**Impression of Expression: The Relationship Between Ambivalent Sexism and Perceptions**

**of Gender-Typed Applicants**

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Honors Thesis

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the current study is to determine a relationship between ambivalent sexism and perceptions of applicants as a function of the applicant's level of masculinity and femininity. Although there has been a progressive shift toward equal opportunity within the workplace, there is still a bias that surrounds applicants' gender and their hireability for certain positions. Furthermore, this discrimination can extend to the gendered job type (e.g., managerial positions are considered masculine) and the incongruency between an applicant's sex and their gender expression (i.e., masculinity, femininity). Researchers have also identified types of biases that exist that can predict this kind of gender discrimination and lack of equal opportunity in employment (e.g., "Beauty is Beastly" effect, ambivalent sexism). In the current study, participants were given hireability questionnaires for one of four applicants (feminine male, masculine male, feminine female, masculine female) for a managerial position. Scores on this survey were analyzed based on the participants' level of sexism (hostile and benevolent). Workplaces can utilize these results to promote the usage of screenings for hiring boards and/or supervisor positions to decrease the prevalent gender bias in hiring and ensure equal opportunity for the workplace.

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The demographic of the workforce has been slowly progressing toward a more diversified aggregation. One of the most influential trends throughout this change has been the increasing number of women within the workforce (Toossi & Morisi, 2017; Fernandez, 2013). Women have significantly increased their presence in the workforce since 1950 and now constitute almost half of the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Despite this progress toward gender equality, women continue to face challenges in selection, compensation, and promotion decisions (see Eagly & Carli, 2007; Dobele et al., 2014). Empirical research has demonstrated that negative stereotypes of women continue to persist, which reflect beliefs that women are less competent in work-related domains than their male counterparts (Heilman et al., 2015). Researchers have continued to research the types of biases that exist that relate to gender discrimination and lack of equal opportunity in employment (e.g., "Beauty is Beastly" effect, ambivalent sexism). The purpose of the current study is to determine a relationship between ambivalent sexism and perceptions of applicants as a function of the applicant's level of masculinity and femininity.

The "Beauty is Beastly" effect describes another way in which people discriminate against women within the workplace due to their physical features. Researchers have found when applying for a managerial position the attractive male or the masculine woman has the advantage over the attractive and/or feminine women (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979). Heiman and Saruwatari also found that the attractive woman did hold the advantage when it came to non-managerial positions by analyzing ratings of qualifications, recommendations for hiring, suggested starting salary, and rankings of hiring preferences. Researchers have also confirmed

that individuals who endorse both hostile and benevolent sexism are more likely to engage in stereotyping and discrimination (e.g., Glick, Wilkerson & Cuffe, 2015).

According to ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and research (Glick et al. 2000), hostile and benevolent sexism are separate, but positively correlated factors. It is likely that the individual who endorses benevolent ideologies also endorses hostile ideologies. However, it is also true that hostile sexism better predicts negative stereotypes about women, while benevolent sexism predicts positive stereotypes about women (Glick et al, 2000). For example, attitudes that are hostile in nature might endorse stereotypes that women are weak or unintelligent. On the other hand, benevolent attitudes might perpetuate stereotypes that women are soft and compassionate.

Empirical evidence has confirmed that individual differences in the endorsement of hostile and benevolent ideologies have implications for support of policies promoting equal opportunity and evaluations of workplace performance for both men and women. For example, Hideg and Ferris (2016) found that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism and participants who were primed with benevolent sexist attitudes were more likely to support equitable employee policies for organizations. However, they only supported the policies that would allow women into feminized positions, not masculine typed positions (i.e., leadership roles). Additionally, Glick and colleagues (Glick et al., 1997) determined that men who endorsed both benevolent and hostile attitudes were more likely than those low in sexism to classify women into the subtypes that aligned with their ambivalent expectations (e.g., career women, homemakers). Similarly, Good and Rudman (2010) examined the relationship between participants' level of hostile and benevolent sexism and their perceptions of applicants and interviewers after reading mock interviews (e.g., competency level, hireability, likeability). They

found that the participants who perceived sexist job interviewers as more likable were also more likely to also perceive the female applicants as less competent and were less likely to believe that she was a hirable applicant. Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed that negative reactions occur when a member of a social group acts in a way that is incongruent with perceived group social roles. In other words, hostility might occur when a member of a group acts in a way that is not congruent with their stereotype. For example, researchers suggested that women might not be trusted and may even be disliked when they use a dominant style of leadership or exert significant influence over men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Such behavior is not congruent with the stereotype of femininity that women are prescribed to possess.

Social role theory suggests that women typically occupy *communal* roles (e.g., roles that involve care and concern for other people) which are often associated with occupations such as being a homemaker, nurse, or elementary school teacher. Men, however typically occupy *agentic* roles (e.g. roles that involve leading or managing other people) which are often associated with occupations such as being a lawyer, CEO, or politician (Eagly & Karau, 2002). For example, females in stereotypical agentic positions face significantly more negative attributes within performance evaluations than males (Smith et al., 2019). Consistent with previous literature (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006), these proscriptive attributes toward female leaders have predominantly feminine connotations.

Phelan, Moss-Racusin, and Rudman (2008) furthered this research by measuring hireability predictors in leadership positions for agentic and communal men and women. Participants were shown video interviews of agentic and communal men and women for a computer lab manager position. The results showed that the biggest predictor of hireability in all applicants was competence, except for agentic females. Due to the incongruence in their gender

roles, agentic women are rated based on their social skills for hireability versus their competence. Overall, agentic men were rated highest in hireability than any other applicant. Gender role stereotypes contain a set of beliefs that women should be oriented toward communality, while men should be oriented more toward agency (Broverman, 1972; Heilman et al., 1995; Heilman, 1995). The theory of role congruency predicts that rewards are given when the characteristics of group members align with the expected characteristics of the group. Conversely, individual group members that do not align with group expectations face sanctions and devaluation. In the case of gender, women who act in an agentic or masculine manner might face ridicule and hostility because they do not conform to the stereotypical view of women being communal, whereas women who act in a communal or feminine manner will encounter more positive and supportive reactions for fulfilling stereotypic expectations.

Research indicates that sometimes the job itself is also important in predicting whether sexism and discrimination will emerge. Some jobs can be considered gender-typed, being masculine or feminine. Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) researched and identified prejudices against female job candidates who worked in an industry incongruent with their gender role. Female applicants are predicted to perform significantly worse than male candidates within a male-dominated workplace. Furthermore, Lyness and Heilman (2006) found that women in line jobs (e.g., business management or operations management) were evaluated less favorably than women in staff jobs (e.g., human resources or administration). In fact, women in line jobs also were rated less favorably than men in both line and staff jobs. That is, women who were in stereotypically male dominated jobs were not only rated lower than men occupying those same jobs, but they also were rated lower than women who filled stereotypically female-dominated jobs. This indicates that women in masculine jobs face discrimination when

compared to men in the same jobs. Furthermore, this discrimination between job types can extend to the influence of incongruency between the sex and the gender expression (e.g., masculinity, femininity) of an applicant. For example, Francesco and Hakel (1981) asked participants to rate applicants for either feminine, masculine, or neutral job types. They found that masculine applicants (of both sexes) were preferred over androgynous applicants, who were both preferred over the feminine applicants across for both the feminine job and the masculine job. In a more recent study, researchers found similar results when crossing applicant gender, facial gender expression, and gendered job type (von Stockhausen et al., 2013). They found that masculine male applicants were rated highest for the masculine job type (leadership position). Whereas both the feminine female and feminine male were rated highest for the feminine job type (team member/ subordinate). Therefore, in the current study, it is hypothesized that participants will rate the masculine applicants (of both sexes) higher than the feminine applicants (of both sexes) in hireability for the managerial position. Additionally, it is predicted that the participants that are high in either hostile and benevolent sexism will be also more likely to rate the masculine applicants higher for hireability than feminine applicants for the managerial position in comparison to those who score lower on the Ambivalent Sexism Scale.

**Method**

**Design**

The current study employed a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design, with the applicant's gender (male, female) and the applicant's facial gender expression (masculine, feminine) as the between-subject factors. The participants' score on the Ambivalent Sexism Scale (i.e., participants' level benevolent and hostile sexism) served as the grouping variable.

Applicant hireability ratings (i.e., perceptions of applicant qualifications, hireability, and ability to manage the pressures of the position) were dependent measures.

**Participants**

A total of 93 undergraduates from a small, liberal arts college in the southeastern United States were given an online survey through SurveyMonkey that included four different questionnaires. Of the total sample, 31 participants received the feminine female applicant, 23 participants received the masculine female applicant, 16 participants received the feminine male applicant, and 23 participants received the masculine male applicant. After participants were exposed to one of the stimuli, they completed the hireability questionnaire (experimenter developed), a manipulation check questionnaire, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fisk, 1998), and the demographics questionnaire. The participant sample was 76% White, 9% Black, 4% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 2% Native American, and 1% other. Based on their self-reported gender identity, the sample was 27% cis-male, 68% cis-female, 2% transgender female to male, 1% non-binary, and 2% other. Lastly, the average age of the current sample was 19.

**Materials**

*Applicant Photos.* The participants were randomly assigned to view one of four composite images that depicted either a man or a woman. The images included a feminine male, masculine male, feminine female, and a masculine male. The same male and the same female were used for both gender expressions, but the images were altered to portray more feminized characteristics (e.g., thin eyebrows, thin neck and face, small nose, larger lips, no facial hair) and more masculine characteristics (e.g., thick eyebrows, larger jaw and neck, wide nose, thinner

lips, facial hair). The photos used for the male applications are originally from a study done by Jones and colleagues (2018). The photos used for female applications are originally from an image set of manipulated images (DeBruine & Jones, 2017).

*Applicant Resume.* Every applicant photo was attached to a resume with identical content across all conditions. The only difference between the content of the resumes was the name of the applicant and the email address that varied by the gender of the applicant (i.e., Christina Johnson or Christopher Johnson). Each resume included a variety of skills and experience necessary for a managerial position within a restaurant. The resumes also included the same level of education and relevant qualifications (e.g., certifications).

**Measures**

*Applicant Hireability Questionnaire (Experimenter Developed).* This seven-item survey measured participants' perception and attitude toward the applicant. Responses were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). An example of an item on the scale included, *"I believe this applicant would be able to handle the pressures of a managerial position."* Based on the participant's answers, total scores could range from 6 (extremely low hireability rating) to 42 (extremely high hireability rating).

*Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Glick & Fisk, 1998).* This 22-item survey was used to measure participants' trait level of benevolent and hostile sexism. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Eleven items measured participants' level of hostile sexism ($\alpha$ = .79). An example from this measure is *"When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against."* Eleven items measured participants' level of benevolent sexism ($\alpha$ = .63). An example from this measure is, *"Women should be cherished and protected by men."*

**Procedure**

Ninety-three participants were solicited through introductory psychology courses and were offered assignment credit in exchange for completing this online study. Participants used one SurveyMonkey link for the entire experiment. After providing their electronic consent, participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 conditions. Random assignment was produced through a function on SurveyMonkey, which failed to deliver an equal distribution of participants between conditions. 16 participants received the feminine male applicant, 23 who received the masculine male applicant, 31 who received the feminine female applicant, and 23 who received the masculine male applicant. They were first asked to review the resume of an applicant applying for a restaurant manager position. The resumes were shown alongside a photo of the applicant, which they were instructed to view. Using the resume and photo given, the participants were then given the hireability questionnaire. This was used to assess the participants' agreeability toward statements addressing the applicant's qualities and hireability.

After completion of the initial survey, participants were given a brief manipulation check to test whether they recognized the sex of the applicant and how they perceived the applicant's gender expression. Then they were asked to complete the *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (Glick & Fisk, 1998), where they were measured on their levels of benevolent and hostile sexism. Lastly, participants were given a demographic survey used to collect information regarding age, gender, and ethnicity. At the end of the survey, the participants read the debriefing statement which provided them with the true purpose of the study.

**Results**

**Ambivalent Sexism**

There were no significant correlations between hostile sexism or benevolent sexism and hiring decisions across all conditions, $rs < .06$.

**Qualification**

There were no main effects for applicant gender or applicant gender expression on perceived qualification, $Fs < 1$. There was also no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and their perceived qualification, $F (1, 89) = 2.12, p = 0.15$.

**Competence**

The results of a between-subjects ANOVA revealed there was a main effect of applicant gender expression on the perceived level of applicant competence (see Figure 1). Masculine applicants received significantly higher competence scores ($M = 1.78$) than feminine applicants ($M = 1.49$), $F (1, 89) = 4.28, p = 0.04$. However, there was no main effect of gender expression on the perceived level of applicant competence, $F < 1$. There was no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and their perceived competence, $F (1, 89) = 0.01, p = 0.91$.

**Work Ethic**

There were no main effects for applicant gender or applicant gender expression on perceived work ethic, $Fs < 1$. There was also no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and their perceived work ethic, $F (1, 89) = 0.00, p = 0.97$.

**Respectability**

The results of a between-subjects ANOVA revealed there was a main effect of applicant gender on the perceived level of respect employees would have for this applicant (see Figure 2). Male applicants received significantly higher respectability scores ($M = 2.27$) than female applicants ($M = 1.74$), $F (1, 89) = 6.66, p = 0.01$. However, there was no main effect of gender

on the perceived level of respectability (from an employee's point of view), $F < 1$. There was no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and the perceived level of respect employees would have for this applicant as their supervisor, $F (1, 89) = 0.84$, $p = 0.36$.

Additionally, the results of a between-subjects ANOVA revealed there was a main effect of gender on the perceived level of customer respect was approaching significance (see Figure 3). Male applicants received a marginally higher score for respectability ($M = 2.10$) than female applicants ($M = 1.74$), $F (1, 89) = 3.47$, $p = 0.07$. However, there was no main effect of gender on the perceived level of respectability (from an customer's point of view), $F < 1$. There was also no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and the perceived level of respect customers would have for this applicant as the supervisor, $F (1, 89) = 0.56$, $p = 0.46$.

**Participant Comfortability**

The results of a between-subjects ANOVA revealed there was a main effect of applicant gender on the potential level of comfort toward the applicant (see Figure 4). Participants reported significantly higher scores for potential level of comfort toward the male applicants ($M = 2.10$) than female applicants ($M = 1.61$), $F (1, 89) = 6.08$, $p = 0.02$. However, there was no main effect of gender on the potential level of comfort toward the applicant, $F < 1$. There was no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and the participant's potential level of comfort toward the applicant if they were their supervisor, $F (1, 89) = 0.23$, $p = 0.63$.

**Stress Management**

There were no main effects for applicant gender or applicant gender expression on perceived stress management, $F$s $< 1$. There was also no significant interaction between

applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and their perceived ability to handle the pressures of a managerial position, $F(1, 89) = 0.63$, $p = 0.43$.

**Hireability**

There were no main effects for applicant gender or applicant gender expression on perceived hireability, $F$s < 1. There was also no significant interaction between applicant gender, applicant gender expression, and their level of hireability, $F(1, 89) = 0.47$, $p = 0.50$.

## Discussion

The purpose of this current study was to determine a relationship between ambivalent sexism and perceptions of applicants based on their gender and gender expression. Specifically, we used four different fictional applicants that displayed either masculine features or feminine features for both genders to measure differences in how they were perceived (e.g., qualifications, respectability, competence, hireability, etc.) when applying for a managerial position. It was hypothesized that all participants would find the masculine applicants significantly more favorable than the feminine applicants. This hypothesis was partially supported as there was a main effect for the gender expression of the applicant on their perceived level of competence. The masculine applicants for both genders were perceived as being more competent than both feminine applicants. This is consistent with previous literature in which researchers have found that both masculine men and women are preferred over feminine personnel for agentic job positions (e.g., manager/ leadership role) (Francesco & Hakel, 1981; von Stockhausen et al., 2013). Previous researchers have also recognized that there are differences in perceptions and attitudes toward applicants based on their gender, which was mirrored in this current study. The male applicants were rated significantly higher for respectability and higher for participants'

level of comfort toward them in comparison to female applicants. This aligns with the results of a previous study conducted by Hans‑Joachim and colleagues (2007). Researchers found that females in leadership roles receive significantly less respect than males in leadership roles. Additionally, the main effect of participant comfortability may be attributed to social role congruency. As stated by Eagly and Karau (2002), negative reactions can occur when encountered with someone who does not act in a way that is congruent with their perceived social role. Because women are typically perceived as fitting communal roles, it may have caused this negative reaction (i.e., lack of comfortability) when participants were exposed to them applying for an agentic role (i.e., managerial position).

Additionally, it was predicted that participants who score high for ambivalent sexism would give significantly higher ratings for masculine participants than those who scored lower in ambivalent sexism. There was no significant correlation between ambivalent sexism and perceptions of applicants, which is inconsistent with previous research. Although Good and Rudman (2010) found that those who are ambivalently sexist tend to have differences in perceptions of male and female applicants (e.g., female applicants are seen as less competent), these differences were not found within the current study. The lack of significant findings may be due to the limitations encountered when conducting this study.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations within the current study that may have resulted in a lack of significant results. As aforementioned, there was an unequal distribution of participants between conditions. The variation of samples between each condition was due to the random assignment being conducted through the function on the platform SurveyMonkey, rather than manually. There was a sample size of only 93 participants for 4 conditions, which caused random

assignment to fail. Therefore, the lack of variance within each condition caused a general loss of power to detect significance. Furthermore, a moderated regression could not be conducted on such small sample sizes to detect any relationship between ambivalent sexism and the dependent measures. Ambivalent sexism was also unable to be analyzed as a grouping variable because of the number of participants within each condition.

Although there were not any significant interactions, there were recognizable trends within the means. For example, there is a steady increase in the average level of comfortability toward the applicant from feminine female to masculine male (see Figure 5), which is what is expected based on previous literature. However, the failure to find any significant differences between these means could have been due to a Type II error. This will be further explored when this study is replicated and extended.

**Future Directions**

In the future, this study has the potential to be replicated and extended for further research. To be more comparable to previous literature, it would be beneficial to add an additional independent variable of job type (i.e., masculine and feminine). Although this study only explored applicants' potential to be hired for a masculine job type (i.e., managerial position), many previous studies have compared types of applicants in regards to their gender-congruent job role (Francesco & Hakel, 1981; Glick et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2019; von Stockhausen et al., 2013). This research would benefit from extension and replication using a larger sample size to avoid a Type II error that may have occurred.

The significant findings of the current study do align with previous research examining gender bias and discrimination in the workplace. The results of this study do support the notion

that industrial-organizational psychologists should further develop selection processes that allow for equitable hiring decisions to decrease gender discrimination in the future.

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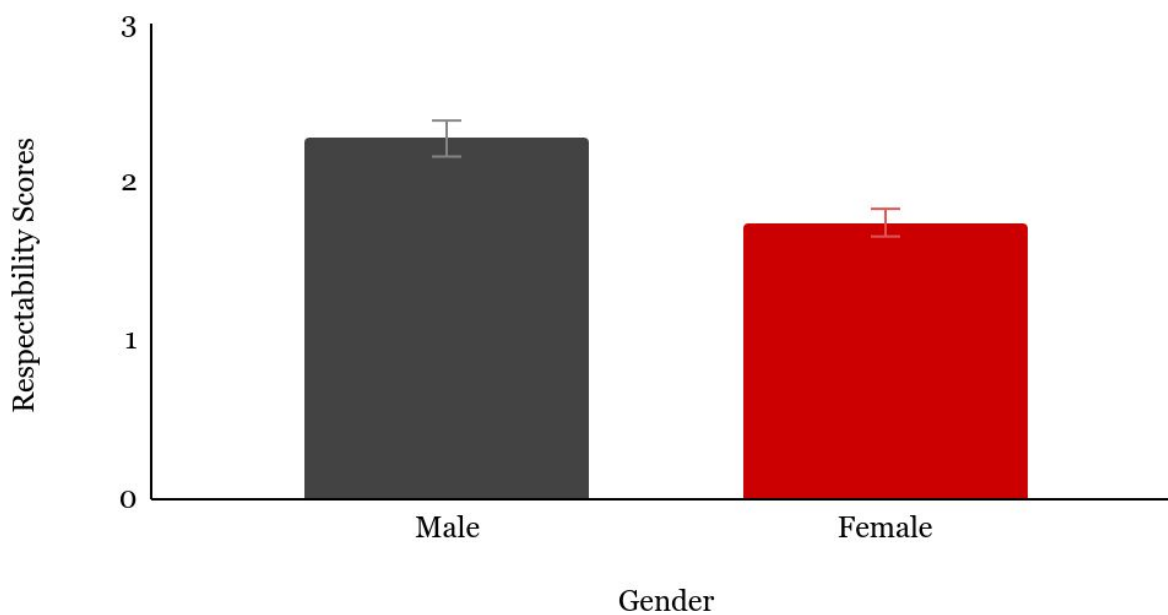
**Appendix**

**Figure 1**

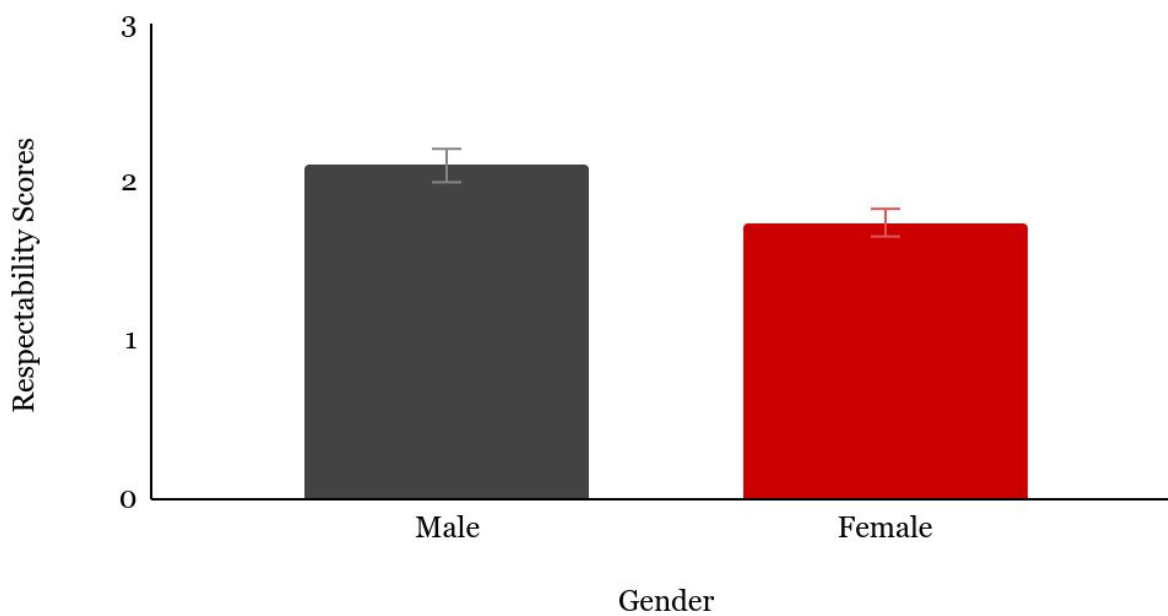*Average Competence Scores as Function of Applicant Gender Expression*
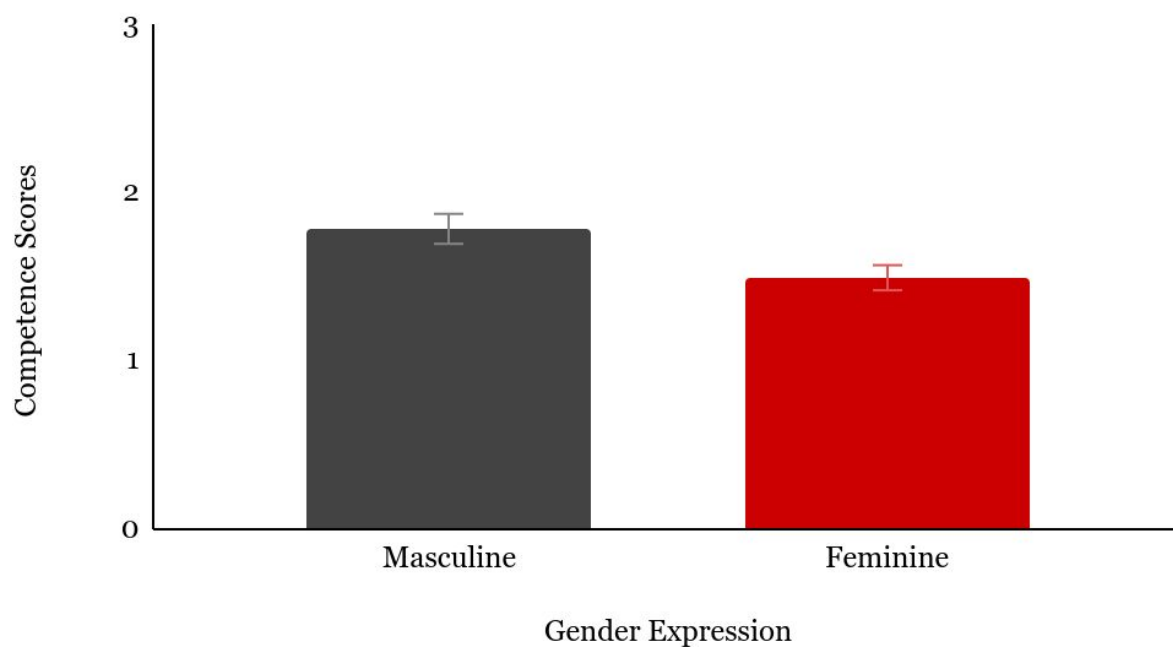


**Figure 2**

*Average Respectability Scores (From Employee Perspective) as a Function of Applicant Gender*
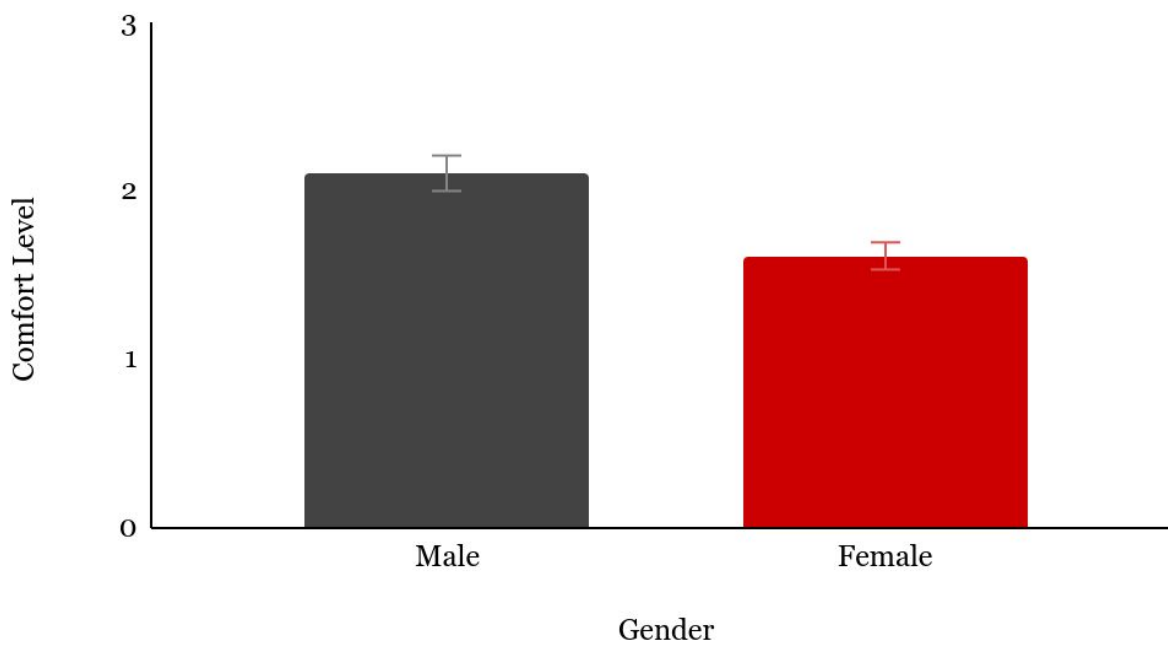
**Figure 3**

*Average Respectability Scores (From Customer Perspective) as a Function of Applicant Gender*



**Figure 4**

*Average Comfort Level Toward Applicant as a Function of Applicant Gender*

**Figure 5**

*Average Comfort Level Toward Applicant as a Function of Applicant Gender and Gender*

*Expression*