MY IMAGE IS NO JOKING MATTER! THE IMPLICATIONS OF LEADER HUMOR ON

EMPLOYEE IMAGE MANAGEMENT

by Shubha Sharma

(Under the Direction of Marie S. Mitchell)

ABSTRACT

Compared to more formal, agentic interactions that leaders are expected to use, leader humor is a form of communication that leaders are not obligated to indulge in. Therefore, when it is used, it becomes a source of important information for employees and works as a signal about their social standing and their leader's attitude towards them. However, leader humor is not always seen as positive and uplifting—at times, it can be perceived as hurtful and attacking. Drawing from image management theory, I develop and test a theory that explains how positive and negative forms of leader humor—*leader affiliative humor* and *leader aggressive humor*—work as a critical source of information for employees' sense of professional image—their perceptions of how others in the workplace appraise their competence, character, and expertise. Across two studies—an experimental-causal-chain study and a time-lagged, multi-source field study—I show that leader affiliative humor enhances employees' image, but leader aggressive humor threatens it. Additionally, my results suggest that different image perceptions resulting from leader humor initiate different image management processes and that employees' gender plays a role in their reactions to threatening information about their image. Through my research, I discuss the implications of employee image for the leader humor literature.

INDEX WORDS: Leader humor, Image management, Gender

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to my family and to my guruji. I stand because they stand by me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Good comedy is a conspiracy—create an in-group.

— McGraw & Warner, The Humor Code

Leader humor—perceptions of the extent to which a leader uses humor with employees (Cooper, Kong, & Crossley, 2018; Martin, 2001)—is touted as an under-appreciated tool for raising employee productivity (Aaker & Bagdonas, 2021; Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995). Humor is said to be ubiquitous in leaders' everyday work interactions (Roberts, Dunne, & Iun, 2016; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Yam, Christian, Wei, Liao, & Nai, 2018). People love to laugh, and the laughter set in motion by leader humor engages employees, raises their motivation and positive work perceptions (e.g., Cooper et al., 2018; Crawford, 1994; Yam et al., 2018), and promotes strong workplace camaraderie (Cooper et al., 2018; Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995). Beyond the advantages for employees, leader humor has been shown to benefit leaders, raising their likeability, respect received by others, and perceived competence (Bitterly, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2017; Mao, Chiang, Zhang, & Gao, 2017).

The traction and benefits of leader humor have also been highlighted in the popular press. For example, the executive team at Southwest Airlines has expressed that humor makes managers more human and less automaton, which is why it stresses leader humor in its management training (Sampson, 2019). Google leadership is also well-known for making jokes to help others relax and have fun at work (Aaker, Bagdonas, Conn, & Saucedo, 2019). The

importance of leader humor is even formalized by some companies, such as Zappos, which

introduced the position of "*fungineers*"—dedicated experts responsible for training leaders to use

humor to create uplifting and positive experiences for employees (Zappos has fun, 2019).

Leaders indeed play a critical role in shaping employee experiences at work. How leaders

interact with their employees is informational; their interactions relay whether leaders find their

employees competent and valued (Roberts, 2005). Employees also keenly observe their leaders

to make sense of their environment and their role in the environment. Leaders exact relevant

norms for the workplace, and, through their actions, shape employee perceptions about their own

worth and potential (Crawford, 1994; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Yam et al., 2018).

Compared to more agentic leader interactions (e.g., task direction, strategy formation), humor is

a form of communication that leaders are not obligated to use, and, thus, when they use it, it is

quite salient to employees. That is, leader humor serves as a critical interpersonal resource for

employees, signaling their social standing and the leader's attitude towards them (Cooper, 2008;

Cooper et al., 2018; Carnevale, Huang, Yam & Wang, 2021; Kong, Cooper, & Sosik, 2019).

Specifically, leader humor represents a socioemotional resource—a social symbol of the

employee's value, standing, or attributed status (Crawford, 1994; Foa & Foa, 1980). These

arguments imply that leader humor is likely a critical source of information for employees' sense

of professional image—employees' perceptions of how others in the workplace appraise their

competence and character (Roberts, 2005)—which suggests that leader humor likely shapes how

employees perceive and manage their image. And yet, not all forms of leader humor are positive

and uplifting.

Despite arguments in support of leader humor, not all scholars embrace it with open

arms—some even question whether leaders' humor is beneficial for employees (e.g., Huo, Lam,

& Chen, 2012; Wood, Beckmann, & Pavlakis, 2014). Leadership literature has highlighted two forms of humor that leaders display—affiliative and aggressive leader humor. *Leader affiliative humor* is defined as perceptions of positively valenced style of humor used to enhance relationships with others (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). *Leader aggressive humor* is defined as perceptions of negatively valenced style of humor used to attack or hurt others (Martin et al., 2003, Yam et al., 2018). I suggest that these different types of leader humor likely signal different information to employees about their standing, status, and value. Leader affiliative humor likely serves as image currency because it relays a degree of care and affection displayed by the leader to the employee (e.g., Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Robert et al., 2016), whereas leader aggressive humor likely threatens employees' image because it signals the leader disdain for employees (e.g., Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Robert et al, 2016; Yam et al., 2018). Given the potential impact of leader humor on employees' image, I question whether all forms of leader humor are enriching to employees. Instead, I believe it is more likely that the different forms of leader humor trigger different types of image management processes that motivate varied behaviors.

My dissertation addresses this research question by integrating arguments in the leader humor literature (see Kong et al., 2019, for a review) with image management theory (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005). I suggest that because leader affiliative humor provides enriching feedback about employees' standing with the leader, it likely fortifies and enhances employees' image. In contrast, leader aggressive humor can come across as leaders using jokes to put down, ridicule, and hurt employees, which likely threatens employees' image. The literature has defined *image threat* as perceptions that individuals' competence or performance is devalued in the eyes of others (Isaakyan, Sherf, Tangirala, & Guenter, 2021: 1049) and,

accordingly, I define *image enhancement* as perceptions that individuals' competence or performance is reinforced in the eyes of others. Based on image management theory, I also propose that employees' sense of image enhancement and image threat from leader humor will engage different image management processes. Image enhancement is likely to influence constructive behaviors, whereas image threat is likely to induce varied reactions based on different psychological states engaged by the threat—problem-solving pondering (i.e., a constructive cognitive reflection about work-related problems; Cropley, Michalianou, Pravettoni, & Millward, 2012; Junker, Baumeister, Straub, & Greenhaus, 2021) and rumination (i.e., a cognitive preoccupation about the negative information received that is in contrast to their desired image; Junker et al., 2021; Querstret & Cropley, 2012)—that motivate constructive and destructive behaviors. Lastly, the extent to which employees react constructively or destructively to image threat from leader aggressive humor is proposed to be influenced by employees' gender. Research has demonstrated that because manhood is highly associated with having status and instrumentality at work (Heilman, 2001), men (compared to women) are more likely to react aggressively than calculatedly to situations that threaten their agency and question their abilities (Leavitt, Zhu, Klotz, & Kouchaki, 2022). In comparison to this, studies indicate that stigmatized and marginalized minorities, such as women (compared to men), are more likely to experience differential treatment at work (Aquino, Galperin, & Bennett, 2004; Gregory, 2003; Lim & Cortina, 2005). According to scholars, individuals who regularly face such challenges are more likely to develop habitual self-protective reactions to such negativity (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Figure 1 depicts my theoretical model.

My dissertation offers several contributions to the literature. Most research in the leader humor domain has investigated its positive impact on employees, with less focus on its

aggressive forms (see Huo et al., 2012 and Yam et al., 2018 for notable exceptions).

Additionally, there have been calls to understand the mechanisms through which leader humor

influences employees (Cooper et al., 2018). I suggest that different types of leader humor signal

different feedback to employees about their professional image, activating an image management

process. In doing so, I extend the leader humor literature by studying both affiliative and

aggressive forms of leader humor and unpacking image management mechanisms that impact

employees. I also contribute to the literature on image management. Even though scholars in

social psychology have discussed possible destructive reactions to image threat (e.g.,

Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990), organizational research has primarily focused on

constructive responses (e.g., Bonner, Greenbaum, & Quade, 2017). I extend the theory by

unpacking cognitive reactions (i.e., problem-solving pondering and rumination) to image threat

as possible reasons for why image threat can result in constructive and destructive behaviors. I

also explain how employees' gender plays an essential role in their reactions to image threat. By

studying how leader humor can differentially impact the image management process for

employees based on their gender, I also contribute to the necessary research agenda on

workplace diversity and leaders' impact on the sense of inclusion for women (e.g., Eagly &

Chin, 2010; Offermann & Malamut, 2002).

FIGURE 1

Theoretical Model
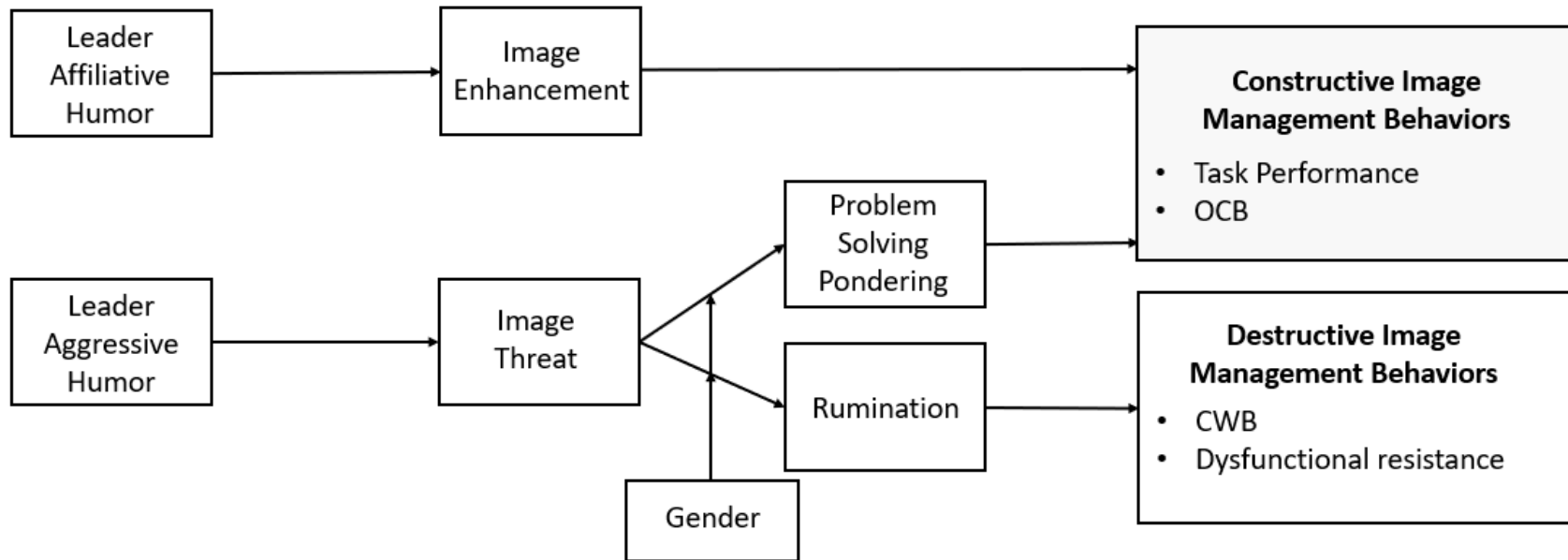
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: LEADER HUMOR AND IMAGE PERCEPTIONS

Humor and its Evolved Conceptualization

All through the twentieth century, scholars in social psychology showed a keen interest in exploring humor, defining it as the ability to make others laugh or smile; playful creation of ambiguity; wit to ridicule the inauthentic, pompous, or privileged; and a cheerful temperament that supports the transcendence of adversity (Martin, 2003, 2007; Martin & Ford, 2018). Thus, research in social psychology has showcased humor as "sense of humor"—a multi-faceted construct describing individual differences in recognizing, using, or creating humorous content (Ruch, 1998). Accordingly, multiple conceptualizations of the construct were developed and used by social psychologists, including humor as a tendency or habit to be funny, humor as a cognitive ability, humor as a temperament trait to be cheerful, humor as an aesthetic response to something funny, humor as a mystified attitude towards the world, and humor as a coping strategy against stress or negativity (Martin, 2003; Martin et al., 2003).

Early scholars in social psychology exalted humor as an ever-positive phenomenon and focused on studying its benefits to individuals' physical and psychological well-being (Lefcourt, 2001; Martin, 2001, 2004). Humor (vs. no humor or less humor) was considered to serve to positively enhance individuals' self-concept and their ability to cope with life events (Kuiper, McKenzie, & Belanger, 1995). For example, humor was considered in a variety of contexts, such as a way to manage stress, anxiety, and surrounding negativity (Abel, 2002; Kuiper & Martin, 1998; Lefcourt & Martin, 1986), a defense mechanism that produced a healthy, cognitive shift from threatening situations (Abel, 1998, 2002; Freud, 1928), a tool to gather courage (Mishinsky,

1977), a means to relieve tension and perceive control over a situation (Kuiper, Martin & Olinger, 1993; Obrdlik, 1942), a way to bond with others (Kirsh & Kuiper, 2003; Kuiper & Olinger, 1998; Ziv, 1984) and increase group cohesiveness (Martineau, 1972), a tool to improve mood and build self-esteem (Lefcourt, 2002; Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993), and a means to ease physical discomfort or pain (Kuiper, Martin, & Dance, 1992; Martin, 2002; Shurcliff, 1968). Towards the beginning of the twenty-first century, scholars noted certain findings in the literature that indicated that humor was not always beneficial to individuals' well-being (Kuiper & Martin, 1998; Martin, 2002), and so, the ultimate positive impact of humor was challenged.

These contradictory views suggested that different types of humor occur in social interactions (Kuiper & Martin, 1998). Martin (2003, 2004). Scholars argued that healthy psychological functioning was associated only with harmless and joyful humor (e.g., perspective-taking or benign humor) and that humor could also be harmful to others (e.g., sarcastic, rude, or defensive humor). Following these discussions, studies delineated the presence of two main categories of humor: adaptive humor and maladaptive humor (Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite, & Kirsh, 2004; Martin, 2007; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002). Adaptive humor maintains a healthy, positive outlook of the world in the actor's interactions with others, which results in benefits for the actor by way of social competence and support in the social environment (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013; Martin, 2003, 2004; Yip & Martin, 2006). In comparison, maladaptive humor diminishes the actor's social connections with others because it exudes a sense of superiority derived from ridiculing others for their shortcomings (Martin, 2003). Some have argued that maladaptive humor serves as a self-defense mechanism by way of attacking others, which is why it impairs interpersonal relationships (Kuiper et al., 2004; Martin, 2003; Nezlek &

Derks, 2001) and reduces user self-esteem (Kuiper & McHale, 2009). With the need to

understand both positive and negative sides of humor, psychologists began exploring varying

effects of humor on individuals' psychological health, social connections, and behaviors, which

gained attention from organizational scholars.

Workplace Humor

Organizational behavior scholars have recognized humor as a predominant and an

inescapable phenomenon in the workplace (Cooper, 2005, 2008). Accordingly, management

studies began to focus investigations on workplace humor, which was initially defined as social

communication that was intended to be amusing (Cooper, 2005). An important development that

occurred in the workplace humor domain was the recognition of the use of humor as a behavior

(i.e., expression or enactment of humor) rather than a tendency or a trait (i.e., sense of humor) or

ability, as it was studied in social psychology (Cooper, 2005). This nuance gave management

scholars added needed specificity on how to study humor in the workplace.

Early work on humor in organizational behavior focused on its positive effects (Duncan,

Smeltzer, & Leap, 1990; Scheel & Gockel, 2017). For employees, humor was associated with

strong bonds among colleagues (Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Huang

& Kuo, 2011), reduced stress (Yovetich, Dale, & Hudak, 1990), freedom in communication and

honesty (Liuberte, 2020), perceived control over the environment along with increased creativity

and motivation (Butler, 2015), citizenship behaviors (Tremblay & Gibson, 2016), and a higher

capacity to cope with negative surroundings (Vetter & Gockel, 2016). As humor research

evolved, organizational behavior scholars argued that humor could possibly be problematic,

given negative associations with employee health and productivity (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006;

Wood et al., 2014). This insight led to studies exploring maladaptive humor in organizations and

its ill effects on its users and targets (e.g., Holmes & Marra 2002; Huo et al., 2012; McGraw &

Warren, 2010; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002).

Even though the rise in studies on workplace humor indicates increased scholarly

attention on the topic, the literature on workplace humor is still "under-researched and under-

theorized" (Westwood & Johnston, 2013: 220), and scholars have argued that there is a need for

more empirical studies and stronger theoretical frameworks to better understand the implications

of different categories of humor to employees (Wood et al., 2014). Notably, a common source of

humor in the workplace is leaders. Researchers have proposed that leader humor is perhaps one

of the most effective communication resources that leaders possess—it has the capacity to

significantly influence employee outcomes (Avolio et al., 1999; Cooper et al., 2018; Crawford,

1994). Yet, scholarly understanding of the topic is limited (see Cooper et al., 2018, for a review).

Leader Humor

Leader humor is an important behavior that defines interactions between leaders and their

employees (Cooper, 2008; Decker & Rotondo, 2001). Humor strengthens the quality of words

relayed by leaders, defining the nature of the connection and making the interactions more

interpersonal, less boring, and more memorable (McGraw, Warren, & Kan, 2015; Strick,

Holland, van Baaren, & van Knippenberg, 2009). The relational currency of humor explains why

leader humor is critically observed and carefully appraised by employees, and why the effects of

leader humor on employees are important to study (Bitterly et al., 2017). And yet, the

mechanisms through which leader humor influences employees have not been given the deserved

attention (Avolio et al., 1999; Cooper et al., 2018; Crawford, 1994).

Another crucial reason to study the impact of leader humor on employees is the power

dynamic that naturally occurs between leaders and employees—the hierarchical nature of the

interpersonal exchanges puts a spotlight on leader humor and reflects its relative power (Cooper, 2005). Research has found that people who occupy high-status roles (i.e., leaders) joke at a higher rate than those of lesser status (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001), and higher-status individuals are more likely to choose someone of lower status as the focus of their jokes (Coser, 1959). The use of humor indicates the "willingness to decrease social distance", but this willingness is usually in the hands of the senior members of a group (Cooper, 2005). In this way, humor appears to have a unique privilege for those with authority (Goffman, 1961; Holmes & Marra, 2002), suggesting they can utilize humor to elucidate the social standing of those with lower status (Smeltzer & Leap 1988). In comparison, employees usually do not enjoy similar capacities and generally do not feel comfortable responding to leaders using similar behaviors displayed by leaders (Duncan, 1984; Vinton, 1989). Thus, humor dynamics in leader-follower interactions are usually one-sided communication and, therefore, leader humor is a powerful tool for leaders to influence and design employees' experiences at work.

Types of Leader Humor

Most research in the leader humor domain has focused on studying *leader affiliative humor*—perceptions of a positively valenced and adaptive form of humor used by leaders to enhance relationships with others (cf. Martin et al., 2003)—because it is an uplifting social communication that yields positive outcomes for employees (Kong et al., 2019; Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). For instance, studies have shown that leader affiliative humor is associated with important outcomes, such as job satisfaction, affective commitment, positive mood, organizational citizenship behavior, and performance (Avolio et al., 1999; Cooper et al., 2018; Hughes & Avery, 2009). The evolution of the topic within the organizational sciences has only recently begun to understand the

implications of *leader aggressive humor*—perceptions of a negatively valenced and maladaptive

form of humor used by leaders to attack or hurt others (cf. Martin et al., 2003)—because its

harmful nature has been found to be harmful to the employees (e.g., Bitterly et al., 2017; Huo et

al., 2012; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Goffman 1961; Yam et al., 2018).

My dissertation focuses on leader affiliative and aggressive humor and suggests that these

forms of leader humor serve as critical information about the leader's perceptions of the

employees. Thus, leader humor has implications for employees' professional image and impacts

employees' image management process.

Leader Humor and Employee Image Management

Employees are determined to develop and maintain a positive *professional image*—

defined as the aggregate of key constituents' (i.e., superiors, subordinates, clients, and

colleagues) perceptions of one's competence and character (Ibarra, 1999; Roberts, 2005; Tice &

Wallace, 2003). Professional image is based on reflected appraisals—how employees think

others perceive them—and is different from others' actual perceptions of employees and

employees' own perceptions about themselves (Roberts, 2005). Employees who display a strong

professional image are considered capable of doing their job efficiently, effectively, and

masterfully (Ibarra, 1999). Individuals who display a strong professional image receive benefits,

such as social approval, power, and career opportunities (Baumeister, 1982; Ibarra, 1999; Leary

& Kowalski, 1990). It is, thus, not surprising that employees consciously and continuously assess

and are attentive to their professional image to navigate important relationships at work, receive

approval and recognition from key constituents, and address perceived inconsistencies between

their desired professional image (of being competent, committed, and an expert at work) and

how they believe others perceive them (Roberts, 2005; Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 2001).

According to image management theory (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005; Rosenfeld et al., 2001), people actively monitor relevant social encounters for signals or signs about what their superiors, colleagues, and other key constituents think of them and look for possible inconsistencies and consistencies between their desired professional image and how others' interactions suggest they are perceived. Acting in accordance with a professional image—of being a competent, committed, and expert worker—is, according to the theory, a primary motivation for employees (Roberts, 2005). Thus, individuals are motivated to enact personas that convey the skills and qualities they believe others will consider prescribed to a professional image (Ibarra, 1999).

Individuals aspire to convey to others an impression of a professional image by acting consistently with the requirements of their social and work roles. Positive interactions with others suggest employees are valued and socially desired and signal that employees are on target for displaying a strong professional image (Ibarra, 1999; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Negative interactions with others relay employees' shortcomings and diminished standing and signal that employees are failing in displaying an ideal professional image (Goffman, 1959; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Receiving information that suggests they are on track with their quest for a professional image reinforces employees' motivation and behavior, whereas receiving information that suggests they are off track can be threatening. Image-threatening information relayed by key stakeholders suggests that targeted employees are devalued in the eyes of others and that their social approval is in jeopardy (Isaakyan et al., 2020; Roberts, 2005). Such a threat to their professional image motivates employees to react (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Isaakyan et al., 2020; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005)—their reactions can be constructive and calculative (actions to please key constituents and strengthen their image to others) or defensive

and aggressive (actions to attain some sense of control over the situation or to attack the source of the discrepancy).

With my dissertation, I propose that leader humor is assessed by employees as an important signal of their acceptability, approval, and position, and, therefore, has implications on employees' image perceptions. I build theory to explain employees' image management processes set in motion by leader humor and explain how their gender plays a role in shaping their image management journeys initiated by leader humor.

CHAPTER 3

THEORY DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES

In this chapter, I develop theory on the implications of leader humor to employee image management. First, I use image management theory (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005) to argue that employees have face—a desired social image (Cupach & Carson, 2002) and leader humor is a source of important information to employees about their value with their leaders and in the workplace. Thus, leader humor offers critical insights to employees about their professional image. Second, I use the image management theory to propose that employees' perceptions of their professional image trigger different image management processes that have implications for employees' reactions. And finally, I incorporate image management theory with relevant research on minority status (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Baumeister et al., 1996) and gender stereotyping (Eagly, 1997; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Heilman, 2012) to theorize how employees' gender influences their reactions to image threat as a result of aggressive forms of leader humor.

Leader Humor and Employee Professional Image Perceptions

The social environment at work is a theater that provides critical information about employees' standing, appropriateness, and value (James, Hater, Gent, & Bruni, 1978; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). That is, interactions within the work environment are input for employees' sensemaking about their image and sense of belonging, which feeds their motivation and behavioral reactions. According to scholars, all employees seek to be successful in their work environments (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). To do so, they monitor their interactions with key

stakeholders carefully to understand behavioral expectations and gauge whether they are behaving appropriately or whether they need to adopt changes that align with expectations and norms (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985; Roberts, 2005). Thus, the image management process for employees begins with monitoring specific, high-stakes situations with important stakeholders and creating awareness of how they are perceived by them (Roberts, 2005).

Leaders are essential sources of information for employees, and, consequently, employees closely observe their leaders and evaluate their interactions with them (Grant, 2012; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Leaders hold formal power over employees and control the resources that affect employees' career success and well-being (e.g., job opportunities, promotions, feedback, and training; Bono & Yoon, 2012; Fiske, 1993; Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012), giving leaders a great deal of influence over employees' experiences at work (Bono & Yoon, 2012; Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Moreover, leaders are in a position to evaluate and rate employees' performance (Bono, Foldes, Vinson, & Muros, 2007; Yam, Fehr, & Barnes, 2014), which means they directly influence and drive employees' potential trajectory within organizations (Kark & Dijk, 2007). Accordingly, leaders who see value in certain employees may choose to aid in their growth through coaching and mentorship, helping these employees build positive perceptions about their capabilities (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Thus, leaders are in a prime position to influence employees' perceptions of their own competence and expertise, thereby elevating or diminishing employees' convictions of their own professional image (Bono & Yoon, 2012; Shamir et al., 1993).

On that account, image management theory (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005) proposes that employees keenly monitor their interactions with leaders to understand whether they are maintaining a strong professional image of someone who is

competent, committed, and an expert worker (Roberts, 2005). Employees strive to keep their professional image intact because it reflects their effectiveness at executing the required duties of their jobs and enhances the likelihood they will receive benefits, such as social approval, influence, and career opportunities and success (Baumeister, 1982; Ibarra, 1999; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005; Rosenfeld et al., 2001). For employees, winning the approval of their leaders reflects a strong professional image, which can ensure them a place in the leaders' inner circle with access to valued outcomes and resources (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005; Schlenker, 1980). By comparison, failure to favorably receive their leader's attention signals to employees that they are displaying a weak professional image (Roberts, 2005).

Leader interactions thereby set the tone for employees' understanding of their professional image (Bono & Yoon, 2012; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008). Positive interactions with leaders signal to employees that they are considered valuable members of their workplace (Bono & Yoon, 2012; Meleady & Crisp, 2017; Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996) and are on the right track to displaying a strong professional image (Roberts, 2005). As such, leaders' positive interactions reinforce employees' image ideals (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Roberts, 2005). In contrast, negative leader interactions relay to employees that they are potentially incompetent, not valued, and not liked (Day & Zaccaro, 2007; Yang, Zheng, Liu, Lu, & Schaubroeck, 2020), which can threaten their professional image (Little, Major, Hinojosa, & Nelson, 2015; Tyler, 1989; Tyler et al., 1996).

I propose that leader humor serves as critical information about employees' professional image. Leader humor influences employees' perceptions about their status and standing within the social environment (Cooper, 2005; Kong et al., 2019). Leader humor also signals leaders' support for employees and suggests whether the employees are competent (Cooper et al., 2018;

Kong et al., 2019). Indeed, research has shown that leader humor is seen by employees as a recognition of their potential (Gkorezis, Petridou, & Xanthiakos, 2014; Yam et al., 2018). However, leader humor is not always positive and can take negative forms. Given this, positive forms of humor—leader affiliative humor—likely serves to signal the leader's approval of the image employees portray, but negative forms of humor—leader aggressive humor—likely suggest that employees' social standing is tenuous and their desire for displaying a professional image is threatened (Kong et al., 2019; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Leader affiliative humor and image enhancement. Leader affiliative humor involves the use of friendly, stimulating, and synergetic humor, and indicates leaders' attempts to bond with their employees (Cooper, 2008; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). Affiliative humor signals to employees that their leaders appreciate them (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Scheel & Gockel, 2017), and see them as worthy professionals—valuable associates they want to include in their inner circle and whose careers they are inclined to invest in (Avolio et al., 1999; Cooper, 2008; Hughes & Avery, 2009; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Scheel & Gockel, 2017). Accordingly, scholars have suggested that the use of leader affiliative humor suggests that leaders have professional regard for their employees and think of them as useful contributors at work (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). Leader affiliative humor is, thus, likely interpreted by employees as an indication that they are progressing well in displaying a professional image because they believe they are valued by their leaders (Scheel & Gockel, 2017).

Image management theory (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005) suggests that employees use leader interactions with them as critical information about their professional image. Employees are motivated to understand their social standing in the workplace and positive leader interactions, such as affiliative leader humor, likely raise their

perceptions of *image enhancement* (perceptions that their competence or performance are reinforced in the eyes of others). To perceive image enhancement, employees need to possess a sense of mastery or control over their work (Ibarra, 1999; Isaakyan et al., 2021; Ladge & Little, 2019; Vough, Cardador, Bednar, Dane, & Pratt, 2013), be appreciated and approved by important constituents (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Isaakyan et al., 2021), and build strong relationships at work (Bonner et al., 2017; Roberts, 2005). Leader affiliative leader humor raises employees' sense of connection with the leader and signals the leader's appreciation and value in the targeted employee. Thus, it should enhance employees' image perceptions.

Therefore, I propose that leader affiliative humor is likely to signal that the leader values, approves of, and wishes to build and maintain positive relationships with targeted employees. Perceptions of leaders' approval and camaraderie are inclined to reinforce employees' perceptions of their image—confirmation that they are competent in the eyes of others and doing their job well. Thus, leader affiliative humor is likely to enhance employees' perceptions of image enhancement. I propose:

Hypothesis 1. Leader affiliative humor will be positively related to image enhancement.

Leader aggressive humor and image threat. Leader aggressive humor involves the use of rude, disrespectful, and sarcastic humor, which is seen as leaders' way to mock and criticize their employees, and to control employee behaviors to motivate possible improvements (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Scheel & Gockel, 2017). Aggressive leader humor indicates that the leader does not value the targeted employee well enough to build or maintain a friendly relationship with the employee (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). Instead, leader aggressive humor is generally interpreted by employees as a punishment for mistakes or for being non-valued outgroup members (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Huo et al., 2012). Accordingly, leader aggressive humor is

likely seen by employees as an indication that their leaders lack respect for them and question their competence (Billig, 2005; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015; Wood et al., 2014). Stated differently, leader aggressive humor should threaten employees' image pursuits.

Image management theory (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005) suggests that negative leader interactions, such as leader aggressive humor, signal that employees are problematic and incompetent, and thus, are not adequately displaying a strong professional image. Instead, leader aggressive humor relays to targeted employees that leaders do not appreciate them. Consequently, leader aggressive humor likely raises employees' image threat perceptions (perceptions that individuals' competence or performance are devalued in the eyes of others; Isaakyan et al., 2021). Employees' perceptions of threat to their professional image can result from their belief that they are considered ineffective at their job (Isaakyan et al., 2021) and that those around them do not view them as acceptable relational partners (Bonner et al., 2017). Due to its capacity to undermine employees' sense of competence, value, and status at work, leader aggressive humor should elicit employees' image threat perceptions.

Therefore, I propose that leader aggressive humor is likely to signal to employees that the leader does not see much value in them, disapproves of their work quality, and does not wish to build a quality relationship with them. Overall, these evaluations suggest that the image employees are portraying is not considered appropriate or desirable by the leader. Thus, leader aggressive humor is likely to generate employees' perceptions of image threat. I propose:

Hypothesis 2. Leader aggressive humor will be positively related to image threat.

Downstream Effects of Image Enhancement and Image Threat

According to image management theory, employees' reactions to their perceived image are contingent on whether they think they are maintaining an ideal professional image or facing

an image threat (Baumeister, 1982; Ibarra, 1999). Individuals make note of feedback about their image, and accordingly, modify their reactions (Goffman, 1959; Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Individuals who receive positive feedback from important constituents about their image are motivated to conduct constructive behaviors that can continue winning others' approval (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ibarra, 1999; Weick, 1979). However, individuals who perceive negative feedback about their professional image are likely to experience internal evaluations to consider whether they can or cannot change their possible selves to improve their image (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). In this process, personal characteristics can determine whether individuals react to image threat in an adaptive or a maladaptive manner (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Cairns, 1992; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Therefore, I theorize that image enhancement and image threat will motivate different reactions. Image enhancement likely motivates employees to indulge in useful behaviors that can help them maintain their positive image in the workplace. Image threat likely initiates a cognitive process through which employees can have either adaptive or maladaptive cognitive reactions to the threat to their image—depending on individual characteristics. Accordingly, I integrate image management theory with gender role theory to propose that employees' gender will impact their reactions to image threat.

Reactions to image enhancement. The process of image management does not cease after employees receive information suggesting a desired image is on track (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Individuals are motivated to promote the continued existence of positive conceptions about themselves and their psychological interests (e.g., their social standing and popularity) that are benefited to them by displaying a strong professional image; thus, employees attempt to

continue displaying a strong professional image (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Swann, 1987).

Employees also consider their image as a means to further influence others by stressing their

unique qualities and showcasing their importance to others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Ogilvie,

1987; Schlenker, 1985). Consequently, those who have received feedback suggesting they are

successfully displaying a strong image are motivated to keep their positive public persona intact

so that others continue to hold them in high regard (Goffman, 1959; Jones, 1964; Leary &

Kowalski, 1990; Ogilvie, 1987; Schlenker, 1985).

Social psychologists have suggested that image management involves maintaining an

image of being competent and effective (Calder, 1977; Korda, 1975; Leary & Kowalski, 1990;

Leary, Robertson, Barnes, & Miller, 1986). The motivation for continued self-presentation

operates to remind others of image-oriented employees' skills and abilities and improve their

prospects for achieving additional positive outcomes (Alicke & Sedikides; 2009; Baumeister,

1982). A sustainable, superior professional image can help individuals enhance their positive

self-concept, gather important resources at work, build a useful social network, and gain more

influence over others (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005; Schlenker,

1980). Research has shown that image maintenance involves behaviors that sustain and grow

employees' careers and workplace relationships (e.g., Bolino, Klotz, & Daniels, 2014; Bolino,

Varela, Bande, & Turnley, 2006; Bourgoin & Harvey, 2018; Cheng, Chiu, Chang, & Johnstone,

2014; Little et al., 2015; Rudman, 1998).

That is, to sustain a professional image, employees indulge in behaviors that they believe

can solidify others' opinions about their competency and work value (Ibarra, 1999; Leary &

Kowalski, 1990; Little et al., 2015). For employees, performing their job effectively (i.e., task

performance) and conducting duties that go above and beyond their formal requirements (i.e.,

organizational citizenship behaviors, OCB) are impactful ways to uphold a professional image (Baumeister, 1982; Bolino, 1999). Scholars believe that continued self-presentational concerns enhance individuals' performance levels (Baumeister, 1982; Henchy & Glass, 1968)—the pressure created by the desire to maintain a strong reputation, please an audience, and potentially receive the benefits associated with a professional image, can make individuals work harder to improve their task performance (i.e., task-related behaviors aimed at performance improvement; Luthans & Kreitner, 1975, 1985). Additionally, an important way in which individuals try to cement their value to others is by being helpful and supportive (Baumeister, 1982; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Satow, 1975). Scholars have claimed that OCB (i.e., individual behavior that contributes to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance; Organ, 1997) may help employees keep supervisors pleased with their workgroup value and protect their favorable standing in the workgroup (e.g., Bolino, 1999; Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2013; Darley, Teger, & Lewis, 1973; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000; Schwartz & Gottlieb, 1980; Yun, Takeuchi, & Liu, 2007). Therefore, I suggest that image enhancement will motivate employees to continue to display a strong professional image by enhancing their task performance and OCB. I propose:

> *Hypothesis 3. Image enhancement will be positively related to (a) task performance and*
> *(b) organizational citizenship behavior.*

>>> ***Reactions to image threat.*** Studies have shown that image threat can generate both constructive and destructive responses (e.g., Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Isaakyan et al., 2021; Vough et al., 2013). Constructive responses are adaptive and focus on addressing and removing the threat. Destructive responses are maladaptive and focus on saving face (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Isaakyan et al., 2021). Image management

theory proposes that those who receive feedback suggesting that they are not displaying their desired image experience image threat, which motivates them to recourse to mental machinations to determine the response to the situation (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Baumeister & Cairns, 1992). However, cognitive reactions to image threat vary (Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005; Swann, 1983). Some individuals attempt to improve their image by problem-solving solutions, while others stew on the negativity of the situation (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

I suggest that these reactions align with the research on *problem-solving pondering* (i.e., considering constructive solutions to the threat) and *rumination* (i.e., having a preoccupation with the negativity of the threat) (Gabriel, Lanaj, & Jennings, 2021; Querstret & Cropley, 2012). There is an understanding in the literature about rumination being a negative process that involves repetitive thinking about negative experiences and is detrimental to recovery, but scholars suggest that when one uses repetitive thinking to think of solutions to a negative situation, it changes the purpose and the outcome of the mental investment (Querstret & Cropley, 2012). Accordingly, scholars suggest that although both problem-solving pondering and rumination are ruminative states that require the investment of mental resources and make individuals cogitate about negative situations, problem-solving pondering involves thinking of solutions and thus, can be functional and non-hostile, but rumination involves being focused on negativity and thus, can be dysfunctional and hostile (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011).

Impact of problem-solving pondering. Problem-solving pondering allows employees to evaluate threatening situations adaptively by way of promoting their mental flexibility and energizes them to think of the most effective ways to fix their issues (Bennett, Gabriel, Calderwood, Dahling, & Trougakos, 2016; Gabriel et al., 2021; Vahle-Hinz, Mauno, de Bloom,

& Kinnunen, 2017). The constructive re-evaluation of a threat has employees consider multiple different ways to tackle it (Foulk, Lanaj, & Krishnan, 2019; Gabriel et al., 2021; Lanaj & Jennings, 2020). Problem-solving pondering "captures forward-looking contemplation of ways to improve work" (Gabriel et al., 2021: 1518), which helps employees increase the effort and time they spend on resolving their issues (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011; Cropley et al., 2012) and makes it more likely for them to alter their own behaviors (e.g., Gabriel et al., 2021). Thus, problem-solving pondering is more likely to result in constructive behaviors that may aid employees in improving their image.

Employees' constructive reactions to image threat and problem-solving pondering involve understanding the source of the negative feedback and finding specific solutions to please their audience (Baumeister & Carins, 1992; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Problem-solving pondering from image threat should relay to employees that perceptions of their competence and worth are diminished in others' eyes and that behaviors are needed that can showcase their competence and worth to others (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005). An important way through which employees showcase their value in the workplace is by completing assigned tasks effectively and successfully (Baumeister, 1982; Dutton et al., 2010; Roberts, 2005). Employees understand that they have benchmarks for evaluating their success in their roles (Ibarra, 1999), and the drive to improve their image motivates them to work hard on their performance, reach the required benchmarks, and prove to others that they are valuable (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Another helpful way of dealing with image threat is behaving like good citizens (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Image threat tells employees that their conduct has fallen short of relational expectations of colleagues (Leary & Miller, 2000). As a result, employees concentrate on "looking good" in front of others and

participate in self-sacrificial behaviors that go beyond the requirements of their formal duties (Bonner et al., 2017; Leary & Miller, 2000). With such demonstrations, employees hope to seem dedicated and caring and win others' approval (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Bonner et al., 2017). Based on these arguments, I propose that through problem-solving pondering, employees will use constructive behaviors such as task performance and citizenship behaviors to resolve their situation. Therefore, I propose:

Hypothesis 4. Image threat will be indirectly and positively related to (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior through problem-solving pondering.

Impact of rumination. Rumination promotes threat-induced arousal or "detrimental cognition" that makes employees continuously dwell on threats (Chawla, Gabriel, da Motta Veiga, & Slaughter, 2019; Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011), where they fester on the negativity of the situation (Barber, Maltby, & Macaskill, 2005; Sukhodolsky, Golub, & Cromwell, 2001). These intense negative thoughts reduce employees' ability to constructively adapt and, instead, promote defensive and seemingly self-destructive behavior (Bushman, 2002; Douglas, Kiewitz, Martinko, Harvey, Kim, & Chun, 2008). Rumination makes it difficult for employees to disconnect from their work problems (Gabriel et al., 2021)—the continuous attention to the negativity of a situation restricts cognitive broadening, situational awareness, and opportunity recognition (Chawla et al., 2019; Cropley et al., 2012; Cropley, Zijlstra, Querstret, & Beck, 2016). Instead, uncontrollable thoughts about their mistreatment and negative experiences often involve employees fantasizing about some sort of control over their threatening situation (Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez, & Miller, 2005); overall, the experience tends to motivate retaliatory, aggressive, and defensive behavior (Denson, Pedersen, Friese, Hahm, & Roberts,

2011; Sukhodolsky et al., 2001). Therefore, rumination from image threat is more likely to result in destructive and retaliatory reactions from employees.

Theory on rumination and image threat suggests that employees may engage in defensive, aggressive reactions to others' negative feedback (Arkin, 1981; Baumeister & Carins, 1992). Employees' beliefs that others regard them unfavorably are highly threatening to their self-concept, making them apprehensive about their authority and social position in their workplace (e.g., Isaakyan et al., 2020). Scholars have suggested that aggressive and defensive reactions to image threat and rumination allow employees to protect their self-concept, perceive some sense of control over their surroundings, and seek revenge (Bolino, Long, & Turnley, 2016; Felson, 1978; Leary, 2019; Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006). Research has shown that employees use counterproductive behaviors (CWB; intentional behavior on the part of employees that is harmful to the organization and its members; Sackett, 2002) to defensively cope with threatening situations and retaliate against image threat (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004; Whelpley & McDaniel, 2016). Additionally, employees also react to threat to their image by retaliating against the individual who poses the threat (e.g., Cupach & Carson, 2002; Isaakyan et al., 2020), such as leaders who initiate image threat with their aggressive humor to the targeted employee. Hence, I suggest employees may also engage in dysfunctional resistance (or expressions of resentment toward leaders by resisting leaders' downward influence attempts; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). Based on these arguments, I propose that through rumination, employees will use destructive behaviors such as counterproductive behaviors and dysfunctional resistance to deal with their situation. Therefore, I propose:

Hypothesis 5. Image threat will be indirectly and positively related to (a)

counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through

rumination.

The moderating effect of gender on reactions to image threat. According to image

management theory, employees' gender is a significant social identity that can play an important

role in determining their reactions to image threat (Roberts, 2005). Gender is a type of minority

status (i.e., one's membership in a salient and marginalized social category; Howell, Harrison,

Burris, & Detert, 2015) that has been considered an essential feature of the social hierarchy—

where individuals fall in the social "pecking order" that determines their worth and rights, and

the treatment they receive from others (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Fiske, 2010; Kang, DeCelles,

Tilcsik, & Jun, 2016). Scholars have recognized that gender stereotypes—generalizations and

expectations about the attributes and capabilities of men versus women—have implications for

employees' social standing in the workplace (Heilman, 2001, 2012). Accordingly, research has

suggested that men tend to enjoy greater status and higher social standing than women, are

granted more influence and value within organizations, and experience more positive interactions

with others (see Heilman, 2012, for a review).

Research has demonstrated that women have historically been treated differently

compared to men at work. For instance, women compared to men are less likely to receive

rewards and opportunities (Blau & Kahn, 2000, 2007; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; McCord,

Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018; Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2015; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, &

Feldman, 2005). Studies have shown that despite producing identical products and results, a

woman's work is considered inferior as compared to a man's (Heilman, 2001; Hekman, Aquino,

Owens, Mitchell, Schilpzand, & Leavitt, 2010). Further, compared to men, women are more

likely to be socially excluded, derogated, discriminated against, and unfairly evaluated (Hekman et al., 2010; Inesi & Cable, 2015; Tai et al., 2022; Tost, Hardin, Roberson, & Gino, 2022).

Relevant to this dissertation, gender stereotypes also promote specific judgments about women and their perceived "lack of fit'' between attributes generally assigned to women and attributes associated with having a strong professional image (e.g., Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Cann & Siegfried, 1990; Gupta, Han, Mortal, Silveri, & Turban, 2018; Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; McCord et al., 2018). That is, the qualities that depict an ideal professional image primarily align with male prescriptions. Stereotypes depict men in an agentic manner, which involves descriptors of men as competent, ambitious, analytical, hard-working, and task-focused (Rudman, Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012)—qualities that align perfectly with the ideal professional image (Roberts, 2005). By comparison, stereotypes depict women in a communal manner, which involves descriptors of women as sympathetic, caring, supportive, helpful, and cooperative (Rudman et al., 2012)—qualities that do not fully align with a professional image (Roberts, 2005). Researchers have argued that the differences in these stereotypes explain why women experience limited career success and are treated as less valuable (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). In all, the literature has demonstrated that gender differences naturally "stack the deck" against women compared to men in the workplace, which impacts their professional image and likely influences how they react to important stakeholders and workplace situations (see Heilman, 1983, 2012; Roberts, 2005). Thus, conformity to gender-role expectations for behaviors is an important factor that can influence employees' image management journeys (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007; Roberts, 2005).

Research on minority status and social hierarchy supports this and suggests that individuals' minority or majority status—such as being a woman or a man—shapes their reactions to negativity towards them (Baumeister et al., 1996; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004). Presumptions about the treatment one must receive and how one must be perceived are based on stereotypes attached to the members of social groups one belongs to. For instance, research has demonstrated that women presume facing more challenges at work than men do and expect more unfair or negative treatment from others (Bosson, Vandello, Michniewicz, & Lenes, 2012; Kehn & Ruthig, 2013; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). Thus, social expectations and norms provide "cognitive anchors" by which individuals react to others' treatment or understanding of them (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997)—individuals psychologically adapt to stereotypes embedded within societal norms—good or bad—and develop expectations based on these stereotypes about their position in the workplace (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017; Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012; Helson, 1964; Raver & Nishii, 2010).

I integrate the image management theory (Roberts, 2005) with the gender role theory (Eagly, 1997; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000) to explain how the influence of gender norms and expectations of others' behaviors and perceptions shape individuals' reactions to image threat. For men, the alignment, and for women, the misalignment between the stereotypes attached to their gender and the qualities associated with a strong professional image builds generalized expectations for them about whether they can be seen as valuable members of the workplace (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984; Schmitt et al., 2014). Research shows that based on historical standards, women have lower levels of entitlement toward receiving unbiased

treatment from others (e.g., Major et al., 1984). In comparison, men are more likely to be aware of their higher status and the privileges that are associated with it and expect to maintain such status through positive interactions with others (Chattopadhyay et al., 2004). According to status researchers, these two different kinds of expectations by women and men about their social standing and how others perceive them can influence their reactions to challenging situations via two different phenomena—the *persistent injustice effect* and the *precarious manhood effect*.

   Image threat and the persistent injustice effect for women. Status researchers suggest that since the members of minority or traditionally less powerful groups (such as women) have historically experienced more negative treatment at work than those in the majority (such as men), they develop a "horizon of expectations" assuming that others would see them as nonvaluable members of the workplace and that they are bound to receive unfair treatment. This is called the *persistent injustice effect* (Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2001). For instance, Davidson and Friedman (1998) found that minority employees (Black vs. White employees) were more likely to associate leaders' negativity towards them with social norms associated with minority discrimination, which made them less impacted by leaders' excuses for unfair outcomes.

   Following the same pattern, an unfortunate consequence of gender discrimination is that women perceive possessing a weaker professional standing than men—they are aware that compared to men, they are not seen as important members of the workplace (Heilman, 1995; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Nelson & Quick, 1985; Roberts, 2005). These perceptions are not off-base, as research has shown that women are deprived of status-affirming resources at work (Heilman, 2012; Koenig et al., 2011). Thus, persistent beliefs of gender discrimination are influential and align with principles of persistent injustice effect. Studies have

shown that women act in ways of anticipatory discrimination based on gender stereotypes and acclimate to the expected negative treatment or discrimination they expect from key stakeholders in the workplace (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017; Correll, 2001; Heilman, 2012). For example, research has shown that women anticipate demands for masculine qualities in job candidates and, thus, problem-solve and finesse their cover letters to be seen as less feminine and more professionally apt (He & Kang, 2021). Women are also less likely to apply to certain managerial jobs as they accept them to be more suited for men and believe that they will not be considered worthy of such jobs (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2013).

Because of generalized expectations, scholars suggest that members of marginalized, minority groups (such as women) are less sensitive to negative feedback about or threats to their social standing as they do not feel entitled to them (e.g., Baumeister, 1986; Baumeister et al., 1996). Therefore, such employees are more likely to react to threats to their position in rational ways that are aimed toward improving their social standing and less likely to react in dysfunctional ways so that they can avoid any further attack on their position (Baumeister et al., 1996). That is, higher levels of psychological adaptation by minority members to negative information and threats toward them can impact their cognitive reactions in a way that such members "find themselves prepared" for negativity and react to it in more adaptive than maladaptive ways (Thau, Aquino, & Bommer, 2008).

Image threat and the precarious manhood effect for men. In contrast with the stereotypes faced by women in the workplace, gender stereotypes favor men at work, historically ascribing them to a more valuable, stable position (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thereby, men consciously or unconsciously presume rights to favorable treatment and seek to maintain their superior social status as competent, experts in their work domain (see Heilman, 2012). Due to

this, men consider negative information about their position and social status in the workplace as counter-normative—a threat to their ego and identity that embodies masculine traits (Leavitt et al., 2022). This is called the *precarious manhood effect* (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello & Cohen, 2008). For instance, Leavitt et al. (2022) found that when men faced gender threats, i.e., their masculinity was questioned and they were considered less assertive, competent, and ambitious, they perceived this as a threat to their autonomy and responded irrationally with increased deviance and reduced problem-solving behaviors.

In contrast to the gender stereotypes faced by women which position them as more unfit for success at work (Heilman, 2012), gender stereotypes attached to men suggest that they are stronger professionals as they are more likely to respond dominantly in the face of competition, exercise their agency, and garner resources (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Arzu Wasti, 2009; Heilman, 2012; Vescio, Schermerhorn, Gallegos, & Laubach, 2021). Scholars suggest that because high-status individuals (such as men) have historically experienced favorable treatment, they likely experience a sense of entitlement toward them (Aquino & Bommer, 2003; Côté, Steller, Willer, Forbes, Martin, & Bianchi, 2021; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Turnipseed & Cohen, 2016). Accordingly, such individuals get used to their surroundings based on norms and stereotypes, and react to stereotypical interactions in an expected, rational manner (Baumeister et al., 1996; Paese & Stang, 1998). However, when high-status members experience situations that deviate from what they are used to and challenge their privileges, such situations can be shocking and unacceptable to them (Baumeister et al., 1996) and can result in dysfunctional psychological mechanisms that make them worry about their situation rather than think about fixing it (Baumeister et al., 1996; Leavitt et al., 2022).

Image threat is seen by employees as negative and disapproving information about their value and position in the workplace (Isaakyan et al., 2021; Roberts, 2005). Consistent with the research on gender stereotyping, the persistent injustice effect, and the precarious manhood effect, I suggest that as feminine stereotypes position women to possess a weaker professional image (Heilman, 2012), women would be more psychologically modified than men to tackle image threat adaptively. In comparison, as masculine stereotypes suggest that men are stronger professionals and better suited for success at work (Heilman, 2012; Leavitt et al., 2022), men would be more shocked than women when their image is threatened and would be more likely to react to it in a maladaptive manner. Instead of considering ways to protect and fix their social standing, men would be more likely to be fixated on the negativity of their situation.

Accordingly, I suggest that in comparison to men, women will be more likely to react to image threat in an adaptive (vs. maladaptive) manner—with positive cognitions aimed at resolving the issue, and that in comparison to women, men will be more likely to react to image threat in a maladaptive (vs. adaptive) manner—with negative cognitions. Thus, I propose:

> *Hypothesis 6. Employee gender will moderate the relationship between image threat and problem-solving pondering such that the relationship will be stronger for women (vs. men).*

> *Hypothesis 7. Employee gender will moderate the relationship between image threat and rumination such that the relationship will be stronger for men (vs. women).*

Finally, based on my arguments, I propose that women (vs. men) will be more likely to problem-solve ponder from image threat, which will motivate them to enhance their task performance and OCBs. In comparison, men (vs. women) will be more likely to set on a downward spiral from image threat, given their rumination, that will motivate them to engage in

defensive and destructive behavior; specifically, they will be more likely to engage in CWB and dysfunctional resistance. I propose:

Hypothesis 8. Employee gender will moderate the indirect relationship between image threat and (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior through problem-solving pondering, such that the relationships will be stronger for women (vs. men).

Hypothesis 9. Employee gender will moderate the indirect relationship between image threat perceptions and (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through rumination, such that the relationship will be stronger for men (vs. women).

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 1: METHODS & RESULTS

Validity Evidence for New Measures

The literature lacks a measure of image enhancement and, therefore, in Study 1, I created

items and provided validity evidence for a new image enhancement measure. Additionally,

existing measures of leader affiliative and leader aggressive humor tend to mix perceptions of

humor with the use of humor or reactions to humor. Thus, based on the recommendation of my

committee, I created new measures for leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor that

purely captured perceptions of leader humor. I conducted three studies under Study 1. Study 1A

was a content validity study, Study 1B was an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and Study 1C

was a convergent and discriminatory study to test for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Study 1A: Content Validity

I followed best practice protocols for new measure creation (Colquitt, Sabey, Rodell, &

Hill, 2019; Hinkin & Tracey, 1999) to develop measures for image enhancement, leader

affiliative humor, and leader aggressive humor. I developed items for each construct based on

my definition of the construct and then conducted a content validity study to assess the degree to

which the items in the measure corresponded with the definition of the focal construct, compared

to orbiting constructs (variables that are similar but phenomenologically different).

Item development. Based on my definition of image enhancement (i.e., perceptions that

individuals' competence or performance are reinforced in the eyes of others), I created items

using the measure for image threat (Isaakyan et al., 2021). Particularly, for the image

enhancement, I adapted items from the image threat measure, which are opposite in nature. Based on my definition of leader affiliative humor (i.e., perceptions of positively valenced style of humor used to enhance relationships with others) and leader aggressive humor (i.e., perceptions of negatively valenced style of humor used to attack or hurt others), I developed items that captured perceptions of these two types of leader humor. The new items created for the three measures are outlined in Table 1.

Next, I followed recommendations provided by Colquitt et al. (2019) to test my new items for content validity. To do so, I collected data from 124 working adults based in the US from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). I used two bogus check items in my survey (e.g., for this item, please select "1") to screen for careless respondents (Meade & Craig, 2012). Participants who failed both these checks, were removed from the data. The final sample consisted of 112 participants, of whom 37.9% identified as female and 78.2% identified as Caucasian, with an average age of 38.90 years old (SD = 9.83). First, on the same page, participants were presented with the definition of image enhancement along with the new items created for image enhancement (i.e., focal construct) and items of its orbiting constructs (variables that are related yet distinct from image enhancement; i.e., desire for status, task proficiency, narcissism). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each item on the page matched the given definition of image enhancement using a 7-point scale (1 = *Item does an EXTREMELY BAD job of measuring the image enhancement concept* to 7 = *Item does an EXTREMELY GOOD job of measuring the image enhancement concept*). Over the next two pages, a similar process was repeated to test the new items created for leader affiliative humor along with items of orbiting constructs (i.e., leader aggressive humor, laissez-faire leadership,

and autocratic leadership) and leader aggressive humor with items of orbiting constructs (i.e., leader affiliative humor, laissez-faire leadership, and autocratic leadership).

According to Colquitt et al. (2019), the items created for the focal construct should be rated more strongly with the definition of the focal construct in comparison to the items of the orbiting constructs. Thus, based on Colquitt et al. (2019), I used these ratings to calculate the *hinkin tracey correspondence* (*htc*) and the *hinkin tracey distinctiveness* (*htd*) indices. The article suggests that an *htc* score of .87 or greater and an *htd* score of .27 or greater demonstrate strong correspondence and distinctiveness respectively. Likewise, all three new measures demonstrated strong definitional correspondence and distinctiveness. The average *htc* and *htd* scores for the newly created measures are provided in Table 2.

As a supplemental analysis, I also calculated *htc* and *htd* indices using only the items of the three newly developed measures. That is, for image enhancement, I used leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor as orbiting constructs. For leader affiliative humor, I used image enhancement and leader aggressive humor as orbiting constructs. And finally, for leader aggressive humor, I used image enhancement and leader affiliative humor as orbiting constructs. Based on standards provided by Colquitt et al. (2019), the results again showed strong correspondence and distinctiveness between the measures. The average *htc* and *htd* scores using only the three new measures are provided in Table 3.

Study 1B: Exploratory Factor Analysis

In Study 1B, I collected data from a separate sample of 140 working adults based in the US from Amazon's MTurk to collect data to conduct an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to discover the factor structure of my new measures and the reliability of the items (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Once again, I used two bogus check items in my survey (e.g., for this item,

please select "1") to screen for careless respondents (Meade & Craig, 2012). None of the

participants failed both checks, and hence all were retained. Out of the 140 participants, 38.6%

identified as female and 77.1% identified as Caucasian. The average age of the participants was

39.71 years old (SD = 10.63).

My analysis and results presented a 3-factor structure. Together the three factors

represented 78% of the total variance. This confirmed the presence of the three separate

measures. The average factor loading for items was .83 and the range of the factor loadings was

.66 to .95. The results of the EFA are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 1: Study1A Newly Created Items

Image enhancement
1. There is a positive impression about me in the eyes of others.
2. There are assurances about my abilities in the eyes of others.
3. There are positive perceptions of me in the eyes of others.
4. There are perceptions of my strong work status in the eyes of others.
5. There are perceptions of my competence in the eyes of others.
6. There is confidence in my capabilities in the eyes of others.
7. There are perceptions of my positive image in the eyes of others.

Leader affiliative humor
1. My leader uses supportive humor with me.
2. My leader uses reassuring humor with me.
3. My leader uses encouraging humor with me.
4. My leader uses elevating humor with me.
5. My leader uses nurturing humor with me.
6. My leader uses uplifting humor with me.

Leader aggressive humor
1. My leader uses demeaning humor about me.
2. My leader uses discouraging humor about me.
3. My leader uses demoralizing humor about me.
4. My leader uses attacking humor about me.
5. My leader uses hurtful humor about me.
6. My leader uses harmful humor about me.

TABLE 2: Study1A *htc* and *htd* for New Measures

Measures	Mean	htc	htd
Image enhancement	6.42	0.92	0.47
Leader affiliative humor	6.60	0.94	0.85
Leader aggressive humor	6.52	0.93	0.72

TABLE 3: Study1A *htc* and *htd* (Supplemental Analysis)

Measures	Mean	htc	Htd
Image enhancement	6.42	0.92	0.70
Leader affiliative humor	6.60	0.94	0.77
Leader aggressive humor	6.52	0.93	0.82

TABLE 4: Study 1B Alpha and Factor Loadings

Items	Factor 1 Image enhancement ($\alpha = .91$)	Factor 2 Leader affiliative humor ($\alpha = .96$)	Factor 3 Leader aggressive humor ($\alpha = .97$)
There is a positive impression about me in the eyes of others.	0.79		
There are assurances about my abilities in the eyes of others.	0.79		
There are positive perceptions of me in the eyes of others.	0.79		
There are perceptions of my strong work status in the eyes of others.	0.66		
There are perceptions of my competence in the eyes of others.	0.74		
There is confidence in my capabilities in the eyes of others.	0.74		
There are perceptions of my positive image in the eyes of others.	0.74		
My leader uses supportive humor with me.		0.87	
My leader uses reassuring humor with me.		0.91	
My leader uses encouraging humor with me.		0.82	
My leader uses elevating humor with me.		0.85	
My leader uses nurturing humor with me.		0.81	
My leader uses uplifting humor with me.		0.82	
My leader uses demeaning humor about me.			0.89
My leader uses discouraging humor about me.			0.84
My leader uses demoralizing humor about me.			0.90
My leader uses attacking humor about me.			0.93
My leader uses hurtful humor about me.			0.93
My leader uses harmful humor about me.			0.95

Study 1C: Convergent & Discriminant Analysis

Finally, to provide convergent and discriminant validity evidence of the three new measures through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999), I again used a separate sample of working adults based in the US via MTurk. A collected data from 310 participants. Once again, I used two bogus check items in my survey (e.g., for this item, please select "1") to screen for careless respondents (Meade & Craig, 2012). Two participants failed both the bogus checks, and hence were removed from the final data. The total sample consisted of 308 participants, of whom, 40.9% identified as female and 70.5% identified as Caucasian, with an average age of 38.68 years old (SD = 9.62) rated the items related to various measures based on their own work experiences.

I collected data on measures that were of related but different constructs to image enhancement, leader affiliative humor, and leader aggressive humor. Specifically, I compared image enhancement with desire for status (with Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy's [2009] 3-item measure), task performance (with Griffin, Neal, & Parker's [2007] 3-item measure), and financial success perceptions (with Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, & Pierotti's [2013] 3-item measure). For leader affiliative humor, I collected data on leader exchange quality (with Colquitt, Baer, Long, & Halvorsen-Ganepola's [2014] 4-item measure), supervisor loyalty (with Liden & Maslyn's [1998] 3-item measure), and supervisor empowerment (with Hill, Matta, & Mitchell's [2021] 4-item measure). For leader aggressive humor, I collected data on autocratic leadership (with Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah's [2007] 9-item measure), laissez-faire leadership (with Bass & Avolio's [1995] 4-item measure), and unethical leadership (with Wu, Liden, Liao, & Wayne's [2021] 4-item measure). Correlations and alphas are presented in Table 5.

I ran a fully latent 12-factor model (image enhancement, desire for status, financial success perceptions, task performance, leader affiliative humor, leader exchange quality, supervisor loyalty, supervisor empowerment, leader aggressive humor, autocratic supervision, laissez-faire leadership, and unethical leadership). The results of the CFA showed that the proposed 12-factor measure model fit the data adequately: $\chi 2$ (df = 1418) = 2834.573 (p < .001), CFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05. All the indicators loaded statistically significantly onto their respective latent factors. The average factor loading was .86 and the range for the loadings was .76 to .92. I compared the 12-factor measurement model with various alternative models (e.g., 11-factor models created by combining items of the focal construct with one of the orbiting constructs or combining the items of both types of leader humor). The 12-factor model showed a better fit to the data than all the alternative models: $\chi 2$ (df = 1429—1481) = 3122.232—8450.611 (p < .001), $\Delta\chi 2$s = 287.66—4396.71, CFI = .53—.89, TLI = .52—.88, RMSEA = .06—.12, SRMR = .06—.15. These results establish the dimensionality and discriminant validity of the measures. The results of the CFA analysis are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 5: Study 1C Correlations and Alphas

	Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	Image enhancement	4.16	0.57	(.93)											
2.	Desire for status	3.08	1.12	.13*	(.90)										
3.	Financial success	3.47	1.03	.38*	.20*	(.91)									
4.	Task performance	4.51	0.50	.49*	-.01	.21*	(.84)								
5.	Leader affiliative humor	3.36	0.98	.38*	.26*	.34*	.19*	(.96)							
6.	Leader exchange quality	3.92	0.81	.45*	.20*	.49*	.37*	.52*	(.88)						
7.	Supervisor loyalty	3.61	1.00	.37*	.12*	.37*	.27*	.58*	.61*	(.92)					
8.	Supervisor empowerment	3.59	0.89	.33*	.10	.41*	.25*	.54*	.52*	.54*	(.88)				
9.	Leader aggressive humor	1.23	0.58	-.24*	-.02	-.19*	-.25*	-.30*	-.34*	-.41*	-.33*	(.97)			
10.	Autocratic leadership	2.49	0.89	-.19*	.13*	-.22*	-.13*	-.26*	-.35*	-.36*	-.43*	.43*	(.92)		
11.	Laissez-faire leadership	1.81	0.87	-.29*	-.03	-.32*	-.26*	-.28*	-.38*	-.43*	-.35*	.45*	.31*	(.89)	
12.	Unethical leadership	2.12	0.92	-.34*	-.12	-.47*	-.27*	-.55*	-.67*	-.66*	-.60*	.41*	.38*	.53*	(.89)

Note. N=308. *p < .05. Coefficients alphas are reported on the diagonal.

TABLE 6: Study 1C Alphas and Factor Loadings

Items	Factor 1 Image enhancement (α = .93)	Factor 2 Leader affiliative humor (α = .96)	Factor 3 Leader aggressive humor (α = .97)
There is a positive impression about me in the eyes of others.	0.84		
There are assurances about my abilities in the eyes of others.	0.78		
There are positive perceptions of me in the eyes of others.	0.84		
There are perceptions of my strong work status in the eyes of others.	0.76		
There are perceptions of my competence in the eyes of others.	0.80		
There is confidence in my capabilities in the eyes of others.	0.79		
There are perceptions of my positive image in the eyes of others.	0.84		
My leader uses supportive humor with me.		0.90	
My leader uses reassuring humor with me.		0.91	
My leader uses encouraging humor with me.		0.91	
My leader uses elevating humor with me.		0.90	
My leader uses nurturing humor with me.		0.88	
My leader uses uplifting humor with me.		0.90	
My leader uses demeaning humor about me.			0.91
My leader uses discouraging humor about me.			0.88
My leader uses demoralizing humor about me.			0.92
My leader uses attacking humor about me.			0.90
My leader uses hurtful humor about me.			0.90
My leader uses harmful humor about me.			0.87

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 2: METHODS & RESULTS

Causal Chain Experiment

Next, in Study 2, I tested my theoretical model using an experimental-causal-chain design, which calls for the effects of the independent and mediating variables in a model to be tested in separate experimental studies (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). This design is ideal for models that allow the manipulation of the mediating variables. It supports causal inferences as each path of an indirect effect is tested using random assignment to experimental conditions and thus, it provides evidence for the direct effects of the independent variables on the first-stage mediators and of the first-stage mediators on the second-stage mediators and the dependent variables. I tested my predictions using two separate experiments. In Study 2A, I tested the effect of leader humor on image perceptions. In Study 2B, I tested the effects of image perceptions on problem-solving pondering, rumination, and the constructive and destructive image management behaviors. I also tested the moderating effect of gender.

Study 2A: Recall Experiment for Leader Humor

Sample and Procedure

I recruited 161 full-time employed adults based in the U.S. on Amazon's MTurk. As in Study 1, I used two bogus check items in my survey (e.g., for this item, please select "1") to screen for careless respondents (Meade & Craig, 2012). I removed any participants who failed both checks. The final sample consisted of 145 participants, of which 40.7% identified as female and 78.6% identified as Caucasian. The average age of participants was 39.57 years old (SD =

10.04) and the average organizational tenure was 7.50 years (SD = 5.85). Participants were employed in various industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, education, finance, insurance, and real estate.

To be eligible, participants had to be at least 18 years old, work full-time (at least 35 hours per week on average), and report to a supervisor whom they interact with on a regular basis. Once participants said yes to these requirements, they were randomly divided into two separate eligibility requirement conditions. Here, half of the randomly assigned participants were told that an additional eligibility requirement of the study is that they be able to recall their leader's humor in the past six months and think of times when their leader "*used humor or joked with them in a positive, friendly, uplifting, and good-natured manner*." The other half of the participants were told to recall their leader's humor in the past six months and think of times when their leader "*used humor or joked about them in a negative, demeaning, or hurtful manner*." These eligibility requirements were worded based on the definition of the two types of leader humor. Based on the definitions, it was important that the participants noted leader affiliative humor as positive humor used *with them* and leader aggressive humor as negative humor used *about them* or *targeted at them*.

Manipulations

Participants were asked to complete one online survey that involved a written recall manipulation task, other measures, and demographic information. Each participant was randomly assigned to either the leader affiliative humor recall condition (coded as "1") or the leader aggressive humor recall condition (coded as "0"). Those participants assigned to the leader affiliative humor recall condition were given the following prompt: "In the following space, we would like you to describe times in the past six months when your supervisor used humor or

joked with you in a positive, friendly, and good-natured manner. That is, we would like you to describe times in the past six months when your supervisor made fun and light-hearted jokes in a conversation with you where the humor was positive, friendly, good-natured, elevating, and uplifting." Participants assigned to the leader aggressive humor recall condition were given the following prompt: "In the following space, we would like you to describe times in the past six months when your supervisor used humor or joked about you in a negative, demeaning, or hurtful manner. That is, we would like you to describe times in the past six months when your supervisor made rude and sarcastic jokes in a conversation about you where the humor was negative, demeaning, discouraging, dismissive, and hurtful to you." In both conditions, participants were asked to provide as much information about their leader's humor as possible— they were asked to write at least five sentences, and describe details such as what the joke was or what was the topic of the humorous comment, what was the conversation about, why was the supervisor using the humor, how did it make the participant feel, and how did they respond to it. After completing this writing recall task, all participants then rated their perceptions of image enhancement and image threat. For completing the survey, each participant received $2.50 via Amazon's MTurk.

Measures

Manipulation checks. To assess the effectiveness of leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor manipulation, I used the newly created measures (6 items each) for leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor from Study 1. On a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*), participants were asked to rate their leader's behaviors they described in the recall essay. For leader affiliative humor, participants rated their agreement using items: "My leader used supportive humor with me," "My leader used reassuring humor

with me," "My leader used encouraging humor with me," "My leader used elevating humor with me," "My leader used nurturing humor with me," and "My leader used uplifting humor with me." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .98. For leader aggressive humor, participants rated their agreement using items: "My leader used demeaning humor about me," "My leader used discouraging humor about me," "My leader used demoralizing humor about me," "My leader used attacking humor about me," "My leader used hurtful humor about me," and "My leader used harmful humor about me." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .99.

Image enhancement. For image enhancement, I used the newly created 7-item measure for this dissertation in Study 1. On a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*), participants were asked to reflect on their interaction with their supervisor they described and rate the extent to which the items of the image enhancement measure accurately reflected their perceptions. The items were: "There is a positive impression about me in the eyes of others," "There are assurances about my abilities in the eyes of others," "There are positive perceptions of me in the eyes of others," "There are perceptions of my strong work status in the eyes of others," "There are perceptions of my competence in the eyes of others," "There is confidence in my capabilities in the eyes of others," and "There are perceptions of my positive image in the eyes of others." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .98.

Image threat. For image threat, I used 7-item measure by Isaakyan et al. (2020). On a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*), participants were asked to reflect on their interaction with their supervisor they described and rate the extent to which the items of the image threat measure accurately reflected their perceptions. The items were: "There is a negative impression about me in the eyes of others," "There are doubts about my abilities in the eyes of others," "There are negative perceptions of me in the eyes of others," "There are concerns about

my work status in the eyes of others," "There are questions about my competence in the eyes of others," "There are doubts about my capabilities in the eyes of others," and "There are concerns about my image in the eyes of others." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .98.

Results

Hypothesis tests. Hypothesis 1 predicted that leader affiliative humor would be positively related to image enhancement and Hypothesis 2 predicted that leader aggressive humor would be positively related to image threat. Results from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) supported these hypotheses. Specifically, image enhancement ratings were significantly higher for those who were in the leader affiliative humor condition than for those who were in the leader aggressive humor condition ($F = 198.43$, $p < .001$, $M_{laffh} = 4.00$ vs. M_{laggh} 2.00; $\eta^2 = .58$) and image threat ratings were significantly higher for those who were in the leader aggressive humor condition than for those who were in the leader affiliative humor condition ($F = 197.77$, $p < .001$, $M_{laggh} = 3.71$ vs. $M_{laffh} = 1.57$; $\eta^2 = .58$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were supported.

Manipulation checks. Results from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) provided support for leader humor manipulation. Specifically, leader affiliative humor ratings were significantly higher for participants in the leader affiliative humor condition than for participants in the leader aggressive humor condition ($F = 434.50$, $p < .001$, $M_{laffh} = 4.00$ vs. $M_{laggh} = 1.49$; $\eta^2 = .75$), and leader aggressive humor ratings were significantly higher for participants in the leader aggressive humor condition than for participants in the leader affiliative humor condition ($F = 487.40$, $p < .001$, $M_{laggh} = 4.08$ vs. $M_{laffh} = 1.27$; $\eta^2 = .77$).

Study 2B: Recall Experiment for Image Perceptions

Sample and Procedure

For Study 2B, I recruited 149 full-time employed adults based in the U.S. on Amazon's MTurk. I used two bogus check items in my survey (e.g., for this item, please select "1") to screen for careless respondents (Meade & Craig, 2012) and dropped any participant that failed both the checks. The final sample consisted of 127 participants, of which 34.6% identified as female and 76.2% identified as Caucasian. The average age of participants was 39.02 years old (SD = 9.83) and the average organizational tenure was 7.03 years (SD = 4.92). Once again, participants represented various industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, education, finance, engineering, and real estate.

To be eligible, participants had to be at least 18 years old and work full-time (at least 35 hours per week on average). Once participants said yes to these requirements, they were randomly divided into two separate eligibility requirement conditions. Here, half of the randomly assigned participants were told that an additional eligibility requirement of the study is that they be able to recall a time in the past six months in which they "*perceived that their competence or performance was reinforced or enhanced in the eyes of others—that they believed their image was bolstered and others saw them as highly valuable in their work environment*." The other half of the participants were told to recall a time in the past six months in which they "*perceived that their competence or performance was devalued or threatened in the eyes of others—that they believed their image was diminished and others saw them as less nonvaluable in their work environment*." These eligibility requirements were worded based on the definition of image enhancement and image threat.

Manipulations

Participants were asked to complete one online survey that involved a written recall manipulation task, other measures, and demographic information. Each participant was randomly assigned to either the image enhancement recall condition (coded as "1") or the image threat recall condition (coded as "0"). Those participants assigned to the image enhancement recall condition were given the following prompt: "In the following space, we would like you to describe a specific incident in the past six months when you perceived that your competence or performance was reinforced or enhanced in the eyes of others—that you believed your image was bolstered and that others saw you as highly valuable in your work environment." Participants assigned to the image threat recall condition were given the following prompt: "In the following space, we would like you to describe a specific incident in the past six months when you perceived that your competence or performance was devalued or threatened in the eyes of others—that you believed your image was diminished and that others saw you as less valuable in your work environment." In both conditions, participants were asked to provide as much information about their specific situation—they were asked to write at least five sentences, and describe details such as what happened that made them perceive such information about their image, what made them believe their image was enhanced/threatened, who made them think of such information, how did they it feel at the time, and how did they respond to it. After completing this writing recall task, all participants then rated their perceptions of problem-solving pondering, rumination, constructive image management behaviors, and destructive image management behaviors. For completing the survey, each participant received $2.50 via Amazon's MTurk.

Measures

Constructs were assessed on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*). Gender was coded "1" for women and "0" for men.

Manipulation check. To assess the effectiveness of the image enhancement manipulation, I used the newly created 7-item measure for image enhancement from Study 1. To assess the effectiveness of the image threat manipulation, I used the 7-item image threat measure by Isaakyan et al. (2020). Participants were asked to rate their perceptions of their image they described in the recall essay. For image enhancement, participants rated their agreement using items: "There was a positive impression about me in the eyes of others," "There were assurances about my abilities in the eyes of others," "There were positive perceptions of me in the eyes of others," "There were perceptions of my strong work status in the eyes of others," "There were perceptions of my competence in the eyes of others," "There was confidence in my capabilities in the eyes of others," and "There were perceptions of my positive image in the eyes of others." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .99. For image threat, participants rated their agreement using items: "There was a negative impression about me in the eyes of others," "There were doubts about my abilities in the eyes of others," "There were negative perceptions of me in the eyes of others," "There were concerns about my work status in the eyes of others," "There were questions about my competence in the eyes of others," "There were doubts about my capabilities in the eyes of others," and "There were concerns about my image in the eyes of others." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .99.

Problem-solving pondering. Problem-solving pondering was assessed with Cropley et al.'s (2012) 3-item measure. The instructions read: "Considering yourself in the last six months, please rate your agreement about whether the following statements are an accurate reflection of

yourself." The items were: "I have thought about how to improve at work," "I have reflected on how to improve at work," and "I have re-evaluated something I have done at work." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .92.

Rumination. Rumination was assessed with Cropley et al.'s (2012) 3-item measure. The instructions read: "Considering yourself in the last six months, please rate your agreement about whether the following statements are an accurate reflection of yourself." The items were: "I have been annoyed thinking about work-related issues," "I have been irritated by work-related issues," and "I have been troubled by work-related issues." Coefficient alpha for the measure: .97.

Task performance. Task performance was assessed with Griffin et al.'s (2007) 3-item measure. The instructions read: "Please rate the extent to which you have engaged in the listed behaviors in the past six months." The items were: "Carried out the core parts of the job well", "Completed core tasks well using the standard procedures", and "Ensured tasks were completed properly". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .92.

Citizenship behavior. Interpersonal citizenship behaviors (OCBI) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCBO) were assessed using Hill, Matta, and Mitchell's (2021) reduced 4-item measures from Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, and Hulin (2009). The instructions read: "Please rate the extent to which you have engaged in the listed behaviors in the past six months." The OCBI items were: "Gone out of the way to be nice to another coworker", "Tried to help another coworker", "Gone out of the way to include another coworker in a conversation", and "Tried to help another coworker". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .94. The OCBO items were: "Volunteered for additional work tasks", "Gone above and beyond what was required for work tasks", "Defended organizational policies", and "Spoken highly about the organization to others". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .89.

Counterproductive behaviors. Interpersonal counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBI) and organizational counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBO) were assessed with Hill et al.'s (2021) reduced 4-item measures from Dalal et al.'s (2009). The instructions read: "Please rate the extent to which you have engaged in the listed behaviors in the past six months." The CWBI items were: "Behaved in an unpleasant manner toward another coworker", "Criticized another coworker's opinion or suggestion", "Excluded another coworker from a conversation", and "Spoken poorly about another coworker to others". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .89. The CWBO items were: "Not worked to the best of his/her ability", "Spent time on tasks unrelated to work", "Taken an unnecessary break at work", and "Worked slower than necessary". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .91.

Dysfunctional resistance. Dysfunctional resistance was assessed with Tepper et al.'s (2001) 7-item measure. The instructions read: "Please rate the extent to which you have engaged in the listed behaviors in the past six months. When your supervisor asked about something on the job, you…" The items were: "…acted like you did not know about it," "…made a half-hearted effort then let the supervisor know you couldn't do it," "…ignored the supervisor," "…disregarded what the supervisor said," "…did not pay attention to the supervisor," "…just said 'no' to the supervisor," and "…acted like the supervisor never asked you to do it." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .89.

Results

The means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and correlations are shown in Table 7.

Hypothesis tests. Hypothesis 3 predicted that image enhancement would be positively related to (a) task performance and (b) citizenship behaviors. Results from the ANOVA supported these hypotheses. Specifically, task performance ratings were significantly higher for

those who were in the image enhancement condition than for those who were in the image threat condition ($F = 5.61$, $p < .05$, $M_{enh} = 4.48$ vs. $M_{threat} = 4.23$; $\eta^2 = .02$). Similarly, citizenship behavior ratings were significantly higher for those who were in the image enhancement condition than for those who were in the image threat condition—for OCBI ($F = 5.22$, $p < .05$, $M_{enh} = 3.93$ vs. $M_{threat} = 3.58$; $\eta^2 = .03$) and for OCBO ($F = 6.82$, $p < .01$, $M_{enh} = 3.36$ vs. $M_{threat} = 2.92$; $\eta^2 = .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b were supported.
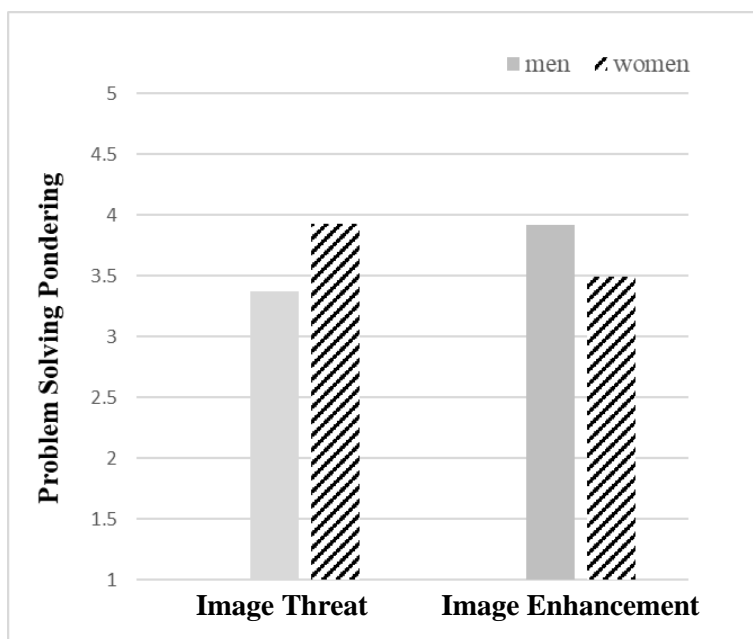
Hypothesis 4 predicted that image threat would be indirectly and positively related to (a) task performance and (b) citizenship behaviors through problem-solving pondering. ANOVA results showed problem-solving pondering ratings were not significantly different for those who were in the image threat condition compared to those who were in the image enhancement condition ($F = 1.16$, $p = .28$, $M_{enh} = 3.75$ vs. $M_{threat} = 3.54$; $\eta^2 = .01$). Results also showed that the serial indirect effect of image threat through problem-solving pondering was not significant on task performance (.01, 95% CI = -.025, .048), OCBI (-.03, 95% CI = -.108, .035), and OCBO (-.07, 95% CI = -.205, .063). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that image threat would be indirectly and positively related to (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through rumination. ANOVA results showed that rumination ratings were significantly higher for those who were in the image threat condition than for those who were in the image enhancement condition ($F = 122.43$, $p < .001$, $M_{threat} = 3.65$ vs. $M_{enh} = 1.63$; $\eta^2 = .45$). Results show that the serial indirect effect of image threat through rumination was significant on CWBI (.38, 95% CI = .157, .607), CWBO (.46, 95% CI = .266, .674), as well as dysfunctional resistance (.18, 95% CI = .002, .350). Thus, results showed support for Hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that employee gender would moderate the relationship between image threat and problem-solving pondering such that the relationship will be stronger for women (vs. men). The univariate results showed a significant interaction between image threat and gender on problem-solving pondering ($F = 5.82$, $p < .05$, $M_{women} = 3.93$ vs. $M_{men} = 3.37$; $\eta^2 = .04$). Likewise, regression results showed image threat X gender on problem-solving pondering was significant ($\beta = .98$, $p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported (see Figure 2).

Hypothesis 7 predicted that employee gender would moderate the relationship between image threat and rumination such that the relationship will be stronger for men (vs. women). The univariate results did not support this prediction. Results showed that the interaction between image threat and gender on rumination was not significant ($F = .86$, $p = .35$, $M_{women} = 3.81$ vs. $M_{men} = 3.58$; $\eta^2 = .01$). Regression results showed that image threat X gender on rumination was not significant ($\beta = .36$, $p = .35$). Thus, Hypothesis 7 was not supported (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 2: Study 2B Image Threat X Gender on Problem-solving Pondering

FIGURE 3: Study 2B Image Threat X Employee Gender on Rumination
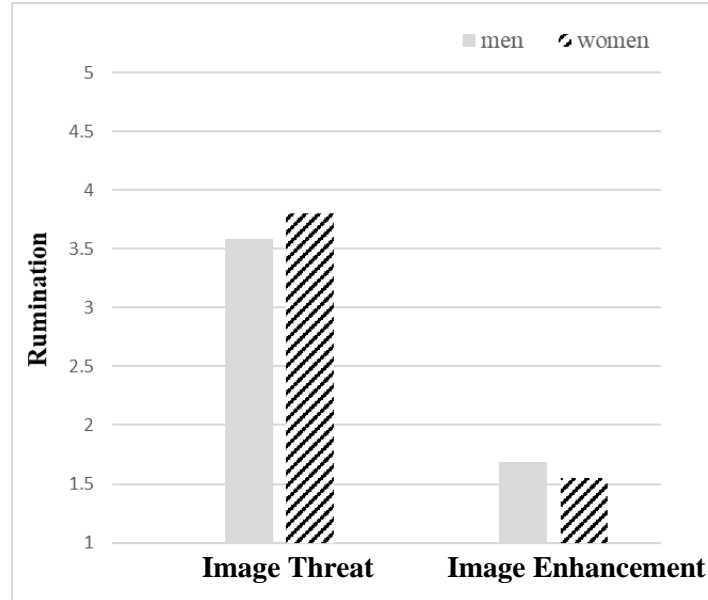
Hypothesis 8 predicted that employee gender would moderate the indirect relationship between image threat and (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior through problem-solving pondering, such that the relationships will be stronger for women (vs. men). Positive indirect effects of image threat on task performance through problem-solving pondering were not significant for both women (-.01, 95% CI = -.060, .071) and men (.01, 95% CI = -.061, .082). The difference between the effects was not significant (-.01; 95% CI = -.116, .124). Positive indirect effects of image threat on OCBI through problem-solving pondering were not significant for both women (.07, 95% CI = -.030, .241) and men (-.08, 95% CI = -.205, .008). The difference between the effects was not significant (.15; 95% CI = -.009, .412). Positive indirect effect of image threat on OCBO through problem-solving pondering was not significant for women (.14, 95% CI = -.075, .396), but was significant for men (-.18, 95% CI = -.350, -.032). The difference between these effects was significant (.32; 95% CI = .048, .658). Overall, Hypothesis 8 supported the prediction that men were significantly less likely to use OCBO.

Finally, Hypothesis 9 predicted that employee gender would moderate the indirect relationship between image threat perceptions and (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through rumination, such that the relationship will be stronger for men (vs. women). Based on my results, I found that image threat X gender was not significant on rumination. Thus, Hypothesis 9 was not supported.

Manipulation checks. Results from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) provided support for image perceptions manipulation. Specifically, image enhancement ratings were significantly higher for participants in the image enhancement condition than for participants in the image threat condition ($F = 289.53$, $p < .001$, $M_{enh} = 4.55$ vs. $M_{threat} = 2.22$; $\eta^2 = .70$), and image threat ratings were significantly higher for participants in the image threat condition than for participants in the image enhancement condition ($F = 372.90$, $p < .001$, $M_{threat} = 4.08$ vs. $M_{enh} = 1.37$; $\eta^2 = .75$).

TABLE 7: Study 2B Correlations and Alphas

	Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Image	0.50	0.50	--								
2.	Problem-solving pondering	3.65	1.10	.10	(.92)							
3.	Rumination	2.63	1.44	-.70*	-.23*	(.97)						
4.	Task performance	3.99	0.73	.41*	.03	-.36*	(.92)					
5.	OCBI	3.76	0.86	.20*	.22*	-.14	.46*	(.94)				
6.	OCBO	3.14	0.98	.23*	.39*	-.21*	.45*	.59*	(.89)			
7.	CWBI	1.41	0.62	-.16	-.02	.33*	-.22*	-.08	.05	(.89)		
8.	CWBO	1.74	0.74	-.14	-.16	.33*	-.27*	-.23*	-.13	.57*	(.91)	
9.	Dysfunctional resistance	1.28	0.51	-.22*	-.13	.28*	-.26*	-.19*	-.02	.72*	.54*	(.89)

Note. N=127.   *$p < .05$. Coefficients alphas are reported on the diagonal.

CHAPTER 6

STUDY 3: METHODS & RESULTS

Time Lagged Field Study

Taken together, Studies 2A and 2B provide partial support for my theoretical model. The results of Study 2A indicate that indeed leader humor has implications for image perceptions in the workplace—leader affiliative humor positively impacts image enhancement and leader aggressive humor positively influences image threat. From Study 2B, I found support for image management theory in organizational behavior that when employees' image is enhanced, they are further motivated to indulge in behaviors that can preserve and protect their boosted image (Roberts, 2005). I found that image enhancement is positively related to constructive image management behaviors (task performance, OCBI, and OCBO). For reactions to image threat, I found support for image management theory in social psychology which says that threats to image can make individuals react in a dysfunctional manner. I found that image threat is positively related to rumination and indirectly through rumination to destructive image management behaviors (CWBI, CWBO, and dysfunctional resistance). Finally, I found that gender moderated the relationship between image threat and problem-solving pondering, such that men are less likely to problem-solve when faced with image threat.

Despite the strengths of Study 2A and 2B, such as strengthened causal inferences, there are limitations. Consistent with image management theory (Isaakyaan et al., 2020; Roberts, 2005), I operationalized image perceptions generally. Still, given the relevance of the model is leader-focused, meaning that employees' image perceptions are based on how leaders treat them,

given the central role leaders play in employees' work lives. This leaves open the idea that image perceptions should be focused on how employees believe their leaders see them—as behaving consistent with an ideal worker (i.e., image enhancement through the eyes of the leader) or falling short of one (i.e., image threat through the eyes of the leader). I addressed this assumption directly in Study 3 with adapted measures that were leader-focused. In Study 2, the language of the items I used to capture image enhancement included the words "in the eyes of others". This language suggested that even though leader humor is behavior from leaders, image perceptions are more general phenomena that individuals create regarding their overall image in the workplace. In my field study, I adapted these items and ended them with the language "in the eyes of the supervisor". With this change, I aimed to capture individuals' perceptions of how their leaders specifically saw them.

Sample and Procedure

Study 3 was a time-lagged, multi-source field study to test my full conceptual model and to capitalize on enhancing external validity and generalizability that the design offers (Lykken, 1968; Tsang & Kwan 1999). To test my hypotheses, I recruited full-time working adults (who worked at least 35 hours per week) employed with a Southeastern University. Eligibility criteria included that the focal participants work under a supervisor who they interact with regularly and that they should be able to recruit their immediate supervisor to complete a single survey for me. To connect with the participants, a description of the study was sent to prospective participants via email, this email included a link to the first survey (Time 1 survey). The surveys were administered electronically using the Qualtrics survey platform. First, I provided participants with a brief overview of the study and asked them to verify their eligibility to participate through a series of questions (for example, "are you at least 18 years of age?" and "can you recruit your

supervisor for this study to take a single, 20-minute survey?"). Participants were paid $5 for each completed survey and a bonus of $5 for completing all four surveys. Their recruited supervisors were also paid $5 for completing their single survey.

Experts recommend that researchers incorporate temporal separation of surveys and multiple sources for data to reduce the potential for common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Thus, I separated my surveys by approximately 3 weeks (the separation was 3.5 weeks for most participants) and collected data from two different sources—focal participants and their supervisors. Each focal participant received four surveys. Although I included two careless responder check questions in each survey, I did not drop anyone from my final sample as my sample was relatively small[1].

At Time 1, a total of 230 focal participants answered questions about leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor, and demographics (e.g., gender, race, age, ethnicity, organizational tenure, tenure with the supervisor). At Time 2, a total of 208 focal participants answered questions about image perceptions (90.4% response rate). At Time 3, a total of 203 focal participants answered questions about problem-solving pondering and rumination (97.6% response rate). And finally, three weeks later, at Time 4, 190 focal participants answered questions about constructive and destructive image management behaviors (93.6% response rate). At Time 4, the recruited supervisors received one, single survey that also requested their perceptions of focal participants' constructive and destructive image management behaviors. A total of 151 supervisors completed this survey (79.5% of the participant base). Thus, I successfully collected data from 151 dyads. On average, focal employees were 43.54 years old (SD = 11.14) with 6.89 years of experience in their organization (SD = 7.53) and 4.98 years with

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[1] I tested my model after removing any participant who failed more than one attention check, but the results remained unchanged.

their current supervisor (SD = 5.44); 69% identified as female and 85.2% identified as

Caucasian. On average supervisors were 48.54 years old (SD = 9.37) with 13.46 years of

experience in their organization (SD = 9.06). 60.9% identified as female and 88.7% identified as

Caucasian.

Measures

Constructs were assessed on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*).

Gender was coded as "1" for women and "0" for men. Focal participants completed measures for

leader humor, image perceptions, cognitive strategies (problem-solving pondering and

rumination), and their self-reported destructive behavior (i.e., counterproductive work behavior,

dysfunctional resistance). Scholars have suggested that destructive or counterproductive

behaviors are better represented through self-report instead of by other sources (e.g., Berry,

Carpenter, & Barratt, 2012). Focal participants' supervisors completed measures for constructive

image management behaviors (i.e., citizenship, task performance).

Leader affiliative humor. At Time 1, I measured leader affiliative humor using the same

6-item measure created in Study 1. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to the

following items: "My leader uses supportive humor with me," "My leader uses reassuring humor

with me," "My leader uses encouraging humor with me," "My leader uses elevating humor with

me," "My leader uses nurturing humor with me," and "My leader uses uplifting humor with me."

The coefficient alpha for this measure was .96.

Leader aggressive humor. At Time 1, I measured leader aggressive humor using the

same 6-item measure created in Study 1. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement

to the following items: "My leader uses demeaning humor about me," "My leader uses

discouraging humor about me," "My leader uses demoralizing humor about me," "My leader

uses attacking humor about me," "My leader uses hurtful humor about me," and "My leader uses harmful humor about me." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .98.

Image enhancement. At Time 2, I measured image enhancement using the same 7-item measure created in Study 1, however, I changed the language in the items to indicate perceptions of one's image in the eyes of the supervisor. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to the following items: The items were: "There is a positive impression about me in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are assurances about my abilities in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are positive perceptions of me in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are perceptions of my strong work status in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are perceptions of my competence in the eyes of my supervisor," "There is confidence in my capabilities in the eyes of my supervisor," and "There are perceptions of my positive image in the eyes of my supervisor." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .96.

Image threat. At Time 2, I measured image threat using Isaakyan et al.'s (2020) 7-item measure, however, I changed the language in the items to indicate perceptions of one's image in the eyes of the supervisor. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to the following items: The items were: "There is a negative impression about me in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are doubts about my abilities in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are negative perceptions of me in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are concerns about my work status in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are questions about my competence in the eyes of my supervisor," "There are doubts about my capabilities in the eyes of my supervisor," and "There are concerns about my image in the eyes of my supervisor." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .96.

Problem-solving pondering: At Time 3, I used Cropley et al.'s (2012) 3-item measure to measure problem-solving pondering. Participants were asked their agreement to the following items: "I have thought about how to improve at work," "I have reflected on how to improve at work," and "I have re-evaluated something I have done at work." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .88.

Rumination. At Time 3, I used Cropley et al.'s (2012) 3-item measure to measure rumination. Participants were asked their agreement to the following items: "I have been annoyed thinking about work-related issues," "I have been irritated by work-related issues," and "I have been troubled by work-related issues." The coefficient alpha for the measure was .89.

Task performance. At Time 4, task performance was assessed by supervisors of the focal participants using Griffin et al.'s (2007) 3-item measure. Supervisors were asked to rate their agreement with the following items about the focal participant's behaviors in the last 3-4 weeks (i.e., since Time 3). The items were: "This employee carried out the core parts of the job well", "This employee completed core tasks well using the standard procedures", and "This employee ensured tasks were completed properly". The coefficient alpha for the measure was .95.

Citizenship behavior. At Time 4, interpersonal citizenship behaviors (OCBI) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCBO) were assessed by supervisors of the focal participants using Hill et al.'s 4-item measures. Supervisors were asked to rate their agreement with the following items about the focal participant's behaviors in the last 3-4 weeks (i.e., since Time 3). The OCBI items were: "This employee went out of the way to be nice to another coworker", "This employee tried to help another coworker", "This employee went out of the way to include another coworker in a conversation", and "This employee tried to help another

coworker". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .89. The OCBO items were: "This employee volunteered for additional work tasks", "This employee went above and beyond what was required for work tasks", "This employee defended organizational policies", and "This employee spoke highly about the organization to others". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .83.

Counterproductive behaviors. At Time 4, interpersonal counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBI) and organizational counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBO) were assessed by the focal participants using Hill et al.'s (2021) measures. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following items about their behaviors in the last 3-4 weeks (i.e., since Time 3). The CWBI items were: "Behaved in an unpleasant manner toward another coworker", "Criticized another coworker's opinion or suggestion", "Excluded another coworker from a conversation", and "Spoken poorly about another coworker to others". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .76. The CWBO items were: "Not worked to the best of his/her ability", "Spent time on tasks unrelated to work", "Taken an unnecessary break at work", and "Worked slower than necessary". The coefficient alpha for this measure was .82.

Dysfunctional resistance. At Time 4, dysfunctional resistance was assessed by the focal participants using Tepper et al.' (2007) 7-item measure. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following items about their behaviors in the last 3-4 weeks (i.e., since Time 3). The items were: When your supervisor asked about something on the job, you…"…acted like you did not know about it," "…made a half-hearted effort then let the supervisor know you couldn't do it," "…ignored the supervisor," "…disregarded what the supervisor said," "…did not pay attention to the supervisor," "…just said 'no' to the supervisor," and "…acted like the supervisor never asked you to do it." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .76.

Controls. According to humor scholars, employee reactions to leader humor can be determined by employees' understanding of leader's personality and type of humor the leader generally uses (e.g., Cooper et al., 2018; Robert, Dunne, & Iun, 2016). For this reason, I controlled for the focal participants' tenure with the supervisor. Additionally, research in image management suggests that compared to employees who have spent a substantial amount of time in a workgroup, new employees are more likely to consider questions and information related to their image in the workplace, and thus, are more likely to observe and react to social interactions (Little et al., 2015; Roberts, 2005). Also, according to studies, employees' tenure can affect their reactions to leader humor (Gkorezis, Hatzithomas, & Petridou, 2011). Based on this, I also controlled for focal participants' tenure at their work. Finally, research on image management theory also recommends that individuals' personality matters in their image management journeys (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005). Employees who regularly interact with their supervisors and their colleagues are more likely to observe their environment and care about their image at work. Accordingly, I controlled for focal participants' extraversion. Extraversion was measured by Goldberg's (1990) 6-item measure. The instructions read: "Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about yourself." The items were: "I feel comfortable around people," "I start conversations," "I talk to a lot of different people at parties," "I don't mind being the center of attention," "I keep in the background (*reverse coded*)," and "I don't like to draw attention to myself (*reverse coded*)." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .76.

Results

The means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and correlations are shown in Table 8.

Hypothesis Testing. To analyze the data for hypothesis testing, I used a manifest variable path analysis model in structural equation modeling (SEM) using Mplus 8. Product term was created using gender coding and centering the image threat measure. In running my model on Mplus, I used bootstrapping with 1000 replications to construct 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to test the significance of my indirect effects. The hypothesized path coefficients are shown in Figure 4.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that leader affiliative humor would be positively related to image enhancement and Hypothesis 2 predicted that leader aggressive humor would be positively related to image threat. The results from the field study supported these predictions. Leader affiliative humor was positively and significantly related to image enhancement ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), and leader aggressive humor was positively and significantly related to image threat ($\beta = .66$, $p < .001$). Thus, I found support for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that image enhancement would be positively related to (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior (OCBI and OCBO). The results showed that image enhancement was positively and significantly related to task performance ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) and OCBO ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$), but not to OCBI ($\beta = .11$, $p = .20$). Thus, Hypothesis 3a was supported and there was partial support for Hypothesis 3b.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that image threat would be indirectly and positively related to (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior through problem-solving pondering. Results from the field data showed that image threat was not significantly related to problem-solving pondering ($\beta = -.17$, $p = .42$). Problem-solving pondering was significantly, but negatively related to task performance ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$). Problem-solving pondering was not significantly related to OCBI ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .44$) and OCBO ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .82$). Accordingly, the

indirect effects from image threat through problem-solving pondering on task performance (.04, 95% CI = -.044, .125), OCBI (.02, 95% CI = -.021, .085), and OCBO (.01, 95% CI = -.030, .055), were not significant. Overall, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that image threat would be indirectly and positively related to (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through rumination. Results from the field data showed that image threat was marginally and positively related to rumination (β = .55, p =.07). Rumination was significantly and positively related to CWBI (β = .11, p < .05), CWBO (β = .24, p < .001), and dysfunctional resistance (β = .18, p < .01). The results showed support for the indirect relationships from image threat through rumination to CWBI (.06, 95% CI = .002, .149), CWBO (.13, 95% CI = .011, .290), and dysfunctional resistance (.10, 95% CI = .008, .225). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that employee gender would moderate the relationship between image threat and problem-solving pondering such that the relationship will be stronger for women (vs. men). Results from the field study did not support this prediction. The moderation effect of employee gender on the relationship between image threat and problem-solving pondering was not significant (β = .10, p = .42). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Hypothesis 7 predicted that employee gender would moderate the relationship between image threat and rumination such that the relationship will be stronger for men (vs. women). Results from the field study did not support this prediction. The moderation effect of employee gender on the relationship between image threat and rumination was not significant (β = -.16, p = .47). Thus, Hypothesis 7 was not supported.

Hypothesis 8 predicted that employee gender would moderate the indirect relationship between image threat and (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior

through problem-solving pondering, such that the relationships will be stronger for women (vs. men). Based on my results for moderation, Hypothesis 8 was not supported.

Hypothesis 9 predicted that employee gender would moderate the indirect relationship between image threat perceptions and (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through rumination, such that the relationship will be stronger for men (vs. women). Based on the results for moderation, Hypothesis 9 was not supported.

Supplemental Analysis for Field Study

As the field study allowed me to examine all my variables together, it gave me a chance to test how the two types of leader humor influenced employee behaviors. Specifically, I planned to study the indirect effects of leader affiliative humor on constructive image management behaviors and of leader aggressive humor on both constructive and destructive image management behaviors. Based on my previous arguments (i.e., Hypothesis 1 to Hypothesis 9), I proposed:

> *Hypothesis 10. Leader affiliative humor will be positively and indirectly related to (a) task performance and (b) citizenship behaviors through image enhancement.*
>
> *Hypothesis 11. Leader aggressive humor will be positively and indirectly related to (a) task performance and (b) citizenship behaviors through image threat and problem-solving pondering.*
>
> *Hypothesis 12. Leader aggressive humor will be positively and indirectly related to (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through image threat and rumination.*

Results

To test these indirect effects from leader humor, I again ran a path model in structural equation modeling (SEM) using Mplus 8. In running my model on Mplus, I used bootstrapping with 1000 replications to construct 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to test the significance of my indirect effects.

Hypotheses testing. Hypothesis 10 predicted that leader affiliative humor would be positively and indirectly related to (a) task performance and (b) citizenship behaviors through image enhancement. Results showed that leader affiliative humor was significantly and positively related to task performance (.04, 95% CI = .010, .091) and OCBO (.05, 95% CI = .014, .102), but not OCBI (.03, 95% CI = -.008, .065) through image enhancement. Thus, Hypothesis 10a was supported and Hypothesis 10b was partially supported.

Hypothesis 11 predicted that leader aggressive humor would be positively and indirectly related to (a) task performance and (b) citizenship behaviors through image threat and problem-solving pondering. Results showed that the effect of leader aggressive humor was not significant on task performance (.03, 95% CI = -.025, .088), OCBI (.01, 95% CI = -.011, .059), and OCBO (.01, 95% CI = -.019, .038) through image threat and problem-solving pondering. Thus Hypothesis 11 was not supported.

Hypothesis 12 predicted that leader aggressive humor would be positively and indirectly related to (a) counterproductive workplace behavior and (b) dysfunctional resistance through image threat and rumination. Results showed that the effect of leader aggressive humor was significantly related to task performance (.04, 95% CI = .001, .099), OCBO (.09, 95% CI = -.007, .200), and OCBO (.07, 95% CI = .005, .150) through image threat and rumination. Thus Hypothesis 12 was supported.

TABLE 8: Study 3 Correlations and Alphas

	Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.	Leader affiliative humor	3.72	0.94	(.96)												
2.	Leader aggressive humor	1.16	0.45	-.28*	(.98)											
3.	Image enhancement	4.13	0.71	.40*	-.34*	(.96)										
4.	Image threat	1.75	0.74	-.38*	.47*	-.82*	(.96)									
5.	Problem-solving pondering	4.25	0.50	.22*	-.08	.12	-.09	(.88)								
6.	Rumination	3.32	0.99	-.29*	.18*	-.19*	.27*	-.09	(.89)							
7.	Task performance	4.48	0.62	.18*	-.27*	.24*	-.30*	-.16	-.06	(.95)						
8.	OCBI	4.45	0.62	.31*	-.24*	.23*	-.27*	.01	-.19*	.53*	(.89)					
9.	OCBO	4.17	0.68	.16*	-.26*	.24*	-.32*	.03	-.16	.63*	.67*	(.83)				
10.	CWBI	1.67	0.51	-.19*	.19*	-.08	.17*	-.09	.27*	.01	.12	-.12	(.76)			
11.	CWBO	2.05	0.59	-.19*	.17*	-.18*	.25*	-.16	.26*	-.05	-.05	-.12	.33*	(.82)		
12.	Dysfunctional resistance	1.13	0.25	-.23*	.31*	-.23*	.23*	-.23*	.21*	-.05	-.09	-.09	.42*	.35*	(.76)	
13.	Extraversion	3.00	0.86	.16	-.03	.12	-.06	.20*	-.01	-.05	.09	.06	.03	-.14	-.05	(.88)

Note. N=151. *$p < .05$. Coefficients alphas are reported on the diagonal.

FIGURE 4: Study 3 Structural Equation Modeling Results [a]
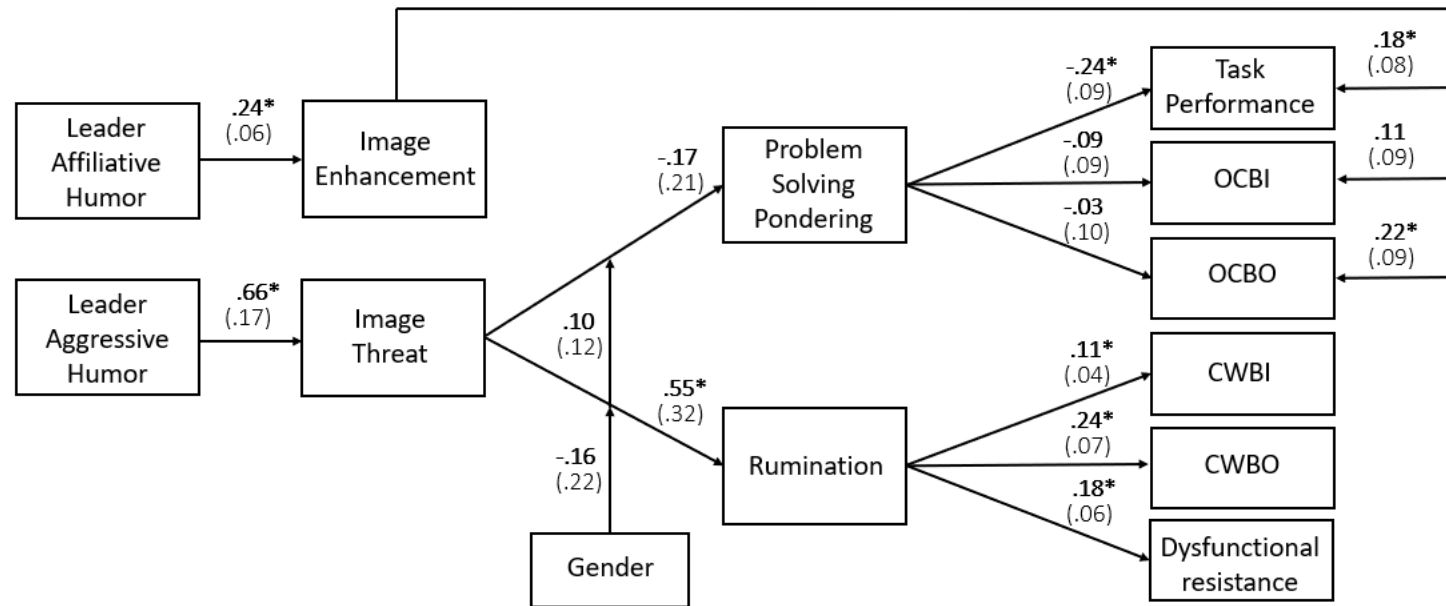
* p < .05, two-tailed. The effect of image threat on rumination was marginal (.07). [a] Path coefficients are unstandardized, with standard errors in parentheses. Although not shown, I modeled direct paths as per following: From leader affiliative humor on image threat (-.25, s.e. = .08, p < .01), task performance (.16, s.e. = .08, p < .05), OCBI (.28, s.e. = .09, p < .001), and OCBO (.06, s.e. = .08, p = .49). From leader aggressive humor on image enhancement (-.25, s.e. = .09, p < .01), problem-solving pondering (-.06, s.e. = .09, p = .50), and rumination (.06, s.e. = .07, p = .36). And, from image threat on CWBI, (.08, s.e. = .07, p = .28), CWBO (.08, s.e. = .08, p = .34), and dysfunctional resistance (-.08, s.e. = .08, p = .32).

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

The literature on workplace humor is still in its infancy. Even though scholars in social psychology have discussed the attributes of humor and its tendency to help individuals cope with stress and the negativities of life, there has not been enough focus in organizational sciences to study humor in the workplace. Accordingly, humor scholars are now calling for the study of workplace humor—its causes, consequences, and the parties involved (Romero & Crithirds, 2006; Martin et al., 2003). As the focus on studying workplace humor increases, scholars have begun to realize the importance of leader humor (e.g., Carnevale et al., 2021; Huo et al., 2012).

Leader humor is said to be an extra behavior that unlike formal leader behaviors (such as training or providing feedback) is not expected from leaders (Copper et al., 2018). Due to this special feature, it is seen as an effort by leaders to signal their perceptions about the target of the humor and to relay an intention to bond with employees. Realizing its importance, there have been calls in the literature to understand the mechanisms through which it can influence employees (e.g., Pundt & Hermann, 2015). Additionally, scholars have introduced focus to explore not only perceived positive forms of leader humor but also forms that can be perceived as negative (Martin et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2014)—they argue that an outright positive perspective on leader humor can be limited because not all types of leader humor are meant to be harmless and uplifting, some are used to attack and hurt (e.g., Yam et al., 2018). With that said, it is important to study these different types of humor as positive and negative signals from leaders about their perceptions of the value of the employees who are the targets of the humor.

In my dissertation, I aimed to answer these calls from humor scholars. I developed and tested a theory that provides an important mechanism through which positive and negative forms of leader humor can influence employees' perceptions and behaviors. Drawing on image management theory (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roberts, 2005), I argued that positive form of leader humor—*leader affiliative humor*—would positively impact employees' perceptions about their image as it would signal to them that their leader approves of them and their performance and finds them worthy enough to use an extra positive behavior with them. I also suggested that negative form of leader humor—*leader aggressive humor*—would negatively impact employees' perceptions about their image as it would signal to them that their leader does not value them and does not approve of their performance. I further proposed that based on image management theory employees whose image is enhanced would indulge in constructive image management behaviors (i.e., task performance and citizenship behaviors) to further protect their boosted image. To test the reactions to image threat, I decided to test the theory on image management in both social psychology and organizational behavior. Whereas, theory in organizational behavior suggests that when employees' image is threatened they react in adaptive cognitions in order to fix their image, theory in social psychology recommends that these cognitive reactions can be maladaptive and dysfunctional. Accordingly, I proposed that image threat would be positively related to problem-solving pondering and rumination, and indirectly and respectively related to constructive (i.e., task performance and citizenship behaviors) and destructive (i.e., counterproductive workplace behaviors and dysfunctional resistance) behaviors through problem-solving pondering and rumination. Finally, because image management theory highlights the importance of employees' gender in determining their reactions to negative information about their image, I tested the moderating effect of gender on employees' reactions

to image threat. After creating and providing validity evidence for three new measures (image enhancement, leader affiliative humor, and leader aggressive humor), I used a causal chain experiment and a time-lagged field study to test my theoretical model. The results provide relevant support for some of my predictions.

Theoretical Implications

My dissertation has several theoretical implications for a number of relevant literatures. First, my dissertation answers multiple calls in the leader humor domain. There have been calls in the literature to unearth the importance of leader humor—to study not only its positive forms but also its negative forms (Cooper et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a need in the literature to study how and why leader humor impacts employees. My dissertation answers these calls by unpacking the image management journeys initiated by both leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor. In doing so, I highlight the fact that humor that is perceived as aggressive can have very different impacts on employees than humor perceived as friendly and positive. My research suggests that leader affiliative humor and leader aggressive humor have contrasting implications on employees' perceptions of how others see their competence, value, and worth. Leader affiliative humor is a positive, while leader aggressive humor is a negative signal to employees about their professional image, and thus, these two types initiate very different image management processes for employees. Leader humor perceived as aggressive tells employees that they are experiencing image threat—that their social standing and perceived competence are challenged. This can make them react with negative cognitions and behaviors that can harmfully impact not only them but also their colleagues and the organization. Therefore by introducing image management theory to the leader humor domain, my research provides image information as important mechanisms that transfer effects from leader humor.

Second, for the image management domain, I study theory present in both organizational science and in social psychology. First, I test and find support for theory in organizational behavior that suggests that employees do not stop making efforts to strengthen their image when they realize that they are indeed considered valuable. In fact, an enhanced image makes them indulge in more constructive behaviors that can help them protect their position. And second, even though the literature on image management in organizational behavior suggests that when individuals' image is threatened they think of ways that can fix their image so that others see them as valuable members of the workplace, theory in social psychology says something different. Social psychologists suggest that a threatening situation like this can adversely impact individuals' ability to react adaptively and instead they react in dysfunctional, destructive ways. My results support this notion and with that, introduce image management theory from social psychology to the organizational behavior domain.

Finally, I contribute to the ongoing research agenda in organizational behavior to understand the impact of gender at work by integrating the gender role theory with the image management domain. Scholars suggest that the stereotypes associated with women provide a "lack of fit" with what is considered the qualities of a strong professional image, while stereotypes associated with men provide a close match. Due to this, women have historically experienced more discrimination and expect negative treatment at work while men experience psychological entitlement to positive treatment (Heilman, 1995, 2012). Status research suggests that this expectation of negativity allows women to react to threats in a more adaptive manner, while psychological entitlement to positivity makes men react to threats in a more maladaptive manner (Davidson & Friedman, 1998). Results from my experiments suggest that indeed men are less likely than women to react to image threat adaptively.

Practical Implications

My research has some important practical implications for managers. First, more and more organizations are emphasizing the importance of humor at work. There are companies that encourage their managers to use humor with their employees to create bonds and make the work environment less formal. Some other companies organize comedy clubs and bring in stand-up artists so that their employees can enjoy some humor, which they believe is a way to reduce employee stress at work. However, my research suggests that as work cultures become more relaxed and less formal, it is important for managers to know that humor at work isn't always perceived as positive. Leader humor can be perceived by employees as aggressive, and when that happens, it can have a detrimental effect on employees' perceptions of their image at work. Employees can take certain kinds of humor as a signal that they are not valued and this can make them react destructively. Such destructive reactions can be harmful not only to the employees but also to their colleagues, their leaders, and their organization.

Second, my research specifies the importance of leaders and their behaviors in creating employees' image perceptions. How leaders behave with their employees is important and thus, leaders need to know that even if they do not intend it, their behaviors can be perceived as aggressive, which can result in destructive reactions on part of the employees. My research suggests that is important for leaders to ensure that their employees know that they are valuable to their workplace and that their leaders appreciate them.

Future Directions and Limitations

By introducing image management theory to the literature on leader humor, my dissertation opens up new areas for future research. First, even though I studied adaptive and maladaptive cognitive reactions to image threat, I think it can be very interesting to study

affective reactions to both image enhancement and image threat. Studying affect in the model will provide an additional mechanism through which the impacts of leader humor can be studied.

Another interesting concept that can be studied through leader humor is that of vicarious image perceptions of observers. Leader humor scholars have suggested that the literature needs to focus on the reactions of observers of humor. I suggest that it would be interesting to study if observing leader affiliative humor toward another employee would make observers feel vicarious image threat for not being the ones involved in the humor incident. Similarly, observing leader aggressive humor towards a colleague can make an observer feel good about not being the target of such humor and that might vicariously enhance their image.

It will also be interesting to study the implications of leader humor on employee image by studying the fit between leaders' intentions of humor and employees' perceptions of humor. For example, it is highly possible that humor that is not intended as aggressive but is perceived as aggressive adversely impacts employees' image perceptions, but humor intended as aggressive but perceived as affiliative has positive implications on employee image.

This research is not without limitations. One such limitation is that the independent and mediating variables in the field study were rated by the same source, which could raise concerns about common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). However, I took steps to minimize such biases. Specifically, the independent and mediating variables were collected at different time points, separated by approximately three and a half weeks. Additionally, given the nature of my theorizing, the independent and mediating variables were appropriately self-rated by employees, given that they rated their perceptions of their leaders' humor and their image.

Conclusion

Leader humor is an essential signal to the targetted employees about the leaders' acceptance, approval, and attitude towards them. For employees, leader humor indicates an extra behavior used for a purpose and they try to make sense of it. However, leader humor can be perceived by employees as both affiliative and aggressive. My dissertation integrates the literature on leader humor with the image management theory to show that leader affiliative humor enhances employees' image, but leader aggressive humor threatens employees' image. My research also shows that image threat can initiate a destructive image management process in which employees can indulge in dysfunctional cognitive and behavioral reactions. I hope that my research is a starting point for future research on the effects of leader humor and image perceptions at work.

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