

# research in brief

## **Recommendation Letters**

The main purpose of the study was to determine whether the sex of the writer of a recommendation letter influences the evaluation of an applicant for a managerial position.

A mail survey was sent to 128 male personnel managers in the Rocky Mountain Region. The survey included a cover letter, one standard favorable or unfavorable letter of recommendation referring to an applicant applying for a managerial

job, and a questionnaire related to the letter. Eighty-two of the mailed questionnaires were returned and analyzed in the study.

A 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design was employed to determine the effect of:

1. Sex of the writer.
2. Sex of the applicant.
3. Whether the letter was favorable or unfavorable on the likelihood that respondents would proceed with an interview for a management training position.

*Results* Contrary to predictions, the sex of the recommendation letter writer didn't influence the evaluation of the applicant—that is, female applicants in this study were chosen to proceed with an interview significantly more often than were male applicants. However, women were seen to have lower initiative and responsibility and less ability to learn quickly. The author concluded it's harder "to change attitudes than behaviors!"

As expected, respondents were more likely to proceed with the interview if the recommendation letter was favorable rather than unfavorable.

*Editor's Note* Each Extension Service often conducts initial screening of applicants using recommendations from friends and associates. In times of affirmative action, it behooves us to be careful not to allow our biases or attitudes to influence this phase of the screening process for either male or female applicants.

"Recommendation Letters: Another Look at Sexual Discrimination."  
Barbara Rosenblum Kryger. Master's Thesis, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 1976.

*Phyllis Worden*