The Link Between Gender & Negotiation

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Key Concepts & Ideas

Published in January 2021, the article "How Gender Differences in Entitlement and Apprehension Manifest Themselves in Negation," from *Group Decision and Negotiation,* unveils the impact that gender has on an individual's "propensity to initiate negotiations." An important concept in this study is that the male societal role is associated with agency, a focus on personal goals, while the female societal role is associated with communion, a focus on relationships. Agency is also associated with dominant behavior which is "controlling, assertive, and autocratic," while communion is associated with subordinate behavior that is "more compliant to social influence…and more cooperative and conciliatory." Because negotiation "has been viewed as a competitive process" and "associated with masculine traits," "the female role" is considered to be "incongruent" with negotiation. While previous studies have found that the way women are viewed and treated when they initiate negotiation may keep them from doing so, these previous studies were primarily focused on situational factors such as who is part of the negotiation and the context rather than "the factors that lead individuals to initiate negotiation" such as "recognition of opportunities, entitlement, and apprehension." It's important to note that the study also measured "the constructs masculinity and femininity instead of relying on the male/female dichotomy."

Important Findings

The first of the three hypotheses tested found that not only do feminine traits not "hamper an individual's ability to identify [opportunities for negotiation]," but they actually "enhance the individual's ability." The second of the three hypotheses tested found that "masculine traits are positively associated with a higher sense of entitlement. The third of the three hypotheses tested found that "feminine traits are positively correlated with higher levels of apprehension towards

initiating negotiations." The study found that traits "traditionally associated with men enhance an individual's sense of entitlement," increasing "the likelihood of the individual engaging in negotiation," and the traits "traditionally associated with women" increase the "level of apprehension" and "decreases the likelihood of an individual engaging in negotiations." These findings are important because they are an extension of previous findings that used an ambiguous definition of male and female and did not determine the traits that are associated with those two genders. The findings of this study are correlated to traits that are specific to masculinity and femininity which were found to be correlated with male and female, respectively. Taking the step to further define masculinity and femininity encourages more reliable results and accurate application. This study highlights a critical issue in negotiation and conflict management and opens the door to understanding why women feel more apprehensive despite being able to identify opportunities for negotiation equally as well as men.

One implication from this study is that women need to become more masculine in order to be less apprehensive and more likely to initiate negotiation. While this is easy to say, it's certainly not easy to do. As stated in the article, "women suffer a backlash when they are perceived as acting in a masculine way." This idea of needing to act more masculine but risking social backlash for doing so is a common situation seen every day. A man and woman could ask someone to do the same task, but the man would be seen as direct, and the woman would be seen as bossy. Stereotypes such as this one have plagued society for hundreds of years. As a negotiator or conflict manager, it's important for me to be aware of how I'm viewed by the other party(s) because of the traditional traits associated with my gender.

Another implication of this study is that these findings might be "largely culture-dependent." Masculine countries will "attribute the most culturally valued traits" to males, and

feminine countries will attribute those traits to females. This study was conducted in Lebanon, a masculine country, but the findings can be applied to any culture, with some small tweaks for correct interpretation. As a negotiator or conflict manager, it's critical to be aware of the culture of the country I'm negotiating in to ensure that I can accurately assess an individual's expected behavior towards entering negotiation or conflict. Utilizing Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture can help me understand the values and norms of other cultures.

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight an individual's propensity to negotiate as a result of their gender. The results of the study "suggest that a reconceptualization of social roles is a necessary condition to bridging the negotiation gender gap." While a reconceptualization of gender roles would help bridge many gaps in society, it's not the most realistic or timely solution to get "other members of society…to modify their understanding of social roles." While that is certainly something that must happen for the betterment of multiple societal issues, the reconceptualization of gender roles is a long-term plan that cannot be implemented right away. Rather than waiting on this long-term strategy, there are recommendations negotiators or conflict managers can use now.

Although society's view of gender roles won't be changing overnight, male negotiators can take it upon themselves to make negotiations and conflict a better experience for women. One recommendation for men negotiating with women is to meet women where they're at, perhaps by toning down some of their masculine traits such as entitlement, or by playing up feminine traits such as being understanding. Since men don't receive as strong of social backlash for displaying feminine traits than women do for displaying masculine traits, male negotiators can help level the playing field. Although this goes against what some people consider the goal

of negotiation, to crush their opponent, and also goes against the male role of agency, there are men who would see value in creating a more positive environment for negotiation. If all parties are at ease and feel that they're in a safe environment, they'll likely enter the negotiation in a more positive mood, perhaps even feeling more collaborative, and there's a chance that a solution might be met that is better than the solution that would have been met before. As a negotiator or conflict manager, being aware of the impact gender has on an individual's likelihood to initiate can allow one to become an advocate for those who may feel more apprehensive. Depending on one's personal negotiation or conflict management style, this recommendation might not be appropriate, but it is a good option for male negotiators in particular who recognize the apprehension women feel and care to do something about it.

Another recommendation is to focus on preparation. As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. While that might not be entirely true, practice and preparation certainly provides comfort and confidence. Stated in the final discussion of the study, negotiation training is useful for bridging the negotiation gap. It's likely that women negotiators and conflict managers, despite the experience they may have, still feel a bit apprehensive in initiating negotiation because of the traditional traits associated with their gender. Being prepared is the key to feeling more confident and confidence is the key to fighting off apprehension. While negotiators and conflict managers probably have ways they like to prepare, there are a few preparation recommendations from the course material that are good for all negotiators and conflict managers to know. Some of the most important parts of the planning process are to define the issues and negotiating goal, identify the stakeholders and their interests, determine your Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA), identify possible solutions and commit to the best one. This planning process is most like the integrative planning process which focuses on "build[ing] relationships

and promot[ing] trust" and also "models cooperative behavior." While this might sound like the best approach for women negotiators to utilize because of their traditional gender roles, negotiators using this kind of approach must "work hard to overcome [biased perceptions] and search assertively for common ground." Being knowledgeable about the different approaches to negotiation and conflict management will allow women to be better prepared and understand which approaches are likely to be most successful for them.

Another recommendation for preparation is to do mock negotiations. Just as people do mock interviews, and just as we completed negotiation case studies in this course, preparing for a negotiation by acting out potential situations with a friend or close colleague might boost confidence. Mock negotiations might help with identifying possible solutions and might help identify what the interests of the other parties are. Being prepared is one of the best, and arguably the easiest, ways to decrease apprehension. Individuals are in control of the amount of time they spend preparing, and the more prepared someone is the more confident they will feel in their ability to complete a successful negotiation.

Another recommendation for women negotiators and conflict managers is to utilize a mediator. There may be some negotiation or conflict situations that make a woman feel more or less apprehensive. For times when apprehension is high and confidence is low, it may be best to use a mediator if an individual feels that their lack of confidence will have a negative outcome on the negotiation. Mediation is a "non-litigative structured process managed by a neutral third party intervenient…" A mediator will help the parties share their "interests, needs, and concerns." After all parties are able to "ask questions… [and] clarify intent," the mediator will help identify possible solutions and the solution that all parties will commit to. Using a mediator

can allow for women to feel supported and advocated for, leading to a decrease in apprehension and likely resulting in a successful negotiation.

Another recommendation specifically for women negotiators and conflict managers is to ignore the social backlash from displaying masculine traits. As we've discussed, women who take on masculine traits tend to face social backlash and are viewed in a negative way. While this might be a roadblock for some, it's not for others. Just as negotiation and conflict management strategies aren't a one size fit all topic, neither is personality. Some people are better at receiving backlash and criticism than others. For women who can handle or ignore the negative backlash, displaying masculine traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness may increase the sense of entitlement they feel and therefore decrease their sense of apprehension. While this recommendation might only be appropriate for women who can accept displaying masculine traits and risking negative backlash, those women, based on the results of the study, are more likely to feel more confident entering a negotiation rather than apprehensive. Although I consider myself to be a feminine woman, I also often display masculine traits such as competitiveness and being very assertive and direct. Throughout the negotiation case studies in this course, I found that reflecting the masculine traits of the males I was negotiating with was more successful than maintaining feminine traits such as being sympathetic and overly focused on the relationship. I personally don't have a problem with risking backlash or being viewed in a masculine way, so this recommendation is one that works well for me.

The final recommendation is specific to negotiators and conflict managers working in a company, perhaps an HR department. It's important to create a safe, rather than hostile, environment for both the company as a whole and for employees in a conflict or negotiation. Because of the apprehension women feel towards negotiation and conflict, creating a safe

environment is a way to advocate for them and make them feel more confident when entering the situation. There are a few things companies can do to create a safe environment. To start, companies can have employees complete unconscious bias training to become aware of their biases towards others. This can help reduce the biases and stereotypes people feel towards colleagues which, in turn, might change attitudes and behaviors when engaging in negotiation or conflict management. Aside from unconscious bias training, companies can create a more inclusive and welcoming culture to build stronger relationships among employees and their superiors, encourage shared experiences between colleagues, and ensure that company values are held deeply throughout all departments and teams. Improving company culture and hiring employees who are a strong fit will help down the line when negotiations or conflict occur. Employees that feel safe and comfortable with one another may feel less apprehensive when entering a negotiation or conflict because they feel more confident in their relationships with colleagues. When entering a negotiation or conflict situation with those outside of the company, employees will still feel less apprehensive because they will feel strongly supported by the company and prepared.

Connection to Course Concepts

Aside from the course concepts utilized in the recommendations section, there are a few other course concepts that relate to the study findings. When thinking about how this study relates to course concepts, I immediately thought of the five conflict management/negotiation styles. As discussed earlier, the male role in society is associated with dominant behavior while the female role is associated with subordinate behavior. Using the traits associated with male and female, it seems that of the five conflict/negotiation styles, more men than women would have a competing style and more women would have a collaborating, accommodating, or compromising

style because of their focus on relationships and cooperation. It would be interesting to extend this study even further and attempt to find an association between gender and the different styles. Although we've learned in this course that negotiation is about more than just having your own needs met, this study often claims that negotiation is viewed as a process of competition which is in line with the distributive bargaining approach, but generally rebuts the effective strategies I've used in this course. Throughout the negotiation case studies completed throughout the session, I found that the integrative approach was most successful.

Future Negotiations & Course Reflection

The empirical research study that I analyzed for this final project helped me identify that some of the feelings I had towards negotiation prior to this course are associated with my gender and the traditional traits of being a woman. While this isn't the sole reason I lacked confidence when entering a negotiation, the results of the study made me feel more "normal" in knowing that my propensity to initiate negotiate is largely impacted by physiology and gender roles set by society. Knowing that apprehension towards negotiation and conflict is something other women deal with, and that a sense of entitlement is normal for men, I feel that I can enter future negotiations being more understanding of others' behavior as well as my own.

This study gave me the opportunity to learn more about the negotiation and conflict management behavior of others. Being informed is one of the best things people can do to be more prepared, and to also make changes in their own behavior; one can't change something if they're not aware a change needs to be made. Analyzing this study helped me better understand the negotiation behavior of my male classmates who, at times, have seemed entitled and overly confident. While everyone chooses to display certain traits over others, knowing that feeling entitled is largely a result of gender helps me feel more accepting of their dominant behavior.

Understanding how masculine and feminine traits impact how men and women enter negotiations and conflict can only help me in the future because I am more aware of my propensity to feel apprehensive and the male's propensity to feel entitled.

At the beginning of this course, I gave myself a 3/10 rating as a negotiator. This was largely due to my lack of confidence when negotiating, along with my passive and avoidant conflict and negotiation style. My goals for this course were to become more confident in confronting conflict, to be less passive, and to stand up for my wants and needs. As the weeks went by and I participated in different types of negotiations, I felt a shift in my attitude towards conflict and negotiation. I felt less intimidated by strong negotiators, and I found myself speaking up more. By the time our final negotiation rolled around, I actually felt excited which isn't something I thought I would ever feel towards the topic.

After completing this course, I feel much more confident in my negotiation and conflict management skills. While I still tend to be a passive communicator, I feel less avoidant of conflict and I feel more comfortable speaking up for what I want and need, both in my personal life and in the course case studies. Although the passivity persists, I don't think it's necessarily a bad quality to have. I find it extremely important to try to maintain a good relationship during negotiations and I think being passive at times helps prevent me from saying things that could damage the relationship. Being passive also allows me to be a good active listener. Having met most of my goals for this course, I think it's fair to change my 3/10 rating to a 6/10. While there is still a lot of room for improvement, this course has provided me with some great tools and has given me the confidence I was lacking.

The major lesson I will take away from this course is in regard to planning and preparation. Prior to this course, I thought I knew how to prepare for a negotiation, but I quickly

realized I had no clue. Learning how to prepare for a negotiation or conflict management situation has helped immensely with feeling more confident and surer of myself and what I have to say. Prior to this course I had only ever practiced preparing for a salary negotiation. I spent a short amount of time listing out the reasons why I felt I deserved that salary, and I also did a bit of calculating to figure out what the minimum target of my Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) was. All I had prepared to negotiate for was one number, but this class and the negotiation case studies opened my eyes to all of the things that can be negotiated on in the same circumstance. As someone who is typically quite anxious prior to any negotiation or difficult conversation, one would think that preparation would be a key step in keeping my anxiety at bay, however no one had ever shown me how to prepare for a negotiation before. Utilizing the planning process discussed earlier has been the best tool for me throughout this course. I am a very logical thinker and need to think things through while having all of the available information in front of me. Following the logical order of identifying the issues to be negotiated on, determining the stakeholders and their interests, and identifying possible solutions as well as my BATNA allowed me to successfully negotiate almost all of the course case studies. Utilizing a more complicated tool such as the currently perceived choice tool as well as the target balance sheet requires some more challenging thought for me personally but are still great tools that can help a negotiator prepare for different perspectives. As I will soon enter into some professional negotiations, utilizing the preparation tools and planning process will help me feel more confident and determined to reach a successful outcome. This course and the negotiation planning process specifically will also be helpful for me as I begin a new journey into mentorship. Although I haven't had much negotiation experience, I will be able to share these lessons and be part of creating the next generation of great negotiators and conflict managers.

References

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