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Article in *Psychology of Women Quarterly* · May 2010

DOI: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01561.x

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## DISRUPTIONS IN WOMEN'S SELF-PROMOTION: THE BACKLASH AVOIDANCE MODEL

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Women experience social and economic penalties (i.e., backlash) for self-promotion, a behavior that violates female gender stereotypes yet is necessary for professional success. However, it is unknown whether and how the threat of backlash interferes with women's ability to self-promote. The present research examined the effects of fear of backlash and self-regulatory mode on women's self-promotion success by testing the backlash avoidance model (BAM), a model designed to account for disruptions in women's self-promotion. Two studies employing U.S. undergraduate samples examined self-promotion both in a live interview and written context. Results supported the BAM's predictions that self-promoting women's fear of backlash inhibits activation of a goal-focused, locomotive regulatory mode, which subsequently interferes with self-promotion success. This process was not evident for self-promoting men (Study 1) or peer-promoting women (Study 2), groups who demonstrated reliably more promotion success than self-promoting women. The influence of women's endorsement of communal stereotypes and their perceived entitlement were also investigated. Implications for women's self-promotion, gender stereotyping, and workplace parity are discussed.

Despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act over 40 years ago, professional women still earn only 77 cents on the dollar relative to their male counterparts, resulting in an estimated \$700,000 to \$2,000,000 lifetime loss of income, depending on education level (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2007). Moreover, women account for only 2% of chief executive officers and 6% of the highest-earning workers in Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2008). Given these persistent gender inequities, it is important to investigate factors that contribute to the relative dearth and undercompensation of high-status professional women.

The present research focuses on self-promotion, a critical component of professional success that predicts perceptions of competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982) and thereby contributes to hiring and promotion decisions (e.g., Janoff-Bulman & Wade, 1996; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Rudman & Glick, 2001). As a primary form of impression management (Jones & Pittman, 1982), self-promotion includes "pointing with pride to one's accom-

plishments, speaking directly about one's strengths and talents, and making internal rather than external attributions for achievements" (Rudman, 1998, p. 629).

Despite its relevance to career success, to our knowledge, researchers have yet to examine gender differences in self-promotion. However, men's advantages have emerged for a host of related behaviors, including estimation of one's abilities (i.e., the female modesty effect; Daubman, Heatherington, & Ahn, 1992; Heatherington, Burns, & Gustafson, 1998), initiation and success of salary negotiations (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007), requests for promotion (Janoff-Bulman & Wade, 1996), and insistence on fair compensation for a job well done (Major, 1993). Therefore, it seemed likely that gender differences might emerge with respect to the expression of self-promotion as well as the processes underlying it.

The present research investigated whether and how women experience more difficulty with self-promotion than men by testing predictions derived from the backlash avoidance model (BAM). Specifically, in two studies we examined the role of women's fear of social penalties for self-promotion (i.e., fear of backlash; Rudman, 1998) and its effect on self-regulation in order to identify factors that disrupt women's ability to self-promote.

### *The Necessity of Self-Promotion*

From informal conversations with supervisors to hiring and promotion interviews, employees must often emphasize

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This research was supported by an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship awarded to the first author, and NSF grant BCS-0443342 awarded to the second author.

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their strengths and assertively pursue their goals in order to move up the ranks (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Indeed, without exercising this ability to sell oneself, individuals are likely to languish behind their self-promoting peers (Janoff-Bulman & Wade, 1996; Kacmar et al., 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Wade, 2001; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). Despite the importance of self-promotion for professional success, little is known about gender differences in this behavior. To address this gap, Study 1 was designed to test for gender differences in self-promotion.

By contrast, research has consistently demonstrated gender differences in the initiation and success of salary negotiations. For example, Babcock and Laschever (2003) found that only 7% of female professional-school graduates made attempts to negotiate increases in their first salary offer, in contrast to 57% of their male classmates. Not surprisingly, males with MBAs routinely obtain higher starting salaries than females with MBAs (Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005; Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993). Results of a meta-analysis showed that women consistently arrive at less favorable negotiation outcomes than men (Stulmacher & Walters, 1999). Thus, poor negotiation outcomes have important economic consequences for employed women.

Although evidence of a male advantage for negotiation suggests that a similar pattern is likely to emerge for self-promotion, we argue that self-promotion merits its own examination for two main reasons. First, negotiations typically take place only during initial hiring or advancement occasions, whereas self-promotion is likely to occur more frequently over the course of an individual's career. Second, as outlined below, the ability to self-promote is necessary for women to overcome negative stereotypes about their competence and leadership skills relative to men's, yet the double standard for self-promotion renders it more acceptable as a strategy for men. This difference suggests that self-promotion poses unique challenges for women that are likely to have implications for their professional success.

### *Backlash for Women's Self-Promotion*

Self-promotion presents a dilemma for women because it disconfirms the stereotype that they are less agentic and competent than men, yet women who self-promote are viewed as less likable (and consequently, less hireable) than male counterparts (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). That is, women's self-promotion elicits *backlash effects*—social and economic penalties for counterstereotypic behavior (for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Thus, professional women face a catch-22: They must overcome negative stereotypes about women by “acting like men” (Catalyst, 2008; Heilman, 1983, 2001) yet when they do so, they risk being penalized for violating gender prescriptions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). In fact, self-

promoting women are seen as more dominant and arrogant than self-promoting men, whose behavior is consistent with stereotypic expectations (Rudman, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Nauts, 2010). The double standard for self-promotion is a critical barrier to women's equitable treatment because self-promotion is necessary for career advancement, yet only women risk penalties for it.

Negotiation research has also uncovered backlash against women. For example, using a hiring paradigm, Bowles et al. (2007) found that male managers were more inclined to work with “nice” women who accepted their initial compensation offers, compared with women who attempted to negotiate for more money. By contrast, negotiating for a higher salary had no effect on managers' willingness to work with male candidates. These findings suggest that women “do not ask” (e.g., for higher pay, more responsibility, or greater recognition; Babcock & Laschever, 2003) because they (accurately) fear negative reactions from others. Consistent with this view, Amanullah and Morris (2010) found that women's fear of backlash for “being too demanding” accounted for gender differences in negotiation success. Thus, fear of backlash for behaving counterstereotypically may undermine women's subsequent abilities to successfully self-promote.

### *The Impact of Representational Role*

If self-promotion is problematic for women because it violates female prescriptions to be helpful, supportive, and other oriented (Wade, 2001), gender differences in negotiation ought to disappear when women negotiate on behalf of a peer—and they do (Bowles et al., 2005). For example, women asked to negotiate starting salaries made significantly larger requests for others than for themselves, whereas men showed the reverse pattern (Wade, 1995). Amanullah and Morris (2010) found a similar pattern: Men earned more than women when negotiating for their own salaries, whereas no gender differences emerged when negotiations were done on behalf of peers. These findings suggest that representational role moderates women's negotiation success, such that women are effective negotiators for other people, but not for themselves. Study 2 sought to determine whether this pattern extends more generally to self-promotion contexts. Additionally, we sought to uncover the specific mechanisms responsible for limiting women's success in promoting themselves.

### *The Role of Regulatory Mode*

We propose that self-regulation may be one such mechanism. Higgins and Kruglanski (1995) conceptualized locomotion and assessment as two self-regulatory modes that pertain to goal-directed behavior. *Locomotion* refers to being able to strive toward goals without inhibition, distractions, or delays. It is characterized by “the felicitous words of the Nike commercial, to ‘just do it’” (Kruglanski et al., 2000, p. 794). In contrast, *assessment* refers to cautiously

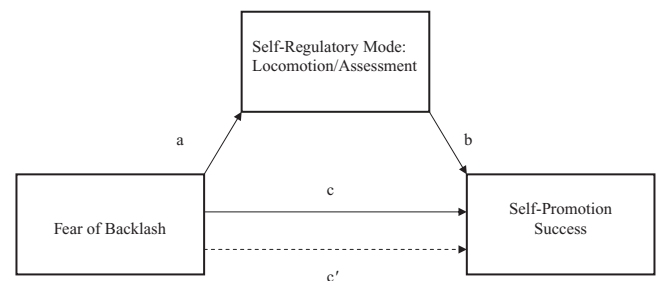
comparing alternatives, with a focus on “finding or doing just the right thing” (Kruglanski et al., 2000, p. 794). Thus, locomotion corresponds to the behavioral activation system, responsible for initiating and sustaining goal pursuit, whereas assessment corresponds to the behavioral inhibition system, associated with caution and risk aversion (Carver & White, 1994; Gray, 1972; Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2003). Locomotion has been positively linked to decisiveness and willingness to accept necessary risks when pursuing a goal, whereas assessment is associated with the need to evaluate the situation, rather than act (i.e., a “wait and see” orientation; Higgins et al., 2003). Finally, locomotion enhances the ability to focus on one’s goals without disruptions or distractions (i.e., “go with the flow”), whereas assessment is negatively associated with freely focusing on the task (Kruglanski et al., 2000).

When considering the role of self-regulation in situations that require self-promotion, we reasoned that people unable to pursue their goal without inhibition may be less likely to sell themselves effectively. Below, we propose a model predicting that women’s fear of backlash for self-promotion impedes their self-regulation, undermining their ability to “go for it” when self-promotion is necessary.

### The BAM

Women who fear backlash for counterstereotypical behavior may (understandably) behave defensively to avoid it. For example, women who feared backlash for scoring well on a masculine knowledge test concealed their success from others and increased their conformity to gender norms, compared with counterparts who did not fear backlash (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). The identical pattern occurred for men who feared backlash for having performed well on a feminine knowledge test, suggesting that, not surprisingly, both genders will protect themselves from social rejection. Similarly, Amanatullah and Morris (2010) found that women’s fear of being judged too “pushy” and “demanding” accounted for gender differences in negotiating an entry-level salary (also see Bowles et al., 2007). When people fear “jeer pressure” for violating gender stereotypes, it likely impinges on their gender identity—a central identity for both women and men—thus constituting a severe threat (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Fagot, Rodgers, & Leinbach, 2000; for a review, see Rudman & Glick, 2008). However, exactly how social threats undermine women’s ability to self-promote is unclear.

The BAM was designed to address this gap. As shown in Figure 1, the BAM posits that, for self-promoting women, fear of backlash for communal stereotype violation (e.g., self-promotion) impairs locomotion (unconstrained goal pursuit) and/or heightens assessment (a cautious, evaluative mode), either of which would diminish self-promotion success. That is, the threat of social reprisals for transgressing gender norms should lead to acute changes in women’s



**Fig. 1.** Backlash avoidance model of self-promotion success for women (BAM). Path a is obtained from regressing self-regulatory mode on fear of backlash. Path b is the effect of self-regulatory mode on self-promotion success after accounting for fear of backlash. The BAM predicts that women who fear backlash for self-promotion will experience decreased locomotion (ability to pursue their goals without inhibition) and/or increased assessment (caution and inhibition) and, as a result, they will show low self-promotion success. That is, self-regulation will mediate the predicted link between fear of backlash and self-promotion success (path c). The dashed arrow indicates the mediated path (path c').

regulatory mode, to the detriment of their self-promotion skills. If so, then women who fear backlash would show low self-promotion ability, but this relationship should be accounted for (i.e., mediated by) impediments in self-regulation (either reduced locomotion, heightened assessment, or both). In essence, fear of backlash for stereotype violation inhibits women’s performance because it serves as a catalyst for self-regulatory processes that interrupt their ability to freely sell themselves.

In contrast, when stereotype violation is not an issue, gender identity should not be threatened. Thus, people are likely to be able to override detriments in their self-regulatory mode that would otherwise disrupt performance. As a result, both self-promoting men and women obliged to promote a peer (a task in keeping with the female stereotype of communality) should not be subject to the mediation process outlined in the BAM. Specifically, although fear of social reprisals (e.g., being viewed as odd or unlikable) may generally reduce self-promotion success, and even influence self-regulation, self-regulation should only hinder promotion success for female self-promoters. Consequently, self-regulation should be ruled out as a mediating variable for male self-promoters or women who promote a peer. Thus, the BAM proposes that people must fear backlash for gender stereotype violation before changes in self-regulation will disrupt their ability to perform. In essence, for male self-promoters and women advocating for a peer, fear of social reprisals differs from fear of backlash (defined as penalties for counterstereotypic behavior). Although social threats can be generally detrimental, only the threat of backlash is likely to be sufficiently severe to instigate changes in self-regulation that will influence performance. When behavior does not violate stereotypes, people should be able to perform well because doing so does not

threaten their gender identity. For this reason, only self-promoting women should support the processes outlined in the BAM.

### STUDY 1

Study 1 was designed to address five specific aims. Specifically, we sought to test for gender differences in self-promotion during a simulated job interview (Aim 1), investigate women's fear of backlash for self-promotion (Aim 2), test the processes outlined in the BAM for self-promoting women (Aim 3), and provide discriminant validity for the BAM by supporting our reasoning that fear of backlash for stereotype violation is necessary for self-regulation to influence performance (Aim 4). To support Aim 4, the success of male self-promoters should not be influenced by self-regulation. Finally, the BAM is predicated on the prescriptive stereotype that women should be more communal than men. Therefore, women (but not men) who endorse this belief should be less likely to show self-promotion ability, because self-promotion violates the other-oriented traits prescribed for women (Aim 5). These objectives led to the following predictions:

*Hypothesis 1.* Men will report more self-promotion success than women (Aim 1).

*Hypothesis 2.* Women will report more fear of backlash than men (Aim 2).

*Hypothesis 3a.* For female self-promoters, fear of backlash will be positively correlated with assessment and negatively correlated with locomotion and self-promotion success (Aim 3). Moreover, as preliminary support for the BAM, locomotion should be positively related to self-promotion success, whereas assessment should be negatively linked to self-promotion success.

*Hypothesis 3b.* According to the BAM, women's fear of backlash will negatively predict self-promotion success, but this relationship will be mediated by reduced locomotion (Aim 3). That is, after accounting for locomotion, the link between fear of backlash and self-promotion success will be reduced to nonsignificance, and a test of the mediated effect will be significantly different from zero. Alternatively, or in addition, the negative relationship between women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success will be mediated by increased assessment (see Figure 1).

*Hypothesis 4.* Because self-promoting men do not violate gender stereotypes, changes in their self-regulatory mode should not interfere with their ability to self-promote. That is, reduced locomotion or increased assessment should not be significantly correlated with their reported performance. These findings would provide discriminant validity for the BAM (Aim 4).

*Hypothesis 5.* Gender will moderate the relationship between endorsing the female communality stereo-

type and self-promotion success, such that this relationship will be negative only for women, not men (Aim 5). For men, we expected no relationship because female prescriptions are not relevant to men's gender identity or expectations for their behavior.

### Method

#### Participants

Participants ( $N = 192$ ; 112 women) were undergraduate students recruited to participate in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement (age:  $M = 18.44$  years,  $SD = 1.08$ , median = 18.00). Racial composition was 48% White, 27% Asian, 9% Black, 6% Hispanic, 4% multiracial, and 6% who indicated another ethnicity. Because participant race had no effect on responses to our measures ( $p > .49$ ), it was not included as a factor in analyses.

#### Procedure and Materials

Participants were recruited for a study ostensibly conducted in partnership with the Office of Career Services, "investigating ways to improve students' interview skills." Participants were told that they would be videotaped during a simulated job interview and that their video would be critiqued by a member of the Career Services staff and then used as a model in workshops for their undergraduate peers. The experimenter then conducted and videotaped participants' job interview, using the questions described below (asked in a random order). Next, participants were escorted to an individual cubicle, where all measures were administered by a computer program; items within each measure were randomly presented. They completed the fear of backlash, self-promotion success, Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ), and communal stereotyping measures (in that order).<sup>1</sup> They then reported their gender and race. Finally, they were fully debriefed and awarded research credit.

*Self-promotion task.* Participants were videotaped while responding to six interview questions designed to elicit self-promotion. The questions were, "What would you say are your best qualities or strengths?"; "What are some of your accomplishments, and why do you think they are important?"; "Tell me about one specific time when you felt successful and proud of yourself"; "Are you good at taking charge of a situation?"; "Do you consider yourself to be ambitious?"; and "Overall, why should someone hire you as opposed to another candidate?"

*Fear of backlash.* To assess fear of backlash, we employed a measure used in previous research, in which it was found that (a) gender deviants (who had been told that they excelled on a cross-gendered knowledge test) scored higher on fear of backlash than gender normatives (who had been told that they had excelled on their own-gender

knowledge test) and (b) gender deviants who feared backlash were likely to hide their gender-atypical success (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Participants in the present study were asked to "imagine a group of people watching the tape of your interview" and then responded to four items using a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much so*). Sample items included, "Would you worry that people might think you were odd?"; "Would you be concerned that you might be disliked?"; and "Do you think you would feel proud?" (reverse coded). To specifically address reactions to self-promotion, we added three items, "Would you worry that people thought you were too confident [assertive]?" and "Would you worry about being called vain?" Scores were averaged to form the fear of backlash index, with higher scores indicating greater perceived threat. The coefficient alpha ( $\alpha = .84$ ) was consistent with past research ( $\alpha = .86$ ; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

*Perceived self-promotion success.* Participants responded to 10 items designed to assess their perceived self-promotion success on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). The scale reflected the fact that self-promotion increases perceptions of competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Sample items included, "Overall, how well do you think you promoted yourself during your interview today?"; "How much do you feel you came across as competent in your interview today?"; and "When others watch your interview video, how qualified do you think they will rate you?"

Participants also responded to five items designed to quantify perceived self-promotion success. These included "Based on your interview today, given a range between \$20,000–\$60,000, what dollar amount do you think you should receive as a yearly starting salary?"; "Given a range between 6 months to more than 2 years, how soon do you think you should be considered for promotion?" (reverse-coded); and "Given a range of 1–10, how many people do you think you would be capable of being in charge of (i.e., as a supervisor)?" Responses to all 15 questions were standardized and averaged to form the perceived self-promotion success index ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Regulatory mode.* The Regulatory Mode Questionnaire (RMQ) is a well-validated instrument for measuring individual differences in locomotion and assessment (Kruglanski et al., 2000). Because regulatory modes should vary as a function of the situation (Higgins, 2000), the RMQ is sensitive to contextual cues and perceived environmental threats (Higgins et al., 2001). Therefore, we used the RMQ to measure state regulatory mode. The locomotion subscale consists of 12 items, rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include "When I decide to do something, I can't wait to get started," "I am a go-getter," and "Most of the time my thoughts are occupied with the task I wish to accomplish." The assessment subscale also consists of 12 questions, in-

cluding "I often critique the work done by myself and others," "I often think that other people's choices and decisions are wrong," and "I tend to analyze the conversations I have had with others after they occur." Items were averaged such that high scores indicated more locomotion ( $\alpha = .82$ ) or assessment ( $\alpha = .67$ ). The coefficient alphas for these indexes were similar to those found in prior research (ranging from  $\alpha = .76$  to  $.86$ ); additionally, test-retest reliability for both scales has been acceptable (mean  $r = .75$ ; Higgins et al., 2003). As noted in the introduction, locomotion positively correlates with uninhibited goal pursuit, which we posit will be difficult for female self-promoters who fear backlash, whereas assessment positively correlates with behavioral inhibition (Higgins et al., 2003; see also Kruglanski et al., 2000).

*Communal stereotyping.* We also measured endorsement of the communal gender stereotype, violations of which are theorized to contribute to backlash against agentic women (e.g., Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Two items asked how important it is for either the ideal man or the ideal woman to enact communal qualities ("being nurturing" and "supporting others") on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). We chose these qualities because prior research demonstrated that they were more prescriptive for women than men (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These two items were averaged to form two subscales assessing the extent to which participants believed men should be communal,  $r(192) = .53$ ,  $p < .00$ , and women should be communal,  $r(192) = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ . We then computed a difference score, such that high scores indicated that women are prescribed to be more communal than men. A difference score was used because prescriptive stereotypes require a relative judgment (i.e., that the ideal woman *should* be more communal than the ideal man).

## Results and Discussion

### Gender Differences

Hypothesis 1 predicted that men would self-promote during a videotaped job interview more effectively than women. Results of a  $t$  test revealed that, as expected, men ( $M = .21$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) reported higher levels of self-promotion success than women ( $M = -.12$ ,  $SD = .98$ ),  $t(189) = 2.33$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $d = .34$ . That is, men were more likely to report that they successfully sold themselves when it was necessary for professional success. However, there were no reliable gender differences for fear of backlash,  $t(190) = .98$ ,  $p = .33$ , locomotion,  $t(188) = .10$ ,  $p = .32$ , or assessment,  $t(190) = .25$ ,  $p = .80$ . Thus, Hypothesis 2's prediction that women would fear backlash more than men was unsupported. Although women's scores were higher than men's, the difference was unreliable ( $M = 2.86$  vs.  $2.73$ ,  $SD = .89$  vs.  $.82$ , respectively,  $d = .15$ ). Nonetheless, for women who do fear backlash, the processes outlined in the BAM should be supported.

**Table 1**  
Correlations Among Dependent Variables by Participant Gender (Study 1)

	<i>FOB</i>	<i>Locomotion</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Communal Stereotype</i>	<i>SPS</i>
Fear of Backlash (FOB)	—	-.27*	.20	.07	-.28*
Locomotion	-.28**	—	.15	-.28*	.25
Assessment	.23*	.22	—	-.03	-.05
Communal Stereotype	.05	-.17	.01	—	.10
Self-Promotion Success (SPS)	-.21*	.34**	.15	-.20*	—

*Note.* Correlations below the diagonal are for self-promoting women; those above the diagonal are for self-promoting men. *N*s range from 79 to 80 for men, and from 109 to 112 for women. High scores indicate greater levels of each variable.

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

### Testing the BAM

Our primary aim was to test the BAM by determining the interplay of fear of backlash and regulatory mode on women's self-promotion success. Before mediation tests can be conducted, the variables must show significant intercorrelations (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Specifically, either path a (from the independent variable to the mediator) or path b (from the mediator to the dependent variable) must be significant in order for the indirect effect to be significantly different from zero, indicating successful mediation (see Figure 1; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Hypothesis 3a predicted that self-promoting women would meet this prerequisite. Table 1 displays the relevant correlations for women below the diagonal. Results provided initial support for the BAM such that women's fear of backlash was negatively correlated with locomotion and positively linked to assessment. In addition, fear of backlash and locomotion were negatively and positively correlated with reports of self-promotion success, respectively. However, assessment was not significantly negatively correlated with women's reports of self-promotion success; in fact, Table 1 reveals a weakly positive association between these two variables. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was only partially supported. Because the relationship between assessment and women's self-promotion success was nonsignificant (and even atheoretically positive), we turned to locomotion as a possible mediator in the BAM.

**Mediation analysis.** Hypothesis 3b predicts that diminished locomotion will mediate the relationship between women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success. To test this prediction, we employed an approach that involves computing confidence intervals based on an asymmetrical distribution of the mediated (indirect) effect (MacKinnon, Fritz, Williams, & Lockwood, 2007). We selected this technique over the Normal Theory (NT) approach introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986) because the latter approach suffers from low power and the associated test for the significance of mediation (Sobel's *Z*) is based on a symmetrical distribution of the mediated effect—an assumption that is

often breached (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). We also opted not to substitute NT with bootstrapping because doing so leads to inflated Type I error rates (up to 10%; MacKinnon et al., 2007), whereas computing asymmetrical confidence intervals offers the best balance of low Type I errors with increased power (see also MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). To operationalize this approach, we used the PRODCLIN program developed by MacKinnon et al. (2007).

Results of this analysis for self-promoting women are reported in Table 2 (top half). As can be seen, paths a, b, and c (corresponding to Figure 1) are all significant. Consistent with the BAM, the  $a \times b$  mediated effect is also reliable, as indicated by the fact that the confidence intervals do not include zero. As can be seen in Table 2, the reliable effect of fear of backlash on self-promotion success (path c) was reduced to nonsignificance after accounting for locomotion (path c'). Finally, Sobel's *Z* was significant, provided for readers accustomed to the NT approach. These results provide initial support for the BAM, suggesting that, when self-promoting women feared backlash, it inhibited their ability to focus on the goal of selling themselves during an interview, and consequently, they reported low self-promotion success.<sup>2</sup>

**Discriminant validity.** To provide discriminant validity for the BAM, Hypothesis 4 predicted that, because self-promoting men do not risk penalties for stereotype violation, they should be able to override the influence of regulatory mode when obliged to promote themselves during a job interview. Table 1, in which men's correlations are shown above the diagonal, supports this expectation. First, assessment was ruled out as playing a role for men because it was reliably correlated with neither fear of backlash (path a) nor self-promotion success (path b). Second, men (like women) showed negative correlations between fear of backlash and both locomotion and self-promotion success. This pattern suggests that, for both genders, anticipated social penalties were negatively related to both goal-directed behavior and reported self-promotion success. Finally, even though men did not show a reliable correlation between

**Table 2**  
Testing the Backlash Avoidance Model (Study 1)

<i>Path/effect</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sobel's Z</i>	<i>95% Confidence Intervals</i>
<b>Self-Promoting Women</b>				
<i>c</i> (FOB → SPS)	-.20*	.09		
<i>a</i> (FOB → Locomotion)	-.27**	.09		
<i>b</i> (Locomotion → SPS)	.31**	.09		
<i>c'</i>	-.11	.09		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	-.08*	.04	2.25*	-.1640, -.0216
<b>Self-Promoting Men</b>				
<i>c</i> (FOB → SPS)	-.27*	.11		
<i>a</i> (FOB → Locomotion)	-.27*	.11		
<i>b</i> (Locomotion → SPS)	.19	.11		
<i>c'</i>	-.22	.11		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	-.05	.04	1.37	-.1314, .0063

*Note.* *N* = 110 women, 79 men. Estimates are unstandardized. FOB = fear of backlash; SPS = self-promotion success. Path *b* is the effect of Locomotion on SPS after accounting for FOB. Path *c'* is the effect of FOB on SPS after accounting for Locomotion. Sobel's *Z* tests the significance of the mediation effect based on a symmetrical distribution of *a* × *b*. Confidence intervals for *a* × *b* are based on an asymmetrical distribution. Intervals that do not include zero support rejecting the null hypothesis that *a* × *b* = 0.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

locomotion and self-promotion success (path *b*), we tested the mediated effect because fear of backlash was linked to locomotion (path *a*). According to MacKinnon et al. (2007), if *either* path *a* or path *b* is significant, then the potential for mediation exists.

Results are reported in Table 2 (bottom half). Supporting Hypothesis 4, the mediated effect was not significant (i.e., the asymmetric confidence intervals included zero), and Sobel's *Z* was unreliable. Further, the significant relationship between fear of backlash and self-promotion success (path *c*) remained reliable after accounting for locomotion (path *c'*). These results support the BAM's assertion that, because men do not suffer fear of backlash for stereotype violation, their ability to self-promote is unlikely to be impeded by disruptions in self-regulatory mode.

#### *Communal Stereotyping Moderation Analysis*

To shed additional light on the processes interrupting women's self-promotion, we examined participants' endorsement of the female stereotype of communality. On average, scores on this index were reliably above zero (*M* = .24, *SD* = .63), *t*(188) = 5.21, *p* < .001, and did not differ by gender, *t*(187) = 1.52, *p* = .13, *d* = .22, indicating that participants generally endorsed the belief that women should be more communal than men. Of more importance, Hypothesis 5 states that endorsement of the female stereotype of communality will negatively predict women's (but not men's) self-promotion success. Table 1 provides preliminary support for this hypothesis, in that endorsing the stereotype was negatively and reliably related to women's self-promotion success, whereas it was weakly but positively related to men's self-promotion success.

To test Hypothesis 5, we standardized all variables and then regressed self-promotion success on participant gender and the female communality index in step 1 and their interaction in step 2. Results yielded the noted main effect for gender, qualified by the predicted interaction,  $\beta = -.15$ , *p* = .04. Dividing the sample by gender revealed that, as expected, endorsement of communal stereotypes negatively predicted women's self-promotion success ( $\beta = -.20$ , *p* = .04), but did not predict men's self-promotion success ( $\beta = .09$ , *p* = .39). These findings suggest that the communal stereotype may inhibit women from freely selling themselves to prospective employers, in that those who endorsed the stereotype showed reduced self-promotion, whereas the stereotype had no effect on men.

Taken together, Study 1's results revealed the expected gender differences in self-promotion success, and they offered initial support for the BAM's ability to illuminate the self-regulatory process disrupting women's ability to self-promote. As predicted, the relationship between women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success was fully mediated by their difficulty focusing on their goal without inhibition (locomotion mode). Additionally, Study 1 indicated that endorsing communal stereotypes impedes women's (but not men's) ability to self-promote. However, because we relied on participants' subjective self-reports, our results are compromised by the possibility that women responded to fear of backlash for stereotype violation by modestly reporting their ability to self-promote. Therefore, Study 2 utilized objective judges to rule out this potential confound. Study 2 also investigated the possibility that women promoted themselves less successfully than men because they suffer from a depressed sense of entitlement (Major, 1993). Therefore, to provide further discriminant validity



for the BAM, we tested whether locomotion would mediate the relationship between women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success more effectively than perceived entitlement.

Finally, although our findings were promising for the BAM, our expectation that fear of backlash would be greater for women than men was not supported, despite considerable research showing that women are more likely to be penalized than men for this behavior during job interviews (Rudman & Phelan, 2008) and the fact that fear of backlash was previously shown to account for gender differences in negotiation success (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). Study 2 will further investigate this issue by examining whether women who promote themselves will report more fear of backlash than women who promote a peer. In addition, assessment was not predictive of women's self-promotion success, so Study 2 afforded a second test of this variable.

## STUDY 2

The four primary aims of Study 2 were to demonstrate women's increased promotion success when advocating for a peer rather than the self (Aim 1); acquire independent ratings of women's self-promotion success (Aim 2); replicate and extend support for the BAM, this time using the context of a written essay rather than an interview (Aim 3); and test perceived entitlement as an alternative mediator of the link between women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success (Aim 4).

To meet these goals, Study 2 included only women and used a different type of self-promotion—in this case, promoting oneself as a candidate for admission to graduate school in a written personal statement. In addition, we randomly assigned half our participants to recommend a peer for graduate work instead of the self. We expected peer-promoters to be relatively more successful than self-promoters because supporting others is consistent with prescriptions for female communality. Thus, women who promote a peer should not suffer the processes outlined in BAM and, as a result, they should be relatively successful (as are women who negotiate a salary for a peer; Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bowles et al., 2005). These expected results would generate additional support for the BAM in a novel self-promotion context.

Of primary importance, Study 2 addressed the concern that women's self-reports of self-promotion success may have reflected their fear of backlash for this stereotype-violating behavior. It is possible that women are not actually less successful at self-promotion than men, but rather that they are simply less willing to report this success in order to mitigate possible backlash. Thus, to provide a more objective assessment of promotion success, we included independent judges' ratings of the essays. This addition also allowed us to address the possibility that Study 1's women may have been unwilling to report high levels of

self-promotion success due to the female modesty effect (Daubman et al., 1992; Heatherington et al., 1998).

Finally, we tested a competing explanation of the effect of fear of backlash on promotion success. Prior research has shown that women do not feel as entitled to (i.e., deserving of) financial rewards as men (Major, 1993). Thus, it was possible that women's fear of backlash might impede their ability to self-promote because they did not feel deserving of self-praise. We therefore examined women's perceived entitlement to self-promote as an alternative mediator in the BAM (replacing locomotion).

Study 2's design was a 2 (promotion condition: self, peer)  $\times$  4 (order of measures: there were four orders, described in the procedure) between-subjects factorial. Specific hypotheses were as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Peer-promoting women will report more promotion success than self-promoting women (Aim 1).

*Hypothesis 2:* Independent judges will rate peer promoters as more successful than self-promoters (Aim 2).

*Hypothesis 3a:* Fear of backlash should be positively correlated with assessment and negatively correlated with both locomotion and self-promotion success for female self-promoters. In addition, self-promotion success should be positively correlated with locomotion and negatively correlated with assessment (Aim 3).

*Hypothesis 3b:* To conceptually replicate Study 1's support for the BAM, women's fear of backlash should negatively predict self-promotion success, but this relationship should be mediated by reduced locomotion (Aim 3). Study 2 also provided a second test of assessment as an additional mediator of the negative relationship between women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success (Aim 3).

*Hypothesis 3c:* To provide further discriminant validity for the BAM, peer-promoting women should not be disrupted by changes in self-regulatory mode, because they are not in violation of gender stereotypes (Aim 3). This finding would conceptually replicate Study 1's results for self-promoting men.

*Hypothesis 4:* Regulatory mode will account for the link between self-promoting women's fear of backlash and self-promotion success better than perceived entitlement, in further support of the BAM (Aim 4).

## Method

### Participants

Participants ( $N = 212$  women; age:  $M = 18.49$  years,  $SD = .98$ , median = 18.00) were recruited to participate in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. Racial composition was as follows: 47% White,

31% Asian, 7% Black, 7% Hispanic, 3% multiracial, and 5% indicated another ethnicity (11% did not indicate an ethnicity).

### *Procedure and Materials*

Participants completed the experiment in individual booths. The experimenter explained that the project was concerned with identifying factors that may lead graduate school admissions committees to judge an applicant as qualified and competent. After informed consent was obtained, participants were randomly assigned to either the self- or peer-promotion condition. They were told that they would be writing to a graduate school admissions committee either on behalf of themselves (self-promotion) or a peer (peer promotion) and that their essay would be used as a model in workshops for undergraduate peers. They were told that students would be critiquing their essays in these workshops to heighten the public nature and consequences of their statements. Participants were instructed not to be modest or to hold back, but rather to focus on presenting themselves (or their peer) in the strongest light possible.

All participants then completed a short, guided brainstorming session to generate ideas and help structure their essay. Participants were told that, "Before writing your essay, we will ask you to do a bit of brainstorming. First, type in your [your peer's] best qualities and why you think you [your peer] possess(es) them." Next, participants were told to "type in some of your [your peer's] personal accomplishments and why you think they are important." The purpose of the brainstorming session was to model a genuine writing assignment and encourage participants to produce a polished essay.

In order to rule out any unintended order effects, participants were then randomly assigned to one of four counterbalancing conditions. In condition 1, they completed the fear of backlash index and RMQ measures (in that order) and then wrote their essay. This condition follows the temporal sequence proposed in the BAM. In condition 2, they took the RMQ first, completed the fear of backlash index, and then wrote their essay. In condition 3, they first wrote their essay, completed the fear of backlash index, and then took the RMQ. In condition 4, they wrote their essay, and completed the RMQ and then fear of backlash measures. Varying the order of presentation allowed for observation and, if necessary, statistical adjustment of any unintended order effects. All participants then completed the promotion success index, followed by the entitlement index. They then reported their race and the gender of the peer they promoted (when applicable). Finally, participants were fully debriefed and compensated. When the study was completed, the four judges rated the essays for promotion success.

*Promotion condition manipulation.* In the self-promotion condition, participants were instructed to write a

statement as if they were applying to graduate school. In the peer-promotion condition, participants were instructed to write on behalf of a close peer applying to graduate school. All participants were told that their essay would be read by others and critiqued in a workshop for undergraduate peers. Specific instructions for the self-promotion condition read as follows:

Now you will write a personal statement as if you were applying for admission to graduate school. Please focus on convincing an admissions committee that you are graduate school material, and that they should admit you. Remember, graduate school admissions are extremely selective, and the competition is fierce. Try to really put yourself in the mindset of someone applying to graduate school, and find a way to "sell yourself" to the admissions committee.

Instructions for the peer-promotion condition replaced "you" with "your peer" as the referent. They also included the specification to "Pick a specific friend whose accomplishments you respect, and who you could imagine applying to graduate school in the near future (you will not need to give their name)." No participants indicated that they were unable to think of a peer who fit these requirements.

*Fear of backlash index and regulatory mode.* We employed Study 1's fear of backlash index ( $\alpha = .81$ ). As in Study 1, participants completed the locomotion ( $\alpha = .76$ ) and assessment ( $\alpha = .71$ ) subscales of the RMQ.

*Perceived promotion success.* Participants responded to the 10 subjective items from Study 1 (modified to fit a graduate school essay context) designed to assess their promotion success on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). For example, self-promoters (peer promoters) were asked, "How much do you feel you (your peer) came across as competent in your written essay?" They were then asked to imagine an admissions officer had read their essay before they responded to two objective indicators of perceived self-promotion success. These items were, "Given a range between \$15,000 and \$30,000, what dollar amount would they recommend as a yearly academic stipend/scholarship?" and "Given a range between 1 and 5 years, how many years would they recommend an academic stipend/scholarship be received?" Responses to all eight questions were standardized and then averaged to form the promotion success index ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Judges' ratings of promotion success.* An independent measure of promotion success was derived from 87 additional naïve participants who served as judges by rating the essays for promotion success. Due to the nature of the essays (personal statement vs. letter of recommendation for a peer), experimental condition could not be masked; however, judges were unaware of the study's hypotheses.

Judges responded to six questions to measure overall promotion success: “How much did you think the author of this essay promoted themselves [their peer]?”; “If you were on a graduate school admissions committee, would you admit this applicant to graduate school?”; “How much did you think this applicant was competent?”; “How much did you think this applicant would be successful in graduate school?”; “How much did you think this applicant was capable?”; and “How well do you think the author of this essay highlighted his or her [their peer’s] qualifications for graduate school?” Responses to these items were averaged to form the judges’ promotion success index ( $\alpha = .91$ ). As with the perceived self-promotion success scale, items were designed to reflect the theoretical link between self-promotion and perceptions of competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982).

*Entitlement index.* To assess perceived entitlement to self-promote, participants responded to three items (“In general, do you feel you have the right to praise yourself publicly?”; “Do you usually feel justified when you speak about yourself positively?” and “In general, do you feel comfortable talking about yourself in positive terms?”) on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). These items were created to mimic those used in previous research measuring women’s sense of entitlement to fair monetary compensation for their work (Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984). Responses were averaged to form the entitlement index ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

## Results and Discussion

### Preliminary Analyses

All of the analyses reported below were first tested as a function of the four different orders in which measures were administered. Because this procedural variable yielded non-significant findings, it was dropped from further analyses ( $p > .58$ ). That is, the findings were virtually identical whether participants wrote their essay before or after they reported their fear of backlash and took the RMQ and irrespective of the order of the fear of backlash and RMQ measures. Participant race also had no effect on responses to our measures,  $p > .31$ . Finally, in the peer-promotion condition, 23% of women selected to write about male peers, compared to 77% selecting female peers. However, the gender of the peer being promoted had no impact on participants’ responses,  $p > .19$ . Therefore, we collapsed across these variables for our focal analyses.

### Differences by Promotion Condition

Hypothesis 1 predicted that self-promoting women would report decreased promotion success relative to peer-promoting women. Results confirmed this expectation, with self-promoting women reporting lower promotion success ( $M = -.34$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) than peer-promoting women

( $M = .31$ ,  $SD = .69$ ),  $t(210) = 6.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , resulting in a large effect size for this difference ( $d = .81$ ). Of more importance, Hypothesis 2 predicted that independent judges would confirm the finding that self-promoting women were less successful than those promoting a peer. Results of a 2 (women’s promotion condition: self or peer)  $\times$  2 (judges’ gender) analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect for promotion condition,  $F(1,87) = 27.06$ ,  $p < .001$ . The gender main effect and interaction terms were not significant ( $F < 1.00$ ,  $p = .80$  and  $.97$ , respectively), suggesting that the judges’ gender did not affect results. As expected, judges rated self-promoting women lower on promotion success ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) than peer-promoting women ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .75$ ),  $t(87) = 6.15$ ,  $p < .001$ , resulting in a large effect size ( $d = 1.32$ ). These results indicate that self-promoting women were, in fact, less successful than peer promoters, rather than simply less willing to rate themselves as skilled at the task. Moreover, the success of peer promoters underscores the fact that women do not lack the skills necessary for successful promotion, but rather that these skills are suppressed when they are obliged to promote themselves.

Consistent with this view, peer-promoting women reported higher levels of locomotion than self-promoting women ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = .65$  vs.  $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = .72$  respectively),  $t(210) = 2.07$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $d = .38$ . This suggests that the locomotion scale was sensitive to task demands, with self-promoting women showing more goal inhibition than women engaged in a communal behavior. In contrast, levels of assessment did not differ by promotion condition,  $t(210) = .41$ ,  $p = .69$ . Moreover, self-promoting women did not fear backlash more than peer-promoting women,  $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ,  $t(210) < 1.00$ ,  $p = .96$ .

### Testing the BAM

Our third aim was to conceptually replicate support for the BAM. Accordingly, Hypothesis 3a expected fear of backlash, self-regulation, and self-promotion success to be significantly intercorrelated for female self-promoters. Table 3 shows the relevant correlations below the diagonal. As can be seen, Hypothesis 3a was supported, with fear of backlash negatively correlated with locomotion and positively correlated with assessment. Replicating Study 1, locomotion was positively correlated with self-promotion success, whereas assessment was weakly (but at least negatively) related to self-promotion success. This pattern suggests that both self-regulatory modes should be tested as mediators in the BAM.

*Mediation analysis.* Hypothesis 3b predicted that, for women obliged to promote themselves, locomotion would mediate the relationship between fear of backlash and promotion success. Table 4 (top half) shows the results of the PRODCLIN analysis testing this hypothesis. As in Study 1, paths a, b, and c are significant, as is the mediated effect

**Table 3**  
Correlations Among Dependent Variables as a Function of Promotion Condition (Study 2)

	<i>Fear of Backlash</i>	<i>Locomotion</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Entitlement</i>	<i>Promotion Success</i>
Fear of Backlash	—	-.23*	.16	-.23*	-.23*
Locomotion	-.22*	—	.03	.29**	.14
Assessment	.13*	.12	—	-.11	.04
Entitlement	-.32**	.23*	-.11	—	.09
Promotion Success	-.25*	.43**	-.09	.30**	—

*Note.* Correlations below the diagonal are for self-promoting women; those above the diagonal are for peer-promoting women. *N*s range from 102 to 110. High scores indicate greater levels of each variable.

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

**Table 4**  
Testing the Backlash Avoidance Model (Study 2)

<i>Path/effect</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sobel's Z</i>	<i>95% Confidence Intervals</i>
<b>Self-Promoting Women</b>				
<i>c</i> (FOB → SPS)	-.19*	.07		
<i>a</i> (FOB → Locomotion)	-.21*	.09		
<i>b</i> (Locomotion → SPS)	.31**	.07		
<i>c'</i>	-.13	.07		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	-.06*	.03	2.00*	-.1424, -.0097
<b>Peer-Promoting Women</b>				
<i>c</i> (FOB → SPS)	-.16*	.07		
<i>a</i> (FOB → Locomotion)	-.25*	.10		
<i>b</i> (Locomotion → SPS)	.06	.06		
<i>c'</i>	-.15*	.07		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	-.01	.02	.85	-.0514, .0144

*Note.* *N* = 102 self-promoting women, 110 peer-promoting women. Estimates are unstandardized. FOB = fear of backlash; SPS = self-promotion success. Path *b* is the effect of Locomotion on SPS after accounting for FOB. Path *c'* is the effect of FOB on SPS after accounting for Locomotion. Sobel's *Z* tests the significance of the mediation effect based on a symmetrical distribution of *a* × *b*. Confidence intervals for *a* × *b* are based on an asymmetrical distribution. Intervals that do not include zero support rejecting the null hypothesis that *a* × *b* = 0.

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

(according to the asymmetrical confidence intervals). Additionally, the inclusion of locomotion reduced the significant relationship between fear of backlash and self-promotion success (path *c*) to nonsignificance (path *c'*). Finally, Sobel's *Z* was also significant. Thus, results from both Study 1 and Study 2 are consistent with the BAM's prediction that women's fear of backlash impedes their self-promotion success because it diminishes their ability to focus on their goal without inhibition or distractions.

Finally, not shown in Table 4, we tested whether assessment would mediate the path between fear of backlash and self-promotion success for self-promoting women. Results showed a weak mediated effect, *B* = .01, and a confidence interval that included zero (–.0075, .0451). These findings again support locomotion (rather than assessment) as a reliable mediator in the BAM.

**Discriminant validity.** To provide further discriminant validity for the BAM, Hypothesis 3c predicted that peer-promoting women would not suffer performance disruptions

as a function of regulatory mode. Table 3 shows the relevant correlations above the diagonal. As can be seen, fear of backlash was negatively linked to locomotion and promotion success. However, there was a missing link between locomotion and promotion success. These results conceptually replicate Study 1's finding for self-promoting men (i.e., that fear of backlash negatively predicted locomotion and promotion success for both genders, but that locomotion was positively linked to self-promotion success only for women). Also consistent with the men's results from Study 1, assessment was not significantly related to any variable in this condition ( $p > .10$ ).

Nonetheless, because path *a* was significant, we tested the mediating effect for peer-promoting women. Table 4 (bottom half) shows the results of this PRODCLIN analysis. In support of Hypothesis 3c, the mediated effect was weak and unreliable, and Sobel's *Z* was not significant. Moreover, the significant relationship between fear of backlash and self-promotion success (path *c*) remained reliable after accounting for locomotion (path *c'*). These results support

**Table 5**  
Testing Perceived Entitlement as Alternative Mediator for Self-Promoting Women (Study 2)

<i>Path/effect</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sobel's Z</i>	<i>95% Confidence Intervals</i>
<b>Model 1</b>				
<i>c</i> (FOB → SPS)	−.19*	.07		
<i>a</i> (FOB → PE)	−.33*	.10		
<i>b</i> (PE → SPS)	.18*	.07		
<i>c'</i>	−.13	.08		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	−.06*	.03	1.96*	−.1252, −.0098
<b>Model 2</b>				
<i>c</i> (PE → SPS)	.22**	.07		
<i>a</i> (PE → Locomotion)	.21*	.09		
<i>b</i> (Locomotion → SPS)	.30**	.07		
<i>c'</i>	.16*	.07		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	.10*	.04	2.04*	.0078, .1363
<b>Model 3</b>				
<i>c</i> (Locomotion → SPS)	.34**	.07		
<i>a</i> (Locomotion → PE)	.24*	.10		
<i>b</i> (PE → SPS)	.16*	.07		
<i>c'</i>	.30*	.07		
<i>a</i> × <i>b</i> (mediation effect)	.04*	.02	1.67	.0029, .0916

*Note.* *N* = 102. Estimates are unstandardized. FOB = fear of backlash; PE = perceived entitlement; SPS = self-promotion success. In Model 1, Path *b* is the effect of PE on SPS after accounting for FOB. Path *c'* is the effect of FOB on SPS after accounting for PE. In Model 2, Path *b* is the effect of Locomotion on SPS after accounting for PE. Path *c'* is the effect of PE on SPS after accounting for Locomotion. In Model 3, Path *b* is the effect of PE on SPS after accounting for Locomotion. Path *c'* is the effect of Locomotion on SPS after accounting for PE. Sobel's *Z* tests the significance of the mediation effect based on a symmetrical distribution of *a* × *b*. Confidence intervals for *a* × *b* are based on an asymmetrical distribution. Intervals that do not include zero support rejecting the null hypothesis that *a* × *b* = 0.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

the BAM's assertion that because peer-promoting women do not violate gender stereotypes, their promotion abilities are unlikely to be disrupted by weakened self-regulation.

#### Testing the Competing Entitlement Model

Our fourth aim was to examine whether perceived entitlement might compete with locomotion as a mediator in the BAM. Table 5's Model 1 shows that entitlement reliably mediated the effect of fear of backlash on self-promotion success (i.e., the confidence intervals did not include zero). Furthermore, the significant relationship between fear of backlash and promotion success (path *c*) was reduced to nonsignificance after accounting for perceived entitlement, whereas the relationship between perceived entitlement and self-promotion success remained strong (path *c'*). Sobel's *Z* was also significant.

To further compare locomotion and perceived entitlement, we conducted two additional tests (again, within the self-promotion condition). First, Table 5's Model 2 tested whether locomotion significantly mediated the relationship between perceived entitlement and self-promotion success. Of promise for the BAM, results showed that both tests of mediation were significant (the confidence intervals and Sobel's *Z*), and the inclusion of locomotion reduced the

magnitude of path *c* from *B* = .22, *p* < .001 to *B* = .16, *p* = .02.

We next examined whether perceived entitlement might mediate the relationship between locomotion and self-promotion success (Table 5, Model 3). Although somewhat weaker, results generated some support for this model. Specifically, whereas the mediated effect was reliable using asymmetrical confidence intervals, Sobel's *Z* was not significant, and the reduction from path *c* to path *c'* was comparatively small (from *B* = .34, *p* < .001 to *B* = .30, *p* < .001). Finally, the mediated effect was descriptively smaller in Model 3 (*B* = .04, *p* < .05) compared to Model 2 (*B* = .10, *p* < .05). Taken together, these results suggested that perceived entitlement can also account for the path between fear of backlash and women's self-promotion success, but they do not rule out locomotion as the key mediator, and there was some evidence that perceived entitlement plays a weaker role compared with self-regulation.

#### Additional Analyses

The above findings for perceived entitlement warranted testing the extent to which women's awareness of sexism (i.e., that women are paid less than men) might have influenced their self-promotion success. To do so, we separated

quantitative indicators of promotion success (i.e., the expected size and length of the graduate student stipend) from qualitative indicators (e.g., "How well do you think you promoted yourself [your peer] in your essay?"). First, if women are aware of sexism, peer-promoters should expect less money (and a shorter time span) for a graduate student stipend when they promoted a female peer, relative to a male peer. However,  $t$  tests revealed no gender differences for either measure,  $t(107) < 1.00$ ,  $p > .77$ . The ratings for the subjective index were similar,  $t(107) < 1.00$ ,  $p = .73$ . In other words, women expected female and male peers to receive similar compensation, and peer promoters reported being similarly effective whether they promoted a female or a male peer.

Second, if female self-promoters report less promotion success using both qualitative and quantitative measures, compared with women who promoted a female peer, this pattern would argue against awareness of sexism because the recipient's gender is held constant. Indeed, results showed reliable differences for the qualitative index,  $t(101) = 2.18$ ,  $p = .03$ , and for both quantitative indicators,  $t(101) > 2.03$ ,  $p = .04$  and  $p < .001$ , respectively. On average, women expected their female peer to be paid more than themselves ( $M = \$21,308$  vs.  $\$19,211$ ,  $d = .50$ ), and to receive the stipend for more years ( $M = 3.41$  vs.  $2.41$ ,  $d = .95$ ). In concert, these findings suggest that women are not downgrading their expectations for themselves (or for women in general) simply because men are typically viewed as entitled to more benefits.

In summary, Study 2's results further supported the BAM's predictions that women would show disruptions in self-promotion to the extent that they feared backlash, but that this relationship would be accounted for by a reduction in the ability to engage in uninhibited goal pursuit (i.e., reduced locomotion). For peer-promoting women, these processes were not evident—just as they were not observed for self-promoting men in Study 1. Addressing a limitation of Study 1, independent judges supported women's own assessments that they were more successful when promoting a peer than themselves, casting doubt on the possibility that women were simply unwilling to report their self-promotion success due to fear of backlash or the female modesty effect. In further support of the BAM, a comparison of locomotion and perceived entitlement did not rule out locomotion as the key mediator. Thus, depressed entitlement for equal benefits was unsupported as an alternative explanation for our findings.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research revealed gender differences in self-promotion, demonstrated women's ability to successfully promote a peer, and provided support for the BAM—a process model designed to explain *how* women's self-promotion skills are disrupted. Although gender differences were previously established for salary negotiation

(Bowles et al., 2007) and theorized to extend to self-promotion (Wade, 2001), to our knowledge the observed gender difference in self-promotion tendencies is unique to the current research, as is the evidence for processes that contribute to this gender disparity. In the context of both a job interview (Study 1) and a graduate school application essay (Study 2), results indicated that self-promoting women who feared backlash showed low promotion success, and this relationship was mediated by the inhibitory effect of fear of backlash on locomotion—a regulatory mode associated with unrestrained goal pursuit (Kruglanski et al., 2000).

As expected, the BAM's mediation hypothesis was not supported for self-promoting men (Study 1) or peer-promoting women (Study 2), likely because their behavior was gender normative. That is, the BAM proposes that people must fear backlash for stereotype violation before self-regulatory processes will disrupt their ability to perform. The finding that fear of backlash diminished locomotion and promotion success for all groups is not surprising; the threat of social rejection is powerful and generalizes to many contexts (cf. Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Nonetheless, in both studies only self-promoting women showed the predicted link between locomotion and promotion success, plausibly because only they had to contend with stereotype violation (and therefore, threats to their gender identity).

In support of this view, Study 1 showed that women who endorsed the female stereotype of communality were inhibited in their ability to self-promote during a job interview, whereas men were not influenced by this stereotype. This result supports our hypothesis that female self-promotion violates gender rules prescribing that women focus on others rather than on themselves. As a result, fear of backlash can lead to processes that prevent women from freely engaging in self-promotion, even when it is necessary for career success. When women who promote themselves fear penalties from others, they may suffer from a reduced ability to focus their attention on the task at hand—to effectively sell themselves when necessary.

It is important to note that our findings suggest that women do not lack the skills to promote successfully. Rather, their (justified) fear of backlash (Rudman & Phelan, 2008) may lead to a shift away from locomotion to the detriment of only their *self*-promotion success. Indeed, Study 2's results, supporting the prediction that women are successful when promoting a peer, are likely due to the perception that promoting others can be seen as nurturing and helpful, and thus women should not incur backlash for stereotype violations (e.g., Wade, 2001). By demonstrating women's disruptions in self-promotion relative to men (Study 1) and relative to peer promotion (Study 2), we extended past negotiation research (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Wade, 1995) to cast a wider net over barriers to women's self-promotion that helps to explain persistent gender inequality in the workplace.

The present research uniquely examined the influence of backlash on actors under relatively naturalistic conditions (i.e., participants' interviews and written essays) rather than their reactions to manipulated counterstereotypical success (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Although considerable past research has examined the conditions that foster backlash (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001) and has uncovered defensive reactions designed to avoid it (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), the current studies are the first to investigate whether women's naturally occurring fear of backlash undermines their ability to act in ways that counter gender stereotypes (here, by self-promoting) and the processes that may be responsible.

Finally, the present findings are consistent with past research showing that locomotion is positively associated with variables that improve performance (e.g., decisiveness and task focus; Kruglanski et al., 2000). Our finding that fear of backlash consistently negatively predicted locomotion suggests that the threat of social sanctions can meaningfully divert attention away from goal pursuit. However, this diversion only inhibited task performance for women obliged to speak well of themselves (not of a peer), providing unique applications of regulatory mode theory to gender equality in the workplace. Although we have argued that reductions in locomotion did not impede performance for self-promoting men and peer-promoting women because their behavior was gender normative, further research is needed to lend confidence to our interpretation. For example, future research might examine men's fear of backlash and reduction in locomotion as impediments to behaviors perceived to be stereotypically feminine.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Unexpectedly, we did not find support for the predictions concerning assessment mode. Regulatory mode theory suggested that a social threat should facilitate a cautious, evaluative mode that would impair performance; however, we found no relationship between assessment and self-promotion success in either study. Instead, only our predictions for locomotion were supported. One possibility is that the active goal pursuit strategy characterized by locomotion is more directly linked to performance outcomes than assessment with its emphasis on cautious evaluation (Higgins et al., 2003), and thus, women's self-promotion tendencies were best explained by decreased locomotion. Indeed, locomotion (more so than assessment) has been found to be associated with a host of task performance processes, including heightened task flow (commitment to maintain action and deal with obstacles; Kruglanski et al., 2000), effort investment (Pierro, Higgins, & Kruglanski, 2002), and achievement orientation (Kruglanski et al., 2000). Also, because assessment taps a "wait and see" orientation and participants were obliged to act (i.e., to be interviewed or write an essay), it may be a better predictor of behavioral postponement than actual behavior.

Contrary to expectations, women's fear of backlash scores did not differ significantly from men's in Study 1, nor did self-promoting women report more fear of backlash than peer-promoting women in Study 2. We made these predictions because past work has documented that women are aware of backlash for stereotype violations: They reported more fear of backlash in response to being told they had scored unusually high on a masculine knowledge test, compared with unusual success on a feminine knowledge test (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Further, fear of backlash for "being too demanding" accounted for gender differences in negotiation success (Amantullah & Morris, 2010). However, in the current studies, women's scores on this measure were generally low; in fact, they were marginally below the scale midpoint for Study 1,  $t(109) = 1.71$ ,  $p = .07$ , and significantly below the scale midpoint for Study 2's self-promoting women,  $t(101) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .001$ . These findings suggest that, on average, women did not fear backlash for female self-promotion, despite significant evidence indicating that women are likely to be penalized for this behavior in a professional context (e.g., Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 2001; for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008). The absence of expected differences on this measure suggests that undergraduate women may simply not be aware of backlash for self-promotion. In the current research, we did not measure *awareness* of backlash independently of fear because, presumably, women must be aware of backlash for stereotype violations in order to fear it. However, future research should address this distinction by measuring awareness of backlash specifically.

Although we can only speculate, there are several possible explanations for our null findings. First, women routinely show denial of personal discrimination (i.e., they believe they are exempt from sexism) even though they acknowledge that women *as a group* are discriminated against (Crosby, 1982, 1984). Thus, women may be aware of possible backlash effects for female self-promotion while exempting themselves from this threat. Second, the experimental design elicited self-promotion in normative contexts (a job interview and writing personal statements) while encouraging participants "to go for it," which may have persuaded female self-promoters that the threat of backlash was low. Third, our participants were undergraduates, who may not have sufficient professional experience to have encountered (and thus fear) backlash for self-promotion. Therefore, future research involving working professionals is needed to investigate whether experienced women are aware of backlash effects for self-promotion. Nonetheless, it is promising for the BAM that, even under these relatively conservative conditions, we found support for the model in each study among women who did fear backlash for self-promotion. Finally, because our research samples were approximately half White, future research should be conducted on more ethnically diverse populations to investigate the generalizability of our findings.

## Conclusion

Two studies uniquely demonstrated that women's self-promotion skills are interrupted in professional contexts, relative both to men and to female peer promoters. Of more importance, we found support for the backlash avoidance model, which posits that women's fear of backlash for counterstereotypical behavior (in this case, self-promotion) reduces activation of a locomotive regulatory mode, which subsequently disrupts self-promotion success. In addition to addressing a gap in the literature by focusing on the processes responsible for undermining women's self-promotion, the present results have implications for workplace policies designed to foster equitable environments. In particular, organizations might consider policy modifications that utilize women's strong peer-promotion tendencies, such as stressing colleagues' performance reviews in hiring and advancement decisions (a procedure already utilized in academic settings as a core part of the tenure process). Moreover, human resource managers might consider offering training in the awareness and effective management of backlash threats a method of combatting the consequences of workplace gender stereotyping. In this way, further research illuminating the factors disrupting women's self-promotion skills and how to overcome them should help to promote a more equitable working environment.

Initial submission: March 9, 2009

Initial acceptance: September 29, 2009

Final acceptance: January 22, 2010

## NOTES

1. To cast a wider net over self-regulation, participants also completed the RFQ (Higgins et al., 2001), which measures individual differences in promotion (i.e., goal approach) and prevention (i.e., loss avoidance) focus. Results for promotion focus echoed results for locomotion, and the two variables were well correlated,  $r(111) = .57, p < .001$ , suggesting that both scales measure unconstrained goal pursuit. By contrast, prevention focus was unrelated to other variables, including assessment,  $r(111) = -.09, p = .36$ . A potential explanation for this null finding is that items measuring prevention focus draw primarily on developmental events (especially parental criticism) because, in theory, when children are criticized by their parents, they learn to become cautious and risk averse. Thus, prevention focus may not be sensitive to context effects, rendering the RFQ less effective for our research aims.
2. As noted, although for women assessment was reliably positively correlated with fear of backlash (path a), it showed a nonsignificantly positive correlation with self-promotion success that was in the opposite direction of that predicted by the BAM (i.e., women holding back from the goal of self-promotion should report lower, not higher, success). Because path a was significant, we investigated whether assessment atheoretically mediated the relationship between fear of back-

lash and self-promotion success. Results showed a weak and nonsignificant indirect effect,  $B = .02$ , and the asymmetrical confidence intervals included zero ( $-.0037, .1105$ ). Thus, we conclude that Hypothesis 3b was supported using locomotion, not assessment, and that assessment did not perform in a manner that would undermine the BAM.

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