

Risqué Business?

Interpersonal Anxiety and Humor in the #MeToo Era

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Abstract

Interpersonal anxiety (i.e., the fear of negative consequences from interacting with someone) may be more prominent in post-#MeToo organizations when interacting with someone of a different gender. Initial exchanges may particularly trigger this anxiety, obfuscating key organizational decisions such as hiring. Given humor's positive, *intrapersonal* stress-reduction effects, we propose that humor also reduces *interpersonal* anxiety. In three mixed methods experiments with hiring managers, we examined the effects of applicant and evaluator gender (i.e., same-/mixed-gender dyad), positive applicant humor (i.e., a pun), and context (i.e., gender salience) in job interviews. Results showed that mixed-gender (vs. same-gender) interactions elicited more interpersonal anxiety, particularly when gender was more salient; mixed-gender interactions also predicted downstream attitudinal outcomes (e.g., social attraction and willingness to hire) and hiring decisions (e.g., selection and rejection) via interpersonal anxiety. Although humor reduced interpersonal anxiety and its consequences for female applicants, the opposite was true for male applicants when gender was salient, because it signaled some of the same expectations that initially triggered the interpersonal anxiety: the potential for harmful sexual behavior. In sum, we integrated diversity and humor theories to examine interpersonal anxiety in same- and mixed-gender interactions, then tested the extent to which humor relieved it.

KEYWORDS: gender; humor; interpersonal anxiety; intergroup relations; hiring

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As diversity within organizations increases, so do intergroup interactions. Interacting with new people may always entail some level of uncertainty. However, intergroup interactions between persons from visibly different social categories such as gender and race carry a higher potential for awkwardness and offense (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996; Hebl et al., 2003; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan & Stephan, 1985), breeding discomfort and a fear of social faux pas (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Loyd et al., 2013). In the worst cases, intergroup interactions result in harassment and discrimination with negative consequences for targets and bystanders (Hitlan et al., 2006; Willness et al., 2007). In other cases, discomfort due to interacting with out-group members—intergroup anxiety—comprises the mere *expectations* of negative psychological and behavioral consequences (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). For example, both men and woman have reported discomfort due to the potential for (allegations of) sexual harassment (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006), a fear likely to be exacerbated in the wake of social movements such as #MeToo¹ (Atwater et al., 2019; Tan & Porzecanski, 2018; Tarbox, 2018).

Articles from the finance, technology, and business sectors indicate apprehension about saying or doing the ‘wrong thing’ with regard to mixed-gender interactions, particularly among men who occupy greater positions of power, status, and leadership in organizations (Bower, 2019; Elsesser, 2019; Johnson & Smith, 2017; Lucas, 2018; Tarbox, 2018). The following quote from a male managing director who claimed [#MeToo] created “a sense of walking on eggshells” (Tan & Porzecanski, 2018, p. 1) illustrates this backlash in the form of intergroup

¹ #MeToo refers to the movement wherein numerous women—and some men—went public with their experiences of sexual misconduct and harassment within the workplace. #TimesUp is a complementary initiative for concrete actions to reduce sexual assault and workplace inequality more broadly. These movements were instrumental in increasing women’s confidence to speak up about harassment (Atwater et al., 2019).

anxiety. While a history of high quality, positive interactions can overcome the intergroup threshold to reduce intergroup bias and increase acceptance (MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015), this #MeToo backlash may have reset employees' histories of positive mixed-gender interactions, raised the intergroup threshold, and/or increased its strength in professional contexts.

One micro-level strategy that may help to break down intergroup barriers and divisiveness is humor, because it generates intrapersonal stress-reduction effects (Freud, 1928, 1960; Martin, 1996, 2001) and related interpersonal benefits (i.e., signaling warmth, inducing positive emotions, building relationships; Bitterly, 2018; Cooper, 2008; Cooper & Sosik, 2012; Martin & Dobbin, 1989). Despite the potential benefits of humor in mixed-gender interactions, the diversity literature has not previously considered humor as a method to *improve* such interactions. Past research on gender diversity typically focuses on humor with sexual, aggressive, or inappropriate overtones (e.g., Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Ford, 2000) or humor in response to such behavior (e.g., Mallett et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020). Thus, it is not surprising that scholars and practitioners view humor as a risky communication strategy in interactions between women and men in the workplace (e.g., Elsesser & Peplau, 2006).

Research on racial diversity in organizations has investigated communication strategies for improving interracial interactions (e.g., Avery et al., 2009), showing that individuals in interracial interactions can use social scripts to reduce intergroup anxiety. We extend this research to explore the efficacy of humor for facilitating initial interactions in mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads as a specific type of social script that can alleviate discomfort. Given the growing evidence that gender of the humor source (i.e., the person expressing the humor) alters the way humor is perceived, interpreted, and appreciated (Decker & Rotundo, 2001; Evans et al., 2019;

Hofmann et al., 2020), we might also expect varying outcomes for mixed-gender interactions based on gender of the humor user.

This research offers a conservative test of the current ‘diversity perspective on humor’ (i.e., that humor is risky) by examining positive, benign humor in mixed- and same-gender interactions. Our primary aim is to examine if female applicants’ use of positive, affiliative humor can reduce evaluators’ interpersonal anxiety towards them. However, we also acknowledge that even this type of humor could be risky for male applicants if it triggers thoughts of some of the very behaviors about which post-#MeToo managers are concerned: sexual, aggressive, or inappropriate jokes (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Bitterly et al., 2017; Ford, 2000; Thomas et al., 2020). Thus, we test for the possibility that positive, affiliative applicant humor may be risky—or risqué as alluded to in our title—for male applicants, particularly when sexual harassment concerns are salient.

In addition to these contributions to workplace diversity research, this research also contributes to the humor literature. Drawing on intergroup anxiety theory (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 1985), we extend humor research by exploring gender effects *in context* and focusing on the gender of *both* persons involved in the humor exchange. We argue that men’s and women’s humor trigger differential effects based on the humor recipient’s gender, particularly in contexts that increase gender salience (e.g., an organization that recently experienced a sexual harassment issue). Furthermore, we extend the theoretical argument that one’s own sense of humor (i.e., the trait aspect of humor) can serve as a coping mechanism to reduce *intrapersonal* stress and anxiety (e.g., Allport, 1961; Freud, 1928, 1960; Ford et al., 2004; Maslow, 1954; Martin, 1996, 2001; Ramachandran, 1998) by proposing and empirically demonstrating that exposure to another person’s humor can reduce *interpersonal*

stress and anxiety. Thus, this research complements the growing body of research on the interpersonal outcomes of humor, while also identifying a new mediator of humor's effects: interpersonal anxiety. By identifying this new operant, our work extends extant research that has primarily taken a social exchange view of humor, examining mediators such as trust (see Kong et al., 2019, for a review). In sum, our research provides a more complete understanding of workplace humor that adds theoretical value as well as practical understanding.

To summarize, we propose that employees in mixed-gender interactions (particularly when gender is more salient) likely experience interpersonal anxiety; however, applicant humor may reduce it (particularly for female applicants). We test these effects in a hiring context because interactional uncertainty is higher in situations where there is limited familiarity between interaction partners (e.g., employment interviews; Gudykunst, 1995). Furthermore, applicant humor has a strong influence on selection outcomes (Bitterly et al., 2018; Cooper, 2005). In the following, we outline our theory and hypotheses, and then provide an overview and specific details of our three experimental studies conducted with experienced hiring managers.

Theory and Hypotheses

Intergroup Workplace Relations and Interpersonal Anxiety

People define themselves and their identities in terms of their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Although social categories guide the initial memberships (Turner et al., 1987), creating groups exaggerates the similarities within groups and the dissimilarities between groups. Because of these forces, social category differences may be particularly evident and influential during initial contact between previously unknown persons, which we examine in the context of hiring. However, more research on intergroup dynamics in organizations is warranted given the need to promote the opportunities of groups typically ascribed lower status (e.g.,

underrepresented racio-ethnic groups and women) and the challenges inherent in reducing bias across groups (e.g., between women and men; see MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015, for a review). To aid this effort, we study the role that interpersonal anxiety may play in hindering intergroup relations in organizations. Although recent studies have examined the role of relational foci in intergroup relations at work (e.g., Dumas et al., 2013; Loyd et al., 2013), this work has typically focused on race-based groups and has not yet explicitly explored concepts closer to our theorizing such as anxiety or interpersonal anxiety.

A wealth of research has found that homophily preferences exist in workplace social relations (see Byrne, 1971; McPherson et al., 2001). Although studies of homophily preferences in hiring have revealed mixed results (e.g., Goldberg, 2005; Graves & Powell, 1996; McCarthy et al., 2010; Sacco et al., 2003), demographic similarity does seem to influence hiring decisions in some instances. In fact, and as suggested by Sacco and colleagues (2003), the presence of mixed results further underscores the importance of research like ours in understanding the boundary conditions (e.g., hiring context and applicant humor) that shape the effects of demographic (dis)similarity on work outcomes (e.g., hiring).

Furthermore, we consider an intervening process by assessing a novel mediator: interpersonal anxiety. Indeed, these preferences for similar others may stem from out-group members triggering more feelings of uncertainty than in-group members because of the greater potential for awkwardness or offense in dyads of differing social categories (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996; Hebl et al., 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Social psychological theory refers to this phenomenon as intergroup anxiety. Here, we compare the feelings elicited in same- and mixed-gender dyads. Thus, we refer to this anxiety as *interpersonal* anxiety, because we assess the phenomenon more broadly, including when the applicant and evaluator are the same gender.

Our concept of *interpersonal* anxiety, an extension of *intergroup* anxiety, encompasses negative expectations of *future* psychological and behavioral consequences from interacting with dissimilar others (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan & Stephan, 1985) as well as “feelings of threat and uncertainty” (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; p. 767). These feelings grow from concerns about how to act, others’ perceptions, and acceptance by both out-group members as well as in-group members who witness or are privy to the interaction (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Although this dynamic has largely been studied and discussed in the social psychology literatures and applied to informal, non-work-related contexts (see Stephan, 2014, for a review), a qualitative management study points to a similar phenomenon that interferes with the ability to develop effective relationships between men and women at work. Elsesser and Peplau (2006) identified the “glass partition,” which includes the concrete, invisible barriers to mixed-gender relations at work such as interaction partners or coworkers misinterpreting friendliness as romantic or sexual interest. Our focus is on evaluators’ concerns about applicants’ *future* behavior and experiences within the organization if they are hired rather than applicant behavior during the interview. For example, evaluators may wonder if an applicant will create problems with dissimilar others—in this case, an opposite sex interaction partner—by using inappropriate sexual humor or conversely, by perceiving benign comments as inappropriate. Thus, we quantitatively test for evidence of a “glass partition” in the context of mixed-gender relations in hiring, including if it is stronger when the context further emphasizes potential difficulties for male-female interactions.

Hypothesis 1: (a) Mixed- (vs. same-) gender interactions elicit more interpersonal anxiety in evaluators, (b) particularly in contexts where gender is more (vs. less) salient.

In addition to evaluators in mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads experiencing more interpersonal anxiety, the complicated dynamics surrounding sexual harassment in organizations suggest that evaluator gender may also matter, because men and women have different concerns

regarding workplace sexual harassment. More specifically, whereas men are more likely than women to fear being targets of *false* allegations of harassment, women are more likely than men to fear being targets of *actual* harassment. A recent nationally representative survey showed that across a range of gender issues at work (e.g., the gender pay gap), men's biggest concern was women making false allegations of sexual harassment, with 82% of men "somewhat" or "very" concerned (Elsesser, 2019). In the words of one (male) wealth advisor, "just hiring a woman these days is an unknown risk" (Tan & Porzecanski, 2018, p. 1). Thus, we could hypothesize that men evaluating female applicants will exhibit more interpersonal anxiety than women evaluating male applicants. At the same time, however, recent research confirms that women are substantially more likely to be sexually harassed than men (Department of Defense, 2019), with as many as 85% having been sexually harassed at work (Merchant, 2017). Unsurprisingly, sexual harassment has negative emotional consequences for women such as nervousness and distress (Atwater et al., 2019). Thus, we could hypothesize that women evaluating male applicants will feel more interpersonal anxiety than men evaluating female applicants due to concerns that they may perpetrate sexual harassment if hired.

However, the paucity of research on post-#MeToo workplaces suggests that these expectations and fears regarding the expectations of new hires are not as neatly split along gender lines as they are often portrayed. For example, even though men ranked fear of false harassment claims by women as the biggest gender issue in the workplace, 55% of both men *and* women reported they were very concerned about women making false claims (Elsesser, 2019). Thus, whereas titles in the popular press include phrases like "avoid women at all costs" (Tan & Porzecanski, 2018), a more thorough reading reveals these titles are somewhat misleading. For example, the same article emphasizing that men now "avoid women at all costs" also noted

“[t]here are as many or more men who are responding in quite different ways.” An applied academic article by Atwater and colleagues (2019) found that 77% of men stated they would be more thoughtful about engaging in potentially inappropriate sexual behavior at work, providing additional support for our contention that the gender-related effects are not so straightforward. In light of the limited rigorous empirical research on the consequences of #MeToo, we do not provide a specific hypothesis but rather pose the following research question (RQ):²

RQ: Does evaluator gender influence the interpersonal anxiety experienced in mixed-gender interactions?

Humor and Intergroup Interactions at Work

Expressions of humor during these initial interactions, however, may alter the link between the gender composition of the dyad and interpersonal anxiety. We define humor as a social communication behavior, namely, an event shared by an agent with a target that is both intended to be amusing and perceived by the target as an intentional act (Cooper, 2005). When interacting with a new person, using humor appropriately (e.g., a pun) can signal a variety of positive attributes such as competence, warmth, and status (Bitterly et al., 2017; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019, 2020). This social signaling (i.e., communicating private information that was previously unknown; Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) is particularly important when interacting with someone for the first time, as interaction partners are automatically and evolutionarily wired to discern a person’s intentions (i.e., to help or to harm) and capabilities (i.e., competence to carry out one’s intentions; Fiske et al., 2002).

A vast stream of research on one’s sense of humor (i.e., an individual difference) has shown its *intrapersonal* stress-reduction benefits (see reviews by Martin, 1996, 2001). The Relief

² Including the potential moderating effect of evaluator gender in our model also affords an empirical advantage by not artificially constraining the effects of same- and mixed-gender interactions to be the same for male and female evaluators.

Theory of Humor (Freud, 1928, 1960) echoes similar claims that one's sense of humor buffers them from stress through cognitive mechanisms (i.e., making more positive or benign appraisals; Kuiper et al., 1993) and decreasing stress-related physiological arousal (Lefcourt et al., 1997; Yovetich et al., 1990). However, we extend this claim by proposing that humor is also an *interpersonal stress-reducer*. Evolutionary psychology and personality research have argued similar sentiments in the context of romantic relations and health effects—that is, that humor and the laughter it triggers disarms people and reduces interpersonal tensions (Martin, 2001; Martin & Dobbins, 1989; Ramachandran, 1998). We extend this line of largely theoretical research by showing causal, empirical evidence of humor's interpersonal-stress reduction effects—regardless of laughter. That is, a person's humor attempt may not only reduce their own anxiety, but also the humor recipient's interpersonal anxiety.

Thus far, the emerging research on humor has produced mixed results pertaining to its interpersonal stress-reducing potential. Carnevale and Isen (1986) found that humorous stimuli reduce feelings of conflict and facilitate cooperation in negotiation pairs. More recently, Cooper and colleagues (2018) tested if leaders' humor reduced followers' burnout but found no empirical support for this claim in their survey study of leader-follower dyads. Because the context within which humor is enacted significantly influences both the frequency of humor and its effects (Lehmann-Willenbrock & Allen, 2014; McGraw & Warren, 2010), and survey studies by their nature collapse across contexts, we aim to clarify these inconsistent results by causally testing *when* humor may reduce interpersonal stress or tension (i.e., interpersonal anxiety).

Although people may react quite differently to various forms of humor (Cooper, 2008; Moake & Robert, 2018; Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014), affiliative humor (i.e., humor used to amuse and affirm others, facilitate relationships and interpersonal attraction; Martin et al., 2003) should

generate generally positive reactions. In other words, positive, affiliative humor may be the least risky form of humor at work (Bitterly et al., 2017) and, thus, the most likely to create positive interpersonal effects (see meta-analysis by Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012) in the form of reduced interpersonal anxiety. In fact, affiliative humor produced by the ostensible source of the stress may be received as especially humorous, and thus particularly effective in reducing interpersonal tension and anxiety (McGraw & Warren, 2010). Thus, we predict that affiliative, appropriate humor has positive, stress-reducing effects on the humor recipient, thereby reducing interpersonal tension in the dyad within which humor is enacted.

Hypothesis 2: Applicant humor reduces evaluators' interpersonal anxiety.

As described previously, interpersonal anxiety includes negative expectations of psychological and behavioral consequences and uncertainty from interacting with someone (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). If these expectations stem from concerns about how to act, others' perceptions of those actions, and/or acceptance by other in-group *and* out-group members, people may logically activate coping strategies to ease these concerns, including specific behaviors to reduce or avoid situations that elicit these thoughts in the first place (see Carver et al., 1989).

The most relevant, problem-focused, behavioral coping strategies for hiring managers include limiting—or eliminating—future interactions with applicants and increasing distance. In a recent review, Stephan (2014) supported these claims with theory, stating that people who feel interpersonal anxiety subsequently avoid those who elicit such feelings. Previous research on race-relations also supports these arguments, such that White participants showed more non-verbal manifestations of anxiety and stress during interracial interactions than intraracial interactions (Trawalter et al., 2012; Trawalter & Richeson, 2008), which was negatively

associated with subsequent intentions to interact with outgroup members (Martinez, 2000). A pair of humor studies also supports this claim—albeit through slightly different yet related mechanisms of warmth and positive emotion—because appropriate humor increases evaluators’ willingness to hire applicants (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020) and decreases peoples’ desires to avoid their debate partners (Baron, 1984). Here, if gatekeepers (i.e., hiring managers) feel interpersonal anxiety towards applicants, their responses may include reducing applicants’ likelihood of being hired, increasing social distance towards the applicants, and avoiding the applicants. In doing so, gatekeepers reduce the likelihood and closeness of *future* interactions with the applicants, thereby alleviating their interpersonal anxiety. Indeed, managers have articulated these strategies in response to the #MeToo movement (e.g., “From believe all women to hire no women? The consequences of #MeToo are not pretty;” Lucas, 2018, p. 1), implicating their applicability to the current study on cross-gender relations and hiring. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal anxiety negatively predicts positive workplace outcomes (i.e., social attraction, selection, and willingness to hire) and positively predicts negative workplace outcomes (i.e., avoidance and rejection).

In sum, combining our theoretical predictions, we propose a moderated mediation model:

Hypothesis 4: The indirect effects of mixed- (vs. same) gender interactions on workplace outcomes via interpersonal anxiety are weaker for humorous applicants (vs. non-humorous applicants) in contexts where gender is more (vs. less) salient.

Overview of Studies

We test our theoretical propositions across three experiments using mixed experimental methods with experienced hiring managers. After three pilot studies to test and select our stimuli, we establish the link between mixed-gender interactions and interpersonal anxiety while explicitly testing the role of context in Study 1; we also test the interpersonal anxiety-reducing effects of positive applicant humor (i.e., a pun). In Study 2, we aim to replicate Study 1 and the

first-stage of our model while also extending these findings by showing the downstream, attitudinal effects of interpersonal anxiety (e.g., social attraction, willingness to hire, and avoidance). In Study 3 (pre-registered),³ we aim to replicate and extend these results while demonstrating their generalizability by assessing hiring managers' interpersonal anxiety towards applicants whom they previously interviewed, including the results of those interviews (e.g., if the applicant was hired or rejected). For an overview of our theoretical model, see Figure 1.

Study 1

First, we aim to test if mixed-gender dyads (i.e., a man evaluating a female applicant or vice versa) versus same-gender dyads (i.e., a man evaluating a male applicant or a woman evaluating a female applicant) elicit interpersonal anxiety, as well as if these effects differ for humorous (vs. non-humorous) applicants and male (vs. female) evaluators. We also test the role of context by manipulating the hiring situation, focusing on recent #MeToo events (i.e., a gender-salient frame) and comparing it with a more neutral, control frame. To better estimate—and control for—relevant evaluator individual differences (e.g., anxiety proneness and risk aversion, Blair et al., 2003), we use a within-subjects, repeated measures design.

Method

Sample

We conducted an experimental vignette study with a sample of American adults with hiring experience recruited via Prolific Academic. We aimed to recruit 200 participants, determined before data collection began. In total, 206 participants began the survey and 201 finished it with complete data. Participants (45.6% female) were an average of 41.63 years old ($SD = 12.00$, range = 24-76). The majority of participants (85.1%) identified as White/Caucasian,

³See the anonymous PDF created for peer-review here: <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=wj4fw8>.

followed by Black/African American (5.4%), Latinx (5.0%), Asian American/Pacific Islander (5.0%) and other (0.5%); they had significant ($M = 20.88$ years, $SD = 11.47$) work experience.

Procedure

In a study of “workplace recruitment,” we randomly assigned participants to view a neutral control frame focused on the “war for talent” or a sexual harassment frame focused on the recent #MeToo movement. Instead of plain text, we increased study realism and strengthened our manipulations by presenting the frames as popular media articles by a technology recruiter. To assess humor’s interpersonal effects in these two hiring contexts, participants viewed a short transcript recounting applicants’ responses to, “As a final question, please explain your motivation to work with us on tech projects/applications in relation to your recent, relevant experience.” Participants saw three applicants—two were non-humorous and a third, humorous applicant who was presented last to reduce demand effects and suspicion. Each time, we randomly assigned participants to view a male or a female applicant; they also stated their own gender.

Because viewing three applicants makes the survey longer than viewing just one, and participants may grow suspicious of the study’s true aims if presented with our key measures multiple times, we did not include manipulation checks. However, we pre-piloted all materials with similar non-overlapping samples (for more details, see the Supplemental Information (SI)).⁴

Measures

Interpersonal Anxiety

⁴ Because we required informed consent, all responses were anonymous, we did not sample minors nor did we include deception, etc., this study—and all studies included in this paper—were technically exempt from formal ethics review at the first author’s university; for more details, see [here](#). However, we also proactively received an a priori, umbrella ethics approval from the Human Subjects Committee of the Faculty of Economics, Business Administration, and Information Technology at the University of Zurich on June 15, 2017, to conduct web-based experimental research, as this was 1 of 2 papers from the “Interpersonal Humor for (Female) Retention and Success in Science” project.

We measured interpersonal anxiety towards the applicant using five items adapted from Britt and colleagues' (1996) intergroup anxiety scale.⁵ Participants rated how much anxiety they would feel toward the applicant (e.g., "I would feel nervous if I had to sit alone in a room with the applicant and start a conversation") from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree."

Applicant and Evaluator Gender, Applicant-Evaluator Gender Mismatch

We manipulated applicant (i.e., humor user) gender and measured evaluator (i.e., participant) gender (male, female, and non-binary). Because no participants selected the third option, the latter measure is a dichotomous indicator of evaluator gender as male (0) or female (1). We then combined these measures to indicate a mixed- (1) or a same-gender (0) dyad.

Applicant Humor

We manipulated applicant humor by including a joke within the short monologue. All applicants spoke about a recent technology conference they had attended, with the two non-humorous applicants talking about "... a conference in California... with an amazing lineup of speakers and conference atmosphere" or "... a Hackathon in New York [where they] had to drink so much coffee. But [achieved] immense progress..." whereas the humorous applicant talked about an event that brought together "... software developers and engineers like me... though, the software folks never wanted to eat lunch with us outside—I think they were afraid of the BUGS or something. (haha)."⁶ For the complete scripts, see the SI.⁷

Results

⁵ The original scale included 11 items, but we excluded the more general items with group referents that did not apply to a specific person (e.g., "I would experience some anxiety if I were the only White in a room full of Blacks.")

⁶ This joke was readily applicable to the recruiter's question, thereby reducing the odds that the humor was distracting, which may particularly harm perceptions of professional women (see Evans et al., 2019).

⁷ Although we had planned to analyze the effects of our manipulations and interpersonal anxiety on objective personnel decisions (e.g., selection), one of our reviewers pointed out that these comparisons across multiple applicants may lead to contrast effects that could have particularly influenced these outcomes (see Cesare et al., 1988; Highhouse & Gallo, 1997).

See Table 1 for descriptives and correlations. We assessed the effects of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, evaluator gender, applicant humor, and hiring context on interpersonal anxiety using multi-level Generalized Structural Equation Modeling (GSEM) in Stata (version 16.1; see Table 2). Although it is less common to analyze experimental data with GSEM, it offers empirical advantages over more common approaches (e.g., ANOVA; Bagozzi & Yi, 1989; Breitsohl, 2019) and the flexibility to account for the data nesting by clustering *SEs*.⁸

Results revealed a significant effect of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch ($b = 0.38$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), such that mixed- (vs. same-) gender interactions elicited more interpersonal anxiety, supporting Hypothesis 1a. There were no main effects of evaluator gender ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .898$) or gender-salient context ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = .615$). Evaluators' interpersonal anxiety did not differ between the non-humorous applicants (Applicants 1 and 2; $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .657$). As expected, interpersonal anxiety was lower towards the humorous applicant (Applicant 3) than the non-humorous applicant (Applicant 1: $b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .008$; $\chi^2(1) = 5.00$, $p = .025$), supporting Hypothesis 2.

Results also revealed a two-way interaction between gender-salient context and gender mismatch ($b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$), such that interpersonal anxiety was highest in the gender-salient context for mixed-gender dyads ($M = 2.99$), significantly higher than same-gender dyads in the gender-salient context ($M = 2.52$; $contrast = 0.47$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$) and same-gender dyads in the control context ($M = 2.56$; $contrast = 0.43$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$); however, it was not significantly higher than mixed-gender dyads in the control context ($M = 2.83$; $contrast$

⁸ Because participant race/ethnicity is important to consider in the context of intergroup anxiety (see Stephan, 2014), particularly in this context as participants viewed not just one but three applicants—all of whom were White/Caucasian—we empirically considered the effect of race/ethnicity in three ways: (a) as a control variable, (b) excluding non-White/Caucasian participants ($n = 30$), and (c) as an *SE* clustering variable to account for participant non-independence with a small number of groups (McNeish et al., 2017). Because participant race/ethnicity did not predict interpersonal anxiety ($ps = .121 - .953$), we opted for the third option. Of note, results did not alter the conclusions drawn when we either controlled for race/ethnicity or excluded non-White/Caucasian participants.

= 0.16, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .101$). These results support Hypothesis 1b, as mixed-gender interactions elicited interpersonal anxiety in the gender-salient context (vs. control).

There was a two-way interaction of gender-salient context and applicant humor ($b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .002$), such that humor increased interpersonal anxiety in the sexual harassment context ($contrast = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$) but decreased interpersonal anxiety in the control context ($contrast = -0.25$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .001$). Gender mismatch and applicant humor also interacted ($b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .001$), as applicant humor increased interpersonal anxiety in mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads (Applicant 3 vs. 1: $contrast = 0.29$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .002$).

Results further revealed a three-way interaction of gender mismatch, gender-salient context, and evaluator gender ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .030$; see Table 2): the effect of gender mismatch was strongest for female evaluators in the gender-salient context (simple slope: $b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$), followed by male evaluators in the gender-salient context (simple slope: $b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .008$), and female and male evaluators in the control context (simple slopes: $b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.10 - 0.14$, $ps = .007 - .058$), respectively (see Figure 2).

Although the four-way interaction with applicant humor was not significant ($b = -0.43$, $SE = 0.27$, $p = .112$), exploratory analyses showed that mixed-gender interactions increased interpersonal anxiety in the gender-salient context more than in the control context, perhaps more so for female evaluators (simple slopes for the control: $b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.32$, $p = .125$ and the gender-salient context: $b = 0.80$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$) than for male evaluators (simple slopes for the control: $b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.18$, $p = .084$ and the gender-salient context: $b = 0.74$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$). Because evaluators reacted differently according to the gender-salient context and the applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, these results inform our research question.

In sum, mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads triggered more interpersonal anxiety, especially for female evaluators in the sexual harassment context. Applicant humor decreased this interpersonal anxiety, but only in the control context and in same-gender dyads; it increased interpersonal anxiety in the gender-salient context and in mixed-gender dyads.

Study 2

Study 1 provided initial support for our predicted effects of mixed-gender interactions, applicant humor, and context on evaluators' interpersonal anxiety. In Study 2, we extend the results of Study 1 by testing if mixed-gender interactions indirectly predict downstream work-related and social outcomes (i.e., social attraction, willingness to hire, and avoidance) via interpersonal anxiety, testing again if these effects differ by applicant humor and evaluator gender, but focusing on the gender-salient context for simplicity. By conducting a between-subjects experiment where participants only viewed one applicant, we also reduce potential contrast effects that may have been a threat in Study 1. We also explore why humor may increase interpersonal anxiety by testing the role of sexual behavior expectations, namely, the idea that humor may increase expectations of sexual behaviors at work, perhaps particularly for male applicants who are the most common sexual harassers—often with sexual humor (see Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). We also conduct extra analyses (e.g., endogeneity, trust, evaluator power, and applicant attractiveness; see the SI) to test the robustness of our effects.

Method

Sample

We conducted an experimental vignette study using a sample of American adults recruited via Prolific Academic. Of the 405 who started the study, five had missing data (e.g.,

participant gender), while 14 incorrectly answered all of our manipulation checks.⁹ The remaining 386 participants (45.6% female) reported being an average of 39.74 years old ($SD = 11.13$, range = 19 - 77). Participants identified as White/Caucasian (87.8%), Black/African American (7.0%), Latinx (6.2%), Asian American/Pacific Islander (4.4%) and other (1.8%). Participants had significant work ($M = 19.59$, $SD = 11.04$) and hiring experience (93.3%).

Procedure

To assess humor's interpersonal effects in a hiring scenario, participants viewed a short written dialogue from one of six actors (i.e., three female and three male actors to account for person-specific effects) with or without humor for a four-condition, between-subjects design. As we were also interested in mixed- (vs. same-) gender interactions, we also included participants' self-reported gender (i.e., female or male evaluator). Thus, our complete design was a 2 (applicant gender) \times 2 (applicant humor) \times 2 (evaluator gender), between-subjects design.

We told participants that we were conducting a study on workplace recruitment. We instructed participants to take "the role of a recruiter, searching for a new talent to fill an open leadership-track position at a major technology company. You are looking for a qualified specialist, but also someone who would be a good colleague. This is increasingly important in light of the 'war for talent' and the rising rates of sexual harassment at work in recent years. #MeToo hit several tech companies quite hard, with clear consequences for the victims, while also ruining personal and company reputations, as well as altering many organizational recruitment and employment practices." Participants then viewed a transcript and a photo pertaining to one of the applicant's interviews. For full transcripts and photos, see the SI.

Measures

⁹ Our results remain generally unchanged in size and significance when we calculate our models including these participants.

For all items in the scales, see the SI. We measured interpersonal anxiety as in Study 1. We manipulated, collected, and/or coded applicant and evaluator gender as in Study 1. Our humor manipulation was also identical to Study 1, but with the addition of two new jokes.

Social Attraction

We measured social attraction using six items from McCroskey et al. (2006). Participants rated potential future interactions with the applicant, including, “I would like to have a friendly chat with them” on a 7-point scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”).

Willingness to Hire

We measured willingness to hire the applicant using three items from Moss-Racusin et al. (2012; e.g., “hire the applicant for the job”) rated from 1 = “very unlikely” to 7 = “very likely.”

Avoidance

We measured participants’ desire to avoid the applicant using three items, constructed to mirror our willingness to hire measure above, rated from 1 = “very unlikely” to 7 = “very likely.”

Sexual Behavior at Work

We asked about participants’ perceptions that the target would engage in different sexual behaviors at work, adapted from Berdahl and Aquino (2009). For example, participants rated the likelihood that the target would “tell inappropriate sexual stories or jokes.” Items were rated from “extremely unlikely” (1) to “extremely likely” (7). We included these at the end of the survey to reduce potential demand effects and suspicion; two participants had missing data.

Manipulation Checks

To ensure participants read and remembered the stimuli, we asked two questions about the information provided in the transcript (e.g., “What was the gender of the applicant?” and “In which area did the applicant complete their studies?”). We also asked perceptions of the

applicant's age (in years) as a filler question to reduce demand effects. Finally, we asked about participants' perceptions of the communication as "funny", "humorous", and "entertaining" (as in Bitterly et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2019) as a manipulation check (1 = "not at all" to 7 = "extremely;" $\alpha = .89$), nested within four other, unrelated filler items.

Control Variables

Because participants viewed three different jokes and actors, we included four dummy variables to account for the various stimuli (though it made no empirical difference). Participant race/ethnicity was not a significant predictor ($ps = .24 - .63$) and is thus excluded for parsimony.

Results

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to establish the discriminant validity of our measured variables, which we report in the SI. Then, we tested the interactive effects of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, applicant humor, and evaluator gender on evaluators' interpersonal anxiety as well as the conditional indirect effects on the outcome variables with SEM and GSEM in Stata, calculated with 20,000 bootstrapped resamples. For descriptives, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha scale reliabilities, see Table 3.

Manipulation Checks

Almost all participants correctly identified the applicant's gender (95.1%). The applicants who told a joke ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.25$) were rated as more humorous than the applicants who did not tell a joke ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.34$), $t(382) = -7.50$, $p < .001$. Thus, these results indicate that our participants paid attention and our manipulations were successful.

Interpersonal Anxiety

First, we analyzed the effects of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, evaluator gender, and applicant humor on evaluator interpersonal anxiety. Results show a significant main effect of

applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, such that mixed- (vs. same) gender dyads elicited more evaluator interpersonal anxiety ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .003$; see Table 4), supporting Hypothesis 1b. Results also revealed a two-way interaction between applicant-evaluator gender and participant gender ($b = 0.52$, $SE = 0.18$, $p = .005$), such that mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads increased interpersonal anxiety for female evaluators ($M_s = 2.20$ vs. 2.76 ; simple slope: $b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$) but did not significantly affect interpersonal anxiety for male evaluators ($M_s = 2.70$ vs. 2.75 ; simple slope: $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .719$), largely replicating Study 1.¹⁰

Results also revealed a three-way interaction between applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, applicant humor, and evaluator gender ($b = 1.09$, $SE = 0.37$, $p = .003$). Compared to no humor, applicant humor increased interpersonal anxiety in mixed-gender dyads for female evaluators ($M_s = 2.57$ vs. 2.98 ; simple slope: $b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .029$) but decreased interpersonal anxiety in mixed-gender dyads for male evaluators ($M_s = 2.91$ vs. 2.56 ; simple slope: $b = -0.35$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .042$; see Figure 3). These opposing effects explain why we did not find a main effect of applicant humor, while also informing our Research Question, because applicant humor triggered different effects for male and female evaluators. Because Hypothesis 2 predicted that humor would reduce interpersonal anxiety, these results show only partial support.

Downstream Effects of Interpersonal Anxiety

Interpersonal anxiety was significantly associated with social attraction to the applicant ($b = -0.53$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$), willingness to hire the applicant ($b = -0.40$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$), and desire to avoid the applicant ($b = 0.46$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3.

Mediation results revealed significant indirect effects of the three-way interaction via interpersonal anxiety across all three outcomes: social attraction to the applicant ($b = -0.56$,

¹⁰ Because Study 2 results are similar to Study 1, this suggests that potential order or contrast effects (see Cesare et al., 1998; Highhouse & Gallo, 1997) related to applicant humor due to our design choices are less concerning.

$SE_{boot} = 0.21, p = .007, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.96, -0.16]$), willingness to hire the applicant ($b = -0.42, SE_{boot} = 0.17, p = .012, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.76, -0.09]$), and desire to avoid the applicant ($b = 0.49, SE_{boot} = 0.19, p = .008, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.13, 0.85]$). Because the effects of mixed- (vs. same) gender interactions on downstream outcomes via interpersonal anxiety improved for humorous applicants with male evaluators ($\chi^2s(1, N = 386) = 4.28 - 5.42, ps = .020 - .039$),¹¹ but worsened for humorous applicants with female evaluators ($\chi^2s(1, N = 386) = 4.61 - 7.76, ps = .005 - .032$) across all three outcomes (see Table 5), these results show only partial support for Hypothesis 4.

These results show that mixed- (vs. same-) gender interactions predict work and social outcomes via interpersonal anxiety, although they differ per applicant humor and evaluator gender. Because Hypothesis 4 predicted that applicant humor would reduce interpersonal anxiety and its downstream effects, our findings only provide partial support as these results show the expected pattern for male evaluators but the opposite for female evaluators.

Sexual Behavior at Work and Robustness Checks

We conducted exploratory analyses of evaluators' expectations of applicants' sexual behavior at work using robust estimators of variance, due to heteroskedasticity (Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg tests, $\chi^2(1, N = 384) = 3.62 - 14.65, p = .002 - .057$). Results showed a significant effect of applicant gender, such that male applicants were rated as having a higher risk of engaging in sexual behaviors at work than female applicants ($b = -0.75, SE = 0.12, p < .001$). There was also a marginally significant interaction between applicant gender and applicant humor ($b = 0.44, SE = 0.24, p = .070$) such that humor increased sexual behavior expectations from male applicants in same- and mixed-gender dyads ($bs = 0.41 - 0.48, SEs = 0.22 - 0.23, ps =$

¹¹ These effects are for social attraction and willingness to hire the applicant, because the effect for avoidance was only marginally significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 386) = 3.61, p = .057$.

.032 - .072) but not for female applicants ($bs = -0.01 - 0.06$, $SEs = 0.19 - 0.21$, $ps = .780 - .947$); no other effects were significant.¹²

These results indicate that hiring managers anticipate applicants' *future* sexual behaviors and treatment at work even at the hiring stage, and these expectations systematically differ by applicant gender and humor. That is, male applicants were ascribed a higher risk of propagating sexual behavior. Positive applicant humor increased the former expectation towards male—but not female—applicants, explaining (in part) why positive humor incurs negative effects for men.

Study 3

Results from Studies 1 and 2 have generally supported our theorizing by showing the effects of mixed-gender interactions, applicant humor, and context on evaluators' interpersonal anxiety, including the polarizing effects of applicant humor for male versus female evaluators when gender is more salient. In our pre-registered Study 3, we aim to replicate and extend these results while also demonstrating the generalizability of our findings by assessing hiring managers' interpersonal anxiety towards real applicants whom they previously interviewed, including the results of those interviews (e.g., if the applicant was hired or rejected).

Method

Sample

We conducted an experimental recall study with experienced, English-speaking (e.g., from the U.S. and the United Kingdom [U.K.]) hiring managers recruited via Prolific Academic.¹³ Of the 670 who started the study, 32 did not finish, 54 did not follow instructions (e.g., they did not recall a [non]humorous applicant when asked to do so), seven had missing data

¹² See the SI for the robustness checks. Briefly, we found no evidence that endogeneity threatened our results. Our results also remained largely unaltered above and beyond perceptions of applicant attractiveness, trust in the applicants, and participant power.

¹³ Although we initially tried to recruit participants for this study via Cloud Research, the data quality was so poor that we stopped it after only 168 participations and received a refund (which we then invested in more Prolific Academic data).

(e.g., gender), and five were outliers; of note, some participants are included in more than one of these categories. We performed these exclusions as described in our pre-registration.

The remaining 602 participants (57.7% female) were an average of 42.0 years old ($SD = 11.11$, range = 22 - 77). They identified as White/Caucasian (89.2%), followed by Black/African [American] (3.1%), Latinx (2.5%), Asian [American]/Pacific Islander (4.8%) and other (2.1%). Participants recalled applicants (47.9% female) whom they identified as White/Caucasian (80.3%), followed by Black/African [American] (7.2%), Latinx (4.3%), Asian [American] /Pacific Islander (6.4%) and other (2.3%). Most of the applicants were junior to the participants (83.9%) and unknown to participants before the interview (88.9%). More than half of the interviews took place before COVID-19 hit the U.S./U.K. (65.5%), whereas 23.1% took place within a few months prior to the data collection and 11.4% during the first wave of COVID-19.

Procedure

To assess humor's interpersonal effects in hiring, participants recalled a recent interview (i.e., within the last year) wherein an applicant used humor or not for a two-condition, between-subjects design. Because we were also interested in mixed- (vs. same-) gender interactions, we included participant and applicant gender in our analyses, although we did not manipulate it.

Participants were asked to recall three applicants whom they had interviewed for a job in the last year, modeled after Bitterly and colleagues' (2017) humor recall paradigm (Study 2a). Then, we asked participants to think of the second applicant, piping in the applicant's name throughout the survey (where applicable). We asked participants to "recall an appropriate story or joke [applicant 2] told you that you thought was funny" or "recall a greeting [applicant 2] told you" in the context of the interview. Then, participants were asked to write at least 100 characters about the situation and the person to the best of their memory and ability.

Measures

As in Study 2, we measured interpersonal anxiety and social attraction; we also collected applicant-evaluator gender match and coded it as in Studies 1 and 2.

Gender-Salient Context

To tap into the broader construct of gender salience at work that we manipulated via our context frames in Studies 1 and 2—which includes but is not limited to sexual harassment concerns—we asked the following: “Have you, your team, and/or your company experienced gender-related events in the recent past, such as sexual harassment issues, gender pay inequality issues, and/or similar legal concerns or pressures?”, answered on a 1 = “No, not at all” to 5 = “Yes, major issues (and it’s still ongoing)” scale.¹⁴ As this was a broad measure, we also included an open-ended question for participants to clarify their responses. Participants added details such as, “a new worker show[ed] unwanted interest in their coworker... so a mediation was needed to get the situation cleared up,” and “there was a harassment issue,” further supporting our use of this measure as an appropriate proxy for our theorizing.

Selection and Rejection

We assessed the interview results using four items for each outcome. For example, “To the best of your ability, please try to remember if [applicant 2] was hired/rejected because of their interview,” rated from 1 = “No, definitely not [certain]” to 7 = “Yes, definitely certain.”

Manipulation Check

¹⁴ Although this may seem like a double-barrelled response scale, we have no measurable reason to believe that this design choice undermined our results. First, participant responses imply a seemingly continuous progression (e.g., see Figures 4-5). Second, the potentially double-barrelled response options apply to very few responses (i.e., only 7 participants reported “Major (Done)” or “Major (Ongoing)”). Finally, an additional validation study showed strong positive correlations between single-barrelled versions of this measure and the original (e.g., $r = .88, p < .001; N = 200$). Although the low mean value suggests a potential floor effect (i.e., 94.2% of participants responded 1 “no” or 2 “minor”), results calculated with a dichotomous version of this measure (i.e., 0 = “no”, 1 = “minor” – “major (ongoing)”) largely mirror results with the continuous measure.

Using the same three items as in Study 2 ($\alpha = .93$), results show that participants rated the humor condition ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.46$) as more humorous than the no-humor/greeting condition ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.44$, $b = 1.07$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$), indicating a successful manipulation.

Results

We conducted CFAs to establish the discriminant validity of our measured variables (see the SI). Following this, we tested the interactive effects of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, applicant humor, and gender-salient context on evaluators' interpersonal anxiety, as well as whether these results differ for male versus female evaluators, using GSEM. Finally, we report the moderated mediation results using SEM and GSEM. As stated in our pre-registration, we clustered *SEs* by participant nationality; multi-level results are consistent with these results (see the SI). Participant race/ethnicity did not predict any of our outcomes ($ps = .496 - .937$) and is thus excluded for parsimony. For descriptives, correlations, and scale reliabilities, see Table 6.

Interpersonal Anxiety

Results revealed a main effect of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch on interpersonal anxiety, such that evaluators in mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads reported more interpersonal anxiety ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$), showing further support for Hypothesis 1a and replicating findings from Study 1 (see Table 7). There was also a main effect of applicant humor ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$), such that evaluators reported less interpersonal anxiety towards humorous (vs. non-humorous) applicants, showing further support for Hypothesis 2 and replicating findings from Study 1. There were no significant main effects of evaluator gender ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .233$) or gender-salient context ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .076$).

Results revealed a two-way interaction of applicant-evaluator gender mismatch and gender-salient context ($b = 0.16$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$): mixed-gender dyads increased interpersonal

anxiety when gender salience was higher (simple slope: $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$) but decreased it when the salience was lower (simple slope: $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .008$), further supporting Hypothesis 1b. There was also a two-way interaction of applicant-evaluator gender and applicant humor ($b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$): humor decreased interpersonal anxiety in same-gender dyads (simple slope: $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$) but increased it in mixed-gender dyads (simple slope: $b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .001$). These results replicate Studies 1-2.

Results also revealed a three-way interaction of applicant-evaluator gender, gender-salient context, and evaluator gender ($b = 0.80$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$) on interpersonal anxiety. The effect of gender mismatch was positive for female evaluators (simple slope: $b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$) but negative for male evaluators (simple slope: $b = -0.39$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$; see Figure 4) when the salience was higher; there were no effects of gender-salient context for male or female evaluators in same-gender dyads (simple slopes: $bs = -0.01 - 0.01$, $SEs = 0.03 - 0.25$, $ps = .872 - .968$).

Finally, results revealed a four-way interaction between applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, applicant humor, gender-salient context, and participant gender ($b = -0.30$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$; see Figure 5). As predicted in our pre-registration based on our Study 1-2 results, there was a negative effect of context gender salience on interpersonal anxiety for humorous applicants in mixed-gender dyads with male evaluators ($b = -0.61$, $SE = .17$, $p = .001$) but a positive effect for female evaluators ($b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .035$). Because humorous male applicants *increased* interpersonal anxiety in mixed-gender dyads when context gender salience was higher, but humorous female applicants *decreased* it, these results replicate Studies 1-2. The opposing effects for male and female evaluators in more gender salient contexts also replicates results from Studies 1-2, further informing our RQ on evaluator gender.

Downstream Effects of Interpersonal Anxiety

As predicted, interpersonal anxiety was negatively associated with social attraction to the applicant ($b = -0.66$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$) and applicant selection ($b = -0.63$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$), and positively associated with applicant rejection ($b = 0.67$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$). These results fully support Hypothesis 3 and replicate Study 2.

Mediation analyses¹⁵ showed that for male evaluators, mixed- (vs. same-) gender dyads with humorous applicants increased selection and social attraction towards female applicants but decreased rejection of female applicants via interpersonal anxiety (indirect effects: $b = -0.16$, 95% CI [-0.19, -0.13]; $b = -0.17$, 95% CI [-0.21, -0.12]; and $b = 0.17$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.18], respectively). Gender salience and applicant humor significantly moderated the indirect effects for mixed-gender dyads with male evaluators (indirect effects: $b = 0.23$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.40]; $b = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.39]; and $b = -0.25$, 95% CI [-0.44, -0.06], respectively), such that applicant humor helped female applicants when gender salience was higher. Mediation effects for female evaluators generally mirrored these findings, but in the opposite direction. Because the effects of mixed- (vs. same) gender interactions on downstream outcomes via interpersonal anxiety improved for humorous applicants with male evaluators, but worsened for humorous applicants with female evaluators—meaningfully differing from each other only in contexts with more gender salience ($\chi^2s(1) = 2.77 - 4.62$, $ps = .032 - .096$) but not in contexts with less gender salience ($\chi^2s(1) = 0.11 - 0.13$, $ps = .715 - .734$)—these results only partially support Hypothesis 4, although they largely replicate the results from Study 2. For the complete results, see the SI.

General Discussion

¹⁵ To simplify the moderated mediation analyses, we created a multicategorical predictor variable by combining all three of our categorical predictors (i.e., 8 total groups) into a single indicator, then used gender salience as a first-stage moderator. We focus here on the specific effects that we predicted in the pre-registration, but we provide the full results, including the direct, indirect, and total effects, in the SI.

Results from three studies show that interpersonal anxiety was more prominent in mixed- (vs. same-) gender interactions, particularly in contexts where gender was more salient. Mixed-gender interactions also predicted social attraction, willingness to hire, selection, avoidance, and rejection via interpersonal anxiety. While positive applicant humor reduced interpersonal anxiety and its negative consequences for female applicants, it elicited the opposite effects for male applicants. These findings highlight important boundary conditions of mixed-gender interactions and the effects of humor at work that are relevant for theory and practice.

Theoretical Implications

Evaluators reported more interpersonal anxiety when evaluating applicants of the opposite gender (compared with same-gender applicants). These results support our predictions based on intergroup and diversity theories (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 1985) and the limited existing research on cross-gender workplace relations, such as a qualitative study on the “glass partition” by Elsesser and Peplau (2006), as well as research within the specific context of mentoring (Clawson & Kram, 1984; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Yang et al., 2014). These findings also extend interpersonal anxiety research, which often examines intergroup racial relations (Britt et al., 1996; Loyd et al., 2013).¹⁶

By studying the influence of gender on humor at the dyadic level, this research builds on existing research to advance our understanding of how others interpret humor when it is expressed by men versus women. Although recent work has shown initial evidence of differences in self-derogating humor appreciation based on the gender of the humor source (e.g., Evans et al., 2019), the current research extends these findings to positive, affiliative humor

¹⁶ A core premise of the intergroup anxiety literature is that Whites and Blacks do not interact much, promoting intergroup anxiety (Stephan, 2014). In contrast, men and women interact often (e.g., as partners, family members, friends). Yet, these examples refer to informal settings. In work settings, men and women are often gender segregated by occupation (Cortes & Pan, 2018); within occupations, they are frequently segregated by task (Chan & Anteby, 2015) and level (i.e., more men in more senior roles; Catalyst, 2020) and informally (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Thus, paired with our results, we believe the intergroup anxiety literature is relevant to explain and predict cross-gender interactions at work.

based on the gender of the humor source *and* the recipient. Findings also showed divergent effects of applicant humor, because humor reduced interpersonal anxiety in mixed-gender dyads for male evaluators but increased it for female evaluators. In other words, female applicants benefited from using a humor style that closely aligns with traditional gender stereotypes and role expectations of women being warm and communal (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Fiske et al., 2002), reducing interpersonal tension and evaluators' perceptions of applicants as a threat. However, by using the same positive, affiliative humor, men seem to have signaled the same expectations that (female) evaluators feared: potentially harmful sexual behavior. We explain this effect with two key literatures. Drawing from diversity research, men are the most common perpetrators of sexual behaviors at work (e.g., telling sexual jokes; Berdahl & Aquino, 2009), an archetype likely activated by applicant gender and humor in a context where sexual harassment concerns are salient. Drawing from humor research (e.g., Yam et al., 2018), evaluators may have viewed male applicants' humor to be a benign violation that signaled other potential violations at work, particularly because sexual harassment violations—usually perpetuated by men (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Merchant, 2017)—were salient.

This research also identifies a new mediator of humor's effects: interpersonal anxiety. Through identifying this new operant, the current research complements extant work that has largely taken a social exchange view of humor, examining mediators such as trust (see Kong et al., 2019, for a review). The humor literature appears to be quickly expanding beyond this social exchange approach, with recent work acknowledging relational identification as another operant of humor (Gkorezis et al., 2016; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). But, rather than examining how humor manifests in or shapes existing relationships (e.g., leaders and followers; Avolio et al.,

1999; Cooper et al., 2018; Yam et al., 2018), we highlight how humor contributes to hiring a new colleague, reflective of a chance to form a new relationship at work.

This research also extends the emerging literature on humor in neutral and positive organizational contexts (e.g., making a presentation or in a typical job interview; Bitterly et al., 2017; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019, 2020), as well as the more established humor literature assessed via field surveys, which averages humor attempts across all contexts and situations (see reviews by Kong et al., 2019; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). In doing so, we aim to provide a more comprehensive picture of humor in interactions entailing higher levels of uncertainty. Because the context fundamentally shapes situational uncertainty and guidelines for social behavior (Baer et al., 2017; Mischell, 1977), humor may have unique effects when used in situations characterized by uncertainty such as the post-#MeToo workplace gender relations we examined. Indeed, all studies explicitly showed the effects of interactional uncertainty (i.e., an unknown person from a different social group) while Studies 1 and 3 explicitly showed the effects of situational uncertainty (e.g., being hired in the wake of a sexual harassment issue).

Finally, we tested an open research question concerning the moderating effect of evaluator gender in mixed-gender interactions. Results generally showed that female evaluators were more strongly and negatively influenced than male evaluators by mixed-gender interactions in terms of its effects on interpersonal anxiety and downstream work and social outcomes. These results are consistent with theory and findings from the intergroup anxiety literature, because minority (vs. majority) members respond more strongly to intergroup interactions (see Stephan, 2014, for a review). However, these findings also seem to contradict popular sentiments from media articles touting pervasive #MeToo backlash wherein senior male leaders express more post-#MeToo anxiety towards—and consequently, also lower intentions to interact with and

hire—female applicants (e.g., Elsesser, 2019; Lucas, 2018; Tan & Porzecanski, 2018; Tarbox, 2018). While our participants were experienced hiring managers, they were admittedly less powerful than the senior leaders in these articles; yet, Study 2 results were also robust to power.

Practical Implications

Regarding who should use humor and when, our findings show that positive, affiliative humor may be a successful strategy for men *and* women in everyday situations when sexual harassment concerns are not salient. When sexual harassment concerns are salient, however, men may do well to reduce their humor use while women may benefit from using more positive humor. These findings complement the emerging research showing negative effects of women's humor, most notably that women's use of self-deprecating humor in presentations is more distracting than men's (Evans et al., 2019). Although Studies 1 and 2 tested contexts that had ostensibly experienced recent sexual harassment issues, these recommendations also apply to a broader category of contexts that highlight gender salience and/or differences (e.g., after a gender discrimination case), an idea that our operationalization and results from Study 3 also support.

In contrast, we detected the first instance to our knowledge where even positive, affiliative humor can be damaging for male humor users. When sexual harassment concerns were salient, humorous men—but not women—elicited expectations that they might tell sexual jokes or stories at work, sexually harass others, misinterpret others' actions as romantic, and flirt with colleagues or customers. Although this may be a somewhat rational response to the current landscape of gender relations in post-#MeToo organizations, if applicants' opportunities are shaped by their identities and/or ostensible personalities, hiring managers should take care to ensure that they reduce potential bias as much as possible (e.g., requiring evaluators to take more time to make their decisions; Axt & Lai, 2019).

Finally, it is worthwhile to note that by highlighting humor as a strategy for applicants to reduce interpersonal anxiety, we do not mean to imply that the onus should be on applicants to protect themselves from discrimination. Clearly, it is the responsibility of organizations to provide thorough training to all employees involved in hiring decisions. However, this is not always the case, and even when training is provided, the content is not always effectively transferred to work activities (Baldwin et al., 2017). Thus, we highlight humor as an active strategy to arm applicants with a specific, evidence-informed behavior to reduce the potential harm of interpersonal anxiety and its effects on work-related and social outcomes.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Key limitations of Studies 1 and 2 include assessing virtual rather than face-to-face interactions and constructing experimental frames rather than testing real harassment issues in organizations. However, we replicated and extended these findings with a more generalizable and externally valid design in Study 3. Although Study 3 examined applicant humor in real interactions, representing a key strength, we cannot rule out misattribution (i.e., recalling a joke by someone other than applicant 2; a similar concern was raised by Bitterly et al., 2017). Paired with the clear, causal links and converging results across studies, this seems less concerning.

Given the emerging evidence of post-#MeToo effects on mixed-gender mentoring (e.g., French et al., 2021), interpersonal anxiety and humor may also shape initial interactions in other professional contexts. For example, can employees use humor to successfully manage a stigmatized identity (see Meisenbach, 2010; Ruggs et al., 2019)? We encourage future research to test humor as a proactive interpersonal or impression management strategy in these areas.

Finally, a question raised by a reviewer: is interpersonal anxiety higher in-person versus online? Means from our three studies suggest lower interpersonal anxiety in Study 3 ($M = 2.52$),

in which most (80.6%) of the interviews were conducted in-person, than in Studies 1 and 2 ($M_s = 2.62 - 2.77$), in which all of the interviews were conducted online.¹⁷ With the rise in virtual interviews, future research should more thoroughly explore this idea and its implications.

Conclusion

Across three experiments, results showed that mixed-gender job interviews increased interpersonal anxiety and multiple downstream relational and employment consequences, especially in contexts where gender was more salient. Although positive humor reduced this interpersonal anxiety and its consequences for female applicants, it incurred more consequences for male applicants. Indeed, sexual workplace humor has been shown to be risky (Bitterly et al., 2017), but our findings show that even positive, non-sexual workplace humor can also be *risqué* for men. These results provide empirical evidence of #MeToo backlash in workplace gender relations while also pointing to positive humor as a proactive tool for female applicants.

¹⁷ We also asked this question in Study 3, which showed that virtual (vs. in-person) interviews elicited *more* interpersonal anxiety ($b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .001$). This may be, in part, due to the artificial nature of virtual interactions, which provide fewer social cues (Blacksmith et al., 2016).

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Table 1

Descriptives, Correlations, and Scale Reliabilities (Study 1)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Hiring context	.50	.50	-							
2. Gender Mismatch (1)	.51	.50	-.13	-						
3. Gender Mismatch (2)	.46	.50	.04	.10	-					
4. Gender Mismatch (3)	.52	.50	.00	.20**	-.03	-				
5. Participant Gender	.48	.50	.00	.01	-.01	-.00	-			
6. Interpersonal Anxiety (1)	2.75	1.12	-.02	.21**	.09	.08	.05	(.82)		
7. Interpersonal Anxiety (2)	2.77	1.16	-.04	.06	.14*	-.02	.00	.53***	(.83)	
8. Interpersonal Anxiety (3)	2.66	1.23	.10	.20**	.06	.24**	-.02	.65***	.57***	(.86)

Note. *N* = 201. (1) = Applicant 1, (2) = Applicant 2, (3) = Applicant 3. Coding is as follows: hiring context: neutral control (0), sexual harassment frame (1); gender mismatch of the evaluator-applicant dyad: same-gender (0), mixed-gender (1); evaluator gender: 0 (male), 1 (female).

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Table 2

Multi-Level Generalized Structural Equation Modeling Results (Study 1)

	Interpersonal Anxiety	Interpersonal Anxiety	Interpersonal Anxiety
Variable	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)
Constant	2.51(.03) ^{***}	2.61(.12) ^{***}	2.53(.03) ^{***}
Gender-Salient Context (GSC)	0.06(.13)	-0.11(.11)	0.08(.36)
Gender Mismatch	0.38(.03) ^{***}	0.18(.12)	0.24(.02) ^{***}
Applicant Humor	-0.10(.04) ^{**}	-0.33(.09) ^{***}	-0.23(.05) ^{***}
Evaluator Gender	0.02(.14)	0.08(.32)	0.16(.11)
Gender Mismatch × GSC	-	0.21(.04) ^{***}	0.02(.18)
Gender Mismatch × Applicant Humor	-	0.29(.10) ^{**}	0.12(.18)
Applicant Humor × GSC	-	0.29(.08) ^{**}	0.12(.14)
Evaluator Gender × Gender Mismatch	-	0.03(.24)	0.06(.19)
Evaluator Gender × Applicant Humor	-	-0.14(.13)	-0.15(.29)
GSC × Gender Mismatch × Applicant Humor	-	-	0.33(.41)
Gender Mismatch × Applicant Humor × Evaluator Gender	-	-	0.03(.28)
GSC × Gender Mismatch × Evaluator Gender	-	-	0.07(.03) [*]
Variance (Latent, Multi-Level Interpersonal Anxiety)	0.77(.04)	0.78(.04)	0.77(.04)
Variance (Measured Interpersonal Anxiety)	0.54(.16)	0.53(.16)	0.52(.16)
<i>Log Pseudolikelihood</i>	-838.64	-831.09	-829.99

Note. *N* = 201. Applicant humor refers to the contrast between Applicant 1 (non-humorous) and Applicant 3 (humorous). Although Applicant 2 was also non-humorous, and it was included in the analyses for completeness, we do not show it here for parsimony and because it was mainly included as a filler applicant. For completeness, we included all three-way interactions in the final model (i.e., the 3rd column). However, the three-way interaction of gender-salient context × applicant humor × evaluator gender is not included here because doing so artificially deflated other *SEs* and was not statistically significant (i.e., *b* = -0.32, *SE* = 0.19, *p* = .101), showing further empirical support for this decision.

^{*} *p* < .05, ^{**} *p* < .01, ^{***} *p* < .001.

Table 3

Descriptives, Correlations, and Scale Reliabilities (Study 2)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender Mismatch	.51	.50	-							
2. Applicant Humor	.49	.50	-.06	-						
3. Evaluator Gender	.46	.50	.02	.00	-					
4. Interpersonal Anxiety	2.62	0.93	.15**	-.01	-.12*	(.94)				
5. Social Attraction	4.99	1.08	-.08	-.01	.01	-.47***	(.89)			
6. Willingness to Hire	4.87	1.20	-.03	-.01	.08	-.31***	.62***	(.94)		
7. Avoidance	2.42	1.18	.02	.00	-.10*	.37***	-.66***	-.79***	(.89)	
8. Sexual behaviors	3.08	1.27	-.02	.09	.00	.37***	-.39***	-.34***	.42***	(.90)

Note. *Ns* = 385 - 386. Coding is as follows: gender mismatch of the evaluator-applicant dyad: same-gender (0), mixed-gender (1); applicant humor: no humor (0), humor (1); evaluator gender: 0 (male), 1 (female).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Path Analysis Results (Study 2)

	Interpersonal Anxiety	Interpersonal Anxiety	Social Attraction	Willingness to Hire	Avoidance	Social Attraction	Willingness to Hire	Avoidance
Variable	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Constant	2.58(.09)***	2.62(.13)***	2.50(1.48)†	5.99(1.67)***	1.73(1.63)	5.42(1.36)***	8.20(1.63)***	-0.83(1.56)
Gender Mismatch	0.28(.09)**	0.29(.17)†	-1.47(1.05)	0.75(1.18)	-0.82(1.15)	-0.51(0.94)	1.48(1.13)	-1.67(1.08)
Evaluator Gender	-0.23(.09)*	-0.32(.19)†	-0.78(1.10)	1.48(1.24)	-1.61(1.21)	-0.22(0.98)	1.90(1.18)	-2.10(1.13)†
Applicant Humor	-0.00(.09)	0.14(.17)	-2.07(1.06)†	0.60(1.19)	-0.18(1.16)	-1.05(0.95)	1.37(1.14)	-1.07(1.09)
Gender Mismatch × Evaluator Gender	-	-0.02(.26)	0.72(0.68)	-0.69(0.77)	0.75(0.75)	0.14(0.61)	-1.12(0.74)	1.24(.0.70)†
Gender Mismatch × Applicant Humor	-	-0.50(.25)*	1.54(0.66)*	-0.26(0.75)	-0.03(0.73)	0.73(0.60)	-0.87(0.72)	0.68(0.69)
Evaluator Gender × Applicant Humor	-	-0.33(.26)	1.23(0.69)†	-0.55(0.78)	0.27(0.76)	0.51(0.62)	-1.10(0.75)	0.90(0.71)
Gender Mismatch × Evaluator Gender × Applicant Humor	-	1.09(.37)***	-0.94(0.43)*	0.26(0.49)	-0.08(0.48)	-0.38(0.39)	0.68(0.47)	-0.57(0.45)
Interpersonal Anxiety	-	-	-	-	-	-0.53(0.05)***	-0.40(0.07)***	0.46(0.06)***
<i>Log Pseudolikelihood</i>	-1350.13	-503.14		-2087.88			-2543.55	

Note. *N* = 386. Coding is as follows: gender mismatch of the evaluator-applicant dyad: same-gender (0), mixed-gender (1); applicant humor: no humor (0), humor (1); evaluator sex: man (0), woman (1). Of note, the categorical variables designating the 3 versions of the stimuli (i.e., different people and jokes) are not shown here for parsimony, however, including them in the model does not change the conclusions drawn from these results.

† *p* < .10, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Table 5

Conditional Indirect Effects of Mixed- (vs. Same) Gender Dyads on the Outcomes (Study 2)

		Social Attraction				
Evaluator Gender	Applicant Humor	Indirect Effects				
	Value	Effect	Boot <i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI	
Female	No	-.146	.108	-.371	.058	
Male	No	-.155	.097	-.369	.015	
Female	Yes	-.436	.123	-.728	-.236	
Male	Yes	.114	.097	-.066	.323	
		Willingness to Hire				
Evaluator Gender	Applicant Humor	Indirect Effects				
	Value	Effect	Boot <i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI	
Female	No	-.137	.106	-.378	.047	
Male	No	-.145	.094	-.370	.007	
Female	Yes	-.408	.131	-.723	-.197	
Male	Yes	.106	.094	-.055	.322	
		Avoidance				
Evaluator Gender	Applicant Humor	Indirect Effects				
	Value	Effect	Boot <i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI	
Female	No	.146	.113	-.053	.393	
Male	No	.155	.098	-.012	.379	
Female	Yes	.465	.129	.250	.763	
Male	Yes	-.112	.098	-.330	.063	

Note. *N* = 386. Bias-corrected, bootstrap analyses and 20,000 resamples calculated with experimental stimuli fixed effects; results remain largely unaltered when calculated with a robust, sandwich estimator of variance and/or the controls. LLCI = lower-level confidence interval; ULCI = upper-level confidence interval. Bolded effects are significantly different from zero.

Table 6*Descriptives, Correlations, and Scale Reliabilities (Study 3)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender Mismatch	.40	.49	-						
2. Applicant Humor	.47	.50	-.02	-					
3. Evaluator Gender	.58	.49	.07	.04	-				
4. Gender-Salient Context	1.40	0.64	-.07	.07					
5. Interpersonal Anxiety	2.52	1.04	.01	.01	.17***	(.78)			
6. Social Attraction	5.00	1.11	-.01	.06	-.03	-.62***	(.82)		
7. Selection	4.58	2.11	.01	.08*	.00	-.32***	.43***	(.93)	
8. Rejection	2.35	1.71	-.02	-.12**	-.00	.41***	-.50***	-.84***	(.89)

Note. $N = 602$. Coding is as follows: gender mismatch of the evaluator-applicant dyad: same-gender (0), mixed-gender (1); applicant humor: no humor (0), humor (1); evaluator gender: 0 (male), 1 (female).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 7

Path Analysis Results (Study 3)

	Inter-personal Anxiety	Inter-personal Anxiety	Social Attraction	Selection	Rejection	Social Attraction	Selection	Rejection
Variable	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE_{robust}</i>)
Constant	2.45(.02) ^{***}	2.32(.30) ^{***}	5.08(.01) ^{***}	4.59(.01) ^{***}	2.43(.19) ^{***}	6.39(.02) ^{***}	5.33(.56) ^{***}	1.25(.22) ^{***}
Gender Mismatch	0.03(.01) ^{***}	0.73(.24) ^{**}	-0.02(.09)	0.04(.37)	-0.06(.33)	-0.07(.65)	1.98(1.87)	-2.05(2.20)
Evaluator Gender	-0.07(.06)	0.21(.39)	-0.07(.05)	0.03(.01) ^{***}	-0.02(.03)	0.03(.06)	0.68(1.19)	-0.63(.71)
Applicant Humor	0.02(.01) ^{***}	0.51(.18) ^{**}	0.14(.09)	0.37(.04) ^{***}	-0.42(.08) ^{***}	0.80(.08) ^{***}	1.29(.40) ^{***}	-0.72(.44)
Gender-Salient Context (GSC)	0.06(.03) [†]	0.15(.31)	-0.07(.05)	-0.16(.08) [*]	0.11(.03) ^{***}	0.24(.09) [*]	0.44(.41)	-0.22(.23)
Gender Mismatch × Evaluator Gender × Applicant Humor × GSC	-	-0.30(.05) ^{***}	-	-	-	-0.17(.76)	-3.33(.27) ^{***}	2.14(.77) ^{***}
Interpersonal Anxiety	-	-	-	-	-	-0.66(.04) ^{***}	-0.63(.07) ^{***}	0.67(.10) ^{***}
<i>Log Pseudolikelihood</i>	-878.20	-872.08	-914.39	-1300.34	-1172.30	-751.20	-1259.47	-1106.84

Note. *N* = 602. *SEs* are clustered by nationality (U.S. = 1, other = 0). Coding is as follows: gender mismatch of the evaluator-applicant dyad: same-gender (0), mixed-gender (1); applicant humor: no humor (0), humor (1); evaluator gender: 0 (male), 1 (female). For the full output with all two- and three-way interactions, see the SI.

[†] *p* < .08, ^{*} *p* < .05, ^{**} *p* < .01, ^{***} *p* < .001

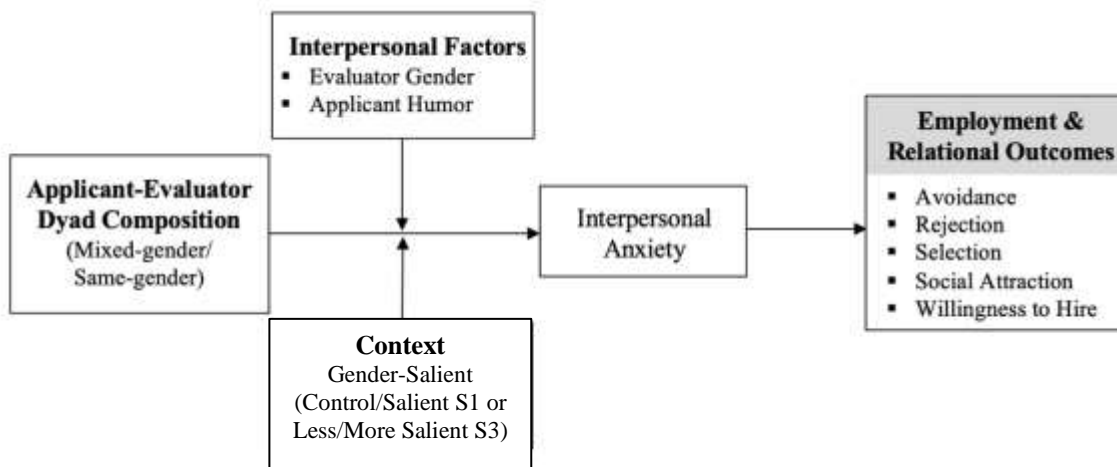


Figure 1. Complete conceptual model

Note. S1 = Study 1, S3 = Study 3.

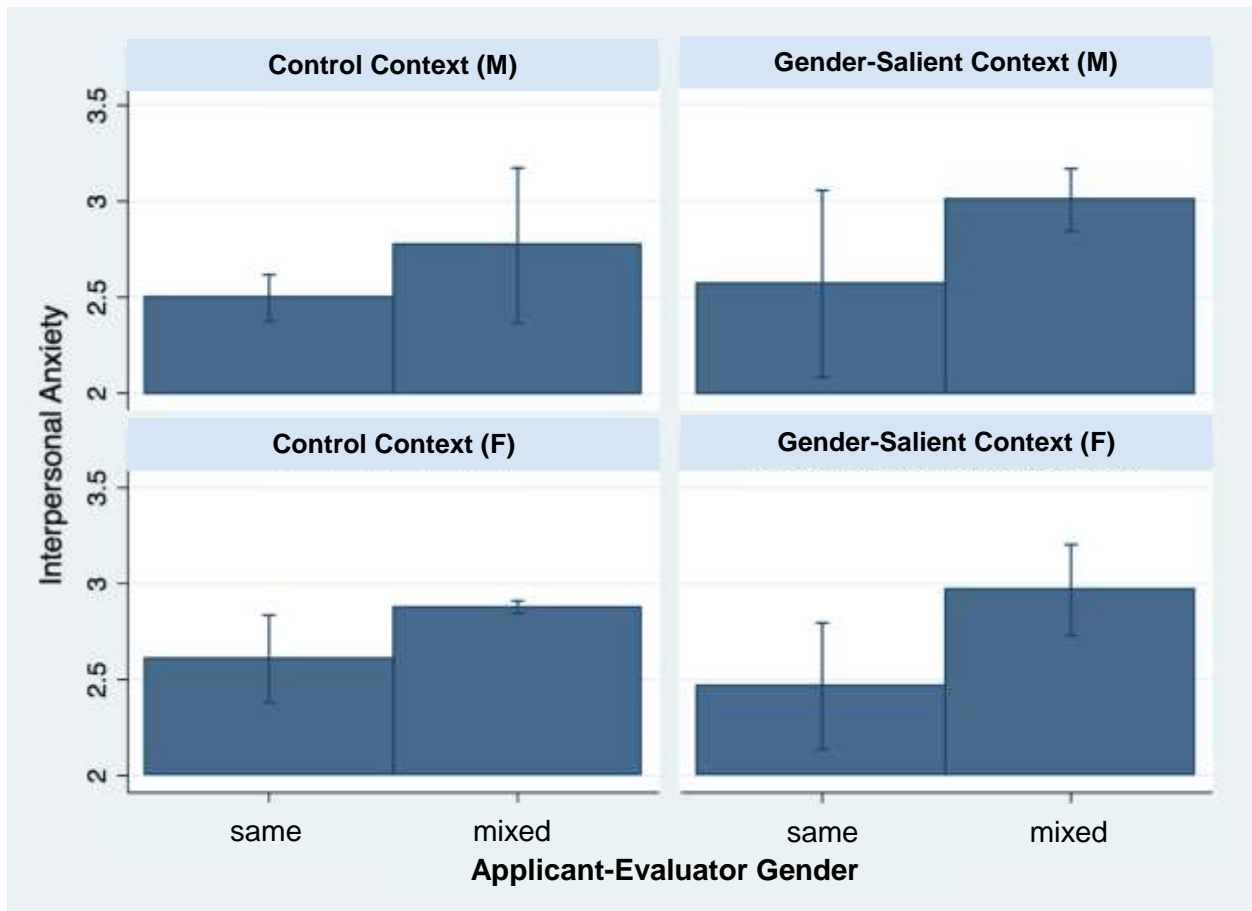


Figure 2. $N = 201$. Interpersonal anxiety fixed effects according to applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, gender-salient context, and evaluator gender (M = male evaluator, F = female evaluator; Study 1).

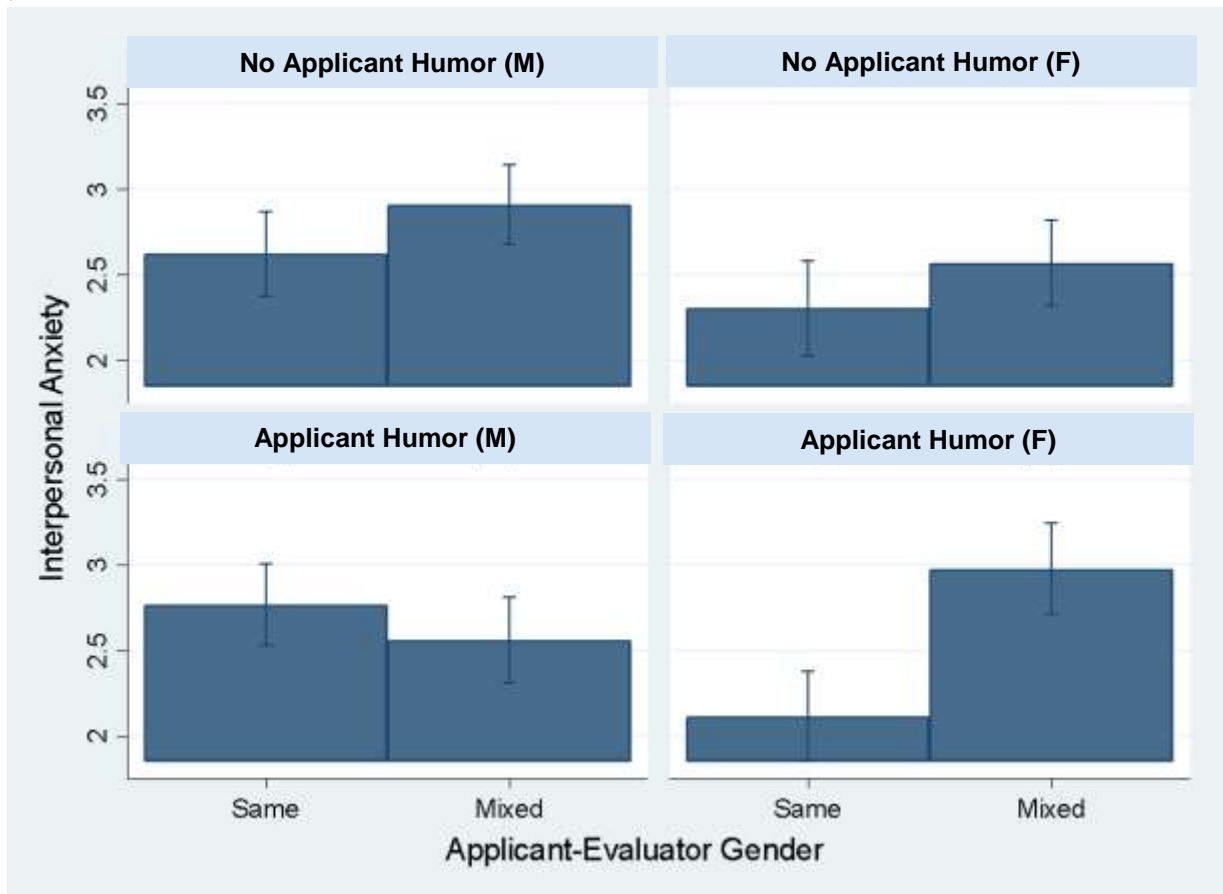


Figure 3. *N* = 386. Outcomes according to applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, applicant humor, and evaluator gender (M = male evaluator, F = female evaluator; Study 2).

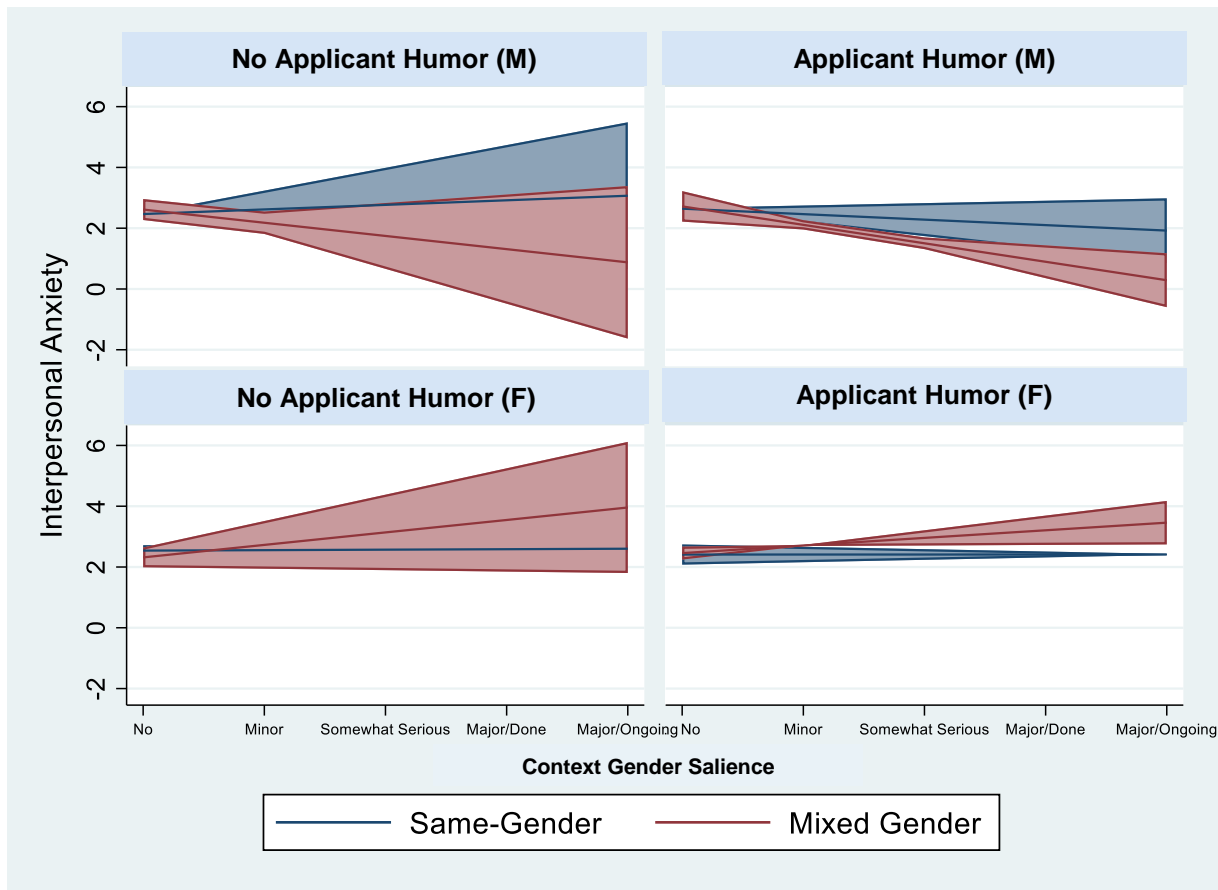


Figure 4. $N = 602$. Interpersonal anxiety by applicant-evaluator gender mismatch (same- vs. mixed-gender dyads), applicant humor, gender-salient context, and evaluator gender (M = male evaluator, F = female evaluator; Study 3).

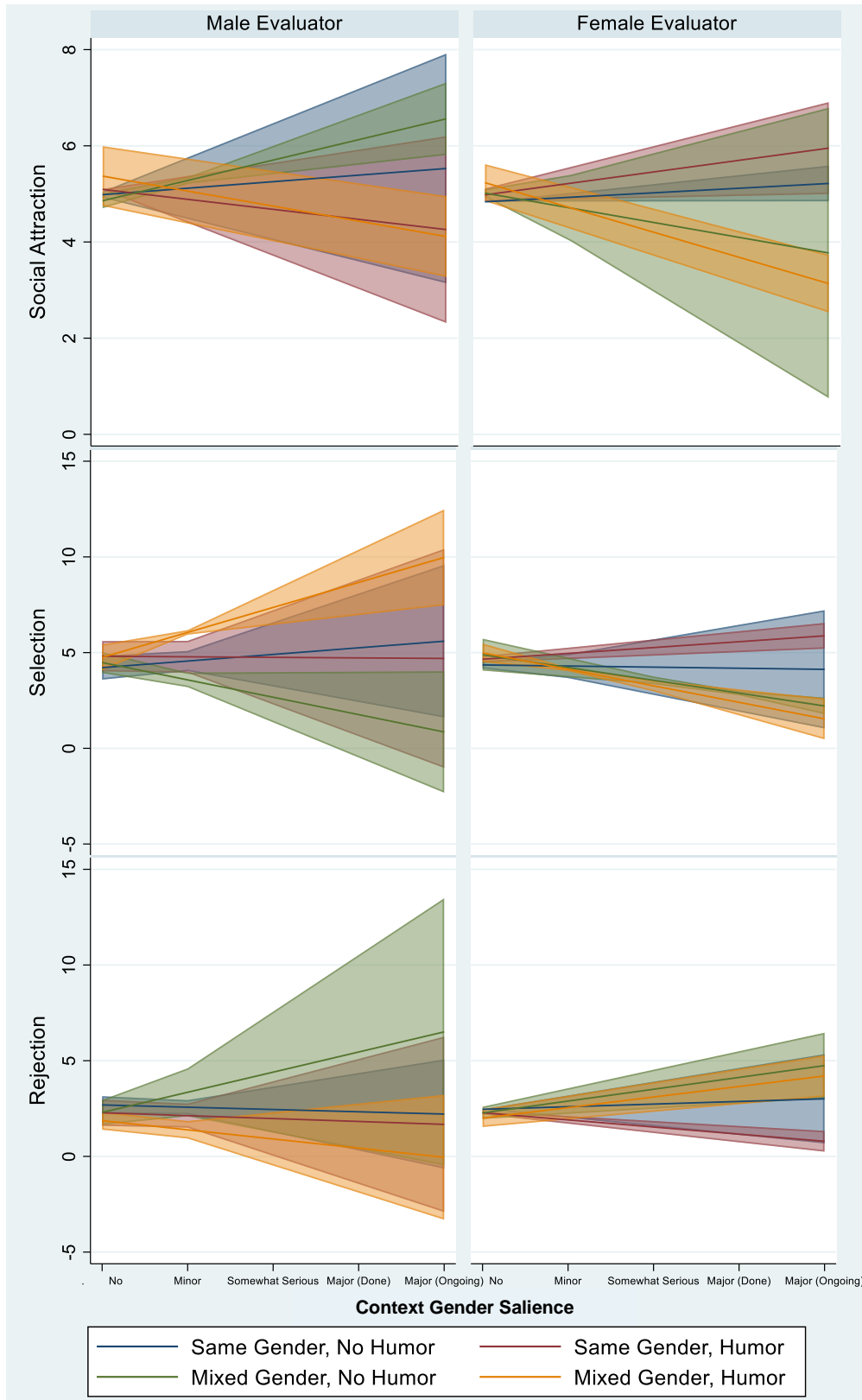


Figure 5. $N = 602$. Outcomes by applicant-evaluator gender mismatch, applicant humor, gender-salient context, and evaluator gender (Study 3).

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION available [here](#).