In Theory

Gender versus Power as a Predictor of Negotiation Behavior and Outcomes

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The assumption that women are inferior simply because they are "different" from men has permeated our culture in the United States as it has many other cultures. Women's lot in life has clearly improved dramatically in this country since the 1700s, but equally clearly, there is still significant discrimination against women in our society in the 1990s.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, psychologists and sociologists have mounted a frontal assault on this long-standing "different and inferior" assumption in many domains. Their work has shown the assumption to be frequently inaccurate. Recent literature reviews show, for example, that there are not clear gender differences in verbal ability (Hyde and Linn 1988), math ability (Hyde, Fennema, and Lamon 1990), or spatial ability (Caplan, McPherson, and Tobin 1985). Nor do there appear to be gender differences in more abstract characteristics or abilities such as moral reasoning (Friedman, Robinson, and Friedman 1987) or leadership (Powell 1990). Nevertheless, the belief in significant, innate, gender differences refuses to die.

The probable reason for the durability of this belief is that, on a day-in, day-out basis, men and women *do* differ in countless ways that are apparent to each of us, researchers and members of the general public alike. One response to the dilemmas these differences have posed for women is advanced by the "cultural feminists" who have sought to fight society's inherent sexism by celebrating women as different from but superior to men (e.g., Gilligan 1982; Rosener 1990). While such theories may be appealing because they highlight women's special qualities and help women feel good about themselves (rather than inferior or deficient), the "different-but-superior" argument does not hold up to the rigorous scrutiny of careful empirical investigation any better than does the more prevalent "different-and-inferior" argument (Tavris 1992).

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An alternative perspective, offered in this article, is that gender differences do exist, but that those of significance relate to contextual rather than to innate personality factors. Contextual factors consist first and most obviously of the immediate situation and its particular demands. More broadly, however, the context of an individual's life includes all aspects in the environment of that individual's life — such as work, family, class, culture, etc. (Tavris 1992).

Contextual factors have often been found to supplant personality factors in determining behavior, sometimes in highly dramatic demonstrations (e.g., Milgram 1963). Nevertheless, researchers and the general public continue to make what psychologists have dubbed the "fundamental attribution error" (Jones and Nisbett 1976). This error consists of assuming that others behave the way they do because of internal personality characteristics rather than because of external situational demands.

Cooperative Women, Competitive Men?

Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the issue of gender differences in negotiation behavior in recent years. In fact, the question of whether such differences exist, and if so, what they are, has never been satisfactorily resolved. Early research suggested that women are "softer" negotiators than men, that they prefer an accommodating style, are generous, and are more concerned that all parties be treated fairly than they are about gaining positive substantive outcomes for themselves (Terhune 1970; Vinacke 1959). These early studies also showed that men are "tough" negotiators who make many demands and few concessions, and that they are more concerned about winning positive substantive outcomes for themselves than about how the other party fares (Bartos 1970; Terhune 1970). Men were also found to be more flexible negotiators than women in that they seemed to use a tit-for-tat strategy more often, and were better at finding rational strategies that allowed them to maximize gains (Terhune 1970).

Although Rubin and Brown (1975) showed that these supposed gender differences in bargaining and negotiating were not consistently supported by research, there tends to be a continuing expectation that women will negotiate and bargain more cooperatively than men. Nevertheless, a few researchers have reached more negative conclusions. For instance, women have sometimes been found to lock into an unrelenting competitive stance when their partners refuse to cooperate, and this behavior has been construed by some as vindictive (Rapoport and Chammah 1965; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973). Rubin and Brown (1975) incorporated these findings into their work, but this negative view has been largely ignored by everyone else.

The fact that negotiation researchers have often depicted women as cooperative might be construed to mean that the cultural feminist perspective (i.e., that women are different but superior) has predominated in the negotiation literature. This would be an incorrect assumption, however, because women's cooperativeness has generally been equated with weakness and ineffectiveness. That is, cooperation is generally considered to be a dangerous negotiating tactic since it leaves one open to exploitation by one's opponent (e.g., Gifford 1989; Pruitt 1983). Thus, women have frequently been portrayed as "nicer" negotiators than men; and, since niceness does not help one to win, men have typically been credited with being more effective negotiators than women. In fact, some

researchers have openly questioned women's negotiating competence, claiming that women's behavior in negotiations is similar to that of men who do not understand the rules of the game (Caplow 1968; Kelley 1965).

Research on leadership provides a clue as to what might account for the frequent assumption that women are overly soft, ineffective negotiators. Leadership is similar to negotiating and bargaining in that it consists of influencing others. Not surprisingly, women's leadership skills have often been doubted on grounds similar to doubts about their negotiating competence. Many studies have been devoted to examining gender differences in leadership, and the nearly universal consensus that has emerged from reviews of these studies is that, when women earn or are given the leader's role, they behave exactly the way male leaders behave (e.g., Powell 1990).

The clue this provides to our understanding of the literature on gender differences in negotiating and bargaining behavior is that the leader role typically confers power on the incumbent. Thus, one might argue that it is power rather than gender that determines how leaders behave. Power has been defined as the potential ability to influence others (Mintzberg 1983; Pfeffer 1981). It accrues from many sources. Those most commonly recognized by management scholars are legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and charismatic power (French and Raven 1960). The number and strength of one's sources of power in a given situation will be referred to in this article as "situational power."

Similar sources of power are present in negotiating and bargaining encounters. Interestingly, the literature on disputing shows differences in the behavior of high- and low-power negotiators that mirror the most commonly assumed gender differences in negotiator behavior and outcomes (Bartos 1970). That is, high-power negotiators tend to compete whereas low-power negotiators tend to cooperate. I am suggesting, then, that because women in American society are more likely to be found in low-power positions and occupations than men, we may have been misled into assuming that observed differences in the way men and women negotiate are due to gender when, in fact, they result from status and power differences.

If contextual factors such as situational power are indeed better predictors of negotiation behavior than gender, there are significant implications for both negotiation trainers and policymakers. For instance, women themselves would no longer be viewed as in need of "fixing." Instead, the practices that keep women in low-power and low-status roles in organizations and society at-large would become the more legitimate focus of change. The possibility that contextual factors are more important than gender was examined by reviewing the existing literature on gender and power in negotiating and bargaining.

Scholars have offered four explanations for the origin of gender differences in negotiating behavior: gender-role socialization; situational power; gender and power combined; and "expectation states" theory.

The gender-role socialization explanation proposes that men and women will negotiate differently and be differentially successful because of the different behavioral expectations associated with their respective gender roles. The purest description of this perspective would be that, because women in U.S. society are expected to be nurturing and supportive, they should be softer, more cooperative negotiators than men. Because men are expected to be tough and task-oriented in our society, they should be harder, more competitive negotiators

than women. Further, since cooperation is generally considered to be a dangerous tactic because it leaves one open to exploitation by one's opponent (e.g., Gifford 1989; Pruitt 1983), women should also be less successful negotiators than men. That is, it is assumed that cooperative women will be taken advantage of to a greater extent than competitive men.

As noted earlier, different researchers have drawn contradictory conclusions about the accuracy of the behavioral expectations associated with the gender-role socialization explanation, but most agree with the expectation concerning success.

The situational power explanation suggests that parties who have more power in a given situation, regardless of their gender, should be more competitive and successful negotiators than parties who have less power. This perspective was popularized by Rosabeth Kanter (1977) who argued that women behave the way any person in a low-power position would behave. Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neill (1977) also argued in the 1970s that women are not any more motivated to help others or to prefer harmony and equality of outcomes than men in conflict situations, but that they are forced to behave this way because of their lower status. Almost no one has examined the validity of this hypothesis for negotiation or bargaining situations.

The gender-plus-power explanation is based on the possibility that giving a person power may not eliminate the effects of his or her gender status (i.e., Fagenson 1990; Powell, Posner, and Schmidt 1984; Terborg 1977). According to this perspective, both the gender-role socialization and the situational power explanations are correct. Consequently, males who have a lot of power are expected to be extremely competitive and successful negotiators whereas women who have little power are expected to be extremely cooperative, but weak and unsuccessful. Men who have little power and women who have a lot of power are expected to be equivalent and intermediate in their competitiveness and success.

Finally, expectation states theory proposes that the effects of power and gender combine with each other, but differently under different circumstances. The specific explanation suggested by this theory is that, when men and women negotiate with each other, gender affects their power and hence, their behavior and outcomes. In particular, male gender is expected to enhance power and female gender is expected to detract from power in mixed-sex pairs.

This explanation is based on Berger's expectation states theory (Berger, Fisek, Normal, and Zelditch 1977). Expectation states theory proposes that status characteristics (i.e., gender) establish performance expectations in small group settings; thus, high-status individuals (i.e., men) are expected to be more competent than low-status individuals (i.e., women). Because of these expectations, high-status individuals do, in fact, initiate more; receive more positive reactions from others, and enjoy more influence. However, the theory argues that gender is activated as a status characteristic only in mixed-sex pairs because it is only in these pairs that gender differentiates the parties. In other words, a powerful woman who must negotiate with a man should have much more difficulty controlling the negotiation than a powerful man who negotiates with a woman. Gender is not expected to have any impact on the power of negotiators in same-sex pairs of negotiators. In other words, being a woman should not diminish your power when you face another woman nor should being a man enhance your power when you face another man.

Reviewing the Literature

Support for these competing explanations about the origin of gender differences in negotiation behavior was examined by reviewing 34 research studies conducted since 1975 that have addressed the topic of gender differences in negotiation, conflict, or power. Only eight of these tested both gender and power and examined actual behavior rather than self-reported behavior. It is these eight studies that provided the data for this review (see Table 1 for a listing and brief description of the studies reviewed). Not all of these studies examined standard negotiation or bargaining situations. Nevertheless, each involved some kind of situation in which the parties had conflicting needs and desires and attempted to influence their own and their partner's outcomes.

Table 1

Description of the Studies Reviewed

	Subject Population[1]	Group Composition[2]	Task	Source of Power	Dependent Variable	Hypothesis Supported[3]
Dovidio et al., 1988	U	MS	Reach agreement on three discussion questions	Expert and reward power	Visual Dominance	P
Kravitz and Iwaniszek, 1984	U	SS	Coalition formation	Number of votes and alternatives	Payoff differences	G x P
Molm, 1986	U	SS & MS	Prisoner's delemna	Control over own outcomes	Power usage	G x P
Putnam and Jones, 1982	G/U	SS & MS	Labor-Management roleplay	Role	Bargainer tactics	P
Scudder, 1988	U	SS	Buyer-seller game	Role	Tactics and profit	G x P
Siderits et al., 1985	U	MS	Melian	Role	Expressions of hostility	P
State and Stake, 1979	U	MS	Dialogues Reach agreement on discussion task	Performance-related self-esteem	Change in opinion	G x P
Watson and Hoffman, 1992	M	SS & MS	Negotiation roleplay	Role	Feelings, behavior, and outcomes	P, G

[1]U = undergraduates G = graduate students M = Managers
[2]SS = same sex MS = mixed sex
[3]P = situational power G = gender G x P = gender x power interaction

In four of the eight studies examined, power emerged as the main explanatory variable. In one of these, gender emerged as a key explanatory variable as well. In the remaining four studies, power and gender affected each other, but in ways that are different from any of the four explanations offered earlier. No support was found for either the additive explanation or for the explanation derived from expectation states theory.

Among those studies in which power was the main explanatory factor (Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltman, and Brown 1988; Putnam and Jones 1982; Siderits, Johannsen, and Fadden 1985; Watson and Hoffman 1992), some supported the explanation as stated (i.e., that power breeds competitiveness and personally favorable outcomes), but others showed contradictory results, particularly with respect to the tactics employed by powerful parties. Among the expected results, power led to such behavior as: greater visual dominance; more expressions of overt hostility toward one's opponents; greater feelings of competitiveness, power, and control; greater expectations of cooperation from one's opponents; greater satisfaction with the outcome of negotiation; and a stronger belief that one had been successful.

However, in one of the studies (Putnam and Jones 1982), powerful parties were found to engage in more defensive than offensive strategies (retractions and accommodations as opposed to threats, rejections, or attacking arguments). In another study (Watson and Hoffman 1992), powerful parties were found to engage in problem-solving rather than competitive tactics. In this latter instance, the more powerful parties were also less successful than the less powerful parties (according to the experimenters' definition of success) although they believed they had been more successful than their less powerful opponents. Thus, while power generally led to greater dominance, competitiveness, and success, it did not necessarily always do so. Perhaps there are circumstances in which strong situational power leads parties to believe that dominant coercive strategies are unnecessary.

Very few results were found that were due strictly to gender, as mentioned earlier, and none of the gender effects concerned tactical behaviors or outcomes. However, in one study (Watson and Hoffman 1992) managerial women reported less self-confidence than managerial men before they took part in a simulated negotiation; less satisfaction with themselves after the negotiation; and the belief that they had been less successful than men, even though this was not true based on the experimenters' definition of success.

Five of the eight studies reviewed found some support for the idea that gender and power affect each other, although the results do not fit any of the explanations that could be derived from existing theory. Among these five studies, two found that having strong situational power leads men, but not women, to behave in what the researchers labeled as more competitive ways (Kravitz and Iwaniszek 1985; Scudder 1988). Competitiveness consisted of winning better payoffs for oneself in one study and of issuing bottom-line, take-it-or-leave-it statements in the other.

A third study found the reverse effect (Stake and Stake 1979). That is, power in the form of performance-related self-esteem increased women's dominating behavior (i.e., number of opinions given and disagreements stated) but not men's. The results from this study are questionable, however, because to match men and

women, the authors were forced to include a group of women with unusually high self-esteem and a group of men with unusually low self-esteem scores.

The remaining two studies found that powerlessness affected men differently than women (Molm 1986; Watson and Hoffman 1992). Men in low-power situations were found to adopt an approach that has been labeled "soft competition" by some researchers (i.e., Savage, Blair, and Sorenson 1989) whereas women did not. Men's approach to dealing with powerlessness consisted of stating their position and then offering logical reasons to support it.

Women's approach to powerlessness depended upon the gender of their opponents according to the results of one study (Watson and Hoffman 1992). Surprisingly, when low-power women faced a male opponent in this study, they were likely to adopt the highly competitive tactic of threatening. This result is surprising in part because it is completely contrary to the predictions of expectation states theory. The supposedly weakest participants (low-power women facing high-power men) were not expected to use the toughest tactics. Yet they did and they reported feeling somewhat more powerful and satisfied with themselves than other women in that study. Women's threatening behavior is also surprising because such an aggressive approach is generally considered dangerous and unacceptable for low-power parties. Yet it worked for the low-power women in Watson and Hoffman's (1992) study.

Another study (Molm 1986) also found that gender and power combined in ways that refuted expectation states theory. In this instance, female/female pairs of bargainers were less likely to engage in a tit-for-tat strategy than male/male pairs. Expectation-states theory predicts no gender differences in same-sex pairs. This finding is noteworthy because the tit-for-tat strategy has been found to be the best one to ensure positive, joint, long-term outcomes in mixed-motive situations. Thus, women may be less likely to settle on a cooperative pattern when they bargain with another woman than will men when they bargain with another man.

Conclusions and Implications

This review yields several findings about situational power and gender that stand out as particularly noteworthy. First, and perhaps most important, situational power appears to be a better predictor of negotiator behavior and outcomes than does gender. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the impact of gender cannot be ignored. Although gender did not affect tactical behavior or outcomes in any of the studies reviewed, it did lead to differences in negotiators' confidence in one study. Further, gender interacted with situational power and other contextual factors in ways that did affect behavior and outcomes.

Power generally leads to greater dominance, competitiveness, and success for both genders. On the one hand, this indicates that women are not softer or less effective negotiators than men are, as was suggested in the 1960s and early 1970s. Given a reasonable degree of situational power, women are likely to be just as oriented toward beating their opponents as men are, and just as successful at doing so. Thus, there is no reason to mistrust women's negotiation abilities. They are capable of negotiating as competitively and successfully as men.

On the other hand, this finding also implies that women are not nicer negotiators than men are. Women are not necessarily any more fair-minded or compassionate, despite what earlier research and some current feminist writers would have us believe. Thus, if we wish to encourage more humane behavior on the

part of the powerful toward the powerless, the answer is not simply to give women a chance to rule, but to change the rules governing how powerful people should behave.

The reader should not construe the assertions of the previous paragraph as an argument against empowering women, but rather as an argument against doing so because women will magically change the way those in power behave. It should not be necessary to justify women's empowerment on the grounds that they are somehow "better" people in general than are men. This is an unfair burden to place on women and an implied and equally unfair condemnation of men.

Interestingly, power did not always lead to dominating, selfish behavior in the studies reviewed. In several studies, the more powerful parties to a negotiation chose less threatening approaches than their lower-power opponents. In one of these studies, the subjects were business students playing the role of management in a labor-management negotiation and in the other, the participants were practicing managers taking part in a simulated negotiation. While one might conclude that it was the simulated nature of these negotiations that led high-power parties to behave less aggressively, most of the negotiation literature has been based on simulations and role-play exercises, and this literature generally shows that power leads to dominance and aggression.

Another possibility is that being a manager or role-playing a manager leads to different uses of power than typically occur when undergraduates negotiate with other undergraduates as peers. The managerial role carries with it legitimate power which may discourage the use of coercion since subordinates are expected to know they are supposed to capitulate. In addition, in the studies that used managers or students role-playing managers (Putnam and Jones 1982; Watson and Hoffman, 1992), the subjects were negotiating with parties from the same organization. Under such circumstances, they may have perceived the conflict within a more cooperative framework and may have even assumed they were responsible for creating such a cooperative framework for the good of the larger organization. These are intriguing questions that merit further research. Since much of the negotiation and conflict management literature is built on studies of undergraduates, possible limits to the generalizability of this work need to be explored.

As noted earlier, gender by itself had little impact on the behavior or outcomes of negotiators in the studies reviewed, but it did affect participants' feelings about negotiating in one of the studies. Managerial women reported significantly less confidence about negotiating than managerial men, and disparaged their success as negotiators more than men even though they had behaved no differently and had been no less successful than the men in their negotiations. This is a significant finding since women's concerns and negative self-evaluations may cause them to shy away from negotiations needlessly and inappropriately. Further, gender interacted with power and with opponent's gender in some unanticipated ways. Several studies showed that men became more aggressive when they had power and more conciliatory when they did not. Women's reactions were more variable and more likely to be dictated by additional contextual factors. In particular, women became highly aggressive when they were powerless against a male opponent. Powerful women were less willing or able to develop a cooperative tit-for-tat strategy when they negotiated with another woman than powerful men were with male opponents. This limited the ability of female/female pairs to achieve cooperative, win/win solutions.

In general, the kinds of adjustments men made to power match the recommendations of current normative models of negotiation (e.g., Savage et al. 1989). Women's adjustments to power were sometimes contradictory to the recommendations of these models though their unconventional approaches sometimes worked for them.

Although power accounted for most negotiation behavior previously thought to be gender-related, the effects found for gender alone and in combination with power suggest that women face dilemmas when negotiating that men do not. Assuming positions of power and feeling comfortable about negotiating appear to be more problematic for women than for men. Additionally, women appear to be particularly sensitive to the gender of their opponents. When their opponents are high-power males, women seem to engage in risky levels of aggressiveness. When their opponents are low-power women, they seem unable or unwilling to find a cooperative give-and-take approach. Each of these areas needs to be researched more fully so that informed recommendations can be developed for women and for men who negotiate with women.

It is important to bear in mind that the prescriptions for successful negotiating are more ambiguous for women than they are for men. The norms that guide competitive, win/lose negotiating were developed by men for men, and they are, therefore, compatible with stereotypical gender norms for men. These norms, however, are not compatible with gender norms for women. Nor can women be expected simply to adopt behaviors that are considered inappropriate for them. My own research (Korabik, Baril, and Watson 1993; Watson 1988), as well as that of others, has shown that both men and women are viewed negatively when they behave in ways that are contrary to society's gender role expectations. Thus, even when it might be appropriate for women to behave competitively to protect their own interests in a negotiation, they are likely to incur much more negative reactions for doing this than men would.

I believe the answer for women may turn out to be that they should learn the skills of principled negotiating (Fisher and Ury 1981). These authors teach negotiators how to understand and protect their own interests while maintaining a positive relationship with the other party. While both men and women would benefit from learning the skills Fisher and Ury recommend, women may need these skills more than men because of the conflicting expectations they face when negotiating. Whereas men may be able to get away with competitive tactics some of the time, women may not.

Clearly, more research on the issues raised in this review is needed. Although the hypothesis that situational power accounts for assumed gender differences was first proposed nearly twenty years ago, almost no one has sought to test it. Nevertheless, as this review shows, the hypothesis has merit. Furthermore, little thought has been given to the possible interactions between gender and contextual variables such as situational power.

It seems we have been content to restrict our research to overly simplistic hypotheses and have, therefore, failed to focus on the factors that are the more powerful determinants of negotiator behavior and outcomes. The interactive effects of gender, power, and opponent's gender that are revealed through this review, though only suggestive given the limited number of studies, point the way toward more meaningful avenues for future research concerning the role of gender in negotiation and bargaining.

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