

**ASSERTIVENESS AND PERCEPTION OF STYLE OF ASSERTIVENESS
AMONG FUTURE SOUTH AFRICAN EMPLOYEES**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Rian E. van Heerden, declare that the Master's Degree research dissertation that I herewith submit for the Master's Degree qualification MAGISTER ARTIUM at the University of the Free State is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the assertiveness and the person perception of the style of assertiveness among future South African employees. An ethnic comparison was made and gender differences investigated with respect to perceptions of assertion.

Regarding the style of assertiveness, prior findings indicate that assertion plus extra consideration (empathic assertiveness) seems to be preferred by test subjects to pure assertion. It is important to note, however, that how a leader is perceived matters a great deal and flexibility in assertiveness is key; it should be appropriate to the situation and take into consideration the assertiveness of the team members. It was also found that persons with low assertion reacted relatively negatively to assertive behaviour. When it comes to the two variables, race and gender, previous research indicates that racial variables are important for assertion (even if it was not as predicted by researchers). Regarding gender, a consistent pattern of sex differences could initially not be found. Later on, research found that the gender variable indeed plays a role in the perception of assertiveness.

A non-probability sampling method, namely convenience sampling, was used. The study initially made use of the AI (Assertion Inventory), a 40 item self-report inventory to test the assertiveness of the participants. The mean scores of the different groups were then compared using one-way MANOVAs. In case of a significant value of F , the analyses were followed up by one-way variance analyses to determine on which of the dependent variables significant differences in averages appeared. The Scheffe post hoc t-test was applied to determine between which of the four groups (combination of gender and ethnicity) these differences appeared.

Regarding own assertion, the entire group (black males, white males, black females, white females) was more assertive than non-assertive. Concerning the subgroups themselves, major differences were not found between the genders regarding the levels of discomfort experienced, although they did differ in the likelihood of a response. The research did not indicate any differences between the two ethnic groups with regard to their levels of discomfort or probability of action. However, if ethnicity and gender are combined, a clear picture emerged with regard to differences in assertive behaviour. Black males were found to be the most assertive, followed by white females, white males and

lastly, black females. Black females experienced higher levels of discomfort and were less likely to act in the situations described by the Assertion Inventory.

Regarding the perception of the style of assertiveness in the workplace, the majority of the participants preferred empathic-assertive behaviour. In the case of gender, both genders regarded empathic-assertiveness as the most appropriate and effective. The same applied to the two ethnic groups. It is important to note that significant differences were found between the two genders and two ethnic groups regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of some of the statements.

In the case of the combination of the two, it seems as if black females are less of the opinion that empathic-assertive, assertive or non-assertive behaviour is appropriate in a corporate environment. Black females also seem to regard aggressive behaviour as effective in a corporate environment.

According to this study, it seems as if the appropriate and effective manager should communicate with his multi-cultural staff using an empathic-assertive approach with the understanding that employees with low levels of assertiveness (especially young black females) will tend to have a negative view of all forms of assertiveness. Flexibility is indeed the key and the behaviour of a leader should be adjusted depending on the assertiveness of the team members.

KEYWORDS:

assertive behaviour, style of assertiveness, perceptions, young adults, corporate environment, gender, ethnicity

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In this study, assertiveness and perception of style of assertiveness among future South African employees was investigated. Special focus was placed on the role of gender and ethnic differences. In this chapter, a general overview of the study will be provided.

1.1 Background

Assertive behaviour as a form of communicating one's needs and wants is a behavioural skill that has its value in the fact that it is neither aggressive nor passive. Assertive people are therefore seldom abused or manipulated and speak their minds whilst respecting the personal boundaries of others. Assertiveness is viewed as a dimension describing people's tendency to speak up for, defend and act in the interest of themselves and their own values, preferences and goals (Costa and McCrae, 1992; Wilson and Gallois, 1993).

It would appear that assertiveness as a personality style reached its zenith during the late 1970s and 1980s (research findings in support of this may be drawn from, among others, PsycARTICLES, Humanities International Complete, Africa-Wide Information and PsycINFO and include the work of Eisler, Frederiksen & Peterson, 1978 and Kelly, Kern, Kirkley, Patterson & Keane, 1980). The construct of assertiveness encompasses a broad field of study and most research has been mainly focussed on the interaction among peers in social situations for instance Epstein (1980) and Fiedler & Beach (1978). Of late, however, the emphasis has shifted to the corporate environment. A review of the most recent international research related to this topic indicates that assertiveness is related to leadership effectiveness and that leaders need to express appropriate levels of assertiveness in different situations in order to be effective (Santora, 2007). Individuals seen as high or low in assertiveness are appraised as less effective leaders. Authors have found that assertiveness is often overlooked in attempts to find out what makes a leader more ineffective (Ames & Flynn, 2007).

Recent South African research (i.e. in the last 10 years) has been limited to for instance, the study of assertiveness (among other traits) as a predictor of detectives' job satisfaction levels (Van Jaarsveld, 2001) and has investigated the effect of race and assertiveness on active and passive influencing (Van der Westhuizen, 2000). Furthermore, a 2008 study by Paterson looked at the situational assertiveness of registered South African dieticians.

South African assertiveness research in the corporate environment however is limited: Minnaar, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2012), for instance, formulated four guidelines regarding the facilitating of the development of assertiveness in late adolescence in the working environment, Lottering (1998) focussed on self-assertiveness as an aspect of management communication in education and, by implication, the relevance of certain facets of assertiveness during the communication of educational managers. Potgieter, in a 1998 study, investigated cross-cultural differences in managers' levels of assertiveness and aggressiveness. Lockyer (1993) pointed to the need for culturally sensitive social skills training in the corporate environment. The work of Swart (1989) can also be mentioned who composed and evaluated an assertiveness training programme for women in management positions. However, the perception of assertiveness style in a corporate environment has not yet been locally addressed.

After a thorough study of the available research findings (using EBSCOHost), it became evident that the emphasis, in effective communication of one's rights or point of view, seems to fall not only on assertion, but on assertion plus "extra consideration" (Woolfolk and Dever, 1979). Woolfolk and Dever (1979) found that this form of communication was perceived as "comparable in effectiveness and appropriateness to assertion while being rated as kinder, less hostile and more satisfying to recipients" (p. 404).

In a later study, Kern (1982) also found that empathy "moderated the negative effects of assertion" (p. 486). According to Kern, "moderating assertion with empathic statements attenuated the relatively negative reactions to assertive responses, while maintaining favourable impressions of competence" (p. 496). Therefore, although empathic-assertive behaviour was rated as less likeable than non-assertive behaviour, such behaviour appears to be a generally superior alternative to "pure assertion".

Woolfolk and Dever (1979) made use of four forms of communication in their study. Aside from "assertion with extra consideration" (p. 407), assertion, aggression and non-

assertion were also utilised. Kern focussed on empathic-assertive, assertive and non-assertive behaviour. The focus of this study was empathic-assertive, non-assertive, aggressive and assertive behaviour.

How are these four behaviours socially perceived? Schroeder, Rakos and Moe (1983) focussed specifically on the social perception of assertive behaviour as a function of response class and gender and evaluated assertive behaviour using an evaluative and perceived assertiveness factor. The dimensions used included likeable-unlikeable, appropriate-inappropriate and effective-ineffective. This study made use of the appropriate-inappropriate and effective-ineffective dimensions.

Concerning the cross-cultural aspect of perceiving assertion, Rakos and Hrop (1985) found that black and white subjects' perception of empathic assertion was affected by the race of the participants, with blacks evaluating empathic assertion by whites in interracial situations less positively than standard assertion in the same context. Whites on the other hand, made no distinction between standard assertion and empathic assertion when the asserter was black. They did make this distinction when the asserter was white. Local research has also neglected to analyse this perception cross-culturally.

With reference to the differences between male and female social perception of assertiveness, Schroeder et al (1983) referred to "the lack of any consistent pattern of sex differences" (p. 535) in existing studies and were ultimately unable to draw firm conclusions regarding the influence of gender variables.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the perception of the style of assertiveness in a South African corporate environment. The present study will make a cultural comparison and will investigate gender differences with respect to perceptions of assertion. It is important to note that the sample will be drawn from a group of people who do not necessarily spend their time in a corporate environment on a daily basis, but that all the vignettes (examples) will reflect corporate situations.

Questionnaires will be used to glean respondents' opinions, although it is acknowledged that there may be a variance between opinions expressed orally and those in written form.

As the aim of this study was to not only primarily determine the levels of assertiveness of future South African employees but also their conduct within specific workplace scenarios where interactions with managers take place, it could be very valuable in aiding future training programmes concerning the further development of managers and staff in a corporate environment, with the specific focus on manager-staff communication.

1.3 Chapter Exposition

Chapters 2 and 3 will include a literature overview and a more detailed discussion of assertive behaviour. The different forms of assertive behaviour will be examined and the concept of “person perception” will be described within the ambit of assertive behaviour. This chapter will also give a detailed account of the latest International and South African research relevant to this study that examines the relationship between assertiveness and leadership. Thereafter, the focus will be on the different variables that have a bearing on assertive behaviour, with the emphasis on the impact of race and gender on how assertiveness is perceived.

Chapter 4 will take a closer look at some of the variables that have a bearing on how assertiveness is perceived. The focus will specifically be on race and gender, but the work of Epstein (1980) regarding situational and dispositional determinants will also be mentioned.

Chapter 5 will discuss the methodology used in this study. The research questions will be stated and specific attention paid to the research design, the aims of the research, how data was collected, the research group, ethical considerations and measuring instruments. Statistical analysis techniques will also be discussed.

Chapter 6 will focus on the analyses of the data and the discussion of the results.

A summary of the most important findings will be discussed in Chapter 7. Attention will also be given to the limitations of the study and a few recommendations will be made for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Assertive Behaviour and Perception Thereof

This chapter will provide an overview of assertiveness behaviour, specifically style of assertiveness as defined by Woolfolk and Dever (1979) and Kern (1982). Research focussing on race and gender in relation to assertiveness will be looked at and the study will examine the ways in which assertiveness can be perceived by sub-ordinates. South African research in particular will also receive attention. It should be noted that although a number of researchers dedicated studies to assertiveness and a number of variables, it seems, following a detailed search, as if assertiveness and leadership did not receive the necessary attention, either internationally or nationally.

2.1 Assertiveness

What is assertiveness? Assertive behaviour is defined as a form of communicating one's needs and wants in a manner that is neither aggressive nor passive and fosters open communication. Assertive people are therefore seldom abused or manipulated and speak their minds whilst respecting the personal boundaries of others. Assertiveness is viewed as a dimension describing people's tendency to speak up for, defend and act in the interest of themselves and their own values, preferences and goals. It is an interpersonal behaviour that promotes equality in relationships and a skill that grows over a period of time, helping individuals to enjoy fulfilling relationships. Similarly, it describes an individual that expresses his or her feelings and behaviours directly and honestly while respecting others. Assertiveness is often confused with aggressiveness. The difference lies in aggressiveness being an attempt to coerce and it usually creates anxiety in the listener. Assertiveness, on the other hand, communicates that both parties are safe, i.e. "I'm not trying to hurt you and I won't let you hurt me" (Bawany, 2015; Costa and McCrae, 1992; Pathak, 2012; Polyorat, Jung and Hwang, 2013; Wilson and Gallois, 1993).

2.2 Style of Assertiveness

It is indeed true that a lot of international research is to be found that focuses on the concept, especially during the late 1970s and 1980s, when assertiveness reached its zenith. However, the area of focus will be narrowed by commencing a discussion around styles of assertiveness. This will eventually lead to a detailed look at assertiveness and leadership, the area of study that forms the core of this research.

Woolfolk and Dever (1979) compared reactions to assertiveness to other styles of communication, namely non-assertion, aggression and assertion plus “extra consideration”. In their first two experiments, in which assertion, non-assertion and aggression was compared, it was found that assertion (without an empathy-consideration) was viewed as more “appropriate-efficacious” than either aggression or non-assertion. This assertion was seen as more satisfying and polite and less hostile and neurotic than aggression, while less satisfying and more hostile than non-assertion. Woolfolk and Dever (1979) found that a fourth condition (assertion plus extra consideration and empathy) seemed to offer “an almost optimal combination of ratings”.

Recipients seemed to prefer assertion plus “extra consideration”, even though it was experienced as comparable in effectiveness and appropriateness to assertion. This style of communication was rated as “kinder, less hostile and more satisfying” to recipients. It was found that if a special effort was made to acknowledge the needs of the other “and be friendly and polite” while at the same stating one’s request, recipients are left more content.

Woolfolk and Dever (1979) warns against generalising their findings to all situations in which assertion, non-assertion and aggression occur, because of the limited number of contexts in which contrasting communication styles were studied, but feel that, after their results, additional research should target the effects of politeness, kindness and empathy in the context of assertive communication. It must also be mentioned that the researchers failed to find interactions between communication and the gender of recipient, communicator or subject.

In a later study, Kern (1982) mentions the Woolfolk and Dever (1979) study and refers to the finding that moderating assertiveness with empathic statements reduces negative perceptions while “maintaining a comparable level of instrumental effectiveness”

(p. 487). Kern makes use of three styles of assertiveness for the purposes of his study: assertive, empathic-assertive and non-assertive.

He makes use of four different interactions on videotape and asks his subjects to give their impressions of the response (which demonstrated one of the three styles mentioned). An example is given (p. 489), which I will repeat for the purposes of demonstration:

Narration: "A friend of yours comes to your door selling magazine subscriptions. She says that it would be a personal favour if you bought one, since she's trying to win a sales contest. You've looked over her list of magazines, but can't find any that really interest you and you feel that the magazines are slightly overpriced. She says:

Prompt voice: "So, John, will you take a magazine?"

Assertive response: "No, I don't want any."

Empathic-assertive response: "No. I'm sorry, but I don't want any."

Non-assertive response: "Uh ... I already get a lot of magazines."

Prompt voice: "Isn't there one magazine that you like? If you take one, it'll really help me win the contest."

Assertive response: "No Judy, I really don't see any that I want."

Empathic-assertive response: "I really hope that you win the contest Judy, but I don't see any that I want."

Non-assertive response: "O.K. Since it means so much to you, I'll take one."

Kern (1982) finds that the differential effects of assertive, empathic-assertive and non-assertive behaviour were consistent with previous research (including Woolfolk and Dever's 1979 study). The models in the videotape portraying assertive behaviour were seen as more competent but less likeable, considerate and desirable than non-assertive models. If the assertive behaviour was moderated with empathic statements, the relatively negative reactions were lessened, while the favourable impressions of competence were maintained. Kern therefore concludes that although empathic-assertive behaviour was seen as less likeable than non-assertive behaviour, this behaviour seems to be a "generally superior alternative to 'pure' assertion". Kern does not find a sex-role bias against female assertion.

Kern (1982) decided to focus on the assertiveness of the asserter and the impact thereof on the evaluation of refusal assertion. He finds that persons with low assertiveness reacted relatively negatively to assertive and "to a lesser extent, empathic-assertive

behaviour”, whilst persons with high assertiveness “generally devaluated non-assertive behaviour”.

2.3 Perception of Style of Assertiveness

The attention is now directed to how the above-mentioned styles of assertion are perceived. Schroeder, Rakos and Moe (1983) focussed specifically on the social perception of assertive behaviour as a function of response class and gender and evaluated assertive behaviour using an evaluative and perceived assertiveness factor.

Schroeder, Rakos and Moe identified seven distinct classes of assertiveness after a thorough literature search, namely: refuse requests, express unpopular opinions, admit personal shortcomings, accept compliments, express positive feelings, make behaviour change requests and initiate interaction.

Ten adjective dimensions were then identified for the subjects to use to rate class-specific assertive behaviour: likeable-unlikeable, effective-ineffective, irrational-rational, active-passive, sensitive-insensitive, assertive-unassertive, unfair-fair, masculine-feminine, appropriate-inappropriate and unaggressive-aggressive.

How were the classes of assertiveness evaluated by the subjects? Schroeder, Rakos and Moe (1983) found (consistent with the findings of Hull and Schroeder, 1979) that the social evaluation of assertiveness differ among classes. More favourable ratings were achieved by the expression of positive feelings, the initiation of interaction and the making of behavioural change requests. Concerning what is perceived as assertive, expressing unpopular opinions and initiating interactions were rated highest.

Two of Schroeder, Rakos and Moe’s (1983) dimensions were used for the purposes of this study: appropriate-inappropriate and effective-ineffective.

Concerning the use of the term “person perception” of style of assertiveness, one can make reference to the research by Tagiuri and Petrullo (1965) in their paper entitled *Person perception and interpersonal behaviour*. Tagiuri and Petrullo state the following: “We propose using the term Person Perception whenever the perceiver regards the object as having the potential of representation and intentionality. Indeed, when we speak of person perception or of knowledge of persons, we refer mostly to the observations we make about intentions, attitudes, emotions, ideas, abilities, purposes, traits – events that are, so to speak, inside the person.”

CHAPTER 3

Assertiveness and Leadership

In this chapter, local and international research will be reviewed concerning the relationship between assertiveness and leadership in order to provide a more detailed account of the most recent trends relating to this study.

3.1 The Curvilinear Relation

In a recent international research paper relevant to the current study, Ames and Flynn (2007) propose that individual differences in assertiveness matter a great deal to the perception of the observer concerning leadership. After a detailed examination of available research, they point out seemingly contradictory results in that leadership seems to be related to high-assertiveness constructs like dominance and aggressiveness, but also to low-assertiveness constructs like self-sacrifice and consideration. What seems to matter a great deal is how the individual is perceived. According to the authors, leaders deemed to be less effective seem to be either high or low in assertiveness. High assertiveness may be effective for short-term goal achievement, but might damage relationships; low levels of assertiveness may be more beneficial socially, but may not contribute to goal achievement. In short: Above a certain level of assertiveness, leaders may be seen as antagonistic, while below this level, leaders may be seen as ineffective. The authors referred to previous leadership research that tested for linear relations between leadership effectiveness and personal qualities, but found no tests for curvilinear relations. This study now links the curvilinear effects of assertiveness to underlying trade-offs between instrumental outcomes (goal achievement) and social outcomes (being very assertive can worsen relationships). This is what accordingly can break a leader.

What then is the style of assertiveness that will constitute effective leadership? The authors suggested some middle range of assertiveness, where neither the social costs nor the instrumental costs are too high. The leadership style should therefore not be too submissive or competitive and assertiveness levels should be appropriate to the situation.

The authors further suggested that the behaviour of a leader should ideally also be adjusted depending on the assertiveness of team members. The bottom line seems to be flexibility.

An interesting point made relates to the reason why over and under assertiveness is so prevalent. According to Ames and Flynn (2007), the reason might be that people might see their own assertive behaviour as rational and adaptive, but may not realise that others perceive their behaviour differently. The work of Ames in 2006 in fact proved the influence of differences in expectancies when it comes to assertiveness. Changing beliefs might therefore change behaviour.

In a later article Ames (2008), during a review of emerging work on the curvilinear relation between assertiveness and effectiveness, suggested that feedback systems in organisations should gauge assertiveness. Co-workers' feedback would be a good indication of whether managers need to push harder or lighten up. Ames also referred to recent research that suggested that male managers may be more harshly judged for under assertiveness, while female managers may be judged more harshly for over assertiveness. This is an area, according to Ames, that still needs further study. We need more research that will explore how gender, stereotypes and other factors affect the perception of personal assertiveness.

3.2 Overview: Further International Research

In his comments on the work of Ames & Flynn, Santora (2007) asked whether a tipping point was to be found in the relationship between assertiveness and effective leadership. Santora discussed the findings and underlined the important implication for leaders that a price may be paid in terms of perceived leader effectiveness when it comes to extreme high/low levels of assertiveness. Leaders need to be cognisant of the demands of the situation and then manifest higher or lower levels of assertiveness. Santora pointed to the fact that leaders may not be able to change their base assertiveness tendencies easily, but stated that this may be addressed with training through which they will be better equipped to recognise assertiveness' positive and negative consequences and to then express the appropriate levels more effectively.

Concerning further applicable international research is a discussion of the research by Flynn & Ames (2007) that needs to be mentioned. In an article in *Credit Union Magazine*

(2007), the role of assertiveness in the assessment of student leadership potential was discussed. Among their findings were that the main weakness in assessing student leadership potential was too much or not enough assertiveness. They also pointed out that it is vital to management skills to know how to get what one wants and to get along. Especially interesting is their suggestion to women to try imitating, as men are judged more positively on either end of assertiveness. Imitating will lead to women being seen more favourably if they are more assertive around assertive people and less assertive around mild-mannered people. Gender will be discussed as a variable in more detail in the following chapter.

In an article by Elkins, Osborne and Saltzberg (1983), the relationship between positive and negative perceptions of assertiveness and the ability to judge assertive responses were investigated. Eighty undergraduates were asked to list 10 words or phrases that they perceive to be descriptive of assertiveness and were also asked to judge the assertiveness, non-assertiveness or aggressiveness of 18 responses given in interpersonal situations. The descriptive words or phrases most often used were: pushy/rude/lack of sensitivity, self-confidence/assured, to the point/direct, outgoing/extrovert, say what you think/feel and leadership.

Words with a negative tone occurred more frequently, but more positive words occurred with a higher combined frequency. Results also indicated that an increase in the negative perception of assertiveness led to less effectiveness in judging assertive behaviour in interpersonal situations.

Southard (2014) focused on leadership and the traits it requires, stating that those who avoid assertiveness often regret their lack of action later, which leads to negative feelings about the topic of concern and oneself. Southard mentions that a subordinate should put themselves in the shoes of the superior to whom the request is being made. Would the individual for instance prefer informal conversations followed by specific paperwork of a detailed report followed by a conversation later? Southard makes an interesting suggestion by stating that focussing on how the other person wants to be approached often curtails the focus on one's own anxiety.

Monteiro, Victor and Pereira (2014) found that self-trust is the single trait common to all their respondents (principals in Portuguese public schools) and that compassion is a striking antecedent in the process of other-trust. They suggest that compassionateness and

assertiveness must combine with one another to achieve leadership that is based on intelligent trust. They also found that “pure” positive behaviours, such as being compassionate, might need to be complemented or tempered with other positive behaviours, such as assertiveness, to become more effective.

In a recent study, Lambertz-Berndt and Blight (2016) attempted to investigate how the cooperativeness and assertiveness of the group leader affect the overall satisfaction of the group members. They also wanted to investigate the ideal characteristics of the group leader and how these factors contribute to the grade eventually assigned to the group leader. Assertive leaders who expressed their opinions with respect to others were found to be different to aggressive leaders. Their focus on group achievement also helped to contribute to group satisfaction experienced. This satisfaction is positively related to both leader assertiveness and leader cooperativeness. Concerning leader grade, the traits exhibited by assertive leaders provided more value to the perception of the leader’s value than more cooperative leaders. Leaders, however, with both assertiveness and cooperativeness, can provide a diversity of traits and approaches to the group dynamic that can ensure the best outcomes for the group. Valuing others’ perspectives and the sharing of ideas remain important characteristics of a leader and contributes to group satisfaction, but only if one demonstrates assertiveness.

In Nooravi’s (2009) dissertation, leadership coaching is specifically addressed with the emphasis on 360-degree feedback. Strengths and developmental needs were focussed on and participants worked with a coach in order to create an action plan for improvement. Improvement was rated using feedback from feedback providers and the participant along with the coach’s observations. Top areas identified where development was necessary were communication (63%) followed by assertiveness (24%), then engaging one’s team/creating a team approach (18%) and lastly improving work/life balance and stress (18%). It seems as if the use of 360-degree feedback were effective in creating change in 84% of the participants, with 54% undergoing major change and 30% demonstrating some change.

This research posits that positive organizational change can be achieved by starting with 360-degree feedback and the coaching of leaders. The shift in the behaviour of leaders will also shift the behaviour of their teams and in so doing the teams will change culture.

Harburg (2006) focused on character as one of the most important attributes of leadership. Character distinguished extra-ordinary leaders from the rest. Harburg stated that research findings point to the fact that we trust leaders of sound judgement and good character and we follow them willingly. Harburg also stated that when both integrity and assertiveness is displayed, it results in the moral courage needed to step up and speak out in questionable situations in spite of the potential personal costs. A way to strengthen character would be to inject integrity and assertiveness into every aspect of operations and content of your organisation. Honesty alone is not sufficient.

Coco (2010) aimed to determine if a positive relationship exist between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction for deans of business schools, with the secondary purpose of determining which emotional quotient (EQ) competencies were most important for satisfied deans. Coco then wanted to establish how these competencies assisted processes related to retention, hiring and development. Concerning EQ, the following subscale competencies were most significant: flexibility, stress tolerance, problem solving, self-actualisation and assertiveness. Assertiveness was therefore found to be one of the competencies that had a positive relationship to job satisfaction for deans (as a leadership role).

3.3 Overview: Relevant South African Research

Most South African research has not dealt with the relationship between assertiveness and leadership directly, but some local assertiveness research is worthy of being mentioned here.

De Bruyn (2000) investigated the reliability and validity of an assertiveness questionnaire to determine assertiveness of the Vaal River Gold Mine supervisors. De Bruyn referred to surveys indicating that the supervisors had limited skills of assertiveness, leading to problems in interpersonal relationships at work and a negative effect on productivity. De Bruyn found that the current questionnaire was lacking and produced an improved questionnaire.

An interesting local study by Minnaar, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2012) justified a closer look. The researchers noticed that the social skills, behaviour and especially the assertiveness of late adolescents at a private technical training college appeared inappropriate in the workplace given their age. Minnaar, Myburgh and Poggenpoel referred

to the definition of assertiveness, stating: "People who are able to act in an assertive manner are capable of expressing their feelings, thoughts and convictions without any aggression, in a non-destructive way and to act in neither an extremely controlling nor an inappropriate reticent manner." The concern was that the late adolescent stage should denote a shaping of a proficiency in relationships, ethics and especially assertiveness. Why then were these adolescents not able to verbalise expectations regarding their needs in the work environment?

The aim of this particular study was thus to describe and explore the way in which late adolescents experience their own assertiveness in relation to their subordinates, peers and superiors at work. After analysing the data, the researchers found that adolescents find it difficult and experience stress when they have to communicate their needs. They also experience being blamed for no reason and need tangible proof of their perceived innocence. Superiors easily intimidate them and they therefore settle for the preferences of other people. When they feel that they have been backed into a corner, aggressive language and behaviour is utilised. They use coping mechanisms to attempt to gain control of the situation. This results in a disassociation from the problem. Alternatively, they will consider looking for other employment.

Minnaar, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2012) formulated four guidelines regarding the facilitating of the development of assertiveness in late adolescence in the working environment:

Facilitate self-acceptance and self-awareness to develop self-confidence. Here late adolescents can monitor themselves by being cognisant of their own spontaneous reactions in different situations. They should then be guided to recognise generalisations, blame, projection and catastrophic thought patterns in themselves. This process can make them aware of their strengths.

Facilitate an internal locus of control for constructive relationships. The idea is to find a feeling of internal control and to not only attribute problems to external situations or persons. Positive feedback will improve positive internal reactions and problem-solving.

Facilitate stress and anxiety control to lessen work-related anxiety. Adolescents should develop an internal locus of control to evaluate external criticism in order to determine when criticism is directed personally and when not. Social friendship structures are important to combat stress and this is where assertiveness skills can be practised.

Facilitate constructive communication skills. Constructive communication is necessary for assertiveness. Communication is not effective if there is a withdrawal from a situation without finding a solution. Boundaries should be set, which is a very important feature of assertiveness. To say “no” and to accept the “no” of others means that boundaries are set and respected without it leading to active conflict.

A few South African studies specifically focussed on cross-cultural differences in assertiveness and the measurement of assertiveness. These studies will be examined closely in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Variables That Have a Bearing on Assertive Behaviour: Race and Gender

In this chapter we will take a closer look at some of the variables that have a bearing on how assertiveness is perceived. We will specifically be focussing on race and gender, but also mention the work of Epstein regarding situational and dispositional determinants.

4.1 Race

4.1.1 International research

The most prominent research concerning assertion and race was conducted by Hrop and Rakos (1985). The researchers referred to evidence suggesting the preference (of college students) of empathic assertion in situations of conflict. They question how these findings can be generalised to those that for cultural or racial reasons deviate from the white, middle-class attitudes held by most of the research subjects. Can 1985 assertiveness training procedures be applied to black people due to observed differences in interpersonal communication styles?

Hrop and Rakos (1985) referred to several studies that at the time found that “interracial assertion by both blacks and whites tend to be more aggressive than intraracial ones. There are no differences between blacks and whites in knowledge of appropriate assertive behaviour. Black assertion compared to non-assertion is considered by white observers to be comparable to white assertion in terms of perceived effectiveness and skilfulness”. It is important to note that studies at the time (as mentioned by the researchers) using diverse subjects found that the impact of the assertive message is in part a function of the race of the speaker, the judge or both.

Hrop & Rakos (1985) decided to assess the social evaluation of assertion as a function of the race of all three role-players: asserter, assertee and judge. They also set out to confirm the preference of empathic assertion (over standard assertion) in the context of the race of all three participants.

Concerning the first experiment (evaluation of assertion as a function of race) they found that racial variables are important, but not as predicted. White assertiveness was

evaluated (by whites) more positively when empathic assertion was utilised compared to standard assertion. Black assertiveness was, however, not similarly judged, indicating that the evaluation of black asserters by whites seem to be more influenced by race than by content. Whites appear to be uncomfortable with black assertion even if it's empathic in nature.

Concerning the second experiment (empathic assertion in the context of race), Hrop and Rakos (1985) found that black judges view white empathic assertion to a black person as appropriate but fairly aggressive in comparison with the same behaviour by a black person to a white person, seen as equally appropriate, but relatively unaggressive. Therefore, college black students seem to prefer standard assertion in white-to-black interactions and empathic assertion in black-to-black interactions. It was possible (according to the researchers) that expressions of empathy by whites were seen as condescending by black participants and therefore judged as inappropriate.

Hrop and Rakos (1985) found in this study that racial variables cannot be ignored during assertiveness training. Training goals for assertiveness towards black people may differ between the races, with white trainees trained to focus on standard assertion and black trainees on empathic assertion. On the other hand, training for assertiveness by black trainees toward whites might have to focus on awareness of and additional communication to handle white discomfort towards black assertion. The empathy element seems to be appropriate as a goal in assertiveness between white people.

Hrop and Rakos (1985) pointed to the discomfort experienced by both races when a member of the other race is being assertive. Black assertiveness is experienced as intimidating and white assertiveness as aggressive. They did caution that more research was needed, since the evaluations were made by observers and not participants in a conflict situation and only male asserters had participated. The reason for this was indicated as evidence suggesting the devaluation of female asserters by conservative individuals. It also seemed as if whites express more conservative sex role attitudes. Racial differences in the perception of conflict assertion, taking into consideration race and sex, need to be investigated.

The perception of non-college participants also needs to be investigated. Evidence seemed to suggest that white corporates do not make a distinction between empathic and standard assertion. Non-verbal components of black communication should be taken into

account, since it differs from predominant (white at the time) cultural norms. Variables like state university vs community college volunteers vs more permanent students need to be taken into account.

Allen-Nichols (2011) analysed, evaluated and assessed the reasons for the low level of advancement of African American women into CEO-level positions within the banking industry in Chicago. The core purpose of the research was to identify workplace barriers (for example, glass ceilings and stereotypes) to African American women attempting to achieve the highest employment positions in the banking sector. The study revealed that in order for more African American women to reach the level of CEO (and maintain it), they need a higher level of mentors, need to show aggression and assertiveness, network and have self-confidence.

4.1.2 Local research

Concerning local research, the focus seemed to have been on cross-cultural differences in assertiveness and responses to assertiveness training. Possible differences in perception of the style of assertiveness were, however, not addressed. Research that can be mentioned include the following.

Potgieter (1998) investigated possible differences between managers of different races in the Cape Metropolitan Area regarding assertiveness and aggressive responses and found that there are indeed differences in aggressiveness and assertiveness between different cultural groups. He found that the successful integration of non-white managers into the managerial ranks were hampered by their non-assertive responses. This then lead to problems in implementing affirmative action programmes. Training programmes for affirmative action should therefore include assertiveness training courses.

Lockyer (1993) points to the need for social skills training in the corporate environment that is culturally sensitive. The values of black people need to be incorporated into the present assertiveness training programme. Lockyer also set out to find how applicable assertiveness training is for black employees. Recommendations are made for changes to the cognitive behavioural assertiveness training programme under investigation and also for more culturally sensitive training and future research.

Nel (1993) focussed on 18 black employees from four different companies to identify the automatic beliefs and thoughts that form the basis of the sample's assertive/non-

assertive behaviour. Six underlying assertiveness themes were discovered: a need for all human beings to support/respect/understand one another; certain kinds of behaviour (e.g. racism, sexism, destructive criticism) do not have to be tolerated; you have something to offer; you have a right to avoid trouble if this will leave your self-respect intact; you have a right to self-advancement; and you have the right to more knowledge/information.

Concerning the non-assertiveness themes, the following findings were revealed: Certain rules cannot be altered and must be obeyed; and an individual cannot make a difference, therefore someone else needs to take responsibility.

Eichstadt (1989) developed a self-report instrument to measure black employees' assertiveness in places of business. New items were written and others modified from available self-report assertiveness measures. Eichstadt emphasised the value of developing measuring instruments for the South African environment, but indicated that the inadequate construct validity and reliability of his own instrument necessitated the need for further research before the use thereof to measure black employee assertiveness.

4.2 Gender

4.2.1 International research

As mentioned earlier in this study, Schroeder, Rakos and Moe (1983) referred to "the lack of any consistent pattern of sex differences" (p. 535) in existing studies and were ultimately unable to draw firm conclusions regarding the influence of sex variables. In other international studies relevant to our research, the following was found:

Netchaeva, Kouchaki and Sheppard (2015) investigated men's reaction to women in superior roles and hypothesised that men in subordinate organisational roles to women will experience threat and therefore act more assertively towards women. Across three studies, Netchaeva, Kouchaki and Sheppard indeed found that men responded to women in supervisory positions with more assertive behaviours and more feelings of threat, these being ways in which one's masculinity is boosted and protected. Status threats were separated from gender plus status threats, indicating that status itself is not enough to trigger feelings of threat followed by self-assertive behaviour. Gender plus status is necessary to lead to these responses.

The findings of Netchaeva, Kouchaki and Sheppard (2015) were in contrast to previous research that indicated negative reactions to female leaders by both men and

women. The findings here showed significant effects only for men. The researchers assumed that the explanation for this was probably the different ways in which negative reactions were operationalised. It was thus possible that both men and women have negative perceptions about female leaders, but these studies showed that for men, these perceptions are likely joined by feelings of threat.

How then do female superiors lessen male self-assertive behaviour? Netchaeva, Kouchaki and Sheppard's (2015) studies showed that (unlike previous studies) the display of characteristics like motherhood or warmth is not necessary to reduce negative reactions towards them. The results suggested a boundary condition indicating that a woman in a superior role displaying administrative qualities (for instance directness and proactivity) elicits less assertive behaviour from men than women displaying ambitious qualities (for instance self-promotion or power-seeking).

Important to note here is that although the researchers ruled out a number of alternative explanations for male reaction to female superiors, there are a few they could not disconfirm. They mentioned the possibility that men might perceive the power of a female superior as more unjustified or illegitimate, providing them with what they see as an opportunity to increase their own power by asserting themselves. Research (Willis, Guinote & Rodriguez-Bailon, 2010) has indeed (according to Netchaeva, Kouchaki and Sheppard, 2015) shown that subordinates will display more approach-orientated behaviour if the power of superiors is seen as illegitimate. This will then also motivate these subordinates to pursue their own goals.

Assertiveness then could be a reflection of male motivation to gain power when working for a female superior who is seen as undeserving of power. Further research here is needed. The researchers also suggested that further research should investigate the effect in organisations with a higher than average proportion of female leaders. Will this create more threat or normalise the idea of having women in positions of power?

It is also necessary here to mention a study by Bean (1977) regarding the "interpersonal perception among college students as a function of sex and level of assertiveness". What thus happens outside a superior-subordinate male and female dynamic? Bean focussed her study on college students and makes use of reactions to assertive persons on a videotape during a laboratory study.

Bean pointed out that assertiveness may play an important part in initial impressions and that this impression formation is of particular concern to college students, especially female college students.

Bean discussed previous research and stated that what is perceived as appropriate assertiveness may be affected by the nature of assertion, the context of assertion, the assertor's qualities (including his/her sex) and the perceiver's qualities, which may include powerful factors such as his/her assertiveness, how traditional his/her views toward women are, as well as his/her sex.

In reference to the research by Wolfe and Fodor (1975) that focussed on adapting assertive behaviour in women by adding cognitive restructuring to the usual assertion training in order to modify women's "irrational" beliefs that they will lose or hurt significant others if they are assertive, Bean speculated that college-age women often express a reluctance to employ assertive behaviour in heterosexual relationships because of their heightened awareness of the nuances of male-female interaction patterns. They apparently fear being seen (especially by men) as "bitchy", rejected or losing others' approval. Bean calls this a "fear of assertiveness" and states that it may be based on the fear that a deviation from traditional sex roles may impede heterosexual relationships.

Bean then based her study on the following questions: Are assertive students liked more, preferred as co-workers, perceived as more appropriate, similar and more physically attractive than non-assertive students? Does the sex of the videotape actor or the sex of the perceiver play a role in the perception of an assertive or non-assertive actor? Does the perception of an assertive or non-assertive actor change according to the perceiver's attitudes toward women of their own level of assertiveness?

Bean found that there is a clear consistent positive reaction of male students to assertive behaviour. Although the non-assertiveness or assertiveness of an actor influenced both male and female perceptions of the attractiveness or the appropriateness of the actor (as well as the actor's perceived desirability as a co-worker), female students were less uniformly positive in their reactions to assertive behaviour. They considered assertiveness for both sexes toward a professor as inappropriate and preferred a non-assertive female as a co-worker in this context. This, according to Bean, indicates that assertiveness appears to be a major dimension of interpersonal perception.

Males in Bean's (1977) study generally perceived assertive behaviour as more appropriate than females and non-assertive behaviour as more inappropriate than females.

A very interesting finding was that males reacted favourably to assertive females (even more favourably than females themselves) and this seems to indicate that it is more likely that assertive females will receive more enthusiastic support from males than other females. It seems to be a result of males being more supportive of assertiveness in general than females. Negative reaction to non-assertive males also seemed to come mostly from other males.

Bean (1977) pointed out that there is a possibility that the way a person responds to people in real life might be different to a person's reaction to the laboratory videotapes used in the study. Here lies its greatest limitation, making it more of a normative study.

However, Bean (1977) felt that at the time there was reason to believe that males will support assertive behaviour. Women's beliefs that men will socially punish assertive behaviour need to be challenged. Negative reactions from the males were more directed towards non-assertive males rather than assertive females, while females were less approving of assertive females than males.

However, as was pointed out in the beginning of our discussion of Bean's research, the focus here was assertiveness as a social interaction skill, which may lead to some difficulties for the late adolescent who is trying to establish relationships with members of the opposite sex.

Ridgeway (2001) in comparison believed that gender is an institutionalised system of social practices, with the gender system deeply entwined with leadership and social hierarchy because of gender stereotypes containing status beliefs that associate greater competence and status worthiness with men than women. Ridgeway referred to the pattern of gender status effects on task behaviours and evaluations and stated that similar patterns would be seen in the tendency of men and women to be selected as leaders. When leadership was defined in more masculine terms as strictly task-orientated, more men emerged as leaders. When the task was more feminine, with leadership defined in social terms, there seemed to be a tendency for women to emerge as leaders. According to Ridgeway, the persisting effects of gender status mean that a female manager's efforts to assert authority over others is subtly undercut by continuing assumptions that she is not quite as competent in the role as a man would be. Studies have shown that women can

mitigate the legitimacy problems they face by combining their assertive, highly competent behaviours with positive, social “softeners”. These techniques allow women to break through the wave of constraints created by gender status, but inadvertently reaffirm gender stereotypes that women need to be “nicer” than men in order to exercise equivalent power and authority. Ridgeway’s view was that it is the unacknowledged network of constraining expectations and interpersonal reactions that is the principal cause of the glass ceiling. She used expectation theory (Wagner & Berger, 1997) to describe how gender status beliefs create this network.

Goman (2010) indicated that only a few women have made it to senior level leadership roles, because women’s intellectual assertiveness evoke a negative effect in mixed-sex discussions, where they received fewer responses than men who provided the same input. Women should be groomed for leadership with the attention placed on coaching, mentoring and career opportunities.

Herrera, Duncan and Green (2012) pointed out that human resources managers are increasingly recognising the need to understand how organisational culture and leadership are affected by the differences between men and women. They specifically examined the influence of gender on the cultural and leadership dimensions identified in the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness research program (2004) and found that gender is a significant predictor in the gender egalitarianism and assertive cultural dimension. It also seems to be a predictor in the participative and self-protective leadership dimension.

Bongiorno, Bain & David (2014) referred to the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) which predicts prejudice towards women who meet the agentic requirements of the role as a leader. Their results indicated a shift in prescriptive stereotypes of women’s agentic behaviour. The source of prejudice was not agentic behaviour from women in leadership, but rather women’s non-agentic behaviour.

Williams & Tiedens (2016) also pointed out that previous research and conventional wisdom suggested that women who display dominant, assertive or agentic behaviour will experience a backlash (more negative outcomes) compared to men. However, there seems to be a surprising number of studies that indicate no backlash. Williams and Tiedens postulated that dominant behaviours that are relatively implicit or less noticeable may yield fewer social penalties. They found that backlash effects are real and that female leaders will

incur likeability penalties when expressing dominance that male leaders will not experience. This did not affect the perception of the female leaders being competent, but there is a negative effect on interpersonal outcomes that ultimately undermines the security of their leadership roles. Williams and Tiedens found that female leaders can indeed achieve influence without incurring social costs by strategically utilising implicit or indirect forms of dominance. Backlash effects may be better understood as moderated by context. Williams and Tiedens referred to research by Amanatullah and Morris (2010) and Amanatullah and Tinsley (2013), who found that it seems to be self-benefitting dominance (asking for a higher salary) rather than dominance generally (asking for a salary increase for a subordinate) that is penalising women. Concerning race, Livingstone, Rosette and Washington (2012) found that white female dominance seems to be penalised more harshly than black female dominance, because black women are stereotypically expected to be more dominant. Rosette and Tost (2010) also found that women at the very highest ranks (for instance CEO's) suffer less of a penalty than women in intermediate ranks. The reason might be that top-level leaders are perceived to have already demonstrated their likeability on previous occasions and therefore reached their current positions.

It is important to note that not all forms of dominance lead to backlash. However, training may be needed for female leaders regarding behaviours that will allow them to be influential while still getting along with others.

Deveny, Springen and Raymond (2008) referred to the contrast between males and females concerning the assertive behaviour that demonstrates leadership qualities. Assertive girls seem to be labelled "bossy", but Deveny, Springen and Raymond argued that bossy behaviour seem to be necessary for young girls in order to become persuasive leaders.

Saile and Boger (2009) specifically focussed on the sex of children in the context of interaction and wanted to find out if girls are more assertive than boys in situations that require them to take over leadership. 357 children between the ages of 10 and 15 years were studied. More assertiveness was reported in situations in which feelings had to be communicated than in situations in which leadership had to be assumed. Girls seemed to be more assertive in taking over leadership than boys and in situations in which feelings had to be communicated, more unassertiveness was reported for opposite-sex interactions than for same-sex interactions. The research method used in the study allowed Saile and Boger

to show that age, sex and mode of interaction are conditions of social unassertiveness in different situations.

4.2.2 Local research

Concerning the limited local research, Williams' (1999) work regarding using assertive training groups as a means towards the empowerment of women can be mentioned. Williams wanted to know what impact becoming assertive would have on depression, feminist orientation, well-being and career choice of the black female participants. Results indicated that an increase in assertiveness did not have an impact on envisaged occupation. It influenced both self-esteem and well-being and has both negative and positive effects.

Regarding assertiveness training, Swart (1989) composes and evaluates an assertiveness training programme for women in management positions. From a theoretical investigation, he concluded that a woman as manager will be more effective if she can be more assertive, characterised by respect for herself and others and effective communication that can lead to mutual growth.

4.3 Situational and Dispositional Determinants

In his study, Epstein (1980) wanted to test differences in social consequences of unassertive and assertive requests and examined whether "situational differences and dispositional characteristics of recipients of these requests contribute to variance in the social consequences". It is important to note that assertive and unassertive requests in Epstein's study occurred in situations that differed in degree of sacrifice involved and in the reasonableness of the request. Epstein found that the social consequences of unassertive and assertive requests depend on the situation, the type of request and the dispositional characteristics of the recipient.

It seems according to the researcher as if assertion tended to produce positive social consequences when the requests are reasonable. Direct aggression led predominantly to negative responses, passive aggression elicited less negative responses in request situations that were reasonable and submission produced positive responses in most cases. In order to clarify Epstein's different forms of communicative behaviour, the following

differentiation might be of use to the reader (as differentiated by Epstein and DeGiovanni, 1978:

Assertion: overt (direct expression) and non-coercive (attempting to force compliance through aversive control); aggressive: overt expression and coercive; passive aggressive: indirect expression; and coercive and submissive: indirect expression and non-coercive.

Epstein (1980) referred to literature suggesting that assertiveness will produce more favourable results than forms of unassertive behaviour such as aggression and submission, but then indicates mixed results when the hypothesis was tested empirically.

There seems to be greater compliance with assertive requests and lower anger than aggression and sometimes not. It also seems as if submission can evoke less anger and more likeability than assertion. The interpersonal consequences of assertive and unassertive responses are indeed, as Epstein pointed out, complex.

It is, however, necessary (since it seemingly has a bearing on assertion and passive aggression) that the degree of sacrifice and reasonableness of the request are also seen as variables, even though we will, for the purposes of this study, focus on race and gender.

4.4 Summation of the most important findings

As mentioned above, it seems (after a detailed search of EBSCOHost), as if assertiveness research reached its zenith in the 70s and 80s with the relationship between assertiveness and leadership receiving limited attention. Regarding “assertiveness”, “assertion plus extra consideration” seem to be preferred by recipients (to assertion, aggression and non-assertion), although they experienced it as as effective and appropriate as assertion.

Research indicates that this “assertion plus extra consideration” seemed to be indeed a generally superior alternative to pure assertion and this style of assertiveness is named “empathic-assertiveness”, as empathic statements were utilised to moderate assertive behaviour. It is also found that persons with low assertion reacted relatively negatively to assertive behaviour. Regarding the social perception of assertion, an evaluative and perceived assertiveness factor with ten adjective dimensions is utilised, of which we decided to use appropriate-inappropriate and effective-ineffective for our research purposes.

What style of leader assertiveness is preferred by subordinates? It seems to matter a great deal how the individual is perceived. A style of leadership that is not too submissive or competitive should be utilised and assertiveness levels should be appropriate to the situation. The bottom line seems to be flexibility. It is important to note that an effectiveness price might be paid by leaders when it comes to high/low levels of assertiveness.

Concerning variables that might have an impact on the perception of assertion, when we focus on race and specifically the role it plays in the social evaluation of assertion, we find the following. When the race of all three the roll players (asserter, assertee and judge) are taken into account, black college students seem to prefer standard assertion in white-to-black interactions and empathic assertion in black-to-black interactions. Whites on the other hand viewed white assertiveness as more positive if empathic assertion was utilised compared to standard assertion. If the asserter is black, however, even if the assertiveness is empathic in nature, whites appear to be uncomfortable. Of importance for the purposes of our study is the finding that racial variables are important for assertion, even if it was not as was predicted by the researchers. Locally, there seems to be a need for social skills training in the corporate environment that is culturally sensitive, incorporating the values of black people into the present assertiveness training programmes.

Regarding the gender variable, a consistent pattern of sex differences could initially not be found. Later on, when male reaction to women in superior roles was investigated, it was found that men respond to women in supervisory roles with more assertiveness and feelings of threat. These significant negative reactions were only found for men, although there might be possible differences in the ways that negative reactions were operationalised. It is, however, clear that men's perceptions are joined by a feeling of threat.

The sex variable indeed seems to play a role. Previous research points to the fact that what is perceived as appropriate assertiveness may be affected by the nature of assertion, the context of assertion, the asserter's characteristics (including his/her sex) and the perceiver's characteristics, which may include his/her assertiveness, how traditional his/her views are towards women and his/her sex. It was also found that there is a clear consistent, positive reaction of male students to assertive behaviour, while female students

were less uniformly positive in their reaction to assertive behaviour. This indicates that assertiveness appears to be a big dimension of interpersonal perception.

CHAPTER 5

Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methodology that was used to gain information regarding the assertive behaviour and conduct of young adults in certain work scenarios is discussed. As was mentioned earlier, the focus was primarily on the role that cultural and gender differences could play. In the discussion to follow, attention is paid to the research design, research aims, data-collection procedure, participants, ethical considerations, measuring instruments, and the statistical analysis techniques.

5.2 Research Design

For this study, a quantitative research approach was used, and non-experimental research was conducted. Two research designs were utilised. During the comparison of the average scores of the groups, a criterion group design was utilised, while a correlational design was utilised to determine the relationship between the variables.

5.3 Research Aims

The aim of the research is firstly to make use of the Assertion Inventory (AI) as a self-report inventory to determine the levels of assertiveness of each of our young adult participants in daily situations. Special attention will be paid to the differences between races and genders. We are however, also interested to know how the young adults will respond to certain situations in the workplace where different styles of assertiveness are utilised by superiors. What is therefore their person perception of the specific conduct?

With this as background, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

Research Hypothesis 1: There are significant differences between the mean total scores for Discomfort and Response Probability for the different genders, ethnical groups and the combination between gender and ethnicity (black men, black women, white men, white women).

Research Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences in the mean item counts for the Discomfort and Response Probability scales for the different genders, ethnical groups and the combination between gender and ethnicity (black men, black women, white men, white women).

Research Hypothesis 3: There are significant differences in proportions for the different genders, ethnical groups and for the combined group (gender and ethnicity) with regard to the four profile groups (Non-assertive, Anxious-performer, Does not care, and Assertive).

Research Hypothesis 4: There are significant differences in the average appropriate- and effectiveness score concerning the behaviour of line managers in scenarios that might present themselves in the corporate environment for the different genders, ethnical groups and the combination between gender and ethnicity (black men, black women, white men, white women).

During the testing of research hypotheses 1, 2 and 4, averages would be compared and can be presented in statistical terms as follows. Where only two groups are involved, for instance gender and ethnicity, the following hypothesis can be postulated:

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

$$H_1 : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

where: μ_1 = the average score for the population of men; or ;

μ_1 = the average score for the population of black young adults;

μ_2 = the average score for the population of women, or;

μ_2 = the average score for the population of white young adults;

In the case of the combined groups, there are four groups, and in this case, the following hypothesis is applicable:

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3 = \mu_4$$

$$H_1 : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2 \neq \mu_3 \neq \mu_4$$

where: μ_1 = the average score for the population of black men;

μ_2 = the average score for the population of black women;

μ_3 = the average score for the population of white men; and

μ_4 = the average score for the population of white women.

In testing Research Hypothesis 3, proportions were compared and can be presented in statistical terms, as follows:

$$H_0 : P_{jk} = P_j P_k \text{ for each of the } jk \text{ cells}$$

$$H_1 : P_{jk} \neq P_j P_k \text{ for at least one of the } jk \text{ cells}$$

where: j refers to the number of columns; and

k refers to the number of rows for each particular situation.

The focus will now be on the process of data collection and the research group.

5.4 Procedure of Data Collection

Data were collected by distributing the questionnaires initially among third year Social Sciences students at the Universities of the Free State and the North-West. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaires at the end of their lectures. Hereafter a second round distributed questionnaire among young males and females (minimum age of 21 and maximum age of 25) in the greater Pretoria area. They were required to specify their ages on the questionnaires. All these individuals were approached in their private capacity. This group consisted of students, young workers and temporary workers. The questionnaires were filled in with the assistance of the research team.

5.5 Research Group

A non-probability sampling method, namely convenience sampling, was utilized. The advantage of non-probability sampling is that they are less complicated and more economical (in terms of time and financial expenses) (Maree & Pietersen, 2009). After convenience sampling was applied, the final sample consisted of 256 participants. The focus was on young adults in the 21-25 age group. Some of the participants were senior students (in their third year) in social sciences at different universities (the University of the Free State and the North-West University) and other members of the public. Some of the participants already had some (casual) work experience, and others not. An attempt was made to achieve the best balance possible between male and female, black and white.

The average age of the entire groups was 22.79 years, with a standard deviation of about 2 years. The way in which the total group was distributed in terms of ethnicity and gender is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency distribution of participants according to Ethnicity and Gender

Ethnicity	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Black	49	41.9	68	58.1	117	45.7
White	83	59.7	56	40.3	139	54.3
Total	132	51.6	124	48.4	256	100.0

About 20 more white than black respondents formed part of the research group. The two genders were distributed more evenly, with 51.6 % males and 48.4% females. The majority of black respondents were female, but for the white respondents, it was males. These differences were regarded as negligible and should have no effect on the results.

Next, the measuring instruments are discussed.

5.6 Measuring Instruments

5.6.1 The Assertion Inventory

For the purposes of this study, Gambrill and Richey's (1975) Assertion Inventory (AI) was used. It is an instrument that can be used with a wide variety of individuals, includes items sampling a range of situations, and is situational specific as length would allow reasonably. Gambrill and Richey (1975) also searched for an instrument that would permit the collection of three types of information regarding assertive behaviour: the degree of discomfort in relation to specific situations, judged probability of engaging in a behaviour, and the identification of situations in which a person would like to be more assertive.

Gambrill and Richey (1975) point out that it is important to distinguish between discomfort and behaviour, since different combinations could necessitate different procedures to be followed with regard to behaviour change. The example mentioned is of a person experiencing high discomfort but still engaging in assertive behaviour. If this happens and is followed by positive consequences, it is likely that similar behaviour occurred before. Inclusion of Discomfort and response also allows possible differences between groups, for instance between males and females, and between treatment and non-treatment populations.

5.6.1.1 Implementation of the Assertive Inventory

The Inventory consists of a 40-item self-report questionnaire, and for each item, the respondent needs to indicate on a five-point scale his or her degree of discomfort or anxiety, the probability of displaying the behaviour if actually in the situation, and the situation in which he/she would like be more assertive. The following scale was used to indicate the degree of **discomfort**,: 1=none; 2=a little; 3=a fair amount; 4=much and 5=very much. To indicate response **probability** the following scale values were used: 1=always do it; 2=usually do it; 3=do it about half the time; 4=rarely do it and 5=never do it.

In developing a list of potential items, a variety of sources were used, including reports from clients and students and a review of the literature, to determine assertion difficulties that occur frequently. The 40 items were then divided into eight categories: turning down requests, expressing personal limitations such as admitting ignorance in some areas, initiating social contacts, expressing positive feelings, handling criticism, differing with others, assertion in service situations, and giving negative feedback.

It was considered that assertive behaviour may vary according to the relationship between the people involved. Were they strangers, intimates, or acquaintances? This was then built into many of the items.

Discomfort and Response Probability scores were computed by adding responses on each dimension, while difference scores for each participant (3 samples of undergraduates as well as a sample of 19 women participating in assertion training programmes) were determined by subtracting the score for Discomfort from the score for Response Probability. Standard deviations and mean scores were calculated and a factor analysis of scores for discomfort using a principle component solution and afterwards a varimax rotation was conducted for one of the samples. In all samples, the number of times an item was circled as a situation in which that males and females would like to behave more assertively was counted.

5.6.1.2 Reliability of the Assertion Inventory

Gambrill and Richey (1975) calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient between pre- and post-tests for one of the samples and found that it indicated high stability of the scores over time. The mean scores for Discomfort and Response Probability for males and females for all the undergraduate samples were non-significant.

According to the researchers, for all the undergraduate samples, the male and female mean scores for Discomfort and Response Probability were not significant. Men, in general, reported less likelihood of engaging in the behaviour if the situation actually presented itself. However, this was significant in only one of the samples, which led to the question if some items were representative of assertion only from a female perspective.

Certain items did reflect gender differences, but they seemed to be reflective of the social expectations for men and women rather than bias in the instrument itself. For instance, men reported that they were less likely than women were to resist sexual overtures, turn down someone requesting a date, or ask if they have offended someone. Women, on the other hand, reported less likelihood of discussing the criticism of someone regarding their work or requesting a date with someone.

Standard deviations for Response Probability and Discomfort reflect a wide range of scores in all undergraduate samples, indicating that respondents in a normal population are distributed widely with regard to "assertion". If the distribution were narrower, it might have suggested that the instrument encouraged stereotypical responses or that it was inadequate in the variations of situations presented.

5.6.1.3 Validity of the Assertion Inventory

According to Gambrill and Richey (1975), an increment of validity is provided by a comparison of the undergraduate and clinical samples. The mean Discomfort score for the 19 women (participating in assertion training programmes) before training was significantly higher than the mean Discomfort scores for the undergraduates. Also, many more individuals in the clinical population than respondents in the normal population fell into the categories "Unassertive" and "anxious performer". The clinical group also decreased significantly in both Response Probability and Discomfort following training, while no change occurred during a five-week interval in the reliability sample. Gambrill and Richey (1975) mention that additional data are needed concerning "the relationship between Inventory scores and independently assessed performance on criterion tasks."

5.6.1.4 Clinical implications

Gambrill and Richey (1975) conclude that the total anxiety score of a respondent seems to be a more predicable indicator of potential clinical candidacy than the total

Response Probability score is. However, one can use the probability score to determine the profile of an individual. With regard to treatment of the “unassertive person” Gambrill and Richey (1975) suggest a different approach than that of the “anxious performer”, suggesting a focus on increased relaxation and covenant control rather than concentrating on the specific nonverbal and verbal components of assertion. For the “unassertive person”, the focus should rather be to develop appropriate responses to correct behaviour deficits.

Gambrill and Richey (1975) also conclude that the Assertion Inventory is useful not only for investigating group differences but also for clinical purposes. It can also be used to look for areas where a person might display dysfunctional assertion and as an instrument in determining if there has been a degree of change after intervention.

According to Gambrill and Richey (1975) the AI can be used to classify respondents into four profiles, namely Unassertive, Anxious-performer, Does not care, and Assertive. To do that, the following cutoff values on the two constructs can be used:

- A score of 96+ on the Discomfort subscale would indicate high discomfort while a score of 95 and less would indicate low discomfort.
- A score of 105+ on the Response Probability scale would indicate low response probability while a score of 104 or less would indicate high response probability.

These four profiles are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Four profiles graphically displayed

Discomfort	Response Probability	
	Low (105+)	High (104-)
High (96+)	Unassertive	Anxious-performer
Low (95-)	Does not care	Assertive

As discussed in paragraph 5.3 the possible significant differences in the average appropriate-and effectiveness scores concerning the behaviour of line managers in scenarios that might present themselves in the corporate environment for the different genders, ethnical groups and the combination between gender and ethnicity (black men, black women, white men, white women) were also investigated. For this purpose, four

vignettes were presented and will now be discussed. With the AI the level of assertiveness (or lack of) of the participants was determined. With the four vignettes the purpose was to determine what their *perceived* level of assertiveness (or lack off) is when they were exposed to situations that regularly occur in the office environment.

5.6.2 The four vignettes

As mentioned earlier, four vignettes were utilised that replicate situations that regularly occur in the office environment. These vignettes were loosely based on the examples provided by Kern (1982). Each vignette specifies a response from a manager who is assertive, Empathic-assertive, Non-assertive, or Aggressive. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which each response is either appropriate or inappropriate and either effective or ineffective.

Participants were asked to rate the vignette responses on a five-point Likert scale that rates the appropriateness of each response as follows: 1 = extremely appropriate; 2 = appropriate; 3 = neutral; 4 = inappropriate; 5 = extremely inappropriate. Similarly, participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of each response as follows: 1 = extremely effective; 2 = effective; 3 = neutral; 4 = ineffective; 5 = extremely ineffective. The internal consistency of the way in which the items of the different responses (Assertive, Empathic-assertive, Non-assertive, and Aggressive) measure on the appropriate and effectiveness scale was examined and is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Alpha Coefficients for the Particular Scales regarding Applicability and Effectiveness of Response

Subscale	α -Coefficients		
	Total Group	Black	White
Assertive: Applicable	.694	.624	.693
Emphatic Assertive: Applicable	.782	.794	.668
Non-assertive: Applicable	.625	.602	.585
Aggressive: Applicable	.666	.721	.625
Assertive: Effective	.685	.595	.696
Emphatic Assertive: Effective	.833	.843	.745
Non-assertive: Effective	.226	.010	.485
Aggressive: Effective	.701	.726	.595

From Table 3, it is clear that the Non-assertive scale measuring effectiveness delivered an unacceptable low internal consistency measurement (less than 0.60) for the entire group as well as for the two ethnic groups. Therefore, it was decided not to use this scale in further analyses. With the exception of the Empathic Assertiveness scale indicating high reliability, the remaining scales indicate only reasonable levels of internal consistency.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Research Committee of the Department of Psychology and the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State.

The ethical guidelines proposed by Allan (2008) were followed. The participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research, the risks of participating and the limits to confidentiality. Thereby, the dignity of the participants and their right to autonomy were respected. All participants gave their consent to participate in the study and for the data to be utilised for research purposes.

Confidentiality was achieved by ensuring that all collected data were stored privately and securely. Also, no identifying data were included in the research report.

5.8 Statistical Procedures

To investigate Research Hypotheses 1, 2 and 4, the average scores of the different groups were compared. In these cases, one-way MANOVAs (Howell, 2013) were utilised to determine if there were significant differences in the average scores. If a significant value of F (according to the Hotelling-Lawley Trace) was found, the analyses would be followed up by one-way variance analyses to determine on which of the dependent variables significant differences in averages appear. The Scheffé post hoc t -test was applied to determine between which of the four groups (combination of gender and ethnicity) these differences appeared (Howell, 2013). To investigate Hypothesis 3, the chi-square test for homogeneity (Howell, 2013) was utilised, since the variables in this case were measured on the nominal level.

There are a number of assumptions if a MANOVA is being used. One of the most stringent assumptions is independence of observations. One way to control for correlations among observations is to use a more stringent alpha level (e.g. $p < .01$) when determining

significance of MANOVA calculations. The next assumption deals with normality of scores. Each of the dependent variables should be normally distributed within groups. Outliers should be removed before a MANOVA is performed. The third assumption deals with homogeneity of variances. This assumption assumes that the dependent variables exhibit equal levels of error variance across the range of independent variables. The Levene's Test can be used to test for homogeneity of variances. The last assumption deals with the homogeneity of covariances and the Box Test can be used to investigate whether the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups. The last two assumptions may be violated without greatly affecting the level of significance or power. However, it is also important to pay attention to unequal sample sizes. If the difference in sample size is significant we should use the Pillai's trace as the multivariate test statistic rather than Wilk's Lambda (Tweedy and Lunardelli, 2016).

To comment on the meaning of statistical significant results found during the test, the practical significance of the results was also examined. As a measure of practical significance, the effect sizes (Steyn, 1999) were calculated. During the comparison of population averages the following guidance values (f) were utilised: 0.1 = small effect, 0.25 = medium effect; 0.4 = big effect. In the case of the χ^2 -test (Research Hypothesis 3), the effect size is indicated by w , and the guidance values are as follows: 0.1 = small; 0.3 = medium; 0.5 = large.

The 1% level of significance was utilised in this study. Only results with medium to large effect sizes are discussed in more detail. The SPSS computer program (SPSS Incorporated, 2015) was used for the analyses. The results are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Results and Discussion of the Results

6.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the results of the study and analyses of the data, together with discussion of the results. In the next paragraphs the statistical analyses will mainly focus on the differences between mean scores and the proportions with regard to assertiveness for young adults. Initially, the focus is on the levels of assertiveness of the participants but their perception of assertiveness with regard to specific scenarios in the workplace will also be discussed. Throughout the analyses the differences in responses relating to race, gender and the interaction between these two variables will be focused on.

6.2 Descriptive Statistics

It was important to firstly investigate whether the data comply with the assumptions when a MANOVA is being used. To comply with the assumption of independence of observations, participants were selected from three independent cities (Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom) and a more stringent alpha level (e.g. $p < .01$) were applied during the analyses of the data. With regards to the second assumption which deals with unexpected values, the data set was investigated for extreme values. No substantial deviations were found. This was followed up by calculating the kurtosis and skewness quotients for all the scales. The scale of which the skewness $> |2|$ and/or the kurtosis $> |4|$ were, will be identified and excluded from further analyses as they are deemed unsuitable for factor analysis. The other two assumptions, namely the homogeneity of variances and covariances will be discussed when the results of the MANOVA are discussed. To investigate these two assumptions the Levene's Test (for variances) and the Box Test (for covariances) were utilized.

In Table 4, the averages (\bar{X}) standard deviations (sd), skewness and kurtosis for the Discomfort and Probability total scores are indicated. This information was calculated first for the total group. The descriptive statistics were also calculated for the two genders, two ethnic groups and the combination of ethnicity and gender (four groups). The mean

difference scores between Discomfort and Response Probability are also reported in Table 3. The difference scores were calculated by subtracting the score for Discomfort from the score for Response Probability.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics regarding the Discomfort and Probability Scores for the Total Group, two Genders, two Ethnic Groups, and the combination of Ethnicity and Gender

Group	N	Discomfort		Response Probability		Deviation		Skewness		Kurtosis	
		\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd	Dis	Pro	Dis	Pro
Total group	256	96.49	21.86	98.23	22.37	1.73	16.57	.099	.131	-.462	.256
Males	132	94.50	21.62	93.63	19.87	0.87	15.57	.276	.085	-.050	-.282
Females	124	98.61	21.99	103.12	23.86	4.51	17.20	-.086	-.020	-.723	.510
Black	117	98.97	22.35	102.10	22.80	3.14	18.17	.152	.231	-.556	.900
White	139	94.41	21.29	94.96	21.54	0.55	15.06	.022	-.014	-.432	-.532
Black Men	49	90.90	22.68	88.41	19.63	-2.49	16.45	.756	-.021	.962	-.286
Black Women	68	104.78	20.36	111.97	19.70	7.19	18.38	-.159	.746	1.018	1.032
White men	83	96.63	20.81	96.71	19.47	0.08	15.05	-.006	.170	-.392	-.391
White women	56	91.13	21.74	92.38	24.23	1.25	15.18	.100	-.040	-.396	-.856

From Table 4 can be depicted that no extraordinary skewness or kurtosis values were found. It can therefore be postulated that the data comply with the assumption of normality and there is proceed with the investigation of the hypotheses.

From the statistics in Table 4, it is clear that in terms of Discomfort total scores, black females achieved the highest average score. Generally speaking, it indicates that they are especially likely to experience a higher measure of discomfort than any other group when confronted with situations as indicated in the Assertion Inventory. The same tendency is found regarding Response Probability. Therefore, black females are also less likely to act in the relevant situations.

It is further noticeable that, with the exception of the total female group and the black females, a very small average was obtained in difference scores. Thus, it can be concluded that the participants (with the exception of the total female group and black females) were more inclined to pair a high Discomfort score with a high Response Probability. This means that although a certain situation might cause a great measure of discomfort, they are inclined to respond to it "rarely" or "never". The opposite is also applicable: A low Discomfort score

is paired with a low Response Probability score. In these cases, the situation does not cause as much discomfort and the participants are likely to respond to it “always” or “usually”.

With the exception of black males (-2.49), the difference score is positive, which indicates that the total Discomfort scores in general were lower than the Response Probability scores. The negative difference score of the black males is therefore an indication that they will act irrespective whether they experience discomfort with doing it.

Next, comparisons were made between the two genders, ethnical groups, and the combined groups (black males, black females, white males, and white females) regarding their average Discomfort and Response Probability total scores (hypothesis 1). This was done using the MANOVA technique to investigate significant differences in the average scores as they appear in Table 4.

6.3 Comparison of Mean Discomfort and Probability scores

6.3.1 Gender

As indicated in paragraph 6.2, the homogeneity of covariances and variances of the dependent variables will first be investigated. The Box Test and Levene’s Test were used to investigate the homogeneity of covariances and variances of the dependent variables respectively. The results of the Box Test (Box’s $M = 6.151$; $F_{(3;13264840)} = 2.033$; $p = 0.107$) indicate no significant differences in the covariances matrices while the results of the Levene’s Test also no significant F -values indicate (Discomfort = 0.160; $p = 0.689$ en Probability = 2.548; $p = 0.112$) which indicate no significant differences in the variances of the dependent variables. The data comply thus to all assumptions and there is proceeded with a MANOVA analysis.

The average total scores for the two genders for Discomfort and Response Probability were compared initially. No significant statistical differences between the averages of the two genders for the Discomfort total score ($F_{1;254} = 2.276$; $p = 0.133$) were found. In this case the null hypothesis can be retained. However, when it comes to Response Probability total scores ($F_{1;254} = 12.102$; $p = 0.001$; $f = 0.22$) there were significant differences in the averages for the two genders, and the results show a medium effect size. Therefore, in this case, the null hypothesis can be rejected. From Table 4, it is clear that females, in comparison with males, achieved a significant higher average. Therefore, compared to males, females are less likely to act in certain situations.

6.3.2 Ethnicity

Next, the average total scores for Discomfort and Response Probability for the two ethnic groups were compared. The Box Test and Levene's Test were used to investigate the homogeneity of covariances and variances of the dependent variables respectively. The results of the Box Test (Box's $M = 4.89$; $F_{(3;242609951)} = 1.517$; $p = 0.208$) indicate no significant differences in the covariances matrices while the results of the Levene's Test also no significant F -values indicate (Discomfort = 0.438; $p = 0.509$ en Probability = 0.001; $p = 0.975$) which indicate no significant differences in the variances of the dependent variables. The data comply thus to all assumptions and there is proceeded with a MANOVA analysis. No significant differences could be found on the 1% level for any of the two total scores (Discomfort: $F_{1;254} = 2.780$; $p = 0.097$ and Response Probability: $F_{1;254} = 6.613$; $p = 0.011$). Therefore, in both these case, the null hypothesis was retained.

Even though the Response Probability scores do not differ statistically significantly for the two ethnic groups, young black adults do show a higher average than young white adults do. At closer inspection of the table, it is clear that this higher Response Probability score is due to the black females that achieved a relatively high average Response Probability score of 111.97.

6.3.3 Combination Between Gender and Ethnicity

The analysis was followed up by comparing the average discomfort of the four groups (black males, black females, white males, and white females) as well as their average response probability by making use of a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The Box Test and Levene's Test were used to investigate the homogeneity of covariances and variances of the dependent variables respectively. The results of the Box Test (Box's $M = 10.461$; $F_{(9;440385)} = 1.145$; $p = 0.326$) indicate no significant differences in the covariances matrices while the results of the Levene's Test also no significant F -values indicate (Discomfort = 0.022; $p = 0.995$ and Probability = 2.208; $p = 0.088$) which indicate no significant differences in the variances of the dependent variables. The data comply thus to all assumptions and there is proceeded with a MANOVA analysis.

For the multivariate test, the Hotelling Trace was used, and the following results were found: ($F_{6,500} = 7.938$; $p = 0.000$; $f = 0.31$). This indicates that the differences on the 1% standard are significant and that the results have a medium effect size. To determine on which of the dependent variables (Discomfort and Response Probability) significant differences in the averages for the four groups are found, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were done. This procedure firstly provides an indication of the dependant variables that display significant differences and secondly for which groups (by utilising the Scheffé test) these differences appear.

With regard to the average Discomfort score ($F = 5.762$; $p = 0.001$; $f = 0.26$), it is clear that on the 1% level, significant differences are to be found in the averages of the four groups and that these differences indicate a medium effect size. Therefore, in this case, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The Scheffé test was utilised to determine the specific differences, and in this case, it is clear that the average for the black females (104.78) does not differ significantly from the average for the white males (96.63) but differs from the averages for the black males (90.90) and white females (91.13) (See Table 4). It seems as if black females, compared to black males and white females, generally experience situations as more uncomfortable.

With regard to the average Response Probability score ($F = 15.319$; $p = 0.000$; $f = 0.43$), it is clear that on the 1% level, significant differences are found in the averages of the four groups and that these differences show a big effect size. As in the case of the Discomfort score, the null hypothesis can also be rejected in this case. The Scheffé test was utilised to determine the specific differences, and in this case, it is clear that the average for the black females (111.97) differs from the averages for black males (88.41), white males (96.71), and white females (92.38) (See Table 4). It seems as if black females, compared to the other three groups, generally indicate that they are not keen to respond.

Next, we investigated whether there were significant differences in the mean item scores of the Assertion Inventory for the two genders, ethnic groups, and for the four groups (black males, black females, white males, and white females) (hypothesis 2). It was done first for the Discomfort items and then for the Response Probability items. Since 40 items are involved, only the items for which significant results were calculated (significant on the 1% level) and with a big effect size ($f \geq 0.4$) are reported.

6.4 Comparison of Discomfort and Probability Mean Item Scores

6.4.1 Gender

For Discomfort only two items (item 22 and 25) were identified that showed a significant difference in average between the two genders, and in these cases, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results are indicated in Table 5.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the Two Genders with regard to Discomfort Items

Item	Males		Females		F	p	f
	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd			
Item 22	1.77	1.07	2.94	1.44	53.993*	0.000	0.46
Item 25	1.47	0.83	2.29	1.26	38.183*	0.000	0.40

* $p \leq 0.01$

In the case of both these items, namely item 22 (Tell someone that you like them) and item 25 (Return defective items e.g. store or restaurant), young female respondents have a significantly higher average score than young male adults have, indicating that the females experienced a greater amount of discomfort in these situations.

Concerning the Response Probability items, significant differences in averages between the genders were identified in the case of three items (item 11, 22 and 25); therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected in these cases. The results are indicated in Table 6.

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the Two Genders with regard to Response Probability Items

Item	Males		Females		F	p	f
	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd			
Item 11	2.27	1.01	3.18	1.20	42.839*	0.000	0.41
Item 22	1.84	0.96	2.86	1.34	49.550*	0.000	0.44
Item 25	1.45	0.86	2.57	1.33	65.326*	0.000	0.51

* $p \leq 0.01$

Young females had a significantly higher average score regarding *turning down a request to borrow money from you* (item 11), *telling someone that you like him or her* (item

22) and *returning defective items* (item 25) than the young male adults. In comparison with the young male adults, they indicate greater discomfort to act in these situations.

Next, possible significant differences in the average item scores of the Assertion Inventory for the two ethnic groups were investigated.

6.4.2 Ethnicity

No significant ethnic differences could be found regarding any of the Discomfort or Response Probability items; therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. In general, therefore, it can be concluded that black and white young adults experience the same degree of discomfort in situations and that they show the same tendencies when it comes to Response Probability. Next, it was investigated whether the combined groups (gender and ethnicity) showed differences regarding the items.

6.4.3 Interaction Between Gender and Ethnicity

Concerning Discomfort, significant differences in averages for the combined groups were identified for four items (3, 12, 22 and 25); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in these four cases. The results are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7
Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the Four Groups with regard to Discomfort Items

Item	Black				White				F	p	f
	Men		Women		Men		Women				
	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd			
Item 3	2.12	0.86	3.15	1.09	2.35	0.88	2.50	0.81	14.352*	0.000	0.41
Item 12	2.33	1.05	3.62	1.17	2.55	0.79	1.98	0.70	35.688*	0.000	0.65
Item 22	1.84	1.16	3.53	1.26	1.73	1.03	2.21	1.31	33.263*	0.000	0.63
Item 25	1.57	0.89	2.56	1.32	1.41	0.80	1.96	1.11	16.728*	0.000	0.45

* p <= 0.01

The Scheffé test was utilised to determine the specific differences in averages between the four groups. Regarding all four items, namely item 3 (Ask a favour of someone), item 12 (Ask personal questions), item 22 (Tell someone that you like him or her), and item 25 (Return defective items, e.g. store or restaurant), the black females, in comparison with the other three groups, showed a significantly higher average score.

Therefore, in comparison with the other three groups, black females experienced a greater measure of discomfort in these situations. With regard to items 12 and 25, there also seem to be significant differences in averages between the white males and white females. With regard to item 12 (Ask personal questions), white males have a higher average score than white females have, while for item 25 (Return defective items, e.g., store or restaurant), white females show a higher score than that for white males. Although white males, compared to white females, experienced a greater amount of discomfort in asking personal questions, they experienced less discomfort in returning defective items.

Concerning Response Probability, significant differences in averages for 10 items (1, 3, 11, 12, 17, 22, 23, 25, 29, and 30) were identified; therefore, in these ten cases, the null hypothesis can be rejected. The results are indicated in Table 8.

Table 8
Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the Four Groups with regard to Response Probability Items

Dependent Variable	Black				White				F	p	f
	Men		Women		Men		Women				
	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd	\bar{X}	sd			
Item 1	2.18	1.25	3.54	1.35	2.17	1.31	2.37	1.43	16.189*	0.00	0.44
Item 3	2.04	0.84	3.16	1.00	2.53	0.83	2.61	0.93	15.179*	0.00	0.42
Item 11	2.29	1.14	3.68	1.07	2.27	0.93	2.57	1.08	27.668*	0.00	0.57
Item 12	2.18	0.83	3.56	1.04	2.59	0.87	2.18	0.97	30.237*	0.00	0.60
Item 17	2.10	1.01	3.49	1.15	2.14	0.74	2.34	1.25	26.735*	0.00	0.56
Item 22	1.86	0.96	3.35	1.16	1.83	0.97	2.27	1.31	28.249*	0.00	0.58
Item 23	1.84	1.05	3.10	1.16	2.27	1.03	2.23	1.18	14.380*	0.00	0.41
Item 25	1.43	0.76	2.96	1.28	1.46	0.92	2.11	1.26	29.592*	0.00	0.59
Item 29	1.71	0.87	3.07	1.11	1.81	0.76	1.82	1.01	31.433*	0.00	0.61
Item 30	1.43	0.74	2.62	1.22	1.67	0.98	1.75	1.03	16.423*	0.00	0.44

* p <= 0.01

The Scheffé test was once again utilised to determine the specific differences in averages between the four groups. In the case of all ten the items, namely item 1 (Turn down a request to borrow your car), item 3 (Ask a favour of someone), item 11 (Turn down a request to borrow money from you), item 12 (Ask personal questions), item 17 (Request a meeting or a date with a person), item 22 (Tell someone that you like him or her), item 23 (Request expected service when such is not forthcoming, e.g., in a restaurant), item 25

(Return defective items), item 29 (Accept a date), item 30 (Tell someone good news about yourself), black females indicate, in comparison to other groups, a significant higher score. Therefore, black females, compared to the other three groups, experienced a greater amount of discomfort to act in these situations.

Except for these differences, the following differences were found for items 3 and 25. With regard to item 3 (Ask a favour of someone), significant differences occurred in averages between black males on the one hand and white males and females on the other hand. Black males achieved a significant lower average score and therefore showed a smaller degree of discomfort to act in these situations. With regard to item 25 (Return defective items), white females showed a higher average score than white males and black males did. The females (black and white) experienced a greater degree of discomfort than males (black and white) did concerning the return of defective items.

The results for Hypothesis 3 will now be discussed.

6.5 Proportional differences with regard to four profile groups

6.5.1 Distribution According to Profile

The AI makes it possible to divide respondents into four profiles (Unassertive, Anxious-performer, Does not care, and Assertive). Those with a high score on the Discomfort scale (96+) but a low score on the Probability scale (105+) fall within the Unassertive group and are persons that have trouble with assertion. The next group show assertive behaviour in spite of high levels of discomfort and are known as anxious performers. Group 3 shows low levels of discomfort and low levels of response probability. They fall within the “Does not care” group. These individuals do not see the point of assertive behaviour; it simply does not matter to them. The last group, namely the Assertive group, show low levels of discomfort with high levels of response probability. They will display certain behaviour at all times, whether discomfort levels are high or not.

The participants were divided into these four profiles according to their total counts on the Discomfort and Response Probability scales. It was calculated for the total group and is indicated in Table 9.

Table 9

Distribution of the Total Group Young Adults According to the four Profiles

Discomfort	Response Probability		Total
	Low (105+)	High (104-)	
High (96+)	Unassertive 81 (31.6%)	Anxious-performer 53 (20.7%)	134 (52.3%)
Low (95-)	Does not care 19 (7.4%)	Assertive 103 (40.2%)	122 (47.7%)
Total	100 (39.1%)	156 (60.9%)	256 (100%)

The majority (40.2%) of the total group of young adults fall in the Assertive group, while about a third fall in the Unassertive group. The Unassertive group is typical of persons who experience problems with assertion.

Next, it was investigated whether there were any proportional differences for the four profile groups regarding ethnicity, gender and the combination between these two variables. These results are presented and discussed in the next section.

6.5.2 Difference in Proportion Regarding Ethnicity and Gender for the Four Profiles

After the research group had been divided into four profiles (Unassertive, Anxious-performer, Does not care and Assertive) according to their responses to the Assertion Inventory, the chi-square test for homogeneity was utilised to examine whether there was a difference in proportion for gender, ethnicity and a combination between ethnicity and gender (black males, black females, white males and white females) regarding the four profiles.

6.5.2.1 Gender

First, we examined if there were proportional differences for the 2 genders with regard to the four profile groups. In this case, a significant χ^2 -value of 19.195 was found; therefore, in this case, the null hypothesis can be rejected. The results are indicated in Table 10. In each cell, the frequency and the row percentages (in brackets) are indicated. The practical significance (w) of the result is also indicated at the bottom of the table.

Table 10

χ² Results between Gender and the four Profile Groups

Gender	Non-assertive	Anxious performer	Does not care	Assertive	Total
Males	29 (22.0%)	36 (27.3%)	6 (4.5%)	61 (46.2%)	132 (51.6%)
Females	52 (41.9%)	17 (13.7%)	13 (10.5%)	42 (33.9%)	124 (48.4%)
Total	81 (31.6%)	53 (20.7%)	19 (7.4%)	103 (40.2%)	256 (100.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 19.195$$

$$p = 0.000$$

$$(w=0.27)$$

$$v = 3$$

The chi-square indicates that, with regard to the four profile groups, significant differences appear (in proportion) on the 1% level for the two groups (males and females). The corresponding effect size of 0.27 indicates that this result is of average practical importance. The findings of this study can be compared with those of Gambrill and Richey (1975). Two of their samples (the Californian sample) were distributed as follows: Assertive: 36%; Non-assertive: 35%; Anxious-performer: 11%; and Does not care: 18%. These samples have been compiled for younger groups (undergraduate students) and can therefore not be used to compare the groups directly.

From Table 10 it is evident that a greater proportion of females (41.9%) than males (22.0%) fall within the Unassertive group, while a smaller proportion of females (33.9%) than males (46.2%) fall within the Assertive group.

6.5.2.2 Ethnicity

Next, the analysis was repeated for the two ethnic groups. A χ^2 -value of 5.572 with 3 degrees of freedom provides a *p*-value of 0.134, indicating that there is no significant difference in proportions between the two ethnic groups. Therefore, The null hypothesis can be retained. More or less the same proportion of black and white young adults appear in the different profile groups.

6.5.2.3 The Combination Between Gender and Ethnicity

For the combination between gender and ethnicity, four groups were formed (black males, black females, white males and white females), and the analysis was repeated. These results appear in Table 11.

Table 11

χ^2 Results of the Combination between Ethnicity and Gender for the Four Profile Groups

Group	Non-assertive	Anxious Performer	Does not care	Assertive	Total
Black Males	7 (14.3%)	13 (26.5%)	3 (6.1%)	26 (53.1%)	49 (19.1%)
Black Females	35 (51.5%)	7 (10.3%)	9 (13.2%)	17 (25.0%)	68 (26.6%)
White Males	22 (26.5%)	23 (27.7%)	3 (3.6%)	35 (42.2%)	83 (32.4%)
White Females	17 (30.4%)	10 (17.9%)	4 (7.1%)	25 (44.6%)	56 (21.9%)
Total	81 (31.6%)	53 (20.7%)	19 (7.4%)	103 (40.2%)	256 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 31.495$
 $p = 0.000$
 $(w=0.35)$
 $v = 9$

The chi-square test-value (31.495) indicates that, on the 1% level, significant differences in proportion with regard to the profile group appear for the four groups (black males, black females, white males, and white females). Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

The corresponding effect size of 0.35 indicates that this result is of average practical importance. From Table 11, it can be derived that a much smaller number of black females (25.0%) than black males (53.1%), white males (42.2%) or white females (44.6%) fall within the Assertive profile group. It further seems as if a much smaller number of black males (14.3%) than black females (51.5%), white males (26.5%) or white females (30.4%) fall within the Non-assertive profile group.

6.6 Assertiveness in the Corporate Environment

6.6.1 Introduction

The last research hypothesis (hypothesis 4) that was investigated focused on the possible differences in the average appropriate and effective scores of certain perceived behaviours of line managers in scenarios that may occur in the corporate environment. Each participant had to answer each scenario in terms of the following behaviours, namely: Assertive, Empathic-assertive, Non-assertive and Aggressive.

Since four related scenarios were presented, a total score across the four scenarios was calculated for each of the behavioural categories (Assertive, Empathic-assertive, Non-assertive, and Aggressive). The total score calculated for each category was divided by the number of items (4 in this case) so that it could alternate only between 1 and 5 (the width of the scale). Therefore, it was easier to compare the averages. These differences were examined for the different genders, ethnic groups, and the combination between gender and ethnicity.

Before this hypothesis is examined, the averages and standard deviations with regard to the possible behavioural categories (Assertive, Empathic-assertive, Non-assertive and Aggressive) are provided in Table 12.

Table 12

Means and Standard Deviations with regard to Appropriateness and Effectiveness for the Various Behavioural Categories

	Behavioural Category	\bar{X}	sd
Appropriateness	Assertive	3.46	0.67
	Empathic-assertive	4.33	0.66
	Non-assertive	3.76	0.74
	Aggressive	2.01	0.79
Effectiveness	Assertive	3.45	0.73
	Empathic-assertive	4.33	0.73
	Non-assertive	3.16	0.58
	Aggressive	1.58	0.76

With regard to appropriateness, the results in Table 12 indicate that Empathic-assertiveness, with an average of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 0.66, is regarded as the most appropriate behaviour. With regard to effectiveness, Empathic assertiveness once

again scores the highest average with 4.33 (with a standard deviation of 0.73) followed by Assertiveness (although Non-assertiveness seems to be more appropriate than Assertiveness).

6.6.2 Differences in Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Behaviour

The possible differences in the average of the scores for appropriateness and effectiveness of the four behavioural categories were examined for the two genders, ethnic groups, and the combination between gender and ethnicity. For this purpose, a one-way MANOVA was done, the results of which are discussed next.

6.6.2.1 Gender

With regard to gender, a MANOVA *F*-value of 8.653 ($v = 8; 247$) was calculated that is significant on the 1% level ($p = 0.000$). To determine on which of the behavioural categories significant differences in averages for the genders appear, a one-way analysis of variance was done. These results, together with the calculated effect sizes (*f*), appear in Table 13.

Table 13

Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the two Genders with regard to the Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scores

Appropriate/Effective	Males		Females		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>
	\bar{X}	<i>sd</i>	\bar{X}	<i>sd</i>			
Appropriate: Assertive	3.71	0.53	3.19	0.70	46.123*	0.000	0.43
Appropriate: Empathic-assertive	4.52	0.56	4.13	0.71	24.438*	0.000	0.31
Appropriate: Non-assertive	3.92	0.58	3.58	0.84	15.061*	0.000	0.24
Appropriate: Aggressive	2.16	0.69	1.85	0.86	10.019*	0.002	0.20
Effective: Assertive	3.74	0.60	3.13	0.73	52.781*	0.000	0.46
Effective: Empathic-assertive	4.52	0.64	4.13	0.76	19.191*	0.000	0.28
Effective: Non-assertive	3.15	0.49	3.18	0.67	0.165	0.685	-
Effective: Aggressive	1.49	0.65	1.68	0.86	3.820	0.052	-

* $p \leq 0.01$

From Table 13, it is evident that significant differences between the two genders are found for all four the appropriateness scores and for two of the effectiveness scores. With the exception of the appropriateness score for Aggression, the others scores indicate significant medium to large effect sizes.

The young adult males regularly achieved (in comparison to the young females) a higher average on these significant appropriateness and effective scores, indicating that the young adult males are of the opinion that assertive behaviour, empathic-assertive behaviour and non-assertive behaviour are more applicable in the corporate environment, with fewer young adult females who hold this opinion. Furthermore, men are more of the opinion that assertive and empathic-assertive behaviour is more effective in the corporate environment, than young adult females hold this opinion.

6.6.2.2 Ethnicity

For ethnicity, a MANOVA *F*-value of 8.902 ($v = 8; 247$) was obtained, which is significant on the 1% level ($p = 0.000$). To determine on which of the behavioural categories significant differences in averages for the two ethnic groups appeared, a one-way analysis of variance was done. These results, together with the calculated effect sizes (*f*), appear in Table 14.

Table 14

Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the Two Ethnic groups with regard to the Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scores

Appropriate/Effective	Black		White		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>
	\bar{X}	<i>sd</i>	\bar{X}	<i>sd</i>			
Appropriate: Assertive	3.18	0.72	3.69	0.52	43.472*	0.000	0.42
Appropriate: Empathic assertive	4.08	0.79	4.54	0.45	34.026*	0.000	0.37
Appropriate: Non-assertive	3.52	0.81	3.96	0.60	24.779*	0.000	0.31
Appropriate: Aggressive	1.95	0.90	2.05	0.68	1.088	0.298	-
Effective: Assertive	3.13	0.79	3.71	0.57	45.536*	0.000	0.43
Effective: Empathic-assertive	4.05	0.85	4.56	0.50	35.170*	0.000	0.27
Effective: Non-assertive	3.11	0.56	3.20	0.60	1.672	0.197	-
Effective: Aggressive	1.76	0.93	1.44	0.54	12.008*	0.001	0.21

* $p \leq 0.01$

From Table 14, it is evident that, with regard to three of the appropriateness and three of the effectiveness scores, significant differences are found for the two ethnic groups. With the exception of the effectiveness score for Aggression, the other scores indicate significant medium to large effect sizes. In comparison with the young black adults,

the young white adults regularly achieved significantly higher averages on these appropriateness and effectiveness scores.

Therefore, the white young adults are of the opinion that assertive behaviour, empathic-assertive behaviour and non-assertive behaviour are more appropriate in the corporate environment, than young adult females hold this opinion. Furthermore, white young adults are of the opinion that assertive and empathic assertive behaviour is more effective in the corporate environment, than young black adults hold the opinion.

6.6.2.3 Appropriateness of Behaviour According to a Combination of Gender and Ethnicity

A MANOVA F -value of 8.532 ($v = 24; 731$) was obtained for the combined group, which is also significant on the 1% level ($p = 0.000$). To determine on which of the behavioural categories significant differences in averages for the combined group appeared, a one-way analysis of variance was done. These results, together with the calculated effect sizes (f), appear in Table 15.

Table 15

Means, Standard Deviations and F-values for the Four groups with regard to the Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scores

Appropriate/ Effective	Black				White				F	p	f
	Males		Females		Males		Females				
	\bar{X}	sa	\bar{X}	sa	\bar{X}	sa	\bar{X}	sa			
App: Assertive	3.60	0.59	2.88	0.65	3.77	0.48	3.56	0.56	34.278*	0.000	0.64
App: Empathic-assertive	4.47	0.73	3.80	0.71	4.55	0.44	4.52	0.47	25.209*	0.000	0.55
App: Non-assertive	3.95	0.71	3.20	0.73	3.91	0.49	4.03	0.74	22.069*	0.000	0.51
App: Aggressive	2.35	0.83	1.67	0.84	2.04	0.56	2.07	0.83	8.105*	0.000	0.31
Eff: Assertive	3.62	0.70	2.78	0.65	3.81	0.53	3.55	0.59	38.188*	0.000	0.67
Eff: Empathic-assertive	4.33	0.90	3.85	0.76	4.63	0.39	4.47	0.63	17.927*	0.000	0.46
Eff: Non-assertive	3.24	0.39	3.01	0.64	3.09	0.53	3.38	0.65	5.044*	0.002	0.24
Eff: Aggressive	1.63	0.78	1.85	1.03	1.41	0.55	1.47	0.53	4.908*	0.002	0.24

* $p \leq 0.01$

The Scheffé test was utilised to determine the specific differences in averages between the four groups. Significant differences in averages appear on the 1% level with regard to all four the appropriateness and effectiveness scores. All the differences indicate medium to large effect sizes. With regard to the four appropriateness scores, the Scheffé-

result shows that the black females regularly differ from the other three groups. From Table 15, it is clear that the black females, compared to the other three groups, achieved lower average scores. Therefore, in comparison with the other three groups, they were of the opinion that assertive, empathic-assertive, non-assertive, or aggressive behaviour is less appropriate in the corporate environment.

With regard to the four effectiveness scores, the Scheffé results indicate that the black females differ from the other three groups with regard to assertive and empathic-assertive behaviour. From Table 15, it is clear that the black females, in comparison with the other three groups, once again achieved significantly lower average scores. Therefore, in comparison with the other three groups, they were of the opinion that assertive and empathic-assertive behaviour in the corporate environment is less effective. It is quite striking that black females, in comparison with white males and white females, achieved a significant higher average score with regard to the effectiveness of aggressive behaviour. Therefore, in comparison with white males, they were of the opinion that aggressive behaviour in the corporate environment is indeed more effective.

Lastly, the Scheffé-results indicate that white females, in comparison with white males and black females, achieved a significantly higher average score concerning the effectiveness of non-assertive behaviour. Therefore, in comparison with white males and black females, the white females were of the opinion that non-assertive behaviour in the corporate environment is indeed more effective.

CHAPTER 7

Summary, Limitations and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the beginning, the study investigated assertiveness of young adults and their perceptions of style of assertiveness in the workplace as future employees. Primarily, the aim of the study was to determine perceptions not only on their own levels of assertiveness, but also their conduct in certain workplace scenarios. Special focus was placed on the role of gender and ethnic differences.

7.2 Assertiveness of participants

Scores on two scales, discomfort and response probability, were used to determine the levels of assertiveness amongst the participants. Scores on these two scales were used to determine the most dominant profile for the different groups and will now be discussed. The mean scores of these two scales were also investigated. In both cases gender, ethnicity and the combination between these two biographical variables were used to compare the proportional differences and mean scores.

7.2.1 Profile Groups

The AI was used to divide the participants into four different groups (Unassertive, Assertive, Anxious-performer and Does not care) depending on their scores regarding discomfort and response probability. From Table 9, it is clear that the majority of the participants (40.2%) see themselves as Assertive, with the minority falling within the Does not care (7.4%) group. With the focus on gender and ethnicity and the combination thereof, these four groups were also compared in terms of these biographical variables.

With regard to **gender** it was found that a significant (on 1%-level) greater proportion of females (41.9%) than males (22.0%) fall within the Unassertive group. It is interesting to note that more males (26.5% black males and 27.7% white males) than females (10.3% black females and 17.9% white females) were found in the “anxious performer” group, which indicates that males will still act even if they are experiencing high levels of discomfort. No significant proportional differences for these four profiles could be

identified for the two **ethnicity** groups. However, when gender and ethnicity were **combined**, it was evident that in comparison with the other three groups, a smaller number of black females (25.0%) fall within the Assertive profile group. This can explain the finding with regard to the two gender groups. It was also found that in comparison with the other three groups, a smaller number of black males (14.3%) fall within the Non-assertive profile group. It seems that the black females are more inclined to unassertiveness (51.5%) than to any of the other profiles. The other three groups, namely black males (53.1%), white females (44.6%) and white males (42.2%), are more inclined to assertive behaviour.

7.2.2 Comparison of Discomfort and Response Probability

The participants' mean total scores as well as the mean items scores on the Discomfort and Response Probability scales were compared in terms of gender, ethnicity and the combination of these two biographical variables. The most important findings will now be discussed.

7.2.2.1 Gender

According to the current research, females seem to be less likely than males to respond in certain AI situations. These findings can be pinpointed to three items: Turning down a person that wants to borrow money; telling someone that you like him or her; and returning defective items. It appears that women would rather not act assertively in these situations compared to men. They also seem to be much more uncomfortable in returning defective items, with telling someone that you like him or her also scoring high on the Discomfort scale.

Except for these items, however, there does not seem to be major differences between the genders with regard to the levels of discomfort experienced, although they differ when it comes to the likelihood of a response. Gambrill and Richey (1975) found gender differences with regard to the following. Men were less likely than women were to resist sexual overtures, turn down a request for a date, or ask whether they have offended someone, while women were less likely to discuss someone's criticism of their work or to request a date with someone. The researchers attribute this to the social expectations of men and women. This might also account for women's responses to Item 22 in the current research (tell someone that you like him or her).

7.2.2.2 *Ethnicity*

The current research does not indicate any significant differences between the two ethnic groups with regard to their levels of discomfort or probability of action. It needs to be pointed out that our findings do not correspond with those of Potgieter (1998), who investigated possible differences between managers of different races with regard to assertiveness and aggressive responses and found that there were indeed differences in aggressiveness and assertiveness between different cultural groups. This position might have changed due to South Africa currently having a much more integrated society.

7.2.2.3 *Combination of Gender and Ethnicity*

The current research indicates several differences between the 4 groups (white males, black males, white females, and black females). Black females seem to be the group that are most uncomfortable when it comes to asking a favour of someone, asking personal questions, telling someone that you like him or her and returning defective items.

It also seems as if black females are less likely to act in these circumstances than the rest of the group are. To this can be added turning down a request to borrow a car, turning down a request to borrow money from someone, requesting a meeting or a date with someone, asking for expected service when it is not forthcoming, accepting a date, and telling someone good news about yourself.

There is also a clear difference between white males and white females concerning two of the AI items. It seems as if white males are more uncomfortable asking personal questions, but less uncomfortable than white females are in returning defective items. With regard to black males, it seems as if they have the least amount of issues (compared to the group) when it comes to asking someone for a favour, while white females (compared to both the male groups) also indicate an unwillingness to return defective items. This seems to be the one item on which all the women struggle to act.

If ethnicity and gender are combined, a clear picture emerges with regard to differences in assertive behaviour. Although there might not be differences between the two ethnic groups and only differences on some AI items when it comes to male versus female likelihood of response, the current research indicates the following with regard to the Assertive and Non-assertive profile groups: With regard to assertiveness, black males

seem to be the most assertive (53.1%), followed by white females (44.6%), white males (42.2%), and lastly black females (25.0%). With regard to non-assertiveness, black females are the most non-assertive (51.5%), followed by white females (30.4%), white males (26.5%) and lastly black males (14.3%).

7.3 Perception of the Styles of Assertiveness in the Workplace

The last part of the study focused on the participants' perceived style of communication in future workplace scenarios. These four styles (assertively, non-assertively, aggressively and emphatic-assertively) were based on the work of Woolfolk and Dever (1979) and Kern (1982). For each of the scenarios, the participants had to evaluate each of these communication styles in terms of its appropriateness and effectiveness (Schroeder, Rakos & Moe, 1983).

7.3.1 Total Group

The total group of participants used in this study seems to deliver similar results as those of Woolfolk and Dever (1979) and Kern (1982), with the majority preferring the empathic-assertive communication style. This was rated as the most effective and appropriate way of communicating with staff. Empathic-assertive communication was followed by non-assertiveness (for appropriateness) and assertiveness (for effectiveness).

7.3.2 Gender

With regard to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the different communication styles in the four scenarios, there are significant differences between the two genders with regard to four of the appropriateness statements and two of the effectiveness statements. Except for aggressiveness (which scored the lowest), it seems as if males are of the opinion that assertive, non-assertive and empathic-assertive behaviour are more appropriate and effective in the corporate environment. It is interesting to note that both genders regard empathic-assertiveness as most appropriate and effective, with both judging non-assertiveness as more appropriate than assertiveness. When it comes to effectiveness, males prefer assertiveness above non-assertiveness, while females prefer non-assertiveness to assertiveness (although to a lesser degree).

The findings of Bean (1977) need to be mentioned again. As mentioned earlier, Bean (1977) found that there was a clear, consistent, positive reaction of male students to assertive behaviour, while female students were less uniformly positive in their reactions. Although the research differed in that the study focussed on college students behaving assertively (and non-assertively), the findings still indicate that assertiveness appear to be a big dimension of interpersonal perception. The findings of the current research supports these differences in perception with regard to the two genders.

7.3.3 Ethnicity

With regard to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the different communication styles in the four scenarios, significant differences between the two ethnic groups were found. In comparison to the young black adults, the young white group was of the opinion that empathic-assertive, assertive, and non-assertive behaviour is more appropriate in a corporate environment. There seems to be greater sensitivity with regard to how instructions are given among the black group. Both groups indicate a preference for empathic assertiveness with regard to appropriateness and effectiveness. Hereafter, both seem to regard non-assertiveness as more appropriate than assertiveness, with both judging assertiveness as more effective than non-assertiveness (black group to a lesser degree).

7.3.4 Combination of Gender and Ethnicity

All groups seem to prefer empathic-assertiveness as the most appropriate and effective way of communication in a corporate environment, irrespective of the scenario. All groups seem to regard non-assertiveness as more appropriate than assertiveness. With regard to the levels of assertiveness among the group in the current study, it seems as if black males are the most assertive (53.1%), while black females are the least assertive (25.0%).

The results indicated that black females (compared to the other groups) are of the opinion that empathic-assertive, assertive, or non-assertive behaviour is less appropriate in a corporate environment. This group also regards assertive and empathic-assertive behaviour in the corporate environment as less effective, when compared with the other

groups. On the other hand, white females (compared to white males and black females) are of the opinion that non-assertiveness is more effective in a corporate environment.

How should the appropriate and effective manager then communicate with his multi-cultural staff? It seems, according to this study, as if an empathic-assertive approach would be best for all groups, with an understanding that employees with low levels of assertiveness (especially young black females) will tend to have a negative view of all forms of assertiveness. Regarding the own levels of assertiveness of the manager, the study of Ames and Flynn (2007) once again needs to be mentioned. They suggest a leadership style that is not too submissive or competitive and that assertiveness levels should be appropriate to the situation. Flexibility is the key. The authors further suggest that the behaviour of a leader should be adjusted depending on the assertiveness of the team members.

Low levels of assertiveness can of course be addressed with assertiveness training and from our study it is clear (as mentioned above) that there is a dire need for this training, specifically for the young black female group, to ensure the most effective environment for conveying corporate instructions.

7.4 Limitations and Recommendations

Although this study specifically addressed own assertiveness and the perception of the styles of assertiveness (including aggressiveness) among future employees, it seems as if there still remains room for further study in a South African context. Regarding the limitations of this study, Bean (1977) can be mentioned, who pointed out that the way a person responds in a laboratory study is not the same way he/she responds to people in real life. If there are real interpersonal/career consequences, different responses might be observed.

We can also not generalise the results because of a non-probability sample. The participants consisted of young adults with some previous informal work experience and are only based in three South African cities (Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom).

It is the recommendation that further study will also focus on the role of the gender of a leader in an assertive context. The gender of the managers was not specified in our study. Is it indeed true (in a South African context), as Netchaeva, Kouchaki and Sheppard (2015) found, that men will respond to women in supervisory roles with more assertive

behaviours and more feelings of threat. Is it true in the South African context that males will respond more favourably to assertive females than females themselves, as Bean (1977) found in her study? Are males really more supportive of assertiveness in general than females? Further investigation is needed.

Regarding ethnic groups, this study also did not indicate the ethnic group of our managers in our four scenarios. In an ethnic-conscious country such as South Africa, future research might also have to focus on the race of the manager. Race clearly plays a role in assertiveness and the perception thereof. As Hrop and Rakos (1985) for instance found, racial variables cannot be ignored during assertiveness training. The suggestion was for white trainees to focus on standard assertion and black trainees on empathic assertion. Lockyer (1993) also pointed to the need for social skills training in the South African corporate environment that is culturally sensitive. Eichstadt (1989) attempts to develop a self-report instrument to measure South African black employees' levels of assertiveness, but indicates that the construct validity, as well as the reliability of his instrument, still has to be determined. Hrop and Rakos (1985) also specifically pointed to the discomfort experienced by both races, when a member of the other race is being assertive. White assertiveness is experienced as aggressive and black assertiveness as intimidating. Further research is indeed also needed regarding these differences in a South African context.

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