GENDER ROLE, ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS, AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

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This study examined the relationship among biological sex, gender role, organizational status, and conflict management behavior of males and females in three similar organizations. Individuals (N = 118) from upper and lower status organizational positions completed the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II, in the context of two recalled organizational conflicts (Rahim, 1983a), and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). After controlling for biological sex, when compared with other gender roles masculine individuals were highest on the dominating conflict style, whereas feminine individuals were highest on the avoiding style, and androgynous individuals on the integrating style. Further, upper organizational status individuals were higher on the integrating style, while lower status individuals reported greater use of avoiding and obliging styles.

Conflict management skills are important if individuals are to function effectively at any level within organizations. With increasing numbers of women moving into decision making positions in organizations (Powell, 1988), coupled with the obvious importance of conflict management skills in providing effective leadership, there has been an increased focus on the possible existence of sex differences in the ability to manage conflict. For example, some have expressed skepticism about women's ability to adopt managerial roles and responsibilities, with the managerial role often associated with the possession of masculine rather than feminine characteristics (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Shein, 1989; Powell & Butterfield, 1979). This has occurred despite findings from research examining conflict management style, and leadership style in general, that suggest males and females who occupy

equivalent managerial positions behave in much the same way (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Korabik, Baril, & Watson, 1993; Powell, 1988). Although considerations arising from discussions of leadership effectiveness have often shaped general debate, our focus here is not specifically on sex differences in conflict management at the leadership level. Rather, we focus more broadly on research on sex differences in dealing with conflict, and consider two theoretical perspectives which may provide a more effective means of explaining individual differences in conflict management style other than biological sex. One perspective highlights the likely influence of gender role orientation. The other emphasizes organizational structure variables and, specifically, organizational status. A better understanding of the contribution of these variables to conflict management has implications for selection and training in organizational contexts and is likely to prove particularly interesting for theorists in the area of gender role socialization.

Conflict management style has been and continues to be measured by a variety of different taxonomies. One of the first conceptual schemes for classifying conflict revolved around a simple cooperation–competition dichotomy (Deutsch, 1949). However, doubts were raised over the ability of the dichotomy to reflect the complexity of an individual's perceptions of conflict behavior (Ruble & Thomas, 1976; Smith, 1987) and a new two-dimensional grid for classifying the styles was developed (Blake & Mouton, 1964). While numerous researchers proposed revisions of this framework, Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) conceptualization has been one of the most popular. They differentiated the styles of resolving interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy their own concerns, while the second dimension explains the degree to which an individual tries to satisfy the needs or concerns of others. Combining the two dimensions results in five specific styles of conflict management, known as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Integrating is characterized by both high concern for self and for others, while an avoiding style is associated with both low concern for self and for others. An obliging style involves low concern for self and high concern for others; conversely, a dominating style is characterized by high concern for self and low concern for others. Compromising is associated with intermediate concern for both self and others. Although it has also been argued that individuals select among three or four conflict styles (Pruitt, 1983; Putnam & Wilson, 1982), evidence from confirmatory factor analyses suggests that the five factor model has a better fit with data than models of two, three, and four style orientations (Rahim & Magner, 1994, 1995).

Considerable research examining individual differences in conflict management style has focused upon sex as an explanatory variable. Although the associated literature is now sizeable, it is characterized by inconsistent results. Some studies suggest that women have a more cooperative orientation to conflict management than men (Rahim, 1983a; Rubin & Brown, 1975). Others suggest that women are more competitive (Bedell & Sistrunk, 1973; Rubin & Brown, 1975). According to the gender role perspective (Bem, 1974; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), differences in conflict management behavior of men

and women may be linked to, but not determined by, biological sex. Rather, gender roles, which are considered to represent learned patterns of masculine and feminine characteristics, may determine how individuals behave in certain circumstances (Cook, 1985). For example, men are generally thought to develop masculine characteristics, which include aggressiveness, independence, competitiveness and assertiveness, while women are thought to develop feminine characteristics such as emotionality, sensitivity and cooperativeness (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972). Since an individual's progress in an organization often seems to have been associated with the possession of masculine rather than feminine characteristics (Brenner et al., 1989; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Powell & Butterfield, 1979), it is possible that in order to progress in their careers women adopt a more masculine orientation. Supporting this suggestion is research evidence which strongly suggests that women managers possess more masculine characteristics than women in the general population (Fagenson, 1990; Muldrow & Bayton, 1979; Powell, 1988). To date, a major weakness in much of the research examining sex differences in conflict management style has been the apparent assumption that biological sex is equivalent to gender role (Korabik, 1990). Furthermore, many of the early conflict management studies were laboratory-based and used the Prisoner's Dilemma Matrix where individuals interacted with strangers on a short-term basis. Eagly and Johnson (1990) argued that in such circumstances sex-based gender roles may provide more guidance than they might normally, and hence produce behavior consistent with male–female stereotypes.

It is appropriate, therefore, to investigate the implications for conflict style of an individual's gender role orientation as well as their biological sex. The gender role perspective conceptualizes masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions, with individuals of either sex able to possess high or low levels of masculinity and femininity. Individuals who possess high levels of both are labeled androgynous; those possessing low levels of both are labeled undifferentiated. A number of theoretical sources suggest that some of the five conflict management styles are compatible with gender role orientation (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Kagan, 1964; Maccoby, 1966). Bem and Lenney (1976) suggest that strongly sex-typed individuals are constrained to their respective stereotypical behaviors, whereas androgynous individuals have greater behavioral flexibility and can adopt both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Following the gender role perspective, competitive or dominating behavior (high concern for self) appears consistent with a masculine gender role, while obliging and avoiding (low concern for self) behaviors appear consistent with a feminine gender role. The integrating and compromising conflict management styles, in which individuals have high concern for both self and others, suggest behavior that is both stereotypically masculine and feminine and thus these conflict styles appear compatible with an androgynous gender role (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Portello & Long, 1994). While few researchers have investigated the relationship between gender role and conflict management style, those who have done so found that (a) feminine individuals disapproved of conflict more than masculine and androgynous individuals (Baxter & Shepherd, 1978), (b) androgynous individuals

reported more use of integrating or compromising styles than feminine or undiffer-
entiated individuals (Yelsma & Brown, 1985), and (c) masculine individuals were
more likely to report a dominating style, while androgynous individuals were more
likely to report an integrating style (Portello & Long, 1994). Thus, since it is clear
that gender roles do not conform to the principal of biopsychological equivalence
(Korabik, 1990), many previous studies of the relationships between biological sex
and conflict style in organizational contexts are open to reinterpretation.

It has also been suggested that an individual's behavior in an organizational
setting may vary according to the position he or she holds in the organizational
hierarchy (Fagenson, 1990; Kanter, 1977). According to the organizational struc-
ture perspective, apparent sex differences in the behavior of men and women are
the product of the differing structural positions of the sexes. Within our society
women are more likely to be found in lower level organizational positions than men
(Powell, 1988) and to have greater difficulty in gaining access to positions that
allow control over resources (Smith & Grenier, 1982). Kanter (1977) argued that as
women are more often in positions of little power or opportunity, they typically
behave in ways that reflect their lack of power. Women and men who are equal in
terms of status should, however, behave similarly. Indeed, a number of researchers
have reported that organizational status accounts for differences in the behavior of
men and women. For example, Eagly and Wood (1982) demonstrated that status
accounted for the belief that women are more compliant than men, and Brenner
(1982) reported that differences in achievement, dominance and nurturance could
be accounted for by differences in organizational status. Yet few studies have
acknowledged that organizational structure variables, such as position or status in
the organizational hierarchy, may be important contributors to conflict management
style. In general, these studies reported differences in conflict management behav-
ior, which mirror the most commonly assumed sex differences. That is, high status
individuals used a competitive style, whereas low status individuals tended to coop-
erate (Watson, 1994). Further, researchers who have examined sex differences in
conflict style among individuals of similar organizational status report no differ-
ences between men and women (Korabik et al., 1993; Renwick, 1977), a finding
which reinforces the perspective that organizational status may be an important
determinant of conflict management style. In other words, it seems likely that much
of the previous research on biological sex and conflict style has failed to consider a
potentially important factor, namely the likely underlying differences in the organ-
izational status of men and women participants.

The focus of this study, therefore, was to examine the relationships, after con-
trolling for the effects of biological sex, between conflict management style and
both gender role and organizational status. Given the conflicting findings in the
literature, our hypotheses were to some extent exploratory in nature. Nevertheless,
as we argued earlier, we predicted that individuals' conflict management styles
would be influenced by their gender roles beyond any influence of biological sex.
Specifically, when compared with the other gender roles, we expected (a) mascu-
line individuals to emerge as significantly higher on the dominating conflict man-
agement style, (b) feminine individuals to be higher on the obliging and avoiding

styles, and (c) androgynous individuals to be higher on the integrating and compromising styles. We also hypothesized that conflict management styles would be influenced by the individual's status within their organization, with upper level individuals highest on the dominating style, and lower status individuals highest on the avoiding and obliging styles.

Method

Participants

Men and women occupying upper and lower level positions in organizations were asked to complete a questionnaire containing the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II (ROCI–II) (Rahim, 1983a) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). These measures led to classification of each individual into either masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated gender role categories, and identified the individual's disposition towards resolving conflict in an avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating, and obliging manner.

Data were collected via questionnaire distribution to 184 individuals holding upper and lower organizational positions in finance-related institutions. Three similar organizations were represented, with participants recruited from various departments and geographical locations. Given the similarity of the organization and the overall sample size, data were combined across institutions. A random selection procedure was used to recruit individuals from the lower organizational level. Given the hierarchical organizational structures, all individuals at the upper organizational level were targeted in order to produce an adequate sample size. Most questionnaires were distributed in person by the second author, and a collection point within each individual's organization was designated for their return. Where this was impractical, questionnaires were distributed through the organization's internal mail system and reply-paid envelopes provided for their return. One hundred and thirty-three individuals returned the questionnaire (72.3% response rate); 118 questionnaires were complete and used in subsequent analyses.

A 2 (biological sex) × 2 (organizational status) chi-square analysis revealed no differences in the proportion of males and females at each organizational level who responded, χ^2 (1, 117) = .03, *ns*. Mean ages, and standard deviations, in years, for the various sex and status sub-groups were as follows: low status females (M = 30.6, SD = 9.7), low status males (M = 29.9, SD = 9.7), high status females (M = 32.5, SD = 7.8) and high status males (M = 41.7, SD = 8.4).

Measures

Organizational Status. Organizational charts and position classification systems were used by the second author (who was familiar with the organization) to identify the levels of organizational status. As a validity check, individual participants were also asked to describe their position as either upper or lower organizational status: upper and lower levels were described as management/ supervisory and non management/supervisory, respectively. There was 100% agreement between the researcher's and participants' classifications. Upper status individuals

held titles such as manager and supervisor and were responsible for the supervision of employees. Job titles of lower status individuals included clerk, teller, loans officer, telephone marketing, and financial services consultants.

Conflict Management Style. Conflict management styles were assessed using Form C of the ROCI–II (Rahim, 1983a), which contains 28 items related to conflict situations involving participants and their peers.[1] The ROCI–II was designed to measure five dimensions or styles of resolving conflict: avoiding (6 items), compromising (4 items), dominating (5 items), integrating (7 items), and obliging (6 items). Individuals responded to each statement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree). Responses were then reverse coded, mean scores (range = 1–5) calculated for each dimension, with high scores indicating greater use of the particular conflict management style.

A number of studies have reported adequate test-retest and internal consistency coefficients for the ROCI–II (Ben-Yoav & Banai, 1992; Rahim, 1983a, 1983b; Weider-Hatfield, 1988). Cronbach α values for our sample were similar to those reported previously: .81 (avoiding), .66 (compromising), .74 (dominating), .81 (integrating), and .74 (obliging). Numerous studies using confirmatory factor analysis and multitrait-multimethod analytic techniques have reported evidence for the convergent and discriminant validity of the subscales (Ben-Yoav & Banai, 1992; Rahim, 1983b; Rahim & Magner, 1994, 1995; Van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990), with low correlations between the scales indicating that separate behavioral styles are being measured (Thornton, 1989).

Gender Role Orientation. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) was used to measure each individual's perceived masculine and feminine characteristics. The Masculinity and Femininity scales comprise 20 masculine and 20 feminine attributes, respectively. Participants responded in terms of how well each attribute describes themselves on a 7–point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Never or almost never true; 7 = Always or almost always true. Mean self-ratings on each scale were computed separately and used together as an index of androgyny, or as characterization of the person's gender role identification. The present study used the median split method to categorize participants as masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated. Thus, individuals were classified masculine if their masculinity and femininity scores fell above and below the median, respectively. For individuals classified feminine the opposite pattern existed. Androgynous individuals scored above the median on both scales, and undifferentiated below on both (Bem, 1977). The respective percentages of male and female participants classified within each gender role were 41.8% and 14.5% (masculine), 14.5% and 38.7% (feminine), 23.6% and 21.0% (androgynous), and 20.0% and 25.8% (undifferentiated), with these proportions not dissimilar to normative data reported by Bem (1974).

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[1] It should be acknowledged that conflict management styles may vary with the target (e.g., superior vs. subordinate), although we are not aware of specific research on this issue. Use of Form C (for peer conflict) was chosen as a precaution against this possibility.

Several studies (Ballard-Reisch & Elton, 1992; Bem, 1974; Cook, 1985; Wong, McCreary, & Duffy, 1990) have reported good test-retest or high internal consistency reliabilities for the masculinity and femininity scales, and in this study the respective Cronbach αs were .86 and .74. Although evidence for the convergent and discriminant validity of the BSRI is conflicting (e.g., Cunningham & Antill, 1980; Lippa, 1985; Marsh & Myers, 1986; Wong et al., 1990), the BSRI continues to be widely used and is considered to have adequate construct validity (see Portello & Long, 1994).

Procedure

The questionnaire informed respondents that the study was being conducted to examine how conflicts are resolved in organizations and the characteristics of people who resolve them. There were two types of conflict scenario: interpersonal and value conflicts. Interpersonal conflicts were disagreements originating from personality clashes, the manner of decision making or the way in which some issue should be approached. Value conflicts were conflicts related to basic personal values, beliefs, ideologies, or ethical issues. The order of presentation of interpersonal and value conflicts was counter-balanced.

Respondents were shown three hypothetical examples of an interpersonal/value conflict involving work peers, asked to describe a similar type of conflict situation that they had experienced with peers and then to complete the 28 items of the ROCI–II (indicating their degree of agreement with each item) with particular reference to that situation. This process was then repeated, with respondents shown another three hypothetical conflicts (of the other type), asked to describe a different conflict situation from that described previously and to complete the ROCI–II with reference to the latter conflict situation. (The six hypothetical examples of peer conflicts are presented in the Appendix.) Pilot testing with an independent sample of individuals from the organizations revealed no difficulties in understanding, relating to, or generating situations that were similar to the hypothetical scenarios. The final stage involved participants completing the BSRI. Standard instructions for both the ROCI–II and the BSRI were included in the questionnaire.

Results

As we are most interested in general tendencies, rather than situation specific behaviors, our analyses focus primarily on data averaged across the two conflict scenarios. (Correlations between scenarios ranged from .39 to .64, $p < .01$.) Thus, unless otherwise noted, all analyses reported here are based on the average of the interpersonal and value scenarios. However, important differences between the individual scenarios and the average results are noted.

Intercorrelations for the five conflict styles, biological sex, organizational status, and the raw scores on the two BSRI scales, masculinity and femininity, are shown in Table 1. The pattern of correlations between the five conflict styles was quite similar to that reported by Rahim (1983a). Significant correlations were detected between several of the conflict management styles and biological sex and

BSRI masculinity. Descriptive statistics for the five conflict management measures by gender role orientation and organizational status are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1
Correlations Between Conflict Management Styles, Biological Sex, Organizational Status and BSRI Masculinity and Femininity Raw Scores

| Variable | Variable | | | | | | | |
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoiding								
2. Compromising	.07							
3. Dominating	−.27**	−.01						
4. Integrating	−.26**	.49**	.17					
5. Obliging	.55**	.35**	−.12	.06				
6. Sex	−.27**	−.19*	.21*	−.04	−.25**			
7. Status	.29**	−.09	−.08	−.30*	.20*	−.17		
8. Masculinity	−.47**	.07	.32**	.28**	−.24**	.33**	−.27**	
9. Femininity	.13	.09	−.14	.18	.15	−.18	−.07	.24**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. (two-tailed)

In order to examine the effect of gender role on conflict management style after controlling for biological sex, two steps were carried out for each conflict management style. First, a regression was conducted with biological sex as the predictor and the conflict management style as the criterion variable and the residuals were calculated. These residuals were then used as a measure of the particular conflict management style after controlling for biological sex. Second, the residuals from the regression analysis were used as the dependent measure in a one-way ANOVA with gender role. This strategy allowed us to investigate the differences in conflict management style among the four gender role groups, after controlling for the influence of biological sex. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for the conflict management regression residuals and the results of post hoc analyses (*LSD*, $\alpha = .05$) where a significant main effect for gender role was identified.

The one-way ANOVAs revealed significant gender role main effects for avoiding, $F(3, 113) = 5.19$, $p < .01$, dominating, $F(3, 113) = 3.59$, $p < .05$, and integrating, $F(3, 113) = 3.72$, $p < .05$. Specifically, for avoiding the feminine group scored significantly higher than masculine and androgynous groups, and the masculine significantly less than the undifferentiated group. The masculine group was found to be significantly higher on dominating than both the feminine and androgynous groups. Finally, the androgynous group was found to be higher on integrating than the feminine and undifferentiated groups, and the masculine group also scored significantly higher than the undifferentiated group. No significant gender role main effects were identified for compromising, $F(3, 113) = 1.09$, *ns*, or obliging, $F(3,$

Table 2
Means (and Standard Deviations) for Each of the Five Conflict Management Styles by Gender Role Orientation and Organizational Status

Style	Gender Role Orientation				
	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated	Overall
Avoiding					
Upper status	2.75	3.36	2.81	3.01	2.93
	(.79)	(.34)	(.70)	(.39)	(.66)
Lower status	2.71	3.67	3.26	3.43	3.34
	(.54)	(.60)	(.74)	(.61)	(.69)
Overall	2.74	3.55	2.98	3.38	3.13
	(.70)	(.53)	(.73)	(.57)	(.71)
Compromising					
Upper status	3.59	3.73	3.78	3.74	3.70
	(.40)	(.24)	(.37)	(.36)	(.36)
Lower status	3.76	3.63	3.7	3.48	3.632
	(.46)	(.45)	(.62)	(.63)	(.54)
Overall	3.65	3.67	3.75	3.57	3.66
	(.42)	(.38)	(.47)	(.56)	(.46)
Dominating					
Upper status	3.12	2.88	3.04	2.73	2.98
	(.49)	(.38)	(.61)	(.64)	(.55)
Lower status	3.41	2.58	3.01	2.72	2.86
	(.46)	(.59)	(.87)	(.45)	(.65)
Overall	3.22	2.69	3.03	2.73	2.92
	(.49)	(.54)	(.70)	(.52)	(.60)
Integrating					
Upper status	4.09	3.96	4.15	4.11	4.09
	(.33)	(.48)	(.27)	(.30)	(.34)
Lower status	3.94	3.8	4.086	3.61	3.84
	(.45)	(.54)	(.43)	(.43)	(.49)
Overall	4.04	3.89	4.12	3.79	3.96
	(.37)	(.51)	(.33)	(.45)	(.43)
Obliging					
Upper status	2.99	3.22	3.12	2.92	3.06
	(.58)	(.34)	(.47)	(.39)	(.48)
Lower status	3.10	3.52	3.17	3.17	3.26
	(.40)	(.39)	(.70)	(.31)	(.55)
Overall	3.03	3.41	3.14	3.08	3.16
	(.52)	(.40)	(.56)	(.55)	(.52)

113) = 1.78, *ns.* Three results for the individual scenarios differed from the averaged results. Specifically, no significant main effect for gender role was identified for integrating in Scenario 1, $F(3, 113) = 1.85$, *ns*, or dominating in Scenario 2, $F(3, 113) = 2.14$, *ns.* Additionally, a significant main effect for gender role was identified for obliging in Scenario 1, $F(3, 13) = 2.91$, $p < .05$. Post hoc analyses indicated that the feminine group ($M = .21$, $SD = .36$) scored higher on obliging than the masculine ($M = -.06$, $SD = .52$) and undifferentiated ($M = -.16$, $SD = .50$) groups. The androgynous group ($M = .01$, $SD = .56$) did not differ significantly from any other group.

Table 3
Means (and Standard Deviations) of the Regression Residuals for Each of the Five Conflict Management Styles by Gender Role Orientation

Style	Gender Role Orientation				
	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated	Overall
Avoiding	$-.29_c$	$.32_a$	$-.13_{b,c}$	$.12_{a,b}$	.00
	(.69)	(.56)	(.71)	(.60)	(.68)
Compromising	.03	-.04	.10	-.11	.00
	(.41)	(.36)	(.49)	(.53)	(.45)
Dominating	$.24_a$	$-.15_b$	$.10_{a,b}$	$-.17_b$	.01
	(.45)	(.56)	(.73)	(.51)	(.59)
Integrating	$.08_{a,b}$	$-.09_{b,c}$	0.15_a	$-.18_c$	-.01
	(.37)	(.51)	(.33)	(.45)	(.43)
Obliging	-.06	.18	-.01	-.10	.00
	(.51)	(.37)	(.57)	(.53)	(.51)

Note Means, within each conflict management style, that do not share a subscript differ significantly (*LSD*, $\alpha = .05$).

The same ANOVAs were also conducted on the raw (i.e., before controlling for biological sex) conflict management scores. The patterns of significance differed from the above results in only two ways. A significant main effect for gender role was identified for average obliging, $F(3, 113) = 3.26$, $p < .05$. Specifically, the feminine group ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .40$) scored significantly higher than all other groups (masculine: $M = 3.03$, $SD = .52$; undifferentiated: $M = 3.08$, $SD = .55$; androgynous: $M = 3.14$, $SD = .56$). Additionally, a significant main effect for gender role was also identified for Scenario 2 dominating, $F(3, 113) = 3.06$, $p < .05$. Post hoc analyses revealed that the masculine group ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .43$) scored significantly higher than the feminine ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .79$) and undifferentiated ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .66$) groups. The androgynous group ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .39$) was also found to score significantly higher than the undifferentiated group.

A similar strategy was used to investigate the relationship between organizational status and conflict management style after controlling for the effects of biological sex. The only difference between the organizational status and the gender role analyses was the use of t-tests in preference to one way ANOVAs in the case of organizational status. The t-tests revealed significant differences between upper and lower status employees in average avoiding, $t(116) = -2.78$, $p < .01$, and average integrating, $t(115) = -3.43$, $p < .01$. Specifically, lower status employees ($M = .17$, $SD = .69$) were found to score higher on avoiding than upper status individuals ($M = -.17$, $SD = .63$), whereas upper status employees ($M = .13$, $SD = .34$) scored higher on integrating than lower status individuals ($M = -.13$, $SD = .48$). No significant effect was found for compromising, $t(115) = 1.30$, ns, dominating, $t(116) = .52$, ns, or obliging, $t(116) = -1.7$, ns. An identical pattern of results was found for both the interpersonal and value scenarios when analyzed separately.

The same series of t-tests was also conducted on the raw (i.e., before controlling for biological sex) conflict management scores. The results of these t-tests differed from the above patterns of significance in only two ways. Specifically, for both the average, $t(116) = -2.14$, $p < .05$, and Scenario 2, $t(116) = -2.04$, $p < .05$, data a significant difference in obliging scores between upper and lower status employees was found. In both cases the lower status (average: $M = 3.26$, $SD = .55$; Scenario 2: $M = 3.17$, $SD = .69$) employees were found to be more obliging than their upper status (average: $M = 3.06$, $SD = .48$; Scenario 2: $M = 2.94$, $SD = .56$) counterparts.

As two of the conflict management styles were found to be significantly related to gender role and organizational status, further analyses were conducted to investigate these relationships in detail. Specifically, for both of these conflict management styles a simultaneous regression strategy was used to explore the unique variance in the respective conflict management styles predicted by gender role and by organizational status. As gender role is a categorical variable (and therefore entered into the regression as a group of dummy variables) it was necessary to combine hierarchical and simultaneous regression techniques. Biological sex and organizational status were both entered on Step 1 and the gender role dummy variables on Step 2. Subsequently, R^2 change was then used as an indicator of the unique variance in the respective conflict management styles predicted by gender role and the square of the semi-partial correlation as an indicator of the unique variance predicted by both organizational status and biological sex. Table 4 displays the Step 2 standardized coefficients from both regressions. Biological sex and organizational status together were found to predict a significant 13.3% of the variance in the avoiding conflict management style, $F(1, 114) = 8.71$, $p < .01$. An investigation of the unique variance predicted on Step 2 revealed that gender role accounted for a significant 10.5% of variance in avoiding, $F(1, 111) = 5.10$, $p < .01$, and organizational status accounted for a significant 3.3% of the variance, $t(111) = 2.19$, $p < .05$. Interestingly, biological sex did not account for a significant amount of unique variance, $t(111) = -1.04$, ns. Similarly, biological sex and organizational status together predicted a significant 9.1% of the variance in the integrating conflict management style, $F(1, 113) = 5.62$, $p < .01$. Examination of

Step 2 reveals that, again, gender role alone accounts for a significant 6.1% of the variance in integrating, $F(1,113) = 2.65$, $p < .05$, and organizational status uniquely predicts 5.6% of variance, $t(111) = -2.70$, $p < .01$. As with avoiding, biological sex alone did not significantly predict integrating, $t(111) = -1.42$, ns.

Table 4

Standardized Regression Coefficients for Prediction of the
Avoiding and Integrating Styles by Biological Sex,
Organizational Status, and Gender Role

Variable	Avoiding	Integrating
Biological sex	−.09	−.14
Organizational status	.19*	−.25**
Masculine	−.26*	.23*
Feminine	.16	.08
Androgynous	−.13	.29*

Note For the masculine gender role masculine was coded as 1 and the other orientations 0, with undifferentiated as the excluded category. Similarly, for the feminine and androgynous gender roles, feminine and androgynous were respectively coded as 1.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Several BSRI items appeared to parallel the conflict style dimensions, so we also examined the data with these items excluded. Three judges (two authors and a graduate student in the area of conflict management) identified any BSRI items that they considered measured something analogous to conflict style. Items on which two judges agreed were deleted when classifying gender role. This led to the exclusion of three items associated with a masculine orientation, all of which (forceful, dominant, and aggressive) reflected a dominant conflict style. Excluding these items affected the gender role classification of 9 of the 118 participants, with the number in any gender role category varying by no more than 3 cases. The patterns reported in the analyses above remained statistically significant.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed support for both the gender role and organizational structure perspectives, beyond the effects of biological sex. Although not clear cut, some support was provided for the predictions that, compared with the other gender role orientations, a masculine gender role orientation was more likely to be associated with a dominating conflict style, a feminine orientation with the avoiding conflict management style, and an androgynous orientation with the integrating conflict management style. The predicted pattern on the obliging dimension was only observed before controlling for biological sex, suggesting that differences

between the gender role orientations on this dimension can be attributed to biological sex. No significant relationship between gender role and the compromising conflict management style was identified, either before or after controlling for biological sex.

Consistent with the organizational structure perspective, after controlling for biological sex, lower organizational status individuals reported greater use of the avoiding conflict management styles. Regression analyses demonstrated that the impact of status on this style was less substantial than that of gender role, but still more than biological sex. Lower organizational status individuals also reported greater use of the obliging conflict management style than upper organizational status individuals, but only before biological sex was controlled. Contrary to our hypotheses, upper organizational status was associated with the use of an integrating, but not a dominating, conflict management style. One possible explanation for this pattern may be that people at upper organizational levels typically experience particular types of conflict that have taught them to recognize and implement various types of solutions. Indeed, given that upper-level organizational roles require collaborative and creative problem-solving approaches (Portello & Long, 1994) and that there is a tendency for executive training programs to stress collaborative attempts at problem solving, perhaps we should have expected such an outcome. While this account would, of course, appear to assume that conflict management styles are acquired or trainable rather than reflecting relatively stable characteristics of the individual, it is of course possible that possession of such characteristics is something that contributes to people reaching upper organizational levels.

Some limitations of this research should be acknowledged. First, it would obviously be useful to replicate this work in different organizational settings. Second, extending the targets of the conflict beyond peers would also be valuable for establishing the generality of the conclusions. Third, our methodology does not permit any assessment of the frequency or severity of conflict, or indeed of the degree of positive/negative affect between participants in the scenarios. Behaviors considered appropriate may differ depending on whether the conflict is with a casual acquaintance or a friend. Given the relatively high scores obtained here for the compromising, integrating, and obliging styles, it is possible that individuals were responding with reference to conflicts with liked peers. It may also be the case that individuals confronted with more serious issues will respond with conflict styles that reflect greater concern for the self. Finally, although our data patterns were unaffected when we deleted BSRI items, which appeared to overlap with conflict style items, we must still acknowledge the potential problem from common method variance, with all data obtained from self-report instruments on the same testing occasion.

Although the variance in conflict management styles explained by gender role and organizational status, respectively, was not particularly large, by demonstrating relationships between conflict management style and an individual's gender role and organizational status above and beyond their biological sex, this study confirms the need to move beyond the "male versus female" explanation for differences in conflict management style in organizational settings, and to consider more carefully

the precise ways in which cognitive and organizational structure variables operate. As well as addressing the limitations highlighted previously, future research might also usefully probe a number of other important issues. For example, extending this line of research to situations where the referent role or relative status of individuals involved in the conflict is different (here conflict was constrained to that between peers) may well offer a different perspective. Also, particularly valuable would be longitudinal data on the influence of organizational structure variables such as status and power on both gender role orientation and conflict style. Finally, validating self-report data on conflict style with other measures obtained in organizational settings (e.g., behavioral measures or peer assessments) would be a useful adjunct to this research. Firm data on such questions would inform discussions about the determinants of gender role orientation, organizational advancement, and the precise nature of the interaction between these variables. In so doing, it would assist in identifying relevant considerations for personnel selection and development initiatives. Integration of such knowledge into organizational programs would not only enhance the quality of working relationships, but would also help to create an environment equally accessible to both men and women.

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Appendix
Hypothetical Examples of Conflict Situations

Example 1: Your peer's phone nearby you rings constantly, disturbing your work. You do not mind answering your peer's phone occasionally; however, it seems to you that your peer is never at his/her desk and is lazy when it comes to answering his/her phone.

Example 2: You and your peer share the same job task. Your peer has decided to change the way he/she performs the task and informs you that that is how they would like you to perform the task. You do not agree with the changes that your peer has made and do not approve of the manner in which your peer made the decision.

Example 3: You and your peer are discussing a co-worker who takes 2 hours for lunch almost every day instead of the allowed 1 hour. You know that on their time sheet they report having only the 1 hour break. You feel that this behavior is unacceptable and that he/she should be reported to the manager. Your peer does not feel that lying on a time sheet is a serious issue.

Example 4: A group of your work colleagues are going out to lunch. Your peer invites you to come along and informs that Jo is also coming. You do not like Jo and as such decline the lunch offer. Despite this your peer still encourages you to come along, saying

that it is silly of you not to come because of Jo. You are annoyed that your peer keeps persisting even after you have declined the offer.

Example 5: You have been discussing with a peer the behavior of a co-worker who you know sexually harasses other workers. Your peer feels that this behavior is harmless fun. You feel, however, that sexual harassment is a serious issue. You suggest reporting your co-worker for his/her behavior, but your peer is against this. You are concerned the harassment will continue if no action is taken.

Example 6: You and a peer have an ideological disagreement over the company's policy upon affirmative action.

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