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“Feminine” strengths, “masculine” costs: Rethinking gender gaps in negotiation research

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Journal

Current Opinion in Psychology

ISSN

2352-250X

Authors

Townsend, Charlotte H

Kray, Laura J

Publication Date

2026-09-01

DOI

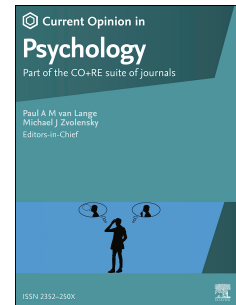
10.1016/j.copsyc.2026.102452

Peer reviewed

Journal Pre-proof

“Feminine” strengths, “masculine” costs: Rethinking gender gaps in negotiation research

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PII: S2352-250X(26)00190-9

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2026.102452>

Reference: COPSYC 102452

To appear in: *Current Opinion in Psychology*

Received Date: 12 June 2026

Revised Date: 13 August 2026

Accepted Date: 4 September 2026

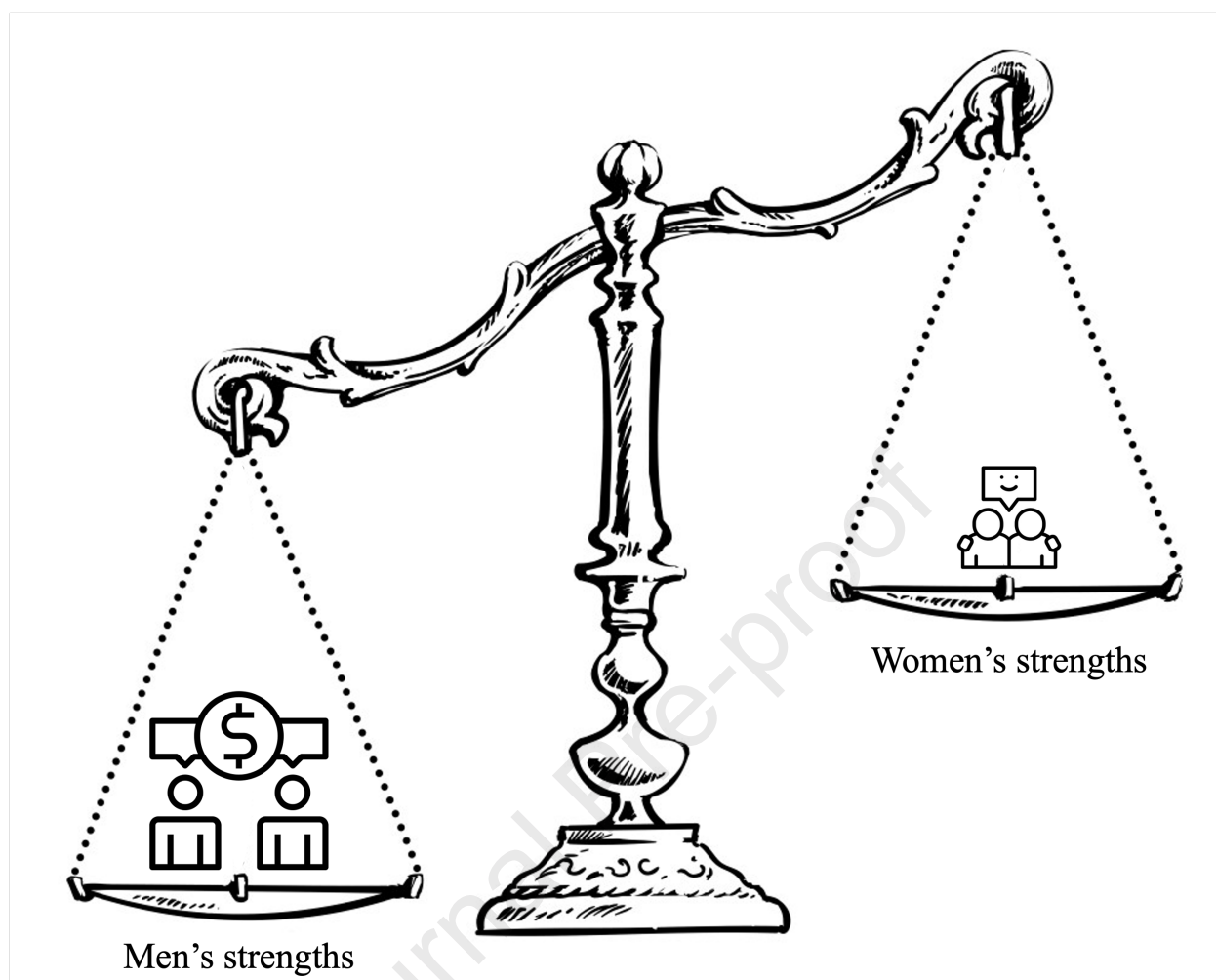
Please cite this article as: Townsend CH, Kray LJ, “Feminine” strengths, “masculine” costs: Rethinking gender gaps in negotiation research, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2026.102452>.

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Author contributions: CRediT

- Conceptualization: CHT, LJK
- Data curation: CHT
- Formal analysis: (N/A)
- Funding acquisition: (N/A)
- Investigation: (N/A)
- Methodology: (N/A)
- Project administration: (N/A)
- Resources: (N/A)
- Software: (N/A)
- Supervision: (N/A)
- Validation: (N/A)
- Visualization: CHT
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Title: “Feminine” strengths, “masculine” costs: Rethinking gender gaps in negotiation research

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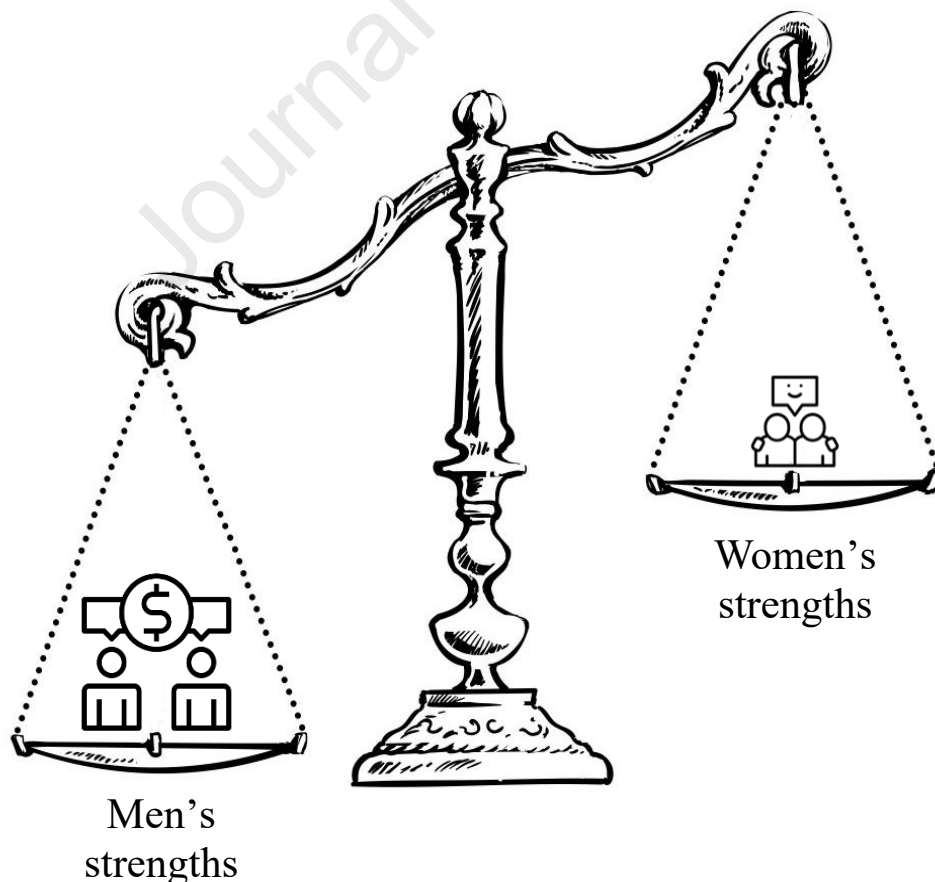
Abstract: The impact of gender on negotiation outcomes has been an important aspect of the negotiation literature for decades. This literature has primarily focused on “masculine” attributes, such as assertiveness, as ideal negotiator characteristics, manifesting in gender research focused on men’s economic advantages in negotiations, to the detriment of both women and men. Yet recent research has begun to examine gender gaps in “feminine” attributes, highlighting women’s strengths in negotiations, particularly in relational outcomes. Future work is needed to fully unpack these results, understand the impact of intersecting identities, and explore partner effects. We also emphasize the importance of replication efforts and conducting this research in naturalistic settings.

Keywords: Gender, negotiation, subjective value, masculinity threat, desire for future negotiations

Highlights:

- Previous negotiation literature has focused on gender gaps in “masculine” outcomes
- Recent work shows how women perform better with respect to relational outcomes
- Men face masculinity threats in negotiations, resulting in worse economic outcomes
- Research at the intersection of gender and other identities provides nuance
- More work is needed in these domains, especially in naturalistic settings

Graphical Abstract:



Current Opinion in Psychology

1.1. Introduction

Tackling the role of gender in negotiations has been a burgeoning area of research for decades, and with good reason: negotiations shape consequential career and personal outcomes. However, the academic literature often focuses on areas where women do not achieve the same outcomes in negotiations as men, reflecting a general devaluation of “feminine”¹ attributes in negotiations [1–3]. This concentration on men’s strengths and women’s weaknesses reinforces the narrative that women’s worse labor market outcomes stem from deficits in negotiations, which may reduce support for structural pay-equity interventions [4]. The literature’s historical emphasis on women’s disadvantages may obscure alternative explanations for disparate outcomes and simultaneously create unique challenges for men. However, a nascent literature has begun to unpack what gender gaps emerge in “feminine” negotiation outcomes, uncovering women’s relational strengths in negotiation, as well as the challenges men face when negotiations are framed as a “masculine” realm. This article highlights emerging work that counters the historical focus on gender gaps in “masculine” attributes, offering promising directions for future research on “feminine” attributes.

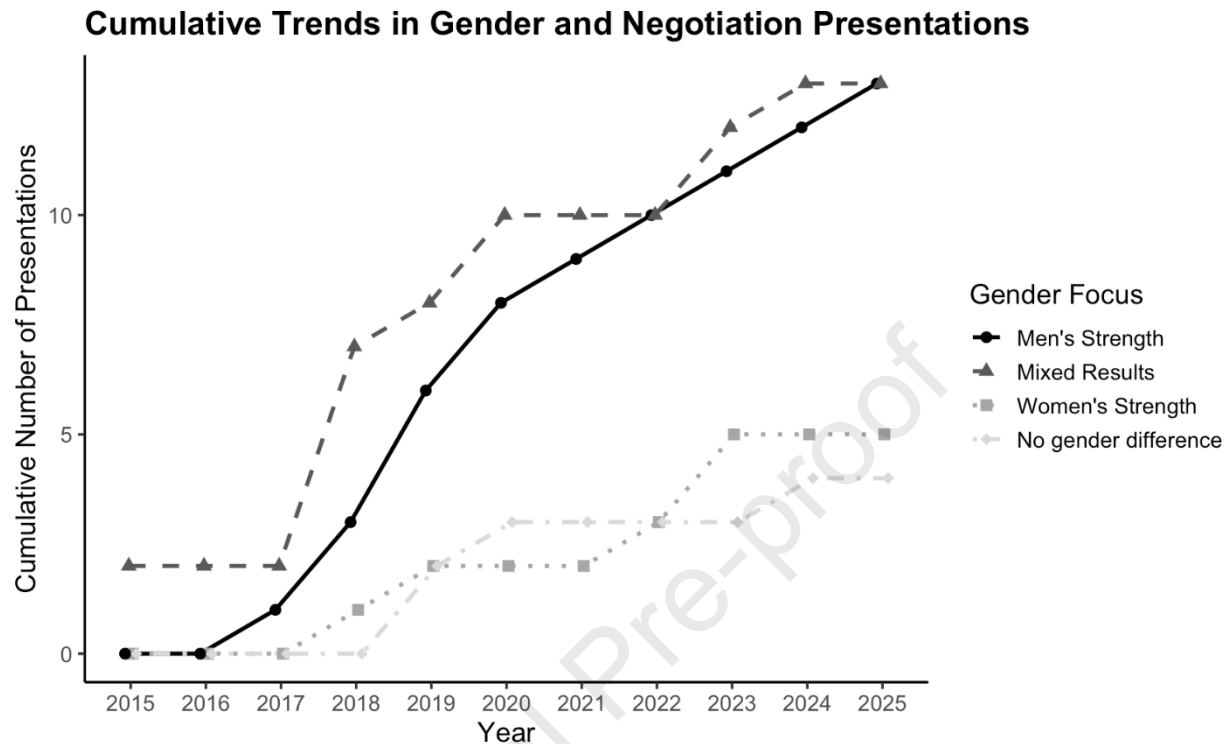
1.1.1. What are we, as researchers, focusing on?

To understand the current landscape of gender and negotiation research, we examined conference presentations from the Conflict Management and Gender and Diversity in Organizations (renamed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion division in 2023) divisions of the Academy of Management Annual Conference (2016 to 2025), and the International Association for Conflict Management (2018 to 2023)². We focused on conference proceedings because they signal emerging research. We then categorized presentations by the outcomes reported in the abstracts as follows: men’s strengths, mixed results (e.g., context-dependent), women’s strengths, and no gender difference. We excluded outcomes that were interventions or were unclear (i.e., results not provided in the abstract, involving only one gender, or theoretical).

¹ We put feminine and masculine in quotes as these are stereotype-based distinctions.

² We focused on these conferences because they provided the title and the abstract of previous programs. Association for Psychological Science and Society for Personality and Social Psychology provide titles but not abstracts.

Figure 1. Cumulative Number of Conference Presentations on Gender x Negotiation by Gender Results Over Time



Description: Line graph representing the cumulative number of presentations from conferences over time by category of results. The data used to make this graph are available at: https://osf.io/p9b4a/overview?view_only=3e8b5b7e8c4e4dfbb4cdcd685a139912.

Figure 1 displays the cumulative number of presentations in each category over time. Research demonstrating men's strengths (and women's weaknesses) and mixed results make up the largest share of presentations. We find this cumulative trend independent of presentations prior to 2015, which would likely indicate an even greater skew towards men's strengths in negotiations. This could reflect true gender differences in negotiations; however, a persistent skew in the literature warrants attention. Furthermore, a balanced literature is important not only for understanding our world but also because artificial intelligence is trained on publicly available content, thereby reproducing existing gender stereotypes [5,6]. Emerging research suggests that LLMs, when asked to provide negotiation recommendations, reinforce traditional gender roles and recommend lower salaries for women [7]. Therefore, we showcase recent developments exploring the "feminine" alongside the "masculine" and propose directions for future research.

1.2. Gender differences in negotiation outcomes

Early negotiation literature theorized gender as a stable trait difference [8]. "Masculine" attributes, such as dominance and rationality, defined effective negotiators, and "feminine" attributes, such as accommodation and emotionality, characterized ineffective negotiators [9]. Consistent with women's presumed weaknesses, evidence suggested that women shied away

from initiating negotiations compared to men [10]. However, experimental work that manipulated which attributes – “masculine” or “feminine” – were linked to negotiator effectiveness showed that gender gaps in economic outcomes depended on which association was salient [11,12]. Today, gender differences in negotiation performance are recognized as highly context-dependent [13,14]. Recent work tracking negotiators’ performance has found no gender differences in economic outcomes [15]. Yet, people continue to overestimate men’s advantages and women’s disadvantages at the bargaining table [4].

Prior literature has primarily measured tangible economic outcomes, such as salary or bonuses, while largely overlooking the quality of the relationship between counterparts. A growing literature has since broadened this focus, highlighting the importance of “feminine” attributes and behaviors, and elevating the counterpart relationship as a central outcome [16–18]. Yet until recently, whether gender differences extend to these relational and subjective outcomes had gone unexamined.

1.2.1. What a “masculine” focus misses: women’s relational strengths

Because negotiation research has long measured effectiveness through a “masculine”-coded lens – assertiveness, claiming value, winning the deal – it has been poorly equipped to detect where women’s negotiation behavior confers an advantage. Recent data from naturalistic settings begin to fill this gap: women create more relational value in negotiations, even when anonymous, while achieving economic outcomes equivalent to men’s [15]. People are more likely to want to negotiate with women again, as both teammates and counterparts in competitive and cooperative negotiations. Assuming returns to repeat negotiations, women may accumulate an economic advantage invisible to any single-negotiation measure, suggesting a need for more longitudinal research. People are also more likely to approach women in market settings expecting warmer interactions [19]. Women spend more time than men seeking value-creation and relationship-related information during negotiation planning [20], and they create joint gains without reducing their individual payoffs [21]. Women are also less likely than men to reach an impasse when they hold weak alternatives [22]. Women are less likely to lie, and meta-analytic evidence shows women negotiate more ethically overall [23,24]. Taken together, this emerging body of research suggests that much of what a “feminine” negotiation style contributes has gone undetected not because it is absent, but because the field’s instruments were attuned elsewhere.

1.2.2. What a “masculine” focus costs: men’s relational and psychological toll

The same “masculine” default that obscures women’s relational strengths imposes a different cost on men: it turns negotiation performance into a test of masculinity, one that carries its own psychological and relational penalties. In negotiations, face threat (i.e., the threat of damage to one’s public self-image) can lead to worse performance for women and men [25,26]; but men face the added prescriptive stereotype that they should be dominant, successful negotiators, converting negotiation into a source of masculinity threat [27]. Men negotiating with other men consequently achieve worse joint outcomes than mixed-gender dyads, consistent with the idea that “toxic masculinity” drives aggressive tactics that undermine men’s own results [21] – a cost of enforcing a “masculine” standard. The same expectations heighten men’s sensitivity to dominance displays from women, increasing anxiety when women behave assertively [28].

Men's greater propensity to deceive in negotiations may exact a further toll: even undetected dishonesty induces guilt and erodes deceivers' subjective value while diminishing their desire to negotiate with the same counterpart again [29], forfeiting relational value. Men may also deprioritize the relationship, as men receive less respect when they succeed in "feminine"-typed tasks [30].

1.2.3. Whom a "masculine" focus rewards: Intersecting identities³

A "masculine" standard is not applied evenly across all women or all men, because the underlying stereotype is not about gender per se but who is perceived as appropriately dominant. Black women receive more favorable negotiation offers than White women and Black men, because they are expected to behave dominantly and rewarded when they do [31]. Yet, outside negotiation settings, Black and Latina women anticipate more backlash than White women do for the same dominance [32], suggesting dominance is rewarded conditionally for Black and Latina women. At the intersection of gender and sexual orientation, heterosexual men and homosexual women are stereotyped as more dominant than heterosexual women and homosexual men; consistent with this, the former receive better negotiation offers than the latter across studies spanning master's students, online sellers, and Indian street vendors [33]. Among men, the pattern is nuanced by race and not uniformly punitive: online car sellers were less likely to respond to White gay men than White straight men, and less polite toward Black and East Asian men regardless of sexual orientation [34]. Together, these findings indicate a "masculine" expectation of dominance that goes beyond a gender-based theory of negotiation, and that naturalistic, field-based methods are best positioned to detect. We also implore researchers to examine "feminine" outcomes through an intersectional lens.

1.3. Good news: Plenty of work to go around

1.3.1. Valuing the "feminine" in negotiations

Some negotiation literature has begun to place more value on traditionally "feminine" attributes, but without examining whether gender differences exist. As detailed in Section 1.2.1, work has begun to explore how women's emphasis on relationships and concern for their counterparts' interests benefit them in negotiations. However, research is needed to understand the contexts and boundary conditions of these results.

Conversation dynamics in negotiations also impact negotiator relationships; for instance, negotiators who interrupt are liked less by their counterparts [35]. Conversely, signaling conversational receptiveness predicts less conflict escalation later [36]. Some work has used negotiation transcripts to examine negotiation behaviors and found that women are more likely than men to accept offers, importantly, without accepting worse offers, which predicts greater liking from their counterpart [15]. However, research has not yet examined gender differences in conversation dynamics within negotiations, and more work should analyze negotiation transcripts to identify where such differences may arise. The gender composition of the group may lead to different conversation styles and outcomes [37]. Qualitative research examining

³ We discuss sexual orientation with terms consistent with each of the authors' preferred terminology from the articles cited.

compensation negotiations revealed that women use novel strategies, such as requesting a performance appraisal prior to negotiations, which scholars had not previously studied [38]. We recommend inductive approaches to uncover negotiation behaviors not yet captured by existing paradigms.

1.3.2. The costs of emphasizing “masculinity” in negotiations

By not focusing on the relationship in negotiations, individuals forgo its economic benefits [39]. Negotiations that overly focus on economic outcomes can undermine economic value [16]. Relational conflict from negotiating reduces the counterpart’s motivation and productivity. However, challenging the assumption that negotiations are a “masculine” domain may be perceived as a masculinity threat and provoke more aggressive behavior among men [21,23]. If so, research suggests that self-affirmation interventions can make men more receptive to women behaving dominantly and reduce backlash toward women [28].

1.3.3. Accounting for differential treatment in negotiations

Unfortunately, while women now initiate negotiations more often than men, they are also told “no” more often than men [4,40]. More research is needed on how and when negotiators treat women and men differently. For instance, men treat other men more aggressively in negotiations [21]. When women have strong (compared to weak) alternatives, negotiations are more likely to end in impasse [41]. Creditor companies led by men are more likely to reject debt renegotiation proposals from debtors led by women, despite renegotiation being the more economically favorable outcome [42]. Prior to even negotiating, women receive lower initial salary offers, especially in “masculine”-typed occupations [43]. Importantly, this work explores the impact of gender on negotiations in settings beyond vignette studies. Additional research is needed to understand how people adjust their behavior in response to their counterpart’s gender in naturalistic settings.

1.3.4. Replication efforts

Gender effects can change over time. Women are perceived as more competent negotiation partners than men [15] and are now more likely than men to initiate salary negotiations [4]. An attempt to replicate Amanatullah and Morris (2010) found that women still anticipate more backlash for negotiating, yet did not replicate the finding that women perform better when advocating for others [44,45]. Because gender stereotypes and behavior change over time [46], replication remains necessary.

1.4. Conclusion

Gendered expectations of negotiators, and gendered research on negotiators, are detrimental to both women and men [11,27]. A “masculine” standard for negotiator effectiveness misses much of what women contribute relationally, costs men psychologically and relationally when they enforce it, and rewards perceived dominance unevenly across race and sexual orientation while ignoring intersectional effects on “feminine” attributes. We highlight several areas for future negotiation research, including exploring gendered outcomes on “feminine” attributes, the costs

of overemphasizing “masculine” attributes, differential treatment in negotiation, and replication efforts, to create a more balanced and contemporary understanding of the relationship between gender and negotiation outcomes.

Acknowledgments: Thank you to Isaac Haile and Petre Lee for their assistance in collecting conference data.

Author contributions: CRediT

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- Data curation: CHT
- Formal analysis: (N/A)
- Funding acquisition: (N/A)
- Investigation: (N/A)
- Methodology: (N/A)
- Project administration: (N/A)
- Resources: (N/A)
- Software: (N/A)
- Supervision: (N/A)
- Validation: (N/A)
- Visualization: CHT
- Writing – original draft: CHT
- Writing – review and editing: CHT, LJK

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** Annotation for Kray et al., 2024 [4]: Reassesses previous findings that women initiate negotiations less than men, showing that women now initiate negotiations more than men. Further, demonstrates the consequences of endorsing the belief that women do not initiate negotiations as frequently as men.

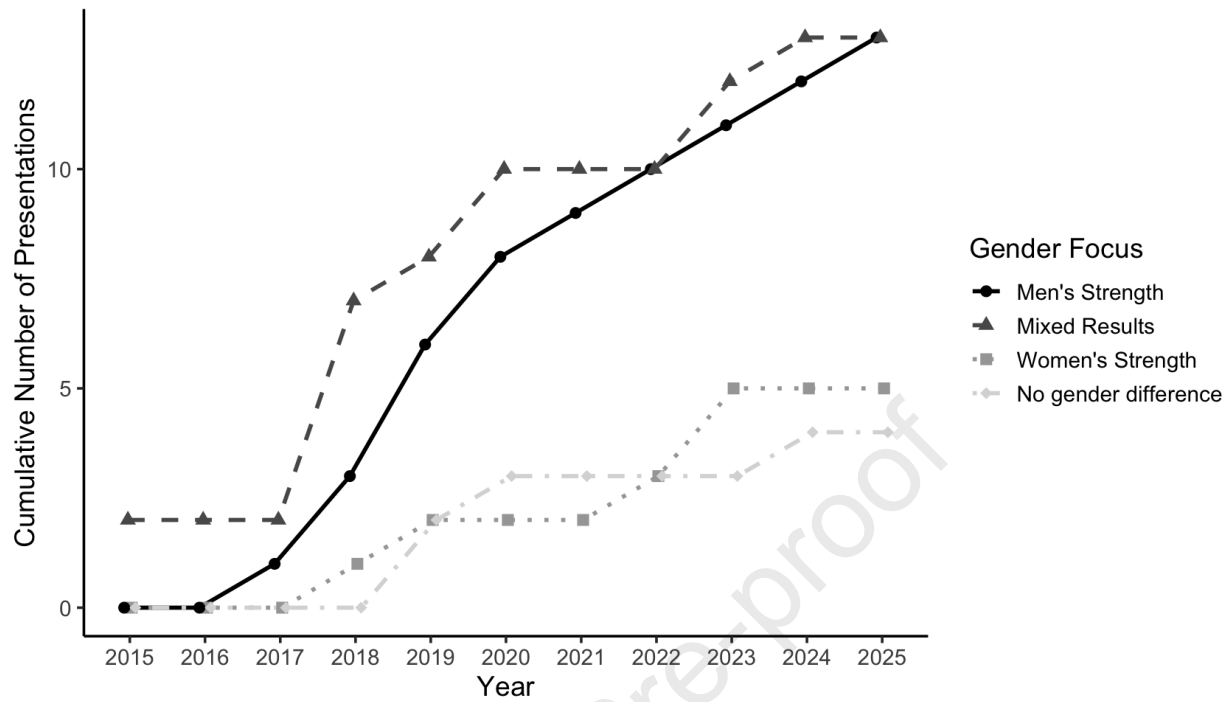
** Annotation for Bowles et al., 2025 [14]: Presents a conceptual framework for how and when gender matters in negotiation, risk-taking, and leadership. Situational ambiguity affects the extent to which individuals must rely on internal or external cues to guide behavior, and the salience or relevance of gender in a given context also impacts the extent to which gender differences arise.

** Annotation for Townsend et al., 2026 [15]: Explores gender differences in subjective value in negotiations, in face-to-face and online (anonymous) negotiations, and when counterpart gender is randomly assigned. Individuals who negotiate with women partners report greater subjective value, which correlates with a greater desire to negotiate with women partners again in the future, as counterparts in competitive and cooperative negotiations, and as teammates. Women perform as well as men in economic outcomes.

* Annotation for Trombini et al., 2024 [28]: Studies contexts, such as negotiations, in which men may face a masculinity threat, and increase backlash towards women who exhibit dominant behavior. Tests self-affirmation as an intervention to increase men’s openness to women who display dominance.

* Annotation for Chang et al., 2026 [34]: Examines the intersection of race and sexual orientation among men in negotiation outcomes in a field study and follow-up experiment. Contributes to intersectional and politeness research in negotiations.

Cumulative Trends in Gender and Negotiation Presentations



Declaration of interests

☒ The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐ The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: