

The Gender Gap in Business Leadership: Exploring an Affect Control Theory Explanation

Amy Kroska and Trent C. Cason
University of Oklahoma

We use affect control theory and its computer simulation program, *Interact*, to theoretically model the interactional dynamics that female and male business executives are likely to face in the workplace and show how these dynamics are likely to contribute to the gender gap in business leadership. Using several analysis strategies and data from 520 simulated events, we find that female executives face a wider range of executive-normative situations that require gender deviance than do male executives, and many of the deviance-inducing events are likely to be unavoidable as a business executive (e.g., confronting an unreliable employee, directing a foolish manager, selling something to an opponent). We also show that a female executive's performance of these gender-deviant actions is likely to elicit highly negative attributions (e.g., ruthless, sadistic, scornful, intolerant), giving the female executives identities with affective meanings that are further from the affective meaning of "an executive" than those likely to be given to gender-deviant male executives. Together these patterns suggest that female executives have less latitude than do male executives in the types of workplace behaviors they can enact without violating gender norms, constraints that are likely to make the path to business leadership more difficult for women. We show how our approach can be used to conceptualize components of the doing gender and other "doing" perspectives, and we discuss how it can be used to theorize about interactional processes underlying other inequalities, including those based on race, class, and age.

Table 1. Evaluation-Potency-Activity Profiles of Female and Male Business Leadership Identities

	Female Dictionary			Male Dictionary		
	Evaluation	Potency	Activity	Evaluation	Potency	Activity
Gender Modified Identities						
Female executive	2.15	2.10	1.73	1.06	.46	.77
Male executive	.13	2.66	1.71	.98	2.08	1.55
Female manager	1.68	1.82	1.83	.90	.25	.72
Male manager	-.18	2.38	1.81	.79	1.86	1.50
Gendered Identities ^a						
Manageress	1.44 †	1.32	1.59	1.22	1.23	.43
Manager	.83	2.26 *	1.74	.98	1.57	1.34 *
Businesswoman	2.46 **	2.25	2.02	1.23	.95	.77
Businessman	1.37	1.96	1.63	1.50	2.00 *	1.66 *

Notes: Data come from the 2001-03 U.S. *Interact* dictionaries (Francis and Heise 2006). Bolding highlights the higher value in each set. ^a t-tests assess differences between the corresponding dimensions within each pair of gendered identities. N for manageress in female dictionary = 28, in male dictionary = 20; N for manager in female dictionary = 29, in male dictionary = 35; N for businesswoman in female dictionary = 41, in male dictionary = 26; N for businessman in female dictionary = 34, in male dictionary = 41; significance is marked on the larger value, with † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests). t-tests could not be performed on the gender modified identities.

Table 2. Gender-Deviant Events and Actor Redefinitions in the Executive-Normative Sample in the Female Dictionary (N = 130)

	Event		Actor Redefinitions that Reduce Deflection after the Event:		Euclidean Distance from EPA of Executive (1.38, 2.75, 1.62) for:		
Gender Deviant for Females:	N (%)	Behavior	Object	Additional Attribute	New Attribute	Female/Male Executive with Additional Attribute	Executive with New Attribute
female - male deflection $\geq .5$	90 (69%)	(-1.07, .91, .71) chide, sue, punish	(.51, .56, .78) merchant, union member, protégé	(-1.97, -.71, -.27) petty, immoral, sadistic	(-2.04, -1.32, -.07) careless, selfish, grouchy	3.16	3.20
female - male deflection > 1.5	70 (54%)	(-1.43, .94, .69) bawl-out, defy, chide	(.60, .37, .77) union member, server, laborer	(-2.25, -.67, -.25) sadistic, scornful, spiteful	(-2.34, -1.29, -.05) scornful, intolerant, careless	3.31	3.35
female - male deflection > 4	31 (24%)	(-2.00, .90, .71) defy, browbeat, bribe	(1.16, .19, .84) shop clerk, laborer, union member	(-2.76, -.72, -.12) intolerant, unfair, scornful	(-2.92, -1.37, .08) intolerant, scornful, unfriendly	3.60	3.68
female - male deflection > 8	4 (3%)	(-2.00, 2.00, 1.00) coerce, boss around, fire_from a job	(2.00, .00, 1.00) employee, assistant, traveler	(-2.57, .81, .44) vengeful, [cruel, shrewd]	(-2.71, .17, .64) rude, egotistical, vengeful	3.21	3.36
Gender Deviant for Males:							
female - male deflection $\leq -.5$	32 (25%)	(2.00, .88, .88) beam at, lunch with, answer	(1.00, .63, .88) merchant, protégé, saleslady	(3.62, -.41, -.24)	(2.09, -.89, -.13) [obedient]	1.82	1.93
female - male deflection < -1.5	8 (6%)	(2.00, .00, 1.00) chitchat with, lunch with, [serve]	(2.00, 1.00, 1.00) customer, vacationer, worker	(4.20, -1.50, .06)	(2.56, -2.01, .16)	2.53	2.21

Notes: Simulations come from the business institution of the 2001-03 U.S. female *Interact* dictionary (Francis and Heise 2006). The EPA scores in the Behavior and Object columns are the average EPA value for behaviors and objects at that level of gender-deviance. The unbracketed concepts are within a Euclidean distance of 1 from the EPA profile in that cell, those in straight brackets [] have a distance greater than 1.0 but less than 1.25, and those in curved brackets {} have a distance greater than 1.25 but less than 1.50.

Table 3. Gender-Deviant Events and Actor Redefinitions in the Executive-Normative Sample in the Male Dictionary (N = 130)

Gender Deviant for Females:	N (%)	Event		Actor Redefinitions that Reduce Deflection after the Event:		Euclidean Distance from EPA of Executive (1.26, 1.93, 1.44) for:	
		Behavior	Object	Additional Attribute	New Attribute	Female/Male Executive with Additional Attribute	Executive with New Attribute
female - male deflection $\geq .5$	28 (22%)	(-1.36, 2.00, 1.36) scold, [boss around, chew out]	(.79, .64, .86) merchant, consultant, purchaser	(-1.32, 2.21, 1.68) {authoritarian}	(-2.02, .64, 1.09) ruthless, quarrelsome, hotheaded	2.60	2.70
female - male deflection $> .75$	12 (9%)	(-2.00, 2.00, 1.67) boss around, coerce, yell at	(.83, .50, .83) union member, protégé, merchant	(-1.91, 2.10, 2.13)	(-2.60, .53, 1.54) violent, ruthless, [hotheaded]	3.01	3.16
female - male deflection > 1	5 (4%)	(-2.00, 2.00, 2.00) [chew out], {scold, shout at}	(1.60, .40, .80) worker, traveler, assistant	(-2.20, 2.07, 2.46)	(-2.88, .51, 1.86) abusive, violent, {ruthless}	3.25	3.40
Gender Deviant for Males:							
female - male deflection $\leq -.5$	49 (38%)	(.29, .00, .24) beckon to, extol, request something from	(.41, .61, .78) superordinate, union member, strike breaker	(-1.20, -2.30, -.81) gullible, unpopular, [thoughtless]	(-1.26, -2.17, -.70) gullible, thoughtless, unpopular	2.58	2.62
female - male deflection $< -.75$	29 (22%)	(1.31, .00, .62) concur with, show something to, pay for	(.41, .62, .76) superordinate, union member, strike breaker	(.21, -1.96, -.25) {dependent, soft-spoken}	(.08, -1.85, -.14) {dependent, inhibited, submissive}	1.92	1.98
female - male deflection < -1	10 (8%)	(2.00, .00, .00) answer, show something to, confer with	(.60, .60, .80) union member, superordinate, strike breaker	(1.64, -1.68, -1.38)	(1.45, -1.59, -1.27) {soft-spoken, cautious}	1.93	2.01

Notes: Simulations come from the business institution of the 2001-03 U.S. male *Interact* dictionary (Francis and Heise 2006). The EPA scores in the Behavior and Object columns are the average EPA value for behaviors and objects at that level of gender-deviance. The unbracketed concepts are within a Euclidean distance of 1 from the EPA profile in that cell, those in straight brackets [] have a distance greater than 1.0 but less than 1.25, and those in curved brackets { } have a distance greater than 1.25 but less than 1.50.

Table 4. Behavior Differences and Deflection Scores for Female and Male Executives Interacting with Various Workplace Objects using the Female Dictionary

Behaviors	Object	Actor-based Deflection for:		Female - Male Deflection	Doing Gender for: ^a	Difference in EPA of Behavior:
		Female Executive	Male Executive			
(1.84, 1.55, 1.76) drink to, chat up, warn	employee (1.88, .05, .84)	.30	1.33	-1.03	female	(1.10, -.31, .28)
(.74, 1.86, 1.48) urge on, challenge, bargain with		1.05	.38	.67	male	
(1.68, .68, 1.33) chitchat with, chat up, chatter to	manager (.83, 2.26, 1.74)	.93	1.63	-.70	female	(1.16, -.24, -.17)
(.52, .92, 1.50) jest with, upbraid, bargain with		1.37	.85	.52	male	
(1.62, .98, 1.29) collaborate with, chat up, beam at	competitor (.69, 1.65, 1.78)	.82	1.38	-.56	female	(1.22, -.31, -.16)
(.40, 1.29, 1.45) bargain with, stop, discipline		1.50	.64	.86	male	
(2.04, .45, 1.73) chitchat with, drink with, chat up	VIP (1.79, 2.79, 1.87)	.90	2.28	-1.38	female	(1.11, -.09, .06)
(.93, .54, 1.67) chatter to, drink with, jest with		.96	1.21	-.25	gender- neutral	
(.92, 1.53, .98) direct, sell something to, bargain with	opponent (-.54, .79, 1.32)	1.31	.76	.55	male	(1.08, -.37, -.43)
(-.16, 1.90, 1.41) discipline, command, penalize		2.11	.42	1.69	male	
(.43, 2.09, .90) confront, bargain with, discipline	unreliable employee (-1.57, -.40, -.36)	1.72	.45	1.27	male	(.92, -.28, -.56)
(-.49, 2.37, 1.46) penalize		2.46	.30	2.16	male	
(.69, 1.52, .96) bargain with, direct, sell something to	foolish manager (-.84, .93, 1.22)	1.49	.71	.78	male	(.91, -.33, -.49)
(-.22, 1.85, 1.45) command, discipline, penalize		2.05	.43	1.62	male	

Notes: Simulation results come from the business institution of the 2001-03 U.S. female *Interact* dictionary (Francis and Heise 2006). The EPA profiles in the Behaviors columns create the least total deflection for a female executive (first profile) or a male executive (second profile) directing an action at the object in that row. ^a Events do gender for females when the actor-based deflection difference (female - male) \leq -.5 and actor-based deflection < 2 ; events do gender for males when the actor-based deflection difference (female - male) \geq .5 and actor deflection < 2 . Events that do gender for one gender are gender-deviant for the other gender.

Table 5. Behavior Differences and Deflection Scores for Female and Male Executives Interacting with Various Workplace Objects using the Male Dictionary

Behaviors	Object	Actor-based Deflection for:		Deflection Difference	Doing Gender for: ^a	Difference in EPA of Behavior
		Female Executive	Male Executive			
(1.24, .24, .49) concur with, show something to, pay for	employee (1.16, .48, .66)	.05	.88	-.83	female	(-.08, -1.29, -.48)
(1.32, 1.53, .97) supervise, join up with, talk to		.17	.29	-.12	gender- neutral	
(1.24, .03, .46) concur with, pay for, show something to	manager (.98, 1.57, 1.34)	.10	1.03	-.93	female	(-.06, -1.14, -.48)
(1.30, 1.17, .94) barter with, supervise, talk to		.09	.42	-.33	gender- neutral	
(1.32, .01, .53) concur with, show something to, pay for	competitor (1.26, 1.66, 1.57)	.08	1.01	-.93	female	(-.09, -1.14, -.48)
(1.41, 1.15, 1.01) barter with, talk to, supervise		.06	.39	-.33	gender- neutral	
(1.38, -.15, .55) concur with, show something to, pay for	VIP (1.30, 2.25, 1.33)	.12	1.12	-1.00	female	(-.10, -1.04, -.48)
(1.48, .89, 1.03) place order with, speak to, barter with		.02	.49	-.47	gender- neutral	
(.66, .44, .19) pay for, tell something to, turn to	opponent (-.46, .24, 1.01)	.43	1.20	-.77	female	(.09, -1.37, -.52)
(.57, 1.81, .71) discipline, confront, exalt		.71	.67	.04	gender- neutral	
(.39, .55, .13) prompt, cue, dissuade	unreliable employee (-1.15, -.07, -.32)	.65	1.37	-.72	female	(.13, -1.42, -.57)
(.26, 1.97, .70) discipline, confront, urge on		.96	.81	.15	gender- neutral	
(.59, .37, .18) turn to, pay for, tell something to	foolish manager (-.64, .63, .81)	.47	1.28	-.81	female	(.10, -1.32, -.54)
(.49, 1.69, .72) discipline, confront, train		.69	.72	-.03	gender- neutral	

Notes: Simulation results come from the business institution of the 2001-03 U.S. male *Interact* dictionary (Francis and Heise 2006). The EPA profiles in the Behaviors columns create the least total deflection for a female executive (first profile) or a male executive (second profile) directing an action at the object in that row. ^a Events do gender for females when the actor-based deflection difference (female - male) \leq -.5 and actor-based deflection < 2 ; events do gender for males when the actor-based deflection difference (female - male) \geq .5 and actor deflection < 2 . Events that do gender for one gender are gender-deviant for the other gender.

Appendix

Behaviors and Identities close to Evaluation (E), Potency (P), and Activity (A) Profiles in the Full Sample and the Executive-Normative Subsample

EPA Profile #	EPA Profile	Female Dictionary		Male Dictionary	
		Behaviors	Objects	Behaviors	Objects
1	2, 2, 2	<i>entertain</i> , .50 <i>amuse</i> , .60 <i>back</i> , .70 <i>flatter</i> , .80 <i>congratulate</i> , .81	<i>entrepreneur</i> , .42 <i>opportunist</i> , .43 <i>coach</i> , .44 <i>leader</i> , .50 <i>businesswoman</i> , .52	<i>entertain</i> , .38 <i>coach</i> , .40 <i>compete with</i> , .41 <i>surprise</i> , .46 <i>joke with</i> , .48	<i>girl Friday</i> , .35 <i>teammate</i> , .41 <i>athlete</i> , .55 <i>businessman</i> , .60 <i>role model</i> , .71
2	2, 2, 0	<i>advise</i> , .40 <i>touch</i> , .45 <i>compromise with</i> , .50 <i>explain something to</i> , .51 <i>reassure</i> , .58	<i>scientist</i> , .29 <i>computer expert</i> , .73 <i>organizer</i> , .74 <i>advisor</i> , .77 <i>employer</i> , .91	<i>financially back</i> , .22 <i>sympathize with</i> , .44 <i>counsel</i> , .45 <i>listen to</i> , .48 <i>instruct</i> , .48	<i>helper</i> , .88 <i>negotiator</i> , .93
3	2, 2, -2				
4	2, 0, 2	<i>drink with</i> , .80 <i>chitchat with</i> , .98	<i>waitress</i> , .85 <i>traveler</i> , .98		<i>waitress</i> , .70 <i>server</i> , .96
5	2, 0, 0	<i>turn to</i> , .51 <i>look at</i> , .63 <i>sit next to</i> , .80 <i>ask about something</i> , .92 <i>discuss something with</i> , .97	<i>small businessman</i> , .28 <i>receptionist</i> , .41 <i>secretary</i> , .74 <i>assistant</i> , .77 <i>flight attendant</i> , .84	<i>answer</i> , .85 <i>show something to</i> , .94 <i>confer with</i> , .95 <i>chitchat with</i> , .95	<i>protégé</i> , .77 <i>apprentice</i> , .80 <i>small businessman</i> , .82 <i>aide</i> , .83 <i>assistant</i> , .84
6	2, 0, -2		<i>retiree</i> , .95		<i>retiree</i> , .93
7	2, -2, 2				
8	2, -2, 0				
9	2, -2, -2				
10	0, 2, 2	<i>command</i> , .79 <i>compete with</i> , .93 <i>disagree with</i> , .95	<i>capitalist</i> , .80 <i>competitor</i> , .80 <i>strike leader</i> , .82 <i>manager</i> , .91 <i>bouncer</i> , .93	<i>command</i> , .82	<i>celebrity</i> , .38 <i>strike leader</i> , .98
11	0, 2, 0		<i>insider</i> , .56 <i>boss</i> , .80 <i>bureaucrat</i> , .96 <i>foreman</i> , .98	<i>reproach</i> , .94	<i>interviewer</i> , .83
12	0, 2, -2				
13	0, 0, 2	<i>banter with</i> , .54 <i>blabber to</i> , .81	<i>salesman</i> , .60	<i>hurry</i> , .81 <i>parody</i> , .83 <i>haggle with</i> , .95	<i>salesman</i> , .53

14	0, 0, 0	<i>nudge</i> , .23 <i>curry favor from</i> , .31 <i>harangue</i> , .48 <i>request something from</i> , .52 <i>kowtow to</i> , .55	<i>spendthrift</i> , .13 <i>salesclerk</i> , .87 <i>tenant</i> , .88 <i>apprentice</i> , .89 <i>yes-man</i> , .90	<i>nudge</i> , .22 <i>beckon to</i> , .33 <i>gawk at</i> , .35 <i>prompt</i> , .36 <i>kowtow to</i> , .37	<i>spendthrift</i> , .41 <i>toady</i> , .44 <i>novice</i> , .52 <i>bureaucrat</i> , .59 <i>strike breaker</i> , .77
15	0, 0, -2	<i>whisper to</i> , .49	<i>clock watcher</i> , .84		
16	0, -2, 2				
17	0, -2, 0				<i>subordinate</i> , .72 <i>office boy</i> , .94 <i>yes-man</i> , .94
18	0, -2, -2				<i>clock watcher</i> , .99
19	-2, 2, 2	<i>boss around</i> , .86 <i>yell at</i> , .87	<i>pimp</i> , .27 <i>mobster</i> , .61 <i>gangster</i> , .61		
20	-2, 2, 0	<i>fire _from a job</i> , .32 <i>lay-off from a job</i> , .84 <i>cut the pay of</i> , .84			
21	-2, 2, -2				
22	-2, 0, 2	<i>chew out</i> , .27 <i>mouth off to</i> , .57 <i>cuss</i> , .66 <i>interrupt</i> , .68 <i>chastise</i> , .73	<i>gigolo</i> , .66	<i>pester</i> , .71 <i>cuss</i> , .74	
23	-2, 0, 0	<i>deprecate</i> , .22 <i>scowl at</i> , .24 <i>scoff at</i> , .34 <i>blame</i> , .45 <i>disobey</i> , .51	<i>foe</i> , .52 <i>bootlicker</i> , .78 <i>malcontent</i> , .96	<i>ridicule</i> , .31 <i>denigrate</i> , .31 <i>exploit</i> , .37 <i>scowl at</i> , .37 <i>demean</i> , .38	<i>foe</i> , .43 <i>scrooge</i> , .60 <i>failure</i> , .78 <i>sexist</i> , .93 <i>malingerer</i> , .95
24	-2, 0, -2	<i>frown at</i> , .58	<i>scrooge</i> , .93	<i>neglect</i> , .97	
25	-2, -2, 2		<i>prostitute</i> , .85 <i>whore</i> , .88		
26	-2, -2, 0		<i>freeloader</i> , .97	<i>beg</i> , .55	<i>bootlicker</i> , .64 <i>prostitute</i> , .71 <i>freeloader</i> , .78 <i>hooker</i> , .80 <i>shoplifter</i> , .83
27	-2, -2, -2	<i>mumble to</i> , .98	<i>do-nothing</i> , .26 <i>underachiever</i> , .29 <i>unemployed person</i> , .70 <i>failure</i> , .84		<i>do-nothing</i> , .17 <i>loafer</i> , .68 <i>unemployed person</i> , .77 <i>has-been</i> , .98

Notes: Concepts come from the business institution of the 2001-03 U.S. *Interact* dictionaries (Francis and Heise 2006). Each cell lists the five business-related behaviors or identities with EPA profiles that are closest, within a Euclidean distance of 1, to the profile in that row. An empty cell indicates that no concepts are within a Euclidean distance of 1 to the profile. The number after each concept is the concept's Euclidean distance from the profile. The italicized concepts are in profile cells that were included in the executive-normative subsample. The subsample includes 13 EPA profiles for behaviors (#1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24) and 10 for objects (#1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 23), thereby creating a sample of 130 events from each dictionary.