

THE EFFECT OF GENDER AND SELECTED PERSONALITY TRAITS ON OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE MEASURES OF SALES PERFORMANCE

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Salesperson performance research suggests that role perceptions, motivation, and personal ability affect sales effectiveness. Personal ability has been somewhat neglected in marketing research. The present study attempted to address this by investigating the effects of two interacting personality traits (empathy and Machiavellianism), a communication skill (self-monitoring), and gender on objective and subjective measures of sales performance. The results indicated that the combination of gender and selected personality traits did have a statistically significant effect on objective, but not subjective, measures of adaptive sales performance. Theoretical and managerial implications were discussed, clearly indicating the centrality and value of self-monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

Theories of salesperson performance suggest that three factors affect sales effectiveness: (1) role perceptions; (2) motivation; and (3) personal ability. Personal ability is a multidimensional construct that encompasses numerous factors, including structural characteristics, such as gender, and personality traits, such as empathy and Machiavellianism. Weitz, Suja, and Suja (1986) concluded that the third component, personal ability, has been somewhat neglected in marketing research. Although it has been emphasized that the consideration of more than one personality trait is required for predicting interpersonal interactions (Ickes and Barnes 1982), only a few theorists have proposed studying the effects of multiple personality characteristics on sales performance. The present study attempted to address these considerations by investigating the effects of two interacting personality traits (empathy and

Machiavellianism), a communication skill (self-monitoring), and gender on objective and subjective measures of sales performance.

Within this study, an attempt was made to determine how to better predict which personality type for each gender would be a high sales performer. This study focused on salesperson empathy, Machiavellianism and self-monitoring skills as they relate to objective (sales volume) and subjective (managerial ratings) measures of adaptive sales behavior. This study should be of value because it was based on actual and current sales personnel performances.

Personal selling effectiveness research has revolved primarily around three approaches: (1) the study of personal characteristics; (2) dyadic research; and (3) selling interactions. The Self-Monitoring Sales Performance Model (SMP) should contribute to and benefit from all three approaches. Sales effectiveness is in large part a function of personality variables and the process of communication (Williams and Spiro 1985). How personality traits interact with gender for high sales performance and managerial ratings should be of

theoretical importance for behavioral scientists concerned with sales management, as well as having practical importance for managers in terms of how to select and train effective sales personnel.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Early research investigating the relationship between sales performance and structural variables, such as gender, and personality traits, such as empathy and Machiavellianism, tended to view their effects in isolation. More recent research concerning these factors and their effects on sales performance has focused on the following two lines of inquiry: (1) that these variables do not act in isolation (it is necessary to examine their interactive effects with other variables); and (2) personality characteristics, such as empathy and Machiavellianism, are multidimensional constructs (some components of these constructs may enhance sales performance, while others may degrade sales performance).

Gender

Gender stereotypes in the work place have been found to influence occupational power. Women sales personnel are rated as less significant or holding and exhibiting less power, but are believed to be more open and empathetic. Schul and Wren (1992) stated that the rapid influx of women into the industrial sales force over the last decade has created a need to upgrade understanding of the female salesperson by examining gender differences in job-related attitudes and behaviors and performance outcomes. Russ and McNeilly (1995) argued that sales managers need to manage adaptively, recognizing gender differences among members of their sales force.

This conclusion is especially convincing in light of the findings by Comer (1992) that men and women sales personnel were treated differently by managers. Male managers described the selling ability of saleswomen more stereotypically than did female managers. Male managers gave female workers lower ratings in terms of job and product knowledge, but not in terms of adaptive behavioral

skills, persuasive skills, and the ability to learn new knowledge. Roberts and Chonko (1993) also established that men were more likely to be affected by supervisory consideration than were women.

Gender segregation of service jobs contributes to the perception that differences in men's and women's social positions are straightforward reflections of differences in their natures and capabilities (Leidner 1991). Gender has also been found to have an effect on how sales personnel perceive themselves on the job, as well as affecting decisions to leave a job. Lindeman, Sundvik, and Rouhiainen (1995) reported that male salespersons were more likely to overestimate themselves, while female salespersons were equally divided among under-, accurate-, and over-estimators. McNeilly and Goldsmith (1991) maintained that there appears to be a tendency for men and women to leave their current sales position because of dissatisfaction with different aspects of the job. Men expressed greater satisfaction than women with salary and opportunities for promotion and less satisfaction with their managers. Since women tend to focus more on co-workers, the lower their satisfaction with fellow workers, the greater their intention to leave. (Shukla and Tripathi 1994). Finally, some studies have found little or no effect of gender on sales performance. Martin and Martin (1991) maintained that there is some evidence to suggest that the effect of sex-role stereotyping on salary assignment may be decreasing. Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1994) argued that gender has only an indirect effect on objective sales performance. They suggested that willingness to adopt technological innovations directly affect sales performance, and that this willingness was in turn affected by gender.

Roberts and Chonko (1994) reconciled some of these perceived discrepancies. They concluded that there are two major theories that could account for the lack of gender differences among sales personnel. Self-selection theory argues that women who choose careers contrary to gender stereotypes share similar motivations with their male counterparts. Additionally, structural theory

maintains that the differences between the sexes due to early socialization will be supplanted in the work place by the perceived costs and rewards associated with occupational roles.

Empathy

Empathy is defined as the sharing of the perceived emotions of another (Dugan 1978). Recent research suggests that the alleged relationship with empathy and sales performance is more complicated than was once believed. (Plank, Minton, Reid 1996) For example, Dawson, Soper, and Pettijohn (1992) stated that their results contradicted the commonly held assumption that empathy is positively related to sales performance, at least among car salespeople. Mick, DeMoss, and Faber (1992) reported that empathetic salespeople might enhance the likelihood that consumers will buy more gifts for themselves. Finally, McBane (1995) suggested that empathy is also a multidimensional construct, and that it has both positive and negative effects on sales performance. Controlling behaviors were found to have a significant effect, while perspective taking did not, and emotional contagion had a negative effect.

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism as a personality trait refers to the belief that manipulative, persuasive behavior may be useful in accomplishing personal objectives. Recent research concerning Machiavellianism and sales performance also suggests that the relationship between the two is more complicated than originally thought. For example, Gable and Topol (1991) found that Machiavellianism interacts with gender. Males with high Machiavellian scores exhibit a higher gross margin percentage.

According to Gable and Dangelo (1994), Machiavellianism interacts with job involvement. There is a significant linkage between Machiavellianism and measures of job performance for managers who perceived themselves as possessing high levels of job involvement. Finally,

Schultz (1993) argued that Machiavellianism interacts with organizational structure -- in loosely structured sales organizations, high Machiavellians significantly outperformed low Machiavellians -- but in tightly structured sales organizations, high Machiavellians failed to outperform low Machiavellians.

Self-Monitoring

Social psychologists use the term impression management to refer to the set of ways by which people either consciously or unconsciously attempt to influence others' impressions of them (Schlenker 1980). It is generally agreed that there are two basic goals in impression management (Gray 1994). The first is to make oneself look good to other people (Leary and Kowalski 1990). Validation of one's self concept is the second goal (Swann 1987). These general goals of impression management can run into conflict with one another.

Snyder (1974) developed a self-report inventory for self-monitoring, a characteristic that he labeled which serves to distinguish between people who favor one or the other impression management goals. Snyder (1974) defined self-monitoring as sensitivity to other people's immediate reactions to oneself, combined with a desire and ability to control those reactions. High self-monitors are people who will dramatically alter their behavior to please their current audience. Low self-monitors are those people who display greater consistency in their behavior from one audience to another.

A number of studies have demonstrated that high self-monitors differ from low self-monitors in the following ways: (1) high self-monitors are better actors (Snyder 1974); (2) high self-monitors care more about social norms and conformity (Snyder and Monston 1975); (3) high self-monitors have more friends, but their friendships are usually less intimate (Snyder and Smith 1986); and (4) high self-monitors tend to choose friends who appear attractive or competent, while low self-monitors tend to choose friends who share their values and attitudes (Jamieson, Lydon, and Zanna 1987).

With respect to self-monitoring and sales performance, Verbeke (1994) demonstrated that salespeople's ability to elicit information from others, to self-monitor during conversations, and to adapt during conversations, were good predictors of sales performance. Lassk, Kennedy, Powell, and Lagace (1992) maintained that self-monitoring is a multidimensional construct, and that some aspects — expressiveness, instrumentality, and modifying behavior — were associated with high sales performance — while sensitivity was not.

Finally, recent research concerning self-monitoring and sales performance indicates that self-monitoring of consumers interacts with self-monitoring of sales personnel. Slama and Celuch (1995) found that consumers with an acquisitive, self-presentation style were more assertive in requesting information, seeking redress, and resisting sales requests. Fine and Schumann (1992) argued that sales performance can only be understood when the interactive effect between self-monitoring of consumers and salespeople is taken into account.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study employed a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design. The independent variables were gender, empathy, Machiavellianism, and self-monitoring. The effects of these independent variables on two dependent variables, sales volume and overall managerial rating, were investigated using multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA).

The combination of traits investigated in this study presupposes an interactive-communication process approach to research on sales effectiveness, because sales people not only act upon customers, but interact with them (Weitz, Suja, and Suja 1986). In addition to contributing to the study of sales performance, attending to interactive-communication traits and skills could potentially assist in the study of bargaining, closing procedures, and negotiation.

An interactive-communications approach to research encourages the use of psychological trait measures that are standardized. This should result in more reliable and valid research results, as the instruments used to assess important variables have been found to possess high reliability and validity (Spiro and Fine 1990). Further, this approach allows for assessing the interaction between salespersons and customers.

Subjects

The subjects were 637 professional sales people and their managers in both the retail and industrial sales areas. The industrial area included representatives from the auto manufacturing industries (Nissan and Saturn) located in central Tennessee. In addition, Anheuser Busch and several advertising agencies in the St. Louis area were also surveyed. Retail establishments included several Famous Barr stores located in southern Illinois and southeastern Missouri. Overall, data was collected from 225, or 35 percent, of the subjects contacted.

Instruments

All subjects received a paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaire consisting of the following four sections: (1) sociodemographic characteristics; (2) empathy; (3) Machiavellianism; and (4) self-monitoring. In addition, each salesperson's manager completed a questionnaire concerning his/her sales performance. Each of these instruments is described in detail below. Scores on the empathy, Machiavellianism, and self-monitoring instruments were dichotomized into high and low scorers based on normative data. A substantial body of research using these three personality inventories, as well as the managerial rating scale, indicates that these instruments are psychometrically reliable and valid.

Empathy. Empathy is an affective state that stems from the apprehension of another's emotional state or condition that is congruent and similar to the perceived state of the other. It is important to differentiate empathy (as defined above) from other

related responses. Although researchers have asserted that empathizing involves cognitive processing, empathy is not the same as the ability to discern the cognitive status of others (Spiro and Weitz 1990).

Empathy is not synonymous with sympathy. Sympathy is defined as an emotional state stemming from another's emotional state that is not identical to the other's emotion but consists of feelings of sorrow or concern for another's welfare (Davis 1980). The empathetic person can understand another's emotions and cognitions without agreeing with that emotion or being caught up by the emotion (Kringle 1989). The Davis Scale (1980) was used to measure empathy.

Machiavellianism. Individuals possessing a Machiavellian personality trait or style extol the virtues of using guile necessary to achieve their objectives. They are self-oriented in so far as personal goals are concerned, have a strong desire to win, and tend to desire power over others. They are higher in ego-drive than the average person with respect to achieving their objectives.

A definition of a Modern-day Machiavellian is one who employs aggressive, manipulative, exploiting, and devious moves in order to achieve personal and organizational goals. These moves are undertaken according to perceived feasibility (what is necessary under the circumstances) with secondary consideration to the feelings or the needs of others. Machiavellianism was measured using the Mach V Scale of Christie and Geis (1970).

Self-Monitoring. Self-monitoring is defined as a personality/communication skill. It is the sensitivity to monitor (control and manage) one's own expressions and self-presentations (Snyder 1979). Individuals differ in such sensitivity. High self-monitors, out of concern for the situational and interpersonal appropriateness of their social behaviors, use cues from relevant others and the social environment as guidelines for regulating and controlling both verbal and nonverbal self-presentation.

Low self-monitors in contrast do not have well-developed repertoires of self-presentation skills. The self-presentation of low self-monitors seems to be controlled from within by their affective states and attitudes rather than from cues present in the situation or environment. Self-monitoring was measured using the scale developed by Lennox and Wolfe (1984).

Adaptive Selling. When reviewing the extensive body of salesperson research, Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) concluded that adaptability was the most important factor in sales success.

Though ability related to adaptive selling is only one element of the ability component, we believe it is a crucial aspect because it indicates the degree to which salespeople are able to take advantage of the unique communication elements associated with personal selling (Weitz et al. 1986, p. 174).

The ability to adapt is related to self-monitoring ability (Spiro and Weitz 1990). Success in sales depends upon accurately uncovering needed information and then converting it into persuasive interactions. These adaptive psychological traits play a pivotal role in at least three associated theories: (1) social learning; (2) role performance; and (3) impression management theory (Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorum 1992). Sales volume was used as the objective measure of adaptive sales performance, while a multi-item instrument developed by Futrell and Parasuraman (1984) was used as the subjective measure of adaptive sales performance.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using separate multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA). The MANCOVA procedure was selected because it permits the simultaneous testing of differences among groups on multiple dependent variables (Hair et al. 1992). MANCOVA allows for the removal of extraneous influences (moderating or intervening factors) upon the dependent variable. The effects of the following four demographic variables were controlled: (1) age; (2) birth order;

(3) gender; and (4) race. Conventional multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were then conducted on the adjusted dependent variables as a means of confirming the results obtained from the MANCOVAs. Chi-Square Tests of Independence were also conducted to determine whether the distribution of high and low scorers on the three personality factors differed among male and female sales personnel.

Hypotheses

- H₁: Female salespeople who are categorized as low scorers on the empathy (E) scale will have higher managerial ratings than those who are categorized as high E scorers. High E males will receive higher managerial ratings than low E males.
- H₂: High E females will have higher sales volume rankings than low E females. High E males will not differ from low E males in terms of volume rankings.
- H₃: Female salespeople who are categorized as high scorers on the Machiavellianism (M) scale will have higher managerial sales performance ratings than low M females. Low M males will have higher managerial ratings than high M males.
- H₄: Low M females will have lower volume rankings than high M females. Low M males will have higher sales volume rankings than high M males.
- H₅: Female salespeople categorized as high scorers on the self-monitoring (S-M) scale will have higher managerial overall ratings of performance than low S-M females, while S-M levels will have no effect on male managerial ratings.
- H₆: Salespeople, regardless of gender, who are categorized as high S-M will have higher sales volume rankings than those who are categorized as low S-M.

RESULTS

The results of the two MANOVAs using gender and empathy as the independent variables are contained in Table 1. The upper portion of Table 1 contains the results using sales volume as the dependent variable, while the lower portion contains the results using managerial overall rating as the dependent variable. As can be seen from inspecting Table 1, two of the three F-tests for sales volume were statistically significant, while none of the three F-tests for managerial overall rating were statistically significant.

Figure 1 plots the means for males and females who were either low or high on the empathy measure. The upper portion of Figure 1 plots the means using sales volume as the dependent variable, while the lower portion plots the means using managerial overall rating as the dependent variable.

The results of the two MANOVAs using gender and Machiavellianism as the independent variables are contained in Table 2. The upper portion of Table 2 contains the results using sales volume as the dependent variable, while the lower portion contains the results using managerial overall rating as the dependent variable. As can be seen from inspecting Table 2, one of the three F-tests for sales volume was statistically significant, and one of the three F-tests for managerial overall rating was statistically significant.

Figure 2 plots the means for males and females who were either low or high on the Machiavellianism measure. The upper portion of Figure 2 plots the means using sales volume as the dependent variable, while the lower portion plots the means using managerial overall rating as the dependent variable.

The results of the two MANOVAs using gender and self-monitoring as the independent variables are contained in Table 3. The upper portion of Table 3 contains the results using sales volume as the dependent variable, while the lower portion contains the results using managerial overall rating

TABLE 1
The Effect of Gender and Empathy on Objective and Subjective Measures of Sales Performance

Sales Volume by Gender and Empathy					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance of F
Gender	10.81	1	10.81	10.33	.002
Empathy	0.88	1	0.88	0.84	.360
Gender x Empathy	8.09	1	8.09	7.73	.006
Residual	229.19	219	1.05		
Overall Rating by Gender and Empathy					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance of F
Gender	352.26	1	352.26	3.42	.066
Empathy	2.11	1	2.11	0.02	.886
Gender x Empathy	257.67	1	257.67	2.50	.115
Residual	22748.09	221	102.93		

TABLE 2
The Effect of Gender and Machiavellianism on Objective and Subjective Measures of Sales Performance

Sales Volume by Gender and Machiavellianism					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance of F
Gender	8.35	1	8.35	7.76	.016
Machiavellianism	0.76	1	0.76	0.71	.402
Gender x Machiavellianism	1.85	1	1.85	1.72	.192
Residual	235.75	219	1.08		
Overall Rating by Gender and Empathy					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance of F
Gender	242.48	1	242.48	2.40	.123
Machiavellianism	174.46	1	174.46	1.73	.190
Gender x Machiavellianism	572.77	1	572.77	5.67	.018
Residual	22317.05	221	100.98		

FIGURE 1
The Effect of Gender and Empathy on Objective and Subjective Measures of Sales Performance

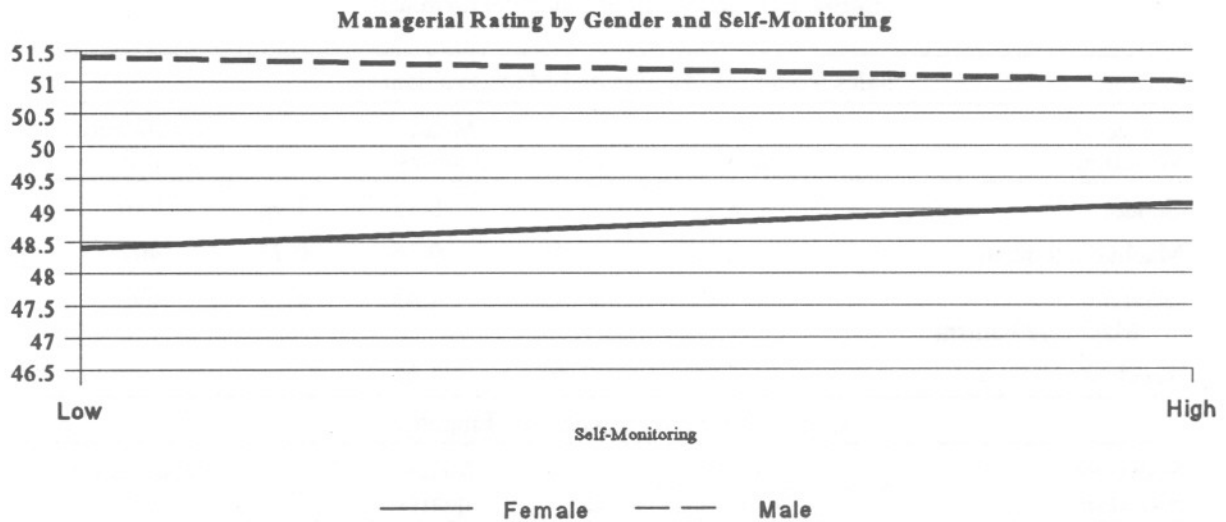
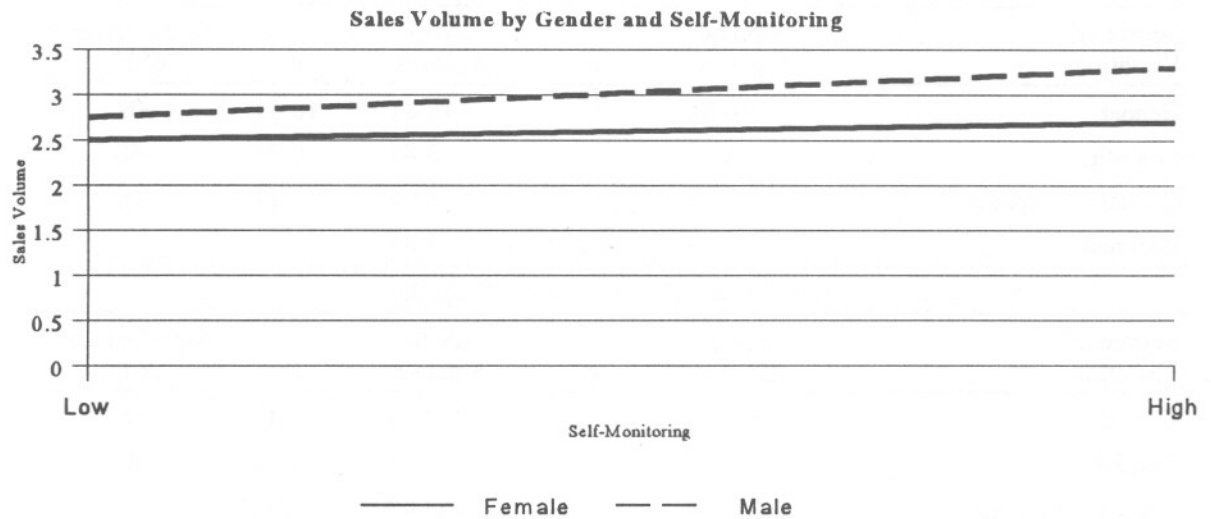
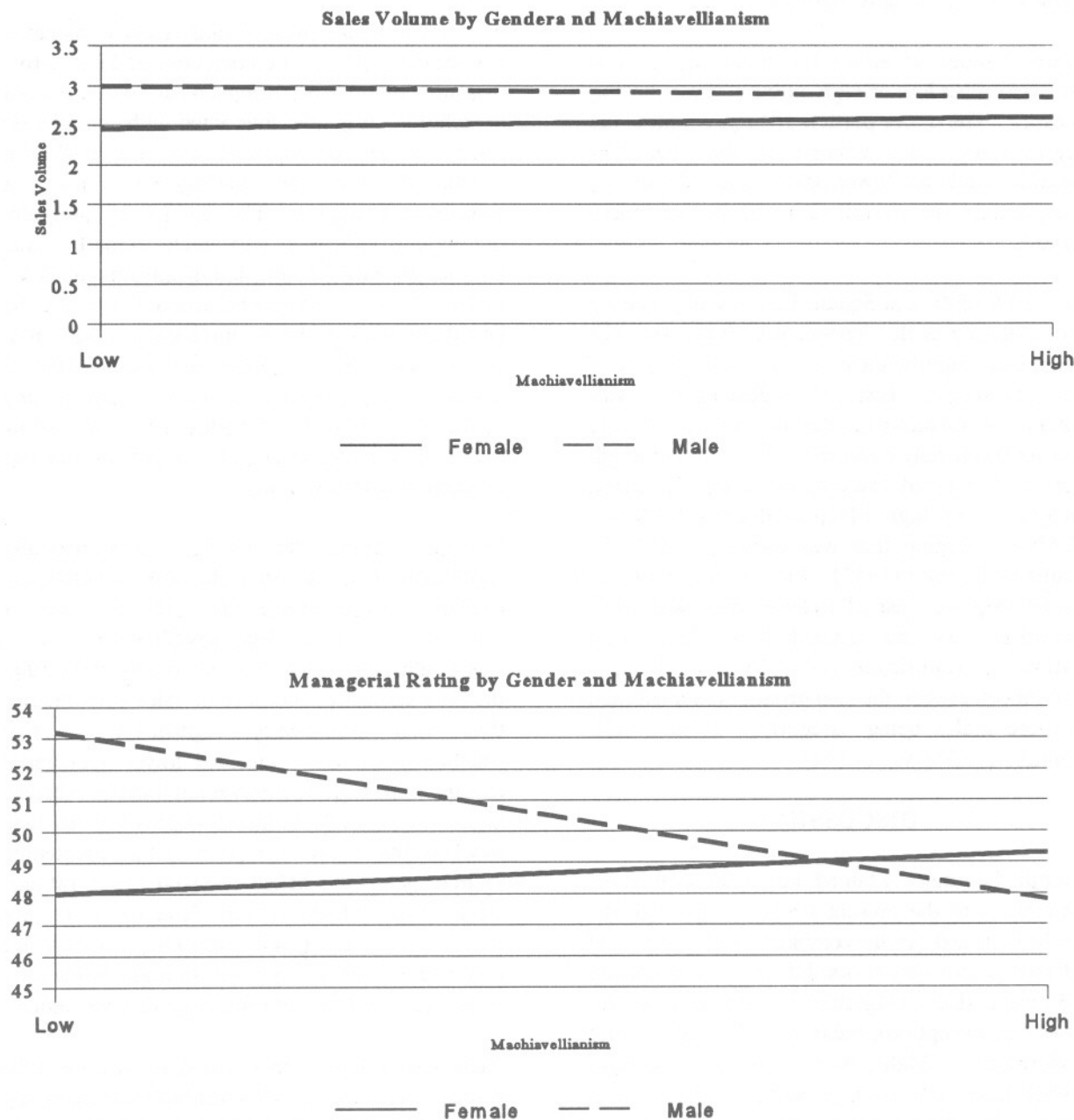


FIGURE 2
The Effect of Gender and Machiavellianism on Objective
and Subjective Measures of Sales Performance



as the dependent variable. As can be seen from inspecting Table 3, two of the three F-tests for sales volume were statistically significant, while none of the three F-tests for managerial overall rating were statistically significant.

Figure 3 plots the means for males and females who were either low or high on the self-monitoring measure. The upper portion of Figure 3 plots the means using sales volume as the dependent variable, while the lower portion plots the means using managerial overall rating as the dependent variable.

The results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence with empathy as the dependent variable were not statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 1.39$. The results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence with Machiavellianism as the dependent variable were also not statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 1.36$, although there was a trend towards more females being categorized as high Machiavellians (58.6% vs. 41.4%), a finding that was consistent with the results of Chonko (1982). Finally, the results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence with self-monitoring as the dependent variable were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 3.60$, $p < .05$. The difference between the two groups was attributed to more males being categorized as high self-monitors (40.8% vs. 27.9%).

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results obtained largely confirmed the hypotheses of the present study. In general, the results indicated that the combination of gender and selected personality traits did have a statistically significant effect on objective, but not on subjective (with one exception), measures of adaptive sales performance. Males were more likely to have higher sales volume than were females. This gender difference may in part be attributed to differences in age and years of sales experience between the male and female sales personnel. The modal age category for males was 36 - 45, while the modal age category for females was 18 - 25. The modal sales experience category for males was 21 or more years, while the modal sales experience

category for females was 3 - 5 years. Such a result is consistent with the work of Levy and Sharma (1994) who demonstrated the value of sales experience on adaptive selling.

The results of the present study clearly indicated that the effect of gender on objective and subjective measures of sales performance can not be viewed in isolation, as gender interacted with empathy on sales volume, an objective measure, and with Machiavellianism on managerial rating, a subjective measure. The gender by empathy interaction indicated that high empathy was advantageous for females, but disadvantageous for males. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the fact that buyers prefer to purchase products from sellers who conform to gender stereotypes. That is, females are expected to be more empathic, and hence more empathic females sell more, while males are not expected to be empathic, and less empathic males sell more.

Machiavellianism did not have a statistically significant effect on either objective or subjective measures of sales performance. However, gender did interact with Machiavellianism for a statistically significant effect on managerial rating, the only subjective measure of sales performance that was statistically significant. High Machiavellian males received lower managerial ratings, while high Machiavellian females received higher managerial ratings. It is possible that high Machiavellian males were perceived as threatening to managers, and hence received lower ratings, while high Machiavellian females were not perceived as being as threatening, and hence received higher managerial ratings, apparently being rewarded for their more aggressive tactics.

Consistent with previous research, the results of the present study also indicated that high self-monitors, regardless of gender, sell significantly more than do low self-monitors. The ability to adapt to the changes in the buyer-seller interaction is related to self-monitoring ability, in that success in sales interactions depends upon accurately uncovering needed information and converting it into persuasive arguments. High self-monitors are

TABLE 3
The Effect of Gender and Self-Monitoring on Objective and Subjective Measures of Sales Performance

Sales Volume by Gender and Self-Monitoring					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance of F
Gender	5.88	1	5.88	5.64	.018
Self-Monitoring	10.44	1	10.44	10.02	.002
Gender x Self-Monitoring	0.01	1	0.01	0.01	.978
Residual	228.23	219	1.04		

Overall Rating by Gender and Empathy					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance of F
Gender	300.06	1	300.06	2.88	.091
Self-Monitoring	3.19	1	3.19	0.03	.861
Gender x Self-Monitoring	12.89	1	12.89	0.12	.725
Residual	22989.84	221	104.03		

FIGURE 3

The Effect of Gender and Self-Monitoring on Objective and Subjective Measures of Sales Performance

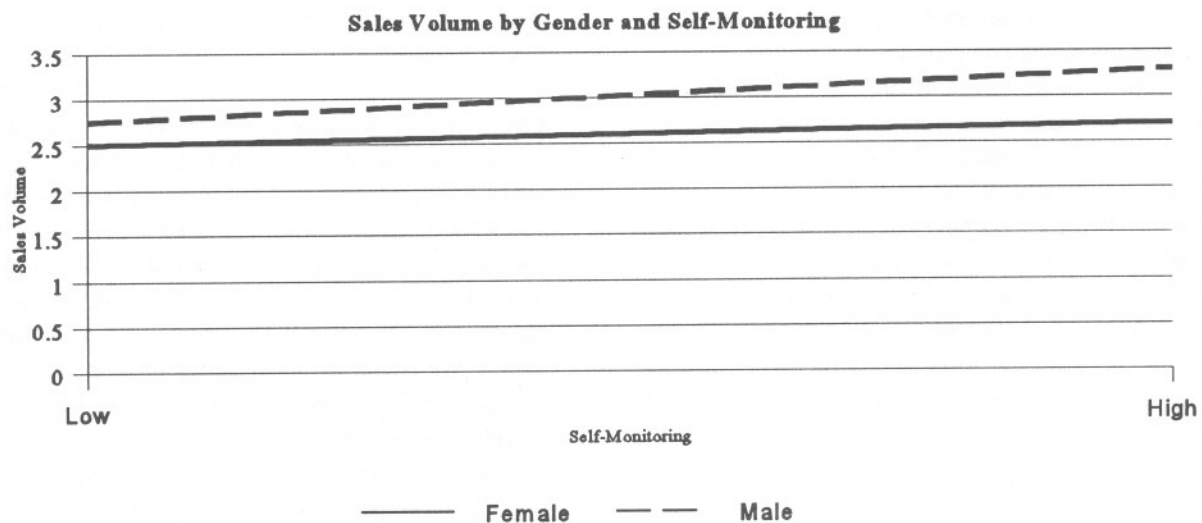
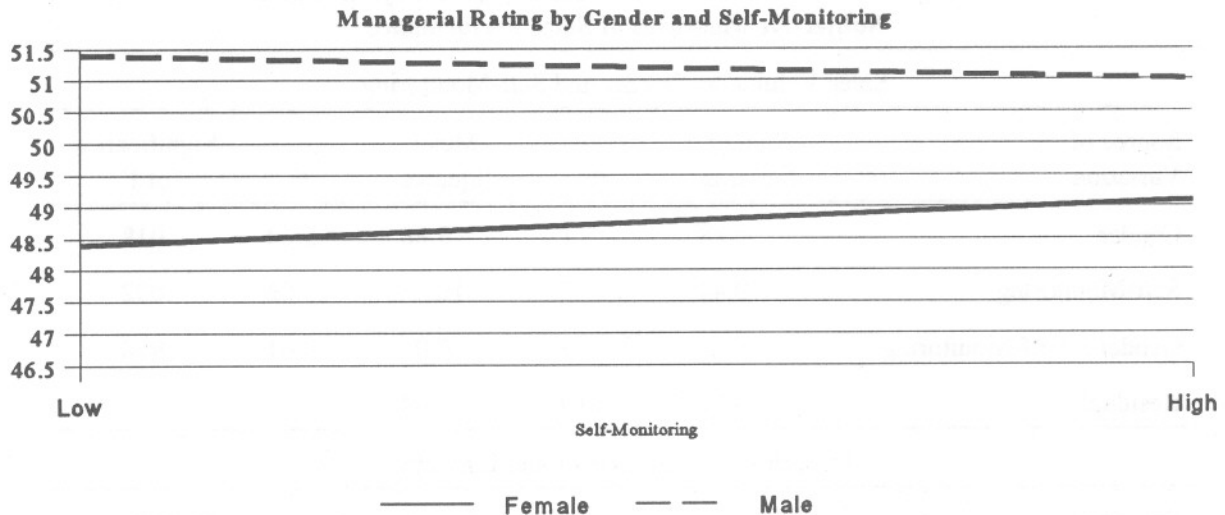


FIGURE 3 (continued)



better to adapt to changes in the sales interaction, and thus are likely to have higher sales volumes.

Managerial Implications

In addition to these theoretical considerations, the results of the present study also have some practical implications for managers. These managerial implications include the following: (1) experience factor; (2) uncommon gender trait factor; and (3) value of self-monitoring.

Experience Factor. As least part of the observed statistically significant difference between the sales volumes of males and females can be attributed to differences in the amount of experience between male and female sales personnel. Not unlike the nature of the overall sales force in the United States, the males in the present study had more years of direct sales experience. It is possible that gender differences between sales personnel may diminish in the future as females begin to enter the sales force at earlier ages, and remain in it for longer periods of time, thereby more closely resembling their male counterparts in terms of experience.

Uncommon Gender Trait Factor. The results of the present study indicate that the effect of gender on sales performance can not be viewed in isolation. Gender interacted with empathy to have an effect on sales volume, an objective measure, and with Machiavellianism to have an effect on managerial ratings, a subjective measure of sales performance. Managers could use this information to encourage their female sales personnel to appear to be more empathic to their customers, while encouraging their male sales personnel to appear to be less empathic. The results also suggest that male sales personnel might be encouraged to display fewer overt Machiavellian personality characteristics.

Value of Self-Monitoring. Finally, the results of the present study indicated that managers would be well served to encourage that their sales personnel, regardless of gender, enhance their self-monitoring communication skills. Clearly the ability to self-monitor is beneficial to the ability to adapt to changes in the sales transaction. As successful sellers are those who are better able to adapt to changes in the buyer-seller interaction, high self-monitors should be better able to uncover needed information and convert it into arguments that persuade a buyer to purchase a product.

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