

# Gender and Competitive Preferences: The Role of Competition Size

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In a series of 8 studies, we examine whether gender differences in competition entry preferences are moderated by the size of the competition. Drawing on theories of gender roles and stereotypes, we show that women, relative to men, prefer to enter smaller compared with larger competitions. Studies 1a and 1b demonstrate this effect in observational data on preferences for working in differently sized firms and applying to differently sized colleges. Studies 2a and 2b replicate the effect with real behavioral decisions in different domains. We also find empirical evidence that prescriptive gender norms and stereotypes underlie this effect. In Study 3, we find experimental evidence that women and men differ in their preferences for differently sized groups under competition, but not in noncompetitive settings. Three additional experimental studies (Studies 4, 5a, and 5b) show that perceptions of comfort in small versus larger competitions underlie women's preferences. These findings suggest that women's preferences for smaller competitions may be driven by an adherence to prescriptive gender norms. We discuss the implications of the current findings for gender inequalities in organizations.

*Keywords:* gender, competition, preferences, entry decisions

Despite recent advances in gender equality in the workplace, women remain underrepresented in the top tiers of organizations. Among Fortune 500 companies, women comprise only 4.8% of CEOs, 14.6% of executive officers, and 16.9% of board members (Catalyst, 2014). Observed gender gaps in compensation among top-level executives, which are as high as 45%, have also been attributed to the fact that women are more likely to manage smaller companies and are less likely to be CEO, Chairman of the board, or President of an organization (Bertrand & Hallock, 2001).

A better understanding of gender differences in competition entry can help shed light on the disparities in organizational outcomes. As Niederle and Vesterlund (2011) note: "If women are more reluctant to compete, then they may be less likely to seek promotions or to enter male-dominated and competitive fields" (p. 602). When it comes to competition entry decisions, indeed, a large body of empirical evidence has demonstrated that, if given the choice, women shy away from competition (Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007, 2011). More often than not, however, women (and men) may not face a choice between entering or avoiding competition but instead must choose among different *kinds* of competition to enter. For example, when applying for a job, rather than forfeiting application, candidates may selectively apply to positions with more or fewer applicants.

Drawing on social psychological theories of gender differences and recent developments in the study of contextual influences on

gender differences in competition, we examine the role of competition size on competitive preferences of women versus men. Through both naturalistic data sets and experiments, we show that women, relative to men, prefer smaller competitions, that this gender difference is specific to competitions, and that it can be partly attributed to women's expectations about feeling more comfortable in smaller competitions. In addition to advancing our understanding of gender differences in competition, the present analysis also offers a new perspective on the persistence of gender inequalities and can provide a potential account of organizational inequalities such as gender wage gaps and the dearth of women in top organizational positions.

## Gender Differences in Competition

Research in economics has demonstrated several important gender differences in competition. Where competitive outcomes are concerned, women have been shown to underperform relative to men (Gneezy, Niederle, & Rustichini, 2003). That is, women and men differ significantly in how well they perform a task when their compensation scheme is based on a winner-take-all tournament. These performance differences, however, tend to dissipate outside competitions or when compensation is instead based on a piece rate scheme by which each person's reward is contingent upon their individual performance (Gneezy et al., 2003). These patterns of findings suggest that women and men do not differ in abilities but rather in their response to competition. Specifically, women's underperformance may be reflective of their choice to not compete (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2008). For example, when offered the choice to perform a task under either a competitive or a piece rate compensation scheme, women opted for the piece rate scheme, tending to avoid competition (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007; see also Gupta, Poulsen, & Villeval, 2005, 2013).

Similar patterns hold in other competitive contexts such as negotiations, which often require the parties to compete over

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distributive issues. Research has shown that women are significantly less likely than men to initiate negotiations and to recognize opportunities for negotiation (Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006; Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Women have also been shown to experience greater relief than men after their first offer is accepted, suggesting that negotiating is uncomfortable for women (Kray & Gelfand, 2009). More recently, gender differences in the preference for competition have also been linked to educational and occupational choices. Women's relative distaste for competition has been found to partially account for gender segregation in professions such as law, business, and management (Kleinjans, 2009).

### **Context and Gender Norms: A Gender-Congruency Account**

More important, these gender differences in competition entry preferences have also been shown to be moderated by contextual factors. The study of these factors, which focuses on the impact of the situation, is in line with well-established traditions in organization science and psychology that have focused on structural factors as a source of gender inequality (e.g., Eagly, 1987, 1997; Kanter, 1977). According to these theories (e.g., social role theory), prescribed norms for femininity are inconsistent with behaviors—such as being a leader or competing—that are associated with advancement at work (Eagly, 1987, 1997; Heilman, 2001). Women are perceived as more communal and less agentic than men and are expected to act accordingly (e.g., Bem, 1974; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Heilman, 2001). Prescriptive gender norms and stereotypes for women, thus, do not include competitive behavior. Furthermore, behaving in ways that are inconsistent with gender stereotypes is perceived as socially unacceptable (e.g., Bartol & Butterfield, 1976), can engender punishment from others (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001), and lead those who violate gender norms to experience anxiety (Luhborg & Zivian, 1995; Parry, 1987). Thus, people generally shy away from gender-incongruent contexts (Bem & Lenney, 1976). Indeed, in societies in which these stereotypes and norms do not exist or are reversed (e.g., matriarchal societies), women have been shown to be more likely to enter competitions than men (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009). Thus, the congruency of social norms and prescriptive gender stereotypes vis-à-vis the context appear to play a role in shaping women's competitive preferences.

In addition to explaining women's general reluctance to enter competitions, gender norms can also help identify the types of contextual factors that shape their propensity to compete and their preference regarding the nature of competition when competition is unavoidable. In theory, contextual factors that attenuate gender norms should moderate gender differences in competition entry decisions. Contexts in which prescriptive gender norms for women are not violated—or violated to a lesser extent—should assuage their general distaste for competition. In other words, if women must compete, they will opt for contexts that better resonate with gender norms, contexts that permit them to orient themselves in ways that are congruent with gender norms.

Indeed, recent studies support this notion. For instance, women were less likely to avoid negotiation when the topic was feminine (i.e., lactation) than masculine (i.e., compensation; Bear, 2011) and

also tended to perform better with feminine than masculine negotiation topics (Bear & Babcock, 2012). Although, as mentioned above, negotiation itself is still something women shy away from, feminine topics were sufficient to change the context such that the negotiation allowed women to behave in ways that were more congruent with gender norms. Furthermore, research suggests that women are more likely to compete when the context becomes more communal, such as when negotiating on behalf of others (Babcock et al., 2006) or entering competitions in teams (Healy & Pate, 2011). Again, although these contextual factors do not make competitions communal per se (e.g., negotiating for others still requires negotiating or competing), these factors can offer ways in which women can orient their behavior to be more communal or in line with gender norms (e.g., caring for others' needs). That is, when allowed to act in accordance with gender stereotypes (i.e., being communal), women are more comfortable with the generally gender-incongruent act of competing.

### **Competition Size and Competitive Preferences**

Drawing on gender role and stereotype theories, as well as on the study of contextual factors of gender differences in competition, we focus on an important yet unexplored contextual factor—competition size—in shaping women's (and men's) competition entry preferences. Previous studies have focused on the outcomes of competition and related topics such as rank (e.g., Chen, Myers, Kopelman, & Garcia, 2012; McGraw, Mellers, & Tetlock, 2005; Medvec, Madey, & Gilovich, 1995), also showing that the number of competitors (i.e., competition size) can be an important driver of competitive motivation (e.g., Ehrenberg & Bognanno, 1990; Garcia & Tor, 2009; Ku, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2005; Tor & Garcia, 2010). To date, however, no studies have examined the role of competition size on gender differences in competition entry preferences. We suggest that competition size or the number of competitors can be an important moderator of these preferences. Particularly, just as gender-congruent contextual factors (e.g., competing on behalf of others) can encourage women to compete by allowing communal behaviors and orientation (e.g., caring for others), we posit that women will prefer to enter smaller (compared with larger) competitions, as these smaller competitions with fewer competitors may appear to offer more opportunities for women to behave communally (rather than competitively) and act more in line with prescriptive gender stereotypes.

To wit, research suggests that smaller social groups tend to offer more opportunities for women to orient themselves in gender-congruent ways by allowing for more communal behavior. Studies show that women exhibit significantly higher need for intimacy—defined by seeking close, communal bonds in their social relationships—than men do (McAdams, Lester, Brand, McNamara, & Lensky, 1988; Schultheiss & Brunstein, 2001), and to the extent that opportunities for intimacy are greater in smaller groups as they enable people to interact more closely, we would expect women to gravitate to groups with fewer individuals. In fact, smaller social groups have been shown to allow individuals to form more intimate friendship social bonds and indeed are more common among girls; on the other hand, larger social groups, which are common among boys, give people more opportunities for competing against others (Benenson, Nicholson, Waite, Roy, & Simpson, 2001; MacCoby, 1986, 1990).

Moreover, there is also evidence women actually prefer smaller social groups because these smaller groups constitute a more gender-congruent context for women by allowing them to behave more communally. For example, girls, compared with boys, have been shown to prefer smaller, relative to larger, social groups, in part because these enable them to form close friendships—or be communal (Benenson et al., 2001; Maccoby, 1986, 1990). Women have also been shown to cultivate smaller and more intimate social bonds and social networks (Borys & Perlman, 1985; see Campbell, 1988), and they tend to belong to smaller voluntary business organizations with fewer members (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982). Taken together, this suggests not only that smaller groups represent social contexts that afford more opportunities for communal behavior—or those in which the potential for intimacy and social bonding is high—but also that women appear to have a preference for these groups with fewer individuals that match gender stereotypes of being relationally oriented (i.e., are gender-congruent).

Moving from social groups generally to competitions, which can be conceived to constitute a particular type of social group in which people relate to one another as competitors, it appears that opportunities for communal behavior might also be ampler in smaller competitions. In the context of competition, smaller groups have indeed been shown to foster more self-deprecating (i.e., communal) behaviors whereas larger groups encourage self-assertive (i.e., competitive) behavior (Benenson, Maiese, Dolenzsky, Dolensky, & Simpson, 2002). In fact, unlike larger competitions with many competitors, smaller competitions may offer more chances for communal orientation such as self-deprecating behaviors precisely because there are fewer people, making it easier to bond more intimately and attend to others' needs (Benenson et al., 2002). This provides further support that smaller competitions—or those that have fewer competitors—may enable people to act more communally (e.g., caring for the needs of others) than larger ones and thus enable women to behave in more gender-congruent ways. Note that is not to say these competitions become communal (i.e., a competition is still a competition), but as with other contextual factors that can afford women more opportunities to enact gender norms (e.g., negotiating on behalf of others), competitions with fewer competitors, like smaller social groups, appear to allow for a more communal orientation. In summary, we suggest that because smaller competitions appear to enable more communal behaviors and provide women more opportunities to act in ways congruent with gender norms, women should prefer to enter smaller competitions.

*Hypothesis 1:* Women, relative to men, will prefer to enter smaller, compared with larger, competitions.

To the extent that women's preferences for smaller competitions are motivated by behaving in gender-congruent ways, gender differences between women and men should be more pronounced in situations—such as competition—that present a particularly gender-incongruent context for women. We would therefore expect gender differences in group size preferences to increase under competition, compared with noncompetitive contexts.

*Hypothesis 2:* Gender differences in group size preferences will be greater in competitive than noncompetitive contexts.

Given our gender-congruency account, we posit that the mechanism underlying women's preferences is the level of comfort they expect to feel in competitions with fewer individuals. That is, feeling comfortable should be the affective response when behaving in a gender-congruent way, as opposed to the discomfort experienced when in a gender-incongruent context. For instance, research has shown that people in professions traditionally held by the opposite sex tend to experience greater emotional discomfort arising from the conflict between their gender and professional roles (Luhaorg & Zivian, 1995; Parry, 1987; see also Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, one way to tap into the idea that women's preference for smaller competitions is a reflection of gender-congruency is by probing for and measuring the degree of comfort they expect to feel when entering this type of competition. In other words, to the extent that gender-congruent behavior feels more comfortable, women's preference for smaller competitions should be motivated by expecting to feel more comfortable in these gender-congruent contexts.

*Hypothesis 3:* Women, relative to men, will prefer to enter smaller competitions over larger ones partly because they expect to feel more comfortable in the former.

## The Present Studies

We tested our hypotheses across a series of eight studies. Although the present analyses are primarily experimental, we first sought to explore our predictions in real-world competitive contexts to provide some ecological validity. Studies 1a and 1b used observational data sets—of firm and college size preferences, respectively—to examine the prediction that women would prefer to enter smaller competitions (Hypothesis 1). Studies 2a and 2b experimentally tested Hypothesis 1 in different task domains and by capturing real behavior. Following from a gender-congruency account, Study 3 tested Hypothesis 2 by examining gender differences in entry preferences under competition and noncompetition. Probing the mechanism, Study 4 tested Hypothesis 3 by examining the role of comfort in these preferences. Finally, Studies 5a and 5b tested Hypothesis 3 by examining the role of comfort at the point of decision, further testing the notion that women's preferences are at least in part driven by behaving in gender-congruent ways.

### Studies 1a and 1b: Evidence From Real-World Data

Studies 1a and 1b tested the proposition that women, relative to men, would prefer to enter smaller, compared with larger competitions (Hypothesis 1). To this end, we examined the preferences for different-sized firms (Study 1a) and different-sized colleges (Study 1b). Although job- and college-related entry decisions can be driven by a host of factors, to the extent that these decisions could at least partly be shaped by competitive preferences, they may provide an interesting first look at the moderating role of competition size for gender differences in entry decisions. In an organization, employees are often competitors vying for status, resources, and rewards (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Milkman, Huang, & Schweitzer, 2014). Thus, preferences for different-sized firms to work in are, *inter alia*, preferences over which different-sized competition—one with fewer or more competitors—to enter. Study 1a explored the relationship between gender and preferences

for different-sized firms to Test Hypothesis 1 using publicly available data. We expected people's preferences for working in a small versus a large firm to vary as a function of gender, with women preferring smaller firms to a greater extent than men. Similarly, among other factors, by deciding to apply to a particular college, applicants are entering a competition against other applicants for a spot at that college. Therefore, we also tested Hypothesis 1 using publicly available college application data. We predicted an inverse relationship between the student body size of a college—a proxy for the number of applicants to that college that is knowable to potential applicants at the time of application—and the percentage of female applicants.

### Study 1a: Method

**Data set.** We used publicly available data from the General Social Survey (Smith, Marsden, Hout, & Kim, 1972-2012). Conducted as an assessment of behavioral and attitudinal social trends in the United States, the survey includes questions about a host of topics from demographics, to political attitudes, to job preferences, for instance.

**Variables.** Of interest to the current study, we focused on the respondent's gender and response to a single question to operationalize entry size preferences: "Suppose you were working and could choose between different kinds of jobs. Which of the following would you personally choose?" Respondents could indicate their preference by selecting either "working in a small firm" or "working in a large firm." This question was included in the 1989, 1998, and 2006 surveys and a total of 3,719 respondents (56% female) provided a response.

### Study 1a: Results

Across the 3 years, 69% of women (1,416 out of 2,066) and 64% of men (1,066 out of 1,653) preferred the smaller to the larger firm. Although the majority of both women and men preferred the smaller firm, the difference between women and men was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.78, p = .01$ . This pattern of results is suggestive that competition size preferences may differ by gender (Hypothesis 1).

### Study 1b: Method

**Data set.** To assess whether women would prefer to enter smaller competitions relative to men, we focused on another real-world context: college applications. Using publicly available records, we created a data set consisting of 288 public, private, and liberal arts U.S. universities and colleges selected to give a range of student body sizes (*range* = 350–59,382, *M* = 10,497, *SD* = 10,829). Data were collected from Peterson's college guide between March and April 2014. Moving down the U.S. News ranking lists for national and liberal arts colleges, only schools with information about the current number of students attending, most recent number of female and male applicants, and the college's ranking and acceptance rate were included in the current data set.

**Variables.** Based on the number of female and male applicants, we computed the percentage of female applicants for each college (*range* = 25.1–74.5%, *M* = 54.9%, *SD* = 7.6%). Given that larger schools generally attract more total applicants (in the

current data set,  $r = .671, p < .001$ ) and that this number is knowable to potential applicants, we used the current student body size of a school as the independent variable (competition size) and percentage of female applicants as the dependent variable. As additional controls, we included the college's ranking (*range* = 1–201, *M* = 93.8, *SD* = 52.9) from its respective U.S. News list—national or liberal arts school—and the acceptance rate (*range* = 5.0–98.0%, *M* = 53.8%, *SD* = 21.9%).

### Study 1b: Results

A bivariate correlation revealed a significant negative association between college size and the percentage of female applicants, suggesting that women prefer to enter smaller competitions,  $r = -.184, p = .002$ . Furthermore, when the percentage of female applicants was regressed on college size, rank, and acceptance rate in a simultaneous linear regression model, size remained a significant predictor,  $\beta_{size} = -.204, p < .001, Adj. R^2 = .05$ . Both rank ( $\beta_{rank} = .034, p = .663$ ) and acceptance rate ( $\beta_{acceptance} = .143, p = .068$ ) were not significant. In the competitive context of applying to college, though there are trends that women prefer the less competitive (based on rank and acceptance rate) schools, the size of the competition appears to be a much stronger predictor of their entry decisions. Identical analyses were performed using the total number of applicants—a direct, though unknowable at the time of application, measure of the size of the competition—as the independent variable. Findings were similar. The bivariate correlation between the number of applicants and the percentage of female applicants was significant,  $r = -.162, p = .006$ , such that as the number of applicants decreased, the percentage of female applicants tended to increase. In a simultaneous linear regression, only the number of total applicants ( $\beta_{applicants} = -.129, p = .037, Adj. R^2 = .03$ ), but not the rank ( $\beta_{rank} = .021, p = .795$ ) or acceptance rate ( $\beta_{acceptance} = .084, p = .296$ ), was a significant predictor.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as predicted, these findings suggested that women prefer to enter smaller competitions (Hypothesis 1).

### Discussion

These first two studies provided suggestive evidence that competition size may be an important factor in shaping women's (and men's) competition entry preferences. Across two different kinds of competitions, we found supporting evidence for our prediction that women would prefer to enter smaller competitions (Hypothesis 1). Although these studies lend ecological validity to this association, there are also drawbacks. For one, many factors other than the competition size—some of which we controlled for and others that we could not tap into—may affect these real-world decisions. Additionally, these types of decisions could involve multiple competitions and it is unclear which of these competition entry decisions people were making. For example, applying to a smaller or larger college could entail two competitions—the initial competition to be accepted over other applicants and the competition against classmates once at the college. Moreover, the effect

<sup>1</sup> Because rank and acceptance rate were significantly correlated ( $r = .671, p < .001$ ), we checked multicollinearity statistics in both regression analyses. All measures met standard cut-offs for noncollinearity: tolerances  $> .525$  and VIFs  $< 1.905$ .

transpires both at the level of student body size and applicant pool size, which are also closely related. Conclusions drawn from the firm sample could also be limited by similar confounds. Working in a firm, employees could be competing against coworkers any number of times depending on the opportunities offered for advancement, which may be fewer at smaller firms. We therefore sought to Test Hypothesis 1 in a more controlled experimental setting to examine gender differences in the decision to enter a single small or large competition consisting of fewer or more competitors, respectively.

### Studies 2a and 2b: Experimental Evidence From Real Decisions

Studies 2a and 2b tested the prediction that women, relative to men, would prefer to enter a small, compared with a large, competition (Hypothesis 1) using experimental designs. Particularly, we examined real behavioral entry decisions for two different types of tasks—a verbal (anagram-solving) task (Study 2a) and a strength task (Study 2b). Whereas participants were led to believe that they would be performing in a competition in Study 2a and, therefore, made a real choice, participants in Study 2b both made a real choice and actually engaged in the subsequent competition. Thus, participants in these two studies provided real behavioral choices. By examining actual decisions in these very different types of tasks, we were also able to test the generalizability of gender differences in competition entry preferences across different domains.

#### Study 2a: Method

**Participants.** In total, 288 participants (40% female), recruited from university listservs and Amazon's Mechanical Turk site in the United States, completed an online study (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 74 years ( $M = 30.6$ ,  $SD = 9.9$ ) and the majority identified as White (78%), followed by Asian American (11%), Black (5%), Hispanic (4%), and Multiracial (1%).

**Procedure.** Participants were instructed that they would be competing in an anagram-solving task with other participants in the study for a chance to win \$3. After reading examples of anagrams (e.g., *TONE can be rearranged to NOTE*), participants were instructed that they would have to solve 15 anagrams correctly as quickly as possible and that the top 10% of participants would win the competition and receive \$3. They were then asked to choose between two competitions that they could enter: a competition with 10 participants or a competition with 100 participants, presented in counterbalanced order.

After indicating their choice, participants provided demographic information and were then informed that the anagram competition would not take place. Participants were compensated \$3 for their participation and debriefed.

#### Study 2a: Results

Choice of competition varied significantly by gender as predicted,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.01$ ,  $p = .045$ . Of the 115 women, 61 (53%) chose the small competition whereas only 71 of the 173 men (41%) chose the small competition. To control for other demographic

variables, we conducted a binary logistic regression in which competition choice was regressed on gender, age, and race/ethnicity (that was coded as a binary variable because of the small number of participants of color in the current sample),  $Adj. R^2 = .02$ . Whereas other demographic variables were not significant ( $Exp(B)_{age} = 1.004$ ,  $p = .766$ , 95% confidence interval [CI, .980, 1.028];  $Exp(B)_{race} = .816$ ,  $p = .488$ , 95% CI [.460, 1.449]), gender remained a marginally significant predictor of choice ( $Exp(B) = 1.627$ ,  $p = .051$ , 95% CI [.999, 2.649]) such that women were about 1.6 times more likely to choose the small competition than men.

#### Study 2b: Method

**Participants.** In total, 125 participants (50% female), ranging in age from 18 to 31 years ( $M = 20.1$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ), participated in the study. The majority of participants identified as White (52%), followed by Asian American (32%), Black (7%), Hispanic (3%), Other (3%), and Multiracial (2%).

**Procedure.** Participants were recruited in and around the campus of a large Midwestern university. To eliminate possible experimenter effects, one male and one female experimenter approached individuals and asked if they would be willing to participate in a research study. Participants were recruited one at a time. After agreeing to participate, participants were handed a packet, which contained the study instructions and measures. Participants were instructed that they would be taking part in a competition against other participants of the same gender. Given that, on average, women and men differ in physical strength, this was specified to ensure fair payoff chances and eliminate any effects because of expectations of gender composition in the different competitions. Participants were further informed that they have the option of competing either in a pool of 10 participants or 100 participants and that, in each competition, the top 20% of participants—those who had the strongest hand grip, as measured by a hand gripper—would win a prize. Participants made their selection of which competition pool they wanted to compete in and then filled in demographic information and a contact email address. After returning the completed packet to the experimenter, the participants were handed the hand gripper and asked to pull as strongly as they could. The experimenter then recorded the strength of the hand grip in the participant's packet. Participants were thanked for their participation and later contacted if they were one of the winners—in the top 20% based on their recorded grip strength—in their respective competition pool. This was a real competition, and winners were in fact paid \$5.

#### Study 2b: Results

As in the previous study, gender had a significant effect on choice,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.08$ ,  $p = .024$ , such that 32 out of 62 women (52%) but only 20 out of 63 men (32%) chose the small competition. Controlling for other demographic variables (age and race/ethnicity coded as a binary variable) in a binary logistic regression,  $Adj. R^2 = .08$ , only gender was a significant predictor of competition choice ( $Exp(B)_{gender} = .2660$ ,  $p = .010$ , 95% CI [1.259, 5.619];  $Exp(B)_{age} = .967$ ,  $p = .738$ , 95% CI [.794, 1.178];  $Exp(B)_{race} = .863$ ,  $p = .699$ , 95% CI [.409, 1.821]). Women were about 2.7 times more likely to choose the small competition than men.

## Discussion

These studies provided converging experimental evidence with real behavioral choices for Hypothesis 1—when making real competition entry decisions, women, relative to men, prefer to enter smaller, compared with larger competitions. Furthermore, by examining entry decisions into two different types of tasks, these findings suggest that competition size can be an important factor in shaping women’s (and men’s) preferences for competition generalizing to a variety of domains. That is, consistent with previous research on the role of gender-congruent contextual factors in shaping women’s competitive preferences (e.g., Bear, 2011), women appear to prefer and choose smaller competitions that are more aligned with prescriptive gender norms because of their size (i.e., fewer competitors). Although the nature of the tasks was different, both studies examined gender differences in entry preferences under competition—a gender-incongruent context for women. To examine the role of competition specifically, we experimentally manipulated the presence versus absence of competition in Study 3.

### Study 3: The Role of Competition

Study 3 tested the proposition that gender differences in group size preferences would be greater under competition than under noncompetition (Hypothesis 2). This study aimed to provide initial evidence that gender norms and stereotypes underlie gender differences in the preference for different competition sizes. To the extent that women’s preferences for smaller competitions are a reflection of gender-congruence, gender differences between women’s and men’s preferences should be evident to a greater extent in contexts that are especially gender-incongruent for women (i.e., under competition). Thus, we expected to observe significant gender differences in group size preferences under competition but not under noncompetition.

## Method

**Participants.** There were 259 participants (49% female) were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk site in the United States for an online study and compensated for their participation. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 69 years ( $M = 31.7$ ,  $SD = 10.4$ ) and the majority identified as White (76%), followed by Asian American (10%), Black (7%), Hispanic (6%), and Other (1%).

**Procedure.** In a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of two competition conditions: tournament (competition) or piece rate (noncompetition). Participants were asked to imagine that they would be completing an easy, neutral counting task in which they needed to correctly identify the number of 0’s in a series of matrices. Depending on the condition they were assigned to, participants were either asked to imagine that their compensation would depend on “how well you do relative to others” such that the top 20% of participants would receive \$5 (tournament) or that they would be compensated based on “how well you do,” earning \$0.05 for each correctly solved matrix (piece rate). Participants in both conditions were asked to select whether they would prefer to complete the task in either a session of 10 or 100 participants, presented in counterbalanced

order. After indicating their preference, participants provided demographic information.

## Results

To test the hypothesis that gender differences in preferences are evident under competition, we conducted a binary logistic regression in which group size preference was regressed on gender and competition condition (tournament vs. piece rate) and their interaction. To control for other demographic variables, we also included age and race/ethnicity (coded as a binary variable because of the small number of participants of color in the current sample) in the regression,  $Adj. R^2 = .09$ . Full regression results are displayed in Table 1.

Condition was a significant predictor ( $Exp(B) = .280$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI [.135, .579]) such that regardless of gender or other demographic variables, people were about 3.6 times more likely to prefer the smaller group in the piece rate, compared with the tournament, condition. As predicted, this effect, however, was qualified by a significant interaction ( $Exp(B) = 3.286$ ,  $p = .023$ , 95% CI [1.180, 9.149]). To probe this interaction, we conducted two additional binary logistic regressions—one per condition—in which group size preference was regressed on gender, age, and race/ethnicity. In the tournament condition, only gender was a significant predictor of preference ( $Exp(B)_{gender} = 2.888$ ,  $p = .004$ , 95% CI [1.390, 6.000];  $Exp(B)_{age} = .977$ ,  $p = .176$ , 95% CI [.945, 1.010];  $Exp(B)_{race} = .1736$ ,  $p = .211$ , 95% CI [.731, 4.124];  $Adj. R^2 = .11$ ) such that women, relative to men, were 2.9 times more likely to prefer the small group. Of the 64 women in this condition, 39 (61%) preferred the small group whereas only 24 out of 65 men (37%) did,  $\chi^2(1) = 7.44$ ,  $p = .006$ . The same effect was not observed in the piece rate condition ( $Exp(B)_{gender} = .833$ ,  $p = .633$ , 95% CI [.395, 1.759];  $Exp(B)_{age} = .989$ ,  $p = .562$ , 95% CI [.952, 1.027];  $Exp(B)_{race} = 1.124$ ,  $p = .789$ , 95% CI [.480, 2.632];  $Adj. R^2 = .01$ ). In the piece rate condition, 40 out of 63 women (63%) and 46 out of 67 men (69%) preferred the small group,  $\chi^2(1) = .39$ ,  $p = .534$ .

## Discussion

These findings supported Hypothesis 2, or the prediction that gender differences in group size preferences would be greater under competition than noncompetition. That is, gender differ-

Table 1  
Binary Logistic Regression of Group Size Preference on Gender, Competition Condition, and Demographic Variables

Predictor	$Exp(B)$	$p$	95% confidence interval
Intercept	2.854	.033	
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.857	.682	[.409, 1.795]
Condition <sup>b</sup>	.280	.001	[.135, .579]
Interaction <sup>c</sup>	3.286	.023	[1.180, 9.149]
Age	.982	.159	[.958, 1.007]
Race/ethnicity <sup>d</sup>	1.394	.278	[.765, 2.539]

<sup>a</sup> Men are the reference group. <sup>b</sup> Noncompetition (piece rate) was coded as 0 and competition (tournament) as 1. <sup>c</sup> The interaction between gender and competition condition. <sup>d</sup> Participants of color are the reference group.

ences in preferences for different-sized groups are evident to a greater extent in contexts that highlight gender norms and stereotypes and present a gender-incongruent context for women (i.e., competition), suggesting a gender-congruency account may provide a mechanism for these gender differences. We investigated these underlying reasons in Study 4.

#### Study 4: Mechanisms for Competition Size Preferences

Following from a gender-congruency account, Study 4 sought to probe potential underlying mechanisms—particularly comfort—for these gender differences in competition entry preferences. Specifically, Study 4 examined the prediction that women, compared with men, would prefer to enter smaller competitions because they expect to feel more comfortable in smaller competitions (Hypothesis 3). Given that psychological discomfort is often a consequence of not conforming to prescriptive gender norms (e.g., Parry, 1987), we expected women to be motivated by anticipated feelings of comfort in their preference for a more gender-congruent (i.e., smaller) competition.

Study 4 also tested the role of an alternative winner-loser mechanism that might shape competition entry decisions. Unlike women, men may not feel discomfort under competition as this presents a gender-congruent context. Because male gender stereotypes and norms dictate agentic and competitive behaviors (e.g., Bem, 1974), men may instead be motivated to adhere to these norms by focusing on the competitive nature of their preferences. Thus, men's preferences, relative to women's, may depend on factors such as the number of winners and losers in the competitions rather than expectations of comfort. Therefore, we probed for this alternative mechanism as a comparative benchmark for examining the relative explanatory power of the comfort mechanism for women's preferences as well as to explore men's preferences.

#### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 117 participants (37% female), ranging in age from 18 to 65 years ( $M = 30.7$ ,  $SD = 9.4$ ), from Amazon's Mechanical Turk site in the United States to complete an online study in exchange for monetary compensation. The majority of participants identified as White (70%), followed by Asian American (10%), Black (8%), Hispanic (7%), Multiracial (3%), and Other (3%).

**Procedure.** Participants were asked to indicate their preference for a small (10 competitors) or large (100 competitors) section of a hypothetical, de-contextualized competition where the top 20% of competitors in each section would receive a \$500 prize. Sections were presented in counterbalanced order. After indicating their preference, participants were asked to indicate which of the following three statements best exemplified their reasoning for their preference: (a) "I would feel more comfortable in smaller competitions"; (b) "I would feel more comfortable in larger competitions"; or (c) "Comfort is not a factor in my preference." To assess the extent to which participants relied on thinking about winners and losers for their entry preferences, they indicated which one of three statements best fit their reasoning: (a) "The number of losers is smaller in smaller competitions"; (b) "The number of winners is greater in

larger competitions"; or (c) "The number of winners and losers is not a factor in my preference."<sup>2</sup> Participants then provided demographic information.

#### Results

Replicating previous results, we found that competition preference varied significantly by gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.87$ ,  $p = .003$ , such that 33 out of 43 of women (77%) but only 36 out of 74 men (49%) preferred the small competition. For comfort reasons, the overall distribution of responses across women and men, which are presented in Table 2, differed significantly,  $\chi^2(2) = 11.81$ ,  $p = .003$ , indicating that women and men reason about their preference in terms of comfort to differing extents. For women, but not for men, the distribution of responses was significantly different from chance ( $\chi^2(2)_{\text{women}} = 19.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2(2)_{\text{men}} = .03$ ,  $p = .987$ ) suggesting that, whereas men tend to be indifferent, women expect to feel more comfortable in smaller competitions.

For winner-loser reasoning, the distribution of responses differed significantly across women and men,  $\chi^2(2) = 12.59$ ,  $p = .002$ . Table 2 also displays these responses. For women the distribution of responses was not significantly different from chance,  $\chi^2(2)_{\text{women}} = 3.40$ ,  $p = .183$ . For men, however, the distribution differed significantly from chance  $\chi^2(2)_{\text{men}} = 9.76$ ,  $p = .008$ . These findings show that reasoning about winners and losers appears to be more random among women than among men and suggest that this type of reasoning may play a larger role in shaping men's preferences.

To complement these analyses and to better examine these two reasons' explanatory power for women's and men's preferences, we ran two binary logistic regressions—one for female and one for male participants—in which competition preference was regressed on usage of comfort and winner-loser reasons as well as other demographic variables (age and race/ethnicity, which was coded as a binary variable). To the extent that people generally explain choices in logically consistent ways (e.g., those who indicated reasoning that there are more winners in the large competition are likely to have indicated a preference for the large competition), we were interested in the usage versus nonusage (rather than directionality) of these reasons as a more informative indicator of the ways in which reasoning about one's preferences in different ways (vs. not reasoning about them in these ways) can shape women's and men's preferences. We turn to the directionality of the effect exclusively and explicitly in Study 5. For the present analyses, we collapsed the first two responses to each reasoning question. Full regression results are displayed in Table 3.

For women, the only significant predictor for entry preference was the use of comfort reasons ( $Exp(B) = 13.225$ ,  $p = .022$ , 95% CI [1.452, 120.440];  $R^2_{\text{women}} = .32$ ) such that women who relied on comfort to explain their preference were about 13.2 times more likely to prefer the small rather than the large competition. Thus,

<sup>2</sup> To mirror the structure of comfort reasons, we included only winner-loser reasons that would more directly and immediately shape preferences for either competition. That is, thinking that the number of winners is smaller in the small competition would likely motivate preference for the larger competition, because there are comparatively more winners in that competition. Thus, regardless of the frame (winners or losers) people adopt, these two items should capture their most immediate rationale for their preference.

Table 2  
*Frequency Distribution of Comfort and Winner-Loser Reasons for Women and Men*

Gender	Comfort reasons			Winner-loser reasons		
	Small comfortable	Large comfortable	Not a factor	Fewer losers	More winners	Not a factor
Women	28 (65%)	7 (16%)	8 (19%)	20 (47%)	11 (26%)	12 (28%)
Men	24 (32%)	25 (34%)	25 (34%)	12 (16%)	31 (42%)	31 (42%)

controlling for demographic factors, comfort but not winner-loser reasons were a significant predictor of preference for women. For men, however, the only significant predictor of preference was the use of winner-loser reasons ( $Exp(B) = .158, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.054, .461]; R^2_{\text{men}} = .26$ ) such that men who reasoned about the competitions in terms of numbers of winners or losers were about 6.3 times more likely than men who did not use a winner-loser rationale to prefer the large competition. Controlling for demographic variables, winner-loser but not comfort reasons predicted men's preferences.

## Discussion

These results suggested that women, compared with men, expected to feel more comfortable in smaller competitions and that this reasoning was consistent with their preference for smaller competitions. This provided initial support for Hypothesis 3 and suggested that smaller competitions may be more congruent with gender norms for women (i.e., allowing for a more communal orientation), which is reflected in their expectations to feel less psychological discomfort. Furthermore, we found that men, relative to women, tended to reason about their preferences in terms of the number of winners and losers. This, too, may suggest that men prefer those competitions that are aligned with gender norms and stereotypes and appear even more competitive (i.e., larger).

Women and men appear to prefer competitions that match gender stereotypes. For women, it appears to be a way to avoid gender-incongruence and feel more comfortable in competition. However, with this study's methodology of asking the mechanism question after the decision, it is difficult to corroborate the extent to which a gender-congruency account motivates actual preferences rather than retrospective self-reporting. To complement Study 4's methodology, Study 5 sought to find evidence of the comfort mechanism by measuring expected feelings of

comfort, which should represent an affective response to gender-congruence, at the point of decision. Given that people are not experiencing the competition at the point of entry, expectations about feelings of comfort rather than actual feelings of comfort seem to be a more proximal motivator and the most appropriate way of gauging gender-congruence for entry preferences. To avoid confounding preferences with expected feelings of comfort, we first examined gender differences in preferences for different-sized competitions (Study 5a) and then, in a separate sample, probed for expected feelings of comfort for the identical competition scenario at the point of decision (Study 5b). That is, if one sample's comfort expectations match another sample's entry preferences, it is good reason to believe that smaller competitions may be more appealing (preferred) by women because they also appear more comfortable (i.e., in line with gender norms).

## Studies 5a and 5b: Further Evidence of a Comfort Mechanism

Study 5 tested the proposition that women would prefer to enter smaller competitions because they would expect to feel more comfortable in these more gender-congruent settings (Hypothesis 3). Complementing Study 4, we measured expected feelings of comfort, but rather than asking participants to report these retrospectively, we first replicated the gender differences in competition size preferences (Study 5a) as a necessary precondition to then test the role of comfort at the point of decision separately (Study 5b).

### Study 5a: Method

**Participants.** In total, 157 participants (48% female), who ranged in age from 18 to 72 years ( $M = 32.8, SD = 11.4$ ) and of whom the majority identified as White (80%), followed by Asian

Table 3  
*Binary Logistic Regressions of Competition Preference on Usage of Comfort and Winner-Loser Reasons and Demographics for Women and Men*

Predictor	Women			Men		
	$Exp(B)$	$p$	95% confidence interval	$Exp(B)$	$p$	95% confidence interval
Intercept	.009	.069		.500	.544	
Comfort <sup>a</sup>	13.225	.002	[1.452, 120.440]	1.259	.679	[.424, 3.739]
Winner-loser <sup>b</sup>	4.773	.149	[.571, 39.918]	.158	.001	[.054, .461]
Age	1.083	.162	[.969, 1.210]	1.032	.399	[.959, 1.110]
Race/ethnicity <sup>c</sup>	2.104	.446	[.311, 14.237]	2.413	.135	[.759, 7.671]

<sup>a</sup> Binary variable of usage of comfort reasons where nonusage is coded as 0 and usage is coded as 1. <sup>b</sup> Binary variable of usage of winner-loser reasons where nonusage is coded as 0 and usage is coded as 1. <sup>c</sup> Participants of color are the reference group.

American (8%), Black (6%), Hispanic (4%), Multiracial (1%), and Other (1%), participated in the study. To sample a diverse population, including working professionals, participants were recruited from both Amazon's Mechanical Turk site in the United States ( $n = 130$ ) and from staff working at a large Midwestern university ( $n = 27$ ).

**Procedure.** Participants were asked to imagine that they would be entering a de-contextualized competition against strangers in which the top 20% would win a prize. Participants were told to imagine that there were two competitions—1 of 10 participants and 1 of 100 participants, presented in counterbalanced order—and that they could choose which one they would prefer to enter. After indicating their preference, participants provided demographic information.

### Study 5a: Results

As in previous studies, we found that preference differed significantly by gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 7.36, p = .007$ , with 50 out of 75 women (67%), but only 37 out of 82 men (45%), preferring the small competition. To control for other factors, we also conducted a binary logistic regression in which competition size preference was regressed on gender, age, race/ethnicity (coded as a binary variable), and sample (coded as a binary variable),  $Adj. R^2 = .09$ . Only gender was a significant predictor ( $Exp(B)_{gender} = 2.787, p = .005, 95\% CI [1.370, 5.670]$ ;  $Exp(B)_{age} = .979, p = .168, 95\% CI [.949, 1.009]$ ;  $Exp(B)_{race} = .698, p = .406, 95\% CI [.300, 1.628]$ ;  $Exp(B)_{sample} = 1.040, p = .935, 95\% CI [.408, 2.648]$ ), such that women were about 2.8 times more likely to prefer the small competition than men.

### Study 5b: Method

**Participants.** There were 121 participants (31% female), ranging in age from 19 to 65 years ( $M = 29.8, SD = 8.2$ ), were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk site in the United States for an online study and received monetary compensation for their participation. The majority of participants identified as White (73%), followed by Asian American (17%), Hispanic (5%), Black (3%), and Other (2%).

**Procedure.** Participants read the same competition scenario used in Study 5a, in which they were asked to imagine that they would enter a competition. Instead of indicating their preference for the competition with 10 or 100 participants, however, participants were asked to indicate which of the two competitions they would feel more comfortable in. After making their selection, participants provided demographic information.

### Study 5b: Results

Consistent with a gender-congruency account, women and men differed significantly in their expectations of comfort,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.27, p = .012$ , such that 25 out of 37 women (68%), but only 36 out of 84 men (43%) indicated that they would feel more comfortable in the small, rather than the large, competition. Controlling for other demographic variables (age and race/ethnicity coded as a binary variable) in a binary logistic regression,  $Adj. R^2 = .08$ , gender was the only significant predictor of comfort expectations ( $Exp(B)_{gender} = 2.771, p = .016, 95\% CI [1.211, 6.342]$ ;  $Exp-$

$(B)_{age} = .970, p = .203, 95\% CI [.926, 1.017]$ ;  $Exp(B)_{race} = 1.142, p = .757, 95\% CI [.492, 2.650]$ ). Compared with men, women were about 2.8 times more likely to expect feeling more comfortable in the small competition.

### Discussion

These findings further supported Hypothesis 3. We showed that women, compared with men, not only preferred to enter a smaller competition, but that at the point of decision, women and men differed significantly in their expectations of comfort for these different-sized competitions. Without confounding comfort expectations and competition size preferences, the observed alignment between women's and men's expectations of comfort and their respective competitive preferences, suggests that comfort may be an important mechanism that can at least in part explain gender differences in entry preferences. Furthermore, when it comes to the point of decision (before the entry decision is made), expectations about which type of competition one would feel more comfortable in appear at least to some extent to shape preferences for entering a particular competition. To the extent that comfort is also an affective response to gender-congruence, these results further indicate that the congruency of gender norms with the competition size may shape women's (and men's) entry preferences.

### General Discussion

Beyond shaping competitive behavior more generally (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013), contextual factors appear to moderate gender differences in competitive preferences. The present set of studies found converging evidence that women, relative to men, tend to prefer and choose to enter smaller competitions over larger ones (Hypothesis 1). This effect was consistent across different contexts in real-world, naturalistic (Studies 1a and 1b) and experimentally tested, real behavioral decisions (Studies 2a and 2b). Furthermore, we found evidence that prescriptive gender norms and stereotypes underlie these preferences. Study 3 found gender differences in group size preferences under competition, but not under noncompetition (Hypothesis 2), suggesting that gender differences are more likely to be observed in contexts that highlight these norms and present a gender-incongruent setting for women. To probe underlying mechanisms more directly, Study 4 showed that women and men differ in their expectations of comfort for different-sized competitions and that, for women, these predicted a preference for the smaller competition (Hypothesis 3). As a more direct test of the gender-congruency account, Studies 5a and 5b showed that not only do women prefer smaller competitions, but they also differ significantly from men in their expectation to feel more comfortable in smaller competitions at the point of decision, suggesting that, to the extent comfort is an affective response to gender-congruence, women's (and men's) competitive preferences may be motivated by behaving in gender-congruent ways.

Extending extant research on the contextual factors affecting gender differences in competition, we provide evidence that competition size differentially shapes women's and men's competition entry preferences. We also bridge this research with psychological theory about gender roles and stereotypes to show that expectations about feeling more comfortable in smaller competitions with fewer competitors (i.e., because the context allows for a more

communal orientation and is thus more gender-congruent) at least partly accounts for women's choices among alternative competitions. Similarly, men's relative preferences for larger competitions may also be driven by gender norms. When reporting retrospective reasons for their preferences, focusing on the number of winners and losers may be a way to bring the competitiveness of the situation to the fore and thereby help align men's preferences with their gender role. At the point of decision, too, men expected to feel more comfortable in the larger (i.e., more competitive) competition, suggesting that their preferences may also be shaped by behaving in gender-congruent ways.

An interesting find was that women's preferences for small competitions remained relatively stable across a variety of domains, suggesting that competition size may be a particularly strong moderator of women's preferences. Indeed, we use existing literature to build the argument in the Introduction that women are likely to pursue situations with fewer people for gender-congruency. However, the experimental results reported here are particularly intriguing because they manifest this preference in competitive situations where women will not actually be interacting with the other competitors. In other words, the fact that women's preference for smaller groups "bleeds" into or is overgeneralized to competitions in which the competitors are not even present, potentially disadvantaging women without enabling them to benefit from community, is even more important and interesting, especially given that many real-world competitions—such as submitting a job application—do occur without interacting with other competitors.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Although we show that women's and men's preferences for different-sized competitions are, at least in part, driven by individual-level psychological factors, many other factors may motivate these preferences as well, particularly for real-world decisions. Gender roles and stereotypes are often maintained through punishment of those who violate these prescriptive norms. Researchers have shown that nonconformity to these norms can incur punishment in the form of backlash (e.g., Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007) and even sexual harassment (e.g., Berdahl, 2007). Thus, women may prefer smaller competitions not only because they expect to experience greater psychological comfort in these settings that allow for more communal behavior, but also because there are fewer negative social consequences from competing in this more gender-appropriate way.

We also note that complex decisions like competition entry are multiply determined. Other contextual factors, for instance, may also affect entry decisions, and competition size could further interact with these factors. For example, particular professional industries that are more aligned with gender norms for women could also be smaller, making it difficult to disentangle entry decisions based solely on size. Nonetheless, we illustrate that competition size is an important factor in shaping women's (and men's) entry decisions.

The present analysis also offers an interesting opportunity for future research. In terms of gender differences in competition entry, researchers have noted that just as women tend to avoid competition, men tend to overcompete (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). Furthermore, researchers have called attention to the fact

that men's behaviors can also be subject to prescriptive gender norms (e.g., Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996). Our findings lend some initial support to the notion that gender norms and stereotypes may indeed play a role in men's preferences. Men appeared to reason about their preferences in gender-congruent ways and, at the point of decision, appeared to select a competitive environment that represents a more gender-consistent choice (i.e., when asked about comfort explicitly, they indicated being more comfortable in the larger competition). That said, following from the literature of gender differences in competition, our analysis has focused more on the psychology of women than on the psychology of men, because women are historically disadvantaged. To be sure, a more complete understanding of men's preferences and decisions will further elucidate the ways in which gender roles and stereotypes operate in organizational contexts and the role they play in shaping gender differences more generally. However, this important avenue for future research is well beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

### Implications

This gender effect in entry decisions may also have important implications for the actual competition that follows entry. For example, the *N*-Effect (Garcia & Tor, 2009; Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013; Tor & Garcia, 2010) suggests that under competition, people feel less motivated to perform as the number of competitors increases, controlling for expected value. For example, individuals report being more motivated to place in the top 20% when competing in a pool of 10 versus 100 competitors of similar ability. Self-selection into different-sized competitions may have interesting consequences for performance. For instance, if women are more likely than men to self-select into smaller competitions and men, behaving in gender-stereotypical ways, act more competitively, then competitiveness may be greater in larger competitions. That is, self-selection into competition may mute the *N*-Effect.

The current research begins to fill the gap in our understanding of the psychological underpinnings of gender inequalities in organizations. Like other research on the contextual factors of gender differences in competition entry, our findings suggest that women are not inherently less competitive than men (e.g., Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005). Instead, certain situations make it more likely for women to compete, suggesting that women can be more proactive when the context enables them to do so. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, encourages women to "think personally, act communally" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 82), seeking out gender-congruent ways of competing and achieving at work.

However, even behaving in gender-incongruent ways can be possible or made more comfortable for women if gender norms are not challenged (Tinsley, Cheldelin, Schneider, & Amanatullah, 2009). That is, framing or thinking about incongruent behavior as an exception to the rule—for example, "I normally wouldn't . . . but" (p. 248)—may help women override initial gender-congruent preferences. A female job applicant, for example, may thus think to herself: "I normally wouldn't apply to work at such a large firm, but in this economy, it's important I take every chance." More directly, learning to feel comfortable with discomfort—or behaving in gender-incongruent ways—may also be an important factor for future success (Warrell, 2013). Thus, making competition entry decisions that feel uncomfortable may not only be important for

getting women into these competitive contexts, but could also be useful in developing an important skill that may help women advance in these situations.

One may also be able to facilitate women's entry into a particular competition by framing it as a small competition or presenting comparisons to larger competitions. Organizations advertising to potential applicants—even if these organizations are not objectively small—may appear so by comparison. Highlighting these comparisons or focusing on smaller units within the organization may help organizations of all sizes attract more female job applicants. At work, too, women's entry into competitions (such as for promotions) may be facilitated through a similar emphasis on the relative size of the competition (e.g., considering employees from a particular unit or from within the organization rather than the entire organization or from outside). Organizations may also be able to make competitions more comfortable for women and help close gender gaps in competition entry. For instance, organizations may cultivate a communal organizational culture through practices such as mentoring committees or programs, or workplace features such as break-room lounges or on-site daycare. In fact, these types of organizational practices may be especially important in larger companies.

In summary, the present analysis highlights the role of a novel contextual factor—competition size—in differentially shaping competition entry preferences for women and men. By showing that the congruency of gender norms and context at least in part underlie women's preferences for smaller competitions (and men's for larger ones), we begin to shed light on the psychological processes that contribute to gender inequalities in organizations. Through a better understanding of these dynamics, individuals and organizations can foster environments that continue to help close gender gaps.

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