

Gender differences in the perceptions of self's and others' use of power strategies.

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Abstract:

The utility of P. B. Johnson's ["Women and Interpersonal Power," in D. N. Ruble & G. L. Zellman (Eds.), *Women and Sex Roles*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1978] framework for the sex typing of power strategies was examined. Female and male subjects rated the extent to which they used a number of power strategies in order to get their way with others. Subjects also rated their perceptions of the extent to which either men-in-general or women-in-general used the strategies. Partial support for Johnson's framework was found in that males reported greater use of "masculine"-typed strategies than did females, though they did not report using these strategies more than "feminine"-typed ones. Females did not report significantly greater use of feminine strategies than did males, though they reported using more feminine- than masculine-typed strategies. Data also indicated that both males and females held similar gender-consistent sex-stereotyped perceptions of the power strategies used by men-in-general and women-in-general. Comparison of self-report ratings with usage attributions for men-in-general and women-in-general revealed that both male and female subjects perceived themselves to use most of the strategies less often and to be more inclined to use socially desirable strategies involving reason and logic and compromise.

Keywords: gender studies | gender differences | sex roles | interpersonal power | power strategies

Article:

Traditionally, men have been considered to be the power wielders in our society. In comparison to women, men have had easier access to sources of influence, such as money and position, and more opportunity to exercise power over others. This important experiential difference has no doubt led to the conclusion, if not the fact, that the existing gender differences in the use of power is related to sex role socialization processes (Johnson, 1976, 1978), gender-appropriate expectations of male and female behavior (Thompson, 1981), and differential distributions of males and females into roles of differing status (Eagly, 1983).

Paula Johnson (1978) has suggested that sex differences in interpersonal power result from differences in the strategies employed by men and women. Males are more likely to use reward, coercion, legitimate, expert, and informational power bases (see French & Raven, 1959), while females are more likely to utilize power determined by referent and indirect power bases. In a study of perceptions of power use by males and females, Johnson (1976) had some subjects rate the likelihood that short descriptions of strategies of influence were characteristic of a male or female actor, while others rated the masculinity-femininity of each strategy. She found that for both methods, male and female subjects tended to associate the use of specific strategies with one gender or the other. Subjects perceived women to be more likely to use strategies of influence involving offers of personal rewards or sexual intimations, while men were perceived to use strategies involving direct coercion, legitimate request, expert argument, and convincing information. Johnson also found that, although her subjects distinguished power strategies as more characteristic of one gender than the other, practically all were identified as used typically by males but not by females.

In Johnson's (1976) study she did not ask subjects to give a self-assessment of their use of power strategies. And, in studies that have relied on self-reported assessments (using a "How I get my way" open-ended format), differences between males and females along the stereotypic dimensions predicted by Johnson have not been found (e.g., Cowan, Drinkard, & McGavin, 1984; Falbo, 1977; Falbo & Peplau, 1980). Falbo (1977), for example, found that sex role orientation and not gender was related to self-reported usage of certain power strategies. Although in a latter study, Falbo and Peplau (1980) did find that among heterosexual couples, females reported greater use of unilateral than bilateral strategies (representing less reliance on target interaction) and tended to use less direct (representing lesser specificity of desired goals) than did males. Finally, in the study by Cowan et al. (1984), self-reported use of power strategies by sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders was found to be related primarily to characteristics of the target (male parent, female parent, and same-sex friend). Although use of some strategies was found to differ by subject gender, an overall multivariate significant effect was not reported. Furthermore, the resulting differences were more a function of age, with most gender differences involving male and female twelfth graders' power relations with same-sex friends. The significant univariate gender differences that did result involved the use of positive affective strategies, with female youths reporting greater use than males.

However, despite the finding of relatively few stereotypic sex differences in self-reported power use in the studies just mentioned, there is reason to argue for the utility of Johnson's sex role stereotype framework to account for gender differences in power use. It is possible that the methodology, i.e., asking subjects to write essays on "How I get my way" with others, may have resulted in subjects offering more individualized and thus less generalized (and less stereotyped) assessments of how they try to influence others. They may also have not recalled all strategies actually used. On the other hand, Johnson's approach involved having subjects classify predetermined strategies into sex-type categories rather than having them classify strategies

identified from an open-ended response format. By limiting subjects to a set of power strategies, some of which were undoubtedly stereotypic of one gender or the other, it is likely that this response format increased the probability of eliciting stereotypic responses from subjects.

Hence, further assessment of possible gender differences in self-reported and perceptions of others' power use seems warranted. Because Johnson's framework suggests that perceived differences in the strategies men and women use to influence others may be due in part to perceptions of what is sex appropriate, the present study was conducted to test three hypotheses relating strategies of influence to self-reported use and sex-stereotyped judgments: (1) there are gender differences in self-reported use of personal power strategies, (2) both males and females are likely to report that men-in-general and women-in-general exhibit sex-stereotyped differences in the use of power strategies, and (3) subjects' self-reported use of personal power strategies is likely to differ from the usage pattern they attribute to men-in-general and women-in-general. Differences between self-rating and those attributed to other men and women are likely to reflect a greater tendency to stereotype use of power strategies by others than to oneself.

METHOD

Subjects

Tables 1-2 are omitted from this formatted document.

Subject participation in the study was solicited in the context of a mass testing session conducted in introductory psychology classes. Participation was completely voluntary; no experimental credit was given. Two hundred and fifteen females and 66 males participated in the study. This ratio of approximately 3:1 reflected the ratio of females to males enrolled in the introductory classes.

Data Collection

A list of 21 personal power strategies identified by Falbo and Gryskiewicz (1977) was used to assess both subjects' self-reported personal use of strategies of influence and their perceptions of the frequency of use of these strategies by men-in-general and women-in-general. Three separate questionnaires were formed by pairing the list of strategies with one of three introductory phrases: "In order to get my way," "In order to get their way, men-in-general," and "In order to get their way, women-in general." Use of each strategy was rated on a 6-point scale of *never* (0) to *always* (5).

The questionnaires were assembled into booklets with either the "men-in-general" or "women-in-general" version paired with the "I get my way" version. The personal report version of the questionnaire always preceded the other questionnaire with which it was paired. The booklets were administered to subjects in a quasi-random order to ensure that approximately equal proportions of males and females completed the same booklet arrangements. Proportionately,

approximately equal numbers of males and females completed the men-in-general (n = 31 and 102, respectively) and women-in-general (n = 34 and 112, respectively) response sets.

Sex Typing of the Strategies

Using Johnson's (1978) sex-typing analysis as a guide, each author independently categorized the strategies as being either "masculine," "feminine," or "nonsex typed." Initial agreement was 90%, and following discussion 100% consensus was reached. The results of this classification analysis are presented in Table I. Strategies that implied primarily actions of evasiveness or indirectness (numbers 1, 4, 10), approval seeking (number 2), insufficiency (numbers 3, 7, 9), identification (number 5), or helplessness (numbers 6, 8) were identified as feminine. Strategies that conveyed actions of coercion (numbers 11, 16, 17), confidence or command (numbers 13, 14, 15, 19), or competence (numbers 12, 18) were identified as masculine. Strategies that could not be typed as being associated more with one sex than the other were considered nonsex typed (number 20, 21). For data analysis, an overall masculine mean score was computed by summing the ratings of strategies designed as masculine and an overall feminine mean score by summing the ratings of the strategies identified as feminine.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There Are Gender Differences in Self-Reported Use of Personal Power Strategies

A multivariate analysis of variance test comparing male and female subjects' personal use of the strategies yielded a significant multivariate effect, $F(21,257) = 2.16, p < .004$. Follow-up t-test comparisons of the use of individual strategies by sex revealed significant ($p < .05$) sex differences for 9 of the 21 strategies (see Table I). Of the strategies that yielded significant ($p < .05$) sex differences in reported personal use, five were sex typed as masculine, two as feminine, and two were nonsex typed. For all except the strategy, "Plead, beg, or pray," males indicated using the strategies significantly more frequently than did females. A comparison of male and female subjects' overall mean use of masculine- vs feminine-typed power strategies revealed that males reported no difference in their use of the two gendertyped strategies ($M = 3.25$ and 3.23 , masculine, and feminine, respectively). By contrast, a significant difference in the use of gender-typed strategies was found for females ($t(214) = 13.68, p < .0001$); they reported using feminine-typed strategies ($M = 3.14$) more than masculine ones ($M = 2.90$). Males also were found to use masculine-typed, but not the feminine-typed, strategies significantly ($t(279) = 4.36, p < .001$) more than females.

Hypothesis 2: Both Males and Females are Likely to Report that Men-in-General and Women-in-General Exhibit Sex-Stereotyped Differences in the Use of Power Strategies

A 2 x 2 between-subject (Subject Sex x Gender of Stimulus Person) MANOVA comparing subjects' perceptions of the extent to which men-in-general and women-in-general typically use each of the 21 power strategies indicated only a main effect for gender of stimulus person

($F(21,255) = 11.02, p < .001$). Both male and female subjects perceived significant differences between men-in-general and women-in-general in their frequency of use of the power strategies. On the basis of overall mean use, both males and females perceived men-in-general as using the masculine-typed power strategies to a significantly ($p < .05$) greater extent than women-in-general. Similarly, overall mean use of the feminine-typed strategies were associated with women-in-general significantly more than with men-in-general.

Hypothesis 3: Subjects' Self-Reported Use of Personal Power Strategies Is Likely to Differ from the Usage Patterns They Attribute to Men-in-General and Women-in-General

Difference scores between subjects' self-reported use and their ratings of frequency of use of the strategies by men-in-general and women-in-general were computed. Comparison of difference scores (via a MANOVA) by sex of subject and gender of stimulus person revealed no differences indicating that the magnitude of difference between self and others was the same for males and females. To identify which strategies self-reported rates differed from men-in-general and women-in-general, a series of t-test analyses were performed. These results revealed that both male and female subjects were found to report using a majority of the strategies significantly ($p < .05$) less often than the rates of use attributed to either men-in-general (10 and 12 strategies for males and females, respectively) or women-in-general (10 and 13 strategies for males and females, respectively). For only a few strategies was there a greater self-reported rate of use. Both groups of subjects were found to use the strategy, "Compromise," significantly more often than men-in-general. In addition, male subjects reported greater use of the strategies, "Act in subtle ways by suggestions or hints" and "Obtain a consensus, agreement"; female subjects reported greater use of the strategy of "Use reason and logic" than they attributed to men-in-general. In comparison to the frequency of use attributed to women-in-general, both groups of subjects were found to use the strategy of using reason and logic significantly more often. Male subjects also reported using the strategy, "State point directly," and female subjects, the strategy of "Compromise," significantly more often than they perceived women-in-general as using.

DISCUSSION

In regard to the first hypothesis concerning gender-related differences in reported personal use of the power strategies, with one exception (the strategy, "Plead, beg, or pray"), males reported significantly greater usage rates than females. With respect to Johnson's framework, gender differences in reported use of sex-typed strategies received mixed support. All strategies except one ("Give irrelevant information") that males reported significantly greater use of were masculine typed. However, females did not report using feminine-typed strategies more often than did males, nor did males use masculine-typed strategies more than feminine-typed ones. The greater overall use of power strategies by the males probably reflects a tendency among males to feel freer to resort to more influence attempts and to use any effective strategy, masculine or feminine to get their way (Eagly & Wood, 1982; Johnson, 1976). Females, on the

other hand, apparently feel more constrained by sex role stereotypes than males and therefore are less likely to use masculine-typed strategies.

The second hypothesis-that males and females hold stereotypic perceptions of the use of power strategies by men-in-general and women-in-general - was supported. For both male and female subjects, men-in-general were perceived to use masculine-typed strategies to a significantly greater degree than were women-in-general. Conversely, for feminine-typed strategies, just the opposite was true. Apparently, in the absence of specific information about history of power use or situational factors (such as relationship of influencer to target and other social characteristics of the influencer), subjects were willing to rely on gender stereotypes as "best" descriptors to account for their expectations of the influence behavior of others (Clifton, McGrath, & Wick, 1976; Myers & Gonda, 1982). The results also are consistent with Johnson's theoretical framework, as well as with earlier work on sex role stereotypes (e.g., Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972).

The final hypothesis was concerned with differences between subjects' self-reported use of the power strategies and their perceptions of use of the strategies by men-in-general and women-in-general. The results revealed comparisons of subjects' use of the strategies was markedly different from the rates of usage they attributed to the "average" man and woman. Both male and female subjects reported significantly lower rates of use of most of the strategies than either men-in-general or women-in-general. Only the strategies of using reason and logic and compromise were associated with greater use by both male and female subjects in comparison to the rates of usage attributed to men-in-general or women-in-general. These findings suggest that in comparison to the average man or woman, subjects perceived themselves to be more diplomatic and reasonable. Also, by virtue of their reported less frequent use of the power strategies, subjects apparently perceived themselves as making substantially fewer attempts to influence others than the average person. These latter findings may reflect a tendency, among the subjects to have underreported their influence behaviors and thus may be interpreted as being influenced by a social desirability bias. However, such a bias does not necessarily imply that reported use of influence strategies are inaccurate assessments of actual behavior. Recent work by Rule, Bisanz, and Kohn (1985) on a theoretical model of knowledge of persuasion suggests that in fact most people report using socially desirable strategies in their initial attempts to influence others and resort to more negative efforts when their first attempts fail. Thus, the data reported here likely reflect subjects' social reality and represent the strategies they perceive themselves to use rather than what they may have thought were "socially appropriate" to use.

Finally, it should be noted that the present study utilized a data collection format that represented a combination of the response alternatives method used by Johnson and the open-ended format, "How I get my way," used in the other studies of power strategies. Contrary to studies that used the latter method, some confirmation of Johnson's sex typing of power strategies framework was found. It thus appears that future research investigating the use of power strategies needs to be careful in the selection of data collection methodologies. It seems that gender-related differences

are more likely to occur under conditions that limit individuality of responses in favor of determined alternatives.

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