company). Future research is needed to examine the generalizability of these findings across different hiring contexts.

Conclusions

In traditionally masculine fields, women applicants are generally disadvantaged. This study drew upon theories of lack-of-fit, role congruity, and stigma acknowledgment 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 acknowledgment 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.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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