

# Gender and Social Influence

## A Social Psychological Analysis

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*ABSTRACT: Men and women are believed to differ in how influential and easily influenced they are: Men are thought to be more influential, and women more easily influenced. In natural settings, men and women tend to differ in these ways, but these differences stem largely from formal status inequalities by which men are more likely than women to have high-status roles. Status is important because of the legitimate authority vested in high-status roles. Within appropriate limits, people of higher status are believed to have the right to make demands of those of lower status, and people of lower status are expected to comply with these demands. Yet, small, stereotypic sex differences in leadership and social influence generally have been found in laboratory experiments and other small-group settings where men and women have equal formal status. These small sex differences may occur because experience with hierarchical social structures in which men have higher status creates expectancies about male and female behavior, and these expectancies affect social interaction in ways that foster behavior that confirms the expectancies. Sex differences that occur in the laboratory as well as natural settings, then, may stem from social structural factors—namely, from the existing distributions of women and men into social roles.*

The impact of gender on social influence has been only incompletely understood by social scientists, although the study of social influence is one of the classic fields of social psychological inquiry. It will be argued in this article that a relation between gender and social influence has been documented in the research literature on sex differences as well as in the literature on stereotypes about male and female behavior. Studies of both types have pointed to greater influence by men and greater influenceability of women, although in laboratory experiments these sex differences in behavior typically are very small. According to the present analysis, the higher status that men ordinarily have in organizations and groups in natural settings is the major cause of these sex differences in influence behavior, even when manifested in laboratory settings.

To identify a starting point for this analysis, it is helpful to think about social influence as it occurs in daily life. Much of the impact that we have on other people's behavior occurs because they comply with our expectations about how they should behave—a type of influence labeled *normative social influence* by Deutsch and Gerard (1955). Because so many of the expectations that people convey about one another's behavior stem from social roles, analysis of the impact of gender should focus primarily on normative social influence that arises in role-regulated contexts.

Each of the role relationships of everyday life, such as husband and wife, professor and student, and employer and employee, defines a set of expectations that people hold about each other's behavior. To understand how gender is implicated in such role relationships, it is important to take into account their hierarchical nature. Individuals who are linked by a set of mutual role obligations are very often unequal in power, when power is understood as the capacity to influence the other person in the relationship. Although both persons may exert influence, it is seldom difficult to identify the position of greater power.

The social norms associated with hierarchical roles ordinarily confer legitimacy on these inequalities of power and status. When legitimacy is established, the individual higher in the hierarchy is believed to have the right to exert influence by virtue of his or her position in the social system, and the individual lower in the hierarchy is believed to have the obligation to comply with the demands that are made (Milgram, 1974).

When superiors in a hierarchy possess legitimate authority in relation to subordinates, normative influence is usually very effective. The extent to which persons who have such authority obtain ready compliance with their requests has been demonstrated by social psychologists in several contexts (e.g., Milgram, 1965, 1974; Orne & Evans, 1965). Although political theorists inform us that limits are imposed on legitimate authority by the very norms that establish it and that it must be exercised within its defined limits to be perceived as rightful (Sternberger, 1968), social psychological research has

shown that subordinates agree to a very wide range of requests made by persons possessing legitimate authority.

This analysis of social influence in terms of hierarchy and legitimate authority has implications for gender issues primarily because men and women are differently distributed into social roles. Within most groups and organizations, the positions held by men tend to be higher in hierarchies of status and authority than the positions held by women.<sup>1</sup>

In work settings, the rule that men have higher status positions is most strictly maintained in contexts where men and women work together and it is necessary for one person to supervise or otherwise control the work of the other. The power differential that forms between the sexes may be clearest when sex-segregated occupational groups exist in this context (England, 1979). When frequent on-the-job interaction is required between persons in a male-dominated and a female-dominated occupation, the male-dominated occupation (e.g., physician) has greater power and status than the female-dominated occupation (e.g., nurse). As far as supervisory and administrative roles in organizations are concerned, there is abundant evidence that women become progressively scarcer at higher levels (L. K. Brown, 1979; Kanter, 1977; Mennerick, 1975).

In settings other than the workplace, power is also not equally shared between men and women. In the family, husbands generally have the overall power advantage for both routine decision making and conflict resolution, even though there are some areas of decision making in which wives have primary authority (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Gillespie, 1971; Scanzoni, 1972). Also, in task-oriented groups of various types, men generally have higher status than women (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill, 1977) and

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<sup>1</sup> There is little evidence of major change in this aspect of American institutions. Aggregate data, such as those on sex differentials in income (Blumberg, 1979) and on sex differences in the time that employed persons spend on housework and child care (Hartmann, 1981), suggest that men's overall advantage in power and status is intact. Yet, dramatic increases in the number of women participating in the labor force and obtaining training in male-dominated, prestigious fields such as law and medicine suggest that the status difference between men and women may lessen in the future.

are more likely to be perceived as leaders (Lockheed, in press) and to hold leadership positions (e.g., Meargeee, 1969; Strodtbeck, James, & Hawkins, 1957).

Because of these pervasive sex differences in the distribution of people into social roles that are hierarchically arranged, there should be relatively large sex differences in influence and influenceability when men's and women's statuses are not equated or controlled. Given the legitimate authority inherent in higher status positions, men would be expected to have greater power to influence others and to resist being influenced merely as a product of their greater concentration in higher status positions. Although most psychologists probably would not consider a sex difference accounted for by the covariation of sex with hierarchical status to be a true sex (or gender) difference, in daily life people must continually deal with differences between women and men that in fact occur in this form. Therefore, the differing distributions of men and women into hierarchically arranged roles must underlie any understanding of how gender affects social influence.

### Formal Status Inequalities and Implicit Theories of Influence

The term *formal status inequality* is convenient for referring to the type of inequality that I have described. Such inequality is a product of a hierarchy of roles that is legitimized by social norms and embedded in the formal structure of groups and organizations. Empirical support for the idea that formal status inequalities between men and women account for most of the differences that occur in their influence and influenceability in natural settings might be obtained in a number of ways. One appropriate method is to determine perceivers' implicit theory of the influence that occurs in the groups and organizations with which they are familiar. Certainly people's beliefs cannot be expected to be completely accurate representations of the social environment (Jones, 1982; Ross, 1977). Yet the idea that hierarchy is the source of social influence sex differences would be supported by the clear recognition of this fact in perceivers' implicit theories of influence. The key hypothesis is that perceivers believe in the stereotypic sex differences that men are dominant and influential and women are submissive and easily influenced to the extent they believe that the men and women they observe are related through hierarchical roles that give men higher status. Although generalized belief in sex differences in attributes such as dominance and influence has been documented repeatedly (e.g., Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974), the origin of these beliefs in the distribution of women and men into roles of differing status had not been demon-

**Table 1**  
*Mean Perceived Likelihood of Recipient's Behavioral Compliance*

Sex of dyad members	Scenarios omitting job titles	Comparison scenarios (including job titles)			
		Low-status communicator		High-status communicator	
		Low-status recipient	High-status recipient	Low-status recipient	High-status recipient
Male communicator, female recipient	9.02	7.61	6.51	10.60	8.23
Female communicator, male recipient	7.44	7.51	5.64	11.08	7.76

Note. From Eagly and Wood (1982). Higher numbers indicate greater compliance (15-point scale). For the scenarios omitting job titles, the male communicator addressing a female recipient was believed more likely to obtain compliance than a female communicator addressing a male recipient ( $p < .05$ ). For the scenarios including job titles, sex of dyad members had no significant effect; compliance was believed to be more likely when the communicator had high rather than low status ( $p < .001$ ) and the recipient had low rather than high status ( $p < .001$ ).

strated before Eagly and Wood's (1982) recent research.

This research on the link between perceived influence and beliefs about distribution into social roles proceeded by presenting each respondent with a written scenario describing two employees interacting in a familiar organizational setting. In each scenario, one employee (the communicator) attempted to influence another employee (the recipient) on a policy issue relevant to the organization. For example, for scenarios that were set in a bank, the communicator recommended that employees ought to dress more formally, to improve the bank's image. The communicator was described as feeling strongly about the issue and was said to present to the recipient an explanation of his or her views on the issue. The recipient was described as not having favored this type of policy in the past. Each scenario concluded by having the communicator ask the recipient whether he or she "goes along with" the policy recommended by the communicator. The subjects predicted the recipient's reactions. Each subject judged only one scenario, in order that all the comparisons between scenarios would be conducted between subjects.

In the first experiment, each scenario was set in a bank or supermarket where either a man was said to be trying to influence a woman or a woman was said to be trying to influence a man. In some experimental conditions, subjects knew the sex of the communicator and recipient and lacked any more valid information for discerning the relative status of these stimulus persons. These subjects inferred that the men in the scenarios held higher status jobs than the women (as shown by subjects' estimates of the salaries and job titles of these men and women). This inference about status was expected to lead these subjects to conclude that a male communicator was more successful in influencing

a female recipient to comply with his recommendation than a female communicator was in influencing a male recipient to comply with her recommendation. As shown in Table 1, this stereotypic inference was obtained in these conditions.

Other subjects in this experiment were given information about the job titles as well as the gender of the communicator and recipient. Both high-status (e.g., bank vice-president) and low-status (e.g., bank teller) job titles were utilized. In these experimental conditions, subjects were expected to base their judgments about social influence on the job title information rather than gender because gender would not be used to infer hierarchical status in the presence of the highly informative job title cues.<sup>2</sup> As expected (see Table 1), these subjects considered the communicator's recommendation more likely to induce compliance when the communicator had a high-status rather than low-status job title and when the recipient had a low-status rather than high-status job title. These subjects did not utilize the gender cues to predict compliance.

The restriction of this experiment to opposite-sex scenarios made it impossible to determine whether the sex difference in behavioral compliance that was perceived in the scenarios that omitted job titles was a product of the male communicator being regarded as more effective than the female com-

<sup>2</sup> The effects of gender and status cues on perceived influence were expected to depend on whether the recipient's response to influence was public or private. Because the power of persons who have higher status in organizations stems primarily from their control over sanctions and access to resources, status differences favoring the communicator should increase subordinates' public compliance, and private, internalized opinion change should be relatively unaffected (Kelman, 1961). Indeed, those few effects that were obtained on subjects' beliefs about private opinion change were weak and reversed effects obtained on perceived compliance (see Eagly & Wood, 1982).

municator or the female recipient as easier to influence than the male recipient. Therefore, in a second experiment, the sex of the communicator and the sex of the recipient were varied orthogonally (with the result that same-sex as well as opposite-sex scenarios were utilized). This experiment showed that the perceived likelihood of compliance was increased by the presence of a male rather than a female communicator as well as a female rather than a male recipient.

A third experiment was designed to clarify the nature of the power the male communicator was perceived to have over the female recipient. This experiment varied whether the communicator and recipient were described as employed by the same or different organizations. If male authority in these scenarios were based exclusively on hierarchical status, the male communicator would be believed to induce compliance only in female recipients employed by the same organization since the sanctions and resources he controls would ordinarily have impact only on subordinates who held positions within the same organizational hierarchy. In contrast, if the male communicator's power derived from an attribute such as competence that lent greater validity to his recommendation, his impact would not depend on having the recipient employed by the same organization.

The scenarios used in this third experiment described opposite-sex employees whose job titles were not indicated. Once again men were perceived to induce more compliance in women than women induce in men, but, in accord with the idea that this inferred sex difference stems from the higher formal status ascribed to men, this effect was confined to those conditions in which the communicator and recipient were employed by the same organization.

In these experiments, subjects made judgments as if they had a theory of how behavioral compliance occurs in the work settings described by our scenarios. This implicit theory was shared by male and female subjects, whose judgments differed very little. According to this theory, one's power to induce compliance is a product of one's status. As a consequence of the greater status of men compared to women, a man is likely to obtain compliance with the expectations that he conveys for persons who occupy positions in the same hierarchy in which he holds his position, and a woman is likely to comply with the expectations of other persons in the same hierarchy. The claim that women were believed to comply more to men than men to women *because* they were believed to have lower positions than men was consistent with structural equation (Kenny, 1979) and other correlational analysis of the Eagly and Wood (1982) data. Subjects' implicit theory, then, was a normative-influence theory of compli-

ance that identified formal status inequalities as a major determinant of compliance and therefore identified sex differences in status as the determinant of sex differences in compliance.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the close fit between this implicit theory and the hypothesis that formal status inequalities underlie perceived sex differences, there are reasons to suspect that perceivers' theory leaves out certain aspects of the effects that gender may have on social influence. In particular, it should be noted that Eagly and Wood's (1982) data showed that subjects believed that men and women of equal status had equal influence. The generalizability of this belief may be open to question because these subjects were asked only about organizations and not about other types of group settings. Further, there is a threat to the validity of such a belief even in relation to organizations because of the confounding of gender and status in the organizational settings where perceivers have gathered their observations of male and female behavior. Perceivers have little experience with organizations that have similar distributions of women and men to the various levels of status, because social structures of this type are extremely rare. Lacking opportunities to observe equal-status contact between the sexes, perceivers may not take note of the more subtle aspects of gender manifested in the absence of formal status inequalities between men and women. It is these more subtle aspects of gender that are the traditional subject matter in the psychology of sex differences.

### Social Psychological Studies of Social Influence Sex Differences

Psychologists' usual question in investigating sex differences is whether men and women differ—given their equivalence in all factors other than sex. Therefore, psychologists carrying out experiments on behavior do not contend with the threat to internal validity that handicaps perceivers: Research psychologists do not assign male subjects to high-status roles and female subjects to low-status roles and then draw conclusions about sex differences in behavior. Instead, they equate males' and females' formal status through the random assignment of subjects to conditions.

<sup>3</sup> Treating status as a major cause conflicts with claims by Ross (1977) and other attribution researchers that perceivers often manifest a fundamental attribution error whereby they attribute to internal attributes, such as personality traits, behaviors that are actually due to situational constraints, such as roles and norms. Yet, in the perceived influence research (Eagly & Wood, 1982), subjects were not asked (as they might be in an attribution study) to explain why men or women achieved a certain amount of influence or to explain why a compliance sex difference might occur. Instead, subjects' judgments of how much influence occurred under differing conditions revealed an implicit theory.

Because sex and status are not correlated in psychological experiments, the findings of experimental research should not be expected to agree very closely with the observations that people derive from everyday life. In fact, many psychologists have noted that there are discrepancies between gender stereotypes, which summarize people's observations about women and men, and the findings of sex difference research (e.g., Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Among the various causes that have been suggested for such discrepancies, most attention has been given to perceivers' inaccuracies and distortions (e.g., Katz & Braly, 1933; Lippmann, 1922) and biases inherent in perceivers' cognitive processing (Hamilton, 1979). Yet the major cause may be that psychologists study behavior almost exclusively in settings that have no formal status inequalities associated with subjects who differ in sex, whereas other people observe behavior almost exclusively in settings that have these inequalities. As a consequence, in experiments psychologists cannot detect the sex differences of everyday life that are a direct result of hierarchical role relations that give men higher status. According to the present analysis, sex differences in influence and influenceability are among the sex differences that in natural settings may stem primarily from this type of inequality.

To examine those aspects of sex differences that are not merely a manifestation of the formal status inequality between women and men, researchers might be expected to abandon the sociological variable of status in favor of variables more closely aligned to the psychological aspects of gender. Yet studies of behavior in task-oriented groups, especially the work of Joseph Berger and his associates (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980) suggest that the formal status inequalities of everyday life exert an effect on behavior even in social settings, such as the experimental laboratory, where exactly the same social role is assigned to all participants, despite their differing status in the larger society. According to this viewpoint, people utilize sex as a status cue in such groups because of their extensive prior experience in natural settings where sex was observed to be correlated with power and prestige. Sex differences in social behavior may arise because of this tendency for sex to function as a status cue.

The idea that sex functions as a status characteristic in small-group interaction was made explicit by Berger and his associates at an early point (e.g., Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1966). Yet the idea was first given thorough exploration by Lockheed and Hall (1976) and then by Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neill (1977). These sociologists suggested that sex is a *diffuse status characteristic*—that is, an attribute

that provides a basis for beliefs about one's competence and value across a fairly wide range of situations. Other examples of diffuse status characteristics are age, race, and physical attractiveness. Persons at one level or "state" of such a characteristic are highly valued, and persons at another level or "state" are less highly valued. Group members make these evaluations on the basis of their knowledge of and past experience in groups and organizations, where such characteristics have acquired meaning through their covariation with power and prestige.

Berger and his associates believe that status characteristics such as sex affect behavior because people have expectations about their own and others' competence, based on these characteristics, and consequently behave in ways that confirm these expectancies. Such a confirmation would constitute a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jones, 1977; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978), which, as suggested by Darley and Fazio's (1980) analysis, may be a product of a sequence of interpersonal events. In laboratory groups and other social settings, then, participants may (a) base expectancies about themselves and other participants on their observation that men generally have higher status than women in the society, (b) interact with each other in a manner that is consistent with the perception of greater authority and privilege in men than women, and (c) consequently behave in a manner that maintains their original beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, men gain greater status in the newly formed groups, initially on an informal basis. As group structure develops over time, this informal inequality may become formalized, for example, by selecting men rather than women for positions of leadership.

The proposition that expectancies about behavior affect behavior is, of course, an application of the familiar normative influence concept. The idea that expectancies apply to an entire category of people merely on the basis of their gender is also familiar since it is implicit in the concept of gender roles (or sex roles), which are norms that specify how men and women ought to behave. According to the present analysis, at least some of these norms concerning male and female behavior stem from the covariation of gender and status in the society—that is, from gender's function as a diffuse status char-

<sup>4</sup> There are numerous demonstrations of aspects of such a sequence of events in the empirical literature on the behavioral confirmation of stereotypes about sex (Zanna & Pack, 1975), race (Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974), physical attractiveness (Anderson & Bem, 1981; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977), and other attributes (Christensen & Rosenthal, 1982; Snyder & Swann, 1978). The Christensen and Rosenthal (1982) study showed that males' expectancies were a more important determinant of this sequence of events than females' and that females showed stronger behavioral confirmation than males.

acteristic. This aspect of gender roles should create sex differences in exerting and reacting to influence that are manifested even in experimental studies of social influence where the formal status of men and women has been equated.<sup>5</sup> Berger (e.g., Berger et al., 1980) maintains that in task-oriented, laboratory groups, individuals who have favorable standing in terms of a diffuse status characteristic such as sex both are given and take more opportunity to state their own views and to exert leadership. Such persons have more influence over other group members and, in turn, are less influenced by them.

### **Reviews of Experimental Literature**

Is it true, then, that there are sex differences in ease of influencing and being influenced, even in settings not involving formal status inequalities? Fortunately, the research literature presents a wealth of information, especially about sex differences in how easily people are influenced. Reviews by Eagly (1978) and Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) of the experimental literature on conformity and persuasion found that the majority of studies reported no significant sex differences. However, among the studies in which significant differences were found, almost all of these differences indicated that females were more influenceable than males.

Before statistical methods were used for aggregating research findings, the fact that most studies failed to find a significant sex difference usually would have been taken as evidence that there is no overall sex difference or that any sex difference is so small that it is generally masked by situational factors. However, use of statistical methods of research integration, often termed *meta-analysis* (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981), may allow a reviewer to conclude that such a difference, although small, is reliable and can be considered statistically significant when the entire set of available studies is taken into account. In a meta-analysis, a quantitative summary is made of the results of independent studies testing the same hypothesis—in this instance, the hypothesis that women are more easily influenced than men. A meta-analysis thereby assesses the evidence that an entire body of research provides about this sex difference.

Meta-analytic studies have established that women are more easily influenced than men (Cooper, 1979; Eagly & Carli, 1981). This overall sex difference proved to be statistically significant when aggregated across a large number of studies. In addition, the magnitude of this difference was assessed

for each study in terms of its *effect size*, which was a standardized score defined as the difference between the means of the male and female groups divided by the within-group standard deviation assumed to be common to the male and female populations (Cohen, 1977; Glass et al., 1981). Based on a sample of 148 conformity and persuasion experiments, the size of the sex difference was estimated to be between .16 and .26 in these standard score units (Eagly & Carli, 1981). In terms of correlational statistics, this overall effect size corresponded to a point-biserial correlation between sex and influenceability that was between .08 and .13. In other words, subjects' gender accounted for about 1% of the variation in subjects' persuasibility and conformity.

These meta-analytic studies have also suggested that the tendency for women to be more easily influenced than men is somewhat stronger in experimental settings involving on-going interaction—namely, in group pressure conformity experiments, an experimental paradigm stemming from the work of Muzafer Sherif (1935, 1936), Solomon Asch (1956), and other investigators (e.g., Crutchfield, 1955). In such studies, the influence induction consists of presenting subjects with other group members who hold beliefs or attitudes discrepant from subjects' own positions. These other members have surveillance over subjects' responses to their influence induction; that is, these other members know (or appear to know) whether subjects have conformed to their views. For experiments of this type, Eagly and Carli (1981) estimated that the size of the conformity sex difference was between .23 and .32 in standard score units.

The idea that the stereotypic sex difference is more likely to be obtained in group situations where men and women have surveillance over each other's behavior was confirmed by the findings of two recent conformity experiments that included a manipulation of surveillance (Eagly & Chrvala, Note 1; Eagly, Wood, & Fishbaugh, 1981). In these experiments, male and female subjects formed mixed-sex groups and received opinions from the other group members that challenged their own views. Subjects then gave their own opinions while the other group members either did or did not have surveillance over these opinions. Males were less conforming than females only with surveillance.

The findings of these conformity experiments, then, were consistent with the meta-analytic generalization that group settings are especially conducive to the stereotypic sex difference whereby women yield to other members' opinions. The importance of the group and of the opportunity it ordinarily provides for surveillance is compatible with the present analysis of how the effects of status carry over

<sup>5</sup> See Eagly and Wood (in press) for a discussion of various alternative explanations of sex differences in influenceability and ease of influencing.

from the larger society to new settings. Thus, Berger's theory of status characteristics (Berger et al., 1980) as well as Darley and Fazio's (1980) idea that a sequence of interactions underlies behavioral confirmations suggest that stereotypic sex differences are particularly likely in interactive contexts that allow women and men to observe and react to one another. Outside of the group pressure conformity paradigm, most social influence experiments do not allow social interaction. For example, in the typical persuasion experiment, subjects respond to influence inductions presented via written texts or audio or video recordings. The social interaction thought to be involved in communicating expectancies and inducing their behavioral confirmation could not occur in such a situation.

There is another point to be kept in mind when evaluating the magnitude of the sex differences obtained in the experimental literature: Even the small effect sizes reported by Eagly and Carli (1981) probably overestimate the influenceability sex difference that has been obtained because at least a portion of this difference may be a research artifact. In the Eagly and Carli (1981) meta-analysis, two possible artifactual causes of the sex difference in influenceability were examined: (a) a greater frequency of masculine than feminine content in the influence inductions used in the studies, and (b) a greater frequency of male than female researchers. Although there was no evidence that influence inductions had a masculine bias, the hypothesis that sex of researchers was a determinant of the sex difference was supported: 79% of the authors of influenceability studies were men, and male authors reported larger sex differences than female authors, in the direction of greater persuasibility and conformity among women. The point-biserial correlation between the sex of the authors of the studies and the effect size of the reported sex differences was .41, with larger effects reported by male authors.<sup>6</sup>

The correlational nature of this relation between sex of researchers and the sex difference outcomes of their experiments precludes a strong causal interpretation, at least until one or more mechanisms are understood by which researchers' gender may affect reported research outcomes. Nevertheless, these findings have one likely implication for the present analysis—namely, that the sex difference in influenceability is probably very small in settings not involving hierarchical roles giving men higher status than women. Eagly and Carli (1981) estimated that had there been equal numbers of male and female social influence researchers, the overall influenceability sex difference would have been between .11 and .18 in standard score units.

In addition to addressing the issue of how easily men and women are influenced, the research liter-

ature on conformity and related behaviors provides insight into whether there are sex differences in exerting influence. Given that men and women are placed in exactly the same circumstances in these studies, do they differ in how readily they influence other persons? Significantly greater success by males as agents of influence has not been found consistently in the research literature on conformity and persuasion (Eagly, 1978). Yet recent reviews (S. M. Brown, 1979; Lockheed, in press) have documented an overall tendency for males to be more influential and dominant in group settings in laboratory experiments. Although these reviews have not provided estimates of the size of such effects, it is worth noting that such findings continue to be obtained in recent, methodologically strong investigations (e.g., Eskilson & Wiley, 1976; Ridgeway, 1981).

In summary, social psychological studies of social influence are quite informative about the impact of gender on influence. Appropriate analyses of this empirical literature show that small sex differences in the stereotypic direction are generally revealed in studies of small-group interaction carried out in laboratories and other settings (e.g., juries) where interaction is initiated in the absence of preexisting role hierarchies and formal status inequalities between the sexes. It appears to be true, then, that men are slightly more influential than women and women are slightly more easily influenced in such settings. The small size of these sex differences will become increasingly apparent as more investigators estimate their magnitude in meta-analytic reviews.<sup>7</sup> Yet even in traditional, nonstatistical reviews, the small magnitude of the sex differences is suggested by the relatively large number of studies that failed to obtain a significant difference between male and female behavior when a stereotypic sex difference was predicted. Because of the low power of many research designs, small differences often fail to reach significance (Cohen, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> A reanalysis of Judith Hall's (1978) meta-analytic review of sex differences in decoding nonverbal cues showed that female authorship was associated with larger sex differences in the female direction (Eagly & Carli, 1981). In other words, women investigators were more likely to find that women are more accurate than men at decoding nonverbal cues. It appears, then, that female investigators are adept at finding a sex difference that favors women (decoding skill) and have difficulty finding a sex difference that favors men (influenceability). In parallel fashion, male investigators are adept at finding a sex difference that favors men (influenceability) and have difficulty finding one that favors women (decoding skill). Eagly and Carli (1981) discussed several possible mechanisms by which researchers' gender may affect the sex difference outcomes of their experiments.

<sup>7</sup> Small magnitude may be characteristic of many other sex differences as well. A recent meta-analysis of sex differences in cognitive abilities (Hyde, 1981) also documented small, stereotypic differences.

## *Reviews of Organizational Literature*

Although it is clear that small, stereotypic sex differences in influence and influenceability appear in laboratory groups and other newly formed groups, it is considerably less certain whether in organizations such sex differences also characterize interaction between women and men of equal formal status. In fact, reviewers of leadership studies conducted in organizational settings (e.g., Barthol, 1978; L. K. Brown, 1979; S. M. Brown, 1979; Osborn & Vicars, 1976; Terborg, 1977) have questioned the presence of stereotypic sex differences and argued that little, if any, difference has been demonstrated in the leadership behavior of male and female managers or in subordinates' reactions to them, once factors such as status and type of job are controlled.<sup>8</sup> More generally, in a wide-ranging study of behavior in business corporations, Kanter (1977) argued that apparent gender differences in the behavior of managers and administrators are a product of the relative positions of men and women in such organizations. According to Kanter, the behaviors often believed to characterize women managers and administrators (e.g., being too emotional and controlling, and insufficiently aggressive) are those that would be expected from persons who lack substantial power and whose advancement is blocked—exactly the situation so often experienced by women in corporations. Kanter argued that any such tendencies in women cannot be accounted for by psychological attributes stemming from female biology or socialization to a female gender role. Rather, they are explained by women's typical situations within corporate hierarchies. Indeed, a similar conclusion was also reached by the subjects in Eagly and Wood's (1982) perceived influence experiments: Although male and female behavior was thought to differ because of males' higher status, males and females of equal status were believed to induce the same amount of compliance with their recommendations.

This equal influence of women and men who have equal status in organizations can be reconciled with the findings of laboratory experiments if it is assumed that the impact of sex as a diffuse status characteristic is not strong enough to affect people's expectations in the presence of the more specific status characteristics that are usually salient in organizations (e.g., job titles, job-related expertise). Although it has been suggested that differing status characteristics generally cumulate rather than nullify one another's impact (Webster & Driskell, 1978),

people who are equated in terms of highly task-relevant characteristics such as job title may not be discriminably differentiated in terms of more global characteristics such as sex and race (Webster, 1977). In organizations, then, any effects of sex may be easily overshadowed by characteristics more immediately relevant to job performance, especially in long-term relationships (Terborg, 1977). Therefore, given that comparisons between male and female managers in organizational studies are between persons in the same or equivalent positions, few sex differences would be found. In contrast, in the relatively more fluid and unstructured situation of many newly formed groups, including laboratory groups, sex can convey information about status with much less competition from other cues and thereby create small, stereotypic sex differences (L. K. Brown, 1979).

## **Gender and Status as Determinants of Sex Differences in Influence Behavior**

According to the social structural analysis of sex differences presented in this article, more than one level of explanation is needed to understand why gender affects social influence. The differing distributions of men and women into hierarchical roles in natural settings and the legitimate authority associated with high-status roles provide the major explanation of the social influence sex differences that occur in natural settings and are represented in stereotypes about men and women. For the most part, these differences are a direct effect of men's higher formal status in most role relationships. Yet we also need a second level of explanation—a psychological one based on the indirect effect that these status differences of natural settings have on behavior through their impact on people's expectancies about their own and others' behavior. This second level is necessary because in small groups where social interaction begins in the absence of formal status inequalities on the basis of gender there generally develops a weak version of the status-correlated sex differences that exist in the larger society (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 1981; Lockheed, in press). As a result, societal social structure tends to reestablish itself in new groups that are formed. A social psychological analysis of the processes by which the society constantly replicates its hierarchical structures in newly formed groups suggests that prior experience with these structures gives people expectancies about men and women, and these expectancies, in turn, affect behavior.

Whether this status analysis of sex differences is uniquely relevant to social influence or is also relevant to other classes of social behaviors is an issue deserving of further consideration. Nancy Henley (1977) has argued that status differences account

<sup>8</sup> These reviewers did not utilize meta-analytic methods to integrate research findings. Although it is possible that meta-analysis would reveal a small sex difference, there is consensus among these reviewers that sex differences are larger in laboratory experiments than in organizational studies.

for sex differences in nonverbal behavior, and Rhoda Unger (1976, 1978) has made the same point in relation to a variety of social behaviors. These analyses suggest that a theory of sex differences that utilizes status concepts may have general utility.

Some caution is in order, however, in relation to the assumption that status accounts for a wide range of sex differences in social behavior. Rather, the argument that the sexes differ because men are more likely to have high-status roles should be regarded as part of a more general analysis based on the distribution of groups into social roles. The central idea of this more general analysis is that significant bases of categorizing people, such as sex, provide a basis for distributing people into social roles that vary on a number of dimensions. Status is only one such dimension. To achieve a general understanding of the behavioral effects of personal attributes such as sex, a careful examination is needed of how these personal attributes link to various dimensions of social roles.

A particular personal attribute such as sex may link to social roles in several ways. For example, sex not only provides a basis for distributing people into role hierarchies, but also provides a basis for distributing people into paid employment versus homemaker roles. Recent research (Eagly & Steffen, *in press*) found that an accentuated version of the traditional female personality stereotype was ascribed to people who fulfill a homemaker role, regardless of their sex. An accentuated version of the traditional male stereotype was ascribed to people who are employed full-time, regardless of their sex. Because men were judged as more likely than women to be employed, belief in stereotypic personality attributes may reflect perceivers' observations of the distribution of males and females into homemaker and employee occupational roles.

Related distributional analyses can be offered for other important attributes of people, such as race, ethnicity, and age. For example, it has been argued that beliefs about racial differences may be based on observations that racial groups differ in social class (Feldman, 1972; Smedley & Bayton, 1978; Triandis, 1977). In general, then, viewing gender in terms of distributions into role hierarchies illustrates a type of analysis based on distributions of people into social roles and societal groups. This approach allows us to understand the behavioral correlates of personal attributes such as race and sex, not by first looking inward at personality structure, but by looking outward toward social structure.

### Social Influence as a Product of Gender-Differentiating Personality Traits

From a more conventional psychological perspective concerning gender, sex differences are a product of

personality traits that differentiate between women and men. Such traits are held to be the result of socialization, or, in some instances, of biological factors. The most common argument is that girls and boys are exposed to different socialization pressures (e.g., Barry, Bacon, & Child, 1957; Weitzman, 1979), and learn to behave in ways that are consistent with the definition of gender in their society. Men and women, according to such an analysis, emerge as adults with decidedly different personalities. Behavioral differences between men and women are held to be a product of these differing personal characteristics.

Even though the present analysis does not invoke personality differences as causes of sex differences, personality explanations may have some merit (e.g., Buss, 1981; Klein & Willerman, 1979) and are not entirely incompatible with aspects of the social role approach developed in this article. One possible link between a personality and a social role approach utilizes the gender-role principle that expectancies about behavior apply to people merely on the basis of their sex. To the extent this is so, it is likely that agents of socialization, such as parents and teachers, hold these expectancies and attempt to prepare children to perform expected behaviors. In addition, socializing agents may be aware of the differing distributions of the sexes into occupational and other social roles and therefore emphasize training and education that prepares girls and boys for roles that they have a fairly high probability of occupying. For these role-linked reasons, then, girls and boys may be treated differently and may develop somewhat different traits and abilities.<sup>9</sup>

### Effects of Social Change

The present analysis of gender and social influence has clear implications for understanding how sex differences may change over time. As Gergen (1973) has noted, social science findings may appear and disappear in response to changes in societal and cultural factors. A social role analysis of sex differences suggests that sex differences will change as the distributions of men and women into social roles change. In particular, the role analysis predicts that sex differences will lessen as women become more frequent occupants of higher status roles.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Despite the plausibility of assuming that anticipated roles affect personality through their effect on socialization, some research findings are less favorable to a personality explanation of influence sex differences than to explanation in terms of the behavioral confirmation of status-linked expectancies. For example, the tendency for the stereotypic conformity sex difference to occur only when group members are under each other's surveillance (Eagly & Chrvala, Note 1; Eagly, Wood, & Fishbaugh, 1981) suggests the behavioral confirmation of status-linked expectancies.

<sup>10</sup> Eagly and Carli (1981) reported that sex differences in

If social change proceeds to the point that men and women become equally represented at all levels of most hierarchies, those aspects of sex differences that are by-products of formal status inequalities would disappear from our behavior, and, in turn, would then begin to disappear from our stereotypes and expectancies. If we cease to expect sex-typed behavior in ourselves and others, the cycle would be broken by which a social pattern of inequality existing in the larger society spills over into our laboratories, committees, and conversation groups and establishes those small and stereotypic sex differences. Social changes already under way in our society, then, if they continue, should bring about cognitive and behavioral changes that begin to erase the power differentials that have characterized everyday relations between men and women.

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