

# Studies' message to women: Keep your cool

2 April 2008

---

New Haven, Conn.-Whether you are running for president or looking for a clerical job, you cannot afford to get angry if you are a woman, Yale University psychologist Victoria Brescoll has found.

Brescoll and Eric Uhlmann at Northwestern University recently completed three separate studies to explore a phenomenon that may be all-too-familiar to women like New York Senator Hillary Clinton: People accept and even reward men who get angry but view women who lose their temper as less competent

The studies, published in the March issue of *Psychological Science*, provide women with recommendations for navigating emotional hazards of the workplace. Brescoll says it pays to stay emotionally neutral and, if you can't, at least explain what ticked you off in the first place.

Clinton's presidential campaign has put a spotlight on the question of whether anger hurts a female candidate. The answer, according to the studies, appears to be an unequivocal yes - unless the anger deals with treatment of a family member.

"An angry woman loses status, no matter what her position," said Brescoll, who worked in Clinton's office as a Congressional Fellow in 2004 while she was preparing her doctoral thesis on gender bias. She noticed over the years that women pay a clear price for showing anger and men don't.

In all studies, both men and women were shown videos of actors portraying men and women who were ostensibly applying for a job. The participants in the studies were then asked to rate applicants on how much responsibility they should be given, their perceived competence, whether they should be hired, and how much they should get paid.

Both men and women in the reached the same conclusions: Angry men deserved more status, a higher salary, and were expected to be better at the job than angry women.

When those actor/applicants expressed sadness, however, the bias was less evident, and women applicants were ranked equally to men in status and competence, but not in salary.

Brescoll and her colleague then compared angry job applicants to ones who did not display any emotion. And this time the researchers showed study participants videos of both men and women applying for lower-status jobs. The findings were duplicated: Angry men were valued more highly than angry women no matter what level position they were applying for. However, the disparities disappeared when men and women who were emotionally neutral were ranked.

A final study showed another way bias against female anger could be mitigated. When women actors explained why they were angry, observers tended to cut them more slack. However, Brescoll noted a final gender difference: Men could actually be hurt when they explained why they were angry - perhaps, says the Yale psychologist, because observers tend to see this as a sign of weakness.

Source: Yale University

APA citation: Studies' message to women: Keep your cool (2008, April 2) retrieved 11 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-04-message-women-cool.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*