

The Price of Power: Power Seeking and Backlash Against Female Politicians

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Abstract

Two experimental studies examined the effect of power-seeking intentions on backlash toward women in political office. It was hypothesized that a female politician's career progress may be hindered by the belief that she seeks power, as this desire may violate prescribed communal expectations for women and thereby elicit interpersonal penalties. Results suggested that voting preferences for female candidates were negatively influenced by her power-seeking intentions (actual or perceived) but that preferences for male candidates were unaffected by power-seeking intentions. These differential reactions were partly explained by the perceived lack of communality implied by women's power-seeking intentions, resulting in lower perceived competence and feelings of moral outrage. The presence of moral-emotional reactions suggests that backlash arises from the violation of communal prescriptions rather than normative deviations more generally. These findings illuminate one potential source of gender bias in politics.

Keywords

gender stereotypes, backlash, power, politics, intention, moral outrage

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Many voters see Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton as coldly ambitious, a perception that could ultimately doom her presidential campaign.

Peter Nicholas, *Los Angeles Times*, 2007

In 1916, Jeannette Rankin was elected to the Montana seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, despite the fact that the election was 4 years before suffrage, and thus she herself was not allowed to vote. Since Rankin's debut as the first female to serve in Congress, women have made significant progress toward the attainment of political influence. Despite the political successes of many individual females in the last century, women as a group are still heavily underrepresented in the highest levels of politics. As of 2009, women occupied 76 of the 435 seats in the House, and 17 of the 100 seats in the Senate. What factors might account for this continued discrepancy? Full consideration of the potential barriers to women in politics is well beyond the scope of the current article (for a review, see Kahn, 1996). Rather, we focus on the stereotype-based social costs women might face as a result of their entry into politics—the interpersonal price for seeking ascension in the political ranks and achieving higher levels of power and influence. More specifically, we predict that the perception that a candidate is power seeking will lead to social penalties for female politicians but not for male

politicians and that these penalties may be reflected in voting preferences.

Power-Relevant Stereotypes

Power seeking may be incongruent with traditional female gender stereotypes but not male gender stereotypes for a number of reasons. Cultural stereotypes depict women in general as being communal—they are sensitive, warm, caring, and concerned about others. In contrast, men are seen as agentic—they are dominant, assertive, and competitive (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Bem, 1981; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These cultural constructs of agency and communality have been shown to be key characteristics in defining gender subtypes (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Eckes, 2002; Heilman & Okimoto, 2008) and are closely linked to competence and warmth, respectively (Wojciszke, 2005), the dimensions that Fiske and colleagues (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999) describe as fundamental to social perception.

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Power and power seeking, in particular, are central to the constructs of agency and masculinity (Rudman, Greenwald, & McGhee, 2001; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Thus, these gender stereotypes make women appear less suited to powerful roles, as they are assumed to lack the agency required for leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Indeed, women are often characterized as soft-spoken and yielding, whereas men are seen as strong willed and having leadership skills (Bem, 1981; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Political psychologists have also noted the incongruence between female gender stereotypes and positions of political power (Huddy & Capelos, 2002). Moreover, research has shown that gender stereotypes can affect voting preferences for male and female candidates by leading voters to assume that women lack effectiveness in male sex-typed political issues such as military and economic policy, and men lack effectiveness in issues demanding compassion such as policies relevant to children and families (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Gender stereotypes can also create assumptions about men's and women's ideological stance on various political issues, which may also affect male versus female candidate voting preferences (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a; J. W. Koch, 2000).

Notably, however, these cultural stereotypes not only describe how people expect men and women to behave, but they also contain a prescriptive component explicating how men and women "ought" to behave (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001, 2008; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Women are not only expected to be communal, but they are *supposed* to be communal as well. Such prescriptive expectations are pervasive, typically endorsed by both men and women, and serve to reinforce cultural stereotypes and existing hierarchical relations (see Fiske & Stevens, 1993; C. Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Ridgeway, 2007; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

As a result of these prescriptive gender norms, women are often interpersonally penalized for their violation of stereotypical expectations, discussed in the literature as "backlash effects" (Rudman, 1998) referring to the negative characterizations ascribed to women exhibiting agentic behavior. Interacting with counterstereotypical women elicits discomfort (Lips, 1991) and negative affective reactions (Richeson & Ambady, 2001), and may lead to the assignment of negative interpersonal characterizations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Indeed, counterstereotypical women are often depicted as "bitchy," "selfish," "ice-queens," and "battle-axes" (Heilman et al., 2004; Kanter, 1977).

Such negative characterizations, however, can also affect subsequent outcomes (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Heilman, 1995, 2001; Nieva & Gutek, 1980; Tosi & Einbinder, 1985). For example, a recent study by Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008) showed that both male and female participants assigned less status and lower salaries to women who expressed anger

compared to their angry male counterparts. Similar findings have been documented in reaction to observations of other types of agentic behaviors, such as self-promotion (Rudman, 1998), competitiveness (Rudman & Glick, 1999), task-oriented speaking styles (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995), authoritative leadership style (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992), administering discipline (Atwater, Carey, & Waldman, 2001; Brett, Atwater, & Waldman, 2005) or criticism (Sinclair & Kunda, 2000), and initiation of salary negotiations (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). Negative reactions to prescriptive violations, however, are not necessarily dependent on the behavior of the actor but can also be simply inferred from the context. For example, Heilman et al. (2004) showed that, for women, merely being successful in male sex-typed occupations led to dislike and negative interpersonal characterizations (see also Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 1999; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Heilman and Okimoto (2007) demonstrated that these penalties for women's achievement in male domains are specifically due to the communal deficit implied by success. Once explicit information was provided that the successful woman was communal, the backlash against her was mitigated.

Power-Seeking Intentions

The existing empirical evidence on backlash against women has focused on demonstrating that people react negatively toward women who engage in specific behaviors (e.g., self-promotion, expressing anger) or who take on certain roles (e.g., holding a masculine-type job, being a working mother). But to our knowledge, research has not yet examined whether simply having an *intention* or a mere thought to engage in a counterstereotypical behavior will lead to similarly negative consequences. Thus, it is unclear whether merely having an *aspiration* for power will elicit backlash.

A growing body of research in moral psychology has shown that people strongly consider an individual's intentions when judging whether he or she is to blame for causing harm to others (Cushman, 2008; Greene et al., 2009; Knobe, 2003; Weiner, 1995). For example, people judge another's behavior as more morally offensive and react with moral outrage if they intended to cause harm to others rather than if the harm was unintentional (Darley & Pittman, 2003; Weiner, 1995). Indeed, our legal system has even formalized the importance of intent in determining the severity of punishment; crimes that harm someone with presumably less intent (e.g., "crimes of passion") are treated more leniently than crimes committed with clear intent (e.g., "premeditated murder"). Thus, if perceivers have access to information about a person's intentions, they are likely to heavily weigh this information in their judgments of that individual.

If a woman is merely perceived as having the intention to gain power, even if she does not actually have any power herself, people are likely to make a wealth of inferences

about her character and judge her accordingly. Specifically, the intention to gain power may signal to others that she is an aggressive and selfish woman who does not espouse prescribed feminine values of communality. Although as of yet absent from the research literature, some popular press management books have exposed workplace norms whereby women who merely verbalize their desire for power are disliked by others and are likely to become targets of workplace bullying (Heim & Murphy, 2001).

Thus, in the current research, we hypothesize that the perceived power-seeking *intentions* of female politicians will have interpersonally penalizing effects. Specifically, we assert that seeking political office because of an intention to gain power is inconsistent with female gender prescriptions of communality, leading to an implied communality deficit for power-seeking female politicians. Moreover, this lack of communality will elicit negative affective reactions, specifically moral-emotional reactions of contempt and disgust that implicate the prescriptive nature of the beliefs. In turn, these reactions manifest themselves in a decreased willingness to support the power-seeking female politician in the polls. In contrast, the belief that a male target seeks political office to gain power will not lead to negative affective reactions or a lack of voter support.

Power Seeking in the Political Domain

Research has not yet addressed the potential interpersonal backlash that women might face for behaving counter to prescribed gender expectations in *political* roles or how that backlash might affect political success. This investigation serves as the first empirical attempt to document the potential existence of backlash effects toward women in politics. However, by couching these hypotheses in this domain, we do *not* mean to suggest that aspirations for power only adversely affect women in political contexts. In theory, counternormative behavior should create evaluative bias regardless of the context, assuming that such intentions are not attributable to an external source of motivation (Kelley, 1973). Rather, the political context may be a particularly rich domain for examining power-seeking intentions, as power and status are central goals (or at least outcomes) for many politicians. Although the desire for political ascension may be motivated by more altruistic desires to implement social change, advancement may also be driven by personal desires for power. And although the *actual* power-hungry intentions of politicians may not be transparent to the public, the *perception* of power seeking may still exist in the judgmental eyes of voters.

We present two empirical studies showing that perceived political power seeking affects respondents' willingness to vote for female candidates but does not adversely affect male candidates. Moreover, we assert that these voting preferences are linked to a lack of perceived communality on the part of the female politician. In Study 1, we examine respondents' choice of equivalently described male versus female

political candidates, examining the extent to which perceptions of each candidate's power-seeking intentions affect this choice. Then, in Study 2, we further unpack this process by examining voting preferences as a function of direct manipulations of power-seeking intentions and target gender, while also examining the mediating role of perceived communality, agency, competence, and moral-emotional reactions toward male and female politicians.

Study 1

In Study 1, we presented participants with two equivalently described politicians, one male and one female, and then asked them to choose which of the two candidates they would vote for. We attempt to first establish that, all else being equal, respondents' choice of the male versus female candidate is influenced by the perceived power-seeking intentions of the female candidate but not the male candidate (Hypothesis 1).

Method

Participants consisted of 80 respondents (34% male) between 19 and 63 years of age ($M = 33.6$, $SD = 10.8$) recruited online in exchange for a lottery reward.¹ All respondents examined *both* a male and a female politician, reported their reactions to each, and then indicated which politician they would vote for.

Respondents were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate "first impressions" of politicians and to assess individuals' memory for important information that is often provided about political candidates. Participants reviewed the website biography page of two Oregon state senators. The websites were created by the researchers for the purposes of the study but looked identical to real senatorial biographies, providing information about the committees that the politicians were currently involved in, their political career history, and biographical and educational background information. All the information was pretested for equivalence (e.g., qualifications, committee work) and was counterbalanced by gender so that each biography described "Ann" half of the time and "John" half of the time. The order in which the two biographies were presented, and the order of target gender presentation, was also counterbalanced. The website descriptions did not include photographs of the politicians and did not provide information suggesting political affiliation. After reading each biography, participants completed a number of memory questions as part of the cover story and reported their impressions of the senators. Then participants were asked to indicate which politician they would vote for.

Measured Variables

Voting choice. The primary measure of voting choice was assessed by simply asking participants, "Who would you

vote for?" Respondents then indicated their vote for "Ann" (female candidate) or for "John" (male candidate).²

Perceived power seeking. We measured participants' perceptions of each target politician's power-seeking intentions to assess the extent to which perceived power seeking affected voting choices and whether this was true for both male and female target politicians. After reading the webpage information of each senator, participants were asked, "Did the senator exhibit a clear desire for power and status?" and responded by providing a 7-point scale rating (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Ratings of male and female targets were uncorrelated, $r = .08$.

Political orientation. We included a measure of political orientation as a control variable in all analyses (see Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). Political orientation was assessed by participants rating themselves, politically, on a 7-point scale (1 = *very liberal*, 4 = *moderate*, 7 = *very conservative*). The mean reported political orientation was normally distributed and very slightly left of center ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.38$).

Results

For assessments of voting choice, there was no clear preference for male (47.5%) versus female (52.5%) politicians, $\chi^2(1) = 0.20$, $p = .66$. However, Hypothesis 1 required examination of voting choice as predicted by power-seeking evaluations.³ Given the forced-choice nature of the data, we employed binary logistic regression techniques for this analysis. While controlling for political orientation, we examined the independent effects of perceived power seeking of both the male and female targets (including both measures as predictors) on voting decisions. Both power-seeking assessments were included simultaneously (assessing relative strength) because participants evaluated both male and female targets but provided only one voting choice (i.e., simple moderation is not appropriate). The voting choice measure was coded so that negative numbers indicate preference for the male politician and positive numbers indicate preference for the female politician.

Results of the logistic regression indicated no significant effect of political orientation on voting choices, $B = -.01$, $\text{Wald}(1) = 0.00$, $p = .96$, and no significant effect of perceived male target power-seeking, $B = .19$, $\text{Wald}(1) = 1.28$, $p = .26$. However, a significant effect was found for perceived female target power seeking, $B = -.44$, $\text{Wald}(1) = 6.35$, $p = .01$ (odds ratio of .64). The higher the perceived power seeking of the female target, the less likely participants were to vote for her. Notably, the lack of a parallel effect for perceived power seeking of the male target suggests that impressions of political power seeking only disadvantaged the female target. The overall regression was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 7.88$, $p < .05$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .125$. Including participant gender in the analysis did not yield

significant effects, $B = .09$, $\text{Wald}(1) = 0.03$, $p = .86$, and did not change the pattern of results.

Discussion

Study 1 provided preliminary evidence that voter choices may be influenced by different perceived attributes depending on the gender of the politician. Specifically, voting choice partly depended on whether participants perceived the female target politician as being power-seeking, an attribute that is inconsistent with the female stereotype. In contrast, perceptions of the male politician's power seeking did not predict voting choice.

All things being equal, male and female politicians did not elicit radically different perceptions of power seeking—the female target was seen as being only slightly more power seeking than the male target. Similarly, female politicians in general were no less preferred than male politicians. This may suggest that female politicians are not generally disliked compared to men, unlike managerial roles where success alone elicits negativity (e.g., Eagly et al., 1992; Heilman et al., 2004). This lack of overt voting bias, however, could be due to participant demand when asked to choose between equivalent male and female candidates. Importantly, however, the extent to which participants viewed the female target as power seeking *did* affect participants' subsequent voting decision, whereas the perceived power seeking of the male target *did not* (complex moderation that would be robust to demand). Thus, regardless of whether male politicians were generally preferred over female politicians, participant voters only reacted negatively to the perceived power aspirations of the female politician.

Study 2

There were four primary goals of Study 2. First, we attempted to make a stronger causal argument by experimentally manipulating both target politician gender and power-seeking intentions in a between-subjects design (examining voting preferences for a single target candidate rather than a voting choice between two candidates). Consistent with our finding that *perceptions* of female power seeking predicts voting choices whereas male power seeking does not, we expected that the *expression* of political power-seeking intentions would result in lower voting preferences when the politician was female but would not have an influence on voting preferences when the politician was male (Hypothesis 2).

Second, we further unpacked the underlying psychological processes driving these differential voting preferences. If power seeking does indeed elicit penalties for female politicians but not male politicians because power seeking is counter to prescribed communal gender norms, we would expect that the expression of female politicians' power-seeking intentions would result in lower perceived communality

(Hypothesis 3) and that these reactions would mediate the effect of female politicians' power-seeking intentions on voter preferences.

Third, we expanded on existing backlash research by investigating the affective reactions elicited by violations of prescribed communal norms. Little research has discussed the discrete emotional reactions of observers following from women's violation of communal prescriptions. The existing research has only documented feelings of dislike (e.g., Butler & Geis, 1990; Carranza, 2004; S. C. Koch, 2005), commensurate with the general negativity felt toward counterstereotypic women. Moreover, there is still a question in the literature regarding the source of these negative reactions. Research has implicated the lack of communality as underlying backlash effects (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007), but it is still unclear whether people respond negatively to women's absence of communality because it violates stereotype-driven communal *prescriptions* (e.g., Fiske, 1998; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001) or the simple violation of communal *expectations* (e.g., Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987). General feelings of negativity may erupt from either type of violation. However, if communality is indeed a behavioral *prescription* for women—a norm that “should” be fulfilled or a behavioral “ought”—the associated emotional reactions should contain a stronger moral component than has been recognized in past research.

If we consider the lack of communality implied by power seeking as violating prescribed behavioral dictates for women, power seeking should elicit feelings of moral outrage—anger, contempt, and disgust emotions evoked by the intentional violation of cherished moral principles (Batson, 1994; Darley, 2002; Haidt, 2003; M. L. Hoffman, 2000; Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998; Montada & Schneider, 1989). In Study 2, we examined self-reported feelings of moral outrage reactions toward power-seeking (and non-power-seeking) male and female politicians. Based on the argument that backlash arises from the violation of prescribed communal imperatives for women, we hypothesized that feelings of moral outrage would be stronger toward female politicians expressing power-seeking intentions compared to female politicians not expressing power-seeking intentions (Hypothesis 4). To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to examine discrete emotional reactions (moral or otherwise) as they relate to penalties for counterstereotypical behavior.

Finally, in Study 2 we also examined perceptions of the target politicians' competence. To what degree do variations in perceived competence affect voting preferences? Past research has shown that voters may assume that women lack competence in handling male sex-typed political issues, as these types of issues require agency and are inconsistent with female gender stereotypes of communality (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). In the current investigation, to the extent that respondents understand this political role as male sex-typed and requiring agentic attributes for success (e.g.,

leadership ability, assertiveness, or even power seeking), female targets may be depicted as less politically competent than male targets. These biased perceptions of competence, however, depend on the job as being clearly male sex-typed and operate only in absence of accessible information regarding job competence (Heilman et al., 2004). Given that we hold information about the targets' competence constant in Study 2, and given the midlevel state senatorial role used in these studies, it is unclear whether male and female power-seeking politicians will elicit differential evaluations of competence (cf. Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008). Thus, it may be that voting preferences are influenced by perceptions of competence as well as affective backlash. To more accurately understand these processes, we examined the influence of both competence and affective backlash in predicting voter intentions.

Method

Participants consisted of 230 respondents (34% male) between 18 and 76 years of age ($M = 36.4$, $SD = 11.8$) recruited online in exchange for a lottery reward. This study consisted of a 2 (target gender: male vs. female) \times 2 (no power-seeking information vs. power-seeking intentions) between-subjects design, with participants randomly assigned to only one of the four experimental conditions.⁴

Identical to Study 1, respondents were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate first impressions and memory for information provided about political candidates. Participants first reviewed the website biography page of an Oregon state senator, similar to the stimuli used in Study 1; however, the content of the biography was identical in all conditions, with the exception of the manipulated variables. After reading the biography and completing memory questions as part of the cover story, participants were asked to report their impressions of the senator, their affective reactions, and their voting preferences. All affective reaction items were presented together in a random order, as were the bipolar adjectives evaluating participant impressions of the target senator.

Manipulated Variables

Target gender. The gender of the politician was manipulated by altering the first name and pronouns in the website biography, describing either “John” or “Ann” Burr.

Power seeking. The target senator's power-seeking intent was manipulated by the inclusion of two additional sentences in the biography. In the no-power-seeking condition, no additional information was provided. In the power-seeking condition, participants read:

The Oregon Sun-Sentinel described him/her as “one of the most ambitious politicians in Oregon . . . a politician that has always had a strong will to power.” Burr him/herself has been quoted as saying that “Being hungry

is everything . . . it's key to gaining influence in politics.

Pilot study. An independent pilot study was conducted to verify that the manipulation effectively varied power-seeking aspirations, independent of perceptions of actual power. Seventy participants (85% female; mean age = 34.5) evaluated the website stimuli varying power seeking (male target held constant). Assessments of *power-seeking aspirations* included the average of two items ($\alpha = .85$) rating the target as "power seeking" on a 7-point bipolar adjective scale, and explicitly asking, "Did the senator exhibit a clear desire for power and status?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Analyses indicated that participants in the power-seeking condition ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.19$) rated the target senator as having significantly higher power-seeking aspirations than did participants in the non-power-seeking condition ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.29$), $t(68) = 4.62$, $p < .001$. Assessments of *power* included the average of three items ($\alpha = .88$) rating the senator as "powerful–not powerful" and "influential–not influential" on 7-point bipolar adjective scales, and explicitly asking them, "Would you say this person is powerful?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Analyses indicated no differences between the power-seeking ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.18$) and non-power-seeking conditions ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.78$), $t(68) = 0.69$, $p = .50$. Results indicated that the manipulation successfully varied power-seeking aspirations without altering perceptions of actual power or influence.

Measured Variables

Voting preference. The primary dependent measure of voting preference was assessed by simply asking participants, "How much would you want this person to be your politician?" Preferences were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Agency. The mediating variable of perceived agency was assessed by the composite average ($\alpha = .83$) of three 7-point bipolar adjective ratings (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Participants rated the extent to which they thought the senator was unassertive–assertive, weak–strong, and not tough–tough.

Communality. The mediating variable of perceived communality was assessed by the composite average ($\alpha = .90$) of two 7-point bipolar adjective ratings (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007): unsupportive–supportive and uncaring–caring.

Competence. Perceived competence was assessed by the composite average ($\alpha = .91$) of three 7-point bipolar adjective ratings (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007): incompetent–competent, ineffective–effective, and unproductive–productive.

Moral outrage. Participants' affective reactions toward the target senator were examined by assessing the extent to which they currently felt specific emotions toward the senator on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Drawing from research on moral emotions (Izard, 1977; Rozin,

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Dependent Measures

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Political orientation	3.75	1.56	—				
2. Agency	5.13	1.08	.11	—			
3. Communality	4.85	1.20	.11	.49**	—		
4. Competence	5.22	1.15	.13*	.74**	.75**	—	
5. Moral outrage	1.45	0.84	.09	.18*	.43**	.39**	—
6. Voting preference	4.50	1.40	-.10	-.40**	-.52**	-.55**	-.36**

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

Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999), we included seven items assessing the three primary "other-directed" moral outrage emotions of contempt (+ disdain), anger (+ irritation and disapproval), and disgust (+ revulsion). All seven items were averaged to reflect a single factor of moral outrage ($\alpha = .93$).⁵

Political orientation. We again included the measure of political orientation used in Study 1 (1 = *very liberal*, 4 = *moderate*, 7 = *very conservative*) as a control variable in all analyses. The mean reported political orientation was again normally distributed and only slightly left of center ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.56$). Correlations between all measures can be found in Table 1.

Results

Cell means and standard deviations for all dependent measures can be found in Table 2. We employed regression techniques to allow for tests of mediation. Slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) were conducted when appropriate to further interpret interaction patterns. We also used stepwise regression (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998) and Sobel (1982) tests to examine indirect effects when appropriate. Specifically, we examined the indirect effects of the manipulations on competence, moral outrage, and voter preferences through perceptions of agency and communality (testing Hypothesis 3). We also tested for the indirect effects of communality and agency on voting preferences through perceptions of competence and moral outrage (testing Hypothesis 4). Only significant effects are discussed in the text, but complete regression results are presented in Table 3.

Participant gender. Including participant gender in a MANOVA yielded main effects on all measured variables, $F(5, 217) = 3.48$, $p = .005$. Women were more likely than men to give favorable (i.e., high) ratings of voting preference, agency, communality, and competence, as well as generally lower ratings of moral outrage. Importantly, however, participant gender *did not interact* with either manipulation; the effects of target gender or power seeking were the same regardless of participant gender, and including participant gender in the analysis did not change the pattern of the results.

Table 2. Study 2: Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Measure Scales

	No power-seeking information		Power-seeking intentions	
Agency				
Male target	4.66	(1.11)	5.52	(1.07)
Female target	5.20	(1.10)	5.14	(0.88)
Communality				
Male target	4.89	(1.15)	4.95	(1.22)
Female target	5.05	(1.25)	4.53	(1.13)
Competence				
Male target	5.04	(1.17)	5.49	(1.06)
Female target	5.26	(1.24)	5.11	(1.08)
Moral outrage				
Male target	1.50	(1.02)	1.45	(0.75)
Female target	1.23	(0.64)	1.62	(0.89)
Voting preferences				
Male target	4.32	(1.15)	4.65	(1.65)
Female target	4.73	(1.54)	4.31	(1.21)

Standard deviations appear in parentheses. All ratings were done on 7-point scales, with higher numbers indicating more preferred, more agency, more disgust, and so on.

Thus, responses of male and female participants were combined for all analyses.

Agency. A significant main effect was found for the power-seeking manipulation, $\beta = .19$, $t = 2.97$, $p < .005$; inclusion of explicit power-seeking information increased perceptions of agency. However, this main effect was further qualified by an interaction between target gender and power seeking, $\beta = -.22$, $t = -3.45$, $p = .001$. Perceptions of agency were not affected by the power-seeking depiction of female targets, $\beta = -.03$, $t = -.35$, $p = .72$. However, power seeking *increased* the agency perceptions of male targets, $\beta = .41$, $t = 4.46$, $p < .001$.

Communality. For perceptions of communality, only a significant interaction between target gender and power seeking was found, $\beta = -.13$, $t = -1.98$, $p < .05$. In contrast to the previous measure of agency, perceptions of communality were not affected by the power-seeking intentions of male targets, $\beta = .04$, $t = 0.41$, $p = .68$, but *decreased* the communality perceptions of female targets, $\beta = -.22$, $t = -2.43$, $p < .05$.

Competence. We then examined perceptions of competence. Only a significant interaction between target gender and power seeking was identified, $\beta = -.14$, $t = -2.10$, $p < .05$. Slope analysis indicated that for male targets, power-seeking information *increased* perceived competence, $\beta = .21$, $t = 2.24$, $p < .05$. For female targets, however, power-seeking information did not affect perceptions of competence, $\beta = -.06$, $t = -.70$, $p = .48$. To further unpack this effect, we considered both agency and communality perceptions as mediators. Both communality, $\beta = .51$, $t = 13.03$, $p < .001$, and agency, $\beta = .49$, $t = 12.14$, $p < .001$, had a positive effect on competence and reduced the effect of the

interaction, $\beta = .04$, $t = 1.09$, $p = .28$. The indirect effect of the interaction on competence was significant both through agency perceptions, $z = -3.32$, $p < .001$, and through communality perceptions, $z = -1.96$, $p = .05$. Thus, the provision of power-seeking information appeared to negatively affect the female target's perceived competence on two levels: (a) they did not benefit from the agency implied by power seeking as men did and (b) they were hurt by diminished communality perceptions whereas men were not.

Moral outrage. Next, we examined the effect of the manipulations on respondents' feelings of moral outrage. We found a significant interaction between gender and power seeking for moral outrage, $\beta = .13$, $t = 2.05$, $p < .05$. Slope analysis indicated that for male targets, power-seeking information did not affect feelings of moral outrage, $\beta = -.04$, $t = -0.42$, $p = .68$. For female targets, however, power-seeking information increased feelings of moral outrage, $\beta = .23$, $t = 2.53$, $p = .01$. As before, we considered both agency and communality perceptions as mediators. Only communality had a negative effect on moral outrage, $\beta = -.43$, $t = -6.06$, $p < .001$, which reduced the interaction to nonsignificance, $\beta = .09$, $t = 1.45$, $p = .15$. Moreover, there was an indirect effect of the interaction on moral outrage through communality perceptions, $z = 1.88$, $p = .059$. The power-seeking intentions of female politicians elicited moral outrage from respondents partly because of the lack of communality implied by power seeking.

Voting preferences. Finally, for the primary dependent measure assessing voting preferences, again there was only a significant interaction apparent between target gender and power-seeking intentions, $\beta = -.14$, $t = -2.15$, $p < .05$. Although the simple effects were only marginal, the power-seeking manipulation appeared to increase voting preferences for male targets but decreased voting preferences for female targets (see Table 2).

To test for mediation, we began by considering the indirect effect of the manipulations on voting preferences through both agency and communality perceptions.⁶ When including them as predictors in the regression, the interaction was reduced to nonsignificance, $\beta = -.05$, $t = -0.82$, $p = .41$. Communality had a positive effect on voting preferences, $\beta = .42$, $t = 6.28$, $p < .001$, representing a negative indirect effect from the interaction to voting through communality, $z = 1.89$, $p = .05$. In other words, the reduction in perceived communality for female targets exhibiting power-seeking intentions partly explained the differing effects of power seeking on voting preferences for male versus female targets. Similarly, perceptions of agency had a positive effect on voting preferences, $\beta = .18$, $t = 2.67$, $p < .01$, resulting in a separate negative indirect effect from the interaction to voting through agency, $z = 2.11$, $p < .05$. Thus, the increase in perceived agency enjoyed by male targets exhibiting power-seeking intentions also partly explained the differing effects of power seeking on voting preferences for male versus female targets.

Table 3. Study 2: Hierarchical Regression Results for Dependent Measures

Outcome	Predictor	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
		β	t value	β	t value	β	t value
Agency	Political orientation	-.12	1.90 [†]				
	Target gender	.02	0.27				
	Power seeking	.19	2.97**				
	Gender \times Power	-.22	-3.45***				
Communality	Political orientation	-.13	-1.91 [†]				
	Target gender	-.08	-1.17				
	Power seeking	-.09	-1.39				
	Gender \times Power	-.13	-1.98*				
Competence	Political orientation	-.15	-2.25*	-.02	-0.69		
	Target gender	-.06	-0.91	-.03	-0.84		
	Power seeking	.07	1.13	.03	0.79		
	Gender \times Power	-.14	-2.10*	.04	1.09		
Moral outrage	Agency	—	—	.49	12.14***		
	Communality	—	—	.51	13.03***		
	Political orientation	.09	1.34	.04	0.66		
	Target gender	-.02	-0.27	-.05	-0.85		
Voting preferences	Power seeking	.10	1.46	.05	0.75		
	Gender \times Power	.13	2.05*	.09	1.45		
	Agency	—	—	.05	0.67		
	Communality	—	—	-.43	-6.06***		
Voting preferences	Political orientation	-.10	-1.54	-.03	-0.47	-.01	-0.25
	Target gender	-.01	-0.08	.02	0.42	.03	0.47
	Power seeking	-.01	-0.19	-.01	-0.15	-.01	-0.20
	Gender \times Power	-.14	-2.15*	-.05	-0.82	-.05	-0.84
	Agency	—	—	.18	2.67**	.03	0.34
	Communality	—	—	.42	6.28***	.19	2.22*
	Competence	—	—	—	—	.33	2.91**
	Moral outrage	—	—	—	—	-.14	-2.19*

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

We then included both competence and moral outrage in the regression, testing for the second level of mediation. The direct effects of both communality, $\beta = .19$, $t = 2.22$, $p < .05$, and agency, $\beta = .03$, $t = 0.34$, $p = .74$, on voting preferences were reduced. Importantly, competence perceptions did have a positive effect on voting preferences, $\beta = .33$, $t = 2.91$, $p < .005$. However, as noted earlier, these competence evaluations were partly biased by unequal perceptions of agency and communality. Indeed, both agency, $z = 2.83$, $p < .005$, and communality, $z = 2.84$, $p < .005$, had a positive indirect effect on voting preferences through competence. Thus, although competence was clearly an important predictor of voting, the competence evaluations themselves were biased against female politicians exhibiting power-seeking intentions, whereas those same power goals increased the perceived competence of male politicians.

There were also informative mediational effects of moral outrage. Feelings of moral outrage had a negative effect on voting preferences, $\beta = -.14$, $t = 2.19$, $p < .05$. The earlier analysis also indicated that moral outrage was predicted by

perceptions of communality. And consistent with Hypothesis 4, there was an indirect effect of communality on voting preferences through moral outrage, $z = 2.06$, $p < .05$. Communal perceptions had an impact on voting preferences partly because a *lack* of communality elicited feelings of moral outrage. Given that power-seeking intentions negatively affected communal perceptions of female politicians but not male politicians, this indirect effect explains participants' moral backlash against noncommunal women as partly underlying differences in reactions to the power-seeking intentions of female versus male politicians.

Finally, we used bootstrapping procedures in structural equation modeling (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) to test the significance of the complete mediational pathway from the interaction to voting preferences, through agency and communality, and through competence and moral outrage. Considering the full mediated model (see Figure 1), there was a significant indirect effect of the interaction on voting preferences, $\beta = -.09$, $SE = .042$, $p < .05$, with a 95% confidence interval between $-.155$ and $-.024$.

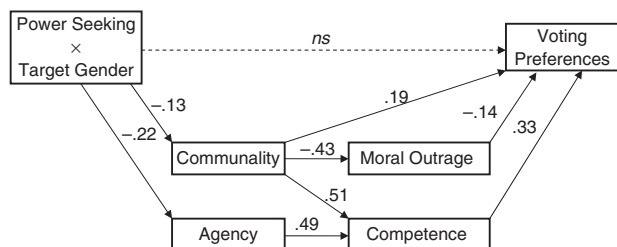


Figure 1. Study 2: Full mediated model

Values are standardized regression coefficients from the regressions (see Table 3). Although only the interaction is graphically depicted in the model, main effects of power seeking, target gender, and political orientation were also included in the analysis. The model is fully identified, so no fit statistics are presented. Only significant pathways are presented; nonsignificant pathways were removed for ease of interpretation.

Discussion

Consistent with the previous study, the results of Study 2 suggest that female politicians are indeed held to different interpersonal standards from male politicians, as only the female target was penalized for exhibiting power-seeking desires. Specifically, the provision of additional information suggesting power-seeking intentions resulted in lower voting preferences for the female target, supporting Hypothesis 2, whereas information about power-seeking intentions actually improved reactions toward the male target.

Study 2 also provided more detailed mediational evidence of the underlying processes. Consistent with past research in organizational contexts (e.g., Heilman & Okimoto, 2007), power-seeking intentions led to an implied communality deficit, but only for the female politician; the power-seeking female target was seen as less caring and sensitive than the non-power-seeking female target, whereas the perceived communality of men was unaffected by power-seeking information (supporting Hypothesis 3). Moreover, these differential communal impressions translated into negative moral-emotional reactions. The power-seeking female politician elicited stronger feelings of moral outrage than male politicians or the non-power-seeking female politician, mediated by perceived communality. These feelings of moral outrage were partly responsible for participants' decreased willingness to vote for the power-seeking female politician (supporting Hypothesis 4).

The occurrence of differential emotional reactions is itself interesting. The finding that moral outrage partly mediated the effect of the target female's communality deficit on voting preferences is important as it is the first attempt to explicitly include measured emotions as part of the explanatory process underlying backlash against counterstereotypical women, as opposed to simply assessing "interpersonal negativity." This finding is also consistent with other theory and research documenting emotional reactions toward women. For example, assessments of hostile sexism also show a clear link between

deviations from traditional gender roles and feelings of contempt and hostility (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Recent research on intergroup affect and stereotyping (i.e., the BIAS map; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007, 2008) also offers somewhat consistent evidence. In a comparable example, feminists have been shown to elicit contempt (Cuddy et al., 2007). Although feelings of contempt are typically described as associated with low warmth and low competence, to the extent that power-seeking female politicians and their self-interested concerns are perceived to negatively affect society, they may also elicit contempt (see Cuddy et al., 2008).

Importantly, the presence of these moral reactions provide evidence that backlash may indeed be driven by deviation from communal *prescriptions* (Fiske, 1998; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001) instead of normative *expectations* (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Jussim et al., 1987)—violations of prescribed communal "oughts" rather than simply deviations from the descriptive expectations of women. Past theorizing has emphasized that backlash toward counterstereotypical women occurs not only because they violate expectations for how women typically behave (i.e., descriptive stereotypes) but also because they violate expectations for how women *should* behave (i.e., prescriptive stereotypes; e.g., Rudman, 1998). Importantly, however, research has not yet documented conclusive evidence for this fine theoretical distinction. The current finding that people report feeling morally outraged at the power-seeking intentions of a female politician helps support the claim that these violations are indeed driven by violations of prescriptive, and not just descriptive, gender stereotypes. Although general negativity is likely to follow deviations from expected behavior (Cialdini & Trost, 1998), the presence of moral-emotional and avoidant reactions (moral outrage reactions of contempt, disdain, anger, irritation, disapproval, disgust, and revulsion) suggest that the power-seeking aspirations of the female politician were not just unexpected but also "wrong."

The finding that moral outrage partly underlies reactions toward counterstereotypical women also has interesting theoretical implications for backlash research. Specifically, this finding suggests that people react negatively to counterstereotypical women because they violate principled behavior, not just because they are unaccustomed to seeing them in a particular role (e.g., president of a corporation). This might suggest that increasing numbers of women in masculine-typed roles will not necessarily make perceivers more favorably disposed toward them. In other words, if these negative reactions are driven, even in part, by feelings of moral-emotional outrage, it suggests that the gender stereotypes underlying backlash toward these women are indeed prescriptive and may persist even as women become more equally represented in these occupations. Interestingly, such a link between backlash and moral perception also suggests that strategies aimed at excusing immoral behavior may be effective in combating negative reactions toward counterstereotypical

women, tactics such as social accounting (Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981) or establishing credentials as a good person (i.e., a “moral bank account” that one can draw on; see Monin & Miller, 2001).

Notably, perceived job competence was an important predictor of voting preferences. Consistent with past research (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a), both communality and agency played a role in perceived competence. Interestingly, however, the power-seeking female target also appeared to be disadvantaged in her competence ratings. The power-seeking female was seen as less communal and thus less competent than her non-power-seeking counterpart and was not seen as any more agentic. In contrast, the power-seeking male did not suffer from a perceived communal deficit and in fact was seen as more agentic than the non-power-seeking male. Therefore, although competence was clearly an important predictor of voting, the competence evaluations were biased against female power-seeking politicians and in favor of male power-seeking politicians. Thus, power-seeking women were disadvantaged on two fronts: (a) they were not given the agentic credit afforded to males exhibiting power-seeking behavior and (b) they were assumed to lack communality, affecting voting preferences through both competence perceptions and affective backlash.

General Discussion

Overall, the results of Study 2 complement Study 1. Whereas Study 1 showed that power-seeking *perceptions* may have biasing effects against female but not male politicians, Study 2 showed that *expressed* power-seeking intent may also bias voting preferences. Moreover, Study 2 provides causal evidence of backlash toward power-seeking women, an improvement over the correlational nature of Study 1, while also unpacking *why* power seeking elicits backlash through detailed meditational analyses. Specifically, unlike male politicians, we find evidence that female politicians are expected to live up to a prescribed level of communality and that failure to meet those communal standards elicits backlash. These findings suggest that the desire for personal power is another perceived trait that may elicit a perceived lack of communality and induce backlash against women.

It is worth noting that despite evidence of evaluative bias, female politicians were generally not seen as any less favorable than male politicians. This general lack of a voting bias may have occurred for a number of reasons. For example, respondents in the current sample may indeed be egalitarian and no more inclined to vote for a male candidate than a female candidate; although we used nonstudent samples, educated Caucasian women were still overrepresented, which may have influenced these baseline voting preferences (see Sears & Huddy, 1993). Moreover, the specific role on which we surveyed (i.e., state senator) may not be as male sex-typed as high-level managerial roles (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Schein, 2001), the context in

which the majority of the research on counterstereotypical backlash has been done. Thus, there may not be a “lack of fit” (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983) between the roles of state senator and that of women. Rather, there is a lack of fit between female gender roles and the power-hungry aspirations that may be held by some political leaders. However, this does not necessarily mean that politics is absent of gendered roles; as with business, positions in the upper echelons of federal politics or those requiring particularly high levels of agency may show some degree of bias in absence of power-seeking perceptions (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a, 1993b). Regardless of whether these baseline gender preferences accurately reflect voting behavior, the present research achieved its theoretical goal of documenting the biasing effects of power-seeking intentions (i.e., evidence of an interaction) and elucidating the underlying theoretical explanation underpinning that bias.

More to the point, these two studies show evidence of differential standards for male and female politicians; voting preferences for the female target were influenced by perceived power-seeking intentions, whereas voting preferences for the male target were not. This is consistent with the fact that people tend to use within-category reference points when judging an individual on stereotype-relevant dimensions (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Biernat & Manis, 1994). For example, when asked to judge whether a woman is tall, individuals will form their opinion based on whether the woman is tall relative to other women, not other men. Thus, people may be quicker to judge a woman as power seeking, as opposed to a man because on average people believe that women are less likely to want power than men. Prescriptive beliefs that women should not desire power may only enhance this “shifting standards” effect.

It may also be worth noting that although female participants provided generally more favorable ratings, in both studies male and female participants did not differ in their reactions to power seeking or target gender; men and women reacted to the power seeking of the target politicians in the same way. This finding is consistent with much of the past research documenting a lack of participant gender differences in backlash reactions toward counterstereotypical women (see Rudman & Glick, 2008, chap. 7), suggesting that both men and women share common gender prescriptions and that those prescriptions manifest themselves in similar ways.

Although the current research serves as the first empirical evidence of backlash toward women in political roles, further research in this domain is necessary. First, it is important to outline the scope of such backlash effects. For example, in the current studies, there was no evidence of backlash in the absence of additional counterstereotypical power-seeking information. Unlike high-level managerial roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman et al., 2004), the senatorial role itself did not imply a communal deficit. This lack of a baseline backlash, however, may be due to the distinct lack of male sex-typed attributes necessary to success in that political role.

In other words, backlash may occur more often in political roles requiring more of a commanding, decisive, and authoritative style (e.g., president of the United States, speaker of the House of Representatives), and further research is necessary to identify whether backlash is indeed an incessant barrier to women in high-level politics. Moreover, it is necessary to further dissect the concept of power. In this investigation, we focused on power *seeking* as counter to stereotypical prescriptions for women and not for men, but it is still unclear whether (and when) simply *having* power implies a lack of communality. We speculate that being powerful is indeed strongly associated with agency and as such can lead to a perceived violation of prescriptive communal norms. However, we believe that a more complete understanding of power is necessary to fully uncover how having power might elicit backlash against women. For example, we would expect the distinction between having “power to” (i.e., communal, prosocial power) versus having “power over” (agentic, egoistic power) to play a key role in determining the effects of perceived male versus female power (Yoder & Kahn, 1992), as the former may imply the exertion of influence for the sake of communal goals.

Notwithstanding the need for future research, this work highlights an understudied source of gender bias in political contexts while expanding our knowledge of the processes through which counterstereotypical characteristics can negatively bias evaluations of women. Moreover, this work underscores the importance of exposing hidden biases that disadvantage underrepresented groups. Although self-interested attributes such as power seeking may be generally unattractive qualities for any politician to possess, selection of the most effective leaders demands equivalent appraisal criteria irrespective of the potential aspirants’ salient social categories. Such clear and consistent evaluative standards would help diminish the trade-offs successful women often face while attempting to negotiate the self-presentational balance between communality, warmth, and likeability, versus agency, competence, and respect.

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Notes

1. Across both studies, the majority of respondents were White (77%), with 14% Asian, 4% Black, and 4% Hispanic. We do not account for race in the analyses but note an overrepresentation of

White females. Because it was administered online, we anticipated that some respondents would not take the survey seriously, so we included two a priori exclusion criteria. Respondents were excluded if they (a) spent less than 10 s looking at the webpage stimuli or (b) answered incorrectly when asked if the senators were from Oregon or New York.

2. The pattern of results was identical when examining a 7-point scale measure of voting preferences that allowed for a “no preference” midpoint.
3. Repeated measures ANOVA indicated no significant difference in power-seeking ratings of male ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.68, SD = 1.44$) versus female ($M_{\text{female}} = 5.13, SD = 1.45$) targets, $F(1, 78) = 1.29, p = .23$.
4. Study 2 also varied whether the politician was elected or appointed; however, when asked directly, participants were unable to accurately recall this fact (< 75% correct). Moreover, initial analyses indicated no significant differences (or interactions) as a result of the additional manipulation, and its inclusion did not change the pattern of results. Therefore, we collapsed across elected and appointed conditions in all subsequent analysis.
5. A factor analysis conducted on all moral outrage items confirmed that participants did not distinguish among contempt, anger, and disgust factors. We also surveyed emotions of admiration, envy, and pity, thus fully representing the four emotional reactions defined by theory on intergroup affect in stereotyping (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007, 2008). No significant effects of were found on these additional emotion measures.
6. Note that an indirect effect of the manipulations, even in absence of a significant direct effect, suggests an important mediating relationship (see Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

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