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When Does Gender Matter in Negotiation?

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Abstract

We propose that two situational dimensions moderate gender effects in negotiation. *Structural ambiguity* refers to potential variation in a party's perception of the bargaining range and appropriate standards for agreement. *Gender triggers* are situational factors that make gender salient and relevant to behavior or expectations. Based on a review of field and experimental data and social psychological theory on individual difference, we explain how structural ambiguity and gender triggers make negotiations ripe for gender effects.

Gender often appears to have economically material implications in negotiations in organizations and markets. But researchers' attempts to tie the phenomenon down in the lab have produced a tangled web of largely contradictory results. By the mid-1980s, the leading experimental researchers in negotiation had tossed the gender variable into a heap of discarded individual difference predictors—ranging from race to authoritarianism—which had failed over scores of tests to produce consistent results. “From what is known now,” one review concluded, “it does not appear that there is any single personality type or characteristic [including gender] that is directly and clearly linked to success in negotiation” (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985: 276). Contemporary feminist ideals of minimalist sex differences further reinforced this perspective. Much of the relevant feminist research of that era sought “to shatter stereotypes about women’s characteristics and change people’s attitudes by proving that women and men are essentially equivalent in their personalities, behavioral tendencies, and intellectual abilities” (Eagly, 1995: 149). By the 1990s most of the negotiation field had wandered away, politically correct and seemingly empty handed, from the investigation of gender effects.

There remained, however, recurrent indications from the field that gender could materially affect negotiations. Take, for example, the experiences of men and women entrepreneurs. In 1999, women entrepreneurs in the U.S. started 40% of new businesses, yet made only 9% of total investment deals, and garnered a mere 2.3% of investment dollars (Almer, 2000; Rosenthal & Rodrigues, 2000). There are multiple explanations offered for the gender gap in venture funding, ranging from quality of life choices to ownership preferences (Prakash, 2000). However, some with direct experience point to differences in the way men and women entrepreneurs have approached their negotiations with prospective investors. Joanna Rees Gallanter, a veteran of the venture capital community, conjectured:

Men and women are fundamentally different creatures. Swagger paves the way to successful venture capital deals [and]...women are often not comfortable talking about what they are worth. They'll go in to pitch a project and naturally put a lower value on it than men do (Almer, 2000).

Kay Koplovitz, chairwoman of the National Women's Business Council, also has argued that the gender gap in venture funding is related to women's relative unwillingness to self-promote: "I don't think women are as boastful and bald-faced about their business as men" (Thomas, 2000).

Perhaps for related reasons, salary negotiations are another arena in which gender gaps are well documented (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Kolb & Putnam, 1995; Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993). Laboratory and field studies suggest that women tend to enter salary negotiations with lower pay expectations, which are then ultimately fulfilled (Major & Konar, 1984; Major, Vanderslice, & McFarlin, 1984b; Stevens et al., 1993). One field study of MBA salary negotiations found that males negotiated significantly higher increases on initial salary offers than did female peers (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991: 256).

Other studies suggest that many men and women *assume* that gender differences in negotiation exist and that they act consciously or unconsciously upon that assumption. One experiment based on a single-offer bargaining simulation ("ultimatum game") showed that, when the bidders knew their partner's gender from a simple name cue, both males and females made significantly lower (more competitive) offers to female respondents (Solnick, 2001). *Business Week* publicized the conclusion from this study that, "despite significant increases in women's relative wages in recent decades, both sexes may still feel that women will accept lower pay than men and that women are more malleable in a bargaining situation" (Koretz, 2001).

Gender-based offer behavior have been observed in other non-salary-related contexts.

Similar results to the ultimatum game experiment were obtained in a separate study based on a “trust game,” in which parties may withhold or exchange back and forth a growing pot of money. When the initial passing party, whether male or female, knew the receiving party was male, the money was passed significantly more often than when the receiver was female (Croson & Buchan, 1999). In another recent study of MBA classroom negotiations over a real-estate sale, male and female sellers reported setting significantly higher intended initial offers when assigned to negotiate with female as opposed to male buyers (Riley, 2000). Similarly, field investigations of car sale negotiations have demonstrated that, controlling for the buyers’ appearance (e.g., attractiveness, indicators of SES) and bargaining script, male and female dealers made higher first and final offers to female than to male buyers (Ayes, 1991).

How can it be that gender differences seem so pronounced in certain domains and invisible in others? Findings from gender research mirror the inductive conclusions one is likely to draw from daily experience: men do not consistently act one way and women another—sometimes gender matters, and sometimes it does not. The objective of this article is to propose an overarching theoretical framework for studying the conditions that foster, shape or suppress the effects of gender on negotiation expectations and performance.

PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF GENDER IN NEGOTIATION

There have been two major streams of research on gender in negotiation. The first surged and largely subsided with trends in psychological research on individual differences in the 1970s and 1980s. The second emerged as a feminist critique of the negotiation field in the 1990s.

The original wave of psychological research on gender as an individual difference in negotiation rested on the premise that gender would be a stable and reliable predictor of bargaining behavior and performance. Consistent with social stereotypes of the “communal”

female and “agentic” male (Bakan, 1966), researchers tested whether female negotiators would be more cooperative and less self-interested than their male peers (e.g., Calhoun & Smith, 1999; Dawes, McTavish, & Shaklee, 1977; Eckel & Grossman, Forthcoming; Elliott, Hayward, & Canon, 1998; Kimmel, Pruitt, Magenau, Konar-Goldband, & Carnevale, 1980; Mason, Phillips, & Redington, 1991; Meeker, 1983; Sell, 1997; Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998). These studies and numerous others produced an assortment of seemingly contradictory findings (Rubin & Brown, 1975; Thompson, 1990; Walters et al., 1998; Watson, 1994).

The two most extensive cross-study evaluations of gender and negotiator behavior were Rubin and Brown’s (1975) literature review and Walters et al.’s (1998) meta-analysis. Both investigations suggested that to the extent that gender differences did emerge, they were on average small and seemed to hold only under particular circumstances. Female negotiators tended to be more cooperative than male negotiators, but also more responsive to the behavior of their negotiating partner. Meta-analytic results indicated, for instance, that females were significantly more competitive than males when their partners played tit-for-tat strategies in prisoner’s dilemma (PD) game structures (Walters et al., 1998). Rubin and Brown (1975) similarly observed that females appeared to be less forgiving of defection in repeated PD play.

Because the effects of gender and other individual differences on negotiation were likely to interact in complex ways with situational factors, Thompson proposed that “a contingency approach may have more predictive validity than a direct-effects model” (1990: 530). However, in the absence of a comprehensive theory, she argued, such situational interactions would be difficult to identify. Lacking an overarching theory or clear-cut results, most experimentalists within the negotiation field discarded gender effects as spurious (Bazerman, Curhan, & Moore, 2000; Lewicki & Litterer, 1985; Thompson, 1990).

In the 1990s, leading feminists within the negotiation field offered an alternative conceptualization of the role of gender as “a belief system that structures and gives meaning to social interactions” (Kolb & Putnam, 1995: 7). Feminist scholars critiqued the discourse of negotiation analysis for its stereotypically masculine characterization of negotiators as boundedly rational, utility-maximizing individuals or agents who are engaged in competitive, transactional interaction (Gray, 1994; Kolb & Putnam, 1995). They argued that this “androcentrism” (Bem, 1993) perpetuated a hierarchical relationship by “which male experience becomes the norm and feminine is seen as different” (Kolb & Putnam, 1995: 7). By reifying the masculine image of the negotiator, what is feminine, by definition, fails to fit the model for success (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Another deeply contextual, qualitative stream of feminist analysis presented an alternative perspective on conflict and negotiation, which de-emphasized the transactional elements of negotiation and brought social and relational dynamics to the fore (Gwartney-Gibbs, 1994; Kolb, 1992; Kolb & Coolidge, 1991; Putnam & Kolb, 2000; Taylor & Beinstein Miller, 1994). The feminist literature has enriched the field by challenging scholars and practitioners to reevaluate taken-for-granted views of negotiation, but this work has not provided a theoretical basis for advancing the empirical investigation of gender effects.

A SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER IN NEGOTIATION

We propose a conceptualization of the role of gender in negotiation that is distinct from previous characterizations of gender as a stable individual trait or de-individualized social construct. We propose a situational perspective on gender in negotiation, which starts with the fundamental Lewinian premise that social behavior is the product of the individual in interaction with the situation (Lewin, 1936). We propose that there are predictable (as opposed to stable) gender differences in negotiation, which are systematically contingent upon the presence or

absence of particular situational cues. Consistent with Deaux and Major's (1987) interactive model of gender in social behavior, we expect the effects of gender to vary across negotiating situations, and we aim to identify the conditions that elicit, alter or suppress gender effects.

Situational Moderators of Gender Differences: Ambiguity and Precipitating Situations

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that gender differences in social behavior stem not only from the "hard-wired" propensities of one sex versus the other, but also from the fulfillment of stereotypic gender roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Towson, Zanna, & MacDonald, 1989) and performance expectations (Beyer & Bowden, 1997; Steele, 1997). In order to predict when gender is most likely to affect social behavior, we should identify those situations that foster or suppress the emergence of individual differences, in general, and those situations that trigger gender-based behavior and performance expectations, in particular. Below, we introduce two fundamental situational moderators that have been shown to influence the extent to which individual difference predicts social behavior. The first is the psychological strength of the situation (Mischel, 1977) and the second is the presence of precipitating factors (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). We later adapt these ideas to the negotiation context.

According to Mischel (1977), the psychological strength of a situation is measured by the extent to which it is uniformly encoded, it induces uniform expectancies as to the appropriate pattern of response, it provides incentives to engage in the expected response pattern, and the skills required to engage in the response pattern are generally held. Snyder and Ickes explain, because psychologically *strong situations* "provide salient cues to guide behavior and have a fairly high degree of structure and definition," they suppress reliance on individual differences. Because *weak situations*, in contrast, "do not offer salient cues to guide behavior and are relatively unstructured and ambiguous," they foster the potential for individual differences to

influence social behavior (1985: 904). Gender and other individual differences have more influence in ambiguous situations because the actors are required to improvise rather than follow a clearly prescribed script (Dykman, Abramson, Alloy, & Hartlage, 1989; Eysenck, Mogg, May, Richards, & Mathews, 1991; Hock, Krohne, & Kaiser, 1996; Lambert & Wedell, 1991; MacLeod & Cohen, 1993; Monson, Hesley, & Chernick, 1981). Improvisation requires the actor to draw upon internal cues, such as attitudes, traits, values (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Snyder & Ickes, 1985) and/or cognitive schema (Dykman et al., 1989) to guide behavioral responses. (See Snyder and Ickes [1985] for a discussion of situational strength and social role theory.)

Studies of gender differences in communication style provide a particularly intuitive illustration of this principle. Communication researchers observe no gender differences in routine, well-scripted interactions, such as requests for information at a booth or in the sale of train tickets (Aries, 1987; Brouwer, Gerritsen, & De Haan, 1979; Crosby & Nyquist, 1977), but they do observe significant divergence in the expressive styles of males and females in private and unstructured conversational contexts (Aries, 1987; Edelsky, 1981; Soskin & Joh, 1963).

Experimental social psychologists have tested directly the effects of situational ambiguity on the emergence of gender differences in social interaction. Dovidio and colleagues demonstrated that the manipulation of information predictive of performance on an interactive task (viz., expertise or resources) moderated the effect of gender on nonverbal behavior in mixed-sex pairs (Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, & Heltman, 1988). In the absence of any information predictive of task performance, “visual dominance” (i.e., the ratio of looking when speaking to looking when listening) was positively correlated with gender. Males’ nonverbal behavior toward female counterparts was significantly more visually dominating than the females’ nonverbal behavior toward male counterparts. When the experimenters created a clear

expertise or resource asymmetry within the pair, “visual dominance” was positively correlated with having relatively greater expertise or resources for the task and unrelated to gender.

Wood and Karten (1986) produced similar results in a mixed-gender group-decisionmaking experiment in which information about task competence was experimentally manipulated by providing (false) positive or negative feedback on a test. In a control condition where the experimenters provided no external assessments of task competence, competence perceptions and social behavior were correlated with sex. Males (as compared to females) were perceived to be more competent and engaged in more task behavior and less social behavior. When the participants received test scores indicating asymmetric levels of task competence within the group, measures of perceived competence and task-oriented social behavior were correlated with test scores and unrelated to gender.

Brenda Major and colleagues’ investigations of the entitlement effect in compensation fit the same pattern of interaction between situational ambiguity and gender. In the absence of clear compensation standards, females (as compared to males) reward themselves less for equivalent labor (Callahan-Levy & Messe, 1979), work harder and with fewer errors for equivalent pay (Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984a), and have lower career-entry and career-peak pay expectations (Major & Konar, 1984). However, in the presence of unambiguous wage comparison information (Major et al., 1984a) or explicit performance feedback (Bylsma & Major, 1992), this gender gap in entitlement disappears.

Ambiguity is also characteristic of those situations in which stereotypes are most virulent, because ambiguity is breeding ground for biased judgments of the self and others (Babcock & Loewenstein, 1997; Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Meta-analytic research on sex biases in work evaluations shows that sex biases are positively

associated with the amount of subjective inference required by the evaluator (Heilman, 1995; Nieva & Gutek, 1980). Experimental researchers have demonstrated that the more clearly observable, job-relevant information there is available, the less likely it is that sex will be used as a source of information in hiring decisions (Heilman, 1984; Heilman, Martell, & Simon, 1988; Tosi & Einbender, 1985) and performance evaluations (Foddy & Smithson, 1999; Heilman, 1995; Lenney, Mitchell, & Browning, 1983; Pheterson, Kiesler, & Goldberg, 1971). Sociological field studies indicate that statistical discrimination in wages is greater where job market information is limited (Chang, 2000) and job performance is difficult to evaluate (Pfeffer, 1977).

While “strong” situations are likely to suppress gender differences (Mischel, 1977), it is not sufficient that a situation be ambiguous for gender differences to emerge. If gender is not salient and relevant to behavior or performance expectations within the situation, then there is little reason to expect behavior or performance to correlate with gender. Snyder and Ickes (1985) explain that, in *precipitating situations*, the individual difference variable is relevant and salient and guides the response pattern. Precipitating situations are those in which there are cues, sometimes blatant and other times subtle, for men and women to enact distinct gender roles and/or to fulfill sex-based performance stereotypes. Gender roles are societal norms that prescribe what are attractive or appropriate situational responses, based on the actor’s socially identified gender (Eagly, 1987). Sex-based performance stereotypes shape people’s expectations about the skills and abilities of men and women. Neither social roles nor stereotypes need to be embraced or internalized to influence behavior (Eagly, 1987; Steele, 1997).

A commonplace example of a precipitating situation is a sex-segregated workplace. Occupations dominated numerically by one sex or the other tend to be imbued with correspondingly masculine or feminine attributes for success (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). The more

identifiable the organizational role or echelon is with one sex category or the other, the more salient and relevant gender becomes to social judgments in the workplace (Lee, 2001). The smaller the percentage of women occupying an organizational position, the greater is the likelihood that women in that position will become the targets of negative stereotypes (Heilman, 1995; Kanter, 1977), receive unfavorable performance evaluations (Heilman, 1995; Sackett, DuBois, & Noe, 1991), and fail to get jobs or promotions (Cohen, Broschak, & Haveman, 1998; Heilman, 1980). In such settings, gender roles are clear, and women who defy the social rules of the situation are likely to be negatively sanctioned for their incongruent behavior.

Although there is some evidence that both males and females are rated more favorably when fulfilling gender congruent roles (Heilman, 1995), there appears to be more of a penalty for counter-stereotypic behavior by females in the workplace than by males (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Communal behavior (e.g., self-effacement, participatory leadership) by men does not tend to be evaluated more harshly than communal behavior by women (Eagly et al., 1992; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Females who act in an agentic manner (e.g., self-promotion, directive leadership) do, however, tend to be evaluated more harshly than male peers behaving in a similar manner (Eagly et al., 1992; Rudman, 1998). Perhaps in anticipation of negative social sanction, women (as compared to men) tend to approach traditionally male-identified roles and tasks with less motivation (Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1996) and less confidence in their performance ability (Beyer, 1990; Beyer & Bowden, 1997; Heilman, 1995; Lenney, 1981).

Claude Steele's work on "stereotype threat" demonstrates how situational factors can heighten the relevance and salience of identity-based performance stereotypes and, thereby, influence the performance of stereotyped groups (Steele, 1997). In one particularly illuminating

test of this theory, Shih, Pittinsky and Ambady (1999) primed Asian females to either their gender or Asian identity before giving them a math test (i.e., implicitly cuing them to the stereotypes that “women are bad at math” or “Asians are good at math”). Shi and colleagues found that the women performed significantly better when their Asian as opposed to gender identity was heightened. This research on stereotype threat reveals the potentially “strictly situational” (Steele, 1997) influence of stereotypes on expectations and performance.

In sum, there are two main categories of situational characteristics that moderate the effects of gender on social behavior. One is the “strength” of the situation (Mischel, 1977) and the other is the salience and relevance of gender to behavior or performance expectations (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). In strong situations, the behavioral script is uniformly encoded and enacted and there is little room for gender differences to emerge. In weak situations, the behavioral cues are ambiguous and the actors must subjectively interpret and improvise their roles. It is under these circumstances—in which the actor is searching the environment and his or her past experience and mental schema for cues—that gender-based social roles and stereotypes are more likely to have an influence. Ambiguity is not sufficient for gender to influence social behavior; gender must be salient and relevant to the actors’ interpretation of the situation.

Moderators of Gender Differences in Negotiation: Structural Ambiguity and Gender Triggers

Motivated by the literature on gender in social behavior, the purpose of this article is to propose the conceptual underpinning for a parsimonious contingency theory of gender effects in negotiation. We apply the notions of “strong” (Mischel, 1977) and “precipitating” (Snyder & Ickes, 1985) situations to the study of gender in negotiations. Translated into the negotiation context, we conceptualize these constructs in terms of “structural ambiguity” and “gender triggers” and propose that they interact to moderate the effects of gender on negotiation.

Structural Ambiguity

Parties' perceptions of the economic structure of a negotiation strongly shape their behavior and performance expectations. The economic structure of a negotiation is a function of the pool of resources potentially available for distribution by the parties and the likely coordination points for agreement (Raiffa, 1982). The pool can be fixed, as in a single-issue price negotiation, or variable, as in a multiple-issue negotiation in which additional value can be created by trading on differences in preferences, expectations, etc (Lax & Sebenius, 1986). Focal points (e.g., a 50-50 split) and other standards for agreement (e.g., market values or social norms of fairness) help parties to coordinate on a specific agreement point out of the potentially infinite set of possibilities (Schelling, 1980).

The term *structural ambiguity* refers to the degree of potential variation in a party's interpretation of the economic structure of the negotiation. This notion of structural ambiguity differs from the game theoretic concepts of “structural uncertainty...surrounding the parameters of the game” or “strategic uncertainty...surrounding the purposeful behavior of the players” (Brandenburger, 1996:222). Uncertainty refers to situations in which probabilistic estimates are known. Ambiguity, in contrast, refers to situations in which the probabilities over alternatives, and even potentially the nature of the alternatives, are unknown (March, 1988).

In a perfectly structurally *unambiguous* situation, both negotiators would know the dimensions of the pool of resources available and would mutually recognize a clear focal point for distribution of those resources. Consistent with Mischel's (1977) definition of a “strong” situation, a structurally unambiguous negotiation would be uniformly encoded, it would induce uniform expectancies as to the appropriate response pattern, and the parties would have the ability and incentive to complete the mutually obvious transaction. For example, in a laboratory

study of negotiations as improvisations, McGinn and Keros (In press) found that price negotiations between friends involved almost no structural ambiguity. The pairs shared an understanding of the bargaining range and the preferred agreement was obvious to both (i.e., “an even split”). Under such circumstances, we would not predict gender differences to emerge.

In a relatively structurally ambiguous negotiation, parties rely on cues from the negotiating context (e.g., the gender of their negotiating partner) and on their prior experience and preconceived notions (e.g., gender-based behavior or performance expectations) to inform their behavior and performance expectations for the negotiation. Other research has shown that heightened structural ambiguity increases the potential for cognitive biases to influence negotiators’ performance expectations and outcomes (Bazerman et al., 2000; Messick & Sentis, 1983; Roth & Murnighan, 1982; Thompson & Hrebec, 1996; Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992). We predict that when structural ambiguity is high, there will be greater potential for gender as well—if it is relevant and salient—to influence parties’ expectations and performance.

In laboratory and classroom negotiations, participants typically are told who the parties are and what their own (and sometimes others’) interests are, the issues to be negotiated are clearly delineated to all parties, and the value of agreement options and the alternatives to negotiation are objectively known. This is helpful for eliciting measurable and comparable outcome data. In practice, however, such a low level of structural ambiguity is rare. It is more common in real-world negotiations that the parties have to estimate the available pool of resources and determine for themselves what constitutes an attractive or unacceptable offer. We suspect that variation in the degree of structural ambiguity across field and experimental negotiation contexts could help to explain some of the inconsistency in the research findings.

Gender Triggers

Gender triggers are situational characteristics that make gender salient and relevant to behavior and/or performance expectations. If there is sufficient structural ambiguity to allow for subjective interpretation and individual improvisation, gender triggers can influence negotiators by effectively cuing them to fulfill gender-specific scripts. Potential gender triggers within negotiation are numerous and varied. The key is that they implicitly or explicitly heighten the parties' awareness of gender as a social factor, not that they necessarily produce identical outcomes (e.g., "gender triggers" do not necessarily favor male over female negotiators).

Gender-based social roles are one form of gender trigger. Gender roles have the potential to influence negotiators by placing constraints on what is viewed as attractive or appropriate negotiating behavior (Eagly, 1987). When gender roles are salient, a set of behaviors enacted by a man may be viewed differently than that same set of behaviors enacted by a woman (Eagly et al., 1992; Rudman, 1998). Gender-based performance stereotypes are another example. Stereotypes that are widely held or implicitly activated influence negotiation outcomes by creating a dynamic of fulfilled expectations about how well one negotiator (the self or other) is likely to perform based on his or her socially identified gender (Beyer & Bowden, 1997; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Lenney, 1981). Explicitly activated stereotypes (e.g., a blunt insinuation of male superiority on a task) can have the opposite effect. Kray and colleagues found that exposure to explicit sex-stereotypes elicits a form of "reactance" (Brehm, 1966) that produces counter-stereotypic negotiation results (Kray et al., 2001).

The following section describes two examples of gender triggers and their predicted influence on negotiation outcomes.

Economic structure of the negotiation: Fixed-sum v. variable sum payoffs. We propose that the consistency between the economic structure of the negotiation and stereotypes of

masculine versus feminine behavior is one potential gender trigger. According to the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), being “masculine” is associated with being (among other things) analytical, assertive, competitive, dominant, forceful, individualistic, and willing to take a stand. Behaving in a “feminine” manner correlates with being (among other things) compassionate, sensitive to the needs of others, soft-spoken, sympathetic, understanding and yielding (Bem, 1974). Characterized by a dance of cooperative and competitive movements (Lax & Sebenius, 1986), negotiations with variable sum payoffs may call for a mix of these stereotypically masculine and feminine attributes.

Competitive bargaining in a fixed-sum negotiation, in contrast, is a characteristically masculine form of interaction. Because of the alignment of competitive bargaining behavior with masculine norms of social behavior, parties in fixed-sum negotiations are likely to expect male negotiators to outperform female negotiators (Beyer, 1990; Lenney, 1981). In competitive bargaining, male negotiators are likely to have greater confidence in their negotiating ability, more optimistic performance expectations, and, as a result, claim more value than their female peers (Beyer & Bowden, 1997; Major & Forcey, 1985). Accordingly, much of the existing empirical evidence that gender influences negotiators’ offer behavior and individual bargaining performance comes from principally competitive negotiations, such as the ultimatum game (Solnick, 2001) and sale price (Ayres, 1991; Kray et al., 2001) and salary negotiations (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Stevens et al., 1993).

Representation role: Promoting one’s own interests v. advocating the interests of others. Another potential gender trigger and moderator of the effect of gender in bargaining is representation role (i.e., negotiating for oneself versus negotiating for someone else). In the classic opposition of gender differences in social behavior, independence and the promotion of

self-interest characterize agency while solidarity and the protection of the interests of others characterize communality (Bakan, 1969). Negotiating for one's own self-interest is stereotypically agentic, whereas negotiating on behalf of others fits the model of communal behavior. If representation role is a gender trigger in negotiation, its effects are more likely to be observed in women's expectations and performances across roles than in men's. Women are likely to exhibit more constraint when negotiating for themselves than when negotiating for others, because the former fulfills an agentic model while the latter is consistent with communal norms of behavior (Bakan, 1966; Beyer, 1990; Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 1992; Kanter, 1977; Lenney, 1981; Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1996; Rudman, 1998). Men, in contrast, would not necessarily experience a comparable role conflict. Representing one's self-interest is agentic, and playing the role of an agent or advocate is not inconsistent with traditional norms of masculine behavior. Consistently, gender differences favoring males should be greater when negotiators are representing themselves as opposed to representing others in competitive negotiations.

The Interaction: Structural Ambiguity and Gender Triggers

In sum, we propose that the effects of gender on negotiation are contingent on two categories of situational factors: the degree of structural ambiguity and the presence of gender triggers. We predict that at relatively low levels of structural ambiguity, gender is unlikely to have a significant effect on negotiation expectations, behavior or performance. While we hypothesize that structural ambiguity is necessary for gender effects to emerge in negotiation, we do not predict that it will be sufficient to produce gender effects. At relatively high levels of structural ambiguity, we would not expect to observe gender differences unless gender was salient and relevant to the parties' interpretation or enactment of the negotiation. Clearly, there is a wide range of gradation in the potential structural ambiguity of a given negotiating situation,

and there are a multitude of potential social cues within the environment that may heighten or offset the influence of gender. We propose this relatively simple conceptual framework as an organizing construct for the development of contingency theories of gender in negotiation.

CONCLUSION

The situational perspective on gender in negotiation that we have proposed advances our understanding of when gender is likely to matter in negotiation. As encouraged by Thompson (1990) and consistent with recent developments in the study of gender in negotiation (Gelfand, Smith-Major, Raver, & Nishii, 2000; Kray et al., 2001; Riley & Babcock, 2002), we argue for moving the investigation of gender in negotiation from direct-effects models to a contingency approach. The finding that gender differences are not consistent across negotiating contexts does not justify disregarding those situations in which gender is a significant factor. We should explore the implications of gender in context, and search for the omitted variables that account for the labile nature of its effects (Deaux & Major, 1987, 1990). The theory of the effects of structural ambiguity and gender triggers on gender differences in negotiation offers a conceptual framework for organizing and advancing the existing literature.

The situational approach also has potential to contribute to the teaching and practice of negotiation. If we can sensitize individual negotiators to the pitfalls and opportunities embedded in particular negotiating situations, we might better advise them how to shape or frame negotiating circumstances to their advantage. So much of the negotiation literature focuses on how parties negotiate within a given bargaining structure. In broadest terms, our situational approach suggests that more systematic attention should be paid to how negotiators can change the game that is being played. Our aim ultimately is to generate prescriptions that improve negotiation performance in general, regardless of gender and other social roles.

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