

WOMEN REBEL MORE AGAINST MALE AUTHORITY THAN AGAINST FEMALE AUTHORITY

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Abstract

It is hypothesized that the influence of a source of authority varies according to his/her competence and genre. It is also expected variations of influence depending on the subordinate gender. 240 participants, in four groups of 30 men and 30 women, answered an allegiance at work questionnaire. A competency and a gender effect are observed. It is particularly noted that, confronted with a competent leader, the submission of women is superior to their insubordination only if the leader is a woman, and that, conversely, confronted with an incompetent leader, the insubordination of women does not take precedence over their submission only when the leader is a man. An analysis in terms of male and female management style is proposed.

Keywords: *Social influence, power of authority, competence, gender.*

1. Introduction

French and Raven (1959), who consider power to be a potential influence, have presented a typology containing 6 sources of interpersonal power, that is, 6 resources which a social agent is likely to have in order to modify the attitude or behaviour of others: coercion (control of others' conduct through threats of negative sanctions) and reward (promises of positive sanctions), legitimacy (recall of the right to be obeyed), expertise (based on the competence of the agent of power), reference (the target identifies with the source of power), and information (argumentative qualities of the message). However, these various strategies of power are not completely independent, at least not in terms of their genesis. Therefore, Lobrot (1966) emphasizes that, historically, several of these forms of power have maintained a link of genetic dependence: in semi-deserts, where irrigation canals were necessary, it was first resorted to technical experts for the realization of the said works. Then, as in any society, interpersonal conflicts emerged and had to be settled; and thus, those technical experts were elected as legitimate bodies to carry out the arbitrations. Finally, since the arbitration decisions were not always observed by the belligerents, a power of coercion was established and at first, the arbitrators were entrusted with this police task. However, on a synchronic level, each of these forms of power seems to be independent of others and self-sufficient. In legitimacy, for example, a form of power in which the source of power considers that it has the right to be obeyed, and the receiver of the order recognizes that it has the duty to obey, obedience must be effective even in the absence of coercion. And this seems to be even more true with the highest form of legitimacy, that is to say with authority, where the correspondence between the hierarchical position and power is statutorily defined, the same as the manner of acceding to this position and the field of exercise of power (that was, for example, the case in Milgram's study, 1974). As Vanneufville (2011) indicates, in this form of power, the subordinate becomes a puppet: "When an order is given, it applies as an absolute order [...]. At work, one must obey [...]. The boss knows" (p120). The receiver of an order issued by an authority must therefore, at least in theory, obey it unconditionally, and in particular, without the source having to explain their order's reason for being or pertinence. The first questioning of this study concerns the actual validity of this unconditionality. Certain authors, such as Morelli (1983) thus argue that the obedience behaviours observed in Milgram's work come more from a power due to competence, than a power due to authority. A laboratory study conducted by Penner, Hawkins, Dertke, Spector and Stone (1973), consisting of electric shocks applied (or avoided) to rats, supports this hypothesis: submission to authority is conditioned by the applicant's competence and only intervenes if the latter is perceived as competent, with conducts of insubordination if this is not the case. We hereby hypothesize that the same phenomenon may be observed at the workplace, more precisely with a modulation of the obedience of subordinates to the orders of their hierarchy according to the level of competence attributed to them.

Another characteristic of the power agent that we wish to examine, on an explanatory basis, concerns its gender. The question then is whether a power agent with an authority status will see their influence vary according to their gender.

Finally (third matter), it was observed (Mayoral & Gangloff, 2013) that women are more rebellious than men, but without taking into account neither the level of competence, nor the gender of the source of authority to which participants were confronted. The point is therefore to also examine if this more pronounced disobedience of women will be found regardless of the level of competence and the gender of the authority source.

2. Method

240 students of the Tandil faculty (Argentina) were divided into four groups (each of them made of 30 men and 30 women, aged between 22 and 24 according to the groups) in order to form, on a voluntary basis, our sample groups.

The participants were first instructed to imagine that they had just obtained their first job, with either a man or a woman as their boss, and that their boss was considered by the other employees to be either competent or incompetent. Each participant was then invited to respond individually to the 12 items of the allegiance questionnaire of Gangloff and Caboux (2003), translated and adapted to Spanish by Mayoral and Gangloff (2008a, b) (see annex). More precisely, the instructions read as follows: “You have just obtained your first job in the private sector. You will be working in a team led by a woman (vs. a man) of about 45. Upon your arrival, your workmates inform you that your boss is very competent (vs. is utterly incompetent). Taking into consideration this situation, we ask you to respond as sincerely as possible to the following questionnaire (the John Temis questionnaire) and to indicate, for each question, how you think you would behave. This questionnaire is anonymous and your answers will only be processed from a statistical point of view. We therefore inform you that there are no good or bad answers: what is important is your appreciation.” Therefore, three independent variables were taken into consideration: the target’s gender and competence, and the participant’s gender.

3. Hypotheses

H1: competent bosses will give rise to more submission than incompetent bosses.

H2: competent bosses will give rise to more submission than insubmission (H2a), and the reverse applies for incompetent bosses (H2b).

H3: competent bosses will get less submission from women than from men (H3a), and incompetent bosses will also be challenged more by women than by men (H3b).

4. Results

The data obtained according to our three variables (competence and gender of the boss, gender of the participants) is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Means (and standard deviation) obtained.

	Competent boss		Incompetent boss	
	Male boss	Female boss	Male boss	Female boss
Men	0.61 (0.14)	0.61 (0.17)	0.42 (0.14)	0.42 (0.17)
Women	0.50 (0.16)	0.61 (0.20)	0.40 (0.21)	0.43 (0.17)
Men + Women	0.55 (0.16)	0.61 (0.18)	0.41 (0.18)	0.43 (0.17)

4.1. The effect of competence

4.1.1. The effect of competence: comparison of the data regarding competence vs. incompetence. Overall (men and women grouped together), competence gives rise to more obedience than incompetence, both when the boss is female ($F(1, 119) = 29.789$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = .20$) and when the boss is male ($F(1, 119) = 20.69$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = .149$). The analysis based on the gender of the participants leads to the same results: amongst men, competence gives rise to more obedience than incompetence, both when faced with a female boss ($F(1, 59) = 18.49$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = .24$) as well as in the presence of a male boss ($F(1, 59) = 24.916$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = .30$); the same is true for women participants, both when the boss is female

($F(1, 59) = 11.767$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = .169$) and when they are male ($F(1, 59) = 11.767$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = .169$). However, we wanted to conduct complementary analyses by comparing the data obtained with the theoretical mean.

4.1.2. The effect of competence: comparison between the data and the theoretical mean.

Overall (men and women grouped together), in the presence of a competent boss, obedience is higher than disobedience, both when the boss in question is female ($t(59) = 4.443$ $p \approx 0.00$) and when they are male ($t(59) = 2.564$ $p = 0.013$). The analysis according to the gender of the participants leads to the same results, but only in the case of men: in the presence of a competent boss, they obey more than they disobey, whether their boss is female ($t(29) = 3.501$ $p = 0.002$) or male ($t(29) = 4.128$ $p \approx 0.00$). On the contrary, in the case of women, in the presence of a competent boss, submission is higher than insubmission only when their boss is female ($t(29) = 2.833$ $p = 0.008$), the difference being insignificant when the boss is male ($t(29) = -0.097$ $p = 0.923$ ns).

Also, overall (men and women grouped together), when the boss is incompetent, disobedience exceeds obedience, whether the boss is female ($t(59) = -3.225$ $p = 0.002$) or male ($t(59) = -3.810$ $p \approx 0.00$). The analysis according to the gender of the participants leads to the same results, but once again solely in the case of men: in their case, when the boss is incompetent, disobedience exceeds obedience, whether the boss is female ($t(29) = -2.580$ $p = 0.015$) or male ($t(29) = -2.919$ $p = 0.007$). On the contrary, in the case of women, in the presence of an incompetent boss, insubmission only exceeds submission when their boss is male ($t(29) = -2.604$ $p = 0.014$), the difference being insignificant when the boss is female ($t(29) = -1.959$ $p = 0.060$).

4.2. The gender effect

4.2.1. The effect of the gender of the boss. We had not established any hypothesis for this situation. We thus notice that when the boss is competent, their gender has no effect at all, neither for male participants, nor for female participants grouped together ($F(1, 119) = 2.819$ $p = .096$ ns). But the analysis according to the gender of the participants indicates that this is only true for men ($F(1, 59) = 0.005$ $p = .94$ ns). On the contrary, for the female participants, a competent female boss is obeyed more than a competent male boss ($F(1, 59) = 5.31$ $p = .02$ $n2 = .08$).

When the boss is incompetent, their gender has no effect at all, neither for male and female participants grouped together ($F(1, 119) = 0.329$ $p = .567$ ns), nor for male participants ($F(1, 59) = 0.005$ $p = .94$ ns) or female participants ($F(1, 59) = 0.618$ $p = .43$ ns) taken individually.

4.2.2. The effect of the participants' gender. When faced with a competent boss, there is no difference between men and women when the boss in question is female ($F(1, 59) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$ ns); on the contrary, when the boss in question is male, women are less submissive than men ($F(1, 59) = 8.17$ $p = 0.006$ $n2 = 0.12$).

Faced with an incompetent boss, there is no visible difference between men and women, neither when the boss in question is male ($F(1, 59) = 0.293$, $p = 0.59$ ns), nor when they are female ($F(1, 59) = 0.148$, $p = 0.70$ ns). More precisely, an item-by-item analysis shows male/female differences in 7 out of the 48 sentences (12 items x 4 conditions):

- faced with a competent female boss, men are more likely than women to consider that their boss is in the best position to know what is good for the company (Q11) ($F(1, 59) = 13.88$ $p \approx .00$ $n2 = 0.193$) and at the same time less hesitant than women to make remarks to their boss (Q5) ($F(1, 59) = 5.80$ $p = 0.019$ $n2 = 0.091$)
- faced with a competent male boss, men are more likely than women to believe that their boss' opinion prevails over theirs (Q9) ($F(1, 59) = 5.74$ $p = 0.02$ $n2 = 0.090$), and, in order to advance in the hierarchy, they accept their boss' decision more than women do (Q6) ($F(1, 59) = 4.527$ $p = 0.038$ $n2 = 0.072$)
- faced with an incompetent boss, men try to defend their ideas more than women do (Q3), both when their boss is female ($F(1, 59) = 4.46$ $p = 0.039$ $n2 = 0.071$) and when their boss is male ($F(1, 59) = 4.191$ $p = 0.045$ $n2 = 0.067$)
- faced with an incompetent boss, women accept less than men do to be controlled (Q10) ($F(1, 59) = 4.191$ $p = 0.045$ $n2 = 0.067$).

5. Discussion / conclusion

Our first hypothesis was that competent bosses would benefit from more submission than incompetent bosses. We notice that this is indeed the case. This role of competence is perfectly consistent with the observations of **Artz, Goodall and Oswald (2017): having followed** over several years 35 000 employees in the United Kingdom and in the United States, these authors note that the competence of the

boss (well ahead of the salary or the work itself) is the most revealing indicator of job satisfaction (variable which one can legitimately think that it correlates with submission).

We also thought (hypothesis H2a) that competent bosses would get more submission than insubmission and, conversely (hypothesis H2b), that incompetent bosses would be subjected more to insubmission than to submission. On these two points, we observe a gender effect, our two hypotheses being verified solely in the case of men: in the case of women, when faced with a competent boss, submission is only higher than insubmission when the boss is female (the difference is not significant when the boss is male), and when faced with an incompetent boss, insubmission solely prevails over submission when the boss is male (the difference is not significant when the boss is female.)

This effect of the gender of the boss, for which our questioning was exploratory and for which we had not made any hypothesis, is also noted when we compare submission to a male boss with submission to a female boss: if this variable has no effect for men (regardless of the competence of the boss in question) or for women when the boss is incompetent, on the contrary, in the case of women, a competent boss is obeyed more when they are female than when they are male.

Our H3a hypothesis was that competent bosses would get less submission from women than from men, and (H3b) that when faced with an incompetent boss, women would protest more than men. We indeed observe more insubmission in the case of women, which corresponds to the result found by Mayoral & Gangloff (2013), but in a more refined manner: it is indeed solely in the presence of a male and competent boss that women prove to be more disobedient than men. We therefore agree with Artz and Taengnoi (2016), who also observe that women are more dissatisfied under the authority of a woman, than under that of a man, while men are not affected by the gender of their boss. This effect of the gender of the boss also contrasts with the remarks of Houel (2014), who, by using a psychoanalytical approach, considers that women submit more voluntarily to a male authority than to a female one. In fact, Houel starts from the mother-daughter relationship during childhood: for all children, be they boys or girls, the mother is their first object of both attachment and authority **and rivalry**. But the girl, at one time or another, aspires to become a woman, and thus needs to liberate herself **from this maternal hold and to rebel**. But being employed again, under the authority of a woman, resumes this conflictive situation, says Houel. We note here that if this rivalry is likely to reborn, it does not translate however into the conflict envisioned by Houel against female bosses, but, on the contrary, into conflicts aimed against male bosses.

A more general explanation of this effect of the gender of the boss can be provided by the study of Folkman (2015), conducted in the United States on 7 280 managers (64% men and 36% women). If a previous study by Landry (1989), conducted in addition on a small number of students (14 women and 7 men), concluded in more competence attributed to men, as compared to women, Folkman (2015) observes instead that women are considered to be more enterprising and more honest than men; they would inspire and motivate their subordinates more, and would develop teamwork better than men, being better able to create group cohesion. In numerous managerial aspects, they would be more competent and would be better leaders than their male counterparts.

One of the limits of our results is the operationalization of the situation proposed to our participants who were students: in order to make the situation as realistic as possible, we have asked our students to imagine themselves at their first job place and to answer a questionnaire of allegiance. It is possible that this first-job situation may have slowed down the frequency of responses of insubordination. However, pending the replication of this study on a population of employees in office who imagine changing their jobs (for example), the results obtained provide new elements on the functioning of the power of authority whose conditional nature we notice. In particular, they highlight the role of the gender of the authority source in what regards female subordinates. We believe that this contribution of knowledge is also likely to allow male executives to adjust their management strategies.

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