

Not For Women Only: Sex vs. Gender

In a literature review and survey-based research on the subject of gender differences in business ethics, McCabe, Ingram, and Dato-on (2006) make a distinction between sex, which is a dichotomous variable, and gender, which is multi-dimensional. Gender consists of biological sex, instrumental (masculine) and expressive (feminine) psychological traits, and gender-role attitudes.

Gender-role attitudes refer to a person's beliefs about which roles are appropriate for men and for women. Such attitudes govern the perception of appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities and exist along a continuum that ranges from egalitarian to traditional. People with egalitarian gender-role views believe that gender roles are not dictated by biological sex. People with traditional gender-role views believe that there are different, mutually exclusive roles appropriate for men and for women. For example, traditionalists would say that it is appropriate for women to care for children and for men to provide for the family.

In the survey research, instrumental and expressive traits were measured using the Personal Attributes Questionnaire developed by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1974; 1975). The instrumental scale contains self-assertive traits more associated with men than with women. The expressive scale consists of desirable, socially desirable traits more associated with women than with men.

Gender-role attitudes were measured using the Male-Female Relations Questionnaire developed by Spence, Helmreich, and Sawin (1980). Scores indicate the degree to which respondents' behaviors and preferences reflect conventional sex-based role expectations.

Finally, participants' ethical perceptions of various business situations were measured using the Ruch and Newstrom (1975) business ethics scale.

Statistical analysis of the survey results showed that, based on sex alone, there are no differences in the ethical perceptions of men and women. But, when the multi-dimensional variable gender is considered, the results show that expressive traits and egalitarian gender-role attitudes contribute to both men's and women's perception of unethical workplace behavior as being unethical.

Because expressive traits and egalitarian gender-role attitudes are associated with the likelihood of perceiving unethical workplace behaviors as unethical, the authors suggest that employers may want to consider these characteristics when hiring and rewarding employees. Further, if employers use egalitarian values as a standard for determining whether actions are unethical, the authors believe that organizational and societal cultures will demonstrate less corruption.

Reference:

McCabe, A. C., Ingram, R. and Dato-on, M. C. 2006. 'The business of ethics and gender', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 64, 101-116.

I did not access the other references cited above; these citations are copied from the primary reference: Ruch, W. A. and Newstrom, J. W. 1975. 'How ethical are we?', *Supervisory Management*, November, 18. Spence, J. T., Helmreich, R. L., and Stapp, J. 1974. 'The Personal Attributes Questionnaire: A measure of sex-role stereotypes and masculinity and femininity', *JSAS: Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 4 (43).

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- Spence, J. T., Helmreich, R. L., and Sawin, L. L. 1980. 'The Male-Female Relations Questionnaire: A self-report measure of sex role behaviors and preferences and their relationship to masculine and feminine personality traits, sex role attitudes, and other measures', *JSAS: Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10 (87), 1-35.