

BEHAVIORAL DISPLAYS OF FEMININITY: DOES APOLOGIZING UNDERCUT
PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AT WORK?

by

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ABSTRACT

KARLI BAUMANN HAHN. Behavioral Displays of Femininity: Does Apologizing Undercut Perceptions of Women at Work? (Under the direction of DR. ALYSSA MCGONAGLE)

The purpose of this study was to test whether behavioral displays of femininity negatively affect perceptions of women's leadership skills, competence and promotability and, therefore, impede progress towards gender parity. This study aimed to add to existing literature on gender bias, which currently primarily examines only *physical* displays of femininity, by examining feminine *behavioral* displays as a trigger of stereotype activation. Specifically, I examined how apologizing behaviors versus expressions of gratitude predict others' perceptions of actors' leadership skills, competence, and promotability. Moreover, I tested whether this relationship was moderated by actor gender. In line with theory on gender stereotype activation, I argued that apologizing would lead to less favorable evaluations of women than use of gratitude. Furthermore, because women's socialization encourages them to apologize excessively as a means to be relational, I argue that an expression of gratitude in place of an apology would result in more favorable evaluations of women. Additionally, I predicted that apologies from female actors would be rated as more necessary compared to apologies issued by male actors. The present study was an online experimental study with participants recruited through the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's SONA research system and through MTurk. Study results indicate no significant mean difference between ratings of apology necessity for male and female actors. Further, results indicate no gender interaction for any of the outcome variables; ratings of leadership skills, competence, or promotability. However, the data show a significant effect on the condition level, with expression of gratitude, in place of an apology, leading to higher ratings of leadership skills and competence, but not promotability. More research is needed to better understand potential differences in outcomes of apologies at work for men and women. More broadly, further exploration and development on gender categorized behaviors is needed to help

researchers better understand how unconscious and subtle gender bias persists in our work environments.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all the strong women in my life who have supported me. You inspired me to push myself, to follow my passions, and to speak my truth. Thank you for believing in me and for helping me to believe in myself.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

These days, discussion of topics related to gender often elicit grumbles from audiences, as many are under the impression that gender inequality is not a modern issue; however, research shows just the opposite. While great strides toward gender parity have been made, research illustrates that gender inequality is still a problem that many organizations are grappling with (Klugman, Kolb, & Morton, 2014; Parcheta, Kaifi, & Khanfar, 2013; Plickert & Sterling, 2017). As history has progressed and overt forms of sexism have been addressed, the prominence of gender bias and inequality has faded. One primary reason for this is that modern gender bias and inequality function beneath the surface in unconscious and subtle forms (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Klugman et al., 2014; Parcheta et al., 2013; Plickert & Sterling, 2017). Because modern gender bias is more abstract and less tangible, it seems less *real*, perhaps because it is harder to grasp. Nonetheless, it persists, only deeper and more discreetly woven into the fabric of our lives. For this reason, it is imperative that researchers continue to uncover the mechanisms that sustain modern gender inequality, particularly at work.

Work environments have a significant impact on the lives of individuals. People not only derive meaning and identity from their work, but individuals' jobs and positions dictate how power in our society is distributed; in the forms of money, status, and influence. In this way, the persistence of gender bias and inequality in the workplace is harmful to those within it. This is particularly true for individuals who are part of historically mistreated groups such as women, transgender individuals, and other minorities. Much previous research has shown that women face many challenges within work environments related to their gender – systemic, interpersonal, and sometimes even internal (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2013; Biernat, Tocci, & Williams, 2012; King et al., 2012). As a result, in recent years, there has been a push for inclusivity and a surge in parity efforts within many organizations. These efforts are to be applauded because progress is being made as more and more women rise to positions of authority (McKinsey & Company,

2018; Pew Research Center, 2018). However, it seems as though we are still decades away from achieving parity as research shows that a significant number of gender inequalities in the workplace prevail (McKinsey & Company, 2018; Mintz & Krymkowski, 2010; Sachs et al., 2018; Sojo, Wood, & Genat, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2015).

Indeed, recent statistics show that 62% of managers are men and only 38% are women, despite the fact that there are qualified women in the pipeline, with women earning 57% of all bachelor's degrees since 1999. As such, the disparity is not as great at the entry level compared to the managerial level, with 52% of entry level employees being men and 48% being women (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Furthermore, research supports the assertion that the gender gap in leadership is not maintained by differences in ability between men and women (Kubu, 2017). Therefore, combatting gender bias and achieving gender parity requires the identification and exploration of other factors that may be contributing to and aiding the maintenance of the gender gap seen in organizations. The present study seeks to do just this.

Previous research has examined how an individual's female gender identity, presentation, or femininity, impacts perceptions and evaluations of women, this research has largely examined physical displays. The present study aims to go a step further and examine how behavioral displays of femininity impact perceptions and evaluations of women using stereotype activation as a theoretical backdrop. Societal mainstream perceptions of femininity are deeply embedded in organizations and the thought processes of employees and coworkers; therefore, developing an understanding of how these perceptions impact evaluations of women is critical (Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000; Fiske et al. 2002; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Understanding the means by which perceptions of femininity hold women back would help build our understanding of how to achieve gender parity at work. My proposed study aims to contribute to the literature by drawing on stereotype activation literature to decipher how behavioral displays of femininity might operate to negatively influence others' perceptions of women's leadership skills, competence, and promotability and therefore impede progress towards gender parity. Specifically, I will test

whether women who display the stereotypical feminine behavior of apologizing are perceived as lacking leadership skills, competence, and promotability using an experimental design. In the following sections, I will provide background information and review research on known reasons for gender inequality in organizations and then describe the present study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Why Gender Bias Exists in Organizations

Historically, there have been two main categories of explanation for the continuance of gender inequalities in organizational leadership: Structural barriers and gendered behaviors internalized through socialization, or social rules for behavior (Ballakrishnen et al., 2019). Structural barriers are most commonly used to explain gender inequality and include ‘the pipeline problem’ and ‘the glass ceiling’. However, as more overt sexism has been addressed by laws and organizational policies, the persistence of gender inequality has called for exploration of alternative explanations (Glick & Fiske, 1996; 2001). This has resulted in a sector of research focused on gendered behaviors, internalized through socialization, that work to form a complex and subtle obstacle between women and leadership success (Ballakrishnen et al., 2019; Eagly & Carli, 2007). While there has been a push for research to explore this direction, the actual research done in this area is limited. The concept of gendered behaviors is not new and has a decent amount of published works in the fields of Sociology and Women’s Studies. However, in the field of Psychology, research on gendered behaviors seems to be very limited. Furthermore, this concept has not been applied or explored from an I/O Psychology context as a method to further develop researchers understanding of workplace inequalities. However, existing research on gendered behaviors posits that modern gender inequality persists due to the *gender system* constructed and maintained by prominent social and cultural beliefs about gender (Eagly et al., 2000; Fiske et al. 2002; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The prevalence of these beliefs maintains social rules for behavior that communicate how to perform one’s gender (Butler, 1990). The engagement in *gender performance* then creates a vicious cycle, as it maintains the gender system and the social norms around femininity and masculinity (Lorbor, 2012).

One primary result of the prevailing gender system is that people use gender information as a frame or lens through which to see and understand how to interact with others (Ridgeway,

2011). Identifying an individual as male or female is a sociocognitive process known as *sex categorization*. Research has shown that individuals automatically and unconsciously engage in this process of categorization (Blair and Banaji 1996; Brewer and Lui 1989; Stangor et al. 1992). While previous research has used the explicit term *sex* in regards to this type of categorization, I argue that *sex categorization* might better be described as *gender categorization* because it is the socially constructed gender that people are being sorted into, not biological (*sex*) categories. *Sex categorization* then results in *gender categorization* because there is an assumption that *sex* and *gender identity* are congruent, which is not always the case. Research shows that *gender* is typically one of the first categories that individuals sort others into because it is simpler and easier to identify than other categorizations (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). *Gender categorization* leads to *gendered* interactions among people because it results in *gender framing*, which research shows may lead to *gender bias* (Blair & Banaji 1996; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway, 2011).

One way this categorization affects women in organizations is that *masculinity* is more typically associated with leadership. In their 2006 study, Sczesny and colleagues gave participants images of confederates (some feminine and some masculine) and asked them to rank the pictured persons on their leadership characteristics. Researchers found that *masculine appearance* was more favorable in regard to leadership competence. Further, participants felt more confident that their evaluations of leadership competence were correct for *masculine images*. Overall, this study demonstrated that *masculinity* is associated with perceived leadership and competence (Sczesny et al., 2006).

On the other hand, research on gender roles has shown that *femininity* is associated with being communal; a care giver, a nurturer, a giver, and a team player (Eagly & Karau, 2002). *Femininity*, then, is defined by relationships with others, and specifically the *feminine role* in the relationship is to relinquish resources, including time, energy, and recognition (Fels, 2004). This is problematic because it perceives *femininity* as incongruent with leadership and power. This is reinforced by the fact that leadership is associated with agency and therefore *masculinity* (Eagly

& Carli, 2007; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). As a result, women can face *pushback* when acting in the role of authority figure, since femininity is incongruent with perceptions of leadership and power (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The lack of alignment between feminine stereotypes (the female gender role) and leadership punishes women in that it results in less favorable evaluations of women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). This leaves women walking a tightrope as they struggle to balance displays of femininity and masculinity. In other words, if a woman acts too masculine, she is cold, pushy, bossy, a *bitch*; if she acts too feminine she is incompetent. This leads me to ask the following research question in the current study: In addition to experiencing negative outcomes for behaving too masculine, are women *also* being punished for behaving in ways that others perceive as feminine?

2.2 Behavioral Displays of Femininity

In the present study, I seek to examine the effect of behavioral displays of femininity on perceptions and evaluations, as such it is important to define displays of femininity. How does one signal femininity to others? To display femininity is to exhibit a behavior that signals to others that you are feminine because the behavior exhibited is perceived to be feminine. Therefore, when women behave in ways that are perceived to be socially categorized as feminine, they affirm to others that they are feminine (Butler, 1999; Lorbor, 2012; Ridgeway, 2011). As the gender system and frame research explains, women are socially prescribed to be feminine (Eagly, 1987). As a result, all of their actions are viewed through that lens, which means they can engage in behaviors that display and communicate femininity unconsciously and inadvertently (Ridgeway, 2009).

This is problematic because such displays of femininity might lead to the development of social and organizational hierarchies that are unfavorable to women. Expectation States Theory (EST) posits that individuals develop informal status hierarchies from known and assumed information about one another (Berger, 1972). According to the theory, social cues lead us to

make assessments of others and the *value* that they bring to social interactions based on our perception of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The nature of this assessment, positive or negative, will then determine the status of said individual in the situation. One's status will then dictate the perceived value of the individual and therefore the amount of influence they have in the situation (Berger, 1972). In this way, displays of femininity might trigger gender-biased responses that negatively frame women's behaviors and make them seem incompetent or inappropriate and cause them to retain lower statuses within work hierarchies. This is problematic if, as I propose, behaviors that display femininity are associated with lower perceptions of leadership skills, competence, and promotability. Later I will detail the specific display of femininity of interest to the present study.

2.3 Stereotype Activation

The literature surrounding the concept of stereotyping is critical to the concept of study that behaving in a way that others perceive as too feminine could have negative consequences for women in organizations. Gender stereotypes prescribe certain attributes regarding physical appearance, behavior, occupations, and other general traits (Deaux & Lewis, 1983, 1984; Deaux & Kite, 1993; Freeman, 1987). Research has shown that gender stereotypes are activated by sex and physical appearance; two elements of a person that are often deeply intertwined (Sczesny et al., 2006).

I suggest, given previous research on stereotype activation, that *displays of femininity* might function as *signals* that could result in *stereotype activation*. This would potentially lead to both assumption and expectation of schema congruence, which may result in biased evaluation and perception of women. When one displays femininity, in the eyes of the observer - that is, said individual behaves in a way that is congruent with the socially prescribed feminine role - it triggers the automatic use of available schemas and stereotype activation about women and femininity. As a result, certain assumptions and expectations are ascribed to the individual by the

observer. Thereafter, perceived and expected behaviors are riddled by biased assumptions and critiqued in regard to expectation congruence. While it is out of scope for the present study to actually test this model, I offer it as a theoretical explanation for the hypothesized effects.

2.4 Gender Role Incongruity

Role Congruity Theory (RCT) suggests that individuals are assigned certain social roles in society, including roles based on an individual's sex; depending on how closely the individual adheres to their prescribed social role, they will be praised or punished (Eagly and Karau, 2002). There are several theories about leadership formation that help to explain the implications of role incongruence. Leader Categorization Theory (LCT) suggests that the individual experiences of employees help inform their views and opinions of leaders (Lord et al. 1984, 2001). These views or opinions are referred to as implicit leadership theories (ILTs) and represent an individual's conceptualization of ideal leaders. LCT suggests that memories from experiences cause us to develop unconscious preconceived ideas about how leaders should look and behave and what qualifications and characteristics they should possess (Lord et al. 1984, 2001). These preconceptions about leaders tend to highlight character traits that are traditionally perceived as masculine such as ambition, assertiveness, and dominance. The alignment of characteristics associated with leadership and the gender stereotype of men, results in the association of leadership roles with men and masculinity.

Eagly and Karau (2002) assert that role incongruity, in regard to leadership, negatively affects women on two fronts. First, the role incongruity of woman and leader results in harsher *evaluations of women's leadership potential*, as the agentic behaviors associated with leadership are in alignment with the gender role of men and therefore are stereotypically masculine. Second, the role incongruity of woman and leader results in harsher *evaluations of women's actual leadership behavior* because exhibiting such behaviors is to exhibit role incongruity; for women to exhibit masculinity. Unfortunately, given what is already known in the literature about

leadership and gender role theory, this exuding of executive presence might prove to be more challenging for women at work than men. Further, research has shown that perceptions of ‘lack-of-fit’ between individual and job (such as a woman in a managerial position that is typically seen as masculine due to leadership stereotypes) might increase gender-biased judgements of behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

2.5 The Feminine Display of Over-Apologizing

There is a common perception that women are far more concerned with being liked than men. This concern of being liked and accepted is understood to stem from the socialization of girls to be nice above all else (Heilman et al., 2004, Tannen, 1995). This concern motivates girls to behave in ways that they feel would signal kindness and warmth. Similarly, research has found that women apologize more in their day to day life compared to men, perhaps as a means to signal kindness and warmth. Data from a 2010 study conducted by Schumann and Ross supported this. In part one of this study researchers asked participants to report daily the number of apologies they issued and the number of apologies they received. Researchers found that women reported having offered more apologies than men. In part two of the study, participants were presented with three conflict scenarios and asked to report whether or not they believed an apology was warranted, how likely they would be to issue an apology, and they were asked to rank the severity of the offense. Results indicated that women judged offences to be more severe and the one offended to be more deserving of an apology. Therefore, one of this study’s main findings was evidence of a gender difference in thresholds of offensive behaviors - men had higher thresholds for offensive behavior than women. Women, therefore, *perceive* more severity in *potentially* offensive behaviors, which might result in women feeling as though an apology is warranted more often than men (Schumann & Ross, 2010). This goes hand in hand with the idea that women are more concerned with being *liked* and seen as *nice* than men.

Similar to the socialization to signal kindness and warmth are the relational patterns of speaking common among women. Researchers suggest that the patterns originate in childhood. For example, research has shown that young children commonly develop playgroups divided by sex and as a result gender differences in linguistic patterns emerge. Groups of young girls are said to interact in a way that balances their needs with others, which is reflected in the relational language commonly used by women (Tannen, 1995). Apologies are a clear example of relational language, as the basic function of an apology is to overcome conflict and to mend discord in a relationship. Because women are socialized from a young age to avoid social conflict and to prioritize relationships over self, it makes sense that apologizing would become habitual. For women, apologizing is often simply a conversational ritualized way of expressing concern or empathy and therefore a linguistic expression of the female gender role. Apologizing is a display of femininity because it allows women live out their gender role of being nurturing and empathetic (Tannen, 1995).

However, there is a broader context to apologizing. Researchers have determined that in the United States, the basic function of an apology is to designate blame. So, while the intention of apologizing may be to express concern and empathy, others will likely interpret the apology as an assumption of blame for an event or occurrence (Maddux, Kim, Okumura, & Brett, 2011). As a result, this habitual apologizing is of concern because, in my opinion, profusely apologizing undermines both the speaker and the message by putting the apologizer in a subordinate position. In this way, I speculate that apologizing might signal a subordinate status. This may harm one's reputation, particularly in a work environment, where perceptions and evaluations operate within such a delicate yet prominent hierarchy. Therefore, I propose that apologizing will negatively impact perceptions of women's leadership skills, competence, and potential due to the subliminal message of an apology signaling weakness, inferiority, and powerlessness.

Leaders are thought of as just the opposite, strong, superior, and powerful and leadership skills as taking charge, not surrendering or needlessly taking responsibility or blame for

interpersonal discord. Research on gender bias has shown that women's actions at work face much more intense scrutiny than their male counterparts. For this reason, I propose that over apologizing will result in perceptions of lower competence in women who over apologize. As a result of negative perceptions of leadership skills and competence I propose that these women will also be ranked as less *promotable*, which would be indicative of a systemic career blocker for women. Furthermore, since over apologizing is characteristic of the female stereotype, it might result in stereotype activation and, therefore, harsher evaluations.

How is apologizing different for men? Since over apologizing can be understood as a stereotypical expression of femininity, men's engagement in over apologizing is likely to be seen as a display of subversiveness. Masculinity is understood as the opposite of femininity, and, therefore, to be masculine is to be antifeminine (Gallegos, Vescio, & Shields, 2019). Moreover, contrary to the socialization of young girls to be feminine through communal and relational displays, young boys are socialized to conceal their expressions of femininity, or emotional expressions, because toughness is more masculine and therefore gender appropriate (Chaplin, Cole, & Zahn-Waxler, 2005; Fivush, 1989; Fivush & Buckner, 2000). Research has shown that men are punished, just as women are, for acting outside of their gender role (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Sirin, McCreary, & Mahalik, 2004). However, recent research has revealed that morality can moderate the negative evaluation of men expressing femininity (Gallegos et al., 2019). Furthermore, additional research has provided evidence that male apologies elicit greater forgiveness compared to female apologies, suggesting that men's apologies carry more weight than women's (Wei & Ran, 2019). For these reasons, I propose that apologizing does not elicit the same negative consequences for men that it does for women. The over apologizing being examined in the current study takes place within a work environment where given previous research on extra role behaviors at work I assert that male apologies will be seen as positive extra role behaviors that communicate balanced leadership versus weakness.

Given that apologizing might potentially make one appear weak, researchers are tasked with determining a better option. In my opinion, when individuals issue apologies excessively it is typically motivated by a concern of being considered rude, and the apology is intended to serve as an expression of politeness. However, in reality, apologies express sentiments of remorse and regret and personal blame (Maddux et al., 2011). Therefore, I suggest that expressions of gratitude are a superior choice to apologizing. Researchers define gratitude as an expression of thankfulness directed towards others, often between helpers and beneficiaries (Grant & Gino, 2010). Contrary to issuing an apology that assigns personal blame, expressions of Gratitude deliver a message of affirmation and convey to others that they are valued (e.g. social worth) (Grant & Gino, 2010). For example, in a work setting rather than apologizing for something going wrong or for being late, one might simply choose to pivot by expressing gratitude and thanking others for their patience. The expression of Gratitude here demonstrates that the individual appreciates others and wants to be respectful of their time and efforts. Expressing Gratitude instead of an apology is likely a better approach for leaders for two reasons. First, gratitude is a positive expression toward the perceiver, whereas an apology focuses on the negative act of the actor. Second, the subjects of sentiments of gratitude are often not an individual but a group. It is my opinion that these two differences result in a message, that when compared to that of an apology, convey appreciation, power, and control. While of course, as with anything, there is a time and place for an apology and maybe even 'over-apologizing,' when one's message should express remorse, regret, and a weakening of one's status. However, in normal workplace interactions with others, gratitude might be more effective than apologizing.

Hypothesis 1: Raters will evaluate female actors' apologizing behaviors as more warranted/necessary than male actors' apologizing behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Apologizing will be associated with lower perceptions of leadership skill (a), competence (b), and promotability (c) for female actors but not for male actors compared to expressions of gratitude.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

3.1 Participants

The sample for the present study was composed of undergraduate students from The University of North Carolina at Charlotte recruited through the University's Research System, 'SONA', and workers via Mturk. Through SONA, any undergraduate UNCC student with an active SONA account and internet access was eligible to participate. Through Mturk, any worker who reported working at least 30 hours a week and who also had internet access was eligible to participate. The 30 hours worked per week threshold for Mturk participant was selected as an exclusionary criterion to aid in the external validity of the study and it being relatable and relevant to working individuals; the primary beneficiaries of the research.

The aim was to recruit at least 160 participants total through both platforms. The raw data collected consisted of 183 respondents. Fifteen participants were removed from the data set due to a significant amount of missing data from their responses. After removing these individuals, the final sample consisted of 168 participants. Of the 168 participants, 84 were randomly assigned to the apologizing condition and 84 were randomly assigned to the gratitude condition.

Participant demographics relating to age, race, gender, employment status, and hours worked per week were collected. It is most helpful to examine the data within the two study conditions; apologizing and gratitude. Each of these two study groups consisted of a total of 84 participants. The specifics of each are further discussed below and in Table 1.

Within the apologizing condition, 71 of participants reported their race as white, 6 as Asian, 3 as black, 3 as Hispanic, and 1 as American Indian or Alaska Native. Forty-eight of the participants assigned to this condition were male and 36 were female. The average age of participants in this group was 34 ranging from 18 to 60. As for the employment status of participants, 68 of participants in the apologizing condition reported being currently employed full-time, 13 part-time, and 3 reported being unemployed. Of those who reported being currently

employed full-time or part-time, 4 reported working 5 hours or less a week, 1 works 10 hours a week, 7 work 20 hours a week, 3 work 30 hours a week, 44 work 40 hours a week, and 22 reported working more than 40 hours a week.

Within the gratitude condition, 64 of participants reported their race as white, 7 as black, 5 as Hispanic, 5 as Asian, 1 as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2 as 'other'. Fifty of these participants reported their gender as male, 31 as female, and 3 as 'other / non-binary'. The average age of participants in this group was 35 ranging from 18 to 59. As for the employment status of participants, 65 of the participants in the gratitude condition reported being currently employed full-time, 11 part-time, and 8 reported being unemployed. Of those who reported being currently employed either full or part time, 3 reported working 10 hours a week, 5 work 20 hours a week, 4 work 30 hours a week, 40 work 40 hours a week, and 24 work more than 40 hours a week.

3.2 Procedure

The present study employed a between-subjects 2 x 2 (actor gender x behavioral condition) experimental design carried out via an online survey. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of two study conditions, apologizing or gratitude. Within each of these conditions, actor gender was manipulated, resulting in four groups: female actor apologizing, male actor apologizing, female actor expressing gratitude, and male actor expressing gratitude.

Vignettes were used in the present study to simulate a workplace interaction between study actors showcasing a particular behavior/ study variable. The vignettes were one paragraph in length. After being randomly assigned a vignette to read, participants were prompted to fill out the study survey, which asked them questions about their perceptions of the actors' leadership skills, competence, and promotability (the dependent variables). For the apologizing condition, participants were asked to rank the necessity of behavior exhibited by the actors in the vignette. Further, each condition or vignette featured a manipulation check to help ensure that the behavior of interest was recognized by participants to make sure that the study measured what it intended

to measure. An example vignette can be found below and the full series of vignettes used in the study can be found in Appendix A.

Before the study launched, pilot testing was completed where about 20 responses were recorded. The pilot testing included all the same characteristics as the actual study but had a comments box at the end for individuals to provide feedback on any issues, concerns, or suggestions.

Example Vignette: Female Apologizing

“Helen’s team is gathering in conference room C for their weekly 10 am team meeting. At 10:02 Helen walks in late and greets the team by saying “so sorry for being late!” Helen then promptly begins the meeting as usual asking each team member to go around the room and provide an update on their work. As the team members give their updates Helen listens closely and jots down a few notes here or there until everyone has given their updates. Helen then begins to set up the presentation she prepared for the team about the new project the team is being tasked with to the conference room television. Unfortunately, she encounters a few technical difficulties, completely out of her control, and it takes her 10 minutes just to get the presentation up. Helen again apologizes to the group saying: “Wow I’m just a mess today aren’t I? So sorry to keep you waiting!” Helen then proceeds with her presentation giving the necessary updates to the team, asking for input, and assigning tasks to group members. The rest of the meeting goes really well and the team has a lot of productive conversation about Helen’s presentation and the new project. The meeting wraps up on time and as the group departs Helen thanks everyone for coming and says “again, my apologies for my disorganization today, I won’t let it happen again.”

3.3 Measures

3.3.A Apology Necessity

The perceived necessity of apologizing behavior was measured with a self-developed four item scale on a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The following is a sample item from the scale: “I feel that it was necessary for (Actor’s Name) to issue the apologies they did.” In use, this scale demonstrated good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .87). See Appendix B for full scale.

3.3.B Leadership Skill

I measured leadership using a self-developed scale containing items intended to assess an individual's perception of others' leadership skills. The scale consists of five items that participants were asked to respond to with the following instructions: "Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the statement is descriptive of (Actor's Name)." A 5-point response scale was used ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The following is a sample item from the scale: "They demonstrated strong leadership skills." In use, this scale demonstrated good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). See Appendix C for the full scale.

3.3.C Competence

To assess perception of competence, the *competence* portion of the Competence and Warmth Scale from Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu, (2002) was used. This scale consisted of five items and had previously demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$; Fiske et al., 2002). The items on this scale were assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). A sample item for competence is, "intelligent." This scale demonstrated good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). See Appendix D for the full scale.

3.3.D Promotability

To measure perceptions of promotability, I used the three-item promotability measure from Thacker and Wayne (1995). Further, I included one item from subsequent research that modified this measure (Harris, Kacmar, and Carlson, 2006): "If I needed advice, I would approach (actor name)." I altered the language of the items to reflect the scenario (e.g., actor name to align with the appropriate vignette). A 5-point response scale was used ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is: "I believe that [Actor Name] will have

a successful career.” In the present study, this scale demonstrated high internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$). See Appendix E for the full scale.

3.3.E Manipulation Checks

To maintain confidence that the study design was successful in measuring the intended constructs, each of the five study groups were prompted to answer manipulation check questions. For the apologizing condition, the following item was included to ensure that participants understood the manipulation of the apologetic language: “Select the adjective that best describes Neal’s/ Veronica’s behavior: Apologetic, Authoritative, Humorous, or Depressed.” Selection of “apologetic” indicated that participants understood the manipulation. For the gratitude condition, the following item was included to ensure that participants understood the manipulation of the use of relational language: “Select the adjective that best describes Neal’s/ Veronica’s behavior: Apologetic, Authoritative, Humorous, or Depressed.” Selection of “authoritative” indicated that the manipulation was successful and that participants understood.

The data show that 95% of participants answered the manipulation check question for the apologizing condition correctly and 5% answered it incorrectly. More specifically, within both the male actor and female actor groups individually, 95% of participants also answered the manipulation check question correctly and 5% incorrectly.

On the contrary, within the gratitude condition, only 40% of participants answered the manipulation check question correctly, meaning that 60% answered incorrectly. For the male actor gratitude group, 33% answered correctly and 67% incorrectly (notably all apologetic). In the female actor gratitude group, 53% answered incorrectly and 47% answered correctly. In hindsight, I realized that the manipulation check questions intended to access gratitude lacked face validity, as participants might not have recognized the expression of gratitude as authoritative. As such, I have opted to not use responses to manipulation check questions as elimination criteria in my data analysis.

3.4 Analysis Strategy

To test Hypothesis 1, I ran a *t*-test to examine the difference in ratings of apology necessity between male and female actors and looked for a statistically significant difference in ratings of apology necessity between female and male actors, with higher ratings of necessity for female actors. To test Hypothesis 2, I used ANOVAS and examined interactions of condition by actor gender on each of the dependent variables.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 was tested by conducting a two-sample *t*-test assuming unequal variances, and test results indicated non-significant differences, $t(84) = 1.99, p = .837$. Therefore, I found a lack of significant mean differences between the ratings of apology necessity between the male actor group and female actor group. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported (I failed to reject the null hypothesis).

Hypothesis 2 was tested by conducting a two-way ANOVA allowing for a comparison between the male and female actor groups for both the apologizing and gratitude conditions. Results indicate no gender interaction for any of the three outcomes variables leadership skills, $F(168) = .283, p = .595$, competence $F(168) = .032, p = .856$, and promotability $F(168) = .547, p = .547$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Although not hypothesized, main effects of condition (apologizing versus gratitude) were significant for leadership skills $F(168) = 10.03, p = .001$, and competence $F(168) = 11.32, p = .0009$, but not promotability, $F(168) = 2.85, p = .093$. Leadership skills were rated higher in the gratitude condition ($M = 4.11; SD = 0.78$) than the apologizing condition ($M = 3.69; SD = 0.92$). Competence was also rated higher in the gratitude condition ($M = 3.85; SD = 0.74$) than the apologizing condition ($M = 3.46; SD = 0.80$).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 General Discussion

Statistical analyses indicated that the proposed hypotheses were not supported. Contrary to my prediction, there are no differences in ratings of apology necessity for male and female actors. Furthermore, against expectations, there was no gender effect of apologizing versus gratitude on ratings of leadership skills, competence, and promotability. Although not hypothesized, the main effects of condition (gratitude versus apologizing) were significant for both leadership skills and competence.

5.2 Implications

The lack of support for my hypotheses unfortunately invokes more questions than answers when it comes to understanding gender bias and the role that gender categorized behaviors play. Lack of difference in ratings of apology necessity for female actors compared to male actors could be the result of perceptions of apology necessity changing over time and gender differences slowly dissolving. The primary research I found on gender differences in apologizing behaviors and perceptions was a study from 2010, so it is reasonable to think that a decade later in 2020, things are different. Further, this research was not specifically examining apologizing behaviors in a work context. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the specific reason for differences in my findings compared to previous studies as there are many possible confounding variables. Overall, more current research on apologizing behaviors and perceptions of those behaviors is needed. Additionally, more of this research needs to focus on how apologizing behaviors may be different in work environments. That is to say that social interactions in the workplace might be subject to a separate set of ‘social rules,’ and therefore, apologies, and the rules that apply to them, might differ in work environments. As Role Congruity Theory is often used to understand the differing expectation for men and women in our society, the roles of managers, subordinates, and executives also each have their own expectations. Perhaps apologies

are expected from subordinates due to their low status in an organizational hierarchy but confusing from higher ups because of their status. Further, while these role expectations might be different in work environments compared to social ones, they likely have varying levels within both. Every organization is made up with a unique set of employees and values that drive individual cultures that determine not only the expectations but the acceptability of social behaviors such as apologizing. These varying levels and influences lead to a lot of questions that current research on the subject does not answer.

While Hypothesis 2 was not supported, testing it led to a different significant finding. The data show that Apologizing results in lower perceptions of leadership skills and competence, compared to gratitude. This finding is quite interesting because it leads to clear prescriptive advice for practice regardless of gender: When faced with the choice to apologize or express gratitude, choose gratitude. Expressions of gratitude correlate to greater perceptions of leadership skills and competence each of which have strong implications on one's ability to advance, gain status, and power within an organization. The data do not provide any further specific explanations for this observation. However, it is my opinion that expressions of gratitude serve as a linguistic or social pivoting tool that allow for individuals to shift from a potentially weak moment or dip in professionalism to a restoration of control and order in a way that others admire and see as respectable. This might allow one to maintain or reestablish their status within the work hierarchy, as described in Expectation States Theory (Berger, 1972). However, despite this finding, as discussed above, much about how apologies are perceived at work is unclear. As with most things, there is a time and a place for an apology, the key is knowing what time and what place. The present study does not provide enough context to understand apologies broadly merely in the context of minimal offenses such as being late to a meeting. The scenarios in the present study were designed to illustrate 'over' apologizing where apologies were arguably not necessary but might often be issued. Therefore, other scenarios where apologies might be issued are still not understood. Further, due to the design of the present study it was not considered how much

apologizing is too much. Because the study scenarios were designed to simulate a single type of instance in which an apology might be issued the outcomes on ratings in other instances are not understood. Meaning that there might be scenarios at work when issuing an apology leads to better outcomes, but that was not examined here.

The present study aimed to help further develop the literature on gender inequality by exploring the concept that behavioral expressions of femininity, such as apologizing, might negatively impact women on the job. The data from the present study do not indicate gender differences in apologizing behaviors or ratings of necessity. However, given that the concept of behavioral expressions of femininity is undeveloped, it is unknown for certain if apologizing is even a valid example of a behavioral expression of femininity, despite the evidence presented that seems to support that it is. There is much less known about behavioral expressions of femininity than physical ones. Furthermore, physical expressions are much easier for researchers to manipulate and observe which makes studying them much simpler. Perhaps, the next step is for researchers to take a step back and more fully develop an understanding of behavioral displays of femininity.

5.3 Limitations

As in any research study, the present study has several limitations. First, one primary concern is whether or not the use of vignettes was appropriate. Vignettes were an ideal choice given the level of control they allow researchers to maintain in ensuring that all other variables except for study variables are the same. In this case this simply meant changing the name to John or Helen and a few phrases to convey apologies or expressions of gratitude. Again, this format allowed for a lot of control of extraneous variables and for adequate focus and variation on study variables. However, the process of reading a vignette might not have been a strong enough manipulation to incur any real effects to measure, particularly in their effort to portray gender. For example, a video clip might have been a stronger manipulation because by nature it is a more immersive experience to watch a clip than to read a paragraph. Furthermore, watching video clips

and responding to them is a very common practice, both in research setting and in private life. That is to say that video is a format that participants might have been more comfortable and used to compared to vignettes.

Additionally, the use of names (John & Helen) was necessary in the study vignettes because it provided a subtle way to communicate gender. However, given the results, it begs the question: Was it too subtle? Due to the nature of the study and the aim of the present research, there was a lot of focus on maintaining control on gendered information portrayed to participants as a means of isolating the gendered information of study: Behavioral displays of femininity. However, at the same time, participants picking up on the gender of the actor is important. The present study did not include any checks to see if the participant registered actor gender. In hindsight, this was an oversight that would have potentially provided more explanation for the results for Hypothesis 2.

In addition to the concern of whether or not the use of names was a strong enough to portray its intended effects, to indicate actor gender, it must also be considered whether or not the use of these specific names might have resulted in unintended effects. For instance, perhaps a participant's mother is named Helen and the repeated use of the name Helen and the strong emotional connection to their mother resulted in artificially inflated results. Moreover, perhaps there is a popular television or other media character that participants strongly associate with the names John or Helen. This too might have resulted in an unknown confounding variable.

Finally, the strength of the condition is of concern. As previously discussed, the manipulation checks did not end up being as successful, helpful, or reliable as intended. While 95% of participants correctly selected 'apologetic' as the descriptive adjective for the apologizing condition, only 40% of participants correctly selected 'authoritative' for the gratitude condition. In hindsight, this might not have been the most appropriate adjective to use. However, the intent was to capture the difference in control and power that are seemingly displayed by gratitude when compared to apologizing which seems to display weakness. Furthermore, regardless of whether or

not participants answered this question correctly, simply viewing the question prior to completing the survey items might have somehow primed their interpretation and influenced how they choose to respond.

5.4 Future Research

The present study's limitations point out differences in design and practice that might advise similar future research, such as using a video clip format, being mindful about the portrayal of gender information, including an item to ensure that participants noticed intended gender information, and being careful with the use of actor names. There are several other topics for future research that should be pointed out. The present study leaves a lot of important questions unanswered, and more research will need to be done in order to gain more conclusive insight. For instance, future research in this area might choose to examine a different behavioral display of femininity. There has been a lot of recent research on the construct of intentional invisibility which looks at how women sometimes intentionally 'step out of the spotlight' leading to lack of credit for their work and ideas. This behavior would have severe impacts on career outcomes as it might unintentionally establish hierarchies that establish women who display this behavior as lacking value and, therefore, influence. Developing a better understanding of intentional invisibility, and how to remedy it, could have a significant positive impact on parity efforts at all levels.

Given that there is much unknown about behavioral displays of femininity, researchers should continue to explore them in more detail to develop literature around the subject. Particularly, researchers may consider how displays of feminine categorized behaviors impact men at work. For instance, researchers might explore if men are punished equally, less, or more for feminine displays compared to women counterparts. Moreover, more general information about the evolution of gender inequality and bias and its effects on the men in business would be valuable. For instance, as there is little known about how gender information communicated through behavior for women, behavioral displays of femininity, even less is known about gender

information communicated through behavior for men, behavioral displays of masculinity. Such information might allow for researchers to understand workplace challenges and obstacles faced by men which is heavily under researched.

Moreover, the present study relied on previous research on the subject of stereotype activation to serve as a theoretical explanation for the predicted effects. Since the data do not support these predictions, future researchers might consider taking a step back and focusing more on what is known about stereotype activation and develop a different model to explain the effects of gendered behaviors. However, future researchers might also consider adapting this study to reflect changes to the design that would test the potentially causal role of stereotype activation.

Finally, the results of the present study, as discussed above, indicate that expressions of gratitude compared to apologizing lead to more favorable perceptions of one's leadership skills, competence, and promotability. There are a lot of potential reasons for this finding, but more research is needed to develop a better understanding of the specifics of using expressions of gratitude as a replacement for an apology and, in particular, how it might differ within work environments. For instance, what other factors and confounding variables might influence the appropriateness of gratitude as a replacement, and what are the best ways for an individual to clearly express gratitude?

5.5 Conclusion

Unfortunately, we must conclude the present study with more questions than answers. While the results do not pose any direct implications for parity efforts, this study has the potential to advise future research examining behavioral displays of femininity. The finding that gratitude is more favorable than apologizing in regard to other's rankings of individuals' leadership skills and competence is exciting. It offers a positive and refreshing prescription of expressing an appreciation for others and their efforts. This might be the best thing anyone can do to not only help others but also themselves.

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APPENDIX A: STUDY CONDITIONS

A.1 APOLOGIZING CONDITION

Female Apologizing:

Helen's team is gathering in conference room C for their weekly 10 am team meeting. At 10:02 Helen walks in late and greets the team by saying "so sorry for being late!" Helen then promptly begins the meeting as usual asking each team member to go around the room and provide an update on their work. As the team members give their updates Helen listens closely and jots down a few notes here or there until everyone has given their updates. Helen then begins to set up the presentation she prepared for the team about the new project the team is being tasked with to the conference room television. Unfortunately, she encounters a few technical difficulties, completely out of her control, and it takes her 10 minutes just to get the presentation up. Helen again apologizes to the group saying: "Wow I'm just a mess today aren't I? So sorry to keep you waiting!" Helen then proceeds with her presentation giving the necessary updates to the team, asking for input, and assigning tasks to group members. The rest of the meeting goes really well and the team has a lot of productive conversation about Helen's presentation and the new project. The meeting wraps up on time and as the group departs Helen thanks everyone for coming and says "again, my apologies for my disorganization today, I won't let it happen again".

Male Apologizing:

John's team is gathering in conference room C for their weekly 10 am team meeting. At 10:02 John walks in late and greets the team by saying "so sorry for being late!" John then promptly begins the meeting as usual asking each team member to go around the room and provide an update on their work. As the team members give their updates John listens closely and jots down a few notes here or there until everyone has given their updates. John then begins to set up the presentation he prepared for the team about the new project the team is being tasked with to the conference room television. Unfortunately, he encounters a few technical difficulties, completely out of his control, and it takes him 10 minutes just to get the presentation up. John again apologizes to the group saying: "Wow I'm just a mess today aren't I? So sorry to keep you waiting!" John then proceeds with his presentation giving the necessary updates to the team, asking for input, and assigning tasks to group members. The rest of the meeting goes really well and the team has a lot of productive conversation about John's presentation and the new project. The meeting wraps up on time and as the group departs John thanks everyone for coming and says "again, my apologies for my disorganization today, I won't let it happen again".

A.2 GRATITUDE CONDITION

Female Gratitude Language:

Helen's team is gathering in conference room C for their weekly 10 am team meeting. At 10:02 Helen walks in late and greets the team by saying "Thank you for your patience! Ready to get started?" Helen then promptly begins the meeting as usual asking each team member to go around the room and provide an update on their work. As the team members give their updates Helen listens closely and jots down a few notes here or there until everyone has given their updates. Helen then begins to set up the presentation she prepared for the team about the new project the team is being tasked with to the conference room television. Unfortunately, she encounters a few technical difficulties, completely out of her control, and it takes her 10 minutes just to get the presentation up. Helen addresses the group saying: "Thank you for your patience. I'm excited to share this new project with you!" Helen then proceeds with her presentation giving the necessary updates to the team, asking for input, and assigning tasks to group members. The rest of the meeting goes really well and the team has a lot of productive conversation about Helen's presentation and the new project. The meeting wraps up on time and as the group departs Helen thanks everyone for coming and says, "I'm looking forward to further discussion about this new project with each of you at our next meeting".

Male Gratitude Language:

John's team is gathering in conference room C for their weekly 10 am team meeting. At 10:02 John walks in late and greets the team by saying "Thank you for your patience! Ready to get started?" John then promptly begins the meeting as usual asking each team member to go around the room and provide an update on their work. As the team members give their updates John listens closely and jots down a few notes here or there until everyone has given their updates. John then begins to set up the presentation he prepared for the team about the new project the team is being tasked with to the conference room television. Unfortunately, he encounters a few technical difficulties, completely out of his control, and it takes him 10 minutes just to get the presentation up. John addresses the group saying: "Thank you for your patience. I'm excited to share this new project with you!" John then proceeds with his presentation giving the necessary updates to the team, asking for input, and assigning tasks to group members. The rest of the meeting goes really well and the team has a lot of productive conversation about John's presentation and the new project. The meeting wraps up on time and as the group departs John

thanks everyone for coming and says, “I’m looking forward to further discussion about this new project with each of you at our next meeting”.

APPENDIX B: APOLOGY NECESSITY SCALE

Participants will respond to the items on a 7-point likert style response scale.

“Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.”

1. It was necessary for (Actor’s Name) to issue the apologies they did
2. I would have issued an apology in a similar situation
3. The apologies given were warranted
4. It would have been rude for (Actor’s Name) to NOT issue an apology

APPENDIX C: PERCEPTION OF OTHERS LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Participants will respond to this measure on a 5-point likert style scale.

“Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the statement is descriptive of (Actor’s Name).”

1. They demonstrated strong leadership skills
2. They acted with authority
3. They commanded the room
4. They are an effective team leader
5. I would enjoy being on their team

APPENDIX D: COMPETENCE & WARMTH SCALE

Participants will respond to the items on a 5-point likert style response scale.

“Using the 1-5 scale with 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely, indicate the extent to which you feel each of the following is representative of (Actor’s Name).”

Competence

competent

confident

independent

competitive

intelligent

APPENDIX E: PROMOTABILITY RATINGS SCALE

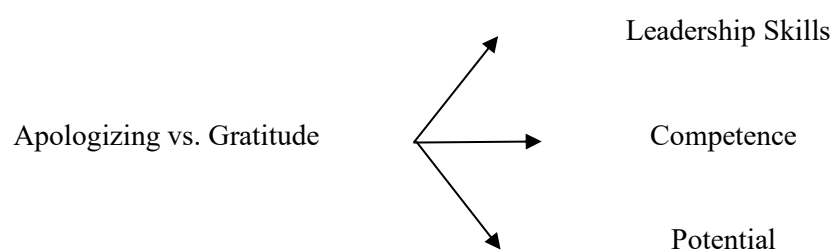
Participants will respond to the following items on a 5-point likert style response scale.

“Consider the vignette you just read and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.”

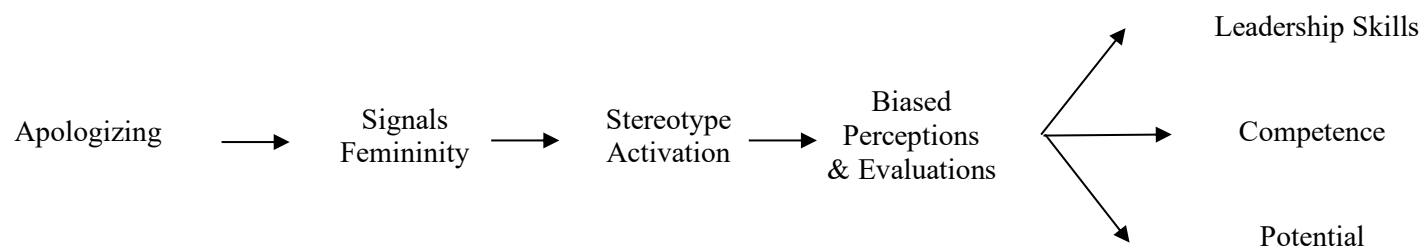
1. I believe that (Actor Name) will have a successful career.
2. If I needed advice, I would approach (Actor Name).
3. If I had to select a successor for a position, it would be (Actor Name).
4. I believe that (Actor Name) has high potential.

APPENDIX F: MODELS

F.1 STUDY MODEL



F.2 THEORETICAL STEREOTYPE ACTIVATION MODEL



APPENDIX G: TABLES

G.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

	<u>Apologizing Condition</u> (<i>n</i> = 84)	<u>Gratitude Condition</u> (<i>n</i> = 84)	
Measures (Demographics)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	χ^2
Age	33.71 (9.92)	34.87 (10.60)	.889
Hours Worked per Week (Intervals) ^a	4.69 (1.41)	4.63 (1.52)	.949
Employment Status	1.23 (0.50)	1.32 (0.64)	.952
Gender	1.44 (0.50)	1.44 (0.57)	1.00
Race	1.37 (0.94)	1.57 (1.26)	.906
Measures (Study Outcomes)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Apologizing Necessity	5.24 (1.05)	--	--
Leadership Skills	3.69 (0.92)	4.11 (0.78)	.002*
Competence	3.46 (0.80)	3.85 (0.74)	.001*
Promotability	3.81 (0.86)	4.04 (0.83)	.107

Note. ^aCategorized as < 5 (1); 10 (2); 20 (3); 30 (4); 40 (5); > 40 (6). Variables with significant baseline differences between groups in participant demographics or measures at baseline at $p < .05$ are indicated by *. ($p < .05$).

G.2 TABLE OF CORRELATIONS FOR STUDY VARIABLES

	<i>N</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Apologizing Necessity	84	--			
2. Leadership Skills	168	.264*	--		
3. Competence	168	.328**	.751***	--	
4. Promotability	168	.183	.796***	.763***	--

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.