

A Global Look at Psychological Barriers to Women's Progress in Management

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In the early 1970s Schein identified managerial sex typing as a major psychological barrier to the advancement of women in the United States. The globalization of management brings to the forefront the need to examine the relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics in the international arena. A review of the replications of the Schein research in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, China, and Japan provides the basis for a global look at the “think manager–think male” phenomenon. Implications of the outcomes, especially among males, for women's progress in management worldwide are discussed.

Barriers to women in management exist worldwide. According to a recent International Labor Organization report (“Women in Management,” 1998), although women represent more than 40% of the world's labor force, their share of management positions remains unacceptably low, with only a small proportion obtaining top jobs.

Butterfield and Grinnell (1999), in their review of 3 decades of research on gender, leadership, and managerial behavior, pointed to the international perspective as an important new frontier. As management becomes increasingly internationalized, research efforts need to follow suit. Cross-national comparisons help avoid oversimplistic explanations and ethnocentric biases (Berthoin Antal, 1987). The discovery of psychological phenomena that transcend national borders facilitates efforts to enhance the status of women in management. Management is going global, and it is time for research on women in management to do so as well.

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Berthoin Antal and Izraeli (1993), in an overview of women in management worldwide, stated that “probably the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialized countries is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male” (p. 63). If the managerial position is viewed as a “masculine” one, then, all else being equal, a male candidate appears more qualified by virtue of such sex typing of the position than a female candidate.

In the early 1970s Schein’s empirical investigations of managerial sex role stereotyping revealed that “think manager–think male” was a strongly held belief among middle managers in the United States. Both male (Schein, 1973) and female (Schein, 1975) managers perceived that the characteristics associated with managerial success were more likely to be held by men than by women. To the extent this attitude is unchecked by structural limitations, a decision maker will favor a male candidate over a female candidate for the same position. As a psychological barrier to the advancement of women in management, the “think manager–think male” phenomenon can foster bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions.

The globalization of management brings to the forefront the need to examine this phenomenon in the international arena. Replications of the original Schein studies provide an opportunity for such an examination. Internationalizing the research question requires studies in several countries, on more than one continent, preferably using the same instrument for comparison purposes (e.g., Haire, Ghiselli, & Porter, 1966; Hofstede, 1980). A review of the replications of Schein’s research in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, China, and Japan provides the basis for a global look at the “think manager–think male” phenomenon.

The Schein Studies

All of the replications used the same methodology and analyses as the original 1973 and 1975 empirical studies. Schein (1973) developed three forms of the Schein Descriptive Index (SDI) to define both the sex role stereotypes¹ and characteristics of successful middle managers. All three forms contain the same 92 descriptive terms and instructions, except that one form asks for a description of women in general (Women), one for a description of men in general (Men), and one for a description of successful middle managers (Managers).

The instructions on the three forms of the SDI are as follows:

On the following pages you will find a series of descriptive terms commonly used to describe people in general. Some of the terms are positive in connotation, others are negative, and some are neither very positive nor very negative.

We would like you to use this list to tell us what you think [women in general, men in general, successful middle managers] are like. In making your judgments, it might be helpful to

¹ Sex role rather than gender role is used throughout the article so as to maintain consistency across research studies. In the early 1970s a distinction between sex role and gender had not yet been made.

imagine you are about to meet a person for the first time and the only thing you know in advance is that the person is [an adult female, an adult male, a successful middle manager]. Please rate each word or phrase in terms of how characteristic it is of [women in general, men in general, successful middle managers].

Ratings on each of the 92 terms are made according to a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not characteristic*) to 5 (*characteristic*) of [women in general, men in general, successful middle managers]. Each subject receives only *one* form of the SDI and is unaware of the purpose of the study.

The research hypothesis is that successful middle managers are perceived to possess those characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men in general than to women in general. Intraclass correlation coefficients (r') from two randomized groups analyses of variance are computed to determine the degree of resemblance between the descriptions of Men and Managers and between those of Women and Managers. Analyses are performed separately for male and female participants.

U.S. Outcomes

Corporate Managers

In 1989 Brenner, Tomkiewicz, and Schein replicated Schein's earlier work. Their sample consisted of 420 male middle-line managers and 173 female middle-line managers drawn from four manufacturing companies, four service-oriented companies, and one combined service and manufacturing company in the United States. The results revealed that the attitudes of male managers were remarkably similar to those held by male managers in the early 1970s. For the males, there was a large and significant resemblance between the ratings of Men and Managers, whereas there was a near-zero, nonsignificant resemblance between the ratings of Women and Managers. As with Schein's (1973) earlier results, the outcomes confirmed, among males, the hypothesis that requisite management characteristics are perceived as more likely to be held by men than by women. In the same year Heilman, Block, Martell, and Simon (1989) also replicated the research among 268 male managers. Their results also confirmed the hypothesis.

The Brenner et al. (1989) study also found that female managers' attitudes differed from those of their earlier counterparts. Among the females, there was a large and significant resemblance between the ratings of Men and the ratings of Managers. There was also a similar resemblance between the ratings of Women and Managers. Unlike Schein's (1975) earlier finding, however, these outcomes were not significantly different from one another. Thus, for the females, the research replication did not confirm the hypothesis that managers are seen as possessing characteristics more commonly ascribed to men than women. According to Brenner et al. (1989), this outcome appeared to be a result of a changed view of

women, rather than a change in perceptions of men or perceptions of requirements for managerial success.

Management Students

In 1989 Schein, Mueller, and Jacobson replicated Schein's work using management students. Their sample consisted of 145 male and 83 female upper class management students enrolled in a small private liberal arts institution in the United States. Their analyses revealed a large and significant resemblance among the males between the ratings of Men and Managers and a nonsignificant resemblance between the ratings of Women and Managers, thereby confirming the hypothesis that managers are seen as possessing characteristics more commonly ascribed to men than to women. For females, there was a significant resemblance between the ratings of Men and Managers and between Women and Managers. These intraclass coefficients were not significantly different from each other. As such, the hypothesis was not confirmed among females.

In 1995 Dodge, Gilroy, and Fenzel replicated the research using a sample of 113 male and 77 female adult Master's in Business Administration (MBA) students. They obtained similar results. The hypothesis that requisite management characteristics are perceived as more likely to be held by men than by women was confirmed among the male students but not among the female students.

"Think Manager–Think Male" in the United States

Compared to female managers in the 1970s and the attitudes they held, female managers some 20 years later no longer sex-type the managerial position. These female managers see women and men as equally likely to possess characteristics necessary for managerial success. No longer influenced by stereotypical thinking, these managers would be expected to treat men and women equally in selection, placement, and promotion decisions.

On the other hand, the male managers in the replication studies hold attitudes similar to those of male managers in the 1970s. Despite all the societal, legal, and organizational changes that occurred in the almost 20 years between the studies, male managers continue to perceive that successful managerial characteristics are more likely to be held by men in general than by women in general.

The pattern of attitudes between management students and the corporate managers is very similar. Female management students do not sex-type the managerial position. Male management students, on the other hand, view the management position in the same way as the male managers. Over the course of almost 3 decades, males have continued to perceive men as more likely than women to possess characteristics necessary for managerial success.

International Studies

Internationally, women hold only a small proportion of management positions and even fewer at the highest posts ("Unequal Race," 1993). According to national surveys worldwide, women's share of management jobs rarely exceeds 20%. And the higher the position, the more glaring the gender gap ("Women in Management," 1998). Do the same psychological barriers to the advancement of women exist worldwide? To what extent does sex role-stereotypical thinking about the managerial job exist in other countries, and how does it compare across countries?

Schein and her colleagues conducted two international multicountry replications to begin to examine managerial sex typing globally. Schein and Mueller (1992) selected Germany² and the United Kingdom as research sites for replication of the stereotyping research done in the United States. According to Berthoin Antal and Krebsbach-Gnath (1988), there are very few women in management in Germany, as reflected by a sparsity of facts and figures on them until the mid-1980s. In a major study of 45,000 German companies in 1988, only 5.9% of top managers and 7.8% of managers at the next level were women (Berthoin Antal & Krebsbach-Gnath, 1994).

In the United Kingdom, according to Davidson (1989), about 20% of managers and administrators are women. Although the occupations in which women are managers are traditionally female, such as catering and retail, Hammond (1989) pointed out that more women are entering sectors that are not traditionally female, such as banking, insurance, and manufacturing.

Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, and Liu (1996) extended the international investigation to the People's Republic of China and Japan. Since the 1949 revolution in the People's Republic of China, official government policies have promoted the equality of the sexes, and all Chinese women are expected to take part in production (Stacey, 1984). Although the employment of women in China is relatively high, about 78% of the female labor force work in low-tech industries and sections (Yi-hong, 1992). Hildebrandt and Liu (1988) reported that 8.9% of Chinese managers are women. Korabik's (1992) interview study of Chinese managers suggested that this figure may be somewhat higher if all types of industries and enterprises are considered. "Women hold posts as factory production workers, workshop directors, chief accountants, although they still account for only a small percentage compared to men . . . the higher the post, the fewer the women" (p. 204).

Although Japanese women constitute 40% of the workforce ("Women in Japan," 1992), only 8% of all managers are women ("Unequal Race," 1993). Employed women tend to hold different types of jobs and earn less money than

²The data from Germany were collected in West Germany just prior to reunification. All references to the status of women in Germany pertain to the same area.

their male counterparts (Rosenfeld & Kallenberg, 1990) and in large corporations are "office ladies": clerical workers who serve tea to businessmen.

Management students were studied in each country. The German sample consisted of 167 female and 279 male management students in a major university. In the United Kingdom the sample was composed of 78 female and 73 male business students enrolled in a metropolitan polytechnic school. The Chinese sample consisted of 123 female and 150 male undergraduate upperclass students enrolled in a school of business in a large city in China. The Japanese sample was composed of 105 females and 211 males enrolled in business courses at a university in a large Japanese city.

International Outcomes

The hypothesis that managers are seen as possessing characteristics more commonly ascribed to men than to women was confirmed for males in Germany and the United Kingdom (Schein & Mueller, 1992) and in China and Japan (Schein et al., 1996). Among the males in all four countries, there was a high and significant resemblance between the ratings of Men and Managers and a low, often close to zero resemblance between ratings of Women and Managers. These outcomes are very similar to those found among U.S. male management students. The Chinese male sample exhibited the highest degree of Men-Manager similarity. A detailed comparative display of the international outcomes can be found in Schein et al. (1996).

Among females, the hypothesis was also confirmed in the United Kingdom and Germany (Schein & Mueller, 1992), as well as in Japan and China (Schein et al., 1996). In all four country samples there was a reasonably large and significant resemblance between females' ratings of Men and Managers. Across country samples there were differences in the degree of resemblance between females' ratings of Women and Managers, ranging from near zero in Japan to moderate in the United Kingdom. All of the Women-Manager coefficients, however, were significantly smaller than their respective Men-Manager coefficients. The U.S. female management student sample, by comparison, did not sex-type the managerial position.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Unlike U.S. female managers and management students, female management students in other countries sex-type the management position. The variations in the degree of managerial sex typing, however, may reflect the females' views of opportunities for and actual participation of women in management in their respective countries. For example, in Japan, with few women in management and little impetus for change ("Women in Japan," 1992), females see no similarity between women and managers.

On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, where females perceive a moderate degree of similarity between women and managers, there is support for improving the progress of women in management. For example, many of the United Kingdom's top companies committed themselves to Opportunity 2000, a voluntary business-led initiative designed to improve the status of women in the workforce (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). And finally, in the United States, where the most progress for women managers has occurred, the females do not sex-type the managerial position.

Although the females' responses may serve as a barometer of change, the similarity in strength of the male perceptions may reflect intractable attitudinal barriers. That the Chinese males show the strongest degree of managerial sex typing is probably not surprising. Chinese women have been considered men's appendage during the many thousands of years of feudal society (Xi-hong, 1992). Gender discrimination in China is often not considered as such, but rather as a true difference based upon a belief in the male's basic superiority (Korabik, 1992). Even women who do become managers are termed "iron women," meaning that they are masculine or without innate female characteristics (Xiao-tian, 1992). Despite government policies promoting equality (Stacey, 1984), the Chinese male appears to have strongly held attitudes more closely akin to those of its feudal patriarchal history than modern day reforms.

Although China's history is different from that of the other countries, the attitudes of the males in the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and the United States are not that much different from those of the Chinese. The similarity in strength of the male perceptions is somewhat disquieting. Regardless of context, there appears to be a devaluation of women's qualifications among male students of management worldwide.

One of the most important hurdles for women in management in all countries has been thought to be the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male. These results provide strong empirical support for that observation, particularly among males. These replications reveal a strong and similar pattern of sex typing of the managerial position among male management students internationally. Schein et al. (1996) observed that, "As they become managers and decision makers of the future, these stereotypical attitudes will continue to limit women's access to and promotions within management internationally" (p. 40).

An International Managerial Stereotype

Is there an international managerial stereotype? Although actual requirements and behaviors are undoubtedly different, are there some characteristics perceived to be important to managers in all cultures? How do women fare, compared to men, on these possibly universal requisite management characteristics?

Schein (1994) examined the data from six research samples—the U.S. corporate managers and the management students in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, China, and Japan—for cross-cultural similarities in perceptions of requisite management characteristics. For each of the six samples, the 15 items rated as most characteristic of successful managers were arrayed. Characteristics found on all six lists or five out of the six composed the international managerial stereotype. The male ($N = 1,278$) and female samples ($N = 729$) were examined separately.

For the males, the characteristics meeting the criteria were leadership ability, ambitious, competitive, desires responsibility, skilled in business matters, competent, and analytical ability. The average ratings of Women and of Men were compared with the average rating of Managers on these seven items. Women were rated lower than Men (and Managers) on all characteristics in all six samples. On all items, except competent, the Women's mean was significantly lower than the Men's.

This focus on actual items is not meant as a form of hypothesis testing, as the main analyses do that. That women are seen as less likely to possess characteristics perceived internationally as requisite management characteristics seems, however, to increase the height of the managerial sex-typing barrier. Heilman et al. (1989), in an extension of their replication study among males, also showed the importance of these same characteristics and women's perceived lack of them, even as managers. They found that when target terms of "women managers" and "men managers" were used, Men were still seen as more likely than Women to possess the key characteristics of leadership ability, desires responsibility, skilled in business matters, and analytical ability, four of the seven items identified by Schein (1994). And even when "successful men managers" and "successful women managers" were used, Men and Managers were seen as more likely to have leadership ability than Women.

The items meeting the criteria among the females were leadership ability, competent, desires responsibility, skilled in business matters, analytical ability, self-confident, prompt, and well informed. A set of items similar to those identified by the males is not surprising, as most samples exhibited a very high degree of similarity between males and females on their ratings of Managers. Also not unexpected, Women were generally rated lower than Men, although the differences varied across samples, and there were some instances of Women rated as similar to Men.

Of the eight items, across the six samples, the Women's mean was significantly lower than Men's on five items, and there were no differences between the means of Women and Men on competent, prompt, and well informed. Compared to the male responses, the differences between Women and Men on all eight items were noticeably smaller than those observed between Women and Men among the male sample.

Looking at the international managerial stereotype items illustrates rather dramatically the unfavorable way in which women are viewed, especially among males. Male management students in five different countries and male corporate managers in the United States view women as much less likely to have leadership ability, be competitive, ambitious, or skilled in business matters, have analytical ability, or desire responsibility. If one holds this view, as apparently most males do, it is no wonder that women globally have difficulty entering and advancing in managerial positions.

It is also important to point out that requisite characteristics for managerial success also vary from country to country. In each study, the perceptions of the participants determine what is perceived to be masculine or feminine. And in each study, these characteristics are compared with the characteristics that the participants perceive to be necessary for managerial success. Conceivably, what could be masculine in one culture could be rated as feminine in another, but both cultures could sex-type the managerial job as “male” if they perceive males as more likely to have whatever characteristics they see managers as likely to have.

The international managerial stereotype, as described by Schein (1994), tells one part of the story. There are some basic and seemingly important characteristics that are both universal and perceived, at least by males, as held by men only. On the other hand, the high degree of resemblance between men and managers across the male samples fills in the rest of the story. Regardless of what characteristics successful managers are thought to have, these characteristics are still perceived to be held primarily by males. As Izraeli and Adler (1994) concluded, “The specific image of an ideal manager varies across cultures, yet everywhere it privileges those characteristics that the culture associates primarily with men” (p. 13).

Think Manager—Think Male: A Global Phenomenon?

Overall, these studies lend strong support to the view that “think manager—think male” is a global phenomenon, especially among males. The strong degree of managerial sex typing found among Chinese, Japanese, British, and German male management students is similar to that found among U.S. male management students. Despite the many historical, political, and cultural differences that exist among these five countries, the view of women as less likely than men to possess requisite management characteristics is a commonly held belief among male management students around the world.

The research on sex role stereotyping and requisite management characteristics, first done almost 30 years ago in the United States, followed up with U.S. replications, and extended internationally, allows us to see the strength and inflexibility of the “think manager—think male” attitude held by males. Despite enormous changes in the status of working women in the United States between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, the corporate males in each decade hold the same

view. Male management students in five countries, differing politically and economically, hold similar attitudes, ones not dissimilar from the U.S. corporate executives.

The global nature of managerial sex typing among males should be of concern to those interested in promoting gender equality worldwide. The strength of the relationship between characteristics perceived to be held by men and those perceived as required for managerial success may explain why efforts to enhance the status of women in management are so difficult. Underlying the resistance, the foot dragging, and the excuses may be a deeply held attitude of “for men only” or “only men are really qualified” to do these jobs. Neither changes in women’s workforce participation nor cultural differences seem to affect the view of women as less likely to possess qualities necessary for managerial success.

In the United States many people believed that as women moved into management, managerial sex typing would diminish. And it did, among women. But men have continued to see women in ways that are not complimentary vis-à-vis succeeding in positions of authority and influence. For example, in a Catalyst survey (1996), male chief executive officers (CEOs) and female senior executives in Fortune 1000 companies were asked why more women had not attained senior managerial positions. Men said it was women’s lack of general management experience or line experience that barred their entry into top spots. But women identified male stereotyping as the major barrier. Once again gender stereotyping works to suggest that women don’t have the masculine characteristics necessary for the tough line positions. Women recognize the insidious effects of such stereotyping on their careers, but men continue to operate with blinders on when it comes to the influence of gender stereotyping on decision making.

Globally, managerial sex typing exists among men and women. Women vary cross-culturally, however, in their attitudes. Based on the U.S. outcomes, we would predict that as their participation rate in management improves, they will see men and women as equally likely to be qualified managers. This participation rate, however, can be kept low if the attitudes of male decision makers, influenced strongly by managerial sex typing, are allowed to go unchecked.

Legal and Structural Efforts

Schein and Mueller (1992) recommended continued international efforts to pass equal employment opportunity legislation and the encouragement of corporate structural mechanisms to circumvent the negative impact of stereotypical attitudes on women’s opportunities. Legal and structural mechanisms are essential to the change process. The results of the Brenner et al. (1989) study suggested that had the legal pressures in the United States been less and these attitudes gone unchecked, women’s gains would have been less dramatic. The psychological barriers, at least among male decision makers, have not diminished: They lost their

force when governmental pressures for equal opportunity and concomitant corporate structural changes to ensure such equality were introduced. Increased recruiting efforts, more objective measurement of managerial abilities, rewards for affirmative action compliance, and constant monitoring of the number of women in the managerial pipeline, among other efforts, decreased the opportunity for stereotypical thinking to enter into decisions on selection and promotion.

As reported by Berthoin Antal and Izraeli (1993), international legislative efforts are increasing. During the 1980s all industrialized countries passed equal opportunity laws. The scope of and legal pressure behind these laws vary among countries, with some relying on voluntary compliance and others, such as that of Australia, having more force. In 1986 Australia passed an Affirmative Action Act based on the U.S. model. Hede and O'Brien (1996), in a study of 1,228 Australian firms, found that the percentage of women in management increased significantly after passage of the act, from 17.2% in 1990 to 21.7% in 1995.

Research on sex role stereotyping and requisite management characteristics can facilitate the legal and structural changes that are still necessary. Empirically grounded research can be a powerful tool for change, especially in emotionally charged areas such as equal opportunity, and can lay the groundwork for corporate structural changes. It can also serve as a barometer of attitude change among women and among men a watchful measure of what has yet to change.

Research Needs

Although laws and corporate practices focusing on objective criteria and removing structural barriers are important, it seems time to address ways to change stereotypical attitudes as well. Schein and Davidson (1993) pointed to the need for more research on attitude change during the management education years. Experimental studies to determine effective interventions, done cross-culturally, might lead to important management curriculum applications worldwide.

More research is also needed on the function that maintaining such stereotypical views of women holds for males. Cognitive consistency theories of attitudes might be helpful here in explaining the continued strength of this stereotypical view despite behavioral evidence that contradicts the view. As a manifestation of men's attempts to preserve their advantage in the workplace, the need to perceive women as not qualified for traditionally male occupations may well be rooted in sexism (Yoder, this issue) and power issues (Lipman-Bluman, 1984). Rather than focus solely on the glass ceiling, perhaps we also need to learn more about factors contributing to the male manager's need to have a "protective power shield."

Further research examining managerial sex typing as a global phenomenon is also needed. Managers, as well as management students, should be included in future international replications. The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics needs to be examined in a wider array of

countries, such as those in South America and Africa. Such research would allow for comparisons between developing and industrialized countries and enhance regional comparisons.

There is enormous power in cross-cultural research. The replications of the managerial sex-typing research in the United States have taken a unique U.S. outcome and established it as a global phenomenon. The pervasiveness of the phenomenon makes a strong argument for implementing organizational changes that can mitigate its effects. A foundation of international research establishes the phenomenon as an attitudinal barrier to women's advancement that cannot be ignored or dismissed. The research outcomes can fuel applied efforts promoting gender equality in management worldwide. Other aspects of research into women in management require a similar cross-cultural look. As called for by Berthoin Antal and Izraeli (1993), "The international comparative perspective needs to be relocated from the periphery of research on women in management to the core. It needs to be integrated and mainstreamed into all our understandings" (p. 91).

The extensiveness of managerial sex typing internationally reflects the global devaluation of women. Based on a worldwide evaluation of the status of women, Rhodie (1989) concluded that "the social, economic and political status of women, compared to men, is still one of subordination" (p. 432). Embedded in all cultures are traditions, practices, and views that impede women's equality. Workplace barriers are one aspect of a whole spectrum of discriminatory practices. Recognizing managerial sex typing as a major barrier to women's opportunities can unite women managers in their efforts for change and link these efforts to the broad one of enhancing the rights, freedoms, and opportunities of all women globally.

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