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**Just Saying "No": An Examination of Gender Differences
in the Ability to Decline Requests in the Workplace**

by

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ABSTRACT

Just Saying “No”: An Examination of Gender Differences in the Ability to Decline Requests in the Workplace

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Anecdotal evidence from popular culture suggests that women have a difficult time declining professional requests made by others. However, very little research has empirically addressed such claims. The current dissertation examined the possibility that women do not say “no” professionally as much as do men in three related studies. The first study examined the willingness that women (and men) show in saying “no” to work-related requests, along with individual differences in and affective outcomes of saying “no.” Results confirmed that women do not feel that they can say “no” in the workplace and that this relates to personality differences and affective outcomes. The second study examined the consequences of saying “no.” This experiment examined differences in raters’ reactions to a target who had been asked to head a committee by his or her supervisor, which differed based on the target’s gender (male or female) and the target’s response (“yes” or “no”). Results supported a distinct preference for targets who did not say “no” to their supervisor and that participants rewarded women in particular with promotions and other rewards when they did not say “no.” The third and final study employed a two-week diary study to measure the extent to which individuals received requests and the nature of those requests and then provided two remediative strategies for men and women to reflect upon when considering requests. Results indicated that there were differences in the types of requests made of men versus women as well as different responses. Additionally, both interventions provided benefits to those exposed to them, though in different ways. The impact of the three studies together is to provide the first-known empirical study to: 1) address the

contention that women say “no” less often than do men; 2) illuminate a potential mechanism behind the behavior: the preference for individuals, particularly women, who do not say “no;” and 3) potentially offer remediative strategies for individuals to engage in to help them deal strategically with professional requests.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

“Even for the most stalwart women, there comes a moment when our inner resolve fails us, and one of the simplest sounds in the English language (n-o) comes out as ‘OK,’ ‘sure,’ ‘why not,’ ‘all right,’ ‘I suppose,’ ‘if you really think so’—or just as a sigh of resignation” (female blogger; Gerber, 2012).

“Every time I say ‘no’ to something that is not important, I am saying ‘yes’ to something that is” (male blogger; Hyatt, 2011).

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence and many blogs and self help books that suggest that people, particularly women, have a hard time saying “no” to professional requests (Gartrell, 2009; Gerber, 2012; Hyatt, 2011; Inam, 2013). As depicted in these writings, women seem to not say “no” because of some sense of duty or expectation or to avoid feelings of guilt when they say “no,” although they may find it more beneficial to say “no” once they have weighed the options and ramifications of responding to professional requests. As Hyatt (2011) expresses, being discerning about the tasks that one says “yes” to allows for more time (and sanity). Despite the abundance of advice and self-help resources, as a whole, almost no empirical research has focused on saying “no” to professional requests and, particularly, as to whether gender differences emerge in rates of and being able to say “no” to professional requests successfully. The current dissertation not only focuses on gender differences in individuals’ ability to say “no” professionally, but also examines potential underlying mechanisms and ways to remediate some people’s seemingly chronic inability to say “no” to workplace requests. There

are a number of potential reasons that women might have particular trouble saying “no” and the current research investigates these reasons by examining the ramifications that female employees face when they do say “no” to professional requests. Clearly, there are times when both male and female employees should say “yes” and times when they should say “no;” hence, the sheer number of times individuals say “no” is of interest but may not give researchers a complete picture of gender differences in saying “no.” That is, men and women not only need to say “no” to avoid being overburdened with work but they also need to carefully decide when to say “yes” or “no” to workplace requests while weighing how such responses might influence career outcomes and trajectories, personal and professional relationships, other career-related opportunities, and potential repercussions.

The current dissertation is important for a number of reasons. First, as already mentioned, there is scant empirical research in this area so the current dissertation adds an empirical account to a sea of anecdotes. Second, there are many reasons posited for gender differences in advancement but differences in the ability to say “no” professionally, which have not been addressed empirically, may be another piece of the inequity puzzle. Third, it is important to examine not only whether this phenomenon occurs differentially for men and women but also to examine the mechanism(s) that might underlie a general predilection for not saying “no” professionally. Fourth and finally, the current dissertation is valuable in exploring two concrete strategies for how employees—both men and women—might be able to increase the rates at which they say “no,” and particularly the rates at which they say “no” to requests to which they probably should be declining.

This dissertation incorporates three studies. The first study assesses how well men and women feel they respond to professional requests, and empirically examines whether differences

exist in men's and women's willingness to say "no" at work. It also explores individual differences as potential moderators. One such difference may lie in personality. Two of the Big Five personality traits, conscientiousness and agreeableness, may be particularly influential on individuals' perceived ability to say "no." Individuals who are highly conscientious, agreeable, or both may experience more difficulty saying "no" than individuals lower on these traits because they feel they should help and that doing so is valuable (Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011; Elanain, 2007; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Another difference may be the extent to which people embrace prescriptive stereotypes and the extent to which saying "no" triggers an affective response (Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997). That is, women may not say "no" because they feel they ought to respond in helpful ways and fear the ramifications of eschewing communal behaviors (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Welle & Heilman, 2007). Additionally, it follows that when individuals say "no," they should feel some sort of emotion based on their response—good if they say "yes" and bad if they say "no"—based on their perception of their own utility in the interaction (Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980). Hence, the first study assesses two potential affective outcomes of saying "no," guilt as a negative outcome and core self-evaluation as a positive. This initial study, then, constructs an important, overall picture of the extent to which both men and women feel that they can or cannot say "no" to workplace requests.

The second study examines in more detail a theoretical explanation for the way in which people may differentially respond to professional requests. As mentioned previously, men and women may be viewed very differently when they say "no" professionally, such that women are penalized more than are men for not behaving in accordance with communal gender

prescriptions (e.g., Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). To examine if women are evaluated more negatively than are men when they do not adhere to gender norms (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Kidder & Parks, 2001), participants read and evaluate male and female targets depicted in scenarios in which they either said “yes” or “no” to professional requests made by their supervisors. Although saying “yes” in order to help someone is in itself a communal behavior, this study attempts to define the parameters of when saying “yes” versus “no” might be detrimental to women (and men).

The third and final study assesses two interventions designed to increase one’s ability to strategically say “no.” One of the goals of this research is not simply to get people to say “no” more often but importantly, to get them to say “no” to the right kinds of things—those that do not help their careers, those that they do not enjoy, those they are doing out of guilt, and those that take them away from family and/or things that they actually really do enjoy or feel they should be doing. The interventions used in this study involve training people 1) to extend their response time so they can consider the request more thoroughly or 2) to consider more fully the potential ramifications associated with their responses to professional requests. To do this, over the course of two weeks, participants kept track of all of the requests made of them at work that fell outside of the scope of their job and how they responded to each request. Participants’ also indicated their stress levels, how much work they believed each request would take to fulfill, and how well they believed that they managed each request. In the second week of the study, participants were assigned randomly to one of three conditions, to 1) engage in no strategy (the control condition), 2) respond to each request with “Let me think about that and get back to you” (the Time-Delay condition) or 3) respond to a series of prompts designed to get them to think critically about the request (the “What Should My Best Friend Do?” [WSMBFD] condition).

After the second week, participants reflected on each of the requests they reported and rated them on the extent to which the request would advance them professionally or otherwise be rewarding professionally or personally.

To set the stage for this dissertation, I begin by reviewing why people often feel compelled to oblige others' professional requests. I then discuss theoretically why men might be particularly likely (when compared with women) to say "no" more often and more effectively (i.e., to say "no" to requests that do not help them). In particular, I draw from Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), the Lack of Fit Model (Heilman, 1983), Enhanced Core Self-Evaluations (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), and guilt to describe why people, in general, probably say "yes" to professional requests more often than they say "no" but also why women might be significantly more likely than men to avoid saying "no." I extend this discussion from how individuals view *themselves* and take on normative prescriptions for their behaviors to how *perceivers* view their own gender when saying "no" to professional requests. I then describe how these views toward others align with self-views and the fears women might have about being denigrated strongly (and more so than men) for saying "no" professionally. I then introduce strategies to better equip people with the ability to say "no." Finally, I conclude with an overall discussion and consider the theoretical and practical implications and applications, as well as the studies' limitations and my recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 The General Difficulty of Saying “No”

In addition to saying “yes” to the basic requirements outlined in one’s basic job duties, employees must decide also whether to say “yes” or “no” to a sea of additional work-related and extra-role-related requests. *All* employees face a host of requests on a fairly regular basis and must navigate through such requests and respond with either a “yes” or a “no.” Such requests may vary in a number of ways. For instance, employees might be asked to agree to in-role related tasks (e.g., leading or being part of a subcommittee, heading a project, taking on a protégé) or they might be asked to participate in extra-role related tasks (e.g., picking up a co-worker from the airport, taking a colleague to dinner, organizing a conference). Requests that start as extra-role, discretionary tasks might become in-role over time, or may blend in-role and extra-role boundaries (e.g. putting in extra-hours to polish a presentation, volunteering to chair a project, meeting with prospective contacts). Such requests may be useful to the functioning of an organization (e.g., participating in an important ad hoc committee); useful to the development of the individual (e.g., participating in a developmental task, attending a workshop designed to provide skills necessary for promotion); or useful to other individuals, but not to the person responding to the request and not critical to the successful functioning of the organization (e.g., proofreading a document for a coworker, attending a practice presentation). Such requests may be related to professional growth (e.g., substituting for a leader, schmoozing clients) or related to personal interest and skills (e.g., choosing a color scheme for a brochure, talking with an interested protégé). Such requests may be long-term (e.g., leading a five-year-long task-focus group) or short-term (e.g., helping move boxes one afternoon). And such requests may involve substantial cognitive energy (e.g., writing a long report, preparing a seminar) or very little energy

(e.g., lending someone your notes or a book). Within the scope of the current research, *all* of such discretionary requests were evaluated in Study 1. Distinctions between the perceived importance, workload, and content of the requests were coded and evaluated in Study 3.

In addition to the rationale offered for reasons individuals may not want to say “no,” it is important to recognize certain idiosyncrasies that are likely to occur in specific industries. In particular, all three studies in this dissertation utilized, in part, a sample of academicians. While the results of the study are not contingent on the industry specifically, academicians make up a sizeable portion of each study’s sample and thereby bring the challenges and benefits of working in academia into their responses. Academia is a working environment in which individuals are highly autonomous and also highly integrated. However, while academia is an environment in which employees are given a lot of choice in the types of tasks they do, the same can be said about entrepreneurs, high-skilled workers, and other professionals. Additional participants in the sample come from a wide range of job types and autonomy levels, wherein the discretion that an individual has over his or her task requirement is highly variable. It should be said that for lower-skilled or blue collar workers, the choice of how one spends his or her time may be more limited than it would be for academic or professional samples, but even workers in less autonomous job settings still have some say over the types of extra-work tasks they perform. Individuals of all job types could be motivated to respond affirmatively to requests for financial reasons or to advance themselves professionally or simply to demonstrate concern for the organization or individuals within the organization. These motivations to not say “no,” when weighed against motivations to act in one’s own interests, may induce employees to respond differently based on their personal norms, societal norms, and beliefs about their role in the organization.

In successfully managing one's time and resources, it is critical to gauge accurately, sometimes with limited information and an inability to know the future, which requests will be productive, fulfilling, and useful to one's future interests and which should be declined. However, when a request is made, it can be difficult for an individual to say "no" even when other priorities should take precedence. Additionally, requests that appear discretionary to some might be perceived as in-role by others and may lead to more negative performance evaluations and interpersonal problems by some, but not all, employees who choose to decline the request. Moreover, tasks that were extra-role could be integrated into the job at the request of the organization or employee, thus blurring the line between actions that are purely discretionary and those that become expected. Finally, the heuristics and strategies that individuals use to determine how they will respond to requests may be impacted by individual differences (such as gender and personality).

The content, context, and source of requests impact an individual's response, but the overarching nature of requests, as a form of interpersonal interaction, is unique from other forms of verbal correspondence in a number of ways. First, requests tend to follow a standard scripted pattern ("Would you please...") and people's compliance with such requests result not only from their interpretation of need but also from their affective reaction to the verbal exchange (Forgas, 1998). The level at which such requests are processed impacts the answer that people are likely to give (Cialdini, 2006). Those who respond to requests, without much consideration, may be more likely to oblige requests that they do not find satisfying later. In this way, theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) may provide important insight into why individuals accept requests that may not be in their best interest. As Forgas (1998) notes, individuals pay almost as much attention to the way a request is presented to them as they do to

the content of such requests. By these means, the request is filtered through a peripheral route, in which context cues play an important role in determining the outcome.

Second, requests that people carefully attend to and evaluate (i.e., process via the central route) create a cognitive load for the listener (Bavelas, 1985), such that the listener has to interpret the request and respond to it, often immediately, as is the norm for many requests. Thus, responses to requests may be schematic when cognitive load is high. Individuals may respond so quickly that they a) do not fully understand the implications of their response and/or b) do not weigh the costs and benefits of accepting or denying the request. Norms of behavior may act as heuristics to cue responses when under cognitive load (Gilbert & Gregory, 1991; N. C. McCrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994). In making individuals more mindful of the responses they make to requests, they may be better able to evaluate the requirements and benefits of the task.

Third, there is a social norm to help others when they request help (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Cialdini, 2006). This is particularly true in environments, such as the workplace, in which individuals have repeated interactions with a consistent group of other individuals and in interdependent situations in which the group's or organization's success depends on individuals working together and offering help (Naumann & Ehrhart, 2011). There are a number of theories describing the reasons why people may be prone to helping behavior and not saying "no," particularly in group contexts, including Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), Empathy–Altruism (Fultz, Daniel, Fortenbach, McCarthy, & Varney, 1986), and Negative–State Relief (Fultz, Schaller, & Cialdini, 1988). Social Exchange Theory states that interpersonal relationships are established by trust that builds over time and are based on a series of rules that govern behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Part of this exchange involves weighing costs and benefits in a relationship and—to that end—giving help is conditioned on an

implied promise that one will receive help from the other individual when it is needed in the future. In an organization, helping behavior—not saying “no”—becomes a group norm because it helps the organization. However, at the individual level, certain employees may suffer a loss of time and resources in service to the group. Thus, while saying “no” may not help the organization, it could be critical for the success of the individual.

The empathy–altruism link is another theory of helping that supports the workplace social norm to not say “no.” Empathy–altruism-based explanations for helping frame it as an individual difference and suggest certain individuals are more prone to help because they have a sense of empathy for those in need of help (Fultz et al., 1986). Thus, their motivations are other-centric and they tend to focus on the needs of others instead of themselves. The empathy–altruism trait is also one of the sub-facets conceptualized in the Big Five (R. R. McCrae & Costa, 1987). Furthermore, research on organizational citizenship behaviors has noted that individuals high in conscientiousness and agreeableness may desire to help the organization and others (King, George, & Hebl, 2005). This theory can explain why individuals do not say “no” by relating saying “yes” to helping people in need. In this way, saying “no” works against our inclinations to assist others when they need help and may be particularly useful in explaining why individuals with certain personality profiles might be more prone to not saying “no.”

Finally, negative-state relief theory postulates that individuals engage in helping behaviors to relieve their negative emotions (Fultz et al., 1988) and thus are acting helpful for egoistic, rather than altruistic, reasons. Unlike altruism–empathy theory, negative-state relief is a situation-specific, rather than individual difference-based explanation for behavior. In this case, individuals avoid saying “no,” not for the benefit of others, but for the benefit of themselves. Some people may simply feel good and experience heightened self-esteem when they help others

(Wood et al., 1997). As such, we might expect that those who help experience heightened levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and core self-evaluation when they say “yes” because they have worked to relieve their negative state. Conversely, saying “no” might not allow for negative-state relief effects and might even lead to increased negative emotions, such as guilt. Whatever the mechanism driving the desire to help, individuals feel compelled to do so when asked (Forgas, 1998).

In addition to the theoretical reasons that have been postulated, there are others that have been the focus of less empirical research attention. For instance, in a recent blog post by Miller (2012), she specifies three main reasons why she believes people have a difficult time saying “no.” First, people have trouble saying “no” because they feel they will let someone down if they do. Second, people may feel they might miss out on a potentially great opportunity if they say “no.” And third, people may feel guilt and pressure if they say “no.” Across most of these explanations, what is fairly consistent is that there is exists a very strong cultural norm to help people when others ask for it (Cialdini, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Fultz et al., 1988) and violating this societal norm can evoke bad feelings about the self and elicit negative emotions and actions from others (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004).

It is very plausible, and seems at least anecdotally evident, that women have a more difficult time and are ultimately less successful at saying “no” than are men. There are a two interrelated reasons that might underlie such gender differences, each of which form the basis for the first two studies of this dissertation: 1) Social Role Theory (Study 1; Eagly, 1987) and 2) Lack of Fit Model (Study 2; Heilman, 1983) and which may explain why women might express difficulty saying “no,” more so than do men.

CHAPTER 3: Study 1: Do Women Not Say “No” (More Than Men)?

“Time and again I hear from clients at live events, especially the women, that they struggle to say ‘no’ because they feel guilty” (female blogger; Steele, 2012).

“A former colleague of mine (currently an assistant professor at the University of Delaware) asked if I was interested in writing a manuscript with her based on data we collected over two years ago. I would be the first author on it because the topic is on [...] and that is not her area; but I think she needs publications. I feel too busy at this moment to take the lead on the paper, so I told her that I couldn’t commit to a new paper right now. I haven’t heard back from her, so I am concerned she may be a little angry with me.”

– Participant 1347 (male), Study 3, Pre-Intervention (Time-Delay Condition)

“A colleague asked me at the last second before I left the office if I could administer an exam for his [...] class this Friday morning. I was frustrated that he had already asked me to cover TWO OTHER lab or lecture sections for him, and now he’s asking for a THIRD favor!?! Ugh! However, I said I would because it’s just administering an exam—I don’t have to prep for it, just stand there and make sure the students don’t cheat.”

– Participant 1360 (female), Study 3, Pre-Intervention (WSMBFD Condition)

3.1 Reasons Why Women Might Say “No” Less Than Do Men

3.1.1 Social Role Theory. Gender impacts the responses that people make in helping behaviors because of norms that women and men hold for their own behavior as well as the gender prescriptions they hold for others. Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) may help explain gender differences that exist in the possible responses that men and women give when they are asked to do something; to not say “no.” Social Role Theory postulates that the distribution of men and women into societal positions (e.g., women as nurses, men as CEOs) creates authentic gender differences in behaviors, attitudes, and interests because men and women engage and become proficient in different skill sets as a function of their different jobs (e.g., CEOs are more likely to make decisions and nurses are more likely to care for others). Such differences in behaviors, attitudes, and interests also result from the fact that others hold stereotypes about men and women because of the differential societal distribution in social roles (e.g., men are CEOs; therefore, they must be good leaders), and these stereotypes often lead to behavioral confirmation and set in motion self-fulfilling prophecies (see Figure 1).

Gender stereotypes and the acquisition of different skill sets may lead directly to women’s inability to say “no.” A typical man may be more assertive, aggressive, and independent, and may have more practice saying “no” as a function of a higher status, leadership position at work. A typical woman, on the other hand, may likely be engaged in a more affiliative and communal profession (Eagly & Crowley, 1986) and may receive fewer opportunities to say “no,” particularly in professions typified by helping and communal behaviors. Hence, responding negatively to requests for help and saying “no” is incongruent with typical helping tasks that women tend to spend their days doing. Not only do men and women engage in helping tasks at different rates then, but others observe such gendered behaviors and

make assumptions and hold beliefs based on those difference, expecting that men and women do and should act according to their gender prescriptions (Eagly, 1987).

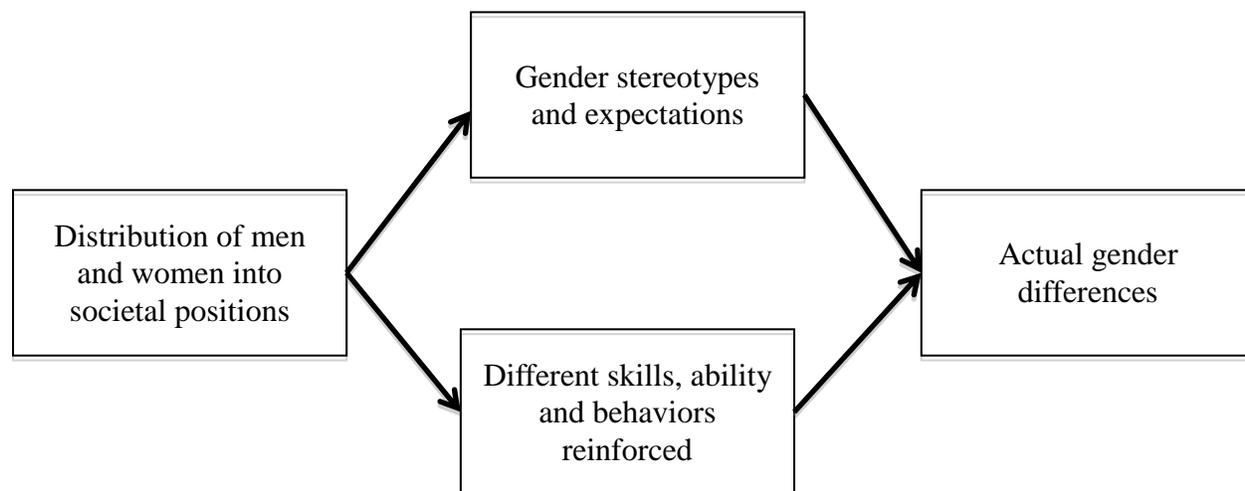


Figure 1. Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987)

3.1.2 Lack of Fit Model. Second and similarly, the Lack of Fit Model (Heilman, 1983) suggests that men and women may differ in the extent to which they embrace gender norms and prescriptive stereotypes (See Figure 2). That is, women may not say “no” because they feel they ought to respond in helpful ways and fear the ramifications of eschewing communal behaviors. Indeed, work by Heilman and colleagues (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004; Welle & Heilman, 2007), supports this theory by showing that women receive lower ratings when they demonstrate evidence of communality deficits (i.e., not being helpful or communal).

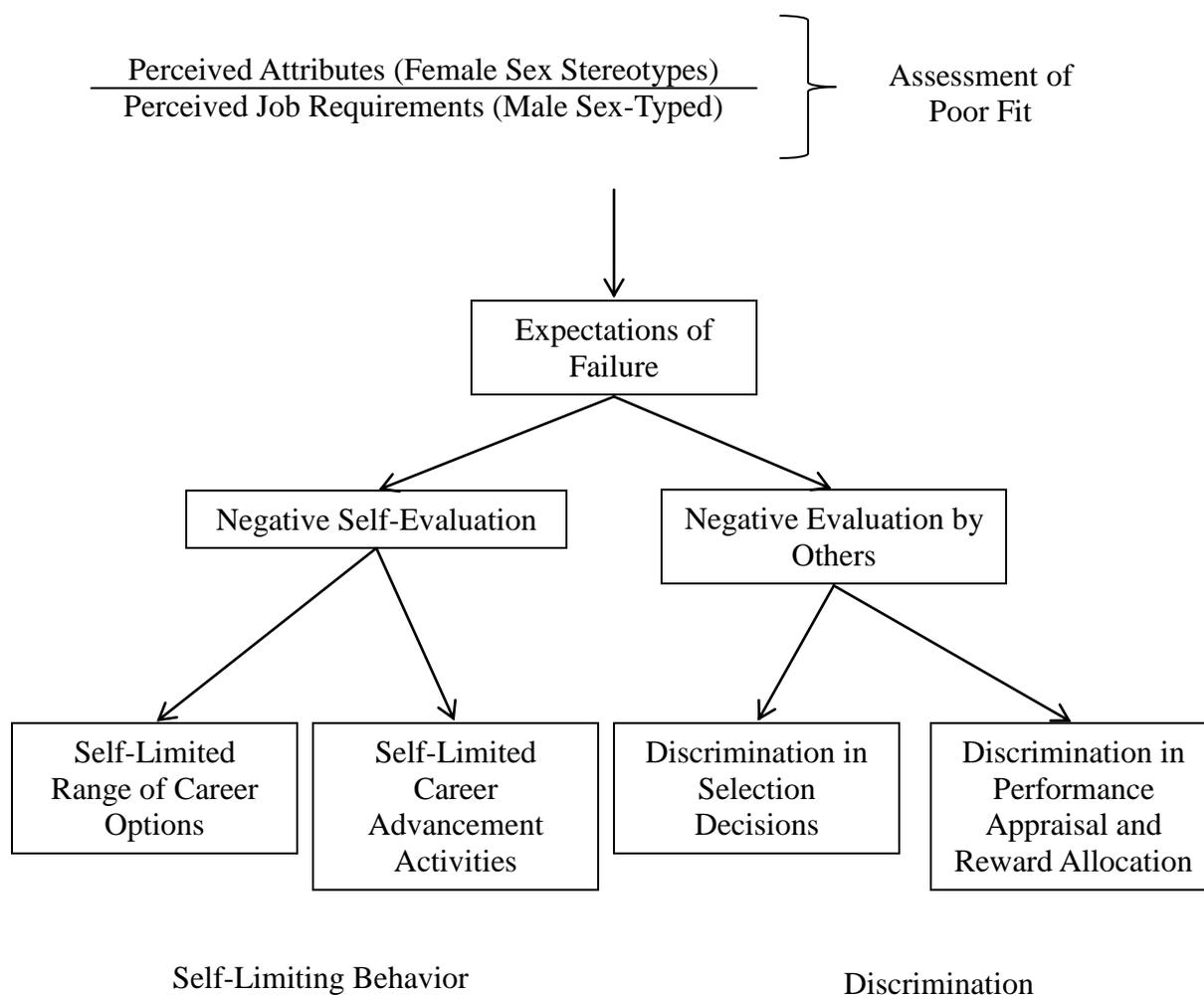


Figure 2. Lack of Fit Model (Heilman, 1983)

In examining the interrelatedness of in- and extra-role tasks and the subjective evaluation of extra-role work, Heilman and Chen (2005) examined performance evaluations made of men and women who performed the same helping behaviors. Men who engaged in helping behavior that was discretionary for the job were awarded a boost in their ratings of performance. Women who engaged in such behavior, however, received no such boost. Additionally, men were not denigrated for not helping; however, women were denigrated when they did not perform helping behaviors. Such differences in the evaluations of identical behaviors from men and women

provide strong preliminary evidence for explaining why women may not say “no” as much. They are penalized more for doing so. As Kidder and Parks (2001) suggest, some OCBs, specifically helping and altruism, may be considered in-role behaviors for women (but not for men) and thus become part of the schemas for evaluating them (Valian, 1999).

Social Role Theory and the Lack of Fit Model offer reasons why women, more so than men, are more likely to not say “no” when faced with a request for help. Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that women engage in helping and communal gender role behaviors because of authentic differences in behavior and because of societal norms. The Lack of Fit Model (Heilman, 1983) suggests that women are penalized when they do not adhere to gender role norms. Thus, there is substantial motivation for women to not say “no.”

Based on these two theoretical rationales, I anticipate that women are unlikely to say “no” to requests made of them with the same frequency as men. Helpfulness and communality are both traits associated with women more so than men (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Because these gender prescriptions are in place, women are likely to not only adhere to the behaviors themselves, but they are likely to describe saying “no” as more difficult for them personally than will men. Thus,

Hypothesis 1: Women will report more difficulty in saying “no” to professional requests than will men.

3.2 Affective Response and Not Saying ‘No’

Responding affirmatively to requests may be caused by or may cause substantial affective responses for the individual. Helping enhances self-esteem (Cunningham et al., 1980; Wood et al., 1997), while not helping may induce guilt (Cunningham et al., 1980; Nelissen, 2014).

According to the negative–state relief model (Fultz et al., 1988), individuals may be prone to

help others in order to alleviate negative moods. Cyclically, not helping may induce guilt (Nelissen, 2014). While helping may alleviate negative mood states, alternative research on responding to requests has found that inducing a positive mood makes individuals more likely to respond favorably to requests (Forgas, 1998). Not saying “no” may have positive benefits for individuals, particularly women; while saying “no” may lead to negative feelings. Short-term emotional gratification may be positive for not saying “no,” regardless of the long-term, potentially negative consequences. I consider two short-term consequences of saying “no”: 1) positive core self-evaluation (for not saying “no”) and 2) guilt (for saying “no”).

3.2.1 Core Self-Evaluation Theory. Core Self-Evaluation Theory (Judge et al., 2003) is an combination of four constructs: 1) self-esteem, 2) generalized self-efficacy, 3) neuroticism, and 4) locus of control. Core self-evaluation provides a useful measure of the extent to which a person feels “good” about themselves. Within the context of the present research and following the gender theories described previously, women may embrace the stereotypical behaviors of not saying “no” more often than do men because women actually get greater levels of self-esteem and feel better when they engage in communal aspects of relationships (Wood et al., 1997). Similarly, the work of Eagly and Crowley (1986) shows that women report gaining satisfaction in being affiliative and offering help, more so than do men. Perhaps, then, women simply like and feel better about themselves when they do not say “no.” This could, in turn, drive them to respond affirmatively to requests, even when such requests are not beneficial to them professionally, but have positive (though short-term) emotional benefits.

3.2.2 Guilt. Guilt may be a strong outcome of violating gender role norms. This negative emotion or affective response occurs specifically in response to the recognition that one’s behavior has violated moral or societal norms (Jones & Kugler, 1993) and is thus event specific

(i.e., it must be triggered by an event or interaction). As such, it is possible that women who violate societal gender norms regarding the stereotypical behavior of helping and say “no” will feel guilt for having violated social norms, more so than will men. This may be particularly true for women who believe that they should be helpful and should not say “no.”

Based on the outcomes that I have described, I anticipate that women are likely to have more emotional responses to helping because it is more closely related to their prescribed gender norms. That is to say, women will have more negative emotions when they say “no” and more positive emotions when they do not. Thus,

Hypothesis 2: Women will express more negative core self-evaluation when they say “no” than will men.

Hypothesis 3: Women will express more guilt when they say “no” than will men.

3.3 Personality Differences in Not Saying “No”

Just as gender norms may play a role in the extent to which individuals feel compelled to respond affirmatively to professional requests, individual differences in personality may also predict the extent to which individuals chronically do not say “no.” In particular, the Big Five traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness may predict the extent to which people help others and do not say “no” in the workplace.

3.3.1 Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is the extent to which an individual is careful, diligent, and responsible in aspects of their work (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Within an organizational context, conscientiousness represents the best predictor of job performance of any of the Big Five traits (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Beyond in-role behavior, conscientiousness is related to engaging in compliance aspects of organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ & Lingl, 1995). Additionally, studies of conscientiousness show that men and women differ on

mean levels of trait conscientiousness, a finding replicated across cultures (R. R. McCrae, Terracciano, & Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005; Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008). Diligent workers may set themselves up to be asked to do more for the organization, both in terms of in-role responsibilities as they excel in their duties, but also may be given opportunities to engage in more extra-role, developmental, and citizenship work. As such, one might expect that the frequency of requests presented to individuals high in conscientiousness to be higher than it would be for individuals low in conscientiousness. That in turn, means that conscientious individuals would have to be more discerning in the requests to which they say “yes” or “no.” However, individuals with strong gender norms to not “say” no, and particularly women, could face a dilemma when confronted with many professional requests. Those high in conscientiousness may feel compelled to not say “no.” Thus,

Hypothesis 4: Individuals high in conscientiousness will have more difficulty saying “no” to professional requests than will individuals low in conscientiousness (H4a).

Conscientiousness will be more strongly related to difficulty saying “no” for women than it will be for men (H4b).

3.3.2 Agreeableness. Agreeableness is the extent to which an individual gets along with others, is cooperative, and is tolerant (Barrick & Mount, 1991; R. R. McCrae & Costa, 1987). Within an organization, individuals who are high on agreeableness demonstrate greater satisfaction with their organization (Organ & Lingl, 1995), greater perceived social support (Swickert, Hittner, & Foster, 2010), less hostility (Allen, David, & Suls, 1999), and better working relationships on teams (Lim & Ployhart, 2004). Additionally, research on trait level agreeableness has shown that women tend to be, on average, more agreeable than men (R. R. McCrae et al., 2005; Schmitt et al., 2008). Of particular relevance to the current study,

individuals who are highly agreeable may be more likely to respond affirmatively to requests because of their propensity to help others and aid the group. In particular, individuals high in agreeableness may not say “no” to requests or make distinctions between the types of requests that they say “yes” to because they are putting the needs of the group before the needs of themselves. This propensity to help, along with strong gender norms to be communal, may compel women to not say “no” to professional requests. Thus,

Hypothesis 5: Individuals high in agreeableness will have more difficulty saying “no” to professional requests (H5a) than will individuals low in agreeableness. Agreeableness will be more strongly related to difficulty saying “no” for women than it will be for men (H5b).

3.4 Method

3.4.1 Participants

The overall sample included 911 participants, of whom 52.4% ($N = 475$) listed their gender as female and 47.6% ($N = 432$) who listed their gender as male. The sample was overwhelmingly White ($N = 687$; 75.8%), followed by Asian ($N = 93$; 10.3%), Black ($N = 60$; 6.6%), Hispanic ($N = 53$; 5.8%), Native American ($N = 9$; 1%), and Middle Eastern ($N = 4$; .4%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 66 years old ($M = 34.17$, $SD = 8.05$). All participants were employed at the time of data collection and reported, on average, a yearly income higher than the U.S. average (\$51,017 in 2013). In this sample, 10.1% of individuals ($N = 90$) reported income less than \$25,000 per year, 23.1% ($N = 205$) between \$25,001 and \$50,000 per year, 35.7% ($N = 317$) between \$50,001 and \$75,000 per year, 21.1% ($N = 188$) between \$75,001 and \$100,000 per year, and 10.0% ($N = 89$) reported earning more than \$100,001 per year. Individuals were

employed in such diverse industries as academia, sales, food service, technology, accounting, and real estate.

3.4.2 Procedure

Participants were recruited using a snowballing technique from online social media, email solicitations, and word-of-mouth. Participants received a solicitation inviting them to take part in the study with a link to an online survey. Participants were informed about the nature of the study and then proceeded to the online survey, which included several measures related to this study as well as additional studies. Upon completion of all measures, participants were thanked and reimbursed for their participation.

3.4.3 Measures

3.4.3.1 Chronic difficulty saying “no.” Participants rated 13 items, developed specifically for this study, evaluating the extent to which they had difficulty saying “no” at work. Example items from this measure include: “I have trouble saying ‘no’ when people ask me to engage in extra work” and “I often agree to do things immediately and then regret not saying ‘no’ later.” Participants made ratings on five-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*usually*) which all loaded onto one factor (eigenvalue = 7.77, accounting for 59.77% of the variance) and so were combined to form a composite measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$). Items are included in Appendix A.

3.4.3.2 Core Self-Evaluation. Using the Core Self-Evaluation Scale developed by Judge and colleagues (Judge et al., 2003), participants rated their agreement with 12 items related to their core self-evaluation. The measure combines self-esteem, self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control in a single factor. Items from this scale include: “I determine what happens in my life” and “I complete tasks successfully.” Six of the items were reverse coded (e.g.,

“Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work”) and higher values on the cumulative score reflected a more positive core self-evaluation. Items were rated on five-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .88. All items are included in Appendix A.

3.4.3.3 Guilt. Participants rated the frequency that they experienced six negative emotions related to guilt within the previous two weeks at work. These items were drawn from the guilt subscale of the Panas-X (Watson & Clark, 1999) and applicants responded on five-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Participants read a prompt: “Indicate the extent to which you have felt the following emotions in the past TWO WEEKS at work,” followed by single word items such as “guilty” and “ashamed.” Items were combined to form a measure of overall guilt (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$). All items are included in Appendix A.

3.4.3.4 Conscientiousness. Using the conscientiousness subscale from the 50-item version of the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg et al., 2006), participants rated ten items related to conscientiousness, such as “I am always prepared” and “I carry out my plans.” Five of the items were valenced positively and five were valenced negatively (and thus reverse-coded; e.g., “I find it difficult to get down to work”). Items were rated on five-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .84. All items are included in Appendix A.

3.4.3.5 Agreeableness. Using the agreeableness subscale from the 50-item version of the IPIP (Goldberg et al., 2006), participants rated ten items related to agreeableness, such as “I have a good word for everyone” and “I respect others.” Five of the items were positively valenced and five were negatively valenced (and thus reverse-coded; e.g. “I suspect hidden motives in

others”). Items were rated on five-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .77. All items are included in Appendix A.

3.5 Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics for the Study 1 measures are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study 1.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Gender			--				
2 Difficulty Saying “No”	3.32 (.98)	-.15**	(.94)				
3 Core Self Evaluation	3.43 (.69)	.12**	-.30**	(.90)			
4 Guilt	1.91 (.96)	-.16**	.46**	-.61**	(.88)		
5 Conscientiousness	3.16 (.79)	-.15**	.25**	-.16**	.22**	(.84)	
6 Agreeableness	3.51 (.70)	-.16**	.26**	-.06	.20**	.73**	(.77)

$N = 704$. **Correlations are significant at $p < .01$.

The first hypothesis examined mean gender differences in the frequency with which individuals expressed difficulty saying “no” at work. This hypothesis was analyzed using an independent samples t -tests comparing men and women on the average of the measure. Results supported Hypothesis 1. As expected, women indicated that they had chronic difficulty saying “no” more so than did men ($M_{\text{women}} = 3.53$, $SD = .97$; $M_{\text{men}} = 3.22$, $SD = .95$; $t(905) = 4.65$, $p < .001$, $d = .32$).

Hypothesis 2 examined the consequences of saying “no” on core self-evaluation. I tested this hypothesis with a hierarchical regression. In the first block, I examined the relation between participants’ ratings of the extent to which they expressed chronic difficulty saying “no” and their ratings of core self-evaluations. Results of this model indicated that there was a negative relation between difficulty saying “no” and core self-evaluation ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$), such that individuals who had difficulty saying “no” had higher core self-evaluation than did individuals who did not have difficulty saying “no.” In the second block, I tested the main effect of gender on the saying “no”–core self-evaluation relation. Results of this model indicated that there was a significant relation between gender and core self-evaluation ($\beta = -.08, p = .01$). Finally, in the third block, I tested the interaction of the saying “no”–core self-evaluation relation with gender as a moderating variable. There was a marginally significant interaction in which the relation between saying “no” and ratings of core self-evaluation was stronger for women than for men ($\beta = .05, p = .09$), such that women expressed a stronger relation between core self-evaluation and difficulty saying “no” than did men (See Figure 3 and Table 2). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 2.

Saying “No” Predicts Core Self-Evaluation and is Moderated By

Step		Unstd. B	Std. Error	Std B	Sig
1	Constant	3.44	.02		
	Difficulty Saying “No”	-.21	.02	-.30	<.001
2	Constant	3.45	.02		
	Difficulty Saying “No”	-.20	.02	-.29	<.001
	Gender	.11	.04	.08	.01
	Saying “No” X Gender	.08	.05	.05	.09

N = 900. Dependent variable = Core Self-Evaluation

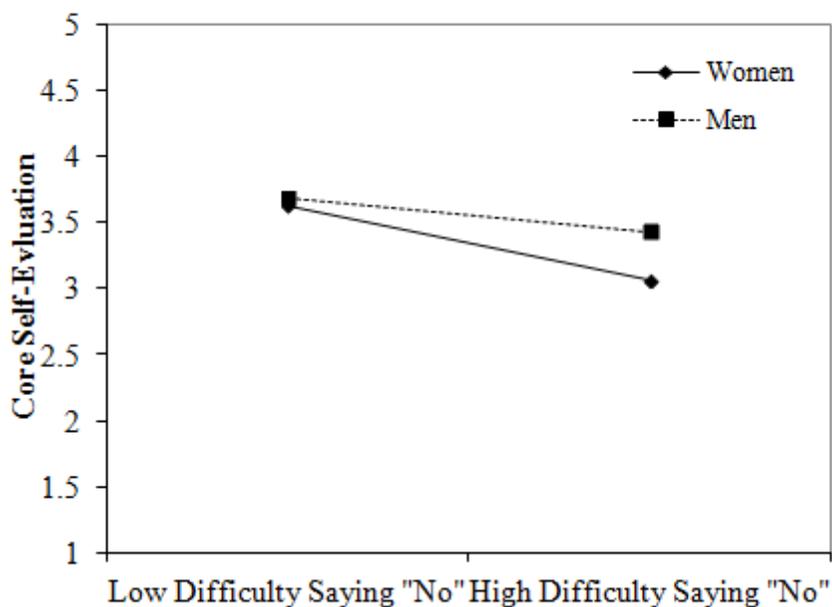


Figure 3. Moderating effect of gender on the difficulty saying “no”–core self-evaluation relation.

$N = 900$. High and low at $\pm 1SD$.

Hypothesis 3 examined the consequences of saying “no” on guilt. I tested this hypothesis with a hierarchical regression. In the first block, I examined the relation between participants’ ratings of the extent to which they expressed difficulty saying “no” and their ratings of guilt. Results of this model indicated that there was a relation between saying “no” and guilt ($\beta = .42, p < .001$), such that individuals who reported difficulty saying “no” had higher ratings of guilt than did individuals who did not have difficulty saying “no.” In the second block, I tested the main effect of gender on the saying “no”–guilt relationship. Results of this model indicated that there was a significant relation between gender and guilt ($\beta = -.09, p < .01$) such that women expressed more guilt than did men. Finally, in the third block, I tested the interaction of the saying “no”–guilt relation with gender as a moderating variable. As expected, the relation between saying

“no” and ratings of guilt was stronger for women than for men ($\beta = -.07, p = .02$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was fully supported. Women experienced more guilt when saying “no” than did men (See Figure 4 and Table 3).

Table 3.

Difficulty Saying “No” Predicts Guilt and is Moderated by Gender

Step		Unstd. B	Std. Error	Std B	Sig
1	Constant	1.93	.03		
	Difficulty Saying “No”	.41	.03	.42	<.001
2	Constant	1.91	.03		
	Difficulty Saying “No”	.40	.03	.40	<.001
	Gender	-.18	.06	-.09	.01
	Saying “No” X Gender	-.13	.06	-.07	.03

N = 900. Dependent variable = Guilt

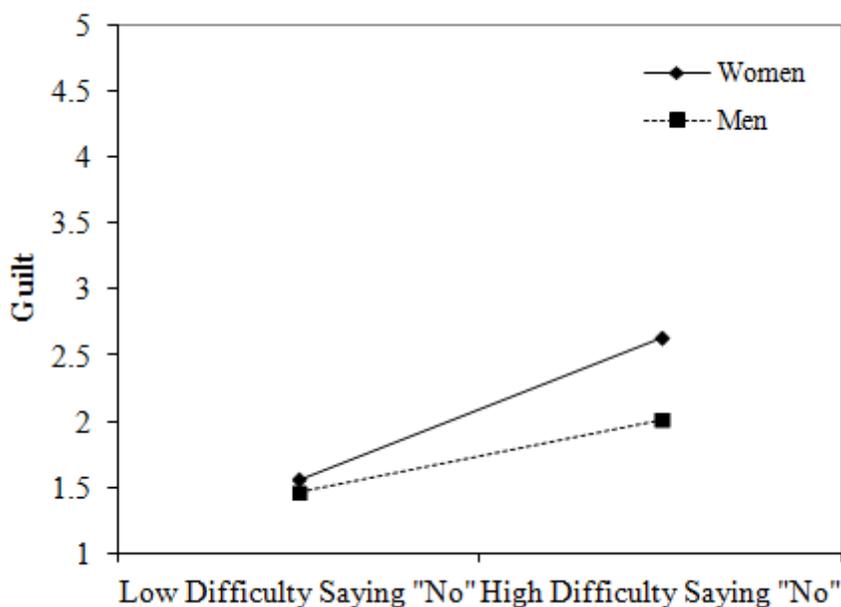


Figure 4. Moderating effect of gender on the difficulty saying “no”–guilt relation.

N = 895. High and low at $\pm 1SD$.

Hypothesis 4 stated that conscientiousness would predict the likelihood that individuals would report chronic difficulty saying “no” (H4a) and that this relation would be particularly strong for women (H4b). I tested this hypothesis with a hierarchical regression. In the first block, I examined the relation between conscientiousness and chronic difficulty saying “no.” As expected, conscientiousness predicted difficulty saying “no,” $\beta = .25, p < .001$, such that individuals high in conscientiousness expressed more difficulty. Thus, Hypothesis 4a was supported. In the second block, I examined gender as a moderator of the relation between conscientiousness and chronic difficulty saying “no.” Although there was a main effect of gender (see Hypothesis 1; $\beta = -.11, p < .01$), gender did not interact with conscientiousness to predict difficulty saying “no,” $\beta = .09, p = .60$. Thus, Hypothesis 4b was not supported (See Table 4). Conscientiousness predicted difficulty saying “no,” but the relation was not dependent on gender. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

Table 4.

Conscientiousness Predicts Difficulty Saying “No”

Step		Unstd. B	Std. Error	Std B	Sig
1	Constant	3.31	.04		
	Conscientiousness	.31	.05	.25	<.001
2	Constant	3.34	.04		
	Conscientiousness	.29	.05	.23	<.001
	Gender	-.22	.07	-.11	<.01
	Gender X Cons.	.05	.09	.52	.60

N = 709. Dependent variable = Difficulty Saying “No.”

Hypothesis 5 stated that agreeableness would predict the likelihood that individuals would report chronic difficulty saying “no” (H5a) and that this relation would be particularly strong for women (H8b). I tested this hypothesis with a hierarchical regression. In the first block,

I examined the relation between agreeableness and difficulty saying “no.” As expected, agreeableness predicted difficulty saying “no,” $\beta = .25, p < .001$. Thus, Hypothesis 5a was supported. In the second block, I examined gender as a moderator of the relations between agreeableness and difficulty saying “no.” Although there was a main effect of gender (see Hypothesis 1; $\beta = -.11, p < .01$), gender did not interact with agreeableness to predict difficulty saying “no,” $\beta = -.02, p = .53$. Thus, Hypothesis 5b was not supported. Agreeableness predicted difficulty saying “no,” but the relation did not depend on gender (See Table 5). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was partially supported.

Table 5.

Agreeableness and Predicts Difficulty Saying “No”

Step		Unstd. B	Std. Error	Std B	Sig
1	Constant	3.30	.04		
	Agreeableness	.37	.05	.25	<.001
2	Constant	3.32	.04		
	Agreeableness	.34	.05	.24	<.001
	Gender	-.21	.07	-.11	<.01
	Gender X Agreeableness	-.07	.11	-.02	.53

N = 707. Dependent variable = Difficulty Saying “No.”

3.6 Discussion

The results of this study support the contention that women experience more difficulty saying “no” to workplace requests than do men. Specifically, Hypothesis 1 demonstrated a mean difference in the extent to which individuals felt they had difficulty saying “no,” with women expressing more difficulty.

In Hypotheses 2 and 3, I examined the impact of saying “no” on core self-evaluation and guilt. Core self-evaluation acted as a proxy for positive feelings that might come from not saying

“no.” Being helpful should boost self-esteem and self-efficacy. Conversely, I expected that not responding affirmatively to requests would lead to guilt. Although single-source data does not give me the opportunity to examine causal effects, chronic difficulty saying “no” significantly predicted higher core self-evaluation and lower guilt. Furthermore, women experienced this relation more strongly than did men. These results suggest one possibility for why women have difficulty saying “no”: they feel bad when they do.

Finally, Hypotheses 4 and 5 examined the individual differences that may be useful in predicting individuals’ propensity to accept requests, in particular conscientiousness and agreeableness. These two traits within the Big Five are related to helping behavior (Organ & Lingl, 1995). Both conscientiousness and agreeableness predicted difficulty saying “no,” such that individuals high in these traits had more difficulty. However, gender did not moderate the relation. Agreeable and conscientious individuals do not say “no,” regardless of their gender.

An important issue that is lacking from this initial study is a mechanistic examination of why individuals, and particularly women, might suffer chronically from an inability to say “no” professionally. Although there are several reasons why women might be more likely to have problems saying “no,” one reality is the fact that there are strong social norms for women to behave communally—to not say “no.” When women act counter to their gender prescriptions (and say “no”), they are more likely than men to encounter significant backlash (Heilman et al., 2004; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). As such, the second study in this dissertation assesses the reality of such backlash by examining the perceptions of male and female employees who say “no” to workplace requests. From the current study, there is ample evidence to suggest that women express difficulty saying “no” more so than do men and some of this behavior can be attributed to internal motivations to increase core self-evaluation and decrease guilt. However,

situational factors also play an important role in determining this behavior and, thus, the second study examines the extent to which others view women as breaking social norms when they say “no.”

CHAPTER 4: Study 2: Are Women Punished More than Men for Saying “No”?

“I was taught early on that it’s impolite to say ‘no.’ A lot of my executive coaching clients have a hard time doing the same, yet it’s a critical skill we need to succeed and keep our sanity” (female blogger; Inam, 2013).

“I once coached a woman who was a well-liked employee within her department. Co-workers loved her because she had a great personality, was outgoing and energetic, and she would willingly jump in and take on additional projects. Unfortunately, she could never seem to get that promotion she so desperately wanted. An analysis of her situation revealed that while she proactively took on projects so she could dazzle management with her skills, she was usually unable to complete all of her projects on time because she was overburdening herself. There was not enough time to complete everything she had agreed to do. Further, when her manager would take advantage of her willingness to take on more and more projects, she did not push back or demonstrate that she did not have the time bandwidth to take on any more. The result ended up being negative comments on her performance appraisal due to her inability to finish projects, which led to lost opportunities for promotions” (female blogger, Quest, 2012).

As discussed in Chapter 2, men and women may be viewed very differently when they say “no” to professional requests and this may account for some of the gender differences found in Study 1. The Normative-Lack of Fit Model (see Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Heilman, 1983) suggests that women who say “no” are violating communal stereotypes about women and are denigrated because of that. One aspect of acting communally is to offer support for those in need (Karasek et al., 1998). While men report offering more help and women report receiving more help, the nurturance aspect of helping is more closely tied to the gender role stereotypes belonging to women (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Responding to requests affirmatively, particularly requests for help, adheres to the stereotypes of women as nurturers and helpers. Helping behavior and not saying “no” professionally is viewed as “in-role” behavior for professional women; hence, those who do not adhere to these norms may be negatively evaluated (Kidder & Parks, 2001). In this study, participants evaluated either a male or female employee who said “yes” or “no” to professional a professional request. In line with the Lack of Fit Model, women particularly may be expected to help when goals are communal in nature and, hence, denigrated more when they do not help (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). It may be the case, however, that men actually get a boost in ratings of performance and likability (over rating for women) when they help with communal tasks, such as helping, because it is not anticipated from men (Park, Smith, & Correll, 2008; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; cf. Heilman & Wallen, 2010).

Kidder and Parks (2001) suggest that certain organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) are considered in-role behaviors for some genders and extra-role behaviors for others, based on the gender norms associated with the job and with the behavior. Specifically, OCBs such as altruism and courtesy, two of the five OCB factors in Organ’s (1988) model, are prototypically

feminine and thus may be considered in-role for female employees but extra-role for male employees. Conversely, two of the other factors, namely sportsmanship and civic virtue (also called voice) are considered prototypically masculine behaviors and thus might be in-role for males and extra-role for females. Similarly, jobs that have high gender disparity may take on the gender stereotypes of the group associated with it and thus particular OCB behaviors may also become associated with that job. For example, nursing is a predominately female profession and may take on female gendered characteristics such as helping (altruism) and courtesy as part of the in-role behaviors expected in that job. The effect of tying gender roles and job roles together is that men and women in the same job may be judged differently for the same behavior because what is considered in-role for one group is extra-role for the other.

Individuals who behave counter to their prescribed gender roles are likely to face disapproval and denigration from those with whom they interact (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Welle & Heilman, 2007). In particular, women who say “no” to requests made of them violate the prescriptive norms for helping and courtesy and may be penalized because they do not meet expectations. These penalties could manifest in a variety of ways. As proposed by Kidder and Parks (2001), women who do not act communally may be acting out of line with behaviors considered in-role for their job and thus may face negative performance evaluations and poor promotion possibilities. Additionally, work by Heilman and colleagues suggests that women acting agenticly are denigrated personally in addition to professionally (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007), thus they may be considered less likeable than their more communal peers. In line with the research by Heilman and Chen (2005) on the consequences of the same behaviors enacted by different genders, the present study will measure perceptions of a fictional target in three ways: 1) evaluations of their job performance, 2) recommendations for promotions and other rewards,

and 3) ratings of their interpersonal skills. Based on previous research, women who say “no” should be denigrated in all three of these areas, more so than will men who say “no.”

Based on social exchange theory, those who help might be evaluated more favorably than those who do not (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Similarly, Heilman’s (1983) Lack of Fit model proposes that individuals are penalized for not adhering to prescribed roles and Heilman and Chen’s (2005) observed differences in ratings for the same behavior. Hence, I predict:

Hypothesis 6: Both male and female employees who say “no” to a supervisor’s request will be rated more negatively than employees who say “yes.” This effect is predicted to emerge on ratings of job performance (6a), recommendations for promotions and other rewards (6b), and ratings of interpersonal skills (6c).

However, based on the research of Heilman and colleagues (Heilman & Chen, 2005; Welle & Heilman, 2007), women might be denigrated when they say ‘no’ to professional requests more than will men. This is likely to occur in ratings of professional job evaluations, recommendations for promotions and other awards, and ratings of interpersonal skills. Thus,

Hypothesis 7: Women who say “no” will be rated more negatively than women who say “yes” and all men, regardless of response. This effect is predicted to emerge on ratings of job performance (7a), recommendations for promotions and other awards (7b), and ratings of interpersonal skills (7c).

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Participants

Participants for this study came from the same sample as the one described in Study 1 (p. 32). A total of 751 individuals with complete data were retained for analysis.

4.1.2 Procedure and Materials

In a second section within the data collection effort described in Study 1 (see p. 32), but after several other tasks in the same survey, individuals randomly were assigned to view one of four vignettes about a target employee. The vignette stated that the target had been asked by his/her supervisor to head a committee, to which the employee responded. The four vignettes had the same content with the exception of the two variables that were manipulated across conditions. First, the response that the target employee gave to the request was manipulated to reveal either acceptance of the request (not saying “no”) or declining the request (saying “no”). Second, the gender of the target was manipulated to be a male or female employee. The manipulated factors were fully crossed, thereby leading to the total of four possible conditions. The vignette, with its different manipulations, is in Appendix B. After reading the vignette, participants rated the target on several dependent variables, of both a professional and personal nature.

4.1.3 Dependent Measures

4.1.3.1 Performance evaluation. Participants rated the job performance of the target individual based on three items from Heilman and Chen (2005) and used seven-point, Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*average*) to 7 (*excellent*). Items were combined to form a single measure of performance evaluation and included items such as “In your opinion, how good are the chances that this employee will advance in the company?” Cronbach’s alpha for the measure was .90. See Appendix B for the items used in this measure.

4.1.3.2 Rewards recommendation. Participants rated the extent to which they believed the target described in the vignette deserved four work-related rewards, which were derived from Heilman and Chen’s (2005) research. Participants gave recommendations based on seven-point,

Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*would definitely not recommend*) to 7 (*would definitely recommend*) based on the prompt “Please indicate the extent to which you would recommend this person for each of the following,” which was then followed by items such as “salary increase” and “promotion.” Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .95. Items included in the rewards measure are listed in Appendix B.

4.1.3.3 Interpersonal warmth. Individuals rated their perceptions of the interpersonal warmth of the target on four items modified from Heilman and Chen (2005). Participants rated these items based on seven-point, Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) based on the prompt “To what extent do the following terms describe this individual?,” followed by adjectives such as “warm” and “selfish” (reverse-coded). Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .83. Items included in the measure of interpersonal warmth are listed in Appendix B.

4.2 Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics of the dependent variables appear in Table 6.

Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Dependent Measures

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1 Performance Evaluation	3.09	.96	(.90)		
2 Promotions/Rewards	2.66	1.04	.71	(.95)	
3 Interpersonal Skills	3.00	.82	.57	.63	(.83)

Note. $N = 747$. All correlations significant at $p < .001$

As shown in Table 6, all variables significantly correlated; therefore, I used a 2 (yes/no) x 2 (male/female) factorial MANOVA to run the statistical analysis. Table 7 illustrates the mean ratings and standard errors of the estimate of the dependent variables for the four conditions.

Table 7.

Ratings of Dependent Variables by Condition (Mean and Standard Error)

Evaluation of Performance		
	Target Gender	
	Women	Men
Yes	3.75(.06) ^a	3.64(.06) ^a
No	2.56(.05) ^b	2.54(.05) ^b

Recommendation for Promotions and Other Rewards		
	Target Gender	
	Women	Men
Yes	3.36(.07) ^a	2.95(.07) ^b
No	2.29(.07) ^c	2.14(.07) ^c

Interpersonal Skills		
	Target Gender	
	Women	Men
Yes	3.52(.06) ^a	3.18(.06) ^a
No	2.85(.05) ^b	2.52(.05) ^b

Note: Different subscripts indicate statistically significant differences by group.

Hypothesis 6 examined the impact of response (“yes”/“no”) on ratings of job performance (H6a), recommendations for promotions and other rewards (H6b), and ratings of interpersonal skills (H6c). As expected, targets who said “yes” to the request were evaluated higher on their performance (H6a: $M_{\text{yes}} = 3.69$, $SE = .04$; $M_{\text{no}} = 2.55$, $SE = .04$; $F [1,739] = 411.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .36$), higher on recommendations for promotions and other rewards (H6b: $M_{\text{yes}} = 3.16$, $SE = .05$; $M_{\text{no}} = 2.21$, $SE = .05$; $F [1,739] = 196.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$), and higher in interpersonal skills (H6c: $M_{\text{yes}} = 3.35$, $SE = .04$; $M_{\text{no}} = 2.68$, $SE = .04$; $F [1,739] = 154.62$, $p <$

.001, $\eta^2 = .17$) than were targets who said “no.” Thus, Hypothesis 6 was fully supported.

Individuals strongly preferred the target employee who said “yes” to their supervisor’s request.

To test Hypothesis 7, I examined the interaction of gender and response on job performance evaluations (H7a), recommendations for promotions and other rewards (H7b), and ratings of interpersonal skills (H7c). Women who said “no” were rated lower on evaluations of performance than women who said “yes,” but so too were men who said “no” versus “yes.” Hence, the anticipated significant differences in gender did not emerge between the two groups (H7a: $M_{\text{women-no}} = 2.56$, $SE = .06$; $M_{\text{women-yes}} = 3.75$, $SE = .06$; $M_{\text{men-no}} = 2.54$, $SE = .05$; $M_{\text{men-yes}} = 3.64$, $SE = .06$; $F [1,736] = .67$, $p = .42$, $\eta^2 < .01$). There was a significant interaction between gender and response on recommendations for promotions and other rewards (H7b: $M_{\text{women-no}} = 2.29$, $SE = .07$; $M_{\text{women-yes}} = 3.36$, $SE = .07$; $M_{\text{men-no}} = 2.14$, $SE = .07$; $M_{\text{men-yes}} = 2.95$, $SE = .07$; $F [1, 736] = 3.78$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$). However, rather than being denigrated for saying “no,” women who accepted the request were given a bonus above and beyond women who declined a request and all men (See Figure 5). Finally, there was no interaction between gender and response on ratings of interpersonal skills (H7c: $M_{\text{women-no}} = 2.85$, $SE = .05$; $M_{\text{women-yes}} = 3.52$, $SE = .06$; $M_{\text{men-no}} = 2.52$, $SE = .05$; $M_{\text{men-yes}} = 3.18$, $SE = .06$; $F [1,736] < .01$, $p = .96$, $\eta^2 < .01$) Thus, Hypothesis 7 was not supported because although there was one significant gender difference (on recommendations for rewards and promotions), it did not occur in the hypothesized direction.

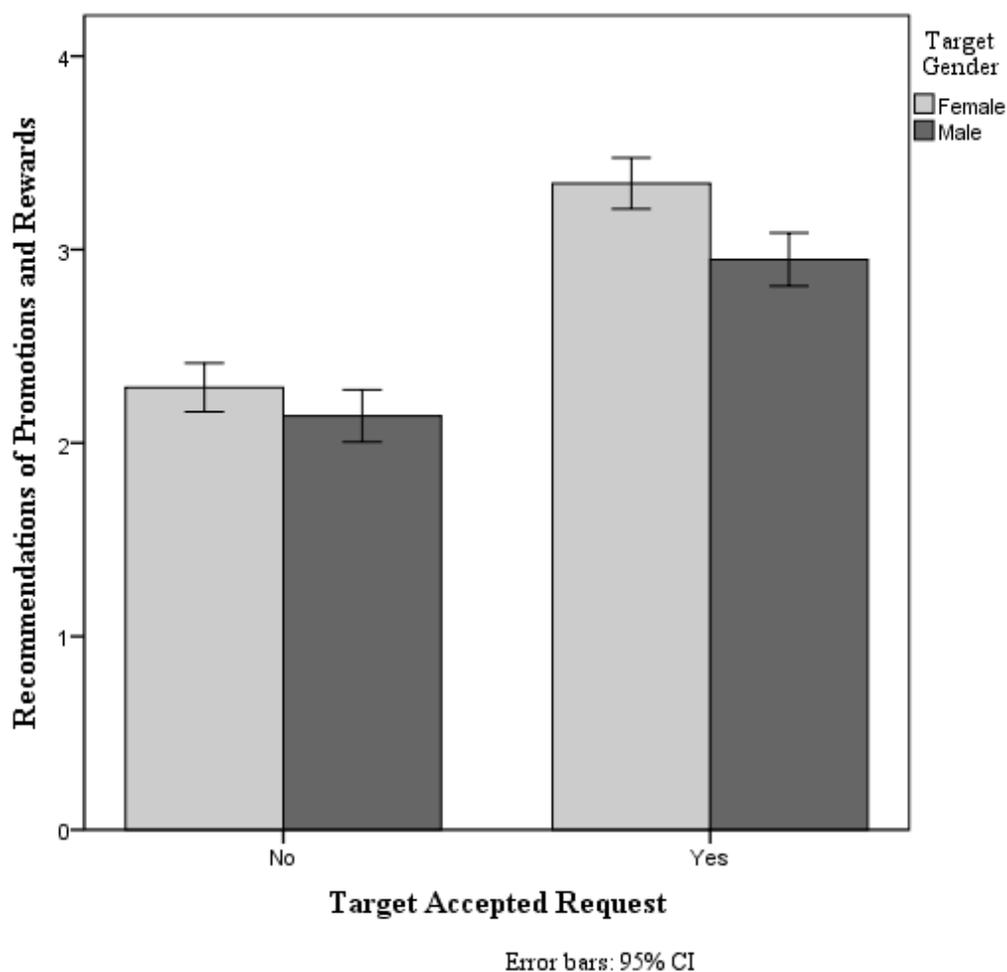


Figure 5. Women received a boost in promotions and reward allocation when they said "yes."

4.3 Discussion

This study extended the findings of study 1—that women do not say “no” as often as men—to include one of the potential mechanisms behind it, which is the influence of others on their behavior. In particular, this study examined the extent to which target individuals face denigration for behaving outside of their prescribed gender norms. This mechanism, based on Heilman’s Lack of Fit Model (1983) and research by Heilman and Chen (2005), proposed that women will be denigrated when they do not perform communal tasks and, specifically, said “no” to a request. That proved to be the case, to some extent. The results of this study suggest that

individuals have a strong affinity for others who say “yes” and that they denigrate those who say “no” to workplace requests. In demonstrating that preference, individuals who did not say “no” were rewarded with more positive performance evaluations, more promotions and other rewards, and more positive interpersonal skills ratings. Additionally, in one case, women were rewarded for saying “yes.” Overall, the findings support the contention that social norms influence saying “no” such that individuals who do say “no” are denigrated for this behavior.

Hypothesis 6 assessed the impact that saying “no” had on individuals’ evaluations of a fictional target. As predicted, individuals who said “no” to their supervisors were rated lower on evaluations of performance, recommended for fewer promotions and rewards, and rated less positively on their interpersonal skills. These findings coincide with reciprocity and social exchange theories. According to theories of reciprocity, acting prosocially is both rewarding and rewarded by the others because it is beneficial to the group (Nelissen, 2014). Additionally, social exchange theory posits that individuals do not act purely out of altruism, but instead act prosocially toward others so that others will return the behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). Not saying “no” to a task such as the one used in this study benefits others because it provides resources and rewards for the group that they otherwise might not have and, therefore, is worth rewarding.

Hypothesis 7 examined the impact of gender on the allocation of positive ratings for targets who did not say “no.” Very few differences emerged. However, when differences did emerge, rather than observing women being denigrated for saying “no,” results suggested that women actually were rewarded for saying “yes.” This finding only emerged on ratings of promotions and rewards. Research by Biernat and Vescio (2002) would suggest that if women are to be rewarded at all, it should be on plentiful, non-zero-sum resources such as praise, rather

than scarce, zero-sum resources such as promotions. However, that was not the case here.

Perhaps this is due to the theoretical nature of the task. Because participants were only presented with one target individual to rate, they did not have to allocate resources the way an organization might and could, therefore, be generous in rewarding targets who acted in accordance with their prescribed gender norms.

Denigration is a potential mechanism behind why individuals avoid saying “no,” but it does not fully clarify the decision of when to say “no.” As the quote from Quest (2012) at the beginning of this chapter highlights, saying “yes” can be just as bad for performance as can saying “no,” so the individual must strike a balance between the two. If the employee says “yes” to everything, they meet with the preferences of individuals for those who help; however, performance declines from carrying too many tasks presents a risk to the employee’s future success. It is clearly in the best interest of all employees to become better and more judicious at saying “no.” When met with a request, it is necessary to judge quickly and accurately the best requests to say “yes” to so that individuals can meet the needs of the group and themselves. This may be particularly useful for women, due to their difficulty saying “no,” especially if the requests made of them do not advance them professionally. Empowering women to get better at saying “no” by having them engage in a brief remediation strategy is the focus of the next study. If women halt their tendencies to not say “no” and evaluate the costs and benefits of saying “no” before they respond, they might actually succeed in being able to say “no” more often. By saying “no” to tasks that do not suit their needs and preferences, rather than hurting women, it will allow them the opportunity to say “yes” to tasks that do. The third and final study introduces two strategies intended to change the frequency with which individuals say “no.” Employing Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model, Flavell’s (1979) theory of meta-cognition,

and theories of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003), the cognitive resources that individuals engage before responding to requests are manipulated.

CHAPTER 5: Study 3: Inducing the Thoughtful “No”

Saying no is “the essence of not only connecting more intentionally, but living and working more intentionally as well. And as women, we so easily get into the trap of trying to please everyone and be friends with everyone, when a more focused and mindful approach would serve us (and others) much better” (Patti DeNucci, networking strategist, as cited in Taylor, 2011).

“My company's CFO requested that I set up meetings with our Government counterparts for her and one of her employees (2 separate meetings). I do not report to the CFO directly, nor am I a member of her extended staff. I am a [...] and report to the VP of Contracts. On one hand I was a little annoyed by the request because I feel like the request was an administrative duty. On the other hand, I am already the person that communicates with the Government on contractual issues. Therefore, I agreed to do it. It shows that I am a team player and that I'm willing to do what it takes to help the company reach its goals.”

– Participant 1457 (female), Study 3, (Control Condition)

A professor ask me to “deliver a late contract letter (was due in July, 2013) to the Dean of the College immediately. I directed the professor to take his letter to one of the department's work study students. He said no, so I asked that he leave it in their office with a note asking someone to deliver it. He said no again, and I told him I didn't have time to run across campus to deliver the letter.”

– Participant 1351 (female), Study 3, (Control Condition)

In the previous two studies, I found that women express more difficulty saying “no” than do men (Study 1) and that this may be due to the denigration faced by individuals who say “no” (Study 2). However, as discussed, there are costs associated with not saying “no”—less time for activities that will make the employee successful, less time for family and friends, and less time spend on tasks that the employee finds personally or professional fulfilling. The third study of this dissertation employed two interventions to help female and male employees consider requests more carefully and increase their ability to say “no” to certain types of requests. That is, the goal of this study was not simply to get men and, in particular, women to say “no” more often, but to get them to say “no” to the wrong kinds of requests—those that do not help their careers, those that they do not enjoy, those they are doing out of guilt or perceived obligation, and those that take them away from family and friends and/or things that they actually really do enjoy or should be doing.

Decisions made thoughtfully should be based on a careful assessment of the individual’s available resources, skills, and interests, and perceived importance of the request. When considered carefully, certain non-developmental, time-consuming, and unenjoyable tasks should be declined in favor of work that is more beneficial professionally and personally, something that may not occur when offering a more immediate answer. During times of high cognitive load, individuals may be particularly likely to fall back on the norms of behavior that are prescribed to them, regardless of their actual benefit. There are several theories that describe the importance of thoughtful processing on decision making, one of which is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Additionally, two other mechanisms, examined in the current study, might serve to increase one’s thoughtfulness: 1) meta-cognition (Flavell, 1979) and 2)

mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003), both of which in turn might help people navigate decisions about saying “no” more carefully.

5.1 The Elaboration Likelihood Model in Changing Attitudes

According to ELM, thoughtful processing of requests changes the influence that requests have on the individual (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In any given situation, there exists a continuum of information processing that influences attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors. Information can be processed peripherally, based on context cues, or centrally, based on information and analysis. Attitudes adapted based on central processing are more difficult to change and tend to be stronger than are those established via the peripheral route. Although past research has focused primarily on ELM as a mechanism for attitude change, it might be particularly relevant for changing women’s behavior (i.e., teaching them to say “no”) because their attitudes toward the gender roles prescribed to them must change as well. Adapting this theory to the process of decision-making, decisions made based on an analysis of gathered information (i.e., via the central route) should be more closely aligned with the individual’s wants and needs than will decisions made offhand (i.e., via the peripheral route).

5.2 Meta-cognition and Mindfulness in Changing Behaviors

Beyond the ELM, central-route processing can also be considered a form of meta-cognition. In his research, Flavell defined metacognition as “knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena” (Flavell, 1979, p. 906), which is to say that metacognition is a conscious awareness of our own thoughts and thought processes. According to Flavell, “cognitive strategies are invoked to *make* cognitive progress, metacognitive strategies to *monitor* it” (emphasis his; Flavell, 1979, p. 909). This metacognitive awareness takes four forms: a) metacognitive knowledge, b) metacognitive experiences, c) goals or tasks, or d) actions or strategies. These

overlapping subgroups provide a basis for the way in which we think about our own thoughts. Of particular relevance to the current research is the subcategory of actions or strategies. Individuals may differentially activate a variety of strategies, some effective and some ineffective, to determine the best way to reach a goal. These goals may or may not be strategic in achieving professional advancement (e.g., a motivation to succeed) or may be based on other motivations (e.g., a motivation to be liked by others). Additionally, strategies may be consciously processed and activated (a meta-cognition) or they may be subconscious heuristics predetermined by past experiences.

At the core of both activating a central route of processing and engaging in meta-cognitive strategies are opportunities to adopt mindfulness. Mindfulness, as described by Bishop and colleagues (2004), has two components that act in tandem to reduce stress and promote well-being. The first component of mindfulness is attention regulation. Training on mindfulness is designed to focus the trainee's attention on the present moment and their current experience. It is a kind of self-check and may be particularly useful for processing requests made by others by encouraging them to understand their current situation. The second component of mindfulness is orientation to the present and may be particularly useful for deciding how to respond to a request.

The purpose of the current study was to manipulate the processing that individuals engage in when presented with requests. To do this, I recruited men and women to keep track of all interactions that they had with others at work during which someone made a request of them. An intervention took place in the second week of data collection. Throughout the two weeks, individuals measured their emotions during the interaction. Afterward, they retrospectively rated the requests they received. In addition to these subjective ratings, requests were objectively

coded by outside raters on variables drawn from Heilman and colleagues' (Heilman & Haynes, 2008; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004) research, along with Eagly's (1987) Social Role Theory.

As shown in my own data from Study 1, women express difficulty saying "no" more often than do men and this is likely in keeping with gender role prescriptions (as discussed earlier) (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Eagly, 1987). Therefore, men would likely have proportionally more "no" responses throughout their first week than would women when responding to professional requests. Thus,

Hypothesis 8: Prior to the intervention, men will say "no" to proportionally more professional requests than will women (H8a). After being exposed to the intervention, women will say "no" to proportionally more professional requests than they did prior to the intervention (H8b).

After collecting the baseline data, participants were instructed to engage in one of two interventions or were assigned to a control condition for the second week of the study. In the control condition, participants kept track of all requests that others asked of them and the respective responses that they gave without any interference as they had in the first week. In a second condition (the What Should My Best Friend Do? [WSMBFD] condition), participants wrote down all requests and then answered several questions, including the advice that they would give to a friend about responding to the request. Based on the strategies outlined in meta-cognition (Flavell, 1979), the WSMBFD strategy might be particularly effective in encouraging women (and men) to elaborate on ramifications and the importance of saying "no" because it encouraged them to think about the request that they received in such a way as to have to convince another person to engage in the behavior. In a third condition (Time-Delay condition),

participants responded to every request with: “I’ll think about that and get back to you,” rather than responding immediately, to assess the possibility that women are just taught to say “yes” in some immediate way that men are not, and to see if the simple passage of time and consideration could encourage individuals to be mindful of the requests they accepted.

Decisions made via the central route are more likely to be based on information gathering and thoughtfulness. By inducing thoughtful processing via either a) the framing of a request as part of a larger context (Will anyone be hurt if I do not do this? Will this take time away from my loved ones?) or b) by delaying the response, individuals might be less likely to say “yes” in these conditions. However, the reframing technique should be more thought inducing than the time delay because it involves more careful consideration. Additionally, the gender norms at work might affect the base rates with which women versus men say “no” and also might affect the impact of the remediative strategy. Thus, I hypothesized that over the course of the two weeks:

Hypothesis 9: Individuals in the WSMBFD and time delay conditions will report saying “no” proportionally more frequently after the intervention than will individuals in the control condition (H9a), and this difference will be larger for women than for men (H9b).

Hypothesis 10: Individuals in the WSMBFD will report saying “no” more frequently after the intervention than will individuals in the Time-Delay condition (H10a), and this difference will be larger for women than for men (H10b).

Additionally, individuals in the theoretically strongest intervention condition, WSMBFD, should demonstrate a strong difference in saying “no” beyond that seen in the control condition. Furthermore, this change might be explained by differences in affective outcomes, namely guilt (negatively) and core self-evaluation (positively). Therefore, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 11: Participants' presence in the WSMBFD condition will predict greater likelihood of saying "no" than will presence in the control condition (H11a).

Furthermore, guilt (H11b) and core self-evaluation (H11c) will mediate the relation between condition and saying "no."

After receiving an intervention, individuals in the time delay and, in particular, the WSMBFD condition should consider the requests made of them more carefully. In doing so, they should be more likely to choose to say "yes" to requests that advance their careers, that would hurt them if they did not say "yes," and that they enjoy and to say "no" to requests that they feel take time away from family and friends. In short, they will say "yes" to the right kinds of requests and be more mindful of their resources. Thus, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 12: After the intervention, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) will say "yes" to requests that they feel will advance their careers (H12a), that would hurt their careers if they said "no" (H12b) and that they will enjoy (H12c) more than will those in the control condition. These same individuals will say "no" to requests that they feel will take time away from family/friends and/or the things they love (H12d) more so than will those in the control condition.

Finally, participants in the intervention conditions should be more selective about the requests that they say "yes" versus "no" to in objective ratings of the requests. In particular, participants should accept requests that are communal in nature, that have the potential to promote them within the organization, and that are important. Conversely, they should decline requests that are communal in nature. Specifically, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 13: After the intervention, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) will say "yes" to requests that are agentic (H13a), that have

promotion potential (H13b), and that are important (H13c) more than will those in the control condition. These same individuals will say “no” to requests that are communal (H13d) more so than will those in the control condition.

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Participants

Participants for this study included 119 individuals, recruited using a snowball technique from online, social media, email solicitation, and word-of-mouth to participate in a web-based diary study. Of the 119 participants who reported events, 57.1% ($N = 68$) identified as female and 42.9% ($N = 51$) identified as male. Participants were predominately White (62.5%; $N = 60$), followed by Latino (16.7%; $N = 16$), Asian (11.5%; $N = 11$), Black (8.3%; $N = 8$), and Middle Eastern (1.0%; $N = 1$) (23 participants did not list race). Most were born in the United States (85.3%; $N = 81$) and all resided in the United States at the time of data collection. The average age of participants was 33.56 years ($SD = 7.61$) and ranged from 22 to 61 years old. Participants reported having a variety of educational backgrounds, including high school diplomas or associates degrees (3.1%; $N = 3$), bachelor’s degrees (28.1%; $N = 27$), master’s degrees (45.8%; $N = 22$), and doctorate degrees (45.8%, $N = 44$) and had attained their highest degree an average of 7.05 ($SD = 7.66$) years ago. All participants were actively employed at the time of data collection and had been in their current positions an average of 2.98 ($SD = 3.59$) years.

In order to complete the desired analyses, I removed reported requests that did not fit specific study criteria, including: 1) requests that referenced the current research study, since all participants in the study met with that request; 2) requests that did not include a clear “yes”/“no” response on the part of the participant (e.g., “My boss asked me to fix problems that the other manager created. Why are they not fixing their own mess?!”; and 3) requests that could not be

matched to the participant due to reporting errors (e.g., the participant typing their identification code into the interaction form incorrectly). Using these criteria, I removed 22 reported requests from the analysis.

The 119 participants in this diary study recorded a total of 1001 requests. Participants averaged 8.41 ($SD = 9.28$) reported request events over the course of the study, with participants reporting between 1 and 88 events. Additionally, 80 participants reported data in both weeks of data collection. Results in this study are based on the data level most appropriate to the analysis, whether individual event ($N = 1001$), group ($N = 119$), or repeated measure group ($N = 80$).

5.3.2 Procedure

Participants took part in a diary study for two weeks. There were three conditions for the study; however, in the first week, all participants took part in a control condition. For their second week, participants were assigned randomly to one of three conditions for the remainder of the study. Table 8 shows the distribution of reported events by assigned condition. Note that although participants took part in the control condition their first week, the condition reported is the one assigned to them in the second week of the study.

Participants received an e-mail at the beginning of the workday from Monday through Friday reminding them to participate in the study and providing a link to a standardized form that they used to describe their request interactions. In the afternoon, participants received a second email reminding them to participate in the study and offering them another opportunity to complete the form. Participants completed one form for each interaction and received examples of the types of interactions that would meet study criteria. Additional information for participants in one of the two intervention conditions also was included with each e-mail solicitation (See Appendix C for condition-specific information).

Table 8.

Reported Events by Week and Condition

		Week 1	Week 2	Total
Condition	Control	224	134	358
	Time Delay	225	102	327
	WSMBFD	217	99	316
	Total	666	335	1001

In the first condition, the control condition, participants were instructed to track all of the interactions that they had with coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates in which a request was made of them that fell outside of their specific job requirements. Specifically, participants were told that requests

“can be small requests or large, but they should be outside of your normal job tasks.

Examples of a small request might be to look over a document and provide verbal feedback or to send an email confirming a meeting. Larger requests might include more time commitment and resources, such as heading a committee or organizing a department-wide request.”

Additionally, participants answered a short series of questions to evaluate their emotions at the moment of the request.

In the second condition, participants reported their interactions as described previously, but they also responded to a set of questions designed to induce thoughtful processing of requests. This condition used framing to induce participants to ask: What should my best friend do? (WSMBFD) and to consider four questions when approached with a request: 1) "Is it likely that saying “no” will hurt your career?,” 2) “Is this request something you would really enjoy doing?,” 3) “Would you advise your best friend to do this?,” and 4) Will saying “no” to this

request allow you significantly more time with your family/friends and/or doing things you love?” The form that they completed included these four questions in addition to a description of their experiences and the series of questions asked in the control condition.

In the third condition, participants reported their interactions as described previously, but were instructed to avoid answering immediately. Specifically, participants were asked to try to tell those who made a request of them: “I’ll think about that and get back to you.” In the interaction form, participants indicated if they were successful in using the strategy and, if not, to describe why they were not successful. They also answered the short series of questions asked in the other two conditions.

After participants completed their two-week diary study, they received an e-mail inviting them to take part in final study survey. In this survey, participants answered a number of demographic questions and then answered a series of ten items about each of their reported requests. Those who participated in the two week diary study *and* completed the follow-up survey were entered into a raffle to win one of twenty \$100 gift cards.

Once all of the events were collected, the reported events were rated on several factors by three trained research assistants in an attempt to evaluate the qualitative data in a quantitative way. Specifically, the means of the ratings of scale items were used in the analysis (inter-rater reliability was about 75% for all items); while disparities on items that were categorical in nature were reviewed until agreement was reached. Disparities tended to include ratings that the response was “unclear” from one coder, but clear for the other two coders.

5.3.3 Materials

5.3.3.1 Interaction form. Participants recorded interactions that they had with individuals at work during which they were asked to do something outside of their specific job

duties. Interaction forms were standardized across conditions to include the participant identification number and two open-response prompts: 1) “Please describe the context of the request (Who made the request? What was the request [Please be as specific as possible])” and 2) “Please describe your response to the request.” Additionally, participants answered a series of three items on seven-point Likert-style scales, which were anchored negatively (1) to positively (7) based on the context of the question. Items included: 1) “How stressful did the request feel at that moment?,” 2) “How well did you manage the situation?,” and 3) “How much work did this request involve?” Participants in the WSMBFD condition answered an additional set of four questions on seven-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Items included: 1) “Is it likely that saying ‘no’ will hurt your career?,” 2) “Is this request something you would really enjoy doing?,” 3) “Would you advise your best friend to do this?,” and 4) “Will saying ‘no’ to this request allow you significantly more time with your family/friends and/or doing things you love?” Participants in the Time-Delay condition answered the two prompts and three questions described in the control condition as well as a dichotomous question: “Did you ask for time to think about the request?” and an open-response prompt: “If no, why not?” All participants were given the option to submit an additional interaction upon submission. The interaction forms can be found in Appendix C.

5.3.3.2 Interaction Reflections. After completing the two-week diary study, participants rated their reflections about the events they reported based on whether the task was complete, followed by six questions designed to probe their experiences. Items were based on the affective outcomes described in Study 1, specifically measures of guilt and core self-evaluation (two items); and the prompts used in the WSMBFD manipulation described in this study (five items). Items were rated on seven-point Likert-style scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*)

and included the following: 1) “I would feel guilty if I were to say ‘no’ to this request,” 2) “I would feel good about myself if I were to say ‘yes’ to this request,” 3) “I believed that not doing this task would hurt my career,” 4) “I believed that doing this task would advance me professionally,” 5) “I believed this task would be enjoyable,” and 6) “I believed not doing this task would allow me more time with my family and friends and/or doing things I love.” All items can be found in Appendix D.

5.3.3.3 Demographic information. In addition to the retrospective questions, participants gave their demographic and work information for a number of items. Personal demographic information included: 1) gender (male/female); 2) race (White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, or Other); 3) age; 4) birth country (“Were you born in the US?” [yes/no]) 5) highest academic degree earned; and 6) years since attaining their highest academic degree. Work demographic information included: 1) “Name of your current position,” 2) “Number of years in your current position,” and 3) “Name of your current organization.”

5.3.3.4. Event Coding. All interactions with complete data (see “5.3.1 Participants” for inclusion criteria) were rated by three trained research assistants on six items related to the event. All events were coded separately (i.e., they existed in individual text files) and identifying information was removed prior to coding to prevent bias based on other interactions reported by the same individual. Two items identified the categorization of events: 1) “Did the personal accept the request?” (yes/no/unclear) and 2) “Where did the request come from?” (superior [higher level]/peer or colleague [same level]/subordinate [lower level]/non-work). Coders also rated the following items on seven-point Likert-style scales, which were anchored negatively (1) to positively (7) and framed based on the item. Items included: 1) “How agentic was the task?,”

- 2) “How communal was the task?,” 3) “Is this task going to help the person get promoted?,” and 4) “Is this task important?” All items and their coordinating scales can be found in Appendix E.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Effect of Time Delay and WSMBFD Interventions

This focus of this study was to induce employees to consider requests made of them more thoughtfully before responding. Hypothesis 8 examined the gender differences in proportional responding to requests made at work. Specifically, I predicted that prior to the intervention, men would say “no” to proportionally more professional requests than would women (H8a) and that after the intervention, women would say “no” to proportionally more requests than they had prior to the intervention (H8b). Of note, men and women did not differ in the number of requests they reported, with men averaging 8 requests received and women averaging 9. I examined this Hypothesis with a 2 (week) x 2 (gender) factorial ANOVA, controlling for participant. As described in the Method, Week 1 provided the baseline data for participants and Week 2 provided the intervention data. To create the criterion, request responses across participants were aggregated to create a single value that represented the proportion of requests that the participant said “yes” to in Week 1 and Week 2. The overall factorial ANOVA showed a marginally significant interaction between gender and week ($M_{women-week 1} = .84, SE = .03; M_{women-week 2} = .71, SE = .04; M_{men-week 1} = .82, SE = .04; M_{men-week 2} = .83, SE = .04; F [1,192] = 3.16, p = .08, \eta^2 = .02$). Contrary to expectations, men and women did not differ in the proportion of requests that they said “yes” versus “no” to prior to the intervention (Week 1). Both men and women responded “yes” to most of the requests that they received ($Yes_{men} = 81%; Yes_{women} = 82%$). Thus, Hypothesis 8a was not supported. However, after the intervention (Week 2), women reported marginally significantly more “no” responses than did men ($F [1,191] = 3.53, p = .06, \eta^2 =$

= .02) and, consistent with Hypothesis 8b, significantly more “no” responses than they did prior to the intervention ($F [1,191] = 5.99, p = .02, \eta^2 = .03$; See Figure 6). Overall, there was an effect of the interventions on women’s responding to workplace requests, partially supporting Hypothesis 8.

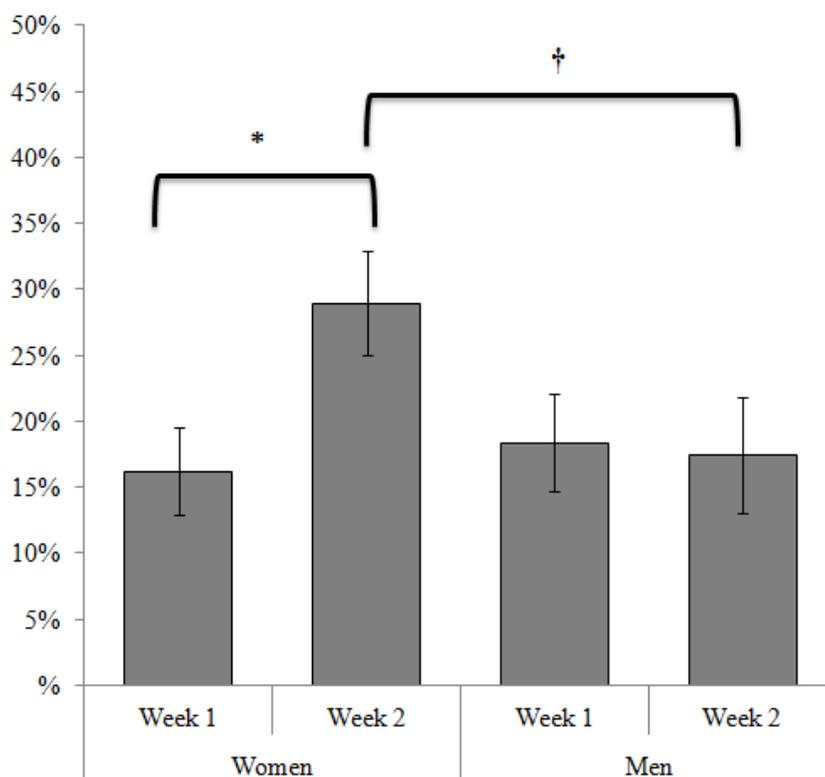


Figure 6. Proportion of requests participants said “no” to by gender and week.

Note. * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

Hypotheses 9 and 10 examined differences in the intervention conditions across the two weeks of data collection. Hypothesis 9 predicted that individuals in the intervention conditions (time delay and WSMBFD) would say “no” proportionally more frequently than would those in the control condition (H9a). Furthermore, I hypothesized that women would demonstrate larger

differences between the manipulations and the control group (H9b). I tested these hypotheses using a 2 (week) x 3 (condition) x 2 (gender) mixed factorial ANOVA with planned contrasts, controlling for participant, with week as a within-subjects repeated measures variable and condition and gender as between-subjects variables. While the 3-way interaction was not significant (See Table 9 for means and standard errors), $F(2,71) = .26, p = .77, \eta^2 < .01$, I ran planned contrasts on the relevant values. In particular, I was interested in examining the effects after the intervention, so I compared Week 2 across conditions. The interventions were not significantly different from the control condition in Week 2, $F(1,184) = .28, p = .60, \eta^2 < .01$. Thus, Hypothesis 9a was not supported. Furthermore, I predicted that the effect of the intervention would be stronger for women than for men. However, the interventions were not significantly different among women, $F(1,184) < .01, p = .93, \eta^2 < .01$ (H9b). Therefore, Hypothesis 9 was not supported.

Hypothesis 10 predicted differences amongst the two intervention conditions. I tested these hypotheses using planned contrasts to examine the same 2 (week) x 3 (condition) x 2 (gender) mixed factorial ANOVA used to test Hypothesis 9. Again in this case, I was interested in examining the effects after the intervention, so I compared Week 2 across the two intervention conditions. The interventions were significantly different from each other in Week 2, $F(1,184) = 4.92, p = .03, \eta^2 = .03$. However, the Time-Delay condition proved to be more efficacious in getting participants to say “no” than did the WSMBFD condition (See Figure 7). Therefore Hypothesis 10a was not supported. Furthermore, I predicted that the effect of the intervention would be stronger for women than for men. However, the interventions were not significantly different by gender, $F(1,184) = 2.15, p = .14, \eta^2 = .01$ (H10b). Therefore, Hypothesis 10 was not

supported; however, the Time-Delay condition did appear to provide an effective means of inducing men and women to say “no.”

Table 9.

Proportion of “No” Responses (Means and Standard Errors)

			Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Women	Week 1	.19	.06	.06	.32
		Week 2	.29	.10	.09	.48
	Men	Week 1	.22	.06	.10	.35
		Week 2	.12	.09	-.07	.31
Time Delay	Women	Week 1	.15	.06	.03	.27
		Week 2	.43	.09	.25	.61
	Men	Week 1	.20	.06	.09	.32
		Week 2	.29	.09	.12	.47
WSMBFD	Women	Week 1	.19	.05	.09	.29
		Week 2	.23	.08	.07	.39
	Men	Week 1	.12	.07	-.01	.26
		Week 2	.09	.10	-.11	.30

Values based on 80 participants with two weeks of data.

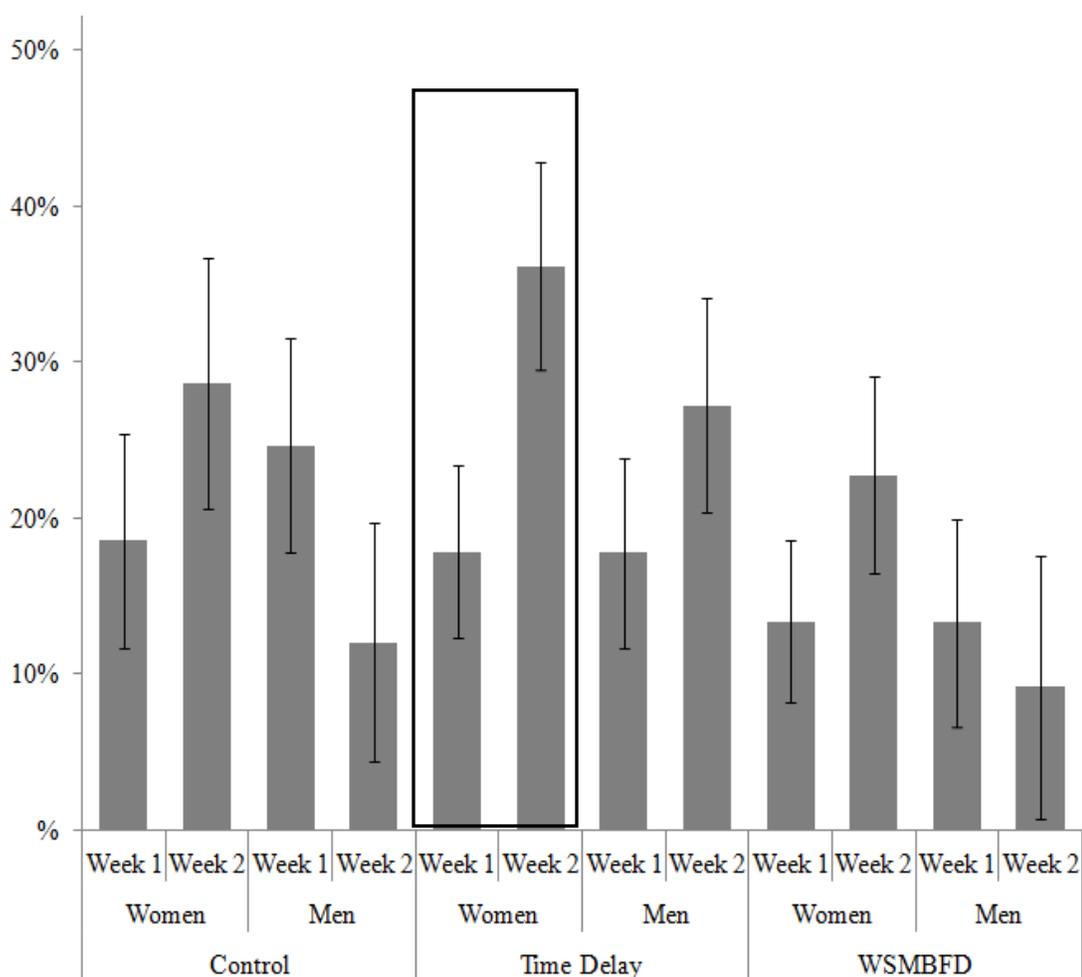


Figure 7. Proportion of “no” responses by condition, gender, and week.

5.4.3 Intervention Comparisons

Hypothesis 11 stated that the participants’ presence in the WSMBFD condition would predict greater likelihood of saying “no” than would their presence in the control condition (H11a). Furthermore, guilt (H11b) and core self-evaluation (H11c) would mediate the relation between intervention condition and saying “no.” This hypotheses were tested using mediated logistic regression (Herr, 1993; MacKinnon & Dwyer, 1993), followed by Sobel tests (Herr, 1993; Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001). However, results did not support a direct path between the

intervention condition (either WSMBFD or the control) and saying “no,” $\beta = -.37$, $SE = .37$, $Wald(1) = .97$, $p = .33$). Thus, Hypothesis 11 was not supported.

Hypothesis 12 stated that after the intervention, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) would say “yes” to requests that they felt would advance their careers (H12a), that would hurt their careers if they were to “no” (H12b), and that they thought they would enjoy (H12c) more often than would those in the control condition. Furthermore, these same individuals in the intervention conditions would say “no” to requests that they felt would take time away from their family and friends and/or doing things they love (H12d) more so than would those in the control condition. This hypothesis was tested using four 2 (week) x 3 (condition) x 2 (response) factorial ANOVAs, with planned contrasts, controlling for participant. Descriptive statistics and correlations can be found in Table 10.

Table 10.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Reflection Variables

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4
1 “I believed that doing this task would advance me professionally.”	2.57 (1.83)	--			
2 “I believed that not doing this task would hurt my career.”	2.95 (1.98)	.61	--		
3 “I believed this task would be enjoyable.”	2.65 (1.67)	.45	.12	--	
4 “I believed not doing this task would allow me more time with my friends and family and/or doing things I love.”	2.50 (1.94)	.28	.23	.15	--

$N = 614$. All correlations significant at $p < .01$

Hypothesis 12a stated that participants Week 2 assigned to the intervention conditions would say “yes” to more requests that they felt would advance their careers than would those in

the control condition. Although the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,605) = .56, p = .57, \eta^2 < .01$, the planned contrasts showed interesting, and hypothesized, differences in the condition (See Table 11 for means and standard errors). As hypothesized, in Week 2, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) said “yes” to significantly more requests that would advance their careers than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,605) = 10.15, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$. Additionally, between the two weeks of data collection, participants in the WSMBFD condition demonstrated a positive significant change in the number of career advancing requests they said “yes” to from before to after the intervention, $F(1,605) = 12.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$. This was not the case for the control condition, $F(1,605) = .44, p = .51, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,605) = .97, p = .32, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 8). The WSMBFD condition effectively changed participants’ behaviors so that they were more discerning about the requests they accepted, which in this case were requests that they felt would advance them professionally. Thus, Hypothesis 12a was supported.

Table 11.

Means and Standard Errors of Advancement Potential By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	2.43	.17	2.24	.23
Time-Delay	2.72	.16	3.05	.29
WSMBFD	2.21	.18	3.36	.27

$N = 606$.

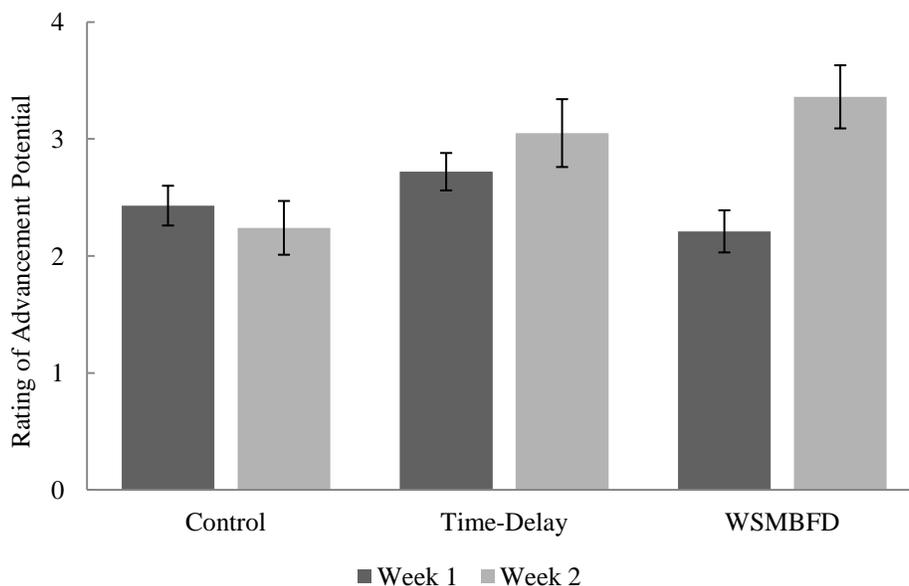


Figure 8. Advancement potential by week and condition.

Hypothesis 12b stated that, during Week 2, participants assigned to the intervention conditions would say “yes” to more requests that they felt would hurt their careers if they were to say “no” than would those in the control condition. Although the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,602) = .27, p = .76, \eta^2 < .01$, the planned contrasts demonstrated the hypothesized differences in the conditions (See Table 12 for means and standard errors). As hypothesized, in Week 2, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) said “yes” to significantly more requests that they felt would hurt their career if they declined than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,602) = 7.80, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01$. Additionally, between the two weeks of data collection, participants in the WSMBFD condition demonstrated a positive significant change in the number of requests they said “yes” to from before to after the intervention, $F(1,602) = 6.86, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$. This was not the case for the control condition, $F(1,602) = .27, p = .60, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,602) = .27, p = .60, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 9). The WSMBFD condition effectively changed participants’ behaviors so that

they were more discerning about the requests they accepted, which in this case was to accept requests that they felt would hurt them if they were to say “no.” Thus, Hypothesis 12b was supported.

Table 12.

Means and Standard Errors of Hurt Career By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	3.12	.18	2.64	.25
Time-Delay	3.20	.18	3.39	.31
WSMBFD	2.81	.19	3.72	.29

N = 603.

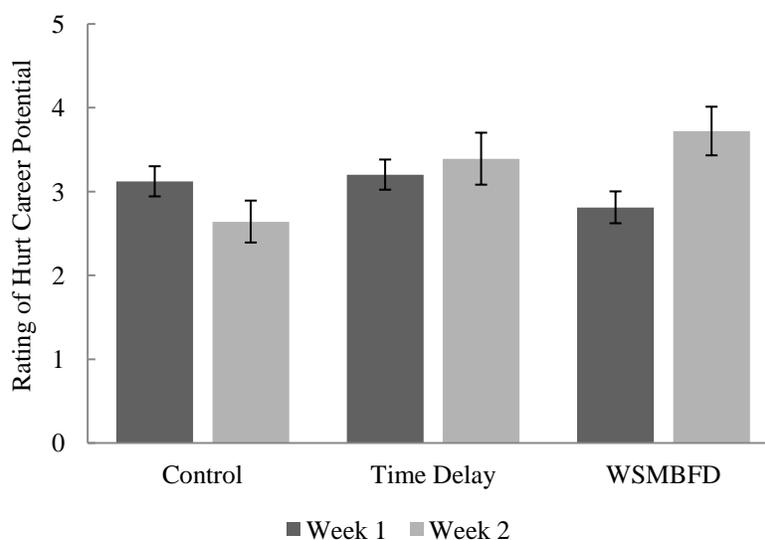


Figure 9. Hurt career by week and condition.

Hypothesis 12c stated that, during Week 2, participants in the intervention conditions would say “yes” to more requests that they felt they would enjoy than would those in the control condition. Although the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,605) = 1.71$, $p = .18$, $\eta^2 = .01$, the planned contrasts showed some of the hypothesized differences between the condition (See Table 13 for means and standard errors). Contrary to the hypothesis, in Week 2, individuals

in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) did not say “yes” to significantly more requests that they felt they would enjoy than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,605) = .25, p = .62, \eta^2 < .01$. However, in accordance with the hypothesis, between the two weeks of data collection, participants in the WSMBFD condition demonstrated a positive significant change in the number of requests they said “yes” to from before to after the intervention, $F(1,605) = 5.86, p = .02, \eta^2 = .01$. This was not the case for the control condition, $F(1,605) = 2.24, p = .14, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,605) = .07, p = .79, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 10). The WSMBFD condition effectively changed participants’ behaviors so that they were more discerning about the requests they accepted, which in this case was to accept requests that they felt would enjoy, although this difference was not significantly different from the control condition. Thus, Hypothesis 12c was partially supported.

Table 13.

Means and Standard Errors of Enjoyment By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	2.42	.16	2.81	.21
Time-Delay	2.79	.15	2.88	.27
WSMBFD	2.31	.16	3.03	.25

$N = 606$.

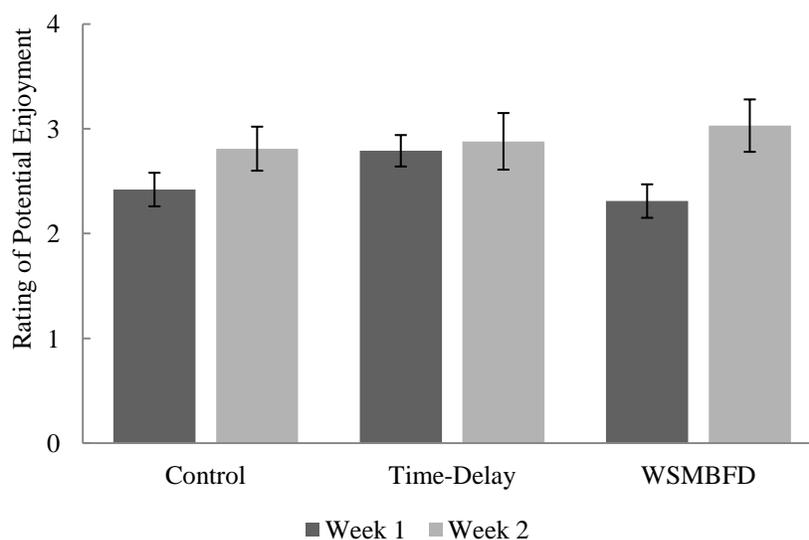


Figure 10. Enjoyment by week and condition.

Hypothesis 12d stated that participants in Week 2 would say “no” to more requests that they felt would take time away from their family and friends and/or doing things they loved if they were in one of the two intervention conditions than if they were in the control condition. Although the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,604) = 1.64, p = .20, \eta^2 < .01$, the planned contrasts showed some of the hypothesized differences in the conditions (See Table 14 for means and standard errors). Contrary to the hypothesis, in Week 2, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) were not more likely to say “no” to requests they felt would take time away from their family and friends than were those in the control condition, $F(1,605) = 1.08, p = .30, \eta^2 < .01$. However, between the two weeks of data collection, participants in the WSMBFD condition demonstrated a positive significant change in the number of requests they said “no” to from before to after the intervention, $F(1,604) = 7.48, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01$. This was not the case for the control condition, $F(1,604) = .15, p = .70, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,604) = .07, p = .79, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 11). The

WSMBFD condition effectively changed participants' behaviors so that they were more discerning about the requests they accepted, which in this case was to reject requests that they felt would take them away from family and friends and/or doing things they loved. Thus, Hypothesis 12d was partially supported.

Table 14.

Means and Standard Errors of Family/Friends By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	2.70	.35	2.99	.68
Time-Delay	2.78	.34	2.92	.37
WSMBFD	2.45	.41	4.70	.72

N = 606.

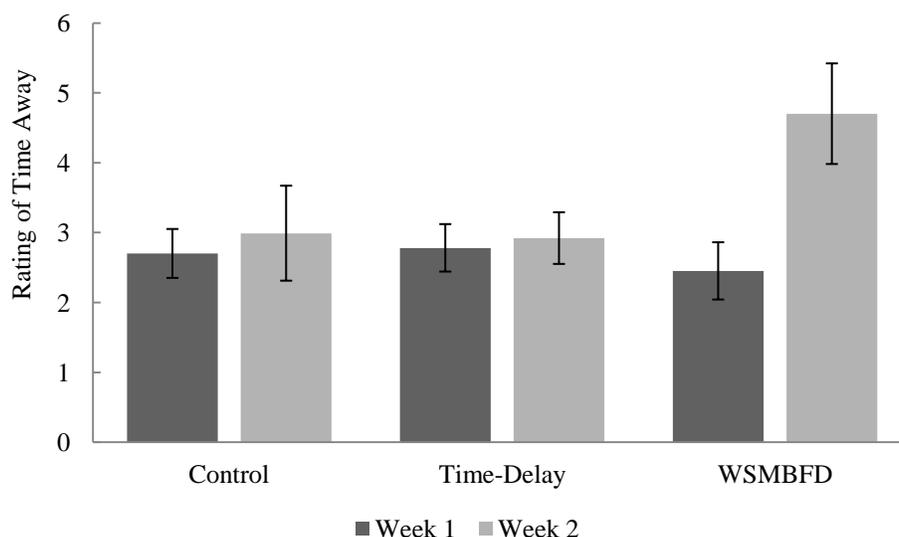


Figure 11. Family/friends by week and condition.

Hypothesis 12 examined the effectiveness of the interventions on changing the behavior of individuals. Results strongly supported the use of the WSMBFD intervention to train individuals to be strategic in the requests to which they said “yes” versus “no.” Individuals in the WSMBFD condition chose to accept requests that were more likely to help them advance their

careers, more likely to hurt them professionally if they were to say “no,” and that they would enjoy. Additionally, individuals in this condition were more likely to say “no” to requests that they felt would take time away from their family and friends and/or doing things they love. Thus, Hypothesis 12 was supported for the WSMBFD condition.

Hypothesis 13 stated that after the intervention, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) would say “yes” to requests that were more agentic (H13a), had more potential for future promotions (H13b), and were more important (H13c) more often than would those in the control condition. Furthermore, these same individuals in the intervention conditions would say “no” to requests that were more communal (H11d) than would those in the control condition. This hypothesis was tested using four 2 (week) x 3 (condition) x 2 (response) factorial ANOVAs, with planned contrasts, controlling for participant. Descriptive statistics and correlations can be found in Table 15.

Table 15.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Coded Interactions					
	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4
1 Agentic	2.45 (1.42)	--			
2 Communal	5.24 (1.20)	-.66**	--		
3 Promotion-helping	2.23 (1.29)	.72**	-.53**	--	
4 Important	3.35 (1.37)	.68**	-.49**	.72**	--

N = 813. All correlations significant at $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 13a stated that participants Week 2 assigned to the intervention conditions would say “yes” to more agentic requests than would those in the control condition. Although the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,988) = 1.26, p = .29, \eta^2 < .01$, the planned contrasts showed interesting, and hypothesized, differences in the condition (See Table 16 for means and standard errors). As hypothesized, in Week 2, individuals in the intervention

conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) said “yes” to significantly more agentic requests than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,988) = 7.61, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01$. Additionally, between the two weeks of data collection, participants in the WSMBFD condition demonstrated a positive significant change in the number of agentic requests they said “yes” to from before to after the intervention, $F(1,988) = 7.29, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$. This was not the case for the control condition, $F(1,988) = 2.51, p = .11, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,988) = .33, p = .57, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 12). The WSMBFD condition effectively changed participants’ behaviors so that they were more discerning about the requests they accepted, which in this case were more agentic requests. Thus, Hypothesis 13a was supported.

Table 16.

Means and Standard Errors of Agentic Requests By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	2.43	.11	2.16	.14
Time-Delay	2.63	.11	2.52	.17
WSMBFD	2.30	.11	2.79	.15

$N = 989$.

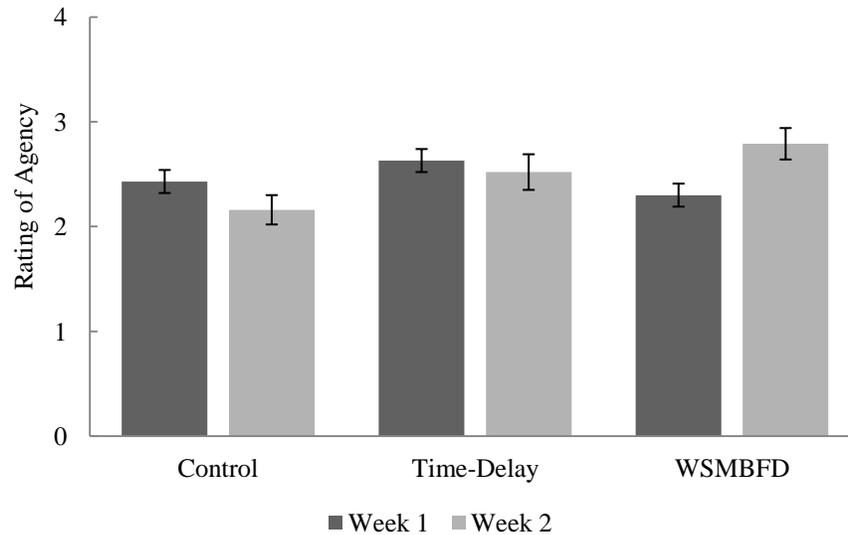


Figure 12. Agentic request by week and condition.

Hypothesis 13b stated that participants Week 2 assigned to the intervention conditions would say “yes” to more requests likely to promote them than would those in the control condition. The three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,988) = .69, p = .50, \eta^2 < .01$. Additionally, the planned contrasts did not show differences in the condition in the predicted direction (See Table 17 for means and standard errors). In Week 2, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) said “yes” to significantly more requests that would promote them than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,988) = 5.78, p = .02, \eta^2 = .01$. However, between the two weeks of data collection, there was no significant change in the number of requests that would offer promotion potential from before to after the intervention for the WSMBFD intervention, $F(1,988) = 2.28, p = .13, \eta^2 < .01$, the control condition, $F(1,988) = 3.08, p = .08, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,988) = .04, p = .84, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 13). Thus, Hypothesis 13b was not supported.

Table 17.

Means and Standard Errors of Potential Promotion Requests By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	2.27	.10	2.00	.12
Time-Delay	2.34	.10	2.34	.15
WSMBFD	2.22	.10	2.47	.14

N = 989.

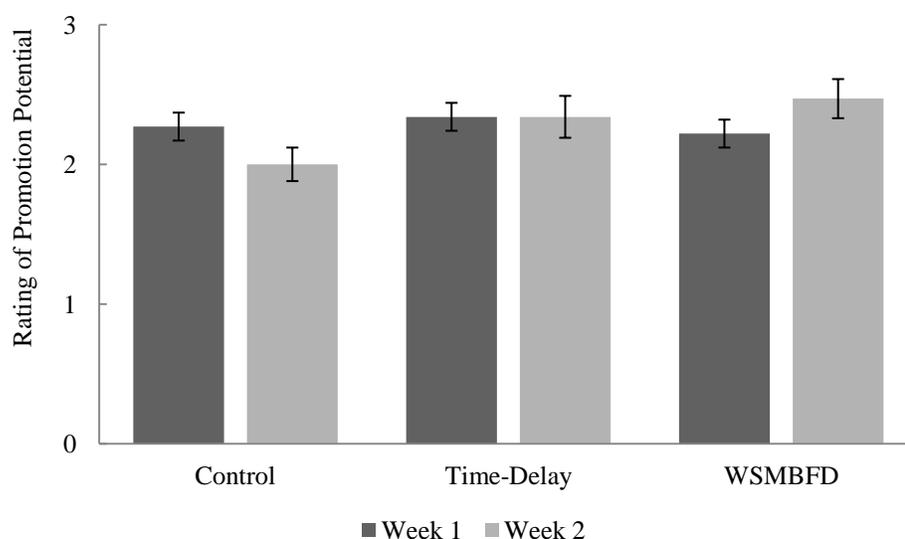


Figure 13. Potential promotion requests by week and condition.

Hypothesis 13c stated that participants Week 2 assigned to the intervention conditions would say “yes” to more important requests than would those in the control condition. The three-way interaction was not significant, $F(2,988) = .67, p = .51, \eta^2 < .01$. Additionally, the planned contrasts did not show differences in the condition in the predicted direction (See Table 18 for means and standard errors). In Week 2, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) said “yes” to significantly more requests that would promote them than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,988) = 10.78, p = .001, \eta^2 = .01$. However, between the

two weeks of data collection, there was no significant change in the number of important requests from before to after the intervention for the WSMBFD intervention, $F(1,988) = 2.66$, $p = .10$, $\eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,988) = 1.81$, $p = .18$, $\eta^2 < .01$. However, there was a significant difference between the two weeks in the control condition, $F(1,988) = 4.87$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 < .01$, such that requests in Week 2 for the control condition were significantly less important than in Week 1 (See Figure 14). Thus, Hypothesis 13c was not supported.

Table 18.

Means and Standard Errors of Important Requests By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	3.43	.11	3.07	.13
Time-Delay	3.46	.10	3.71	.16
WSMBFD	3.26	.10	3.55	.15

$N = 989$.

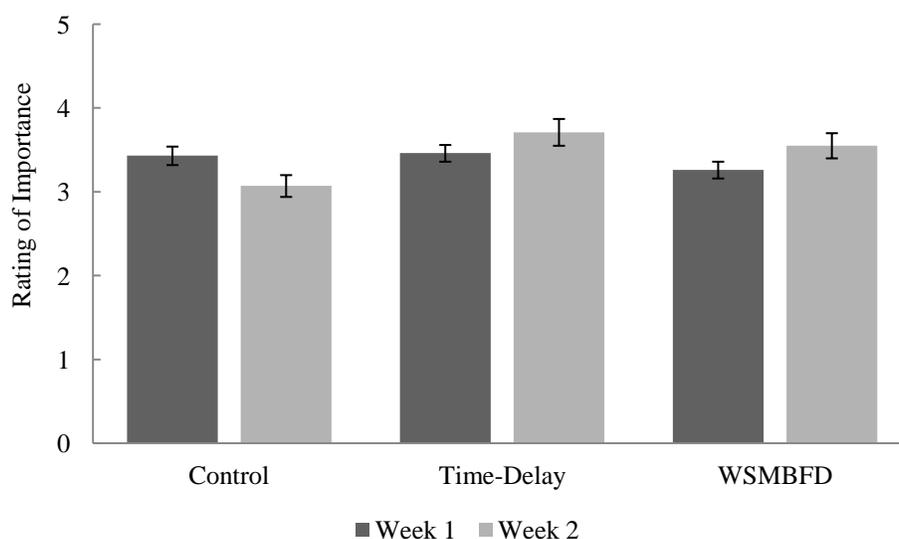


Figure 14. Request importance by week and condition.

Hypothesis 13d stated that participants Week 2 assigned to the intervention conditions would say “no” to more communal requests than would those in the control condition. The three-

way interaction was not significant, $F(2,988) = 1.48, p = .23, \eta^2 = .01$. Additionally, the planned contrasts did not show the hypothesized differences (See Table 19 for means and standard errors). In Week 2, individuals in the intervention conditions (Time-Delay and WSMBFD) did not say “no” to more communal requests than did individuals in the control condition, $F(1,988) = .13, p = .72, \eta^2 < .01$. Between the two weeks of data collection, there was a not significant change in the number of communal requests from before to after the intervention for the WSMBFD intervention, $F(1,988) = .06, p = .81, \eta^2 < .01$, the control condition, $F(1,988) = .57, p = .45, \eta^2 < .01$, or the Time-Delay intervention, $F(1,988) = 1.08, p = .30, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Figure 15). Thus, Hypothesis 13d was not supported.

Table 19.

Means and Standard Errors of Communal Requests By Week and Condition

	Week 1		Week 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control	5.04	.18	5.27	.25
Time-Delay	5.45	.18	5.16	.22
WSMBFD	5.06	.21	5.15	.33

$N = 989$.

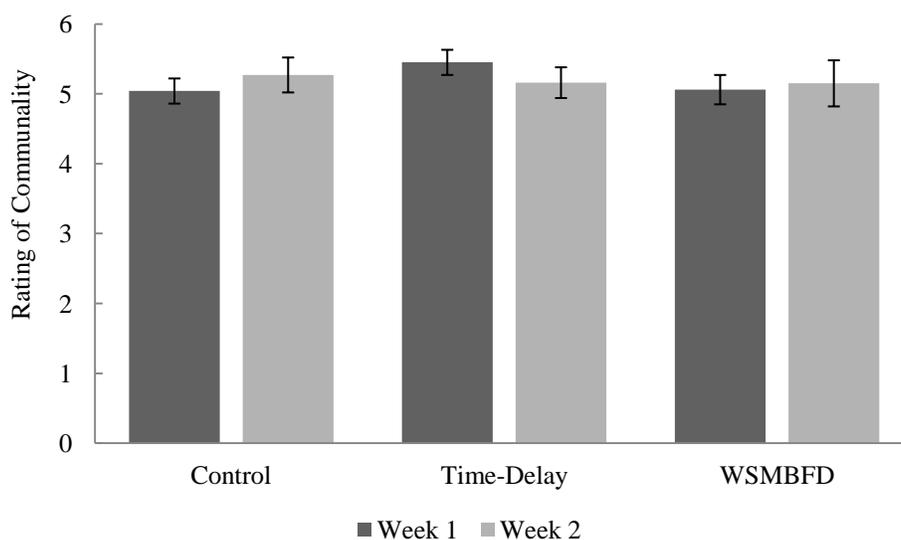


Figure 15. Communal requests by week and condition.

Hypothesis 13 stated that in Week 2, participants in the intervention conditions would accept requests that were more agentic, more likely to offer promotion potential, and were more important and to say “no” to requests that were more communal than would those in the control condition. As expected, participants in the WSMBFD condition were more like to accept agentic requests and requests that were likely to offer promotion potential. However, contrary to expectations, there was no appreciable effect of the WSMBFD intervention on the importance or communality of requests that individuals said “yes” and “no” to, respectively. Thus, Hypothesis 13 was partially supported.

5.5 Discussion

This study presents the effectiveness of two remediative strategies to help men and women say “no” strategically—reframing to induce thoughtful processing (WSMBFD) and a Time-Delay. By clearing the litter of less meaningful tasks, individuals may have more opportunities to do the things that will promote them faster, increase their performance, and

provide personal fulfillment. The results of this study strongly suggest that inducing thoughtful processing of the requests individuals receive is a viable way to get women (and men) to manage their time and resources in a way that is beneficial to them.

Hypothesis 8 examined the effectiveness of the Week 2 interventions as a whole. Results supported the effectiveness of the interventions, particularly for women. Women in Week 2 said “no” significantly more than any other group. Based on this finding, the effectiveness of the interventions was encouraging, but required more information to draw strong conclusions.

Hypotheses 9 and 10 elucidated the effectiveness of the interventions. While I expected that the WSMBFD condition would be the most powerful, the Time-Delay condition came forth as the one most useful in encouraging women to say “no.” This is likely due to the lag in time that this condition provided. By giving women an opportunity to consider requests more thoughtfully, they were likely to say “no.” However, these hypothesis are useful in describing the proportions of “yes” and “no” responses that people gave, but more information was called for in assessing the quality of “yes” and “no” responses. However, as described in Hypothesis 11, the relations between the intervention conditions and saying “no” were not mediated by affective responses of guilt and core self-evaluation.

Hypotheses 12 and 13 examined the overall effectiveness of the intervention strategies to modify participants’ behaviors. Hypothesis 12 strongly supported the use of the WSMBFD intervention to make individuals more mindful of the requests they accepted. Individuals in this condition chose to say “yes” to requests that they felt would help their careers, hurt them if they were to say “no,” and that they thought they would enjoy and to say “no” to tasks they felt would take them away from loved ones. Finally, individuals in the WSMBFD

intervention chose to accept requests that were objectively more agentic (Hypothesis 13). Thus, the WSMBFD intervention made individuals more strategic in their responding.

Studies 1 and 2 in this dissertation identified the difficulty that women have in saying “no” and examined one of the reasons that may be the case. Study 3 offered a potential strategy for overcoming the inability to say “no” to requests that will not make individuals successful. By making the requests more salient and engaging in central route processing and by making individuals more mindful of the types of requests they received, participants were better able to judge the costs and benefits of the requests and were able to be strategic in the types of requests they chose to accept. The present study did not teach participants to say “no” to all requests, but rather, helped individuals identify the requests that would or would not help them succeed.

CHAPTER 6. General Discussion

In three studies, I examined the difficulty that women having in saying “no” to workplace requests. The first study examined the phenomenon of saying “no” and examined two individual differences that contributed to not saying “no” as well as two affective outcomes. The results of this study supported the plethora of anecdotal evidence in popular media, self-help books, and blogs, which contend that women do not say “no” at work and that they would benefit by being able to do so, in the form of less guilt and more positive core self-evaluation. While personality effects on difficulty saying “no” emerged, these traits, specifically conscientiousness and agreeableness, did not interact with gender. Being conscientious, agreeable, or both was likely to discourage one from saying “no,” regardless of gender.

In the second study, I examined one potential reason for explaining why women feel compelled to not say “no”: that they fear being penalized because of it. This study was based on the work of Heilman and Chen (2005), which found that women were given worse performance evaluations, fewer recommendations for promotions and rewards, and were deemed less likeable when they did not behave communally. In the present study, I found that individuals rating a target strongly preferred one who said “yes” as opposed to “no” to a request made by a supervisor. Acting communally was valued by the group. Additionally, female targets in this study were given a boost in promotions and rewards when they said “yes.” Thus, a preference for people who help and validation for women who say “yes” may be one of the reasons that individuals find saying “no” difficult.

Study 3 examined the types of requests that individuals received at work and tested two remediative interventions to teach women (and men) to say “no” at work. Specifically, this study was designed to promote thoughtfulness in responding to requests so that individuals would say

“yes” to requests that would help them be successful in the organization and “no” to requests that they did not enjoy, did not help them succeed, and that took time and resources away from other priorities. Inducing a Time-Delay allowed women to think more carefully about the requests they were asked to perform and led to proportionally more “no” responses than prior to the intervention. The WSMBFD condition, on the other hand, led individuals to be more strategic in the requests they accepted. Participants in this condition accepted requests that were strategic and declined requests that would take time away from other priorities. Thus, Study 3 provided one answer to the question of how to teach individuals to say “no”: to make the requests more salient and to make the responses more thoughtful.

The overall findings of these three studies can be summarized as such: Women have a more difficult time saying “no” to workplace requests, in part because of their short-term emotional reactions to the requests, because of the types of requests they receive, and because they are encouraged not to say “no;” however, thoughtfully considering requests leads all individuals to make choices that are more strategic to their long-term success.

6.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of this dissertation contribute to the literature, theoretically and practically, in at least three ways. First, results of Studies 1 and 3 provide empirical evidence supporting the anecdotal evidence available that posits that women, more so than men, have a greater inability to say “no” to professional requests made of them in the workplace. Previous research has simply not empirically addressed what has become a common conjecture made in blogs and business (self-help) literature. By examining the extent to which the phenomenon exists (Study 1) and providing a remediative intervention (Study 3), the empirical research presented in this dissertation provides both evidence of the problem and a potential solution.

Second, this study examined the impact of prescriptive gender norms for helping on the inability of individuals (and women in particular) to say “no” to professional requests (Study 1) and the social norms that create an environment in which saying “no” is discouraged (Study 2). In understanding the impact of social norms on individuals’ behavior, we can better address the potential inequality that results from outmoded gender prescriptions. The current research shows the underlying importance that gender stereotypes and normative expectations have on one’s willingness to engage in workplace behaviors that seem to be beneficial in pleasing others but may actually be harmful in getting one promoted. As Vescio’s (Biernat & Vescio, 2002; Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005; Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003) work shows, women are often accorded the praise not the power, and one of the implications of this work is that people believe that women are nice and want praise, not power. This belief about the niceness of women, laced with benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), means that women are expected to say “yes” and they typically do. For men, however, their willingness to say “yes” professionally may be more strongly linked to the powerful outcomes. Study 2 demonstrated the preference individuals have for those who help.

Third, from an applied perspective, this study may shed light on gender differences that still remain steadfast in the workplace and provide some strategies to guide individuals in how to act to remediate such differences. That is, the rates at which women advance relative to men are still very disparate and underlying this may be gender differences in the inability to successfully differentiate workplace assignments that employees should versus should not accept. If women simply do not say “no,” they may be showing that they are open to the idea of promotions but closed to having the time and resources to accommodate such upward career moves. Accordingly

women may be limiting their ability to shatter glass and succeed at rates similar to men because they are saying “yes” to tangential things that keep them busy but not advancing.

6.2 Limitations of this Dissertation

As with any empirical research study, this dissertation has limitations. The primary limitation of Study 1 is the reliance on single-source and single-time point data collection. Because the data collected in this study were provided entirely by the participants, there is no way to verify its authenticity or correspondence to actual personality traits, affective responses, and behaviors. Additionally, because the data was collected at a single time point, it is difficult to make directional predictions, thereby limiting the questions that can be answered by the data. However, there is still enormous merit to collecting and having Study 1 data. This dissertation breaks new territory in the field and, as such, provides an important benchmark from which to begin. That is, it was a vitally important measure, in some way, of the existence and the strength of the construct and to see if general differences emerged in rates of saying “no” professionally between men and women. Study 1 provided that necessary empirical data, then, to confirm previous non-empirical conjectures that women have more difficulty saying “no” at work than do men. Additionally, Study 1 established relations between the difficulty of saying “no” and a number of other variables of interest.

The second study employed a modified paradigm of that used in Madeline Heilman’s research (Heilman & Chen, 2005; Heilman & Haynes, 2008; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004; Heilman & Wallen, 2010) to examine how women are treated when they say “no.” In adapting this well-established methodology, it was necessary to change the question being asked. Saying “no” differs from the agentic/communal comparisons that Heilman and her colleagues make. It is closely related to communal behaviors, because saying “yes” at its core a

communal act in helping others. However, it is a very specific type of communality. In particular, say “yes” does not necessarily have to be beneficial to others. As shown in Study 3, individuals can act in their own self-interest when saying “yes” by choosing to accept requests that are agentic and likely to promote them. Therefore, Study 2 presents potential research endeavors to determine the finer distinctions that can be made in individuals’ perceptions of saying “no.” Therefore, the current study supplies a general benchmark for future research in this methodology to determine the conditions under which women may be denigrated for saying “yes” or “no.”

In the third study, as with Study 1 and Study 2, all individuals participated voluntarily. However, in evaluating the extent to which individuals say “no,” these participants had already shown their propensity to not say “no” simply by taking part. This is true of the third study particularly because of the research questions and because of the far greater time investment than the previous two studies. However, this does not negate their participation and, in fact, adds to the strength of the study. Participants who were willing to track all of their requests for two weeks were perhaps some of the individuals most likely to benefit from the interventions.

Another limitation of the third study is the distinction that participants were asked to make between in-role and extra-role requests. As stated previously, the distinction between the two can often become muddled (Kidder & Parks, 2001). I explained the types of requests that I wanted to collect from participants in their daily emails and also made myself available to answer any questions they might have regarding the interactions they should report; however, reporting was done at their own discretion. On a similar note, there was no way to determine days in which participants did not receive any requests and days when they received requests but did not submit an interaction form. Several participants e-mailed when they did not have any

requests in a day, but others were not so conscientious and therefore there may be some instances in which low participant request rates are confounded with days that did not involve requests. However, the analyses done in this study did not require daily interactions; therefore, all reports that fit the criteria were included and provided useful input.

A final limitation of this dissertation is present in all three studies but is perhaps more philosophical in nature. In order to measure saying “no,” the response of “no” versus “yes” was dichotomized. That is to say, individuals in this study who said “yes” were treated the same as those who did not say “no.” In the second study in particular, the responses of the target in the vignette used a “yes”/“no” dichotomy. However, as an examination of anecdotal (Gerber, 2012) and Study 3 empirical data would suggest, saying “no” is not always the same as saying “yes.” Gradations of willingness and commitment mean that there are also nuanced differences in the ways in which individuals accept or decline requests. However, the dichotomization used in the present dissertation provides at least two benefits. First, by dichotomizing the responses of individuals into “yes” and “no,” I was able to make comparisons in the data that otherwise would be difficult to evaluate methodically. Second, as the first study of its kind, using a dichotomous point of comparison sets a benchmark from which other, more specific questions can be asked. Thus, the question “Is not saying ‘no’ the same as saying ‘yes’?” falls outside of the scope of the current research but provides an excellent platform for continued study in this research area.

6.3 Strengths of this Dissertation

The primary strength of this dissertation is its novelty. This set of three studies taps a construct that has not previously been examined and thus provides the first empirical study of a complex and important workplace phenomenon, the inability of women to say “no” to workplace

requests. In the three related studies, I have determined the existence of the construct, evaluated a potential mechanism driving it, and tested remediative strategies to address the issue.

Additionally, this dissertation, and particularly Study 3, provides a remediative strategy to adapt successful behavioral strategies that might make women more successful in the workplace. By creating the two interventions described, I have been able to encourage women (and men) to say “no” to the types of requests that they should avoid, and to say “yes” to the requests that potentially will make them more successful at work.

6.4 Future Directions

As stated previously, this study is the first of its kind and therefore the field is open to more complex research on saying “no.” First, only a small sample of affective outcomes and personality traits were examined in Study 1. Future research could delve more closely into the manifestation of the construct. I examined two personality traits and two affective outcomes in this study, but there may be other correlates more related and more informative. For example, much of the research presented as theoretical foundation in this study used OCB or helping behaviors. However, future work is necessary to define the intersections between not saying “no” and helping. The similarity of the concepts creates the assumption that they overlap; however, empirical research on not saying “no” and prosocial behaviors and well as saying “no” and negative behaviors and outcomes would provide a more detailed model for this behavior.

Second, research that allows for directional predictions would be particularly useful in understanding the outcomes of saying “no.” In these three studies, saying “no” was examined without a time component; thus, we do not yet understand the full scope of the consequence that an individual, particularly a women, might face when saying “no.” Research on workplace interdependence might implicitly assume that individuals will help one another when asked (for

example; Cunningham et al., 1980) because social norms are in place to do so. Hence understanding the ramifications for both the individual and the organization is critical, as there may be negative consequence for perceived anti-social behavior for someone who says “no,” even when it helps the individual.

Third, additional research on the nuances of saying “no” could provide an even more complex picture of the situations in which saying “no” will be most strategic for women. For example, Study 2 could be modified to include more complex interactions in which an employee says “yes” or “no.” Additionally, individual differences on the part of the rater may provide some useful information on who is most likely denigrate women (and men) who say “no.”

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation provides the first empirical evidence of women’s inability to say “no” at work and strategies to make saying “no” strategic. As evidence from popular culture suggests, women have a difficult time declining professional requests made by others. The first study examined the willingness that women (and men) showed in saying “no” to work-related requests, along with several factors that defined relations to the construct. Results confirmed that women had difficulty saying “no” to workplace requests and that personality traits and affective outcomes played a role in this difficulty. The second study examined the consequences of saying “no” based on potential denigration that women might face for not acting communally. Results supported a distinct preference for targets who did not say “no” to their supervisor. The third and final study employed a two-week diary study that measured the extent to which individuals received requests and the nature of those requests and then provided two remediative strategies for men and women to reflect upon and consider requests. Results indicated that interventions were successful at getting women to say “no” more often (Time-

Delay condition) and in making all participants more strategic in the requests to which they said “yes” (WSMBFD condition). By making individuals better at saying “no,” they have more time and resources to devote to the tasks that will make them successful at work.

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Appendix A: Study 1 Measures

Chronically Not Saying No

Instructions: Please consider the extent to which you engage in the following behaviors while at work.

1 = never to 5 = usually

- 1) I have trouble saying “no” when people ask me to engage in extra work.
- 2) I have a hard time saying “no” when my male coworkers/colleagues ask for my help.
- 3) I often agree to serve on committees and help with things.
- 4) I have a hard time saying “no” when my subordinates/junior colleagues ask for my help.
- 5) I usually agree readily to help my coworkers when they ask me, despite how much work it is.
- 6) After I say “no” to a few requests for help, I start to feel guilty.
- 7) Even though I know I don’t have the time, I often agree to do things that are time-consuming.
- 8) It is very difficult for me to say no to others.
- 9) I have a hard time saying “no” when my supervisors/senior colleagues ask for my help.
- 10) I often agree to do things immediately and then regret not having said “no” later.
- 11) When I am behind on my own projects, I still have problems saying “no” to others’ requests.
- 12) I agree to help people I work with at the detriment of achieving my own goals.

- 13) I have a hard time saying “no” when my female coworkers/colleagues ask for my help.

Core Self-Evaluation Scale (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen 2003)

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

- 1) I am confident I get the success I deserve in life.
- 2) Sometimes I feel depressed. (reverse-coded)
- 3) Why I try, I generally succeed.
- 4) Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless. (reverse-coded)
- 5) I complete tasks successfully.
- 6) Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work. (reverse-coded)
- 7) Overall, I am satisfied with myself.
- 8) I am filled with doubts about my competence. (reverse-coded)
- 9) I determine what will happen in my life.
- 10) I do not feel in control of my success in my career. (reverse-coded)
- 11) I am capable of coping with most of my problems.
- 12) There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me. (reverse-coded)

Guilt (Watson & Clark, 1999)

Instructions: Indicate the extent to which you have felt the following emotions in the past TWO WEEKS at work.

1 = not at all to 5 = very much

- 1) Guilty
- 2) Ashamed
- 3) Blameworthy
- 4) Dissatisfied with self
- 5) Angry at self
- 6) Disgusted with self

Conscientiousness (Goldberg et al., 2006)

Instructions: Please rate the extent to which each of the following statements describes you.

1 = not at all to 5 = very much

- 1) I am always prepared.
- 2) I pay attention to details.
- 3) I get chores done right away.
- 4) I carry out my plans.
- 5) I make plans and stick to them.
- 6) I waste my time.
- 7) I find it difficult to get down to work.
- 8) I do just enough work to get by.
- 9) I don't see things through.
- 10) I shirk my duties.

Agreeableness (Goldberg et al., 2006)

Instructions: Please rate the extent to which each of the following statements describes you.

1 = not at all to 5 = very much

- 1) I have a good word for everyone.
- 2) I believe that others have good intentions.
- 3) I respect others.
- 4) I accept people as they are.
- 5) I make people feel at ease.
- 6) I have a sharp tongue.
- 7) I cut others to pieces.
- 8) I suspect hidden motives in others.
- 9) I get back at others.
- 10) I insult people.

Appendix B: Study 2 Stimuli and Measures

Vignette

Instructions: Please read the following scenario carefully. You will be asked to answer a series of questions about the situation immediately after reading it.

“A **female/male** employee in your work group has been asked by **her/his** supervisor to head up a new committee that will solely help in her/his department.

The **female/male** employee decides to say ‘**no**’ / ‘**yes**’ to the supervisor.”

Performance Evaluation (Heilman & Chen, 2005)

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

1 = average to 7 = excellent

- 1) Overall, how would you rate this employee’s performance over the past year?
- 2) In your opinion, how good are the chances that this employee will advance in the company?
- 3) In your assessment, how good are the chances that this employee will succeed?
- 4) To what extent would you recommend the following rewards for this individual:

Reward Recommendations (Heilman & Chen, 2005)

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you would recommend this person for each of the following.

1 = would definitely not recommend to 7 = would definitely recommend

- 1) Salary increase
- 2) Promotion

3) High profile project

4) Bonus pay

Interpersonal Warmth (Heilman & Chen, 2005)

Instructions: To what extent do the following terms describe this individual?

1) Warm

2) Sincere

3) Good-Natured

4) Selfish

Appendix C: Study 3 Diary Study Interaction Forms

Control Condition

- 1) What is your four-digit identification code? (response required)
- 2) Please describe the context of the request.
- 3) How stressful did the request feel at that moment? (1 = Not at all stressful to 7 = Very stressful)
- 4) Please describe your response to the request.
- 5) How well did you manage the situation? (1 = Not at all well to 7 = Very well)
- 6) How much work will this request involve? (1 = Very little to 7 = Very much)
- 7) Do you have another interaction to report? (Yes/No)

WSMBFD Condition

- 1) What is your four-digit identification code? (response required)
- 2) Please describe the context of the request.
- 3) How stressful did the request feel at that moment? (1 = Not at all stressful to 7 = Very stressful)
- 4) Is it likely that saying 'no' hurt your career? (1 = Not at all to 7= Very much)
- 5) Is this request something you would really enjoy doing? (1 = Not at all to 7= Very much)
- 6) Would you advise your best friend to do this? (1 = Not at all to 7= Very much)
- 7) Will saying 'no' to this request allow you significantly more time with your family/friends and/or doing things you love? (1 = Not at all to 7= Very much)
- 8) Please describe your response to the request.
- 9) How well did you manage the situation? (1 = Not at all well to 7 = Very well)

10) How much work will this request involve? (1 = Very little to 7 = Very much)

11) Please describe the outcome of your response to the request.

12) Do you have another interaction to report? (Yes/No)

Time-Delay Condition

1) What is your four-digit identification code? (response required)

2) Please describe the context of the request.

3) How stressful did the request feel at that moment? (1 = Not at all stressful to 7 = Very stressful)

4) Did you say: "I'll think about that and get back to you"? (Yes/No)

5) If no, why not?

6) Please describe your response to the request.

7) Please describe the outcome of your response to the request.

8) How well did you manage the situation? (1 = Not at all well to 7 = Very well)

9) How much work will this request involve? (1 = Very little to 7 = Very much)

10) Do you have another interaction to report? (Yes/No)

Appendix D: Study 3 Retrospective Report

- 1) Is the requested task complete? (Yes/No)

Norms and Consequences of Saying “No” (from Study 2)

Instructions: Please rate each of your reported interactions on the following items on how true they are of this particular task.

1 = Not at all to 7 = Very much

- 1) I would feel guilty if I were to say “no” to this request.
- 2) I would feel good about myself if I were to say “yes” to this request.

Reframing Questions (from the WSMBFD condition)

Instructions: Please rate the extent to which you believe the following are true of the request.

1 = Not at all true to 7 = Very much true

- 1) I believed that doing this task will hurt my career.
- 2) I believed that doing this task will advance me professionally.
- 3) I believed this task would be enjoyable.
- 4) I believed not doing this task would allow me more time with my friends and family and/or doing thing I love.

Appendix E: Study 3 Independent Coding of Reported Events

Categorical Variables

- 1) Did the personal accept the request? (Yes/No/Unclear)
- 2) Where did the request come from? (Superior [higher level]/Peer or colleague [same level]/Subordinate [lower level]/Non-work)

Interval Variables

- 1) How agentic was the task? (1 = Not at all agentic to 7 = Very agentic)
- 2) How communal was the task? (1 = Not at all communal to 7 = Very communal)
- 3) Is this task going to help the person get promoted? (1 = Not at all to 7 = Very much)
- 4) Is this task important? (1 = Not at all to 7 = Very much)