

Sex Differences in Self-Reported Influence Among Union Officers

Dafna N. Izraeli

Department of Sociology, Bar-Ilan University

This study explores differences between men and women in self-reported influence (SRI) and its correlates among 148 male and 111 female elected union committee officers in Israel. Results indicated that women rate their influence lower than do men. An examination of the difference in patterns of associations shows that sex proportion and serving as chairperson are significant predictors of influence only for women. An examination of differences in the strength of the association suggests that women's perception of their influence is more responsive to the evaluations of their fellow workers, whereas that of men is more responsive to the committee's influence on management.

This study explores for sex differences in leadership in a union context. Research on this issue to date has focused on men and women in management (Birsdall, 1980; Donnell & Hall, 1980; Osborn & Vicars, 1976; Terborg, 1977). Unlike managers, who are appointed or assigned to a position, union officers must mobilize the support of a constituency that elects them. The accumulation, exertion, and maintenance of power are important aspects of their role.

Research suggests strongly that men are more concerned with dominance than women, that they are more likely to behave in a dominant way, and that they have a higher assessment of their influence in task-oriented groups (Lips, 1981; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; O'Leary, 1974; Stake, 1979). Are these findings valid for men and women who choose to seek positions of leadership? Furthermore, are there sex differences in the

socio-demographic and organizational antecedents of influence?

These questions inform this study, which examines self-perceived influence and its correlates among men and women in a grassroots leadership role. It is a field study, with the sample drawn from industrial trade union officers in Israel. We first present the union context and in a later section describe the particular sample studied.

Union Context

The union officer in Israel operates as part of a workers' committee elected usually every 2 years. The workers' committee is the plant-level organization of the trade union department of the Histadrut—General Federation of Labor, which represents approximately 80% of all wage and salaried workers in Israel.

The workers' committee is responsible for the administration of the pertinent collective agreement within the plant and for ensuring management's compliance with it. In addition, union officers usually participate in decision making about promotions, negotiate wage increases and fringe benefits above those determined in the industry-wide collective agreement, and intervene on matters of dismissals, transfers, and other changes in worker status or role.

Although the committee collectively represents all workers in the firm, individual members tend to be bound by obligations and allegiances more to specific sectors of the

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Dafna N. Izraeli, Department of Sociology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 52100 Israel.

worker population—segmented by seniority, ethnicity, sex, department, and occupation, than to others. The issues negotiated with management and the order of priority they receive are determined in the ongoing negotiations within the committee. In other words, the amount of influence individual members have over the other members of the committee is an important determinant of their ability to implement their goals and to advance interests of their specific constituencies. The amount of influence they have over their constituencies and over management in turn affects their power position within the committee.

Hypotheses

Sex Differences in Influence

Numerous studies show that in achievement settings women have lower expectancies for success than men, and lower evaluation of their abilities and performance. This is particularly the case when they are faced with male-associated tasks and/or male co-workers (Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978; Lenney, 1977; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Stake, 1979). Influence and leadership in the public domain are everywhere and have always been associated with men; the trade union organization is in this respect no exception.

We hypothesized that, among union officers, women perceive themselves as less influential than do men.

Sex Differences in Correlates of Influence

In comparing men and women we distinguish between sex differences in the (a) patterns and (b) strengths of correlations with self-reported influence. We expected to find few differences in the pattern but considerable differences in the strength of the correlations. The effects of three different clusters of variables on self-perceived influence are examined: experience, organizational structure or context, and evaluational or social cues.

Experience. Theories of adult socialization are based on the assumption that exposure to new situations, acquisition of new roles, or the development of new skills can enhance

self-esteem and that “changes in self-esteem parallel occupational successes and failures” (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978: 443). We expected that certain adult experiences (education, participation in union officer training courses, seniority in the union officer role, and serving as chairperson of the workers’ committee) would be positively associated with influence for both sexes. Although education and training enhance the probability of effective performance, re-election to the committee (seniority) and election to the position of committee chairperson are indications of successful performance.

For example, in a study of Chicago women, Lopata (1980) found that respondent’s years of completed education contributed significantly to variance on a leadership score. Aldag and Brief (1979) found that tenure among nursing personnel was more strongly correlated with sense of potency than with any of the other variables examined. Lockheed and Hall (1976) found that women who had an opportunity to develop task-specific expectations of competence in single-sex groups were more active and influential in mixed-sex groups than women who did not have such an opportunity. We found no evidence in the research literature that would lead us to expect differences between men and women in the pattern of correlations between such experience measures and self-reported influence (SRI). We reasoned, however, that because women have fewer early life opportunities for feeling influential and are less often expected to be influential, the impact of influence enhancing experiences would be stronger for them. One basis for such reasoning is that Izraeli (1982) found prior experience in a supervisory role to be a better predictor of union leadership for women than for men.

Structure. The social context within which people act out their occupational roles shapes the opportunities they have for feeling influential (Kanter, 1977). We examined the effects of three aspects of organizational structure: size of factory, size of committee, and the proportions of women and men on the committee. Worker committees play a more influential role in larger firms than in smaller firms where worker-management re-

lations are more likely to be direct and informal (Kaminka, 1977), and size of committee is strongly correlated with size of firm. We expected that both factory and committee size would be positively associated with SRI for both men and women but had no hypothesis regarding sex differences in the strength of the relationships.

According to Kanter (1977), the relative number of each sex in a group has important consequences for social interaction. Variations in sex proportion have been shown to be associated with sex differences in achievement (Spangler, Gordon, & Pipkin, 1978) and in influence (Israeli, 1983).

Heilman and Kram (1978) investigated 100 insurance company employees and found that women's tendencies to derogate themselves were evident when working with males but negligible when working with females. When paired with a female, women subjects accepted more responsibility for success and less for failure and reported greater confidence about future performance than when paired with a male. Co-worker sex had no such effect on males.

We hypothesized that sex proportion would be positively correlated with influence for women but not for men and that the correlation between sex proportion and SRI would be significantly stronger for women than for men.

Social-evaluation cues. In a review of the literature on self-confidence in achievement settings, Lenney (1977) contended that women's self-evaluations and expectancies for success are more influenced by characteristics of the context and more "vulnerable to situational influences," such as certain evaluation cues, than is the case for men.

The present study examined the relationship of influence to three evaluation cues: evaluation by fellow workers, evaluation by management, and influence of committee on management. We hypothesized a relationship between respondent's perception of both workers' and management's appreciation of his or her role performance and self-assessed influence for both sexes but expected this relationship to be stronger for women than for men. This is in line with the finding that being liked and accepted is more important

for women than for men (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Hoffman, 1972) and that part of women's self-evaluation is contingent on their certainty about others liking them, a relationship not found for men (Berger, 1968).

Predicting sex differences in the relationship of SRI with committee influence on management led to conflicting hypotheses. On the one hand, the findings of previous studies that point to the need of each sex to succeed in ways culturally prescribed for that sex suggest that committee influence correlates with SRI for men but not for women. This is on the assumption that being part of an influential group is culturally more important for men than for women (Berger, 1968; Carlson, 1970; Hollander, 1972).

On the other hand, studies comparing men and women *within* occupations show them to be very similar in a wide range of role-relevant variables. For example, when occupation is held constant, no significant sex differences were found in job satisfaction, motivation to work, job involvement, job outcome preferences, leader behavior, communication style, and perceived abilities (Birsdall, 1980; Chapman, 1975; Donnell & Hall, 1980; Kaufman & Feters, 1980; Osborn & Vicars, 1976). Although the results are not always consistent, the general thrust of this research is that persons alike in relevant ways tend to select themselves for the same occupational roles (Holland, 1973), and accumulated experience coping with the commonalities in structure and performance demands of these roles has a further "convergence effect." This theory suggests no sex differences in the relationship between SRI and influence of committee on management. Consequently, we did not specify a hypothesis.

Summary of Hypotheses

1. Men assess their influence higher than do women.
2. There are no sex differences in the correlates of influence except for sex proportion, for which an interaction effect with sex of respondent is expected.
3. Influence correlates more strongly with experience, structure, and evaluation variables for women than for men, except for influence

of committee on management, for which no hypothesis was stated.

Method

Sample

The data for this study were collected in 1978-79 and form part of a larger project on men and women as worker committee members (Izraeli & Poraz, 1980).

The sample was drawn from a list of firms in Israel that met the following three criteria: (a) They were within one of the three female labor intensive industries—food, textiles and clothing, and electronics; (b) they had a minimum of 100 workers; and (c) at least one woman was a member on the committee. Of the 65 eligible firms, 57 (87.7%) were included in the final sample, four refused to cooperate, and four were excluded because of geographical distance. Responses were obtained from 259 part-time local union officers (111 women, 148 men) who comprised 80% of the membership of these committees. The workers' committees studied ranged in size from 3 to 21 members, the number of women on each committee ranged from 1 to 7, and the proportion of women varied from 5% to 100%. The mean committee size was 6.9 members and the mean number of women was 2.2. Sixteen committees were chaired by a woman, 41 by a man.

Twenty-five percent of the firms had up to 150 employees, 28% up to 250, 25% up to 500, and 22% over 500 to a maximum of 2,800 employees. The proportion of female employees ranged from 9% to 95%. The women were on the average younger than the men: 35% were under 29 compared to 6.8% of the men, whereas 44% of the women were over 35 compared to 63% of the men. Women on the average had less education than men. Close to 38% had completed only primary school compared to 27.4% for men, whereas only 18% of the women had more than high school education compared to 33.6% of the men. These sex differences in demographic characteristics reflect those of the workers in the firms studied.

Measures

Self-Reported Influence (SRI). Respondents were asked to rate the amount of influence they have over the members of the workers' committee, over management, and over their workers, using a scale from 1 to 5. An SRI index was constructed from the combined average score on the three questions; $\alpha = .76$.

Experience, structure, and evaluation cues. There were three groups of independent variables on which men and women were compared:

1. *Experience.* Seniority: total number of years as member of the workers' committee; education: number of years of formal schooling; courses: number of committee member training courses attended (of at least 3 days' duration); chairperson: a dichotomous variable indicating whether at the time of the study the person was or was not the chairperson of the workers' committee.

2. *Structure.* Proportion of those on the committee who were women: size of committee = total number of members; factory size = total number employed.

3. *Evaluation cues.* Three questions were used. To what extent do your workers value your performance as a member of the workers' committee? To what extent does management value your performance as a member of the workers' committee? How much influence does the workers' committee in your firm have over the management? Responses to each were recorded on a scale of 1 to 5.

Results

Sex Differences in Self-Reported Influence (SRI)

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with sex as the main grouping was computed on the three influence questions as a whole, taking into account their interrelationships. The results of the test indicate that there is a significant sex difference in self-perceived influence and that, as predicted, men rate themselves higher on influence than women rate themselves (F Wilks's Lambda criterion = 4.32; $p < .01$). This finding was further confirmed when a t test was used to compare men and women on the self-reported influence (SRI) index, which serves as the independent variable in this article (one-tailed $t = 3.12$, $p < .01$). Individual t tests conducted for each of the three influence measures separately reveal that the largest sex difference occurs for self-assessment of influence over fellow committee members (one-tailed $t = 3.02$; $p < .01$), the smallest for self-assessment of influence over fellow workers (one-tailed $t = 1.86$; $p < .05$), with influence over management falling between the two (one-tailed $t = 2.47$; $p < .01$). An unanticipated finding is that the standard deviation on the SRI score is significantly greater for women than for men ($F = 1.74$; $p < .01$) suggesting that women form a less homogenous group with regard to self-perception of influence.

The possibility that the above-observed sex differences on self-reported influence are an artifact of the different distribution of men and women by size of firm (number of employees) or by type of industry (textiles, food, or electronics) was examined. Two one-way analyses of variance tests (ANOVAs) were computed. The results showed no significant main effect for size of firm or for type of industry. We did find a significant main effect for sex

in both cases, $F = 11.05$, $p < .01$ and $F = 12.17$, $p < .01$, respectively, but there were no significant interaction effects. The sex difference in SRI is, therefore, not an artifact of firm size or industry affiliation. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Sex Differences in Correlates of Self-Reported Influence

Separate stepwise regressions of self-reported influence (SRI) were computed on each of the three sets of independent variables: experience, structure, and evaluation cues. The regressions were computed independently for men and for women. In addition, each set of predictors was entered as a block in the hierarchical order specified at bottom of Table 1, making a total of eight regressions. The results are reported in Table 1.

Experience. The four experience variables together explain 12.2% of the variance in SRI scores for women and only 3.3% for men

(Table 1, first regression). The standardized Beta weight is significant only for the chairperson variable, and it is significant only for women. Of the experience variables, both being chairperson and attending training courses predict SRI for women, and they together explain approximately 12% of the variance. None of the experience variables predicts SRI for men. The simple correlations between SRI and course attendance are significant for both sexes, whereas that between SRI and seniority is significant for women only.

Structure. The three structure variables combined explain 12.3% of the variance in SRI scores for women but only 2.0% of the variance for men (see Table 1, second regression). For women, sex proportion in itself explains 11.6% of the variance and was the only variable for which either the standardized Beta weight or the R^2 change was significant. Sex proportion is not correlated with SRI for men. The unexpected finding that committee

Table 1
Regression of Self-Reported Influence on Independent Variables by Sex

Regression	Independent variable	Men ($n = 131$)			Women ($n = 101$)		
		Beta	R^2 change	r	Beta	R^2 change	r
1st	Experience						
	Courses	.132	.018	.13*	.144	.033*	.22*
	Education	.108	.011	.11	.097	.004	.13
	Chairperson	.064	.003	.10	.238*	.084**	.29**
	Seniority	.046	.001	.04	.113	.001	.22*
	Total R^2		3.3%		12.2%		
2nd	Structure						
	Size of committee	.232	.019	.14	.046	.001	-.12
	Sex proportion	.091	.002	.00	.321**	.116**	.34**
	Size of firm	.044	.001	.10	.098	.006	.08
	Total R^2		2.2%		12.3%		
3rd	Evaluation cues						
	Comm. infl. on mngmt.	.292**	.199**	.44**	—	.000	.20**
	Worker evaluation	.286**	.090**	.45**	.483**	.298**	.55**
	Mngmt. evaluation	.183*	.030*	.34**	.179*	.028*	.35**
	Total R^2		31.9%		32.6%		
4th	Experience		.034			.123**	
	Structure		.051			.039*	
	Evaluation cues		.270**			.215**	
	Total R^2		35.5%			37.7%	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

size is negatively correlated with SRI for women may be explained by the negative correlation between committee size and proportion of women on the committee ($r = -.37$), the latter being an important predictor of SRI among women.

Evaluation cues. The three evaluation variables combined explain 31.9% of the variance in SRI for men and 32.6% for women (Table 1, third regression). Despite this similarity in total amount of variance explained, there are marked differences in the relative weight of individual variables for each sex. For men the Beta and R^2 change of all three evaluation variables are significant. Influence of committee on management alone explains almost 20% of the variance, followed by worker evaluation, which explains 9%. For women, the Beta of both worker and manager evaluation are significant, and the former alone explains 30% of the variance. Management evaluation adds less than 3%. Perceived influence of the committee on management did not even enter the regression equation and contributes nothing to explaining variance over the contribution made by the other two variables; for men, it is the best predictor of SRI among the evaluation cues.

SRI was regressed on all 10 variables entered as three blocks in hierarchical order for each sex separately (4th reg.). For men, the Beta of only the three evaluation variables was significant. For women the Beta of only worker valuation was significant (figures not in table). The total variance explained by the independent variables was 35.5% for men and 37.7% for women.

Hypothesis 2, that there are no sex differences in the pattern of correlations with influence, except for the effect of sex proportion, was only partially supported. No sex differences were found for the effects of education, size of firm, and size of committee. Contrary to expectation, these variables proved to be nonsignificant for SRI of either sex. The correlations between number of courses attended and SRI was significant for both men and women but the Beta weights were not. Worker and management evaluation correlated with SRI for both men and women; however, there were several unanticipated sex differences in correlational patterns. Among

Table 2
Gender Differences in the Strength of the Relationship of Independent Variables With Self-Reported Influence

Variable	Fisher's ^a r to Z ($n = 232$)	Beta ^b ($n = 235$)	F^c ($n = 240$)
Chairperson	2.21**		4.21*
Sex proportion	3.80**	.424*	
Management valuation	1.27	.180	
Committee influence on management	3.03**	.278	
Worker valuation	1.50	.529*	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$$a. \frac{Z_1 - Z_2}{\sqrt{\frac{1}{n_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{n_2 - 3}}}$$

^b Standardized Beta weight for the interaction between sex and the independent variable.

^c ANOVA interaction effect for sex and chairperson.

the experience variables, seniority was correlated with SRI for women only, but it was not a significant predictor of SRI. Chairperson was a predictor of SRI for women but not for men. Among the evaluation-cue variables, committee influence on management was a predictor of SRI for men but not for women.

Sex differences in strength of relationships were measured for the five variables for which the Betas were significant for one or both sexes (see Table 2). Two different methods were used, each asking a different research question:

1. Fischer's r to Z test for comparing correlations examines whether the difference in the proportion of variance in Y (influence) explained by X (independent variable) for women and men is significant.

2. Hierarchical regressions test for the significance of the interaction between sex and the independent variable. The Beta of the interaction variable indicates whether the sex difference in absolute amount of variance explained is significant. By entering the main effects (sex and the independent variable) first, we get a conservative estimate of the interaction effects. This method was not used for testing interaction effects between sex and chairperson, because both are dichotomous

variables. A one-way ANOVA was computed instead. Regarding the first three variables in Table 2 (chairperson, sex proportion, and management evaluation), the results for both tests of significance are consistent and for the other two they are not. Chairperson and sex proportion are more strongly associated with SRI among women than among men and explain a greater proportion of the variance in SRI among women than among men. With regard to management evaluation, neither test produced significant sex differences. With regard to committee influence, the correlations with sex are significantly different (Fischer's Z), but the slopes (Beta of the interaction variable) are not. In other words, the absolute amount of variance in SRI explained by committee influence on management is greater for men than for women. At the same time, the extent to which it affects SRI is equivalent for both sexes.

This apparent anomaly may be explained by the fact that, as reported at the beginning of the findings, the variance in influence is significantly greater among women than among men. Consequently, the same absolute amount of variance explained will entail a greater proportion of variance explained for men (where variance in SRI score is smaller to begin with) than for women. Worker evaluation, on the other hand, has a greater absolute affect on SRI of women than of men (significant Beta), although for reasons just explained there is no difference in the proportion of the variance explained.

Hypothesis 3, which predicted sex differences in the strength of the correlations with influence, was confirmed for three of the five variables: committee chairperson ($Z = 2.21$, $p < .01$), sex proportion ($Z = 3.80$, $p < .01$), and committee influence ($Z = 3.03$, $p < .01$), but not for worker evaluation or management valuation. The absolute contribution of worker evaluation to explaining variance in SRI is greater for women than for men.

Discussion

The major question in this study asked if there are sex differences in the variables associated with a union officer's belief that she or he is influential. The answer in general is affirmative, and there were more differences

than predicted. On the whole, however, the patterns of association appear to be more similar than different. Similarities were found for 6 of the 10 variables examined and differences for four.

The strong association of SRI with sex proportion for women supports Kanter's argument that sex proportion of a group is an important feature of the social context. As the proportion of women increases, it appears that they are treated and behave in a less stereotypical fashion and become more similar to men in their perceptions of their own influence. When we compared SRI scores of men and women, each of whom belonged to a group in which their respective sex comprised 30% or less of the membership, the difference was significant ($t = 3.46$, $p < .01$). The difference, however, disappeared when we compared men and women, who each comprised 70% of the membership of their group. The levelling occurred because of the increase of SRI scores among women, who comprised the majority of the group, whereas SRI scores of men remained stable. In other words, men's self-perception of influence appears to be more generalized over different contextual situations and less responsive to the sex proportion of the group. This was also the case with regard to being chairperson. Although the SRI scores of rank-and-file female members were lower than those of male members, the scores of female chairpersons were equal to those of male chairpersons. The difference in SRI scores of the chairpersons and others was significantly greater for women than for men, although in both cases the chairperson had a higher SRI score than did the rank-and-file member.

The findings regarding evaluational cues suggest less that women are more sensitive than men to social cues than that each may be more responsive to different social cues. In this study, committee influence was associated with SRI among men but not at all among women. A possible explanation for this difference is that, for women, being elected to a committee in itself provides a sense of potency and that women do not expect and are not expected to be part of an influential committee. Or when they are part of an influential committee, women's periph-

eral involvement in the committee results in nonidentification with its power accomplishments. According to this theory, we would expect that SRI would be strongly associated with committee influence among women who are the chairpersons of their committee, compared to rank-and-file female members. The chairperson is expected to display influence. Cultural norms define power as more appropriate for men than for women in general but also more for those in leadership roles than others. We would, therefore, expect significantly stronger correlations for female chairpersons than for rank and file but milder differences between male chairpersons and male rank and file.

The data, however, do not support this contention. The correlation between SRI and influence of committee on management for female chairpersons is $r = .30$, ($p = .12$; $n = 16$); for female rank and file, $r = .24$, ($p = .01$ $n = 86$); whereas for male chairpersons $r = .59$, ($p < .01$ $n = 39$) and for male rank and file $r = .34$, ($p < .01$ $n = 95$). In other words, for the women in this sample, playing a role high in requirement for leadership qualities does not intensify the relationship between self-perception of influence and perception of the influence of the group of which she is the formal leader. This is not the case for men. Among male chairpersons, SRI and committee influence are significantly more strongly associated than they are among rank-and-file members as well as among female chairpersons.

An underlying, but not tested or articulated, rationale of this analysis is that sense of influence may be caused by the variables found to be correlated with it. An alternative assumption is that experience, structure, and evaluation cues reflect rather than determine sense of influence. For example, women who feel more influential are more likely to get elected (and thus comprise a larger proportion of the membership), to be chosen as chairpersons, to get themselves sent to training courses, and to feel more valued by workers and management than women who believe they have little influence. It is possible, furthermore, and very likely, that these are not competing theories but that both are correct and that influence and other variables affect

each other. Further research is needed to examine these issues.

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