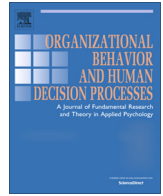




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A social-cognitive approach to understanding gender differences in negotiator ethics: The role of moral identity



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ABSTRACT

To date, gender differences in ethics have received little theoretical attention. We utilize a social-cognitive framework to explain *why* these differences emerge and *when* women engage in less unethical negotiating behavior than do men. We propose that, relative to men's, women's stronger moral identities suppress unethical negotiating behavior. Study 1 establishes a gender difference in moral identity strength through a meta-analysis of over 19,000 people. Study 2 observes gender differences in two aspects of negotiator ethics – moral disengagement and opportunism. Study 3 establishes moral identity strength as an antecedent to negotiator ethics. Finally, Studies 4 and 5 explore financial incentives as a situational moderator. Because financial incentives temporarily decrease the salience of moral identity, they could mitigate gender differences in negotiator ethics, leading women to act more like men. Across both studies, financial incentives impacted women's (but not men's) unethical negotiating behavior. Our findings help to explain why and when gender differences in ethics emerge.

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1. Introduction

Since Gilligan (1982) proposed that women and men reason differently about morality, scholars have found persistent evidence of gender differences in ethics both generally (for meta-analyses, see Borkowski & Ugras, 1998; Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997; Whitley, Nelson, & Jones, 1999) and in negotiations specifically (Haselhuhn & Wong, 2012; Kray & Haselhuhn, 2012; Robinson, Lewicki, & Donahue, 2000; Westbrook, Arendall, & Padelford, 2011).

Differences in men's and women's ethicality in negotiations have received relatively little theoretical attention to date, despite the importance of understanding negotiation processes and outcomes, as well as gender differences within negotiations. Negotiations are a critical organizational context to understand. Beyond being a fundamental mechanism by which resources are divided, women face numerous hurdles in negotiations (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005; Kray, Kennedy, & Van Zant, 2014; Kray & Thompson, 2004; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Tinsley, Cheldelin, Schneider, & Amanatullah, 2009). Additionally, negotiations are a masculine context (Bowles & Kray, 2013), in which men are expected to perform better than

women (Kray et al., 2001), and poor performance relative to women can threaten men's sense of masculinity (Kray & Haselhuhn, 2012; Netchaeva, Kouchaki, & Sheppard, 2015). To the extent that unethical tactics are perceived to provide an advantage over competitors, men may therefore be especially likely to use them when negotiating, whereas women may be less inclined to rely on unethical tactics. Practically, because unethical tactics can help negotiators to claim value (O'Connor & Carnevale, 1997; Schweitzer, DeChurch, & Gibson, 2005), gender differences in negotiator ethics may provide a novel explanation for why women have worse negotiation outcomes than men under some conditions (Mazei et al., 2015; Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Alternatively, to the extent that women negotiators have ethical strengths, women may have a negotiating advantage over men under certain conditions, such as when relational capital and subjective value are important (Kennedy & Kray, 2015).

The current research builds on contemporary social-cognitive accounts for ethical behavior to understand why and when gender differences in negotiator ethics emerge. We go beyond existing research on gender differences in ethics in two ways. In considering *why* women negotiate more ethically than men do, we propose that women internalize moral traits in their self-definitions more strongly than men do—that is, women have stronger moral identities. We expect moral identity to have a number of downstream consequences in negotiations, including moral disengagement

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and unethical behavior. To our knowledge, we are the first to provide an empirical test of why gender differences emerge in ethics generally or in unethical negotiating behavior specifically. In asking *when* gender differences in negotiator ethics are likely to emerge, we expect that certain situational factors (e.g., financial incentives) will suppress chronic gender differences in ethical behavior, leading women to act similarly to men.

1.1. Gender differences in ethical attitudes and behavior

Philosophers (e.g., Kant) and early psychologists (e.g., Freud, Kohlberg) originally proposed that men were morally superior to women (for a summary, see Walker, 2006). Since these controversial propositions, research has examined gender differences in ethical attitudes and behavior, both generally and in negotiations specifically.

1.1.1. Outside the negotiation context

Many studies have explored the extent to which women and men view unethical behaviors as such. Generally, men are more accepting of unethical behavior than women. Meta-analyses have found that women report more ethical attitudes (Borkowski & Ugras, 1998), hold business practices to higher ethical standards (Franke et al., 1997), and report less favorable attitudes toward cheating (Whitley et al., 1999) than do men. When men do view a behavior as unethical, they still report greater willingness to engage in the behavior than do women (Doty, Tomkiewicz, & Bass, 2005). When women are asked to sacrifice ethical values (e.g., honesty or loyalty) for money or social status at work, they lose interest in the job, whereas men do not (Kennedy & Kray, 2013). Gender differences in ethical attitudes emerge not only in student samples, but also in samples of working adults (Valentine & Rittenburg, 2007).

Other studies have examined ethical behavior. For instance, Dreber and Johannesson (2008) explored deceptive behavior via an economic game (the “Deception Game”) and found that only 38% of women lied to secure a monetary benefit, relative to 55% of men. In a meta-analysis, Kish-Gephart, Harrison, and Trevino (2010) found gender differences to emerge not only for ethical intentions, but also for ethical behavior.

1.1.2. Within the negotiation context

Gender differences in ethical attitudes and behavior have also been documented in negotiations. Kray and Haselhuhn (2012) found that men exhibited more lenient and egocentric attitudes about negotiating ethics than did women. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2000) found that women were less accepting of a wide array of unethical negotiating strategies than were men. Examining negotiators' behavior, Haselhuhn and Wong (2012) coded deception from email transcripts of a negotiation: Whereas only 11% of women were deceptive, 25% of men used deception to secure a deal that harmed their counterpart's interests. Although less research has focused on gender differences in the realm of negotiation, these findings suggest that women negotiators exhibit relatively high ethical standards and engage in less unethical negotiating behavior than do men.

Why might these gender differences in negotiator ethics emerge? Is there an underlying psychological factor that can account for gender differences in unethical negotiating behavior? To date, these questions have received little theoretical attention. For instance, Franke et al. (1997, p. 920) noted that “the ethics literature has taken on a debate-like quality where the focus appears to center on *whether* gender differences exist, rather than exploring *why* such differences might occur.” Because the literature has focused on documenting the existence of gender differences in negotiator ethics rather than providing an explanation for these

differences, we focus on exploring the critical question of why gender differences in negotiator ethics exist.

1.2. Explaining why gender differences emerge in negotiator ethics

1.2.1. Historical approaches

One explanation for these gender differences focuses on women's and men's distinct styles of ethical reasoning. Building on cognitive developmental models of morality that assume people progress into increasingly sophisticated modes of processing and resolving moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1971; Piaget, 1932), Gilligan (1982) proposed that men and women utilize qualitatively different moral approaches. By this account, women exhibit an ethic of care, whereas men exhibit an ethic of justice, meaning that women resolve ethical dilemmas by considering others' needs whereas men resolve them by considering individuals' rights. Gilligan's proposition inspired much research spanning several decades (e.g., Ford & Lowery, 1986; Pratt, Golding, Hunter, & Sampson, 1982; Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, & Perry, 2002; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Jaffee and Hyde's (2000) meta-analysis found that women do rely more on care-based reasoning and less on justice-based reasoning than men, but concluded that the gender differences were too small to justify treating women and men as different types. Moreover, because more recent research has found evidence that moral intuitions, not moral reasoning, drive ethical behavior for most people (Haidt, 2001) gender differences in moral reasoning are unlikely to explain why men and women differ in unethical negotiating behavior. Finally, previous attempts to explain gender differences in ethical behavior in terms of distinct reasoning processes cannot explain when and why moderators exist. These limitations suggest that a more nuanced approach is needed to explain gender differences in ethical behavior.

1.2.2. A social-cognitive approach

With this goal in mind, we adopted a social-cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1991), which emphasizes self-regulatory processes in explaining gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) and ethical behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002). According to this perspective, degree of cognitive sophistication in moral reasoning is less important in predicting behavior than is a consideration of whether being a moral person is an essential aspect of the self-concept because how individuals define themselves motivates behavior that is consistent with the self-definition (Blasi, 1980, 1993, 2004). As noted by Bandura (2001, pp. 8–9), “A complete theory of moral agency must link moral knowledge and reasoning to moral conduct [because] moral reasoning is translated into actions through self-regulatory mechanisms.” Another advantage of this approach is that it allows for situational variation in ethical behavior, depending on the momentary salience of an individual's moral identity. Although identity is a relatively stable construct in the sense that some traits are more chronically and readily accessible than others in an individual's self-concept (Boegershausen, Aquino, & Reed, 2015), situational cues can temporarily activate or de-activate moral identities within people's working self-concepts (Aquino & Reed, 2002), allowing scope for understanding how context can affect men and women's ethicality. Thus, by considering moral identity, the current research focuses not on individual differences in the type of moral content that appeals to women and men, but on how gender differences in moral identity interact with the social context of competitive negotiations to predict ethical cognitions and behavior.

1.2.2.1. Moral identity. To start then, we draw from prior research that has linked identity to ethicality. Moral identity is defined as conceiving of the self in terms of moral traits that indicate respon-

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