# CENTER FOR GENDER IN ORGANIZATIONS

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# NEGOTIATION THROUGH A GENDER LENS

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CGO

Linking gender and organizational effectiveness

CENTER FOR GENDER IN
ORGANIZATIONS

The Center for Gender in Organizations (CGO) is dedicated to advancing learning and understanding of the connection between gender, in all its complexities, and organizational effectiveness. Through research, education, convening, and information dissemination, CGO aims to be a major catalyst for change in enhancing equity and effectiveness in organizations in both the profit and non-profit sectors worldwide. CGO is a part of Simmons School of Management and is supported by core funding from Simmons College and The Ford Foundation. To learn more about CGO and our activities, visit our website at www.simmons.edu/som/cgo.

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Negotiation is a critical skill for managers today. This increasing relevance of negotiation to managerial work has increased the educational demand for negotiation skills. Not surprisingly, with this concern for practice, questions about gender—specifically concerning the differences between men and women and the consequences of these differences—have been commonly asked. They have not been adequately answered. In this paper, traditional views of gender and negotiation are reviewed. An alternative perspective looks at gender as a systemic factor, influencing not only men and women, but also the very knowledge that constitutes effective negotiation practice. This perspective has the potential to expand the domain of strategic advice that can help all negotiators become more effective at what they do.

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Negotiation is a critical skill for managers today. In the not too distant past, those who negotiated did so because their jobs required them to bargain over contracts with suppliers, customers, and/or unions. In other words, negotiation was a skill used primarily by people who did it for a living. Now, changes in the economy and shifts in organizational structures mean that a major part of a manager's job is likely to be spent negotiating. The shifting boundaries between a firm, its suppliers, its customers, and even its competition, require that more people than ever are likely to be both negotiating complex deals and then bargaining over their implementation. Further, more often than not, managers are in roles in which their responsibility exceeds authority. This means that significant time is spent negotiating with a range of internal and external stakeholders in order to get a job done, a budget approved, and staffing assigned for projects, among other tasks. In network and team structures, bargaining is the common strategy used to secure commitments and buy-in. And as people change jobs throughout the course of their careers, there are many opportunities to negotiate conditions and compensation and/or to secure funds to support new ventures.

This increasing relevance of negotiation to managerial work has increased the educational demand for negotiation skills. A significant field of research has developed to meet that demand, a field that is guided by a pragmatic concern for practice. The field is marked by an interest in doing empirical research that can be easily translated in prescriptive advice, advice that promises to make people better negotiators. Not surprisingly, with this concern for practice, questions about gender—specifically concerning the differences between men and women and the consequences of these differences—have been commonly asked. They have not been adequately answered. A 4th Frame perspective poses different questions, and not only about gender.[1] It also has the potential to expand the domain of strategic advice that can help negotiators become more effective at what they do.

# II.   GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE 1ST AND 2ND FRAMES

Gender is one of the most easily measured of variables and so it is not surprising that the question "Do men and women negotiate differently?" has dominated the research on gender in negotiations. The differences that are identified tend to cluster around cooperation versus competition and individualist versus relational perspectives. Women presumably are more cooperative and relationally oriented than men. Despite decades of trying to demonstrate these effects, the results are unconvincing. Although individual pieces of research produce contradictory findings, meta-analyses have shown statistically significant, but nonetheless small, differences on the cooperation-competitiveness dimension (Walters et al., 1998). In other words, the chances that a negotiator would be cooperative or competitive in any given situation is less likely to have to do with gender than other factors, such as position in the organization (Watson, 1994).

To ask a question about gender differences assumes that gender is an essential and stable attribute of individuals. Accounting for these differences requires that there be some basis in biology, socialization, or role theory to explain why these differences exist. Generally, the argument is advanced that a woman's social development and the mothering role she often plays leads her to emphasize nurturance and support in her social relations, whereas men are groomed for separation and individuation. These social factors are typically identified as the root causes of difference in negotiation (Kolb and Coolidge, 1991). The problem is that these differences in development or role are not directly tested in the negotiation research but rather are mobilized after the fact to explain what differences are found (Ely, 1999). Thus, when men outperform women in negotiations, a common finding in salary and compensation negotiations, the reasons are attributed to problems that women have: they care too much about relationships; don't set their aspirations high enough; and are too emotional, among other reasons (Stuhlmacher and Walters, 1999). As a 1st Frame perspective would predict, this study of gender difference is really about women's deficiencies.

In a field that prides itself on its pragmatism, the advice that comes from this stream of research can be a problem. First, it is directed really only to women—how they can better equip themselves to negotiate. There is nothing that derives from this line of inquiry that speaks to men. Second, the advice from this work may itself be gendered. Thus, to tell women to act in a more self-interested or assertive way assumes that these behaviors are neutral in the sense that men and women can use them interchangeably. However, these behaviors, when enacted by a woman, are likely to be seen differently from how one sees them in a man. This advice asymmetry can create double binds for women.

The 2nd Frame becomes particularly salient in the distinctions between integrative or mutual gains approaches as opposed to zero sum or distributive negotiations. The former approach relies on more relationally based principles. From a 2nd Frame perspective, therefore, feminine skills are likely to be valued. Indeed, the importance of relationships has been popularized in a number of books (Fisher and Brown, 1987; Ury, 1990). The concept is captured in the *dual concern* model—to do well for oneself, one also has to have a high concern for the interests of the other party (Pruitt, 1981). Thus more feminine attributed skills, such as empathy and

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understanding, are advocated as central to reaching mutual gains outcomes (Kolb and Coolidge, 1991; Mnookin et al, 2000).

While there is considerable evidence for the dual concern model, the actual association of these supposed feminine skills with outcomes is not well developed (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). In "Integrative Bargaining: Does Gender Make a Difference?" Patrick Calhoun and William P. Smith (1999) set out to test whether a "feminine concern" for the other party is correlated with joint gains for men and women. The findings are not encouraging. It is not enough to care about the other. For women to achieve high joint gain, in this case profit, they need to be primed to pay more attention to their own needs. Without this priming, they too easily make concessions. For men, looking out for themselves yielded the highest joint profit; they had no need to attend to the interests of the other party. This study and others in this tradition call into question the notion of valuing feminine skills. Indeed, it is difficult to separate the advice—pay more attention to self-interest—from that coming out of work in the 1st Frame.

Further, even when supposedly feminine skills are valorized for their contribution to mutual gains, a subtle translation process occurs. To value the feminine is to appreciate the relational belief system in which such attributes as empathy and caring are rooted (Fletcher, 1994; Fletcher, 1999). However, as these skills have been popularized, they are divorced from that context and become instrumental means to achieve individual ends. Thus empathy becomes a way to learn about the interests of the other party in order to do well for oneself (Mnookin, 2000) and concern for the other party translates into "enlightened self-interest" (Rubin et al, 1994).

Taken together, the Frame One and Frame Two perspectives that have dominated the thinking about gender and negotiations have lead to a theoretical and practical dead end. The research and the pragmatic advice that derives from them reinforce masculine attributes: enlightened individual self-interest; analytic rationality; objectivity; and instrumentality, for example. Those attributes typically labeled as feminine are less valued: empathy; concern for relationships; subjectivity; and emotional expressiveness, for example. While feminine attributes can be appreciated, they pale beside the traits associated with masculinity, which are seen as intimately tied to success. Thus gender in the 1st and 2nd Frames translates into a problem only for women. The theory and practice of negotiation remain untouched by this work.

# III.   GENDER AND NEGOTIATION FROM THE 4TH FRAME

To look at gender in negotiations from the 4th Frame is to take a deeper look at the negotiation field than a simple comparison of differences between men and women. It is to consider how theory, research, and norms of practice that appear neutral and natural are gendered and to uncover what has been silenced or ignored in the field. From that perspective, there are three areas that a 4th Frame can elucidate: 1) the challenges of social position; 2) the ways gender and legitimacy are negotiated in bargaining interactions; and 3) the possibilities for transformative outcomes.

## A.   GENDER AND THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL POSITION

As the negotiation field has developed in the recent past, it has been dominated by several perspectives: economic decision analysis (Raiffa, 1982; Lax and Sebenius, 1986); social psychology (Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim, 1994; Thompson, 2001); and cognitive psychology (Neale and Bazerman, 1991). These perspectives focus on individual actors (as either principals or agents) engaged in transactional deal making. The best outcomes are achieved through the rational analysis of issues, interests, and options and packages that can be constructed across differences. In so doing, these rather technical negotiation models ignore the very social processes that make the kind of mutual gains negotiation they espouse possible. To focus, for example, on cognition and analytic prowess as major barriers to agreement minimizes how important social positioning is to one's ability to engage the issues in the ways the models suggest. By ignoring these social processes, individuals come to blame themselves and their deficiencies for inequities that no amount of rationality can correct.

A good example of this problem is the issue of relative power in negotiations. Bargaining power is typically dismissed by noting that powerful actors don't necessarily get good outcomes (Lax and Sebenius, 1986). While that is surely true, it is also true that not all negotiators are equally situated because of their positions in organizational hierarchies, their connection to (or exclusion from) influential networks, or their class, race, gender, or ethnicity. In most empirical work, bargaining power is seen as a function of alternatives or BATNA—Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement—a concept that locates power in the choice situations of negotiators. What is missing from this construct is an exploration of the conditions under which different parties to a negotiation have good BATNAs or access to information about the other party's BATNA. These have been shown to have a significant effect on outcomes (Pinkley et al, 1994).

Studies of women and minorities in negotiation demonstrate the importance of *positioning* and how important it is to how members of these groups fare (Watson, 1994; Kolb and Williams, 2000). In a study of salary negotiation, Seidel, Polzer and Stewart (2000) show that lower salary outcomes for minorities could be explained by the access they had to social networks within and across organizations and not by their BATNAs in a salary negotiation. A 4th Frame perspective enlarges the domain for theory and potential research to the many sources of power inequities in negotiations. It brings into focus the challenges of social positioning, especially unequal status and influence, and offers strategic advice on ways to negotiate from these positions (Kolb and Williams, 2001).

**B. GENDER AND THE CHALLENGES OF STAYING IN A LEGITIMATE POSITION**

The 4th Frame shifts thinking about gender away from essential characteristics of men and women to the negotiation interaction itself. Gender and its enactment is quite fluid and variable; the challenge is to understand how and under what conditions gender is mobilized in negotiation. Understanding how people do gender in negotiations opens up new possibilities for strategic advice on managing the challenges that result. In "Gender and the Shadow Negotiation," Kolb (1998) describes different ways that gender can become prominent in negotiations. The first has to do with identity and how salient gender is to an individual negotiator. At the individual level, one can consider the degree to which negotiators identify with the masculine and/or feminine side of themselves and how they enact these identities in the process. Recent research by Hannah Riley (2001), for example, suggests that women are more likely to take up a traditional feminine role when engaged in distributive bargaining and when they are negotiating for themselves.

Expectations and stereotypes can impact the degree to which gender becomes salient. In a series of studies, Laura Kray, Adam Galinsky, and Leigh Thompson show how susceptible negotiators are to positive and negative stereotypes (Kray et al, in press). When masculine stereotypes are associated with negotiation effectiveness, men outperform women. By the same token, when bargainers are primed to link negotiation effectiveness with feminine traits, women outperform men (Kray et al, 2001). Interestingly, the reverse is also true. When negotiators are told that masculine traits such as self-interest, assertiveness, rationality and limited displays of emotion are associated with inferior outcomes, women outperform men. And when negotiators are told that feminine traits—listening well, being verbally articulate, and having insight into others' feelings—yield poor outcomes, women do worse than men. This line of research implies that negotiators are suggestible to stereotypes about gender. This is even more likely to happen in ambiguous, less structured situations (Riley, 2001).

Looking at negotiation interactions through the 4th Frame yields process insights beyond a more dynamic way of understanding gender. It helps us appreciate the interactive by-play—how negotiators use *strategic moves* to enhance their position and how these moves can have the effect of undermining or delegitimizing the other party (Kolb and Williams, 2000, 2001). Negotiators are most effective when they are positioned to advocate for their interests. When a party is challenged in ways that put them in a one-down and/or gendered position, they have a more difficult time pressing for what they need. To have one's competence, motives, ideas, legitimacy, and style challenged as the other party presses for advantage can undermine one's position and sense of oneself. It is important to note that strategic moves are not made out of malice, but are part of the normal routine of people pushing to make the best agreement for themselves. For mutually beneficial outcomes to be realized, however, both parties must occupy a legitimate position from which to advocate for what they need. In other words, there needs to be some measure of parity between the parties to keep them working toward mutual gains. Thus, when strategic moves threaten that parity, they need to be resisted. The research suggests that there are choices in how these moves can be resisted or *turned* to restore a working relationship between parties. Turns are responses that shift the meaning of actions that others have taken to discredit or undermine a negotiator (Goffman, 1967). A repertoire of *turns*, such as interrupting the action, naming a challenge, correcting impressions, and diverting to the problem, helps

negotiators manage difficult negotiation interactions (Kolb and Williams, 2000). The 4th Frame opens up this new area of thinking about what is happening in the shadows of a negotiation.

Challenges also become a way to resist gender stereotypes and, indeed, any move that puts a negotiator in a disadvantageous position (Gherardi, 1996). For example, in Cynthia's Challenge (see Appendix), we see a person who finds herself exploited by the organization, particularly her boss. One could question how much this is a matter of gender—the degree to which Cynthia plays the role of helper in the organization and George's expectation that she will continue to do so without much in the way of title and reward. Or that the expectation that people need to promote and push for their own rewards reflects a gendered standard in this organization. One might also observe her experience the last time she negotiated with George and the degree to which her salary demands and how she presented them violated his stereotyped gendered expectations of her. In this negotiation, one could consider what kinds of challenges are likely, for example, to her competence, her ideas, her style, or challenges that threaten her or appeal for her sympathy. With some of these in mind, Cynthia can be prepared to *turn* these challenges and to keep herself in a viable bargaining position (Kolb and Williams, 2000).

## C.   GENDER AND THE POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION

The dominant paradigm in negotiation laboratory research (and in most teaching) is a multi-issue game, where optimal integrative outcomes are achieved by making trades or packaging issues that have different relative values to bargainers (this is called logrolling). In most empirical work, there are definitively optimal outcomes, which are measurable and scoreable and that are achieved only through a process of trade-offs. With this criterion as the basis for assessing outcomes, other possibilities that may involve more feminine concerns are defined as less than optimal. Studies of friends, dating couples, and people who have relationships with each other, for example, often emphasize fairness and equity in negotiations and so fail to achieve the kinds of optimal outcomes defined in the research (Valley et al, 1995). Thus, in the design of research and the criteria by which agreements are judged, other possibilities are closed off. In "Rethinking Negotiation: Feminist Views of Communication and Exchange," Putnam and Kolb (2000) show how the dominance of exchange in both distributive and integrative negotiations, particularly the focus on trades as the major activity of bargaining, renders invisible other ways that parties engage issues and create agreements. Negotiators can develop relationships with each other that lead to more open inquiry and that, in turn, create new understandings about the issues in dispute which can lead to different kinds of outcomes beyond trades.[2] Under these conditions, different combinations of skills and behavior would become more important. With this broader definition of what mutual inquiry might look like in negotiation there are possibilities for transformative outcomes that had not been thought about before the negotiations began.

Traditionally, the study of gender in negotiations has been narrowly conceived as one of difference. The result of this work is static and tends to reinforce existing stereotypes and practices. By looking at negotiations through a 4th Frame gender lens, it becomes clear that the individualist focus in the field misses the social and interactive dynamics that characterize negotiations in most settings. By attending to these social processes, which a 4th Frame on gender does, it becomes possible to expand the strategic repertoire of what people need to know

to be effective negotiators.  A 4<sup>th</sup> Frame also provides a lens from which to question models of negotiation, not only to understand better why they make gender differences prominent, but also to explore how they undermine more feminine values like relationship- and trust-building as well as problem solving.

[1]   The conventional scholarly wisdom about gender can be captured through three traditional approaches, or frames, about what gender is and why inequities exist between men and women at work.  These three frames are rooted in the common tendency to think of gender as an individual characteristic and gender issues as stemming primarily from differences between men and women, either in the traits and skills they possess or in the ways they are treated.  The 4th Frame offers a conceptual leap from thinking about gender as an individual characteristic to thinking about it as a systemic factor, influencing not only men and women, but also the very knowledge that underlies our beliefs about what makes for good workers, good work, and successful organizations (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000).

[2]   Alternative models that stand in comparison to the dominant one will likely appear deficient, devalued, and inadequate since the standards of traditional perspectives have shaped our very knowledge of a particular phenomenon.  The temptation, when exposed to "difference," is to critique it using the assumptions and criteria of the traditional approach.  Thus, feminine approaches are critiqued because they leave a person open to exploitation.  This criticism, however, draws from and functions within the status quo.  In many ways, it serves to reinstate the dominant stance of the traditional model rather than to critique its alternative.

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**Cynthia's Challenge[1]**

Cynthia is a Project Leader at an international medical research institute. She has worked there for five years and has received salary increases as she has taken on more responsibilities. With the resignation of the Program Director in her division, Cynthia is now one of the most senior people in the division in terms of responsibility, but not in terms of salary. At the same time, she has been taking on added responsibilities because of turnover and finds herself working more than 80 hours a week, picking up the slack from the Program Director's departure. She knows that others with less responsibility are paid more than she is and that eats at her. She also wants the Program Director position. She's essentially been in an acting role and wants it to be official. She's always been on good terms with George, the Director General, pitching in as needed. Recently, she oversaw the five-year external review of the program in her division and worked around the clock to make sure it was successful, and it was. Deciding the time was right, she planned to see George about a promotion to the Program Director position with an increase in pay the job merited.

Cynthia had a negotiation with George about salary a year ago. Although she ultimately got a raise, the negotiations were difficult, and she felt she deserved more. George praised her, telling her how much he valued her contributions to the Institute. But when she raised the salary issue, he became angry and accused her of being inconsiderate and irresponsible in bringing the issue up when they faced major funding challenges. Cynthia did not want this situation to be repeated.

[1] The conventional scholarly wisdom about gender can be captured through three traditional approaches, or frames, about what gender is and why inequities exist between men and women at work. These three frames are rooted in the common tendency to think of gender as an individual characteristic and gender issues as stemming primarily from differences between men and women, either in the traits and skills they possess or in the ways they are treated. The 4th Frame offers a conceptual leap from thinking about gender as an individual characteristic to thinking about it as a systemic factor, influencing not only men and women, but also the very knowledge that underlies our beliefs about what makes for good workers, good work, and successful organizations (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000).

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[1] This vignette was developed by Deborah M. Kolb, Professor of Management, Simmons School of Management, Center for Gender in Organizations, 2001.