

Climbing to the Top: How Gender, Race & Ethnicity Influence Perceptions of Status in the Workplace

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Introduction

Although we see diversity growing, gender and race still play a role in how one is perceived and how one advances or gets rewarded in a workplace setting. For those who aren't part of the dominate race, gender or both, people react differently towards them, especially when they display an emotion associated with negative behaviors that is linked with a specific gender or race (Zammuner, 2000). This can be seen in Zammuner (2000), who found that people believe men are able to intervene and handle any type of situation that is presented meanwhile women aren't capable of intervening because they are not able to control their emotions. These stereotypes can lead to discrimination in a workplace and subconsciously people may view women/women of color or men of color in a negative light relative to their white male counterparts which may affect how they are treated (Brescoll, 2016). In fact, Brescoll (2016) found that women are seen as communal and less agentic and when acting in a dominate, independent or aggressive manner they are perceived as unfit to serve the role of a successful leader. Moreover, Tiedens (2001) revealed that emotional expressions for both men and women provide a short-hand communication of traits; sadness communicates warmth and anger communicates competence. The attributions a person makes about someone of color or of another gender, hinders that person's advancement in the workplace. Although gender and race have been explored separately as an influencing factor on the attributions made of a person in power (e.g., see Tiedens, 2001), they have yet to be explored together. This study investigates the influence both race and gender may have on the attributions made in a workplace setting, specifically those made about males or females of color who display anger when in a position of power in the workplace. It is hypothesized that race and/or gender have an influence on the attributions people make about white males and female versus males and females of color. Internal attributions will more often be made about angry females and angry males of color when in a position of authority due to stereotypes that portray females as incapable of controlling their emotions and males of color being an angry person.

Method

Participants

Thirty-five undergraduate students (six males and twenty-eight females), seven employees of an engineering firm (five males and one female) and six police officers from a local prison participated (nine males and five females) in this field study. Participants ranged in age from 18-68 years. Participants who were part of the college's participant pool received a ½ credit towards their research requirement. Participants outside of the college participant pool did not receive any compensation.

Materials

An online questionnaire which was delivered through Qualtrics was used in this study. The questionnaire was made up of a consent form, a set of videos designed to represent an angry or calm display of emotion presented by an authority figure in a workplace who was either male or female, white or a person of color. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions designed to assess external and internal attributions made about each authority figure. In addition, there were five post study questions design to assess suspicion. Lastly, participants were presented with a demographic form and debriefing form.

Procedure

Researchers sent an email to a college community, a local engineering firm and a local prison. Participants were invited to take part in this study and were provided a link which directed them to the consent form. Participants then viewed two videos displaying a supervisor in a state of anger or calmness. There were a total of eight conditions (male/person of color angry, male person of color calm, female/person of color, angry, female/person of color calm, male/white angry, male/white, calm, female/white, angry, female/white, clam). The videos were then followed by eight attributional questions, five post study questions, a demographic form and a debriefing form.

Results

A mixed factorial analysis of variance, 2(calm, angry) x2 (authority's gender) x2(authority's race) x2 (participant gender) was conducted to assess the relationship between race and gender of the authority figure in an angry and calm state and the gender of participants when answering a series of workplace questions (See Figure 1). Findings were significant in that the first effect, revealed that people were more willing to work for the male authority of color and woman of color regardless of emotion condition. The effect revealed participants found the angry white male and white female, angrier than both the angry authority of color (See Figure 2). Question four asked participants if they believed the authority figure left their house with the same mood they entered the office with and revealed the participants were more likely to attribute the strong emotional display of anger to internal attributions for that individual. Question five's effect, showed the authority figure of color were seen as angrier than the white authorities (See Figure 4). Question six also revealed, the authority figure of color were seen as the figure who'd get angry at everyone versus the white authority figures. Within items four through six, the male and female authority of color were always rated higher. These interactions show that internal attributions are often related to how the male and female authorities of color are seen as a person in which stereotypes and pre-conceived notions arise. For question seven the effect showed participants felt the calm emotional display was attributed to external factors more than the angry emotional display. The analysis also revealed participants were more likely to believe the situation caused how they reacted in the calm condition which points to an internal attribution.

When analyzing items seven and eight participants often attributed the anger expressed by white male authority figures to external attributions such as home life. In comparison to the male and female authority figures of color, participants attributed their expression of anger to internal attribution, e.g. personality.

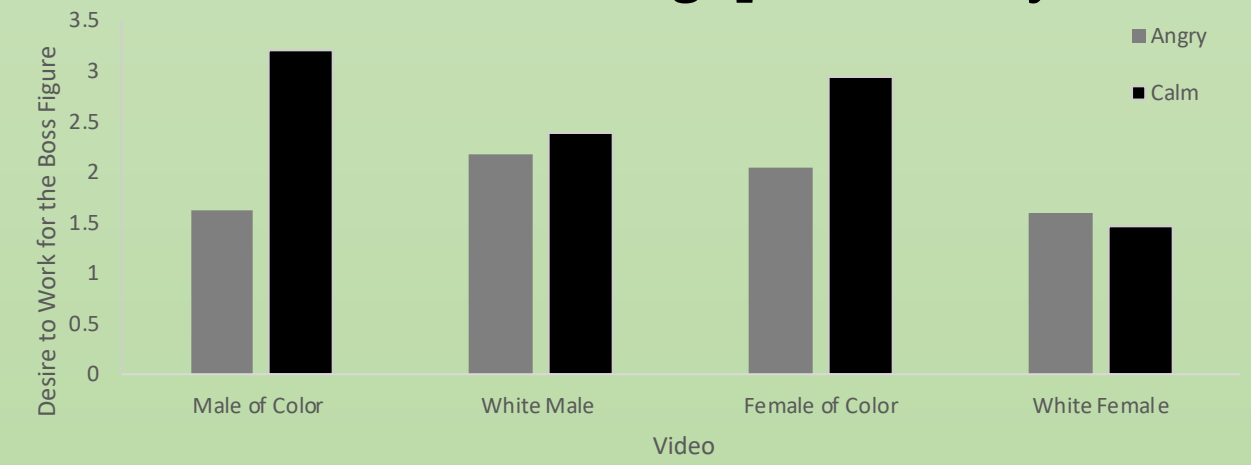


Figure 1. Partciapants' Desire to Work for Four Different Boss Figure in an Angry vs. Calm State

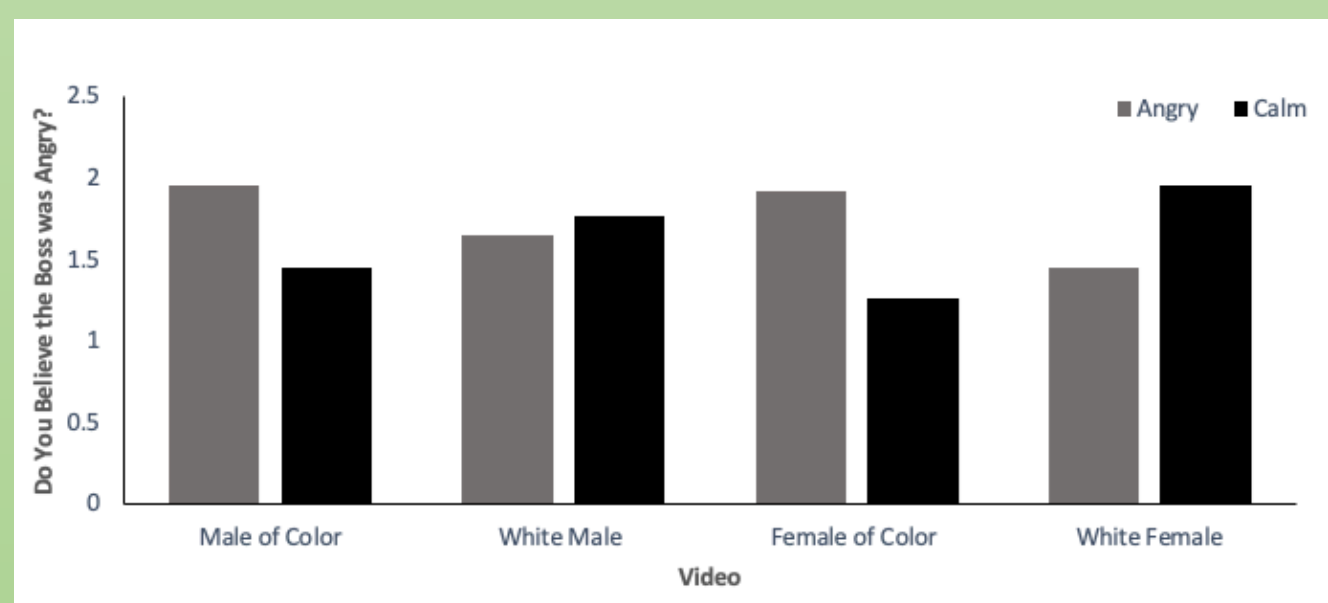


Figure 2. Partciapants' Belief on How Angry vs. Calm each Boss Figure is

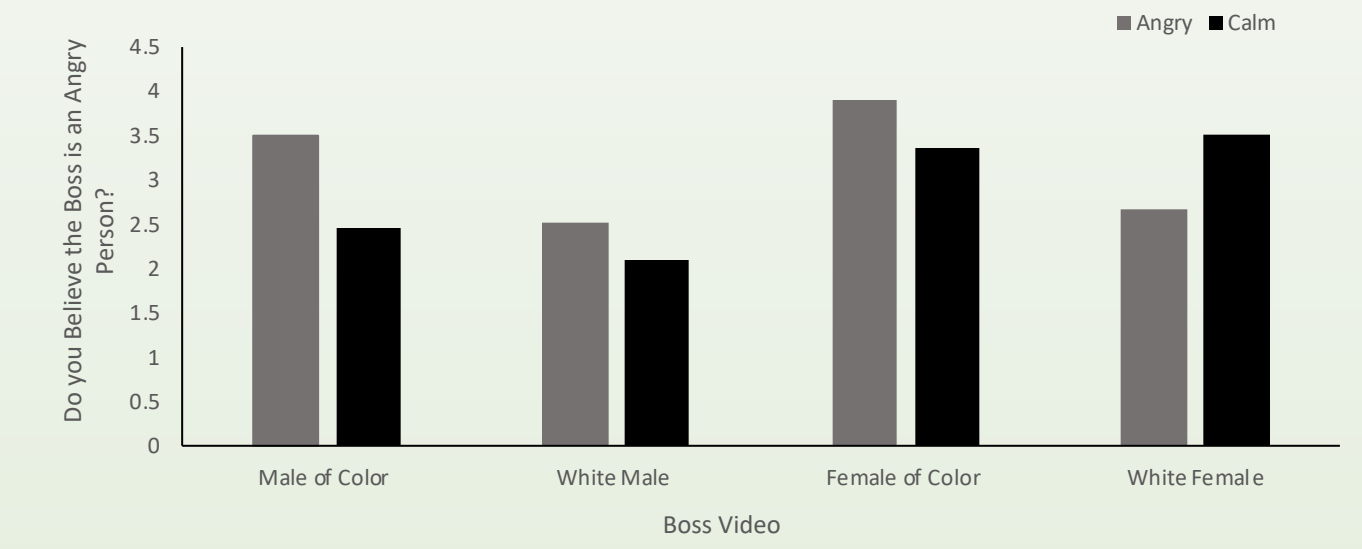


Figure 4. Level of Attribution That the Boss is an Angry Person

Conclusion

This study examined the intersectionality between race and gender and its impact on how an authority figure is perceived when displaying anger and calmness. It was hypothesized that race and gender would influence the attributions people make about White males and females or those of color and that more internal attributions would be made about angry males and females of color. The results supported the hypotheses in that participants attributed the display of anger by a white male or female to external attributions while anger displayed by a male or female of color was attributed to internal attributions. Interestingly, analyses revealed significant interactions across items examining internal attributions. These interactions displayed white females along with males and females of color being clustered together as participants attributed their anger to the authority figure's personality. External attributions were often in favor of the white male authority figure. Findings also showed participants rated white females more negatively throughout all questions, meaning participants reported that they would like to work for the white female authority figure less than all the other figures. Also, participants viewed the calm white female as angry, sometimes angrier than her white counterparts. This may be due to the stereotype that women have an inability to control their emotions. Future research should take into consideration different population perspectives such as employees that have been in the workforce for a number of years as well as from large business companies and STEM companies. Also, categorizing age when analyzing the date may present different ideologies and influence the data. The design should also be taken into consideration in order to look at the differences across conditions. The evidence in these studies can help correct implicit biases during the hiring process or when one is trying to climb up the social ladder.

References

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