

# COMPETENT YET OUT IN THE COLD: SHIFTING CRITERIA FOR HIRING REFLECT BACKLASH TOWARD AGENTIC WOMEN

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We present evidence that shifting hiring criteria reflects backlash toward agentic (“masterful”) women (Rudman, 1998). Participants ( $N = 428$ ) evaluated male or female agentic or communal managerial applicants on dimensions of competence, social skills, and hireability. Consistent with past research, agentic women were perceived as highly competent but deficient in social skills, compared with agentic men. New to the present research, social skills predicted hiring decisions more than competence for agentic women; for all other applicants, competence received more weight than social skills. Thus, evaluators shifted the job criteria away from agentic women’s strong suit (competence) and toward their perceived deficit (social skills) to justify hiring discrimination. The implications of these findings for women’s professional success are discussed.

As all successful employees know, job interviews provide an important opportunity to “make a good impression.” However, an applicant’s gender can have a profound effect on evaluations because it establishes stereotypic expectations for a candidate’s interview style and job suitability (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fiske, 1998). For women, this situation results in a double bind that constitutes a formidable impression management dilemma (Catalyst, 2007). To be perceived as competent, ample research demonstrates that an applicant must display confidence, independence, and ambition (e.g., Dipboye, 1985; Rudman, 1998; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). This is especially true for women vying for leadership roles because they must disconfirm negative female stereotypes to avoid being disqualified on the basis of perceived incompetence (Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988; Heilman, 1983, 1995). However, when women necessarily portray themselves as ambitious and capable, they are viewed as highly qualified for leadership roles, but they risk social and economic penalties (*backlash effects*; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). This dilemma represents a catch-22 for women, such that they must enact agency to be

perceived as competent, but if they do so, they risk backlash.

The goal of the present article is to further clarify the ways in which competent, confident women can be disadvantaged during the hiring process. In addition to replicating backlash toward agentic female applicants, we uniquely investigated how evaluators subtly shift their hiring criteria to further discriminate against “masterful” (i.e., confident, competent, and ambitious) women. Specifically, if evaluators deemphasize the importance of competence and instead emphasize perceived social skills in their hiring criteria only when evaluating agentic women, this action would suggest the process by which perceivers justify discriminating against highly qualified women and would reveal another significant barrier to gender equity.

## *Backlash Toward Agentic Women*

Past research has documented a discrepancy between stereotypically feminine traits and those considered necessary for leadership roles (Dipboye, 1985; Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983, 2001). Women are typically perceived as more *communal* (e.g., caring and interdependent) and less *agentic* (e.g., ambitious and self-reliant) than men (Basow, 1986; Williams & Best, 1990). Thus, there is a mismatch between what women are thought to be like and what leadership is thought to require. As a result, it is not surprising that, unless disconfirmed, evaluators’ stereotypical expectations can lead to gender bias in hiring, placement, and promotion (e.g., Dodge et al., 1995;

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Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glick et al., 1988; Heilman, 1983, 1995).

To combat the perceived lack of fit, female leadership candidates must present themselves as unambiguously agentic (e.g., ambitious, competitive, and capable) to ensure they are perceived to be as competent as men. However, women face interpersonal penalties when they exhibit agency. Specifically, agentic women are rated as highly competent and capable of leadership, but they are viewed as socially deficient by both male and female evaluators, which ultimately leads to hiring penalties (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Moss-Racusin & Heilman, 2006; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001).

For example, Rudman (1998) showed that, although self-promotion is necessary for perceptions of competence, it decreased the social skills ratings of female applicants and their likelihood of being hired (see also Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). In contrast, identically self-promoting male applicants were viewed as highly competent, likeable, and hireable, indicating that only women faced sanctions for displaying confidence and ambition in an interview setting. Although men who enact communality during job interviews also risk penalties, the masculine stereotype of agency and ambition typically aligns with the qualities desired in most leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983). As a result, men do not face the same pressure as women to overcome stereotypic expectations to succeed in the workplace.

In sum, female applicants must combat sex discrimination and are often forced to choose between disqualification for being insufficiently competent and disqualification for being insufficiently feminine when they compete for leadership roles. Even when they manage to crack the glass ceiling and are hired for a management position, backlash can result in gender discrimination at all stages of women's careers, including salary negotiations (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007; Janoff-Bulmann & Wade, 1996), performance evaluations (Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Brett, Atwater, & Waldman, 2005; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992), and promotion decisions (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Heilman et al., 2004). In this way, the cumulative effects of penalizing female agency are likely to have a substantial impact on women's ability to achieve the highest levels of leadership and professional success (for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, in press). Thus, understanding the professional consequences of backlash is an essential step toward achieving gender parity in the workplace (Catalyst, 2007).

Although previous research suggests that female agency risks backlash in the form of hiring discrimination, the precise nature of the judgment process has yet to be investigated. In the present research, we hypothesized that decision makers would shift the hiring criteria for managerial jobs in a manner that would result in a double disadvantage for highly qualified women. Specifically, we expected that hiring criteria would be shifted away from agentic women's

competence and instead emphasize their social skills, reflecting an additional form of backlash.

### *The Biasing Role of Shifting Criteria in Hiring Decisions*

Past research suggests how discrimination may contaminate hiring decisions even when applicants have demonstrated that they are qualified. Specifically, evaluators may subtly shift the criteria they use to make hiring decisions to benefit gender or race typical applicants (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002; Norton, Vandello, & Darley, 2004). For example, Uhlmann and Cohen (2007) showed that evaluators shifted their hiring criteria for a police chief position such that the specific strengths of the male applicant were more valued than were those of the female applicant. When the male applicant was described as "street-smart" and the female applicant as "well-educated," street smarts were rated as more important for job success. When their qualities were reversed, education was rated as more important than street smarts. Pitting education against a history of activism, the same pattern occurred for a Women's Studies professorship, such that the female applicant's attributes were favored over the male applicant's, no matter what they were. Evaluators were apparently unaware of these biases, because those who shifted their hiring criteria viewed their decisions as more objective than individuals who did not shift their criteria. Thus, shifting emphases in job criteria appears to be a subtle, hidden bias that benefits gender typical applicants.

Similarly, Norton et al. (2004) found that evaluators justified prejudicial hiring and admissions decisions by emphasizing different performance criteria. For example, when information about the gender of the applicant was not available, participants favored an educated applicant for a construction management position over an applicant with strong work experience (Norton et al., 2004, Study 1). However, when the educated applicant with low work experience was female, evaluators deemed work experience to be a more important hiring criterion than education, thus biasing their decisions in favor of the White male applicant (for applications of shifting criteria to racial discrimination, see Hodson et al., 2002; Norton et al., 2004).

Although prior research suggests that traits assigned to applicants whose gender matched the occupational role were valued more than when those same traits were assigned to mismatched applicants, an investigation of the weighting of traits stereotypically associated with men and women, relevant to hiring decisions, is needed. The present research investigated the possibility that evaluators uniquely deemphasize the importance of competence when making hiring decisions about agentic women, thereby decreasing their chances of being hired. In other words, we examined whether shifting hiring criteria reflects a novel form of backlash that may help to explain hiring discrimination against agentic women interviewing for a leadership position.

### Overview of the Research and Hypotheses

To examine shifting hiring criteria as a form of backlash toward agentic women, we taped agentic and communal male and female confederates interviewing to be a computer lab manager, a male-dominated job. To manipulate agency, applicants presented themselves as confident, ambitious, and competitive. To manipulate communality, applicants presented themselves as competent, but also modest and cooperative. Participants then evaluated the applicants' competence, social skills, and hireability.

We hypothesized that (1) we would replicate backlash effects, with the agentic female applicant suffering low social skills and hireability ratings compared to the agentic male applicant (i.e., social and economic sanctions), but receiving similar competence ratings. More important, we hypothesized that (2) the hiring preference for the agentic male applicant, compared to the agentic female applicant, would be explained by shifting criteria emphasizing competence and social skills for the male applicant, but deemphasizing competence and overemphasizing social skills for the female applicant. Because we expected agentic women to be perceived as equal in competence to agentic men but less likeable, this shift would result in a double disadvantage for atypical women, with their high competence devalued and their low social skills overemphasized. The predicted pattern would uniquely explain how evaluators justify not hiring highly competent female applicants and reveal the underpinnings of a subtle form of sex discrimination.

## METHOD

### Participants and Design

Volunteers ( $N = 428$ ; 242 women) participated in exchange for partial credit toward their Introductory Psychology research participation requirement. Of these, 250 (58.4%) were White, 31 were Black (7.2%), 94 were Asian (22%), 24 were Hispanic (5.6%), and the remaining 29 participants (6.8%) reported another ethnic identity. The design of the study was a 2 (participant gender)  $\times$  2 (applicant gender)  $\times$  2 (interview style: agentic, communal) between-subjects factorial. A power analysis suggested that the  $N$  for our study design was adequate to detect even a small effect size (.20) at .90 probability.

### Materials

**Interview scripts.** To manipulate agentic and communal interview styles, two scripts were created. Responses to 12 questions relevant to the computer lab manager position (e.g., "What are your technical skills?" and "How will you handle conflict resolution?") as well as responses to two neutral questions (e.g., "Have you traveled much?") were scripted. The questions appeared written on the screen. For agentic applicants, responses emphasized their technical competence, independence, and leadership ability. For

communal applicants, responses were more modest, emphasizing their interpersonal and social skills. For example, agentic applicants responded to the question, "What kind of managerial style do you have?" as follows:

There's no question about it, I like to be the boss. I let people know what's expected of them, and I'm able to lean on people if they lag behind. But I'm also quick to spot talent and to promote people who deserve it and who will do their best for me. But I like being in charge—to be the person who makes the decisions. In my experience, that's the best way to get things done well.

Communal applicants responded to the same question as follows:

Well, my preference is to get people together, to talk through whatever issues are on the table, and to come to some consensus about the decisions that have to be made. Sometimes people have to be encouraged to speak up, and I'll do my best to give them that opportunity. I like to have plenty of input from the people who work with me.

Two male and two female confederates were taped in both styles, yielding a total of eight videotaped interviews (approximately 15 minutes in length). Preliminary analyses suggested collapsing across the confederates of the same gender for our focal analyses.<sup>1</sup>

**Competence index.** Evaluators responded to three items using scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*) to assess the perceived competence of the applicant (Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). The items were "Did the applicant strike you as competent?" "How likely is it that the applicant has significant technical skills for this job?" and "Would you characterize the applicant as someone likely to get ahead in their career?" These items were averaged to form the competence index ( $\alpha = .83$ ), on which high scores indicated greater perceived competence.

**Social skills index.** Evaluators responded to six social skills items using the same scale (Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). Sample items were "Would you characterize this person as someone you want to get to know better?" and "Did the applicant strike you as likable?" In addition, participants were asked to "estimate the percentage of users who would feel comfortable seeking help from the applicant," on a 1 (0–17%) to 6 (84–100%) scale. These seven items were averaged to form the social skills index ( $\alpha = .85$ ), on which high scores indicated greater social skills.

**Hireability index.** Hireability was assessed with three items (Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). Respondents indicated how likely it was that they "would choose to interview the applicant for the job," "the applicant would be hired for the job," and "you would hire the applicant for the job"

on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) and 6 (*very much*). Responses were combined to form the hireability index ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

### Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to evaluate the interviews of either agentic or communal male or female applicants in a private booth. Participants were told that the job applicant was interviewing for a computer lab manager position. The job was described as requiring strong technical knowledge to keep the computers running smoothly, as well as social skills to assist student and faculty users. It was emphasized that the lab manager needed to work well under pressure because of the rapid turnover in technology and had to be a self-starter because he/she would be completely in charge. It was also necessary to be a “good listener” and sensitive to users’ concerns. This description afforded evaluators the option to shift their hiring criteria toward applicants’ competence or interpersonal skills.

After watching the interview, participants alerted the experimenter, who started a computer program that recorded their assessment of the applicant’s competence, social skills, and hireability.<sup>2</sup> Items within each measure were presented in random order. After completing the survey, participants were thanked and debriefed.

## RESULTS

### Manipulation Check

Prior to our focal analyses, we performed a manipulation check to confirm that our communal applicants were perceived as more socially skilled than the agentic applicants, whereas the agentic applicants were perceived as more competent. Results strongly supported this pattern, with agentic applicants ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) receiving significantly higher competence ratings than communal applicants ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = .93$ ),  $t(426) = 20.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.41$ , but significantly lower social skills ratings ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) than communal applicants ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = .80$ ),  $t(426) = 8.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .75$ .<sup>3</sup>

### Hypothesis 1: Replicating Backlash Effects

Backlash effects would be indicated by a significant Interview Style  $\times$  Applicant Gender interaction for social skills and hireability, with agentic women rated lower than agentic men. To test this hypothesis, we submitted social skills and hireability to separate 2 (sex of rater)  $\times$  2 (applicant gender)  $\times$  2 (interview style: agentic, communal) ANOVAs. Consistent with past research (e.g., Heilman et al., 2004; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001), these analyses revealed no significant main effects or interactions involving the sex of the rater.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 shows the results, collapsed across participant gender.

**Table 1**  
Evaluations of Male and Female Agentic and Communal Job Applicants

Interview style and measure	Male applicants		Female applicants	
	M	SD	M	SD
Ratings of agentic applicants				
Social skills	3.54 <sub>a</sub>	1.02	3.23 <sub>b</sub>	.95
Hireability	4.92 <sub>a</sub>	.62	4.18 <sub>b</sub>	1.12
Ratings of communal applicants				
Social skills	3.95 <sub>a</sub>	.83	4.22 <sub>b</sub>	.75
Hireability	3.12 <sub>a</sub>	1.17	3.21 <sub>a</sub>	1.23

Note.  $N = 85$  (agentic male), 111 (agentic female), 113 (communal male), and 119 (communal female). Means not sharing subscripts differ for applicants within rows ( $p < .05$ ).

*Social sanctions.* Results for the social skills index revealed the main effect of interview style described above, as well as the predicted Interview Style  $\times$  Applicant Gender interaction,  $F(1, 420) = 10.87$ ,  $p = .001$ . Table 1 shows that, consistent with past backlash research, male agentic applicants were rated as more socially skilled than female agentic applicants,  $t(194) = 2.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .32$ . Thus, women pay a price for agency that men do not incur. Unexpectedly, male communal applicants were viewed as less socially skilled than female communal applicants,  $t(230) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = -.27$ , suggesting that atypical men may also risk social backlash. In past research, communal applicants have received comparable social skills ratings (Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). It may be that the lengthier interview format adopted for this experiment resulted in a less favorable rating for modest, cooperative male applicants or increased liking for communal female applicants.

*Economic sanctions.* For the hireability index, results showed a significant main effect of interview style,  $F(1, 420) = 169.30$ ,  $p < .001$ . Agentic applicants ( $M = 4.50$ ) were viewed as more hireable than communal applicants ( $M = 3.17$ ), resulting in a large effect ( $d = 1.03$ ). This effect shows the importance of agency for being perceived as qualified for leadership roles. However, this effect was qualified by the predicted Interview Style  $\times$  Applicant Gender interaction,  $F(1, 420) = 13.51$ ,  $p < .001$ . As expected, male agentic applicants were rated as more hireable than female agentic applicants, resulting in a medium effect size,  $t(194) = 5.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .53$ , and demonstrating backlash in the form of hiring discrimination (see Table 1). By contrast, and in line with past research, there were no gender differences for communal applicants’ hireability,  $t(230) = .57$ ,  $ns$ ,  $d = -.07$ .

### Hypothesis 2: Shifting Criteria as Backlash Toward Agentic Women

The goal of hypothesis 2 was to test whether the hiring penalty for agentic women would be explained by evaluators shifting their hiring criteria away from agentic women's competence and toward their social skills. To test this process, we simultaneously regressed the hireability index on competence and social skills ratings, separately for each applicant type. We then conducted Hotelling's *t* tests to assess reliable differences in the regression coefficients.

Table 2 shows that evaluators weighed competence more heavily than social skills for all applicants, with the exception of agentic women, whose social skills were given more weight than competence,  $t(110) = 3.19, p < .01$  (overall  $R^2 = .28$ ). Thus, hiring criteria shifted for agentic female applicants, with social skills emphasized more than competence. By contrast, competence and social skills received equal weight in the hiring decisions for agentic male applicants,  $t(84) = 1.52, ns$ . That is, even though the regression coefficient for competence is larger than for social skills, the difference was unreliable.

For communal men, hiring was predicted by competence more than social skills,  $t(112) = 3.41, p < .01$  (overall  $R^2 = .47$ ). For communal women, hiring was predicted almost solely by competence; social skills ratings were a weak predictor,  $t(118) = 23.39, p < .01$  (overall  $R^2 = .54$ ). These results indicate that communal applicants' social skills were minimized when evaluators made hiring decisions in favor of their relatively low competence. Because managerial jobs require high levels of competence (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999), this pattern is not surprising.

More remarkable was that agentic women's competence was minimized as a hiring criterion in favor of their relatively low social skills. Because agentic applicants were rated as higher on competence than social skills, agentic women were doubly disadvantaged. First, their high competence was devalued as a hiring criterion and second, their low social skills were overemphasized. How devalued was their competence? Table 2 shows that agentic women's competence had lower predictive utility compared with

agentic men's competence,  $z = 2.05, p < .05$ . Not shown in Table 2, it was also a poorer predictor relative to communal men's competence,  $z = 3.01, p < .01$ , and communal women's competence,  $z = 5.09, p < .001$ . Thus, although agency is necessary for strong impressions of competence, for women it is likely to be discounted when hiring decisions are made in favor of their perceived social skills deficits.

## DISCUSSION

To be perceived as qualified for leadership roles, it is incumbent on women to present themselves as competent and ambitious; yet when they do so, they risk social and economic penalties (Heilman et al., 2004; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). The present findings replicated backlash effects for female agency, underscoring professional women's impression management dilemma. A double standard for agency limits women's ability to put their best foot forward during job interviews and potentially throughout their careers (Rudman & Phelan, in press). Thus, backlash is an important piece of the glass ceiling that may impede women from acquiring leadership roles and achieving professional success.

Of more importance, the present research extends prior evidence for backlash by demonstrating that shifting hiring criteria is a means by which agentic women suffer employment discrimination. When evaluators made hiring decisions about the agentic male applicant, perceived competence and social skills were equal determining factors. Thus, evaluators followed the provided guidelines indicating both technical and interpersonal skills were necessary for job success. In contrast, when judging the agentic female applicant's hireability, social skills were perceived as a more important factor in hiring decisions than competence. Because agentic female applicants received generally high competence ratings but suffered from lower social skill ratings than agentic male applicants, this shift in hiring criteria doubly disadvantaged them. Further, the fact that low competence was emphasized almost to the exclusion of social skills for communal female applicants underscores the double bind professional women face. If they enacted

**Table 2**  
Simultaneous Regression Coefficients Predicting Hiring Decision From Social Skills and Competence Ratings for Each Applicant Type

Rating	Agentic applicants			Communal applicants		
	Male	Female	Gender difference	Male	Female	Gender difference
Competence	.44 <sub>x</sub> *	.17 <sub>x</sub> *	2.05*	.52 <sub>x</sub> **	.71 <sub>x</sub> **	2.10*
Social skills	.26 <sub>x</sub> **	.46 <sub>y</sub> **	1.50	.27 <sub>y</sub> **	.05 <sub>y</sub>	1.95

Note. Regression coefficients are standardized betas. Means not sharing subscripts within columns indicate a significant difference in the contribution of the two predictors, based on Hotelling's *t* tests ( $p < .05$ ). Gender differences refer to applicant gender; tests of applicant gender differences were independent and are based on *z*.

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

the requisite agency, evaluators emphasized their low social skills when making hiring decisions, whereas if they adhered to stereotypic expectancies, evaluators emphasized their low competence. In either case, female applicants were not likely to be hired.

However, shifting hiring criteria was only a sign of sex discrimination for agentic female applicants. This is because evaluators shifted toward competence when rating communal men, as well as communal women. Although this shift is understandable for a managerial position and justifies communal applicants' low hireability relative to agentic applicants, it also illuminates the advantage that agentic men receive. Whether rating communal applicants or agentic women, shifting criteria led to hiring decisions that always favored the normative agentic male applicant. Thus, in addition to suffering backlash in the form of perceived social skills deficits for agentic women and low competence for communal men, atypical applicants are further disadvantaged due to shifting criteria that discount their strongest qualities.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

The present research adds to the literature on shifting hiring criteria as a form of sex discrimination (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007), but questions remain as to why the shifting of criteria occurs. For example, it is possible that, when women appear not to meet female communality prescriptions, evaluators pay particularly close attention to this perceived discrepancy, resulting in a shifting of hiring criteria based on information salience. However, it is also possible that perceived communality deficits result in dislike of agentic women, and evaluators must then justify their desire not to hire them by shifting their hiring criteria. Another potential underlying process concerns the greater association of men with authority, relative to women (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). It is possible that people who automatically show these associations might also shift their hiring criteria to justify discriminating against agentic women. That is, gendered leadership associations might moderate the shifting criteria effect.

A limitation of the present research is that we examined shifting hiring criteria when agentic women apply for a leadership position. Although past research has found backlash effects in other contexts (e.g., when agentic women compete for a partnership role; Rudman, 1998), whether the shifting criteria effect occurs in other cases is a question for future research. In addition, we used a male-dominated role (computer lab manager) to operationalize leadership, so we cannot know whether results would generalize to a female-dominated or a gender-neutral leadership role. However, Rudman and Glick (2001) found that agentic women were particularly prone to backlash when the leadership position was "feminized" to emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills. Because female-dominated leadership positions are largely in human resources and education,

which require interpersonal skills in addition to agency, it seems likely that backlash would be a considerable barrier for confident and competent women even in these fields.

The present research demonstrates that, although agency is necessary for both genders to be viewed as competent enough for leadership positions, and thus, hireable, these expectations carry an extra burden for women, who must work to counteract perceptions that they are socially deficient. Future research should examine the means by which women may soften their agency to avoid this perception and, therefore, backlash. For example, Rudman and Glick (2001) found that women who tempered their agentic qualities with a declaration that they were "team players" more interested in "helping others" than in "getting ahead" could convey their competence without risk of backlash. However, this mix of communality and agency was accomplished through different channels (a "life philosophy" essay for communality and a verbal interview for agency). This raises the question of how women might accomplish a mixed impression during an actual interview. Our initial strategy was to feminize some agentic women by having them frequently smile and appear enthusiastic; however, this strategy backfired because it resulted in lowered hireability (see footnote 1). Thus, this issue remains a question for future research.

Further, past research has shown that female supervisors who have clearly demonstrated competence avoided backlash when evaluators learned they had a husband and children (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). However, because women with families are readily discriminated against, even this limited strategy may not be optimal (Williams, 2000). More important, having to display communal qualities in addition to competence is less than ideal because it presents an additional burden for female leaders not experienced by male leaders. Nonetheless, future research should investigate various means by which women might present themselves as a blend of agency and communality and whether doing so reduces the tendency for evaluators to engage in shifting hiring criteria.

Finally, although considerable evidence for backlash has accrued, both in the laboratory and the field (Rudman & Phelan, in press), future research should begin to examine its effects on women's professional behavior. Counterstereotypical women and men are aware of backlash and strive to avoid it (e.g., by hiding atypical success; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). But hiding professional success in a male-dominated occupation (i.e., by being reluctant to self-promote) is hardly a viable option for career women. In fact, fear of backlash may help to explain the gender gap in achievements that require self-advocacy, such as negotiating compensation packages and competing for promotion (Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Bowles et al., 2007).

### Conclusion

The present research demonstrates a novel and important means by which backlash impedes women's professional success. The double standard for agency results in women having to choose between perceptions of incompetence if they fail to disconfirm negative female stereotypes and perceptions of poor interpersonal skills when they do. Evaluators doubly disadvantaged agentic female applicants by shifting the hiring criteria away from competence to overemphasize interpersonal skills. Although this shift may serve to justify evaluators' low hiring recommendations, because it was reserved exclusively for agentic women, it reflects a form of backlash and, thus, sex discrimination. Forcing women to choose between being respected and being liked is patently unfair and a serious barrier to gender equality in the workplace.

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### NOTES

1. We originally set out to examine whether an exaggerated "feminine style" (i.e., frequent smiling) would soften backlash for agentic women, while exacerbating it for communal men. However, the results of 2 (interview style: agentic, communal)  $\times$  2 (femininity: high, low)  $\times$  2 (applicant gender)  $\times$  2 (participant gender) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) for the competence, social skills, and hiring indexes revealed null effects for femininity, with the exception that high feminine targets were less likely to be hired than low feminine targets,  $F(1, 412) = 3.69, p = .03$  ( $M = 3.71, SD = 1.35$  vs.  $M = 3.84, SD = 1.25$ , respectively). There were no reliable interaction effects for femininity, and the Interview Style  $\times$  Applicant Sex interactions remained robust. Therefore, we combined the two male and two female applicants for the findings reported here.
2. Measures of positive and negative male and female prescriptive stereotypes were also administered. The results from those measures are reported elsewhere (Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008).
3. In the present research, the correlation between competence and social skills in each of the conditions was as follows: agentic female ( $r = .26$ ), agentic male ( $r = -.11$ ), communal female ( $r = .43$ ), and communal male ( $r = .47$ ).
4. Although participant gender effects are not found using the backlash paradigm, participant gender effects have been found in research examining women who speak persuasively (Carli, 1990, 2001; Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995), with men (as compared to women) more likely to judge assertive speech harshly in women. This difference in participant gender effects between Carli's research and backlash paradigms is likely due to the topic about which women are speaking assertively. In Carli's research, they are talking assertively about a social issue or campus policy, whereas in backlash research, agentic women are speaking assertively about their qualifications and accomplishments to be hired. Speaking assertively about oneself is more taboo for women, compared with talking about other topics. Consistent with this interpretation, in our comprehensive review of the backlash literature, we routinely found no evidence of participant gender effects (Rudman & Phelan, in press).

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