

VALUES AND POLITICS OF A BEHAVIOR CHANGE SUPPORT SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

We report on an analysis of 27 media opinions concerning *Just Not Sorry*, a tool intended to influence word choice when composing email. Designed for and by women in business, *Just Not Sorry* persuades users to avoid apologies such as “sorry,” hedge words such as “just,” and intensifiers such as “very.” Our media analysis explicates differing positions on whether *Just Not Sorry* supports gender equality, while confirming the relevance of values such as achievement, autonomy, privacy, and politeness, and implicating further values of mindfulness and sincerity. We propose media analysis as a “discount” method for empirical discovery of values and value tensions.

KEYWORDS: Persuasive technology, values, email, language, gender, feminism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Just Not Sorry is a Gmail plug-in that highlights when the user writes apologies such as “sorry,” hedge words such as “just,” and intensifiers such as “very” (Def Method, 2019b). Red underlines appear as if the words had been misspelled. For each underline, a motivational quote appears as a tooltip. One such quote follows as an example: “Using ‘sorry’ frequently undermines your gravitas and makes you appear unfit for leadership - Sylvia Ann Hewlett.”

In this case study, we consider *Just Not Sorry* as an example of a persuasive technology—that is, a technology designed to change attitudes and behaviors (Fogg, 2002). *Just Not Sorry* came to our attention through a survey of technologies designed to influence speech and writing (Twersky & Davis, 2017). When we describe *Just Not Sorry* to others, it elicits strong and opposing reactions. Some say, “I need that!” while others say, “I would never use a tool like that.” Our research question for this case study: What might explain such strong, opposing reactions?

To address this question, we adopted value sensitive design (Friedman et al., 2006) as our guiding theory and methodology, intertwining conceptual, technical, and empirical investigations. In our initial conceptual investigations, we considered direct and indirect stakeholders and the values implicated by those relationships. In parallel technical investigations, the authors each installed *Just Not Sorry* and used it for at least one month. We examined the source code on GitHub (Def Method, 2019a), as well as the system image presented in the Chrome Web Store (Def Method, 2019b). To understand the intentions behind

Just Not Sorry, we read Tami Reiss's (2015) story of the tool's conception and design. Finally, to address our research question, we conducted a content analysis of media opinions about *Just Not Sorry*. The main goal of this paper is to report on the findings of that analysis.

In the next section, we present as background our initial conceptual investigations. After refining our research question, we describe the method and results of the media analysis. We conclude with a brief discussion of the findings and implications for future value sensitive design studies.

2. PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL INVESTIGATIONS

2.1. Stakeholders and values

Just Not Sorry was inspired by a conversation among women in leadership positions about recent satire exaggerating women's stereotypical overuse of words such as "just" and "sorry" (Reiss, 2015). According to Reiss (2015), the group agreed these stereotypes were true: "The women in these rooms were all softening their speech in situations that called for directness and leadership. We had all inadvertently fallen prey to a cultural communication pattern that undermined our ideas." Reiss proposed a tool to help women change their behavior. In this way, *Just Not Sorry* was designed by and for women, to promote the status of women. However, the description of *Just Not Sorry* on the Chrome Web Store (Def Method, 2019b) does not mention gender, and we found masculine as well as feminine names among the authors of public reviews. Therefore, while gender and thus *identity* is salient to the design of *Just Not Sorry*, it is likely that users (or direct stakeholders) include both women and men.

Just Not Sorry is intended to enhance users' *achievement* and *social power* through its support for behavior change. From the Chrome Web Store description and our inspection of the tool, we see that *Just Not Sorry* respects users' *autonomy* in that it suggests changes but does not compel them. Finally, *Just Not Sorry* protects users' *privacy* in that it leaves no trace of its use when emails are sent.

Indirect stakeholders include email recipients, colleagues, and feminists. Email recipients may perceive an email composed in accordance with *Just Not Sorry* as rude or abrupt, implicating the value of *politeness* or *courtesy*. If *Just Not Sorry* does indeed promote workplace success, colleagues who do not use the tool may find their own achievement and social power lessened. Changes in communication style across a workplace or industry may enhance either *collaboration* or *competition*.

While still more indirect, feminists constitute a large stakeholder group with a substantial interest in *Just Not Sorry*. Bucholtz (2014 [1991]) offers the following definition of feminism:

A diverse and sometimes conflicting set of theoretical, methodological, and political perspectives that have in common a commitment to understanding and challenging social inequalities related to gender and sexuality.

Hence, considering feminists as a stakeholder group implicates the value of *equality* with respect to gender. We refined our research question as follows: Could conflicting perspectives on gender equality explain strong, opposing reactions to *Just Not Sorry*? In the next section, we consider the diversity of feminist perspectives, drawing on Bucholtz (2014 [1991]) as our primary source.

2.2. Feminist perspectives on language

We find that it is one particular kind of feminism that motivates *Just Not Sorry*. Reiss (2015) seeks to enhance women's positions within existing structures by helping them address a perceived deficiency in their attitudes and behaviors. This is a textbook example of a liberal feminist approach: "Given its concern to bring women into men's spheres, liberal feminism has generally aimed to eradicate gender inequality by eradicating or at least reducing gender difference," efforts that "have sometimes resulted in societal expectations that women must adapt to male norms" (Bucholtz, 2014 [1991]). Bucholtz goes on to write that Robin Lakoff is the linguist most associated with liberal feminism. Lakoff's groundbreaking work, *Language and Woman's Place* (2004 [1975]), describes how a culture that expects women to use "women's language," including hedge words, vacuous modifiers, and superpolite forms, is one means by which "women are systematically denied access to power." Lakoff also applies the concept of the double bind to women's language: if women adopt the language of power, they are still denied access to power due to their unfeminine behavior.

Contemporary feminist scholars Gill and Orgad (2017) associate *Just Not Sorry* with the movement they call "confidence culture," in which the persistence of gender inequality is attributed to individual shortcomings that can be addressed through projects of self-improvement. Where Bucholtz (2014 [1991]) observes that liberal feminism "is often no longer recognized as feminism at all," Gill and Orgad describe confidence culture as a popular, postfeminist remaking of feminism.

While liberal feminism seeks equality through the reduction of gender differences, cultural feminism views women's communication practices as distinctive and of value equal to or greater than men's (Bucholtz, 2014 [1991]). Bucholtz cites Deborah Tannen's work as emblematic of a cultural feminist approach. Tannen's work, including bestsellers *You Just Don't Understand* (1990) and *Talking from 9 to 5* (1994), attributes miscommunication between men and women to gendered communication practices, including men's cultural preference for "report talk" and women's for "rapport talk."

Beyond liberal and cultural feminism, Bucholtz (2014 [1991]) explains a third and less common branch of difference feminism: radical feminism, in which all inequality is viewed as having gender inequality at its root. And beyond theories that view gender as an essential difference, we find

- material feminism, which "holds that women's subordination is a consequence of class oppression" (Bucholtz, 2014 [1991]);
- critical race feminism, which "challenges the field's tendency to marginalize the distinctive experiences of women of color" (Bucholtz, 2014 [1991]);
- queer feminisms, which challenge heteronormativity and the gender binary.

3. METHODS

3.1. Forming the corpus

To form the corpus, we conducted a Google Search for the keywords "Gmail 'Just Not Sorry'" on December 13, 2019. We did not use a news database, such as NewsBank, ProQuest, or NexisUni,

because we found these databases do not include relevant women’s publications such as *Vogue* and *Marie Claire*, and do not consistently index popular online news sources such as *Slate*.

Amongst over 100 search results, we identified 26 articles that meet the following criteria:

1. The article is published in a blog, magazine, or newspaper that is recognized as notable by its inclusion in Wikipedia. This excludes not only personal blogs and web sites, but also small business blogs and minor news sources such as high school newspapers. We wanted to ensure that all the articles included in our analysis were clearly intended for a public audience.
2. The article’s author expresses a substantive opinion regarding *Just Not Sorry*, including some rationale. This excludes purely factual reporting, including reporting on others’ opinions, as well as articles that follow a factual report with a brief, unsupported evaluation (e.g., “Genius!”)

Most articles are the work of a single author, but Day and Ellen (2016) wrote in conversation with each other. Their segments are coded as two separate cases, leading to the 27 cases listed in Table 1.

Table 1. All cases, classified as supportive, critical, or equivocal with respect to *Just Not Sorry*.

(a) Supportive tone			(b) Critical tone		
Author	Gender	Genre	Author	Gender	Genre
Brandon (2015)	M	Business & Tech	Grose (2016)	F	News (US)
Curtis (2018)	F	Business & Tech	Horobin (2016)	M	News (UK)
Day (in Day & Ellen, 2016)	F	News (UK)	Minter (2016)	F	News (UK)
Erikson (2016)	F	Women	Sawyer (2016)	F	Business & Tech
Fessler (2018)	F	Business & Tech	Tejada (2016)	F	Women
Gillespie (2016)	F	Women			
Ginn (2016)	F	News (UK)	(c) Equivocal tone		
Hines (2016)	F	Women	Author	Gender	Genre
Guest (2016)	F	News (UK)	Cauterucci (2015)	F	News (US)
Lastoe (2016)	F	Business & Tech	Dishman (2016)	F	Business & Tech
Lord (2015)	F	Women	Ellen (in Day & Ellen, 2016)	F	News (UK)
Paul (2016)	M	Business & Tech	Garcia (2016)	F	Women
Scott (2016)	F	News (UK)	Levine (2016)	F	News (US)
Stevens (2016)	F	News (US)	Turk (2019)	F	Business & Tech
Wills (2016)	F	News (UK)			
Ye (2016)	F	Business & Tech			

3.2. Coding and analysis

Coding and analysis was performed by the first author, using a hybrid approach guided by the recommendations of Lazar et al. (2017). After reading the articles several times, I classified the overall tone of each author as supportive, critical, or equivocal with respect to *Just Not Sorry*, as shown in Table 1. I inferred each author’s gender from their name and classified the publications by genre. I then proceeded to open coding, with attention to authors’ treatment of gender as

well as their arguments supporting, opposing, or critiquing *Just Not Sorry*. From prior experience, I was sensitized to statements alluding to values as framed by Friedman et al. (2006) and by Schwartz (1994). From our preliminary conceptual investigation, I was also sensitized to feminist concepts as presented by Bucholtz (2014). After the initial coding was complete, I identified open codes with feminist perspectives and classified each author's perspective according to the predominance of the evidence. In parallel, I identified open codes as arguments supporting or opposing *Just Not Sorry* and grouped similar arguments through axial coding, an iterative process in which some open codes were revisited.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Does the corpus include feminist viewpoints?

The composition of the corpus confirms the relevance of gender: the vast majority of the authors (24/27) have women's names, and six articles appear in publications for women. But few opinions come from an explicitly feminist position. Only Ellen (2016), Turk (2019), and Wills (2016) refer directly to "feminism" or a "feminist issue," and just six (Cauterucci, 2015; Curtis, 2016; Ellen, 2016; Ginn, 2016; Horobin, 2016; Lastoe, 2016) mention gender equality or inequality, the central concern of feminism.

Yet the content analysis reveals many statements consistent with an underlying perspective of liberal or cultural feminism. Statements typical of liberal feminism include problematizing women's language, taking masculine behavior as the norm or ideal, arguing that women need to change to achieve success in traditionally male workplaces, and articulating a double bind.

Acting like a spellcheck for sorries, the app was designed to help women who are prone to using "soft" language at work and thereby sending emails which are about as effective as putting on a baby voice when asking for a pay rise. (Wills, 2016)

Way back when, my high school English teacher, Mrs. Skoog, told my all-women's class to stop qualifying our speech and our writing with the word "just." ... Mrs. Skoog encouraged us to...say and write what we meant with confidence and authority—the way men did. (Lastoe, 2016)

[L]anguage is the key element in helping women progress to the top and succeed there. The question is then, how can women change their language to convey confidence? (Ginn, 2016)

If emailing "like a woman" is to perpetuate stereotypes about how women should act, but emailing "like a man" is to reinforce the idea that professionalism should aspire to male corporate culture—and if either approach can be held against you anyway—then what's a female emailer to do? (Turk, 2019)

By contrast, cultural feminists value women's language and behavior as much as or more than men's.

[W]omen can also be superb, hyper-intuitive people-readers and managers... So, while the female approach isn't always softer, when it is, let's own it. (Ellen, in Day & Ellen, 2016)

[I]t is also my hope that “Just Not Sorry” isn’t indicative of yet another way women need to act more like men in order to succeed. Sometimes, it’s okay to soften language if that feels more authentic. In many cases, it’s paramount to consider people’s reactions and sensitivities before speaking. (Levine, 2016)

Rather than holding our hands up and apologising for our choice of words, let’s stand up for them. Let’s stand up for taking people’s feelings into consideration when we speak, for not seeing arrogance as a virtue, for thanking people for their contributions and for being sorry for putting our work onto other people. Let’s stop apologising for being women and instead demand that men behave differently. (Minter, 2016)

Other feminist stances beyond liberal and cultural feminism do not seem to be represented in the corpus. Fessler (2018) and Wills (2016) mention “the patriarchy,” but colloquially and not in the context of radical feminism. No one writes from the standpoint of critical race feminism; only Turk (2019) briefly considers biases beyond gender bias. And while many disagree with drawing a stark distinction between women’s and men’s behavior, all assume gender is binary. For example:

I’m disinclined to think this is a clear male v female divide - we’ve all experienced colleagues, both men and women, who fall on both ends of the spectrum. And although the idea that men and women speak a different language is age old, I’ve seen no solid evidence that women write ‘sorry’ and ‘just’ in emails more than men. (Hines, 2016)

Classifying all cases according to their predominant sentiments (Table 2) reveals many more liberal feminists (17) than cultural feminists (3), as well as two more who advocate for gender equality without clearly adopting a stance of liberal or cultural feminism. Three discuss gender only to downplay its relevance, while two writing for business publications avoid discussing gender altogether.

Table 2. Cases by position on gender equality.

Liberal feminists	Cauterucci, Curtis, Day, Dishman, Fessler, Garcia, Gillespie, Ginn, Hines, Lastoe, Lord, Sawyer, Scott, Stevens, Tejada, Turk, Wills
Cultural feminists	Ellen, Grose, Minter
Other feminists	Horobin (makes neither kind of statement), Levine (makes both equally)
Downplay gender	Erikson, Guest, Paul
Do not discuss gender	Brandon, Ye

4.2. Do feminist positions predict opinions about *Just Not Sorry*?

Reviewing Table 1 shows that we cannot predict authors’ opinions about *Just Not Sorry* based on either their gender or their audience. But can we predict their opinions from their positions on gender equality? Table 3 shows that, to some extent, we can. In this corpus, authors who downplay or ignore gender all recommend *Just Not Sorry*, cultural and other feminists all critique or oppose *Just Not Sorry*, and liberal feminists are divided. The remainder of this section explicates these differences in opinion.

Table 3. Position on *Just Not Sorry* vs. position on gender equality.

	Supportive	Equivocal or Critical
Liberal feminists	Curtis, Day, Fessler, Gillespie, Ginn, Hines, Lastoe, Lord, Scott, Stevens, Wills	Cauterucci, Dishman, Garcia, Sawyer, Tejada, Turk
Cultural feminists	-	Ellen, Grose, Minter
Other feminists	-	Horobin, Levine
Downplay gender	Erikson, Guest, Paul	-
Do not discuss gender	Brandon, Ye	-

4.3. Disagreements about the value of the target behavior change

Brandon (2015) and Ye (2016) argue for *Just Not Sorry* without reference to gender. Like the majority of the authors (21/27)—including all 16 who ultimately recommend *Just Not Sorry*—Brandon and Ye begin by problematizing some of the words and phrases flagged by the app, characterizing these words as “wishy-washy,” “weak,” “timid,” even “submissive,” in contrast with the “confident,” “strong,” “authoritative” language they see as key to effective business writing. Along with Erikson (2016) and Paul (2016), who mention gender only to say that the app can be used by men as well as women, Brandon and Ye recommend *Just Not Sorry* to support individual achievement. Hines (2016), here classified as a liberal feminist, most explicitly addresses achievement:

[I]f it helps me be part of the high-achieving crew, I’m happy to use every tool out there to suppress my natural tendency to put ‘not offending anyone’ ahead of ‘getting the job done’. (Hines, 2016)

On the other hand, as we have already seen, those taking a cultural feminist perspective disagree that the behavior targeted by *Just Not Sorry* is problematic. They argue instead that a “softer” or more considerate approach has value. Grose (2016) adds that *Just Not Sorry* ignores social context:

What is appropriate, effective language when writing to a boss might not work with a subordinate; ... you might not even use the same style of writing when communicating with a woman colleague as with a man.

Grose (2016) goes on to argue that feminine communication styles “can be incredibly useful in the realpolitik of the workplace,” including the use of “sorry” as a “conversational smoother.” Ellen (2016) also links apologies to “good manners,” which she values in “both sexes”:

Like me, I’m sure you’ve come across presumptuous braggarts, shameless buck-passers and dreary blame-dodgers of both sexes; the types that think basic good manners are for other people. ... Is it really so bad to say “Sorry for bothering you...” at the start of an email? Where some see feeble and self-defeating, I see human and perceptive – and how about a round of applause for just plain nice?

Horobin (2016) argues that apologies are not just valuable but often necessary, independent of gender:

The problem with an app designed to discourage the use of apologetic language is the assumption that saying sorry is always an act of contrition – one that undermines one’s case, or assumes an inferior position. Since saying sorry can be a valuable means of refusing a request: “Sorry, but I’m just too busy right now”; or enlisting someone’s support – “I’m sorry to bother you when I know you’re busy.” Removing this useful word runs the risk of making you appear plain rude. There are many business contexts in which an email to a customer or a boss requires apologetic language; to avoid such politeness strategies when explaining why a report is late, or asking for a pay rise, would be a risky policy indeed.

To sum up, Brandon, Erikson, Paul, and Ye recommend *Just Not Sorry* because they value “strong” language in support of achievement. Ellen, Grose, Horobin, Levine, and Minter oppose *Just Not Sorry* because they value feminine language, or politeness irrespective of gender.

In the bottom four rows of Table 3, just Guest remains. Similar to Ye, Guest (2016) writes about apologizing as “a hard habit to shake.” But where Ye (2016) recommends *Just Not Sorry* for supporting “repetition and practice” towards “improving your writing,” Guest (2016) sees other values at stake:

I do use “sorry” liberally when I notice I’ve caused damage or am in the wrong, but I no longer apologise for myself, my opinions, or other people’s mistakes. ... When “sorry” is used, it is more meaningful for being meant. ... The app should make us stop and think – whether we are British, or women, or in the workplace – about when a thing is really worth apologising for.

Guest values the role of *Just Not Sorry* in promoting mindfulness and eliminating habitual apologies, leading to greater sincerity. Some liberal feminists make similar claims about mindfulness and sincerity:

Anything that makes us more aware of the language we use and the effect it has can only be a good thing “in my opinion” (whoops). (Wills, 2016)

Of course, every now and then you really do screw up and ought to send an apology, and every now and then you're not entirely sure about something — which is why we have the words "I think" in the first place. Fortunately, the email doesn't reflect any of the suggested changes or stay underlined once it's sent. It merely encourages you to take a second glance at an email to make sure that the words you're using are actually words that you mean. (Lord, 2015)

Note that Lord links sincerity and mindfulness to *Just Not Sorry*’s support for autonomy and privacy.

Returning to Table 3, we see that we cannot predict whether a liberal feminist will recommend *Just Not Sorry*. Like Brandon, Erikson, Paul, and Ye, liberal feminists problematize words or phrases targeted by *Just Not Sorry*. Most go on to implicitly or explicitly tie the problematic

language to gender. Curtis (2018) and Fessler (2018) directly characterize such writing as “lady language,” while some like Stevens (2016) cite “evidence” that women write or speak differently from men. Others foreground their identities as women in connection with such language. For example, Day (2016) writes about how she removed “filler words” from her emails after writing a novel with a “bombastic male protagonist,” while Garcia (2016) and Lord (2015) address their presumed female audience as “you” or “we.”

Some liberal feminists, including Hines, Wills, and Lord, recommend *Just Not Sorry* for reasons we have already seen. Others critique the completeness of *Just Not Sorry* with respect to the intended behavior change. Dishman (2016) points out that the app does not distinguish between the many uses of the word “just,” not all of which are diminishing, while Garcia (2016) finds that *Just Not Sorry* does not flag all of *Vogue’s* “six things every working woman should avoid when writing an email.” Sawyer (2016) agrees that women should change, but disagrees that *Just Not Sorry’s* focus on email is effective:

An email that omits words like “sorry” will do little to improve how you’re viewed in the workplace, especially if you still use such words during in-person meetings and presentations.

4.4. Disagreements about the effects of the intervention on the user

Reiss (2015) intends *Just Not Sorry* to help women in leadership write “with the confidence of their positions.” Some liberal feminists also hope the app will help make confident women:

Our favourite part is that when you hover your cursor over the highlighted word, up pops a quote from a successful woman to remind you that you, too, are a strong woman who doesn’t need to be apologising for anything. (Gillespie, 2016)

With less than 10% of executive directors at FTSE 100 companies being women there are areas that need improvement to reach gender equality; one of these areas is women’s ability to assert themselves and confidence. Changes to how we speak and how we hold ourselves to confront these subtle, yet important behaviors will begin to make a big difference. (Ginn, 2016)

While I think some softening language is sometimes needed, I’d prefer to sound in control and definitive and have my words matter—rather than sound soft and sweet, careful of not coming across as demanding. (Lastoe, 2016)

But some liberal feminists believe *Just Not Sorry* will have the opposite effect, undermining rather than bolstering women’s confidence. This is the crux of Cauterucci’s (2015) critique:

[P]art of me always cringes when people tell women that the way they speak or write is wrong. ... Making fun of the way women speak, when they’ve been socialized for a lifetime to take up as little physical, temporal, and aural space as possible, is not productive and can further erode their self-confidence.

Cauterucci (2015) seems to recommend *Just Not Sorry* in the end, but her recommendation is equivocal:

This app relieves women of a bit of the sizeable burden of realigning their subconscious word choices though the hover-over explanations could be tweaked to read as more encouraging than blame-y.

Tejada (2016) goes further and rejects *Just Not Sorry* for engendering shame around women's language:

When someone types these kinds of words, they get underlined in red. (Get it? It's as if the words are misspelled! For shame, ladies!) ... Instead of creating apps that shame women...we should be writing our own stories about intelligent women who don't care whether they're liked.

Horobin (2016) names this concern directly, citing cultural feminist Deborah Cameron's objections to "efforts to police women's language." Cultural feminists Ellen and Grose also argue this point:

It's arguable that the female "sorry" communication tic has been overplayed – overexamined, exaggerated and distorted in a way that traditional "masculine" mannerisms would never be. It errs on the patronising – "This can help you with that pathetic girly thing you do that renders you a disgrace to modern feminism." (Ellen, in Day & Ellen, 2016)

My fervent hope for 2016 is that there are fewer articles and tech hacks preaching at women — particularly young women — about how they should be speaking, writing and presenting themselves to the world. Maybe if their communications weren't constantly picked apart, even by well-meaning observers, they'd have more of the deeply felt confidence they need to succeed. (Grose, 2016)

Hence, this is an objection that unites some liberal and cultural feminists.

4.5. Disagreements about implications for gender equality

As we saw earlier, Ginn (2016) implies that *Just Not Sorry* will help boost women into positions of authority and thereby promote gender equality. Her opinion is by far the most hopeful. Four other liberal feminists recommend *Just Not Sorry* as "a step in the right direction" while acknowledging there are bigger problems for gender equality that it does not address:

Gender inequality has had its influence on both women's and men's speech for centuries. A Gmail plug-in won't completely dismantle linguistic gender stereotypes, but pointing out simple words that unintentionally undermine certain voices is a step in the right direction. (Curtis, 2018)

[T]his plug-in is not the most important stride that's ever been made in the ongoing battle for women's rights, but it's still a nice bit of wood thrown on to the bonfire. (Day, 2016)

No Gmail plugin will topple [the patriarchy], but calling out the ways in which we unintentionally diminish our voices is a meaningful step forward. (Fessler, 2018)

[W]hile we agree...it's rubbish that 'female' patterns of speech are still seen as weak, and it'd be great if we could change how people read our speech rather than having to change the speech itself – the app does make a good way to tackle the current struggle until we sort out the bigger issues. (Scott, 2016)

Turk, too, reports that she uses *Just Not Sorry* begrudgingly in the absence of “real empowerment”:

I use [the] plugin, but I don't always change the words it suggests. Instead, it helps me decide whether I'm saying what I actually want to say. It's the difference between writing a certain way because you want to, or because you feel you have to. Ultimately, real empowerment would be not having to think about how we come across at all. Needless to say, there are conspicuously few think pieces out there about how men should email. (Turk, 2019)

But some oppose *Just Not Sorry* because it “misses” or “ignores” a larger problem. For Sawyer (2016), the larger problem is that women “lack confidence and have few mentors to help them navigate the professional landscape.” Horobin (2016) claims that *Just Not Sorry* is beside the point altogether:

To advocate that women imitate male speech in order to gain equality in the workplace is to ignore the real problems about gender inequality which have nothing to do with the way women dress or speak. ... I'm sorry, but I just don't think that an app will help.

And Ellen (2016) fears that *Just Not Sorry* could even “mask” bigger problems of gender inequality:

My concern is that email drives such as these, while good for awareness, aren't going to tackle the far more entrenched issues, and might even serve as another mask. As in, “Oh look, there's a 'Just Not Sorry' email plug-in – gender disparity in the workplace is solved!”

5. DISCUSSION

As we have just seen, differing perspectives on gender equality go some distance towards explaining disagreements about *Just Not Sorry*. While some agree that apologies and hedges are signs of weakness, others value this softening and attribute it to gender. While some see the app boosting women's confidence, others predict the opposite effect. While some view the app as a small step towards gender equality, others see it as a distraction from more fundamental issues.

But perspectives on gender do not explain all critiques of *Just Not Sorry*. Some value politeness separately from femininity, and others agree with the premise of *Just Not Sorry* but think it doesn't go far enough. Moreover, the media analysis confirms the relevance of a range of values: not only gender *identity* and *equality*, but also *achievement*, *autonomy*, and *privacy*. Guest

(2016) points towards further values of *mindfulness* (also evident in Reiss's 2015 essay) and *sincerity*.

We have shown that media analysis can contribute to value sensitive design as a form of empirical investigation. Our understanding of the role of gender in opinions about *Just Not Sorry* is more nuanced than before, and we discovered two further values to consider. But the approach has both advantages and disadvantages, for example, in comparison to semi-structured interviews. Media opinions constitute a naturally occurring, public dataset for which human subjects review is not required; data collection takes hours rather than weeks or months. Media opinions inform and are informed by public opinion. However, an article is not a conversation. We can't ask questions; we can only interpret what is written. Moreover, media opinions do not necessarily represent all opinions: we see only what writers and editors deem appropriate for publication. Finally, media opinions are not necessarily independent of each other. Where it might be surprising and meaningful to see the same words (e.g., "lady language") across several interviews, in media opinions it may only mean that one author read another's work.

The next step for this study of *Just Not Sorry* is to plan empirical investigations focused on the adoption of the app and its effectiveness in promoting behavior change. This media analysis will inform the design of a survey or interview protocol through the identification of additional values and viewpoints to address. Media analysis could take a similar role in other value sensitive design studies. While this is a retrospective study of an existing technology, which let us search for the tool's name, we can also imagine a role for media analysis in formative value sensitive design studies, particularly in the design of behavior change support systems. If the target behavior is one that people already try to change in the absence of supporting technology, a media analysis could focus on opinions about that behavior change. Media analyses could also consider opinions about related or competing tools.

6. CONCLUSION

We have contributed a value sensitive design case study of a persuasive technology concerned with language and gender. Through a media analysis focused on opinions about the tool, we confirmed the relevance of several values identified in a preliminary conceptual investigation, discovered two further values, and characterized disagreements about the tool grounded in disagreements about gender equality. In the context of value sensitive design, media analysis may work as a "discount" empirical method informing (or if necessary, replacing) surveys or interviews. While this study is a retrospective analysis of an existing tool, media analysis might also contribute to formative value sensitive design.

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