MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY

Arthur G. Bedeian, Achilles A. Armenakis

Almost two decades ago, von Haller Gilmer, after an exhaustive survey of what had been written about the jobs women hold, their attitudes, interests and abilities, dejectedly summarized his effort by commenting:

> The literature centered around the woman worker, the woman executive, and the professional women in industry is fraught with conflicting opinions, pronounced prejudices, and almost a 'mythology.'[1]

It is a sad commentary on the field of personnel research that it has only truly been within the last five to ten years that many of the conflicting opinions, pronounced prejudices and myths surrounding women workers, and especially, women managers, have finally been empirically investigated.[2]

Over ten years have lapsed since the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although almost four out of every ten members of our country's work force are female, only one in six-hundred of our nation's top executives is a woman. What accounts for this discrepancy? To a very large extent, the same prejudices, myths, and conflicting opinions noted by Gilmer almost twenty years ago still exist today. To varying degrees, many prejudices and myths are a result of cultural conditioning and ingrained attitudes. If significant differences do actually exist between male and female managers, the possible ramifications for personnel policies should be understood. The present study was conducted to determine the existence of possible male-female differences regarding the legitimacy of various organizational influences.

METHODOLOGY

Data analyzed in the present study were collected by means of the Schein-Ott *Legitimacy of Organizational Influence Questionnaire.*[3] This questionnaire is designed to measure the legitimacy of organizational influence in 55 behavior and attitude areas, ranging from highly job related (e.g., "working hours") to highly personal (e.g., "attitudes toward sexual morality"). Survey respondents are asked to answer "yes," "no," or "uncertain" to each questionnaire statement depending upon whether or not they feel it is legitimate for organizational influence to be exerted in that area. Responses are analyzed by computing an Influence Index for each area of inquiry. The closer an Influence Index is to +100, the greater number of survey responses marked "yes" for an area of inquiry; while the closer an index is to −100, the greater the number of "no" responses. For complete scoring information, see Schein and Ott.

In the present study, the Schein-Ott questionnaire was administered in January, 1975, to 135 members of the Business and Professional Women's

---

[1] B. von Hall Gilmer, "Psychological Aspects of Women in Industry," *Personnel Psychology,* Winter, 1957, pp. 439–452.

[2] See, for example, Charles D. Orth, III, and Frederic Jacobs, "Women in Management: Pattern for Change," *Harvard Business Review,* July, August, 1971, pp. 139–147; Teresa E. Levitin, Robert P. Quinn, and G. Stainee, "A Woman is 58% of a Man," *Psychology Today,* March, 1973, pp. 89–91; Joan Crowley, Teresa E. Levitin, and Robert P. Quinn, "Seven Deadly Half-Truths About Women," Psychology Today, March, 1973, pp. 94–96; or C. F. Fretz, and Joanne Hayman, "Progress for Women— Men are Still More Equal," Harvard Business Review, September–October, 1973, pp. 133–142.

[3] Edgar H. Schein, and Steven J. Ott, "The Legitimacy of Organizational Influence," *American Journal of Sociology,* LXVII, May, 1962, pp. 682–689.

Clubs of America at its Alabama state winter board meeting. Of this total, 58 members met the study's requirements of actually managing an industrial or business activity and having subordinates report directly to them.

For purposes of comparison and analysis, the survey results obtained were matched with comparable 1972 data on male managers collected by Kemp.[4] The Kemp data were chosen for use not only because they represent the responses of an all male population (80 supervisory employees from three manufacturing and one non-manufacturing companies), but also because they were the most current U.S. data on this topic available.

Use of the Schein-Ott questionnaire has been reported in numerous studies. The original studies on the legitimacy of organizational influence conducted by Schein and Ott, and Schein and Lippitt[5] have been followed by the later work of Davis, Heizer, Heizer and Litton, Kemp, and Bedeian.[6]

The hypothesis tested was that there would *not* be a significant relationship between the Influence Index values (derived from the Schein-Ott questionnaire) of the male managers and those of the female managers. The study results did not support the hypothesis. Using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient, *rho*, the rank-order correlation of items (based on their Influence Index values) between the male and female managers' responses

[4] B. Wayne Kemp, *Organizational Influence and its Relation to Leader Behavior;* D.B.A. Dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1972.

[5] Edgar Schein and Gordon L. Lippitt, "Supervisory Attitudes Toward the Legitimacy of Influencing Subordinates," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* II, No. 2, 1966, pp. 199–209.

[6] Keith Davis, "Attitudes Toward the Legitimacy of Management Efforts to Influence Employees," *Academy of Management Journal,* XI, June, 1968, pp. 153–162; Jay H. Heizer, "Minorities and Organizational Legitimacy," *North Texas State University Business Studies,* Fall, 1972, pp. 28–35; Jay Heizer, and Donald Litton, "Some Negro and White Views of Organizational Legitimacy," *Southern Journal of Business,* VII, August, 1972, pp. 1–7; B. Wayne Kemp, "Organizational Influence and Its Relations to Perceived Leader Behavior" in Thad B. Green and Dennis F. Ray (eds.), *Management in an Age of Rapid Technological and Social Change,* Mississippi State Southern Management Association, 1973, pp. 124–136; and Arthur G. Bedeian, "A Comparison and Analysis of German and United States Managerial Attitudes Toward the Legitimacy of Organizational Influence," *Academy of Management Journal,* (in press).

was +.86 (p < .0001). Although this correlation indicated a significant relationship between the two sets of Influence Index values, there were a few interesting areas of *disagreement* between the male and female managers. These areas, as well as those areas of agreed high and low legitimacy, will be discussed below.

ITEMS ON WHICH MALE AND FEMALE MANAGERS AGREED

ITEMS OF HIGH LEGITIMACY

Male and female managers agreed that of the original 55 items, 14 items which generally concerned job-related performance showed high legitimacy; these are listed in Table I with an indication of the extent of agreement.

Several of these work-related items showed a paired-consistency of rating. As might be expected, the item "alcohol consumed during working day" and "number of alcoholic drinks during lunch time" are both considered areas of high legitimacy. The same expected relationship exists between the items "type

TABLE I

Items Where There Is Agreement of High Legitimacy

	male mgrs.*	female mgrs.
alcohol consumed during the working day	100	69
number of alcoholic drinks during lunch time	67	72
type of clothing worn at work	80	60
degree of formality of clothing	80	60
importance attached to getting along with other people	100	97
kind of temperament exhibited on the job (i.e., how excitable or phlegmatic or aggressive or passive, etc.)	100	95
manner of supervising subordinates	67	56
tidiness of office or work area	100	97
using profanity at work	80	91
time spent talking to spouse on telephone while working	80	79
time spent doing job-related reading at work	80	69
working hours	67	91
how critical of the company in public	100	86
how work day is divided among various duties	100	64

* Male managers' scores abstracted from Kemp, ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCE AND ITS RELATION TO LEADER BEHAVIOR, DBA Dissertation, Mississippi State University.

of clothing worn at work" and "degree of formality of clothing." However, three other items (importance attached to getting along with other people, kind of temperament exhibited on the job, and manner of supervising subordinates) presented an interesting difference. Males and females agreed that the first two were items of high legitimacy—that "getting along with people" and "exhibiting specific temperaments on the job" were matters of concern to the organization, but that the third item, "manner of supervising subordinates," is much less legitimate. Although research relating to the existence of male and female differences in these areas has been generally lacking, some evidence has been offered purporting that women show a greater concern than men for the "socio-emotional" aspects of employment,[7] or that women are perhaps slightly better judges of people than men,[8] or that females perceive their environment more accurately than males.[9] As is evident, our study turned up contradictory findings: we did not uncover any appreciable male-female difference in the perceived legitimacy of influence regarding these areas.

On the other hand, at least three studies have been conducted that offer some parallel evidence concerning *similarity* in male and female response. Day and Stogdill found that male and female supervisors occupying similar positions and performing similar functions demonstrate similar leadership behavior and are equally effective, at least as evaluated by their subordinates.[10] And Megargee[11] and Bartol[12]

[7] Crowley, Levitin and Quinn, "Seven Deadly Half-Truths About Women."

[8] Ronald Taft, "The Ability to Judge People," *Psychological Bulletin*, LII, January, 1955, pp. 1–23.

[9] Randall S. Schuler, "Male-Female Organization Perceptions and Attitudes Controlling for Job Content," in Manfred W. Hopfe (ed.) *Proceedings* (1974), Atlanta, American Institute for Decision Sciences, 1974, p. 36.

[10] David R. Day and Ralph M. Stogdill, "Leader Behavior of Male and Female Supervisors: A Comparative Study," *Personnel Psychology*, XXV, Summer, 1972, pp. 353–360.

[11] Edwin I. Megaree, "The Influence of Sex Roles on the Manifestation of Leadership," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, L, October, 1969, pp. 377–382.

[12] Kathryn Bartol, "Female Leaders, Need for Dominance, and Subordinate Satisfaction: Analysis of a Stereotype" in Green and Ray's *Management in an Age of Rapid Technological and Social Change,* Southern Management Association, 1973, pp. 107–115; and also, "Male Versus Female Leaders: The Effect of Leader Need for Dominance on Follower Satisfaction," *Academy of Management Journal*, XVII, June, 1974, pp. 225–233.

have investigated male/female leader need for dominance as related to performance and satisfaction.

At best, all that can be said is that the results of their work are complimentary, but far from reinforcing in nature.

Concerning another common stereotype about women, it has long been thought that women are more concerned than men with the hygienic aspects of their jobs (see Crowley, Levitin and Quinn,[7] for instance), or that women are supposedly more concerned with comfortable surroundings and are more fastidious than men; but the responses to the item "tidiness of office or work area" gave men a slight edge in favor of fastidiousness.

ITEMS OF LOW LEGITIMACY

These items were comprised, for the most part, of personal beliefs and acts, and involved, especially, behavior at home or relationships with family members. Table II identifies, of the 55 original items, 23 on which there was agreement of low legitimacy.

TABLE II

Items Where There Is Agreement of Low Legitimacy

	male mgrs.	female mgrs.
kind of spouse	−100	−86
faithfulness to spouse	−60	−70
whether spouse works or not	−100	−97
number of children	−100	−97
where children attend school	−100	−93
owning own house or not	−87	−81
kind of house or apartment lived in	−100	−86
place of residence	−100	−79
who friends are	−73	−84
leisure time spent with peers	−87	−68
church attended	−100	−100
political affiliation	−100	−100
attitudes toward saving money	−87	−71
attitudes toward smoking	−100	−55
amount of life insurance held	−100	−78
where vacations are spent	−100	−100
leisure time spent with superiors	−67	−72
leisure time spent with subordinates	−60	−66
close friends in a rival company	−73	−76
amount of entertaining	−87	−99
kind of car driven	−87	−100
amount of money given to charity	−100	−70
quantity of alcohol consumed at home	−73	−67

A number of these items could possibly have been construed to involve the organization's activities or reputation, and so, therefore, to be subject to some measure of legitimate organizational concern. For instance, items such as "leisure time spent with superiors" or "with subordinates," "close friends in a rival company" and "amount of entertaining" were assigned low legitimacy. Also, items that might possibly have been interpreted as involving a company's image (or, in the case of a private automobile, for instance, a product bias because of a supplier or a customer relationship) were nonetheless given low legitimacy.

One item, "amount of money given to charity," is interesting in light of the pressures many organizations exert to obtain 100% employee participation in community charity drives (United Fund). The item "quantity of alcohol consumed at home" underscores the respondents' (male and female) tendency to draw a strict line separating their on-the-job activity from their home activity—they recognized alcohol intake *on the job* as a matter of high legitimacy for the organization, but not *off the job*.

ITEMS ON WHICH MALE AND FEMALE MANAGERS DISAGREED

While Table II might lead one to believe that male and female managers completely agree in believing that an organization's influence ceases to be legitimate outside of working hours and within the boundaries of personal beliefs and actions, this is not quite true. It is the area of disagreement that supplies the most interesting material surveyed. Table III identifies eight items of substantial disagreement (i.e., influence index values with an absolute difference of 50 or more) in both areas— that dealing with job performance and behavior, and that dealing with personal matters. Each of these items of disagreement should be considered with respect to research findings available for comparing male and female managers.

Consider first the disagreement over "willingness to play politics to get ahead" and "competition with peers for promotion." The male managers surveyed were largely in agreement regarding the legitimacy of organizational influence in these areas. A large number of the women managers, however, felt otherwise. Empirical research findings that might relate to this area are at best confusing. If "playing

TABLE III

Items Where There Is Substantial Disagreement Among Male and Female Managers in Degree of Legitimacy of Influence

	male mgrs.	female mgrs.
willingness to play politics to get ahead	60	−39
competition with peers for promotion	67	−11
attitudes toward unions	80	−51
use of credit and responsibility in meeting debts	13	−67
wearing beard, mustache, etc.	47	−68
where charge accounts are maintained for personal shopping	20	−93
participation on a company athletic team	20	−45
whether one uses the company product or not	−67	25

politics" can be related to aggressiveness, there is some evidence that supports the view that males are more aggressive than females.[13] On the other hand, the question of competitiveness, as inferred in "competition with peers for promotion" is wide-open for debate. Crowley, Levitin and Quinn report findings that indicate that the stereotype that women are less interested than men in promotions is a half-truth; and Vinacke and associates have concluded that women adopt an anticompetitive strategy as related to sex roles.[14] Lirtzman and Wahba challenge this view and contend that many coalitional behavior patterns are a result of situational factors and due largely to traditional cultural role definitions.[15]

The contrast in feelings surrounding the item "attitudes toward unions" is, to say the least, interesting; traditionally women have been seen by union leaders as having little concern for unionism and as being apathetic to union requirements, such as paying dues. But the data reported here seem to

[13] E. E. Maccoby and C. N. Jacklin, "Female vs. Male: Defining the Difference," *Psychology Today*, December, 1974, pp. 109–112.

[14] W. E. Vinacke, "Sex Roles in a Three-Person Game, *Sociometry*, XXII, 1959, pp. 343–360; with T. T. Uesgi, "Strategy in a Feminine Game," Sociometry, XXVI, 1963, pp. 75–88; and with J. R. Bond, "Coalitions in Mixed-Sex Triads," Sociometry, XXIV, 1961, pp. 61–75.

[15] Sidney E. Lirtzman and Mahmoud A. Wahba, "Determinants of Coalitional Behavior of Men and Women," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, LVI, October, 1972, p. 406–411.

indicate a greater belief among women managers than men managers that employee attitudes toward unions should be free of managerial influence attempts.

The literature on differences between male and female attitudes offers no explanations for some of these items of disagreement (for instance, "use of credit and responsibility in meeting debts" or "wearing a beard or mustache") and we have no theory to offer also, so these remain unexplained for the moment. We'd like to point out, finally, that only one of these disputed items was viewed by women as legitimate and by men as illegitimate: "whether one uses company products or not"; again, we have no theory to offer to explain that.

SUMMARY

The rank-order correlation of the items studied and the preceding analysis indicated that there were considerable areas of agreement between the behavioral attitudes and values of the male and female managers surveyed. Members of both sexes seemed to recognize that certain legitimate areas of organizational influence do exist; however, they disagreed somewhat on both the proper extent and composition of this influence. This disagreement existed in both related and non-related job performance areas as well as in items related to personal beliefs and actions. In a few cases, these differences, based on current research available, *appear* due to sex differences, e.g., ability to judge people, ability to accurately perceive one's surrounding environment, passivity versus competitiveness. If such differences do actually exist, their implications for organizational personnel policies should be investigated.

Two points of caution must be considered in the interpretation of the data presented. First, they are not generalizable to all male and female managers. The survey results do not necessarily reflect the way in which all male or female managers would respond to the question of organizational legitimacy. The subjects sampled may or may not be representative of the populations from which they were drawn. It is believed that the study's participating female managers are probably representative of their geographical area. Regarding the survey instrument, it is probably fairly comprehensive in that it measures most areas that might conceivably fall within the realm of "organization influence." However, the data does not purport to indicate all areas of perceived legitimacy or illegitimacy of organizational influence for the groups studied.

The second precautionary point in the analysis of the data also deals with interpretation. The authors of the present study and all those referenced have been affected by both ingrained attitudes and cultural conditioning. While logic and objectivity are vital in academic research, a researcher's logic and objectivity are also clearly affected by what he or she has encountered. This point would seem especially important in such an emotional area of investigation as male-female differences.

Arthur G. Bedeian

is Assistant Professor of Management, and Acting Director of Research in the School of Business at Auburn University. He spent 1973–74 as a faculty member in the Boston University Overseas Graduate Program. He has published over 30 articles in business and management journals.

Achilles A. Armenakis

is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Management, Auburn University. He has published papers in journals such as *Personnel Psychology, Journal of Management,* and *Human Relations.*