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MARISA SAAVEDRA FLORES
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FINDING POWER IN POLITENESS:

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AT WORK

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Ryan S. Bisel

Dr. Mark C. Bolino

Dr. John Banas

Dr. Sun Kyong Lee

Dr. Elena Bessarabova

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, David and Dora Saavedra, and their parents, Ambrocio and Maria Marcos Savedra, and Ignacio "Nacho" and Josefina Garcia. I wouldn't be here without your love, support, and bravery.

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Abstract

The workplace is rife with situations that require courage, from confronting unethical behavior to advocating for equality. However, employees often avoid voicing issues that are politically sensitive (Seeger, 2001, 2004) for fear of retribution, damaging their reputation, or threatening coworkers' face (Bisel, 2018; Ethics Resource Center, 2000, 2007). Hence, the need for organizational members to communicate courageously and advocate against unethical or unjust behavior, policies, and practices are of the utmost importance (Lyons, 2017). This study sought to distinguish a new type of employee voice and workplace courage behavior: *social justice advocacy at work* (SJAW). SJAW involves communication by an organizational member that seeks to change organizational policy or practice to remediate real or perceived issues of social injustice in the workplace. Using politeness theory as a framework, this study examined how power, level of politeness, and issue type can shape individuals' perceptions of the competence *and* courageousness of social justice issues advocacy within the workplace setting. This message effects experiment followed a 2 (power, supervisor-directed vs. coworker-directed) x 3 (levels of politeness, off-record with facework, on-record without facework, on-record without facework with expletives) x 2 (issue type, diversity hiring advocacy message vs. gender pay inequality advocacy message) design. Investigating power dynamics and language features that influence perceptions of speakers can potentially identify more effective ways to voice issues advocacy courageously, while also maintaining both positive workplace images and relationships with coworkers.

Results support the notion that potential SJAW advocates need not choose between achieving perceptions of either communication competence or courageousness when engaging in SJAW. On the contrary, the use of politeness and facework in SJAW resulted in higher

perceptions of both competence *and* courageousness for the advocate, with politeness specifically functioning as the linguistic component necessary to fostering both of these perceptions. Additionally, results revealed that participants assigned to conditions in which SJAW was communicated to a supervisor perceived the advocate to be more courageous than participants assigned to conditions in which SJAW was communicated to a coworker.

The study also addresses the implications of these results from a critical perspective. Challenging the criticisms of scholars who may decry this study's recommendations as respectability politics, the author asserts that polite SJAW can and should be viewed as a tool to provide individuals a means to transform their workplace into a site of both conformity and resistance (Dazey, 2021) by adhering to organizationally- and hierarchically-acceptable means for raising social justice issues at work (Harris, 1999). Implications for theory and practice conclude the study.

Keywords: politeness theory, employee voice behavior, workplace courage, employee silence, social justice issues, dissent, ethics in the workplace, communication competence, courageousness, respectability politics

Chapter 1: Introduction

Unethical behavior plagues many U.S. organizations in all sectors and industries (Ivcevic et al., 2020). In 2018, a Global Business Ethics Survey reported that more than 1 in 4 employees have observed unethical behavior at work, including abusive behavior, sexual harassment, or discrimination. Despite the prevalence of unethical behavior in the workplace, employees are often hesitant to speak up for fear of being labeled negatively, damaging interpersonal relationships, or experiencing retaliation (Milliken et al., 2003). Speaking up about social justice issues also involves considerable risks. Attitudes toward social justice issues, as well as those championing them, have been the topic of contention and debate in recent years. The term "social justice warrior" is a pejorative term used to describe an individual who is overly-progressive or liberal in their political orientation (Ohlheiser, 2015), and whose motivation to voice social justice concerns is spurred by a desire to appear morally superior (Phelan, 2019).

Though social justice issues may indeed be voiced by an employee who has a genuine desire for fairness and justice for fellow employees, these definitions add additional support to the notion that voicing social justice issues in the workplace is an organizationally-risky behavior that can have negative reputational outcomes for the advocate. Consequences include damage to the professional image of the employee due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic (Seeger, 2001, 2004) and offending or insulting the target of the message (Valde & Henningsen, 2015). In other words, talking about politically-sensitive messages at work is risky because it implies a deficiency within the organization (Detert & Burris, 2007), and hence, a deficiency of decision-makers and leaders of the organization, as well. Voicing social justice issues in the workplace, despite the myriad of potential negative consequences, is a risky, yet worthy

endeavor that likely requires skillful balance of competence and courage to mitigate negative perceptions of the individual raising the issue.

Organizations are a microcosm of society and its problems. In the long term, scholars can learn valuable information as to how organizational communication about social issues can serve as a catalyst for broader social change by studying how issues are raised and rectified within organizations. In the short term, learning how to raise social justice issues in the workplace in a way that protects employees' professional image can make individuals more likely to speak up when they encounter discrimination or other unethical behaviors.

This research directs scholarly attention to the ways employee advocacy about social justice issues in the workplace create favorable or unfavorable perceptions of advocates, and in doing so, extends the literature on employee voice and workplace courage in several ways: First, this study is the first to define and differentiate a specific type of employee voice behavior and workplace courage, *social justice issues advocacy* (SJAW). SJAW has its own unique characteristics and consequences, which can help explain why voice is seen favorably and results in positive outcomes in some cases, but not in others. Second, this research examined underlying factors that affect perceptions of an employee's SJAW efforts, (a) power dynamics, (b) degree of politeness of the SJAW, and (c) issue type. Third, this study integrated politeness theory with the constructs of employee voice and workplace courage to examine how organizational members perceive those who voice SJAW in terms of communication competence and courageousness. Lastly, this study presents SJAW as a complex dynamic in which specific linguistic adjustments influence perceptions of issues advocates' communication competence *and* courageousness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social Justice Issues Advocacy

"Advocacy" is conceptualized in various ways in different literatures. In nonprofit studies, advocacy is defined as "the act of directly representing, defending, intervening, supporting, or recommending a course of action with the goal of securing or retaining social justice" (Mickelson, 1995, p. 95). When used in a political context, advocacy often refers to a coordinated effort by individuals whose goal is to achieve specific policy changes (Prakash & Gugerty, 2010). Communication scholar John Daly describes advocacy as promoting ideas in unique and persuasive ways to gain the support of decision-makers (Daly, 2011). In organizational studies, advocacy is more broadly defined as actions that seek to change public policies or practices through the support of a cause or idea (Norander, 2017). To date, advocacy-related investigations in organizational studies tend to focus on communication external to the organization. Public relations research on organizational issues management focuses on organizations' attempts to influence audiences' (i.e., publics) perceptions of information about issues in a manner that is advantageous for the organization (Hoffman & Ford, 2010). Issues are defined as "contestable questions of face, value, or policy that affect how stakeholders grant or withhold support and seek changes through public policy" (Heath, 1997, p. 44). Yet another approach focuses on understanding the activities and strategies used by organizations, usually nonprofit organizations, to enact change. An example of an institutional campaign aimed at changing individual behavior would be the public education campaigns of the American Lung Association warning the public of the dangers of tobacco smoking.

Another vein of advocacy studies identifies advocacy as a type of organization that is unique due to the importance of promoting core values to the organization's mission (Norander,

2017). The efforts of advocacy organizations or groups are largely aimed at external agents, such as governments and businesses. These agents advocate within the system by attempting to make changes through legislative lobbying or work outside the system through public education campaigns, mass media approaches, and demonstrations or protests (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Mosley, 2011; Norander, 2017). Advocacy organizations may seek to change policy in a variety of domains, including environmental protection, health care, education, and promoting economic and social justice (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). An example of this type of organization would be the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), whose goal is to remedy social injustices by lobbying for changes to laws they deem discriminatory (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019).

An area of research that is adjacent to advocacy is that of organizational rhetoric. Organizational rhetoric is the study of "formal, public messages and discourses (e.g., CEO speeches, mission statements, public relations campaigns, and discourses)" that can be focused internally or externally in an effort to create persuasion or identification (Cheney et al., 2004, p. 80). For example, external audiences may be the target of organizational discourse to repair a damaged organizational image or to shape the public's understanding of upcoming policy initiatives (Cheney, 1992; Vibbert & Bostdorff, 1993). Internal organizational discourse, on the other hand, may seek to influence members to adopt organizational objectives, as well as inculcate members to accept decision premises on behalf of the organization (Bullis, 1993; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

To further distinguish between organizational advocacy, issues management, organizational rhetoric, and SJAW, it is important to clarify that, though the purpose of organizational advocacy is to enact change, the term "advocacy" tends to describe the activities of a group or an organization whose purpose is to lobby for change to an outside entity and does

not address efforts by individual organizational members who wish to enact change, particularly in the realm of social justice, in practice or policy within their organizations. For the purposes of this study, the phrase "social justice issues advocacy" describes the communicative behaviors of an *individual* or individuals who seek to change policy or practice *within* an organization to remediate issues, specifically issues of social injustice, in the workplace. While many organizational advocacy efforts are focused on change on a broad scale, SJAW focuses on change that begins with the voice behavior of individuals within an organization, thus examining the communicative behaviors that occur "upstream" to promote and start the process of change at the organizational level, which may eventually lead to large-scale campaigns and change on a societal level.

SJAW shares many key characteristics with employee voice behavior and incorporates definitions of related constructs from various literatures, including social psychology, management, and communication. In the following section, literature on voice and related constructs including issue selling, issue crafting, proactive behaviors, upward communication, whistleblowing, boatrocking, impression management, and organizational silence are explained.

Differentiating SJAW from Related Constructs

Over the last 20 years, a growing body of research explores how and why employees speak up or withhold potentially useful information in the workplace (Morrison, 2011). A closely-related construct to that of voice is prosocial work behavior. Prosocial work behaviors are defined by Brief and Motowidlo (1986) as behaviors performed by an organizational member that the employee expects will help the member to which it is directed and is "performed with the intention of promoting the welfare of the individual, group, or organization to which it is directed" (p. 711). Specifically, Brief and Motowidlo (1986) include two employee voice

behaviors in their classification of prosocial work behaviors, including attempting to make improvements to organizational operations and objecting or alerting organizations to unethical requests, policies, or procedures. Social justice issues advocacy overlaps with these features of voice behavior and prosocial organizational behavior in that the goal of SJAW is to voice issues to change policy or practice within an organization, thus helping other members who have been discriminated against or marginalized. However, the concept of SJAW is distinct from both voice and prosocial work behaviors in the specificity of the type of issue it is seeking to remediate, namely, social justice issues.

Issue selling

An adjacent concept to employee voice behavior is that of issue selling. *Issue selling* is defined as the "voluntary, discretionary behaviors organizational members use to influence the organizational agenda by getting those above them to pay attention to an issue" (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Grant et al. (2009) described a specific type of issue selling, rational issue selling, as particularly proactive form of this behavior in which employees use evidence and logic to build a persuasive argument that is presented to supervisors to lobby that a specific issue needs organizational attention (Dutton et al., 2001). According to Morrison and Phelps (1999), issue selling is a vital means of getting issues on the organizational agenda and is an important first step in initiating organizational change (Dutton et al., 2002).

Though SJAW and issue selling are distinct concepts, there are several similarities. Both issue selling and SJAW's goals are to get an issue of concern on the organizational agenda with the goal of achieving some type of organizational change (Dutton et al., 2002). Issue selling, however, is solely upward-focused with the specific goal of gaining management's attention to an issue. SJAW is exclusively about remedying social justice issues in the workplace and is also

often directed to supervisors but can also be directed laterally to other managers who have the power to influence the organizational agenda. Hence, research on considerations and consequences of issue selling behavior can provide useful information for understanding organizational advocacy behaviors.

Issue crafting

The concept of *issue crafting*, a closely-related concept to that of issue selling, can also help inform our understanding of SJAW. Issue crafting refers to employees' attempts to publicly portray an issue as legitimate in a way that differs from an employee's private opinion of that issue (Sonenshein, 2006). For example, an employee may be dismayed by the lack of diversity in his or her department and raise the issue to his or her supervisors. However, instead of citing the true motivation for raising the issue (for example, that the employee feels the lack of diversity is unethical and discriminatory), the individual will "craft" their public communication about their private moral concern to make their communication conform to the logics of business discourse. The individual may cite the fact that diversity is financially beneficial for organizations, brings in new insights and ideas, and attracts higher quality job candidates—all without giving explicit voice to underlying moral motivations. Research on issue crafting has shown that the more successfully the individual creates public justifications that appeal to the target's meaning system (Bisel & Kramer, 2014; Creed et al., 2002), the more likely the message is to gain management's attention (Ocasio, 1997) and be viewed as credible and trustworthy (Cheney et al., 2004; Elsbach & Elofson, 2000). Research on issue crafting is enlightening to this study in that it focuses specifically on how language is used to shape organizational reality (Sonenshein, 2006) and can inform investigations of how specific language features of SJAW influence perceptions of individuals performing SJAW.

Proactive Work Behaviors

Another concept adjacent to that of voice is proactive work behaviors. Proactive behavior is defined as pre-emptive action taken by an employee that affects change for themselves or their environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Grant et al., 2009; Parker et al., 2006). One type of proactive behavior in particular is referred to in management literature as "promotive" behavior, which involves promoting, encouraging, or affecting change in some way (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). When coupled with challenging behaviors that speak out against the status quo in seeking change, this behavior is termed "challenging promotive behavior." The categories of proactive behavior and challenging promotive behavior both encompass the voice behaviors of issue selling and hence, social justice issues advocacy, in that all of these behaviors suggest the presence of a problem and either explicitly or implicitly suggest a solution to the problem. While SJAW may not always be pre-emptive, it is certainly aimed at promoting change and attempting to alter the status quo of the organization toward social justice and equality.

Upward Communication and Dissent

Upward communication, another related construct to employee voice behavior, is a broad term used to describe the transfer of information from one member of an organization to another, who holds more decision-making authority in the organizational hierarchy (Roberts & O'Reilly,1974). This term includes any communication between a subordinate and supervisor, making this construct broader than that of voice. Research on upward communication indicated that it is essential in helping leaders stay aware of issues or challenges that arise at lower levels of the organization, and provides crucial information to decision-makers from front-line supervisors, employees, and clients (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974). Unfortunately, according to Kassing (1997, 1998, 2002), critical upward communication often goes unheard, especially when

it involves expressing ideas that suggest the need for a change in the status quo. This type of upward communication, termed organizational dissent, can be done in several ways. *Articulated dissent* involves clearly and directly expressing dissent to organizational members who have the ability to influence change within the organization (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999). *Latent dissent* refers to communicating dissent to coworkers or other employees who lack the organizational power to enact change. Finally, *displaced dissent* refers to voicing dissent to external audiences such as family, friends, or significant others (Turnage & Goodboy, 2016). Research on organizational dissent is useful in conceptualizing SJAW, as both tend to convey the belief that the current state of the organization is unacceptable and needs to be changed.

Whistleblowing and Boatrocking

Whistleblowing is another construct related to that of voice, in that it describes the act of a current or former organizational member disclosing illegal, immoral, or illegitimate organizational practices to an outside party that may be able to affect change (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2008). Whistleblowing is a broader construct than voice due to its inclusion of communication outside of the organization, not just internal communication; however, it is narrower in scope in its restriction of the types of behaviors (i.e., immoral or illegal activities) that are reported (Miceli et al., 2008, Morrison, 2011). A famous and current example of whistleblowing is that of Edward Snowden, a former contractor for the National Security Agency (NSA). Snowden breached security to send classified documents to national news outlets thus revealing overreach of the U.S. government in its surveillance of U.S. citizens (Klein, 2013). A related phenomenon to whistleblowing is termed boatrocking (Redding, 1985). *Boatrocking* occurs when employees voice disagreement with supervisor's behavior or requests, usually on ethical grounds, and seek to voice their dissent within the organization (Bisel & Arterburn, 2012;

Kassing, 2005; Payne, 2007). The definition of SJAW can be informed by research on these various types of dissent behavior within and outside of the organization, and further inform our study on how this type of voice behavior influences perceptions of the dissenter.

Organizational Silence and MUM Effects

The counterpoint to studies of employee voice behavior are studies of employee silence. Silence is described by Milliken et al. (2003) as the act of withholding useful information, opinions, and concerns regarding organizational issues. This construct could be viewed as opposite of voice (Ashford et al., 2009; Morrison, 2011); thus, exploring the issue of silence will likely shed light on factors that influence an employee's decision of whether or not to engage in social justice issues advocacy.

Conventional wisdom tells us that most individuals avoid broaching unpleasant topics, an observation that led to Rosen and Tesser (1970) to identify this phenomenon as the MUM (keeping Mum about Undesirable Messages) effect. This effect holds true in the workplace as well, with research indicating that, despite the numerous benefits of employee voice behavior to organizations, employees often avoid communicating conflicting opinions about organizational practices and policies to their supervisors (Kassing, 2006) and choose to remain silent on organizational issues (Detert & Edmonson, 2011; Morrison, 2011). Research on issue selling reveals that employees will avoid voicing issues due to employees' fear of retribution (Morrison, 2011). Additionally, employees will be motivated to remain silent if they perceive their voice efforts as futile, perceive that voicing an issue may damage their workplace image, harm their emotional well-being and self-esteem, result in negative performance evaluations, and result in fewer opportunities for promotion (Ashford et al., 1998; Morrison, 2011; Milliken et al., 2003).

Additionally, numerous organizational communication studies reveal that employees are reluctant to voice concerns about moral issues, resulting in the moral mum effect (Bisel et al., 2012). The *moral mum effect* refers to an individual's reluctance to use moral language to defend a decision (Zanin et al., 2016). According to Bisel and Adame (2019), the tendency of employees to avoid voicing private moral concerns is influenced by implicit theories of authority. Implicit theories are taken-for-granted beliefs that serve as a sort of cognitive processing map, allowing individuals to process information effortlessly and, subsequently, to take action (Detert & Edmonson, 2011; Ross, 1989). Individuals are socialized into implicit theories of voice throughout the lifespan, which manifests in their tendency to avoid speaking to supervisors using moralized language (Bisel & Adame, 2019). Similarly, implicit theories of voice can also shed light on employees' motivation to remain silent about organizational issues. Detert and Edmonson (2011) argue that implicit theories of voice exist in hierarchical organizations and lead most employees to conclude that voice behavior is a risky action that should be avoided. In the following sections, we will continue exploring the unique, risk-laden nature of SJAW and its relationship with two outcome variables: perceptions of communication competence and perceptions of courageousness.

Study Variables

Dependent Variable 1: Perceptions of Communication Competence and SJAW

Engaging in SJAW likely entails communicating about sensitive topics, which can potentially threaten public images and perceptions of self. Much is known about how communicators adjust their messaging to persuade others about sensitive topics. Research demonstrated that an important part of addressing sensitive issues in the workplace is the communication competence of the speaker (Kingsley Westerman et al., 2018). Communication

competence refers to an individual's "ability to adapt messages appropriately to the interaction context" (Spitzburg & Cupach, 1984, p. 64) and is comprised of three main aspects: relational appropriateness, task-related effectiveness, and balance between these goals within the given context. Appropriateness refers to the degree to which messages avoid threatening face, breaking social or relational norms, rules, or expectations, while task effectiveness refers to how successful the message is in achieving the task or goal (Spitzburg & Cupach, 1984). Imagine, for example, a situation in which a company bookkeeper becomes aware that female executives make a significant amount less than their male counterparts. If the bookkeeper raises concerns with management regarding the systemic inequality, the success of the bookkeeper's SJAW might depend, in part, on how well he or she appropriately and effectively communicates the message. If, on one hand, the bookkeeper is overly appropriate and chooses to remain silent or speak in highly-euphemistic terms (Lucas & Fyke, 2013), the nature or urgency of the SJAW message may be ignored or not identified altogether. If, on the other hand, the bookkeeper is overly task-effective in demanding change, he or she may be perceived as offensive and lacking credibility and thereby run the risk of undermining the impetus for the issues advocacy.

Communication studies of the interrelationship among communication competence, credibility, and persuasiveness date back, quite literally, thousands of years. Aristotle examined this relationship in his seminal work *Rhetoric* (Cooper, 1932), stating that the means of persuasion are primarily based on three factors: *ethos* (i.e., personal characteristics of the speaker), *pathos* (i.e., the use of emotion as a persuasive tool), and *logos* (i.e., use of evidence and reason to persuade). If individuals are to be successful in their persuasive efforts, Aristotle claimed, they must be perceived as credible. Aristotle also recognized the importance of emotion in communication, encouraging communicators to use both verbal and nonverbal messages to

persuade the audience. These studies demonstrated burgeoning understanding of the complex dynamics among influence, power, and effective communication that effectively preserves relationships between individuals. In the organizational context, employees voicing SJAW need to effectively manage the tension between relational appropriateness and task effectiveness. This skill is essential to the success of this kind of organizational communication to avoid the previously mentioned negative consequences associated with voicing social justice concerns in the workplace. In other words, skillful SJAW is a matter of communication competence.

Dependent Variable 2: Perceptions of Courageousness and SJAW

As with other types of voice behavior, SJAW entails some risk due to the potential for negative consequences that can result from voicing issues in the workplace (Carson & Cupach, 2000; Czopp et al., 2006). Hence, voicing SJAW in the workplace, despite the risk of negative consequences, could be considered an act of *workplace courage*. Courage has been studied for thousands of years; moral philosophers, including Aristotle and Plato, explained that courage is a key virtue necessary for unlocking other important virtues (Aristotle, 1987; Lee, 2003). Stories dating back to ancient times often lauded courage on the battlefield (Worline, 2004).

In recent decades studies in this area have been expanded to encompass acts of courage in the workplace. *Workplace courage* is defined by Detert and Bruno (2017) as "a work domain-relevant act done for a worthy cause despite significant risks perceivable in the moment to the actor" (p. 594). According to Detert and Bruno (2017), three characteristics constitute workplace courage: (a) the act must be *relevant* to a workplace and its stakeholders, (b) the act must be considered *worthy,* and (c) the act must be considered *risky*. These acts can include challenging powerful individuals (Koerner, 2014), challenging unethical behavior from a colleague or one's

organization (Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Baratz & Reingold, 2013), and speaking out about unethical or illegal behavior (Shepela et al., 1999). Social justice issues advocacy is risky communication, and thus, courageous because it implies a deficiency in the organization's current value system and ways of doing. SJAW may also be perceived as inappropriate or "out of bounds" for workplace talk due to the political, moralistic, value-laden, or potentially divisive nature of the topic being advocated (Bisel, 2018). SJAW may also be viewed as an issue to be dealt with by top-level management only, and not necessarily within the authority domain of middle-management or lower-level employees' decision making (Bisel, 2018). Hence, voice, and in particular SJAW, involves an aspect of risk-taking (and therefore, courageousness) perhaps even more so than other types of voice behavior (e.g., speaking up about minor operational concerns).

Lyons (2017) offered a definition of a similar but more general concept, highlighting communication in a courageous act. He defines *courageous communication* as meaning-making that goes against what is perceived to be the group's consensus (Lyons, 2017) and involves (a) risk in speaking out, despite the potential for retributive consequences, (b) seeking to remedy what is perceived to be unethical or ineffective organizational practices, (c) speaking out for the good of the organization (Hornstein, 1986). These characteristics also clearly encompass SJAW behavior, which is performed in order to remedy social injustice in the workplace. Together, these definitions demonstrate an area in management and communication literature that is rife with opportunity to expand upon both current workplace courage literature and courageous communication literature. Currently, studies of courageous communication in the workplace are relatively limited, possibly due to the complex, value-laden nature of the construct, or perceptions of courage as a "soft" concept that is not easily measured or studied (Jablin, 2006);

however, as evidenced by these definitions, SJAW is an act that could be classified as *courageous workplace communication*, a concept that would be situated in both management and communication literatures, overlapping both employee voice and workplace courage research.

Thus far, SJAW has been defined and conceptualized in terms of perceptions of communication competence and courage. The question then becomes, *What communication factors might play a role in how these perceptions are shaped?* In the following sections, two factors are proposed to influence perceptions of the communication competence and courageousness of employees voicing SJAW in the workplace: power and politeness.

Independent Variable 1: Power Dynamics and SJAW

Power is omnipresent in organizations and is necessary to coordinate the completion of tasks and aid in cooperation (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Power is also a defining characteristic of the supervisor and subordinate relationship (Pfeffer, 1992; Raven et al., 1998; Yukl, 2006). As most employees' success in the workplace is dependent upon completing tasks successfully, an awareness of relational power dynamics and political skills are even more important in the workplace (Pfeffer, 1992). The notion of power, however, further complicates the expression and perception of SJAW in the workplace, as every organization exists within a cultural context that influences norms and expectations for individual behavior (Pfeffer, 2009). When exploring the complex notion of how SJAW is perceived in the workplace, power dynamics between the target and the influencer can help explain many of outcomes (Pfeffer, 2009) and can help explain why some SJAW is perceived as courageous and competent while others are not.

Power is defined by French and Raven (1959) as the potential to change the belief, attitude, or behavior of the target. French and Raven (1959) outline five bases of power: coercion, reward, legitimacy, expert, and referent. Coercive power uses the threat of punishment

to force compliance from the target. An example of using coercion to influence could be a manager using the threat of docking an employee's pay if they do not arrive to work on time. Though coercive power might achieve compliance in the short term, this type of power is problematic, as the influencer must constantly surveil the target to ensure compliance. Reward power uses the ability to give or withhold a reward to the target that is earned by compliance of the target. An example of this could be a manager awarding gift cards to employees for outstanding work. In many cases, individuals' position within the hierarchy grants them control over resources (e.g., promotions, budget) and reward power over employees (Pfeffer, 2009). Legitimate power comes from the influencer holding a title or position of authority and is often influenced by social norms (Raven, 1992).

According to French and Raven (1959), a culture that emphasizes respect for positions of authority and acceptance of the social structure bolsters the legitimate power of individuals in these positions. An example of legitimate power would be a manager making a request of an employee to scan a document and the employee recognizing the authority of his or her manager and completing the request. Expert power is power that is granted based on one's knowledge, experience, or skills (French & Raven, 1959). Expert power could be conveyed by having certain degrees or credentials, or a personal history of experiences that is known by others (Raven, 1992). As a result of this knowledge or skill set, someone with expert power gains trust and compliance from others (Raven, 1992). An example of this could be an employee who has years of experience in the industry in which he or she works. Other coworkers may take directives from this employee regarding best practices due to their trust that the experienced employee knows the best way to complete the task.

Ostensibly, SJAW is voiced with the goal of achieving social justice within the organization. If this goal is to be realized, the appropriateness of the target of the request must be considered. Requests voiced to those who have the power and resources (i.e., those higher in the organizational hierarchy) to enact these changes should be considered high in task-related effectiveness. Since task-related effectiveness is related to how successful the message is in achieving its goal, one would posit that directing SJAW to someone who can help the advocate achieve their goal would be perceived as more competent, assuming that the message is relationally appropriate (Spitzburg & Cupach, 1984). Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1a: Participants perceive SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor to be more *communicatively competent* than one voiced by a coworker to a fellow coworker.

Alternately, research also supports the argument that employees who are lower in the organizational power structure are especially vulnerable to the risks of voicing SJAW. Research indicated that offending a supervisor raises employees' fear of retribution or losing their employment (Bisel et al., 2011; Bisel & Arterburn, 2012). Valde and Henningsen (2015) state that expressing disapproval of a supervisor's behavior on ethical grounds could challenge the supervisor's public-image needs by interfering with the supervisor's ability to gain social approval (i.e., positive face) and challenges the supervisor's desire and prerogative to act autonomously (i.e., negative face). In many SJAW situations, the public image needs (i.e., face) of a speaker can be challenged by face-threatening acts as well. Research by Bisel et al. (2011) supports this claim, as they assert that denying an unethical request of a supervisor is a face-threatening act that can have significant and negative consequences for the speaker. Together, these studies represent support this research's argument that, in advocating for social justice issues in the workplace, employees are indeed engaging in an act fraught with face-related risks.

Since risk-taking is central to perceptions of courage and those lower in the organizational hierarchy are subject to supervisors' job security, resource allocation decisions, and evaluations, SJAW is a much more risky, and hence, a more courageous act for these individuals. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

> **H1b**: Participants perceive SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor to be more *courageous* than one voiced by a coworker to a fellow coworker.

Independent Variable 2: Politeness in SJAW

Power dynamics between communicators seems important to understanding the pattern of perceptions created by SJAW messages; however, it also seems likely that message content itself is also an important element in understanding whether and to what degree SJAW messages are perceived as competent and courageous. According to Wellmon (1988), an important aspect of communicative competence is the speaker's ability to take the face of their communicative partner into consideration in a given interaction. *Face* is defined by Goffman (1967) as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself (sic)…[that is] delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 213), and is the public image that one wishes to have supported in interactions with others (Cupach & Metts, 1994). According to Goffman, individuals enact behaviors that support their desired version of identity, and, to be successful, conversational partners must validate this identity in interactions (Shimanoff, 2009). For example, if an individual is attempting to enact the public image of an effective supervisor, the individual's actions will align with this persona or the individual will risk threatening that desired image. The supervisor could lose face if she is disorganized, unprepared, or uninformed for a departmental meeting. In turn, employees could threaten the supervisor's face if they ignore directives or openly challenge the supervisor's authority. In such a scenario, the supervisor would still hold

her title, but she would have lost face by having the supervisor public image threatened in interactions with her employees.

According to Cupach and Metts (1994), behaviors that serve to endorse an individual's positive face include smiling, demonstrating warmth, focusing on the speaker, responding appropriately, and demonstrating fairness. Wellmon (1988) identified behaviors such as being a good listener, having a friendly, approachable manner, understanding human nature, interacting well with others, and having clear verbal communication as being key in competent communication that takes the other's face into consideration. These characteristics reflect the importance of recognizing and maintaining face as a key aspect of communicative competence (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Weinstein, 1969; Wiemann, 1977).

An extension of Goffman's concept of face, *politeness theory*, was conceptualized by sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987). The theory explains how individuals adapt their language-use in ritualized interactions and, in doing so, reflect wider social and relational contexts. Across three different cultures, Brown and Levinson noted that individuals tend to avoid direct, instrumental communication in favor of less-direct language forms, which have the function of protecting against threats to face. Brown and Levinson (1987) posited that a desire to preserve face was the driving motivation behind the use of these language forms. However, despite social pressure to honor the face of others, many types of communication common in the organizational context have the potential to threaten others' face and damage relationships (Bisel et al., 2011). *Face-threatening acts* (FTAs) are interactions that have the potential to challenge one's ability to maintain his or her face (Valde & Henningsen, 2015), and include "acts of contradicting, disagreeing, interruption, imposing, borrowing, asking

a favor, requesting information, [and] embarrassing" (Morand, 2000, p. 237). FTAs, according to Valde and Henningsen (2015), occur in the workplace frequently and the consequences of committing FTAs can be serious; confronting or challenging a coworker can damage working relationships and create contentious workplace climates (Bisel et al., 2011).

In the organizational context, avoiding FTAs could help preserve the face of coworkers, but can greatly inhibit organizational members' ability to work effectively and even make organizations susceptible to the proliferation of unethical behaviors (Bisel, 2018; Morrison, 2011). Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that reasonable and socialized members of society will seek to avoid committing FTAs, but when FTAs are unavoidable, individuals will likely engage in communication strategies to buffer the face-threatening effects of these messages and thus lessen damage to the individual's face to its desired state (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967; Morand, 2000). These behaviors, referred to as *facework* by Goffman (1967), are strategic, linguistic behaviors that draw upon linguistic politeness routines learned throughout lifespan socialization.

Facework can be employed to minimize face threat to a speaker or a receiver and preserve the individual's desired image (Morand, 2000). Facework can be both protective (in advance of face threats) and corrective (after face threats have surfaced) for addressing both self and other face concerns. Furthermore, as in the case with SJAW, there are times and situations that necessitate FTAs due to an organizational exigency that cannot be ignored if it is to be solved or addressed. For example, if a favored employee is stealing from the company this issue should be brought to the attention of management, even if it threatens the face of the supervisor by implicitly communicating that the supervisor may have allowed these illegal actions to continue because of a lack of attention or willful ignorance. In these cases, a face threat is

necessary to bring sensitive issues to the attention of management but can be redressed with protective and corrective facework.

Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that all adults have a desire to maintain face during interactions and distinguish between two types of face concerns that motivate individuals' communication with others: positive face and negative face. *Positive face* refers to one's desire for social approval (Goffman, 1967). To continue with the supervisor example, positive face needs are met when employees treat the supervisor with deference, liking, and respect. *Negative face* refers to an individual's need for autonomy and is communicated by interacting in ways that respect the individual's time, recognizes boundaries, and avoids impositions (Goffman, 1967). Employees can honor their supervisor's negative face by asking if the supervisor is busy before requesting assistance, knocking before opening his or her office door, and avoiding intrusive questions. For example, when broaching the topic of a social justice issue in the workplace with a supervisor, an employee might communicate the following message:

> "Hey Jordan, are you busy? I just wanted to chat about something that has been causing me some concern. I was doing some work on payroll and I noticed that we have some pretty dramatic pay inequalities between the male and female customer-service employees. I'm sure you weren't aware of this. I was hoping there was something we could do to rectify these inequalities, as it seems pretty unfair."

This message is an example of SJAW, couched in extensive facework. The speaker minimizes the threat to face by saying he/she "*just* wants to chat." The speaker softens the severity of the problem by saying there are "pretty dramatic" differences in pay, as opposed to "severely disparate," or harsher language. The speaker's emphasis that, "I'm sure you weren't aware of this," appeals to Jordan's need to save face and implies that if Jordan had been aware of the

problem, he or she would have certainly corrected it already. Additionally, this message recognizes the autonomy of the individual and conveys respect for Jordan's time by asking if he/she is busy as a preface to the SJAW. Together, this example of SJAW demonstrates how a message could be conveyed appropriately, effectively, and competently by acknowledging the face of the receiver.

The importance of managing face in interactions is an even more prevalent concern in conflict, confrontation, or when broaching politically-sensitive topics that have a face-threatening aspect to them, such as in SJAW (Kassing, 2006; Lewis & Yoshimura, 2017; Rasinski, Geers, & Czopp, 2013; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). However, it is likely both supervisors and employees tend to avoid SJAW for fear of negative interpersonal ramifications, which could result from threatening their coworker's face (Rasinski et al., 2013). According to Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998), fear of threatening a coworker's face is a valid concern, as the extent to which face is managed effectively during conflict situations affects the quality of the relationship between individuals. Similarly, research suggests that both supervisors and employees are often concerned about impression management (a concept related to facework, see below) in the workplace and how their communication is perceived (Kingsley et al., 2018).

Carson and Cupach (2000) support this notion by asserting that managers who deliver face-threatening criticisms may be rated as less competent communicators. Specifically related to addressing social ills in the workplace, Czopp et al. (2006) found that individuals who confronted racial prejudice in a hostile manner were perceived more negatively than those who used a nonthreatening manner to address the issue. This body of research supports the need for a better understanding of how specific language features of the SJAW message can possibly mitigate the negative consequences of performing this unique type of voice behavior. Research

by Kassing (2005) found that upward dissent strategies that also had the greatest potential to threaten the face of the supervisor were rated as least communicatively competent by participants. Additionally, the two upward dissent strategies that were rated highest in communication competence (i.e., solution presentation and direct-factual appeal) "appear to mitigate face threat through direct and open communication" (Kassing, 2005, p. 231). Hence, politeness theory and facework provide a valuable framework for understanding perceptions of upward dissent strategies and can likely inform our understanding of perceptions of SJAW messages. If organizational members are aware of ways they can broach social justice issues that minimize the threat to their workplace relationships and image, these members may be more likely to perform SJAW in ways that garner perceptions of communication competence and courage, while avoiding perceptions of incompetence and cowardice.

A constant tension exists when delivering risky or face-threatening messages, such as SJAW, between appearing competent while also maintaining the appropriateness and effectiveness of the message. Messages that lack a balance between relational appropriateness and task effectiveness result in the speaker being perceived as incompetent (Carson & Cupach, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). For example, an evaluation from a supervisor may be appropriate (i.e., avoids threatening the employee's face) by using vague, sugar-coated, or obtuse language, but may not convey to the employee what needs to be improved clearly, thereby rendering the feedback incompetent. Not conveying feedback for improvement clearly to the employee, a key responsibility of the supervisor, results in the supervisor focusing excessively on avoiding negative feedback that could threaten the employee's face, rendering the supervisor ineffective in achieving the purpose of the conversation (Spitzburg & Cupach, 1984). Consider, for example, the following hypothetical message:

> "Taylor, I think the feedback we have received from customers regarding your service has been a little bit concerning, but I'm sure it's really not your fault. Maybe we could work a little bit on getting the reports submitted sooner, but it's really not a big deal."

In this example, supervisor's feedback is replete with facework, which is done by using hedging language with facework (e.g., "I think..," and "maybe"), using phrases that minimize the threat of the feedback (e.g., "it's really not a big deal") and ambiguous language (e.g., "a little bit concerning"). However, in a message focusing solely on saving the face of the receiver, the message loses its effectiveness and does not communicate to the employee clearly what needs to be improved, thus resulting in incompetent supervisor communication. Similarly, Morand (2000) found that politeness in downward communication served to conceal the urgency of directives. For example, a supervisor who says "Could I have that report when you're done with it?" communicates far less urgency than a supervisor who says "I need that report by 3 o'clock." Subsequently, the tardy submission of a report from an employee upon hearing the first example would be the result of the supervisor's overly-polite feedback.

Alternately, excessive focus on the task effectiveness of a message can also result in perceptions of the supervisor as incompetent (Carson & Cupach, 2000). To continue with the previous example, a supervisor who is primarily concerned with message effectiveness (i.e., achieving the goal of giving feedback for improvement to the employee successfully), may not recognize the face-threatening nature of giving feedback and ignore the employee's expectation for politeness and face-saving strategies in this context (Carson & Cupach, 2000). This type of message might sound like the following:

> "Taylor. Listen up! The feedback we have received from customers regarding your service has been horrendous. You need to fix this immediately! I need reports turned in on time, and if they are late again you will be written up."

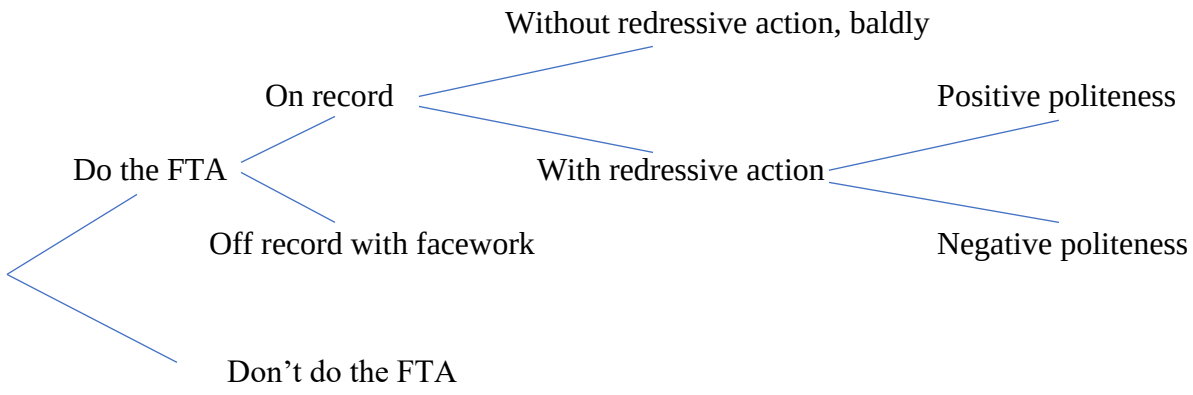
In this example, the negative information is communicated very directly, with disregard for the face of the receiver. Though one might perceive receiving these types of messages as part of the psychological employment contract that requires feedback from supervisors, the directness of the feedback and disregard for common politeness strategies may lead to the supervisor being perceived as an incompetent communicator who violates expectations for politeness and thus, threatens the relationship between supervisor and employee. Over time, prolonged disregard for the face needs of the subordinate could erode trust and the subordinate's perception that the supervisor is communicatively competent (Rasinski et al., 2013). That loss in source credibility and relational resources could undermine the supervisors' personal power base and capacity to influence the subordinate's commitment (Richmond et al., 1983).

These examples demonstrate another tension present in communicating SJAW, which is the tension between the need to address risky topics and the need for the speaker to maintain his or her image as a competent communicator in the workplace. Addressing issues of social injustice by voicing SJAW also calls for speakers to demonstrate courageousness by challenging the organization's status quo despite serious consequences, which complicates the notion of perceptions of competence due to the face-threatening nature of these issues.

Facework strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) outline several facework strategies, including on-record, off-record, bald without redress, redressive action, positive politeness, and negative politeness. On-record strategies are used if, in communicating an FTA, other participants in the interaction agree upon the intention of the message. For example, if an

employee says, “I will be at the meeting tomorrow morning,” others hearing this statement would likely agree that the speaker was committing him- or herself to this particular act, thus making this statement “on-record” as a promise to perform the stated action (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In contrast, a message is “off-record” if there is more than one possible interpretation of the message, enabling the speaker to deny committing him- or herself to one particular intention. For example, an employee might say, “Gosh, money is tight these days,” to his supervisor with the intent of implying a desire for a raise. However, upon the supervisor asking, “Are you asking me for a raise?,” the employee could deny this intent plausibly, as the message was sufficiently ambiguous. Linguistic devices that can be used to achieve the “off-record” strategy include metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, and understatement, each of which hint subtly at the speaker’s meaning without directly communicating it (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These devices used to achieve an “off-record” strategy serve as an extreme form of facework that can be useful in communicating the face-threatening act of SJAW. In using these devices to communicate a risky, politically-sensitive message, they can act as a safeguard for both the speaker and the receiver of the SJAW by providing alternate interpretations of the criticism, while recognizing the positive and negative face of the supervisor (Goffman, 1967).

Figure 1. Strategies for Committing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987)



Committing an FTA baldly, without redress involves communicating a message in the most direct and explicit way possible. For example, “Get this report on my desk by five” would be considered this type of FTA. FTAs are typically communicated this way if the speaker has little fear of reprisal from the receiver, or if there are pressing demands (e.g., an emergency) that are implicitly agreed upon as taking precedence over the receiver’s face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Redressive action seeks to neutralize the potential face damage of an FTA and can take two forms: positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is when the person committing the FTA treats the receiver as someone who is similar to themself, is known and liked (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

For example, using an inclusive “we” can convey positive politeness, as when an employee says to his or her supervisor, “We don’t want people to think we discriminate in our hiring practices, right?” In this example, the face threat is minimized by the employee conveying that his or her wants are the same as the supervisor’s wants. Negative politeness, on the other hand, focuses more on protecting or restoring the receiver’s negative face. That is, it focuses on respecting the autonomy of the receiver and is characterized by humility and formality of the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Some typical examples of redress are apologies for interference, linguistic choices that convey deference, hedges, use of passives that distance both the speaker and the receiver from the act, and providing an alternate, face-saving “out” that makes the receiver perceive his or her response is not forced. An example of this may sound like the following:

> “Hey, Pat, I’m sorry to bother you with this, but it has come to my attention that there is somewhat of a pay disparity between men and women on our maintenance staff. I would

understand if you didn't know about it, since you've been really busy with the new account. If you have time, do you think this is something you could look into?"

In this example, the individual voicing the SJAW uses a humble tone and conveys deference by apologizing for the imposition and demonstrating respect for the receiver's time. He or she also provides an alternate, face-saving course of action for the receiver other than investigating the pay discrepancy issue ("If you have time…"). Ostensibly, the receiver could fall back on the ready-made excuse that he or she did not have time to address the concern, rather than the face-threatening alternative, which is that the receiver did not perceive the issue of gender pay discrimination to be an urgent matter worthy of his or her immediate attention.

Both organizational power and varying levels of politeness of SJAW messages likely contribute to shaping perceptions of communication competence and courageousness of SJAW in the workplace. However, understanding the necessary components that impact how these perceptions are formed can enhance our understanding of SJAW as a risky and courageous communicative act. Thus, I propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: Participants perceive SJAW off-record with facework voiced to a coworker to be more *communicatively competent* than (i) SJAW on-record without facework, which is perceived to be more communicatively competent than (ii) SJAW on-record without facework/with expletives.

H2b: Participants perceive SJAW off-record with facework voiced to a coworker to be more *courageous* than (i) SJAW on-record without facework, which is perceived to be more courageous than (ii) SJAW on-record without facework/with expletives.

H3: The greatest difference in participants' perceptions of *communication competence* exists between SJAW with facework voiced by a coworker to a supervisor and SJAW voiced without facework/with expletives by a coworker to a coworker, such that addressing powerful others politely is seen as competent compared to addressing coworkers with expletives.

Literature on the risk of voicing social justice issues in the workplace has already established the consequences that are imminent when voicing dissent to a supervisor due to power differentials that guide employee behavior within the organizational hierarchy, supporting the notion that SJAW is a courageous act. However, the relationship between politeness and courageousness is less clear. Philosopher Stephen Leighton (2021) begins to make the connection between politeness, courageousness, and other virtues such as good-temperedness. The use of politeness in the classroom context can also inform this study due to the similar power differential between students and instructors as employees and supervisors. Research in the instructional context indicates that the use of politeness in emails from students to instructors can increase perceptions of competence (Trees, et al., 2009; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011) likeability (Bolkan & Holmgren, 2012; Jessmer & Anderson, 2001) fairness (Trees, et al., 2009), and friendliness (Jessmer & Anderson, 2001). Alternately, the use of profanity has been shown to result in perceptions of the speaker as antisocial, dishonest, and a violation of social and moral norms (Feldman, et al., 2017; Jay, 2009). Based on this research, it stands to reason that politeness in a risky, yet worthy situation can result in positive perceptions of the speaker, including perceptions of courageousness, while the use of profanity when raising SJAW can result in lower perceptions of courageousness. This reasoning leads me to pose the following hypothesis:

H4: The greatest difference in participants' perceptions of *courageousness* exists between SJAW with facework voiced by a coworker to a supervisor and SJAW voiced without facework/with expletives by a coworker to a coworker, such that addressing powerful others politely is seen as courageous compared to addressing coworkers with expletives.

Independent Variable 3: Issue Type and SJAW

The previous section established that power dynamics and message politeness content of SJAW are likely to influence perceptions of the SJAW speaker's communication competence and courageousness. It is possible that idiosyncratic characteristics of the social justice issues being voiced may also influence these outcomes; however, it is also possible that larger patterns exist because of the contingencies of the speech situation and limited available means of persuasion and impression management. If a consistent pattern of perceptions of SJAW is detected across issue-type, then that finding would be consistent with the notion that these patterns are widespread and not only associated with the idiosyncratic nature of specific issues themselves. These points lead to posing the following research question:

RQ: Are the patterns of perceptions of courage and communication competence different across two issue types being advocated (i.e., diversity in hiring, gender pay equity)?

Chapter 3: Method

Power Analyses

The power analysis program G*Power 3 was used to determine the number of participants needed to achieve sufficient statistical power. Three a priori power analyses with power level set at .80, alpha level set at .05, and different effect sizes ranging from small to medium were computed. For an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), a small effect size is .10 and a medium effect size is .25 (Cohen, 1992). The power calculation with the effect size set at .10 indicated a needed sample size of 1,634. A second power calculation with a .20 effect size yielded a needed sample size of 404. The third power calculation with a .15 effect size yielded a needed sample size of 732. To balance the projected effect size and the financial constraints associated with compensating working adult participants, the sample size goal was set at 600, but ultimately a final sample of 481 working adults was obtained (see below).

Participants

Participants were US-based working adults recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), in late summer of 2021. Crowdsourcing services can be an appropriate means of sampling participants, as researchers established participants drawn from them are as diverse as other methods (e.g., a convenience sample using undergraduate students; Burhrmester et al., 2011). The survey was limited to working adults who are verified as high-performing MTurk workers and who have been vetted as holding other full-time employment. These inclusion criteria are important, as they increase the likelihood that individuals participating in the study are indeed working adults. Limiting the study to verified high performers also increased the likelihood that the participants answered thoughtfully and thoroughly.

A sample of 481 adults who work at least 20 hours per week participated in this online experiment. Of those, 307 have at least 1 year of experience as a supervisor (M = 4.68, SD = 6.4)

while years of overall work experience ranged from 1 to 50 years (M = 18.10, SD = 10.24). Participants ranged from 24 to 68 years of age (M = 40.54, SD = 9.59) and included 197 females, 265 males, 2 did not identify as only male or female, and 17 chose to not answer. Participants lived in 50 different states in the United States. Participants' education levels ranged from some high school to an earned doctorate or professional degree, with a bachelor's degree as the most common educational level of attainment (46.2%).

Procedure and Design

Solicitation emails directed participants to an online survey in which they first answered questions regarding their age and employment. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and all participants completed informed consent before participating. All participants were 18 years or older and currently employed at an institution other than Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants then completed a CAPTCHA to avoid bots. After completing the survey, participants were compensated $3.00 USD.

This message effects experiment followed a 2 (power; supervisor-directed vs. coworker-directed) x 3 (levels of politeness; off-record with facework, on-record without facework, on-record without facework with expletives) x 2 (issue type; diversity in hiring advocacy message vs. gender pay inequality advocacy message) design. Participants read, "You are about to read a workplace scenario and indicate your level of agreement with multiple statements. Please read the scenario carefully." All participants then read the following prompt: "Imagine you work in an organization and work 40 hours a week doing important administrative tasks for your department. After lunch one day, the following interaction occurred." Participants were then randomly assigned one of the 12 experimental conditions (see Appendix A for list of scenarios) involving an organizational issue advocacy (SJAW) message communicated to a supervisor or

coworker by a coworker. Three SJAW conditions vary by facework strategies: In one condition, the SJAW is highly polite by including off-record, deniable, questioning (which serves as facework) about the SJAW issue (i.e. *"Do you think…?"*). In a second condition, SJAW is bald, on-record *without* facework (i.e., "I think that's wrong and needs to be changed."). In a third condition, SJAW is bald, on-record with expletives ("I think that's FUCKING wrong and needs to be FUCKING changed"). Participants were then asked to rate the coworker's communicative competence and courageousness (see below). Next, participants answered manipulation check items and demographic questions.

Measures

Perceptions of Communicative Competence

Participants completed Kassing's (2005) Perceived Competence of Upward Dissent Strategy Index (PCUDSI; Appendix B). The one factor, 8-item measure was used to capture participants' perceptions of the communicative competence of a speaker voicing an organizational issue advocacy in a written scenario. Each item is measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include: "This means for expressing one's workplace concerns could be used in most situations," "This means for expressing one's workplace concerns is appropriate," and "This means for expressing one's workplace concerns is effective." High scores on the measure indicate high perceptions of communicative competence of the speaker. Cronbach's alpha of the original measure was acceptable, a = .90.

Perceptions of Courageousness

Participants completed a slightly-modified version of Norton and Weiss' (2009) Courage Measure (CM; Appendix B). Language was modified to measure the participant's perception of a

third-party's (i.e., the observed coworker in the scenario) courageous behavior as opposed to a report of perceptions of one's own level of courageousness. The one factor, 12-item Courageousness Measure was used to capture participants' perceptions of courageousness of a speaker voicing a social justice issue in a written scenario. Each item is measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include: "The speaker's words were courageous" and "The speaker's words were cowardly." High scores on the measure indicate high perceptions of courageousness of the speaker. Cronbach's alpha of the original measure was acceptable, $a = .80$.

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks were conducted to ensure that participants perceived that the advocacy message they read was voiced to a supervisor or a coworker by a coworker, about the issue of inequality in gender pay among executives or the importance of diversity in hiring, and whether the issues advocacy varied by politeness—and consistent with the condition to which they were assigned (Appendix C). Manipulation check items were completed by participants after dependent variables were measured.

First, to ensure participants perceived the message was directed to a supervisor or a coworker by a coworker, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with four statements using an interval-level measure (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Example items include "My coworker was speaking to the BOSS," and "My COWORKER was speaking to another COWORKER." Each participant's responses were evaluated for each of the four items to determine if scores were less than 5 (*somewhat agree*) on the 7-point scale. When participants' responses were not consistent with their assigned condition, as indicated by a score of 5 or lower, the cases were dropped from further analysis. Second, to ensure participants perceived the nature

of the issue being advocated, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with several statements using a nominal measure (yes/no): Examples include "Someone was talking about female executives and their pay," and "Someone was talking about the kinds of people we hire." Again, if participants' responses were not consistent with their assigned condition, they were dropped from further analysis. These two manipulation checks resulted in 33 cases being removed from the final dataset.

Next, participants were asked to think about the nature of the SJAW message and subsequently completed an adapted version of Trees and Manusov's (1998) Politeness Scale. Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "The speaker was positive toward the other," "The speaker was understanding toward the other," and "The speaker's message was demanding." High scores indicate high levels of politeness perceived within a message. Responses were averaged to compute a variable. To determine whether the politeness manipulation operated as intended, a one-way ANOVA was performed to explore whether respondents perceived the SJAW message to have varying levels of politeness or impoliteness consistent with the experimental manipulations. A significant difference was detected among the three groups in terms of their perceptions of politeness, and consistent with experimental manipulations, $F(2, 478) = 162.931$ $p < .001$. A Tukey HSD post hoc test indicated that participants perceived the "off record with facework" ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.46$) condition as more polite than the "on record, without facework" condition ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.5$). The "on record, without facework" condition was perceived as more polite than the "on record, without facework and with expletives" condition ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.23$), which was perceived as significantly less polite than the "on record,

without facework" condition. Thus, the politeness of the experimental scenarios were perceived by participants as expected.

Finally, a realism check was used to determine whether participants perceived the scenarios as representative of a realistic situation. Participants responded to a Likert-type scale regarding the realism of the scenarios (see Appendix D). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "The scenario is realistic" and "The scenario could happen in reality." A one-sample *t*-test compared the respondents' responses ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.94$) to the scale mid-point of 3 indicated that the scenarios were considered realistic, $t(479) = 24.744$, $p < .001$.

Chapter 4: Results

To test hypotheses involving SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor or coworker and its influence on perceived communication competence and courage, two 2 (power: SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor vs. coworker) X 3 (politeness: off-record with facework vs. on-record without facework vs. on-record without facework with expletives) X 2 (issue: diversity vs gender pay gap) factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted (See Table 1 & 2 for descriptive statistics).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Experimental Conditions

			Communication Competence		Courage	
Power	Politeness	Issue	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Upward	Off-record with facework	Diversity	4.69	1.46	4.80	1.55
Lateral	Off-record with facework	Diversity	4.46	1.62	4.18	1.61
Upward	On-record without facework	Diversity	3.72	1.56	5.15	1.37
Lateral	On-record without facework	Diversity	4.04	1.40	4.62	1.91
Upward	On-record without facework, with expletives	Diversity	1.83	0.62	4.07	1.51
Lateral	On-record without facework, with expletives	Diversity	2.30	1.30	3.26	1.59
Upward	Off-record with facework	GPG	4.47	1.44	4.78	1.41
Lateral	Off-record with facework	GPG	4.38	1.38	4.14	1.71
Upward	On-record without facework	GPG	3.39	1.72	4.52	1.63
Lateral	On-record without facework	GPG	4.24	1.46	4.45	1.51
Upward	On-record without facework, with expletives	GPG	2.03	0.82	4.45	1.23
Lateral	On-record without facework, with expletives	GPG	2.70	1.28	3.89	1.52

Note: GPG = gender pay gap

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Power	1.50	0.50					
2. Politeness	3.00	0.84	-0.02				
3. Issue	1.50	0.50	-0.06	0.03			
4. Comm. Competence	3.53	1.68	-0.10*	-0.55**	-0.00		
5. Courageousness	4.36	1.00	0.17**	-0.15**	-0.01	0.31**	

$^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$

Hypotheses

Power and Communication Competence (H1a)

H1a predicted SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor would be perceived as more communicatively competent than when voiced to a coworker. Results revealed a significant main effect for power $F(1, 469) = 7.06$, $p < .01$; however, the effect size was small (partial eta squared = .015). Additionally, examination of cell means indicated that, contrary to H1a, SJAW voiced by a coworker to a coworker is perceived as more communicatively competent than when voiced to a supervisor. Thus, H1a was not supported.

Power and Courageousness (H1b)

H1b predicted SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor would be perceived as more courageous than when voiced to a coworker. Results revealed a significant main effect for power on perceptions of courage, $F(1, 479) = 15.47$, $p < .001$; the effect size was small-to-medium (partial eta squared = .032). Specifically, participants assigned to conditions in which SJAW was communicated to a supervisor perceived the advocate to be more courageous than participants

assigned to conditions in which SJAW was communicated to a coworker, $p < .001$. Thus, H1b was supported.

Politeness and Communication Competence (H2a)

H2a involved the influence of degree of SJAW politeness on perceived communication competence. H2a(i) predicted SJAW voiced with facework to a coworker would be perceived as more communicatively competent than when voiced without facework. H2a(ii) predicted SJAW voiced without facework to a coworker would be perceived as more communicatively competent than when voiced without facework, with expletives. Consistent with H2a, results revealed a significant main effect for politeness on perceptions of communication competence, $F(2, 469) = 116.93$, $p < .001$; the effect size was large (partial eta squared = .333). A planned comparison test was conducted to understand group mean differences. Follow-up tests evaluated the three pairwise differences among mean, with alpha set at .016 (.05/3 = .016) to control for Type I error across the three comparisons. Specifically, participants assigned to the SJAW with facework condition ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.47$) reported a higher degree of perceived communication competence than those assigned to the SJAW without facework condition ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.55$), $p < .001$. Participants assigned to the SJAW without facework condition reported a higher degree of perceived communication competence than those assigned to the SJAW without facework, with expletives condition ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.09$), $p < .001$. Finally, participants assigned to the SJAW with facework condition perceived the speaker to be significantly more communicatively competent than those assigned to the SJAW without facework with expletives, $p < .001$. Thus, H2a and its subparts were supported.

Politeness and Courageousness (H2b)

H2b involved the influence of degree of SJAW politeness on perceived courageousness. H2b(i) predicted SJAW voiced with facework by a coworker would be perceived as more courageous than when voiced without facework. H2b(ii) predicted SJAW voiced without facework is more courageous than when voiced without facework, with expletives. Consistent with H2b, results revealed a significant main effect for politeness on perceptions of courageousness, $F(2, 467) = 11.307$, $p < .001$; the effect size was medium-to-small (partial eta squared = .046). Planned comparison tests were conducted to understand group mean differences. Follow-up tests evaluated the three pairwise differences among means, with alpha set at .016 (.05/3 = .016) to control for Type 1 error across the three comparisons. Specifically, results did not detect a significant difference in perceived courageousness between SJAW with facework ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.59$) and SJAW without facework ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.48$), *ns*. However, results indicated that both conditions were seen as significantly more courageous than SJAW voiced without facework, with expletives ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.52$), $p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively. Thus, H2b(i) was not supported but H2b(ii) was supported.

Interaction of Power and Politeness on Communication Competence (H3)

Results indicated a significant interaction effect between power and politeness in terms of generating perceptions of communication competence, $F(2, 469) = 3.81$, $p < .05$; however, the effect size was small (partial eta squared = .016). H3 involved the interactive effect of SJAW politeness when SJAW is voiced by a coworker to a supervisor versus a coworker on perceptions of communication competence. Specifically, H3 predicted that the greatest difference in participants' perceptions of communication competence exists between SJAW with facework voiced to a supervisor and SJAW voiced without facework/with expletives to a coworker, such

that addressing powerful others politely is seen as especially competent as compared to addressing coworkers with expletives. Results indicated that the greatest difference between means was 2.66, which occurred between SJAW voiced with facework to a supervisor (M = 4.59, SD = 1.45) and SJAW voiced without facework with expletives—also voiced to a supervisor (M = 1.93, SD = 0.72), not a coworker. The difference between means comparing SJAW with facework voiced to a supervisor (M = 4.59, SD = 1.45) and SJAW without facework with expletives voiced to a coworker (M = 2.52, SD = 1.29) was 2.07—the second greatest mean difference observed among conditions. Thus, H3 was not supported.

Interaction of Power and Politeness on Perceptions of Courageousness (H4)

Results indicated a significant interaction effect between power and politeness in terms of generating perceptions of courageousness, $F(2, 469) = 3.81$, $p < .05$. H4 involved the interactive effect of SJAW politeness and power on perceptions of courageousness. Specifically, H4 predicted that the greatest difference in participants' perceptions of courageousness exists between SJAW with facework voiced by a coworker to a supervisor and SJAW voiced without facework/with expletives by a coworker to a coworker, such that addressing powerful others politely is seen as especially courageous as compared to addressing coworkers with expletives. Results indicated that the greatest difference between means is 1.24, which occurs between SJAW voiced without facework to a supervisor (M = 4.85, SD = 1.53) and SJAW voiced without facework with expletives voiced to a coworker (M = 3.61, SD = 1.58). The difference between means when comparing SJAW with facework voiced to a supervisor (M = 4.79, SD = 1.48) and SJAW without facework with expletives voiced to a coworker (M = 3.61, SD = 1.58) was 1.18. This was the second-greatest difference between means, thus H4 is not supported.

Influence of Issue-Type on Study Variables (RQ)

Results indicated a significant interaction effect between politeness and issue in terms of perceptions of courageousness, $F(2, 467) = 3.67$, $p < .05$; however, the effect size was small (partial eta squared = .015). Specifically, when the content of the SJAW message was about gender pay gap perceptions of courageousness varied less across politeness condition as compared to when the SJAW message was about a lack of diversity. However, when SJAW emphasized a lack of diversity, the highest degree of perceived courageousness occurred when no facework was utilized and the lowest degree of courageousness was indicated when no facework with expletives was utilized.

No other interaction effects were observed among study conditions associated with SJAW issue-type, which implies that issue-type had only minor influence in shaping perceptions of social justice advocates' competence or courageousness.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The goals of this research were to investigate social justice issues advocacy (SJAW) and consider its viability as a distinct and unique branch of the nomological network of the employee voice construct, as well as to determine how specific language features used when voicing social justice issues in the workplace create favorable or unfavorable perceptions of advocates. Specifically, this study examined how (a) power dynamics, (b) degree of politeness, and (c) issue type influence perceptions of communication competence and courageousness of those voicing SJAW in the workplace. In the following paragraphs, key findings of this research and its contributions to literatures on employee voice, politeness theory, and courage in the workplace are discussed.

First, this study contributes to the employee voice behavior literature by establishing SJAW as a sub-category of employee voice. The current political climate in the U.S. makes voicing social justice issues potentially harmful to individuals' reputations by promoting attributions of "virtue signaling," "moral grandstanding" (Tosi & Warmke, 2020), or speaking out for the purpose of gaining recognition or appearing morally superior (Westra, 2021). There are several motivations for would-be organizational issue advocates to remain silent on issues of social justice, including the potential harm to one's workplace reputation, emotional well-being, and professional opportunities (Ashford et al., 1998; Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011; Milliken et al., 2003). Potential advocates may fear violating organizational and societal expectations that encourage deference to authority, expectations for who can give directives to whom, and expectations that sensitive topics should be avoided to protect coworkers' and supervisors' preferred perceptions of self (Valde & Henningsen, 2015).

However, this research supports the notion that potential social justice advocates need not choose between achieving perceptions of either communication competence or courageousness

when engaging in SJAW. Results indicated that, on the contrary, the use of politeness and facework in SJAW gained both perceptions of competence *and* courageousness for the advocate, with politeness specifically functioning as the linguistic component necessary to fostering both of these perceptions. This research aligns with Kassing's (2005) research that revealed upward dissent couched in facework was rated as more communicatively competent compared to other forms of dissent. Likewise, the present study demonstrated that SJAW that included the most politeness also achieved the most perceptions of competence. Taken together, these patterns of findings suggest politeness is a key aspect of managing reputational riskiness due to violating the status quo and breaching organizational hierarchy.

The findings of this research also support the idea that the type of issue advocated by the employee would not impact perceptions of competence and courageousness. In recent years, social science research has paid increased attention to the goal of replication to establish the validity of findings (Kohler & Cortina, 2019). The research design of this study addressed this goal by building in an internal replicability mechanism to each of the 12 conditions. As the results reveal, perceptions of social justice advocates' competence or courageousness do not seem to be related to issue-type, which was shown repeatedly across the 12 conditions, thus strengthening the finding that the primary catalyst to shaping perceptions of competence and courageousness is, in fact, politeness.

This research also contributes to literature in organizational behavior that focuses on the connection between speech style and status attainment. Much of this research emphasizes the importance of speaking assertively to command respect and move up the corporate ladder (Fragale, 2006). On one hand, "tentative" or "powerless speech," such as hedges and tag questions that characterize polite messages (Lakoff, 1973) may be seen as a lack of assertiveness

or uncertainty. However, these findings revealed that using these linguistic adjustments when voicing SJAW can facilitate perceptions of the positive qualities of competence and courageousness, both of which are desirable and necessary characteristics for organizational members and leaders. Thus, in the context of SJAW, tentative or softened speech signals interpersonal sensitivity (Leaper & Robnett, 2011), while also achieving the function of raising face-threatening but important social justice-related concerns. Additionally, advocates who do not use the resource of politeness can expect the reverse; that is, they will likely be perceived as lacking courage and communicatively incompetent in these situations. Overall, the use of politeness in voicing SJAW is shown to be a crucial aspect of these messages that influences advocates' ability to maintain positive perceptions.

This study contributes by expanding upon the growing literature in organizational communication on the interplay of power and politeness in workplace interactions. Results indicated that SJAW voiced laterally (i.e., by a coworker to a coworker) was found to be the most communicatively competent, especially when it involved facework. This finding most likely does not indicate people prefer to voice SJAW to coworkers as much as they *do not* prefer raising sensitive issues to authority figures. These findings were consistent with Ploeger et al.'s (2011) previous research on the hierarchical mum effect, which examined patterns of directness used when denying unethical requests at work. This study showed that subordinates used the most indirect language (i.e., the most polite language) when denying a supervisor's unethical request (Ploeger et al., 2011).

Findings were also aligned with previous research on the moral mum effect (Bisel et al., 2011), which describes individuals' reluctance to use explicitly moral language in the workplace. This alignment is unsurprising given the fact that SJAW is inherently face threatening due to the

moral and ethical nature of the issues being voiced, which implicitly calls the moral identity of the individual and collective target into question. According to researchers on these phenomena, employees avoid raising moral issues, such as SJAW, to those in positions of authority to avoid committing a face-threatening act, which is seen as socially and organizationally risky (Bisel & Adame, 2019; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Zanin et al., 2016). FTAs that are voiced to those higher in the organizational structure are especially egregious because they violate implicit communicative expectations for appropriateness in the workplace with powerholders (Ploeger et al., 2011). Taken holistically, these results provide valuable insight into how power, organizational hierarchy and social and organizational norms for politeness play a role in how SJAW is perceived in the workplace, and in particular, how characteristics specific to SJAW function as a face-threatening act, especially when voiced to a supervisor.

The pattern of findings indicated that polite SJAW is especially useful for achieving perceptions of courage and competence. Critical scholars may interpret this pattern from the framework of *respectability politics*. Research that emphasizes the importance of utilizing politeness when advocating for marginalized groups to those in positions of power may raise alarm among critical scholars familiar with the concept of respectability politics: The term describes "the process by which privileged members of marginalized groups comply with dominant social norms to advance their group's condition" (Dazey, 2021, p. 580), and has been examined in race and ethnic studies, social movements, and critical theory for the past three decades (Dazey, 2021; Jackson, 2016; Pitcan, Marwick, & Boyd, 2018; Richardson, 2019). A key characteristic of respectability politics is the endeavoring of marginalized people to make themselves appear "respectable" by adopting the norms and values (i.e., ways of speaking and behaving) of white, American, middle-class society, thus distinguishing themselves from

"unrespectable" members of the group (Dazey, 2021, p. 581; Higginbotham, 1993). Several critiques exist for the usage of respectability politics within marginalized groups to achieve social equality, including the critique that it encourages assimilation into the dominant society, that it puts the onus of achieving equality on those who are oppressed, yet ignores the existence of structural and societal obstacles to achieving this goal, and that it encourages passivity within marginalized groups.

However, these critiques are currently being met by a call from some scholars to view respectability politics from a broader view by recognizing the power of respectability to both facilitate change and reproduce power structures that constrain our communication and behaviors (Dazey, 2021). This approach is an apt lens through which to view both respectability politics and polite SJAW. Both approaches share the goal of raising issues of social change, and both approaches could be considered a response to social injustice, in and of themselves (Dazey, 2021). When delivered by a member of a marginalized group, both approaches can serve a dual function by simultaneously making a demand for social justice, while directly contradicting stereotypes of how individuals of marginalized groups "should" behave and speak. In the same vein, I argue SJAW, as well as respectability politics, are multi-faceted concepts with complex, yet flexible, nomological and axiological substructures, which should not be dismissed with reductive labels of "word policing" or "linguistic prescriptivism." On the contrary, the concomitantly progressive and conservative, reproductive and disruptive nature of polite SJAW further supports the assertion that politeness in SJAW, such as respectability politics, can and should be viewed as a tool to provide individuals a means to transform their workplace into a site of both conformity and resistance (Dazey, 2021) by adhering to organizationally- and hierarchically-acceptable means for raising social justice issues at work (Harris, 1999).

Finally, this research expands on the workplace courage literature in two ways. First, this research answers Detert and Bruno's (2017) call for workplace courage to be viewed as a more complex construct through the development of a taxonomy of workplace courage behaviors. This research supports the idea that SJAW meets the criteria of workplace courage and should be added to the body of workplace courage literature because it is (a) workplace-relevant, (b) risky, and (c) for a worthy cause. First, SJAW is considered "workplace relevant" because it is related to situations and/or circumstances in the workplace. SJAW is also risky, due to the face-threatening nature of the message to the target (Valde & Hennigsen, 2015; Bisel, 2018), the political sensitivity of the message (Lewis & Yoshimura, 2017), and its violation of the organization's hierarchy (Pfeffer, 1992). Lastly, though this assessment is largely dependent on time and place, most would agree that challenging the status quo in order to obtain equal treatment for others would be a "worthy" cause (Miceli et al., 1999). Due to the current state politics in the United States, further developing the workplace courage taxonomy could help drive future research to include communication about social justice, as well as the complex circumstances and considerations of performing SJAW in the workplace.

Second, this research expands upon the paucity of scholarship on workplace courage by exploring the perceptual consequences of a courageous act experienced by a courageous actor. Though several workplace courage studies focus on the influence of courageous acts on a beneficiary or organization, fewer studies examined the benefits or harms of performing courageous acts. For example, courageous actors can be seen as having increased potential as a manager and executive (Finkelstein et al., 2009), as well as being perceived as higher performers (Palanski et al., 2015). This study adds nuance to the current literature by shedding light on the complexity of SJAW as a courageous behavior, and the important role linguistic adjustments

play in influencing the outcomes experienced by those performing workplace courage. As previously mentioned, depending on the way SJAW is expressed, the message can influence perceptions of competence and courageousness of the actor positively or negatively. This finding is also unique in workplace courage research in that it addresses the *communicative* aspect of the workplace courage act and exemplifies the assertion that the way the message is expressed can, in fact, shape the consequences experienced by the actor.

Practical Implications

Individuals have private moral concerns and aspirations. Those private moral concerns and aspirations can serve as springboards for organizational ethical development when voiced productively—a positive organizational communication phenomenon known as *organizational moral learning* (Bisel, 2018). Organizations should consider training employees to raise social justice concerns in their organization for several reasons. First, employees are an integral part of identifying and addressing unethical, unfair, or otherwise problematic behaviors, policies, or procedures in the workplace (Kaptein, 2011). Kaptein also argues that addressing management directly with concerns of unethical behavior is "more efficient, effective, and ethical than internal and external whistleblowing" (p. 514). Encouraging and even training employees how to engage in SJAW politely can provide potential advocates with the communication skill needed to raise issues to decision-makers who can make changes within the organization, thus avoiding the organizational strife that can result from more public and external methods of raising ethical concerns (Redding, 1985). Providing scripts or other specific semantic "recipes" to employees that protect the professional image of the social justice advocate can help reassure potential advocates that, in using these scripts, they will potentially avoid the personal, professional, and economic penalties (e.g., reputational harm or lower job performance evaluations) that many

individuals fear can result from raising these issues at work. This reassurance, in turn, could make individuals more likely to raise these issues in the first place knowing that their professional image will be protected and even bolstered by communicating these issues competently within their organization.

Second, in addition to addressing unjust behaviors, policies, or procedures within the organization, speaking up to challenge the status quo has the potential to transform an entire organization for the better (Eyrich et al., 2019). Popular imagination may project organizational transformation as being the exclusive domain of the highest-level decision makers; however, research revealed that mid-level managers and first-line supervisors can enact surprisingly significant changes, even in large organizations. For example, Eyrich et al. (2019) explained several cases of large-scale cultural changes in organizations occurring as a result of mid-level managers and supervisors with "a clarity of conscience and a willingness to speak up" (p. 4), which can then serve as a catalyst for large-scale organizational change by providing voice, leadership, and vision for others in the organization.

Third, a growing body of research supports the notion that courage (e.g., SJAW) is a skill that can be strengthened over time through practice and training (Cox et al., 1983; Eyrich et al., 2019; Hallam & Rachman, 1980; Rachman, 2010). Employees and managers alike should be trained and encouraged to use polite SJAW to strengthen their ability to challenge the status quo so that, when presented with an unjust situation, they are ready to deploy the linguistic resources at their disposal to advocate competently and courageously. Ultimately, this research provides resources to employees at all levels of the organization that can help decrease the proliferation of discrimination and inequality in the workplace altogether.

Again, results and recommendations generated from this research should not be understood as prescribing adherence to hegemonic norms (as in respectability politics), but as a tool to help would-be social justice advocates, whether they be members of a marginalized group or not, raise justice issues while also preserving interpersonal relationships and meeting communicative expectations of organizational life. This research can help individuals protect their professional image and recognize the personal, professional, and economic realities that deter individuals from voicing SJAW in the workplace.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study provides heuristic value in the study of employee voice behavior and workplace courage. A limitation of this study is that the hypothetical nature of the experimental design and materials may weaken the ecological validity of findings. To remedy this pitfall, future research should involve naturalistic field case observations of SJAW, which can then be compared to this study's findings to assess their ecological validity.

Future research should also address the following areas: (a) developing communication behavior-focused measures for both SJAW and workplace courage, (b) examining perceived motivations of the social justice advocate, (c) examining contextual factors that inhibit or promote the performance of SJAW, (d) determining short- and long-term personal and organizational consequences of performing SJAW, and (e) examining demographic differences of the social justice advocate and of participants to examine the impact of these factors on perceptions of communication competence and courageousness.

Current research in workplace courage calls for the development of behavior-focused measures (Detert & Bruno, 2017). Future research should continue to test and refine the SJAW measure to help understand this type of communicative behavior as a sub-construct of workplace

courage. This research could serve not just to further the study of communicative workplace courage behaviors but could also help guide managers in specific behaviors in which to train their employees.

Second, though nuances in the results of this study could be attributed to a byproduct of research design, participants may have attributed motivations to the social justice advocate as being self-interested or other-interested in their SJAW endeavors. Future research should examine the perceived motivations of the social justice advocate, and the influence on those attributions on perceived communication competence and courageousness attributions.

Third, this study provides a starting point for studies examining the contextual factors that influence the performance of SJAW. Cleary and Horsfall (2013) state that an organization's structures and rules can influence the performance of certain behaviors and their attributions of these behaviors as risky and/or worthy. Based on Clearly and Horsfall's research, as well as the current study, future research should examine organization's overt and tacit stimuli that can shape an organizational members' perceptions of the acceptableness of acts such as SJAW. Addressing these nuances in context are essential, according to Detert and Bruno (2017), in establishing a complete and legitimate workplace courage taxonomy.

Fourth, future research on SJAW should examine both short- and long-term personal and organizational consequences. As short-term consequences, research should examine how employees who voice SJAW are perceived in terms of other qualities that have organizationally-relevant outcomes, including likeability and credibility. Studies should also examine the impact of SJAW on operations, policies, and procedures. What strategies are most effective in changing the status quo? SJAW could ultimately result in large-scale changes in an organization, so further

examining how this occurs could have significant consequences for organizational members at all levels.

Finally, though this study did not specify the race and/or group membership of the advocate, only differences in the levels of politeness, differences in the levels of power between the advocate and the target, and differences in the issue that was raised. Future studies should also examine demographic factors of the social justice advocate, and how differences in race, gender, etc. of the social justice advocate may influence perceptions of communication competence and courageousness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, results of this study support the notion that performing social justice issues advocacy can have negative reputational outcomes for the advocate if it is done impolitely. Findings also support the notion that the value-laden and political aspects of SJAW further distinguishes it from other voice behaviors, carrying its own unique and potentially harmful consequences if performed unskillfully. This construct provides ample avenues for future research that can further explore the complex circumstances and outcomes surrounding this new construct, adding value to both organizational communication and management literatures.

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Appendix A

Experimental SJAW Messages

Scenario #	Scenario
1	**Lateral, Off-Record with Facework, Diversity Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to another coworker, "Currently, only 2% of our organization's employees are racial minorities. I was wondering about your thoughts on that issue. I know there are differing opinions about this. Do you think that's wrong and possibly needs to be changed?"
2	**Lateral, On-Record w/out Facework, Diversity Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to another coworker, "Currently, only 2% of our organization's employees are racial minorities. I think that's really problematic of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's really wrong and really needs to be changed."
3	**Lateral, On-Record w/out Facework w/ Expletives, Diversity Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to another coworker, "Currently, only 2% of our organization's employees are racial minorities. I think that's really *shitty* of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's *fucking* wrong and really needs to be *fucking* changed."

4	**Lateral, Off-Record with Facework, Gender Pay Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to another coworker, "Our organization pays female executives 20% less than male executives. I was wondering about *your thoughts* on that issue. I know there are differing opinions about this. *Do you think* that's wrong and *possibly* needs to be changed?"
5	**Lateral, On-Record w/out Facework, Gender Pay Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to another coworker, "Our organization pays female executives 20% less than male executives. I think that is really problematic of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's really wrong and really needs to be changed."
6	**Lateral, On-Record w/out Facework w/ Expletives, Gender Pay Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to another coworker, "Our organization pays female executives 20% less than male executives. I think that is really *shitty* of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's *fucking* wrong and needs to be *fucking* changed."
7	**Upward, Off-Record with Facework, Diversity Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a

	nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to the boss, "Currently, only 2% of our organization's employees are racial minorities. I was wondering about *your thoughts* on that issue. I know there are differing opinions about this. *Do you think* that's wrong and *possibly* needs to be changed?"
8	**Upward, On-record w/out Facework, Diversity Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to the boss, "Currently, only 2% of our organization's employees are racial minorities. I think that is really problematic of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's really wrong and really needs to be changed."
9	**Upward, On-record w/out Facework w/ Expletives, Diversity Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to the boss, "Currently, only 2% of our organization's employees are racial minorities. I think that is really shitty of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's fucking wrong and needs to be fucking changed."
10	**Upward, Off-Record with Facework, Gender Pay Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred.

	You hear your coworker say to the boss, "Our organization pays female executives 20% less than male executives. I was wondering about *your thoughts* on that issue. I know there are differing opinions about this. *Do you think* that's wrong and *possibly* needs to be changed?"
11	**Upward, On-Record w/out Facework, Gender Pay Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to the boss, "Our organization pays female executives 20% less than male executives. I think that is really problematic of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's really wrong and really needs to be changed."
12	**Upward, On-Record w/out Facework w/ Expletives, Gender Pay Issue** Imagine you work for a large company. Your work involves mostly administrative and paperwork tasks. You work in an office with a team of many others who do similar tasks. On Fridays, employees from the office often eat lunch together at a nearby restaurant. At these lunches, people socialize and discuss work. During one of these lunches, the following situation occurred. You hear your coworker say to the boss, "Our organization pays female executives 20% less than male executives. I think that is really shitty of this organization. There is only one right opinion about this. I think it's fucking wrong and needs to be fucking changed."

Appendix B

Study Measures

Perceived Communication Competence

(Kassing, 2005)

1. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns should be used in most situations.
2. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns should be used to address serious workplace issues.
3. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns should be used before other means.
4. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns should be used after all other means of expressing concern have been tried.*
5. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns should be used as a last resort. *
6. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns could negatively affect an employee's relationship with his or her supervisor.* ®
7. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns is appropriate.
8. This means for expressing one's workplace concerns is effective.

Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*

Revised Courage Measure

(Norton & Weiss, 2007)

1. The speakers words were courageous.
2. The speaker's words were both bold and admirable.
3. The speaker's words were cowardly.
4. It took "guts" for the speaker to talk that way.
5. The speakers words were "chicken."
6. The speaker's words were "lion-hearted."
7. The speaker's words were moral and brave.
8. The speaker's words were virtuous and risky.
9. The speaker's words were spineless.
10. The speaker's words showed "backbone."

Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*

Appendix C

Manipulation Checks

Power

1. My coworker was speaking to the BOSS.
2. My coworker was speaking to another COWORKER.
3. In the scenario, the speaker was communicating to someone ABOVE them in the organization.
4. In the scenario, the speaker was communicating to someone AT THE SAME LEVEL as them in the organization.

Scale: 1 = *strongly agree*; 7 = *strongly disagree*

Revised Politeness Scale

(Trees & Manusov, 1998)

1. The speaker was positive toward the other.
2. The speaker was understanding toward the other.
3. The speaker's message was demanding.
4. The speaker's message was tentative.
5. The speaker took great care not to impose on the other.
6. The speaker was appropriate.
7. The speaker's message was proper.
8. The speaker was polite.

Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*

Issue Type

1. Someone was talking about female executives and their pay.
2. Someone was talking about the kinds of people we hire.
3. Someone was talking about how much we pay female executives.
4. Someone was explaining that our workforce is very diverse.
5. Someone was talking about how racially diverse our organization is.
6. Someone was explaining that we pay female executives the same amount as male executives.

Scale: 1 = *strongly agree*; 7 = *strongly disagree*

Message Realism

The scenario…

1. is realistic.
2. could happen in reality
3. could happen to me.
4. is true-to-life.

Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*

Table 3. Hypotheses (2 x 3 x 2)

Hypothesis	IVs	DVs	Analysis	Statistic
H1a: Participants perceive SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor to be more *communicatively competent* than one voiced by a coworker to a fellow coworker.	Power (Coworker communicates to a Supervisor vs. Coworker)	Communication Competence	Factorial ANOVA	*F*
H1b: Participants perceive SJAW voiced by a coworker to a supervisor to be more *courageous* than one voiced by a coworker to a fellow coworker.	Power (Coworker communicates to a Supervisor vs. Employee)	Courageousness	Factorial ANOVA	*F*
H2a: Participants perceive SJAW off-record with facework voiced to a coworker to be more *communicatively competent* than (i) SJAW on-record without facework, which is perceived to be more communicatively competent than (ii) SJAW on-record without facework/with expletives.	SJAW off-record with facework vs. SJAW on-record without facework vs. SJAW on-record without facework/ with expletives	Communication Competence	Factorial ANOVA	*F*, Tukey
H2b: Participants perceive SJAW off-record with facework voiced to a coworker to be more *courageous* than (i) SJAW on-record without facework, which is perceived to be more courageous than (ii) SJAW on-record without facework/with expletives.	SJAW off-record with facework vs. SJAW on-record without facework vs. SJAW on-record without facework/ with expletives	Courageousness	Factorial ANOVA	*F*, Tukey

H3: The greatest difference in participants' perceptions of *communication competence* exists between SJAW off-record with facework voiced by a coworker to a supervisor and SJAW on-record, voiced without facework/with expletives by a coworker to a coworker, such that addressing powerful others politely is seen as courageous compared to addressing coworkers with expletives.	Power (Coworker communicates to a Supervisor vs. Coworker) vs. SJAW off-record with facework vs. SJAW on-record without facework/ with expletives	Communication Competence	Factorial ANOVA	*F*, Tukey
H4: The greatest difference in participants' perceptions of *courageousness* exists between SJAW off-record with facework voiced by a coworker to a supervisor and SJAW voiced without facework/with expletives by a coworker to a coworker, such that addressing powerful others politely is seen as courageous compared to addressing coworkers with expletives.	Power (Coworker communicates to a Supervisor vs. Coworker) Vs. SJAW off-record with facework vs. SJAW on-record without facework/ with expletives	Courageousness	Factorial ANOVA	*F*, Tukey
RQ: Are the patterns of perceptions of courage and communication competence different across two issue types being advocated (i.e., diversity in hiring, gender pay equity)?				