

Study finds 'masculine' women get more promotions at work

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Women who demonstrate stereotypical masculine traits should be mindful of their behavior if they want to get ahead in the workplace. That is the finding of researchers at George Mason University and Stanford University who recently completed a study that examined the effects of self-monitoring on women's promotions.

Previous research has shown that women who exhibit conventional male characteristics such as self-confidence and dominance may suffer from the "backlash effect" in which they are viewed negatively for not acting in a traditionally feminine manner.

But according to researchers Olivia O'Neill, assistant professor in Mason's School of Management, and Charles O'Reilly, professor in Stanford's Graduate School of Business, women who are able to self-monitor their masculine behavior use it to their advantage and get more [promotions](#) at work than both men and other women.

"Although masculine women are seen as more competent than feminine women, they are also seen as less socially skilled and, consequently, less likeable and less likely to get promoted," says O'Neill. "Our research shows that self-monitoring this behavior can have beneficial effects for masculine women, leading to more promotions and success in the workplace."

For the study titled "Reducing the backlash effect: Self-monitoring and women's promotions," the researchers collected information at two

different time periods.

During the first assessment, which took place in 1986-1987, 80 participants (47 percent of whom were women) who were enrolled in the first year of a two-year business school program, completed personality and management questionnaires. The researchers followed up eight years later after the participants had graduated to gather information on their career history.

The results showed that masculine women who are good at self-monitoring, or knowing when to ‘turn on and off’ these masculine traits, had a higher likelihood of being promoted than those women who were not as successful at self-monitoring. By contrast, self-monitoring did not make a difference in the number of promotions men received.

“We’re not saying that women have to start acting more feminine to succeed in the workplace,” says O’Neill. “The most important thing to remember is being able to accurately assess social situations and respond appropriately.”

More information: The study was published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* and can be found here: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... 325.2010.02008.x/pdf](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2149-8187.2010.02008.x/pdf)

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