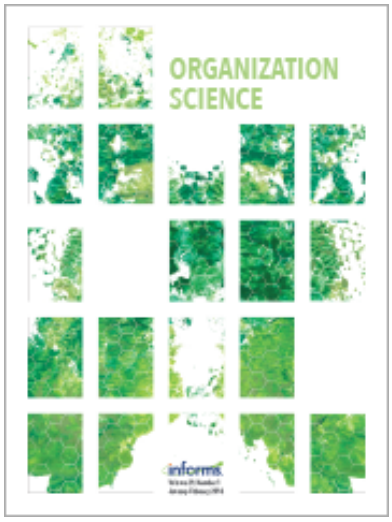


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# Passion Penalizes Women and Advantages (Unexceptional) Men in High-Potential Designations

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**Abstract.** High-potential programs offer a swift path up the corporate ladder for those who secure a place on them. However, the evaluation of "potential" occurs under considerable uncertainty, creating fertile ground for gender bias. We document that men are more likely than women to be designated as high potential, and unpack how gendered responses to employees' expressions of passion—one of the most commonly used criteria used in evaluating potential—both penalize women and advantage men in high-potential selection processes. First, and based on prior research on gender display rules, we suggest that expressions of passion are viewed as a less appropriate emotional display for women than men, giving rise to a female penalty. Second, and drawing on shifting standards theorizing, we posit that expressions of passion shift evaluators' predictions of candidates' diligence more meaningfully for men than women, creating a male advantage—particularly for men who are reasonably high but not exceptional performers. We provide supporting evidence across two studies examining placement into high-potential programs in a real talent review setting ($N$ = 796) and a preregistered experiment that uses videos featuring trained actors ($N$ = 1,366), supported by two supplementary studies ($N$ = 1,590). Taken together, this work sheds light on the ways the increasing emphasis on passion in contemporary workplaces may exacerbate gender inequalities. Progressing our understanding of gender bias beyond gendered reactions to criteria that penalize women (i.e., backlash), our work also unveils a novel and particularly pernicious form of gender bias driven by gendered inferences about passion that advantage men.

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**Keywords:** gender bias • shifting standards • passion • diligence • talent management • high potential

High-potential programs play a central role in identifying and developing employees as future leaders of their organizations (Derr et al. 1988, Groysberg and Lee 2009, Silzer and Dowell 2009, Dries et al. 2012). Employees deemed to be high potential receive opportunities and resources in the hopes of eliciting higher future performance (Silzer and Dowell 2009, Cappelli and Keller 2014, Finkelstein et al. 2018, Church et al. 2021, Kehoe et al. 2023). Such programs are widespread, with a recent study noting that 71% of Fortune 500 companies have them (Bergeron 2021). They are also highly selective. Typically, only the top 20% of performers are eligible for them, and an even smaller share of this select group eventually attain a program seat (Silzer and Dowell 2009). The abundant advancement opportunities presented to those identified as high potential (Church et al. 2021) means that these programs could play an important role in addressing systemic inequalities in organizations, including increasing the representation of women at senior levels (Kehoe et al. 2023).

Although the benefits of being labeled as "high potential" are clear, evaluating "potential" is complicated, as it requires evaluators to make preemptive judgments about the future performance of employees on the basis of current signals (Tormala et al. 2012, Finkelstein et al. 2018). To facilitate this, organizations typically implement processes that rely on formalized criteria to evaluate potential (Silzer and Church 2009a, Silzer and Dowell 2009, Cappelli and Keller 2014, Finkelstein et al. 2018). One of the most commonly used criteria to assess potential is passion—defined as "a strong feeling toward a personally important value or preference that motivates intentions and behaviors to express that value or preference" (Jachimowicz et al. 2018, p. 9980)—with Silzer and Church (2009a) finding that 90% of the 30 large corporations they surveyed relied on passion to identify high potential (see also Mitteness et al. 2012, Cech 2021, Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022). This reliance on passion in high-potential contexts holds promise, as prior research suggests that employees who

experience greater passion for their work perform better and work harder (Curran et al. 2015, Pollack et al. 2020).

However, we suggest that this common practice of relying on passion as a key criterion for designations of high potential may produce gender inequalities. Why? Though passion is both an intrapersonal (subjectively experienced) and interpersonal (externally expressed) phenomenon, in the context of identifying high-potential employees, evaluators have to form their judgments based on how candidates *express* passion—the affective displays that employees engage in when they feel passionate for their work (e.g., eyes lighting up, energetic gestures, varied vocal pitch) as well as the verbal statements they make that highlight how identity relevant the work is to them (Cardon et al. 2009, Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Cho and Jiang 2022, Krautter et al. 2023).[1] More specifically, we argue that the distinctively *affective* expressions of passion lead evaluators to both penalize women and advantage (unexceptional) men when they are being evaluated for potential.

First, we draw on prevailing theory about gendered emotional stereotypes and backlash (Shields 2005, Rudman and Phelan 2008, Heilman 2012, Brescoll 2016, Correll et al. 2020), which suggests that women's emotional expressions—particularly when expressing more intense emotions—are often viewed as inappropriate in interpersonal and organizational contexts. This occurs because evaluators tend to perceive women's emotional expressions as *overly* intense and uncontrolled (Timmers et al. 2003, Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008). We argue that because expressions of passion are often marked by high emotional intensity, women's expressions of passion will be particularly likely to elicit gendered concerns about excessive and thus inappropriate emotionality (Hutson-Comeaux and Kelly 2002, Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008), leading to evaluations that their leadership ability is weak (Shields 2002, 2005; Brescoll 2016). These stereotypes will, in turn, elicit a *female penalty* for evaluations of passion in high-potential contexts.

Second, we develop novel theorizing that suggests a simultaneous *male advantage* in these same evaluation processes. Specifically, and drawing on research showing that evaluators not only react directly to but also draw inferences about others' emotional expressions (Van Kleef et al. 2012), we suggest that employees' expressions of passion shape evaluators' beliefs about their future diligence, a key attribute that matters for high-potential designations. That is, evaluators infer from employees' affective expressions of passion that they will apply higher levels of effort and more time in their future work. Critically, we argue that this inference is gendered in a way that confers a male advantage because of deeply embedded cross-cultural stereotypes that attribute women's achievements to hard work and effort and men's to their natural talent and ability (Schmader et al. 2007, Napp and Breda 2022, Eberhardt et al. 2023). Drawing on the shifting standards model (Biernat et al. 1991, Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997), we theorize that these stereotypes generate a lower baseline standard for inferences of men's diligence (Biernat et al. 1991, Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997), creating a longer runway for expressions of passion to increase inferences about men's future diligence. Because women are expected to be highly diligent at baseline (Schmader et al. 2007), and truly exceptional employees are expected to be highly diligent regardless of their gender, we suggest that expressions of passion will be particularly likely to positively shape evaluators' inferences of diligence among reasonably high-performing (rather than exceptional) men, in turn increasing their likelihood of being designated as high potential.

We provide empirical support for these predictions across two main and two supplementary studies. Using data from an actual talent review process of the top-performing quintile of employees at a large engineering firm, Study 1 ($N$ = 796) provides initial evidence that men are more likely to be categorized as high potential than women. This discrepancy is driven in part by gender differences in the returns to being perceived as passionate, which boosts high-potential designations for reasonably high-performing male employees but not their female counterparts. To examine why these gendered returns to passion occur, and to provide causal evidence, we conducted Study 2 ($N$ = 1,366), a preregistered experiment using videos with trained actors as manipulation materials, modelled after the talent review process from Study 1. In this study, we replicate the gender gap in high-potential designations and, using responses to survey questions as well as analyses of open-text data from nomination recommendations, identify two pathways through which this gender gap emerges: first, expressions of passion are seen as less appropriate for women than men, leading to a female penalty, and second, they shift inferences of diligence among reasonably high-performing men more than for reasonably high-performing women or exceptionally high employees overall, leading to a male advantage.[2]

The current research makes several contributions to extant theory and literature. First, our theorizing and findings unpack whether, when, and how passion is gendered, extending emerging perspectives on whether and how passion might confer benefits unequally to different groups (Rao and Neely 2019, Kim et al. 2020, Cech 2021, Siy et al. 2023). We introduce and find support for a dual pathway model of gendered interpersonal effects of passion which provides a broader explanation for how (reasonably high-performing) men gain outsized access to upward mobility in organizations. We distinguish between a female penalty (via gendered judgments about the appropriateness of emotion displays) and a male advantage (via gendered

inferences about diligence) that arises specifically from affective expressions of passion rather than verbal statements that highlight how personally meaningful the work is. Taken together, our research suggests that the increasing reliance and popularity of passion as a workplace criterion may lead to unintended unequal outcomes (Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022), and that—despite the promise they hold for developing a gender-diverse pipeline—high-potential programs may, in fact, reinforce rather than mitigate systemic gender inequality when they rely on perceptions of passion as a criterion for entry (Benson et al. 2022).

The current research also advances a more comprehensive understanding of gender bias in ambiguous evaluative contexts (Botelho and Abraham 2017, Correll et al. 2020). We extend prior literature on emotions and gender backlash (Shields 2002, Rudman and Phelan 2008, Brescoll 2016), which has typically focused on female penalties for negative or dominant emotions (e.g., anger; Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008), by demonstrating that backlash may also be elicited by expressions of passion, which are generally prescribed and broadly positively valanced. We also contribute to our understanding of how gender frames the way criteria are viewed and valued differently for men and women (Correll et al. 2020) by theorizing and showing that even when men and women are perceived to embody a criterion equally, predictions about what this means for their future behavior can still differ by gender. Ultimately, such gendered inferences reflect a type of bias that may be particularly likely to manifest in predictive evaluative contexts (Heilman 2012, Correll et al. 2020), and which is especially subtle and pernicious (Phillips and Jun 2022).

## Theory and Hypothesis Development

### The Gender Gap in Identifying High Potentials

Identifying high-potential employees—those believed to be best placed to develop into a future leader of an organization—is a cornerstone of talent management and ubiquitous in contemporary organizations (Derr et al. 1988, Groysberg et al. 2008, Groysberg and Lee 2009, Silzer and Dowell 2009, Dries et al. 2012). Participants in high-potential programs typically receive additional developmental opportunities and resources, including rotational assignments, internal leadership development programs, external education programs, special projects, mentorship and coaching, and access to private interactions with leadership via meetings and dinners (Silzer and Dowell 2009, Huselid and Becker 2010, Cappelli and Keller 2014, Finkelstein et al. 2018, Church et al. 2021, Mayo 2023).

Whereas the benefits of being labeled high potential are clear, the evaluation processes and criteria used to judge potential occur under considerable uncertainty. Central to our theorizing is that the uncertainty inherent in identifying high-potential employees is a fertile breeding ground for bias to emerge (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, Botelho and Abraham 2017, Lee and Huang 2018). Prior research has suggested that bias in evaluations is more pronounced when criteria used to make them are subjective (rather than objective), the information feeding into them vague (rather than clear), and the cues used to provide that information ambiguous (rather than definite; Pheterson et al. 1971, Nieva and Gutek 1980, Heilman 2012). Potential is a slippery construct which, at its core, is a forecast about the future performance and growth capabilities of an individual (Tormala et al. 2012, Kupor et al. 2014, Finkelstein et al. 2018). Even though decision makers often claim that they "know potential when they see it" (Finkelstein et al. 2018, p. 6), by definition, potential is not directly observable; it requires forecasts about future high performance, evidence of which cannot yet exist.

This subjectivity and uncertainty inherent in evaluating potential is likely to lead to a gender gap in identifying high-potential candidates. Under conditions of ambiguity like these, evaluators rely more heavily on accessible and visible cues such as gender to inform their decisions, despite them being irrelevant to underlying quality (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986, Heilman 2012, Jacquart and Antonakis 2015, Joshi et al. 2023). Given the strong associations of men (and not women) with leadership (Schein and Davidson 1993, Eagly and Karau 2002), and women with lower status (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, Ridgeway 2014), evaluators are more likely to view greater leadership potential in men than women and use such gender-stereotypical information in their decisions (Botelho and Abraham 2017). Research has borne out that female employees' potential is underestimated and undervalued. Women who start with the same ratings of potential as men subsequently outperform them (Benson et al. 2022). Similarly, Player et al. (2019) document that evaluators value men's leadership potential more highly than women's. Taken together, extant theory and emerging evidence lead to our baseline hypothesis about the gendered nature of high-potential designations.

**Hypothesis 1.** *Men are more likely than women to be designated as high potential.*

### Perceptions of Passion as a Key Criterion for "High-Potential" Designations

Although prior work suggests that a gender gap in identifying high potentials is likely, less is known about *why* and *when* such a gap might emerge. One way to understand why this gender gap may arise is to focus on the criteria commonly used to identify high potential (see Finkelstein et al. 2018), of which one of the most prominent is perceptions of employees' passion for their work

(Curran et al. 2015, O'Keefe et al. 2018, Pollack et al. 2020, Li et al. 2021). The connection between perceptions of passion and potential has been evidenced across a variety of domains. Passion is commonly described as an antecedent of higher future performance (e.g., see Curran et al. 2015, O'Keefe et al. 2018, Pollack et al. 2020, Li et al. 2021). Entrepreneurs who pitch their ventures in the hope of securing funding—a context focused on assessing the potential and future growth of highly uncertain, early-stage ideas—are more successful when they engage in expressions of passion in their pitches (Chen et al. 2009, Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Oo et al. 2019). Passion is also frequently heralded as a key attribute that should be exhibited by those seeking to advance their careers (e.g., Hagel et al. 2013, Chen et al. 2015, Whitehurst 2016, O'Keefe et al. 2018, Cech 2021), and frequently incorporated by organizations in their consideration of talent and evaluations of potential (Silzer and Church 2009a, Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022).

Passion is an internal state that manifests in outward expression. Although employees experience passion subjectively, observers can only evaluate how passionate a focal employee is through the expressions of passion they engage in (Cardon et al. 2009, Chen et al. 2020, Krautter et al. 2023, Schwarte et al. 2023, Bailey et al. 2024). Prior research highlights that its expressions make passion a particularly visible attribute that can be observed from even a brief interaction (Chen et al. 2009, Li et al. 2017, Ho et al. 2021, Allison et al. 2022, Wang et al. 2022). That is, passion is a highly accessible criterion, readily expressed by targets and readily observed by others (Jachimowicz et al. 2019, 2022; Cho and Jiang 2022). In such interpersonal contexts, the cues that inform perceptions of passion include both affective expressions (Chen et al. 2009; Mitteness et al. 2012; Curran et al. 2015; Li et al. 2017; Jachimowicz et al. 2019, 2022) as well as expressions that communicate a high degree of personal relevance, commonly through direct verbal statements (Vallerand et al. 2007, Krautter et al. 2023, Bailey et al. 2024). Indeed, recent conceptualizations of passion underscore the distinctive importance of its affective expressions when differentiating it from related constructs and documenting why it is uniquely relied upon as a criterion in evaluative interpersonal workplace contexts (Cho and Jiang 2022, Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022, Kwon and Sonday 2024).

The affective nature of passion's expression and perception in organizations has two key implications for its use as a criterion in high-potential designations. First, social information that contains affective components is perceived more quickly and noticed more readily (Van Kleef and Côté 2021). As a result, evaluators may arrive at judgments about a focal employees' passion through fewer interactions than for other criteria which require multiple demonstrations across contexts and over time to be shown convincingly. Second—and key to our argument—is that the distinctively affective nature of passion expressions can elicit gender biases that are rooted in reactions toward and inferences about such emotional displays.[3]

## Female Penalty for Expressions of Passion via Reduced Appropriateness

Decades of research has established a *female penalty* with evaluators reacting negatively toward women's behavior that violates gender stereotypes and prescriptions (i.e., backlash effects; Rudman 1998, Rudman and Phelan 2008). This also applies to the domain of emotions (Plant et al. 2000; Shields 2002, 2005; Brescoll 2016), with women penalized for emotional expressions that violate gendered emotional display rules: the implicit or explicit norms about which and what level of emotional expressions are appropriate in a given context (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008, Brescoll 2016). Emotional expressions that deviate from emotional display rules are perceived as inappropriate and lead to unfavorable impressions and behavioral responses (Van Kleef and Côté 2021). Importantly, the same emotional expression can be deemed inappropriate for women but appropriate for men (Brescoll 2016). This is because expressing certain emotions is acceptable for men but proscribed for women (e.g., highly agentic, powerful, or dominant emotions; Plant et al. 2000, Rudman and Phelan 2008, Rudman et al. 2012, Smith et al. 2016). In addition, women's emotional expressions are often seen as overly intense, dysfunctional, and stemming from a lack of control (Hutson-Comeaux and Kelly 2002, Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008), feeding perceptions of those emotional expressions as inappropriate, particularly in workplace settings where objectivity and rationality are valued (Shields 2002, 2005; Timmers et al. 2003; Frasca et al. 2022).

We extend these well-established insights to suggest a female penalty for expressions of passion. Specifically, because passion is an intense state (Chen et al. 2009, Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Bredehorst et al. 2024), we suggest that its expressions will be judged as inappropriate for women because of gendered concerns about overemotionality and lack of control. In a high-potential setting, such appropriateness evaluations are consequential because they connote a lack of leadership competence related to self-control and objectivity (Brescoll 2016, Smith et al. 2016). This leads us to our first hypothesis about a female penalty for expressions of passion through reduced perceptions of appropriateness:

**Hypothesis 2.** *There is a gendered and negative indirect effect of passion on high-potential designations through appropriateness, such that women's expressions of passion are seen as less appropriate (versus men's), and in turn, women are less likely to be designated as high potential (versus men).*

## Male Advantage for Expressions of Passion via Inferences of Future Diligence

Gender differences in evaluations of expressions of passion could also emerge because evaluators view the same expressions as connoting different levels of passion depending on who expresses them. Men who express excitement, animatedly move their body, and use varied gestures might be perceived as more passionate than women when they engage in the same behavior (Correll et al. 2020). However, prior research does not support this possibility. A recent study finds no gender differences in the self-reported behaviors women and men when they experience passion for their work, nor does it find gender differences in how these expressions are subsequently perceived as connoting passion by observers (Krautter et al. 2023). Similarly, whereas Wolf et al. (2016) hypothesized that framing affective expressions of distress as passion would be more effective for men than for women, they found no evidence to support their prediction. Beyond judging affective expressions of passion as less appropriate for women compared to men, these findings suggest that there may be no gender differences in how evaluators view expressions of passion in women and men (Correll et al. 2020).

We argue, however, that this conclusion may be premature: although evaluators may view women and men as equally passionate given the same expressions of passion, what they *infer* about men and women's *future* behavior from these expressions—a critical step in forecasting potential—may be different. More precisely, we argue that in contexts where evaluators make predictions about the future, gender differences emerge not only in evaluations of the present or past (i.e., how passionate an employee is perceived to be) but also in inferences about the future (i.e., what an employee perceived as passionate is predicted to do). Predictions about future behavior are necessarily inferential, particularly in the context of high-potential designations (Tormala et al. 2012, Finkelstein et al. 2018). To make this argument, we draw on prior literature, which suggests that affective expressions will likely trigger subsequent inferential processes that shape evaluations alongside more immediate reactions (Van Kleef et al. 2012). This inferential pathway can be understood as "cognitive responses such as assumptions made about people and situations based on emotional expressions" that involve "more deliberate inferential processing of the meaning and implications of others' emotional expression" (Van Kleef and Côté 2021, p. 633). As such, expressions of passion are likely to prompt such additional inferential processes in a high-potential context (Van Kleef 2009, Van Kleef et al. 2012).

Although evaluators may draw various inferences from expressions of passion,[4] we focus on *diligence*, a particularly common and especially critical inference in high-potential contexts that an employee will engage in *sustained application and investment of high levels of effort and time toward work* (Trix and Psenka 2003, Schmader et al. 2007, Ma et al. 2022).[5] Prior research has shown that individuals who experience high levels of passion engage in high levels of activity (Vallerand et al. 2007) with vigor (Curran et al. 2015, Pollack et al. 2020), for longer hours (Curran et al. 2015, Pollack et al. 2020), with greater effort, and over longer periods of time (Krautter et al. 2023) than those with low levels of passion. Similarly, observers also hold lay beliefs that associate passion with dedication, work ethic, and effort expenditure (Schellenberg et al. 2022, Wang et al. 2022).[6] As a result, evaluators may infer from an employee's expressions of passion that they will demonstrate high levels of diligence, a prediction about possible future improvement and growth that is essential in high-potential designations (Silzer and Church 2009b, Church and Rotolo 2013).

Critically, we argue that this inference will be gendered, such that evaluators will update their beliefs about diligence in response to expressions of passion more readily for men than women because stereotypes of women as highly diligent are deeply entrenched in professional contexts. For example, in recommendation letters, women are described more often than men as having grindstone traits (Schmader et al. 2007), such as "hardworking" and "determined" as well as "diligent" (Trix and Psenka 2003). This even extends to reference letters for academic economists, with the terms "diligent," "hardworking," and "dedicated" more common in letters for female than male candidates (Eberhardt et al. 2023). These stereotypes of women as highly diligent co-occur with two dominant associations for men. First, in contexts where diligence has female associations, male associations are often the opposite, highlighting a lack of effort (Jackson and Dempster 2009, Kessels and Heyder 2020). Indeed, some gender scales incorporate "diligence" as indicative of femininity and "lazy" as indicative of masculinity (Krahé et al. 2007). Second, where women's achievements are associated with diligence, men's are associated with natural talent or brilliance (Eberhardt et al. 2023, Napp and Breda 2022). For instance, in the domain of academic achievement, teachers describe male students either as failing to meet their potential because they lack diligence or as achieving effortlessly because of their innate talent (Perander et al. 2020), whereas female students are typically described as "hardworking, diligent, quiet, reliable" (Jones and Myhill 2004, p. 566). As a result, fields that emphasize brilliance are disproportionately male, and women's interests in those fields increase when the importance of dedication and effort to success in that field is emphasized (Leslie et al. 2015, Bian et al. 2018).

This prevalent stereotype that women are generally expected to be more diligent than men, in turn, limits how meaningfully female employees' expressions of passion shift inferences about how much *more* diligent

they may be. To make this argument, we draw on shifting standards theorizing (Biernat et al. 1991, Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997), which proposes that when gendered expectations exist, they beget a lower standard for the gender from whom the attribute or behavior is less expected. Consider parenting: given gender stereotypes about motherhood, more extensive parenting is required from mothers than fathers to elicit evaluations of them as a better parent (Bridges et al. 2002). In our context, because observers already expect women to be diligent, they are held to a higher baseline standard. This higher baseline set for women makes it less likely that their expressions of passion will move the needle on how diligent evaluators believe women will be as they develop their potential, as there is less room to become more diligent. In contrast, the lower standards set for men provide more leeway for their expressions of their passion to shift how diligent evaluators believe they will be as they develop theirs. That is, although diligence is valued equally in men and women in high-potential designations, we posit that affective expressions of passion will shift inferences of diligence for men (for whom diligence is unexpected) more so than for women (for whom diligence is already expected).

An important caveat is that we expect these gender differences to emerge only in evaluations of reasonably high-performing but not exceptionally high-performing men. Although both reasonably high-performing and exceptionally high-performing employees surpass the bar for consideration as high potentials (typically, the top quintile of performers; Silzer and Church 2009a, Church and Rotolo 2013), this top-performing group has a local distribution of performance (Rosette and Tost 2010, Leslie et al. 2017). There is less ambiguity in evaluating truly exceptional performers, and their exceptionality will likely dampen gender bias in inferential processes about them (Bohnet et al. 2016). In addition, baseline expectations for the diligence of exceptional performers are likely high for both genders, and thus expressions of passion are unlikely to meaningfully shift inferences of diligence for either gender. We therefore expect to see a boost in predictions of diligence from expressions of passion only for reasonably high-performing men, ultimately leading to their higher ratings of potential.

This leads to our hypotheses about the gendered effects of passion on high-potential designations for reasonably high performers through diligence (see Figure 1 for our full theoretical model).

**Hypothesis 3.** (a) *The relationship between passion and high-potential designation is stronger for reasonably high-performing men than for reasonably high-performing women.*

(b) *The relationship between passion and high-potential designation for reasonably high-performing men (versus women) is explained by an indirect effect through diligence: passion more meaningfully shifts (i.e., increases) predictions of diligence for reasonably high-performing men (versus women), and in turn, reasonably high-performing men are more likely to be designated as high potential (versus women).*

## Study 1: Gendered Benefits of Passion in High-Potential Designations

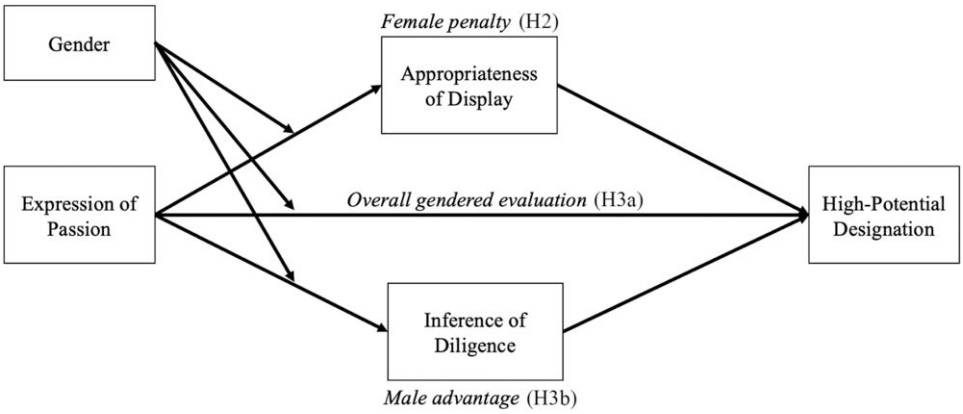
In Study 1, we use archival data from a large global organization in which managers conduct a yearly review to identify high-potential employees. In this organization, all employees first undergo an annual performance review which evaluates their performance against their prior year's objectives. Similar to many other organizations (Silzer and Church 2009b, Silzer and Dowell 2009, Church and Rotolo 2013), the organization then also conducts a talent review as a related but independent process approximately one to two months after the performance review. Only the top quintile of performers is included in the talent review. Managers evaluate this reasonably high to exceptionally high-performing subset of employees on various attributes the organization desires of its leaders—critical to the current context, one of these attributes is the extent to which they are passionate about their work—and determine which among them receive a high-potential designation.[7] With this archival data set, we test our hypotheses about the gender gap in high-potential designations (Hypothesis 1), and the gendered evaluation of passion for reasonably high-performing employees that advantages men, increasing their likelihood of being designated as high potential (Hypothesis 3a).

### Method

**Participants and Procedure.** We accessed data from 4,309 employees at a large, international engineering company. The employees consisted of 2,975 men (69.0%) and 1,044 women (24.2%); 290 employee records did not include gender information (6.7%). As in many organizations, the talent review process was limited to employees who exceeded a performance threshold. Each year, employees' performance was rated on a scale from 1 to 10, with higher numbers denoting better performance. Only employees who exceeded a two-year cumulative performance threshold of 14 (at least 7 out of 10 for each of the two prior years) were included in the talent review. A total of 818 employees met this threshold, roughly representing the top quintile (19%) of performers, a proportion consistent with many organizations' talent review programs (Silzer and Dowell 2009).

Of these 818 employees, 32 had no rating for passion, leaving a final sample of 786, 196 of whom were women (24.9%). These employees were distributed across 30 countries: 69.1% were in Europe,[8] 24.9% were located in other English-speaking countries, including the United States, Canada, and Australia; and a small sample was

**Figure 1.** Theoretical Model




*Notes.* Figure 1 displays our theoretical model. We suggest that men are more likely to be designated as high potential than women (Hypothesis 1), and that this is explained by both a female penalty (Hypothesis 2 (H2)) and a male advantage (Hypothesis 3b (H3b)) in response to expressions of passion (Hypothesis 3a (H3a)). First, based on prior theorizing, the female penalty pathway predicts that expressions of passion are judged to be more less for women than men, leading to differences in high-potential designations (Hypothesis 2). Second, we build novel theory to suggest that a male advantage exists alongside this process: we argue that expressions of passion more meaningfully increase inferences of diligence for men than women (Hypothesis 3b). Both pathways underlie why passion is positively associated with being designated as high potential for men more so than for women (Hypothesis 3a). Note that, for simplicity, we focused this figure on only reasonably high-performing (but not exceptional) women and men. We also note that although passion can be expressed and perceived through other factors—in particular, through verbal statements of high identity relevance—our theorizing focuses on gender biases in response to affective expressions of passion.

from Asia (6%). Employees were distributed over 14 departments, including 180 in sales, 148 in manufacturing, 108 in research and development (R&D), and 72 in finance. Our sample displayed patterns consistent with evidence that men and women are unequally represented in senior management (Joshi et al. 2023). In this sample, in order from the lowest to the highest organizational level, individual contributors were 48.2% women (66 of 137), professionals were 28.6% women (70 of 246), middle managers were 17.6% women (51 of 290), and executives were 7.9% women (9 of 113).

**Independent Variable: Passion Ratings.** All 786 employees who formed part of our final sample were evaluated on their passion, rated with a single item as part of the talent review process. The guidebook for the talent review defined passion as "voluntarily goes the extra-mile; thrives for greater responsibility, achievement or distinction; willing to take on new challenges; strong motivation energy and dedication." This description is broadly in line with prior academic measures that seek to capture outward expressions of passion (e.g., Chen et al. 2009, Jachimowicz et al. 2019).[9] The employees were rated as 1 (never; the person has never demonstrated this characteristic), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), or 5 (always; the behaviors relative to this characteristic are always visible in any context or situation in which the person works).

**Moderator: Gender.** We accessed gender from the company's human resources records, with zero denoting "female" and one denoting "male."

**Moderator: Reasonably High vs. Exceptional Performance.** Our theorizing specified that the disproportionate benefit of passion for men over women would be more likely to emerge when employees possess reasonably high but not exceptional performance. As aforementioned, employees were only eligible for the talent review process if their two-year cumulative performance scores ranged from 14 to 20. These employees were grouped by the organization into three performance categories: "high performer" (score of 14), "outstanding performer" (scores between 15 and 17), and "exceptional performer" (scores between 18 and 20). High performers fall at the bottom of the distribution of eligible employees, and thus evaluators in this context would likely see them as reasonably high (but not exceptional) performers. In our analysis, we collapsed the outstanding and exceptional performance categories because there were only 10 exceptional performers in our data. This resulted in 325 reasonably high performers (41.3%), of whom 78 were women (24%) and 245 were men (76%; two were missing gender information), and 461 exceptional performers (58.7%), of whom 118 were women (26%) and 343 were men (74%).

**Dependent Variable: High-Potential Designation.** Employees eligible for the talent review were rated on potential by their direct manager. The talent review process took place every year about two months after the performance review, also conducted by the direct manager, as well as second managers if they shared a subordinate. The temporal lag between the two ratings alleviates some common method variance concerns (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Managers' potential ratings were

submitted to the talent development committee, composed of top managers across several countries, who discussed the evaluations and incorporated them in their country-level succession planning. Finally, these ratings received final confirmation from the chief executive officer of the corporation. This chain of evaluation and verification ensured accountability and credibility in the process.[10]

All 786 employees who formed part of our final sample were evaluated on their potential. Ratings fell into one of three categories, ranging from "realized potential" ($N$ = 233; 29.6%) to "moderate potential" ($N$ = 351; 44.6%) and "high potential" ($N$ = 202; 25.7%). For this organization, only those rated as high potential were provided with increased development and advancement opportunities.[11] Thus, we categorized employees as either having high potential or not (merging the realized-potential and moderate-potential groups). Consistent with common organizational practice and our theorizing, the threshold designating high-potential employees was fairly high (Silzer and Dowell 2009) and represented only 5% of the total employee population in our sample.

**Control Variables.** We used additional variables available in the archival data set as controls. We controlled for age, as there is a documented preference to designate younger employees as high potential (North 2019), whether the employee worked in Europe (coded one) or not (coded zero), as well as the employee's level (using dummy variables for individual contributor, professional, and middle-management employees, leaving executive as the reference group). We included the proportion of men in the department (relative to total employees) as a measure of male dominance (Feldberg 2022), computed using the full sample ($N$ = 4,309) and their relative distribution by gender in the 14 departments.

## Results

Zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 1 are shown in Table 1. We report results below using mixed effects linear probability models with robust standard errors (Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2017) for ease of interpretation of results and coefficients.[12] We report all analyses with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (Table S2) and hierarchical logistic modelling (Table S3) in our Online Supplement. Results remain robust across identification strategies. We model random intercepts by organizational level ($ICC_{org\text{-}level}$ = 0.113), department ($ICC_{department}$ = 0.009), and country ($ICC_{country}$ = 0.023) to account for nesting of employees within organizational levels, departments, and countries. Although additional nesting may occur at lower levels (e.g., manager level or office level), we were restricted by our access to data (a limitation we address in Study 2).

First, we examined the possibility that evaluators perceive men as more passionate than women. There was no correlation between employee gender and evaluators' ratings of their passion ($r$ = 0.02, $p$ = 0.59), and this was the same in a multilevel regression with controls ($b$ = −0.01, SE = 0.08, $p$ = 0.92). We further examined whether gender differences in perceptions of passion differed by whether they were rated as reasonably high or exceptional performers, or in more male-dominated departments. Although reasonably high performers were seen as less passionate than exceptional performers ($b$ = 0.28, SE = 0.13, $p$ = 0.03), there was no statistically significant interaction between gender and performance ($b$ = −0.01, SE = 0.15, $p$ = 0.94). Similarly, the interaction between gender and the representation of men in a department was not statistically significant ($b$ = 0.28, SE = 0.43, $p$ = 0.51). We also tested whether gender differences in perceived passion differed by organizational cluster or country, finding that the gender difference in perceptions of passion remained nonsignificant in all of these models, including when we add controls (all $p$ > 0.30). These results suggest that women and men are perceived as equally passionate across performance levels and organizational contexts, and reduce the concern that the gendered effects we seek to identify are driven solely by differences in how passionate evaluators believe men and women are for their work.

**Table 1.** Study 1: Means Standard Deviations, and Correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. *Male Employee* | 0.75 | 0.43 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. *Age* | 44.52 | 9.20 | 0.13** | | | | | | | |
| 3. *Europe* | 0.69 | 0.46 | 0.11** | 0.03 | | | | | | |
| 4. *Proportion Men in Department* | 0.75 | 0.16 | 0.40** | 0.06 | 0.01 | 0.11** | | | | |
| 5. *Individual Contributor* | 1.17 | 0.38 | −0.25** | −0.16** | −0.14** | 0.03 | −0.05 | | | |
| 6. *Passion* | 3.80 | 0.88 | 0.02 | −0.10** | −0.08* | 0.18** | −0.03 | −0.05 | | |
| 7. *Categorized as Reasonably high Performer* | 0.41 | 0.49 | 0.02 | 0.09* | −0.00 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.06 | −0.16** | |
| 8. *Categorized as High Potential* | 0.26 | 0.44 | 0.08* | −0.28** | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.01 | −0.12** | 0.32** | −0.20** |

*Note.* $N$ = 786.
*$p$ < 0.05; **$p$ < 0.01.

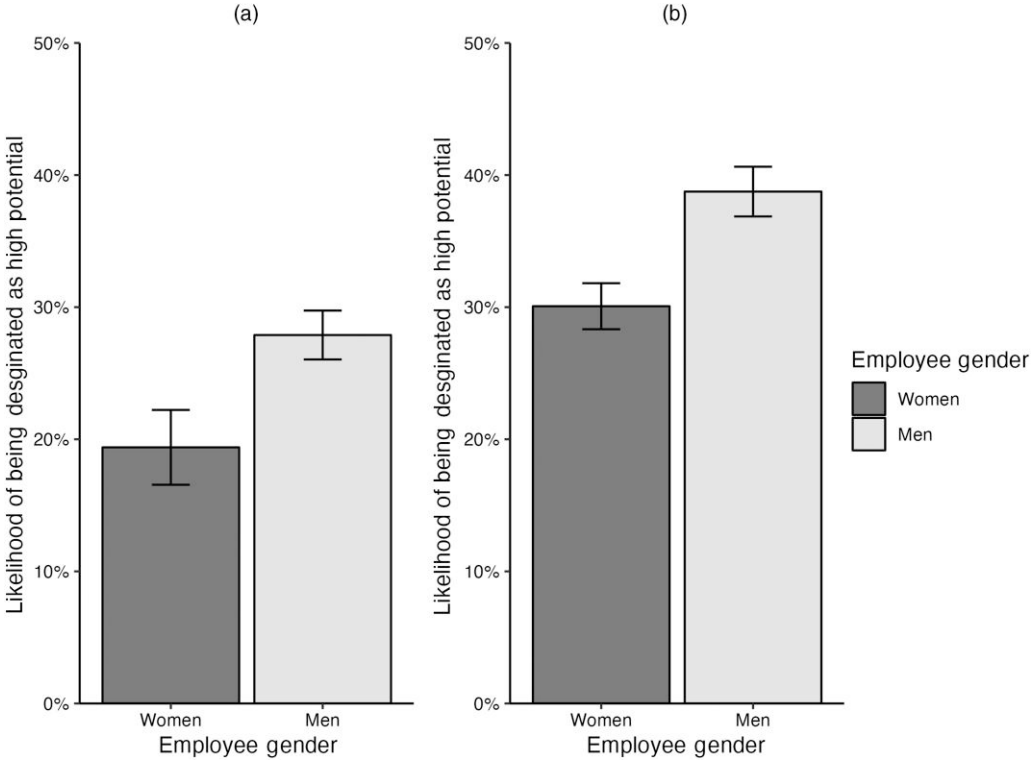
We then tested our focal hypotheses. The regression results are displayed in Table 2. We first tested whether men were more likely to be designated as high potential than women (Hypothesis 1). Model 1 in Table 2 displays a baseline estimate (in OLS) of the effect of being a man on high-potential ratings. Controlling for age, we find that men are significantly more likely than women to be designated as high potential ($b = 0.114$, SE = 0.034, $p = 0.001$; see also Figure 2(a)). Model 2 estimates the same effect in a mixed-effects linear probability model, adding clustering by organizational level, department type, and country, additional controls for whether the employee works in Europe or not, and the proportion of men in each department. The coefficient of the dummy variable for male on high potential becomes nonsignificant, albeit still favoring men directionally ($b = 0.026$, SE = 0.033, $p = 0.50$). This suggests that the gender gap in potential may vary by country, department type, and organizational level. Models 3 and 4 add our moderating variables as main effects. Model 3 indicates that reasonably high performers are significantly less likely to be rated as high potential relative to exceptionally high performers ($b = -0.127$, SE = 0.007, $p < 0.001$), consistent with our theorizing about the relative uncertainty of potential among reasonably high (compared to exceptional) performers. Model 4 shows that passion has a significant positive effect on ratings of potential, validating that passion is a key criterion in high-potential designations ($b = 0.121$, SE = 0.009, $p = 0.002$). Models 1 to 4 show that in this organizational context,

**Table 2.** Study 1 Regression Results

| | DV: High-potential designation | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Linear mixed effects | | | | | |
| | OLS | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| *Male* | 0.114*** | 0.026 | 0.030 | 0.033* | −0.032 | 0.031 | −0.033 |
| | (0.034) | (0.033) | (0.027) | (0.015) | (0.148) | (0.037) | (0.165) |
| *Age* | −0.014*** | −0.016*** | −0.016*** | −0.014*** | −0.014*** | −0.014*** | −0.014*** |
| | (0.002) | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| *Europe* | | −0.024 | −0.026 | 0.009 | 0.003 | 0.007 | 0.002 |
| | | (0.039) | (0.041) | (0.039) | (0.036) | (0.034) | (0.035) |
| *Proportion Men in Department* | | 0.143*** | 0.150*** | 0.149*** | 0.156*** | 0.167 | 0.171 |
| | | (0.016) | (0.008) | (0.028) | (0.037) | (0.117) | (0.119) |
| *Reasonably High Performer* | | | −0.127*** | −0.097*** | 0.249 | −0.093** | 0.252 |
| | | | (0.007) | (0.009) | (0.159) | (0.029) | (0.207) |
| *Passion* (rated) | | | | 0.121*** | 0.134*** | 0.120*** | 0.133** |
| | | | | (0.008) | (0.031) | (0.019) | (0.043) |
| *Individual Contributor* (dummy) | | | | | | −0.334*** | −0.330*** |
| | | | | | | (0.047) | (0.049) |
| *Professional* (dummy) | | | | | | −0.282*** | −0.277*** |
| | | | | | | (0.032) | (0.033) |
| *Middle Management* (dummy) | | | | | | −0.182*** | −0.177*** |
| | | | | | | (0.037) | (0.034) |
| *Male* × *Reasonably High Performer* | | | | | −0.165 | | −0.165 |
| | | | | | (0.262) | | (0.298) |
| *Male* × *Passion* | | | | | 0.019 | | 0.018 |
| | | | | | (0.041) | | (0.061) |
| *Reasonably High Performer* × *Passion* | | | | | −0.091 | | −0.091 |
| | | | | | (0.053) | | (0.079) |
| *Male* × *Reasonably High Performer* × *Passion* | | | | | 0.042 | | 0.043 |
| | | | | | (0.085) | | (0.107) |
| *Constant* | 0.799*** | 0.896*** | 0.905*** | 0.339* | 0.286 | 0.542*** | 0.487** |
| | (0.080) | (0.217) | (0.209) | (0.172) | (0.210) | (0.141) | (0.186) |
| *Cluster by Country* | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| *Cluster by Department* | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| *Cluster by Organizational Level* | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Observations | 756 | 752 | 752 | 752 | 752 | 752 | 752 |

*Notes.* Four employees missing department-level data were dropped in Model 2. The model estimates come from linear probability models with robust standard errors. We did not have department data for 4 employees, and so there is a small drop in sample size from Model 1 to Models 2 and onward.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

**Figure 2.** Gender Gap in High-Potential Designation for Studies 1 and 2




*Notes.* Figure 2 displays the results in support of Hypothesis 1—a gender gap in high-potential designations—from both Studies 1 and 2. Panel (a) demonstrates the gender potential gap in Study 1 (archival field data), and panel (b) demonstrates the gender potential gap in Study 2 (preregistered online experiment).

employees are more likely to be designated as high potential if they are men, younger, belong to a male-dominated department, are exceptionally high performing, and seen as passionate.

Next, we tested our prediction that, for reasonably high performers, passion would be positively related to a high-potential designation for men but not women (Hypothesis 3a). We conducted a three-way interaction (Model 5) between passion (ranging from one to five), gender (female versus male), and performance (reasonably high versus exceptional) on high-potential designation (yes versus no). Neither the three-way interaction ($b$ = 0.042, SE = 0.075, $p$ = 0.57) nor any of the two-way interactions ($p > 0.16$) were statistically significant. However, given that our hypothesis focused on differences between reasonably high-performing men and women, and following prior recommendations (Martin and North 2021), we decomposed the interaction and conducted planned contrasts to examine the marginal effects of passion by gender and performance. Our analyses reveal that for reasonably high-performing men, passion was positively and significantly associated with being designated as high potential ($b$ = 0.184, SE = 0.049, $p < 0.001$). This was not the case for reasonably high-performing women ($b$ = 0.076, SE = 0.065, $p$ = 0.239). Among exceptional performers, passion significantly predicted high-potential designation for both men ($b$ = 0.269, SE = 0.023, $p < 0.001$) and women ($b$ = 0.236, SE = 0.055, $p < 0.001$). These results provide support for Hypothesis 3a. Adding additional controls by organizational level in Models 6 and 7 does not change our main finding: passion ratings benefit reasonably high-performing men ($b$ = 0.181, SE = 0.024, $p < 0.001$) but not reasonably high-performing women ($b$ = 0.073, SE = 0.081, $p$ = 0.365).

## Discussion

Study 1 provides initial support for Hypotheses 1 and 3a using archival data from a talent review process in a global organization. Our findings are in line with an overall gender gap in high-potential ratings (Benson et al. 2022), with men being more likely than women to be designated as high potential. We also uncover that evaluators were more likely to categorize reasonably high-performing men as high potential when they were seen as passionate for their work, whereas reasonably high-performing women did not accrue similar benefits when they were seen as passionate. Overall, these results provide initial evidence of gender differences in

evaluations of passion for high potential in an externally valid context.

Although this data set provides many strengths, there were several limitations to this study that stem from the archival nature of the study and limited access to available data. First, the definition and measurement of passion in this context were decided by the organization prior to the access to data, and thus do not align perfectly with prior measures and theorizing in the academic literature. Relatedly, there is a possibility that gender biases may have occurred in how managers formed perceptions of passion itself. Although we do not find gender differences in how passionate women and men were judged to be, we cannot definitively rule out that biases played into these perceptions as in this study we do not have access to how women and men expressed passion. Our access to archival data was also limited in terms of additional nesting variables such as manager-level identifiers or demographics (such as their gender) or office-specific norms around passion. This restricts our ability to examine or account for additional variation. Moreover, we were unable to access the total number of managers per department, again restricting our ability to account for manager-level nesting and constituting a major limitation of this study. Finally, this study neither provides causal evidence nor evidence of potential mechanisms underlying why passion was associated with gendered outcomes, being unable to provide evidence for a female penalty, a male advantage, or both. We address these limitations in Study 2.

## Study 2: Mechanisms and Full Model

In Study 2, we sought to provide causal evidence and examine the underlying mechanisms of our predicted effects in a tightly controlled and highly powered experimental design. Mirroring the organizational context of Study 1, in this experiment, we asked participants to put themselves in the shoes of a manager conducting a talent review who needs to decide whether to designate an employee as high potential, and then to justify that choice. We asked participants to view a target employee's expression of passion, rate the appropriateness of the employee's emotional display, and report inferences of their diligence using both quantitative measures and coded qualitative data from participants' written justifications for their choices. This design allowed us to test our full model: gender differences in high-potential designations (Hypothesis 1) that are explained in part by gendered evaluations of passion via judgments of lower appropriateness of emotional display for women compared to men (Hypothesis 2), and via inferences of higher diligence for reasonably high-performing men but not women (Hypotheses 3a and 3b). We preregistered both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study at https://aspredicted.org/TGH_FR9.[13]

### Method

**Participants.** Following our preregistration, we recruited 1,500 participants located in the United States via Prolific who indicated having at least some managerial experience.[14] As preregistered, we excluded participants who failed an attention check, described below ($N = 134$ participants). Our final sample of 1,366 participants consisted of 662 men (48.5%), 680 women (49.8%), and 24 (1.75%) participants who indicated another gender category. The sample was predominantly white ($N = 1{,}041$; 76.2%), with 98 (7.2%) identifying as Black; 88 (6.4%) as Latino/Hispanic, 91 (6.7%) as Asian, and 10 (0.7%) as American Indian, and 38 (2.8%) indicating another identity not listed. Participants were, on average, 38.55 years old (standard deviation (SD) = 13), and had, on average, 18 years of work experience (SD = 12). Most held a postsecondary degree: 146 (10.7%) held a two-year (associates) or vocational degree, 537 (39.3%) held a four-year college degree, and 300 (22.0%) held a graduate degree. Of those who did not hold a postsecondary degree, 283 (20.7%) had completed some college, 103 (7.5%) had a high school diploma or GED, and 5 (0.4%) completed some high school or less.

**Procedure.** Our design varied focal employees' expression of passion (through a video manipulation), their gender (female versus male), and their performance (reasonably high versus exceptional), for a total of eight cells in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design. We mimicked elements of past experimental work on evaluation processes (Castilla and Bernard 2010, Galperin et al. 2020), while adapting certain features based on the talent review process from our field site in Study 1. For each condition, participants first saw a profile of a junior consultant early in their career. All information (their position, tenure, and salary) was identical except for the employee's name (which was either Scott or Erica), and the employee's performance, which was either reasonably high (performance rating 4.18/5) or exceptional (performance rating 4.71/5). This information was displayed in an infographic (see Appendix F in our Online Supplement), which represented how the focal employee compared to other employees at the organization, modelled after the talent review materials from the organization study, Study 1. The profile name served as our *gender manipulation*, and their reported performance served as our *performance manipulation*.

Participants were then shown an excerpt from a video interview of the employee during an ostensible talent review process. These videos served as our *passion expression manipulation* (described below). To verify that the participant understood and watched the video in its entirety, the study did not proceed until the video had played to its end, and we included an attention check that required participants to indicate the correct name of the project the employee discussed in it. After

participants viewed the video, they decided whether or not to designate the focal employee as high potential. Subsequently, they were asked to justify their decision by writing a few sentences about why they chose the designation they did, which was to be reviewed by a talent development committee comprised of representatives of higher management. We included this nomination form because it is typical for high-potential designation processes to include a further review by senior management after a manager's endorsement and before a final decision (Silzer and Dowell 2009, p. 233), as was also present in our Study 1 field site. Finally, participants completed a series of measures pertaining to our mediator and control variables.

**Passion Expression Manipulation.** We developed manipulation materials for the control and passion conditions following Cho and Jiang's (2022) iterative method, basing the content on past research manipulating expressions of passion (e.g., Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Cho and Jiang 2022, Wang et al. 2022, Bailey et al. 2024). Consistent with past conceptualizations and empirical measures and manipulations of passion in interpersonal contexts, we manipulated expressions of passion through both affective expressions and verbal statements of high identity relevance (Chen et al. 2009, Mitteness et al. 2012, Davis et al. 2017, Li et al. 2017, Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Cho and Jiang 2022, Wang et al. 2022, Krautter et al. 2023).[15] Table 3 displays the

**Table 3.** Study 2 Manipulation Scripts with Summaries of Justifications

| Control condition | Passion condition | Explanation/justification |
|---|---|---|
| **Interviewer: Please give a brief introduction of yourself.**<br>**Employee:** Hi there, my name is [Scott/Erica]. I have been a consultant at Experify Consulting Group for two years. | **Interviewer: Please give a brief introduction of yourself.**<br>**Employee:** Hi there, my name is [Scott/Erica]. I have been a consultant at Experify Consulting Group for two years. | We carefully thought about the role and field of the fictional employee to ensure that they were not explicitly and obviously gendered. Healthcare consulting is a field that is relatively gender balanced. |
| **Interviewer: Please tell me a bit about a project that you worked on this year.**<br>**Employee:** If I had to pick a specific case, I would say the case for Pharmavax. Pharmavax is a biotech/pharmaceutical company that is looking to expand and grow their internal research. Specifically, for the case, they were looking for counsel about the kinds of drugs and treatments they should expand into for clinical trials and research. They were also looking for suggestions around translating these new research goals to their clients and stakeholders in an effective and accessible way. I was on a team with four other consultants, and we completed the case successfully. | **Interviewer: Please tell me a bit about a project that you worked on this year.**<br>**Employee:** If I had to pick a specific case, I would say the case for Pharmavax. Pharmavax is a biotech/pharmaceutical company that is looking to expand and grow their internal research. Specifically, for the case, they were looking for counsel about the kinds of drugs and treatments they should expand into for clinical trials and research. They were also looking for suggestions around translating these new research goals to their clients and stakeholders in an effective and accessible way. I was on a team with four other consultants, and we completed the case successfully. | The control condition is consistent with the passion condition in describing the employee as working on a project that involved the accessibility of healthcare, which is a prosocial and communal setting (healthcare/accessibility).<br>The passion condition is also consistent with the control condition in describing the employee as working on a team and briefly describes that the team performance on the case was successful. |
| As a team, we planned out our approach for this case from the very beginning and worked well together. Thanks to our coordination and efficiency, the client seemed satisfied with the product and solution we brought to them.<br>And so this case stands out to me because of our careful planning, execution, and ultimately, our performance. | This case stands out to me because the accessibility of healthcare, especially to the public, is something that I find very meaningful and important.<br>For this reason, it was a particularly memorable case. I'm very passionate about this topic and so I'm glad that consulting lets me pursue the things that I am passionate about on the job. | We designated a target of passion (the accessibility of healthcare) that was appropriate for this context. Prior research manipulating passion has often done so with similarly prosocial targets of passion (e.g., Cho and Jiang 2022).<br>We designed our control condition to highlight a positive organizational work example, similar to prior work (e.g., Wang et al. 2022). Thus, the project itself (in a communal domain, working with a team) are all identical in treatment and control. The key difference is that the control condition enjoyed working together on a team (which highlights communality), whereas the passion condition is passionate about the accessibility of healthcare (also highlighting communality). |

manipulation scripts as well as a summary of our justification for the content. We elaborate on details of the manipulation in detail below.

We first developed the verbal scripts in which an employee describes a project (consulting on an R&D project for healthcare accessibility of a biotech firm) and their experience working on a high-performing team. We aimed to maximize consistency in the scripts while recognizing the difficulty of doing so, as manipulating passion necessarily requires additional content to highlight the employee's personal investment and endorsement of its personal significance. The primary verbal difference in the passion (versus control) condition was the employee stating that they find healthcare accessibility personally meaningful, and that they are glad to be able to pursue what they are passionate about at their job. This follows prior research, which has often used similarly prosocial targets of passion (such as environmental issues, see Jachimowicz et al. 2019; or making the world a better place, see Cho and Jiang 2022). To maximize consistency and to balance the communal values signaled by personally endorsing healthcare accessibility in the passion condition, we ensured that the control condition script highlighted a positive work example (e.g., see Wang et al. 2022, Bailey et al. 2024), signaled their communality (i.e., they enjoy working on a team), and was not actively dispassionate. To provide confidence that our hypothesized effects are not driven by semantic differences between the scripts or inferences arising from them (e.g., communality), we rule out various alternative mechanisms empirically.

We hired and worked with nine professional actors (men and women) who recorded videos for both the passion and control conditions. They were provided with instructions that included descriptions of theoretically derived affective expressions of passion (Chen et al. 2009, Jachimowicz et al. 2019), including excitement, eyes lighting up, animated body movement, and varied vocal intonation (adapted from Chen et al. 2009). We filmed multiple iterations of the videos, providing feedback about changes to align their acting more closely to the theoretical definition of expressions of passion. After finalizing all actors' videos, we conducted a pretest with a separate sample of 800 participants recruited via Prolific to determine the female and male actor who were most equally matched on various attributes (e.g., passion, attractiveness, authenticity). We collected additional data to validate that the videos manipulated passion as opposed to related concepts, such as charisma or excitement; these extensive validation and pretests, reported in the Online Supplement, showed that our manipulation increased perceptions of passion more than any other construct.

**Dependent Variable: High-Potential Designation.** We used a multicategorical measure of potential, as in past research (Leslie et al. 2017) and the organizational setting in Study 1. Participants were asked to designate the employee they viewed as being "absent of high potential" ($N$ = 82; 6.0%), "moderately high potential" ($N$ = 815; 59.7%), or "exceedingly high potential" ($N$ = 469; 34.3%). As in Study 1, we recoded "high potential" as a binary variable such that only employees rated as of exceedingly high potential were coded as one (34.3%), and employees rated as absent of high potential or of moderately high potential were coded as zero (65.7%).

**Mediator: Appropriateness of Emotional Display.** We measured the perceived appropriateness of the employee's emotional display (Van Kleef and Côté 2007, Jachimowicz et al. 2019) with a five-item scale ($a$ = 0.94; sample item: "Erica's/Scott's display of emotion appears to be reasonable for the situation"; see Van Kleef and Coté 2007).

**Mediator: Inferences of Diligence.** We measured inferences of diligence using an established measure from the Competent, Ambitious, Dominant, Diligent, Independent, Self-assured model of agency (Ma et al. 2022), asking participants to rate the focal employee on the items "dedicated (wholly committed to an end)," "task-oriented (focus on getting the job done)," and "hardworking (working with diligence)" from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree); $a$ = 0.87.[16]

**Control: Attractiveness.** Because attractiveness can influence evaluations (Han and Laurent 2023), we asked participants to rate the employee with a single-item asking how attractive the employee was, ranging from one (not at all) to seven (extremely). We report our results below without controls, but all results hold with controls (available in our Online Supplement).

## Main Results

Zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 2 are in Table 4. For ease of interpretation, we refer to the male employee target (male condition) as Scott and the female employee target (female condition) as Erica. As preregistered, we analyzed and report our results with analysis of variance (ANOVA), though our analyses remain robust when we use OLS or logistic regression (reported in the Online Supplement).

**Manipulation Checks.** As part of our survey measures, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which the focal employee expressed passion for their work on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). Participants rated the employee in the passion condition as more passionate (mean (M) = 6.33, SE = 0.04) than the employee in the control condition (M = 5.31, SE = 0.04; $F(1, 1{,}364) = 370$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.21$). This indicates that the videos manipulated passion

**Table 4.** Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. *Diligence* (quantitative) | 6.17 | 0.84 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. *Appropriateness* | 5.54 | 1.17 | 0.46*** | | | | | | | | |
| 3. *High Potential* | 0.34 | 0.47 | 0.35*** | 0.32*** | | | | | | | |
| 4. *Attractive* | 4.57 | 1.29 | 0.32*** | 0.28*** | 0.18*** | | | | | | |
| 5. *Competence* | 6.12 | 0.98 | 0.66*** | 0.49*** | 0.35*** | 0.33*** | | | | | |
| 6. *Proactive* | 6.00 | 0.88 | 0.64*** | 0.50*** | 0.34*** | 0.31*** | 0.66*** | | | | |
| 7. *Warmth* | 5.49 | 1.17 | 0.48*** | 0.41*** | 0.29*** | 0.45*** | 0.61*** | 0.50*** | | | |
| 8. *Excitement* | 5.30 | 1.45 | 0.39*** | 0.43*** | 0.33*** | 0.31*** | 0.36*** | 0.45*** | 0.54*** | | |
| 9. *Charisma* | 4.88 | 1.35 | 0.41*** | 0.51*** | 0.36*** | 0.36*** | 0.41*** | 0.47*** | 0.51*** | 0.65*** | |
| 10. *Confidence* | 5.01 | 0.87 | 0.52*** | 0.41*** | 0.37*** | 0.22*** | 0.53*** | 0.60*** | 0.35*** | 0.41*** | 0.47*** |

*Note.* $N = 1{,}357$–$1{,}366$ (depending on missing data).
***$p < 0.001$.

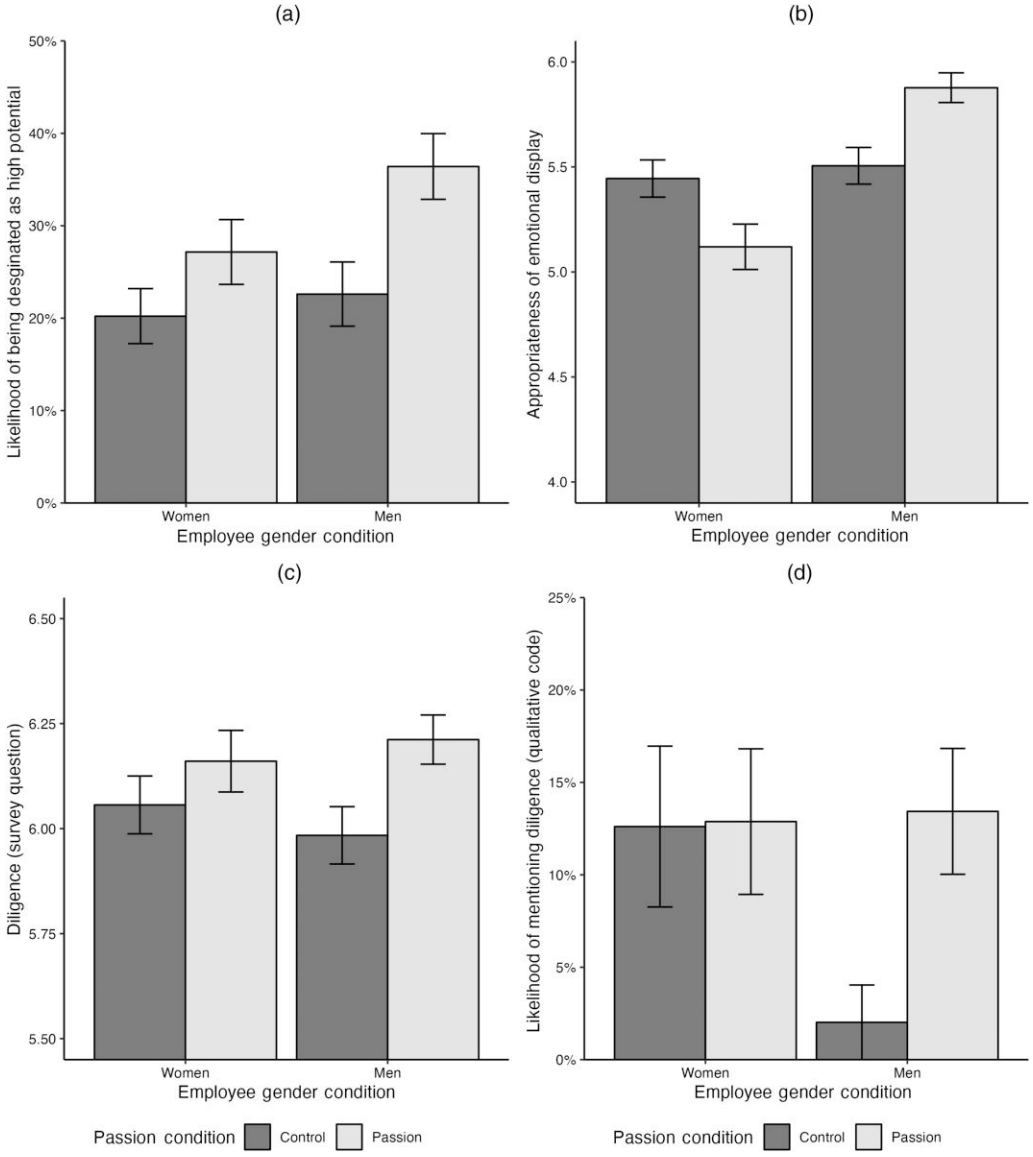
effectively, but also that the control condition reflected a level of passion one might expect from an "average" worker who was not actively dispassionate (given that ratings were substantially above the scale midpoint), providing a conservative test of our hypotheses. There were no interactive effects of the passion manipulation with gender or performance, nor their three-way interaction ($p > 0.40$), indicating that the passion manipulation increased passion (relative to control) equally for the male and female targets and across performance conditions. This ruled out the possibility that passion was perceived to be at different levels for reasonably high-performing women and men (Correll et al. 2020).

We also asked participants to rate the focal employee's level of performance relative to their peers on a scale from one (very poor ability relative to peers) to five (exceptional ability relative to peers). Our analyses highlight that participants rated the employee in the exceptional performance condition as higher performing (M = 4.29, SE = 0.02) than the employee in the reasonably high performance condition (M = 4.00, SE = 0.02; $F(1, 1{,}364) = 67.9$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$). This indicates that we manipulated performance effectively, particularly given that a four on the scale corresponded to "high ability relative to peers," whereas a five on the scale corresponded to "exceptional ability relative to peers." There were no interaction effects of the performance manipulation with gender or passion, nor their three-way interaction ($p > 0.22$), indicating a similar manipulation of performance across the gender and passion conditions.

**Gender Differences in High-Potential Designations.** We conducted a two (passion condition: passion versus control) by two (gender condition: male versus female) by two (performance condition: reasonably high versus exceptional performance) ANOVA on high-potential designation and found main effects of gender, passion, and performance. In line with Hypothesis 1 and prior research (Benson et al. 2022), we found that Scott (M = 0.38, SE = 0.02) was designated as high potential more often than Erica (M = 0.30, SE = 0.02; $F(1, 1{,}358) = 11.88$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.008$; see Figure 2(b)). Employees in the exceptional performance condition were more likely to be designated as high potential (M = 0.42, SE = 0.02) than employees in the reasonably high performance condition (M = 0.27, SE = 0.02; $F(1, 1{,}358) = 34.70$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$). Finally, employees in the passion condition were designated as high potential more often (M = 0.39, SE = 0.02) than those in the control condition (M = 0.29, SE = 0.02; $F(1, 1{,}358) = 15.01$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$). These results replicate the main effects we found in Study 1.

None of the two-way interactions were significant ($p > 0.30$) and, consistent with Study 1, our focal three-way interaction between gender, performance, and passion did not meet the standard threshold for statistical significance ($F(1, 1{,}358) = 3.11$, $p = 0.078$, $\eta^2 = 0.002$, $p = 0.08$). However, Hypothesis 3a focuses on a specific contrast within the reasonably high-performance condition. Consistent with our preregistration and our findings from Study 1, we decomposed the interaction to examine the specific contrasts we theorized and found that—when he was a reasonably high performer—Scott was significantly more likely to be designated as high potential in the passion (M = 36.4%, SE = 3.4%) than the control condition (M = 22.6%, SE = 3.8%; $b = 0.14$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.008$). In contrast, there was no statistically significant difference in how often Erica was designated as high potential across the passion (M = 27.2%, SE = 3.6%) and control conditions (M = 20.2%, SE = 3.4%; $b = 0.07$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.17$) when she was a reasonably high performer (see Figure 3(a)).[17] Within the passion condition, Scott was more likely than Erica to be categorized as high potential (36.4% for Scott versus 27.2% for Erica; $b = 0.09$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.065$), although this did not meet the common threshold of statistical significance. In the control condition, there was no significant gender difference in high-potential designations (22.6% for Scott and 20.2% for Erica; $b = 0.02$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.64$). In other words, the expression of passion gave rise to a gender gap in high-potential ratings because of the

**Figure 3.** Study 2: High-Potential Designation and Diligence by Gender and Condition (for Reasonably High Performers)



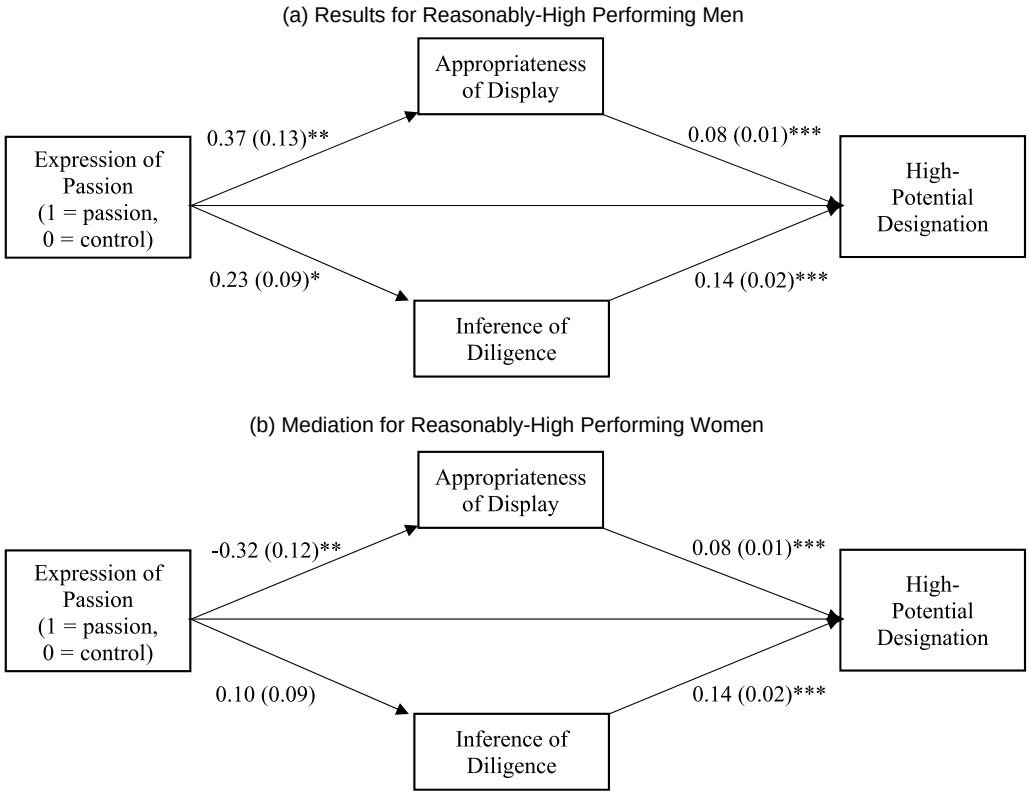

*Notes*. Figure 3 displays the results from Study 2. Panel (a) demonstrates that the gender gap in high-potential designation manifests in the passion but not the control condition. Panel (b) demonstrates that perceived appropriateness of emotional display was lower for women in the passion condition (relative to the control condition), but higher for men in the passion condition (relative to the control condition). Panel (c) (through survey questions) and panel (d) (through qualitative codes) highlight a gender difference in diligence, such that diligence was higher in the passion condition for men (relative to the control condition), but not women.

advantage conferred upon the reasonably high-performing male employee.[18]

**Female Penalty Through Reduced Appropriateness of Display.** We next turned to test our proposed mechanisms: appropriateness of emotional display and inferences of diligence. First, we focus on each mediator separately: we describe the results with the mediator as the outcome, then the indirect effect through the mediator. For the indirect effect, we tested the moderated mediation models with Model 12 draws from his categorization of models (Hayes 2018) using 5,000 bootstraps (Figure 4) using the PROCESS function of the package bruceR (Broadly Useful Convention and Efficient R functions) in R (Bao 2021). Then, we describe the results when appropriateness and diligence are parallel mediators in the same model.

We began with appropriateness (Hypothesis 2). Running the three-way ANOVA on appropriateness as the dependent variable, we found a statistically significant main effect of gender ($F(1, 1{,}357) = 37.36$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$) such that Scott's emotional display was seen as

**Figure 4.** Study 2: Expressed Passion on High-Potential Designations via Diligence and Appropriateness




*Notes.* Figure 4 displays results of multiple mediation analyses for Study 2. Coefficient values are displayed, followed by standard errors in parentheses. Panel (a) displays the indirect effect of condition on high-potential designation via appropriateness and diligence for reasonably high-performing men (indirect effect (appropriate): $b = 0.029$, SE = 0.010, $p = 0.003$, [0.012, 0.050]; indirect effect (diligence): $b = 0.032$, SE = 0.013, $p = 0.014$, [0.008, 0.059]; direct effect: $b = 0.077$, SE = 0.048, $p = 0.109$, [−0.017, 0.170]). Panel (b) displays the results of the same analysis for reasonably high-performing women (indirect effect (appropriate): $b = -0.026$, SE = 0.012, $p = 0.027$, [−0.049, −0.004]; indirect effect (diligence): $b = 0.015$, SE = 0.014, $p = 0.309$, [−0.013, 0.043]; direct effect: $b = 0.081$, SE = 0.05 $p = 0.08$, [−0.011, 0.172]); $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

more appropriate than Erica's. Importantly, there was a statistically significant interaction between gender and the passion condition ($F(1, 1{,}357) = 23.95$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$). Probing this two-way interaction demonstrated a female penalty: Erica's display of passion was seen as less appropriate (M = 5.12, SE = 0.09) compared to control (M = 5.44, SE = 0.08; $b = -0.32$, SE = 0.12, $p = 0.009$), whereas Scott's display of passion was seen as more appropriate (M = 5.88, SE = 0.08) relative to control (M = 5.51, SE = 0.09; $b = 0.37$, SE = 0.13, $p = 0.003$; see Figure 3, panel B). These effects did not differ by performance condition, such that the three-way interaction between gender, passion, and performance conditions was not statistically significant ($F(1, 1{,}357) = 0.48$, $p = 0.490$, $\eta^2 = 0.0004$).

In turn, there was a positive indirect effect of passion via appropriateness on high potential for Scott ($b = 0.48$; SE = 0.015; $p = 0.001$; 95% confidence interval (CI), [0.019, 0.078]), and a negative indirect effect for Erica ($b = -0.042$; SE = 0.018; $p = 0.019$; 95% CI, [−0.077, −0.007]). The indirect effect of passion via appropriateness on high potential was positive and significant for men at all performance levels and negative and significant for women at all performance levels. Critically, the female penalty occurred in reporting Erica's expression of passion as less appropriate, but there was no gender difference in the extent to which appropriateness of emotional display per se was valued for high-potential designations: perceived appropriateness of emotional display significantly and positively predicted high-potential categorization ($b = 0.13$, SE = 0.010, $p < 0.001$), and this relationship was not moderated by employee gender or employee performance conditions ($p > 0.51$). Thus, we found support for a female penalty for expressions of passion through appropriateness: expressing passion was seen as less appropriate for women, which made them less likely to be designated as high potential.

**Male Advantage Through Inferences of Diligence Among Unexceptional Employees.** Next, to test diligence as our mechanism (Hypothesis 3b), we examined how passion, gender, and performance affected inferences of diligence. Running the same ANOVA on

diligence as the dependent variable, we found a main effect of performance ($F(1, 1{,}358) = 7.61$, $p = 0.006$, $\eta^2 = 0.006$), such that exceptional performers were inferred to be more diligent (M = 6.23, SE = 0.032) than reasonably high performers (M = 6.10, SE = 0.032). We also found a directional main effect of passion which did not meet the standard threshold for statistical significance ($F(1, 1{,}358) = 2.98$, $p = 0.08$, $\eta^2 = 0.002$), such that employees in the passion condition were descriptively inferred to be more diligent (M = 6.21, SE = 0.03) than employees in the control condition (M = 6.13, SE = 0.03; see Figure 3(c)). The main effect of gender was not statistically significant ($F(1, 1{,}358) = 0.13$, $p = 0.72$, $\eta^2 = 0.0001$), likely because gender differences in inferred diligence vary as a function of passion and performance level, as we theorize. Although the three-way interaction was not statistically significant ($F(1, 1{,}358) = 1.46$, $p = 0.23$), given our focus, we again tested the contrasts within the reasonably high-performance condition. In this group, Scott was inferred to be more diligent in the passion condition (M = 6.21, SE = 0.06) than the control condition (M = 5.98, SE = 0.07; $b = 0.23$, SE = 0.09, $p = 0.01$). In contrast, for Erica, there was no statistically significant difference between the passion (M = 6.16, SE = 0.06) and control conditions (M = 6.06, SE = 0.06; $b = 0.10$, SE = 0.09, $p = 0.25$; see Figure 3(b)).[19] That is, passion boosts inferences of diligence for reasonably high-performing men but not for reasonably high-performing women.

In turn, among reasonably high-performing male employees, there was a positive indirect effect of passion on high-potential designation through diligence ($b = 0.044$; SE = 0.044; $p = 0.012$; bootstrapped 95% CI, [0.011, 0.079]). In contrast, for reasonably high-performing Erica, there was no statistically significant indirect effect of passion on high-potential designation through diligence ($b = 0.020$; SE = 0.020; $p = 0.30$; bootstrapped 95% CI, [−0.018, 0.058]). Critically, there was no gender difference in the extent to which diligence was valued for high-potential designations: as theorized, diligence was significantly and positively related to high-potential categorization ($b = 0.20$, SE = 0.014, $p < 0.001$), and this relationship was not moderated by employee gender or employee performance conditions (all $p > 0.16$). Taken together, and supporting Hypothesis 3b, expressing passion increased predictions of diligence for reasonably high-performing men, which made them more likely to be designated as high potential, reflecting a male advantage. The same was not true for reasonably high-performing women, or exceptionally performing employees overall.[20]

Importantly, when appropriateness and diligence are parallel mediators in the same model, both pathways remain robust (see Figure 4). For diligence, there remains a statistically significant and positive indirect effect for reasonably high-performing Scott but not reasonably high-performing Erica, whereas for appropriateness, there remains a statistically significant and positive indirect effect for Scott (at both performance levels) and a negative indirect effect for Erica (at both performance levels). This supports our theorizing of two distinct pathways that both impose a female penalty (via gendered judgments of appropriateness of emotional display) and confer a male advantage (via gendered inferences about diligence). It also underscores the uniqueness of diligence as a gendered inference from perceptions of passion for *reasonably high performers* in particular: the female penalty for passion via appropriateness applies across levels of performance, but the male advantage for diligence occurred only when Scott was a reasonably high performer, because exceptional men and women were expected to be highly diligent regardless of their passion.

## Supplementary Analyses of Open-Text Responses

To supplement our quantitative tests, we also analyzed the nomination forms' open-text responses, where participants articulated the reasoning behind their high-potential designation decisions. We preregistered analyses of the open-text-box data because we intended for them to supplement our main results. On average, participants' nominations were 42 words long (SD = 20.5, range = 6 to 204 words, similar to previous research; e.g., see Wang et al. 2022). This supplemental analysis of open-text responses allows us to triangulate evidence for one of our hypothesized mechanisms using participants' own words (e.g., for a similar approach, see Rivera and Tilcsik 2016, Correll et al. 2020, Campbell and Hahl 2022).[21]

We developed initial code categories around the presence of passion, any mention of performance, and any mention of diligence. The first two authors coded 100 of the open-text-box responses to develop new codes and refine existing codes. The final code definition for diligence aligned closely with our theoretical definition: any "mention that the employee is hardworking, dedicated, and have a strong work ethic." We focus primarily on the results for diligence but provide the list of common codes and example quotes in Table 5. After finalizing the codes, two research assistants blind to the purpose of the study and experimental conditions coded all open-text-box responses. Each nomination form could be tagged with multiple codes. We later added an additional research assistant to code only for diligence, given our theoretical focus on this variable as the mechanism of our effects. We calculated the interrater reliability to justify aggregation. The three raters had good agreement for the diligence code (ICC(2,1) = 0.56, ICC(2,$k$) = 0.79); we therefore averaged across raters. We examined the relative frequency of our coded themes across the different experimental conditions for those (469 out of 1,366) who designated the employee

**Table 5.** Study 2: Full List of Qualitative Codes and Definitions

| Code | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Competence | Mentions that this person performs well/to a high caliber | "I think she would be a good asset to upper management given her natural abilities, leadership potential, and ability to work with others." |
| | | "We should be taking care to move Scott up in our organization. He is exactly the kind of top talent we need. His passion and intellect are clear, and his performance numbers are astonishing." |
| Passion | Mentions that this person is passionate for their role (specifically mentions the word "passion") | "Erica demonstrates and encompasses one of the most important key indicators of success, and that is passion. A love for what she does and the clients she serves, she is a true asset in this role … and she gets my highest recommendations." |
| | | "I believe that Scott has the abilities needed to be a senior consultant. He is passionate and knowledgeable about the work and takes the time to learn about the client's needs and goals." |
| Diligence | Mentions that this person is hardworking, is dedicated, has a strong work ethic | "Erica seems passionate about the future of her career and is able to explain things very well. She seems like she is eager to make progress in her career and will work hard to achieve her goals." |
| | | "Scott is a hard working individual who exceeds in all necessary fields to further himself in this company. Not only does he demonstrate passion and need in his work, he also works efficiently to leave a lasting mark on those he encounters. Given his current abilities he shows great potential to lead in this company." |
| Enthusiasm | Mentions that this person displays strong positive affect, comes across as excited and/or energetic | "Erica seems highly motivated by her job to the point she sees it as a calling. She exudes enthusiasm and seems like a good fit. Few others demonstrate this level of enthusiasm." |
| | | "This employee's enthusiasm for his work is exactly what is needed for his future potential. I could detect his passion very strongly. His articulation and personable demeanor also really stood out for me." |
| Predicted ability in new role | Mentions that this person would thrive as a leader and/or possesses leadership aptitude | "Erica is very passionate about her work and what she does is extremely important to her. She fulfills the aspects of the job and would serve as a great leader and mentor to others in the organization. She has a huge amount of leadership potential." |
| | | "I can tell Scott put a lot of thought and effort and passion into his work. He has passion to make a difference and he carries this forward into his work. … You can't have a leader without the rest of the team, and I think Scott has what it takes." |
| Clear communication style | Mentions that this person is clear, articulates well, is organized | "Erica is very passionate about her work. She is able to describe the case she went through well and clearly articulate why she found it particularly meaningful." |
| | | "Scott is a very well organized worker. Not only has he demonstrated his abilities to successfully complete a project with his careful planning, he's also shown that he works and communicates very well with a team. Based on these reasons I feel that Scott meets all the necessary requirements for advancement here." |

*Notes.* We present common qualitative codes among nominations for those categorized as high potential. These qualitative codes were developed and refined by the first two authors based on the first 100 open-text-box responses. We only present definition and example quotes above for qualitative codes for which at least 5% ($n = 23$) of the responses were coded as such. Additional codes of interest (which were coded for less than 5% of the nominations) include "willingness to improve," "motivated by intrinsic rewards," "motivated by external rewards," "(in)appropriateness of emotional display," "(un)professional," "arrogant," "questions contributions," "nervous," "not ready," and "predicted satisfaction in new role."

they evaluated as high potential. This allows us to compare how often diligence is offered as part of their reasoning for making this designation. We first describe the overall patterns and give examples of our qualitative themes. We then share the results of our analyses of these frequency patterns.

**Themes.** As expected, participants referred to employees' passion and performance frequently and took both into account in their high-potential designations, reflected in one participant stating, "We should be taking care to move Scott up in our organization. He is exactly the kind of top talent we need. His passion and intellect are clear, and his performance numbers are astonishing." Another participant wrote, "When I think about potential, I think about passion. Erica shows a high level of passion for growth, and I believe that with that high drive and energy, she can very well grow into someone who would well suit a senior consultant."

Evaluators made several attributions about the value of passion as a rationale for high-potential designations. Notably, diligence (i.e., hard work, industriousness, and

dedication) was highlighted frequently when designating the reasonably high-performing man who expressed passion as high potential. In an illuminating example, one evaluator remarked (emphases ours): "I think Scott has a lot of potential. He's passionate about his job and *works really hard to excel at it*. I think he will go far in this company. I believe he would be a great asset, so I would be proud to nominate him for the promotion. Another stated: "Scott is extremely knowledgeable and very passionate. With his *hard work and dedication*, I proudly nominate Scott." Importantly, *diligence* was only highlighted for Scott's high-potential designation when he expressed passion; there was virtually almost no mention of *diligence* in the control condition. These rationales are consistent with our quantitative results showing that reasonably high-performing men who were passionate were predicted to be highly diligent.

Among those who evaluated the reasonably high-performing woman (Erica), *diligence* was also a commonly used rationale for designating high potential. However, Erica was described as diligent whether she expressed passion or not. For example, one evaluator described Erica in the control condition (emphasis ours): "I think she is a *hard worker* that takes pride in her work. She shows in the video the care she has for this company and how she wants to succeed." That is, even without displaying passion, evaluators predicted that Erica would be diligent and hardworking. Thus, whereas diligence was highlighted as a specific benefit for the reasonably high-performing man *only* when he expressed passion, diligence was mentioned whether or not the reasonably high-performing woman expressed passion. This points to passion denoting diligence as a unique mechanism conferring an advantage for reasonably high-performing men.

**Quantitative Analysis of Codes.** We next conducted an exploratory quantitative analysis of the codes from the open-text data. To do so, we ran a two (passion condition) by two (gender condition) by two (performance condition) ANOVA on the *diligence* code. Although the overall three-way interaction was not statistically significant ($F(1, 461) = 2.50$, $p = 0.11$, $\eta^2 = 0.005$), we focused on the contrast within reasonably high-performing employees given our theorizing and Hypothesis 3b. Participants were more likely to mention diligence as a reason for designating reasonably high-performing Scott as high potential in the passion (M = 13.4%, SE = 3.0%) than in the control condition (M = 2.0%, SE = 4.3%; $b = 0.11$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.031$). Yet, for reasonably high-performing Erica, participants were equally likely to mention diligence in their nominations of high-potential designation regardless of whether she was in the passion (M = 12.9%, SE = 3.7%) or the control condition (M = 12.6%, SE = 4.1%; $b = 0.00$, SE = 0.06, $p = 0.96$; see Figure 3(d)). Diligence was mentioned equally for men and women in the exceptionally high-performance condition, with no differences by gender or passion (all $p > 0.12$). These analyses align with our earlier results: diligence is a unique inference from passion when displayed by men (but not women) that explains its gendered benefit for high potential among reasonably high performers.[22]

## Discussion

In Study 2, we found support for our full model. As in Study 1, men were designated as high potential more often than women (in support of Hypothesis 1). We also found support for two mechanisms. First, reflecting the female penalty path, expressions of passion were judged as less appropriate for women than men, regardless of their performance level, which in turn explained women's lower likelihood of being designated as high potential (in support of Hypothesis 2). Second, participants were more likely to categorize a reasonably high-performing man as high potential when he displayed passion (versus not) but were not more likely to categorize a reasonably high-performing woman as high potential when she did (versus not; in support of Hypothesis 3a). Reflecting the male advantage path, we found that, for the reasonably high-performing man, expressing passion increased inferences of his diligence, explaining the higher likelihood of designating him as high potential, whereas passion had no statistically significant effect on inferences of diligence for reasonably high-performing women (in support of Hypothesis 3b). In two supplementary studies (reported in more detail in the Online Supplement), we find that diligence is the most common spontaneous trait inference from passion, and that the gendered reactions we observe here are specific to affective expressions of passion, rather than verbal assertions that denote the high identity relevance.

Our theorized mechanism through diligence represents a more novel form of gender bias in response to expressions of passion. As such, we explored whether our core predicted mechanisms remained robust to alternative potential inferences of passion that might explain the effects we observe (including ambition, charisma, and enthusiasm). We find that most alternative mechanisms explain a general benefit of expressed passion for all employees across performance and gender conditions, and, importantly, the gendered pattern for diligence remains robust when including each of these alternative mechanisms. Additional exploratory analyses reported in the Online Supplement add further nuance to our effects, finding that the gendered mediating effect of diligence was observed most strongly through the item "hardworking," further underscoring our conceptualization of diligence as fundamentally about inferring future effort (see Appendix H and Table S6 in the Online Supplement).[23]

## General Discussion

Across two main studies in the field and lab, as well as two supplementary studies, we developed and tested theory about *why* and *when* evaluations of passion are biased by gender in high-potential settings. In archival data from a large, multinational organization's talent scouting process as well as a preregistered online experiment using carefully developed video materials, we found that men were more likely than women to be designated as high potential. Consistent with our theorizing, we found that gendered evaluations of employees' expressions of passion—one of the most common criteria used in high-potential designations—are one reason for this gender gap, particularly among reasonably high but not exceptional performers (the population for which being designated as high potential is possible but not assured). We introduce and find support for a dual pathway model for the gendered benefits of expressed passion that distinguishes a female penalty (via gendered judgments of appropriateness of emotional display) and a male advantage (via gendered inferences about diligence), which offers a broader explanation than we have had before for how (reasonably high-performing) men gain outsized access to upward mobility in organizations.

### Theoretical Contributions

Our theory and findings make several contributions to extant literature. First, our findings contribute to the passion literature by explicitly engaging with its intersection with gender inequality. We examine whether, when, and why passion offers gendered benefits by focusing on evaluators' reactions to expressions of passion in a consequential workplace advancement context. Research to date on responses to naturalistic expressions of passion has rarely, if at all, engaged with gender (Breugst et al. 2012; Li et al. 2017; Jachimowicz et al. 2019, 2022; Allison et al. 2022), and experimental research manipulating passion has often relied on male participants (e.g., Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Cho and Jiang 2022). We draw on theories about the interpersonal effects of emotions to theorize that the expression of passion—given its intensely emotional connotations—produces gendered evaluative outcomes through two pathways: (1) a penalty imposed on women via gendered emotional stereotypes and emotional display rules that mean that expressions of passion are perceived as less appropriate for women than men (Shields 2002, Brescoll 2016) and (2) an advantage conferred to men via inferential processes that stem from passion (Van Kleef 2009, Van Kleef et al. 2012) that amplify beliefs about how diligent men (but not women) will be because men are held to a lower baseline standard for it (Biernat et al. 1991, Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997).

This sets up a potential double bind for women who express passion: organizations increasingly expect passion in the workplace (Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022) and impose costs on those who fail to meet this expectation (Kwon et al. 2023, Kwon and Sonday 2024). Yet living up to such expectations requires women (and men) to express passion, including through affective manifestations. However, when women engage in such expressions, we find they are both penalized for them *and* simultaneously accrue less benefits from them than men. The increased valuation of passion in the contemporary workforce may create an emotional labyrinth for women who must toe the line about what emotional expressions are deemed "appropriate" for them, increasing their already higher emotional labor and burden (Brescoll 2016). More broadly, our insights generate additional questions about how passion might be gendered at different stages of social perception and cognition in different contexts, including whether these and related processes may also gender the *experience* of passion (Curran et al. 2015, Pollack et al. 2020, Allison et al. 2022). Overall, our findings highlight the possible ways in which passion may (re)produce inequality (Cardon et al. 2009; Curran et al. 2015; Jachimowicz et al. 2019, 2022; Pollack et al. 2020).

We also extend prior literature on passion by offering inferences of diligence as an explanation for its interpersonal value at work and for advancement. Though touted as an important and even aspirational attribute (Cardon et al. 2009; Curran et al. 2015; Jachimowicz et al. 2019, 2022; Pollack et al. 2020) associated with beneficial workplace outcomes (Chen et al. 2009, Jachimowicz et al. 2019, Cho and Jiang 2022), less is known about why passion is valued and how its value is derived in interpersonal contexts (Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022). We theorize that evaluators' predictions about passionate employees' diligence offers one explanation for the value of expressing passion in settings where one's future potential is evaluated. Importantly, we demonstrate that this key inference is *gendered* because of deeply held cross-cultural stereotypes of women that explain women's achievements as dominantly a function of their effort (diligence), and men's achievements as dominantly a function of their innate talent (brilliance; Jackson and Dempster 2009, Heyder and Kessels 2015, Leslie et al. 2015, Bian et al. 2018, Napp and Breda 2022). These stereotypes mean that men are held to lower standards for diligence than women (Biernat et al. 1991, Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997), which provides reasonably high-performing men with more runway for their expressions of passion to lead to perceptions of their diligence. Thus, we foreground diligence as an important (gendered) inference drawn from passion.

We also contribute to the literature on gender bias in ambiguous evaluative contexts. First, we build on prior literature on gender and emotional stereotypes, which

finds that particularly intense emotional expressions lead to women being seen as overly emotional and out of control (Hutson-Comeaux and Kelly 2002, Shields 2002, Timmers et al. 2003, Brescoll 2016). This line of work has commonly focused on penalties women incur for displays of dominant emotions, including anger (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008) or pride (Plant et al. 2000, Brescoll 2016). Extending this work on emotional display rules, we theorize and find that gender backlash also occurs for the intense but relatively positively valanced expressions of passion, highlighting that display rules may also be gendered even for emotional expressions that are commonly desired and rewarded (Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022).

It is interesting to note that we found the perceived appropriateness of expressions of passion to be gendered in multiple ways. In Study 2, we observed both the female penalty we predicted (that passion in women is seen as less appropriate relative to the control condition), as well as a (surprising) male advantage (that passion in men was seen as more appropriate relative to the control condition; see Figure 3(b)). Given that the control condition was not actively *dispassionate*, we interpret this pattern of results to suggest that display rules may exist that proscribe how passionate men *should* be. This opens a conceptual window for future research to explore whether display rules exist for women and men not just at high levels of intense emotional expressions—the focus of prior research—but also at moderate levels, that is, examining at which level different emotional prescriptions for women and men might apply.

Second, we introduce diligence as a novel mechanism for gender differences in evaluators' responses to expressions of passion which advantages reasonably high-performing (but not exceptional) men. This mechanism advances our understanding of how gender frames evaluations beyond prior suggestions that gender may shape how passion is perceived in men and women when they engage in the same displays and behaviors (which we do not find evidence for; Wolf et al. 2016, Correll et al. 2020). More precisely, we advance prior theory to suggest that even when men and women's expressions are perceived as embodying a criterion (like passion) to the same level, the inferences that evaluators draw from those expressions about what those whom they are evaluating will do in the future may still be gendered. We suggest this inferential path is particularly important in future-oriented decisions, such as those that designate high potential, because they depend on evaluations about future performance.

This male advantage that arises through inferences of diligence from passion is likely to be particularly subtle and pernicious. Biases along this inferential pathway are more covert and thus harder to control or account for in formal processes. Even if one were to "fix" the valuation of passion itself, gendered inferences could still create gender gaps in evaluation outcomes. In contrast to inequity frames that emphasize unequal penalties for women, prior research suggests unequal benefits (or male advantage) are categorized as discrimination less readily (Phillips and Jun 2022). Indeed, shifting standards confer this male advantage through seemingly positive stereotypes of women as hardworking. The inferences drawn perpetuate inequality by maintaining low standards for men while upholding high standards for women in ways that make it more challenging for women to benefit from expressing passion. Note, however, that whereas the current research focused on diligence given its centrality as a key inference from passion—and the associated lower bar for diligence in men than women (Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997)—we encourage future research to examine whether inferences from other criteria may lead to a female advantage when shifting standards beget a lower bar for an inference in women than men. A good place to start looking would be the various other inferences from passion we identified in our analysis of alternative mechanisms, such as charisma.

## Practical Contributions

Our findings have several practical implications for organizations and managers. In theory, high-potential programs place women and men on an upward trajectory by allocating opportunities and resources to them to support their development (Silzer and Church 2009a) and facilitate higher performance (i.e., Pygmalion effect; Eden 1992, Wang et al. 2022). We find that high-potential programs may not only fail to mitigate the gender gap but also perpetuate gender inequality. Supplementary analyses of Study 1 data reported in the Online Supplement suggest that gendered returns to being perceived as passionate were particularly large for employees at the lowest organizational level (individual contributors). Critically, this level is also where gender representation was most equal (48.2% female) compared to higher levels. These findings complicate organizations' seemingly well-intentioned ambitions to address gender inequality through high-potential programs. A gender gap in high-potential designations reverberates at later promotion decisions, and the label "high potential" is sticky, with those deemed to "pass the hurdle … given the benefit of the doubt in the future" (Silzer and Church 2009a, p. 272). In this organizational context, they may have instead exacerbated inequality.

Although this might imply a simple solution of abandoning passion as a criterion in high-potential designations, the current research suggests a more nuanced approach might be in order. Our findings about the distinctively gendered nature of affective expressions of passion highlight how managers and organizations could avoid and reduce such biases. Rather than making judgments about employees based on affective displays

of passion, managers could contribute to more equitable outcomes by seeking out conversations and sustained interactions with employees to ascertain how personally important they find their work. Indeed, our supplementary study demonstrated that when passion was expressed via verbal expressions of identity relevance, there was no gender difference in ratings of potential, appropriateness, or predicted diligence. Future research should also explore whether raising awareness of this gender bias is enough to reduce its prevalence.

Another alternative may include asking organizations to consider how to raise the bar for (reasonably high-performing) men. Evaluators could also be asked to compare an employee's diligence to other reference groups, for example, or organizations can make the subjective inferences inherent in high-potential designation processes more explicit to evaluators (Uhlmann and Cohen 2005). More generally, organizations may wish to reconsider relying on subjective attributes when clear behavioral indicators observed over a long timeframe would be more objective. Finally, senior staff members who make final decisions about high-potential designations could consider scoping for potential gender biases explicitly or implementing gender quotas, the latter of which, one study found, raised men's competence more than women's (Besley et al. 1982). Ultimately, we highlight several challenges in implementing quick fixes that are unlikely to address systemic biases but note the promise that structural interventions might play in narrowing the gender gap in high-potential designations, which contributes to advancing gender equality in leadership ranks.

## Limitations and Future Directions

We encourage future research to elucidate other criteria that may fall prey to this dual process of gender bias beyond expressions of passion. Our theorizing sheds light on the kinds of criteria that may be particularly susceptible: those that necessitate an inferential process to derive their value to an outcome, whether affective (Van Kleef 2009, Van Kleef et al. 2012), distal (and thus requiring an additional inferential leap; Van Iddekinge et al. 2009), or multifaceted (and thus requiring that evaluators "unpack" them to derive their value). We hope our theorizing and findings provide a starting point for future research on this topic.

Several additional findings indicate theoretical nuances to investigate in future research. First, although we test various alternative mechanisms for our hypothesized effect, others that we do not test directly remain possible. We cannot fully rule out that passion might be perceived more readily in men than women, even though our empirical data from both Studies 1 and 2 show no evidence of gender differences in viewing passion. Differences in how passionate women and men are perceived to be could add another layer of bias to its use as a criterion, and future research could investigate more directly whether women and men express passion differently, and whether it is perceived differently for women and men in naturalistic organizational settings (though see the work by Krautter et al. (2023), who do not find evidence in support of this view). These potential differences may depend on occupational or industry contexts. Women may have a smaller acceptable behavioral repertoire to express passion in male-typed industries, for example, a possibility we encourage future research to examine.

Additionally, future work should investigate our evidence for gendered display rules around passion and explore whether these are further moderated by organizational contexts (e.g., cultural display norms for passion at the organization, office, or team level, or by profession, occupation, or industry; Hochschild 1979, Rafaeli and Sutton 1989, Wolf et al. 2016) or cultural contexts (Ekman 1987, Matsumoto 1990). The target of passion—what employees are passionate about—may further modify gendered display rules around passion. For instance, there may be work domains for which women are prescribed to be passionate, such as in professions that place an emphasis on passion for helping others. Future research could also examine contextual moderators for when expressions of passion may be seen as more appropriate (and result in benefits) for women. For instance, it might be seen as more appropriate for women to express passion when the domain is non–work related, or when women highlight the positive affect and warmth that expressing passion may exude. Despite the widespread emphasis on passion in contemporary organizations (Jachimowicz and Weisman 2022), the paucity of research investigating whether and how passion is gendered reinforces our hope that this work inspires future research at the intersection between gender and passion that tackles the various ways that gender might frame how passion is experienced, expressed, perceived, or rewarded versus penalized.

Beyond expanding our understanding of how passion is gendered, future work should also examine how other social categories frame evaluations of passion. One limitation of this work is our focus on gender without considering its interaction with race. Throughout our studies, we either lacked information on race (Study 1) or controlled for it by holding the race of the target actor constant (i.e., as white in Study 2). Although we did not examine how race interacts with our findings, past research has suggested important intersectional differences. For example, scholars have theorized that the passion Black men display may not be interpreted as passion but rather as anger, and that displays of passion might look different for Asians who are stereotyped as being less emotionally expressive (Rao and Neely 2019). Display rules may also differ along race/gender

intersections (Motro et al. 2021), whereby passion may be seen as more appropriate (and thus confer greater benefits) for some groups over others. We encourage future research to investigate how passion intersects with other social categories (such as social class; Cech 2021) and examine how passion may be expressed, perceived, or evaluated differently as a function of a target's social categories and their intersections.

Our studies also reveal several additional boundary conditions we encourage future research to examine further. In supplemental exploratory analyses in Study 1, we found suggestive evidence that the gendered benefits of passion on high-potential designation are amplified among English-speaking countries (the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom), consistent with extant research on cultural differences in the emphasis placed on passion in these geographies (Curran et al. 2015, Li et al. 2021, O'Keefe et al. 2022). We also find that these gender gaps are particularly pronounced among early-career employees (i.e., individual contributors in our Study 1), suggesting that the gendered benefits of passion are more likely to emerge under conditions of increased uncertainty—in this case, estimating the future potential of newer, lower-ranking employees.

Other organizational and occupational boundary effects likely exist, although we cannot fully rule them out or test them with our existing data. For instance, important contexts to consider are the relative representation of men and women in the local department, organization, or profession, as well as the extent to which those contexts are seen as stereotypically masculine. Our existing data can only partially address and test these contexts, although evidence of moderation is mixed. For instance, both Study 1 and 2 provide suggestive evidence that our effects may be especially salient or possibly unique to male-dominated and stereotypically masculine contexts. Specifically, the organizational setting of Study 1 is an engineering firm that is male dominated and stereotypically associated with men. Supplemental analyses suggest that the gendered benefits of passion are descriptively strongest in male-dominated departments, although the local gender composition of the department does not significantly moderate our effects. In Study 2, we controlled for the organizational and occupational context by specifying a healthcare consulting context (a relatively gender-neutral field) and still found gendered evaluations of potential via gendered benefits of passion. We also found evidence that evaluator gender may matter: In Study 2, male evaluators were more likely to rate male employees as higher potential than female employees, but the gendered valuation of passion was stronger for female evaluators. These findings provide evidence that gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched in cultural valuations of passion, and that merely increasing the proportion of female representation in leadership ranks is unlikely to resolve such biases. Overall, our supplemental analyses in this paper provide mixed evidence about contextual moderators for these effects that future research can theorize and test more deductively.

Further, consider that in Study 2 (though not in Study 1), we found that passion was beneficial among exceptional female (but not male) employees. This aligns with prior research identifying that some gender effects can reverse for the highest-performing women. These women can receive a pay premium compared to similar men (Leslie et al. 2017), as well as positive attributions about their agentic behavior (Rosette and Tost 2010). To explore the potential benefits of passion for exceptionally performing women further, we reexamined our Study 2 data using measures we report in the Online Supplement. We found that passion had an indirect effect on high-potential designations for exceptional women by shifting predictions of their self-assured agency. This was the only mechanism that exerted a descriptively unique and larger effect for exceptional women, and no other groups (see the Online Supplement for further analyses described here and in the following).[24] Qualitatively, evaluators emphasized the enthusiasm of exceptional women who expressed passion. This pattern of results suggests that observers generate inferences about passion in exceptional women that differ from stereotypical images of cold but brilliant women (Quadlin 2018). We encourage future research to further elucidate why passion may benefit exceptional women specifically. More generally, the data indicate that the main effect of passion on potential for exceptional employees functions through a different mechanism than the appropriateness of their emotional display or inferences about their diligence. We implore subsequent research to examine ways that passion derives interpersonal benefits and value in organizations beyond what has been shown to date (Jachimowicz et al. 2019). Our analysis of alternative mechanisms as well as our supplemental study examining naturalistic inferences about passion provides several promising avenues for this future research.

Finally, we note two empirical limitations of our data. First, our data focus only on who is designated as high potential and does not follow employees' subsequent career paths or promotions. Although there is good reason to believe that the resources and development opportunities that employees in high-potential programs receive accelerates their advancement (Benson et al. 2022), we encourage future research to collect data on promotions and performance over time. Second, although the patterns of the three-way interactions among gender, passion, and performance were consistent across both studies, in neither case did they reach statistical significance—with the caveat that the sample size of Study 1 was restricted by access to organizational data—highlighting the need to replicate our

findings in larger samples. The lack of consistent statistical significance in our results may also be a function of contextual moderators such as geographic location, evaluator gender, or employee hierarchical level, which we encourage future research to examine more closely.

## Conclusion

The current research considered gender biases in identifying high-potential employees based on passion, one of the most common criteria contemporary organizations use in this process. Across two studies in the field and in the lab, as well as two supplementary studies, we find converging evidence that women are less likely than men to be designated as high potential. We develop and test theory to show that the gendered benefits of passion expressions emerge through two pathways, one that imposes a female penalty (via gendered judgments about the appropriateness of emotion displays) and another that confers a male advantage (via gendered inferences about future diligence). Our findings highlight how seemingly innocuous and even beneficial stereotypes of women as more diligent create a shifting standard that begets a lower bar for men, in particular those we may refer to colloquially as "mediocre men" (Oluo 2020), providing them with a boost their female counterparts cannot access, and ultimately contributing to gender inequality at the top. As Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State, famously said: "There's plenty of room in the world for mediocre men. There is no room for mediocre women" (Time 2017).

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### Endnotes

[1] Note that an additional way to characterize passion is to focus on the target of passion, that is, what people are passionate about.

[2] Our two supplemental studies test our underlying assumptions and rule out alternative explanations.

[3] Note that our theorizing about such gendered effects focuses on the *affective* expression of passion rather than verbal statements that connote high identity relevance. We empirically test our assumptions in a supplementary study, which we describe at the end of Study 2, which we then discuss in more detail in the general discussion.

[4] For instance, evaluators may infer warmth, or charisma, among other inferences. We address alternative inferences by measuring and controlling for them in Study 2.

[5] We elaborate on this definition word by word in Appendix A in the Online Supplement and provide theoretical comparisons of diligence with other related constructs in Table S1 in the Online Supplement.

[6] In a supplemental study, we examined naturalistic inferences of passion in an open-ended setting, in which participants simply described trait inferences associated with passion (not for the purpose of a nomination form for high-potential nomination). Diligence emerged as the most common trait inference from passion (see the Online Supplement for further details), supporting our theorizing of diligence as a spontaneous and key inference of passion.

[7] The full list of attributes and characteristics used in the potential scouting is "forward thinker," "agile learner," "different thinker," "people enabler," "resilient," "socially intelligent," "proactive," and, finally, "passionate." Managers are explicitly instructed to evaluate candidates on each of the eight attributes and incorporate all of the ratings holistically into their final recommendations about the employee's potential.

[8] Our categorization of whether a country is in Europe or not includes the United Kingdom as a European country.

[9] We acknowledge that this rating of passion may not align perfectly with prior measures and theory, given it was part of the organization's internal review process, and also that we do not capture expressions of passion which give rise to such ratings. We address this limitation in Study 2, where we were able to operationalize passion in a way that aligns with its theoretical conceptualization more closely, and more importantly, captures its expression.

[10] Given the process described here and the limitations of our archival data, we could not test for potential effects of evaluator gender in Study 1. We examine the role of evaluator gender in our second study.

[11] Note that this theoretical focus on the "high-potential" designation category versus not high potential (no potential, moderate potential) is also in line with prior research (Leslie et al. 2017), which largely finds distinct effects only for the high-potential designation.

[12] With the exception of Model 1 in Table 2, which is just OLS.

[13] Our preregistration did not include appropriateness because this mechanism was not initially part of our primary theoretical focus, but became more central during the review process. We therefore suggest that readers should view our empirical findings around appropriateness aimed at providing support for Hypothesis 2 as more exploratory.

[14] We derived this sample size a priori allowing for 150 responses per cell for sufficient power to detect a small-to-medium effect size (see Fath and Proudfoot 2024). With an eight-cell design, this meant a sample of 1,200. A pilot of the study indicated attrition due to failure on the focal attention check, so we increased our target recruitment to 1,500 to account for this attrition.

[15] Because our experimental manipulation comprises both affective expressions and a verbal expression of high identity relevance, we aimed to verify that the gendered outcomes we theorize and find

occur are due to the affective expressions of passion we theorize rather than the verbal affirmations of high identity relevance. To do so, we conducted a supplementary preregistered experiment with a passion manipulation focused only on verbal expressions of high identity relevance without any affective expressions of passion. As predicted, we find that when passion is expressed via high identity relevance alone, there are no gender differences in designations of high potential, the appropriateness of emotional display, or predictions of future diligence (see the Online Supplement). These findings support our theorizing that the gendered returns to passion are specific to its *affective* expression.

[16] We dropped the fourth item—"active (characterized by energetic work)"—because it had a much lower item loading (0.62 compared to other items loadings all above 0.80).

[17] Figure S2 in our Online Supplement plots the coefficients of passion on high potential by gender and performance for Studies 1 and 2.

[18] Within the *exceptional* performance condition, although not hypothesized, passion exerted a positive effect on high-potential ratings for Erica but not Scott. At exceptional performance levels, Erica was more likely to be designated as high potential in the passion condition (M = 43.3%, SE = 3.3%) compared to the control condition (M = 28.2%, SE = 3.7%; $b = 0.15$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.002$). Conversely, for Scott, regardless of whether he expressed passion (M = 49.1%, SE = 3.6%) or not (M = 44.9%, SE = 3.4%), he was similarly likely to be designated as high potential ($b = 0.04$, SE = 0.05, $p = 0.41$). These findings differ from our results from Study 1, where we found no difference in passion ratings by gender at exceptional performance levels. We discuss potential explanations for this divergence among exceptional performance levels in more detail in the general discussion.

[19] In the exceptional performance condition, ratings of diligence did not differ between the passion and control conditions for neither Erica ($M_{passion} = 6.23$, $M_{control} = 6.27$, $b = 0.04$, SE = 0.09, $p = 0.66$) nor Scott ($M_{passion} = 6.18$, $M_{control} = 6.24$, $b = -0.06$, SE = 0.09, $p = 0.53$), likely because of a ceiling effect of inferred diligence among exceptional performers.

[20] Predictions of future diligence did not explain the benefit of passion we observed for exceptionally high-performing women (indirect effect = 0.008; SE = 0.017; $p = 0.67$; bootstrapped 95% CI, [−0.026, 0.041]). We discuss the boost passion provides to exceptional women, and potential underlying mechanisms, in the general discussion.

[21] We focus on diligence but not appropriateness in our analysis of open-text responses because the former is more likely reflective of a deliberate cognitive process, whereas the latter reflects a more immediate reaction. Indeed, and in line with this logic, although we also coded for the (in)appropriateness of emotional display, there were only a handful of instances in which evaluators spontaneously mentioned this explicitly in their nomination forms.

[22] Note that these results qualitatively replicate when using Linguistic Inquiry Word Count, a text analysis software, to code for diligence (Pennebaker et al. 2015). For more details on this analysis, see our Online Supplement.

[23] We also find that gender differences in the evaluations of Scott and Erica were larger for female than male evaluators (see Figure S3 in the Online Supplement), a finding we discuss in more detail in General Discussion. Specifically, among male evaluators, there was a descriptively (but not significantly) higher likelihood of designating both Erica and Scott as high potential in the passion versus the control condition ($b = 0.09$, SE = 0.07, $p = 0.20$ for Erica; $b = 0.11$, SE = 0.07, $p = 0.12$ for Scott). However, female evaluators were more likely to rate Scott as high potential when he expressed passion compared to the control condition ($b = 0.18$, SE = 0.07, $p = 0.01$), but not more likely to rate Erica as high potential when she expressed passion ($b = 0.02$, SE = 0.07, $p = 0.79$). We describe the implications of these boundary conditions in the general discussion.

[24] We note that these findings are in line with predictions made in Ma et al. (2022) about the gendered benefits of self-assured agency for women, although they did not find support for their predictions with their data.

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