

**PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AS MANAGERS  
IN THE U.S. AND BRAZIL**

by

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The authors thank Dr. Joseph W. Coleman, Wright State University, for his help in the statistical analysis.

## **ABSTRACT**

In this study we investigated attitudes of Brazilian subjects toward women as managers, and compared Brazilian attitudes about female managers to U.S. attitudes. We used the Women as Managers Scale (WAMS) to measure perceptions of 728 U.S. and 544 Brazilian subjects. The perceptions of both Brazilian men and U.S. men for this sample were less positive about women as managers than perceptions held by their female counterparts. In addition, no significant differences were found between perceptions of Brazilian and U.S. men, or between the perceptions of Brazilian and U.S. women. Findings are discussed in terms of existing research and areas for future research are suggested.

## **INTRODUCTION**

With its above-average GDP growth and its ranking as the fifth-most populous country and the tenth-largest economy in the world, Brazil is an increasingly attractive market for global business (EIU ViewsWire, 2009). Brazil is also attractive because it “does not suffer from the ethnic and border conflicts of India, Russia’s loose regard for contracts, or China’s supercharged credit- and investment-led growth” (Barber, Rathbone, & Wheatley, 2009, p. 9). To prepare for expatriate assignments in Brazil, managers need knowledge of local customs and attitudes to enhance the likelihood of successful performance.

One host-country attitude about which knowledge is important for any expatriate is that of women as managers (Insch, McIntyre, & Napier, 2008; Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998). In Brazil, the role of women in business has changed dramatically in the past few decades. Women have been accepted in the workforce at a variety of levels, but still face the potential for gender discrimination.

## **BACKGROUND**

In the early days of Brazilian colony, there was no room for the personal growth of women, who were entirely restricted and absorbed by the domestic duties of mother and wife (Del Priore, 1994). During the twentieth century, the push for female equality eventually resulted in the 1985 creation of the National Council for Women’s Rights, which was a result of national movements toward democratization of the country. In 1988, the new Federal Constitution eliminated the legal gender inequalities, a measure considered “a fundamental milestone in the citizenship and human rights of the women” in Brazil (Pitanguy & Miranda, 2006, p. 23).

The right of a woman being elected to public office also had a long evolution: the first congresswoman was elected in 1933 and the first state deputy in 1970 in São Paulo. In the same year, the first woman was promoted to the position of Minister. In 1990 the country had its first female director of the Ministry of Finance and its first senator. During 2001, the presence of women in all levels of public office reached 11.5% (Piovesan, 2006, p. 43).

Between 1992 and 2002, women in the Economically Active Population increased from 28 million to 36.5 million; the rate of activity for women increased from 47% to 50.3%; and, women's participation in the total number of workers increased from 39.6% to 42.5% (Bruschini et al., 2006). Sixty-two percent of university graduates are women (Santos, 2006). Results of a 2006 study of 2,000 companies indicated that 23.6% of all director-level jobs were occupied by female executives, and that women occupied 11.5% of the executive jobs in factories, 15.2% in the civil construction, 30.5% in clinical services and hospitals, 16% in financial services, and 50.2% in community and social services. Traditional professions also present significant percentages of female participation: 14% of all engineers, 55% of all architects, 40% of all medical doctors, 43% of all lawyers, and 33% of all judges (Bruschini et al., 2006).

In spite of the progress made by Brazilian women, the continuing potential for gender discrimination seems to exist. The World Economic Forum ranked Brazil as 74<sup>th</sup> out of 128 countries on its gender gap list (Hausmann et al., 2007). Also, women have a stronger presence in traditionally female sectors than in the traditionally male sectors (Maxfield, 2005). In addition, Brazilian women perceive that they must work harder to advance as compared to their male counterparts (Bruschini & Puppini, 2004). Finally, in one of the few empirical studies investigating Brazilian attitudes toward women as managers, results indicated Brazilian women possessed more egalitarian attitudes toward women in the workforce than did Brazilian men (Olivas-Luján et al., 2009).

With the goal of adding to the empirical knowledge about Brazilian workplace attitudes, we conducted an exploratory study investigating attitudes about women as managers among Brazilian men and women. Because of the abundance of research on U.S. perceptions of women as managers, we also compared the Brazilian perceptions to a sample of U.S. perceptions collected from a similar sample at the same point in time in order to benchmark our findings.

## METHODOLOGY

**Subjects.** Of the 1,272 subjects, 728 were U.S. subjects—715 were bachelor’s degree-seeking undergraduate students at a midwestern state university, 5 were graduate students at a midwestern state university, and 8 were non-students. All of 544 Brazilian subjects were degree-seeking graduate students from two different universities and three university centers. There were 586 males and 686 females in the study. The use of students in organizational research is an established procedure (Greenberg, 1987). In the present study, English was the primary language for the U.S. students; Portuguese for the Brazilian students. The distribution of the subject population is shown in Table I.

**TABLE I  
DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECT POPULATION BY  
YEAR IN SCHOOL AND COHORT**

		Cohort		Total
		American	Brazilian	
Year in School	Freshman	34	0	34
	Sophomore	42	0	42
	Junior	246	0	246
	Senior	393	0	393
	Graduate	5	544	549
Total Students		720	544	1,264
Total Non-Students		8	0	8
Total Subjects		728	544	1,272

**The Women as Managers Scale.** We used the “Women as Managers Scale” (WAMS) to measure subjects’ perceptions of women as managers (Peters, Terborg, and Taynor, 1974; Terborg, Peters, Ilgen, and Smith, 1977), chosen because it has been used extensively in previous research. The WAMS consists of 21 Likert-type scale statements ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Two Brazilian university professors, fluent in both English and Portuguese, independently translated the WAMS scale from English to Portuguese. They compared the two translations, corrected minor differences, and agreed upon a revised version in Portuguese. The revised version was shown to several Brazilian faculty members within a Brazilian university to assure that it was clear. The questionnaire was then modified as appropriate. With clarity in Portuguese verified, the corrected Portuguese version was translated back into English and a comparison was made between the original English version and the back-translated version. A few minor changes were made to account for some idiomatic expressions that were awkward or that were more British than American.

Finally, copies of the original and back-translated English versions were reviewed by a person fluent in English to assure that there was a one-to-one correspondence between the two versions.

The translation approach herein follows the recognized translation-reverse translation method established in previous research (e.g., Sincoff, Owen, & Coleman, 2009; Stewart, Carland, Carland, & Watson, 2003; Hwang, Yan, & Scherer, 1996; Guthrey & Lowe, 1992; Candell & Hulin, 1987).

**Analytical Approach.** Our analytical approach employed t-tests of total WAMS score means to test group scores on five null hypotheses:

1. Ho: The perceptions of women as managers will not be significantly different for subjects from the U.S. and for subjects from Brazil.
2. Ho: The perceptions of women as managers will not be significantly different for men and women.
3. Ho: The perceptions of women as managers will not be significantly different for Brazilian men and Brazilian women.
4. Ho: The perceptions of women as managers will not be significantly different for U.S. women and Brazilian women.
5. Ho: The perceptions of women as managers will not be significantly different for U.S. men and Brazilian men.

## RESULTS

Table II shows the results of the two sample t-test of the means used to test the five hypotheses. For the first four hypotheses, the null hypothesis for the test of equal variances was rejected, and the two-sample test of the mean assuming the variances of each group are not equal was applied. For hypothesis number 5, the null hypothesis of equal variances was not rejected, and the pool t-test assuming equal variances was used.

**TABLE II**  
**TWO SAMPLE T-TEST OF THE MEANS**

Hypothesis #	Cohorts	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	U.S./Brazilian	-1.584	1,217.714	.114
2	Men/Women	-14.875	1,014.584	.000*
3	Brazilian Men/ Brazilian Women	-8.257	321.842	.000*
4	U.S. Women/Brazilian Women	1.718	662.632	.086 <sup>+</sup>
5	U.S. Men/Brazilian Men	-1.202 <sup>#</sup>	576	.230

<sup>#</sup>Equal variance t-test utilized; \* Significant at the .05 level; <sup>+</sup>Significant at the .10 level.

When gender was tested, there was a significant difference in the means for both all males' perceptions versus all females' perceptions and for Brazilian males' perceptions versus Brazilian females' perceptions (p-values equal to .000 for both cases). The perceptions of U.S. females and Brazilian females were different at the .10 level of significance but not at the .05 level (p-value equal to .086).

No significant difference was found for the hypothesis test between the U.S. and Brazilian cohorts (p-value equal to .114) and the hypothesis test between the U.S. males and Brazilian males (p-value equal to .230).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The results add to the knowledge about Brazilian attitudes toward women as managers in several ways. First, only a few empirical studies have been previously conducted on this topic. Second, the results mirror the Olivas-Luján et al. (2009) findings of a more positive perception of women as managers among Brazilian women as opposed to Brazilian men. Third, the pattern of similarities and differences among the cohorts in this study reflects the pattern that has emerged from previous research on U.S. subjects: in spite of the progress made by women over the past few decades, men are still less likely than women to see female managers in a positive light in both Brazil and in the U.S.

When considered in light of the factors mentioned earlier in this paper, the results suggest that a cultural stereotype about women as managers contributes to the potential for gender discrimination in the Brazilian workplace. In fact, it would appear that the same psychological barriers faced by female managers in the U.S. exist in Brazil. The good news about our findings is the existence of a great deal of information on how to address such a cultural stereotype, both in terms of expatriate training and in terms of guidance for both male and female managers to reduce the negative impact of such stereotypes on organizational effectiveness. Future research is suggested to expand and clarify these findings with regard to the sample, the nature of the stereotype specific to Brazil, and the extent to which stereotypical perceptions affect organizational effectiveness in Brazil.

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