

“Passing the Buck”: Incongruence Between Gender Role and Topic Leads to Avoidance of Negotiation

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Abstract

Avoidance of negotiation is rarely investigated, and the implicit assumption guiding much of the current negotiation research is that engagement is inevitable. In addition, compensation is typically examined, although topics related to both employment and family life are also negotiated in organizations. Two experimental studies tested hypotheses about how incongruence between gender role and negotiation topic influences the likelihood of passing off the negotiation, i.e., “passing the buck.” In study 1, women were significantly more likely to avoid a negotiation about compensation than men, and aversion partially mediated this gender difference. Study 2 revealed a significant two-way interaction between gender and negotiation topic on avoidance. Women were significantly more likely to avoid negotiation about compensation than men; conversely, there was a trend for men to avoid negotiation about access to a lactation room, with the interaction mediated by aversion. The findings underscore the importance of both negotiation topics and avoidance.

Just as two parties in a negotiation must agree to a potential solution for it to constitute an agreement, it takes both parties to agree to negotiate for a negotiation to occur in the first place. This process typically involves one person explicitly approaching the other party and initiating a negotiation and the other party either engaging in the negotiation or not. This interchange is critical because it determines whether a negotiation will occur, let alone an agreement be reached. Surprisingly, very little is known about

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the initiation of negotiation, and even less about how people respond when someone else initiates a negotiation with them. Some research points to the role of gender in determining people's propensity to initiate negotiation with evidence that women are less likely than men to initiate a negotiation (Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006; Small, Gelfand, Babcock, & Gettman, 2007). However, it is not known whether gender also influences negotiators' willingness to engage versus avoid when faced with an initiation of negotiation.

In this article, I go beyond a simple gender differences explanation and consider how gender role incongruence with the negotiation situation, specifically in terms of the topic being negotiated, influences the way individuals respond to the initiation of negotiation, especially in terms of their likelihood to avoid rather than engage in the negotiation. In two empirical studies, I propose and test hypotheses that, when faced with an initiation of negotiation, gender role incongruence with the negotiation situation on the part of the responder leads to a state of aversion to engaging in the negotiation, which subsequently leads to avoidance.

Avoidance and Negotiation

When faced with an initiation of negotiation from another party, an individual has several options, such as engaging in the negotiation, involving a third party, or avoiding the negotiation. Research in negotiation primarily has examined the engagement phase, even though avoidance is also one possible response. People may avoid negotiations for a variety of reasons—fear of failure, discomfort, or lack of skill. Any of these reasons suggest that people avoid negotiations because they find them aversive. Aversion is defined as the experience of repugnance or intense dislike, which creates the impulse to move away (Merriam-Webster, 1991). More generally, aversive situations are usually considered intimidating and anxiety-provoking (Osborne, 2001; Small et al., 2007).

Avoidance of situations that individuals find aversive is a basic human drive that was first studied systematically by Thorndike, who originated operant conditioning theory (Thorndike, 1898), as well as by Cannon, who identified the fight or flight mechanism (Cannon, 1932). The basic idea underlying this research was that people innately avoid aversive situations. Likewise, pursuing pleasure versus avoiding pain—the hedonic principle—is a fundamental principle of psychology (Freud & Hubback, 1922). Higgins (1997) subsequently showed that the classic, hedonic principle is an oversimplification of motivation and self-regulation, and that, within the broader pursuit of desired goals, people implement promotion-focused or prevention-focused strategies depending upon the particular goal. In addition, extensive empirical research on stress and coping in fields such as health psychology and psychiatry has shown that avoidance is a widely used coping mechanism in response to a stressor (Clohessy & Ehlers, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993; Roth & Cohen, 1986).

In the conflict literature, avoidance is characterized by complete disengagement from the conflict resolution process (de Dreu & van de Vliert, 1997). For the most part, researchers in conflict and negotiation have discounted avoidance as a strategy (Blake & Mouton, 1978; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Rahim, 1985), and according to the Dual

Concerns Model (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), avoidance is only used under conditions of low concern for oneself and low concern for the other party. However, by essentially equating avoidance with indifference to a negotiation situation, i.e., only used when one has little concern for oneself and the other party, the conflict and negotiation literatures appear to underestimate how commonly avoidance may be used. Nonetheless, it is difficult to estimate the prevalence of avoidance given that, despite some evidence that avoidance is a commonly used strategy for conflict resolution (Best & Andreasen, 1976), empirical research in conflict and negotiation rarely addresses avoidance, with a few notable exceptions that primarily investigate the role of culture in conflict resolution styles (Morris et al., 1998; Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994; Tjosvold & Sun, 2002).

Avoidance has been conceptualized somewhat more broadly within the organizational literature than in the conflict and negotiation literatures. Ashforth and Lee (1990) argued that avoidance should not be simply equated with withdrawal. Instead, they argue that avoidance is typically manifested as “defensive behaviors,” such as shifting responsibility to someone else, i.e., “passing the buck.” Avoidance in the form of shifting responsibility has not been studied previously in relation to negotiation, most likely because of the fact that, within the negotiation literature, avoidance is considered synonymous with withdrawal. However, complete withdrawal from a negotiation is not always a realistic option, whereas shifting responsibility is a more inconspicuous and socially acceptable way of avoiding. If the prospect of negotiating is perceived as aversive, passing off the negotiation to someone else may be a socially acceptable way to avoid engaging in the negotiation as opposed to outright disengagement. This begs the question of when engaging in a negotiation will be perceived as aversive, which, in turn, will lead to passing the buck rather than engagement.

Gender and Negotiation

Findings from previous research on gender and negotiation support the prediction that women are more likely than men to perceive responding to an initiation of negotiation as aversive. Past research on gender and negotiation has shown that women rate negotiating as significantly more aversive than men do (Small et al., 2007), that initiation of a negotiation elicits greater nervousness on the part of women than men (Babcock et al., 2006; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007), and that men tend to slightly outperform women in distributive negotiations (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999).

However, there is also evidence showing that, in certain negotiation situations, women outperform men (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001). For example, when negotiating on behalf of others, women’s negotiation performance was slightly better than that of men’s (Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005), and when told that typical feminine characteristics are associated with success at the bargaining table, women also outperformed men (Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002). These findings indicate that gender alone would not necessarily lead to avoidance as a response to an initiation of negotiation, since the role of gender appears to involve a complex interplay between the person-situation fit in a negotiation. In fact, the mixed findings concerning gender and negotiation point to the importance of gender role incongruence, meaning the fit—or

lack thereof—between a person's gender and the gendered characteristics of a negotiation situation. In the following sections, I discuss gender role incongruence in greater detail, as well as relate gender role incongruence to avoidance.

Gender Role Incongruence

Roles are generally defined as a set of expectations and norms that guide behavior in a given situation (Katz & Kahn, 1978), and gender is one of the most salient roles in people's lives. Gender roles refer to a set of expectations and norms that are associated with being a man or a woman, and the breadwinner versus caretaker role is one of the principal distinctions made between the social roles for men and women (Eagly, 1987). Similarly, Bakan (1966) identified the distinction between agency and communality, with agency, characterized by assertive and independent behavior, associated with the masculine gender role, and communality, characterized by caretaking and concern for others, associated with the feminine gender role.

These distinct social roles render different role expectations for men and women (Eagly, 1987) and ultimately become self-reinforcing by way of descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes, which refer to features of a stereotype and to beliefs about how people should behave, respectively, and often lead to penalties for stereotype violation (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Both men and women who act contrary to their gender role have been shown to experience penalties (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Riggs, 1997), and thus, it is not surprising that behaving outside of one's gender role has also been shown to arouse discomfort (Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005; Luhaorg & Zivian, 1995; Parry, 1987).

Similar to stereotyping, sex-typing, which refers to the classification of jobs, behaviors and tasks by sex, pertains to the extent to which people expect someone to perform a certain task based on his or her sex. There is empirical evidence for sex-typed tasks, meaning that different tasks and behaviors are classified as masculine, feminine or neutral (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Deaux & Emswiller, 1974). For example, preparing formula for a baby bottle is considered a feminine sex-typed task, whereas oiling a squeaky hinge is considered a masculine sex-typed task. Furthermore, both men and women have been shown to experience discrimination when applying for opposite sex-typed jobs, i.e., when a job was female sex-typed women received higher ratings than men for selection and vice versa (Davison & Burke, 2000). According to Heilman's Lack of Fit Model (1983), both stereotypes about women and sex-typing of jobs help to perpetuate sex discrimination in the workplace by contributing to perceptions of lack of fit, with these perceptions held both by the individual target and by others in the workplace. In terms of negotiation research, the consequences of a lack of fit and sex-typing in negotiation situations have not been examined.

In the following section, I explain in more detail how gender role incongruence in a negotiation, meaning a lack of fit between one's gender role and the gendered nature of the negotiation situation, may affect behavior at the bargaining Table. I specifically focus on the topic being negotiated and the fit, or lack thereof, between the topic and the negotiator's traditional gender role.

Negotiation Topics and Gender Role Incongruence at the Bargaining Table

Both men and women negotiate in various domains of their lives, yet the findings on gender and negotiation consistently show women to be at a disadvantage at the bargaining table, particularly when negotiating about issues related to compensation (Small et al., 2007; Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Negotiation concerning compensation appears to be fundamentally different from other types of negotiations, and researchers have argued theoretically that negotiation over compensation and monetary issues is a particularly problematic context for women (Bowles et al., 2007; Wade, 2001). Moreover, Stuhlmacher and Walters (1999) pointed out that most experimental negotiation studies involve masculine sex-typed issues, i.e., negotiations over prices of cars, airplanes and engines, as opposed to feminine sex-typed issues, i.e., negotiations related to childcare issues, with children's teachers etc. Apart from one recent study (Miles & LaSalle, 2008), there is scant empirical work examining how the topic of the negotiation influences the relationship between gender and negotiation outcomes.

This lack of attention paid to the role of the topic being negotiated is surprising, especially given that it is one of the most salient pieces of information available during a negotiation. Furthermore, the negotiation topic may potentially influence the likelihood of gender differences given that topics may be sex-typed rather than gender neutral. Indeed, both children and adults have been shown to cognitively categorize information as masculine versus feminine (Bennett, Sani, Hopkins, Agostini, & Malucchi, 2000; Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978) and, as discussed earlier, there is empirical evidence that tasks and behaviors are sex-typed (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Deaux & Emswiler, 1974). In this way, negotiation topics typically associated with the male gender role, such as money and access to resources, are likely to be more gender role incongruent for women than men, whereas negotiation topics typically associated with the female gender role, such as issues related to communal behaviors and care-taking, are likely to be more gender role incongruent for men than women.

The effect of gender role incongruence has been investigated in a variety of literatures, although not in negotiation research specifically. Research on gender role incongruence has examined both how it influences perceivers of gender role incongruent situations as well as targets who are experiencing the gender role incongruence. For example, Eagly and Karau's (2002) classic work has shown the ways in which prejudice against female leaders emanates from role incongruity between that of the traditional female role and the leadership role. Thus, their work primarily focuses on the effect of incongruence on perceptions. In addition, Heilman and Okimoto (2007) demonstrated that providing information about communal characteristics concerning women in masculine roles was a way to mitigate social penalties for women in incongruent roles.

There is also empirical evidence showing that incongruence influences the emotional experience of the target, i.e., the individual in the incongruent situation. For example, gender role violation has been shown to lead to feelings of discomfort. (Bosson et al., 2005). Likewise, Parry (1987) demonstrated that a mismatch between gender role beliefs and occupational status led to greater anxiety than when these factors match, and

Luhaorg and Zivian (1995) showed that a mismatch between gender role and occupation led to greater role conflict than a match between gender role and occupation. Finally, individuals who are strongly identified with their gender have been shown to prefer to avoid activities associated with the opposite sex even at a cost to themselves (Bem & Lenney, 1976). Thus, gender role incongruence appears to influence both observers' perceptions and the experiences of individuals in the incongruent situation.

In light of these previous findings, as well as the literature discussed above about the relationship between the individual's gender role and the topic of the negotiation, I hypothesize that responding to an initiation of negotiation concerning a gender role incongruent issue will be an aversive experience thereby raising the likelihood of avoidance, especially since avoiding is a common strategy for coping with an aversive situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Furthermore, I am specifically interested in investigating avoidance as manifested in terms of shifting responsibility, or to put it more colloquially, "passing the buck," meaning passing off the negotiation to someone else. To pass the buck means to "shift responsibility to someone else" (Merriam-Webster, 1991). Passing the buck has been identified as a defensive avoidance tactic in organizations (Ashforth & Lee, 1990) and has also been widely discussed in literature on public policy concerning "blame avoidance," i.e., the idea that politicians are more motivated to avoid blame rather than claim credit (Weaver, 1986). As a result, politicians pass the buck by forcing choices on others. For example, Congress often approves politically unappealing decisions, e.g., nuclear waste disposal and then passes the buck to the president, forcing the final decision, i.e., whether or not to veto, into his lap (Weaver, 1986). Thus, "passing the buck" appears to be a fairly prevalent phenomenon in organizational and public life that is worthy of further investigation into the context of negotiation.

In sum, the overall aim of this article is to test hypotheses that gender role incongruence leads to avoidance, and that this relationship is explained by the feelings of aversion because of being in a gender role incongruent situation. This article also has two additional purposes, namely, to underscore the broader importance of the response phase of the negotiation process, particularly with respect to avoidance, and to show that negotiation topics, especially compensation, are not gender neutral.

Study 1

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of gender role incongruence discussed earlier, in the first study I hypothesized that women would be more likely to avoid engaging in a negotiation about compensation than men by expressing a greater likelihood to pass off the negotiation to someone else.

H1: Women will report a greater likelihood of avoidance, i.e., passing the buck, as a response to an initiation of negotiation about compensation than men.

Furthermore, this greater likelihood of avoidance on the part of women in the context of compensation will be explained by feelings of aversion. As discussed earlier, being in a gender incongruent role leads to discomfort, and past research on gender and negotiation in the context of compensation has shown that negotiation concerning

compensation is a more aversive experience for women than for men (Babcock et al., 2006; Bowles et al., 2007; Small et al., 2007). Given that avoidance is an emotion-focused coping strategy, meaning that it is a way of managing the experience of stress-induced emotions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988), and passing the buck facilitates withdrawal from an aversive situation, the gender difference in avoidance predicted in hypothesis 1 will be explained by women's greater experience of aversion relative to men.

H2: Feelings of aversion will mediate the relationship between gender and avoidance of engaging in a negotiation concerning compensation.

Overview of Study 1

In study 1, participants read a scenario concerning a hiring situation. They were asked to imagine themselves as the hiring manager and to think about how they would respond to an initiation of negotiation about compensation from a job candidate. Participants were asked to rate items concerning how they would feel on the receiving end of the negotiation, as well as how likely they would be to avoid engaging in the negotiation by passing off the negotiation to someone else. In addition, study 1 was conducted using a sample of working professionals who reported having been on the receiving end of a negotiation. The choice of this type of sample was intentional to lend external validity to the investigation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 137 alumni (74 men and 63 women) of the business school of a private university. One thousand one hundred and fifty-seven alumni were contacted, 107 emails bounced and 187 responded fully to the survey (response rate = 18%). Of the 187, 13 were disqualified because they reported not anticipating a negotiation after reading the scenario and an additional 37 were disqualified because they reported never having been on the receiving end of a negotiation, leaving a sample size of 137. Participants were highly educated with 125 (91%) reporting their highest level of education as Master's Degree. In terms of age, 86% of sample was between 30 and 44 years old. Participants in this sample were also highly experienced—22% reported 6–10 years of work experience, 45% reported 11–15 years of work experience, and 33% reported 16 or more years of work experience. Ninety-eight percent of the sample reported having at least 1–2 years of managerial experience, with a large portion of the sample (66%) reporting between 3 and 10 years of managerial experience.

Procedure

Participants were contacted via email and invited to participate in the survey as a way to contribute to research at their *alma mater*. Participants were told that the study concerned "hiring practices." Participants first read the following scenario:

You are a team leader for Pulpmark Products, a large, consumer product company. As a team leader you oversee five product managers who are responsible for managing both marketing and product development. You are currently in the process of hiring a new product manager who will report directly to you. You have a qualified candidate named David. David has five years of experience (post-MBA) as a product manager at a rival consumer products company. You have spoken with his references, and they all gave David great recommendations. He has expressed interest in working at Pulpmark. In addition, the salary range for the position was included in the job description. During the initial interview, David mentioned that, if things move forward, you will need to discuss the salary range since it is lower than he had expected.

It is important to note that in order to make the situation as masculine as possible the job candidate was a man named David. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to rate whether or not they anticipated a negotiation with David to make sure that they had read and understood the scenario. Participants were then asked a series of questions about their feelings about negotiating.

Subsequently, participants were told:

In the meantime, the HR manager, Steve, emails you about the status of the hiring situation. The following email exchange ensues:

Steve: What's the latest on hiring the new product manager?

You: I have a candidate, named David, but we still need to negotiate the salary.

Steve: Great. Are you doing the negotiation or should I?

Participants were asked to rate their likelihood of passing the negotiation off to Steve, as well as what they would email back to Steve. This email exchange was written to be as subtle and casual as possible. Steve simply asks, "Are you doing the negotiation or should I?" in order to give participants the option to avoid the negotiation in as inconspicuous a manner as possible.

The final portion of the survey consisted of demographic questions, such as sex, age, occupation, experience with being on the receiving end of a negotiation, and industry.

Measures

Check for Understanding of Scenario

Participants were asked whether or not they anticipated a negotiation with David to verify that they had read and understood the scenario.

Aversion to Engaging in the Negotiation

Participants rated items concerning how aversive they considered the impending negotiation with David on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. A principle components factor analysis of six items (see Appendix for list of items) related to feeling at ease (reversed scored), pressure, nervous, confidence (reverse scored), certainty about performance (reverse scored) and dislike about

negotiating produced a single factor ($\alpha = .82$). This measure is a composite of negative feelings about negotiation intended to capture a general state of aversion to negotiating. This measure was developed based on other measures of negative feelings concerning negotiation, such as nervousness, low self-efficacy, and aversiveness of negotiating used in previous studies (Bowles et al., 2007; O'Connor & Arnold, 2001; Small et al., 2007).

Avoidance of Negotiation

Participants rated two items concerning avoidance (“How likely are you to let Steve do the negotiation?”; “I would definitely want Steve to conduct the negotiation”) each on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. The indicator of avoidance consisted of these two items ($\alpha = .90$).

Results

See Tables 1 and 2 for a complete list of means and standard deviations as well as a correlation matrix for all the variables.

Gender and Avoidance

Hypothesis 1—that women will be more likely to avoid responding to a negotiation about compensation than men—was supported. There was a significant gender difference in avoidance, $t(135) = -2.98, p < .01$, with women significantly more likely to avoid ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.85$) than men ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.67$).

Table 1
Means and standard deviations by gender—study 1

	Men	Women
Aversion	2.77 (.83)	3.14* (1.00)
Avoidance	2.75 (1.67)	3.64** (1.85)
<i>n</i>	74	63

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Standard deviations appear in parentheses.

Table 2
Intercorrelations among variables—study 1

Variable	1	2	3
1. Gender	–	.20*	.25**
2. Aversion		–	.34**
3. Avoidance			–

Notes: $N = 137$; gender coded as male = 0, female = 1. Pearson correlation coefficients: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

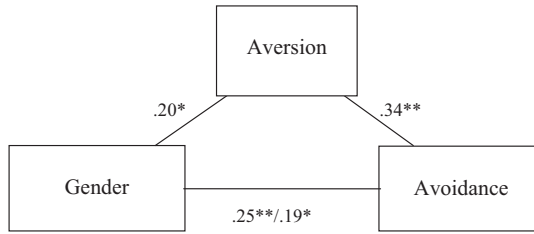


Figure 1. Partial mediation by aversion of gender on avoidance—study 1. Sobel z : 2.09, $p < .05$. Standardized betas shown; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Mediation of Gender and Avoidance by Aversion

There was also a significant gender difference in aversion, $t(135) = -2.40, p < .05$, with women reporting significantly more aversion ($M = 3.14, SD = 1.00$) than men ($M = 2.77, SD = .83$). As per Baron and Kenny (1986), to test for mediation, the independent variable must be significantly correlated with both the outcome variable and the mediator. In this case, gender was significantly correlated with both avoidance and aversion. As such, a Sobel test was used to test hypothesis 2, that aversion would mediate the relationship between gender and avoidance. Results reveal that aversion partially mediated the relationship between gender and avoidance, Sobel $z = 2.09, p < .05$. The standardized beta for gender on avoidance was reduced from $b = .25, t(135) = 2.98, p < .01$ to $b = .19, t(134) = 2.29, p < .05$ after aversion was entered into the regression (R^2 for regression model = .15; see Figure 1).

Discussion

The results of study 1 supported the predictions that, given a negotiation about compensation, which is typically associated with the male gender role, women would report greater aversion and would be more likely to avoid than men. Furthermore, the results showed that aversion about responding to an initiation of negotiation partially mediates the relationship between gender and avoidance. These results should also be considered in light of the sample from which the data were collected. The sample consisted of working, highly educated professionals who reported having been on the receiving end of negotiations. This type of sample lends external validity to the research, since the results reflect the thoughts and feelings of experienced professionals as opposed to those of naïve undergraduate students.

Although the results support hypotheses 1 and 2, the findings could also be interpreted as men avoiding less overall than women because they find negotiation less aversive in general (Small et al., 2007). To fully test the effect of gender role incongruence, it is also necessary to show the opposite pattern of the above results when a negotiation situation is congruent for women but incongruent for men. Thus in study 2, I

varied the topic being negotiated to fully test the hypothesis that gender role incongruence leads to avoidance.

Study 2

Although the focus on compensation and monetary issues in negotiation research is understandable given its relevance to the workplace, other research has shown that people negotiate a myriad of issues above and beyond compensation in the workplace, including issues more typically associated with the female gender role, such as balancing between work and family life (Rousseau, 1995). Furthermore, research has shown that when communal characteristics are elicited at the bargaining table, gender differences in negotiation performance are attenuated (Bowles et al., 2005; Kray et al., 2002). Thus, it is also important to examine the role that gender plays when more communal issues are negotiated.

The quintessence of communality is taking care of others, and care giving, such as child rearing and eldercare, is more often performed by women than men even in dual-career couples (Berardo, Shehan, & Leslie, 1987; Brody, 1981; Condran & Bode, 1982). This sex-segregation evident in the care giving arena is also reinforced by the fact that care giving is considered to be more in-role behavior for women than for men. In fact, when engaging in feminine, role-violating behaviors, heterosexual men tend to be classified as homosexual, and thus they often issue disclaimers about their sexuality, which have been shown to mitigate the discomfort they feel about being stigmatized for their behavior (Bosson et al., 2005). Furthermore, tasks associated with communal activities such as childcare and homemaking are consistently rated as feminine sex-typed (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Deaux & Emswiller, 1974).

Access to a lactation room, i.e., a room where working mothers can pump breast milk, is an example of a feminine sex-typed issue that arises in the workplace and is subject to negotiation. Lactation rooms are increasingly common in most organizations (CDC, 2007) with 25% of companies reporting that they offer lactation rooms (Society for Human Resources Management, 2008), and access to this resource has emerged as an important work-life issue (Lepore, 2009). As such, negotiations concerning this issue are presumably becoming increasingly common. Thus, in study 2, in addition to again hypothesizing that women are more likely to avoid a negotiation about compensation than men, I also hypothesized that men are more likely to avoid a negotiation about a feminine topic—in this case, access to a lactation room—than women are.

The hypotheses tested in study 2 are as follows:

H1: Women will report a greater likelihood of avoidance, i.e., passing the buck, as a response to an initiation of negotiation about compensation than men.

H2: Feelings of aversion will mediate the relationship between gender and avoidance of engaging in a negotiation concerning compensation.

H3: Men will report a greater likelihood of avoidance, i.e., passing the buck, as a response to an initiation of negotiation about access to a lactation room than women.

H4: Feelings of aversion will mediate the relationship between gender and avoidance of engaging in a negotiation concerning access to a lactation room.

Considered jointly, hypotheses 1 and 3 imply that there will be an interaction between gender and topic of negotiation on avoidance, such that people are more likely to avoid negotiations about gender role incongruent topics. Hypotheses 2 and 4 likewise together imply that feelings of aversion will mediate this gender by topic interaction on avoidance.

Overview of Study 2

Study 2 tested hypotheses 1–4 with an experimental protocol similar to that of study 1, but which also included a topic manipulation, such that participants were randomly assigned to respond to a negotiation about compensation versus a negotiation concerning access to a lactation room. In addition, the negotiation topics were first evaluated for masculinity versus femininity in a pretest to determine empirically that compensation and access to a lactation room indeed differ in ratings of masculinity and femininity.

Pretest

Participants

The sample for the pretest consisted of 18 male and 15 female undergraduate and graduate students (mean age = 24), who were native English speakers primarily from the United States and who participated in the pretest for pay.

Procedure

Participants read two versions of the following scenario. Each version of the scenario was varied only by the topic of the negotiation (compensation vs. access to a lactation room):

You are a manager in the marketing department of a consumer products company. Business has been going well, and you have decided to hire a new marketer. You advertised the position on several web sites. In the ad you included the salary and benefits information. You received several applicants, and you decided to interview a candidate named Susan. Susan has a solid resume and several years of marketing experience. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Susan is also a new mother of twins. During the interview, Susan mentioned that, if things move forward, you will need to discuss the...

...salary and bonus, because she would like an increase in both the salary and percentage yearly bonus being offered.

...access to a lactation room (a room where nursing mothers can pump breast milk for their babies), because there is not one currently available.

Note that in both scenarios, the initiator of the negotiation was a woman. This was held constant for practical purposes, since only a woman would initiate a negotiation

over access to a lactation room, although both men and women could respond to this type of negotiation.

Participants rated each scenario for masculinity and femininity on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 = not at all, 4 = somewhat and 7 = very much. Masculine was defined for participants as “a situation that you would typically associate with a man,” whereas feminine was defined for participants as “a situation that you would typically associate with a woman.” The order of the scenarios was counterbalanced.

Results

The means and standard deviations for masculinity and femininity for both scenarios appear in Table 3. Compensation was rated as significantly more masculine than access to a lactation room, $t(32) = 8.92, p < .001$, and access to a lactation room was rated as significantly more feminine than compensation $t(32) = -10.28, p < .001$. Although the mean ratings for masculinity and femininity for access to lactation room were much more extreme than those for compensation, which tended to fall close to the midpoint (4) of the scale, compensation was rated as significantly more masculine than feminine, $t(32) = 3.13, p < .01$, just as access to a lactation room was rated as significantly more feminine than masculine, $t(32) = -17.97, p < .001$. Having established these significant differences for masculinity and femininity for the negotiation topics, I subsequently tested the hypotheses for study 2.

Method

Participants

The sample for study 2 consisted of 44 male and 44 female participants with an average age of 25, who were native English speakers primarily from the United States and who were recruited from a university participant pool participated in the experiment (“Workplace Scenario Study”) for pay.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to read either the compensation or access to lactation room scenario, which were identical to the scenarios that appear above for the pretest.

Table 3
Means and standard deviations for masculinity and femininity ratings—pretest for study 2

Topic of negotiation	Masculine	Feminine
Compensation	4.42 (1.79)	3.55 ^a (1.44)
Lactation room	1.45 ^{**} (.87)	6.55 ^{**a} (.83)

Notes: $N = 33$; $**p < .01$, $*p < .05$; Asterisks refer to significant differences within masculinity/femininity ratings and between topics; ^a $p < .01$, ^b $p < .05$; Superscripts letters refer to significant differences within topic and between masculinity/femininity ratings.

As in study 1, participants were asked whether or not they anticipated a negotiation, as well as a series of questions about their feelings about negotiating.

Subsequently, participants in the compensation condition were told:

In the meantime, the HR manager, Sarah, emails you about the status of the hiring situation. The following email exchange ensues:

Sarah: What's the latest on hiring the new product manager?

You: I have a candidate, named Susan, but we still need to negotiate the salary.

Sarah: Great. Are you doing the negotiation or should I?

Participants were asked to rate their likelihood of passing the negotiation off to Sarah, as well as what they would email back to Sarah.

Participants in the lactation room condition read the exact same information as above except the line "...we still need to negotiate the salary" was changed to "...we still need to negotiate about access to a lactation room." Finally, participants answered demographic questions and were dismissed.

It is important to note that, for the purposes of this study, the HR manager was a woman named Sarah, when compared to study 1 in which the HR manager was a man named Steve. This change was made to lend more ecological validity to the design, since passing off a negotiation about access to a lactation room to a woman would most likely have more face and ecological validity for participants than passing off this type of negotiation to a man. In addition, in this study, the gender of the initiator was always a woman, to facilitate the use of the access to the lactation room scenario.

Measures

Manipulation Check

The manipulation check consisted of the following question: "In this study, I read a scenario about a negotiation over: compensation, start date, access to a breastfeeding room and flexible hours."

Aversion to Engaging in the Negotiation

Participants rated items concerning how aversive they would find the impending negotiation with Susan on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. As in study 2, a principal components factor analysis of six items related to feeling at ease (reversed scored), pressure, nervousness, confidence (reverse scored), certain (reverse scored) and dislike produced a single factor ($\alpha = .85$).

Avoidance of Negotiation

Participants then rated two items concerning avoidance ("How likely are you to let Sarah do the negotiation?"; "I would definitely want Sarah to conduct the negotiation")

each on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. The indicator of avoidance consisted of these two items ($\alpha = .91$).

Results

See Tables 4 and 5 for a complete list of means and standard deviations as well as a correlation matrix for all the variables.

Manipulation Check

Only responses from the 88 participants (out of 98) who correctly answered the manipulation check question (“In this study, I read a scenario about a negotiation over: compensation, start date, access to a breastfeeding room and flexible hours”) according to the condition to which they had been assigned and who fully completed the survey were included in the analyses.

Gender by Topic of Negotiation on Avoidance

Hypotheses 1 and 3 together imply that there will be an interaction between gender and topic of negotiation on avoidance, and thus a 2×2 ANOVA was performed to

Table 4
Means and standard deviations for aversion and avoidance by gender and topic – study 2

	Men		Women	
	Compensation	Lactation room	Compensation	Lactation room
Aversion	3.08 (1.15)	3.48 (.88)	4.09 ^a (1.18)	3.25* (1.10)
Avoidance	3.17 (1.64)	4.33* (1.93)	4.45 ^b (1.78)	3.28* ^c (1.99)
<i>n</i>	24	20	21	23

Notes: Standard deviations appear on parentheses.

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; Asterisks refer to significant differences within gender between topics.

^a $p < .01$, ^b $p < .05$, ^c $p < .10$; Superscripts letters refer to significant differences between gender within topic.

Table 5
Intercorrelations among variables—study 2

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Gender	–	.07	.17	.04
2. Topic		–	–.09	.00
3. Aversion			–	.58**
4. Avoidance				–

Notes: $N = 88$; gender coded as male = 0, female = 1. Pearson correlation coefficients: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

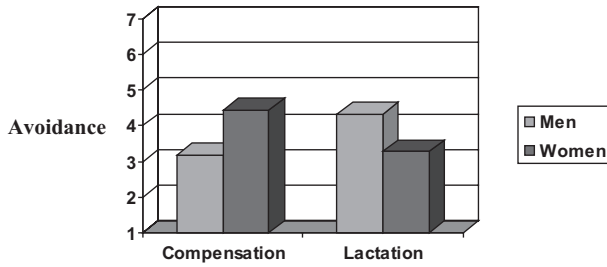


Figure 2. Gender*topic of negotiation on avoidance—study 2. $F(3,84) = 8.82, p < .01$ for two-way interaction.

test for an interaction effect. Results from a 2×2 ANOVA revealed a significant two-way interaction between gender by topic of negotiation on avoidance, $F(3, 84) = 8.82, p < .01$ (see Figure 2). Hypothesis 1, that women are significantly more likely than men to avoid in the compensation condition was also supported, $t(43) = -2.53, p < .05$, which replicates the gender difference in avoidance found in study 1. Hypothesis 3—that men will report a greater likelihood of avoidance in the lactation room condition than women—was weakly supported. In the lactation room condition, the gender difference in avoidance trended toward significance, with men slightly more likely to avoid than women $t(41) = 1.74, p < .10$. The differences in the means for avoidance between topics but within gender were also compared to better understand the nature of the significant gender by topic interaction. Men were significantly more likely to avoid in the lactation room condition compared to the compensation condition, $t(42) = -2.15, p < .05$, whereas women were significantly more likely to avoid in the compensation condition compared to the lactation room condition, $t(42) = 2.05, p < .05$.

Mediation of Gender by Topic of Negotiation on Avoidance by Aversion

There was no gender difference in aversion in the lactation room condition, and as a result, hypothesis 4—that feelings of aversion will mediate the relationship between gender and avoidance of engaging in a negotiation concerning access to a lactation room—was not tested since a significant relationship between the independent variable and the mediator is a prerequisite of testing for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). However, given that hypotheses 2 and 4 together imply that feelings of aversion will mediate the gender by topic interaction on avoidance, further analyses were performed to investigate this full model. First, a 2×2 ANOVA was performed to test for an interaction effect between gender and topic of negotiation on feelings of aversion. Results from a 2×2 ANOVA revealed a significant two-way interaction between gender by topic of negotiation on aversion $F(3, 84) = 6.99, p < .02$. This interaction was primarily driven by women’s greater feelings of aversion relative to men in the compensation condition $t(43) = -2.91, p < .01$.

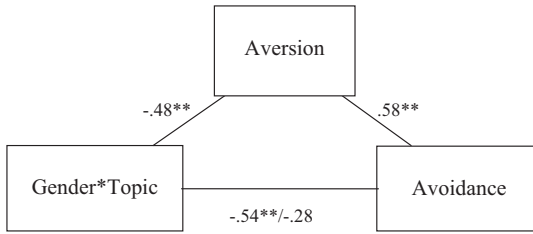


Figure 3. Mediation of gender*topic of negotiation on avoidance by aversion—study 2. Sobel $z = -2.45$, $p < .05$. Standardized betas, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Since the gender by topic interaction was significantly correlated with both aversion (the predicted mediator) and avoidance (the outcome measure), according to Baron and Kenny (1986), the prerequisites for testing for mediation were satisfied. In this case, the independent variable consists of an interaction term—gender by topic—and as such a mediated moderation model was tested (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). As per Aiken and West (1991), aversion was first centered at the mean since the model includes an interaction term. Mediation analyses demonstrated that aversion partially mediated the gender by topic interaction on avoidance. The standardized beta for gender*topic on avoidance was reduced from $b = -.54$, $t(84) = -2.97$, $p < .01$ to $b = -.28$, $t(83) = -1.74$, $p < .10$ after aversion was entered into the regression equation, Sobel $z = -2.45$, $p < .05$ (R^2 for model = .36; see Figure 3).

To better understand the nature of this mediated moderation model, mediation analyses of topic on avoidance by aversion were also performed separately for men and women. Results revealed that aversion was a significant mediator of topic on avoidance for women but not for men. For women, the standardized beta for topic on avoidance was reduced from $b = -.30$, $t(42) = -2.05$, $p < .05$ to $b = -.11$, $t(41) = -.846$ (ns) after aversion was entered into the regression equation, Sobel $z = -2.14$, $p < .05$. For men, aversion was not a significant mediator, Sobel $z = 1.23$, ns, although there was a moderate change in the standardized beta for topic from $b = .32$, $t(42) = 2.15$, $p < .05$ to $b = .21$, $t(41) = 1.69$, $p < .10$ after aversion was entered into the regression equation.

Discussion

The findings from study 2 provide further evidence that people in gender role incongruent situations are more likely to avoid than people in gender role congruent situations. There was a significant interaction between gender and topic of the negotiation on avoidance. Men were significantly more likely to avoid a negotiation concerning access to a lactation room than a negotiation concerning compensation, and the opposite results were true for women. Consistent with the results from study 1, women were significantly more likely to avoid a negotiation concerning compensation than men. However, hypothesis 3 was only partially supported, with a trend toward significance

for men to be more likely than women to avoid the negotiation concerning access to a lactation room.

Also as predicted, aversion mediated the gender by topic interaction on avoidance. Moreover, aversion explained the relationship between negotiation topic and avoidance for women but not for men. It is interesting that men's avoidance differed significantly between conditions but that their feelings of aversion about the situation did not. It is possible that men's decision to avoid in the lactation condition was driven by some kind of cognitive assessment of the situation—perhaps that a woman would have greater expertise—rather than an emotional response of aversion to engaging in a negotiation about access to a lactation room. Another possible explanation is that men were less willing and/or able to self-report about their feelings of aversion to the situation than women.

The replication of the gender difference in avoidance in the compensation condition is important to note given that these studies examine a new phenomenon that has not been investigated previously. In addition, these studies used participants from different populations, namely professional adults in study 1 and university students in study 2. Thus, the findings generalize across people with and without work experience, and greater work experience does not seem to mitigate the effects of being in a gender role incongruent situation. There were also several differences in protocols between the studies—the gender of the initiator and the gender of the HR manager to whom the participant can pass off the negotiation. That the gender difference in avoidance in the compensation situation was robust enough to replicate provides additional support for the gender role incongruence predictions.

Finally, the gender difference in avoidance was significant in the masculine topic condition but was only a trend in the feminine topic condition, which was counter to hypothesis 3. However, this finding is consistent from a status perspective, since a masculine situation, which is typically associated with high status, is more likely to influence gender differences to a greater degree than a feminine situation, which is typically associated with low status and thus less threatening (Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004). In fact, previous work on gender and negotiation has argued that gender differences in initiation of negotiation about compensation are salient because compensation is a status-based resource, and women's attempt to negotiate for compensation violates status norms by making claims to a resource associated with higher status (Bowles et al., 2007). More generally, previous work on the psychology of gender has primarily found support for gender differences in masculine as opposed to feminine tasks. For example, gender differences in attribution style have been found in the context of a masculine task, with men more likely to attribute success to ability and failure to bad luck, and women more likely to attribute success to good luck and failure to ability, but not in the context of a feminine task (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974). Thus, although the lack of a significant gender difference in the feminine negotiation topic runs counter to the hypothesized findings, when considered in the broader spectrum of research on gender, it appears that masculine situations may be more threatening to women than feminine situations are threatening to men and thus masculine situations may have a greater impact on women's behavior than feminine situations on men's behavior.

General Discussion

The relationship between gender role incongruence and avoidance as a response to an initiation of negotiation was investigated in this article. The results from study 1 demonstrated women's greater likelihood to avoid engaging in a negotiation about a role incongruent issue—compensation—when compared to men for whom compensation is a role congruent issue. Furthermore, study 1 demonstrated that feelings of aversion to negotiating partially mediated the relationship between gender and avoidance. The results from study 2 showed that gender role incongruence is salient for both men and women by providing evidence that men were more likely to avoid engaging in a negotiation about a prototypically feminine topic than a prototypically masculine topic. Furthermore, feelings of aversion partially mediated the interaction between gender and negotiation topic on avoidance.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research makes a number of contributions to the negotiation literature. The findings indicate that negotiation topics are not gender neutral and that the gendered nature of negotiation topics is an area for future research. The results from study 2, in particular, provide preliminary evidence that compensation is a masculine issue, and that the implicit assumption underlying much research in negotiation that compensation is gender neutral should be reconsidered. Much of the previous work on gender and negotiation has examined gender differences in initiation of negotiation and negotiation performance in the context of compensation and monetary issues (Babcock et al., 2006; Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Small et al., 2007; Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Although past researchers have argued theoretically that negotiations about compensation have different implications for women than for men (Bowles et al., 2007; Wade, 2001), this issue has not been examined empirically. The fact that compensation is a masculine issue may help to explain why negotiations concerning compensation and other monetary issues are a more problematic context for women than for men.

Likewise, this work contributes to a growing body of research demonstrating the importance of situational moderators in understanding gender and negotiation, such as situational ambiguity, representation role, salience of stereotypes at the bargaining table, and framing of the negotiation situation (Bowles et al., 2005; Kray et al., 2002; Small et al., 2007). The findings from the studies in this article indicate that negotiation topic is another important moderator of the effect of gender on negotiation outcomes.

These studies also add to a burgeoning literature in negotiation that highlights the ways in which the current paradigm for studying negotiation is incomplete. Currently, the predominant paradigm for experimental research in negotiation is to assign roles to participants and instruct them to negotiate. Both the initiation of negotiation and the response to the initiation are overlooked in this paradigm, with the implicit assumption being that it is normative for negotiations to be undertaken. However, just as Small et al. (2007) showed that the initiation of negotiation is not necessarily normative for

women, these studies show that the likelihood of avoidance of engaging in a negotiation is heightened when people are anticipating a gender role incongruent negotiation situation. Furthermore, results from Small et al. (2007) also showed that the baseline rate of initiation of negotiation for all participants was rather low—for example only 12% of participants negotiated in the first study reported in that article. Altogether, the findings reported here as well as the findings from previous work indicate that negotiation researchers may be overestimating the extent to which people negotiate, an overestimation that is reflected in the paradigm used to study negotiation.

From a practical perspective, the results indicate that people need to be cognizant of how they respond when others negotiate with them, not only of how they behave when negotiating on their own behalf. Women's greater propensity relative to men of avoiding a negotiation about compensation could be costly if passing off the negotiation is viewed negatively by peers and/or superiors in the workplace. Although passing the buck has been identified as a widely used tactic in organizations and in politics (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Weaver, 1986), when used on a regular basis, this type of tactic could delegitimize a manager, especially a female manager who regularly shies away from compensation negotiations. Furthermore, the trend for men relative to women of avoiding negotiations about a feminine issue, such as access to a lactation room, may also be costly given that "family friendly" policies have been shown to increase job retention and satisfaction among female employees (Scandura & Lankau, 1997). Passing off this type of a negotiation could potentially lead to decreased satisfaction among subordinates if they feel that their negotiations about work-life issues are consistently being passed off by their manager as opposed to being dealt with directly. Passing off these negotiations could also have broader ramifications for the work environment, since it can lead employees to discern that these issues are not negotiable and thereby decreasing perceptions that a workplace is family friendly.

Limitations and Future Directions

These studies had some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, in both studies, there was a match within the scenarios between the gender of the initiator and the gender of the person to whom the negotiation could be shifted. In study 1 both roles were men, and in study 2 both roles were women. It is unclear whether a mismatch between the gender of these roles, i.e., responding to a male initiator with the opportunity to pass off the negotiation to a woman and vice versa, would change the results. Previous research indicates that the mismatch conditions should be investigated further. For example, Bowles et al. (2007) found that women were more reluctant than men to initiate a negotiation about compensation when they anticipated negotiating with a male evaluator but not with a female evaluator. Thus, future research should investigate the entire array of gender matches and mismatches among the initiator, the responder, and the person to whom the negotiation is shifted.

Future work should also disentangle the gendered nature of negotiation topics with the gendered nature of negotiation in general. Past research has shown that typical masculine traits and behaviors are associated with success at the bargaining table (Kray

et al., 2001). If masculinity is associated with success in negotiation in general, then the effect of gender role incongruence of negotiation topic may be confounded with the negotiation situation itself, which may help to explain why the results were as predicted in the masculine negotiation condition but not in the feminine negotiation condition. In a related vein, given the weak support for hypothesis 3—that men would avoid more than women in the feminine condition—future work should investigate other feminine topics to discern whether this lack of support was specific to the lactation room topic, or whether gender role incongruence simply does not affect men's behavior in the same way that it affects women's behavior in the context of negotiation. Although it could be that negotiation itself is an aversive activity for women regardless of topic, the fact that women were significantly less likely to avoid the lactation room negotiation than the compensation negotiation indicates that topic does play a role.

Another related issue to follow up on in future research is what mediates avoidance for men. Although aversion mediated the gender by topic interaction on avoidance as predicted, aversion explained the relationship between negotiation topic and avoidance for women but not for men, which is a limitation of this research. Thus, future research should investigate additional cognitive mediators, such as self-efficacy and/or perceptions of appropriateness of the negotiation situation. It may be that, for men, the decision to avoid or engage in negotiation is based purely on a cognitive assessment of how appropriate the negotiation is for them or how successful they will be, rather than on an emotional reaction. These types of cognitive variables could explain why men were significantly more likely to avoid the lactation room scenario than the compensation scenario and would also be consistent with previous findings in gender and negotiation showing that negotiation itself is a less aversive domain for men than for women (Small et al., 2007). Thus, understanding what mediates men's behavior is an important area for future research.

Furthermore, the feminine and masculine negotiation topics were not well calibrated. The pretest for study 2 showed empirically that compensation was both more masculine than access to a lactation room and was rated significantly more masculine than feminine. However, the topics chosen were somewhat unbalanced in the sense that the mean rating for femininity for access to a lactation room was much more extreme than the mean rating for masculinity for compensation. Therefore, in future work, it will also be important to examine gender role incongruence using topics that are better calibrated in terms of masculinity and femininity.

In addition, an important alternative explanation that was not explored here but that would be worthwhile to investigate in future work is the possibility that women are more likely than men to avoid negotiations on the receiving end because they do not believe that they have the power to make the decisions inherent in a negotiation, especially given their generally lower status in organizations. In fact, perhaps the avoidance of negotiation is driven more by not feeling powerful and/or entitled to make decisions as opposed to the negotiation context itself. This alternative explanation is worth exploring in future work since being on the receiving end of a negotiation inherently involves being in the position to make a potentially influential decision.

On a more practical level, regarding the relevance of this research to work-life issues, these studies only examined access to a lactation room as a feminine issue, an issue that is particularly sex-typed in that only women can lactate, though, to be sure, both men and women can respond to a negotiation about this issue. Future research should also examine how people respond to other work-life issues that are often negotiated in the workplace, such as flexible work hours, leave to care for sick children and/or relatives, and onsite day care arrangements. Examining these issues could help to disentangle to what degree negotiable issues related to parenthood are sex-typed, as well as whether men and women differ in terms of avoidance as a response to these other issues as well.

Finally, future research should also examine avoidance using a behavioral dependent variable. Given that affective forecasting has been shown to over-inflate both positive and negative emotions when compared to the emotions that are subsequently felt in real-time (Van Boven & Ashworth, 2007), participants may have overestimated how aversive they would find the situation, as well as how likely they would be to avoid. Nonetheless, inflated estimations influence subsequent behavior, and an inflated assessment of feelings of aversion is likely to lead to avoidance. These inflated estimations subsequently promote a cycle of behavior, i.e., the continual avoidance of negotiation, since an individual never has the opportunity to learn whether or not negotiation is more or less aversive than his or her affective forecast. Thus, even though the outcome variable was a likelihood estimate, affective forecasting would most likely have a similar effect on actual behavior.

In sum, the findings from these studies contribute to a growing body of research on gender and negotiation that encompasses all phases of the negotiation process, as well as important situational moderators. Results demonstrate that individuals in gender role incongruent situations are more likely to avoid than those in gender role congruent situations. Future research should consider more carefully the effect of the topic under negotiation, as well as the response phase of negotiation, with special consideration paid to avoidance as a response.

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Appendix 1: Measures

Aversion

- (1) I dislike having to negotiate the salary.
- (2) I would feel at ease during this negotiation (R).
- (3) I would feel nervous during this negotiation.
- (4) I would feel a lot of pressure during this negotiation.
- (5) I would feel confident that I would do well in this negotiation. (R)
- (6) I would feel certain that I would do well in this negotiation. (R)

Avoidance

- (1) How likely are you to let Steve (Sarah) do the negotiation?
- (2) I would definitely want Steve (Sarah) to conduct the negotiation.

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