

HUMILITY EXPRESSION AND ITS EFFECTS ON MORAL SUASION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF OCASIO-CORTEZ'S COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Humble leadership can be described as a positive psychological feature that allows leaders to admit their limitations, be open to new ideas, and give a voice to others while also recognizing their merits. The present study ($n = 268$ participants) explored the persuasive effects of a female politician communicating a humble stance by considering the role emotional displays at play (joy, calmness, sadness, and anger) when discussing a moral issue (hosting immigrants). The results revealed that the politician elicited positive emotions and evaluations of her competence and benevolence, especially when exhibiting a sad facial display, by contributing to the intention to accept the moral gist of her persuasive message. Overall, these 'gendered' effects are discussed in relation to the 'political authenticity', which can be perceived as high especially when the humble message is connected with several social reasons, as is the case with gender or social status.

Keywords: persuasion, expression of emotions; gender differences, moral and prosocial effects

Introduction

In political persuasion, politicians seeking votes should demonstrate three main qualities: competence, trustworthiness, and the ability or power to deliver on their promises. Recently, this latter feature has been represented in multimodal political communication, where politicians striving to persuade an audience of voters seek to exhibit that they have more power than their opponent by interrupting and discrediting the opponent and raising their voice (Bertolotti & Catellani, 2018; Carraro et al., 2012; D'Errico & Poggi, 2012; Poggi et al., 2011).

These considerations, developed within the commonly used framework of personalization (Pedersen & Rahat, 2019), led political persuasion scholars to overlook the notion of humility as a stance seen as a multimodal public act performed interactively through communication, both verbal and non-verbal, whereby the person places himself in relation to the object of the communicative interaction and/or expresses his/her relationship to the interlocutor (D'Errico & Poggi, 2019). Humility has also been defined as a positive feature associated with intrapersonal benefits, as in the cases of gratitude promotion (Kruse

et al., 2014). It is also associated with interpersonal benefits, as in the cases of fostering forgiveness (Davis et al., 2013) and promoting prosocial behaviour (Exline & Hill, 2012). Humility is the tendency to express positive other-oriented emotions (e.g. empathy and compassion) or the ability to regulate self-oriented emotions in ways that are socially acceptable (e.g. pride or excitement about one's accomplishments; Davis et al., 2013). According to the personalization framework these features of humility appear to be useless, if not counteractive and incoherent, since they may be perceived as 'unauthentic' (Luebke, 2020), especially in male politicians (Liu et al., 2015). On the contrary, when political debate is seen as a conflict between different points of view, humility may be seen as positively contributing to arguing one's own stance.

The nature of humility can be described by considering two sides: self-abasing humility and appreciative humility. In contrast to dominance, self-abasing humility is likely to follow personal failures (similar to modesty). It motivates a behavioural orientation towards hiding from others and is associated with feelings of submissiveness, unimportance, and worthlessness and traits like low self-esteem and introversion (Weidman, et al., 2018, p. 161). Appreciative humility is based on the most representative feelings and thoughts of humility. This typically follows personal success and is associated with compassion, grace, and understanding and traits like high self-esteem, status, and agreeableness. Appreciative humility motivates a behavioural orientation towards celebrating others (Weidman et al., 2018), as it is based on people being highly self-aware of their own strengths and limitations (Tangney, 2000).

Several studies in the field of organizational psychology, primarily taking into account appreciative humility, have identified an association between humble leadership and leaders who acknowledge personal faults, mistakes and limits; are open to new and even contradictory ideas; and have the tendency to give a voice to and acknowledge the credits of employees (Liu, 2016).

Humility in political communication has been minimally explored because power and dominance are two of the crucial dimensions of persuasion within this realm (Burgooon & Dunbar, 2000; Morini, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2013). Recent studies (D'Errico, 2020) have explored the association between individual differences and the evaluation of leadership effectiveness in the sense that a humble stance in political communication is preferred by individuals with a high level of social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) and low moral relevance (Graham et al., 2011). In particular some studies show that a male politician who adopts humble communication styles is evaluated negatively and perceived as less proactive, less exciting, charismatic and, in a particular condition, as more hypocritical (D'Errico, 2019). Looking at the gender expectation approach, leadership is traditionally considered more masculine-oriented and associated with task-oriented behaviour that differs from the feminine orientation to relationships (agentic versus communal behaviours; Eagly, 1987, 2005; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Koenig et al., 2011). For example, it has been demonstrated that female leaders who seek managerial positions are the object of criticism (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). As what concerns gender differences in the emotional expression literature has confirmed the same orientation (Chaplin, 2015) because women tend to display greater levels of positive emotions and internalize negative emotions like sadness, fear, anxiety, shame, and guilt (Brody & Hall, 2008) since these involve

expressively reflecting others' sorrow (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Prentice & Carranza, 2003). These rules for internalizing emotions in females are consistent with societal gender roles and stereotypes for women, such as the belief that women are more relationally oriented and nurturing than men (Koenig et al., 2011; Simon & Hoyt, 2008; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1991). By contrast, men are not expected to express emotions like sadness and anxiety as much. Instead, they tend to display emotions that are more consistent with their gender stereotypes (they are more assertive, independent, and more aggressive than women), such as anger, contempt, and disgust. These stereotypes are in line with the traditional men's roles, such as protecting their family and overcoming dangers that interfere with their ability to provide for their family (Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Steffen, 1984).

Several studies in the fields of organizational and political psychology have revealed that moral emotions can have a crucial role in inspiring and fostering motivation in others during the persuasion process (Eisenbeiss & Van Knippenberg, 2015; Halperin & Schori-Eyal, 2019; Pagano & Huo, 2007), but they can also have counterproductive outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 1990). For example, Johnson and Dipboye (2008) and Damen and colleagues (2008) found that a leader's display of positive emotions was positively related to their followers' evaluations of their charisma. In the political domain, Brader (2005) used two experiments to demonstrate that cueing enthusiasm motivates participation in elections, while fear stimulates vigilance and increases reliance on concurrent evaluations. These results were generally confirmed in several studies (Lewis, 2000), though Van Kleef and colleagues (2010) later pointed out how the effectiveness of positive emotions can depend on individual and contextual factors, such as moods or personal traits.

The relationship between humility and emotions has been explored in the political domain by pointing out that humble politicians frequently express negative emotions, like anger and sadness, in expressing seriousness and concern about the topic at hand (D'Errico, 2019).

Seen from an experimental point of view, humble male leaders can be more effective when conveying their moral message through an angry facial expression since they are perceived negatively and even as hypocrites when expressing sadness (D'Errico, 2019). However, a relevant exception is Barak Obama's self-presentation, when speaking both as an incumbent and as the US president. One relevant aspect of his political speech was his choice to overtly share with his audience the most difficult part of his autobiography, i.e. that he was born to a racially mixed couple (Leone et al., 2015). A more particular one relates to a multimodal analysis of his political speech in two official Back to School speeches that was integrated with a FACS analysis of his facial expression of emotions. This showed that the persuasive impact of his moral contempt for the disadvantages experienced by the children of social minorities in school was reinforced by his facial expressions and micro-expressions of sadness. Interestingly, these emotional signals were used only when speaking with classes of low-status students, while the same signals were neither expressed nor leaked when he gave his Back to School speech in schools attended by students from more affluent social groups (Leone et al., 2018). In this sense we can infer that humble self-presentation in male politicians may be processed by the audience in terms of 'political authenticity', even when the message is perceived as being coherent with their true self (Gunn, 2015), for example as socially sharing the more difficult aspects of his personal story. This evidence suggests that, when framed

in self-disclosure that is perceived as spontaneous, male leaders' negative or deactivated emotional expressions may be positively accepted together with their moral message.

Method

Starting from a positive consideration of humility and thus the 'appreciative' side (Weidman et al., 2018, p.155), the aim of the present study is to understand the persuasive effects of a female politician communicating on a controversial issue, when trying to induce moral suasion while showing a humble stance. Because the previous literature has neglected the persuasiveness of humble female politicians, the first research question concerns the condition that promote higher evaluations in terms of the benevolence and competence of a female politician showing a humble stance.

The second question is when is the female politician able to induce positive emotions and prosocial behavioral intentions in the audience? Considering the literature on gender expectations and previous studies on humble leaders, we can expect that humble female leaders will be perceived positively since a 'communal' approach to leadership can be viewed as more female 'appropriated'. We therefore expect that a female leader trying to enact a moral suasion while showing a humble stance will induce positive emotions and enhance participants' prosocial orientation.

The third question is whether emotional displays are one of the factors that help improve persuasiveness when moral issues are referred to. In particular we expect that a female politician, showing either the emotion of sadness, highly congruent with the gravity of the issue at stake, or positive emotional expressions of her inner states (joy and calm) will elicit higher positive emotions in the recipients, together with higher positive evaluations that judge her to be more benevolent and competent. Finally, we expect that these reactions will in turn affect the prosocial orientation of the recipients. Support for this can be found in the social psychology literature that suggests that expectations of inner emotional displays, such as sadness, or positive emotions are gender-dependent (Eagly, 1987, 2005), and that can promote prosocial behaviours (Hoffman, 2008). The same literature suggests that external and agentic emotions (such as anger) are on the contrary associated with harmful behaviours.

The present study was aimed at observing whether a female politician speaking humbly about a controversial and consequential moral issue (the hosting of immigrants) and showing different emotions will achieve a persuasive effect.

With the above research questions in mind, we will first outline the preliminary study aimed at testing the emotional display of the humble female politician and then describe an experimental study on female humble versus non-humble messages in support of hosting immigrants, differentiating the humble variable by emotional displays of calmness, joy, sadness, and anger.

A pilot survey identified Rep. Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and, to a lesser extent, two Italian female politicians (Raggi, Mayor of Rome, and Chiara Appendino, Mayor of Turin) were perceived as humble politicians. To avoid partisan bias, we chose the politician who was not Italian.

We selected four of Ocasio-Cortez's emotional facial expressions, differentiated according to level of arousal (low versus high) and valence (positive versus negative),



Figure 1. Alexandra Ocasio Cortez’s emotional facial displays (calmness, joy, anger and sadness).

and thus obtained four photos showing a high level of calmness, joy, sadness, and anger, respectively (Figure 1).

By means of an online survey with 30 participants (balanced for gender with 59% women and a mean age of 24.5 years) we tested to see if the four photos would elicit the emotions of calmness, joy, sadness, and anger. The results showed that Ocasio-Cortez’s facial displays (Figure 1) were significantly perceived coherently with the four expected emotions of calmness [$F(3, 50) = 112.05; p < 0.022$], sadness [$F(3, 50) = 352.18; p < 0.001$], anger [$F(3, 50) = 314.18; p < 0.001$], and joy [$F(3, 50) = 388.12; p < 0.001$]

To study the persuasive effect of a female politician who communicates with a humble stance and who can display different emotions relating to a particular moral issue, we designed an experimental study including humble versus non-humble messages in support of hosting immigrants, differentiating the conditions by emotional displays of calmness, joy, sadness, and anger, as tested in the pilot study.

Participants and experimental design

We designed a quasi-experimental study involving 268 participants randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. The majority of the participants were adult Italian women (mean age, $M: 31.7$; $DS: 12.6$; 60% women) with a university degree (48%) or secondary education (43%). Their political orientation was mainly democratic (51% democrats), 23% moderate (23% right-wing), and 11% declared that they belonged to social movements with no ideological orientation.

I thank you all for the warmth with which you welcomed me. I am very impressed and excited. My fellow citizens, today, I would like to address a delicate issue—that of our fellow immigrants, who come to our country in search of a dignified life for themselves and their families. We are studying measures to regulate landings in our country to ensure a civil welcome. But I would like to talk with you and try to understand the best solution. For example, what I would like to ask you is if we are a nation that values families and works together for their well-being. I would like to ask you, are we a nation that tolerates the hypocrisy of a system in which workers, who very often work and support our homes, do not have the possibility to get right with the law? Or are we a nation that gives them the chance to stand up, take responsibility, and give their children a better future? I would like to hear your opinions and propose to discuss together, taking into account and reconciling both the fears of us fellow citizens and imagining the difficulties of those who enter a country in a difficult situation.

Figure 2. ‘Humble’ speech on immigration policy

The study was based on a 2×4 bifactorial between-subject experimental design with two independent variables: the politician’s humble stance (present or not) and the politician’s emotional display (calmness, joy, anger, and sadness). The dependent variables were (1) emotions experienced during the politician’s message, (2) evaluation of the politician, (3) emotions felt towards immigrants, and (4) prosocial orientation (to what extent is it right/necessary to host immigrants?).

Procedure

The methodology was a quasi-experiment, differentiated by two experimental conditions, performed by combining visual (pictures of the politician) and semantic stimuli (extract of a real speech) and a read from the politician’s message. Each participant was randomly assigned to a condition and then exposed to only one of the possible experimental conditions obtained by crossing the two independent variables: (1) politician’s facial emotional displays (calmness, joy, anger, and sadness) and (2) humble versus non-humble communication via a message on immigration (Fig.2).

The content of the non-humble message was the same as the humble one but the speaker used directive verbs, the first person and personal pronouns (I want to address a delicate issue, we will be able to approve, I want to be clear, But my country gives them a chance) and presents the content via his/her solution or desires (This is my point of view and I would

like my country to be able to manage), and does not try to discuss it and find the solution with the audience. In full the non-humble message reads:

Today I want to address a delicate issue, that of immigrants who come to our country in search of a dignified life for themselves and their families. We are confident that we will be able to approve measures to regulate landings in our country, to ensure civil welcome. But what I want to be clear is that mine is a nation that respects fundamental values such as the dignity and well-being of all men. I want it to be clear that my nation will not tolerate the hypocrisy of a system in which workers, who very often work and are supportive in the homes of my voters, do not have the opportunity to settle with the law. But my country gives them a chance to stand up, to assume their responsibilities, and to give their children a better future. This is my point of view and I would like my country to be able to manage both the perplexities of those who host and the difficulties of those who enter our country in a difficult situation.

Measures

After reading either the humble or the non-humble message, participants filled in a quantitative survey including manipulation check questions (manipulation check: ‘How humble did you find the message to be?’; significance according to the ANOVA analysis: [$F(1, 268) = 4.501$; $p < 0.05$]). This check tests whether the message was perceived as humbler in the humble condition versus the non-humble condition ($M_h=3,22$; $M_{nh}=2,81$). Four groups of questions were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = very much), described as follows:

1. Positive Emotions towards the politician experienced during the message. Participants answered the following question ‘During the reading of the message, to what extent did you feel the following towards the politician?’ by evaluating the items: attentive, curious, upset, irritated, relieved, uncomfortable, amused, disappointed, calm, embarrassed, envious, anxious, helpless, frightened, stressed, bored, contemptuous, compassionate, disgusted, admiration, embittered, outraged, angry, enthusiastic. Then we took the sum of positive emotions corresponding to the classical definition of ‘positive valence’ given by Lewin (1951) as the ‘force that attract individuals to desirable object and repel them from undesirable ones’, which can include emotions like satisfaction, interest, hope, pleasure, enthusiasm, admiration, joy, empathy, and calmness (Frijda et al., 1989). Finally, we created a unique index of positive emotions which showed high reliability with an optimal Cronbach’s Alpha ($\alpha=0.91$).
2. Evaluation of politician competence and benevolence. Participants answered the question ‘After the reading of the message, to what extent did you assess the following with regard the politician...’ by assessing their level of agreement on the items: strong, powerful, uninfluential, determined, dominant, authoritative, authoritarian, unsure, undecided, humble (manipulation check), competitive, charismatic, obnoxious, grumpy, cold, unjust, good, incorrect, generous, altruistic, unfair, dishonest, unselfish, incompetent, intelligent, skilled, knowledgeable, self-confident, charming, seductive, convincing. The variable evaluation of politician competence and benevolence was created on the basis of a factorial analysis that extracted two main factors that were named

Table 1. Agreement with message and behavioural intentions.*Experimental conditions

			Humble		Not Humble	
Agreement with message	N		M	DS	M	DS
		39	<i>Calm</i>	3.97	1.09	3.91
	36	<i>Joy</i>	3.94	0.79	3.92	0.91
	32	<i>Anger</i>	3.84	0.99	3.69	0.71
	28	<i>Sadness</i>	4.39	0.96	3.59	1.16
Intentions of hosting immigrants						
	39	<i>Calm</i>	3.80	0.15	3.88	0.17
	36	<i>Joy</i>	3.64	0.16	3.84	0.16
	32	<i>Anger</i>	3.81	0.17	3.59	0.18
	28	<i>Sadness</i>	4.25	0.18	3.63	0.17

‘competence’ (including the following items: positive, strong, competent, exciting, convincing, credible, active), ‘benevolence’ (including the following items reliability, correctness, fairness, tolerance, charitability, and the reversed: dangerous, false, crafty, and hypocritical). The items extracted from the factorial analysis were summed to create two indexes, one for competence and one for benevolence; these dimensions were reliable according to the Cronbach Alpha, respectively .72 and .78.

- Moral emotions felt towards immigrants. Participants answered ‘During the reading, to what extent did you feel the following towards immigrants?’ by assessing their level of agreement on an ad hoc scale with the following items attentive, curious, upset, irritated, relieved, uncomfortable, amused, disappointed, calm, embarrassed, envious, anxious, helpless, frightened, stressed, bored, contemptuous, compassionate, disgusted, admiration, embittered, outraged, angry, enthusiastic (Question:). Emotions towards immigrants was calculated using a unique index of moral emotions that explained 38% of the variance respective to the factorial analysis, and it had good reliability ($\alpha=0.88$). We took the sum of the scores of interests, empathy, worry, shame, and guilt in order to create a unique index of moral emotions.
- Prosocial orientation: Participants answered the following questions: ‘How right, necessary, useful and important is it to host immigrants?’ Then we created a unique index by summing the four items associated with this question, which showed high reliability and had an optimal Cronbach Alpha ($\alpha=0.95$).

Results

An ANOVA analysis was used to test the general level of agreement with the message, which indicated that humility had a significant main effect [$F(1, 266) = 3,36; p < 0.05; \eta^2=.03$] in the sense that agreement was higher in the humble condition (Table 1). Moreover, we found

Table 2. Competence and benevolence evaluation. *Experimental conditions

			Humble		Not Humble	
Competence	N		M	DS	M	DS
		39	<i>Calm</i>	3.25	0.90	3.35
	36	<i>Joy</i>	3.56	0.71	3.52	0.82
	32	<i>Anger</i>	3.33	0.90	2.89	0.70
	28	<i>Sadness</i>	3.53	0.89	3.08	1.14
Benevolence						
	39	<i>Calm</i>	3.23	0.89	3.35	0.89
	36	<i>Joy</i>	3.63	0.68	3.41	0.84
	32	<i>Anger</i>	3.14	0.92	2.63	0.70
	28	<i>Sadness</i>	3.83	0.86	3.19	1.04

that humility and emotions had an interaction effect [$F(3, 266) = 4.47; p < 0.025; \eta^2=.02$]. As shown in Table 1, the level of agreement was higher when Ocasio-Cortez communicated her message in a humble way with a sad facial display; the differences were lower for the other emotional displays.

Behavioural intentions had a significant interaction effect, as revealed by the ANOVA analysis [$F(3, 266) = 6.65; p < 0.05; \eta^2=.04$], in the sense that orientation to hosting immigrants was more likely with the negative emotions (sad and anger) and humble condition and with the positive facial displays (calmness and joy) in the non-humble ones.

Politician evaluation

The variable politician evaluation was created on the basis of a factorial analysis that extracted two main factors that were named competence (including the following items: positive, strong, competent, exciting, convincing, credible, active), benevolence (including reliability, correctness, fairness, tolerance, charitability, and the reverse: dangerous, false, crafty, and hypocritical). These dimensions were reliable with a Cronbach Alpha of .72 and .78 respectively.

The ANOVA analysis showed the experimental condition of humility had some significant effects on the evaluation of the politician's competence [$F(1, 266) = 2.90; p < 0.05; \eta^2=.014$] and benevolence [$F(1, 266) = 6.40; p < 0.005; \eta^2=.032$] in the sense that Ocasio-Cortez's humble stance increased her evaluation to a benevolent and competent politician compared to the non-humble one.

Emotion significantly improved perceptions of the politician with, in general, facial displays of joy increasing her perceived benevolence and competence: [$F(3, 266) = 2.63; p < 0.005; \eta^2=.031$; benevolence: $F(3, 266) = 7.40; p < 0.000; \eta^2=.07$]. In this case there was an interaction effect [$F(3, 266) = 2.52; p < 0.05; \eta^2=.028$] on benevolence: when she

Table 3. Results of linear regression analysis examining the effect of positive emotions towards politician, evaluation of politician benevolence and moral emotions towards immigrants in predicting prosocial orientation towards immigrants. N = 266; b: unstandardized regression coefficient; SE: standard error; β : standardized coefficient; t: obtained t-value; p: probability; R²: proportion of variance explained. N = 266.

	¹ b	² SE	³ β	⁴ t	⁵ p	⁶ R ²
CONSTANT	2.94	0.28		10.44	0.00	
POSITIVE EMOTIONS TOWARDS POLITICIAN	0.31	0.07	0.29	4.019	0.00	
EVALUATION OF POLITICIAN BENEVOLENCE	0.21	0.77	0.19	2.717	0.007	
MORAL EMOTIONS TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS	0.15	0.74	0.11	1.957	0.05	
MODEL						0.000

NOTE: ¹b: unstandardized regression coefficient; ²SE: standard error; ³ β : standardized coefficient; ⁴t: obtained t-value; ⁵p: p-value; ⁶R²: proportion of variance explained.

communicated humbly and expressed negative emotions and exhibited a sad emotional display, she was perceived as more benevolent. Thus, the female humble stance induced higher evaluations of her benevolence when she was communicating her message with a sad facial expression. (Table 2).

Positive emotions towards the politician

The variable emotions were analysed by a repeated measures ANOVA that showed a significant within-effect in the sense that the positive emotions were higher than the negative ones ($p < .05$). Thus, we will focus only on the positive emotions that are significantly affected by the between factors (humility and emotional display). We took the sum of the positive emotions (satisfaction, interest, hope, pleasure, enthusiasm, admiration, joy, empathy, and calmness) and calculated its reliability with the Cronbach Alpha that was high ($\alpha = 0.91$).

After this, an ANOVA with manipulated variables indicated that participants felt more positive emotions towards Ocasio-Cortez in the humble condition than they did in its absence [M: 2,99 vs 2,72; $F(1, 266) = 4.28$; $p < .035$; $\eta^2 = .018$] and in the joy condition than in sadness, anger, and calmness [respectively, M: 3,18 vs 2,82, 2,63 and 2,86; $F(3, 266) = 4.31$; $p < .005$; $\eta^2 = .048$]. No significant interaction effect was reported.

Moral emotions towards immigrants

Emotions towards immigrants were calculated using a unique index of moral emotions that explained 38% of the variance respective to the factorial analysis, and it had good reliability (α : 0.88). We took the sum of the scores of interests, empathy, worry, shame, and guilt in order to obtain a unique index of moral emotions. The ANOVA run on moral emotions as a dependent variable indicated humility had a significant main effect in the sense that participants felt higher levels of moral emotions in the humility condition [$F(1, 266) = 4.07$; $p < .04$; $\eta^2 = .016$; (M: 2,34; ds: 0.8 vs 2,06; ds: 0.68)].

Testing the persuasive model on the moral topic

Lastly, we performed a linear regression including positive emotions towards the politician, the evaluation of the politician's benevolence, and the moral emotions towards the immigrants, and it was significant [$F(3, 266) = 20.97$; $p < .001$]. As shown in Table 3, the three variables significantly affect prosocial orientation towards immigrants, with higher positive emotions towards the politician ($\beta = .29$; $p < .001$), higher evaluation of the politician's benevolence ($\beta = .19$; $p < .007$), the higher moral emotions toward immigrants ($\beta = .11$; $p < .05$), giving a higher propensity to host immigrants.

Discussion

The present contribution starts by defining humility as a positive communicative move, then looks at the sincerity of the message, its admission of the person's limits and peculiarities, and recognition of the merits of others. A humble stance can be considered a positive feature since it is related to prosociality, empathic orientation, and the empowerment of the persuaders (Nielsen et al., 2013). This can be seen in organizational contexts primarily, and much less in the political sphere where the idea of humility has often been neglected in favour of notions like dominance and power. In fact, a recent study (D'Errico, 2019) highlighted the fact that male politicians talking humbly about a moral issue, like hosting immigrants, are not evaluated positively, and thus their message can easily be equivocated (Bull, 2007). A relevant exception is analyses of Obama's political speeches which point to the more general rhetorical strategy he used consistently, both when speaking as an incumbent and when playing the official role of US president, to overtly refer to his uncomfortable social position as the son of a mixed married couple – illegal in some North American states at the time of his birth. We can speculate that, being framed in the context of such an authentic self-presentation (Gunn, 2015), the sincerity of his message when speaking on moral issues associated with social discrimination could not easily be seen as the simple words of a hypocritical tongue (Leone et al., 2015). Moreover, an in-depth analysis of two official Back to School speeches, in which Obama, then US president, overtly blamed social inequalities on schools, suggesting that his moral suasion for enhancing equal school opportunities appeared more effective when he was overtly displaying facial expressions of sadness while directly addressing disadvantaged students (Leone et al., 2018). The objective of this study was to verify whether anything changes if the politician is female rather than

male, considering the role played by a person's emotional facial display. In general, the positive emotions expressed by the female politician increased the positive evaluations in terms of competence and benevolence, and this result is congruent with the fact that women are socially (stereotypically) required to express positive emotionality (Brody & Hall, 2008; Liu, 2016). When the emotionality expressed is considered in relation to a humble stance, however, sadness is found to have a significant effect that contributes to a higher evaluation of the politician's benevolence. The level of agreement with the message and the propensity to accept the moral message is also higher.

This demonstrates that the humility a woman is expected to show according to gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987; 2005) is not persuasive in all emotional display conditions since the level of agreement, the propensity to host immigrants, and the female politician's evaluation of benevolence is higher mainly in the negative emotional displays than in the positive ones: in anger and in sadness. Our manipulation shows that, when communicating humbly, Ocasio-Cortez was perceived as more benevolent when expressing her message with anger and sadness, and that these results can be explained if we consider that sadness is congruent with the internalizing emotions that are typical of women (Brody & Hall, 2008), while anger is, in this case, third party anger towards others' injustices (Van Doorn et al., 2014), or empathic anger (Batson et al., 2007), since the message is one of immigrant safety and care.

In a certain sense, the humble stance is accepted better when it is perceived as genuine and close to the politician's image than if it is coming from a woman and is congruent with the gender expectations of being careful about others' needs, and emotionally involved in others' problems.

This is not the same results of a previous study on a male politician (Obama) (D'Errico, 2019), which show that humility increased negative emotions like anxiety, fear, disgust, and contempt. When communicating humbly, the male politician was evaluated as less factual and more hypocritical than he was when the humble stance was absent. This was even more true when he expressed his stance using a sad facial expression, since that can be interpreted, given power and status expectations (Eagly, 1987, 2005), as signalling potential failure or a lack of effectiveness. A male politician's increased state of anxiety makes the message less persuasive, but these results can also be explained if we consider that the male politician in the experiment was the most powerful man in the world during that period: the President of the United States. The humble stance could also be persuasive in a male politician if he is perceived as 'one of us' from a power status point of view. In this sense, the persuasive impact of the negative emotions on the face of a male leader that is overtly and fearlessly declaring his humble origins from his initial low-status situations suggests that humility is seen as a signal of authenticity when the political speaker is somehow connected, either for gender or for social reasons, to the dominated group (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2006). At the same time female politicians are seen as more authentic when their persuasive messages are expressed 'on behalf of a broader collective and not for the self' (Hall & Donaghue, 2013, p. 643), thus in political contexts, that historically can be defined 'masculine' (Angouri, 2001; Katila & Eriksson, 2013), female humble expressions can be viewed positively mainly when are coherent with gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the moral message attributed to Ocasio highlighted that women are perceived to be persuasive when they talk humbly about others' suffering since their political authenticity is strictly linked to 'crisis management'

(Ryan et al., 2011). These results led to a more complex aspect of female leadership that it is known in the literature as the ‘glass cliff’ (Ryan et al., 2011) in which women are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions in problem organizations, unlike men, who are more likely to be appointed to stable leadership positions in successful organizations. But in this case it is also important to highlight the ‘utility of humility’ (Weiss & Knight, 1980), that women better perform in conveying moral messages and in changing prosocial behavioral orientation. Future studies could help overcome the lack of knowledge by shining light on the cultural differences and on whether women in objective power positions continue to be perceived as persuasive (competent and benevolent) and whether men in lower power positions continue to be perceived as less persuasive. Furthermore, Ocasio-Cortez, the politician chosen in this study to avoid partisan polarization, can be considered a non-partisan leader in the context – given the participants’ nationality – and so future studies could compare her with a ‘national’ or regional public figure to corroborate the results. Another limitation that could be improved in future studies regards the participants’ characteristics, such as level of political engagement and attitude, or individual differences, since as D’Errico (2020) has stated, humble leadership is preferred, for instance, by individuals with a high level of social dominance (Pratto et al., 1994) and low moral relevance (Graham et al., 2011). In any case, this study helps to underline that humility relates to the affective side of trust (McAllister, 1995), which enables the level of agreement to increase in line with the moral message, as long as the humble message is communicated by a politician displaying social coherence with his/her past personal story and his/her current power position.

Finally, the social implications of the present study relate to the modern communicative contexts in which signals of dominance seem to prevail. They can be considered persuasive during elections, but not in all types of political speech, some of which have the function of managing particular moments of social and political life. In crisis management, for instance, when there is a need to remind people of their mutual solidarity duties, humility signalling seems far more appropriate and closer to others’ needs. Interestingly, the importance of such signals is more evident in candidates who contradict the stereotyped expectations of social dominance. The first illuminating example was that of Obama, who used his position of initial social marginality – owing to his origins – both as a weapon in the electoral competition and as a guarantee of sincere rapprochement with discriminated social groups. But a speech analysis of women’s politics would represent an even more interesting field of study, and for the opposite reason; since women’s effective access to power or, conversely, their violent discrimination in the full exercise of their civil rights is currently one of the clearest distinctions between democratic politics and undemocratic politics.

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