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Gender Differences in Responding to Conflict in the Workplace: Evidence from a Large Sample of Working Adults

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Abstract This investigation tested for gender effects in conflict behaviors by examining the ratings made by the bosses, peers, and subordinates of over 2,000 working adults participating in leadership development programs conducted in the U.S.; the effects of two confounding factors—age and organizational status—were controlled in all analyses. Consistent with predictions derived from a gender role analysis, women were rated as significantly more likely to engage in almost every constructive behavior. Also as predicted, men were rated as more likely to engage in active destructive behaviors. Rater gender had no effect for peers and subordinates, but female bosses made more positive ratings of targets than male bosses. In general, bosses rated targets somewhat higher on passive responses.

Keywords Gender roles · Gender differences · Conflict style · Workplace Conflict

Introduction

This paper tests the proposition that there are reliable gender differences in the way that adults respond to conflict in the workplace. Based on the well-known arguments of Bakan (1966) and Parsons and Bales (1955) regarding the cultural gender stereotypes involving agency and commu-

nion, we hypothesize that men and women will respond to workplace conflict in distinctive ways that are consistent with these cultural expectations. To evaluate these ideas we asked the bosses, peers, and subordinates of over 2,000 working adults in the United States to rate how frequently they engaged in a variety of conflict behaviors. Given the ubiquity of workplace conflict and its complex impact on morale and productivity (e.g., DeDreu et al. 2004; DeDreu and Weingart 2003; Simons and Peterson 2000), a better understanding of how gender affects this phenomenon has much value.

Do Gender Differences Exist?

Are there gender differences in the way people respond during interpersonal conflicts? It has long been hypothesized that there are—that men and women display behaviors during conflict that are consistent with broad gender role stereotypes (e.g., Rubin and Brown 1975). Thus, men have been hypothesized to act in a more forceful, dominating manner during conflict, consistent with their gender stereotype of being assertive and task-oriented, while women have been hypothesized to respond in more conciliatory ways, consistent with their gender stereotype of being communal and relationship-oriented (Bakan 1966; Parsons and Bales 1955; Vinacke et al. 1974). The logic of this position is that interpersonal conflict is a specific domain within which general cultural roles will be enacted.

However, evidence on this question is decidedly mixed. A number of investigations have found that women do report possessing conflict styles that reflect a greater concern for interpersonal relationships, and men report possessing styles reflecting a greater concern for task completion and success (e.g., Brahnham et al. 2005;

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Kilmann and Thomas 1977; Rahim 1983; Rosenthal and Hautaluoma 1988; Rubin and Brown 1975; Sadri and Rahmatian 2003; Thompson 1990). Holt and DeVore (2005), in a meta-analysis of studies employing measures of conflict style, also concluded that reliable gender differences exist for at least some of these styles.

In contrast to these findings, which are based heavily on studies carried out with student samples, investigations focusing specifically on gender differences in workplace conflict reveal another pattern. With only the occasional exception (e.g., Brewer et al. 2002; Thomas et al. 2008), studies of male and female managers routinely find no differences in conflict style (e.g., Chusmir and Mills 1989; Korabik et al. 1993; Renwick 1977; Shockley-Zalabak and Morley 1984; Watson and Hoffman 1996). Thus, at least with the U.S. samples that constitute this literature, it is much less clear that gender has any effect on conflict style in the workplace.

What Accounts for the Inconsistency?

Several factors may contribute to this pattern. First, and most importantly, workplace norms may minimize or even eliminate the effects of broader cultural expectations (Eagly et al. 2000; Wagner and Berger 1997). For example, men and women who occupy the same managerial role might not differ in their leadership behaviors because such roles often provide fairly clear guidelines about expected (and proscribed) behavior. As a result, behavior of men and women can be very similar because the prescriptions of the organizational role override the influence of gender roles. Consistent with this argument, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found in a meta-analysis of research on general leadership style that evidence for gender-stereotypic differences was strongest for investigations in which the participants were *not* actual managers (for example, laboratory studies), and weakest when participants were managers occupying similar roles. This is of course the same pattern found in studies of conflict behavior. Moreover, when conflict style has been studied by specifically comparing student and managerial samples within the same investigation, gender differences are found only for the students (Shockley-Zalabak and Morley 1984).

Second, the widespread use of self-report data in these investigations (e.g., Brewer et al. 2002; Chusmir and Mills 1989; Korabik et al. 1993; Renwick 1977; Shockley-Zalabak and Morley 1984) may contribute to the inconsistent pattern that has been found. Although useful in many ways, self-reports have clear limitations. For example, there is considerable evidence that people often lack insight into the reasons for their actions (Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Wilson 2002), and that self-reported behavior is often correlated only modestly with the reports of outside

observers (e.g., Conway and Huffcutt 1997; Funder and Colvin 1988). Thus, inaccurate recall may provide a source of “noise” in self-reports of conflict behavior that could contribute to inconsistent findings. In addition, to the extent that self-reports are colored by self-presentational concerns about “proper” modes of responding to conflict within one’s particular organization and role, such data may obscure any real gender differences that exist.

A third factor that may play a role is the use of relatively small sample sizes. In particular, if it is assumed that men and women occupying similar positions find their behavior constrained at least to some degree by role requirements and workplace norms, then the size of any gender differences that do exist may well be small. As a result, such differences may not emerge reliably when using the kind of sample sizes that have been typically employed. For example, in the six studies that found no gender differences among managers (Brewer et al. 2002; Chusmir and Mills 1989; Korabik et al. 1993; Renwick 1977; Shockley-Zalabak and Morley 1984; Watson and Hoffman 1996), the number of managers ranged from 65 to 201. In an absolute sense, these sample sizes are not “too small”; however, given the forces working against gender differences in the workplace, samples of this size may well lack the necessary statistical power. It is noteworthy that one recent study finding significant gender differences was based on a much larger sample. Thomas et al. (2008) used a sample of 2,400 working adults and found that men scored higher on a measure of competing, while women scored higher on compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

Are Gender Differences in Workplace Conflict Important?

As noted above, the forces operating to minimize gender differences in workplace conflict behavior may render any such differences modest in size; thus, it is legitimate to ask how important such differences really are. One way to approach this question is to consider the implications of specific conflict behaviors—and whether these implications are different for men and women. Considerable evidence suggests that women and men are often evaluated in significantly different ways for displaying the same behavior (e.g., Eagly et al. 1992; Jago and Vroom 1982).

More specifically, there is evidence that this kind of bias may also be found in responses to conflict. Butler and Geis (1990), for example, exposed naïve participants to male and female group leaders who resolved differing opinions in a group discussion by engaging in a collaborative, calm analysis of differing views—in short, by displaying a set of clearly constructive responses to conflict. Observers coded the facial expressions of the naïve participants during the discussion, and significantly greater levels of displeasure were evident toward female leaders. Thus, women and men

exhibiting the same constructive pattern of behavior evoked different responses in fellow group members—responses that were more negative for women. A similar pattern has been found for more destructive responses as well. Korabik et al. (1993) found that although women and men did not differ on their reported use of a dominating conflict style, subordinates exhibited differing responses to male and female managers who used such a style. The use of a dominating style was more strongly negatively correlated with perceptions of effectiveness for female than for male managers.

In short, it appears that women may run the risk of being negatively evaluated for their responses to conflict—not only competitive ones (Korabik et al. 1993) but cooperative ones as well (Butler and Geis 1990). Given this state of affairs, we believe that even relatively small gender differences may have substantial effects on the ways that male and female managers are viewed by their bosses, peers, and subordinates—and that there is consequently real value in this investigation.

The Current Investigation

Given the difficulty of demonstrating gender differences in workplace conflict behavior, it may appear somewhat quixotic to undertake another investigation of this question. However, for both theoretical and methodological reasons, we believe that such an effort is worthwhile. Theoretically, the presence of organizational role constraints need not entirely override the effect of gender roles. Even when there is pressure to conform to organizational roles, employees may have considerable flexibility in the particular way that they fulfill those roles (Podsakoff et al. 2000). Men and women come to the role with different sets of skills and traits (Eagly 1987; Eagly and Johnson 1990) that allow them to fulfill role requirements in discriminable ways. Deeply ingrained gender roles may in fact provide a kind of “implicit, background identity” in the workplace (Ridgeway 2001, p. 644). Under the right circumstances, then, it may yet be possible to demonstrate gender differences in workplace conflict behavior.

In the present investigation we take several steps to provide the fullest opportunity for such differences to emerge. First, as in the Thomas et al. (2008) study, we employ a large sample of working adults so as to provide sufficient statistical power to detect even relatively small differences. Second, rather than relying on self-reports, we elicited ratings of conflict behavior from a variety of different workplace observers: bosses, peers, and subordinates. Such ratings are certainly not perfect measures of conflict behavior; like self-reports they also rely on the perceptions of fallible observers. However, unlike self-reports they provide impressions of the target’s behavior

from a variety of observers occupying three different organizational “vantage points”; thus, the strongest evidence for gender differences will be when all rater groups report a consistent difference.

Employing three rater groups provides another advantage as well; it allows us to examine the possibility that individuals will employ somewhat different conflict behaviors with each group. For example, considerable evidence suggests that people occupying higher status positions in an organization are generally more likely to use active forms of conflict resolution such as competing and collaborating, and less likely to employ more passive strategies such as avoiding and accommodating (e.g., Brewer et al. 2002; Chusmir and Mills 1989; Thomas et al. 2008). Having three rater groups allows us to determine whether target participants will display a similar pattern: using more active approaches with their subordinates and more passive ones with their superiors. At least one investigation, using South African bank employees, has reported such a pattern (Slabbert 2004).

Third, the use of multiple raters allows us to examine whether or not the gender of the *raters* will influence their evaluations of the target. Early reviews of this question suggested that rater gender had little effect on performance evaluations (Landy and Farr 1980). However, later research has often found that women provide more positive evaluations (Benedict and Levine 1988; Scherer et al. 1991; Shore and Thornton 1986). Although the explanation for this pattern is not entirely clear, it suggests that female raters in this investigation might also display a “positivity” bias and generally rate targets as more constructive and less destructive than male raters.

Fourth, in this investigation we measure conflict behavior in a slightly different way than most previous investigations. The dominant approach for some time in conflict research has been to assess five broad conflict styles: competitive, cooperative, avoidant, accommodating, and compromising (e.g., Rahim 1983; Thomas and Kilmann 1974). However, in this investigation we employed a behavior-based measure: the Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP; Davis et al. 2004). Rather than measuring preferences for five broad styles, the CDP assesses 15 specific behaviors falling into four domains: *active constructive* (representing effortful responses that directly address the conflict itself in a productive way), *passive constructive* (responses that are constructive, but involve little overt effort), *active destructive* (effortful responses that make the conflict worse), and *passive destructive* (non-helpful responses that require little overt effort). Descriptions of the 15 scales appear in Table 1. Although some of these behaviors map onto one of the five styles (e.g., the CDP scale “winning at all costs” and the “competitive” style), not all of them do (e.g., the CDP scale “self-criticizing”).

Table 1 CDP Responses to Conflict scale definitions.

| Response category | Conflict behavior and definition |
|----------------------|---|
| Active constructive | Perspective taking: Putting one's self in the other person's position, trying to understand his/her point of view. Creating solutions: Brainstorming, asking questions, working to create solutions. Expressing emotions: Talking honestly, expressing one's thoughts and feelings. Reaching out: Making the first move, trying to make amends. |
| Passive constructive | Reflective thinking: Analyzing the situation, weighing pros and cons, thinking about the best response. Delay responding: Waiting, letting matters settle down, taking a "time out" when emotions run high. Adapting: Staying flexible, trying to make the best of the situation. |
| Active destructive | Winning at all costs: Arguing vigorously for one's own position, striving to win at all costs. Displaying anger: Expressing anger, raising one's voice, using harsh words. Demeaning others: Laughing at the other person, ridiculing his/her ideas, using sarcasm. Retaliating: Obstructing the other person, getting revenge later. |
| Passive destructive | Avoiding: Avoiding or ignoring the other person, acting distant and aloof. Yielding: Giving in or accommodating the other person to prevent further conflict. Hiding emotions: Concealing one's true emotions even though feeling upset. Self-criticizing: Replaying the incident over in one's mind, criticizing one's self for not handling it better. |

Finally, in this investigation we control for two variables that might influence conflict behaviors and also be associated with gender: age, and status within the organization. Several investigations have recently found that older adults are less likely to respond to conflict in ways that are actively destructive (Birditt and Fingerman 2005; Birditt et al. 2005), and are more likely to act in a passive, avoidant fashion (Birditt and Fingerman 2005; Blanchard-Fields et al. 1995). According to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen 1998), such a pattern results from a heightened interest in maintaining smooth social relationships that comes with age. Thus, to the degree that gender and age are related in this investigation, apparent gender effects may result from the influence of age. In addition, status within an organization can influence behavioral responses to conflict (e.g., Holt and DeVore 2005). Evidence suggests that higher status individuals are more likely to engage in problem solving and forceful assertion, and less likely to plead with or placate the other party (Holt and DeVore 2005; Watson and Hoffman 1996). Consequently, in all of the multivariate and univariate analyses reported here, we control for the target person's age and status within the organization.

Predictions

Based on the belief that gender roles can influence behavior even in the face of role constraints and organizational norms, we predict that men and women, in general, will differ on each of the four behavioral categories assessed by the CDP. However, in keeping with the notion that general styles may be enacted through a variety of specific behaviors, we recognize

that even for behaviors in the same category the size of these differences is likely to vary.

1. Consistent with their cultural role as communal and other-oriented (Bakan 1966; Parsons and Bales 1955), women will be more likely to exhibit behaviors that reflect concern for the other party. Thus, we expect women to display higher levels of the active constructive behaviors *perspective taking*, *creating solutions*, *expressing emotions*, and *reaching out*.
2. Consistent with their cultural role as communal and other-oriented, women will also display higher levels of the passive constructive behaviors *reflective thinking*, *delay responding*, and *adapting*.
3. Consistent with their cultural role as agentic and task-oriented (Bakan 1966; Parsons and Bales 1955), men will be more likely to exhibit behaviors that reflect a desire to prevail over the other party. Thus, we expect men to display higher levels of the active destructive behaviors *winning at all cost*, *displaying anger*, *demeaning others*, and *retaliating*.
4. Consistent with their cultural role as communal and other-oriented, women in general will be more likely to engage in behaviors that avoid or minimize overt conflict. Thus, we expect women to display higher levels of the passive-destructive behaviors *avoiding*, *yielding*, and *self-criticizing*. However, given the strong countervailing socialization pressures for males to not express emotions (e.g., Wester et al. 2002; Wong and Rochlen 2005), we offer no prediction for *hiding emotions*.
5. Given the theoretical and empirical support for the notion that people in organizations use more active and direct influence strategies when they are in higher status

positions and more indirect strategies when they are in lower status positions (e.g., Holt and Devore 2005; Thomas et al. 2008), we expect to find rater effects. Specifically, we expect subordinates to report that the targets engage in higher levels of the more active behaviors (both constructive and destructive) and for bosses to report that the targets engage in higher levels of passive behaviors (both constructive and destructive).

6. Given the empirical evidence that women provide somewhat more positive performance evaluations (e.g., Scherer et al. 1991), we expect that female bosses, peers, and direct reports will rate the targets generally higher on constructive behaviors and lower on destructive behaviors.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The initial pool of target participants in this research consisted of 3,793 working adults (2,204 men, 1,589 women). Between 2000 and 2003, these individuals took part in executive training programs carried out by affiliates of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), a nonprofit educational institution with the mission of increasing the leadership capabilities of individuals and organizations. One of those affiliates, the Leadership Development Institute (LDI) of Eckerd College, carried out the lion's share of these programs, and accounted for over 75% of the participants. As a rule, individuals participated in a program at the request of their organizations, as part of the organizations' commitment to the training and development of their employees; CCL is perhaps the best-known training organization for this purpose in the U.S. A program typically lasted several days, and consisted of group discussions, learning activities, and feedback sessions in which participants were told the results of various instruments they had taken.

Prior to attending a program, the target participants were required to have their bosses, peers, and direct reports (that is, subordinates who report directly to the target participants) evaluate them. Participants were typically asked to have four peers and four direct reports complete the evaluations. In addition to providing a more complete picture of how the target was perceived, using multiple raters within a category also helped ensure the anonymity of the peers and direct reports. In contrast, since most targets had only one boss, the bosses' responses were typically not anonymous. Eighty-eight percent of the initial target participants (3,342) had at least one boss complete the instrument; 97% (3,661) had at least one peer complete it; and 79% (3,012) had at least one direct report do so.

For this paper, we used data regarding the 2,211 participants (1,385 men; 826 women) who had been evaluated by at least one person in each rater category, and who had both male and female raters in the both the peer and direct report categories. All participants' responses became part of an ongoing database devoted to this conflict measure; it is that database that is examined in this paper. A previous investigation (Davis et al. 2004) employed a subset of these data ($N=538$), but that investigation dealt with gender differences only tangentially. No published work has yet examined the issue of gender differences with the full sample employed here.

Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 86, with a mean of 42.7. The sample was overwhelmingly Caucasian (83%), with small numbers of African-Americans (5%), Hispanics (4%), Asians (3%), and Native Americans (1%); four percent provided no racial information. The majority of the sample (71%) described themselves as middle or upper-middle managers, with roughly equal numbers reporting higher or lower levels within their organizations.

Measures

All programs included the Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP), a 63-item scale that measures 15 different behavioral responses that an individual might display during a conflict episode. These 15 behaviors fall into four general domains: *active constructive* (perspective taking, creating solutions, expressing emotions, reaching out); *passive constructive* (reflective thinking, delay responding, adapting); *active destructive* (winning at all costs, displaying anger, demeaning other, retaliating); and *passive destructive* (avoiding, yielding, hiding emotions, self-criticizing). For each item, target participants used a five point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *almost always*) to indicate how they "usually respond before, during, and after interpersonal conflicts that occur in your life". Observers were asked to answer with regard to how the target "usually responds before, during, and after interpersonal conflicts that occur". (See Table 1)

Although target-participants completed the conflict measure, we only report analyses of the ratings made by bosses, peers, and subordinates. The reason for this lies in an ambiguity about the meaning of the targets' self-ratings. Because the instructions of the instrument asked targets to indicate their typical behavior during conflicts "that occur in your life", there is no guarantee that targets are answering about workplace conflict. Thus, comparing target self-ratings and those made by workplace raters is problematic; they may be answering about completely different situations and behaviors.

Previous research has revealed that the pattern of correlations between the CDP scales and measures of the

five broad “conflict styles” (e.g., Kilmann and Thomas 1977) are as expected (Davis et al. 2004), and associations between CDP scale scores and measures of hostility, coping, and emotional regulation (Capobianco et al. 2001; Kraus et al. 2001) also indicate that the CDP scales are tapping their intended dimensions. The internal reliability estimates (Cronbach’s alpha) for each scale and each rater group appear in Table 2.

For each of the CDP scales, three variables were initially computed for each target: mean boss rating, mean peer rating, and mean direct report rating. Thus, for example, all the ratings made by a given target’s peers on the dimension of perspective taking were averaged to produce the mean peer rating for that behavior. The number of raters in each category ranged from 1 to 14 for peers ($M=4.23$), from 1 to 11 for direct reports ($M=3.47$), and from 1 to 4 for bosses ($M=1.16$). In addition, for some analyses variables were computed separately for male and female raters. Thus, for each CDP scale we also computed the mean score for male peers, female peers, male direct reports, and female direct reports. Because so few participants had multiple bosses, no such scores were calculated for this rater category.

In addition to the CDP itself, primary participants also completed a background information sheet that included items assessing sex, age, and level within the organization (hourly employee; first level; middle level; upper middle; executive; top level). Analyses revealed no significant gender difference for age ($t<1$) although men tended to be slightly older, and a significant gender difference for organizational status, $t(2,112) = -3.26$, $p<.001$. Women tended to occupy slightly lower positions in their organizations.

Rater Agreement

Although the ratings by bosses, peers, and direct reports will be addressed in detail in the analyses that follow, it is useful to directly examine agreement within and between rater categories (Table 3). Following the strategy of Funder (Funder and Colvin 1988; Funder et al. 1995), we measured rater agreement in two ways. For agreement within a category, we calculated intra-class correlations. Given the wide variation in the number of raters, we based these analyses on participants who had at least two raters in a category, and the intra-class correlations in the table are based on the ratings of two randomly selected raters per participant. For agreement between categories, we created a mean score (for each behavior for each target participant) based on all the raters in each category, and then calculated Pearson correlation coefficients between the scores in each category.

As Table 3 reveals, all correlations were positive and significant, with somewhat higher associations found for the active destructive behaviors. In addition, slightly lower agreement was found between the two rater groups most discrepant from one another in status (bosses and direct reports). These values are as high as or higher than those typically found in applied research using multi-rater instruments (Conway and Huffcutt 1997), and are also comparable to the inter-rater agreement typically found regarding traits possessed by a target (Funder and Colvin 1988; Funder et al. 1995). These associations therefore suggest that a substantial degree of agreement exists among observer groups regarding the frequency with which the target individuals display specific conflict behaviors. (We also examined the degree of agreement between rater

Table 2 Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for all conflict scales and rater groups.

| | Self-rating | Bosses | Peers | Direct reports |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|-------|----------------|
| Perspective taking | .88 | .89 | .88 | .87 |
| Creating solutions | .67 | .79 | .79 | .80 |
| Expressing emotions | .85 | .87 | .86 | .84 |
| Reaching out | .78 | .85 | .85 | .85 |
| Reflective thinking | .77 | .86 | .86 | .87 |
| Delay responding | .64 | .69 | .68 | .67 |
| Adapting | .71 | .85 | .84 | .82 |
| Winning at all costs | .65 | .74 | .76 | .71 |
| Display anger | .77 | .83 | .83 | .82 |
| Demean other | .73 | .82 | .82 | .81 |
| Retaliating | .79 | .86 | .86 | .86 |
| Avoiding | .76 | .79 | .81 | .80 |
| Yielding | .84 | .83 | .84 | .85 |
| Hiding emotions | .68 | .69 | .67 | .63 |
| Self-criticizing | .78 | .71 | .70 | .64 |
| Mean alpha | .75 | .80 | .80 | .79 |

Table 3 Rater agreement within categories (intra-class correlations) and between categories (Pearson correlations).

| | Within category | | Between categories | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| | Peers (<i>N</i> =2,378) | Direct reports (<i>N</i> =2,211) | Boss-peers (<i>N</i> =2,513) | Boss-direct reports (<i>N</i> =2,513) | Peers-direct reports (<i>N</i> =2,513) |
| Active constructive | | | | | |
| Perspective taking | .46** | .43** | .40** | .33** | .41** |
| Creating solutions | .35** | .40** | .35** | .26** | .34** |
| Expressing emotions | .32** | .38** | .27** | .20** | .28** |
| Reaching out | .38** | .36** | .35** | .24** | .32** |
| Passive constructive | | | | | |
| Reflective thinking | .44** | .46** | .41** | .35** | .40** |
| Delay responding | .29** | .31** | .26** | .21** | .28** |
| Adapting | .43** | .42** | .39** | .31** | .38** |
| Active destructive | | | | | |
| Winning at all costs | .47** | .42** | .43** | .35** | .44** |
| Displaying anger | .51** | .57** | .49** | .43** | .56** |
| Demeaning others | .43** | .40** | .42** | .31** | .39** |
| Retaliating | .39** | .35** | .32** | .24** | .33** |
| Passive destructive | | | | | |
| Avoiding | .28** | .27** | .28** | .19** | .27** |
| Yielding | .29** | .32** | .28** | .20** | .28** |
| Hiding emotions | .29** | .27** | .28** | .20** | .29** |
| Self-criticizing | .25** | .30** | .24** | .21** | .24** |
| Mean <i>r</i> | .37 | .38 | .34 | .27 | .35 |

** $p < .001$

categories separately for male and female targets. The correlations were highly similar, indicating that raters had very comparable levels of agreement regardless of target gender.)

Results

In order to evaluate our hypotheses, we carried out two different types of analyses. First, to take fullest advantage of our large sample and multiple-rater design, we employed mixed-model analyses in which rater group served as a within-subjects variable. In these analyses we expected to find certain rater main effects (Hypothesis 5). In addition, we expected to find a number of gender main effects (Hypotheses 1–4). We were also interested in the discovering the degree to which such effects are qualified by Gender x Rater interactions. The presence (or absence) of such interactions will allow us to determine how consistent across raters any gender effects may be.

Second, we then carried out separate analyses for each rater group (bosses, peers, and subordinates) in which the

gender of the rater was included. The reason that we did not include rater gender in the first set of analyses is that so few target individuals had both male and female raters for *all* of the three categories; including rater gender in the first analyses would have reduced the sample size from over 2,000 to only 115. This second set of analyses will allow us to evaluate the possibility of rater gender effects (Hypothesis 6). Finally, in all of the multivariate and univariate analyses reported here, we control for age and organizational status as well. The mean scores of men and women on the 15 behaviors appear in Table 4.

Analyses Using Rater Group as Within-Subject Variable

Active Constructive Responses

A 2 (Gender) × 3 (Rater) × 4 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the active constructive responses to conflict, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Behavior, $F(3, 2119) = 62.23$, $p < .001$, Rater, $F(2, 2120) = 3.40$, $p < .05$, and Gender $F(1, 2121) = 25.30$, $p < .001$. In addition, the Gender x Behavior interaction was

Table 4 Effect of gender on conflict behaviors (univariate analyses). Values in boldface indicate a significant univariate main effect for gender.

| | Gender of the primary participant | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | Male | Female | Effect size (<i>d</i>) |
| Active constructive | | | |
| Perspective taking | | | |
| Boss | 3.23 | 3.38 | .25 |
| Peer | 3.19 | 3.30 | |
| Subordinate | 3.25 | 3.34 | |
| Creating solutions | | | |
| Boss | 3.62 | 3.70 | .11 |
| Peer | 3.65 | 3.70 | |
| Subordinate | 3.79 | 3.80 | |
| Expressing emotions | | | |
| Boss | 3.43 | 3.51 | .24 |
| Peer | 3.43 | 3.52 | |
| Subordinate | 3.47 | 3.59 | |
| Reaching out | | | |
| Boss | 3.37 | 3.45 | .16 |
| Peer | 3.29 | 3.38 | |
| Subordinate | 3.42 | 3.48 | |
| Passive constructive | | | |
| Reflective thinking | | | |
| Boss | 3.79 | 3.86 | .06 |
| Peer | 3.76 | 3.78 | |
| Subordinate | 3.90 | 3.90 | |
| Delay responding | | | |
| Boss | 3.03 | 3.11 | .15 |
| Peer | 2.98 | 3.03 | |
| Subordinate | 2.98 | 3.01 | |
| Adapting | | | |
| Boss | 3.65 | 3.75 | .14 |
| Peer | 3.60 | 3.64 | |
| Subordinate | 3.70 | 3.75 | |
| Active destructive | | | |
| Winning at all costs | | | |
| Boss | 2.80 | 2.75 | .09 |
| Peer | 2.88 | 2.82 | |
| Subordinate | 2.86 | 2.82 | |
| Display anger | | | |
| Boss | 1.90 | 1.81 | .10 |
| Peer | 1.94 | 1.89 | |
| Subordinate | 1.85 | 1.83 | |
| Demean others | | | |
| Boss | 1.72 | 1.64 | .14 |
| Peer | 1.77 | 1.70 | |
| Subordinate | 1.66 | 1.62 | |
| Retaliate | | | |
| Boss | 1.55 | 1.48 | |

Table 4 (continued).

| | Gender of the primary participant | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | Male | Female | Effect size (<i>d</i>) |
| Peer | 1.66 | 1.61 | .09 |
| Subordinate | 1.58 | 1.57 | |
| Passive destructive | | | |
| Avoiding | | | |
| Boss | 2.08 | 2.12 | .10 |
| Peer | 2.07 | 2.10 | |
| Subordinate | 1.93 | 1.97 | |
| Yielding | | | |
| Boss | 2.34 | 2.33 | .03 |
| Peer | 2.28 | 2.27 | |
| Subordinate | 2.14 | 2.13 | |
| Hiding emotions | | | |
| Boss | 2.67 | 2.67 | .05 |
| Peer | 2.64 | 2.62 | |
| Subordinate | 2.57 | 2.57 | |
| Self-criticizing | | | |
| Boss | 2.81 | 2.88 | .20 |
| Peer | 2.69 | 2.78 | |
| Subordinate | 2.56 | 2.61 | |

Ratings were made on a 1 (never) to 5 (almost always) rating scale

significant $F(3, 2119)=14.65$, $p<.001$. Finally, significant multivariate covariate effects were found for age, $F(1, 2121)=7.39$, $p<.01$, and organizational status, $F(1, 2121)=4.23$, $p<.05$. Older adults, and those with higher organizational status, were seen as slightly more likely to employ active constructive responses. Given these significant multivariate findings, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) ANCOVAs.

We had hypothesized that women would be more likely to engage in active constructive responses to conflict (Hypothesis 1). As predicted, significant gender effects were found for all four behaviors: Perspective Taking, $F(1, 2128)=31.09$, $p<.001$; Creating Solutions, $F(1, 2144)=6.09$, $p<.05$; Expressing Emotions, $F(1, 2141)=28.85$, $p<.001$; Reaching Out, $F(1, 2132)=12.98$, $p<.001$. In each case, women were rated as more likely to engage in the active constructive behaviors. Significant rater effects were also found for the behaviors of Perspective Taking, $F(2, 2127)=3.47$, $p<.05$, Creating Solutions, $F(1, 2143)=3.08$, $p<.05$, and Reaching Out, $F(1, 2131)=4.80$, $p<.01$. As expected (Hypothesis 5), subordinates provided the highest ratings for Creating Solutions and Reaching Out; however, the rater effect for Perspective Taking was due to peers providing the lower ratings than the other two groups. There were no significant Gender \times Rater interactions.

Passive Constructive Responses

A 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) \times 3 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the passive constructive responses to conflict, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Gender, $F(1, 2138)=8.06$, $p<.01$, Rater, $F(2, 2137)=4.93$, $p<.01$, and Behavior, $F(2, 2137)=206.43$, $p<.001$. There was also a significant Rater \times Behavior interaction, $F(4, 2135)=3.50$, $p<.01$. Finally, a significant multivariate effect was found for the age covariate, $F(1, 2138)=10.10$, $p<.01$, but not for organizational status. Older respondents were more likely to employ passive constructive responses to conflict. Given these significant multivariate findings, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) ANCOVAs.

We had hypothesized that women would be more likely to exhibit passive constructive responses (Hypothesis 2). This pattern emerged for two of the three behaviors: Delay Responding, $F(1, 2139)=11.56$, $p<.001$, and Adapting, $F(1, 2140)=9.64$, $p<.01$; as predicted, women were described as more likely to delay responding and to adapt. Significant rater effects were found for all three behaviors: Reflective Thinking, $F(2, 2144)=6.32$, $p<.01$; Delay Responding, $F(2, 2138)=3.37$, $p<.05$; and Adapting, $F(2, 2139)=4.00$, $p<.05$. As predicted (Hypothesis 5), bosses rated the targets highest on Delay Responding; however, for the other two passive constructive behaviors the highest ratings were made by subordinates, and the lowest ratings by peers. There were no significant Gender \times Rater interactions.

Active Destructive Responses

A 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) \times 4 (Behavior) mixed models MANCOVA was carried out on the active destructive responses to conflict, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Gender, $F(1, 2138)=7.49$, $p<.01$, Rater, $F(2, 2137)=6.31$, $p<.01$, and Behavior, $F(3, 2136)=396.30$, $p<.001$. In addition, the Behavior \times Rater interaction was significant, $F(6, 2133)=2.47$, $p<.05$. Finally, marginally significant multivariate effects were found for the organizational status covariate, $F(1, 2138)=7.49$, $p<.10$, and for age, $F(1, 2138)=3.76$, $p<.06$. Those higher in status and age were slightly more likely to employ active destructive behaviors. Given these significant multivariate findings, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) ANCOVAs.

We had hypothesized that men would be more likely to display active destructive responses to conflict (Hypothesis 3). As predicted, there were significant gender effects for all four behaviors: Winning, $F(1, 2142)=4.35$, $p<.05$;

Displaying Anger, $F(1, 2142)=5.11$, $p<.05$; Demeaning Others, $F(1, 2143)=10.38$, $p<.001$; and Retaliating, $F(1, 2139)=4.08$, $p<.05$. In each case, males were rated as more likely to engage in active destructive responding, as predicted. Significant rater effects were found for Demeaning Others, $F(2, 2142)=9.25$, $p<.001$, Retaliating, $F(2, 2138)=7.86$, $p<.001$, and a marginal effect for Displaying Anger, $F(2, 2141)=2.75$, $p<.07$. However, contrary to Hypothesis 5, it was peers—not subordinates—who rated the targets highest on these behaviors. Only one Rater \times Gender interaction was significant, for Displaying Anger, $F(2, 2141)=4.00$, $p<.05$; the gender difference on this behavior held for bosses and peers, but not for subordinates.

Passive Destructive Responses

A 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) \times 4 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the passive destructive responses to conflict, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Behavior, $F(3, 2075)=123.19$, $p<.001$, and Rater, $F(2, 2076)=6.92$, $p<.001$. In addition, both the Behavior \times Gender, $F(3, 2075)=7.77$, $p<.001$, and Behavior \times Rater, $F(6, 2072)=2.90$, $p<.01$ interactions were significant. Finally, a significant multivariate effect was found for the organizational status covariate, $F(1, 2077)=3.89$, $p<.05$. Those with higher organizational status were seen as less likely to use such responses. Given these significant multivariate findings, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 3 (Rater) ANCOVAs.

We had hypothesized that women would be generally more likely to display passive destructive behaviors (Hypothesis 4). This prediction was partially supported, as two gender effects reached significance: Avoiding, $F(1, 2139)=4.54$, $p<.05$, and Self-Criticizing, $F(1, 2081)=19.87$, $p<.001$; in both cases, women were rated higher. Three rater effects were significant: Avoiding, $F(2, 2138)=4.12$, $p<.05$; Yielding, $F(2, 2135)=3.11$, $p<.05$; and Self-Criticizing, $F(2, 2080)=10.97$, $p<.001$. Consistent with Hypothesis 5, in each case bosses rated the targets highest on these passive responses and subordinates rated them lowest. There were no significant Gender \times Rater interactions.

Analyses of Each Rating Group Including Gender of Rater

In order to evaluate Hypothesis 6—that rater gender would have a significant effect on the ratings of conflict behavior—we next carried out analyses separately for each rater group and included rater gender as a variable. For the peer and direct report analyses, rater gender was treated as a within-subjects variable; for the boss analyses, rater gender was treated as a between-subjects variable.

Peer Ratings

We first carried out four Gender \times Rater Gender \times Behavior mixed-model MANCOVAs, one for each of the four types of responses (active constructive, passive constructive, active destructive, passive destructive). In each analysis, Rater Gender and Behavior served as within-subjects variables, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Although a number of main effects and interactions involving Gender and Behavior were found (mirroring the results reported earlier), there was never a significant effect of any kind for Rater Gender in these multivariate analyses. Thus, contrary to Hypothesis 6, male and female peers did not differ in their ratings for either constructive or destructive behaviors.

Direct Report Ratings

We first carried out four Gender \times Rater Gender \times Behavior mixed-model MANCOVAs, one for each of the four types of responses (active constructive, passive constructive, active destructive, passive destructive). In each analysis, Rater Gender and Behavior served as within-subjects variables, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Although a number of main effects and interactions involving Gender and Behavior were found (mirroring the results reported earlier), in three of the multivariate analyses there was no effect of any kind for Rater Gender. Thus, contrary to Hypothesis 6, male and female direct reports for the most part did not differ in their ratings.

The exception to this general pattern was found for the active destructive behaviors. A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) \times 4 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the active destructive responses to conflict; rater gender and behavior served as within-subject variables, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Behavior, $F(3, 732)=86.13$, $p<.001$, and Rater Gender, $F(1, 734)=5.03$, $p<.05$; there was also a significant Gender \times Rater Gender interaction, $F(1, 734)=7.11$, $p<.01$. In addition, there was a multivariate covariate effect

for organizational status, $F(1, 734)=7.85$, $p<.01$, and a marginal effect for age, $F(1, 734)=3.13$, $p<.08$. Given these significant multivariate effects for both Rater Gender and the Gender \times Rater Gender interaction, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) ANCOVAs.

There were no significant Gender effects for these behaviors, and only one significant Rater Gender effect, for Retaliating, $F(1, 738)=10.43$, $p<.001$. Consistent with Hypothesis 6, female subordinates rated the targets lower on this behavior. Interestingly, however, there were significant Gender \times Rater Gender interactions for three of the four active destructive behaviors: Winning, $F(1, 738)=8.96$, $p<.01$; Demeaning Others, $F(1, 743)=4.09$, $p<.05$; and Retaliating, $F(1, 738)=5.00$, $p<.05$. These interactions all took the same form, as displayed in Table 5. Male and female subordinates did not differ in how they rated their female bosses; in contrast, when rating a male boss, male subordinates viewed him as higher on these active destructive behaviors than did female subordinates.

Boss Ratings

A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) \times 4 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the active constructive responses to conflict; behavior served as the within-subject variable, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Behavior, $F(3, 2390)=15.84$, $p<.001$, Gender, $F(1, 2392)=6.45$, $p<.05$, and Rater Gender, $F(1, 2392)=5.21$, $p<.05$; there were also significant interactions between Gender \times Behavior, $F(3, 2390)=7.74$, $p<.001$, and Rater Gender \times Behavior, $F(3, 2390)=10.67$, $p<.001$. In addition, there were multivariate covariate effects for organizational status, $F(1, 2392)=11.47$, $p<.001$, and age, $F(1, 2392)=6.56$, $p<.01$. Given the significant multivariate findings involving Rater Gender, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) ANCOVAs.

Women were rated by their bosses as higher on all four behaviors, with the gender effect significant for Perspective Taking, $F(1, 2337)=12.96$, $p<.001$, and Expressing

Table 5 Effects of target gender and rater gender on active destructive ratings made by direct reports.

| | | Winning | | Demean other | | Retaliating | |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | | Target gender | | Target gender | | Target gender | |
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Rater gender | Male | 2.86 ^a | 2.78 ^{ab} | 1.60 ^a | 1.56 ^{ab} | 1.59 ^a | 1.55 ^{ab} |
| | Female | 2.71 ^b | 2.80 ^{ab} | 1.54 ^b | 1.60 ^{ab} | 1.48 ^b | 1.56 ^{ab} |

Ratings were made on a 1 (never) to 5 (almost always) rating scale. For each variable, values sharing the same superscript did not differ at the .05 level

Emotions, $F(1, 2337)=4.98, p<.05$. In addition, significant effects of rater gender were found for Perspective Taking, $F(1, 2337)=10.89, p<.001$, Creating Solutions, $F(1, 2337)=9.51, p<.01$, and Reaching Out, $F(1, 2337)=10.62, p<.001$. In each case, female bosses rated the target individuals as higher on the active constructive behavior. There were no significant interactions between gender and rater gender. Thus, consistent with Hypothesis 6, female bosses rated the targets higher on active constructive behaviors.

A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) \times 3 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the passive constructive responses to conflict; behavior served as the within-subject variable, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Behavior, $F(2, 2394)=76.26, p<.001$, Gender, $F(1, 2395)=4.24, p<.05$, and Rater Gender, $F(1, 2395)=32.18, p<.01$; there was also a significant interaction between Rater Gender \times Behavior, $F(2, 2394)=3.30, p<.05$. In addition, there was a multivariate covariate effect for age, $F(1, 2395)=7.20, p<.01$. Given the significant multivariate findings involving rater gender, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) ANCOVAs.

One main effect for gender was found for Delay Responding, $F(1, 2337)=6.73, p<.01$, with women rated higher by their bosses. Significant effects of rater gender were found for all three behaviors: Reflective Thinking, $F(1, 2337)=15.03, p<.001$, Delay Responding, $F(1, 2337)=20.12, p<.001$, and Adapting, $F(1, 2337)=33.43, p<.001$. In each case, female bosses rated the target person as higher on the passive constructive behavior. Thus, consistent support was found for Hypothesis 6 with these passive constructive behaviors.

A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) \times 4 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the active destructive responses to conflict; behavior served as the within-subject variable, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate main effects were found for Behavior, $F(3, 2393)=117.82, p<.001$, Gender, $F(1, 2395)=5.10, p<.05$, and Rater Gender, $F(1, 2395)=29.58, p<.001$; there was also a significant interaction between Rater Gender \times Behavior, $F(3, 2393)=3.48, p<.05$. There were no multivariate covariate effects. Given the significant multivariate findings involving rater gender, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) ANCOVAs.

One main effect for gender was found for Displaying Anger, $F(1, 2337)=6.16, p<.05$, with men rated higher by their bosses. Significant effects of rater gender were found for all four behaviors: Winning, $F(1, 2337)=28.49, p<.001$, Displaying Anger, $F(1, 2337)=9.38, p<.01$, Demeaning Other, $F(1, 2337)=24.42, p<.001$ and Retal-

iating, $F(1, 2337)=17.83, p<.001$. In each case, male bosses rated the target person as higher on the active destructive behavior. Thus, consistent support for Hypothesis 6 was found for these active destructive behaviors.

A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) \times 4 (Behavior) mixed-model MANCOVA was carried out on the passive destructive responses to conflict; behavior served as the within-subject variable, with age and organizational status serving as covariates. Significant multivariate effects were found for Behavior, $F(3, 2339)=53.18, p<.001$, and Rater Gender \times Behavior, $F(3, 2339)=4.65, p<.01$. In addition, there was a multivariate covariate effect for organizational status, $F(1, 2341)=4.94, p<.05$. Given the significant multivariate finding involving rater gender, we next examined each behavior separately via 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Rater Gender) ANCOVAs.

Only two significant univariate effects were found. There was a main effect of gender for Avoiding, $F(1, 2337)=4.75, p<.05$, with women rated higher on this dimension by their bosses, and there was a main effect of rater gender for yielding, $F(1, 2337)=6.02, p<.05$, with female bosses rating the targets higher on this dimension. Thus, contrary to Hypothesis 6, female bosses did not rate targets higher on passive destructive behaviors.

Discussion

This investigation offered six predictions, the most important of which had to do with the effect of target gender on conflict behavior: 1) that women would employ more active constructive responses, 2) that women would employ more passive constructive responses, 3) that men would display more active destructive responses, and 4) that women would generally display more passive destructive responses. Results provided full support for two hypotheses, and considerable support for the other two.

The strongest support was for the active constructive and active destructive behaviors; men and women differed in the predicted fashion for all eight of these responses, and only once was the gender effect qualified by a Gender \times Rater interaction. All observer groups rated women as behaving in more active constructive ways, and rated men as behaving in more active destructive ways. The predictions regarding passive constructive behaviors received almost as much support. The predicted pattern of women engaging in more of these responses emerged significantly for two of the three behaviors; only the response of reflective thinking failed to display this pattern. Similar evidence for gender differences also emerged for the passive destructive behaviors. We had hypothesized that women would exceed men on avoiding, yielding, and self-criticizing; this pattern emerged significantly for avoiding

and self-criticizing. We offered no prediction for hiding emotions, and there was in fact no gender difference for this behavior. Taken as a whole, then, the expected gender differences were found for 12 of the 14 behaviors for which predictions were made.

We find it especially noteworthy that these patterns were found even under relatively stringent conditions: studying a population of real working adults, using ratings made by outside observers rather than self-reports, and controlling for the effect of age and organizational status. For all of these reasons, we believe that these results provide relatively strong evidence that men and women can occupy similar roles in the workplace but respond to conflict using somewhat different behavioral repertoires.

Hypothesis 5—that bosses would rate the targets higher on passive responses and that subordinates would rate them higher on active responses—received mixed support. This pattern emerged most strongly for the passive destructive behaviors, where rater effects of the expected form were significant for three of the four behaviors. Bosses rated the targets highest, and subordinates rated them lowest, for avoiding, yielding, and self-criticizing. In addition, a similar pattern emerged for one of the passive constructive behaviors (delay responding). Thus, there is fairly convincing support for the idea that these participants displayed somewhat more passive responses to conflict with their bosses than with their direct reports. On the other hand, evidence was much less supportive for active behaviors. Direct reports did view the targets as especially likely to use two of the active constructive behaviors (creating solutions and reaching out), but the clear pattern for active destructive behaviors was that peers rated the targets highest on these dimensions.

Evidence was also mixed regarding Hypothesis 6—that female raters would view the targets as responding more constructively and less destructively than males. Virtually no support was found for this hypothesis in the ratings made by peers and subordinates; however, consistent effects of rater gender were found for bosses. As predicted, female bosses rated targets higher on every one of the seven constructive behaviors, and male bosses rated targets higher on all four of the active destructive ones. Thus, the positivity bias expected for female raters was restricted to a single rater category: bosses.

Gender Differences in the Workplace

The fact that women significantly exceeded men on six of the seven constructive behaviors lends strong support to the hypothesis that women in the workplace display conflict behaviors consistent with their cultural stereotype as more communal and relationship-oriented than men. The fact that men significantly exceeded women on all four active destructive behaviors similarly supports the hypothesis that

men in the workplace display conflict behaviors consistent with their cultural stereotype as more assertive and task-oriented than women.

This investigation is among the first to demonstrate consistent gender differences in workplace conflict behavior (as opposed to styles). The few previous studies that have taken a behavioral approach have typically found such differences to be elusive in managerial samples (e.g., Korabik et al. 1993; Watson and Hoffman 1996). What accounts for the difference between the present investigation and prior work? We suspect that two factors are primarily responsible. First is the rather large sample size in the current investigation. To the degree that structural forces work against gender differences in the workplace—and we believe that such forces are substantial—the magnitude of any gender differences that survive may be modest. Thus, smaller sample sizes are not likely to provide the statistical power necessary to reveal such differences. In the present investigation, of course, our sample size provided considerable power.

The second factor has to do with the way that conflict behavior was measured in this investigation. In both of the previous studies that used managerial samples and behavioral measures (Korabik et al. 1993; Watson and Hoffman 1996), conflict behavior was assessed by having managers engage in a structured role-playing exercise; transcripts of the sessions were then coded for evidence of behavioral responses to conflict. At least two features of this procedure may have diminished the possibility of finding significant gender differences. First, the artificiality of this process may have prevented participants from being engaged enough to fully display the range and intensity of their responses to real-world conflict. Second, the use of transcripts means that much visual and auditory information that might be crucial for evaluating conflict behavior was not available. In contrast, the data in the current study came from ratings based on observations of behavior that occurred spontaneously in the natural setting of the workplace; the bosses, peers, and subordinates in this investigation were therefore able to make use of the full range of information available during conflict episodes. Additional research in natural settings using measures other than self-reports will be of great value in further evaluating this question.

Conflict Styles and Conflict Behaviors

A feature of this investigation that differs from most previous work is our use of an instrument designed to measure specific conflict behaviors rather than styles. The dominant approach for some time has been to measure conflict in the workplace in terms of five such styles (e.g., Rahim 1983; Thomas and Kilmann 1974). Although the precise terminology varies from measure to measure, these

instruments are all based on a theoretical stance initially taken by Blake and Mouton (1964): that responses to conflict can be best understood in terms of two underlying concerns of the individual. Such “dual concerns” models assert that responses to conflict are the result of one’s standing on: 1) concern for self-outcomes (or task completion), and 2) concern for other-outcomes (or affective goals). Five specific conflict “styles” result from the relative importance of these two concerns: competitive (high self-concern; low other-concern), cooperative (high; high), avoidant (low; low), accommodating (low; high), and compromising (medium; medium).

It may be that gender differences in workplace conflict are less likely to appear when measured at the level of such broad, general styles, and more likely to be found if measured at the level of more concrete, specific behaviors. According to this argument, even if men and women endorse similar global styles, they may nevertheless differ in the particular behaviors they use to enact those styles (e. g., Podsakoff et al. 2000). In addition, focusing on behavior has the advantage of assessing some responses that might not fit easily within the dual-concerns approach. That approach, coming as it does from a tradition based on the study of negotiation, conceives of conflict styles as largely under the control of the individual actors. That is, in order to further our underlying concerns for maximizing self- or other-outcomes, we *choose* to compete, or collaborate, or avoid conflict with the other party. However, behavior during and after a conflict episode is not always rational. Some responses are hasty, emotional, and ill-considered; they occur in the heat of the moment and are not carried out in support of any strategic goal. Thus, an assessment strategy focused on specific behaviors may also allow an examination of responses that fall outside of the domain represented by the dual-concerns approach. In the current investigation, for instance, it was found that in the aftermath of conflict women were more likely to ruminate about the event and to criticize themselves for not handling it better. Such a finding would not have emerged from a traditional styles-based investigation.

Gender Differences or Stereotypes?

One complication in interpreting the results of this investigation arises from the fact that the indices of conflict behavior are all based on ratings made by observers rather than on more objective data; as a result, these observer ratings may not reflect actual differences in the behavior of men and women but simply reflect gender stereotypes. That is, the ratings made by bosses, peers, and subordinates may indicate—at least to some degree—the raters’ adherence to cultural gender stereotypes. Although the nature of the data mean that this possibility cannot be completely ruled out,

there is reason to believe that it does not fully account for our findings. Specifically, the pattern of correlations between and among rater categories supports the argument that these ratings are based on actual behavior of the targets and not the simple application of gender stereotypes to the specific targets.

Consider first the correlations among members of the same rating group (Table 3). The intra-class correlations are substantial, indicating a considerable degree of agreement among peers, and among subordinates, regarding the degree to which target individuals display each behavior. Moreover, the size of these associations is especially high for the behavior that is probably the most overt and memorable—anger displays—thus reinforcing the notion that respondents are responding to actual behavior as they make their ratings. Consider next the correlations between rater categories, which are also substantial. Tellingly, these correlations are also substantial even when computed *separately* for male and female targets. The application of gender stereotypes cannot be accounting for rater agreement when all of the targets are of the same gender.

Moreover, these correlations display an interesting pattern. The level of agreement is consistently lower between ratings made by bosses and subordinates than it is for any other combination. Since these are the two groups that are the most different in status from one another, it is reasonable to assume that the situations in which they see the target individual are the most different from one another. The fact that these two groups show the lowest agreement is consistent with the argument that they are making their judgments based on evidence—the target behavior they have observed—and not on the simple application of gender stereotypes.

How Important Are These Gender Differences?

Assuming that these gender differences are real, how important are they? One way to evaluate this question is to consider the size of the effects—and in a word, they are small. The largest univariate effects of gender were found for two of the active constructive behaviors: perspective taking ($d=.25$) and expressing emotions ($d=.24$). Effect sizes for most of the other behaviors were much more modest, and even these two were in the range that Cohen (1988) describes as “small”. Thus, while the differences between men and women that emerged from this investigation were reliable, they are overshadowed by the variability that exists within each gender. In terms of predicting any individual’s behavior during conflict, gender is only one factor among many that exerts some modest influence.

However, another way to evaluate the importance of these differences is to consider their possible consequences. As noted earlier, men and women are viewed in different

ways for performing the same behaviors. The Butler and Geis (1990) findings are especially instructive here. In that study, participants were exposed to male and female group leaders who resolved differing opinions by engaging in a collaborative, calm analysis of differing views—in short, by displaying what we would characterize as active constructive behaviors. Based on the coding of their facial expressions, it was determined that participants had significantly greater levels of displeasure toward female leaders.

Given that different consequences accrued to women and men for displaying *equal* levels of active constructive responding in the Butler and Geis study, the fact that women in the current investigation were *more* likely to display such behaviors becomes significant. Even if the size of this gender difference is not great, the heightened tendency of women to engage in active constructive behavior may have a real and unanticipated cost. To the degree that this occurs—and surely this effect will also be subject to situational moderation—then the absolute size of gender differences in conflict behavior is to some degree a tangential issue. What may be most important is not the sheer likelihood that men and women will act differently, but the implications that their actions have for what follows.

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