

# Culture Signaling at Work: System Justification in High Tech

Elizabeth Marks-Cyr



# Silicon Valley: Vanguard of the Modern Workplace

Grey walls → Vibrant colours

Cubicles → Bean bag chairs

Formal wear → ~~Office~~ casual

Fun perks



# Organizational Culture and the Competing Values Framework

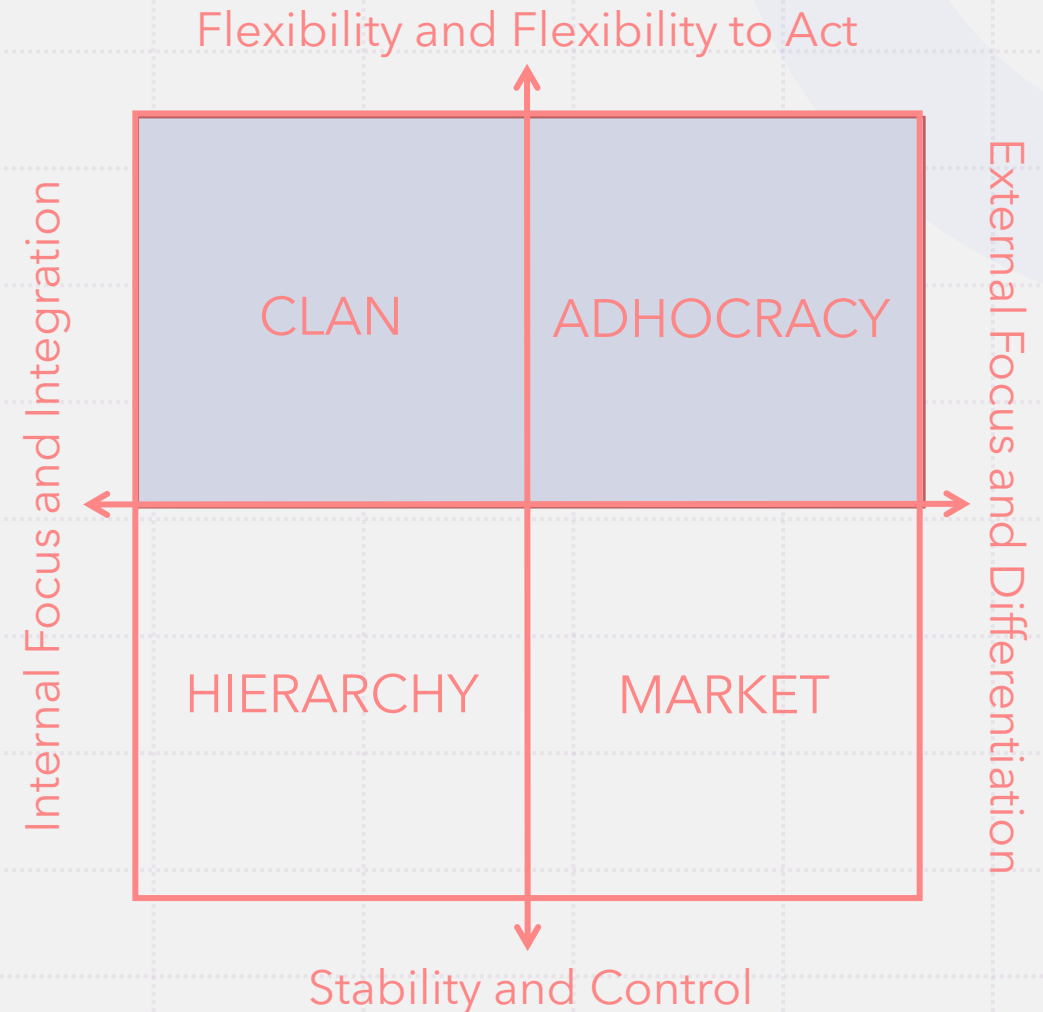
## Organizational Culture

Shared beliefs, values and assumptions

Determine the norms and patterns of behaviour that develop in an organizations (Johns & Saks, 2020)

## Competing Values Framework

(Kim & Quinn, 2000)



# Prototypical Adhocracies : Clan-Culture Perks

## Clan Culture

- A friendly work environment that resembles family for employees
- ↓ Burnout, stress

## Adhocracy Culture

- A dynamic and creative workplace focused on rapid growth and risk taking.
- ↑ Burnout, employee stress
- Typical in tech sectors

**Innovation**



**Rapid Growth**



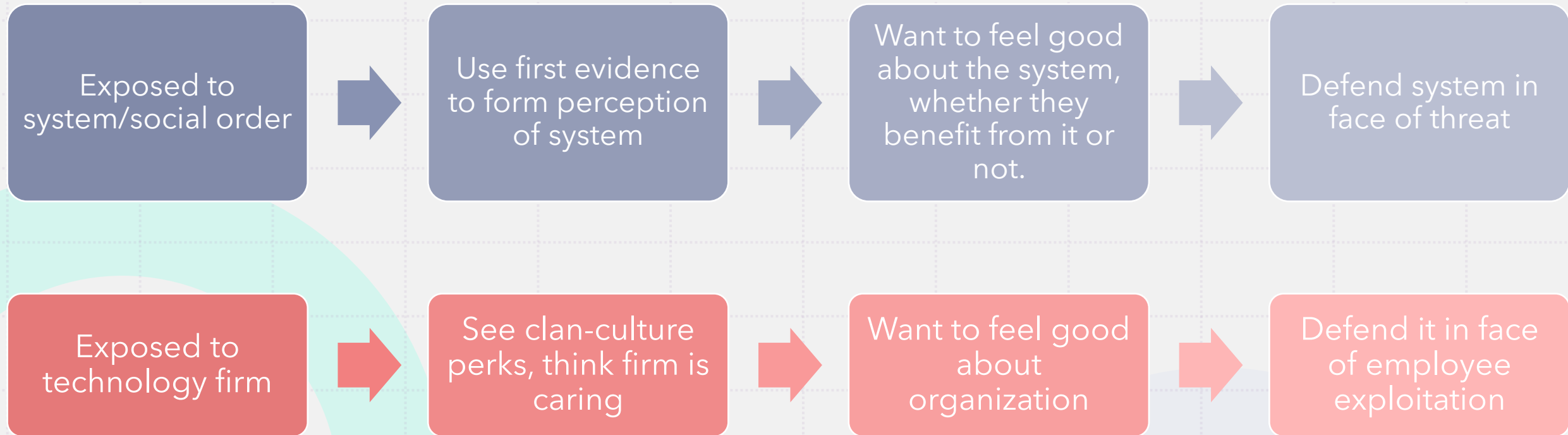
**Mismanaged Time**  
**Unmet Needs**  
**Risk Taking**  
**Stress**  
**Burnout**



# System Justification

The social and psychological tendency to defend the status quo

## System Justification Theory



(Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004; Kim et al., 2020)



# Research Questions

*How can we study this?*

*What are measurable  
outcomes?*

# Hypotheses

**H1**

Presence of clan culture perks

↑ Unfairly compensated tasks  
Exploitation Justification  
and/or beyond job scope

**H2**

Presence of clan culture perks

↑ Unfair or demeaning  
Mistreatment Justification  
treatment from superior

**H3**

Presence of clan culture perks

↑ Unreasonably high work  
Expectations of Perfectionism  
standards

# Methodology – Participants

165 Brock University  
students

Control: n=82

Experimental: n=83

Predominantly Social  
Science and Health  
Science Students

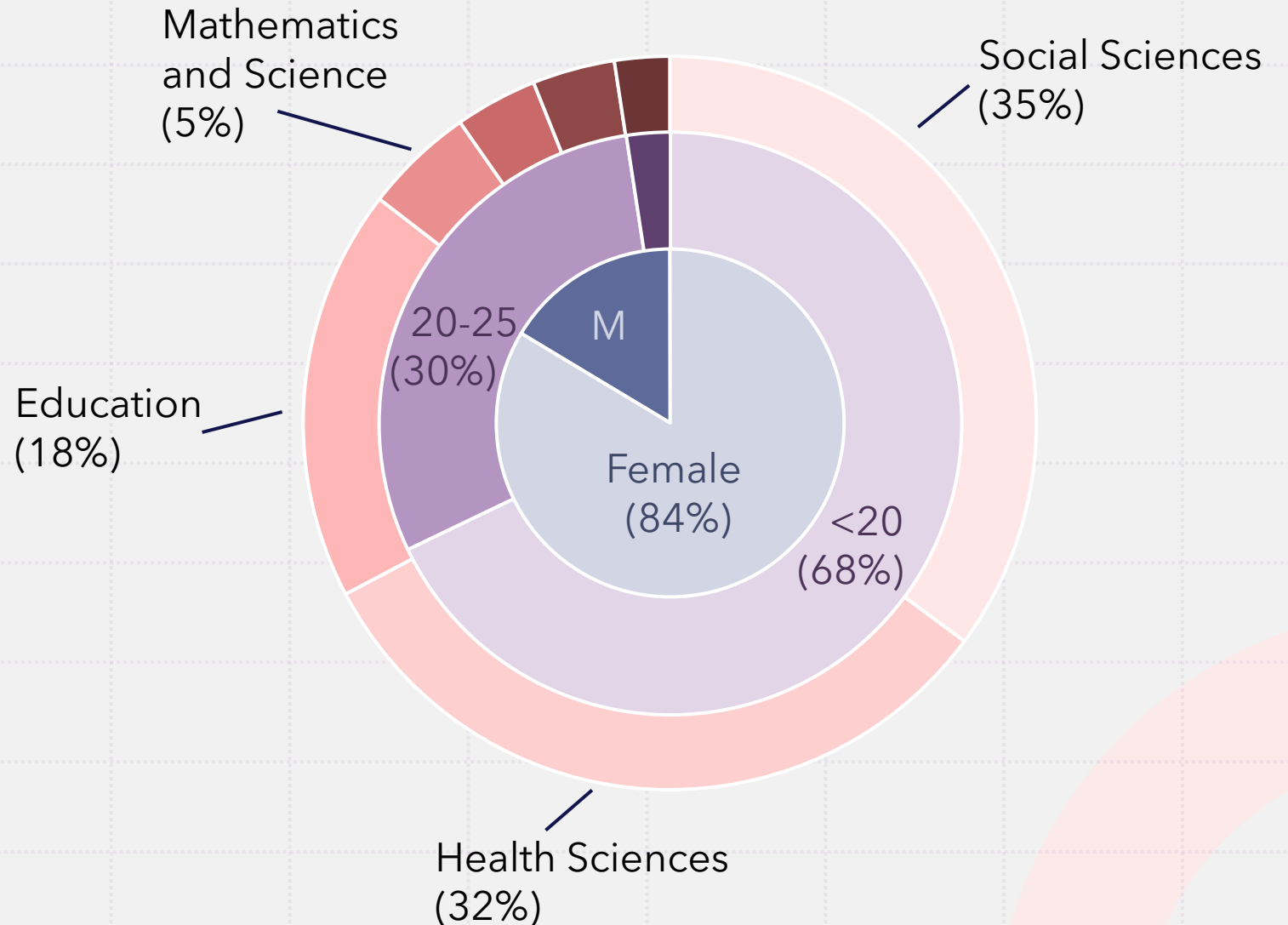
Age Mean: 19.36

Age SD: 1.99

Range: 17-28

83.6% Female

16.4% Male





# Methodology – Materials

*“John works as a software developer for a San Francisco based tech company called CCM as a software developer...”*

*“The following two pages briefly describe some of the perks and benefits offered to employees of CCM...”*

## Control

### Additional coverage

#### Prescription Drug Benefits

CCM's benefits package provides coverage for both non-specialty and specialty prescription medication. You may obtain up to a 30-day supply of medications from preferred pharmacies or a 90-day supply from select pharmacy mail services.



#### Vision

CCM's vision plan covers annual eye exams and eyewear.



#### Dental

CCM's dental plan offers full coverage for preventative and diagnostic care as well as partial coverage for basic treatments such as fillings.



#### Mental Health Benefits

Full coverage: access to short-term counselling for a variety of life events

Partial reimbursement: a network of licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and long-term counselling services.

## Experimental

### Perks for employees

#### Several free meal options

Choose from a variety of on-site cafes and restaurants serving up snacks, drinks and meals. Staff favorites include the pulled pork tacos at our in-house gastropub and the banana cheesecake made fresh at our grab-and-go café.



#### Staff games room

Whether you want to unwind alone or bond with your team members, our games room boasts a full range of arcade classics like Pac-Man and Space Invaders; the latest consoles and releases; a wall of board games; as well as several table games such as ping-pong and foosball.

#### Gym

Enjoy the convenience of a fully equipped, on-site, gym and showers to cut the commute out of your routine.



#### Nap Room

Sound proof nap pods are available to rest in if you need to step away from your work to recharge.



# Methodology – Measures

## Scenarios are presented in small stories

"A manager at CCM is sick, and no one from management can fill in. John is asked to take over the manager's duties until they come back so things can continue moving smoothly."

## Measures are scored on 7-point Likert Scales

"CCM is behaving reasonably in asking John to take over these duties temporarily without compensation."

Please rank how strongly you agree:  
1 = Strongly disagree - 7 = Strongly Agree

# Results: Manipulation Check

No significant difference in perception of perks between conditions ( $t(163) = 0.27, p = 0.79$ )

No effect of condition ( $D = 0.0416$ ).

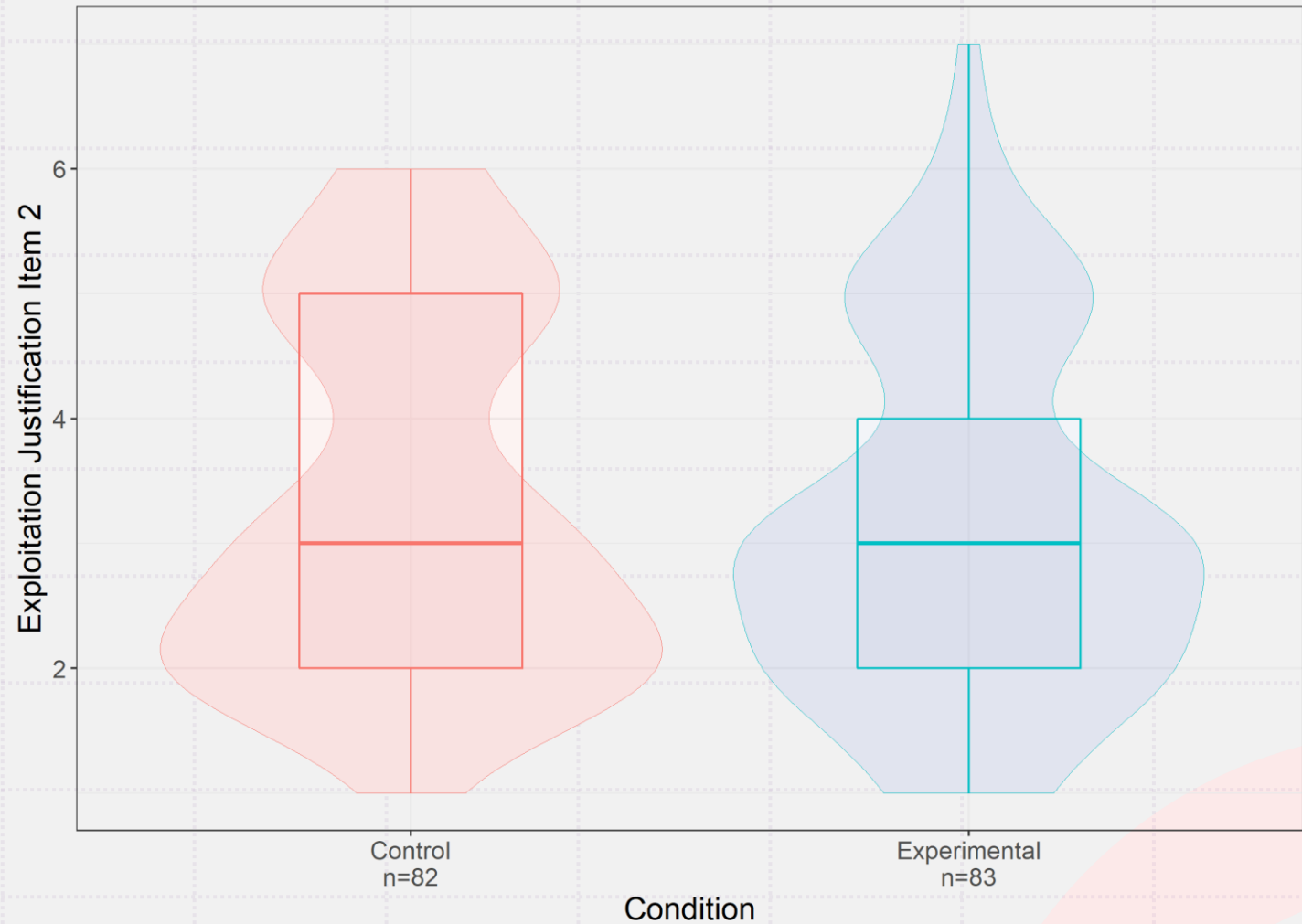


# H1 Results: Exploitation Justification

*John is asked to take over his managers role while they are sick for no extra compensation.*

No significant difference in justification of exploitation between conditions ( $t(163) = 0.93, p = 0.35$ )

No effect of condition ( $D = 0.15$ ).



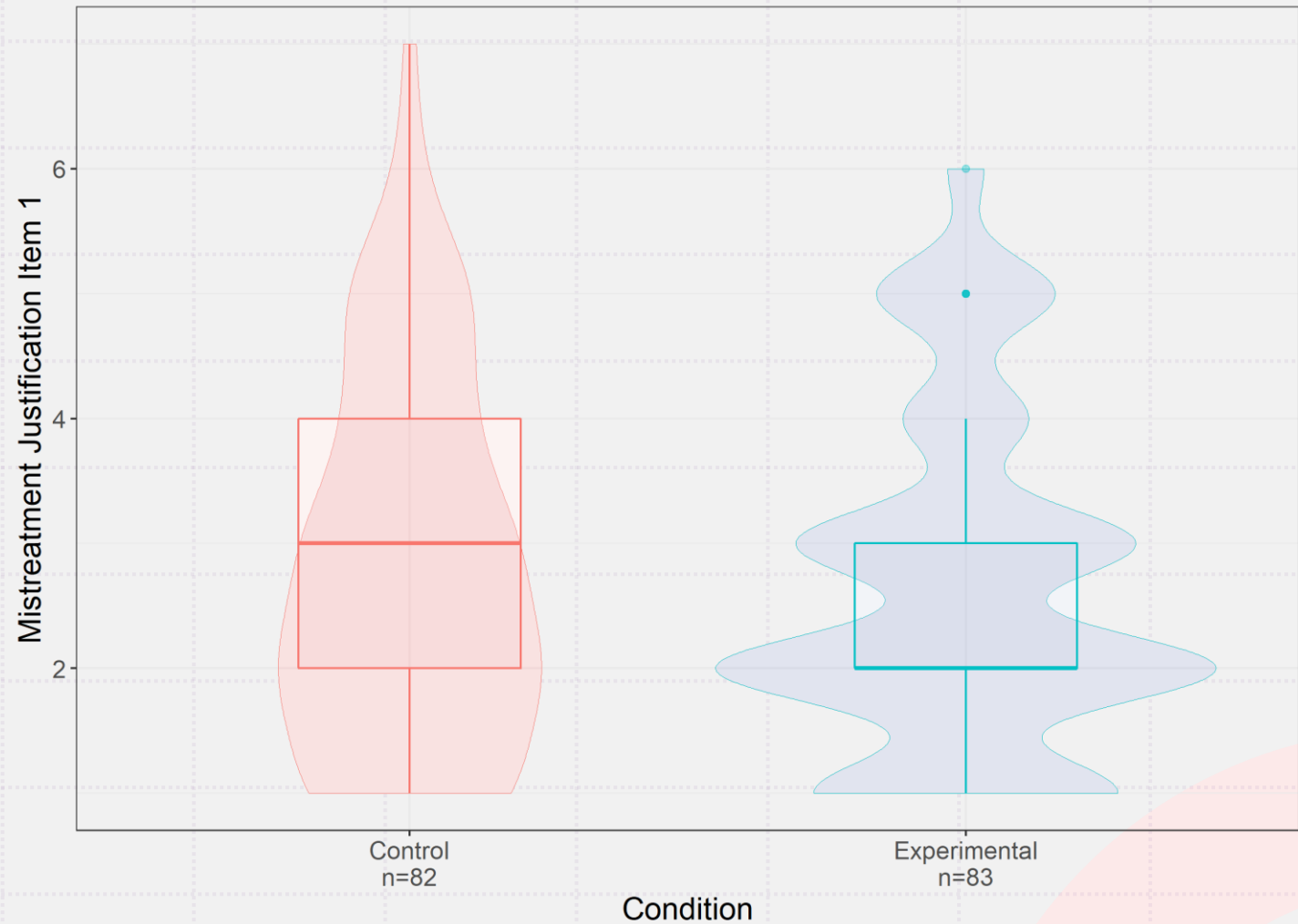
*\*Inter-item correlation significant ( $r = 0.28, p < .001$ ) but Not strong enough to warrant aggregation*

# H2 Results: Mistreatment Justification

*John makes a mistake at work and is punished in an unfair and demeaning way.*

No significant difference in justification of mistreatment between conditions ( $t(163) = 0.7, p = 0.49$ ).

No effect of condition ( $D = 0.11$ ).



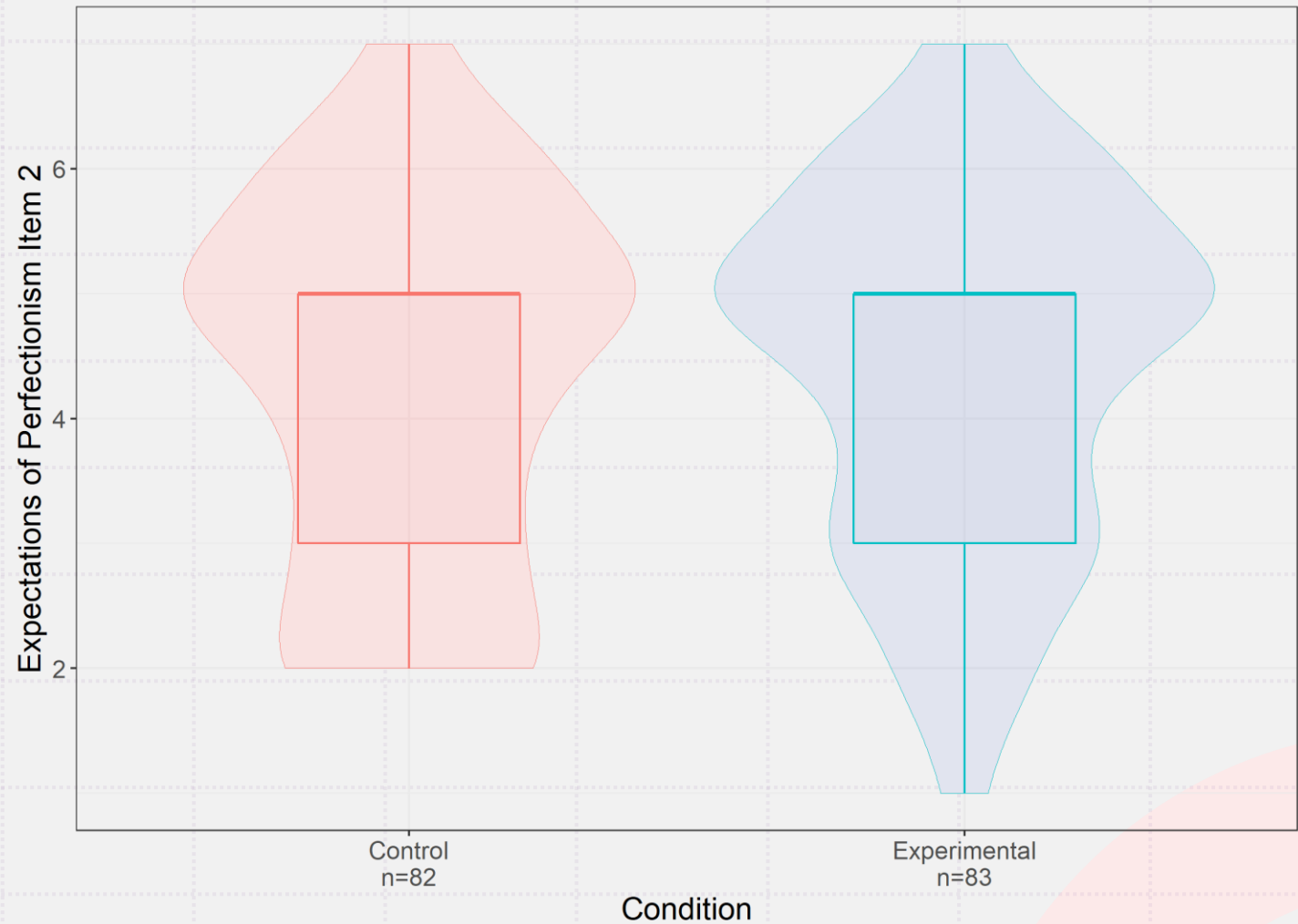
*\*Inter-item correlation significant ( $r = 0.33, p < .001$ ) but not strong enough to warrant aggregation*

# H3 Results: Expectations of Perfectionism

*John's is told that CCM holds its employees to higher standards than the rest of the industry so, while his work is great, it will need to be even better if he wants to fit in.*

No significant difference in expectations of perfectionism between conditions ( $t(163) = -0.57$ ,  $p = 0.57$ ).

No effect of condition ( $D = -0.09$ ).



*\*Inter-item correlation not significant ( $r = -0.01$ ,  $p = 0.92$ ) and did not warrant aggregation*



# Results: Correlational Analysis

Correlational analysis of all outcome variables found relationships between:

- Manipulation check and expectations of perfectionism ( $r = 0.32, p < .01$ )
- Manipulation check and expectations of gratitude ( $r = 0.39, p < .01$ )
- Perception of CCM as a fun place and:
  - Exploitation legitimization ( $r = .24, p < .01$ )
  - Mistreatment legitimization ( $r = .23, p < .01$ )
  - Expectation of perfectionism ( $r = .21, p < .01$ )
- Belief that CCM cares about its employees well being and:
  - Exploitation legitimization ( $r = .35, p < .01$ )
  - Mistreatment legitimization ( $r = .35, p < .01$ )
  - Expectation of perfectionism ( $r = .21, p < .01$ )

# Discussion - Findings

- Insignificant difference in means for the manipulation check between conditions
  - Suggests our **manipulation was ineffective**
  - Brings analysis of outcome variable into question but no key hypothesis confirmed
- Significant correlations between our manipulation check and several measures of observer perceptions of CCM as a clan culture
  - Suggests a **relationship does exist** between clan culture signalling and justification of unfair expectations put on employees

# Discussion - Limitations

- **Ineffective manipulation** → inability to interpret t-test analysis
  - Delivery of IV through brochure may be too subtle
  - Measure of DV's through vignettes may also be too subtle or lack construct validity
- **Sample not reflective** of individuals working in the tech sector
  - More female (though this is changing!!)
  - Younger
  - Very few studying math or science
- Participants typically **lacked career experience**
  - may not know how unusual clan-culture perks are
  - Participants may **not have exposure to clan organizational culture** → not associate clan culture signals with positive employee outcomes/treatment

# Discussion – Future Studies

- Change manipulation →
  - Delivery of IV through more direct means than brochure
  - Measure of DV's through more direct means than vignettes
- Collect from a more representative sample
  - Mechanical Turk to access employed adults
  - Stack Overflow to access tech employees, ideally managers
- Correlational study
  - Participants diagnose company's organizational culture
  - Respond to measures of DVs

# Discussion – Implications

- If relationship does exist:
  - Informs organizations of the importance of clearly defining their culture and allows them to better meet the needs of their employees
  - Builds on Organizational Culture literature
    - Speaks to the impact of misleading culture signaling
  - Adds to workplace perk literature
    - Bulk of perk research studies positive outcomes so this provides a balancing perspective
  - Informs prospective employees seeking new employers
    - Learning to accurately identify an organizations culture

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