SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE: BUSINESS DECISIONS MADE WITH GENDER AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

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ABSTRACT

Eight hypothetical incidents involving typical business decisions were distributed to a sample of 512 participants. Each incident had two forms, differentiated only by the gender of the individual involved. Significant differences were found in response patterns depending upon the gender of the individual involved and the gender of the respondent.

A study was conducted in 1973-74 in which eight hypothetical situations requiring the making of a business decision were distributed to a cross-section of subscribers to the *Harvard Business Review* [1]. One-half the subscribers received surveys in which a male subject was involved in each incident, while the other half received surveys in which a female subject was involved in each incident. Thus, there were two versions of each incident, one male and one female. Other than the gender of the subject, both versions were identical. The intent of the survey was to see whether sex stereotyping was present among respondents, many of whom were middle- to upper-level executives. What was being measured, then, was implicit or subconscious stereotyping, since respondents were not told the purpose of the survey, nor was any respondent given both versions of an incident, since gender would stand out as the obvious moderator.

When the results of the survey were published showing significant stereotyping by gender, the most common response among readers with whom the author was familiar was "of course, what did you expect, given the respondents?" Subscribers to the *Harvard Business Review* in 1974 can themselves best be stereotyped as white, male, middle age, executives. If any group were going to stereotype by gender in business decisions, these were felt to be prime candidates.

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A few years ago the author administered the identical survey to a sample of 512 son-to-be-graduated undergraduate college students, 271 male and 241 female. Of the 271 male respondents (M.R.), 135 were given the male version (M.V.) of each incident, and 136 were given the female version (F.V.). Of the 241 female respondents (F.R.), 121 were given the male version of each incident, and 120 were given the female version. All students were surveyed during the same semester they were taking a course in Personnel Management and immediately after they had completed the section of the course dealing with Federal Fair Employment Practices, Title VII, the Equal Pay Act, etc. Hence, the subjects should have been "sensitized" to discrimination issues to far greater degree than a cross-section of the population at large or their age group in particular. The author would contend that any stereotyping found in this group would underestimate that found among the population at large.

The intent of this recent replication of the earlier survey was to see how the attitudes of this younger, highly educated, "sensitized" sample, equally divided by gender, compared to those held by participants in the earlier survey. The results showed that this group of college students implicitly stereotyped by gender and, most interestingly, did so to the same extent as the *Harvard Business Review* subscribers [2]. Although the students had been raised in the post-Fair Employment Practice era, it should be emphasized that while laws may change employment practices, they cannot change attitudes, and it was attitudes that were addressed in the survey. Thus, while one hears considerable talk about how the younger generation is more "enlightened" and "open-minded" and not burdened with the prejudices of their parents, the evidence suggests otherwise. The author feels that what is being detected by observers who claim an "enlightened" generation is more of a reluctance by this generation (particularly college students) to openly admit such attitudes than was the case with their parents and grandparents.

For purposes of the present study the author replicated the earlier study and tabulated responses not only by gender of subject, but also by gender of respondent to see whether members of one gender engage in implicit sex stereotyping to a greater degree than the other. The author's personal belief was that males would stereotype females in regard to personnel decisions to a greater degree than other females would.

SURVEY RESULTS

The first three incidents involved a conflict between responsibilities on the job and at home. It is the author's belief that when such a conflict arises, most individuals expect the male to place job responsibilities first and the female to give first priority to the home.

Incident 1

Jack and Judy Garrison have been married three years. Jack is an aspiring business executive and Judy is a successful free-lance writer. This is part of a conversation they had after coming home from a cocktail party at the home of an executive in Jack's division:

Judy: Oh boy, what a bunch of creeps. Do we have to go to these parties, honey?

Jack: Judy, you know we have to. These things mean a lot to me. Tonight I had a chance to talk to Mr. Wilson. On the job it would take weeks to get an appointment with him. I was able to get across two good ideas I had about our new sales campaign, and I think he was listening.

Judy: Is Wilson that fat slob who works in marketing, the one with the dull wife? I spent ten minutes with her and I nearly died! She's too much. Jack, the people there tonight were so dull I could have cried. Why did I major in English lit. anyway? I prefer to talk to people who know what is going on in the world, not a bunch of halfwits whose main interests are their new cars and spoiled kids. I tried to talk to one guy about Virginia Woolf and he didn't even known who she was. These people are incredible. Do we have to go to another cocktail party again next week? I'd like to see Look Back in Anger instead. I've got the tickets. One of my wifely duties is to give you culture. What an uncouth bunch in the business world!

Jack: One of my husbandly ambitions is to get ahead in the business world. You know that these parties are required for bright junior executives coming up in the organization. And I'm a bright junior executive. If we don't go, who knows which of the other junior exec.'s will get to Wilson with their good ideas.

Judy: Can't you relax and work a forty-hour week? That's what they pay you for.

Jack: I guess I'm too ambitious to relax.

Judy: I'd still like to go to the play. At least we could think about real problems.

Jack: And I'd be a mediocre, lower-management nobody for the rest of my career.

Judy: I want you to be a success, Jack. But the idea of spending more evenings

talking to idiots is too much!

The "female version" had Judy as the aspiring executive and Jack as the reluctant spouse, with all other details being identical. Respondents were then asked to choose one of three responses (see Table 1).

It is obvious from these results that members of both genders expect the female to suppress her personal desires and support the male in his work role to a much greater extent than the male in a similar situation. Such expectations will, in turn, make it easier for the male to succeed in balancing career and home demands than a female—that is, the male will have more assistance and less resistance in doing so. Additionally, it can be seen that males were slightly more inclined to feel that the subject should attend the parties alone, while females were slightly more willing to allow the subject to stop attending the parties.

Table 1. Responses to Incident 1

	Female Version	Male Versior
The Spouse Should Go to	Parties and Stop Making Su	ch an Issue of It
Overall	30%	72%
Female respondents	28%	69%
Male respondents	32%	74%
The Junior Executive Shore	uld Attend the Parties Alone	
Overall	42%	18%
Female respondents	40%	15%
Male respondents	44%	20%
The Junior Executive Show	uld Stop Attending the Partie	s
Overall	28%	11%
Female respondents	32%	15%
Male respondents	24%	7%

Incident 2

Ruth Brown, an accountant in the main office, has requested one month's leave beginning next week. She has already taken her vacation this year. She wants the leave to take care of her three young children. The day care arrangements the Browns had made for the period covered by her request suddenly fell through, and they have been unable to make other arrangements satisfying their high standards. Ruth's husband is principal of the junior high school and he cannot possibly get off during the next month.

The problem is that Ruth is the only person experienced in handling the "cost" section in the accounting department. We would either have to transfer an accountant with the same experience from the Richardson Division or else train a replacement for only one month's work. I have urged Ruth to reconsider this request, but she insists on going ahead with it.

I have also checked with the legal department and we do not have to hold the position open for Ruth if she insists on taking the whole month off.

I would appreciate it if you could give me your decision on this as soon as possible.

The male version was identical except it involved Ralph Brown, whose wife was a principal. Respondents were then asked if this was an appropriate leave request, and whether they would grant leave with pay, or without pay (see Table 2).

Table 2. Responses to Incident 2

	Yes, Female Version	Yes, Male Version
Is This an Appropriate Le	eave Request?	
Overall	51%	31%
Female respondents	51%	31%
Male respondents	51%	31%
Would You Grant Leave	with Pay?	
Overall	72%	56%
Female respondents	80%	59%
Male respondents	64%	53%
Would You Grant Leave	Without Pay?	
Overall	11%	3%
Female respondents	9%	2%
Male respondents	13%	4%

In this case, the results indicate that sex stereotyping benefits females. A leave request for child care is considered acceptable by more than one-half of the respondents when it is made by a female, but by less than one-third when made by a male. As in the first incident, the evidence suggests that when a job-home conflict arises, the male is more likely to be expected to accommodate his work schedule, while it is more acceptable for the female to miss work and devote her energies to the home.

Such stereotyping is going to create increasing problems for both husbands and wives as more and more wives pursue careers. Women will find it hard to advance as long as most employers believe that women's first allegiance is, or should be, to the home and not the job; at the same time, males are going to find themselves more often in situations where their absence from work is necessary because of a working spouse, yet where their employers view the reason for such absence as "unacceptable."

When analyzed by gender of the respondents, it is obvious that while the respondent's gender is not a moderator variable in the judgment of whether this is an appropriate leave request, female respondents are significantly more generous in awarding leave with pay when such a leave request is granted. Much has been written about the "compassion" of females in business decisions relative to males, and at the risk of exposing one of the author's own stereotypes, he feels this may be the determining factor in the different responses to the middle question above.

Another possible explanation lies in a difference between female respondents and female subjects. Since the majority of female respondents (young college students) probably did not have children, while the female subject had three, the moderator variable here may be the presence of dependents rather than gender of the respondent.

Incident 3

Situation three presented a direct career conflict between a husband and wife:

As you know, Ronald Cooper is a computer operator in my section. He has played a key role in computerizing our inventory system. Recently Ronald's wife was offered a very attractive managerial position with a large retail organization on the West Coast. They are seriously considering the move. I told Ronald that he has a very bright future with our organization and it would be a shame for him to pull out just as we are expanding our operations. I sure would hate to lose him now. What do you think we should do about the situation?

The alternative form had Rhonda as the computer operator, and her husband offered the job on the West Coast. Respondents were asked to choose from among three alternative responses (see Table 3).

Table 3. Responses to Incident 3

	Female Version	Male Version
Try to Convince the Operator To Leave Now	that Too Much Has Been	Invested in Their Career
Overali	41%	88%
Female respondents	40%	84%
Male respondents	41%	91%
Don't Try to Influence the Op	erator	
Overall	60%	14%
Female respondents	58%	17%
Male respondents	60%	11%
Offer the Operator a Sizeable	Raise as an Incentive to	Stay
Overall	22%	28%
Female respondents	27%	33%
Male respondents	17%	23%

It is obvious from the response pattern that the respondents viewed male employees as more worth retaining than female employers, even when the qualifications of each were the same.

The most notable difference when the results are analyzed by gender of respondent is that females are much more generous when offering a raise as an incentive than are males, and that this generosity holds whether the subject is male or female. Whether this is another measure of the compassion discussed in the previous incident or simply a difference of opinion by gender as to what is the best economic decision is open to interpretation.

When looking at responses to the first three situations, one begins to get some insight into why absenteeism and turnover rates are higher for females than males, even when they are at the same organization and compensation level. If employers do not make as much effort to retain females as they do males and if, as seen in the preceding incident, females are more readily granted unscheduled absences, is it any wonder that the government reports slightly higher absenteeism and turnover rates for females than for males [3]?

The reader should not that in each of these first three incidents involving a work versus home conflict, there was no significant difference in the amount of sex stereotyping done by male and female respondents.

The fourth and fifth situations dealt with an employee's unacceptable conduct, the question being what disciplinary action, if any, should be taken.

Incident 4

I have a problem and I don't see how to solve it. It concerns one of the design engineers, Jill Diller, who has worked for me for the past fifteen months. Jill persists in arriving late every morning. She is always ten minutes late, more usually fifteen minutes to a half hour. I am at my wit's end. I have tried everything I can think of—private discussions, written reprimands, threats, sarcasm, and more. She is still late every morning.

When Jill walks into the office, the work stops and everyone watches. Some of the designers are even joking that Jill's coming in late has something to do with her recent engagement. I don't like to get too tough with a creative girl like Jill, but her behavior is bound to hurt morale in the department.

The male version involved Jack Diller. Respondents were asked to selected from among three courses of action (see Table 4).

In the case of both the female and male employee the respondents considered the situation serious enough to warrant the more severe actions. Yet they were slight more inclined to take such action when the employee involved was a female. This may be connected to the value the respondents attached to employees of different genders, as exhibited by the responses to the preceding incident. The willingness to risk losing an employee through more severe disciplinary actions and the lesser effort made to retain female employees both seem to the author to

Table 4. Responses to Incident 4

	Female Version	Male Version
Suspend for One Week fo	r Continued Tardiness	
Overall	72%	64%
Female respondents	68%	59%
Male respondents	75%	70%
Overall Female respondents	51% 46%	42% 38%
Overall		
Male respondents	55%	46%
Don't Make an Issue of Ta	ırdiness	
	00/	11%
Overall	8%	11/0
Overall Female respondents	8% 13%	20%

provide insight into the value the respondents placed on employees of different genders. The response patterns indicate that when all else is equal, males are viewed as more valued employees by members of each gender—more effort is put into retaining them and severe discipline is less likely to be used for fear of losing them.

When analyzed by respondent gender, it can be seen that males were more likely to make an issue of such behavior either through suspension or a discharge threat while females were more likely not to make an issue of such behavior. Here again, as in the two earlier incidents, males are seen as more likely to choose options that have a negative impact on the subjects (regardless of gender) than are females. As in the previous incidents, whether this reflects compassion levels or different views of what constitutes good business sense and/or ethics is something each individual must decide for him/herself.

Incident 5

Situation five involved unacceptable personal, rather than work, conduct.

I would like to get your advice on a matter of great sensitivity involving one of the junior executives in our organization. It has been brought to my attention by an unimpeachable source that Bill Holman, assistant comptroller in my division, is having an affair with a prominent young socialite. I

understand it has reached the point where any day now Bill's wife will publicly denounce the socialite as a homewrecker. I have been reluctant to bring this up, but I know Bill's marital problems will hurt his work. I would appreciate any advice you could give me on this.

The female version involved Renee Holman having an affair with a young playboy. Respondents were asked to select from among three responses (see Table 5).

The only real difference between the male and female version in this situation seems to be the middle option; respondents were more likely to request that a male employee see a marriage counselor than a female. The author feels that the almost identical results to the first option have to do with the equal number of male and female respondents given each version. It is obvious from the middle option that members of one sex (regardless of which one) are less likely to approach members of the opposite sex on issues such as this. Additionally, the second option indicates that the respondents were willing to go to greater lengths to correct the unacceptable behavior of male employees, even when this behavior was of a personal, rather than a work, nature.

Incident 6

Male respondents

This situation is becoming all too common today: by playing a numbers game the organization has hired enough females to comply with the law, but through

Male Version Female Version Do Nothing Unless the Junior Executive Raises the Issue 52% Overall 50% 54% Female respondents 50% 51% 51% Male respondents Advise Junior Executive to See a Marriage Counselor 56% Overall 40% Female respondents 58% 42% 22% 70% Male respondents Confront Employee and Threaten Termination Unless Affair Stops 3% 4% Overall Female respondents 3% 4%

3%

4%

Table 5. Responses to Incident 5

subtle forms of unintentional sex discrimination does not allow them to develop as managers to the same extent that equally qualified males do. Then the females' comparative lack of advancement in the organization is used as evidence that they are not as well-suited for the work. This failure to advance can also lead to higher rates of absenteeism and turnover, and so perpetuates the cycle. The difficulty here is that the decisions as to who advances may be made on the grounds of legitimate individual qualifications, and may not be discriminatory at all. The discrimination occurred earlier, however, when females, because of subconscious discrimination, were not given the same opportunities to develop as males. Incident 6 addresses this type of situation:

I am pleased that we have the opportunity to send a representative to the Dunbar conference on production supervision. I know from personal experience that it is a high-quality conference, and it has developed such a favorable reputation in this area that it is considered an important form of recognition for those who are selected to attend.

I have reviewed our supervisory staff quite carefully and have narrowed the choice down to two people, both of whom I feel are qualified to attend. Unfortunately, we can send only one person, and I will leave the final selection up to you, depending on what you feel we want to emphasize. The two candidates are Susan Adams and John Elms.

Susan Adams is supervisor of knitting unit A. She is 25, married, and has no children. She has been employed by our company for three years. She is a college graduate with a general business degree, and we consider her to have potential for higher-level positions.

John Elms is supervisor of knitting unit B. He is 43, married, and has two teen-age children. He has been employed by our company for 20 years. He is a high school graduate. He has been a steady, conscientious employee, advancing gradually from a helper's job to his present position, which may be as high as he will be able to go, judging from our assessment of the information in his file. Selection for this conference would mean a lot to John.

In the alternate form, the two names are reversed. Respondents were asked to select one of the two to go to the conference. When all responses were considered collectively, without differentiation by gender of the subject, the results emerged as shown in Table 6.

Hence, regardless of gender, the majority of respondents felt that the older employee should be sent. When the results were sorted by subject gender, however, the results are shown in Table 7.

These results indicate that the respondents, when selecting younger workers with career potential to participate in a developmental conference, are more likely to expend company resources if the employee is a male, even when all other qualifications are equal. The gender of the respondent did not moderate the results either by age of the subject regardless of gender or by gender of subject when age (25) was held constant.

Table 6. Responses to Incident 6 by Age of Subject

Send 25 Year Old	
Overall	31%
Female respondents	30%
Male respondents	33%
Send 43 Year Old	
Overall	69%
Female respondents	70%
Male respondents	67%

Table 7. Responses to Incident 7 by Gender of Subject

Send 25 Year Old Female	
Overall Female respondents	23% 24%
Male respondents	23%
Send 25 Year Old Male	
Overall	39%
Female respondents	35%
Male respondents	45%

Incident 7

Situation seven deals with the selection/promotion decisions for a position requiring extensive traveling.

Pursuant to our recent discussion with you about the need to recruit a purchasing manager for the new operation, we have developed a set of brief job specifications and have located some candidates who may be suitable for the opening. Will you please review the attached resume and give us your evaluation?

Job requirements for purchasing manager:

The major responsibilities of the new purchasing manager will be to

purchase fabrics, materials, and clothing accessories (buttons, belts, buckles, zippers, and so on) for the production of finished goods.

For the most part, the purchasing manager will have to travel around the country visiting wholesalers and attending conventions and showings. The person hired for this position should have a knowledge of the quality of raw materials and have the ability to establish a "fair" price for goods purchased in large quantities. The person selected for this position will have to travel at least twenty days each month.

RESUMÉ

Name: Mr. Charles Tank

Position Applied for: Purchasing Manager

Place of Birth: Cleveland, Ohio

Marital Status: Married, four children ages 11, 8, 7, and 4
Education: B.S. Business Administration, Ohio State University
Relevant Work Experience: One year as purchasing trainee, Campbell
Textiles, Inc. Ten years' experience in various retail clothing stores, in
sales, buying, and general management.

Interviewer's Remarks: Good personal appearance; seems earnest and convincing. Good recommendations from previous employers.

The female version had Mrs. Charlene Tank as the candidate. Respondents were asked to answer three questions (see Table 8).

respondents apparently felt that employees with this set of characteristics, regardless of gender, were not suited for the position in question. The author

Table 8. Responses to Incident 7

	Female Version	Male Version
Would You Select This Ca	ndidate?	
Overall	23%	33%
Female respondents	25%	33%
Male respondents	20%	34%
Is the Candidate Favorably	Suited for the Job?	
Overall	33%	38%
Female respondents	33%	37%
Male respondents	32%	40%
Does the Candidate Have	the Potential to Remain on t	he Job?
Overall	30%	35%
Female respondents	28%	34%
Male respondents	31%	35%

would contend that the presence of four young children is the main variable in the subjects' decision(s). Yet in all three areas of inquiry, males were selected more often or rated more favorably than females. This response pattern seems to the author to indicate that the subjects are exhibiting the same values evidenced in the responses to the second incident; that is, the first allegiance of males belongs to the job and that of females to the home and/or family. It should be noted that female respondents held or exhibited this attitude to the same degree male respondents did. This type of subconscious sex stereotyping makes it more acceptable for a male to be selected for a job involving extensive travel than a female—even when both have the same employment qualifications and the same situation at home.

Incident 8

The final incident addresses the job vs. work dilemma even more directly:

We are at the point where we must make a decision on the promotion of Cathy Adams of our personnel staff. Cathy is one of the most competent employees in the corporate personnel office, and I am convinced that she is capable of handling even more responsibility as Bennett Division personnel director. However, I am not altogether certain that she is willing to subordinate time with her family to time on the job, to the extent that may be required with Bennett. I have had the opportunity to explore with her the general problem of family versus job, and she strongly believes that she would very rarely stay late at the office or participate in weekend meetings.

She believes that her first duty is to her family, and that she should manage her time accordingly. This viewpoint has not affected her performance in the past, but it could be a problem in the more demanding position as head of personnel with the Bennett Division.

The male version involved Gerald Adams. Respondents were given three possible courses of action (see Table 9).

The responses to the first and third options indicate that identical family demands and/or commitments do not disqualify males to the same extent they disqualify females. Not only are females expected to yield to family demands in the work versus home dilemma (as shown in the previous situations), but even if they set priorities identical to those of their male counterparts, the males are still given more consideration on the job. What may be surprising to the reader is the equal percentage of male and female respondents who felt this way. As in some of the previous incidents, respondent gender is not a moderator variable in stereotyping of subjects by gender. The effects of this type of sex stereotyping will be difficult, at best, to overcome.

Table 9. Responses to Incident 8

	Female Version	Male Version
Do Not Promote		
Overall	34%	10%
Female respondents	33%	11%
Male respondents	34%	10%
Persuade the Candidate to	Make a Stronger Job Comr	mitment Prior to Promotion
Overall	29%	32%
Female respondents	30%	33%
Male respondents	28%	31%
Base the Promotion on Pa	st Experience	
Overall	40%	58%
	40%	59%
Female respondents	-TQ /Q	JJ /0

CONCLUSION

When the results are examined without regard to respondent gender, the conclusions to be drawn from this study are obvious. If the subjects used here are any indication, there is a good deal of unintentional, subconscious sex stereotyping taking place in the business sector of our society. The author feels quite strongly that, if anything, the responses of the subjects used here *underestimate* the extent of the problem. The subjects were younger than most people in business, were college-educated, and were undergoing a learning experience (the personnel course) that sensitized them to the area of employment discrimination. It is reasonable to expect that responses from such a group would be different from those of a more general sample.

While we as a society can legislate against overt discrimination, equally important and necessary are efforts to eliminate the type of subconscious stereotyping evidenced in the present study. Even if all members of the business community fully comply with the written laws regarding equal/fair employment, the barriers erected by the type of discrimination found in this study will still be imposing. Only after this more difficult type of discrimination is eliminated will real equal employment practices be attained. Making people aware of the problem, as this study has attempted to do, is the first step.

When analyzed by respondent gender, the results indicate that males and females are equally guilty of sex stereotyping, which serves to the detriment of females in the workplace. In the few areas where male and female respondents differed, the difference was consistent across both the male and female versions of the incident. Thus, while there are variances revealed by respondent gender, they are not of a nature to indicate one group stereotypes other individuals by gender more than the other group. Said another way, the results show two things. First, that stereotyping by gender hurts women in the workplace, and second that males and females are equally guilty of such stereotyping.

Since the female respondents in the present study constitute a sample of the group from which the women business leaders of tomorrow will come (young, college-educated), one may well conclude that even as legislation makes it possible for more women to rise in corporate hierarchies, there will still be implicit barriers to other women attempting the same climb. Legislation containing numerical goals or quotas may require a minimum number of females to be placed in certain occupations or at certain structural levels, but once there, numerical progress beyond that point will not be made easier by their presence if they hold the same attitudes toward female employees as their male coworkers or predecessors. Legal attempts to manipulate numbers and placement by gender cannot manipulate attitudes. Furthermore, if such numerical and placement differences by gender are eliminated by legislation but attitudinal differences across genders remain unchanged, then such legislation will be needed indefinitely. If, as the results of the present survey indicate, the women legislated in new positions and levels implicitly discriminate against other women to the same extent men do (or did), then nothing changes or will change beyond the minimum levels legislated.

The only optimistic interpretation the author can render of these data rests on the theory that those among the present female respondents who will eventually rise in the business sector to the level where they will be making decisions such as those contained in the survey are different from those respondents who will not attain such positions. Every female (or male for that matter) who attends college and takes business courses is not going to occupy a managerial position. Hence, those among the present female respondents who will become managers may well have ability and/or personality traits allowing them to do so that differentiate them from other female respondents. Such a theory is just that at this point—a theory. Data were not gathered in the present survey in such a manner as to test this hypothesis. Given the results of previous research in this area, the author offers this as a possible but not probable explanation.

From the perspective of workforce-oriented women, perhaps the best concluding statement comes from that famous 20th-century philosopher, Pogo, who said: "We have met the enemy and (s)he is us."

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