Manager–Employee Communication in the #MeToo Era:
The Role of Gender Similarity and Context Ambiguity in Ethical Leadership

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Sexual harassment is a widespread problem in the American workplace. Managers must understand how their employees perceive ethical leadership in this context. This includes current undergraduates—managers' future employees. Undergraduates are entering the workforce in a climate of heightened awareness due to the #MeToo movement and federally required collegiate sexual violence training. Grounded in scholarship on ethical leadership and feminist standpoint theory, the experiment compares U.S. undergraduates' perceptions of male and female managers across common workplace scenarios and examines their evaluations of managers' traits and behaviors. Analysis reveals (a) what manager behavior is deemed ethical, (b) a general preference for female managers, and (c) that women evaluate female managers more positively than male managers. This study's findings provide important implications for employee–manager communicative exchanges.

Keywords: ethical leadership, feminist standpoint theory, sexual harassment, workplace harassment

The #MeToo movement augmented the American workplace and conceptions of ethical behavior (Williams & Lebsock, 2018). Almost half of male managers now report being "uncomfortable" participating in common work activities with women, such as working alone in an office together or socializing outside of work (Cho, 2019). Further, the percent of male managers who say they are uncomfortable mentoring a female employee has tripled since before #MeToo: from 5% to 16% (Cho, 2019). This puts women at a distinct disadvantage because a lack of mentorship could impede their upward mobility. Additionally, two thirds of male leaders say they fear how these common workplace activities may get misconstrued (Bennhold, 2019). These survey results indicate that one result of #MeToo is that everyday workplace exchanges fall into a questionable gray area for some managers. Do these gray areas exist for employees? Do these gray areas exist for undergraduates, managers' future employees, who are witnessing this apprehension as they prepare to start their careers?

Undergraduates learn about careers from educational and work experiences, family, peers, and the media, and these experiences are part of a student's vocational anticipatory socialization (VAS) process

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(Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010). Jablin (2001) defined VAS as how individuals develop "beliefs concerning how people communicate in particular occupations and in formal and informal work settings" (p. 734). Current and recent undergraduates' VAS has also been further affected by two significant factors related to sexual harassment. First, their VAS stage coincided with the #MeToo movement and its revelations about sexual misconduct in the workplace.[1] Potential exposure to #MeToo discourse on social media is important because students use social media for career preparation (e.g., Fetherston, Cherney, & Bunton, 2018). Second, these students are also among the first generation of students to enter the workforce with mandatory sexual violence training. The Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act was enacted in 2015 and requires institutions to provide sexual violence awareness, education, and prevention programs to enrolled students ("Campus SaVE Act," 2018). Students also learn about consent and bystander intervention, which helps students recognize potentially inappropriate or harmful situations. Exposure to #MeToo and this training may affect undergraduates' perceptions of the workplace. To assess these perceptions, this study asks current U.S. college students to evaluate communicative exchanges between themselves and a hypothetical manager at the start of a new job. Male and female students were randomly assigned to one of three common workplace exchanges involving either a male or female manager and then asked to evaluate the manager's traits, behaviors, and ethical leadership.

This study makes three contributions. First, we extend previous work on gender differences in perceptions of appropriate behaviors in social-sexual situations (Dougherty, 2001; Garlick, 1994). To do so, we use feminist standpoint theory to examine students' perceptions of appropriate manger behaviors. Second, we examine gender differences in ambiguous situations. Previous research has found greater differences in individuals' perceptions of appropriateness in "more ambiguous behaviors" than in extreme behaviors (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). Has greater awareness via #MeToo, its subsequent media coverage, and students' training flattened these differences? Finally, by examining the interaction of different- and same-sex participant and manager dyads, we extend previous work that had focused on only male–female relations. As more women move up the managerial ladder, it is important to examine how their sex and power via title affect interactions with male and female employees. Effective leadership depends on leaders understanding both their own behavior and others' behavior preferences to avoid misunderstandings (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Consequently, this study's findings provide important implications for theorizing about ethical leadership and gender relations, and practical applications for approaching employee-manager exchanges.

Ethical Leadership and Employee–Manager Interactions

Managers have incentive to be perceived as ethical leaders. Ethical leaders demonstrate normatively appropriate behavior via their actions and interpersonal relationships and by promoting ethical conduct to their followers (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Mayer (as cited in McQuaid, 2016) noted that research consistently shows that "employees who believe their leader is ethical are happier, more committed, perform better, are more likely to be helpful to others and less likely to behave unethically" (para. 4). Brown and colleagues (2005) found a positive relationship among ethical leadership, job

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[1] The original "Me Too" movement was launched in 2006 by Tarana Burke, and the viral #MeToo movement in the wake of allegations against Harvey Weinstein began in the fall of 2017 (Ohlheiser, 2017).

satisfaction, and perceived leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, Zanin, Bisel, and Adame (2016) found that when managers talk about ethics, their employees are more willing to report unethical behavior. All of this suggests that ethical leadership begets a more positive work environment.

Ethical leadership includes a combination of traits and behaviors, and employees look for clues in interpersonal communication with leaders to determine their character (Brown et al., 2005; Kaiser & Hogan, 2010). Traits typically aligned with ethical leaders include honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness (Brown et al., 2005; Kaiser & Hogan, 2010). These traits correspond to prototypical leadership qualities (i.e., positively associated with leadership), which also include being hardworking, intelligent, dedicated, and caring, and having charisma; anti-prototypical qualities (i.e., negatively associated with leadership) include being manipulative, pushy, domineering, and power-hungry (Brown et al., 2005; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). Behaviorally, leaders can set an example for employees by, for example, treating employees fairly and discipling unethical employees (Brown et al., 2005). Craig and Gustafson (1998) developed the Perceived Leadership Integrity scale (PLIS) to assess the role of leaders' ethical integrity in their perceived effectiveness. Items include statements that measure subordinates' ratings regarding the likelihood of a leader engaging in unethical behavior, such as "deliberately fuels conflict among employees" (Craig & Gustafson, 1998, p. 143). This study combines trait and behavioral assessments to supply a multidimensional examination of ethical leadership.

Perceptions of ethical leadership can vary, however, in the context of social-sexual situations. Individuals typically agree that explicit behaviors such as physical sexual contact and coercion are clear examples of sexual harassment or assault (see Berryman-Fink & Riley, 1997; Rotundo et al., 2001). However, differences appear in the more ambiguous and subtle behaviors, such as sexual innuendos (Berryman-Fink & Riley, 1997; Rotundo et al., 2001). These exchanges may lack sufficiently clear-cut cues of (in)appropriate behavior and are consequently more prone to individual interpretation (Garlick, 1994). These ambiguous behaviors are also more common than extreme forms of harassment (see Garlick, 1994; Rotundo et al., 2001). To examine how future employees perceive managers in these exchanges, we exposed participants to one of three ambiguous scenarios—the same scenarios male managers reported avoiding because of fear that they could be misconstrued (Bennhold, 2019; Cho, 2019). In each condition, a manager says they want to get to know the new employee and invites them to come by their office, join them for lunch, or join them for drinks.

These three conditions also reflect varying levels of perceived appropriateness. Garlick (1994) asked undergraduate students to report their level of comfort with a series of professor behaviors as well as their perceptions of appropriateness. Male and female undergraduates expressed the most comfort and perceived appropriateness with a professor's invitation to their office, followed by an invitation to lunch; a request for drinks after class produced the least amount of comfort of the three (Garlick, 1994). Garlick's (1994) findings are highly applicable to our study because both studies include undergraduates and focus on invitational contexts, and the student–professor dyad mimics the uneven power dynamics of an employee–manager exchange.

Participants in Garlick's (1994) study may have ranked the scenarios differently for multiple reasons. First, Garlick (1994) posits that the conditions of the setting in which the interaction takes place

may affect perceptions, and Wilhoit (2018) asserts that organizational spaces are socially constructed. For our study, appropriateness may vary between the office and lunch/drinks conditions because the former takes place in the workplace, and the latter invitations occur outside the workplace. Meetings in the workplace setting are more common and frequent, which may normalize them, remove ambiguity, and prompt individuals to view leaders offering these interactions as more ethical. Second, the addition of alcohol and how it is perceived in the U.S. may create different perceptions. In the U.S., alcohol consumption increases perceptions of sexual availability and anticipation of consensual sex, and it has been linked to sexual assault (see Abbey, Zawacki, & McAuslan, 2000). These perceptions may prompt individuals to view drinks as less appropriate. Based on this rationale, we predict:

H1:　　　*Participants in the office and lunch conditions are more likely to view managers as ethical leaders than those in the drinks condition (H1a), and participants in the office condition are more likely to view managers as ethical leaders than those in the lunch condition (H1b).*

The Workplace Across Employees' and Managers' Sex

To further our investigation, we explore the direct effects of employee and manager sex, and the interaction of the two. To examine each of these, we build on Korabik and Ayman's (2007) multiperspective model of gender and leadership. In this model, while sex and gender are "orthogonal constructs . . . [and] theoretically independent, the sex-linked gender-role socialization that is still commonplace in Western culture means that empirically they often are not" (Korabik, 1999, pp. 12–13). While our experimental design focuses on participant and manager sex, this study is consequently linked to gender perceptions.

Korabik and Ayman's (2007) model integrates three perspectives. First, the intrapsychic perspective includes gender-role orientation, such as gender schemas and stereotypes (Bem, 1993; Korabik & Ayman, 2007). Second, the social structural perspective includes how gender influences access to power and resources. Korabik and Ayman (2007) argue that "the most important aspect of gender is the sex of the leader which acts as a stimulus for others' perceptions, observations and evaluations" (p. 3). Traditionally, this has resulted in male leaders, who have higher social status and power, being perceived more positively than lower status female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Korabik & Ayman, 2007). As discussed later, our study incorporates feminist standpoint theory to assess the influence of power, and we also push back on the traditional perspective of male dominance in leadership evaluations (see Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013). The last perspective focuses on interpersonal interactions, which are a function of gender-fueled expectations of the self and others, and these interactions can be influenced by situational cues (Deaux & Major, 1987; Korabik & Ayman, 2007). The scenarios in our study focus on interpersonal interactions, and the three scenarios act as different situational cues. Further, this perspective argues that male and female leaders will have different interactions with male and female subordinates, resulting in different outcomes for each party (Korabik & Ayman, 2007). Our study examines these different outcomes by including same- and different-sex interactions.

Regarding employees' sex, women and men may perceive ethically ambiguous interactions differently for two reasons. First, women and men differ regarding ethics and morals. Women have higher ethical standards than men in relational contexts involving the interests of others (Dawson, 1997) and regarding

business dilemmas that concern social and interpersonal issues, such as sexual exploitation and integrity of employee relations (Smith & Oakley, 1997). Further, a meta-analysis found that women are more likely to internalize moral traits in their self-definitions than men (Kennedy, Kray, & Ku, 2017). Notably, Keller (1999) found that people characterize prototypical leaders as those similar to one's self. If women have higher ethical standards, internalize those standards, and construct preferences that are similar to their self-concept, it may explain why women expect leaders to be more honest than men (see Epitropaki et al., 2013). Second, women are more likely to view a broader array of behaviors as harassment. This pattern was clear in meta-analyses conducted by Blumenthal (1998) and Rotundo and colleagues (2001), as well as in Dunn and Cody's (2000) study on undergraduates and working adults. Rotundo and associates (2001) found that men and women were similar in their perceptions of more extreme behaviors (e.g., sexual coercion), but differed on "less extreme and more ambiguous behaviors," including derogatory attitudes and dating pressure (p. 919).

Differences in ambiguous situations may occur because men and women have different standpoints. According to feminist standpoint theory, "truth is understood differently based on the status and related perspectives of the knower" (Dougherty, 2001, p. 374), and "all knowledge is contextualized and tied to location and vantage" (Sloan & Krone, 2000, p. 112).[2] Social and historic conditions create gender inequality, and these power dynamics and experiences inform men and women's partial knowledge and perspectives.

Regarding sexual harassment, Dougherty (2001) asserts that external and social forces prompt men and women to construct different role expectations. "Women are more likely to form standpoints around the expected role of the victim" (Dougherty, 2001, p. 374), creating a "power with" standpoint in which women orient toward fear of physical harm (Dougherty, 1999). Women may carry this role expectation because misogyny and violence against them is prevalent, resulting in "even minimal sexual behaviors [being] seen as potentially threatening and offensive" (Berryman-Fink & Riley, 1997, p. 37). Not all women must experience the same level or type of harassment to hold this standpoint. Collins (1997) noted that groups appear based on "their shared location in relations of power" (p. 376), and "group realities transcend individual experiences" (p. 375). Therefore, women's gender-fueled group consciousness is based on their shared marginalized power location.

Men form a "power over" standpoint based on their often-privileged role of being in power and controlling others, which also extends to their sense of masculinity and sexuality (see Dougherty, 1999). Wood (1994) argues that men historically have viewed sexual harassment as something men do to women— thus exerting power over others—and as a normal part of life. In this vein, Dougherty (2001) found that men believed sexualized behavior served a functional purpose of creating and showing camaraderie in the workplace, whereas women found such behavior to be dysfunctional and unacceptable.

In sum, women have higher ethical standards than men and expect more morality from their leaders. Additionally, women's often victimized and marginalized standpoint orients them to view more

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[2] There are many variations on and critiques of feminist standpoint theory, and it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these permutations (see Collins, 1997, for an overview). Further, as Collins (1997) and others point out, there are different locations of power within women as a group, as gender intersects with race, class, etc.

social-sexual scenarios as threatening and harassment. If women in our study are confronted with an ethically ambiguous scenario that calls into question a manager's morality, and if this scenario taps into their power with standpoint, women may be more likely to negatively evaluate managers in these scenarios than men. We predict:

H2:   Female participants are less likely than male participants to view managers as ethical leaders.

A manager's sex can also affect evaluations. As previously noted, the social structural perspective highlights that the public traditionally does not view women as meeting leadership role expectations (Korabik & Ayman, 2007). A long line of research has shown that based on constructs such as role incongruity theory, the lack of fit model, and the "think manager-think male" paradigm, stereotypes of women and leadership conflict (see Epitropaki et al., 2013). Societal perceptions of women's roles are at odds with our perceptions of leaders, such that society expects women to exhibit communal traits (e.g., kindness and sympathy), and they align agentic traits (e.g., independence and strength) with men and leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These expectations were supported by a recent Pew Research Center (2018a) study. Based on these associations, we would typically expect male managers to garner more positive evaluations than female managers.

We posit, however, that certain leadership qualities assigned to women and the #MeToo movement may shift this expectation. The public views female business leaders as more ethical. For example, when asked whether women or men in top business positions are better at being honest and ethical, 31% said women, and 3% said men (Pew Research Center, 2018b).[3] Perhaps this is why Choi, Hong, and Lee (2018) found that an increase in female representation in organizations corresponds with an increase in organizational integrity. Female leaders' perceived moral high ground may be particularly advantageous in the current climate. Men are more likely than women to be the perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault (Kearl, 2018; Puente, 2017). Further, #MeToo has focused predominantly on powerful men being accused and/or convicted of sexual assault and harassment (Kearl, 2018). This intense emphasis on male perpetrators in the workplace may make the notion of "men as harassers" top of mind for the public. This environment, coupled with female leaders being perceived as more ethical and existing standpoints, could create a context in which male managers are perceived more negatively than female managers in workplace conditions. This environment could also shift our participants to favor ethics and integrity, traits typically aligned with women and prototypical leaders. We predict:

H3:   Participants view female managers as more ethical leaders than male managers.

At the intersection of employee and manager sex, we expect those in different-sex scenarios to express more negative impressions of managers than those in same-sex scenarios. Research has found that scenarios involving different-sex student–advisor dyads were perceived as more inappropriate to undergraduates than same-sex dyads (Burgasser & Faherty, 2009). Our prediction for the female employee–male manager dyad is based on several factors regarding women's standpoints. First, as previously noted, female leaders are perceived as more ethical than male leaders. This perception may prompt female

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[3] The remaining 64% said there was no difference.

employees to interpret female managers' invitations as more ethical and benign. Second, women's standpoint regarding sexual harassment is oriented toward being the victim and men being the perpetrators, and this may lower women's evaluations of male managers' ethics. These standpoints are informed by a number of factors. Women are more likely to report that their perpetrator was male, and women are 2 1/2 times more likely than men to say their perpetrator was their boss (Kearl, 2018). Further, the media focuses on male perpetrators and female victims (Serisier, 2016), which may socialize women to perceive different-sex scenarios more negatively. During the VAS phase, female future employees may have been exposed to these hostile workplace conditions vicariously through family, friends, or the media. Per Korabik and Ayman's (2007) multiperspective model, it is possible that when confronted with a male manager making an ambiguous proposition, female participants may evaluate that manager more negatively than when the proposition comes from a woman.

Men's standpoint may also be motivating their interpretation of events. Men are oriented toward fears of false accusations of harassment (Dougherty, 1999) and a concern regarding how events may get misconstrued (Bennhold, 2019). These standpoints were evident in a Pew Research Center (2018c) survey conducted after #MeToo went viral, which found that 55% of men think that the increased focus on sexual harassment has made it harder for men to know how to interact with women in the workplace. Further, when asked which answer would be considered a major problem regarding sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, men were slightly more likely than women to answer, "Employers firing accused men before finding out all the facts" (Pew Research Center, 2018c, para. 2). In the current climate, future male employees about to start their careers may see the workplace as more precarious than before, and this may prompt male participants to be more likely to call out female managers' questionable behavior because of fear of being perceived as engaging in or condoning inappropriate behavior. This leads us to expect:

H4:   *Participants in the female employee–male manager (H4a) and male employee–female manager (H4b) dyads are less likely to view managers as ethical leaders than participants in the corresponding same-sex dyads.*

Method

We conducted a 2 × 2 × 3 experiment: participant sex (man or woman) by manager sex (man or woman) by workplace exchange (office, lunch, or drinks).

Participants

Participants were recruited from the undergraduate communication research pool at a large southern university in the United States from April to July 2018. A total of 557 participants started the study, but 39 did not finish the study and were removed. We also used another technique to determine participant inclusion. After participants read a hypothetical employee–manager scenario, they were asked an open-ended question: "What are your thoughts about the request of the boss?" The open-ended question enabled participants to engage in a deeper meaning-making process because they had to use their own words to describe their perceptions. The Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program was used to assess how engaged participants were in their responses. LIWC is an automated textual analysis program that assesses

psychologically meaningful categories. LIWC's composite Analytic score was used because it evaluates participants' formal, logical, and hierarchical thinking (Pennebaker, Chung, Frazee, Lavergne, & Beaver, 2014). Responses ranged from 1 to 151 words (M = 29.67, SD = 19.21). The Analytic score ranged from 0 to 99 (M = 49.91, SD = 33.34). Participants who had a score of less than 15.00, and thus showed a lower level of cognitive engagement with the scenario, were excluded from the study (n = 103).

After these exclusions, we had 415 participants (247 women, 167 men, and 1 other). The average age of participants was 20.91 (SD = 2.44, range: 18–41). Participants identified as White (327), Asian (45), Hispanic or Latino/a/x (34), American Indian or Alaska Native (32), Black or African American (27), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1), and Other (4); participants were allowed to select more than one racial or ethnic group. Participants represented a variety of majors, including, but not limited to, communication, business, marketing, psychology, and nursing. Participants reported that they had work experience as part-time employees (n = 403), full-time employees (n = 105), part-time volunteers (n = 216), full-time volunteers (n = 25), and being self-employed (n = 57); participants were allowed to report more than one type of prior employment. The only prescreening requirement was that participants be 18 or older. Participation was voluntary, and participants received extra credit as compensation for completing the study.

Measures

Four factors were used to measure ethical leadership, including three scales and a single-item measure. All items for each scale were randomized to buffer participant fatigue and avoid order bias. All items were measured on a 0–100 sliding scale. The intercorrelation matrix and descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Evaluative Criteria.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Prototypical Traits	61.47	20.61			
2. Anti-Prototypical Traits	20.45	16.11	−.47***		
3. Likelihood to Harass	24.03	22.49	−.41***	.73***	
4. Manager Integrity	80.62	17.22	.48***	−.79***	−.66***

Note. Items include all conditions.
***p < .001.

Prototypical and Anti-prototypical Traits. Manager traits were measured on a 14-item scale based on previous research on prototypical and anti-prototypical traits (e.g., Offermann et al., 1994). Participants were asked to rate how correctly each adjective described the manager, from *incorrect* = 0 to *correct* = 100. Confirmatory factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed two distinct factors. All items only loaded on one factor at greater than .60 with no crossloaders over .30. Composite variables were created and labeled prototypical and anti-prototypical traits. Prototypical traits referred to attributes that most managers should desire to have (e.g., caring, honest), and was reliable (a = .910). Anti-prototypical traits included characteristics that most managers would not want to be identified with (e.g. aggressive, pushy), and was reliable (a = .879).

Manager Integrity. Ethical leadership was also measured using Craig and Gustafson's (1998) PLIS. This scale had 31 items and asked participants to rate managers on how well the items described the manager, from 0 = *extremely unlikely* to 100 = *extremely likely*. Sample scale items included "Would lie to me," "Lacks high morals," and "Is evil." Wording and anchors from the original PLIS were used. In the original scale, higher scores indicated that the manager was exhibiting less integrity. To aid in interpretation, we reverse coded so that a higher score reflected participants perceiving the manager as having more integrity in terms of character and conduct. Because this is a validated scale, confirmatory factor analysis was performed to ensure that participants answered in line with previous research. The scale was reliable (a = .983).

Likelihood to Harass. The PLIS does not include an explicit item on harassment, so we developed one and kept it separate to avoid obfuscating outcomes for a direct measure. We asked participants to rate managers on a scale from 0 = *definitely false* to 100 = *definitely true* for the following statement: "This manager is likely to commit an act of harassment." This item had an acceptable skewness and kurtosis (< 1.0).

Overall, the items were not significantly skewed, and there were no noted issues regarding kurtosis. The final composite items were tested for correlations to avoid multicollinearity. The measures were moderately correlated, but not greater than .80 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012).

Procedures

Participants were asked to complete an online study using the Qualtrics platform. This study was a between-subjects design, and participants were randomly assigned to one of six hypothetical conditions. The manager's sex was indicated by his or her name and use of gendered pronouns. As an example, the office condition is listed next.

> Imagine that you have just been hired to work as a customer service representative at a large financial institution. One day your boss, [Danielle/Daniel], comes over and begins to talk with you. After some small talk, [Danielle/Daniel] says that [she/he] tries to learn as much as [she/he] can about [her/his] employees, so [she/he] can help them as much as possible. Before [she/he] leaves, [she/he] asks that you come by [her/his] office when you get a chance so that you can get to know each other better.

To change the condition, the line "asks that you come by her office when you get a chance" was changed to "asks you to join her for lunch" in the lunch condition, and "asks you to join her for drinks" in the drinks condition. These three scenarios were selected because the aim of this study was to understand perceptions of manager integrity in ambiguous everyday work scenarios; these situations are the most common and also ones in which differences in perceptions of appropriateness are most likely to arise (Garlick, 1994; Rotundo et al., 2001). A manipulation check with another undergraduate sample confirmed that participants were significantly likely to correctly identify the sex of the manager and invitation type (e.g., lunch versus drinks) in their randomly assigned scenario.

After the scenario, participants were asked to choose yes or no to "I have read and understood the scenario above." Participants could not answer this question until 30 seconds had elapsed to prevent any tendency to click through the scenario without reading it. Participants then completed the previously mentioned open-ended question before completing the scales.

Results

The first portion of H1 predicted that participants in the office and lunch conditions would rate managers as more ethical than those in the drinks condition. One-way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs), with post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni correction, were conducted. Higher scores indicate participants were more likely to believe the manager portrayed these traits/could enact these behaviors. An ethical leader would have higher scores on prototypical traits and manager integrity, and lower sources on anti-prototypical traits and likelihood to harass. Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations for each comparison.

Table 2. MANOVA Tests of Evaluative Criteria in Each General Condition.

Conditions	Prototypical Traits	Anti-Proto. Traits	Likelihood to Harass	Manager Integrity
Office	64.67 (18.72)	19.71 (15.63)	21.85 (20.20)	82.60 (18.69)
Lunch	64.70 (21.00)	15.90 (13.17)	19.50 (21.59)	84.44 (14.36)
Drinks	55.18 (20.77)	25.46 (17.72)	30.50 (24.13)	75.01 (19.24)
F	11.56***	14.40***	10.65***	13.70***

Note. Mean listed, *SD* in parentheses.
***$p < .001$.

There was a significant effect of workplace condition on prototypical traits, $F(2, 461) = 11.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .048$. Managers in the office and lunch conditions were rated more positively than in the drinks condition, both $p < .001$. Results for anti-prototypical traits were significant, $F(2, 461) = 14.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .059$. Managers in the drinks condition were rated as more likely to display anti-prototypical traits than those in office ($p < .01$) and lunch conditions ($p < .001$). Ratings of likelihood to harass were significant, $F(2, 461) = 13.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .056$. Managers in the office and lunch conditions were rated as less likely to harass than in the drinks condition, both $p < .001$. Finally, results for manager integrity were significant, $F(2, 390) = 12.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .060$. Managers in the drinks condition were rated more negatively than those in the other conditions, both $p < .001$. H1a was fully supported: Managers in the drinks condition scored in the hypothesized direction for each comparison on each measure.

The same MANOVA results were analyzed to test H1b, which predicted that participants in the office condition would have more favorable evaluations than those in the lunch condition. Although the MANOVA was significant, there were no significant results that supported H1b.

H2 proposed female participants would evaluate managers, regardless of manager sex, as less ethical than male participants. MANOVA was conducted. The only significant difference between male and female participants was on likelihood to harass, $F(1, 462) = 4.20$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .017$. Men rated managers less likely to harass than women ($MD = 4.36$). Table 3 provides these findings. H2 was minimally supported.

Table 3. MANOVA Tests of Male and Female Participants.

Participant Sex	Prototypical Traits	Anti-Proto. Traits	Likelihood to Harass	Manager Integrity
Woman	60.11 (22.47)	19.87 (16.47)	25.76 (23.65)	80.71 (18.06)
Man	63.54 (17.26)	21.33 (15.56)	21.40 (20.37)	80.46 (15.90)
F	3.10	0.91	4.20*	0.02

Note. Mean listed, *SD* in parentheses.
*$p < .05$

Two-way MANOVAs with post hoc analyses using Bonferroni correction were conducted to assess any differences between participants for each condition. There was a significant effect of participant sex on prototypical traits, $F(2, 462) = 15.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .062$. In the drinks condition, women ($M = 51.58$, $SD = 22.13$) rated managers as less likely to display these positive traits than men ($M = 61.85$, $SD = 16.15$, $p < .05$). All other post hoc comparisons in the same condition were nonsignificant.

H3 predicted that female managers would be rated as more ethical than male managers. According to MANOVA results, H4 was supported on every variable. Table 4 provides the means and standard deviations for each comparison. Men scored lower than women on prototypical traits, $F(1, 462) = 15.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .062$, and manager integrity, $F(1, 462) = 6.68$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .028$. Men scored higher than women on anti-prototypical traits, $F(1, 462) = 15.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .065$, and likelihood to harass, $F(1, 462) = 25.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .098$.

Table 4. MANOVA Tests of Male and Female Managers.

Manager Sex	Prototypical Traits	Anti-Proto. Traits	Likelihood to Harass	Manager Integrity
Woman	65.10 (19.32)	17.53 (14.11)	18.99 (18.44)	82.65 (16.68)
Man	57.77 (21.26)	23.42 (17.46)	29.17 (24.97)	78.54 (17.55)
F	15.15***	15.97***	25.023***	6.68**

Note. Mean listed, SD in parentheses.
**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

An additional two-way MANOVA was conducted to assess any differences for each condition. Post hoc analyses with Bonferroni correction revealed significant differences in the lunch condition for prototypical traits, $F(5, 458) = 9.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .094$. Male managers ($M = 57.27$, $SD = 20.74$) scored lower than female managers ($M = 71.84$, $SD = 19.15$), $p < .001$. In the drinks condition, male managers ($M = 38.42$, $SD = 25.47$) scored higher than female managers ($M = 22.68$, $SD = 19.97$) on likelihood to harass, $F(5, 458) = 10.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .104$.

The next set of hypotheses examined the interaction of employee and manager sex. Female (H4a) and male (H4b) participants were predicted to rate same-sex managers more positively than different-sex managers, regardless of condition. MANOVA results indicated significant differences between same-sex and different-sex ratings for prototypical traits, $F(3, 460) = 7.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .078$; anti-prototypical traits, $F(3, 460) = 6.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .068$; likelihood to harass, $F(3, 460) = 14.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .135$; and manager integrity, $F(3, 460) = 3.48$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .037$. Female participants rated female managers significantly different than male managers on every variable (see Table 5). Women rated female managers

higher than male managers for prototypical traits *(p < .001)* and manager integrity *(p < .01)*. Women rated male managers as more likely to portray anti-prototypical traits *(p < .001)* and to harass *(p < .001)* than female managers. There were no significant differences between the ratings of men with male managers versus female managers. H4a was supported, but H4b was not supported.

Table 5. MANOVA Tests of Same- and Different-Sex Participant–Manager Dyads.

Participant Sex	Manager Sex	Prototypical Traits	Anti-Proto. Traits	Likelihood to Harass	Manager Integrity
Female	Male	54.84***	23.81***	33.69***	80.28**
		(22.85)	(18.66)	(26.51)	(14.04)
	Female	65.45***	15.87***	17.72***	84.03**
		(20.82)	(12.78)	(16.98)	(15.98)
Male	Male	62.41	22.79	22.00	80.28
		(17.59)	(15.45)	(20.50)	(14.04)
	Female	64.60	19.96	20.84	80.63
		(16.97)	(15.61)	(20.35)	(17.53)
	F	7.71***	6.68***	14.35***	3.48*

Note. Mean listed, *SD* in parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Additional two-way MANOVAs were conducted to assess any differences between same-sex and different-sex dyads across conditions. Results indicated significant differences among conditions in prototypical traits, $F(11, 452) = 6.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .131$; anti-prototypical traits, $F(11, 452) = 5.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .111$; likelihood to harass $F(11, 452) = 6.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .142$; and manager integrity, $F(11, 452) = 3.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .084$. Post hoc analyses with Bonferroni correction revealed that for prototypical traits, significant differences occurred in the lunch condition: Women who were subordinate to male managers ($M = 54.97$, $SD = 21.76$) reported lower evaluations than did women with female managers ($M = 72.40$, $SD = 21.63$), $p < .01$. Significant differences were also found in the drinks condition for anti-prototypical traits and likelihood to harass. Women with male managers evaluated them as more likely to portray anti-prototypical traits ($M = 30.27$, $SD = 19.09$) than did women with female managers ($M = 19.51$, $SD = 15.37$), $p < .001$. Similarly, women with male managers evaluated them as more likely to harass ($M = 44.47$, $SD = 24.44$) than did women with female managers ($M = 21.08$, $SD = 18.54$)$, p < .001$.

Discussion

The #MeToo movement created a ripple effect across the U.S. workforce. Johnny Taylor, CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management, said the movement "created this HR level of activity like nothing we've ever seen" (Noguchi, 2018, para. 2). From handling complaints, to launching investigations and conducting trainings, Taylor said the movement's effect was pervasive (Noguchi, 2018). One effect of the movement is that managers increasingly need to know what exchanges are appropriate, especially for newer employees and across gendered dyads. We posit that this is necessary for three reasons. First, communication between employees and managers is important during the entry phrase because these initial exchanges influence employees' perceptions of their managers, as well as employees' subsequent attitudes

and behaviors (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Kramer, 2010). Second, a social learning approach proposes that managers influence the ethical conduct of their employees via modeling (Brown et al., 2005). If managers want an ethical workplace, then their communication in this entry phase, and what type of ethical leadership it models, is key. Finally, if male managers are reluctant to engage with and mentor junior women because of how such interactions may be interpreted (Bennhold, 2019; Cho, 2019), it is important for them to know which work interactions are less likely to get misconstrued. To understand how future employees perceive ethical leadership in this climate, our study examined undergraduates' perceptions across three common workplace scenarios. This analysis yielded three important results.

First, female participants' perceptions varied based on the manager's sex, but male participants' perceptions did not. Male participants did not differ in their perceptions of male and female managers. But, as predicted, female participants rated male managers more negatively than they rated female managers across the board. This partially supports Burgasser and Faherty's (2009) finding that scenarios involving different-sex student–advisor dyads were perceived as more inappropriate than same-sex dyads. This also supports the interpersonal perspective of Korabik and Ayman's (2007) model, which argued that male and female leaders have different interactions with male and female subordinates, resulting in different outcomes for each party. Further, women's standpoints and social status may foster these differences. Women who see themselves as vulnerable because of a "power with" standpoint (Dougherty, 1999) and lower status according to Korabik and Ayman's (2007) social structural perspective may be more suspect of male managers' ethical leadership.

These standpoint and status differences also manifested in the finding that female participants were more likely than male participants to say the manager would commit an act of harassment. In previous studies, women were more likely than men to call out unethical behavior in relational contexts and perceive a wider array of social-sexual behaviors as harassment (Blumenthal, 1998; Dawson, 1997; Rotundo et al., 2001; Smith & Oakley, 1997). Women may view ambiguous scenarios as a potential threat because women are subjected to more harassment (Berryman-Fink & Riley, 1997) and are more likely to say their perpetrator was their boss (Kearl, 2018), and their standpoint orients them to an expected role of being a victim of harassment (Dougherty, 1999, 2001). When considering this finding, it is important to keep two factors in mind. First, women and men evaluated managers similarly for the other three variables. In the aggregate, there were few significant differences between female and male undergraduates. Second, women's and men's perceptions of likelihood to harass were both on the lower end of the scale. Participants were given a 100-point scale, ranging from *definitely false* (0) to *definitely true* (100), and men's and women's averages were both under 26. Some averages were higher in certain conditions—the highest score was for women in the male-manager-drinks condition—but averages never broke the 50-point mark. Thus, men and women rated managers' likelihood to harass as relatively low. This suggests that the interaction of employee–manager sex is key to revealing differences. Comparing participant sex on its own produced few differences, whereas once manager sex was taken into consideration, we found significant, consistent effects.

Second, we also see consistent effects with female managers being evaluated more positively than male managers. We argued that even though men are typically more aligned with leadership qualities within the social structure perspective (Korabik & Ayman, 2007), the current public reckoning with sexual harassment may shift perceptions in favor of women. Our analysis supported this prediction, and women

received higher ethical leadership ratings across every variable. This finding lies in contrast to research on role incongruity theory, the lack of fit model, and the think manager-think male paradigm (see Eagly & Karau, 2002; Epitropaki et al., 2013). This finding prompts two possible interpretations. First, it is possible that cultural changes and women's increasing representation in leadership positions have chipped away at the think manager-think male paradigm for younger adults. Scholars have suggested there has been a "feminization" of leadership over time (see Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Given that previous work has found that female managers feel devalued in patriarchal organizations (Sloan & Krone, 2000), this shift paints a more positive future picture for women. Second, these results may suggest that future employees are seeking more ethical managerial leadership in the wake of sexual harassment and assault scandals. Because the public views women as more ethical leaders (Pew Research Center, 2018b), this shift could benefit women. This shift is not unfounded. Others have noted that when organizations experience a crisis or scandal, they often bring in female leadership, and certain female leadership behaviors are considered "most important" for managing in a crisis (McKinsey & Company, 2009; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). When combined with previous findings, female managers are seen as more ethical leaders, and female participants drove this perception. These results also suggest that male managers seeking to establish productive relationships with their new female employees may have a steeper hill to climb in the relationship-building process.

Finally, in terms of invitational context, managers offering to get to know their new employees with a meeting in their office or over lunch were considered more ethical than those inviting employees for drinks. This predicted finding was consistent across all variables, with managers in the drinks condition perceived as less likely to portray prototypical traits and integrity, more likely to portray anti-prototypical traits, and more likely to harass. Korabik and Ayman (2007) stated that interactions can be influenced by situational cues, and the presence of alcohol may act as a strong cue. Americans view alcohol consumption as increasing perceptions of sexual availability and anticipation of consensual sex (see Abbey et al., 2000), and consequently as less work appropriate. Contrary to our predictions and previous research (e.g., Garlick, 1994), there were no significant differences in perceptions of managers in the office versus lunch conditions. Taken together, these results indicate what is considered an appropriate getting-to-know-you environment for new employees and managers. Additional work is needed to generalize these findings and determine whether they are prevalent in other cultures that may have differing opinions of work contexts and alcohol use.

This study has some notable limitations. First, participant and manager sex were treated as binary; therefore, this study cannot assess how gender-variant or nonbinary identities may affect the employee–manager dynamic. Second, the effect sizes for many of the results would be considered relatively small. Although the sample size was not particularly small, it may be prudent in future replications to increase the sample size so there are more participants per cell across a 2 × 2 × 3 design. Third, this study asked participants to evaluate a scenario within a lab setting. Lab settings offer a high degree of control, but they incur potential issues with external validity. Finally, we did not ask participants to report whether they had experienced sexual violence personally, and such experiences could affect participants' perceptions of these scenarios. A replication of the current study with the addition of some of these variables could be a valuable next step.

These limitations do not diminish this study's findings because it is important to understand how undergraduates in the midst of the VAS phase evaluate ethical leadership. Members of this cohort of students are in a relatively unique position regarding the focus of this study because they are entering the workforce

with mandatory sexual violence training and surrounded by discourse about sexual violence. Their perceptions carry both short-term and long-term implications. In the short term, their evaluations in this study can inform current managers about how to communicate and interact with new hires during this period of heightened awareness. In the long term, these participants will go on to be leaders within their organizations and become role models to their employees of ethical leadership. The widespread agreement that having drinks is inappropriate, the favoring of female managers, and the interactive effects of employee–manager sex could signal broader, future cultural shifts in workplace appropriateness, ethical leadership, and gender dynamics.

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