

Gender stereotypes and the apology in a small state: Uncovering Creole male stereotypes in the Seychelles using digital matched-guise methodology

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Abstract: Recent research in the Seychelles speaks of a “growing crisis of masculinity”, manifested in statistics such as a ten-year life expectancy difference in favour of women, alarmingly high levels of substance abuse amongst younger men, and underachievement of boys in schools. According to the authors, males are generally disempowered by stereotypical views of males as “irresponsible”, “unreliable” and “secondary to women”. Similar gender patterns have been observed in other ex-slavery Creole cultures such as the small states in the Caribbean, and some scholars argue that these structures have historical origins dating back to slavery. In this study, we seek to explore aspects of Seychellois stereotypes of masculinity through so-called matched-guise experiments. Through digital manipulations of voice quality, we produce identity-warped male and female versions of the same monologue recording – a short apology. We then asked respondents to listen to the recordings and respond to the same in a short online questionnaire, where we ask questions relating to their impressions of the apology and the speaker. Dimensions here include honesty-dishonesty; politeness-impoliteness; weakness-strength; and reliability-unreliability. Differences in results of responses to male and female versions of the apology give strong indications that Seychellois stereotypically view males as dishonest, unreliable, lazy and careless. We discuss potential origins and consequences of such constructions, and propose awareness-raising measures for how these destructive historically produced scripts of gender can be rewritten.

Keywords: digital matched guise methodology, inferiority, masculinity, Seychelles, small states

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Introduction

In his analysis of how researchers have grappled with the concept of the small state, Maass (2009) observes that, although no consensus has been reached regarding a concise definition, *vulnerability*, and its counterpart and cure, *resilience* (-building), have been identified as important attributes of small states. The development has seen these attributes being broken down into operationalised and indexed features and frameworks being developed to help resilience building (Briguglio et al., 2009; Lewis-Bynone, 2014). While the early focus was primarily on quantifiable aspects of economic vulnerability and resilience (e.g. Briguglio et al., 2010), factors such as social and environmental sustainability have attracted more attention recently, and a search for, and discussion of, suitable variables as indicators and

components of ‘vulnerability versus resilience’ are underway (Lewis-Bynone, 2014; St Bernard, 2014).

Focussing on the social side of resilience building on a more generic level, Eriksen (2011, p. 95), summarises crucial challenges of small states as:

promoting social equality without demanding cultural similarity; developing a pride in the local as something unique, not as an inferior copy of the metropolitan; and finally, developing a local politics which grows out of domestic concerns proper, not of political projects developed overseas.

The size of such challenges is quite substantial from the outset, and their chances of success closely depend on prevalent international political trends, donations and discourses, which can lead to “ontological traps”, drawing attention and resources away from the exact local initiatives and domestic concerns that Eriksen points to (Baldacchino, 2018). One such example is how concerns regarding climate change could put important social projects, such as gender issues, on the back burner. However, there need not be a conflict here. For example, although superficially very different domains, environmental issues and social cohesion can be linked, and their gendered dimension has been underlined by Dunn (2013) and Chambers, Northover & Taylor (2013), both in the same issue of *Small States Digest*.

Gender equality is the focus of the present article, a factor by many seen as a central element in the development of social sustainability and resilience building. However, the aim here is to address an aspect of gender that is often seen as intangible and difficult to capture as a simple statistic, but nevertheless, we would argue, in crucial need of address for sustainability to be achieved. To be more precise, the subject of this study is that of gender stereotypes. Here, we will explore some aspects of the gendered stereotypes that exist in the context of the island state of the Seychelles using a modernized and digitized methodology inspired by the so-called matched-guise experimental set-up (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960). The purpose of the experiment is to empirically uncover some of the aspects of Seychellois local and metropolitan gender stereotypes that may affect expectations and behaviours of men and women alike in the Seychelles. The overall aim is to discuss our findings in the light of Seychelles’ historical past, current societal challenges, and further relate to how these findings may be of possible relevance to small states of similar background.

Why then is the Seychelles a suitable object for a study with the present focus? With a population of 95,000 inhabitants (World Bank 2017), it is obviously a small state. Moreover, the country belongs to a subgroup of Small States, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Crossley & Sprague, 2012). In this context (i.e. SIDS) the Seychelles makes a good prototypical candidate; Seychelles, as many of these states, has developed its identity and social structure in a postcolonial context mixed with the particular circumstance of being an island state, and as such, its history and geography affect aspects of sustainability in its many different shapes (societal, environmental, and so on). In short, the Seychelles shares many attributes with small states with similar background in the Caribbean and the Pacific. For this reason, perhaps, Seychelles served as an example (together with Vanuatu and St Lucia) in Briguglio et al.’s (2010) manual for profiling small states’ vulnerability and resilience, and in this sense it could be viewed as a benchmark for comparison.

Background

Gender structures in the Seychelles

The question of masculinity and femininity in the Seychelles is complex. Seychelles is popularly, and somewhat misleadingly, occasionally referred to as a ‘matriarchal’ or ‘matrifocal’ society, where women tend to be “dominant in the household, be in control of economic expenditures” and where “unwed mothers are the social norm” (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2017). Much statistics from the Seychelles supports this image. In 2010, 51% of households were headed by women (National Statistics Bureau, 2018), and women are also highly visible in public life. For example, the 2011 parliament boasted the fifth highest proportion of women in the world with 43.8%, and although this figure was radically reduced in the 2016 elections, women still occupy 41 % of the Ministerial posts. Women also make up a clear majority of the civil service (62%, according to Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010), and are massively overrepresented in all government-funded areas such as education and health, as well as in sectors such as finance and insurance (National Statistics Bureau, 2018).

On many levels there is, what most people would call, “gender equality” in the Seychelles. Girls and boys all attend school for at least 9-10 years, and there are no legal, social or religious pressures that disfavour women or force them into unwanted gender roles. It is, for example, quite acceptable for women to have children outside wedlock, and many do. Nevertheless, in many other areas, the Seychelles has quite clear gender divisions that mirror global hegemonic masculinity patterns. For example, many occupational sectors such as fisheries, transportation, engineering and construction are dominated by men, and gender roles in the home are overall fairly ‘traditional’, with women tending to have the main, or sole, responsibility for the upbringing of children and household duties. Note, however, it is in no way taboo for men to care for children and the household, and you often see fathers with infants and young children on busses, and so on. However, women are also often the main breadwinners, and in many cases men’s role in family life, both as breadwinners and/or in upbringing, is marginal. This places unreasonable burdens on many women in the Seychelles, especially as multigenerational family structures are gradually disappearing, and it is less likely that grandmothers, aunties and sisters can be relied upon for support and to share child care.

Men’s disengagement from the family can be seen as a backlash against the public portrayal of men as inadequate and irresponsible (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010, p. 80). Male respondents in their study claimed that women were taking over as providers and that men had given up. The following reported statements from interviews with respondents in their study are quite telling: “*they don’t need men anymore*” and “*they want to be in the driver’s seat; let them be, we stay out.*” In their study, men further reported that they felt incapacitated and disorientated because both government and society only emphasized the rights of women and children. In sum, Geisler & Pardiwalla (2010) argue that males are generally disempowered by stereotypical views of males as “irresponsible”, “unreliable” and “secondary to women ... in life generally”.

Creole gender stereotypes from a political and historical perspective

The stereotype of the ‘irresponsible’ male is mirrored in many SIDS with a history of colonialism and slavery. There may be reasons for this. In his study of gender roles and nationalism, Eriksen (2017, p. 1448) maintains that “although it is commonly assumed that

gender identity is primarily personal while national identity is primarily political, these two dimensions – the instrumental and the symbolic – merge in practice.” Beckles (2004), for example, argues that the Caribbean Black/Creole male construction as ‘lazy’ and ‘irresponsible’ was politically and ideologically motivated as a way of reducing the potential threat that male slaves constituted in the colonial project, and to retain patriarchal (white) power. As an illustration of such constructions, Beckles (2004, p. 233) discusses the term *Quashee* that was used in the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe the typical male slave. In this construction, the African and Creole male was described as “docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing”. Beckles argues that such constructions, in combination with violent terror, were psychological weapons designed to suppress the male slave, and thereby reduce the threat of the slave male community, which greatly outnumbered the slave owners.

Female slaves, on the other hand, posed less of a physical threat, and were a valuable resource in that their children also were born into slavery. Under these structures, white slave masters had rights (including sexual rights) over all women and children (many of whom they had fathered), and while maternal lineage was formally recognised, paternal was not. In this way, male slaves had their roles as husbands and fathers forcibly taken away from them (Beckles, 2004). Moreover, female slaves were often let into the homes of the slave masters, and in the colonial mission it was particularly important that they remained loyal to the slave owners and their ideals. In summary, slave masculinity was dishonoured by the condition of being “kept” and “kept down” and also rendered “socially dead” by the denial of such aspects as fatherhood (Beckles, 2004, p. 230). In this way, the brutal system of slavery seems to have resulted in an emasculated male and “a strong independent female who single-handedly was deemed to be responsible for the well-being of the family” (Mohammed, 2004, p. 61).

We would argue that very similar structures existed in the Seychelles (Bwana & Bwana, 1996; Chang-Him, 2002; Maiche, 2003), and that current gender stereotypes are closely linked to the Seychelles’ historical past. According to this logic, male stereotypical constructions in the Seychelles are partly the result of a slave past, and restricted to the Creole male in the national psyche. This idea has, in turn, probably been reinforced in post-slavery, and even neo-colonial times, in order to support power structures which may benefit from discrediting Creole men. In other words, we hypothesise, stereotypes which refer to males as ‘irresponsible’ and ‘unreliable’ apply only to Seychellois creole men, while the white ‘European/Western male’ is regarded in higher esteem, yet another example of a construction where the local is described as an “inferior copy of the metropolitan” (Eriksen, 2011, p. 95). Further, such stereotypes may serve to disrupt social cohesion and sustainability, and finding ways to raise awareness about these issues becomes an important aspect of resilience building.

Methodological Background

Matched-guise studies

The current study explores some of the male/female stereotypes using a so-called matched-guise experimental set-up (Lambert et al., 1960). A key feature of the method is that it allows researchers to measure how judgements and evaluations of the same output (linguistic or otherwise) may be affected by judges’ perceived identity of the speaker (producer). The matched-guise technique is a powerful tool in exposing stereotyping since it generates objective measurable data about a phenomenon which otherwise tends to be illustrated using highly subjective and anecdotal evidence. In Lambert et al.’s original study, an actor produced

the same text in two or more variants, and the study showed how a brief recording in French versus English (in Canada) triggered different responses regarding speaker's personality, social status and character, depending on the language/accents of the speaker (Bradac, Cargile, & Hallett, 2001). The matched-guise test is still used today to test how judgement of speakers is affected by stereotyping in various disciplines, ranging from sociolinguistics, social psychology, business research and medicine (Cargile, 1997; Cargile & Giles, 1998; Lawson & Sachdev, 2000; Dixon, Mahoney, & Cocks, 2002; Bilaniuk, 2003; Carson, Drummond, & Newton, 2004; Buchstaller, 2006). A good example is how the same CV is judged differently depending on the perceived nationality of the applicant (indicated by typical Arab or European names, for example).

A major critique of traditional matched-guise set-ups based on spoken language has been that it is almost impossible to control for unwanted background variables, even when the same actor/actress is used. Speed, intonation, or pitch can all have a significant impact on how something is perceived, and it is very difficult to control for these when making multiple recordings of the same text (Tsalikis, DeShields & LaTour, 1991). Also, when exploring the gender variable in matched-guise set-ups, one has to use two actors, making it even more difficult to control for unwanted background variables such as accent (Bilaniuk, 2003). Such challenges have restricted gender research using matched-guise set-ups with voice recordings to date, and most studies are limited to very short utterances, evaluations based on a simple 'hello' (McAleer, Todorov & Belin, 2014), or a short reading of a passage (Ko, Judd & Blair, 2006).

In the current study, we use 'voice-morphing' techniques to digitally manipulate the *same recording* in order to create a seemingly 'male' and female versions of the same conversation. We thus believe that we are able to eliminate many unwanted background variables previously pointed out as problematic in matched-guise set-ups (Tsalikis et al., 1991).

The speech act under investigation: the Apology.

In this study, we ask our respondents to judge a speaker on the basis of an apology, produced either in either Kreol Seselwa (the first language in the Seychelles) or English. Dimensions explored, such as sincerity, honesty and politeness, are closely associated with male and female stereotypes in the Seychelles, but also occur frequently within apology research in general. Apologies can tell us a lot about power relations. According to Olshtain (1989, p. 156), an apology is intended to provide support for the hearer who was "malaffected by a violation". By apologising, the speaker is thus willing to "humiliate himself or herself", and to admit to fault and responsibility for the offence in order to restore social equilibrium. There is thus a 'power dimension' to apologising, and it is more likely that we see apologies directed from the powerless to the more powerful than vice versa (Brown & Lewinson, 1987).

The social function of an apology is, however, not only directed at the receiver. Meier (1996, p. 152) compares apologising to 'repair work', meant "to remedy damage incurred to the offender's image when the latter behaves in some way below the standard expected relative to a particular reference group." In this model, the main emphasis of the function of apologising is restoring the offender's public image. For this to succeed, an apology must be viewed as sincere, genuine and honest: the apologiser must truly feel remorse for what she/he has done, is honest about the circumstances surrounding the offence and means what they say. Without these ingredients, an apology can easily be seen as an 'excuse': a way to get off the hook.

Whether an apology is perceived as truly genuine or not is partly determined by aspects such as politeness conventions, its linguistic shape and how it is delivered. This complexity is also reflected in its form. The exact details may differ from culture to culture (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Meier, 1996; Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu, 2007; Hahn & Hatfield, 2011). However, a genuine apology in most cultural contexts will consist of up to five strategies: a linguistic expression of apology (*I am sorry*, for example); an acknowledgement of responsibility for what has occurred; an explanation; an offer of repair; and a promise that it will not recur (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). Ultimately, however, the success or failure of an apology is determined by its receiver. If the offended does not believe the offender, i.e. that she/he is genuinely remorseful and accepts responsibility for the mistake, that the explanations provided are truthful, and that the promises of repair and non-re-occurrence can be relied upon, an apology can quickly turn into “a poor excuse”. In other words, a prerequisite for a successful apology is trust. This trust can of course be based on previous experience (it is for example hard to trust someone who has lied to you in the past), but also on collective beliefs and stereotypes about certain social groupings (men, for example). In our experiment, we expose respondents to the same apologies, where the only difference is the apparent gender (as manifested by voice quality) and ethnicity (as manifested by language) of the person apologising. It is thus reasonable to assume that differences in interpretations will be based on aspects of trust, which in turn, we theorise, will be affected by stereotypical preconceptions of the social group in question (Seychellois men or women and expatriate men and women).

Method

Overview

Through digital manipulations of voice quality, we produced identity-warped male/female and Creole/expatriate versions of the same/similar language output, in this case, two short humble apologies delivered in either Kreol Seselwa or English. We then asked respondents to listen to the recordings and respond to the same in a short online questionnaire, where respondents had to respond to statements relating to their impressions of the apology and the speaker. Dimensions explored include many of the aspects discussed in association with male and female stereotypes in the Seychelles such as in/sincerity, dis/honesty, un/reliability, lazy vs. hardworking, im/politeness, and un/reliability. The overall aim has been to empirically explore aspects of Seychellois gender stereotypes, and also to see how these compare with Seychellois constructions of expatriate male/female stereotypes. In a separate questionnaire, delivered after the respondents had listened and responded to the apologies, we also tried to map the group’s stereotypical preconceptions of the traits explored by explicitly asking respondents to state whether they believed trait characteristics such as ‘being honest’ was typically male, female or neutral. We did not include aspects related to ethnicity here, as we deemed such questions to be potentially offensive.

The apologies

The apologies were first produced in Kreol Seselwa in consultation with other native speakers (one of the authors of this article speaks fluent Kreol Seselwa). They are contextualised as subordinate workers apologising to a superior over the phone for mistakes resulting from misunderstandings. The apologies are ‘complex’ (Deutschmann, 2003) in that they contain all five strategies listed by Cohen & Olshtain (1981): (1) an explicit expression of apology; (2) an admission of fault; (3) an explanation; (4) promise of repair; and (5) assurance that it will not happen again: see Apology 1 and 2 below (English transcripts).

Apology 1

Sorry Madam [1]. I'll start marking those exam papers straight away [4]. You know, I thought the deadline was next week [3]. But I'll start working on them straight away [4]. Sorry again [1], it is my fault [2]. I misunderstood the directives [2]. The next time I'll make sure I read your e-mails more carefully [3,5].

Apology 2

Of course Madam. I'll look at all the details that you have asked me to check straight away [4]. And I really apologize [1] for not contacting you until today. Sorry! [1] I am really sorry [1]. My fault [2]. In the future, I will make sure I check my e-mails earlier [3, 5].

(Numbers in brackets refer to Cohen and Olshtain's different strategies, as listed above.)

The apologies follow Seychellois cultural politeness conventions with clear signalling of respect (the use of honorifics, such as *Madam*), and with a tone of voice in both recordings that is 'humble' and unquestioning. In summary, there is nothing in the wording or delivery that suggests that this is anything but a genuine apology.

The recordings

When making the recordings, we used four actors: two native Kreol Seselwa speakers (one male and one female), and two native English speakers (one male and one female, both with American accents). In choosing actors for the recording, we first had to make sure that their voices would respond well to voice-morphing. From prior pilot tests, we knew that some voices sounded more believable than others after digital manipulation. For this reason, we systematically pre-tested a number of different voices to see how they responded to digital morphing before choosing actors. Two short sound files from each potential actor (one original and one which had been voice manipulated) were sent to 25 peers asking them whether a) the recordings sounded natural, and b) sounded convincing as male/female voices, or not. Based on these responses, we chose the four voices, two male and two female, that were evaluated most positively. Since one of the actors was female and one male in each language, we could also counterbalance any potential effects resulting from the voice manipulation.

The initial recordings were made using Avid Pro Tools HD 12.0.0, and then edited in the same software. Pitch shifting was processed manually with X-Form (Rendered Only) using Elastic Audio properties in Pro Tools. Two different versions of each apology were thereby produced. For example, in one of the versions, the female native English speaking actor's voice playing "expatriate" was altered, or 'morphed', so that the pitch and timbre matched what was conceived as a male speaker (based on the pre-tests described above). In the other version, her voice was largely left unmanipulated. The same procedure was carried out with all the recordings in Kreol Seselwa and English. Moreover, in the final product, all versions had the sound quality reduced to match that of a typical telephone conversation. This left us with eight guises: two in which the Creole speakers' voices sounded 'male' (one original and one manipulated), two in which Creole recording sounded 'female' (one original and one manipulated), as well as equivalent versions produced by the male and female English native speakers. The recordings were then 'packaged' as Youtube videos with images that signalled the ethnicity and gender of the apologisers (see [Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1: Images used for the Youtube videos which were then arranged in a counterbalanced design (gender and ethnicity reordered) in the electronically distributed Survey Monkey response questionnaire.



Data collection

All recordings and questionnaires were packaged in a Survey Monkey electronic questionnaire for easy distribution. The questionnaire included an introductory page explaining that this was a study on language and politeness (without giving the exact details of the design). Respondents were here asked to provide basic details of themselves (age, gender, nationality, and education). After this, an automated ‘randomiser’ directed them to either Group A or B. Respondents were not aware of the design of the experiment or that some recordings had been manipulated. Each respondent then listened and responded to four apologies (two in English and two in Kreol Seselwa) according to the counterbalanced order indicated in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Group A and B response orders.

Group A (31 respondents)	Group B (35 respondents)
Apology 1, Creole, female, original	Apology 1, Creole, male, manipulated
Apology 2, Creole, male, original	Apology 2, Creole, female, manipulated
Apology 1, Expatriate, female, manipulated	Apology 1, Expatriate, male, original
Apology 2, Expatriate, male, manipulated	Apology 2, Expatriate, female, original

After the response phase, respondents were directed to another page where they were asked to respond to statements about various traits and whether they considered these to be typically male, female or neutral.

Response statements

After each apology, the respondents had to respond to statements on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from: disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (6) regarding their impressions of the person apologising. These included:

The person apologising is being completely sincere
The person apologising is being honest - this was a mistake
The person apologising genuinely regrets the mistake
The person apologising takes full responsibility for the fault
The person apologising is insincere
The person apologising is being dishonest - this was no 'mistake'
The person apologising does not really regret anything
The person apologising is just making up excuses to get off the hook
The person apologising is very polite

In the final part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought various traits were male or female, on a scale where -2 indicated typically male, -1 somewhat male, 0 neutral, +1 somewhat female, and +2 typically female. Traits included were:

Being honest
Being polite
Being reliable
Being organised
Being hardworking
Being dishonest
Being rude
Being unreliable
Being lazy
Being messy

Respondents

We distributed the questionnaires via Seychelles social media (Facebook) in various popular groups, and also used our contacts at the University of Seychelles to secure respondents. In all, 66 respondents completed the survey. All were Seychellois, 23 were male and 43 were female. After randomisation, 31 of these ended up in Group A and 35 in Group B. Other aspects of their demographics are summarised in [Figure 2](#) and [Table 2](#).

Figure 2: Age distribution of respondents.

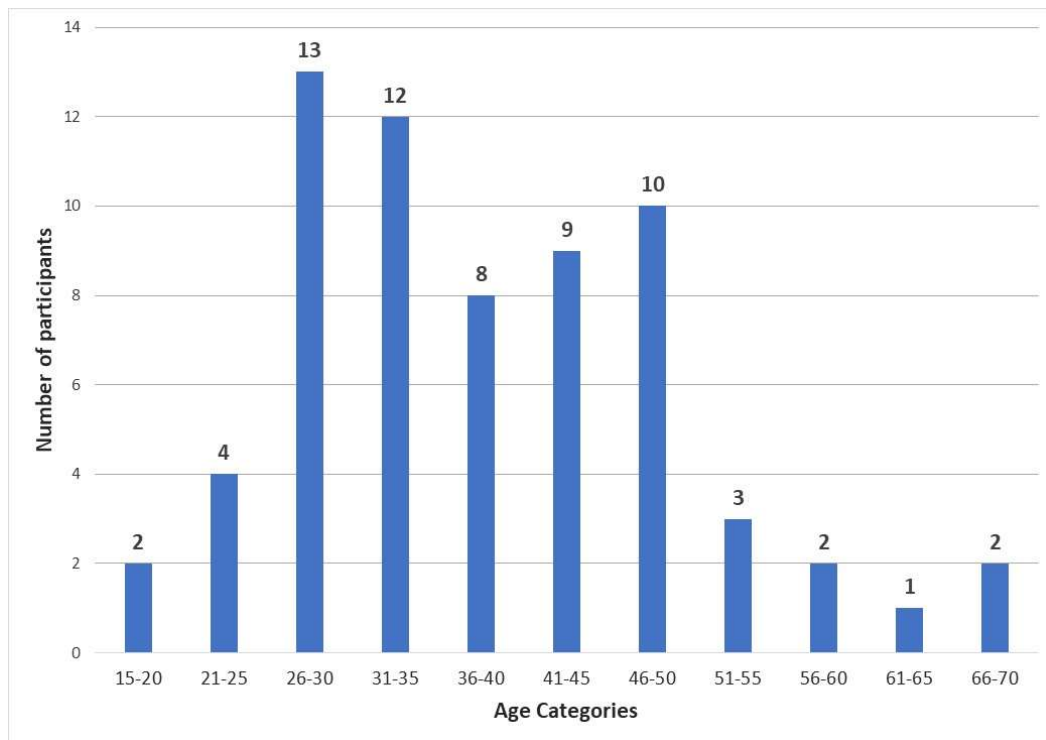


Table 2: Educational background of respondents.

Level of education	No. of respondents
Secondary school	0
A-levels or other post-secondary training	27
Graduate university education (Bachelor)	23
Post-graduate university education (Master's, PhD)	16

It is clear from the above that the sample of respondents was by no means representative. Firstly, women were highly overrepresented. Moreover, it is clear that our contacts at the university were probably the main source of informants given the fact that the respondent population were highly educated.

Data Analysis

In our analysis, we wanted to answer two main questions:

- Firstly, and most importantly, we wanted to analyse whether there were any significant differences in how the apologies in the four guise categories (Seychellois male, Seychellois female, Expatriate male and Expatriate Female) were evaluated.
- Secondly, we wanted to see whether any background variables related to respondent identity may have affected the results. Here, the gender of the participant was of particular interest.

For the analysis, we used multivariate analysis designs in SPSS (GLM-repeated measure design) to analyse the data. No significant effects could be deduced on the basis of respondent identity (probably because there were not enough respondents for this to be relevant) and respondent identity was thus dismissed as an explanatory factor. We were thus left with a ‘clean’ analysis of how respondents had reacted to the different guises.

Results

Responses to the apologies

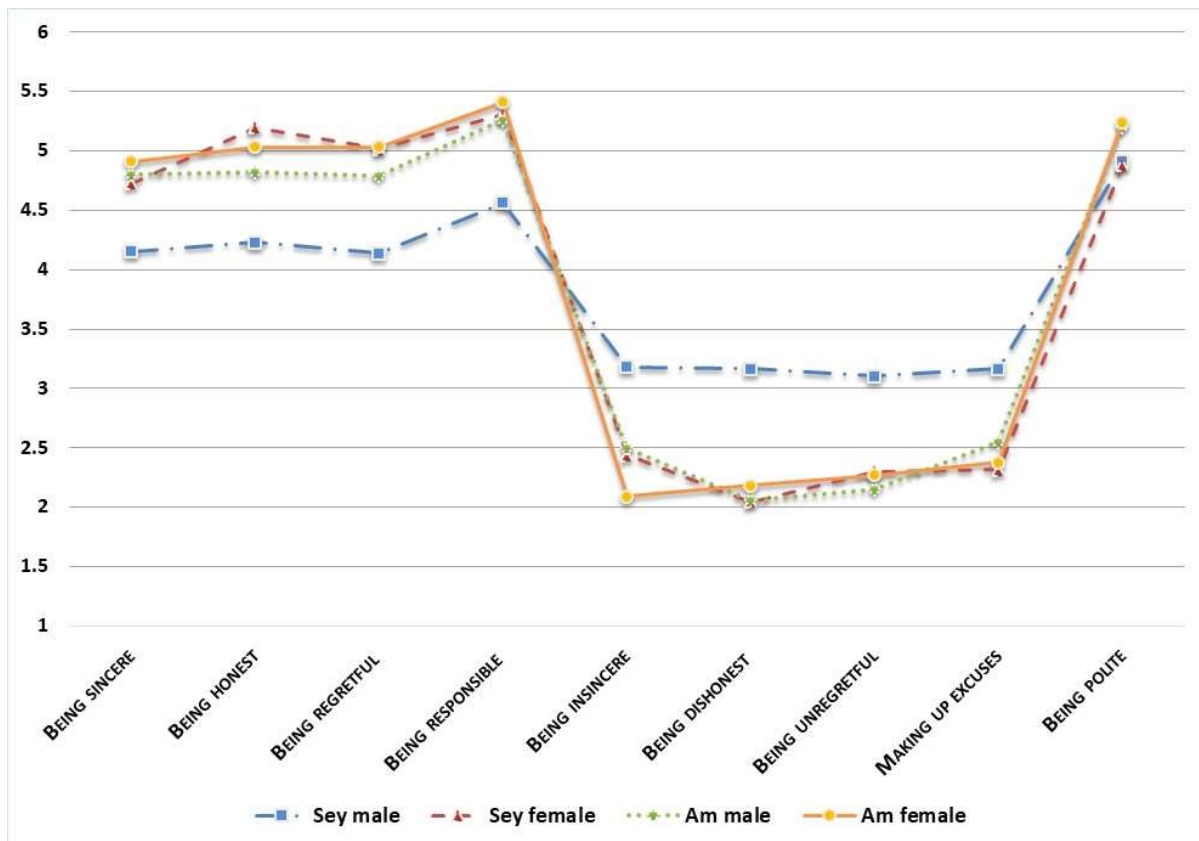
The response patterns to the guises were quite clear. There were no significant differences in how respondents judged the apology guises labelled as ‘produced’ by expatriate male and female speakers or the Seychellois female speakers. The Seychellois male speaker guises, however, stood out, and received significantly lower scores on all aspects such as sincerity, honesty, being regretful and taking responsibility for the fault compared to the other groupings (with one exception: honesty and the expatriate male guise). There were no significant differences in how polite any of the speakers were deemed to be. See [Figure 3](#) and [Table 3](#) below for the specific results.

Table 3: Results from data analysis. Seychellois male apologies compared to other groups.

	Compared to	Mean difference	Std error	Significance
Sey. Male (Being sincere)	Sey. Female	-0.576*	0.292	0.05
	Expt. Male	-0.652*	0.256	0.013
	Expt. Female	-0.758*	0.248	0.003
Sey. Male (Being honest)	Sey. Female	-0.970*	0.24	0.001
	Expt. Male	-0.591	0.252	0.132
	Expt. Female	-0.803*	0.249	0.012
Sey. Male (Being regretful)	Sey Female	-0.879*	0.278	0.002
	Expt. Male	-0.652*	0.256	0.013
	Expt. Female	-0.894*	0.263	0.001
Sey. Male (Being responsible)	Sey Female	-0.742*	0.268	0.007
	Expt. Male	-0.697*	0.234	0.004
	Expt. Female	-0.848*	0.246	0.001
Sey. Male (Being insincere)	Sey Female	0.742*	0.261	0.006
	Expt. Male	0.682*	0.278	0.017
	Expt. Female	1.091*	0.241	0.000
Sey. Male (Being dishonest)	Sey Female	1.121*	0.251	0.000
	Expt. Male	1.106*	0.221	0.000
	Expt. Female	0.985*	0.234	0.000
	Sey Female	0.803*	0.258	0.003

Sey. Male (Being unregretful)	Expt. Male	0.955*	0.229	0.000
	Expt. Female	0.833*	0.242	0.001
Sey. Male (Making up excuses)	Sey Female	0.848*	0.256	0.001
	Expt. Male	0.621*	0.262	0.021
	Expt. Female	0.788*	0.268	0.005
Sey. Male (Being polite)	Sey Female	0.03	0.203	1.000
	Expt. Male	-0.288	0.154	0.395
	Expt. Female	-0.333	0.182	0.433

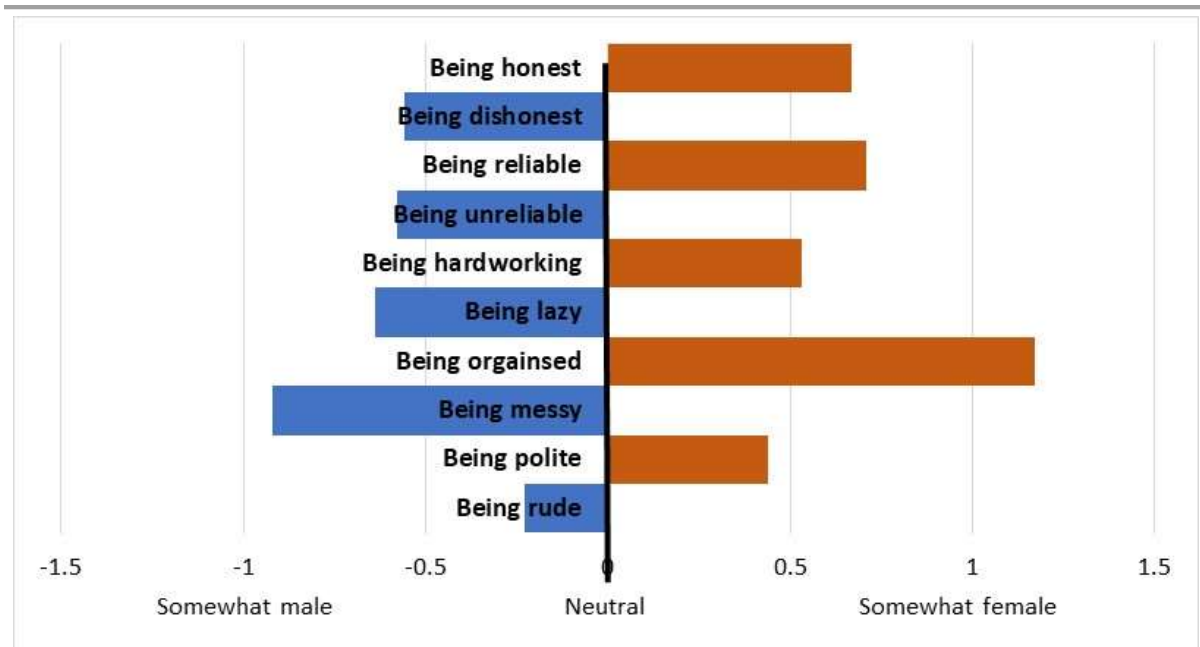
Figure 3: Apology responses. (High figures indicate that respondents agree with the statements (1 = Disagree strongly; 6 = Agree strongly). Figures for each category are the mean value of responses to two apologies: one manipulated and one original.)



Stereotypical preconceptions of traits

Note that the statements posed to the respondents in this part did not distinguish between Seychellois and expatriate male and female stereotypes. We did not want to include this variable for ethical reasons, but it is reasonable to assume that when responding to typical female and male traits, respondents referred to those stereotypes that were closest to them, i.e. Seychellois male and female stereotypes. The results are summarised as [Figure 4](#).

Figure 4: Respondents' gender stereotypical views of various traits relevant to the study. (Negative values indicate 'somewhat male' (-1) and 'typically male' (-2), while positive values indicate 'somewhat female' (1) and 'typically female' (2) traits.)



From our results, it is clear that the respondents had generally quite negative stereotypes about males as being messy, lazy, unreliable and dishonest. In contrast, females were deemed to be organised, hardworking, reliable and honest. The differences for the trait politeness were less marked, 'being rude' coming out as only a marginally male feature (i.e. almost gender neutral).

Analysis and Discussion

Although our results can be questioned on a number of methodological issues (a small unrepresentative sample of respondents, for example), we would argue that they provide empirical evidence for a tendency that is generally observable in the Seychelles, namely that stereotypes surrounding Seychellois men are, on the whole, quite negative when it comes to traits such as honesty, work ethic and reliability. These claims are supported by other researchers (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010). Such stereotypes, when deeply rooted, obviously pose a real danger for any development of social sustainability and resilience. Stereotyping, based on various social categories such as gender and ethnicity, serves to simplify how people perceive and process information about individuals (Talbot, 2003: 468), and it also builds up expectations on how they are supposed to behave. People can choose to ignore such expectations, but they still have to relate to them. In this way, negative stereotypes of men in general, unfairly risks impacting negatively on various aspects of an individual's life, including upbringing, how he is treated in school, employability, and the ability to receive and manage credits and loans. Additionally, since social interplay is a key factor in identity construction, a self-fulfilling prophecy kicks in: it can, and does, transform 'as if truths' into real truths.

There is plenty of evidence that suggests that many men (and of course women too) in the Seychelles are seriously disempowered. The Seychelles has one of the highest prison population rates in the world, out of which the majority (95.5%) are men, more specifically 799 per 100,000 in 2015 (Walmsley, 2015). A major contributory factor to these depressing statistics is likely to be the alarming rate of opiate abuse among the male population: Seychelles tops the world ranking, together with Afghanistan and Iran. Meanwhile, girls massively outperform boys in school (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010); Seychelles has the largest gender differences in reading rates among 14 African nations investigated (Hungu & Thuki, 2010, p. 83).

These figures may well be the consequences of unequal gender structures in schools where, according to a Ministry of Education study (2002), the expectations for girls on the part of teachers were higher than those for boys. The study also revealed consistent differential treatment of boys and girls with regard to streaming, attention time and punishment. These gender patterns are incidentally mirrored in the Caribbean, where according to De Lisle (2018, p. 447) males tend to end up in the lower stream (low ability) classes and are treated accordingly. Upbringing too, has an important part to play. Through surveys and interviews, Geisler & Pardiwalla 2010 (p. 77) reveal a family structure where many boys are “pushed out into the street”, thrusting them “outside the place where emotions and sensitivity are learned and attachments are formed”. According to the authors “Seychellois boys appear to be confined within the parameters of a narrow stereotypical image of toughness, roughness, irresponsibility, independence, and laziness” (ibid.). In summary, these negative observations, facts and figures seem to be the result of a vicious negative feedback loop, where negative expectations lead to negative consequences, which in turn feed into negative expectations, and so on.

As illustrated by our results, negative male stereotypes do not seem to apply to all males, but more specifically to Seychellois males. Based on anecdotal evidence as well as our own experiences and observations (and partly supported by Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010), we would also argue that negative male stereotypes are class specific, and do not apply fully to the well-educated middle-classes, and/or the so-called *Gran Blan* population, descendants of the original French settlers. Such claims of course need to be confirmed empirically: but, seen from a structural and historical perspective, they ‘make sense’. The original construction of the lazy and irresponsible *Quashee* male (see Beckles, 2004, above) was applied by the suppressors (slave owners) to the suppressed (slaves) in order to motivate injustices, and to maintain hegemonic structures. There is no reason that such stereotypical constructions should not have persisted if they benefited the powerful. As has been noted, colonised people have consistently been depicted negatively as weak, barbaric, childlike, dumb, and so on. (Nandy, 2004; Thong, 2012). Given the Seychelles’ long colonial history, it was after all important to retain ethnocentric beliefs that the morals and values of the coloniser were superior to those of the colonised, and here Creole men in particular, were important targets.

In the Seychelles of today, there are still many interests that arguably benefit from the stereotypical idea of the unreliable, dishonest and lazy, working class, male Seychellois. For example, it justifies the import of cheap manual labour in the construction and hotel industries. This has led to a development whereby almost one third of the Seychelles labour force (over 17,000) is made up of foreign labour, this while more than 25% of the Seychellois male population only have informal jobs, 4.2 % are unemployed and almost 3% are stuck in prison (National Statistics Bureau, 2018). It also justifies primarily foreign men to remain in ultimate charge of prestige institutions such as investment companies, big multinational hotels and

international banks. So while the idea of the ‘glass ceiling’ is applicable to Creole women in spite of their relatively strong societal position in the Seychelles, it is also relevant to many Creole men. The ceiling is thus primarily made up of *white* expatriate men (and a small minority of privileged Seychellois men). Finally, the ‘masculinity crisis’ provides a steady revenue to the drug and alcohol industries. In summary, it appears that a neo-colonial status quo which mirrors historical patterns is being maintained.

Efforts to redress social problems in the Seychelles seem generally to be more focussed on dealing with the consequences rather than the causes of current problems. According to Geisler & Pardiwalla (2010, p. 80), male respondents accused social service agencies and NGOs of discrimination against men, and there was no point in raising cases since “decision makers [held] a preconceived idea of men as losers”. According to their report “NGOs were seen to provide support to women only and the one existing fathers’ association remained largely invisible” (ibid.). Men were also reported to claim that “mothers did not allow them to take care of their children, and that instead they threw men out of the house, humiliating and ridiculing them in the process” (ibid.). Though limited, this provides evidence for one of the big challenges facing small island nations according to Eriksen (2011, p. 95), namely “political projects developed overseas,” which have little understanding of local contexts and concerns.

Conclusion

Current gender structures in the Seychelles are detrimental to all Seychellois. On the one hand, many women are overburdened by the responsibilities of bringing up a family and being the sole economic providers, while at the same time having to pursue careers and shoulder professional responsibilities. Many Seychellois working class men, on the other hand, are marginalised, both in the home and on the labour market, leading to various negative consequences such as violence, social isolation, unemployment and drug abuse. We would argue that this state of affairs is at least partly a consequence of gender stereotypes stemming from an historical past, when it was in the interest of the powerful to disrepute Creole masculinity while at the same time gaining the loyalty of Creole women. In so-doing, they contributed to a split between the sexes, and a current situation where the discourse between Seychellois men and women is “charged with accusation, disappointment and prejudice” (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010, p. 81).

In order to remedy current trends, and the so-called masculinity crisis, the reconstruction of national gender stereotypes is arguably a central factor. Educational institutions should play a vital role in this process, proposing new alternatives, and providing a historical understanding of how the national psyche has been shaped by plantation culture and slavery. Today’s curricula pay little attention to these matters, and we would argue that an increased understanding of the nation’s history is a key step to break the shackles of the past, to create new and better informed identity constructions, and to foster what Eriksen (2011, p. 95) calls “a pride in the local as something unique [and] not as an inferior copy of the metropolitan”. Here, we also see that methods based on the models used in this study could help to illustrate the effects of stereotyping on conception and to stimulate discussions – particularly in schools and other learning spaces. In this work, it is also crucial to portray “the dynamism and complexity of the masculinity construct” (De Lisle, 2018, p. 459) and to propose alternatives to the hegemonic stereotypical variants. Such models would be applicable to many SIDS contexts.

The social problems current facing the Seychelles illustrate the vulnerability of small postcolonial states. This ‘smallness’ can, however, be turned into a blessing. The nation has enormous potential. It has less than a 100,000 inhabitants, and while things quickly can turn for the worse, positive changes are also attainable. The population is, on the whole, well-educated and informed, and the time is ripe for Seychellois to take greater charge of their own destiny and seize their own history (Baldacchino, 2018). In this work, educational institutions are given, key players. We are convinced that the Seychelles, and other SIDS like it, are able to meet current challenges; and, while outside help and expertise by all means can be sought, the problems and solutions should be defined and owned by the local population.

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