



Powerless Men and Agentic Women: Gender Bias in Hiring Decisions

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Abstract

We examined male power-roles as a potential moderator of gender bias in hiring decisions. Drawing from previous work on perceptions of agentic women and precarious manhood theory, we predicted that men in low-power roles may react more negatively to agentic women compared to men in high-power roles. In two experiments, male participants evaluated résumés from male and female job candidates applying for a managerial position. Across experiments, results suggest that lacking power may facilitate biased hiring decisions. U.S. college men assigned to (Experiment 1, $n = 83$) or primed (Experiment 2, $n = 84$) with a low-power role rated the female applicant as less hireable and recommended a lower salary for her compared to the male applicant. This difference did not occur in the high-power or baseline conditions. A meta-analysis combining the results of both experiments confirmed that gender bias was limited to the low-power condition. Results are discussed in terms of powerlessness as a masculinity threat that may have downstream consequences for women.

Keywords Gender roles · Masculinity · Interpersonal control · Hiring decisions · Leadership · Backlash effect · Precarious manhood

Why does gender inequality persist? One factor to consider is cultural stereotypes of men and women which lead to women facing challenges in gaining access to high-power leadership positions. Although 43.6% of workers in U.S. management, business, and operation occupations are women, they are far less likely than men are to occupy the highest leadership positions (e.g., 4.6% of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies are women; Catalyst 2016). There are various factors that contribute to this gender discrepancy in status positions, including gendered social status, cultural stereotypes, and biased hiring decisions.

In the current work, we focus on hiring discrimination among prospective male decision-makers for multiple

reasons. First, American men have a more stereotypically masculine view of managers, whereas women believe that managerial roles require androgynous traits (i.e., both masculine and feminine; Schein 2001). In addition, American men are less likely to prefer a female boss compared to American women (Gallup 2014). In experimental work, men are more likely to exhibit a pro-male bias in hiring decisions, particularly for male-dominated jobs (Koch et al. 2015). More broadly, men traditionally have more power, and thus they have more to gain from maintaining the status quo of gender inequality (Pratto et al. 1997a). These beliefs and experiences suggest that men generally may be less accepting of women in traditionally masculine roles. We further consider conditions that may exacerbate rejection of atypical women, particularly conditions that may lead men to experience masculinity threat. Drawing from work on reactions to agentic women and precarious manhood theory, we investigate male power-roles as a potential moderator of gender bias in hiring decisions.

Gender Stereotypes and Reactions to Agentic Women

Stereotypes not only describe men and women (i.e., descriptive norms), but also inform us as to what men and women should be (i.e., prescriptive norms; Diekmann and Goodfriend

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2006; Eagly 1987). Men should be agentic (e.g., assertive, confident, dominant) and women should be communal (e.g., nice, helpful, interpersonally sensitive). By specifying the desirable (and undesirable) characteristics of group members, the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes serves to reward and punish stereotype-consistent and inconsistent behaviors, respectively, which in turn maintains the existing gender hierarchy (Eagly et al. 2000).

Individuals who violate these gender norms tend to face sanctions from others (i.e., a backlash effect; Rudman 1998). For example, in initial work, participants given identical information about agentic male versus female job applicants believed that the male applicant was more likeable and therefore more “hireable” for a traditionally masculine job (Rudman 1998). More recent research suggests that backlash is driven more by perceptions that agentic women are “too dominant” as opposed to lacking in communality (Rudman et al. 2012b). Similarly, a recent meta-analysis revealed that dominant women are perceived as equally competent but less likeable and hireable than dominant men are, particularly when dominance displays were overt (e.g., demanding, argumentative) as opposed to subtle (e.g., direct speaking style, expansive posture; Williams and Tiedens 2016). Thus, women in traditionally masculine careers face a dilemma: possessing the necessary agentic qualities for success is a violation of the gender role prescription for women. This incongruity between occupational characteristics and gender roles is thought to be one of the main factors leading to discrimination against women (Burgess and Borgida 1999; Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001).

Several studies suggest perceivers’ gender-related beliefs influence perceptions of agentic women. For example, people with a stronger implicit relation between gender and agency-communion (as measured by the Implicit Association Test; Greenwald et al. 1998) were more likely to view an agentic woman as lacking in social skills (Rudman and Glick 2001). Similarly, individual differences in prescriptive gender stereotypes (i.e., beliefs about what women should be) predicted a preference for an agentic male over an agentic female job applicant (Gill 2004). Finally, individuals with strong gender system-justifying beliefs (GSJB; Jost and Kay 2005) seem particularly likely to derogate agentic women. Specifically, participants with higher GSJB scores were especially likely to perceive an agentic woman as less favorable than an agentic man, rating her as more dominant, less likeable, and less hireable for a managerial position (Rudman et al. 2012b; Study 3). Together, these findings suggest that individual differences in gender stereotypes and beliefs predict negative perceptions of agentic women, presumably because agentic women violate traditional gender expectations and challenge existing gendered power structures.

Men may be particularly likely to resist women in non-traditional roles. Those who benefit most from the status-quo

of inequality should be inclined to maintain the current system (Sidanius and Pratto 1999), and indeed some men appear to be motivated to maintain the inequality from which they benefit. Men, more so than women, endorse social dominance beliefs (Pratto et al. 1997a), pursue hierarchy-enhancing occupations (Pratto et al. 1997b), and tend to score higher on hostile sexism, which is, in part, characterized by a rejection of non-traditional women (Glick and Fiske 1996). All this points to the possibility that some men may reject agentic women who, by definition, challenge the gender status quo.

Additional work suggests that men generally have a stronger pro-male bias when it comes to leadership and other masculine domains. For example, in the United States, the “think manager-think male” (Schein 1973) stereotype remains a strongly held belief among more male than female managers and management students (Schein 2001). In national survey data, more American women report a preference for female bosses compared to American men (Gallup 2014). Finally, when making hiring decisions for typically masculine positions, men may be more likely to engage in gender discrimination. Specifically, a recent meta-analysis of 136 experiments on hiring decisions found that men exhibited a larger pro-male bias ($d = .30$) and women exhibited nearly zero bias ($d = .01$) when considering applicants for male-dominated jobs (Koch et al. 2015). Thus, men may be more likely than women to construe leadership in masculine terms, reject female bosses, and prefer to hire men for traditionally male-dominated positions.

Precarious Manhood

In the current work, we consider conditions that may moderate men’s reactions to agentic women. We draw on precarious manhood theory, which states that manhood is an achieved status that must be continually affirmed; further, when gender status is threatened, men should behave in ways to restore their feelings of masculinity (Vandello and Bosson 2013). We propose that one way to reaffirm manhood is to derogate an agentic woman.

First, men seem to be particularly sensitive to challenges to their masculinity, more so than women who experience challenges to their femininity. Specifically, men who experienced a gender-identity threat (e.g., false feedback suggesting they were more feminine than masculine) subsequently completed more anxiety-related word fragments than did men who were not threatened and women who were (e.g., women who were told that they were more masculine than feminine; Vandello et al. 2008). Consequently, men may respond in ways that restore their “manhood,” such as displaying physical aggression (Bosson et al. 2009). Men who score highly on precarious manhood beliefs may be particularly sensitive to masculinity threats, and therefore more likely to defend and restore their manhood. For example, men high in precarious manhood

beliefs were more likely to find sexist and anti-gay jokes humorous, and further, reported that this served as an impression management technique, presumably to appear more masculine (O'Connor et al. 2017).

Likewise, threats to the male identity appear to increase the likelihood of sexual harassment perpetration. Sexual harassment could be considered a form of backlash that serves to deter women from traditionally masculine occupations (Rudman and Phelan 2008) and protects gender-based power and status (Berdahl 2007). For example, in one study, men who experienced a gender-identity threat responded by sexually harassing a female confederate (i.e., sending her pornographic pictures), presumably to restore their threatened identity (Maass et al. 2003). Similarly, in another study, men primed with power were particularly likely to engage in sexual harassment when they were concerned with appearing incompetent (Halper and Rios 2018).

Finally, masculinity threats seem to promote ideologies that subjugate women. In particular, when men experienced a threat to male identity (by receiving false-feedback on a gender knowledge test), they reported being uncomfortable with others knowing their results, which in turn increased anger and subsequently led to greater endorsement of social dominance and benevolent sexism (Dahl et al. 2015). More generally, experiencing a threat to one's self-image can lead to stereotypic impressions and negative evaluations of a member of a stereotyped group (Fein and Spencer 1997). Together, these results imply that if male-identity is threatened, negatively evaluating an agentic woman could provide an opportunity to restore masculinity.

Most work on precarious manhood typically employs fairly broad threats to gender identity. We focus on threats that may be more common within workplace settings; specifically, we investigate the potentially gender-affirming or gender-threatening nature of different power roles. Some evidence suggests that low-power subordinate roles may undermine masculinity. For example, people perceive men who are subordinate to women as less masculine and lower in status than men who are subordinate to other men (Brescoll et al. 2012). Other work has directly tested the idea that men who are subordinate to women experience threat. Specifically, men, but not women, responded with increased threat (e.g., anxiety-related word fragment completion) when negotiating with a female manager as compared to a male manager. This increased threat subsequently led men to respond more assertively in the negotiation, presumably as a way to reduce the feeling of threat (Netchaeva et al. 2015, Studies 1 and 2). Together, these findings suggest that powerlessness may produce a threat to masculinity. In the current work, we explore whether engaging in gender discrimination may serve as a way to alleviate this threat. Previous work has demonstrated that stereotypes and prejudice emerge under conditions of self-image threat and, furthermore, function to repair self-esteem. Under conditions of self-affirmation, this effect does not

occur (Fein and Spencer 1997). Thus, if powerlessness is gender-threatening whereas feeling powerful is gender-affirming, we expect powerless, but not powerful, men to display gender bias as a way to alleviate the identity threat.

The Present Studies

We suggest that for male perceivers, their own position of power, or sense of powerlessness, is an important moderator of reactions to agentic women. Integrating work on precarious manhood and gender-based hierarchies, in the current research we examined the effect of high- and low-power roles as moderators of gender bias in hiring decisions. Specifically, we hypothesized having low levels of power increases men's negative reactions toward agentic women. Male participants—either assigned to (Experiment 1) or primed with power roles (Experiment 2)—evaluated résumés from equally qualified male and female targets applying for a managerial position. Gender bias could be expressed in the form of lower hireability ratings, salary recommendations, and trait ratings for the female compared to the male target. A baseline (no specific role or no prime) condition was included in each experiment to serve as a basis for comparison.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 was designed to test whether men would be more likely to engage in discrimination against an agentic woman when the men were in a low-power role versus a high-power role. Power was operationalized as control of resources and outcomes (Fiske 1993; Keltner et al. 2003). Discrimination could take the form of recommending lower salaries and lower ratings of hireability for the female job applicant.

Male participants expected to participate in a two-person interaction in which one person would be the high-power supervisor and the other would be the low-power subordinate. While waiting for the interaction to begin, participants completed a résumé evaluation task. Participants read a job description and were presented with two résumés with one describing a male and the other describing a female target. After reading the résumés, participants made hiring and salary recommendations and rated the targets on competence and social skills. In a baseline condition, participants received no power manipulation; that is, they were not given any information regarding an interaction and simply completed the dependent measures, starting with the filler task. The resulting design was a 3 (Power: high, low, baseline) \times 2 (Target: female, male) mixed-model design with power as a between-subjects manipulation and target gender manipulated within-subjects.

Method

Participants

Eighty-three men ($M_{age} = 19.24$, $SD = 1.79$, range = 18–31) from a large U.S. Midwestern university participated in return for partial course credit. Self-reported race included 68 (81.9%) White, 10 (12%) Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 (1.2%) Hispanic, with one participant not indicating his race. Random assignment yielded three groups equivalent on age and race ($ps > .25$), and cell sizes ranged from 25 to 30.

Procedure

Male participants were recruited with a cover story that the study was about interpersonal coordination. Upon arriving at the lab, participants were seated at a computer. In the high- and low-power conditions, participants first read that they would be working on a coordination task with a research assistant. Further, they were told that the task required one person to act as supervisor and one person to act as subordinate. After receiving their role assignments, participants were informed that they would be completing several unrelated “pretest measures” while the experimenter was setting up for the interpersonal coordination task. These measures included a filler task (reading information about junk food taxation and reporting their attitude), a measure of prescriptive and descriptive gender stereotypes, the résumé evaluation task, measures of mood and ambivalent sexism, and demographics. The primary dependent variables were embedded within the résumé evaluation task, and they included salary and hiring recommendations as well as ratings of competence and social skills. Participants in the control condition did not receive information on the interpersonal coordination task. Instead, they began the study with the “pretest measures.” Participants did not actually complete the interpersonal coordination task.

Power Manipulation Participants in the high- and low- power conditions were told they would be working with the research assistant on an interpersonal coordination task which involved building a structure with Legos® building blocks, and further, that one person would be the supervisor and the other would be the subordinate. Following this information, participants were led to believe that roles were determined by their scores on a questionnaire (cf. Anderson and Berdahl 2002; Galinsky et al. 2003; Guinote 2007; Vescio et al. 2005). Participants first responded to five questions that were designed to be related to the upcoming task, but that were somewhat vague in order to bolster the believability of the feedback (i.e., How much experience do you have working in groups?; How much experience do you have working on committees?; Do you work well with others?; How much experience do you have working with models?; Do you take direction well?). The

computer supposedly scored participants’ responses and assigned them to the role of supervisor or subordinate. In reality, roles were randomly assigned.

Participants then received instructions for the interpersonal coordination task based on their assigned role (cf. Galinsky et al. 2003, Study 1). The supervisor was described as being in control of directing the task and evaluating the subordinate whereas the subordinate role was described as lacking control over the task and evaluations. Specifically, in the high-power condition, participants read:

Based on your answers, you have been assigned to the role of SUPERVISOR. The research assistant will be the subordinate. As Supervisor, you are in charge of directing the subordinate in building something called a Tanagram from a set of Legos. You will decide how to structure the process for building the Tanagram and the standards by which the work is to be evaluated. In addition, you will also evaluate the builder at the end of session in a private questionnaire—that is, the subordinate will never see your evaluation. Thus, as Supervisor you will be in charge of directing the building and evaluating your subordinate.

Low-power participants read:

Based on your answers, you have been assigned to the role of SUBORDINATE. The research assistant will be the Supervisor. As a subordinate, you will have the responsibility of carrying out the task of building something called a Tanagram from a set of Legos according to instructions given to you by your Supervisor. Your Supervisor will decide how to structure the process for building the Tanagram and the standards by which the work is to be evaluated. Which tasks you complete will be decided by the Supervisor. In addition, you will be evaluated by the Supervisor at the end of the session. This evaluation will be private; that is, you will not see your Supervisor’s evaluation of you. You will not have the opportunity to evaluate your Supervisor. Only the Supervisor will be in charge of directing production and evaluating performance.

Participants in the control condition did not receive any information about the Tanagram task or a role assignment.

Résumé Evaluation Task Of primary interest in our study was whether participants’ power role would moderate evaluations of agentic male and female targets. To capture these ratings, we used a résumé evaluation task (cf. Gill 2004). As part of our cover story, participants in the high- and low-power conditions were told that the research assistant would need time to

set up the Tanagram task. During this time, participants were asked to complete a series of pilot measures for upcoming studies. Specifically, instructions indicated:

Pretesting is an important part of the research process—before we include measures in our future studies, we test whether these measures are reliable and valid. On the following screens, you will be presented with instructions from a few different tasks. When you are ready to complete the pretest, please click continue below.

Participants in the baseline condition received the same cover story without references to the Tanagram task. The résumé evaluation task was included among the so-called pilot measures. Participants were asked to study a job description for a Project Manager position before evaluating the résumés. Instructions for the task and job description were as follows:

Imagine you are an executive for a consulting company called "Business Solutions, Inc.," which is interested in hiring a new Project Manager. The job description for the Project Manager position is below. Please study the job description carefully. After, you will be shown résumés from job candidates.

Our company—Business Solutions, Inc. —provides consulting services to outside businesses in the area of personnel management. Specifically, we help outside businesses develop and implement effective methods for evaluating the performance of their employees. Currently, we are seeking a Project Manager to supervise the activities of 30 Business Solutions employees who are collaborating on a particular assignment. This Project Manager will have the duties of ensuring that client deadlines are met and that Business Solutions provides high-quality, attentive service. We believe that meeting deadlines and providing top-notch service are the surest ways to guarantee future business for our company. Thus, it is important to us that we hire the best Project Manager we can. Qualifications: Degree in Business, Management, Psychology, or related fields. Some management experience preferred. Interested, qualified applicants should contact A. Greene, Director of Recruitment, at (512) 555-2341.

Next, participants were presented with résumés from Brian Smith and Karen McKay; the order of presentation was counterbalanced across participants. Pilot-testing indicated that the résumés were both perceived to be of moderate quality. In separate data collection, participants ($n = 34$) reviewed the résumés (without names attached) and responded to three items: "How impressive is this résumé?", rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*); "I would recommend this applicant for a

management position," rated from 1 (*definitely not*) to 7 (*definitely yes*); and "How likely is it that this applicant has sufficient skills to perform in a management job?," rated from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*extremely likely*). Responses were averaged to create a composite score of résumé quality ($\alpha = .96$), with higher scores indicating a more favorable evaluation. Results indicate there was no significant difference between the résumés, $t(33) = -.56$, $p = .58$, and they were of moderate quality ($M_{\text{man}} = 4.95$, $SD = 1.04$; $M_{\text{woman}} = 5.00$, $SD = 1.21$).

Both targets were agentic in that their résumés stated that they had previous leadership experience (and both were applying for a leadership position). Analyses reported in the following results suggest that participants perceived the targets to be more agentic than communal—across experiments, participants rated both male and female targets as higher in competence than in social skills. Thus, the primary difference across résumés was the target's gender.

Measures

The main dependent variables of interest were target evaluations, which included hiring and salary recommendations as well as ratings of competence and social skills. In addition, immediately following their role assignment, participants in the high- and low-power condition responded to three manipulation checks designed to measure the effectiveness of the power manipulation: "How much will you be in charge of directing the task?," "How much will you be in charge of evaluating the other person?," and "To what extent will you have power over the other person?" Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Responses across items were averaged ($\alpha = .88$), with higher scores indicating a greater sense of control/power.

Hiring Recommendations After reading both résumés, participants were first asked to make a hiring decision, using the prompt, "If it were up to me, I would offer the position to..." Responses were coded as 0 (Karen McKay) and 1 (Brian Smith). Participants also responded to two continuous hireability items for each target: "Karen McKay's/Brian Smith's résumé would incline me toward hiring her/him for the Project Manager position" and "Karen McKay's/Brian Smith's résumé indicates that she/he is a very strong candidate for the Project Manager position." Responses were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*definitely no*) to 7 (*definitely yes*). Responses on the two continuous items were correlated ($r_{\text{woman}} = .61$, $p < .001$; $r_{\text{man}} = .82$, $p < .001$), and thus were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater hireability.

Salary Recommendations In addition, participants recommended a starting salary for each target. This item was an open-ended response with participants responding to the prompt: "Assuming that starting salaries for the type of

position that Karen McKay/Brian Smith is seeking range from \$30,000 to \$40,000 (depending upon the qualifications and desirability of the candidate), I would be willing to offer Karen McKay/Brian Smith a starting salary of...” (Gill 2004).

Target Trait Ratings Finally, participants evaluated targets for competence and social skills (cf. Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 1999). Specifically, participants indicated the likelihood that the applicant possessed eight traits related to competence (competent, independent, confident, determined, analytical, ambitious, competitive, able to work well under pressure) and nine traits related to social skills (kind, supportive, warm, sincere, helpful, likeable, friendly, good listener, sensitive to the needs of others). All ratings were on a 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*extremely likely*) scale. Responses for each subscale were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater competence ($\alpha = .92$) or social skills ($\alpha = .95$).

Additional Excluded Measures In both experiments, several additional measures were included to explore potential mediators of the relationship between power roles and discrimination. Before the résumé evaluation task, participants completed measures of descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes (Gill 2004) as well as their confidence in those stereotypes. Following the résumé evaluation task, participants completed a measure of mood (Watson et al. 1988) and ambivalent sexism (Glick and Fiske 1996). No significant effects of power emerged on any of these measures and thus we will not discuss them further.

Results

Power Manipulation Check

Analyses of high- and low-power participants' perceptions of power and control suggest that the power manipulation was successful. Participants in the high-power condition felt more powerful ($M = 5.72$, $SD = .59$) than did participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.58$), $t(53) = 8.57$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.24$.

Salary and Hiring Recommendations

The primary question of interest is whether men in different power roles would engage in hiring discrimination. More specifically, we hypothesized that men in a low-power position would view the agentic female as less hireable and recommend a lower salary for her than for an agentic male target. To examine these a priori hypotheses, two planned contrasts were conducted comparing the low-power condition with the high-power condition and the baseline condition. To directly compare each condition, difference scores were created for each of the dependent measures by taking responses for male targets and subtracting responses for female targets. Positive

scores indicate higher responses for men, while negative scores indicate higher responses for women.

First, to examine salary recommendations, we conducted two planned contrasts. That is, we first compared the low-power condition to the high-power condition and then compared the low-power condition to the baseline condition (cf. Abelson and Prentice 1997). One participant was excluded from analysis because he did not recommend a salary. These contrasts revealed significant differences in the impact of target gender when comparing the low- and high-power conditions, $t(79) = -2.88$, $p = .005$, $d = .90$, and the low-power and baseline conditions, $t(79) = -2.88$, $p = .005$, $d = .69$. Participants in the low-power condition showed a greater difference in salary and favored men ($M = 1476.0$, $SD = 2566.98$) than participants in the high-power condition ($M = -418.76$, $SD = 1470.37$) and the baseline condition ($M = -431.39$, $SD = 2971.68$).

To test the overall effects, salary recommendations, not difference scores, were submitted to a 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) mixed-model General Linear Model (GLM), with Target Gender treated as a within-subject factor. There was a significant main effect of Power, $F(2, 79) = 3.20$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Overall, participants in the baseline condition recommended higher salaries ($M = \$35,076$, $SD = 3497$) than did those in the both low-power ($M = \$34,138$, $SD = 3213$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$) and the high-power ($M = \$32,879$, $SD = 3142$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$) conditions. This main effect was qualified by a significant Power \times Target Gender interaction, $F(2, 79) = 5.41$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, mirroring the results of the planned contrasts. (See Table 1 for all cell means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Experiment 1.)

Turning to the choice of applicant, participants recommended either the female or male applicant for the position. Discrimination would be evident within each condition if the male applicant was chosen disproportionately (i.e., more than 50%). Responses were coded as 0 = female choice and 1 = male choice. Thus, proportions above .50 indicate preference for the male target and below .50 indicate preference for the female target. We analyzed participants' choice of applicant by first comparing the low-power condition to the high-power condition and then the low-power condition to the baseline condition. Chi-square tests were non-significant comparing the low- to high-power conditions, $\chi^2(1, n = 55) = 3.35$, $p = .07$, $V = .25$, and the low-power and baseline conditions, $\chi^2(1, n = 53) = 2.50$, $p = .11$, $V = .22$. Testing the percentage of participants who chose the male applicant against 50% within each condition suggested that low-power participants were not significantly more likely to choose the male applicant (68%), $\chi^2(1, n = 25) = 3.24$, $p = .07$, $\Phi = .36$. Participants in the high-power condition (43%), $\chi^2(1, n = 30) = .53$, $p = .47$, $\Phi = .13$ and baseline condition (46%), $\chi^2(1, n = 28) = .14$, $p = .71$, $\Phi = .07$, chose each applicant equally. Finally, the overall 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) Chi-square was not significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 83) = 3.18$, $p = .15$, $V = .21$.

Table 1 Evaluations of female and male job applicants within experimental condition, Experiment 1

Condition	Women			Men		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
High power						
Choice	57%	—	—	43%	—	—
Hireability	5.17 _a	.20	[4.77, 5.57]	4.93 _a	.24	[4.44, 5.43]
Salary	\$33,086 _a	\$630	[\$31,796, 34,376]	\$32,672 _a	\$567	[\$31,511, 33,834]
Social skills	4.54 _a	.11	[4.33, 4.76]	4.53 _a	.12	[4.29, 4.76]
Competence	4.85 _a	.10	[4.65, 5.05]	4.71 _a	.13	[4.44, 4.98]
Low Power						
Choice	32%	—	—	68%	—	—
Hireability	4.86 _a	.22	[4.40, 5.32]	5.42 _b	.22	[4.98, 5.86]
Salary	\$33,400 _a	\$716	[\$31,922, 34,877]	\$34,876 _b	\$667	[\$33,499, 36,253]
Social Skills	4.96 _a	.15	[4.65, 5.27]	4.82 _a	.14	[4.53, 5.11]
Competence	5.10 _a	.14	[4.81, 5.38]	5.18 _a	.17	[4.83, 5.52]
Baseline						
Choice	54%	—	—	46%	—	—
Hireability	5.20 _a	.22	[4.75, 5.65]	4.98 _a	.22	[4.53, 5.44]
Salary	\$35,292 _a	\$727	[\$33,801, 36,782]	\$34,860 _a	\$709	[\$33,405, 36,316]
Social skills	4.91 _a	.17	[4.57, 5.26]	4.64 _a	.14	[4.36, 4.93]
Competence	5.14 _a	.14	[4.85, 5.44]	5.21 _a	.16	[4.87, 5.55]

A significant mean difference between the woman and man target across a row is indicated by different subscripts ($p < .05$)

Analyses of the continuous measure of hireability revealed similar results. Two items assessing hireability were averaged and difference scores were created. Two planned contrasts were conducted, first comparing the low-power condition to the high-power condition and then comparing the low-power condition to the baseline condition (cf. Abelson and Prentice 1997). These contrasts revealed significant differences in the impact of target gender when comparing the low- and high-power conditions, $t(80) = -2.13$, $p = .04$, $d = .58$, and the low-power and baseline conditions, $t(80) = 2.05$, $p = .04$, $d = .58$. Participants in the low-power condition showed a greater difference in ratings of hireability and favored men ($M = .56$, $SD = 1.33$) than participants in the high-power condition ($M = -.23$, $SD = 1.42$) and the baseline condition ($M = -.21$, $SD = 1.36$).

To test the overall effects, ratings of hireability were submitted to a 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) mixed-model GLM, with Target Gender treated as a within-subject factor. The main effects of Power and Target gender were not significant ($ps > .81$). In addition, the overall 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) interaction did not reach significance, $F(2, 80) = 2.85$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$.

Results support the hypothesis that low-power men may be more likely to discriminate against agentic women by recommending lower salaries and being less likely to hire them. The next question is whether this discrimination was reflected in trait ratings of the targets.

Trait Ratings

Mean competence and social skills ratings were created by averaging responses to the two subscales. Data were submitted to a 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) \times 2 (Scale) mixed-model GLM, with the last two factors treated as within-subjects factors. Previous findings on the backlash effect typically find agentic women are rated as competent, but lacking in social skills. If backlash on trait ratings were to be present in the current findings, we would expect the female target to be rated as equally competent but lower in social skills when compared to the man, particularly in the low-power condition.

Analyses of target trait ratings suggest the targets were perceived similarly. Overall, targets were rated as more competent ($M = 5.03$, $SD = .69$) than socially skilled ($M = 4.74$, $SD = .67$), $F(1, 80) = 20.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$, and participants in the baseline ($M = 4.98$, $SD = .66$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$) and low-power ($M = 5.01$, $SD = .65$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$) conditions rated targets higher across traits than participants in the high-power condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = .48$), $F(2, 80) = 3.03$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .079$. Finally, the female ($M = 4.92$, $SD = .61$) and the male target ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .66$) were rated similarly across traits, $F(1, 80) = 3.42$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. No other effects were significant ($Fs < 1.90$).

Discussion

The results of Experiment 1 supported the hypothesis that low-power may facilitate gender discrimination in hiring decisions. Although the male and female job applicant were perceived as equally competent and socially skilled, men assigned to a low-power role rated the female job applicant as less hireable, recommended a lower salary for her, and tended to choose the female applicant less often compared to the male applicant. This did not occur when men were in a high-power role or a baseline condition. In Experiment 2 we sought to replicate these findings using a different power manipulation.

Experiment 2

The procedure for Experiment 2 was identical to Experiment 1 with the exception of the specific power manipulation. Male participants ($n = 84$) were first primed with high- or low-power (or were assigned to a baseline condition). Following a filler task, participants completed the résumé evaluation task. Finally, participants completed the remaining dependent measures.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four men ($M_{age} = 19.49$, $SD = 1.64$, range = 18–27) from a large U.S. Midwestern university participated in return for partial course credit. Random assignment yielded three groups ranging in size from 27 to 29 and of equivalent age across groups ($p = .41$). Due to a computer error, participants' self-reported race/ethnicity was not recorded.

Power Primes

Upon arriving in the lab, participants were seated at a computer and told they would complete a series of computerized tasks. Specifically, participants received a cover story indicating that we were in the process of developing several computerized tasks that were previously paper-and-pencil measures. The first task involved writing a brief essay to prime power. Participants were given 2 min to write about a time when they had power over someone (high-power prime), someone else had power over them (low-power prime), or their most recent trip to the grocery store (baseline; Galinsky et al. 2003). Specifically, participants in the high-power [low-power] condition were instructed:

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals [in which someone else had power over you]. By power, we mean

a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Please describe this situation in which you had [did not have] power—what happened, how you felt, etc.

In the baseline condition, participants were instructed to “Please recall your most recent trip to the grocery store. Please describe your experiences at the store—what happened, how you felt, what you purchased, etc.”

Dependent Measures

Dependent measures were identical to Experiment 1. Again, the primary dependent variables were target evaluations—including salary and hiring recommendations, a continuous measure of hireability ($\alpha = .66$), as well as competence ($\alpha = .93$) and social skills ($\alpha = .91$) trait ratings.

Results

Essay Coding

Essays were coded by two independent raters on a variety of dimensions as a check of the manipulation. First, the essays were coded for specific context. Overall, most participants in the high- and low-power conditions wrote about situations related to school (12, 21.1%), family (12, 21.1%), and sports (10, 17.5%), followed by work (9, 15.8%), friends (5, 8.8%), or Greek-life (2, 3.5%); the remaining participants (7, 12.3%) wrote about miscellaneous contexts such as romantic relationships, legal settings, and military. All participants in the baseline condition wrote about a trip to the grocery store, as instructed.

Next, in order to ensure that our power manipulation was successful, several types of phrases were categorized and counted. We expected participants in the high-power condition to make more references to self-power (e.g., “I controlled him”) and other-powerless phrases (e.g., “they weren’t put in charge”) indicating they wrote about a time when they had more control than someone else. In the low-power condition, we expected more references to other-power (e.g., “they had power over me”) and self-powerless phrases (e.g., “I felt kind of helpless”), indicating they wrote about a time in which someone else had more control. Finally, we explored whether participants made references to responsibility by counting self-responsibility (e.g., “I felt responsible”) and other-responsibility phrases (e.g., “he was responsible”). We did not expect participants in the baseline condition to make any references to power or responsibility. The coders initially agreed on 96.2% of the word counts. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

Word counts were submitted to a GLM with Power (high, low) as the between-subjects factor. Analyses suggest that the

power manipulation was successful. Participants in the high-power condition included more self-power references ($M = 1.31$, $SD = 1.17$) than did participants in the low-power condition ($M = .04$, $SD = .19$), $F(1, 55) = 32.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .37$. Participants in the high-power condition did not make any self-powerless references whereas participants in the low-power condition did ($M = .39$, $SD = .74$), $F(1, 55) = 8.24$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Similarly, participants in the high-power condition did not make any other-power references, but participants in the low-power condition did ($M = .57$, $SD = .84$), $F(1, 55) = 13.57$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$. Only one participant in the high-power condition made an other-powerless reference, and this did not produce a significant difference between conditions ($F < 1$). Thus, overall it appears that participants in the high-power condition indeed wrote about a time when they had power, whereas participants in the low-power condition wrote about a time when someone else had power over them. Participants in the baseline condition did not make any power-related references.

Finally, participants in the high-power condition tended to mention self-responsibility ($M = .34$, $SD = .61$) more than did participants in the low-power condition ($M = .04$, $SD = .19$), $F(1, 55) = 6.50$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. There were no significant differences between conditions on other-responsibility phrases, and only one participant made this type of reference. Participants in the baseline condition did not refer to responsibility.

Salary and Hiring Recommendations

The primary research question was whether the results of Experiment 1 would replicate using a different power manipulation. Specifically, would low-power men be more likely than high-power men to discriminate against an agentic female job candidate?

In order to test for replication, all analyses paralleled those in Experiment 1. We first compared the low-power condition to the high-power condition and then compared the low-power condition to the baseline condition. One participant was excluded from analysis because he did not recommend a salary. These contrasts revealed significant differences in the impact of target gender when comparing the low- and high-power conditions, $t(80) = -2.47$, $p = .016$, $d = .66$. Participants in the low-power condition showed a greater difference in salary and favored men ($M = 833.33$, $SD = 2183.86$) than did participants in the high-power condition ($M = -627.72$, $SD = 2243.49$). There were no significant differences in gender effects comparing the low-power and baseline conditions, $t(80) = 1.66$, $p = .10$, $d = .45$.

To test the overall effects, salary recommendations, not difference scores, were submitted to a 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) mixed-model General Linear Model (GLM), with Target Gender treated as a within-subject factor. The main effects of Power and Target Gender were not significant

($ps > .75$). However, replicating Experiment 1, the overall 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) interaction was significant, $F(2, 80) = 3.16$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. (See Table 2 for all cell means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Experiment 2.)

Turning to applicant choice, we analyzed participants' choice by first comparing the low-power condition to the high-power condition and then the low-power condition to the baseline condition. The Chi-square test was significant when comparing low- and high-power conditions, $\chi^2(1, n = 57) = 3.96$, $p = .05$, $V = .26$, and nonsignificant when comparing low-power and baseline conditions, $\chi^2(1, n = 55) = 2.18$, $p = .14$, $V = .20$. Testing applicant choice within each condition against 50% revealed nonsignificant effects in the low-power (64%), $\chi^2(1, n = 28) = 2.29$, $p = .13$, $\Phi = .29$, high-power (38%), $\chi^2(1, n = 29) = 3.24$, $p = .07$, $\Phi = .24$, and baseline conditions (56%), $\chi^2(1, n = 27) = 3.24$, $p = .07$, $\Phi = .11$. Finally, the overall 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) Chi-square was not significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 84) = 3.18$, $p = .12$, $V = .23$.

Similar results were found on the hireability difference scores. Planned contrasts revealed a significant difference in the impact of target gender when comparing the low-power and baseline conditions, $t(81) = 2.12$, $p = .04$, $d = .51$. However, there was no significant difference in the impact of target gender when comparing the low- and high-power conditions, $t(81) = -1.412$, $p = .16$, $d = .42$. Participants in the low-power condition showed a greater difference in ratings of hireability and favored men ($M = .36$, $SD = 1.41$) more so than participants in the baseline condition ($M = -.43$, $SD = 1.63$).

To test the overall effects, ratings of hireability, not difference scores, were submitted to a 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) mixed-model GLM, with Target Gender treated as a within-subjects variable. The main effects for Power and Target Gender were not significant. In addition, the overall 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) interaction was not significant, $F(2, 81) = 2.33$, $p = .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$.

Although the results of the hireability ratings and applicant choices trended in the same direction as Experiment 1, not all results reached significance. Salary recommendations produced a stronger pattern that was consistent with Experiment 1: low-power men recommended a lower salary for the agentic woman.

Trait Ratings

Mean competence and social skills ratings were submitted to a 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) \times 2 (Scale) mixed-model GLM, with the last two factors treated as within-subjects factors. As in Experiment 1, trait ratings did not differ by target. Overall, targets were rated as more competent ($M = 5.16$, $SD = .78$) than socially skilled ($M = 4.81$, $SD = .65$), $F(1, 81) = 28.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$, and the female ($M = 5.05$, $SD = .69$) and male target ($M = 4.92$, $SD = .77$) were rated similarly across traits, $F(1, 81) = 3.11$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. No other effects were significant ($Fs < 1$).

Table 2 Evaluations of female and male job applicants within experimental condition, Experiment 2

Condition	Women			Men		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
High power						
Choice	62%	—	—	38%	—	—
Hireability	5.43 _a	.15	[5.12, 5.74]	5.28 _a	.22	[4.83, 5.72]
Salary	\$34,410 _a	\$429	[\$33,532, 35,288]	\$33,782 _a	\$601	[\$32,551, 35,014]
Social skills	4.90 _a	.14	[4.61, 5.20]	4.66 _a	.12	[4.42, 4.89]
Competence	5.27 _a	.15	[4.96, 5.58]	5.21 _a	.15	[4.89, 5.52]
Low Power						
Choice	46%	—	—	64%	—	—
Hireability	4.84 _a	.16	[4.50, 5.18]	5.20 _a	.24	[4.71, 5.69]
Salary	\$34,196 _a	\$825	[\$32,504, 35,889]	\$35,111 _a	\$1050	[\$32,953, 37,270]
Social skills	4.88 _a	.10	[4.68, 5.09]	4.80 _a	.16	[4.47, 5.14]
Competence	5.16 _a	.18	[4.80, 5.52]	5.15 _a	.16	[4.82, 5.48]
Baseline						
Choice	66%	—	—	44%	—	—
Hireability	5.11 _a	.17	[4.75, 5.47]	4.68 _a	.24	[4.20, 5.17]
Salary	\$34,148 _a	\$409	[\$33,308, 34,989]	\$33,981 _a	\$591	[\$32,767, 35,196]
Social skills	4.91 _a	.16	[4.59, 5.23]	4.69 _a	.20	[4.28, 5.10]
Competence	5.16 _a	.15	[4.85, 5.46]	4.98 _a	.19	[4.58, 5.38]

A significant mean difference between the woman and man target across a row is indicated by different subscripts ($p < .05$)

Meta-Analytic Combined Analyses

The results of Experiment 1 and 2 supported the hypothesis that low-power men would discriminate. Low-power men's hiring and salary recommendations revealed bias against the agentic woman. For baseline and high-power men, there was no evidence of bias. Across studies, using different power manipulations, and across measures, planned contrasts revealed a consistent pattern; however, the overall 3 (Power) \times 2 (Target Gender) interaction did not consistently reach significance, particularly on continuous measures reflecting hiring recommendations. In retrospect, our analyses were likely under-powered to test the full interaction, with cell sizes ranging from 25 to 30 (observed power for salary was .83 in Experiment 1 and .59 in Experiment 2; observed power for hireability was .54 in Experiment 1 and .46 in Experiment 2). Given that the pattern of results was nearly identical in both experiments, it seems unlikely that these results occurred by chance. To examine this possibility, the effects of Experiment 1 and 2 were combined using meta-analytic procedures (Rosenthal 1991) to create a more precise estimate of effect size and allow for greater statistical power in line with current recommendations (Cummings 2014). These combined analyses seemed particularly appropriate given the nearly identical procedures of the experiments. Further, the power-role assignments from Experiment 1 could be considered a power-prime (similar

to Experiment 2) because participants' assigned roles did not pertain directly to the hiring scenario or ratings.

To test the statistical probability of each combined effect, the relevant p values of the overall interactions were used to find the corresponding z -score for each effect in the two experiments. The two z -scores were then summed and divided by the square root of 2 (i.e., the number of experiments) to yield the combined z -score. Finally, the corresponding p value was obtained for the combined z -score (Rosenthal 1991). For example, to examine the combined interactive effect on salary recommendations, the p value from the Power \times Target Gender interaction in Experiment 1 ($p = .01$) and Experiment 2 ($p = .05$) were used to find the corresponding z -scores of 2.57 and 1.96, respectively. These z -scores were summed and divided by the square root of 2 to yield a combined z -score of 3.20 and a corresponding p value of .001. In the following, we report the relevant combined analyses along with combined simple effects within each condition.

Analyses of salary recommendations revealed a significant Power \times Target Gender interaction ($z = 3.20$, $p = .001$). Combined simple effects revealed that participants recommended a lower salary for the female applicant compared to the male applicant only in the low-power condition ($z = 3.20$, $p = .001$). In the high-power condition, participants recommended a higher salary for the female applicant compared to the male target ($z = -2.09$, $p = .04$). In the baseline condition, salary recommendations did not differ ($z = -.83$, $p = .41$).

Similarly, results revealed a significant main effect of power on choice of applicant ($z = 2.12$, $p = .03$). Low-power participants were more likely to choose the male than the female applicant ($z = 2.35$, $p = .02$). In contrast, high-power ($z = -1.40$, $p = .16$) and baseline participants ($z = -.65$, $p = .42$) were equally likely to choose the male and female applicant.

Finally, similar results emerged on hireability ratings. Results revealed a significant Power \times Target Gender interaction ($z = 2.50$, $p = .01$). In the low-power condition, participants rated the female applicant as less hireable than the male applicant ($z = 2.31$, $p = .02$). In the high-power ($z = -1.20$, $p = .23$) and baseline ($z = -1.53$, $p = .13$) conditions, participants rated the female applicant similarly to the male applicant.

Overall, meta-analytic combinations provided support for the hypothesis that having low levels of power increases men's negative reactions toward agentic women. Across two experiments, low-power participants consistently discriminated against the female applicant, whereas high-power and baseline participants did not.

General Discussion

The goal of our research was to examine whether men's level of power would moderate gender discrimination. Using a résumé evaluation paradigm, male participants evaluated a male and female target applying for a managerial position. The results of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 suggest that low-power men may be more likely than high-power men to discriminate against agentic women. When men were assigned to (Experiment 1) or primed with (Experiment 2) a low-power role, they engaged in discrimination against the female applicant: Compared to the male applicant, low-power men rated her as less hireable and recommended a lower salary for her. However, no discrimination occurred in the high-power or baseline conditions. A meta-analysis combining the results of both experiments confirmed that only low-power men made lower recommendations for the female applicant.

Why did powerlessness produce discrimination for these men? As we discussed previously, men seem to be particularly sensitive to gender-identity threats (e.g., as measured by anxiety-related word fragment completion; Vandello et al. 2008), and past research has shown that men behave in ways that can presumably restore their masculine identity (e.g., physical aggression, Bosson et al. 2009; sexual harassment, Maass et al. 2003; sexist and anti-gay humor, O'Connor et al. 2017). Thus, one possible explanation for our findings is that being in a low-power role was threatening to the male participants, and they reacted with discrimination to alleviate this threat. This interpretation is consistent with recent work suggesting being in subordinate positions, particularly to women, is perceived as

less masculine (Brescoll et al. 2012) and experienced as threatening for men (Netchaeva et al. 2015).

Limitations and Future Directions

At first glance, our findings may seem inconsistent with work on the backlash effect that typically finds that agentic women face lower hireability and likeability/social skills ratings (for review, see Rudman et al. 2012a). In the current studies, targets were generally seen as more competent than socially skilled, regardless of targets' gender. This is likely due to the different target manipulations in the current work versus the manipulations typically employed in backlash experiments. The current work used a very subtle, minimalistic target manipulation (similar to the Goldberg 1968, paradigm) by only varying targets' gender through the names listed on the résumé. The agency of the targets could be inferred from their previous leadership experience and by the mere fact that they were applying for a managerial position. In contrast, work on the backlash effect typically use more in-depth target manipulations (e.g., asking participants to watch videos of the targets being interviewed) making the agency of the targets particularly salient.

Furthermore, recent work on the backlash effect has demonstrated that backlash is better explained by violations of status-related gender expectations. Women face backlash for appearing too dominant; men face backlash for appearing too weak (Rudman et al. 2012a). In the current research, it is unlikely that our subtle manipulation produced perceptions of dominance, nor were dominant trait ratings assessed. This interpretation is supported by results in our baseline condition. If the target manipulation was strong enough to produce the backlash effect, then we would expect to see negative evaluations of the female target in the baseline condition. This did not occur; instead, men in the baseline condition rated the male and female target equally across dependent measures. To directly test whether male power roles moderate the backlash effect, future work will need to employ a stronger manipulation of targets' agency and expand trait ratings to include measures of dominance.

Thus, comparing our findings to work on backlash suggests that different processes may be at work. For example, the current findings could be interpreted in line with a shifting standards effect (Biernat and Vescio 2002). According to the shifting standards model, when perceivers make judgements of targets on subjective measures (e.g., Likert-type scales), they make comparisons to within-group standards. Consequently, when women are judged on trait-ratings, they may be compared to other women (e.g., she's competent, for a woman). However, when perceivers make judgements on objective or zero-sum measures (e.g., hiring decisions), they tend to make comparisons between groups (e.g., he's more hireable than she is). Thus, the typical shifting standards effect suggests stereotypes may be masked on subjective measures but emerge more clearly on objective measures. This perspective

may explain why differences did not emerge on trait ratings of competence and social skills (i.e., subjective measures) but did emerge on hiring decisions and salary recommendations (i.e., objective measures).

However, it should be noted that bias on objective measures only emerged within the low-power condition. Thus, the question still remains—why did bias surface exclusively within this condition? We propose that the hiring discrimination exhibited is more easily interpreted in line with precarious manhood theory. In other words, the discrimination was not produced by decreased likeability as would be expected by backlash theory. Instead, it was likely due to masculinity threats. Hiring discrimination was only evidenced in the low-power condition, implying that powerlessness was threatening to the male participants.

Although the pattern of our results suggests that men may have experienced threat, we did not directly assess threat. Threat may be a difficult construct to measure directly, given the potential for reactivity on the part of respondents and the social desirability of appearing independent and in control. Therefore, future studies attempting to measure threat as a mediator might employ implicit measures (Vandello et al. 2008) or measure threat indirectly by measuring changes in gender identity or self-esteem (Luhtanen and Crocker 1992).

Alternatively, the low-power role may have been more broadly threatening to personal independence instead of a specific threat to masculinity. From this perspective, when given control over a hiring decision, low-power men seemed to exert that control to a greater extent than high-power participants, perhaps as a way to restore a personal sense of control. If this were the case, though, it would be reasonable to expect that ratings for *both* the male and female target would be lower in the low-power condition compared to high-power or baseline. To examine this possibility more closely, future research should examine responses to agentic women by female participants. If the effect was found to be limited to only male participants, that could suggest gender identity threats are at play and provide stronger support for the precarious manhood hypothesis.

Similarly, the specific source of the threat men are experiencing is not clear in the current research. We assume that men perceive low power to be a threat to masculinity (Netchaeva et al. 2015); however, it is also plausible agentic women are viewed as more threatening to low-power men than to high-power men. More specifically, low-power men may be more likely to perceive agentic women as a reason for their low levels of power (i.e., agentic women are taking their power away). This might prime low-power men to have thoughts of instability associated with their power. Past research has identified that when power is viewed as unstable, individuals are more likely to act in corrupt and self-interested ways (see Maner and Mead 2010). Future research should explore this possibility by manipulating the stability of power for high-power men and measure hiring and salary decisions

of women. If agentic women are an instability cue for low-power men, we would expect to replicate the current findings only in conditions in which men are led to believe that their power is stable. In conditions of unstable power, we should find that all men, regardless of level of power, are more likely to discriminate against agentic women. However, if having low levels of power is a direct threat to masculinity (and not a cue for instability), we would expect to replicate the current findings, regardless of stability of power, providing strong support for the precarious manhood hypothesis.

Although most work on the backlash effect suggests that both men and women engage in backlash (for a review, see Rudman and Phelan 2008), other work suggests that men and women may use power differently. For example, in traditionally male-dominated domains, high-power men (particularly those focused on the weaknesses of their subordinates) were more likely than high-power women to use gender stereotypes when interacting with and evaluating a female subordinate (Vescio et al. 2003). In addition, hierarchies are likely to have different psychological meaning, and thus different consequences for men and women. Men tend to endorse social dominance beliefs (Pratto et al. 1997a) and generally prefer hierarchies (Schmid Mast 2005). For men, this preference for hierarchical relationships correlates with a general willingness to use stereotypes as well as specific judgments of female targets as lower in status than male targets. For women, preference for hierarchy is not associated with these other variables (Schmid Mast 2005). Thus, it seems reasonable to anticipate that women and men will respond differently to high- and low-power roles.

Practice Implications

The current findings extend work on precarious manhood by focusing on variables relevant to work-place settings. Few studies have investigated masculinity threats in the workplace (for a discussion, see Netchaeva et al. 2015). Both our manipulation of power roles and our assessment of hiring decisions are directly relevant to organizational contexts. Much of the advice offered to achievement-oriented women who are trying to succeed focuses on the development of more masculine traits. One does not have to look far to find titles like “Lean In” (Sandberg 2013), “Feminist fight club” (Bennett 2016), or “Nice girls don’t get the corner office” (Frankel 2014) that spend pages suggesting women should become more agentic in their interactions in the workplace to get ahead.

The current work suggests this approach may not be the best strategy. In fact, women who act in agentic ways may be more likely to face discrimination in the workplace, especially by men who are experiencing low levels of power. This possibility suggests that organizations should be aware of how employees feel about their status because these perceptions affect real hiring decisions. For example, when hiring committees are used,

members of the committee may have very different perceptions of given candidates depending on their own gender and power status within the organization, or relative to other members of the committee. These different perceptions can lead to negative outcomes for applicants who are female and agentic.

Conclusions

Women seeking leadership positions must strike a delicate balance. They need to demonstrate competency, but at the same time, not appear too dominant. Our findings suggest additional impression management concerns to consider. For example, women may need to consider the roles men occupy in their organization or perhaps minimize situations that may be construed as threatening to masculinity.

Our initial work suggests that low-power men may be more likely than high-power men to resist agentic women. The process by which this occurred has yet to be clearly identified. There is still much work to do to fully understand the relationship among power, masculinity threats, and hiring discrimination. A more complete understanding of the specific processes and conditions that lead to negative evaluations of agentic women can point to strategies for reducing bias. Ultimately, as women continue to advance in traditionally masculine roles and roles change in society, so too will stereotypes (Diekmann and Goodfriend 2006; Eagly et al. 2000; Koenig and Eagly 2014). Identifying conditions that can reduce negative reactions—or possibly even promote positive reactions—to agentic women can potentially help to remove some of the barriers to this change.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval The research was conducted in accordance with APA standards for the ethical treatment of human subjects.

Conflict of Interest We do not have any conflicts of interest pertaining to this submission.

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