

Getting credit for proactivity? The effects of gender

Alina S. Hernandez Bark¹  | Kseniya Seliverstova² | Sandra Ohly³

¹Social Psychology, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany

²University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany

³Business Psychology, University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany

Correspondence

Dr. Alina S. Hernandez Bark, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany.
Email: HernandezBark@psych.uni-frankfurt.de

Abstract

With our research, we contribute to the research on proactive work behavior in two ways. First, we examine a person's gender as a boundary condition for proactive behavior at work. Based on social role theory, we argue that women are less likely to receive credit for showing personal initiative (PI) than men. Second, we examine agency and communion as underlying mechanisms that translate PI into a person's evaluation and drive backlash effects. The hypotheses were tested in two complementary experimental studies (Study 1; $N = 114$, Study 2: $N = 163$) using simulated job interviews. Our results show that PI relates to better evaluations (likeability, perceived competence, performance evaluations, expected success and hireability) of the job applicant and that these effects are mediated by agency and communion. Further, we find backlash effects for women high in agency and men high in communion on likeability (Study 2). The implications of these results for organizations and future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS

backlash effect, gender role theory, gender stereotypes, personal initiative, proactive work behavior

1 | INTRODUCTION

Last year, Sheryl Sandberg asked me what my own data showed about gender. I had done more than a decade of research on success at work, but because of my resistance to acknowledging gender biases, it hadn't occurred to me to systematically analyze differences between men and women in my studies. When I finally did, I was mortified: Men got credit for speaking up and helping, but women didn't. Grant (2015)

Modern performance concepts recognize the need for proactivity in organizations (Campbell, 2000; Griffin et al., 2007). Employees are more and more expected to show proactive behavior that contributes to organizational goals. Proactive behavior relates to more work

engagement, more task behavior and better performance (Bergeron et al., 2014; Madrid et al., 2018). However, proactive work behavior can take different forms, such as taking charge, voicing suggestions, and proactively solving problems (for overviews see Bindl & Parker, 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013). In this paper, we focus on the proactive work behavior of personal initiative (PI). It is defined as a 'work behaviour characterized by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in the pursuit of a goal' (Frese & Fay, 2001, p. 134). In general, PI is positively related to job performance, including supervisor-ratings (meta-analysis Thomas et al., 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013). However, following recent research the positive effects of PI does not always evolve and might depend on further factors (Belschak et al., 2010; Grant et al., 2011). For example, whether or not employees receive credit for their proactive behavior depends on a variety of factors, such as the situational knowledge of the employee (Chan, 2006), the positive affect expressed (Grant

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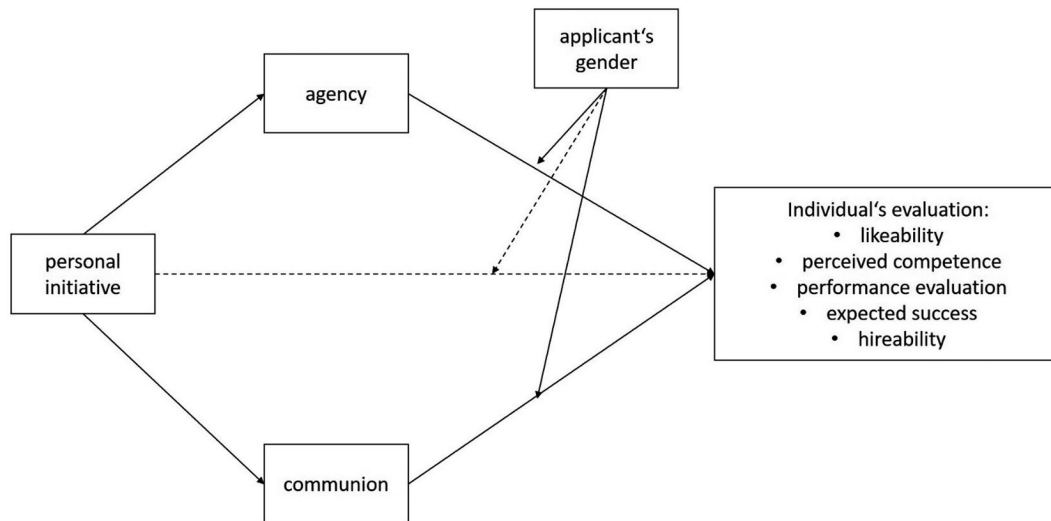


FIGURE 1 Proposed model

et al., 2009, 2011), and the political skill or the confidence of the employee (Nguyen et al., 2017; Shi et al., 2011; Wihler et al., 2017). These findings indicate that the effects of proactive behavior are dependent on its enactment and perception by others. This might be especially true for a more persistent proactive work behavior like PI as research by Burriss (2012) on voice behavior showed that managers react unfavorably to voices that challenge the manager, whereas they react favorably to a less challenging form of voice.

Even though previous research has credited that the success of proactive work behaviors and PI might depend on individual characteristics, an important individual characteristic has largely been neglected in proactivity research in general and specifically in research examining the outcomes of proactivity. This characteristic is the individual's gender. As suggested by the opening quote, there is reason to expect that women will not receive the same credit for their PI as men that is based on traditional gender roles and backlash effects when violating gender role expectations (Heilman, 2012; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). We will outline why we assume that agency and communion, as the Big Two in person's perception and impression formation (e.g., Abele, Cuddy, et al., 2008), mediate the effect of PI on an individual's evaluation and how this might be the underlying rationale for differential effects of PI for women and men. Precisely, the model that we develop in the following is depicted in Figure 1. We test the model two controlled, complementary experiments, to be able to rule out alternative explanations based on individual characteristics (knowledge, skill, positive affect or confidence) or contextual influences (work role, supervisor characteristics). At the end, we will discuss the implications of our findings for future research and derive practical implications.

Thus, with this paper, we contribute to the existing literature by (a) examining a relevant, but so far neglected individual characteristic, an individual's gender, on the effects of PI, (b) deepen our understanding how PI converts into individual's evaluation by including agency and communion as underlying mechanisms, and (c) examine

if gender differences in the effects of PI might be explained by violating traditional gender stereotypes.

1.1 | Personal initiative

Personal initiative is one form of proactive work behavior. Latter one is defined as a self-directed and future-focused action in an organization, which aims to bring about change (Bindl & Parker, 2010). It can take different forms, such as taking charge, voicing suggestions, and proactively solving problems (for overviews see Bindl & Parker, 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013). Making a suggestion on how to improve working procedures would be considered voice behavior (Klaas et al., 2012). Whereas PI is also conceptualized as contributing to organizational goals but characterized by a high persistence and overcoming resistance by others when making suggestions (Bledow & Frese, 2009; Frese & Fay, 2001). For individuals high in PI making a suggestion and waiting for a response would not be enough, they would persistently try to overcome barriers (in more active ways; Frese & Fay, 2001). They would follow up upon their suggestion, would try to convince important stakeholders or contribute to implementing their suggestion. Hence, PI can be conceptualised as a more challenging form of proactive work behavior. Despite its challenging nature, PI is positively related to performance, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, indicating that it has mainly positive outcomes (Binnewies et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013; Wihler et al., 2017). Based on these previous findings, we assume that PI might be perceived as acting in the interest of the organization and showing effort in fostering improvement for the good of the organization which might result in more positive evaluations. People showing high PI are more engaged and show more effort and might be perceived as effective co-workers one might like as they go the extra-mile aiming at improvement. This should be reflected in higher perceived competence, but also higher likeability.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) *PI relates positively to an individual's evaluation (e.g., likeability, perceived competence).*

1.2 | Gender and personal initiative

As stated before, PI is characterized by a high persistence and assertiveness regarding the follow-up of made suggestions (Bledow & Frese, 2009; Frese & Fay, 2001). Frese and Fay (2001) suggested that “PI in employees is not always welcomed by supervisors or colleagues. Often high-PI people are perceived by their environment as being tiring and strenuous. Every initiative “rocks the boat” and makes changes. Since people tend not to like changes (Oreg, 2003), they often greet initiatives with scepticism” (p. 141). Thus, PI is a challenging form of proactive behavior that also might be perceived as dominant and not purely positive.

With keeping this in mind, we now explain why this might be an issue that leads for differential effects for women and men showing PI. Even nowadays and after years of gender equality movements in almost all Western countries, the gender roles of women and men still differ (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Braun et al., 2017; Diekman et al., 2005; Haines et al., 2016; March et al., 2016; Obioma et al., 2021). Gender roles are socially shared beliefs about attributes of women and men (Biddle, 1979). They consist of a descriptive (how women and men actually behave), prescriptive (how women and men should behave) and a proscriptive (how women and men should not behave) component (Cuddy et al., 2008; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 1995; Rudman et al., 2012; Wood & Eagly, 2002). Women are more associated with being concerned about the well-being of others and thereby with communal attributes, such as being warm, kind, friendly, empathic, supportive, gentle, and caring; whereas men are more associated with agentic attributes, such as being self-confident, ambitious, assertive, controlling, independent, dominant, and competitive (Abele, Uchronski, et al., 2008; Bakan, 1966; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Haines et al., 2016; Hernandez Bark et al., 2014; March et al., 2016; Rudman et al., 2012; Williams & Best, 1990). Thus, women in general are still expected to show compassion with others, while men in general are expected to be dominant and assertive (Heilman, 2001). Importantly, gender roles are one fundamental criteria for the perception and evaluation of an individual and thereby facilitate biases in personnel selection decisions, the evaluation of leadership potential and behavior, performance evaluations and career advancement (Heilman, 2001, 2012; Hernandez Bark et al., 2014, 2016; Koch et al., 2015; Konrad et al., 2000; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman et al., 2012).

Moreover, research shows that gender role congruent behavior is socially accepted and relates to positive affect as well as enhanced self-esteem, whereas gender role incongruent behavior is associated with social disapproval and backlash effects (Diekman & Eagly, 2008; Eagly et al., 2000; Evans & Diekman, 2009; Heilman, 2012; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Backlash effects are negative evaluations of women showing proscriptive characteristics and behavior like assertiveness (Rudman & Glick, 2001). If women are perceived as dominant, they are less liked, less hired and even

sabotaged (Heilman, 2012; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman et al., 2012; Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). The meta-analysis by Williams and Tiedens (2016) showed that especially women who explicitly expressed dominance (e.g., demands) instead of using more subtle forms (e.g., eye contact) experience more backlash effects.

Combining these findings on backlash effects for women with the definition of PI as a more assertive and challenging form of proactive work behavior that might be perceived as dominant and prescriptive for women, we assume that women showing PI will experience backlash effects.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) *Gender moderates the relation between PI and an individual's evaluation (e.g., likeability, perceived competence) in the way that women showing PI are evaluated less favorably than men (backlash effect).*

1.3 | Agency and communion as underlying mechanism

Agency and communion are the two fundamental dimensions of social judgment (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske et al., 2002). Agency is associated with the goal-pursuit of the self, whereas communion is associated with the consideration of others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Attributes like being assertive, active and independent represent agency, whereas attributes like caring, trustworthy and loyal represent communion (Abele, Uchronski, et al., 2008). Both agency and communion perceptions influence how we judge people (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007). They influence how much we like someone and as how competent we perceive someone. Further, previous research shows that agency relates to performance and hireability evaluations and that communion relates to likeability (Abele et al., 2016; Rudman et al., 2012; Wojciszke et al., 2009).

Based on the definition, PI should signal agency due to its assertive and dominant nature (Abele, Cuddy, et al., 2008; Abele et al., 2016). Hence, we believe that people showing PI will be perceived as agentic, and high PI will be related to high agency ascriptions. At the same time, PI is also defined as contributing to the organizational goals which might be perceived as loyalty and trustworthy. People who are high in PI show more engagement and extra effort, which might be positively evaluated by supervisors and co-workers. Therefore, we assume that both agency and communion as fundamental dimensions of social judgment mediate the relation between PI and an individual's evaluation.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) *Agency and communion mediate the relation between PI and an individual's evaluation.*

Further, we assume that the backlash effects for women showing PI (see Hypothesis 2) are driven by agency perceptions. Women who behave in an agentic way and not in a communal one experience backlash effects and are evaluated negatively (Heilman, 2012;

Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman et al., 2012). Thus, especially women who are perceived as dominant are prone to backlash effects as they are perceived as less likeable and experience backlash effects on other downstream outcomes like hireability (Brescoll, 2012; Rudman et al., 2012; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Therefore, we assume previous research and the general assumption of backlash effects for women who are perceived as agentic, we assume:

Hypothesis 4 (H4) *Gender moderates the relation between agency and an individual's evaluation (e.g., likeability, perceived competence) in the way that women high on agency are evaluated less favorably than men (backlash effect).*

So far, we have established that women and men do not always receive the same consequences for the same behavior and explained backlash effects toward agentic women. However, also men, who violate gender role expectations and show behaviors and attributes prescriptive for men, might experience backlash effects (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rosette et al., 2015). As communion is congruent to the female gender role, but not to the male gender role, and the male gender role is less dynamic than the female gender role (Lopez-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2011; Wilde & Diekmann, 2005), we assume that high communality is less beneficial for men (backlash effects for men).

Hypothesis 5 (H5) *Gender moderates the relation between communion and an individual's evaluation (e.g., likeability, perceived competence) in the way that the relation between communion and an individual's evaluation is weaker for men than for women.*

We tested the hypotheses in two experimental studies using a simulated employment interview with examples of PI taken from the SJT-PI (Bledow & Frese, 2009). In Study 1, we examine if the link between PI and an individual's evaluation is contingent of the gender (Hypothesis 1 and 2). In Study 2, we include agency and communion as underlying mechanisms (Hypothesis 3–5) and test the full model.

2 | STUDY 1: METHOD

2.1 | Participants

The sample was recruited through various social networks, special online platforms, and at the university. $N = 114$ participants consented to take part in this study. They were $M = 29.64$ years of age ($SD = 15.71$). Seventy-nine percent were female (two did not indicate their gender), and 77.9% of participants had some work experience in the form of a permanent job, trainee program, or student job.

2.2 | Design and materials

Study 1 used a 2 (PI: low vs. high) \times 2 (HB: low vs. high) \times 2 (applicant's gender: female vs. male) between-subject design. Participants

read a job advertisement for the position of "Training director m/w" and were asked to evaluate the job applicant from the perspective of a future colleague. The job advertisement clearly stated that PI was required (in addition to more technical requirements related to the job of a training director). This specific job was chosen based on previous research as a gender-neutral position (Heilman et al., 2004) requiring PI according to job analyses (O*net¹). The manipulation of PI included three questions and answers taken from the SJT-PI by Bledow and Frese (2005, 2009). In the first item, the interviewer asked how the applicant had managed to stay up-to-date in their previous jobs. The response started by explaining that the company did little to keep their employees up-to-date. Manipulated high level of PI were: "I was overloaded with my daily tasks, but nevertheless took the necessary time to keep me up-to-date. If necessary, other tasks had to wait." Low levels of PI were manipulated using this response: "I was overloaded with my daily tasks, and didn't have much time to inform myself on the latest developments. Thus, I relied on my colleagues to keep me well informed and concentrated on my day-to-day work." Additional items taken from the SJT asked for how to deal with conflicts among colleagues (high PI: actively address the conflict, low PI: stay calm and trying not to get disturbed) and how to approach a new software program (high PI: organize a training session with an expert, low PI: not getting upset and wait). In the condition of high PI, the applicant consistently reported high levels of PI in response to the interviewer and consistently low levels of PI in the low PI condition. HB manipulation was taken from the study of Podsakoff et al. (2011). "In my experience it is better to help a new colleague right in the beginning, everyone is better off this way. For example, I once had a colleague who always made the same mistake in entering data when ordering something. I helped her in my lunch break and explained the correct procedure." was used as high HB response. "In my experience they need to find their way on their own. If I spent my time helping them, I would fall behind with my own tasks. When someone asks for help, I tell them to go to their supervisor." was used as low HB response.

To manipulate the gender, the fictional candidate was introduced either as Alexander Becker or as Alexandra Becker. A black and white icon of a man or a woman was also added to the interview. They are depicted in Figure 2. It was decided not to use a photo of the candidate to avoid the effects of attractiveness on evaluation decisions.

After reading the scenario, we assessed the likeability and perceived competence of the applicant.

2.3 | Measures

All measures were rated on a seven-point rating scale ranging from 1 = 'not true' to 7 = 'completely true'. HB was rated using three items by Netemeyer et al. (1997). A sample item is "This person gives his/her time to help employees with work-related problems." ($\alpha = .95$).

¹www.onetonline.org

FIGURE 2 Icons used in the manipulation of applicant's gender



TABLE 1 Summary of experimental conditions, means and standard deviations of dependent variables (Study 1)

PI	n	Likability		Perceived competence	
		M	SD	M	SD
PI low total	56	3.51	1.18	3.11	1.17
PI high total	56	4.45	1.51	4.42	1.33
Male applicant					
PI low	26	3.46	1.13	2.85	0.91
PI high	30	4.33	1.52	4.45	1.42
Female applicant					
PI low	30	3.55	1.24	3.33	1.33
PI high	26	4.58	1.51	4.39	1.24

Note: $N = 112$.

Abbreviation: PI, personal initiative.

PI was measured with four items from Frese et al. (1997). A sample item is "He/she actively attacks problems". Cronbach's alpha for the four-item scale was .83.

The likability of the applicant was measured with two items from Reysen (2005). The items were "This person is likable" and "I would like this person as a co-worker" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). Perceived competence was rated using two items from Podsakoff et al. (2011). A sample item is "Based on the interview, I would say this person is highly competent". Coefficient alpha for this scale was .92.

3 | STUDY 1: RESULTS

3.1 | Manipulation checks

To determine whether the manipulations of PI and HB were effective, ANCOVAs with the PI and HB manipulation as between-subject factors and applicant's gender as control were conducted. Results indicated that the ratings of PI in the low PI condition ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.94$) were significantly lower than in the high

PI condition ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.23$), $F(1, 109) = 127.71$, $\eta^2 = 0.54$, $p < .001$. However, there was also a crossover effect of the HB manipulation on the PI ratings, $F(1, 109) = 26.04$, $\eta^2 = 0.19$, $p < .001$, but the effect of the PI manipulation (*Cohen's d* = 2.14) on the PI rating was stronger than of the HB manipulation (*Cohen's d* = 0.97).

Also, the ratings of HB in the low HB condition ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.42$) were significantly lower than in the high HB condition ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.06$), $F(1, 109) = 187.70$, $\eta^2 = 0.63$, $p < .001$. Again, there was a cross-over effect of the PI manipulation on the HB rating, $F(1, 109) = 35.13$, $\eta^2 = 0.24$, $p < .001$, but the effect of the HB manipulation (*Cohen's d* = 2.59) on the HB ratings was stronger than of the PI manipulation (*Cohen's d* = 1.12).

3.2 | Hypotheses test

The means and standard deviations of likeability and perceived competence in the low versus high PI condition in general and for female and male applicants are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 2 Results of ANOVAs (Study 1)

Predictor	Dependent variables					
	Likeability			Perceived competence		
	MS	F	Partial η^2	MS	F	Partial η^2
Controls						
Participant's gender	0.12	0.09	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.00
Helping behavior	57.42	42.50***	0.29	22.18	15.92***	0.13
IVs						
PI	26.08	19.31***	0.15	49.64	35.62***	0.25
G	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.48	0.34	0.00
G \times PI	0.05	0.04	0.00	2.46	1.77	0.02
Model R^2			0.37			0.33

Note: $N = 112$. Controls were helping behavior (0 = low, 1 = high) and dichotomous gender of the participants (0 = male, 1 = female).

Abbreviations: G, gender; MS, mean squares; PI, personal initiative.

*** $p < .001$.

Univariate ANOVAs with participant's gender and the HB manipulations as controls were conducted for each likeability and perceived competence. We included the HB manipulation as control, as we wanted to control for the effects of HB on the DVs and focus solely on the effect of PI and the gender of the applicant. We controlled for participants' gender based on previous research (Koch et al., 2015). The summarized results of ANOVAs for likeability and perceived competence are reported in Table 2.

The analyses revealed a significant main effect of PI manipulation on likeability, $F(1, 106) = 19.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.15$, and on perceived competence, $F(1, 106) = 35.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.25$. When PI was low, rated likeability ($M = 3.51, SD = 1.18$) and perceived competence ($M = 3.11, SD = 1.17$) were lower than in the high PI condition (likeability: $M = 4.45, SD = 1.51$; perceived competence: $M = 4.42, SD = 1.33$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. However, neither were there main effects of applicant's gender on likeability, $F(1, 106) = 0.03, n.s., \eta^2 = 0.00$, or perceived competence, $F(1, 106) = 0.34, n.s., \eta^2 = 0.00$, nor did gender moderate the effect of PI on likeability, $F(1, 106) = 0.04, n.s., \eta^2 = 0.00$, or on perceived competence, $F(1, 106) = 1.77, n.s., \eta^2 = 0.02$. Hence, Hypothesis 2 of differential effects of PI for female and male applicants was not supported. In addition, participant's gender as had no significant effect on likeability, $F(1, 106) = 0.09, n.s., \eta^2 = 0.00$ nor perceived competence, $F(1, 106) = 0.02, n.s., \eta^2 = 0.00$, whereas HB significantly affected likeability, $F(1, 106) = 42.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$, and the perceived competence, $F(1, 106) = 15.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.13$.

4 | STUDY 1: DISCUSSION

In Study 1, applicants who reported behavioral examples of PI received higher overall evaluations and higher likeability ratings, compared to those who did not (support for H1). This was independent of the applicant's gender and we found no support of backlash effects against female applicants who showed high PI (no support of H2).

It might be that participants perceived PI in this study as fulfilling the job requirement which was described in the fictitious job ad, and that the requirement to show PI was a strong cue guiding the evaluation of the fictitious applicant, and that any potential gender biases in the evaluation were thus overridden. This idea is based on the argument that specific expectations about the appropriate behavior are a more important determinant of people's reaction than gender-based expectations (Eagly et al., 1992).

If women showing PI in real life would not be prone to backlash effects, this would free them from the double bind thus fulfilling the female gender role expectation of being communal when showing agentic connotated behaviors like PI. To further explore the effects of PI, and to examine in more detail underlying mechanisms how PI translates into an individual's evaluation, we assessed in Study 2 also the agency and communion perceptions, as these are the two fundamental dimensions of social judgment and used additional evaluation measures which might be more susceptible to gender biases (Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

5 | STUDY 2: METHOD

5.1 | Participants

The sample was recruited through posting the link to the survey in various social networks and online platforms. Although there were over 1,000 clicks on the link to the survey information, the majority did not participate in the survey. The final sample consisted of 163 individuals (34 male, 129 female) as people with more than 25% of missing information in scales, not passing the manipulation check and not specified gender were excluded. The mean age was $M = 25.85$ years ($SD = 8.29$). The majority of them (123 individuals) had work experience. The advertisement of this study might also lead to the high number of clicks, but low participation rate as the commitment to participate in the survey might have been low as

then it was visible that there was no financial incentive for participation, but only the possibility to get course credit for psychology students of one German university.

5.2 | Design and materials

The same 2 (PI: low vs. high) × 2 (HB: low vs. high) × 2 (applicant's gender: female vs. male) between-subject design as in Study 1 was employed. Like in Study 1, we assessed perceived likeability and competence of the applicant. Further, we included a performance evaluation, the expected success of the applicant, and the hireability of the applicant. In addition, participants also rated the applicant on agency and communion.

5.3 | Measures

All measures were rated on a seven-point rating scale ranging from 1 = 'not true' to 7 = 'completely true' unless noted otherwise.

PI, HB, likeability and competence were assessed with the same scales as in Study 1. All showed excellent reliability (PI: $\alpha = .92$; HB: $\alpha = .93$; likeability: $\alpha = .89$; competence: $\alpha = .82$). PI and HB scales were just used for the manipulation checks.

In addition to the measures in Study 1, we assessed performance evaluation in Study 2 ("How would you evaluate the person's approach to handle work tasks?"; 1 = very bad to 7 = very good), expected success in organization ("Do you believe that the person will be successful in this organization?"; 1 = not successful at all to 7 = very successful), and hireability for the position ("Would you recommend to hire the person for the described position?"; 1 = do not recommend at all to 7 = fully recommend) with three items adopted from Heilman et al. (2004). These three constructs, especially hireability, are frequently used constructs in research on backlash effects (Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Williams & Tiedens, 2016), and should allow a more fine-grained inspection of possible backlash effects.

Moreover, agency (sample items: assertive, independent) and communion (sample items: caring, understanding) were assessed with eight items each (Abele, Uchrowski, et al., 2008). The scales had very good internal consistency (agency: $\alpha = .89$; communion: $\alpha = .92$).²

6 | STUDY 2: RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of all outcome variables for female and male applicants in the low versus high PI conditions are reported in Table 3. Further, Table 4 displays the overall means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and reliabilities.

²Despite high intercorrelations of the used competence related DVs, the confirmatory factor analyses in Mplus showed that the model assuming independent factors had better fit indices (RMSEA = 0.083, CI RMSEA [0.035, 0.129]; TLI = 0.973; CFI = 0.986) than one global factor model (RMSEA = 0.147, CI RMSEA [0.112, 0.184]; TLI = 0.913; CFI = 0.942).

TABLE 3 Summary of experimental conditions, means and standard deviations of dependent variables (Study 2)

PI	n	Likability		Perceived competence		Performance evaluation		Expected success		Hireability		Agency		Communion	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
PI low	83	3.50	1.35	3.42	1.27	3.54	1.34	3.16	1.35	2.92	1.48	3.88	0.99	3.56	1.27
PI high	80	4.60	1.43	4.86	1.27	5.18	1.04	4.89	1.36	4.69	1.64	5.26	0.76	4.24	1.15
Male applicant															
PI low	44	3.45	1.38	3.50	1.36	3.48	1.44	3.20	1.39	3.00	1.48	4.00	1.10	3.54	1.38
PI high	40	4.64	1.41	4.91	1.34	5.38	1.03	5.03	1.27	5.00	1.54	5.29	0.85	4.25	1.23
Female applicant															
PI low	39	3.55	1.32	3.32	1.18	3.62	1.23	3.10	1.31	2.82	1.49	3.75	0.84	3.57	1.14
PI high	40	4.55	1.46	4.81	1.21	4.98	1.03	4.75	1.45	4.37	1.69	5.24	0.66	4.23	1.09

Note: N = 163.

Abbreviation: PI, personal initiative.

TABLE 4 Intercorrelations, means, standard deviations and reliabilities (Study 2)

	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
1. Participant's gender ^a	0.79	0.41	— ^b										
2. HB manipulation	0.47	0.50	0.03	— ^b									
3. PI manipulation	0.49	0.50	0.05	0.01	— ^b								
4. Gender applicant ^a	0.48	0.50	-0.05	-0.03	0.03	— ^b							
5. Agency	4.56	1.11	0.11	0.08	0.62 ^{***}	-0.05	(0.90)						
6. Communion	3.89	1.26	0.07	0.60 ^{***}	0.28 ^{***}	0.01	0.51 ^{***}	(0.92)					
7. Likeability	4.04	1.49	0.06	0.46 ^{***}	0.37 ^{***}	0.01	0.60 ^{***}	0.79 ^{***}	(0.89)				
8 Perceived competence	4.13	1.46	0.10	0.32 ^{***}	0.50 ^{***}	-0.03	0.71 ^{***}	0.66 ^{***}	0.78 ^{***}	(0.82)			
9. Performance evaluation	4.34	1.45	0.08	0.25 ^{**}	0.57 ^{***}	-0.03	0.76 ^{***}	0.63 ^{***}	0.74 ^{***}	0.79 ^{***}	— ^b		
10. Expected success	4.01	1.60	0.13 ⁺	0.21 ^{**}	0.54 ^{***}	-0.04	0.73 ^{***}	0.57 ^{***}	0.68 ^{***}	0.78 ^{***}	0.77 ^{***}	— ^b	
11. Hireability	3.79	1.79	0.12	0.36 ^{***}	0.50 ^{***}	-0.10	0.66 ^{***}	0.72 ^{***}	0.78 ^{***}	0.80 ^{***}	0.78 ^{***}	0.81 ^{***}	— ^b

Note: $N = 163$. HB manipulation (0 = low, 1 = high). PI manipulation (0 = low, 1 = high) Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) is displayed in parentheses.

^aMale = 0, female = 1;

^bNot applicable.

*** $p > .001$. ** $p > .01$.

⁺ $p < .10$.

6.1 | Manipulation checks

ANCOVAS with PI manipulation (low vs. high), helping behavior condition (low vs. high) as between-subject factors and gender of the applicant (female vs. male) as covariate showed that PI and helping behavior manipulations had the intended effect. The PI ratings in the low PI condition ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.17$) were significantly lower than in the high PI condition ($M = 5.16$), $F(1, 158) = 196.58$, $\eta^2 = 0.54$, $p < .001$. However, there was also a cross-over effect that the HB manipulation affected the PI ratings, $F(1, 158) = 18.45$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$, $p < .001$. But the effect of the PI manipulation was stronger (Cohen's $d = 2.21$) than of the HB manipulation (Cohen's $d = 0.68$). Although not in focus of the current research question and just entered in the analyses as control variable, we also calculated the effect of the HB condition on helping behavior. The HB ratings in the low HB condition ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.43$) were significantly lower than in the high HB condition ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.27$), $F(1, 158) = 239.81$, $\eta^2 = 0.60$, $p < .001$. However, there were also cross-over effects in the way that the PI manipulation also effected the HB rating, $F(1, 158) = 64.89$, $\eta^2 = 0.29$, $p < .001$. However, the effect of the HB manipulation (Cohen's $d = 2.45$) on the HB rating were stronger than of the PI manipulation (Cohen's $d = 1.272$).

6.2 | Hypotheses test

To test the proposed model, we used PROCESS (version 3.4.1) with 5,000 bootstrapping samples and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) (Hayes, 2017). Agency and communion as only metric variables of the interaction terms were mean-centered. Thereby, we ran model 14 for each DV and entered HB manipulation (low vs. high) and participant's gender as covariates. Instead of following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach of testing mediations, we followed the arguments and the more recent procedure of testing mediation effects (MacKinnon et al., 2000; Rucker et al., 2011; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The results of all analyses are presented in Table 5.

6.2.1 | Agency

Forty percent of variance in the applicant's agency ratings was explained. None of the covariates was significant (participant's gender: $b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 1.27$, *n.s.*; HB: $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = 1.27$, *n.s.*). Supporting one precondition for Hypothesis 3, PI ($b = 1.37$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = 9.94$, $p < .001$) significantly related to agency in the way that high PI was associated with higher agency.

6.2.2 | Communion

Forty three percent of variance in the applicant's communion ratings was explained. Of the covariates participant's gender was not significant ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 0.66$, *n.s.*), whereas HB positively

related to the applicant's communion rating ($b = 1.49$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = 9.97$, $p < .001$). Supporting one precondition for Hypothesis 3, PI ($b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = 4.51$, $p < .001$) significantly related to communion in the way that high PI was associated with higher communion.

6.2.3 | Likeability

Neither did PI ($b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 0.61$, *n.s.*) nor applicant's gender ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 0.43$, *n.s.*) significantly related to likeability. Thus, there was no significant direct effect of PI (*direct effect* = 0.11, CI 95% [-0.24, 0.45]) on applicant's likeability ratings when agency and communion were included as mediators (not supporting H1 but supporting H3). But both agency ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$) and communion ($b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 5.20$, $p < .001$) significantly related to the likeability ratings of the applicant (support of H3). Further, the interaction term of agency \times applicant's gender ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = -1.71$, $p = .089$) and communion \times applicant's gender ($b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 2.66$, $p < .01$) were significant. The simple slope showed that the positive relation between agency and likeability was stronger for men ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$) than for women ($b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 2.24$, $p < .05$). Further, the assumed mediation of PI through agency on likeability was significant for male applicants (*indirect effect* = 0.68, CI 95% [0.27, 1.06]), but not for female applicants (*indirect effect* = 0.35, CI 95% [-0.04, 1.06]). Thus, these results fully supported the assumed backlash effect of agency for female applicants (Hypothesis 4). The simple slopes showed that the positive relation between communion and likeability was slightly weaker for men ($b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 5.20$, $p < .001$) than for women ($b = 0.88$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 8.33$, $p < .05$). However, for both female and male applicants assumed mediation of PI over communion on likeability was significant (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.36, CI 95% [0.18, 0.58]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.59, CI 95% [0.32, 0.88]), although the index of the moderated mediation showed that the indirect effects differed by gender (index = 0.22, CI 95% = 0.04, 0.45). These findings support Hypothesis 5. The full model explained 69% of variance in applicant's likeability ratings. None of the covariates was significant (participant's gender: $b = -0.13$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -0.77$, *n.s.*; HB: $b = 0.23$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 1.30$, *n.s.*).

6.2.4 | Perceived competence

PI ($b = 0.37$, $SE = 0.19$, $t = 2.02$, $p < .05$) significantly related to the perceived competence of the applicant (supporting H1). Further, agency ($b = 0.59$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 4.73$, $p < .001$) and communion ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 3.68$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted perceived competence. Neither was applicants' gender ($b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = -0.35$, *n.s.*) nor were the interaction terms including applicant's gender (agency \times applicant's gender: $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -0.17$, *n.s.*; communion \times applicant's gender: $b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.14$,

TABLE 5 Results of moderated mediation (Study 2)

	Step 1 Agency			Step 1 Communion			Step 2 Likeability			Step 2 Perceived competence		
	b	SE	t	b	SE	t	b	SE	t	b	SE	t
Intercept	-0.93***	0.17	-5.34	-1.34***	0.18	-6.02	3.94***	0.20	19.37	3.82***	0.22	17.51
HB manipulation	0.18	0.14	1.27	1.49***	0.15	9.97	0.23	0.18	1.30	0.20	0.19	1.07
Participant's gender	0.22	0.17	1.27	0.12	0.18	0.66	-0.13	0.17	-0.77	0.06	0.18	0.33
PI manipulation	1.37***	0.14	9.94	0.68***	0.15	4.51	0.11	0.17	0.61	0.37*	0.19	2.02
Agency							0.50***	0.12	4.31	0.59***	0.12	4.73
Communion							0.54***	0.10	5.20	0.41***	0.11	3.68
G							0.06	0.13	0.43	-0.05	0.14	-0.35
G × agency							-0.24 [†]	0.14	-1.71	-0.03	0.15	-0.17
G × communion							0.34**	0.13	2.66	0.00	0.14	0.01
R ²	0.40			0.43			0.69			0.63		
	Step 2 Performance evaluation			Step 2 Expected success			Step 2 Hireability					
	b	SE	t	b	SE	t	b	SE	t			
Intercept	4.11***	0.20	20.40	3.63***	0.25	14.59	3.46***	0.27	13.54			
HB manipulation	0.06	0.18	0.34	0.03	0.22	0.14	0.09	0.22	0.40			
Participant's gender	-0.05	0.17	-0.27	0.18	0.20	0.86	0.14	0.21	0.67			
PI manipulation	0.52**	0.17	3.06	0.52*	0.21	2.47	0.68**	0.22	3.14			
Agency	0.72***	0.11	6.26	0.73***	0.14	5.18	0.42**	0.15	2.86			
Communion	0.33**	0.10	3.21	0.27*	0.13	2.09	0.70***	0.13	5.39			
G	-0.04	0.13	-0.27	-0.08	0.16	-0.47	-0.33*	0.17	-1.98			
G × agency	-0.16	0.14	-1.17	-0.05	0.17	-0.28	0.02	0.18	0.11			
G × communion	0.06	0.13	0.45	0.15	0.16	0.95	0.08	0.16	0.50			
R ²	0.68			0.60			0.66					

Note: N = 163. Controls: HP manipulation = helping behavior (0 = low, 1 = high) and gender of the participants (0 = male, 1 = female), PI manipulation = personal initiative (0 = low, 1 = high), G = gender of the applicant (0 = male, 1 = female).

[†]p < .10.

*p < .05.; **p < .01.; ***p < .001.

$t = 0.01$, $n.s.$) significant. Thus, there was no support for any backlash effects. Further, the assumed mediation of PI over agency on perceived competence did not vary between female and male applicants, as the mediation was supported for both (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.80, CI 95% [0.45, 1.23]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.77, CI 95% [0.42, 1.14]). Also, communion mediated the relation between PI and perceived competence for female and male applicants similarly (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.28, CI 95% [0.10, 0.48]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.28, CI 95% [0.10, 0.52]). Therefore, although the direct effect of PI (*direct effect* = 0.37, CI 95% [0.01, 0.74]) on applicant's perceived competence remained when agency and communion were included in the model, the results supported the assumption that agency and communion mediate the relation between PI and perceived competence (H3). The full model explained 63% of variance in applicant's perceived competence. None of the covariates was significant (participant's gender: $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 0.33$, $n.s.$; HB: $b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.19$, $t = 1.07$, $n.s.$).

6.2.5 | Performance evaluation

PI ($b = 0.52$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 3.06$, $p < .01$) significantly related to the performance evaluation ratings of the applicant (supporting H1). Further, agency ($b = 0.72$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 6.26$, $p < .001$) and communion ($b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 3.21$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors of performance evaluation. Neither applicants' gender ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -0.27$, $n.s.$) nor the interaction terms including applicant's gender (agency \times applicant's gender: $b = -0.16$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = -1.17$, $n.s.$; communion \times applicant's gender: $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 0.45$, $n.s.$) were significant. Thus, there was no support of any backlash effects for performance evaluation. The assumed mediation of PI over agency on performance evaluation did not differ for female and male applicants, as the mediation was supported for both (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.98, CI 95% [0.64, 1.40]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.76, CI 95% [0.46, 1.09]). The same was found for communion. Communion mediated the relation between PI and performance evaluation for female and male applicants similarly (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.22, CI 95% [0.05, 0.43]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.26, CI 95% [0.11, 0.46]). Therefore, although the direct effect of PI (*direct effect* = 0.52, CI 95% [0.19, 0.86]) on applicant's performance evaluation ratings remained when agency and communion were included in the model, the results supported the assumption that agency and communion mediate the relation between PI and performance evaluation (H3). The full model explained 68% of variance in applicant's performance evaluation ratings. None of the covariates was significant (participant's gender: $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -0.27$, $n.s.$; HB: $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 0.34$, $n.s.$).

6.2.6 | Success expectation

PI ($b = 0.52$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = 2.47$, $p < .05$) significantly related to the success expectation ratings of the applicant, supporting H1. In

addition, agency ($b = 0.73$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = 5.18$, $p < .001$) and communion ($b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 2.09$, $p < .05$) did predict success expectation. Neither applicants' gender ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = -0.47$, $n.s.$) nor the interaction terms including applicant's gender (agency \times applicant's gender: $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -0.28$, $n.s.$; communion \times applicant's gender: $b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = 0.95$, $n.s.$) were significant. Thus, there was no support of any backlash effects. The assumed mediation of PI over agency on expected success did not differ for female and male applicants, as the mediation was supported for both (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 1.02, CI 95% [0.57, 1.46]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.94, CI 95% [0.51, 1.36]). These results supported the assumption that agency mediates the relation between PI and expected success (H3), despite the fact that the direct effect of PI (*direct effect* = 0.52, CI 95% [0.11, 0.94]) on applicant's expected success ratings remained when agency and communion were included in the model. However, communion only mediated the relation between PI and expected success for female (female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.28, CI 95% [0.09, 0.54]), but not for male applicants (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.18, CI 95% [-0.09, 0.40]). This supported Hypothesis 5 (backlash effects for men). The full model explained 40% of variance in applicant's expected success. None of the covariates was significant (participant's gender: $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.20$, $t = 0.86$, $n.s.$; HB: $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = 0.14$, $n.s.$).

6.2.7 | Hireability

PI ($b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = 3.14$, $p < .01$) significantly related to the hireability of the applicant, supporting H1. Further, agency ($b = 0.42$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = 5.39$, $p < .001$) and communion ($b = 0.70$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 5.93$, $p < .001$) predicted hireability. Applicants' gender significantly related to hireability ($b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -1.98$, $p < .05$) in the way that male applicants received higher hireability ratings. However, none of the interaction terms including applicant's gender was significant (agency \times applicant's gender: $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 0.11$, $n.s.$; communion \times applicant's gender: $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = 0.50$, $n.s.$). Thus, there was no support of any backlash effects, but being male was associated with higher hireability ratings. The assumed mediation of PI through agency on hireability did not differ for female and male applicants, as the mediation was supported for both (male applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.57, CI 95% [0.18, 1.04]; female applicants: *indirect effect* = 0.60, CI 95% [0.13, 1.08]). Further, communion mediated the relation between PI and hireability for female (*indirect effect* = 0.47, CI 95% [0.22, 0.79]) and male (*indirect effect* = 0.53, CI 95% [0.26, 0.88]) applicants similarly. Although the direct effect of PI (*direct effect* = 0.68, CI 95% [0.25, 1.11]) on hireability remained significant when agency and communion were included in the model, these results supported the assumption that agency and communion mediate the relation between PI and hireability (H3). The full model explained 66% of variance in applicant's hireability. None of the covariates was significant (participant's gender: $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = 0.67$, $n.s.$; HB: $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = 0.40$, $n.s.$).

7 | STUDY 2: DISCUSSION

Most of our hypotheses were confirmed in Study 2. Supporting Hypothesis 1, PI positively related to perceived competence, performance evaluation, expected success, and hireability even after inclusion of agency and communion as mediators. Only for applicant's likeability, there was no direct effect of PI with the mediators included. Thus, the effect of PI on the applicant's likeability seems to be driven purely by their agency and communion perceptions, whereas for the other evaluation dimensions agency and communion do mediate the relation between PI and the respective evaluation dimension not completely. Hypothesis 2 that gender moderates the effect of PI on an individual's evaluation was not tested directly in Study 2 as we assumed agency and communion as underlying mechanism that drive the effects of PI (Hypothesis 3) and potential backlash effects (Hypothesis 4 and 5). And indeed, both agency and communion mediated the relation between PI and all included dimensions of an individual's evaluation (likeability, perceived competence, performance evaluation, expected success and hireability). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported—although it was only a partial mediation for all assessed evaluation dimensions (perceived competence, performance evaluation, expected success, and hireability) except for likeability where PI had no significant direct effect when agency and communion were included (indication of full mediation).

We found only partial support for Hypothesis 4 that assumed backlash effects for agentic women. As assumed the relation between agency and likeability was stronger for men than for women and that the mediation of PI over agency on likeability was only significant for men, but not for women. We did not find such backlash effects for perceived competence, performance evaluation, expected success or hireability. These findings are congruent to previous research on backlash effects that also found agentic women to be perceived as less likeable, but still competent (Heilman, 2012; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Hypothesis 5 that assumed backlash effect for communal men was partially supported. The relation between communion and likeability was slightly weaker for men than for women and although communion mediated the relation between PI and likeability for men and women, the index of the moderated mediation showed that the conditional effects were different for women and men. Thus, we found support for backlash effects for communal men on likeability. Further, although there was no significant interaction of gender and communion on expected success, communion only mediated the relation between PI and expected success for women, but not men. This might be interpreted as a hint for a backlash effect for communal men. But we did not find support for backlash effects for communal men on the other dimensions (perceived competence, performance evaluation, and hireability). However, previous research on backlash effects for men also found backlash effects not on all evaluation dimensions (Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010).

Not in the scope of our hypotheses, but noteworthy and in line with previous research (Heilman, 2001, 2012), we found a main

effect of applicant's gender on hireability in the way that men were perceived as more hireable.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our experimental studies suggest that PI leads to more positive individual evaluations like likeability and perceived competence (H1 tested and confirmed in Study 1 and Study 2) and that this effect is mediated by agency and communion (H3 tested and confirmed in Study 2). The assumption that women do not benefit from showing PI to the same degree as men do (Hypothesis 2 and 4) due to the assertive and dominant connotation of PI, which is congruent to the male, but not female gender role was not confirmed in Study 1, but partially supported in Study 2 when agency and communion as underlying mechanism were included. In Study 2 we found backlash effects for agentic women only on likeability which kind of supports the notion that men receive credit, but women do not (at least not to the same degree) in the opening quote of our paper by Adam Grant. Further, this result is congruent to previous research that also found backlash effects for agentic and dominant women only on likeability, but not competence-related outcomes (Heilman, 2012; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Importantly, although we explicitly chose a gender-neutral position for which PI was expected, we found backlash effects for women on likeability. This highlights the relevance of future research addressing possible backlash effects for women engaging in proactive work behaviors, as potential backlash effects might be even stronger when proactive behaviors are not explicitly expected from the position or shown in more male-typed settings and context.

We also found backlash effects for communal men on likeability and expected success (H5 tested and confirmed in Study 2), but not on perceived competence, performance evaluation, and hireability. These results are also consistent with previous research that found backlash effects for men violating gender role expectation by showing proscriptive behaviors for men (Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). We are aware that previous research has also found a communality bonus effect for men (Heilman & Chen, 2005; Hentschel et al., 2018). However, the results in this research could be explained by the expectation violation theory (Prentice & Carranza, 2004) such as that communal attributes might have been perceived as an unexpected, but positively evaluated asset for men that were interpreted as an add-on to the fulfillment of the agentic male gender role, whereas women have to show both agentic and communal characteristics to avoid backlash effects (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

These results highlight the importance of considering gender when studying the outcomes of PI and very likely other forms of proactive work behavior. Acknowledging this boundary condition is important, because it suggests that the same behavior will not necessarily lead to the same desirable outcomes. Recommendations that women should "lean in", to take charge and volunteer for challenging tasks (Sandberg, 2013) might not be effective, as the efforts of women to show PI will be more or less fruitless—at least as long

as they are perceived as dominant and assertive and proscriptive for women. Even when they show the same desirable behavior as men do, they might be less rewarded by positive evaluations. For example, Luksyte et al. (2018) found that innovative work behaviors were associated with positive performance evaluations for men, but not for women. Also, organizational citizenship behavior toward the organization did translate into receiving more promotions for men, but not for women (Allen, 2006). These findings can be explained by the double bind women face. If they align to the required agentic connoted behavior, they violate from their female gender role expectations; if they fulfil the communal connoted female gender role expectations, they do not fulfil agentic connoted job expectations.

Further, we also found backlash effects for men high in communion on their likeability and for them PI did not transmit over communion into expected success. Although, there is some research about the consequences of gender role violations for men (Hernandez Bark et al., 2021; Judge et al., 2012; Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rosette et al., 2015), we suggest that in future studies on PI and other forms of proactive work behavior gender should not only be included as a boundary condition, but explore mechanisms that are able to reduce backlash effects and boundary conditions for backlash effects for both women and men, including the explicit requirement of being proactive in the job which might alleviate some backlash effects, as discussed previously.

Given that performance evaluations serve as the basis for promotion, a biased performance evaluation will lead to tangible career outcomes. Our studies add to previous research on the relevance of gender in the workplace that has examined communication, leadership, negotiations, and other behavior (Heilman, 2012) by examining PI as a form of proactive behavior. Our results suggest that proactive behavior is another type of behavior worth examining. Interestingly, proactivity research so far has neglected any potential gender biases. Field studies examining supervisors' performance evaluations of different types of proactive behavior of their employees generally do not test for differential gender effects (Burris, 2012; Glaser et al., 2016; Grant, 2013; Grant et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2017; Wihler et al., 2017). Differentiating the effects of proactive behavior on performance evaluations by gender would provide valuable information for gender equality. Furthermore, it would also provide insights into potential boundary conditions. Future research should use field studies examining gender effects in different types of organizations (with or without a culture valuing proactivity), different types of jobs (proactivity required or not), or by examining different types of proactive behavior (challenging vs. less challenging) to shed light on boundary conditions. For example, one possibility why we did not find backlash effects in Study 1 and not consistently for all evaluation dimensions in Study 2 might be that in the used manipulations of PI, the job applicant showed a concern for the well-fare of others and the organization. When PI is attributed to prosocial motivation, it is, generally more likely to be rewarded with better supervisors' evaluations (Grant et al., 2009). Therefore, we suggest that in future research a variety of proactive behaviors, even different manipulations of PI, should be examined, as how the proactive

behavior is pursued might exaggerate or mitigate the consequences of proactive behavior (Parker et al., 2019).

8.1 | Practical implications

One way to prevent gender biases is to carefully examine selection and performance appraisal procedures. Heilman (2012) suggests that it is helpful to reduce ambiguities in the evaluation process and to accurately characterize the requirement of a position. In our case, this suggests that there is less gender bias if there are strong cues that PI is required in a given job, either by explicitly listing it as a requirement in the job ad or by including it as a performance facet in appraisal systems. These ideas are however speculative, and definite recommendations can only be given after more research has examined the gender biases in field studies.

8.2 | Limitations

In our studies, we used scenarios of a job interview to be able to control all external forces. One could question to what degree the scenarios realistically depict a real situation, and the evaluations generalize to real job decisions. We took care to make the situation as realistic as possible for our respondents by including a job ad and some filler information to make the interview sound like a real job interview. The clear majority of our participants had work experience, which suggests they had some experience with the selection context and were able to imagine this situation. Furthermore, the participants were instructed to evaluate the job applicant from the perspective of a future colleague, which is closer to their level of experience as the majority did not have a leadership position. Nevertheless, it would be informative to have HR managers or supervisors rate the job applicants in our scenario, or to examine gender effects in organizational performance evaluations.

Further, future research might decide to test the assumed mediation differently. We followed Stone-Romero and Rosopa's (2008) recommendation and used randomized experiments which created a special purpose (SP) setting to test our mediation models. In Study 1, we manipulated in a scenario the PI (low vs. high) of a job applicant and measured the applicant' perceived competence and likeability. In Study 2, we again manipulated in a scenario PI (low vs. high) of a job applicant, but in addition to Study 1, we assessed not only the perceived competence and likeability, but also the applicant's performance evaluation, hireability, expected success as dependent variables, and agency and communion as mediators. Thus, one might argue that the internal inference about the causal relation is weak as the panacea for testing mediation models is to conduct two randomized experiments and to manipulate both the independent and the dependent variable (Stone-Romero & Rosopa, 2008). As the BigTwo, agency and communion, are the two fundamental dimensions of social judgment that influence how humans evaluate an individual (Abele, Cuddy, et al., 2008; Abele et al., 2016), and the causal

relation between agency and communion influencing an individual's evaluation has been established in several randomized experiments (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman et al., 2012), we did not manipulate agency directly in our Study 2, but only measured it. We think that as (a) the relation between the independent variable (PI) and the dependent variable (the applicant's evaluation on likeability and perceived competence, etc.) was confirmed in a randomized experiment (our Study 1 and Study 2), and (b) the relations between the mediator and the dependent variables (an individual's evaluation) have been confirmed in several randomized experiments (e.g., Rudman et al., 2012), there is strong internal validity for the assumed causal relation in our mediation model. However, of course future research might probe this by using two randomized experiments in SP settings and manipulating both PI (independent variable) and agency/communion (mediators).

8.3 | Conclusion

The findings of our experimental studies suggest that PI translates into individual's evaluation over the big two of social judgment (agency and communion), and that gender is an important characteristic that should be considered and examined further in proactivity research as we find support for backlash effects for both women and men violating gender role expectations.

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ORCID

Alina S. Hernandez Bark  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2175-5229>

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