

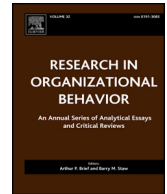


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# A pawn in someone else's game?: The cognitive, motivational, and paradigmatic barriers to women's excelling in negotiation

Jessica A. Kennedy<sup>a,\*</sup>, Laura J. Kray<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, United States

<sup>b</sup> Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, CA, United States

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### ABSTRACT

Women's relatively worse performance in negotiation is often cited as an explanation for gender differences in advancement and pay within organizations. We review key findings from the past twenty years of research on gender differences in negotiation. Women do underperform relative to men in negotiation, but only under limited circumstances, which means the performance gap is unlikely due to lesser skills on their part. The barriers between women and negotiation excellence are of three types: cognitive, motivational, and paradigmatic. Cognitive barriers stem from negative stereotypes about women's negotiating abilities. Motivational barriers stem from desire to prevent women negotiators from excelling in a masculine domain. Paradigmatic barriers stem from how negotiation is currently studied. We call for greater attention to motivational barriers and for changes to the negotiation paradigm. Women negotiators are not incompetent, and training them to negotiate more like men is not obviously the solution. In fact, women have greater concern for others than men do, and their cooperativeness elevates collective intelligence and enables ethical behavior. Under a new paradigm of negotiation, the value of these strengths could become more readily apparent. In particular, we advocate for greater attention to long-term relationships, subjective value, and relational capital, all of which may have important economic implications in real world negotiations.

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Within a framework of inequality the existence of conflict is denied and the means to engage openly in conflict are excluded.

—Jean Baker Miller, M. D. *The New Psychology of Women*

Women in organizations are succeeding to a lesser degree than men. Women still hold only 5% of CEO positions (Catalyst, 2015), 19% of Board Directorships (Catalyst, 2015) and are estimated to earn only \$0.82 for every dollar paid to men (Hegewisch, Ellis, & Hartmann,

2015). When women are under-represented in high status positions, it becomes more difficult for other women to succeed in the organization (Ibarra, 1992, 1993; Kanter, 1977). The female gender group is seen more negatively in firms with fewer senior women (Ely, 1994) and women's skills go unrecognized (Joshi, 2014)<sup>1</sup>.

Despite similar career aspirations, the trajectories of high-achieving men and women in MBA programs vary in important ways. A recent survey of Harvard Business School alumni showed that women were less likely than men to hold senior management positions, less likely to

<sup>1</sup> We recognize that the term female usually refers to biological sex, whereas the term woman refers to the social meaning of gender. However, we will use these terms interchangeably for the sake of clarity in writing.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jessica.kennedy@owen.vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jessica.kennedy@owen.vanderbilt.edu) (J.A. Kennedy).

have people directly reporting to them, and less satisfied with their careers (Ely, Stone, & Ammerman, 2014). Men and women in their sample did not differ in the ambitiousness of their career goals, though women were apparently less able to realize their aspirations.

Gender differences in negotiation performance are commonly invoked as one explanation for disparities in pay and advancement (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013a; Bowles & McGinn, 2008; Kulik & Olekalns, 2012; Nadler & Nadler, 1987; Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Negotiation is an important method of distributing scarce resources, such as pay and promotions (Kray & Thompson, 2005). Negotiation skills also determine the division of labor in the home (Bowles & McGinn, 2008), which affects the time and psychological resources women can devote to their work (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). In light of these facts, it is important to understand when and why gender differences in negotiation performance emerge and to understand the impact of negotiation differences on career outcomes. As the introductory quote suggests, until the motives and assumptions that contribute to a gender gap in negotiation performance are fully uncovered, an unacknowledged conflict may exist between women and the bargaining table, as it is currently conceived.

## 1. Overview

To answer these broad questions, we have divided our analysis into five sections. In the first section, we review key findings from two decades of research on gender in negotiation to determine whether and when the playing field is level. In light of recent theoretical and empirical reviews of this research area (Bowles & McGinn, 2008; Mazei et al., 2015; Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999), our aim is simply to identify areas of consensus around whether a gender gap exists and under what circumstances. To preview this analysis, the evidence suggests that advising and training women to become better negotiators is a necessary but insufficient condition for altering gendered career outcomes. We are not optimistic that negotiating training alone, as it is currently conceptualized, will reduce the gender gaps in pay and advancement.

In the second section, we turn to the question of *why* men's and women's negotiation track records differ. To date, the field has focused largely on cognitive barriers, interpreting gender differences as reflections of predictable biases emerging from gender stereotypes. In this research stream, gender stereotypes are identified and shown to hold women back economically and socially in a self-fulfilling prophecy. While this perspective has advanced our understanding of women's negotiation challenges considerably, to further eradicate barriers to women's career advancement, negotiation researchers must also acknowledge the motivational and paradigmatic underpinnings of gender differences in negotiation performance. We consider the role of motivated cognition and gendered paradigmatic assumptions in portraying women as players in a negotiation game that they cannot seem to win. By juxtaposing these accounts, we seek to explain why men and women differ in negotiation performance. Our analysis is designed to encourage researchers to

consider a broad range of factors that may be preventing women from achieving success in bargaining. Fig. 1 summarizes the barriers.

The third section identifies women's strengths as negotiators. Generally, women have greater concern for others than men do, and their cooperativeness elevates collective intelligence and enables ethical behavior. We identify several ways in which women's strengths have not been fully recognized, resulting in an overly pessimistic view of women's negotiating ability. Under the current negotiation paradigm, women's strengths are often portrayed as weaknesses, but unnecessarily so. When considered in the light of a new, more realistic paradigm, women's strengths could shine.

In the fourth section, we consider gender differences in negotiation performance through the lens of relational models (Fiske, 1992). Cumulatively, the evidence suggests an interesting possibility for future research—that different relational models could be applied by women and by the people with whom they negotiate. Although there is insufficient evidence at this point to conclude that the application of different relational models drives gender differences in negotiation performance, we consider this possibility as an important avenue for future research.

In the fifth and final section, we consider how cognitive, motivational, and paradigmatic barriers can be eliminated, leveling the negotiation playing field. We highlight a number of variables known to improve women's outcomes, but many of these factors focus on what women can do within a system that requires them to be subservient. Consequently, we call for greater attention to what organizations and negotiating counterparts can do to create a context for women to excel at rates comparable to men.

## 2. Gender differences in negotiation performance

Negotiations are social interactions in which people mutually allocate scarce resources (cf. Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Because the characteristics associated with success are more closely linked to men than to women, negotiation is considered a masculine domain (Bowles & Kray, 2013). Consistent with this perspective, gender differences in negotiation emerge across multiple dimensions of performance. Below we consider the strength of evidence for gender differences in economic and relational performance. We also consider gender differences in attitudes towards negotiating, which have been theorized to be essential to effective performance across contexts. Finally, we weigh the evidence suggesting women are less likely to initiate negotiations than men are.

### 2.1. Economic performance

The most common measure of negotiation performance in the literature is economic, measured either as the dollar value of an agreement or the number of utility points captured in a simulation. There is significant evidence to suggest a robust gender difference in economic performance. When faced with the task of negotiating a favorable deal with another party, men tend to receive better

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