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The Intersection of Gender and Negotiation: A Comprehensive Look at the Literature

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Abstract

According to the majority of literature it appears there are differences in specific advantages and disadvantages genders are exposed to in negotiations. This article aims to further introduce and break down the literature in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the intersections of negotiation and gender in regards to general negotiation practices, negotiations within the workplace, and what can be done to level the playing field in regards to disadvantages placed on certain genders. This article also addresses the remaining gaps in the literature and suggests where the research should move in future studies.

Keywords

gender, negotiation, intersection, men, woman, sex, stereotypes, education, differences

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Introduction

Negotiation can take on various forms and includes many variables that interact to impact the outcome and value gained. One area of research includes how differences in gender impact negotiation, mainly regarding cisgender males and females. Over time questions have been raised and attempted to be answered on the following: what are the differences in how genders negotiate; why are there differences; and what can transpire to educate and eliminate some of the differences that negatively impact certain genders? This article reviews gender differences in general and the workplace and explores why such differences exist. Additionally, the article considers further education and research as tools to mitigate challenges associated with gender and negotiation. Knowledge of these differences and how they may be advantageous or place a specific gender at a disadvantage is crucial. With this information, one is not only able to leverage certain aspects associated with their gender in the negotiation but also will have the ability to acknowledge the perceptions and actualities about the differences in how their gender versus their opposite gender negotiate. It is clear after reviewing the literature that certain genders, primarily women and other gender minorities, are disadvantaged in negotiations. It is essential to uncover, acknowledge, and ask why this is in order to move forward and find ways to ensure that certain gender stereotypes do not hinder success in negotiation.

Sex Versus Gender

Before discussing the various intersections of gender and negotiation, it is crucial to note that much of the research, when discussing gender, only discusses cisgender males and females. It also should be noted that in some of the research presented, the experiments were done with males and females, and the assumption of being cisgender was likely made before the experiment. Little is done to assess the particular forms in which those identifying as non-binary or transgender may

differ regarding negotiation characteristics. Thus, this discussion focuses on the differences between cisgender males and females, as is common in most literature. For example, an article recently justified focus on traditional approaches to gender by stating: “This grounds my necessary disclaimer that much of the work characterized in this article as taking one of the traditional feminist approaches to “gender” in principled negotiation theory and practice, which term is predominant in the literature, is really about sex” (Turetsky et al., 2022). This shows that much literature discusses sex rather than gender. Therefore, much of the advice these articles offer is “largely applicable to mythological, sex/gender congruent, “male/masculine” men and “female/feminine” women only” (Del Gobbo, 2018). However, to discuss differences, it is vital to acknowledge socially constructed stereotypes that stem from thoughts on gender which are typically why the term “gender” rather than “sex” is used.

Main Gender Differences in Negotiation

According to most research and experiments, there are many general differences in gender when negotiating. Specifically, these general differences can be attributed to trait and style differences and negotiations differing when gender pairings change.

Trait and Style Differences

According to the literature, notable feminine stereotypes include being cooperative (Kray, 2004), using less intensive language (Roberts, 2016), placing a high priority on relationships (Roberts, 2016), being more sensitive to nonverbal cues (Craver, 2017), and taking a more conservative approach when approximating the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) and anchoring (Klein, 2012). This differs from men. The majority of the literature finds masculine stereotypes in negotiation to include being highly competitive, including when perceiving the ZOPA and anchoring; being assertive (Kray, 2004); using intensive language (Roberts, 2016); and

placing a heavy focus on their interests (Klein, 2012). These differences show that there are instances where men or women can be more or less successful in specific negotiation strategies and situations. For example, “explicit activation of the feminine stereotype led negotiators to be more effective logrollers, more capable at conceding on low priority issues for their preferred outcome on high priority issues. Explicit activation of the feminine stereotype created resources and expanded the pie” (Kray, 2004). This shows that traits and skills many feminine negotiation stereotypes possess help in integrated bargaining when seeking to understand the other party's interests to enlarge the pie. However, in navigating these stereotypes, issues can be raised. For example, one study found that when combining gender and race, specifically when an African American woman adopts pieces of the masculine stereotype, there appears to be a double standard. When acting assertively, they are perceived as “controlling, manipulative, and aggressive” (Schneider et al., 2012). Women are also disadvantaged when it comes to zero-sum negotiations due to their competitive nature and the narrow room for creative solutions and enlarging the pie. An article supports this mode of thought when stating, “the attributes of women that add value in most conflicts have the potential to be abused in zero-sum negotiations” (Klein, 2012). This is also true as research also supports the notion that men are more prone to interrupting conversations and speaking for more extended periods (Craver, 2017). This can further disadvantage women as they may feel a loss of control when bargaining as the masculine competitive nature may opt to control the negotiation.

Despite these possible disadvantages of the feminine stereotype and disadvantages that a woman must acknowledge and deal with, women have specific attributes that aid in ensuring success, specifically in integrative bargaining and creating collaborative solutions. Women have a greater capacity for trust that allows for increased collaboration and creation. At the same time,

men are less collaborative and trusting (Roberts, 2016). This allows women to be highly successful in developing creative solutions to adopt outcomes of mutual gain. These feminine attributes are particularly useful in peace resolutions and international negotiation (Klein, 2012). Women have been proven to be better than men at reading nonverbal cues, which can foster women's success in negotiation. Schneider's article highlights this when stating, "Women are better able to read smiles and better able to read eye contact. Women are also better able to read emotions through these nonverbal cues. Interestingly, men are better at reading threatening cues but will often miss other emotions that are conveyed through these nonverbal cues" (Schneider et al., 2012). From this research, it can be gathered that although women may be disadvantaged because of stereotypes or masculine negotiation skills being favored over feminine ones, women possess some traits that aid them in negotiation.

Negotiating with the Opposite versus the Same Gender

While there are general differences in men's and women's traits and styles, there are also differences when people of the same or different genders are paired in negotiations. For example, an experiment regarding the likelihood of using ultimatums in negotiation found that "men are 121% more likely to use *ultimatums* against known male partners compared to known female partners" (Huang & Low, 2022). It becomes clear throughout Huang & Low's research that outcomes and how negotiations ensue depend partly on gender pairings. This statement became more evident when the experiment also discovered that "men are 13.4 percentage points more likely to be *friendly* against known female partners compared to male partners (that is, a 30% increase)" (Huang & Low, 2022). This implies further that men alter the way they negotiate depending on what gender they are negotiating with. The experiment also uncovered that "male-male pairs significantly under-perform when communication is introduced. Men playing with male

partners do worse than any other pairing, including women playing with male partners, who out-earn men with male partners by about a dollar per negotiation” (Huang & Low, 2022). Clearly, gender pairings have a significant impact on the successes and failures of negotiation.

While the studies mentioned above discuss the differences in men when paired with other males or females, other studies discuss differences in negotiation outcomes when females are paired with other females or males. According to one study, these differences are observable by age eight. The experiment found that when paired with a male evaluator, young girls initially asked for fewer stickers (Arnold & McAuliffe, 2021). This supports earlier findings that women were more conservative when anchoring and perceiving the possible ZOPA. Therefore, the question arises as to whether women are conditioned at an early age to ask for less, especially when paired with a male. This is particularly interesting since the experiment also found that “boys, on the other hand, made requests that did not change with age or the gender of the evaluator” (Arnold & McAuliffe, 2021). More imperatively, if these differences are anchored on gender conditioning, how does this conditioning operate?

Touch also contains the potential to further negotiation. There is a reason hands are shaken, and pats on the back are given. However, men and women are socialized differently to give and receive touch in different ways. A recent study in 2019 found that men generally refrain from touch unless initiated by the other party. It discovered that this allows women to use touch to their advantage to build relationships with the opposing party (Schneider, 2019). This introduces the question of “why.” It would be beneficial to research why men seem less comfortable than women at initiating physical touch in the negotiation process. Is it how men have been socialized to think about touch in a professional setting, and if so, has this changed over time since this article was written relatively recently?

Why a Difference?

The existing research indicates that gender impacts negotiation. Such differences lead to the question of “why.” The consensus from a few sources attributes these differences to socially constructed beliefs about how genders should act and participate in negotiations conditioned from an early age, leading to self-fulfilling prophecies later in the negotiation. An article that sought to revise how negotiation is taught states, “they create expectations that men will be more competent than women. These expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies that affect assertiveness and confidence in negotiation (both of which are necessary for effectiveness)” (Schneider, 2010). This supports the idea that revision to education about negotiation in terms of gender needs to take effect. A separate article came to a similar conclusion that, “perceptions can prime knowledge structures in the mind that assimilate behaviors consistent with the activated bias, stereotype, or discrimination, creating self-fulfilling prophecies that work to the negotiator's disadvantage” (Del Gobbo, 2018). In discovering two pieces of separate literature affirming the same notion that through socialization and built upon gender stereotypes, a self-fulfilling prophecy can occur, hindering one's performance in negotiation, it further exposes why there are differences in not only how different genders negotiate but also the difference in success within genders in negotiation.

Perhaps the most extensive support of this argument, however, is the finding that there is a difference in negotiation behavior by gender as early as the age of eight. This study indicated “that—consistent with adult work—girls asked for less than boys when negotiating with a man” (Huang & Low, 2022). The support for a socialized self-fulfilling prophecy is so fundamental in this finding, specifically because results seem to be standard across age groups. It was clear from prior studies done with adults that socialization could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Huang's study shows how early in children's lives, socialization concerning gender and self-fulfilling

prophecies can manifest. This shows that conditioning begins early and does not cease to affect female behavior within adult negotiation.

Gender Differences in the Workplace

When the average person thinks of negotiation, it is likely a workplace or professional negotiation. In this section, gender differences in the workplace with negotiation are further examined.

Advocating for Others Versus Self

The current research promotes the idea that women may be better off advocating for others in negotiation than for themselves. This is not only due to how advocating for others by women is received but also how the woman perceives it. It has been shown that women tend to have better outcomes and are more passionate about advocating for others versus themselves. An article supports this idea: “When a woman negotiates on behalf of herself, assertive bargaining is encoded as incongruent, with communal prescriptions of the feminine role. When a woman negotiates on behalf of others, it is encoded as congruent with communal femininity” (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). The article points out that, because of stereotypes, when a woman advocates for herself, it is seen outside of a feminine way to act and is not received as well as if she were to be advocating for someone else. The study also stated that the “results indicate that self-advocating female negotiators felt the need to ask for nearly \$8,000 less than the other three groups to avoid social backlash” (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). The stereotype that it is more masculine to be assertive when advocating for oneself is further confirmed. The stereotype not only ensures women are perceived differently than men by others when acting assertively but is seen affecting the woman's perception of herself and how she can behave based on the stereotype awarded to her based on her sex. A study confirms that women do better when negotiating on behalf of others, stating that “they

(women) usually set higher goals and obtain more advantageous results when they bargain on behalf of others” (Craver, 2012). It is clear that the majority of women are more comfortable when advocating on behalf of another, which would enormously benefit a woman who is an attorney or working in litigation as she will negotiate and advocate on behalf of her client. The final article discussed that supports this idea states that women will tend to be more assertive and aggressive when negotiating on behalf of someone else. This reveals whether it is appropriate for a woman to overcome the stereotype she has been given if she is advocating for another individual or party. Or will a woman still be chastised for stepping out of her allotted stereotype?

Initiation and Salary Negotiation

There has been a gender pay gap for years despite attempts at passing legislation to close the gap. It is common to wonder how this issue remains even with laws in place to prevent the gap, such as The Equal Pay Act of 1963.

The literature suggests that in the past, it was due to the conditioned expectation that since women typically work in the home and do not get paid a salary, women should expect and accept lower salaries. However, the literature supports that now it is due to women feeling less comfortable initiating negotiation, particularly regarding salary and raises, for fear of being reprimanded or liked less. One piece of literature states, “In terms of compensation, women expect to be paid less and accept less pay than men” (Roberts, 2016). This study was performed in 1984 after The Equal Pay Act, showing that although there was a law to equalize pay, women were still expected to be paid less. A more recent study in 2009 stated, “These three experiments showed that male evaluators penalized women more than they penalized men for attempting to negotiate for higher compensation” (Elzer, 2009). This shows that even in later years, women are penalized for attempting to initiate negotiation regarding compensation. Because of this penalization, it is

conceivable that many women are uncomfortable initiating salary negotiations because they fear, at best, being disliked and, at worst, being dismissed. Research further supports this by stating that “employers are often not receptive to women who *do* negotiate or that employers might even dislike women for being too aggressive” (Elzer, 2009). Being aggressive is a trait that is commonly thought of as masculine when it comes to negotiation, and women are seen getting punished for adopting these traits that do not align with the feminine type assigned to them.

This introduces a more significant issue aligning with the narrow view of gender. The aggressive masculine stereotype assumes that men are masculine. Del Gobbo's journal questions the way we educate individuals on negotiation when stating, “We might call this feminist negotiation theme, “*fix everyone around the androgyne.*” This theme is reflected by prescriptions in the classroom that “men should learn to be more like women and women should learn to be more like men” (Del Gobbo, 2018). This implies the automatic assumption of two genders assigned specific masculine and feminine stereotypes. It also suggests that educating genders to be more like their opposite enforces the focus on differences between exclusively two genders.

While, in today's society, specifically within the United States, the narrow assumption of gender and its qualities are slowly expanding, and there are men who adopt feminine qualities and women who adopt masculine qualities. There is still a long way to go in reducing the backlash one receives for being one gender, adopting the traits of another, and further work to be done in diffusing the system assuming that all are cisgender. It also seems conclusive as the literature thus far has supported that stepping out of cisgender stereotypes of male and female is cause for a poor negotiation outcome with few exceptions.

Expressly, in salary negotiation, it has also been noted that while men and some cisgender women can initiate and be more aggressive in salary negotiation, the research supports that if one

is a racial minority, a racial minority and a woman, non-binary, or transgender one is not allotted the same equal opportunity in negotiation that is allotted to cisgender white females and men. According to an article in 2018, it states, “A racialized woman and a trans woman, let alone a racialized trans woman, cannot simply “lean into” salary negotiations in the same way as a white cisgender woman when it may not be safe, productive, or even possible to do so” (Del Gobbo, 2018). This is one of the few articles that address gender outside of the cisgender masculine/feminine norm. It aims to recognize that some racial and gender minorities can still not initiate and negotiate competitively because it can, at worst, place them in a dangerous situation.

What Can Be Done?

As research demonstrates some adverse outcomes in negotiation based on gender, the question is, what can be done to limit such negative aspects? Many articles have suggested different avenues of change.

Fix Men? Fix Women? Fix the System?

If specific differences in gender and negotiation are an issue, it seems that education is a way to begin change. However, research has suggested different education approaches. For example, one author stated that “Our intention with this article is to articulate ways to move away from the dominant approach of teaching gender (first generation) - often viewed as “fixing women” or dealing with stereotypes” (Schneider, 2010). It is clear that in the past, the goal has been to educate more women on masculine stereotypes and to “fix them.” However, much literature is moving to teach a more inclusive and expansive concept. One article describes how one organization encouraged women to become more confident by teaching more feminine ways of approaching negotiation and working as an attorney as well as masculine ways. It states specifically, “Workways faculty emphasized some “feminine” ways of working, such as stressing

the construction of narratives and attention to interpersonal work, in addition to the importance of manipulating the numbers and understanding the law of substantial performance of construction contracts” (Farber & Rickenberg, 1999). This shows that by educating people on both masculine and feminine approaches it was demonstrated, “that women in the Workways section assessed their abilities higher than women in the non-Workways sections” (Farber & Rickenberg, 1999). Literature also indicated educating women early to advocate for themselves is crucial. This was indicated when stated, “we should be teaching young girls to advocate for themselves in the context of negotiation from as early as elementary school” (Huang & Low, 2022).

It should be noted that in the past, the idea of educating women by “fixing them,” as referenced in Schneider's article above, through teaching them to adopt more male attributes, is now being pushed back against. A new educational approach believes educating women and men on equally important feminine attributes that can aid in negotiation is growing to become more popular and effective.

While this may be beneficial, another piece of research argues that molding the education system around male and female attributes benefits negotiation. It reinforces the differences and ignores the existence of other genders. This is clear when it is stated, “According to this theory, we should reject the M/F dualism altogether, assume that men and women are equally mobile and essentially the same, M=F, and aspire to a superior “third sex” model that combines all or some of the psychic qualities traditionally associated with male/masculine and female/feminine negotiators” (Del Gobbo, 2018). This shows one theory offering the benefits of discarding teaching a difference in male and female negotiation and approaching education from a point that does not center around gender but instead combines all traits from both male and female style tendencies in negotiations.

Gaps in the Research

After reviewing the literature, there are a few instances where further research needs to be done. Two areas of interest that contain little to no research are how those who do not identify as cisgender are affected and/or perform in negotiation settings and how touch differs by gender. Thus far, research is limited to these two aspects. There is a lack of research on people who identify as transgender or non-binary regarding their success, limitations, and stereotypes within a negotiation. Research in this area would work towards a more comprehensive overview of how gender can impact the negotiation. It could bring to light new ways in which disadvantages based on gender could be avoided within the negotiation realm.

Another area with little research is how different genders view and can use touch in negotiation. While the importance of touch is beginning to fade with the move to virtual meetings following Covid-19 possibly, how men and women may be able to use or not use touch to their advantage in negotiations is still an area in need of research. In reviewing essential gestures such as shaking hands, pats on the shoulder, etc., it would be beneficial to review how comfortable genders are in using these types of touch in negotiation with the same gender versus the opposite gender.

Conclusion

After reviewing research on the intersection of gender and negotiation, it is apparent that some differences between men and women can be beneficial and learned from, while others disadvantage genders. There is education that needs to be reformed and future research that needs to expand on different genders in order to gain a more comprehensive overview. From the literature reviewed, it has been gathered that it would be beneficial to acknowledge and educate genders on how they are socialized and the stereotypes associated with them to foster awareness and avoid

limitations or placing limitations on persons of the opposite gender. Going forward, it has also been revealed that it is vital to educate on feminine attributes in negotiation and masculine attributes, weighing their education equally. While research has become more inclusive over time, it is also apparent that studies need to be done that include all genders, including non-binary and transgender people. Overall, this article has aimed to analyze and give insight into research about the intersection of gender and negotiation and consider what can be done to limit aspects that put certain genders at a disadvantage in negotiation due to those differences.

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