SEX DIFFERENCES IN ENDORSEMENT OF INFLUENCE TACTICS AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR TENDENCIES

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ABSTRACT: Sex differences in the endorsement of influence tactics and political behavior tendencies were surveyed among 337 employees (176 males and 161 females). The sample was composed of managers, business owners, and professional, technical, sales, and office support workers from a variety of organizations. No significant differences were found between males and females with respect to scores on the Political Orientation Questionnaire, preference for teamwork, exchange of favors, and upward appeal. However, women were significantly less likely than men to perceive themselves as relying on charm, manipulative tactics, and personal appearance to achieve results and gain advantage. None of the sex differences could be attributed to years of job experience.

Sex and gender differences among workers have been of long standing interest to researchers in organizational behavior, personnel psychology, and management. As the term is currently used, gender usually refers to the perception that people have about the differences between males and females. Sex differences, however, refer to actual differences between males and females (Powell, 1987). Previously, the terms gender and sex were used interchangeably, and still are to some extent.

Among the many gender or sex differences observed in the workplace have been stress (Jick & Mitz, 1985), pay expectations (Major & Konar, 1984), sources of job satisfaction (Gomez-Mejia, 1983), leadership style (Jago & Vroom, 1982), number of influence attempts on subordinates (Ayers-Nachamkin and associates, 1982), and ingratiating behavior (Schmidt & Kipnis, 1987). Specifically, Schmidt & Kipnis (1987) found that women who used ingratiating tactics, and who acted as “bystanders” tended to receive high performance evaluations. In contrast women who were classified as “shotguns” (refuse to take no for an an-
swer), and “tacticians” (using reason and logic to influence others) tended to receive lower evaluations. Men who received the highest performance evaluations relied more heavily on reason and logic to influence others; men who fell into the categories of shotguns, ingratiators, or bystanders, tended to receive lower evaluations.

Sex differences in influence tactics would appear to have considerable relevance in understanding the behavior of women engaged in managerial, professional, and technical work because interpersonal influence is important in higher-level work. For example, managers must influence subordinates to achieve goals and professionals must influence others to accept their technical advice. The topic gains in social relevance because of the rapidly increasing number of women in high-level managerial positions in work organizations.

As reported in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1988*, 43.4 percent of managerial and professional positions are held by women. (The total U.S. work force is 44.4 percent female.) Illustrative subcategories and their corresponding percentage of women include the following: Public officials and administrators, 42.0; financial managers, 38.4; personnel and labor relations managers, 48.8; purchasing managers, 29.4; managers, medicine and health, 62.2; managers, marketing, advertising, and public relations, 24.9.

An important component of exerting influence is political behavior or organizational politics—defined generally as methods of acquiring power or gaining other types of advantage (Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez, 1981). The process of organizational politics is said to consist of intentional acts of influence undertaken by individuals or groups to enhance or protect their self-interest when conflict courses of action are possible (Gray and Ariss, 1985). Although organizational politics has been studied frequently in recent years, so far no empirical research has been reported on sex or gender differences in political behavior. However, recent anecdotal research suggests that women are more likely to use devious political tactics against each other than men use against men or women (Briles, 1988).

An empirically-based list of influence tactics has been studied by Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980), and Schmidt & Kipnis (1987). The influence tactics reported in these two studies are assertiveness, ingratiation (friendliness), rationality (reason), sanctions, exchange of favors, upward appeal, bargaining, and blocking of another's work.

Kanter (1977), in her analysis of one large organization, contends that individual differences in behavior due to sex are not important. What she sees as important are the forces associated with occupying certain roles—those which have traditionally been the domain of one sex or the other. An inference from Kanter’s assertions is that sex differ-