ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT STYLES OF MANAGERS: THE EFFECT OF GENDER ROLE ORIENTATIONS

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ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT STYLES OF MANAGERS: THE EFFECT OF GENDER ROLE ORIENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of gender role orientations on conflict styles used by superiors when in conflict with their subordinates. Previous studies examining differences in conflict styles based on biological sex have been contradictory and inconclusive. However, few studies have examined the conflict styles used based on gender role orientations. This study filled the gap using surveys collected via snowball sampling in order to collect self-reported data regarding the relationships between gender role orientations and conflict styles of superiors. The measures used included the BSRI to measure gender role orientations, and the ROCII-II to measure conflict styles in superior-subordinate relationships. This study found that men are more likely to use the dominating style of conflict and women are more likely to use integrating and avoiding. Masculine individuals were found to use dominating more often, androgynous individuals used integrating more often, and feminine individuals used avoiding more often. Gender role orientation was also found to be a significant predictor of the avoiding and obliging conflict styles.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Previous studies in the area of gender differences in conflict styles have been inconsistent, and a clear answer to whether these differences exist has not been established. Several studies have indicated differences between men and women in regard to conflict styles used (Bond & Vinacke, 1961; Hocker & Wilmot, 1985; Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983; Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann, 1977; Uesugi & Vinacke, 1963; Wheeless & Berryman-Fink, 1985), while many others stated that there are no differences (Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1984; Turner & Henzl, 1987; Gayle, 1991; Wu, 2009). The thrust of the proposed thesis will be to explore the idea that these contradictory results may be caused by the use of biological sex as the variable, rather than using gender role orientations. An individual’s biological sex may differ from his or her gender role orientation, which concerns how masculine, feminine, or androgynous a person is (Bem, 1981). Bem has shown that while biological sex is determined from birth and has two discrete categories, gender role orientations are more fluid and fall on a continuum from maleness to femaleness. Men do not always conform to highly masculine roles, and women do not always conform to highly feminine roles, which could be the cause of the inconsistencies in studies regarding biological sex.

Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) completed a study regarding the relationship between gender role orientations, organizational status, and conflict style. The
researchers stated that gender roles were significantly more indicative of conflict styles than biological sex, and they were also able to form relationships between conflict style use and gender roles. For example, they linked the integrating style to an androgynous gender role orientation, and the avoiding style was linked to a feminine gender role orientation. However, this study only considered relationships between peers, and did not examine superior-subordinate relationships. Studies regarding conflict styles in superior-subordinate relationships have been unclear, as several cite differences between men and women (Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983; Turner & Henzl, 1987; Wheeless & Berryman-Fink, 1985), while others found no differences between men and women (Renwick, 1977; Shockley-Zalabak, 1981). These conflicting findings could be a result of the heavy reliance on biological sex as a variable, rather than using gender role orientations. Furthermore, there are no existing studies that connect gender role orientations specifically with the conflict styles used by superiors in conflict with their subordinates. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining conflict styles of managers, and discovering whether relationships with gender role orientations exist.
Gender Role Orientations

Gender schema theory. Gender schema theory “proposes that sex typing results, in part, from the fact that the self-concept itself gets assimilated into the gender schema” (Bem, 1981, p. 355). In other words, children are socialized into gender roles based on what society considers to be appropriate for their biological sex. Children learn and internalize these attributes that society considers sex role appropriate, and link those attributes to themselves. Furthermore, Bem stated that these internalized attributes become a “motivational factor that prompts the individual to regulate his or her behavior so that it conforms to the culture’s definition of maleness and femaleness” (p. 355). The researcher further states that individuals who are sex-typed will display more gender-appropriate behaviors and avoid behavior that is gender-inappropriate more so than individuals who are non-gender typed.

Extensive research exists supporting the claim that gender roles are socially instilled in children from the moment they are born (Fisher-Thompson, 1993; Hughes & Seta, 2003; Turner, Gervai & Hinde, 1993; Barry, Bacon, & Child, 1957; Briggs & Pinola, 1979; Karre, 1976; Horan, Houser, & Cowan, 2007). Fisher-Thompson (1993) stated that parents purchase toys which are considered sex-appropriate for their children, which reinforces the internalization of culturally appropriate gender roles. Turner et al.
(1993) also concluded that children begin to recognize gender roles early, and stated that they continue to favor toys that are considered sex-appropriate. Furthermore, Briggs and Pinola (1979) found that children are socialized into gender roles by the way their parents communicate with them. Daughters tend to be nurtured and praised for kindness, but are punished for being dominant or aggressive. Sons are praised for being competitive and independent, but are scolded for showing signs of sympathy and weakness. The researchers further stated that this type of socialization by parents allows boys to become independent, but restricts girls into being dependent. Karre (1976) also concluded that children form gender roles from a young age, and stated that placing daughters in activities such as ballet, tea parties, doll houses, and dress up leads them to form domestic and passive traits. However, Horan, Houser, and Cowan (2007) stated that the sex of the parent is more influential than the sex of the child. The researchers found that mothers communicate similarly to both sons and daughters, and they communicate feminine attributes, like sympathy and compassion, to their children regardless of sex. However, the researchers specified that while fathers communicate similarly to sons and daughters, they only impose masculine traits onto their sons.

**Biological sex vs. gender role orientations.** Researchers across several disciplines have implemented gender role orientations as a variable rather than relying on biological sex (Wu, 2009; Brewer, Mitchell, & Weber, 2002; Bem, 1981; Furgerson & Rudnick, 2014). Bem (1981) stated the importance of no longer relying on biological sex as a prediction of behaviors and attributes:

> In short, human behaviors and personality attributes should cease to have gender, and society should stop projecting gender into situations irrelevant to genitalia. Were this to occur, we might then come to accept as a given the fact that we are
male or female as un-self-consciously as we now accept as a given the fact that
we are human. Our maleness or femaleness would be self-evident and non-
problematic; rarely would we be prompted to ponder it, to assert that it is true, to
fear that it might be in jeopardy, or to wish that it were otherwise. The gender
distinctions that remained would still be perceived—perhaps even cherished—but
they would not function as imperialistic schemata for organizing everything else,
and the artificial constraints of gender on the individual's unique blend of
temperament and behavior would be eliminated. The feminist prescription, then,
is not that the individual be androgynous, but that the society be aschematic (p.
363).

Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) demonstrated the importance of using gender role
orientations as a variable rather than biological sex in their study on the relationship
between conflict styles, gender role orientations, and organizational status. The
researchers concluded that gender roles demonstrated a relationship with chosen conflict
styles above and beyond biological sex, and stated that the move away from the
biological ‘male versus female’ variables in research is necessary. Furgerson and
Rudnick (2014) further illustrated this importance in their study regarding gender parity
in speech and debate. The researchers stated that previous research used the first names
of participants to classify them as biologically male or female. Furgerson and Rudnick
chose to use Bem’s Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) instead in order to identify gender role
orientations and gain a more inclusive view of gender.

As previously stated, research has indicated that men and women do face gender
stereotypes, and that gender role orientations are socialized from birth by the actions of
parents, peers, and society. However, even though these differences exist in previous
research, to say that all men are dominant and masculine, and all women are nurturing
and feminine, is not a fair assessment. A woman can be female according to her
biological sex, but have a gender role orientation that is masculine or androgynous. The
measure of a person’s maleness and femaleness, or one’s masculinity, femininity, or androgyny, paints a more accurate picture, rather than placing prescriptions or generalizations on individuals based solely on their biological sex. Based on the previous research in this area, it is evident that gender is not a static variable, but rather one that moves along a psychological spectrum from masculine to feminine without concern for biology. Research studies should take care to avoid assumptions based on sex, and use gender role orientations as a variable instead.

Conflict Styles
Conflict has been extensively studied from many angles, including language conflict (Janssens, 2015), intercultural conflict (Krone & Steimel, 2013), interpersonal conflict (Aloia & Solomon, 2015), organizational conflict (Erbert, 2014), and conflict styles (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). According to Honeycutt (2003), conflict is an unavoidable part of human life and interactions. Furthermore, the researcher states that “conflict is kept alive in everyday life as a result of imagined interactions which allow individuals to relive old conflicts and even construct new arguments” (p. 16). While this idea is important to all areas of conflict and communication, it is especially important to the field of organizational communication due to the nature of relationships within organizations. Organizational conflict is a “feature of organizational life where differences, oppositions, and contradictions are managed with varying degrees of success” (Erbert, 2014, p. 1). Because organizational conflict is defined as a feature of organizational life, conflict in organizations is inevitable, and managers spend approximately 20% of their time managing conflict (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976).
Since a large amount of time is spent in conflict management, researchers have developed several ways to describe conflict styles. Blake and Mouton (1964) originally decided upon two variables to aid in the development of conflict styles in superior-subordinate relationships. These two variables are concern for people and concern for production. From these variables, the researchers categorized five styles of conflict as forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, problem-solving, and compromising. Thomas (1976) began a reconceptualization of Blake and Mouton’s original styles into a taxonomy that can be applied to situations beyond superior-subordinate relationships. Thomas defined the two underlying dimensions as assertiveness and cooperativeness, and categorized the five styles of conflict as competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. However, Rahim and Bonoma (1979) later defined two basic dimensions of handling conflict as concern for self and concern for others. From these dimensions, Rahim (1983) derived five styles of conflict which individuals use. These styles include integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising.

Integrating, which consists of a high concern for self and others, “involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties” (Rahim & Buntzman, 1989, p. 197). Obliging, a low concern for self and high concern for others, focuses on diminishing differences in conflict and satisfying the concerns of the other party. Dominating, a high concern for self and low concern for others, “has been identified with win-lose orientations or with forcing behavior to win one’s position” (p. 197). Avoiding, a low concern for self and others, defines a person who withdraws from the conflict and chooses not to satisfy his or her own concerns or the other’s concerns. Compromising, an intermediate concern for
self and others, “involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision” (p. 197).

Factors contributing to chosen conflict style. Utley, Richardson, and Pilkington (1989) connected some personality traits to chosen conflict styles. The researchers concluded that “individuals who are relatively nurturant, enduring, achievement oriented, or who wish to ‘look good’ in the eyes of others report relatively frequent use of integrating in response to conflict” (p. 292). Furthermore, the researchers also found that participants who display a high need for dominance and understanding frequently use the dominating style of conflict. However, the researchers noted the importance of considering situational factors when examining conflict styles, especially with avoiding and obliging. Putnam and Wilson (1982) also concluded that situational factors are more influential in conflict management styles than personality factors. However, Terhune (1970) found the opposite and stated that personality effects are much greater in determining chosen conflict styles. Antonioni (1998) further attempted to relate personality to conflict styles by conducting a study regarding the big five personality traits as they relate to conflict styles. The researcher defined the big five traits as extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. In a sample of 120 managers, extraversion and conscientiousness had a positive relationship with the integrating style of conflict. Furthermore, agreeableness was positively related to avoiding, conscientiousness had a negative relationship with avoiding, and agreeableness and neuroticism were both negatively related to dominating. The inconsistencies in conclusions from this area of research about whether or not personality or situational factors determine the conflict style a person uses may indicate that other factors are
influencing conflict management styles, rather than situational and personality factors being the only indicators.

Conflict in Superior-Subordinate Relationships

As previously stated, managers spend a large amount of their time managing conflict (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). This fact has resulted in a large amount of research in the area of interpersonal conflict within organizations. Renwick (1975) found that most superior-subordinate disagreements resulted from administrative issues. For example, “differences and disagreements were most likely to occur over an organization’s policies and procedures and the planning of activities” (p. 452). The researcher further concluded that technical problems, like promotions, supervision, and direction, were also frequently cited as topics of conflict, while personal issues were rarely the topics of conflict. Renwick also concluded that “different perceptions of the same situation and differences in knowledge or factual material were cited as the most frequent reasons for superior-subordinate conflict” (p. 452), while personality differences were rarely a source of conflict. Pondy (1967) also found that superior-subordinate conflict frequently resulted from differences in goals and values between the organization and the subordinates. The researcher suggested conflict in these instances could be minimized by “using personal persuasion and group pressures to bring subordinate goals more closely into line with the legitimate goals of the organization” (p. 316).

Researchers have also studied the conflict styles as they relate to superior-subordinate relationships. More specifically, researchers have studied conflict in regard to effective and ineffective styles of superiors and subordinates, as well as styles relating to
positive and negative outcomes. Felts and Jorgensen (2008) found that from the perspective of both superiors and subordinates, collaborating is considered to be effective and leads to greater satisfaction, while avoiding leads to less-desired outcomes and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, compromising was also seen as effective by subordinates, and subordinates reported using mostly accommodating and collaborating with their supervisors. These findings align with those of Rahim and Buntzman (1989), which stated the use of collaboration by superiors led to a higher amount of cooperation from subordinates in following directions given by superiors. Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield (1996) also found collaborating to be the most effective style of conflict, and stated that collaborating is related to the highest amount of rewards for the subordinates.

Furthermore, the researchers concluded that forcing is related to the lowest amount of rewards for the subordinates. Richmond, Wagner, and McCroskey (1983) reported similar results regarding forcing, and concluded that the use of forcing by superiors led to communication anxiety in subordinates, as well as work dissatisfaction. Burke (1970) studied the conflict styles as they relate to subordinate outcomes, and stated that forcing and withdrawing were related to negative outcomes, while confronting and problem solving were highly related to positive outcomes. The researcher further concluded that smoothing was related to positive outcomes in most cases.

Knowing which conflict styles are effective in which situations is extremely important for both superiors and subordinates. Superiors must also be aware of the positive and negative outcomes that can result from choosing certain conflict styles. Furthermore, superiors and subordinates must be aware of which factors may influence the choice of conflict styles within organizational communication. As previously stated,
several researchers have considered personality traits and situational factors as predictors of chosen conflict styles (Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Terhune, 1970; Antonioni, 1998). However, these studies have led to inconsistencies as to whether or not personality traits and situational factors are strong predictors of chosen conflict styles. These inconclusive results indicate that other factors need to be explored to find connections with chosen conflict styles, which will allow superiors and subordinates to have a better understanding of the conflict styles that are used in organizational settings.

**Gender in superior-subordinate conflict.** There are several existing studies which have examined the influence of gender in superior-subordinate conflict situations. Early research on biological sex differences in organizational conflict cited differences between men and women, and stated that women are more likely to use coercive strategies and less likely to use rewarding strategies when dealing with subordinates (Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983). Previous research further examined perceptions of communication competence based on gender, and found that women were more likely to report female managers as competent communicators, and had more positive views of female managers than men (Wheeless & Berryman-Fink, 1985). Turner and Henzl (1987) stated that women were among the most assertive groups in their study, and found that women were more assertive with male subordinates than female subordinates.

While the studies mentioned found significant differences between chosen conflict styles of men and women in superior-subordinate relationships, other studies found no significant differences. Renwick (1977) concluded that “both male and female subordinates describe themselves as most likely to rely on compromise, confrontation,
and smoothing in that order to manage superior-subordinate conflict and that neither sex is likely to withdraw from such differences and disagreements” (p. 411). Shockley-Zalabak (1981) also found that male and female managers ranked conflict styles in the same order, indicating that there may be a management perspective of conflict instead of perspectives unique to males or females. However, Renwick did find significant differences in the way subordinates perceive male and female superiors to handle conflict. For example, “women described their supervisors as less assertive, specifically, as more likely to withdraw from conflicts, smooth over differences and compromise on issues of disagreement than did their male counterparts” (p. 412). Findings in the area of biological sex and conflict styles in superior-subordinate relationship have been diverse and inconclusive. This assortment of conclusions suggests that there are more variables at work in these relationships, and biological sex alone is not a strong enough predictor of conflict style chosen by a superior or subordinate.

Gender and Conflict

*Biological sex and conflict.* Studies regarding the differences in conflict management styles men and women use have produced varying outcomes. This literature review has taken a historical perspective on gender and conflict, and the inconsistencies in previous research highlights the importance of continued updates to this line of research. The fluidity of gender and the way society perceives gender is constantly changing, which could be why the research appears to be inconclusive. Early research concerning biological sex differences in interpersonal conflict argued that women are more likely to use accommodation strategies (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985), while men are more likely to use verbal aggression in conflicts (Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann,
The research of Bond and Vinacke (1961) and Uesugi and Vinacke (1963) also concluded that women are more likely to use an accommodative strategy in conflict and are more willing to compromise, while men are more likely to use an exploitative strategy and are mostly concerned about their own interests.

While many studies exist that cite clear differences in conflict management styles used by men and women, there are also several studies that have shown no significant differences between the conflict management styles men and women use in organizational conflict (Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1984; Turner & Henzl, 1987). Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1984) stated there was no support from their findings for the perspective that females choose conflict styles that have a larger concern for the relationship. Rather, males and females chose similar conflict styles. Turner and Henzl (1987) found that male and female participants in their study were consistently assertive, rather than the men showing more assertiveness than women. Gayle (1991) also concluded that sex is not the most accurate indicator of conflict style, and stated that “the influence of sex was miniscule compared to a host of unidentified factors” (p. 14).

More recent research on biological sex differences in conflict styles has also had fluctuating results. Anderson, Drewes, and Volk (2008) concluded that “women tend to use a broader range of conflict management styles” than men (p. 21). The researchers also found that women used the integrating and avoiding styles more often than men, and they used the dominating style at a similar level as men. However, the men mostly used the dominating style. The research by Smith et al. (2013) supports this notion by stating that “men, more than women, are somewhat beholden to rigid gendered behavioral displays, while women tend to draw from a wider behavioral repertoire” (p. 1173).
Rizaladdin and Zhang (2010) stated that men used more styles that were of a low concern for others, while women used more styles that were of a high concern for others. However, Ramos Salazar and Guerrero (2012) stated their findings had no support for sex differences in conflict styles. Wu (2009) also found no differences in the expected conflict management styles between the sexes.

The study of gender implications on conflict management style is lacking a clear answer as to whether or not women and men actually show differences in their selection of conflict management styles. However, this lack of clarity could be due to the heavy reliance on the use of college students in survey research, which has resulted in a narrow age population from which data has been collected. Furthermore, the idea that all men choose similar conflict styles, and all women choose similar conflict styles, is stereotypical in itself. Since individuals can be masculine, feminine, or androgynous, regardless of their biological sex, gender role orientations may be a better variable when measuring conflict style differences.

**Gender role orientations and conflict.** While the previous research in the area of biological sex differences in conflict styles is contradictory and inconclusive, few studies have examined the differences in conflict management styles based on gender role orientations. A possible reason for the contradictions in this research could be that a person’s biological sex does not determine his or her gender role orientation. A man who is biologically male may take on a more feminine or androgynous gender role orientation, leading him to not use the dominating and aggressive conflict styles that are stereotypical of men. While there do not seem to be clear differences or similarities when biological sex is the variable, there could be differences in conflict styles used between individuals.
with masculine, feminine, and androgynous gender role orientations. Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) illustrated this concept in their study regarding gender role orientations, organizational status, and conflict style. The researchers found that gender roles were significantly more indicative of conflict styles than biological sex. Specifically, the researchers stated that “a masculine gender role orientation was more likely to be associated with a dominating conflict style, a feminine orientation was more likely to be associated with the avoiding conflict management style, and an androgynous orientation with the integrating conflict management style” (p. 89).

These findings highlight the importance of moving away from a comparison of biological sex and using gender role orientations as a variable instead. However, few additional studies exist that research conflict styles based on gender role orientations. Furthermore, the study by Brewer et al. (2002) examined conflict styles based on conflict with peers, meaning that conflict with subordinates may produce different results. The varying results in previous research indicated that biological sex alone is not a strong enough predictor of chosen conflict style in superior-subordinate relationships. Several studies cited differences in the way men and women handle conflict in these relationships (Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983; Wheless & Berryman-Fink, 1985; Turner & Henzl, 1987), while others found no differences between men and women (Renwick, 1977; Shockley-Zalabak, 1981). Studies regarding gender and conflict style in superior-subordinate relationships are unclear and inconclusive. Stating that all female superiors use the same conflict style and all male superiors use the same conflict style is not a fair assessment. However, using gender role orientations as a variable may find better results. For example, individuals with a feminine gender role orientation may align with a
particular conflict style, regardless of their biological sex. As previously mentioned, Brewer et al. found a link between conflict style and gender role orientations, but they did not examine superior-subordinate relationships. Finding out whether there is a relationship between gender role orientations and conflict style in superior-subordinate relationship is an important next step. Thus, this study seeks to answer several research questions:

RQ1: What differences, if any, exist between the conflict management styles of female and male superiors?

RQ2: What differences, if any, exist between the conflict management styles and gender role orientations of superiors?

RQ3: Which variables of the gender role orientations and biological sexes, if any, are predictors of each of the five conflict management styles?
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Overview

This study was conducted using an online survey, and snowball sampling was used to solicit participants. The researcher posted the survey on Facebook and LinkedIn, and also e-mailed the link to numerous personal and professional contacts. The researcher asked others to share the survey on their own social media pages, and to also e-mail the survey to their personal and professional contacts. Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older, currently employed, and working in a position that requires direct supervision over subordinates. Participants responded to two separate screening questions regarding their employment status and their status as a supervisor/manager before they were able to proceed with the study. In this study, supervisors/managers were defined as those individuals who have employees that report directly to them. Participation in this study was voluntary and confidential, and no identifying data was collected.

Participants

A total of 198 survey responses were collected. A review of the data collected revealed that numerous individuals were not supervisors/managers based on their responses to the screening questions, and several more did not complete the entire survey. After accounting for these responses, a total of 140 responses were useable for statistical
analysis. The sample was 50% female (N = 70) and 50% male (N = 70). Two additional demographic questions asked for age and tenure as a supervisor/manager. There were 12 participants (6.1%) age 18-24, 38 participants (19.2%) age 25-34, 30 participants (15.2%) age 35-44, 30 participants (15.2%) age 45-54, 26 participants (13.1%) age 55-64, and 4 participants (2%) 65 and older. There were 13 participants (6.6%) who had been employed as a supervisor/manager for less than 1 year, 39 participants (19.7%) for 1-3 years, 24 participants (12.1%) for 4-6 years, 13 participants (6.6%) for 7-10 years, and 51 participants (25.8%) for 10 years or more.

Procedure

The participants were provided with an explanation about the survey, which included information about the requirements and their consent. By continuing the survey, participants verified their consent to participate, as well as verifying they were 18 years of age or older. The participants were then presented with a series of demographic questions. The first two were screening questions, which asked if the participants were currently employed, and if they were currently employed as a manager/supervisor. If they responded no to either screening question, they were automatically sent to the end of the survey. If they responded yes to both screening questions, they proceeded to answer two important demographic questions regarding biological and psychological gender. The participants were asked additional demographic questions about their age and tenure as a manager/supervisor at the end of the survey.

Measures

After filling out the first demographic section, the participants filled out two
separate sections of the survey regarding gender role orientations and conflict management styles. The scale used to measure gender role orientations was the short form version of Bem’s (1981) Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI). According to Campbell, Gillaspy, and Thompson (1997), the “short-form of the Bem yielded comparable or more reliable scores ($\alpha_m=.82$, $\alpha_f=.89$) for our data than did the 40-item long-form ($\alpha_m=.85$, $\alpha_f=.81$), especially on the feminine scale” (p. 122). A reliability analysis for this study found a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.823. The participants were asked to indicate how well they identify with 30 characteristics. Of the characteristics listed, 10 were masculine, 10 were feminine, and 10 were neutral. The participants used a 7-point Likert-type response option to indicate how they identify with the characteristics, 1 being never or almost never true and 7 being always or almost always true. This information was used to determine the participants’ gender role orientations, or how masculine, feminine, or androgynous they are.

The participants then filled out form B of Rahim’s Organizational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI-II) to determine their conflict styles. Rahim (1983) developed the ROCI-II to measure the five styles of handling conflict. The ROCI-II was “designed on the basis of lengthy and repeated feedback from the subjects and factor analyses of various sets of items” (p. 370). The original measure contains three separate forms to measure conflict with a superior, a subordinate, or a peer. Rahim concluded that the scales are empirically valid, and are appropriate for “the diagnosis of styles of handling interpersonal conflict among the members of an organization” (p. 375). Weider-Hatfield (1988) further concluded that the scales show adequate reliability, and stated the measure can accurately predict conflict behaviors. A reliability analysis for this study found a
Cronbach’s alpha of 0.80. Form B, which was used for this study, listed 35 items regarding conflict situations with subordinates. The participants were asked to answer each question on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This information was used to determine if the participants use integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, or compromising conflict styles.

Data Analysis

The data from the online survey was imported into SPSS. Descriptive statistics were run to determine the amount of useable responses, and to determine the participants’ age and tenure in their positions. The masculinity variable was then computed by taking the average of the masculine questions from the BSRI, and the femininity variable was computed by taking the average of the feminine questions from the BSRI. The androgyny variable, which ultimately determines if an individual is masculine, feminine, or androgynous, was computed by taking the femininity variable minus the masculinity variable, then multiplying by 2.322 (Bem, 1981). Participants were then coded as 1 – masculine, 2 – feminine, or 3 – androgynous. Individuals with an androgyny score of -1 and below were coded as masculine, androgyny scores between -1 and 1 were coded as androgynous, and androgyny scores of 1 and above were coded as feminine.

After the gender role variables were complete, the five conflict style variables were created. A variable was created for integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising. These variables were computed by adding the responses for the questions from each respective style. The participants were then given a score for each of the five conflict styles. Once the variables were complete, statistical tests were run to determine
relationships between biological sex, gender role orientation, and conflict style. These tests included independent t-tests, a one-way ANOVA, Bonferroni post-hoc test, and several multiple regressions. Reliability analyses were also run for each of the scales to determine the Cronbach’s alphas.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

RQ1 asked what differences, if any, exist between the conflict management styles of male and female superiors. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the five conflict styles and biological sex. The means differences are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for biological sex and conflict style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>29.4203, SD 2.76217</td>
<td>30.5143, SD 2.85269</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>18.9714, SD 4.67175</td>
<td>21.6522, SD 4.95517</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>22.4571, SD 3.77899</td>
<td>20.4000, SD 4.59489</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>24.3571, SD 2.84903</td>
<td>24.9571, SD 2.98030</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>0.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>25.0286, SD 3.72213</td>
<td>26.0429, SD 3.18254</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results indicated that there is a significant difference in the integrating conflict style between male (M = 29.42, SD = 2.76) and female supervisors (M = 30.51, SD = 2.85); t(137) = -2.3, p = 0.023. There is also a significant difference in the avoiding conflict style between male (M = 18.97, SD = 4.67) and female supervisors (M = 21.65, SD = 4.96); t(137) = -3.3, p < 0.001. The dominating style of conflict also indicated a significant difference between male (M = 22.46, SD = 3.78) and female supervisors (M = 20.4, SD = 4.59); t(138) = 2.9, p = 0.004. There was no significant difference in the obliging conflict style between male (M = 24.36, SD = 2.85) and female supervisors (M = 24.96, SD = 2.98); t(138) = -1.2, p = 0.225. There was also no significant difference in
the compromising style between male ($M = 25.03, SD = 3.72$) and female supervisors ($M = 26.04, SD = 3.18$); $t(138) = -1.7, p = 0.085$. These results indicated that female supervisors use integrating and avoiding more than male supervisors, male supervisors use dominating more than female supervisors, and there is no difference in the way male supervisors and female supervisors use obliging and compromising.

RQ2 asked what relationships, if any, exist between the gender role orientations and conflict management styles of superiors. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the five conflict styles across the three gender role orientations. The means differences scores are shown in table 2. A Bonferroni post-hoc test was also conducted in order to show which relationships were significant. Results indicated that there is a significant difference in the integrating conflict style across the three gender role orientations; $F(2, 136) = 3.5, p = 0.033$. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for androgynous individuals ($M = 30.47, SD = 2.53$) was significantly different than masculine individuals ($M = 29.07, SD = 2.55$) in reference to the integrating style of conflict. However, there is no significant difference between feminine individuals ($M = 30.34, SD = 3.31$) and masculine individuals. There is also no significant difference between feminine and androgynous individuals. These findings show that androgynous individuals use integrating more than masculine individuals.

Results indicated that there is a significant difference in the avoiding conflict style across the three gender role orientations; $F(2, 136) = 4.02, p = 0.020$. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for feminine individuals ($M = 22.05, SD = 4.36$) was significantly different than androgynous
individuals ($M = 19.39, SD = 4.97$). There was no significant difference between feminine and masculine individuals ($M = 19.67, SD = 5.27$), and no significant difference between masculine and androgynous individuals. These findings show that feminine individuals use avoiding significantly more than androgynous individuals.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Androgynous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>29.07</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>30.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>22.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>22.69</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>20.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>24.40</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>25.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>25.11</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>25.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results from the dominating style of conflict indicated that there is a significant difference across the three gender role orientations; $F(2, 137) = 4.24$, $p = 0.016$. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for masculine individuals ($M = 22.69, SD = 4.73$) was significantly different than feminine individuals ($M = 20.07, SD = 4.37$). There is no significant difference between masculine and androgynous individuals ($M = 21.46, SD = 3.58$), and no significant difference between feminine and androgynous individuals. These findings show that masculine individuals use dominating significantly more than feminine individuals. Results from the obliging style of conflict ($F(2, 137) = 2.48$, $p = 0.088$) indicated that there is no significant difference between masculine ($M = 24.4, SD = 3.2$), feminine ($M = 25.47, SD = 2.6$), and androgynous individuals ($M = 24.21, SD = 2.83$). Results from the compromising style of conflict ($F(2, 137) = 0.54$, $p = 0.586$) also indicated that there is no significant difference between masculine ($M = 25.11, SD = 4.05$), feminine ($M = 25.87, SD = 3.17$), and androgynous individuals ($M = 25.63, SD = 3.24$).
RQ3 asked which variables of the gender role orientations and biological sexes, if any, are predictors of each of the five conflict management styles. Several multiple regressions were conducted to see if the gender roles or biological sex were significant predictors of conflict style. Using the enter method, it was found that gender role orientation and biological sex explained a significant amount of the variance in the conflict style of avoiding ($F(2, 91) = 4.77, p = .01, R^2 = .10$). It was also found that gender role orientation and biological sex explained a significant amount of the variance in the obliging style of conflict ($F(2, 92) = 2.637, p = .05, R^2 = .06$). There were no significant predictors of the integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict. However, gender role orientation was found to be a significant predictor of the avoiding and obliging styles of conflict, which can be seen in table 3. These results differ from the RQ2 results due to the use of different statistical examinations. The relationship for these styles was positive, meaning that it is a female-oriented relationship. Biological sex and gender role orientation are significant when used together, but biological sex was not a significant predictor for any of the five styles of conflict when used on its own.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Style</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Partial Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>-.605</td>
<td>-0.063</td>
<td>.546</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bio Sex</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>2.254</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bio Sex</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>1.416</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>-.132</td>
<td>-1.256</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bio Sex</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>-1.549</td>
<td>-0.159</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td>1.988</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bio Sex</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.590</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>.982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bio Sex</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>1.355</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

Significant results were found for each of the three research questions. There were clear differences in certain conflict management styles between male and female supervisors for biological sex. There were also significant differences in the conflict styles used based on gender role orientation. However, biological sex was not a significant predictor of any of the conflict management styles, while gender role orientation was a significant predictor of two conflict styles.

Gender Differences in Conflict Styles

The first research question asked what differences exist in the conflict management styles of male and female superiors. The data collected shows that female supervisors use the integrating and avoiding styles of conflict significantly more than male supervisors, and male supervisors use the dominating style of conflict significantly more than female supervisors. These findings align with those of Anderson, Drewes, and Volk (2008) and Smith et al. (2013). Anderson, Drewes, and Volk found that women use integrating and avoiding more than men, and concluded that women use a larger variety of conflict styles than men. However, the researchers also found that men and women used the dominating style at a similar level, which is inconsistent with this study’s
findings. Smith et al. (2013) concluded that “men, more than women, are somewhat
beholden to rigid gendered behavioral displays, while women tend to draw from a wider
behavioral repertoire” (p. 1173). This finding aligns with the current study due to women
using a broader range of conflict styles.

The data collected also indicated that there is no significant difference between
male and female supervisors with the obliging and compromising conflict styles. This
finding aligns with that of Renwick (1977), who concluded that men and women are
equally likely to rely on compromising and smoothing conflict styles. This finding also
aligns with the numerous studies that found no significant differences in the way men and
women handle conflict (Gayle, 1991; Ramos, Salazar & Guerrero, 2012; Shockley-
Zalabak & Morley, 1984; Turner & Henzl, 1987; Wu, 2009). However, the findings in
the current study that show significant differences between men and women with
integrating, avoiding, and dominating are inconsistent with studies that found no
differences between men and women.

The findings of this study could result from many factors. Our society
consistently reinforces the notion that men that they should be dominant, competitive,
and strong-willed. The dominating style of conflict is defined as a “win-lose” scenario, or
a high concern for self and a low concern for others. The idea of being dominant and
competitive certainly fits in with the definition of the dominating style of conflict.
Perhaps the emphasis on this stereotype leads men to be more likely to use the
dominating style of conflict than women. In addition to the stereotypes placed on men,
our society also tells women that they should be agreeable, kind, and soft-spoken. The
integrating style is defined as a “win-win” scenario, or a high concern for self and others.
The avoiding style is defined as a “lose-lose” situation, or a low concern for self and others. Women who conform to the stereotype of being agreeable and kind could be more likely to engage in the integrating style of conflict in order to find the solution that best works for both parties. Women who choose to be more soft-spoken could use the avoiding style of conflict because they may wish to not engage in any type of conflict or confrontational situation. While the current study did find significant differences with certain conflict styles, the overall findings in this area are still contradictory and inconclusive. This further reinforces the notion that biological sex should not be the sole variable used in studies regarding conflict style, and other factors should be explored.

Gender Role Orientations and Conflict Styles
The second research question asked what relationships exist between the gender role orientations and conflict styles of superiors. The data collected shows that androgynous individuals use integrating the most, feminine individuals use avoiding the most, and masculine individuals use dominating the most. These findings align exactly with those of Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) when they stated that “a masculine gender role orientation was more likely to be associated with a dominating conflict style, a feminine orientation was more likely to be associated with the avoiding conflict management style, and an androgynous orientation with the integrating conflict management style” (p. 89). The study by Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber specifically looked at conflict with co-workers, while the current study looked at superior conflict with subordinates. The findings of the current study, paired with those of Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber,
emphasize that gender role orientations may have a stronger link with conflict styles, and there are many other factors at work other than biological sex alone.

Men and women do not all conform to the stereotypical gender roles of their biological sex, which is why gender role orientations are increasingly important in studies that involve gender. Using biological sex as the only variable does not account for the individuals from each gender who are non sex-typed. While our society expects and emphasizes particular traits for each gender, many individuals choose not to conform to these traits. Individuals who have a masculine gender role orientation are those who value traits like dominance, assertiveness, and independence. It certainly makes sense for individuals who display these traits to be more likely to use the dominating style of conflict, regardless of their biological sex. Similarly, individuals who value traits like tenderness, agreeableness, and friendliness may be more likely to use the avoiding style of conflict. Since the integrating style of conflict is considered a high concern for self and others, it would make sense that individuals who are androgynous, or value traits from masculinity and femininity equally, would be more likely to use the integrating style. The results of RQ1 may be an indication that many individuals conform to the stereotypes of their biological sex, but the results of RQ2 shows that the gender role orientation variable is able to give a more accurate reading that includes the individuals who are non sex-typed.

Predictors of Conflict Styles

The third research question asked what differences exist between biological sex and gender role orientation as a predictor of conflict styles. Perhaps the most impactful
finding of this study resulted from this research question. Biological sex was not a significant predictor of any of the five conflict styles. However, gender role orientation was a significant predictor of the avoiding and obliging conflict styles. The relationships between gender role orientation and the two conflict styles were positive, meaning femininity was a significant predictor of individuals using the avoiding and obliging style of conflict. The idea of feminine individuals using the avoiding and obliging styles of conflict more than masculine or androgynous individuals aligns with the previous statements regarding the traits valued by feminine individuals.

While gender role orientation was a significant predictor for only two of the conflict styles, it is still extremely important to note that biological sex was not a significant predictor for any conflict style. This is a strong indication that biological sex is not the best variable to use when studies involving gender are conducted. Studies can still use biological sex as a variable, but it is important to use gender role orientation as an additional variable in order to compare the results. The idea of all men being dominant, aggressive, and forceful, and all women being kind, agreeable, and tender is outdated and inaccurate. However, determining the gender role orientations allows for a more accurate reading on the traits individuals portray, and enables the different gender role orientations to be connected to other variables more accurately than simply using biological sex.

Limitations

While the findings of this study are certainly significant, there were several limitations. This study originally aimed for a total of 250 survey responses, but only 140
useable responses were collected. Using snowball sampling to gather participants who are managers or supervisors proved to be a difficult task. If future studies are conducted, different methods of gathering participants should be considered. Recruiting several organizations that are willing to send out the survey to all supervisors and managers with the organization would likely be more successful than relying on connections. Snowball sampling is also less reliable and representative than random sampling. Another study should be conducted using a random sample from diverse companies and corporations to see if similar results are found. Future studies should also collect a larger sample size to make sure the results are reliable. Since the current study did not use random sampling, there were issues with distributing the survey only to supervisors and managers. A large number of respondents answered “no” to being a supervisor or manager, which made it appear that there was a larger amount of useable responses than were actually collected. If random sampling is used in a future study, it would be much easier to make sure the survey was only distributed to supervisors/managers to avoid this issue.

Future Implications

Future studies should continue to explore the ways in which men and women handle conflict in superior-subordinate relationships. More importantly, future studies should continue to use both biological sex and gender role orientations as variables when studying other variables that have long received confusing or contradictory results when examining gender. Developing a deeper understanding about who is more likely to use different styles is extremely important to organizations and the people within. Realizing that there are not specific styles that each gender always uses, and that there are many
other factors contributing, will help people in organizations better communication in conflict situations. Future studies should also explore subordinate conflict with superiors and co-worker conflict. Continuing this line of research is important to be sure that stereotypes are avoided and a true understanding chosen conflict style is developed.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

BSRI

The 30 characteristics of the BSRI that were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale are outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Items</th>
<th>Feminine Items</th>
<th>Neutral Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Leadership ability</td>
<td>Understanding Sympathetic</td>
<td>Conscientious Unpredictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Eager to soothe hurt feelings</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong personality Forceful</td>
<td>Sensitive to needs of others</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to take a stand</td>
<td>Loves children</td>
<td>Secretive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Affectionate</td>
<td>Adaptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defends own beliefs</td>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>Conceited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to take risks</td>
<td>Warm Tender</td>
<td>Tactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B
ROCI-II

The 35 questions of form B of the ROCII-II that were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale are as follows:

Integrating:
- I try to investigate an issue with my subordinates to find a solution acceptable to use
- I try to integrate my ideas with those of my subordinates to come up with a decision jointly
- I try to work with my subordinates to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations
- I exchange accurate information with my subordinates to solve a problem together
- I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way
- I collaborate with my subordinates to come up with decisions acceptable to us
- I try to work with my subordinates for a proper understanding of a problem

Avoiding:
- I attempt to avoid being “put on the spot” and try to keep my conflict with my subordinates to myself
- I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my subordinates
- I try to stay away from disagreement with my subordinates
- I avoid an encounter with my subordinates
- I try to keep my disagreement with my subordinates to myself in order to avoid hard feelings
- I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my subordinate
- I usually hold on to my solution to a problem

Dominating
- I use my influence to get my ideas accepted
- I use my authority to make a decision in my favor
- I argue my case with my subordinates to show the merits of my position
- I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor
• I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue
• I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation

Obliging
• I generally try to satisfy the needs of my subordinates
• I usually accommodate the wishes of my subordinates
• I give in to the wishes of my subordinates
• I sometimes help my subordinates to make a decision in his/her favor
• I usually allow concessions to my subordinates
• I often go along with the suggestions of my subordinates
• I try to satisfy the expectations of my subordinates

Compromising
• I give some to get some
• I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse
• I win some and I lose some
• I try to play down our differences to reach a compromise
• I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks
• I negotiate with my subordinates so that a compromise can be reached
• I use “give and take” so that a compromise can be made
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

The following demographic questions were asked:

1. Are you currently employed?
   a. Yes
   b. No
2. Are you currently employed as a supervisor/manager? For this study, a supervisor/manager is defined as having employees who report directly to you.
   a. Yes
   b. No
3. How long have you been employed in a management position? _____________
4. What is your biological gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Prefer not to answer
5. Which gender do you identify as?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Prefer not to answer
6. What is your age?
   a. 18-24
   b. 25-34
   c. 35-44
   d. 45-54
   e. 55-64
   f. 65+
APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL