

Breaking Silence: Tactical Choices Women Managers Make in Speaking Up About Gender-Equity Issues*

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ABSTRACT This study examines female managers' assessments of how to speak up about the treatment of women in their organizations. Qualitative data from 172 women provide an in-depth look at their theories about the right way to sell this issue. In addition, inductive exploration of the tactics chosen by 985 other women to address gender-equity concerns yields four clusters of issue-selling tactics for this issue. We draw from these two complementary analyses to suggest implications for the future study and practice of issue selling, and for shaping organizational cultures to support gender equity.

INTRODUCTION

Morrison and Milliken (2000) argue that silence is pervasive in organizations. Those below top management have concerns and issues but are afraid to raise them or have 'learned' not to raise them over time. Indeed, middle managers face tough choices regarding whether and how to raise issues or initiatives of potential organizational importance. On the one hand, if they could raise an issue in a credible and effective manner that brings significant organizational returns it could have positive effects on their careers. On the other hand, raising a controversial issue in an awkward or threatening manner can have stigmatizing effects (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Hornstein, 1986). Managers are often unsure of how best to raise an issue, and may therefore stay silent about the issue despite its importance.

While ambiguity about how to speak up exists for all issues, certain issues carry an extra burden. Some issues are problematic for individuals and organizations

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because they are controversial – people often disagree about the issue's importance, relevance, and meaning – or because they are less consensually legitimate 'business' issues. While any issue may be charged within a particular environment (e.g., in this company, talking about issue X is controversial), certain issues seem to be highly charged in most settings. Examples of issues that are often highly charged in American businesses include social responsibility, issues related to the natural environment, minority group treatment, and AIDS. Across contexts, these issues may simply feel more controversial and explosive. While Ashford et al. (1998) examined female middle managers' decisions about *whether* to raise such issues or to stay silent, we are interested in understanding the related decisions about *how* to sell such issues in organizations. These two questions are connected, since expectancy theories of motivation (e.g., Vroom, 1964) and self-efficacy theory (e.g., Bandura, 1977) suggest that knowing how to do something is critically related to one's motivation to do it.

This paper examines middle managers' implicit theories about how to bring an important but controversial issue to the attention of top managers. Specific knowledge about how managers contemplate voicing concern about such issues should help managers hoping to create a culture of openness rather than silence design specific changes in the environment that might facilitate the selling of such issues.

The Case of Gender-Equity Issues

The issue we focus on is how women think about selling gender-equity issues. By gender-equity issues we mean the umbrella of concerns that relate to the differential treatment of women and men in their work organizations. Generally, these issues describe the concerns that organizational members might have about discrepancies in career opportunities, about inclusion or exclusion in organizational events, and about differences in the treatment of employees' daily activities, based on their sex. In some contexts, such as in nursing, men may be in the minority and therefore at risk of second-class treatment. However, in most US companies, gender-equity issues are interpreted as dealing with biases against women's advancement.

We chose to focus on the selling of gender-equity issues for practical reasons. First, the ability to make a diverse workforce feel welcomed and valued is increasingly important in today's organizations (Cox and Blake, 1991; Jackson, 1992). However, there is continuing evidence of women's difficulties in maintaining career progression rates equal to men's (Stroh et al., 1992), being selected for international assignments that can advance their careers (Forster, 1999), and achieving powerful positions on corporate boards (Bilimoria and Piderit, 1994). Female middle managers face problems with interpersonal networks (Cannings and Montmarquette, 1991), less payoff from human capital (Egan and Bendick, 1994), pay and promotion discrimination (Liff and Ward, 2001; Murrell et al., 1995; Schneer

and Reitman, 1995) and bias in performance appraisal processes (Heilman, 2001). If these negative outcomes persist, in part, because positive change is still needed within organizations on issues of gender equity, then understanding the barriers to creating such change is worthwhile. We also believe that, for women managers, learning how to raise this issue successfully is part of the tacit knowledge (Wagner and Sternberg, 1985) that is politically important to their success.

We also chose to focus on this issue for theoretical reasons. Previous work on issue dimensions (Dutton et al., 1989) suggests that one important dimension is an issue's divisiveness. There is no doubt that female employees often experience gender-equity issues as highly charged and imbued with negative evaluative meanings. Davidson and Cooper (1984) found that sexual discrimination was a primary source of stress for women managers. In addition, Ashford (1998) showed that gender equity was rated as significantly more negative, emotional and divisive than other issues on a semantic differential (Osgood and Suci, 1955) in a sample drawn from a wide variety of contexts. Learning about reactions to this issue may be generalizable to a theoretical category of issues similar in their divisiveness.

We focused on women managers' ideas (as opposed to male managers' ideas) about how to raise this issue for three reasons. First, while men may encounter sex discrimination in certain female-dominated occupations, the literature suggests that women are still far more likely to face gender-equity issues in the workforce (Brass, 1985; Catalyst, 1996; Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990). As Hughes and Kerfoot (2002, p. 474) note, 'discourses that attest to women having "made it" are prevalent in contemporary western societies . . . yet [scholars] continue to present counter-vailing research evidence'. Second, an all-female sample allows us to explore the particular tensions that are associated with selling an issue on behalf of one's own group. So, while both men and women may notice and speak up for gender-equity issues, we believe that women's acts aimed at raising gender-equity concerns will have different connotations than would men's when they are selling on behalf of women. For example, people may be more likely to ascribe self-serving motives to women selling gender-equity issues than they would to men selling these issues on behalf of women. These tensions may specifically affect how women will raise this issue (rather than how men might speak up on behalf of women).

The Issue-Selling Literature

Our work grows out of more general treatments of the issue-selling process. Dutton and Ashford (1993) defined issue selling as managers' attempts to call the organization's attention to key trends, developments, and events that have implications for organizational performance, and developed a conceptual framework that described when issue selling will occur, the form it will take, and the outcomes it might yield. Issue selling, then, refers to when employees break silence and speak up on behalf of an issue.

The empirical work to date has focused on individuals' decisions about whether to sell an issue. For instance, Dutton et al. (1997) explored the contextual factors that lead individuals to sell or to refrain from selling issues to those above them. Ashford et al. (1998) found that the relational aspects of context mattered in choices about whether to sell an issue, because they shaped individuals' perceptions of the risks to their image involved in selling. Dutton et al. (2002) found that although issue sellers read a number of cues to help them decide whether to raise issues of pay equity, the most influential cue was the sense that the organizational culture was inclusive.

While these studies help us understand decisions about *whether* to sell an issue, we know little about *how* middle managers might plan to go about such an activity. Only one empirical study to date has directly examined the kinds of actions that managers take to sell an issue. Dutton et al. (2001) examined accounts of selling a variety of different issues within one organization, and found that preparation for issue selling, the formality and the timing of selling, how an issue was 'packaged', and who was involved in selling it were key elements of managers' choices about how to sell. However, many questions remain, because that first study examined issue selling within a single organization, and relatively few of the issues examined within the study were controversial or charged. More evidence is still needed about how selling tactics vary across organizations, and across different types of issues.

In the pair of studies reported in this paper, we combined qualitative and quantitative inductive approaches to examine women managers' theories about how to sell a particular issue within their organizations. In the next sections of this paper, we describe our interpretations of women's qualitative comments about selling these issues, and our quantitative explorations of issue-selling tactic clusters. We begin with a description of the exploratory qualitative study, which gave us insights into the variety of ways in which women managers think about selling the issue of gender equity.

THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

Methods

The population that we targeted for this study was composed of all the female graduates throughout the history of a Midwestern business school. Respondents received a survey directly from the business school, along with two cover letters, one from the authors and one from the dean, explaining the nature and importance of the study. Surveys were returned anonymously and confidentiality was assured.

One-fifth of the female graduates were randomly selected to receive qualitative surveys. We removed 111 individuals from the group of 887 qualitative survey

recipients when their initial responses indicated that they would not have opportunities to sell issues to top managers, either because they were not currently employed (either retired or out of the labour force, primarily due to child rearing) or because they were not employed in hierarchical settings (if they ran their own business or worked within a small group without hierarchical layers). Of the remaining 776 survey recipients, 218 completed the qualitative survey, for a response rate of 28 per cent.

The sample was comprised of female managers, with average full-time work experience of 11.32 years ($SD = 6.66$), and average supervisory experience of 5.39 years ($SD = 5.50$). They had worked an average of 4.21 years in their current organization ($SD = 4.69$), and an average of 3.28 years in their current position ($SD = 3.28$). They worked in various functions, including marketing (21.4 per cent), finance (17.8 per cent), and accounting (11.7 per cent); 64 per cent worked in staff positions. Of the respondents, 90 per cent were white.

To provide the respondents with a common framework, we defined gender-equity issues. Our definition was based on a case situation presented in the *Harvard Business Review* (Reardon, 1993). While it may not be the way that every respondent would have described the issue, we felt that it was critical that the respondents were reacting to the same issue description. The definition focused on three experiences women might have in an organization: an eroding sense of worth and place due to the atmosphere of the organization; feeling unwelcome or unimportant due to events or incidents that, on their own, would be small things, but together and in repetition are quite powerful; and feeling that their ability to get ahead within the organization is limited. Examples were given following each component of this issue description (see Appendix for the full issue description). We asked our respondents to use this definition of gender-equity issues in their response to the following question, designed to get at respondents' theories about the best way to sell the issue: 'Drawing on your experience, what advice would you give women on how to go about selling this issue? (Assume that they have already decided to sell). Be as specific as you can.' These responses served as the data for this first study.

Coding the Qualitative Responses

A total of 172 respondents offered codable responses to our focal question (the other 46 either left this question blank, or offered advice that did not fall into any of the coding categories). We employed standard practices for qualitative data analysis, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Glaser and Strauss (1968, 1970). We developed a list of codes inductively, by generating a list of all the elements of advice mentioned by more than two respondents, yielding 78 codes. The unit of analysis for this first coding was the phrase or mention; that is, if a woman offered similar pieces of advice twice, using different words, her advice was coded

twice for this initial category determination. Two coders analysed each respondent's answer to the question above, and coded each element of advice using a code on the list. The coders then compared results, and reconciled disagreements. The coders achieved 72 per cent agreement in their coding of 553 elements of advice. The majority of discrepancies occurred because one of the coders had failed to code a particular phrase, rather than because the coders had coded the same phrase differently. The cases in which one coder had failed to record a particular code were easily reconciled by mutual agreement. Other disagreements were resolved by consultation and debate, following the example of other researchers (e.g., Dutton et al., 1997; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1991).

Once all comments were coded using one of the 78 codes, two separate coders combined the 78 codes into 15 themes, using the individual rather than the phrase as the unit of analysis. Changing the unit of analysis from phrases to individuals enabled us to move from examining counts of codes to examining themes used by each respondent. This was important because the 172 respondents had given an average of 3.2 codable pieces of advice each. We wanted to differentiate between a respondent who gave three pieces of advice about how to involve others, and a respondent who gave three pieces of advice about three different themes. To construct the themes, the coders were guided by theoretical interests in understanding how individuals thought about involving others, using rationality, and protecting their image in issue selling, and by a desire to highlight any unique insights offered by this qualitative data. An inter-coder reliability of 97 per cent was achieved between the two coders. The small number of differences were discussed and resolved easily. Of the 172 respondents, 167 used one or more of the 15 themes. (The remaining five respondents advised women not to sell gender issues, despite the survey instructions to assume that the recipient of advice has already decided to sell.)

Frequency counts for the 15 themes are presented in Table I. In the following section, we highlight the four sets of themes.

Themes in the Qualitative Data

The most prominent themes to emerge from these data had to do with involving others in one's selling effort. Indeed, the most frequently named piece of advice for selling the issue was to involve others. Seventy-seven respondents (46 per cent) mentioned that women should involve others in their selling attempt. Of these, 17 specifically directed women to involve someone with power (e.g., 'find a senior ally (male or female) in the organization'), while another 14 mentioned involving peers. The remaining 46 individuals described how one should involve these 'others' in several ways. An example of this type of response is: 'Find a peer first to bounce off frustrations, get someone else's perspective. Helps to take away some of the emotional baggage. That way you can build a stronger case.' Five functions of

Table I. Themes in the qualitative data

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Respondents who mentioned theme</i>
<i>Involvement</i>	
Involve someone with power	17
Involve peers	14
Involve others (unspecified)	46
<i>Framing</i>	
Do homework first	56
Use a rational, fact-based approach	52
Positive framing	14
Negative framing	13
Positives and negatives	5
<i>Demeanour</i>	
Control emotions	22
Build a positive image first	13
Protect image while selling	12
Be professional, positive, etc.	48
Avoid whining, attacking, etc.	20
<i>Timing</i>	
Use caution/proceed slowly	34
Promptness	16
Total respondents	172

involving others were mentioned with roughly equal frequency. They included evaluating the seller's opinion about the situation (e.g. 'check for objectivity'); building a safety net (e.g., 'find issue supporters, build a united front'); getting input, advice and feedback; building awareness of the issue; and helping to sell the issue.

The second most prominent set of themes in these data had to do with the framing of the issue. Specifically, 52 respondents (31 per cent) mentioned something about the need to take a rational, fact-based approach to selling this issue (e.g., 'Be fastidious in outlining to upper management the costs and liabilities (including legal) of not addressing the issue'). Many women mentioned using facts, examples or data (e.g., 'Gather detailed information – facts – to support your ideas'). Consistent with this rational approach, 56 women (34 per cent) mentioned once or more the need to do homework prior to selling the issue (e.g., 'Document specific occurrences to build your case. You have to have proof'). Homework included: documenting incidents (eight mentions), preparing solutions (25 mentions), knowing your audience (six mentions), learning the organization's history/business (five mentions), and other factors receiving less than five mentions. Also consistent with the rational approach, 19 per cent of women advised the use of instrumental framing. Fourteen women advised the use of positive

framing, emphasizing the benefits of addressing gender issues, while 13 others advised the use of negative framing, pointing out drawbacks of not addressing gender issues, and another five suggested framing the issue in terms of both positives and negatives.

A third category of themes addresses the aspects of selling demeanour that would be desirable or undesirable for women. For instance, 22 women (13 per cent) mentioned the need to control emotions. This theme shows up in statements such as 'Do not display emotion. Take a clinical tone' and 'Do it like a man would – very logical, little or no emotion involved'. Similarly, 25 women (15 per cent) offered advice about building a positive image before selling, or protecting one's image while selling gender issues. Forty-eight additional respondents (29 per cent) mentioned 'dos' in their advice, including: be professional, be positive, use humour, be assertive, be diplomatic, be tactful, be patient, be consistent, be confrontational, be focused, be persistent and be fair. Examples of this type of advice included the following: 'Don't come across as an inflexible women's libber – I think that carries negative connotations. Listen to others – there are valid views on the other side and they need to be addressed.' Another woman advised: 'Be patient, gentle, and learn how the political game is played. Even the men in the "old boys network" have learned how to campaign for an issue.' In contrast, 12 per cent of respondents referenced things not to do, including not to: whine, attack, blame, or be too liberal or inflexible. One example of this advice is, 'Don't point fingers – defensiveness is a primary reaction.'

The last set of themes concerned the timing of the issue selling. About 20 per cent of women counselled caution and another 10 per cent mentioned the best timing for the selling attempt. While their advice varied, most encouraged discussing gender issues when the inequity first happens (as opposed to tolerating several incidents first). For example, one respondent believed that women should 'Bring it up *soon* after instances happen (timeliness is key).' However, others advised choosing battles carefully, and working on specific cases rather than tackling every instance of unfairness.

Putting the Themes in Context

The collective wisdom of our qualitative survey respondents is fairly intuitive. They advise other women who intend to draw attention to the gender-equity issues in their own organizations to involve others in their issue selling, take a rational, fact-based approach and make an instrumental case for addressing the issue, time their efforts appropriately, and cultivate a polished selling demeanour. Some of this advice seems generic, simply reflecting these women's best advice about how to successfully get attention for any issue. For instance, the implication that others are to blame for a problem is likely to provoke defensiveness whether the issue is excluding women from social activities or losing track of costs for a new product

launch, and in either case, avoiding blame is desirable in order to maximize cooperative problem solving. Likewise, many of the functions of involving others in the issue-selling attempt would be relevant regardless of the issue.

In other cases, however, the respondents' advice seems sensitive to particular concerns that may arise when selling gender-equity issues. For instance, about a fifth of the respondents who explained why they would involve others focused on the purpose of building a safety net, in ways that indicated that this particular issue raised concerns about psychological safety and image for them, reflecting the risk they take when they raise this issue. Likewise, the codes in the selling demeanour theme can also be seen as an indication of the discomfort or danger some respondents associated with this task. That is, the positive aspects of selling demeanour (e.g., be professional and positive) would serve as specific ways of reducing risk to the seller's image while selling gender issues. Conversely, the negative aspects of selling demeanour that respondents counselled women to avoid are actions that might undermine one's image when addressing this issue. For example, respondents who warned women not to come across 'as an inflexible women's libber' and to keep in mind that 'even the men in the "old boys network" have learned how to campaign for an issue' seem to be advising about a particular danger that might arise when raising gender equity that needs to be managed.

Dutton and Ashford (1993) anticipated these concerns in their theoretical framing of the issue selling process, arguing that image concerns could be as important to issue-selling decisions as sellers' beliefs in their ability to get attention for their issue. They proposed that one outcome of issue selling is whether selling attempts maintained or enhanced the seller's credibility for future selling attempts. Their approach is consistent with symbolic interactionist and impression-management perspectives, which suggest the importance that individuals place on constructing and maintaining a certain image in settings important to them (Fine, 1993; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). In this vein, Leary and Kowalski (1990) argued that individuals desire a positive image with others and will engage in proactive attempts to create one. Many of the suggestions for how to sell this issue seemed aimed at building a positive image or guarding against a negative image. Ashford and her colleagues (1998) have presented evidence that such image concerns are related to the choice of whether to raise issues of the treatment of women in organizations. Our data suggest that they also affect advice on how to raise such issues.

THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY

To complement our qualitative study and allow us to explore how women think about combining tactics to sell gender-equity issues, we also conducted a quantitative study in parallel, using an approach drawn from the influence tactics literature.

Our primary focus in this study was on examining more precisely how women would combine tactics when selling gender-equity issues, and what would lead them to choose different combinations of tactics. While the majority of the empirical work on influence tactics has examined the use of each tactic separately, researchers have increasingly called for investigations of sequences and combinations of tactics (e.g., Farmer et al., 1993; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1983, 1988; Perreault and Miles, 1978). These calls recognize the limitations of studying separate tactics, a practice that implicitly assumes that managers choose each tactic independently of the others. Examining tactics simultaneously allows researchers to portray the choices managers make more realistically as simultaneous and mutually dependent choices of clusters of tactics, and to examine the antecedents of tactic choice. Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) provided perhaps the best-known example of work responding to this call. They clustered managers based on the influence tactics they used over a period of time with their superiors, and labelled the influence styles represented by these clusters as follows: bystanders (who used low amounts of all tactics), shotguns (who used a lot of the various tactics and emphasized assertiveness and bargaining), tacticians (who used an average amount of the tactics and emphasized reason), and ingratiators (who emphasized this single tactic).

These arguments prompted our decision to identify interpretable patterns in the ways that women managers espouse approaching the selling of this issue in organizations. Unlike Kipnis and Schmidt, we are not identifying individual differences in influence 'types' (e.g., those who stand by or those who are tactical). They assume that individuals use the same consistent influence pattern over a period of time. Our exploration is of the combinations of tactics that women would use in selling this specific issue and any sense we can make of which women choose which pattern.

We examined five tactics drawn from theories of issue selling as a specific type of influence and from the influence literature more generally. The first two tactics appear frequently in studies of upward influence attempts (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1983), and are two of the tactics that scholars have argued to be most appropriate when raising issues upward in organizations (Andersson and Bateman, 2000). These two tactics are the use of reason (often labelled rationality) and the extent to which the seller ingratiated herself with the influence target (sometimes labeled friendliness rather than ingratiation). The final three are prominent in the issue-selling literature (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). These three tactics examined were the extent to which the seller involved others in the selling attempt (similar to coalition-building in the upward-influence framework); the extent to which the seller sought out a private setting to sell the issue; and the extent to which the seller would employ a moral framing when selling the issue.

Because the qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted in parallel, our choice of measures was not informed by the four sets of themes from the quali-

tative data. Therefore, the timing themes from the qualitative data are not captured in the quantitative measures that we gathered. In other ways, however, significant overlap is apparent. The reasoning and moral framing tactics correspond to the framing theme from the qualitative data, while ingratiation captures some of the concepts in the demeanour theme, and the other-involvement and private setting tactics correspond with the involvement theme.

These overlaps are particularly important because they help to guide our understanding of how different influence tactics might be combined into a set. Within the influence tactics literature, Falbe and Yukl (1992) provide three categories of tactics (soft, hard, and rational) and Yukl et al. (1993) provide an investigation of the consequences of these categories separately and in combination. In their framework, soft influence tactics are those that involve power sharing and the use of personal power (e.g., inspirational appeals, consultation, and ingratiation). This corresponds with our focus in study 2 on the ingratiation tactic. Hard influence tactics include using coalitions and invoking legitimate authority. This corresponds with our focus in study 2 on coalitions and moral appeals (though there may also be an element of inspiration in moral appeals). Rational influence tactics involve the use of persuasion and logical explanations. This corresponds with our focus in study 2 on the reasoning tactic. Tepper et al. (1998) showed that influence agents who combined rational and soft tactics, or hard and soft tactics, encountered less resistance from their influence targets than did agents who used rational or hard tactics alone. This suggests that combining rational or hard tactics with soft tactics is likely to produce a more desirable outcome, and so part of what we wanted to explore here was how women managers combined different tactics in their efforts to raise gender-equity issues.

Perceptions that might shape tactic choices. Given our focus on these five issue selling tactics, and our desire to explore how women would choose different combinations of these tactics to sell gender-equity issues, our analyses proceeded as follows. First, we constructed clusters of individuals based on the combinations of tactics that they preferred. Second, we examined how three sets of seller perceptions related to these tactic clusters. We were guided by studies in the issue-selling and influence areas to identify relevant perceptual variables that might be associated with women's different choices. As is clear from the discussion above, the risk women perceive to their image stemming from raising gender-equity issues may play an important role in how those women proceed with selling this issue. In addition, we believed (and theorizing in the issue-selling literature suggests) that the importance that respondents' placed on the issue and the extent to which it was perceived to be a real issue in their organization might influence the combination of tactics chosen to use when selling gender-equity issues (cf., Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton and Ashford, 1993). We believed that the number of allies they felt they could rally for the issue, as well as the degree to which they felt personally sup-

ported in the organization, would shape the level of support that they anticipated for selling this issue (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). We treat all of these variables in an exploratory manner, looking to see the insights they yield in their pattern of relationships with the influence/selling tactics and clusters.

Sample and Methods

The population that we targeted for this study was composed of the remaining four-fifths of the female graduates of a Midwestern business school, who did not receive qualitative surveys. We mailed 4098 quantitative surveys to this population. As in the other survey, we excluded 786 individuals from the eligible population because they were not employed or worked in non-hierarchical settings. Thus, the eligible population for the study was 3312 (4098 – 786). Of these, 1019 graduates returned surveys, for a response rate of 31 per cent. Their demographics were similar to those in the qualitative sample.

The quantitative surveys were structured to measure a variety of context and personality constructs first. This was done so that we could get assessments of these variables prior to describing gender-equity issues to the respondent. Gender-equity issues were then described, in the same way as in the qualitative survey.

Issue-selling tactics. The rationality and ingratiation tactics were measured with three and four items, respectively, drawn from Schriesheim and Hinkin's (1990) revision of Kipnis et al.'s (1980) influence tactic scales. Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) showed that these factors were distinct and that the items loading on each made up a reliable scale in their sample, although in our sample the reliability for ingratiation was borderline ($\alpha = 0.80$ for rationality and 0.68 for ingratiation).

These items used a five-point Likert response format. Sample items for the two scales are: 'Use logic to convince them' (rationality), and 'Act very humbly with them while making your selling attempt' (ingratiation). The alpha coefficients for the rationality and ingratiation scales in this study were 0.68 and 0.59, respectively.

Intentions to sell this issue by making a moral appeal (three items), involving others (four items), and by using private forums (three items) were measured with items pretested in a group of 56 MBA students who answered a pilot version of the survey, thinking back to their previous work environments. These items used a seven-point Likert response format anchored by 'to no extent' and 'to a great extent'. Sample items for the moral-appeal scale were: 'Use values to help sell the issue (e.g., "it's the right thing to do")?' For the other-involvement scale: 'Involve others at your same level in the selling attempt?' and for the private tactics scale: 'Rely on private settings to talk to others about the issue?' Coefficient alphas for these scales were 0.89, 0.80 and 0.80 for the moral appeal, other-involvement and private tactic scales respectively.

Perceptions that might shape tactic choices. Several additional variables were used to explore the meaning of the clusters obtained in our cluster analyses. These were measured as follows.

Image risk was measured with six general questions asking for respondents' perceptions about how their images would be affected if they were to sell this issue (using seven-point Likert scales). These items were based on Ashford's (1986) scale measuring the risk in seeking feedback in organizations. In contrast to Ashford (1986), though, this scale also asks respondents about potential gains as well as harm to their image (with these items reverse-coded). A sample item is: 'If I were to sell this issue, others in the organization would think worse of me.' This scale showed good reliability in this sample ($\alpha = 0.91$).

We used two measures to assess individuals' level of concern about the issue. The extent of gender-equity issues was assessed with a single item asking respondents, 'To what extent is the issue described (gender equity, as described above) an issue in your work organization?' Responses were on a scale from 1 ('to no extent') to 7 ('to a great extent'). Issue importance was measured with three items. A sample item is 'How much does this issue matter to you personally?' (1 = 'not at all' and 7 = 'a great deal'). The coefficient alpha in this study was 0.89.

We used two different measures to assess the favourability of the selling context. The existence of allies was measured by asking, 'How many potential allies (male or female) would you have at your level in your company for this issue?' Perceived organizational support was measured with the 17-item Index of Perceived Organizational Support (IPOS) developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). The coefficient alpha in this study was 0.81.

Analyses and Results

Measures. To examine the interrelationships among the items used to measure the focal tactics, we conducted a factor analysis with VARIMAX rotation. We used combined criteria of eigenvalues greater than one and a scree test for selecting the number of factors to retain. We retained five factors that corresponded with the five tactics we believed the items were measuring. We retained items for each factor if they loaded greater than 0.60 on their primary factor and not greater than 0.35 on any secondary factor. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table II.

Scale means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations are presented in Table III. Although the reliability coefficient for the ingratiation scale is marginal, all other reliabilities are acceptable and all reliabilities are similar to the results obtained in previously published studies. The ingratiation scale in particular has attained reliability coefficients similar to ours in previous studies (cf. Yukl and Falbe, 1990). Scale intercorrelations are generally low.

Table II. Factor analysis of issue-selling tactics

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factors</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1. Involve others at your same level in the selling attempt?	0.80				
2. Involve others at a higher level in the selling attempt?	0.70				
3. Involve others at a lower level in the selling attempt?	0.66				
4. Find some allies to help you sell this issue?	0.82				
5. Build a coalition to sell the issue?	0.74				
6. Make a moral appeal to help sell the issue? (e.g. 'We should be open to all employees')		0.84			
7. Use values to help sell the issue? (e.g. 'It's the right thing to do')		0.90			
8. Sell the issue by appealing to 'what's right'?		0.91			
9. Rely on private settings to talk to others about the issue?			0.85		
10. Find a private place to discuss the issue with the appropriate person(s)?			0.80		
11. Bring up the issue with others privately?			0.83		
12. Present them with information in support of your point of view?				0.77	
13. Use logic to convince them?				0.79	
14. Explain the reasons for your selling attempt?				0.70	
15. Sympathize with them about the added work that attending to this issue might cause?					0.65
16. Make them feel good about you before making your selling attempt?					0.76
17. Act in a friendly manner prior to making your selling attempt?					0.61
18. Act very humbly with them while making your selling attempt?				0.32	0.59
Amount of variance explained	25.5	11.0	10.5	8.7	7.4

^aOnly loadings greater than 0.20 are reported.

To get an initial sense of how our respondents felt about the tactics we measured, we wanted to examine the relative frequency with which they would use the different tactics. However, a comparison of the mean intended use of each of the issue-selling tactics is complicated by the fact that rationality and ingratiation were measured on five-point scales, while other-involvement, private setting, and moral framing were measured on seven-point scales. By dividing the mean on each scale by the maximum possible score on that scale, we learn that our respondents were most likely to favour the use of rationality in selling gender-equity issues, followed by other-involvement, the use of private settings, moral framing, and ingratiation. Since our interest was in the combinations of tactics used, we performed a cluster analysis next.

Table III. Scale characteristics and correlations among study variables

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>
1 Image risk	4.17	1.14									
2 Extent of issue	4.10	1.72	0.28***								
3 Issue importance	5.16	1.36	0.08*	0.45***							
4 Perceived organizational support	4.87	1.01	-0.35***	-0.35***	-0.18***						
5 Number of allies	12.41	17.75	-0.11**	0.05	0.02	0.01					
6 Rationality	4.38	0.57	-0.02	-0.02	0.05	0.07*	0.06				
7 Ingratiation	3.02	0.69	0.11***	0.10**	0.10**	-0.06	0.05	0.25***			
8 Involving others	5.36	1.06	0.07*	0.14***	0.15***	-0.07*	0.16***	0.26***	0.17***		
9 Private settings	5.17	1.15	0.15***	0.10**	0.14***	-0.06	-0.01	0.23***	0.21***	0.21***	
10 Moral appeal	4.38	1.46	-0.07*	0.01	0.11***	0.02	0.05	0.19***	0.21***	0.23***	0.21***

*Note** = $P < 0.05$.** = $P < 0.01$.*** = $P < 0.001$.

Table IV. Mean tactic use for influence tactic clusters

<i>Issue-selling tactics</i>	<i>Cluster</i>				
	<i>Proactives</i>	<i>Value-based</i>	<i>Cautious</i>	<i>Bystanders</i>	<i>Whole Sample</i>
Rationality	4.5	4.3	4.4	3.9	4.4
Ingratiation	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.0
Other-involvement	5.7	5.4	5.5	3.8	5.4
Private settings	6.0	4.3	5.6	3.7	5.2
Moral framing	5.6	4.8	2.9	2.6	4.4
N	354	283	253	95	985

Cluster analysis. To examine differences among women managers in their theories about how to sell gender-equity issues, we conducted a K-means cluster analysis (Engelman and Hartigan, 1981) of the quantitative ratings of the five issue-selling tactics. This analysis identifies clusters of respondents composed of women who rate their extent of intended use of the various tactics similarly. We used standardized scores for the tactics so that each cluster mean could be interpreted relative to the sample mean for each tactic. We performed cluster analyses to extract two, three, four, five, six and seven clusters, and compared the results of these solutions to determine which was most parsimonious and interpretable. The four-cluster solution is reported in Table IV. With the exception of the Bystander cluster, our findings diverge from Kipnis and Schmidt (1988). Based on the averages reported by members of each cluster on the five tactics we examined, our four clusters can be interpreted as follows.

Cluster 1: Proactive Selling. These women report the highest average scores on all tactics. They appear to be willing to do whatever it takes to sell this issue. This may be due to their high levels of interest in the issue or due to a proactive personal style (Bateman and Crant, 1993). In either case, their high scores on all tactics led us to label this 'Proactive Selling'. This cluster includes 354 women managers.

Cluster 2: Value-Based Selling. These women score high on the extent to which they would frame the issue as a moral issue, and they score lower than average on the extent to which they would seek out private venues to sell the issue. These women managers seem more willing to reveal their interest in this issue (by using public settings) and their values concerning the issue. Given these tendencies, we labelled this cluster 'Value-Based Selling'. This cluster includes 283 women managers.

Cluster 3: Cautious Selling. These women managers score high in the extent to which they would use private settings to sell gender-equity issues and low in their intended

use of a moral framing. In contrast with the women in Cluster 3, these women do not seem as willing to reveal their interest in this issue. Given their apparent tactical steps to cloak their interest in gender-equity issues, we labelled this cluster 'Cautious Selling'. In all, 253 managers fall into this cluster.

Cluster 4: Bystanders. These women managers score low on the extent to which they would use any of the tactics to sell the issue. They may be uninterested in this issue (and therefore would not exert any effort in any way to sell it) or they may be similar to Kipnis and Schmidt's (1988) bystanders, who just typically use little influence. In either case, these women would tend not to engage the process of issue selling for this issue. Therefore, we labelled this cluster 'Bystanders'. This cluster is represented by 95 managers.

Perceptions that might shape tactic choice. The ANOVA results presented in Table V indicate significant differences across women in the four tactic clusters in several other variables that we explored. In terms of the image risk that women managers perceived, managers who were classified in the Bystander and the Value-Based Selling tactic clusters report lower levels than do the managers who were classified in the Proactive Selling and the Cautious Selling clusters ($X = 3.96$ and 4.05 vs. 4.23 and 4.35 , respectively). In terms of level of concern about gender-equity issues, the women in the Bystander cluster have the lowest average ratings for issue extent ($F = 5.82$, $p < 0.01$) and for issue importance ($F = 8.90$, $p < 0.01$). The women in the Value-Based Selling cluster rate the issue extent slightly higher, and women in the Cautious Selling cluster see gender-equity issues as quite extensive in their organizations. The women in the Proactive Selling cluster have the highest average ratings for both issue extent and issue importance. In terms of the favourability of the organizational context for selling gender-equity issues, women in the Bystander cluster scored higher on perceived organizational support ($F = 2.91$, $p < 0.05$) than women in any of the other three clusters. Women in the Proactive

Table V. Differences across influence tactic clusters

	<i>Proactives</i>	<i>Value-based</i>	<i>Cautious</i>	<i>Bystanders</i>	<i>F</i>
Perceived image risk	4.24	4.05	4.35	3.96	4.65**
Extent of the issue	4.26	4.08	4.29	3.51	5.82***
Issue importance	5.37	5.13	5.22	4.59	8.90***
Perceived organizational support	4.84	4.88	4.76	5.11	2.91*
Allies	12.80	12.60	13.34	7.77	1.97

* = $P < 0.05$.

** = $P < 0.01$.

*** = $P < 0.001$.

Selling, Value-Based Selling, and Cautious Selling clusters may be able to identify a greater number of allies available to them (although the differences between the groups did not attain significance on this variable).

DISCUSSION

We began this research with an interest in the dilemmas faced by female middle managers calling attention to issues regarding the treatment of women. We argued that breaking silence on a charged issue like this might raise concerns about how the selling attempt might look to others, about how to raise it, and about how others might react to the knowledge that the woman manager in question considers the charged issue important. If Morrison and Milliken (2000) are correct that a silencing managerial belief is that employees are self-interested, then women raising issues about the treatment of women run a very high risk of being seen as such. Our starting assumption was that concerns about how to raise this issue would be related to how women will recommend breaking silence to raise it. To examine this proposition, we gathered evidence regarding women's beliefs about how to sell gender-equity issues in their organizations by asking them the extent to which they would use various tactics suggested in the issue-selling and influence literatures. In this section, we discuss the implications of this evidence.

Our analyses reveal a range of different stances toward selling the issue of gender equity. On the one hand, some of the women managers in our sample appear to have little interest in raising it. The Bystanders in our quantitative sample can be characterized in this way. They don't feel that gender equity is an important issue and see instances of it rarely in their context. This seems to be a likely explanation for why they report that they are less likely than the average woman manager in our sample to raise the issue using any of the tactics that we examined. We don't know whether our Bystanders are like those identified by Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) who showed a pattern of using few influence tactics at all over a period of time. We don't have any evidence that our respondents in the Bystander cluster are timid, but we know they don't care much about this issue (and the importance of the issues involved was not examined in the Kipnis and Schmidt study). Some of the women managers in the qualitative study also offered advice that might be consistent with the Bystander cluster of selling tactics. For instance, women advised proceeding slowly, and discussing both the positives and the negatives of addressing the gender equity issue.

On the other hand, most of the women managers who participated in our quantitative study indicated a higher level of concern about gender-equity issues, and higher levels of anticipated use of the various selling tactics, compared with those in the Bystander cluster. Involving others was a frequently endorsed tactic (and was also a prominent theme from the qualitative study). Our qualitative respondents report that they would involve others to test their claims, to get advice and

feedback, to make more of a splash, and to build a safety net, among other reasons. Our quantitative data suggest that women in the Proactive Selling, Value-Based Selling, and Cautious Selling clusters would all choose to involve others in their attempt to sell gender-equity issues, but the women in those three clusters differ in other key ways.

The greatest contrast with the women in the Bystander cluster is the women in the Proactive Selling cluster, who indicated the highest level of intended use of all tactics of the four groups and favour using both private settings and a moral framing for this issue, along with involving others. The women in the Proactive Selling cluster have the highest average ratings for both issue extent and issue importance, suggesting that they were more motivated than women in the Bystander cluster to raise the issue. However, they also perceived more image risk, and lower levels of perceived organizational support. While the difference between women in the Bystander and Proactive Selling clusters may be explained in terms of differences in their level of concern about gender-equity issues, other factors distinguish the Proactive Selling cluster from the Value-Based Selling and Cautious Selling clusters.

Like those in the Proactive Selling cluster, the women managers in the Cautious Selling cluster favour using private settings to sell gender-equity issues, but unlike the Proactives, the Cautious seem reluctant to use a moral frame for the issue. Those in the Value-Based Selling cluster are willing to use moral appeals, like the Proactives, but are less likely than either Proactives or Cautious to sell gender-equity issues in private settings. Dutton and Ashford (1993) associate both moral framing and public selling with a higher level of pressure on the target to acquiesce to the seller's demands (or react against them). What explains why the women in the Value-Based Selling and Cautious Selling clusters make these different choices about issue selling tactics? These two groups differed in their perceptions of image risk. Women in the Cautious Selling cluster perceived a higher level of image risk than did women in the Value-Based Selling cluster. The tactics most related to perceived image risk in the quantitative study were the use of ingratiation and private settings (although those correlations were low overall). With regard to ingratiation, our qualitative data suggest that concerns about making an accusation or being seen as promoting one's own group may lead women to consider using softening tactics such as friendliness. Indeed many of the 'dos' suggested by our qualitative respondents reflect a 'softening up' approach, in their emphasis on tactfulness and avoiding pressure. Thus, image risk may also play a role in explaining how managers combine issue-selling tactics, with those managers who feel more image risk choosing to soften their influence attempts more.

Similarly, the differences between women in the Cautious Selling cluster and those in the Proactive and Value-Based Selling clusters suggest that selling in private settings is seen as part of a softening strategy. However, it is important to

note that organizational silence is perpetuated if the use of private settings for raising controversial issues like this predominates. Morrison and Milliken (2000) suggest that collective sensemaking processes are central when controversial issues arise. If there is no public discussion on the issue of gender equity, then organization members are much more likely to conclude that this issue is undiscussible and sensemaking about how to address the issue is less likely to be productive since it will remain a private and individual endeavour, rather than a public and collective one.

It is perhaps surprising that there are not significant differences between women in the Proactive Selling, Value-Based Selling, and Cautious Selling clusters in terms of the favourability of the organizational context for selling gender equity issues. While Bystanders reported higher levels of perceived organizational support, there were no significant differences between the other three clusters on this variable. Furthermore, there were no significant differences among the clusters in the number of allies they anticipated finding to support selling gender-equity issues. Ashford et al.'s (1998) study showed that perceived organizational support was significantly and negatively associated with image risk, which in turn was associated with willingness to raise gender equity issues. In this study, the women in the Value-Based Selling cluster report a lower level of image risk compared with the Proactive Selling and the Cautious Selling clusters, but it is not clear why, because they do not differ in levels of perceived organizational support. Perhaps there are other aspects of context favourability, not analysed in this study, which might explain the lower levels of image risk for women in the Value-Based Selling cluster.

In particular, our findings raise questions about the issue selling tactic of making moral appeals. Women in the Value-Based and Proactive Selling clusters favoured the use of this tactic, while women in the Cautious Selling and Bystander clusters did not. There may be cultural differences across organizations in whether a moral appeal is considered a hard influence tactic or a soft one, which could explain some of the differences in image risk across the clusters. Together with our examination of the issue selling tactic of private settings, these questions raised about making moral appeals suggest that research on soft, hard, and rational influence tactics may need to consider how a wider range of tactics may fall into each category. Such research may also benefit from considering the possibility that an inspirational appeal may be read as a soft tactic in one organization, but as a hard tactic in a different organizational context where norms may discourage employees from raising value-laden issues.

Limitations

Of course, because our analyses were exploratory, our interpretations of the results are inductive, and it would be desirable to test the causal relationships suggested by our findings in future studies. The value of the study should be considered in

light of its methodological limitations, and in light of the design choices we have made, which have drawbacks as well as benefits.

First, we set out to study women managers' implicit theories regarding how to raise this issue, not their actual behaviours in their past selling attempts. We did this explicitly for both a theoretical and a practical reason. We were interested in obtaining female managers' sense of how to work the context within their organizations. We wanted to obtain insights into their recipes for raising issues of this sort. For our purposes, their thoughts about how they would go about selling this issue were as important as how they might actually have gone about it in the past. We also shied away from asking 'how have you sold this issue' because we believe that not all of our sample would have sold it in their work experience to date. What we wanted to capture was this sample's sense of the best way to go about it, not their actual reports of how they had gone about it in the past. Nevertheless, there may be differences between women's implicit theories and their reported behaviour that our study did not capture. Also, the effects of social desirability bias are unexplored in this research. A fruitful next step may be a role-playing experiment or an event history study to get at this difference between what women say they would do and what they actually would do in an organization.

A second key design choice in our study was the choice to focus on a single issue. To obtain detailed information about the process of selling an issue, we felt the need to ground our study in one issue. This choice reflects our view that much is lost when we ask respondents to average their reports of issue-selling behaviour over several issues at once; we believe that much depends on the nature of the issue sold. We chose to study an issue that is particularly important in today's workplace, but caution is required in generalizing from the results of this single-issue study. Our findings may only generalize to divisive issues and/or issues that are personally relevant to the seller. It may be also that this issue's perceived urgency may differ from that of other issues. To overcome these limitations, future research might compare the actual selling of different types of issues to establish whether the process varies depending on issue characteristics.

There are also several methodological limitations of the study. First, our data are necessarily subject to common method variance concerns, since our theoretical interest was in the connections between intra-individual phenomena. Second, conclusions about the rationality and ingratiation constructs must be tempered in light of the lower reliability coefficients of the measures we used. Third, we did not measure the extent of issue-selling experience, and it is possible that another sample that different in level of experience with selling gender-equity issues might report different choices about tactics to use in selling attempts. Fourth, because our sample was made up of business school graduates, it is possible that these women may be more proactive about selling a controversial issue than other women managers would be, since socialization in a business school culture may encourage speaking up about controversial issues.

CONCLUSION

Our qualitative and quantitative studies together illustrate women managers' wisdom about how gender-equity issues ought to be sold and provide evidence about a range of factors that may shape women's decisions about how to sell an issue of this type. This work also opens up practical implications and questions for future research.

From a practical perspective, top managers wishing to encourage open dialogue about gender-equity issues must find ways to immunize their members against image risk in order to get a clear reading of managers' and employees' levels of concern about gender-equity issues. Leaders must both build supportive relationships with women so that they feel less at risk, and create opportunities to raise these issues in safe settings. This may include taking time to speak with individual women in private, since they should feel a lower level of threat in expressing their opinions in one-on-one conversations. Leaders must also understand that women may raise this issue in groups as a way of gaining support, communicating their sense of the issue's importance and protecting themselves against perceived risk. Leaders who appreciate this motivation can more easily guard against defensive reactions to coalitions, in order to avoid entering into a vicious cycle with women who raise gender-equity issues in spite of their perceptions of image risk that may arise from their memory of leaders' past defensiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest several directions for future research regarding issue selling. First, our results suggest that concern for the issue, image risk, and anticipated support may shape women's choices of influence tactic clusters for this issue. Thus, tactic choices are not merely a function of seller characteristics, but also arise out of an interaction between the seller, the particular issue, and the context. If women vary in their levels of concern about different issues, in the image risk they perceive for those issues, and in the support they anticipate about different issues, then their selling tactics are likely to vary for different issues. The contrast between our results and those of Kipnis and Schmidt (1998) suggest that there may be merits in analysing how tactics are combined for selling a single issue, rather than viewing combinations of tactics as a result of women's stylistic preferences for using different tactics. Also, our results regarding selling with moral appeals and in private settings open up some questions regarding the framework of soft, hard, and rational influence tactics. Future research into the influence of seller, target, issue, and contextual characteristics on tactic choices could help us to move beyond the assumption of stylistic preferences, and into a more nuanced understanding of how context and cultural norms shape tactic choices.

Second, our findings suggest that research into the antecedents of concern for an issue, image risk, and the favourability of selling context would be helpful. More broadly, understanding how the framing of an issue has evolved over time, and

how the signals sent by top management about the issue have been received by employees, is needed to gain a sense for how issues become 'charged' in a way that may silence middle managers.

Third, our findings raise the possibility that seller, issue, and contextual characteristics may also impact women's choices about other aspects of the selling process, such as whether to sell an issue, who to approach with a concern or potential opportunity, and when to raise a controversial issue. As Morrison and Milliken (2000) suggest and Ashford et al. (1998) have shown specifically related to this issue, women's perceptions of the 'safety' of the organizational context influence their willingness to raise an issue. These 'safety' readings may influence decisions about how to raise the issue as well. In fact, the decision about whether to sell a controversial issue at all may be influenced by the perceived options for how to go about selling that issue. For instance, while a woman may hesitate to raise an issue of gender equity in a public forum where she anticipates few allies, she may become more willing if an opportunity opens up for her to raise her concerns in a private, informal setting. Thus, it will be important to develop a deeper understanding of the iterative nature of decisions about issue selling, and to understand how managers' history regarding a particular issue shapes their actions.

Finally, our results suggest that it would be useful to conduct studies of how multiple issues are sold over time and in a variety of contexts, in order to explore whether issue selling takes a common form across issues and across sellers over time, or if tactics are tailored to the nature of the seller, the particular issue, or the context. If issue-selling tactics are tailored, then it would make little sense to analyse the consequences of issue sellers' styles without considering the context within which effectiveness is assessed. As more evidence about this question accumulates, it may be important to examine how issue-selling styles evolve over time and in response to context. Such studies could address the possible tensions between tactic choices that feel safe and those that are most likely to be successful in bringing attention to significant issues in organizations.

NOTE

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APPENDIX: ISSUE DESCRIPTION

The following description was used to depict gender-equity issues:

Sometimes women experience an eroding sense of worth and place
due to the atmosphere of the organization.

Examples of this might include: at meetings, women are interrupted, talked over, their ideas aren't heard, side conversations occur during their presentations, their explanations and other persuasion attempts fall on deaf ears.

Sometimes women tend to feel unwelcome or unimportant due to events or incidents that on their own would be small things, but together and in repetition are quite powerful.

Examples might include: retreats with 'men only' bars, informal meetings-before-the-meeting, and post-mortems after the meeting from which women are excluded, men making a big deal of the few occasions where they play 'Mr Mom'.

Sometimes women feel that their ability to get ahead within the organization is limited.

Examples might include: women seeing that there are no women in the senior ranks of the organization and that women approaching the senior ranks seem to opt to leave the organization.

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