

A GENDER COMPARISON OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SALES MANAGERS

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As women play a larger role in the professional workforce of business around the world, the issue of potential gender difference becomes more important to management of the sales force. This study considers the possible cultural differences that exist among businessmen and women in three countries: France, Malaysia, and the USA. The basis for comparison was national identity, or the extent to which recognition is given to a culture's unique characteristics. Four dimensions were used to determine the extent of national identity: belief system importance, ethnocentrism, cultural homogeneity, and emphasis upon national heritage. Sales force managerial implications of these results are analyzed and greater sensitivity to male and female differences and needs emphasized.

INTRODUCTION

As women play a more and more prominent role in the professional workforce of business organizations around the world, the issue of potential gender differences in areas which affect selection, training, motivation, and performance, etc., becomes an important consideration. Past research (cf. Dion, Easterling and Javalgi 1997) has suggested that significant differences exist between men and women who are involved in the same jobs, while more recent research (Moncrief et al. 2000) has concluded that these differences are becoming less important. Most of this research, particularly in the sales literature, has been directed toward traditional sales constructs such as role conflict, role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and others. While this may be appropriate within the context of a domestic U.S. sales organization, such findings may be incomplete as the issue shifts toward effectively managing both men and women in a multinational/multicultural setting (Bu and Mitchell 1992).

The fundamental problem with applying current domestic-based gender focused sales research is that these studies generally fail to take into account underlying cultural differences, which may exist between men and women in differing international settings. Professional women around the world are increasingly likely to choose sales as their career path for a number of reasons. These include the fact that the so-called "glass ceiling" is a real obstacle to their advancement within an organization (Burke and McKeen 1995) and success in sales offers the opportunity to tangibly demonstrate not only their value to the firm but also secure a good working knowledge of the firm, the product offering, customer base, and competitors. A career in sales also enables women to overcome potential gender-based earnings biases within an organization (Schul and Wren 1992).

The purpose of this study is to consider possible cultural differences that may exist across genders. As firms expand globally, building management programs within a given culture without taking into account potential differences between male and female employees could be particularly problematic (Kling et al. 1999). This is true for any employee, but the issue becomes even more crucial in the case of salespeople given their

role in representing the firm and securing revenue. Therefore, using a sample comprised of both male and female professionals drawn from three distinct countries and cultures, this study will explore the extent to which gender differences do, or do not, exist across accepted national identity characteristics using the approach adopted by Moncrief, et al. (2000).

The notion of tailoring aspects of the sales management program to the needs of female salespeople is not new, given that many domestic firms have developed separate selection, training, and motivation programs for the women in their sales force (Siguaw and Honeycutt 1995). The identification of any significant differences may suggest the need to tailor aspects of the sales management program to the nature of the sales force and the culture in question, while a finding of no significant differences would help to support current domestic sales research and would allow both researchers and decision makers to focus their attention on more specific sales-related constructs.

GENDER RESEARCH IN SALES

Moncrief et al. (2000) provide a good literature review when considering U.S. sales force gender studies beginning with Brief and Oliver's (1976) gender comparison of organization and organizational level among retail salespeople where no significant differences were identified. During about the same time period, Busch and Bush (1978) investigated gender differences using job satisfaction, values, role clarity, performance and propensity to leave among pharmaceutical salespeople. The conclusions of these authors were that men had a higher propensity to leave and emphasize career advancement, while women place a higher emphasis on co-worker relations. No gender differences were found in this study in job satisfaction and value constructs. In a similar study of pharmaceutical salespeople, Swan, Futrell, and Todd (1978) found that men and women have differing views of their jobs, particularly in relation to

independence on the job where females indicated a significantly higher level of importance being attached to independence than their male counterparts.

Moving forward in time, one study (Gibson and Swan 1981) concluded male and female salespeople were not significantly different in their expectations for success, but males did have higher aspirations. Gable and Reed (1987) found that women were underrepresented in sales organizations, while Fugate, Decker, and Brewer (1988) identified differences in terms of the ways males and females operate in a sales environment requiring different management approaches.

By the 1990's the focus in the sales force gender studies had shifted almost exclusively to the traditional sales constructs identified by Churchill et al. (1985) in their meta-analysis of sales performance research. Using job satisfaction as a primary variable, McNeilly and Goldsmith (1991) determined that men and women would leave a sales job for different reasons with men placing more emphasis on purely career-related issues while women were found to be more likely to consider personal issues such as family-job time management issues. This is further supported by Schul and Wren (1992) in their gender study of pharmaceutical salespeople. These authors concluded that no significant differences existed between men and women in terms of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, role conflict, role ambiguity, or performance. However, Schul and Wren (1992) found significant differences did exist in extrinsic rewards and turnover. More recently (Russ and McNeilly 1995), also found no differences in job satisfaction but significant differences in organizational commitment and turnover where the female responses were more positive in terms of organizational commitment and propensity to leave. Using similar constructs, Siguaw and Honeycutt (1995) reported women had lower conflict and ambiguity and higher levels of customer-oriented selling but found no differences on the other variables.

Moncrief et al. (2000) suggest that the increasing convergence among male and female salespeople in these traditionally accepted performance constructs (Churchill et al. 1985) is due to the tremendous increase in women within professional sales organizations in the past decade. Moncrief et al. (2000) determined that within sales organizations and industries with a gender balance there are likely to be fewer gender differences. However, even Moncrief et al. (2000) acknowledge that female salespeople tend to have less role conflict and a lower propensity to leave and that these tendencies increase as gender balance and longevity in the organization increase. Additionally, Duncan (1997) investigated ethical differences of male and female sales professionals based on a series of relational and non-relational scenarios. The conclusion of this study were: 1) significant ethical differences existed in relational, but not non-relational situations, with females more likely to behave ethically and 2) these gender-based ethical differences become more enhanced as the age and job experience of the individual increase. This is reinforced by Luxen (2005) and Park and Krisnan (2005) who both found that females operated along more relationally-based lines when dealing with suppliers than did their male counterparts.

Although it may be true that increasing numbers lead to more acceptance of women by customers, suppliers, and other salespeople, differences persist. Even in circumstances where women have a substantial and established role in a sales organization, sales managers must pay some attention to gender differences in order to maximize the potential of their sales force, both males and females (Dion, Easterling, and Javalgi 1997; Fine and Pullins 1998). In a study of sales professionals in the insurance industry Ahmed (2000) found that, while between 1983 and 1998 women salespeople as a total percentage in the industry rose from 12 percent to 19 percent, 7 in 10 reported feeling isolated and a lack of management support. Among the recruiting and retention solutions proposed by this author

(Ahmed 2000) were the need for a strong mentoring program and better management awareness of the specific and unique issues relevant to women in the sales force. Given the domestic, or single nation/single culture nature of the current sales literature as it relates to gender differences, none of these studies consider the added complexity of cultural differences in managing a sales force comprised of both men and women.

While some firms worry about the effectiveness of female professionals in other cultures (Businessweek 2000), Boyacigiller (1996) highlights the increasing importance of female professionals in the global economy. Further, Solomon (1998) highlights the fact that the increasing growth of women in the professional ranks means that they are no longer necessarily less effective due to cultural biases. Current sales literature suggests that fewer and fewer differences exist in the U.S. between male and female sales professionals, yet some research is beginning to emerge which suggests the importance of accounting for cultural differences in sales research (Mintu-Wimsatt and Gassenheimer 2000).

A body of literature also exists which focuses on gender differences in the workforce across global cultures. The conclusion of many of these studies, when applied in a sales management context, is that in other cultural environments substantial gender differences may exist which would impact the recruitment, selection, training, and ongoing management of indigenous female sales professionals in markets outside of the U.S. (Carson, Larson, and Irwin 1995).

For example, Orser (1995) points out the need to account for sex role stereotyping and the fact that the importance of this construct varies by country and culture. Further, in some cultures, men and women are considered to behave and think differently and are encouraged to do so, leading organizations in such a culture to expect female professionals to be treated differently (Shoa, Baker, and Wagner 2004;

Scheibal, 1995). This is supported by more recent research (Campbell and Campbell 2003) that found male and female managers displayed very different behaviors related to intention to quit. Sengupta (1995) suggests that while culturally-influenced gender roles vary by culture, one that persists to some extent across cultures is the traditional female role within the family and a somewhat “decorative” role in society at large, a finding consistent with the results obtained by Vescio, et al. (2005).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore potential cultural differences between nationalities, particularly as they relate to gender differences. As discussed above, the objective is to identify possible differences and then relate these differences to effective management of a sales force which is likely to have an increasing number of females regardless of the given country. To that end, the following basic research questions are posed:

1. To what extent do males and females culturally differ when compared in the context of several national samples? And,
2. Within each national sample, to what extent do males and females differ on a defined set of cultural criteria?

The identification of significant differences across the national samples or, alternatively, failure to find any differences, should help to better focus the means by which sales managers deal with both male and female salespeople across a variety of cultures.

The data collected for this study was obtained from samples of professionals, both male and female, in three culturally-distinct countries: Malaysia, the United States, and France. These countries were selected for several reasons. First, these three nations are distinct in terms of the cultural composition of their population. Second, each country is distinct in its geographic location, with a country from the regions of Asia, North America, and Europe

represented. Third, each sampled nation is unique in its economic characteristics with Malaysia being a market still in the stages of development, the United States representing the closest to a stand-alone economy, and France being a member of a regional trading bloc (i.e., the European Union). Finally, while women are playing an increasingly important role in each country, the education level of females and their level of participation in the workforce does vary across the sample.

Comparisons of the samples were done in two stages (see below). The first involved comparisons across each national sample while the second involved comparisons between genders within each sample. The basis for these comparisons was the “national identity” of the respondents. National identity has been defined as “the extent to which a given culture recognizes and identifies with its unique characteristics” (Keillor and Hult 1999, p.67). The framework of national identity is built around four basic constructs: national heritage, cultural homogeneity, belief system, and ethnocentrism. National heritage is defined as the importance attached to historical figures and events that, in turn, reflect a given culture’s sense of its unique historical heritage. Cultural homogeneity refers to the extent to which a given society has a sense of its own cultural distinctiveness. Belief system takes into account the role that religion and other supernatural beliefs help to encourage cultural participation and solidarity. Finally, ethnocentrism is generally accepted to be the extent to which individuals make cultural judgments using their own culture as the base line criteria. In this study, national identity was measured using the NATID scale developed by Keillor et al. (1996). Using a 7-point Likert scale, the NATID scale was specifically designed to measure the extent to which individual respondents psychologically emphasize their national identity and allows the strength of national identity, and its related constructs, to be compared across national samples.

The overall number of respondents was 372. The respondents were drawn from business organizations and were determined to be “professionals”. Professional was defined as a full-time, salaried employee who either had other individuals reporting directly to them, controlled financial resources, or had the prospect of doing either in the future given their current position. The sample was not limited exclusively to salespeople given that within each national sample the gender distribution might be problematic. The breakdown, both by country sample and gender, is provided in Table 1.

DATA ANALYSIS

In considering the stated research questions, the first posited potential cultural differences between men and women across the defined national samples. Using the analysis of variance technique (ANOVA), the three national samples were compared along their overall national identity scores as well as each individual national identity dimension. These comparisons were performed using each aggregate national sample as well as by gender. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis.

As might be expected, given the diverse nature of the countries sampled, the results of the aggregate sample comparisons show significant differences exist for the overall national identity of each culture as well as for the four dimensions that comprise national identity. Consistent with the findings of the aggregate comparison, both male and female samples were significantly different for overall national identity. However, as the analysis moves to the gender comparisons more noteworthy differences begin to emerge. From the perspective of the male subset of the national samples, the overall differences appear to be driven by the wide range of scores in the areas of belief system and ethnocentrism. In the case of the former, Malay males reported a relatively high mean of 4.36 while French males reported a relatively low mean score of 2.97 with U.S. male respondents roughly in the middle (3.65).

In the case of the latter (i.e., ethnocentrism), French male respondents indicated a mean score of 4.29, U.S. male respondents 3.03, leaving Malay males approximately in the middle with a mean score of 3.78. Interestingly, no significant differences were found across the three male national samples for either national heritage or cultural homogeneity. This suggests that in managing a multi-cultural male-dominated sales force, the cultural challenges may not be focused on the somewhat more tangible historical/social-based characteristics but on the less tangible perceptual/value-based characteristics.

In contrast to the male sample comparisons, all the female comparisons along the four national identity dimensions showed significant differences. In the case of national heritage (5.00) and ethnocentrism (4.42) French females reported significantly higher mean scores while Malay females indicated significantly higher mean scores on the cultural homogeneity (4.99) and belief system (4.42) dimensions. Throughout these comparisons, U.S. females reported scores consistently lower along every dimension. This finding may reinforce the need to pay particular attention to a wide range of cultural issues when managing females in other cultures and countries.

Thus far the results, placed in the context of the first research question, indicate males and females do differ significantly across national samples but in different ways. This seems to point to the need to begin considering different management strategies depending not just on the overall culture but also taking into account the gender composition, current and future, of the sales organization. The analysis now turns to the gender comparisons within each national sample beginning with the Malay respondents (see Table 3 below).

Beginning with the Malaysian sample, the analysis found no significant difference between the overall national identity scores of men and women. However, among the four dimensions, significant differences were

TABLE 1
Sample Distribution by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Malaysia	67	60	127
USA	74	56	130
France	55	60	115
Total	196	176	372

TABLE 2
Country Comparisons of National Identity

	Malaysia	USA	France	F-value	Sig.
National Heritage	4.73 (all) 4.52 (male) 4.92 (female)	4.47 (all) 4.55 (male) 4.37 (female)	4.99 (all) 4.94 (male) 5.00 (female)	6.067 (all) 1.991 (male) 5.540 (female)	.003 (all) .139 (male) .005 (female)
Cultural Homogeneity	4.73(all) 4.49 (male) 4.99 (female)	4.21 (all) 4.27 (male) 4.12 (female)	4.65 (all) 4.65 (male) 4.64 (female)	7.135 (all) 1.334 (male) 9.118 (female)	.001 (all) .266 (male) .000 (female)
Belief System	4.39 (all) 4.36 (male) 4.42 (female)	3.35 (all) 3.65 (male) 2.96 (female)	2.97 (all) 2.97 (male) 3.05 (female)	61.543 (all) 23.986 (male) 40.409 (female)	.000 (all) .000 (male) .000 (female)
Ethnocentrism	3.83 (all) 3.78 (male) 3.89 (female)	2.91 (all) 3.03 (male) 2.75 (female)	4.31 (all) 4.29 (male) 4.42 (female)	35.937 (all) 13.261 (male) 26.506 (female)	.000 (all) .000 (male) .000 (female)
Overall National Identity	17.69 (all) 17.16 (male) 18.23 (female)	14.95 (all) 15.51 (male) 14.21 (female)	16.92 (all) 16.86 (male) 17.12 (female)	23.773 (all) 4.625 (male) 25.090 (female)	.000 (all) .011 (male) .000 (female)

TABLE 3
Gender Comparisons of National Identity - Malaysia

	Males	Females	T-value	Sig.
National Heritage	4.52	4.92	-2.122	.036
Cultural Homogeneity	4.49	4.99	-2.299	.023
Belief System	4.36	4.42	-.276	.783
Ethnocentrism	3.78	3.89	-.651	.516
Overall National Identity	17.16	8.23	-1.770	.079

identified for two of the four. Although there were no significant differences between male and female respondents for either belief system or ethnocentrism significant differences did exist for the national heritage and cultural homogeneity dimensions. In both cases the participating Malay women reported higher mean scores than their male counterparts. A review of the NATID items for these dimensions shows they tend to focus on the more tangible historical aspects of cultural values. One possible explanation for this is that, as a traditional culture, the level of participation of women in the workforce is lower in less developed economies. This result might be caused by the fact that women have been socialized into more insular traditional roles (Abdoolcarim 1993) while men, by virtue of their longer experience in the business world, have a broader worldview. In addition, Asian businesswomen are expected to maintain a dual role of family caretaker and businesswoman (Lee and Tan 1993) with caretaker as the primary task.

Another noteworthy result is that both belief system and ethnocentrism mean scores, characteristics often associated with less diverse traditional cultures, are lower than those for national heritage and cultural homogeneity. This may be an indication that being part of a traditional culture has more to do with a sense of identifying with a cultural group than with values and opinions that might be viewed as judgmental or exclusive.

Moving to the analysis of the U.S. sample, only one national identity dimension (i.e., belief system) was identified as significantly different across genders, but that difference was so substantial it resulted in a significant difference for U.S. men and women in overall national identity score (see Table 4).

The surprise on the results in the U.S. gender comparisons is not only the dimension in which the significant difference was identified, but also the direction of the difference. Popular culture, as reflected in the media, might expect

one to conclude U.S. males would be more ethnocentric, perhaps even more “patriotic” (using national heritage and cultural homogeneity as indicators), than U.S. females. However, the results indicated that males scored higher on religious belief systems. So-called conventional wisdom would not lead one to suspect that U.S. males attach significantly higher levels of importance to religion than U.S. females. However, detailed analysis of the results demonstrate that U.S. women do not feel religious beliefs define someone as American as much as U.S. males do, and U.S. women are less likely to impose their religious beliefs on others. Without attaching excessive importance to a limited amount of data, this finding may serve to highlight the danger of relying on stereotypes when considering gender differences in the management process.

The final country sample analyzed included respondents from France (see Table 5).

Unlike the other two country samples, no significant differences were detected between French male and female respondents. This uniformity shows that, in terms of national identity, no differences exist between the genders. While the ethnocentrism mean scores could be considered moderately high (Keillor and Hult 1999) the scores for national heritage and cultural homogeneity are relatively strong. On the other hand, the scores for belief system are relatively weak. This suggests that although gender differences are less marked among the French respondents these same individuals do have unique value sets that might represent challenges in their management and motivation.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Both Malay males and females rank the importance of their belief system significantly higher than their international counterparts. Thus they firmly believe that part of what defines them as Malay is their religion. Malay women are also very proud of their national heritage and their culture. Management needs

TABLE 4
Gender Comparisons of National Identity - USA

	Males	Females	T-value	Sig.
National Heritage	4.55	4.37	.882	.379
Cultural Homogeneity	4.27	4.12	.877	.382
Belief System	3.65	2.96	4.319	.000
Ethnocentrism	3.03	2.75	1.422	.158
Overall National Identity	15.51	14.21	2.758	.007

to recognize and/or adjust their management policies for the female Malay sales force to allow for recognition and admiration of Malaysian culture and acknowledgement of Malaysian achievements. Failure to do so could de-motivate or cause job dissatisfaction and role conflict. In addition, one must recognize and be extremely sensitive to the importance of religion in this culture. Disrespecting Islam would demoralize or even cause turnover with a Malay sales force. The use of Islamic teachings and beliefs in the correct manner could prove to be a motivational tool. When selling to Malays, the correct use of Islamic practices, anecdotes and phrases should prove effective.

Belief systems are strong in Malaysia in general. Southeast Asians tend to believe in natural talent, mystical as well as religious systems, and even psychic predictions. Managers need to keep these strong belief systems in mind when attempting to motivate, train, or supervise Malays. For example, a key but difficult task is to convince an employee that they possess natural talent. However, if successful this employee's productivity is likely to rise dramatically.

Both French males and females are rather ethnocentric. The French view France as superior. French women are especially proud of their national heritage. Management's failure to recognize and/or adjust their management policies to allow for recognition of French achievements could de-motivate, cause job dissatisfaction, and role conflict for a female French sales force. Management needs to act

with dignity and tact, conscious of the French woman's knowledge of everything from high style and good food to table manners. French products are generally regarded as superior by the French, so emphasis should be placed on any French components included in the product during a sales interaction. If French research helped develop the product, this contribution should be mentioned, etc.

The results indicate that the converging similarities between male and female salespersons in the USA are probably not true in other countries, especially in Asian cultures. Management must continue to be sensitive to gender implications domestically, and must especially be conscious of the gender cultural differences in diverse countries around the world. The only USA significant difference was emphasis on belief systems, which, as previously mentioned, had the surprising results of being more significant for U.S. males. However, the belief system measure does not define one's level of religiousness or spirituality, but rather if one's belief defines them as American. The results also indicate that U.S. women do not believe as strongly that a particular religion or belief defines them as American as do U.S. males.

This raises questions of imposing one's beliefs upon others for acceptance, teamwork, and long-term belonging. While the stereotype that U.S. males are less church going, less spiritual, etc. may hold true, it appears that U.S. males are also more likely to impose their beliefs upon others or expect agreement regarding

TABLE 5
Gender Comparisons of National Identity - France

	Males	Females	T-value	Sig.
National Heritage	4.94	5.00	-.280	.780
Cultural Homogeneity	4.65	4.64	.055	.956
Belief System	2.97	3.05	-.454	.651
Ethnocentrism	4.29	4.42	-.379	.705
Overall National Identity	16.86	17.12	-.369	.713

beliefs. For males, belief congruence is more necessary for acceptance to the inner circle, or into an accepted group, etc., which indicates less tolerance for differences by U.S. males.

Some very significant managerial implications can be drawn from these differences. Topics that are likely to evoke differences between U.S. males should be avoided in the work force. U.S. females are probably better ambassadors of goodwill should these types of problems arise. In a sales environment, more efforts should be made to match up U.S. male/male salesman/customer belief systems than in the case of male/female or female/female salesperson/customer matches. This could even suggest that hiring local males is preferable to males for other regional areas since they are more likely to have differing belief systems (which could include more than religion). Further, if relocation is necessary, then a female sales force may prove more effective. Last, one could conclude that this is a basic premise for the persistence of the glass ceiling: U.S. men simply do not tolerate belief system differences and seek to avoid it. Belief systems can include everything from political opinions to the importance placed on sports or what constitutes a funny or acceptable joke, as well as religious affiliation. These often differ between men and women in the U.S.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The fact that the sample is not limited to salespeople does somewhat undermine the research's ability to draw sales force

conclusions. However, general conclusions on cultural values and beliefs can be drawn from people in any area of business. Future research using only salespeople would be very helpful to confirm or disconfirm the results found in this study.

The measurement instrument could be modified or enlarged, as it examines only religion as the major component of belief systems. Other components on worldviews could be included. Also, the measurement instrument could examine more than preference for domestic products as a means of measuring ethnocentrism. However, these measures were drawn from a previously accepted scale and were therefore useful for this study and for purposes of comparison.

This study does illustrate that gender differences can be quite pronounced in other cultures. More studies need to be done on gender differences in sales in the global economy. The special emphasis on women as decorative (at least in many cultures) and the possible effect of this view on women in sales, or the special home and child-care responsibilities of women in most cultures could be examined, for these also have management implications.

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APPENDIX:

National Identity Scale (NATID)

National Heritage

1. Important people from [insert country] past are admired by people today.
2. One of [insert country] strengths is that it emphasizes events of historical importance.
3. [insert country] has a strong historical heritage.

Cultural Homogeneity

1. A [insert nationality] possess certain cultural attributes that other people do not possess.
2. [insert nationality] in general feel that they come from a common historical background.
3. People frequently engage in activities that identify them as [insert nationality].

Belief System

1. A specific religious philosophy is what makes a person uniquely [insert nationality].
2. It is impossible for an individual to be truly [insert nationality] without taking part in some form of religious activity.
3. Religious education is essential to preserve the cohesiveness of the [insert nationality] society.
4. A specific religious philosophy is not an important part of being an [insert nationality].
5. A true [insert nationality] would never reject his or her religious beliefs.

Ethnocentrism

1. We should purchase product manufactured in [insert country] instead of letting other countries get rich off us.
2. It is always best to purchase [insert country] products.

3. [insert nationality] should not buy foreign products because it hurts [insert nationality] businesses and causes unemployment.
4. It may cost me in the long run, but I prefer to support [insert nationality] products.
5. Only those products that are unavailable in [insert country] should be imported.

Uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).