

Changing the Narrative: WOMEN AS NEGOTIATORS— AND LEADERS

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SUMMARY

The reasons for women's relatively slow ascension in the workplace have been a matter of considerable debate. This article explores why so much remains misunderstood about the challenges women face and why negative stereotypes—specifically, the view that women are innately poor advocates for themselves—persist. In fact, women possess unique advantages as negotiators, including greater cooperativeness and stronger ethics. But often those strengths are overlooked or severely undervalued. This article presents practical strategies for managers and negotiators of both genders to close the performance gaps and calls for changing the narrative on what it means to be a successful negotiator.

KEYWORDS: gender, sex differences, negotiation, stereotypes, ethics, moral identity, women in management

All hell broke loose in August, when a Google software engineer named James Damore wrote and circulated a 10-page manifesto critical of the Internet giant's diversity program aimed at hiring and cultivating more women. Specifically, Damore challenged conventional wisdom that bias and discrimination explain the dearth of women engineers and leaders in Silicon Valley—and raised the prospect that biology may play a role as well. Within days of the memo's release, Damore was out of a job, officially fired for violating Google's code of conduct. In the fiery debate that ensued, critics slammed Damore for sexism and argued that Google was justified in firing him. For its part, Google stood accused of corporate shaming and of capitulating to a national culture of political correctness.

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We've seen this before. In 2005, Lawrence H. Summers, the former U.S. Treasury Secretary who was then president of Harvard University, delivered a speech in which he suggested "issues of intrinsic aptitude" explain the dearth of women leaders in academia. Never mind that Summers acknowledged that his views were "unofficial" and intentionally thought-provoking so as to elicit evidence to the contrary. Widespread outrage that Summers would give credence to the mere existence of gender differences forced his resignation.

It is unfortunate that the question of whether biology contributes to the gender gap in business continues to be so politicized. We separate the political from the scientific and propose that a minimization of differences approach to gender equality may hold women back by preserving the status quo.¹ If we move the discussion of biological versus cultural differences aside for a moment and examine empirical evidence of gender differences through the lens of growth mindsets, then both women and men stand to improve their negotiating skills by appreciating what we have to learn from each other based on differences as they appear today and without concern for whether they will persist over time.² While men and women currently exhibit slightly different negotiating styles (with substantial agreement in styles as well), patriarchal assumptions about masculine superiority obscure some of the ways in which stereotypically feminine strengths are essential to effective negotiating. To make this argument, we identify what contextual factors increase or decrease gender differences in negotiating effectiveness. While gender differences are not set in stone, they fluctuate in systematic ways and savvy negotiators utilize both masculine and feminine approaches to get to yes.

The hypersensitivity around women in the workforce is understandable. There is powerful evidence that women continue to struggle in their careers relative to men, both in their pursuit of senior leadership positions and of equal pay. According to Catalyst, women at the start of this year held just 5.8% of CEO positions among S&P 500 companies, a rate virtually unchanged from a decade ago; globally, women filled 24% of senior management roles as of 2016. Women are also severely underrepresented on company boards in the United States, with women occupying only 33% of director seats, according to a 2016 McKinsey & Company report. When it comes to compensation, the data point to a relentless divide as well. The most recent statistics show that female full-time workers made 80 cents for every dollar made by male full-time workers in 2015, or about a nickel more than they did two decades ago and about 19 cents more than they earned in 1960. The gap widens over time and up the income scale: female graduates of Ivy League colleges who are now in their mid-30s earn on average 30% less than their male peers, according to the Equality of Opportunity Project.³

The Google controversy only highlights how divisive, frustrating, and, ultimately, unidentified the reasons are for why female workers continue to struggle relative to men in the workplace—and why effective remedies for rectifying the inequality remain elusive. Research has shown, for example, that women's economic outcomes do not differ from those of men when negotiating on behalf of others, but the perception that they are incapable of advocating effectively for

themselves remains influential.⁴ This points to the core challenge women face as negotiators and, by extension, as seekers of equal standing with their male counterparts: generally speaking, both genders accept the negative stereotypes of women as incompetent agents for themselves. We suggest that this belief is based on a biased understanding of what it means to be an effective negotiator.

Underlying the perception of women as poor negotiators is a fundamental flaw in how negotiating success is studied and measured. In academia and in business, negotiations are often viewed as isolated events where victory goes to the party that scores the best deal, financial or otherwise. But negotiations do not happen in a vacuum. Often, the parties involved—a customer, a vendor, or an employee—are engaged in an established relationship, where maintaining trust and mutual respect are just as important as the immediate financial stakes. Women outpace men in achieving these intangible outcomes, with research showing that they tend to be more cooperative, empathetic, and ethical in their negotiating tactics. Far from weaknesses, these traits are invaluable. For example, in 2013, a crippling U.S. government shutdown over the federal budget ended only after a bipartisan coalition of female senators crafted a compromise. Republican and Democratic senators alike credited the women's collaborative stances for ending the impasse. Separately, former UN ambassador Samantha Power told *The Atlantic* in a video interview that the presence of six women during her tenure on the organization's 15-member Security Council enabled a culture of "more interaction, more listening."⁵ Even the public recognizes the value that women bring to the table: in a survey of 64,000 people across the globe, two-thirds of respondents agreed that the world would be a better place if men thought more like women.⁶

The strengths women have used to negotiate effectively in politics extend to the corporate setting. Often in business negotiations, the end goal is *not* total victory over the opposing side at the best possible price. Instead, it is a deal that also preserves trust and commitment in a key relationship—with a customer, a supplier, or even a manager. With individual negotiations involving a raise or a promotion, it is just as important that the negotiators feel a sense of personal satisfaction with the result and their role in it. Consistent with positive gender stereotypes, the evidence suggests that these are outcomes that women excel at achieving. Only when women are given the credit they deserve will we bridge the gender divide.

Gender Roles in Negotiations: Parsing Fact from Fiction

Much has been learned about gender roles in negotiation over recent decades. We know, for instance, that gender does make a difference in striking deals and resolving conflict in two significant ways. In a 2007 *California Management Review* article, "Leading through Negotiation: Harnessing the Power of Gender Stereotypes," Kray discussed how men on average behave more competitively and act in more self-serving ways than women do.⁷ The second gender

difference centers on outcomes: men achieve more favorable results in negotiations on average than do women; separate research has shown their gains relative to women to be modest to large in size.⁸

For their part, women negotiators tend to be more cooperative. They demonstrate greater concern for the other participants and a higher commitment to ensuring that all parties are treated fairly in a negotiation. As described below, women are also less willing than men to behave unethically in negotiations and this has important implications for their own job satisfaction, their professional relationships, and for organizations as a whole. It is true that women admit to a greater dislike of negotiating⁹ and, some evidence suggests, are more reluctant to initiate bargaining for more money.¹⁰

How we interpret these gender differences matters. Growth mindsets allow us to move past the biology vs. culture debate. Unfortunately, the take-no-prisoners posturing that men more often bring to the table is currently considered a sign of high performance. Stereotypically female approaches that are more conciliatory and adhere to higher ethical standards are seen as weak. In other words, women are often seen as better human beings, but poorer negotiators, than men. Moreover, the more favorable negotiating outcomes that men achieve *on average* are worrisome because even small differences can compound over time. Martell Lane and Emrich found that a mere 1% bias against women in work performance evaluations resulted over time in a 30% performance gap between the sexes.¹¹ The compounding effect may explain why female Ivy League graduates start off earning the same as their male peers, but lose significant ground by their mid-30s.

Although the Google memo debate suggests otherwise, it is not unreasonable to consider whether gender differences in negotiation outcomes could occur because men are more innately talented in the domain than women. The data, however, cast doubt on this explanation. The most current research contradicts the idea that women always perform worse than men when negotiating; instead, differences in outcomes are situational. Women, for example, negotiate as effectively as men when they think of the exercise as a learning tool rather than a test of true ability.¹² In a 2015 meta-analysis, Mazei et al. found that women perform as well as men under three conditions: when negotiating on behalf of another person (but not a larger entity), when given information about the bargaining range, and when they had experience with negotiation. Under these circumstances, men not only lost any advantage but also underperformed women. Overall, the gender difference in economic outcomes was so variable that the authors concluded, "A single overall true gender difference does not exist."¹³

Further research finds other instances in which women surpass men in negotiations. Women have an advantage when successful negotiation is linked to stereotypically feminine traits, such as good listening skills, and poor negotiation is tied to stereotypically masculine traits, such as assertiveness.¹⁴ When the stereotype of what it means to be an effective negotiator is regenerated to include feminine traits, women gain rather than lose ground in their negotiation outcomes.

Women also do better when the parties to a negotiation are conscious of gender stereotypes and their attendant limitations.

Women's seeming aversion to negotiating can reflect their understanding of social expectations rather than innate gender differences.¹⁵ When told that negotiating is expected in a particular setting, women overcome their reluctance toward deal making and conflict resolution. The same result occurs when women are told that their wages are negotiable. They are just as willing to engage in bargaining, too, when the task is portrayed as "asking" rather than negotiating.¹⁶ Women's apparent preference for asking over negotiating may reflect their greater concern for politeness. This also suggests that women dislike the term "negotiate," but not necessarily the act of negotiating itself. When women feel powerful, their attitudes toward negotiating are similar to men's.

So is the playing field in negotiations level? No, but not because women do not have what it takes to excel. Far from possessing inferior negotiating skills, women are often equal matches to men at the bargaining table, but aspects of the negotiating context—specifically, negative stereotypes—undermine perceptions of their performance. As a result, perceived gender differences in negotiation performance are commonly invoked as one explanation for the disparities between men and women in pay and advancement. The remainder of this article describes how and why this is misguided. Until the motives and assumptions that contribute to a gender gap in negotiation performance are fully uncovered, women will continue to be viewed as poor negotiators—and pay a substantial price throughout their careers.

Why Gender Stereotypes Persist: A New Perspective

To date, research into the question of *why* men's and women's negotiation track records differ has concentrated largely on cognitive barriers, in which gender differences are seen as reflections of predictable biases emerging from gender stereotypes. In other words, women struggle economically and socially to achieve equality with men because gender stereotypes act as self-fulfilling prophecies. Blaming gender stereotypes and training employees to recognize their own unconscious biases, for example, has been at the root of Google's efforts to hire more women and to help them advance. According to this explanation for gender differences, people enter into a negotiation with expectations, valid or not, as to how women will perform and treat them unequally based on those assumptions. Even when men and women use identical bargaining strategies, they are perceived differently. In one telling study, Bowles et al. reveal that working adults were less interested in working with a female job candidate after she attempted to negotiate for higher compensation, but were not put off when a male job prospect tried to negotiate.¹⁷ It did not matter if the candidate took only a moderately assertive approach or a highly assertive one. The authors' research further shows that negotiators are four times more likely to mislead a female counterpart than a male counterpart.¹⁸ Because of this deception, women often enter into more deals at a distinct and unfair disadvantage.

The false proposition, then, that women are incompetent negotiators becomes reality simply because people believe it to be so. This, in turn, perpetuates a vicious cycle of “reign of error” in which women’s poor performance in one negotiation is seen as proof of future incompetence. The self-fulfilling prophecy explanation suggests that women’s performance in negotiation—and, ultimately, their ability to become recognized leaders in business—should improve once negative stereotypes about women’s negotiating abilities disappear. Practically speaking, this assumes that, in order to achieve pay and performance parity, women should defy stereotypes simply by acting more like men.

The Current Reality Reflects a Desired Reality

Recent research, however, suggests that this fix is insufficient because there are additional, unexplored barriers that perpetuate the idea that women lack the skills to be effective negotiators. One set of barriers is “motivational” in that they reflect a desire to prevent women negotiators from excelling in a masculine domain. People cling to negative stereotypes to satisfy their own psychological needs. In the negotiating context, they will interpret performance measures in ways that are biased against women.

In fact, the outrage directed at Damore and Summers might reflect an intuitive recognition that they harbor motivated bias. Although both parties presented their claims as scientific, audiences may have perceived them as advancing self-serving arguments against women’s abilities, without the requisite attention to facts and counter-evidence required for fairness. If influential leaders want to believe that women are biologically inferior, then institutions might have good reason for ousting them.

Why do people need to believe women are inferior negotiators? For one thing, it satisfies a psychological desire to believe that the world is just and that women struggle to advance in their careers because of their own deficiencies and not because they are treated unfairly. This gives people reassurance that outcomes in general are predictable and largely controllable. For many, it could be unbearably threatening to perceive the world any other way.¹⁹ It is difficult for people to stay motivated at work and optimistic about their futures if they perceive important outcomes to depend largely on luck.

Motivational reasoning also serves another purpose. It reaffirms men’s social status and masculinity, including their traditional role as providers and women as nurturers. This explains why men are more likely to view the status quo between men and women as fair and to endorse the idea that biological differences account for the fact that women are underrepresented in the fields of math, science, and engineering.²⁰ Men are also likely to view negotiations as a test of their masculinity, which could be threatened by the prospect of “losing,” particularly to a woman.

Men are not the only ones who subconsciously subscribe to gender stereotypes. Women, too, want to believe the status quo is fair, legitimate, and inevitable, even if that belief puts them at a disadvantage. As a result, women look to

justify the current gender hierarchy, in which men rank higher than women. Believing that women are less competent than men helps them to rationalize the social order. By internalizing negative stereotypes about themselves, women avoid having to acknowledge that discrimination underlies their problems at the work. Even when a woman recognizes injustice in how her gender is treated relative to men, the “denial of personal disadvantage” that Crosby identified more than three decades ago often leads her to think she is not personally affected by the inequity.²¹

When the Name of the Game Is Winner-Takes-All

There is a third type of barrier preventing women from being recognized as skilled negotiators on par with men. In general, society values negotiation prowess in ways that favor decidedly masculine traits, such as assertiveness, a focus on self-interest, and the ability to think and act rationally. So, when scholars and others set out to evaluate who is successful at negotiating, and who is not, they conceptualize and measure performance based on what they consider to be correct and objective characteristics of effective negotiations. But is this viewpoint accurate? No. The ability to maintain long-term relationships and solve problems collaboratively, which are just two skills that women exhibit with mastery, matters a lot in business and in life. Indeed, a great deal of evidence shows that women possess skills that are valuable in negotiation contexts that more closely resemble real-world conditions. But the current prism through which negotiation success is viewed overlooks these attributes. Interestingly, research finds that even when gender-neutral characteristics are ascribed to effective negotiators, men are still perceived as outperforming women.²²

By valuing masculine characteristics, this paradigmatic barrier unfairly rewards men at the expense of women. The problem begins with researchers, where an overreliance on laboratory and classroom simulations, which are easy to control and generate an abundance of publishable data, lead to conclusions that are not readily generalized to work settings. Simulations serve as good practice, but as unrealistic measuring tools for gender differences for several reasons, including the fact that the stakes for participants are low relative to the career-ending risks working professionals can face at the negotiating table. Higher stakes are likely to homogenize behavior. Because simulations are also typically set up as game-like competitions, the value of collaboration and problem solving required of real-world negotiations gets overlooked. In the real world, generating goodwill through problem solving, a skill at which women excel, is necessary for striking agreements. In fabricated settings, participants treat the negotiation as a one-shot interaction, which means relationships among participants are seen as short term and, therefore, expendable.

Finally, by focusing solely on price or some other material outcome, simulations ignore two valuable measures of negotiation success: relational capital, which refers to the mutual liking, trust, knowledge, and commitment to an ongoing relationship between two people; and subjective value, which is a negotiator’s satisfaction with the outcome, his or her role in it, the relationship

with the other party, and the bargaining process itself. Curhan et al. show that, over time, subjective value predicts job satisfaction and turnover better than economic outcomes.²³

The paradigmatic barrier causes people to overlook, or severely undervalue, the unique strengths that women bring to negotiations. Simulations allow negotiators to practice their competitive tactics, but create a false context where men feel more comfortable than women and, therefore, have distinct advantages. There is a great deal of evidence that women possess skills that are valuable in negotiation contexts that more closely resemble real-world conditions. An important first step, then, toward recognizing the powerful role women can play in negotiations is for researchers to create simulations that reward these key strengths.

Only once those strengths, which include a greater tendency to collaborate and higher ethical standards, are studied and recognized for their value in negotiations, will women get the recognition they deserve—and the pay and promotions that the father in the Audi ad envisions for his competitive daughter.

The Case for Women as Leaders in Negotiations

Sallie Krawcheck once reigned as the most powerful woman on Wall Street. With an MBA from Columbia University, she catapulted through the cut-throat ranks of the investment world. She eventually rose to become chief financial officer of Citigroup before the age of 40 and a rumored candidate for CEO. Celebrated for her unfailing integrity, intelligence, charm, consensus building, and tireless energy, Krawcheck was not only surviving but also thriving in one of the most supercharged, male-centric industries around. In a 2002 cover story, “Can Sallie Save Citi?” *Fortune* magazine described her as an “iron woman” with the stamina and leadership qualities of a “presidential candidate.”²⁴

Her meteoric rise briefly stalled in 2008 when, at the height of the global financial crisis, Krawcheck was fired from Citigroup after a falling out with higher-ups. Krawcheck, who by then was serving as CEO of Citigroup’s Global Wealth Management Division, thought the financial behemoth owed clients partial refunds for their losses on investments that Citigroup had marketed as low risk. It was an ethical stance that her male superiors at first rejected, and Krawcheck was shown the door.

At the time, Krawcheck was adamant in press interviews that her ouster had nothing to do with her gender. Today she is equally resolute in her conviction that gender had everything to do with her downfall at Citigroup. “I was fired for being a woman,” Krawcheck told a New York audience late last year.²⁵

What changed? According to Krawcheck, her turnabout came after she reviewed the research on the role of gender in business and came to understand that her views on reimbursing Citigroup clients stemmed from a set of values closely tied to being female. In arguing for partial refunds, Krawcheck had wanted

to be fair—to Citigroup and its customers—out of a sense of moral obligation. In short, Krawcheck concluded that she, in fact, had been fired for exhibiting female attributes and qualities.

Krawcheck, who now runs two companies aimed at helping professional women advance, Ellevest Financial and Ellevate Financial, and has written a book, *Own It: The Power of Woman at Work*, has become the newest public face of an inchoate movement in business and politics to recognize women for their unique skills. These attributes apply to the negotiating arena, where research underscores many distinctly female traits linked to effective negotiation, including verbal ability, listening skills, and expressiveness.

As former UN ambassador Samantha Power observed, and research has confirmed, women also tend to negotiate more cooperatively than men do. They encourage others to participate and express their viewpoints, while showing greater sensitivity toward those with opposing opinions. These mostly female traits influence negotiations in two key ways: they raise collective intelligence in groups and model ethical behavior. The former is important because collective intelligence refers to a group's ability to perform well on a variety of tasks, including negotiations. Cooperation builds relational capital, or trust and commitment within relationships, and, as Curhan et al. has shown, relational capital and maximum economic outcomes can coexist in a negotiation.²⁶

Why Not When: An Empirical Analysis of Gender Differences in Negotiation

There is another advantage women offer in negotiations: a greater tendency to behave ethically. This characteristic contradicts centuries of philosophical and psychological discourse, from Immanuel Kant to Sigmund Freud, which assumes men are the morally superior sex. A robust body of research disputes that notion and, in fact, establishes that women have stronger moral identities, which translate into more ethical behavior. Women's greater unwillingness to rationalize unethical behavior or morally disengage, which refers to the belief that ethics do not apply to a particular context, starts in adolescence.²⁷ Research by Kennedy and Kray has shown that women report greater moral reservations, moral outrage, and job dissatisfaction than men at the prospect of sacrificing ethical values for money or social status.²⁸ They also see ethically questionable negotiation tactics, such as making false promises, attacking an opponent's network, or deceiving a counterpart, as less appropriate.²⁹ For their part, men are more likely to lower their ethical standards to achieve their desired economic outcomes. Just as they see cooperation as a vice, men are more likely to regard ethics as roadblocks to negotiation excellence.³⁰

To the extent that gender differences in ethics in the negotiating arena have been analyzed, studies have focused on *when* men and women exhibit contrasting ethical behavior and not *why* these differences emerge. This omission is significant because gender differences in ethics may provide a novel explanation for why women have worse negotiation outcomes than men under some

conditions. Understanding why women have an ethical advantage in negotiations relative to men, and how that advantage can bolster relational capital and subjective value, could help unlock the “black box” that allows researchers to predict gender differences without knowing the reasons behind them.

New research sheds light on this crucial question of *why* women negotiators behave more ethically.³¹ In the first-ever empirical test of why gender differences emerge in ethics generally, or in unethical negotiating behavior specifically, Kennedy, Kray, and Ku find that women possess stronger “moral identities” than men. In other words, women internalize moral traits—defined as being caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind—in their self-definitions more strongly. This sense of moral identity explains why women are less likely to morally disengage or otherwise behave unethically.

Kennedy, Kray, and Ku’s conclusions are based on a series of studies.³² In the first one, a meta-analysis of existing research data on close to 20,000 people found a significant gender difference in the strength of men and women’s moral identities. This is important because moral identity acts as a buffer against the temptation to rationalize, plan, and engage in unethical behavior, including in competitive negotiations. The meta-analysis suggested that there is about a 66% probability that a randomly chosen woman would have a stronger moral identity than a randomly chosen man. Women’s moral identity, in turn, restrains them from the temptation to gain a short-term advantage by negotiating unethically.

Next, the studies aimed to understand how men and women respond to ethical quandaries in a negotiation. Two hundred seventeen participants recruited from an online website were asked how they would handle the sale of their used car, which is a common, high-stakes transaction with a high potential for deception. They were told that their car had a minor problem, a missing fuel cap, and a far more serious issue involving the transmission. The participants were then asked whether they would reveal the car’s problems to a potential buyer. To ensure that they did not feel pressure to act ethically, they were given examples of how deception was not uncommon in car negotiations.

The goal was to measure “moral disengagement” among participants, or their willingness to rationalize unethical behavior by, for example, blaming the victim or downplaying the consequences of unethical conduct. Prior research has found that an individual’s moral identity and ability to morally disengage drive ethical judgments. To test for moral disengagement, a scale developed by Bandura in 1996 was adapted to negotiations and asked participants to respond to 32 statements such as “It’s ok to omit information if the buyer doesn’t ask the right questions” and “Bending the truth is no big deal when you consider that others are engaging in outright fraud.”³³

Researchers also measured participants’ opportunism, or their willingness to take advantage of prospective buyers who were strangers. Questions included the following: “When negotiating with [interested buyers], how committed are you to negotiating openly and in good faith?” and “How obligated do you feel to

act in a completely trustworthy and honest manner in your dealings with [interested buyers]?"

The findings were consistent with prior research. Women were less likely to morally disengage and less likely to behave opportunistically than men when selling a used car to people they do not know.

Next, researchers sought to show that stronger moral identities explained why women morally disengage less and behave less ethically than men in negotiations. In this instance, 324 male and female students from two U.S. universities were presented with the same scenario involving a used-car sale. Participants were first asked to imagine a person who was fair, compassionate, and exhibited other traits demonstrating moral identity, and then to report how important it was for them to share these characteristics. Next, participants read the used-car negotiation scenario and responded to the same 32 statements used to measure moral disengagement in the prior study. Once again, women revealed stronger moral identities and less willingness to morally disengage or endorse unethical negotiating tactics. These results confirmed that women morally disengage and behave unethically less than men because they self-conceptualize more in moral terms.

When Women, Too, Bend the Rules

Are women always more likely to take the higher ground in negotiations? The answer is no. In two final studies, researchers tested whether situational factors, specifically financial incentives, could prompt women to negotiate unethically. In the first study, 224 business students negotiated as if they were a manager and a job candidate. The goal of the managers was to recruit the candidate at the lowest possible salary. The job seekers, on the contrary, were told to value job security and to decline any salary offer without a guarantee of holding the position for at least two years. Next came the moral dilemma: managers could not give candidates the job reassurance they sought because they knew the job would be eliminated in six months. The managers were told that rewards of either \$50 or \$150 would be given to the manager who negotiated the lowest salary or to a randomly selected manager.

The analysis focused on the managers' deceptive behavior. Researchers first tested for moral identity strength and found that 64% of the female participants had strong moral identities, compared with 33% among the men. But women's strong moral identities did not always translate into more ethical behavior. When given the prospect of a \$150 reward, the women were far more likely to dupe job seekers than when the reward was only \$50. In fact, they were eight times more likely to fool the job seeker when the potential reward was \$150 instead of \$50. The opposite was true for men: financial rewards, small or large, did not influence their penchant for deception at all. Moreover, the female managers were six times more likely to lie when they believed the reward was based on performance rather than at random. These results suggest that, given the prospect of a financial reward, especially one that is meted out based on performance,

women are just as likely to behave unethically as men are in negotiations. For their part, men are willing to lie regardless of whether there is a financial reward, even a large one.³⁴ These findings suggest, once again, that negotiating contexts matter for gender differences. To reap the value of women's strengths, organizations need to create the right environment—namely, one that encourages people to identify with moral traits and avoids steeply rewarding unethical behavior.

Ethics Really Do Matter

The current negotiating paradigm that places a premium on no-holds-barred posturing in pursuit of the best possible outcome seems to reinforce the idea that ethical negotiating is a sign of weakness. Ethics, after all, may have cost Sallie Krawcheck her job. But this win-at-all-costs mind-set overlooks, or at least rationalizes, the significant harm that unethical behavior can have on workers and their organizations. Consider these reasons why ethics matter in business generally, and at the bargaining table specifically:

- *Ethics promote personal satisfaction:* Morality has implications for subjective value, which, as noted above, has to do with one's sense of self. The types of offers negotiators make and accept have lingering implications for the kind of person they are and the types of relations they have with others. For negotiators, upholding their principles is an important driver of their satisfaction with themselves following the negotiation. To the extent that women uphold their principles better than men, their negotiation skills may result in lasting satisfaction with their relationships and commitment to their work organizations.
- *Ethics ensure fair play:* In most arenas, unethical behavior is not a route to high performance, but a misunderstanding of what it means to perform. By forfeiting ethical standards, negotiators are essentially cheating, much like an athlete who takes steroids or a student who copies classmates' exams. Rather than pursue true excellence, these negotiators seek cheap shortcuts. The effects on professional relationships can be lasting. Research has shown that both the ones who deceive and those who are deceived feel less satisfied with the relationship.³⁵ Moreover, deceptive negotiators are more likely to believe their counterparts are less trustworthy than honest negotiators.
- *Ethics bolster the company brand:* According to Mirvis, "there is a growing consensus that organizations with cultures grounded in integrity make ethical behavior everybody's responsibility and this builds stronger relationships between a company, its employees, and other stakeholders."³⁶ When parties to a negotiation feel they have been deceived, relationships with employees, customers, investors, suppliers, government regulators, and the public at large suffer. Walmart muscled its way into the Mexico market by using bribes as a negotiating tactic and is facing one of the largest corruption fines ever levied against a U.S. company.³⁷ For its part, Citigroup ultimately issued the partial client refunds Krawcheck had fought for.

Practical Strategies for Leveling the Playing Field

There is no shortage of advice on how women can become “better” negotiators. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, has famously urged women to overcome the barriers they face in the workplace by “leaning in”—that is, by strengthening their commitment and ambition. For women negotiators, this advice translates to actively defy gender stereotypes. Krawcheck, on the contrary, says the system is to blame and women should stop trying to act like men. Others maintain that more flexible career tracks that support women’s needs are the only way to close the gender performance gap.

Training, advice, and more flexible career tracks are all necessary, but insufficient, responses to the challenges women face in the workplace, and in the negotiating arena specifically. Real change will happen only once attitudes about women, their performance as negotiators, and what it takes to be a successful negotiator change. There are a number of strategies women and men could use to improve their negotiating outcomes, among them the power of preparation and love for the game.³⁸ The latest research suggests additional strategies that women and men, including managers, can employ to challenge negotiation norms and improve outcomes for both genders.

- *Be willing to have the discussion:* Lawrence Summers and James Damore learned the hard way that, in our culture, even the mere suggestion that gender differences in personality, interests, or skills might be contributing to the persistent gender divide in the workplace is strictly taboo. Instead, we are expected to lay all the blame on gender stereotypes, and readily silence anyone who thinks otherwise. This is regrettable. Implicit biases are not the only reason why women have struggled in the workplace — and the sooner we can have an open-minded and dispassionate conversation about the full range of contributing factors, the better-equipped we will all be to find workable solutions.
- *Recognize that negotiation skills are learned:* Gender stereotypes hold that women negotiators are innately ineffective, but extensive research dispels these assumptions. Men and women become effective negotiators through hard-work and practice, not genetics. Studies have found that negotiators who believe skills are learned outperform negotiators who think they are fixed. Those same individuals also rely on stereotypes less and are more receptive to evidence challenging their assumptions.³⁹
- *Raise awareness of how meritocracies can enable bias:* Most organizations try to reward employees with raises and promotions based on performance, not demographics. While meritocracies are important, they do not always provide a safeguard against discrimination. Castilla and Benard show that, in non-meritocratic situations, female candidates for raises and promotions are more likely to be rewarded than male candidates, possibly because people overcorrect for their bias against women. The opposite is true in a meritocracy, where a sense of objectivity can inadvertently prompt people to act on stereotypes because they assume they are not prejudiced to begin with.⁴⁰

- *Challenge biases against women negotiators:* As the discussion of motivational barriers indicates, a skilled female negotiator threatens both long-held expectations of how women perform in negotiations and men's own social status and masculinity. To reduce these threats, self-affirmation exercises can help men and women overcome stereotypes and enable them to be more receptive to evidence of high performance. This may be especially important for women who, as Crosby found, can recognize that negative stereotypes of their negotiating ability are wrong and unfair, yet they may subconsciously be unwilling to acknowledge that they are personally affected by these misperceptions. In a self-affirmation exercise, which ideally would happen before pay and promotion decisions are made, participants either think of a time when they acted fairly or were creative, or they write down a cherished personal value. These tools help to reduce the sense of threat, and remind people of their desire and ability to be fair. Male negotiators, too, can seek common ground with their female counterparts; focusing on a shared identity fosters cooperation and a sense there is parity among negotiators.
- *Advocate for women:* The backlash against a woman who asks for a promotion or a raise can be fierce. Often, she is labeled as pushy or entitled—criticisms that are not aimed at men who advocate for themselves. Women could take turns advocating for each other's promotions or salary increases, or they could frame their requests as helping with the cause of gender equity. In this way, negotiators frame their requests as supporting others rather than serving their own interests alone. The downside is that women who band together could be seen as threats to the gender hierarchy. If a majority of women and men in an organization take up the cause of gender equality, then a sense of inevitability takes over. When change seems inevitable, people tend to rationalize it rather than resist it.
- *Double down on the primacy of ethical behavior:* Although women have stronger moral identities than men, they are more likely to doubt themselves when ethical conflicts arise in negotiations due to a lack of confidence grounded in prevailing negative stereotypes. As a result, they tend to think that their unwillingness to cross moral lines reflects a misunderstanding on their part of how business gets done in the “real” world. Women can escape this trap by reminding themselves and others of the many payoffs to acting ethically in business generally and in negotiations specifically. Speaking to the power of ethics in collaboration with other like-minded colleagues will go long way toward changing current attitudes about successful negotiating.

Each one of these strategies works within the existing gender hierarchy, but they alone are not sufficient. There is one more overarching obstacle that needs to be overcome in order for women to truly attain the recognition they deserve as competent self-advocates—and to achieve significant and lasting gains in the workplace. That is, scholars, business leaders, and working professionals themselves need to embrace a new definition of what constitutes “negotiation success.”

Conclusion: A New Approach

Too often in negotiations, victory is assumed to mean taking it all, at any cost to the other party. But this view is an impoverished conceptualization of negotiation success. Negotiators could and should set a much higher bar. Conflict should be resolved in ways that maximize financial value for *both* parties, or else the agreement is inefficient. The interaction should allow for valued relationships to endure and for negotiators to feel satisfied with their results and their own roles in creating them. Satisfaction with the outcome and the relationship are often just as important as the size of one party's monetary gain. The most successful negotiations hit the trifecta of maximum joint economic, relational, and subjective value. As described here, women could excel at all three dimensions because of their unique characteristics, including a greater tendency to collaborate and behave ethically in bargaining. When these typically female traits are linked to negotiation excellence, women set higher goals for themselves and perform as well as men.⁴¹

While possible, changing the negotiation paradigm is not easy. Gender stereotypes, and the misguided assumption that they are warranted, are hard to overcome. Doing so successfully requires academics to conduct their research into gender differences differently, women and men negotiators to think about their roles in new ways, and innovative leaders to instill a new mind-set in their organizations. According to Schoemaker and Tetlock, highly creative people are able and willing to push new ways of thinking. "Breakthrough innovations," they write, "often come from mavericks willing to reject convention and hierarchy."⁴²

Perceptions of women in business, and in negotiations specifically, are starting to change, albeit slowly. According to Sallie Krawcheck, the characteristics women typically exhibit at work—greater abilities to build relationships, assess risks, collaborate, and deliberate than their male colleagues—are increasingly valued in business. For her part, Samantha Power, the former UN ambassador, told *The Atlantic* that the culture of listening and collaboration generated by the six women on the 15-member Security Council later suffered after some left the council and were replaced by men.

The fact that so many people comment [on the loss of female voices on the council] and are embarrassed by this, including in all fairness the men on the council, is a sign that things are changing—and they're not changing nearly fast enough.⁴³

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