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**Gender Diversity Dynamics in Humanitarian Negotiations:  
The International Committee of the Red Cross as a Case Study  
on the Frontlines of Armed Conflicts**

by Federica du Pasquier

## **Abstract**

Negotiations for access are crucial for the success of humanitarian operations. They also occur in contexts of armed conflict and violence that typically entrench gender identities. Building on the vast research showing that gender affects the conduct and outcome of negotiations, this paper explores gender dynamics in a humanitarian setting. After outlining its methodology and surveying the relevant literature, this paper sketches out the ways 21 practitioners at the International Committee of the Red Cross see gender dynamics affecting their work in the field. These interviews support previous findings on men and women's diverging conceptions of gender's impact and relevance, as well as on the cross-cultural consistency of gender dynamics in war. In a context where, unlike in many corporate settings, women's work as humanitarian actors is congruent with prescriptive gender stereotypes, this study shows that they can be perceived as more legitimate because they are thought of as selfless caregivers and potential mothers. This paper ultimately argues that, rather than studying the impact of gender in isolation, further research should explore how the intersectionality of different diversity dimensions—such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and religion—affect humanitarian negotiations. In terms of policy implications, this study makes the case for actively fostering diversity, including in terms of gender, within negotiating teams to ensure they are more flexible in adapting to different scenarios and more creative in dealing with complex problems.

## **About the Author**

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## **About the Humanitarian Negotiation Working Paper Series**

The *Humanitarian Negotiation Working Paper Series*—an initiative of the Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action (ATHA), a program of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative—aims to respond to the increased interest across the humanitarian sector in inter-agency dialogue on professional practices related to negotiations in humanitarian contexts. Building on an ongoing series of advanced practitioner workshops that ATHA has been convening at the field level for humanitarian practitioners since 2014, the working paper series is oriented toward generating an evidence base of professional approaches and reflections on current dilemmas in this area. The *Working Paper Series* also aims to marry the well-established field of negotiation theory, a body of literature primarily focused on other contexts, such as legal and political settings, with the burgeoning interest in the practice of humanitarian negotiation.

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## Introduction

Negotiations for access lie at the heart of humanitarian organizations' work. They are crucial for the success of humanitarian operations, which depend on the consent of the parties that control access to the populations in need of assistance and protection. On the frontlines of armed conflicts, the vast majority of counterparts negotiating on behalf of authorities are men. Humanitarian negotiation teams, though, are becoming increasingly mixed. Yet, while various humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins sans Frontières, have recently engaged in research on their negotiation practices, no attention has yet been directed toward the impact of gender on humanitarian negotiations.

The vast literature on gender and negotiations shows that gender affects how counterparts perceive one another, the negotiation style adopted, and the outcome of negotiations, particularly when negotiators communicate in person and in situations that exacerbate gender stereotypes. Humanitarian negotiations involve a crucial dimension of personal relationship building and occur in contexts of armed conflict or other types of violence that typically entrench gender identities. According to previous research in analogous fields—e.g., negotiations in business, peacekeeping, and peacemaking contexts—one would thus expect gender to have a high level of impact on humanitarian negotiations. Studies have also shown that gender roles in conflict situations are remarkably consistent across cultures, meaning that gendered dynamics are expected to transcend the negotiation context. What are the implications for organizations whose aim is to gain increased access to populations in need of protection and assistance?

This paper offers preliminary evidence of the gender dynamics at play in humanitarian negotiations. In particular, as a case study, this paper draws on the experience of male and female negotiators of the ICRC. It proceeds in five parts. Part I provides information about the research methodology of this study. Part II defines crucial concepts and surveys relevant literature on the role of gender in negotiation. Part III, based on interviews with 21 humanitarian negotiators working for the ICRC, sketches out the ways that these practitioners see gender stereotypes affecting their work and that of their colleagues in the field. Part IV revisits the central concepts from existing literature examined in Part II in light of the interview findings. Drawing, in particular, on recommendations stemming from the fields of peacemaking and peacekeeping, Part V outlines key institutional policy implications for humanitarian organizations.

The primary aim of this paper is not to analyze or essentialize differences in male and female styles and approaches to negotiation. Rather, this paper seeks to illuminate the

extent to which literature on gender and negotiations and gender and war can inform negotiations in a humanitarian setting, and vice-versa. This paper ultimately argues that, rather than studying the impact of gender in isolation, further research should explore how the intersectionality of different diversity dimensions—such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and religion—affect humanitarian negotiations.

## **I. Methodology**

The preliminary results examined in this paper are based on intensive, semi-structured (one to one-and-a-half hours each) research interviews with 21 negotiators (9 men and 12 women) who work for ICRC operations, either in field delegations or at headquarters. Each interviewee has between 10-30 years of experience negotiating on the frontline of armed conflicts with counterparts that include both governmental actors and non-state armed groups. Collectively, the interviewees have worked in all regions where the ICRC has field operations (Africa, Asia & Pacific, Europe & Central Asia, Middle East, and the Americas).

The initial interviewee pool drew from previous interview-based research conducted by the Humanitarian Negotiation Exchange Platform (HNx) at the ICRC, a project that led to the production of a transversal internal study on ICRC humanitarian negotiations. In partnership with the Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action (ATHA), the author worked with HNx to identify participants of the HNx study whose experience was markedly shaped by a gender component. Relevant participants were invited to contribute to this study, and then snowball sampling was employed by asking these professionals to nominate other colleagues whose experience they thought would be most pertinent to this project. The sample was chosen to represent a variety of ICRC operational settings to reflect the wide array of cultural contexts in which ICRC practitioners work. Participants were also selected on the basis of their leadership positions as heads of delegation or region, for instance, and/or their long-term involvement with the ICRC, in order to avoid discrepancies in levels of experience and expertise among the interviewee pool.

A few caveats are important to bear in mind regarding the interviewees. First, despite efforts towards achieving equal gender balance in the interviews, practitioners overwhelmingly referred their female colleagues, thus slightly skewing the sample. Second, of the 21 interviewees, only one was resident. Furthermore, most of the expatriate staff was white European (15), including 10 out of 12 women. Further research exploring how gender interacts with other diversity dimensions, including race/ethnicity, age, and religion should endeavor to include a balance of expatriate and resident staff. For confidentiality considerations, all citations in this paper are

anonymous. Interviews were conducted in both English and French. All translations are the author's.

## II. Humanitarian Negotiations in Context: Terminology and Literature

### A. Humanitarian Negotiations

Humanitarian negotiations aim to “ensure the impartial protection of, and the provision of assistance to, civilians affected by armed conflict and other people rendered hors de combat, as stipulated by international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.”<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian access, the prerequisite for delivering assistance and ensuring protection, is normally achieved and maintained through a process of constant negotiations.<sup>2</sup> According to the delegate in charge of security at the ICRC's Directorate of Operations, to be able to operate, “the ICRC must first ensure that it is accepted by the parties to a conflict,” and to establish “a relationship of trust.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, he argues, “the ICRC has no means of exerting pressure to impose its activities. Persuasion, influence and credibility are its only weapons.”<sup>4</sup>

The aforementioned transversal study conducted by the ICRC's HNx initiative has shown that “a major component of ICRC negotiations involve the establishment and maintenance of relationships with counterparts” and that “a relationship based on trust was overwhelmingly seen by interviewees as a pre-requisite to any form of humanitarian agreement.”<sup>5</sup> Be it at checkpoints or at higher political levels, humanitarian negotiations are thus at the heart of humanitarian organizations' work. They are also markedly relational in nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Mancini-Griffoli, Deborah and André Picot. 2004. “Humanitarian Negotiation: A Handbook for Securing Access, Assistance and Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict.” Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, p. 19. Retrieved November 8, 2016 ([http://www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx\\_news/188HumanitarianNegotiation.pdf](http://www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx_news/188HumanitarianNegotiation.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> Assistance refers to the provision of goods and services to meet the physical, psychosocial, and socioeconomic needs of affected persons, while protection focuses on ensuring that the behavior of parties to the conflict is consistent with obligations under international law. See Mc Hugh, Gerard and Manuel Bessler. 2006. “Humanitarian Negotiation with Armed Groups: A Manual for Practitioners.” United Nations, p. 5. Retrieved November 8, 2016 (<https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/HumanitarianNegotiationswArmedGroupsManual.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> Brugger, Patrick. 2009. “ICRC Operational Security: Staff Safety in Armed Conflict and Internal Violence.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 91(874): 436. doi:10.1017/S1816383109990075.x.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). 2015. “Humanitarian Negotiation Exchange (HNx): Analytical Report on ICRC Negotiation and Mediation Practices.” External Draft for Consultation, p. 9.

## B. Gender, Sex, and War

Gender is traditionally understood to mean “a set of cultural institutions and practices that constitute the norms and standards of masculinity and femininity.”<sup>6</sup> Sex, in contrast, is a word that refers to the biological differences between men and women.<sup>7</sup> While critical feminist theorists in the 1970s and 1980s have repudiated gender-conservative discourses that link biological sex and sociocultural gender in a simplistic and deterministic way (i.e., sex equals gender), more recent researchers have also problematized drawing too stark a distinction between sex and gender. Rather than “constructing a false dichotomy,”<sup>8</sup> one such author argues, “gender/sex should be reconceptualized as a mixed phenomenon, which includes both biological materiality and sociocultural dimensions.”<sup>9</sup> Although individual men and women may not necessarily conform to these stereotypes, masculinity is largely associated with “physical strength, action, hardness, and aggression,” and femininity with “passivity, empathy, caring, and emotion.”<sup>10</sup> In many spheres of life, such as those pertaining to political and military leadership, society values traits associated with masculinity.<sup>11</sup>

Research on gender and war has shown that conflict leads to the extolling of value traits associated with masculinity<sup>12</sup> and contributes to fixing constructed identities through the imposition of a binary “us” and “them.”<sup>13</sup> One such opposing pair is that between “beautiful souls” and “just warriors.”<sup>14</sup> In the “beautiful souls” narrative, women are thought of as pure, virtuous beings, immune from the baser drives that impel men to battle, and therefore in need of protection, and men wage war to rescue or protect them. Critical feminists have argued that this narrative serves to recreate and secure women's social position as noncombatants and men's identity as warriors. They have showed that it is also a fundamental part of discourses justifying the making and fighting of

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<sup>6</sup> Steans, Jill. 1998. *Gender and International Relations*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Oakley, Ann. 2015. *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 18-49.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Goldstein, Joshua. 2001. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Lykke, Nina. 2010. *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*. New York: Routledge, p. 25. See also Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* London: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> Chinkin, Christine and Mary Kaldor. 2013. “Gender and New Wars.” *Journal of International Affairs* 67(1): 167-168. Retrieved November 8, 2016 (<http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/1469702447/fulltextPDF/FF2341D457B546D7PQ/1?accountid=11311>).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Goldstein, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Kaldor, Mary. 2013. “Identity and War.” *Global Policy* 4(4): 336-346. doi:10.1111/1758-5899.12084.x.

<sup>14</sup> Elshtain, Jean Bethke. 1987. *Women and War*. New York: Basic Books, p. 43.



wars.<sup>15</sup> Literature on gender in war has also shown that “despite the diversity of gender and of war separately, gender roles in war are very consistent across all known human societies.”<sup>16</sup> Cross-cultural consistency of gender roles in war stems from the combination of “small, innate biological gender differences in *average* size, strength, and roughness of play” with the “cultural molding of tough, brave men, who feminize enemies in dominating them.”<sup>17</sup>

The study of gender and sex differences has long been—and to a certain extent continues to be—controversial. In the 1970s, in particular, feminists rejected literature and psychology studies exploring gender differences, arguing that claims about sex differences falsely portrayed women as inferior to men.<sup>18</sup> A countertrend of feminist psychologists has since emerged that accepts the existence of sex and gender-related differences.<sup>19</sup> To this day, although the fear that literature highlighting gender differences will ultimately serve to undermine women persists—in particular with essentialist explanations linked to biology<sup>20</sup>—there is widespread consensus across disciplines around the existence of gender-induced differences.<sup>21</sup> By recognizing that differences can have a positive outcome and analyzing the particular challenges women are subjected to, the research on gender differences in the field of negotiation has

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See also Sjoberg, Laura. 2010. “Women Fighters and the ‘Beautiful Soul’ Narrative.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 92(887): 67, which states, “In this understanding, the ‘beautiful soul’s presence is crucial both to wars and their justificatory narratives. ‘Beautiful souls’ require protection; the protection of the feminine can then be read as a crucial cause of war. The images of femaleness in the gender-stereotypical ‘beautiful soul’ narrative, then, simultaneously enable war and sub-ordinate women.”

<sup>16</sup> Goldstein, 2001, 3. Also see p. 9, where Goldstein argues that the reason why “this diversity disappears when it comes to the *connection* of war and gender” is that “to help overcome soldiers’ reluctance to fight, cultures develop gender roles that equate ‘manhood’ with toughness under fire.”

<sup>17</sup> Goldstein, 2001, 6. Furthermore, Goldstein argues that men are not innately disposed to war. Instead, as he states on p. 253, they most often “need to be dragged kicking and screaming into [war], constantly brainwashed and disciplined once there, and rewarded and honored afterwards.” Indeed, as he notes on p. 264, fear and combat trauma are pervasive among men in battle, and appeals to a warrior masculinity “force men to endure trauma and master fear, in order to claim the status of ‘manhood.’”

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Bernard, Jessie. 1974. *Sex Differences: An Overview* (Module 26). New York: MSS Modular Publications, p. 13, which refers to studies of sex differences as “battle weapons against women.”

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Ferris, Elizabeth. 1993. *Women, War and Peace*. Uppsala: Life & Peace Institute.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, see Unger, Rhoda and Mary Crawford. 1992. *Women and Gender: A Feminist Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, which argues that, for an oppressed group such as women, differences become deficiencies.

overwhelmingly aimed to serve as a tool of female empowerment and to increase women's participation and influence.

### C. *Gender, Negotiation Theory, and Literature on Peacekeeping and Peacemaking*

The analysis of the social construction of gender in negotiation dates back to the mid-1990s, when two seminal meta-analyses found that gender effects in negotiation were significantly linked to situational factors.<sup>22</sup> The first study showed that women appear to behave more cooperatively in negotiations than men, but only slightly, and that stereotypical gender differences increase markedly with the negotiators' ability to communicate with their counterparts.<sup>23</sup> It found that when communication was restrained, or in the case of abstract bargaining paradigms, this difference was considerably lower.<sup>24</sup> The second study argued that the differences that previous studies found in the outcomes of negotiation settlements between men and women might have been caused by the stereotypically masculine nature of the negotiations at hand (e.g., negotiating issues related to cars, airplanes, computer systems, or turbo engine parts, as opposed to traditionally stereotypical feminine tasks involving child care, caretaker issues, housework, or grade school teachers). Similarly, it hypothesized that stereotypical power differentials (e.g., a male supervisor and a female subordinate) in the study role-play would lead to stereotypical gender differences in settlements. In brief, this study concluded, the situation and negotiation structure may influence gender differences in negotiation outcomes.<sup>25</sup> According to these seminal meta-analyses, in sum, the differential impact of gender therefore increases in face-to-face negotiations, where negotiators communicate in person, and in situations that exacerbate gender stereotypes. Both of these elements apply to humanitarian negotiations.

Further research on the content and implications of gender stereotypes found that they are at the root of gender effects in negotiation. Because masculine attributes—assertiveness, independence, and rationality—are thought to be more valuable at the bargaining table than feminine ones—emotionality, concern for others, and passivity—

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<sup>22</sup> Bowles, Hannah Riley. 2012. "Psychological Perspectives on Gender in Negotiation." HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP12-046, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, p. 4 ([https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9830358/RWP12-046\\_Bowles.pdf?sequence=1](https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9830358/RWP12-046_Bowles.pdf?sequence=1)).

<sup>23</sup> Walters, Amy E., Alice F. Stuhlmacher, and Lia L. Meyer. 1998. "Gender and Negotiator Competitiveness: A Meta-analysis." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 76(1): 1-29. doi:10.1006/obhd.1998.2797.x.

<sup>24</sup> Walters, Stuhlmacher, and Meyer, 1998, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Stuhlmacher, Alice F. and Amy E. Walters. 1999. "Gender Differences in Negotiation Outcome: A Meta-analysis." *Personnel Psychology* 52(3): 653-677. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6570.1999.tb00175.x.

this strand of literature posits that female negotiators are disadvantaged.<sup>26</sup> Recent studies have also investigated how prescriptive gender stereotypes (i.e., beliefs about the characteristics that men and women *should* possess)<sup>27</sup> and the ensuing gender policing affect female negotiators' behavior. These studies have shown that women are more successful at negotiating higher compensation outcomes for others than for themselves,<sup>28</sup> and that this could be explained by greater fear of social backlash in negotiations for oneself.<sup>29</sup> When advocating for others, this literature shows, women have more liberty to negotiate forcefully, and gender differences in performance decline.<sup>30</sup> These findings corroborate previous research on the cost of self-advocacy for women, a strand of literature that has shown that the pursuit of higher compensation aligns with the masculine stereotype of the agentic, breadwinning man but contradicts normative expectations that the communal woman should be more concerned for others than for herself.<sup>31</sup> Since women need to weigh the social risks of negotiating against potential economic benefits, amongst other factors, women face a "compensation negotiation dilemma."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kray, Laura J. and Leigh Thompson. 2004. "Gender Stereotypes and Negotiation Performance: An Examination of Theory and Research." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 26:103-182. doi:10.1016/S0191-3085(04)26004.x.

<sup>27</sup> As opposed to beliefs about the characteristics that men and women do possess. For a detailed study on prescriptive and descriptive gender stereotypes, see Burgess, Diana and Eugene Borgida. 1999. "Who Women Are, Who Women Should Be: Descriptive and Prescriptive Gender Stereotyping in Sex Discrimination." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 5(3): 665-692. doi:10.1037/1076-8971.5.3.665.x.

<sup>28</sup> Bowles, Hannah Riley, Linda Babcock, and Kathleen L. McGinn. 2005. "Constraints and Triggers: Situational Mechanics of Gender in Negotiation." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89(6): 951-965. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.951.x.

<sup>29</sup> For further literature on the risks of social backlash for women who are self-promoting, see, for instance, Rudman, Laurie A. 1998. "Self-Promotion as a Risk Factor for Women: The Costs and Benefits of Counterstereotypical Impression Management." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74(3): 629-645. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.3.629.x.; Rudman, Laurie A. and Peter Glick. 1999. "Feminized Management and Backlash Toward Agentic Women: The Hidden Costs to Women of a Kinder, Gentler Image of Middle Managers." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77(5): 1004-1010. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.77.5.1004.x.

<sup>30</sup> Amanatullah, Emily T. and Michael W. Morris. 2010. "Negotiating Gender Roles: Gender Differences in Assertive Negotiating are Mediated by Women's Fear of Backlash and Attenuated When Negotiating on Behalf of Others." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98(2): 256-267. doi:10.1037/a0017094.x.

<sup>31</sup> Wade, Mary E. 2001. "Women and Salary Negotiation: The Costs of Self-Advocacy." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 25(1): 65-76. doi:10.1111/1471-6402.00008.x. On gender-linked stereotypes, see also Eagly, Alice. 1987. *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, Bowles, 2012; Bowles, Hannah Riley and Linda Babcock. 2013. "How Can Women Escape the Compensation Negotiation Dilemma? Relational Accounts are One Answer." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 37(1): 80-96. doi:10.1177/0361684312455524.x.; Bowles, Hannah Riley and Kathleen L. McGinn. 2008. "Untapped Potential in the Study of Negotiation and Gender Inequality in Organizations." *The Academy of Management Annals* 2(1): 99-132. doi:10.1080/19416520802211453.x.; Small, Deborah A., Michele Gelfand, Linda Babcock, and Hilary Gettman. 2007. "Who Goes to the Bargaining Table? The

Another interesting finding in the field of mediation and gender theory is that men and women think very differently of the influence of gender on their practice. According to a seminal study in this field, “men often did not conceive of gender as a relevant issue... and didn’t think it made any difference whether the third party was male or female.” They also very often denied the relevance of gender as an analytic category.<sup>33</sup> Women, in contrast, “never considered gender irrelevant.”<sup>34</sup> They thought it influenced their vision of the role of mediator and that “aspects of their sex-linked socialization and roles were relevant and valuable in their ongoing work.”<sup>35</sup> For women, taking into account the potential impact of being female was critical.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000)—which addressed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building and mandated increased representation of women in domestic armed forces and all peacekeeping operations—has given rise to a prolific literature on gender in the fields of peacekeeping and peacemaking. Research has shown that the participation of women at the peace table “contributes to a more comprehensive peace agreement, and bolsters the prospect of sustainable peace,” not only because it lends greater weight to issues that specifically affect women, but also by virtue of including a broader range of (mainly civil society) actors in the process.<sup>36</sup> Many studies have also called for the greater involvement of women in peacekeeping operations, dispelling myths that female participation would encounter staunch resistance in traditional societies and showing that the resistance was instead due to biases amongst contributing countries.<sup>37</sup> The presence of female peacekeepers has been empirically shown to improve the operation’s chance of success, in part because, due to

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Influence of Gender and Framing on the Initiation of Negotiation.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93(4): 600-613. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.93.4.600.x.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Weingarten, Helen and Elizabeth Douvan. 1985. “Male and Female Visions of Mediation.” *Negotiation Journal* 1(4): 353.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> O’Reilly, Marie and Andrea Ó Súilleabháin. 2013. “Women in Conflict Mediation: Why it Matters.” Issue Brief, International Peace Institute, p. 1. Retrieved November 13, 2016 ([https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi\\_e\\_pub\\_women\\_in\\_conflict\\_med.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_women_in_conflict_med.pdf)). See also Potter, Antonia. 2008. *Women and Negotiations with Armed Groups*. Geneva: HD Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. Retrieved November 13, 2016 (<https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/106Womenandnegotiationswitharmedgroups-February-2008.pdf>); O’Reilly, Marie, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz. 2015. “Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes.” New York: International Peace Institute. Retrieved November 9, 2016 (<https://www.ipinst.org/2015/06/reimagining-peacemaking-womens-roles-in-peace-processes>); Anderlini, Sanam. 2007. *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance Olsson, Louise. 2000. “Mainstreaming Gender in Multidimensional Peacekeeping: A Field Perspective.” *International Peacekeeping* 7(3): 1-16. doi:10.1080/13533310008413846.x.

gender stereotypes, men and women are perceived differently. One study states, "The presence of a man in a tense situation can be provocative, even if that man has no intention to provoke. On the other hand, the woman tends to calm stressful situations because she is expected to be peaceful."<sup>38</sup> Research has also shown that men react differently to confrontations with men and women in positions of authority, with the latter often escalating into a contest of male dominance.<sup>39</sup>

A number of expectations stem from the literature reviewed above regarding the findings of a case study on gender dynamics in humanitarian negotiations. First, it is likely that men and women will conceive of the influence of gender on their practice differently, with women considering it to be more relevant than their male colleagues. Second, based on the experience of women in peacekeeping operations, one may assume geographical restrictions on staffing female humanitarian professionals to stem from biases in the institution rather than from actual resistance in traditional societies. Third, studies have demonstrated that gender roles in conflict situations are remarkably consistent across cultures, meaning that gendered dynamics should be similar irrespective of the negotiation context. Fourth, given that previous literature has found the differential impact of gender increases where negotiators communicate in person and in situations that exacerbate gender stereotypes, one would expect the following case study to show gender to have a high level of impact on humanitarian negotiations.

Finally, research on prescriptive gender stereotypes has shown they exert pressure for gender-congruent behavior, and in particular, for women to act as communal advocates rather than as self-promoters. While this has been found to overwhelmingly prejudice them in business settings, such as in compensation negotiations, the stereotype of women as selfless caregivers is congruent with their role as humanitarian actors. It could, therefore, be an advantage in these negotiations. Conversely, one might expect stereotypical masculine attributes, such as assertiveness, to constitute a hindrance when advocating on behalf of others.

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<sup>38</sup> DeGroot, Gerard J. 2001. "A Few Good Women: Gender Stereotypes, the Military and Peacekeeping." *International Peacekeeping* 8(2): 35. doi:10.1080/13533310108413893.x. See also Olsson, 2000, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Stiehm, Judith Hicks. 1997. "Peacekeeping and Peace Research: Men's and Women's Work." *Women & Politics* 18(1): 42. doi:10.1300/J014v18n1\_02.x.

### III. A Case Study: The International Committee of the Red Cross

#### A. *Differing Perspectives on the Relevance of Gender*

This study corroborated aforementioned research showing that men and women conceive of the influence of gender on their negotiation and mediation practices differently, meeting the first of the expectations outlined above. Eleven out of the twelve women interviewed thought that their gender has had an “impact on [their] negotiation practice” and on how they are perceived by their counterparts. Female interviewees stated, for instance, that “the fact that the environment is mostly male has influenced my style” and “being a woman in negotiations on the field can have an impact.” In contrast, many men questioned the relevance of gender as an analytical category in humanitarian negotiations. When asked about differences between men’s and women’s negotiation techniques, they often insisted that women are “just as capable as men” to negotiate on the frontlines. “I don’t see a difference between men and women in their negotiation styles,” a male interviewee commented. “I don’t think there is a difference in approach,” another corroborated, “we speak the same language.”

These comments on the (lack of) impact of gender on negotiation styles and approaches by men were typically followed by a rejection of gender as a criterion limiting the staffing of women to certain postings. One male interviewee said, “The historical assumption has been that women would find it difficult to take a lead role in places such as Afghanistan and Somalia. My experience is that this doesn’t hold true. If you have the right person, the gender doesn’t matter. There were not times where we thought that women couldn’t do things that men could. People didn’t have issues talking to female delegates.” Another added, “In Najaf and Kirkuk, we had always said no to women delegates. We thought they would not be able to negotiate in these circumstances. I think this is wrong; it is a myth that we should break.”

This seems to indicate that these interviewees associated acknowledging a sex-based difference with justifying limitations on women’s involvement in certain contexts, potentially due to the history of, and debates around, staffing at the ICRC. Women concurred that the barriers, which the ICRC traditionally imposed on women, were not justified. As one female interviewee stated, “The ICRC was convinced that it wasn’t possible to have women in these positions. And it was wrong.” Some felt that these institutional prejudices posed a bigger challenge to their humanitarian work than the difficulties inherent in the contexts where they worked. One interviewee, for instance, commented, “There is more reluctance against sending women within the ICRC than from the field.” However, women did not infer from this that their gender had not influenced their negotiation practice. Interestingly, the fact that respondents saw female

participation in humanitarian negotiation as stymied less by the traditional societies in which they have operated than by the ICRC's institutional biases is reminiscent of similar findings in the field of peacekeeping, and meets the second expectation outlined above.

### *B. The Institutional Approach to Gender and Staffing*

The extent to which interactions with outside stakeholders are predicated on internal, institutional considerations is also apparent in how many interviewees spoke about the position of women within the organization when asked about the impact of gender on frontline humanitarian negotiations. Many participants were of the opinion that the ICRC had evolved enormously from an extremely male-dominated, "macho" institution to a more balanced one that includes more women in higher-ranking positions. These interviewees imparted that this shift occurred due to a variety of reasons. First, women pushed for change and led by example. As one female interviewee stated, "The most effective way to push for change is to lead by example. To take on the challenge and show that women are as capable as men. It's the best change to get things moving." Second, individual and collective experiences led practitioners to re-evaluate their perspectives. According to one interviewee, "Women have become more visible. Individual and collective experiences have changed the institutions. I realize today how much I was impregnated with a macho vision of the world. I thought the contexts we work in necessitate machos. Experiences made me change radically." Third, pressure from donors necessitated a shift in the institutional approach to staffing. "Donors, especially the USA and Nordic countries, made this a condition for funding," said one interviewee. Fourth, a more general shift in mentalities occurred. "Times have changed," one interviewee asserted. "More women are ready to take on the challenge."

Many women spoke highly of the situation the institution has reached today. One, for instance, stated, "The ICRC takes women as seriously as men—I was never in a situation where I was disadvantaged. I see many examples of women around me." However, female interviewees also stressed that being a woman still implies difficulties, most of which are linked to balancing work and family life, issues that are similar to challenges faced by women in all industries. According to one female interviewee, "While the job, as such, is not harder for women, organizing your life around it definitely is. It is harder for women to also take care of their children, etc., and society treats men and women differently on this." The exigencies of working in the humanitarian field and relocating frequently appear to exacerbate these issues. "We can't go on a mission without our children, whereas men do," one female interviewee commented. "It's harder for us to have a partner who stays at home." After having children, several female participants said, they had "less time" to focus on establishing

informal relationships with their interlocutors during negotiations, which put them at a disadvantage. Finally, some female respondents highlighted the lack of “accompanying measures” for the promotion of women at the ICRC, such as assistance for childcare, the possibility for mothers to work from home, etc. “They push a lot, but they don’t accompany,” one interviewee said.

### *C. Practitioners’ Perspectives on Gender Dynamics and Humanitarian Negotiations*

This section will report on participants’ responses related to the dynamics of negotiations with both male and female counterparts. In particular, it will examine the dynamics at play in different gendered dyad types, those being:

- Female Humanitarian Negotiator and Male Counterpart
- Male Humanitarian Negotiator and Male Counterpart
- Female Humanitarian Negotiator and Female Counterpart
- Male Humanitarian Negotiator and Female Counterpart

The first sub-section will look at negotiations with male counterparts, the second at those with female counterparts. A few preliminary observations are worth noting. First, these interviews corroborate previous studies, referred to in the first section of this paper, showing that humanitarian negotiations include an important relational component. According to one participant, for instance, “There is always a part of personal interaction that can prove extremely important.” Second, all interviewees stated that the overwhelming majority of their counterparts have been men. “We are mainly dealing with the weapon carriers, which is dominantly a male environment,” one participant explained. Another added, “99% of our counterparts are men. Men speak to men, we speak to another gender.” As a point of reference, in 2015, women made up 39% and 54% of the ICRC field and headquarters staff, respectively. Looking just at expatriate delegates working in the field, 44% are women.<sup>40</sup> Third, many interviewees commented that they “did *not* see any variation along the cultural context” in their gendered experience of humanitarian negotiations. In general, responses were remarkably constant across the cultural environments in which negotiators operated, a finding that is consistent with literature on war and gender referenced above, and which thus also validates the third expectation referred to in the previous section. Crucially, however, negotiators’ race and nationality also seem to affect the negotiation considerably. Finally, all interviewees insisted on the importance of the negotiator’s personality and style as trumping his/her personal attributes, including gender.

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<sup>40</sup> Statistics courtesy of the ICRC Human Resources Shared Services.



## 1. Male Counterparts

Almost all the women interviewed (11) felt that being a woman was overwhelmingly an advantage in their negotiations with male counterparts. Some men thought women could be at an advantage in certain settings, and one argued it was “very clearly a disadvantage.” Although, as mentioned above, the majority of men did not think that gender had an influence on negotiations, those who thought that being a woman had a positive, tangible effect on the outcome of the negotiation traced this advantage back to four factors, which will be described below.

The first factor, which twenty of the twenty-one interviewees mentioned, was the absence of rivalry between negotiating parties of different sexes and the non-threatening character of female negotiators for their counterparts. Both male and female participants said that women delegates “were perceived less as a threat.” They also argued that there were “no issues of rivalry,” whereas two men negotiating would tend to want to affirm their status as the dominant actor in the relationship. “In certain situations, it may be easier to make concessions to a woman because there is less the question of power struggle—although she still represents the institution,” one interviewee commented. According to another interviewee, male counterparts feel empowered, rather than threatened, by conceding requests to female negotiators: “As women, you can appeal to the ego of your male counterparts. In general, the people you are speaking to have decision-making power. And they want to show you that they *can* take that decision, even if it is not in their immediate interest.” Several male interviewees observed that the presence of women negotiators can contribute to reducing the tension and intensity of a discussion.

A second, and related, factor that over half (15) of the interviewees mentioned is that women are seen as having greater legitimacy and credibility in carrying the humanitarian message and talking about humanitarian issues—in particular in relation to the plight of their beneficiaries—than their male colleagues. “We might be perceived with more legitimacy when we speak about the plight of our beneficiaries—e.g., when we speak on behalf of mothers who lost their children,” one female participant said. Various female interviewees commented that they were perceived as more “credible,” “sincere,” “naïve,” and “genuine” by their male counterparts. Women related these perspectives of their legitimacy to their role as potential mothers. “Somehow, there is a point where a woman brings you down to your role in your family. She seems to be more genuine. It’s more understandable that she [would] act as a mother towards her child than as a predatory actor.” Accordingly, while most female interviewees did not believe their perception was tangibly affected by whether they were married or their age, some found that their interlocutors had even greater respect for mothers: “Having

children and saying it gives you more *gravitas*, it is recognized as having value." Interestingly, several interviewees (6) made reference to Mother Teresa in this sense, implying that female negotiators were associated with this saintly figure: "Women, for sure, have greater legitimacy in carrying this humanitarian message. You have something clean, like Madre Teresa." In line with the fifth expectation formulated above, stereotypes of women as selfless caregivers are thus strikingly congruent with their role as humanitarian actors, which plays to their advantage. As this paper will describe below, this observation has a striking parallel in male humanitarian negotiators' perceptions of their female counterparts.

Third, one third (4) of the women interviewed also thought they were at a significant advantage because their presence in overwhelmingly masculine environments, and in typically male roles, surprised and destabilized their interlocutors. In some instances, counterparts were impressed that these female delegates were putting themselves in physical danger to conduct their work, and therefore, had great respect for what they perceived as courageous behavior. "Non-state armed groups find it courageous that a woman would take the risk to come see them," a female respondent said. Another added, "In some places I worked before, being a female was considered a greater physical risk. My interlocutor was very impressed that we were there, just physically. He considered us nearly as female warriors, which helped us to get respect more quickly." In other instances, this surprise effect was related to the low expectations their counterparts held in terms of these female delegates' knowledge and experience in matters related to warfare. One female interviewee stated, "You can surprise them, especially the military. After five minutes, they take you seriously, and at the end of the meeting they are generally quite impressed because they did not expect anything."

The last advantage that interviewees mentioned female delegates have in negotiations with male counterparts is the ability to use their charm. In negotiations with members of the opposite sex, be it for men or women, "there is always an element of charm that comes into play," a male respondent said. "Seduction plays a role. Men use it with their female interlocutors, and vice-versa," a female participant added. Yet, although this element could be an advantage, women were always very quick to note that being too charming was also dangerous, and that it could harm one's professional credibility. Others noted that the level of formality of the interaction very much determined the extent to which charm played a role. In more formal negotiations, charm matters less.

That being said, interviewees also perceive being a woman to be a double-edged sword in some contexts. Participants identified three main challenges for female negotiators, with male interviewees mostly mentioning the third. The first difficulty for women, which is linked to the charm dimension described above, is that of having to continuously set boundaries and insist on the professional nature of the relationship,

especially for young delegates. "As a woman, you need to be firm, to set your boundaries clearly," one interviewee explained. While being a woman can ease the establishment of a relationship with one's counterparts, female respondents asserted, dealing with undesired or unprofessional attention is a recurrent challenge: "When I get asked out for drinks by my counterparts, I try to shrug it off as a joke; but sometimes, I have had to be more firm, to the professional nature of our relationship. This is something I have had to do very often. It is always very delicate to draw the line." This element of the dynamic between humanitarian negotiators and their counterparts is both crucial and sensitive, especially given the fact that personal relationships are very often a decisive factor in humanitarian negotiations.

Another challenge women reportedly face, related to the "surprise effect" mentioned above, is being taken seriously in contexts where their presence and expertise largely runs against expectations shaped by gender stereotypes. Some interlocutors do not consider women as credible counterparts. For instance, a female interviewee recalls a situation in which her interlocutor, a man, "didn't consider me as the counterpart with whom to discuss business, although I was completely qualified and entitled to discuss substantial matters." In these situations, female delegates face a prejudice that they need to overcome. One female interviewee stated, "You need to surprise them or they will not take you seriously." Once they have been able to prove themselves to be competent, however, most female interviewees felt their gender became an advantage. In one such example, a respondent remembers, "When I was working in Bosnia, many of my interlocutors had a very macho attitude. Yet after a couple of months of working with them, I had been able to go further than my predecessor. You cannot reduce everything to gender, but I do feel it played an important role. Although it was more difficult at first, once they had decided they could trust me, it was easier."

Finally, participants mentioned that some interlocutors, be they very conservative religious scholars or members of the army, refused to speak to women. In some contexts, "bringing a lady to be present during the negotiation was not allowed," one interviewee said. "Some interlocutors will not want to meet women," another corroborated. However, all those who did experience this resistance stressed that this happened in very few cases. None of the female interviewees included in this study had experienced it personally. "Nobody has ever refused to speak to me," said one female interviewee. To be sure, this is a reflection of the extensive contextual and stakeholder analyses that go into the preparation of negotiations. Yet it also stands to indicate that the problem might be a lot more limited than often assumed.

Conversely, many interviewees, including both men and women, remarked that in the case of negotiations between two men, issues of status and power were much more

important, an element that could lead tensions to arise or escalate. Several commented that “men are much more concerned with preserving their status vis-à-vis their interlocutor.” Negotiations with men are “more confrontational,” one male interviewee said, as “men with power play a lot on their positioning: you need to recognize the position they occupy, you can’t make them lose face. If you don’t make them feel like they have a superior position, it doesn’t go well.” A female participant added, “I strongly feel a competition in the spirit with which two men approach negotiations. It’s like arm wrestling in which each one needs to prove that he is stronger and smarter.” This also corroborates the fifth expectation formulated in the previous section, according to which stereotypical masculine attributes such as assertiveness might, at times, be perceived as incongruent with advocating on behalf of others

## 2. Female Counterparts

All participants remarked that they had had very few experiences negotiating with female counterparts, and therefore, cautioned against extrapolating too much from their limited experiences. Nevertheless, their observations strikingly coalesced around two axes. Some respondents, both male and female, thought women were at an advantage in their negotiations with other women. Female delegates, they argued, were able to create a special bond and to have greater complicity because it was easier for women to bring the discussion to a personal level. Some “shared stories about their families.” Others “organized *girls-only* dinners” in which they discussed the challenges of being a woman in circles related to politics and conflict and concluded that, although they weren’t “on the same team,” they were “confronted with the same difficulties.” Other interviewees also thought that the exacerbated masculinity of the environment in which female negotiators and their counterparts operate, and the paucity of women occupying leadership roles, led to a form of mutual recognition between the two. “You bond because there are very few women. It is automatically a very privileged relationship,” a female participant commented. One of her male colleagues concurred, “There is bonding due to mutual recognition, which is linked to the male-dominant culture.”

However, other respondents thought that negotiations between two women were more difficult. Some female delegates were very aware that the style they have developed with men “doesn’t work” in their negotiations with women. One female interviewee commented, “The most difficult negotiations I have ever had have been with women. In these moments, I realized that my style as I had adopted it did not work at all in all cases.” Another female interviewee expressed a similar sentiment, “I have had to deal with some very tough women in ministerial positions with whom nothing worked, and I almost felt it was better to be a man. I can’t say why, I just couldn’t break through.”

According to the comments described above, men might be at an advantage in negotiations with female counterparts because they are better placed to play the charm card. One participant commented that her head of delegation, a man, consciously integrates a gender dimension in his negotiations: “There is a difference when he deals with men and women. The arguments are the same, but maybe when it’s a woman my boss would tend to reflect on what kind of argument would flatter her... he is softer with a woman. It’s not that he is in a seduction role, but he uses greater charm—even unconsciously.” Another also recalls, “In one particular encounter, my female counterpart was very angry... and I couldn’t play on being a woman with her, of course. It was my boss (a man) who charmed her out of her anger—so it was the other way around than what normally happens.”

In an interesting parallel to the credibility advantage female negotiators can be perceived to have, several male delegates thought that, in some of the very few instances they had dealt with female counterparts, it was easier to bring up humanitarian arguments. One said, “In Somalia, in Nepal, for instance, I felt it was easier to talk to a woman about humanitarian issues. She could relate to children, the suffering of the wife of someone who went missing.” Another male interviewee recalled an instance when the fact that his counterpart was a woman in a predominantly male environment “gave her a particular aura, a kind of special respect. She represented the beneficiary population. She had a special proximity to the beneficiaries.” A third concluded of a negotiation with a female counterpart: “I think the fact that she was a woman gave her greater legitimacy and credibility.” Again, this seems to indicate that gender stereotypes, and in particular that of women as care-givers, play out strongly in the humanitarian context. This seems to be true not only of counterparts but also amongst humanitarian practitioners, consciously or not.

#### *D. Gender and Negotiation Style*

While the primary objective of this study was not to study gender-based differences in negotiation style and approaches, this section will briefly outline respondents’ observations on the topic. Every interviewee noted that negotiation styles and approaches very much vary from one delegate to another, and it is difficult to trace them back to gender alone. Many stressed that the most important thing is to “know your stuff” —i.e., that mastering the substance is paramount to a successful negotiation and that men and women did not have different abilities in this regard. Yet, a few women mentioned that the fact that they had negotiated almost exclusively with men had, sometimes unconsciously, shaped their styles. They believed the difference lay not in the core of the argumentation but rather in the style and approach with which men and women bring arguments forward. One interviewee stated, “The core doesn’t

change, it is at the margins of the discussions, in the approach.” For many, the aims, content and substance of the negotiations were very much shaped by the institution. “We have a very predefined institutional approach to negotiations, it’s like a ritual,” one interviewee stated. While some male interviewees also commented that there might be a “slight tendency” for women delegates, on average, to be “smoother,” “take a softer role,” or be “more patient,” others said that women delegates could sometimes be “more direct” and “more frontal” than their male colleagues. Several described one of their female colleagues as “blunt” and “abrasive,” demonstrating that not all behavior abides by gender stereotypes. Further research could thus aim to shed light on how gender affects negotiation style in humanitarian negotiations, and to what extent, as argued in analogous fields, such as mediation studies, gender dynamics can impact upon the objectives and outcomes of the negotiation.

As mentioned above, both men and women sometimes resort to their charm when negotiating with a member of the opposite sex. Some also used other stereotypes, be it consciously or unconsciously, to play on the gender-based advantages identified above. Related to women’s perceived greater credibility and legitimacy in discussing humanitarian and family issues, for instance, some women delegates talked to their counterparts about their families and children or tried to “reach out to their humanity, their emotions,” an approach that they don’t believe their male colleagues use. Others also said they used their “maternal authority” with their counterparts. Yet, other female delegates said they play on the “surprise effect” or alternate between a more stereotypical behavior expected from a woman and a tougher stance. For instance, a female respondent explained, “My overarching tactic is as follows: I get in smoothly, to put my interlocutors at ease, then hit them with facts they don’t expect me to know, then I am nice again.”

#### *E. Other Dimensions of Diversity*

Interviewees also highlighted the relevance of other dimensions of diversity (e.g., nationality, religion, and ethnicity) in a humanitarian context. In some instances, these broader diversity issues nuanced and complemented the gender dynamics at play. In other instances, their importance transcended that of gender. These issues will be described below.

Some interviewees thought that the advantages they enjoyed were a function of being “a Western woman” or a “foreign woman.” One noted, “There is a big difference between foreign and resident staff in terms of whether women are accepted. Swiss women raise curiosity. But if you are a Sudanese woman in Darfur, for instance, you will be very hard-pressed to obtain anything from your counterpart. It is a non-starter.”

To a certain extent, this seems to also apply to non-Western expatriate women. One interviewee commented, "Since 2002-3, we have had more non-Western women. They sometimes have this same acceptance problem. With Lebanese women, for instance, the interlocutor will likely ask more questions at the beginning, but then it will be easier and faster for them to build a relationship." Others thought that the issue of gender was very similar to that of other diversity criteria in that diversity aspects of practitioners' profiles had often been used to exclude individuals from positions for which they were perceived to be unsuited. Indeed, one participant said, "For me, the question of the acceptance of women is extremely similar to the acceptance of other diversity criteria. I remember a friend from Zambia who was told that he couldn't work in central Asia because people wouldn't take him seriously. Well, he did, and everyone got used to him."

Interestingly, negotiators from the same region, religion, or ethnic background as their counterparts, as well as staff negotiating with counterparts with a different religion and ethnic background, thought they could be at a distinct advantage in their negotiations. On the one hand, one interviewee argued that, in a predominantly Muslim and very religious context, "Without having a male Muslim delegate, it would have been extremely difficult to obtain access." In his view, "being a 'brother Muslim,' you have greater legitimacy, they listen to you, they can't pull out the Islam card." On the other hand, another interviewee stated, "It was easier for me as a Pashtu-speaking Brit to establish trust than for my Afghan colleagues, because they knew I didn't have any tribal affiliation." Another delegate said interlocutors sometimes did not take non-white delegates seriously. He added: "They feel that you don't represent the institution fully. They might want to speak to someone who is blond." Yet another interviewee noted that greater familiarity with the context could also have another drawback: "With familiarity, your interlocutor can give himself greater license to push for things, ask favors, go beyond the professional setting."

Accordingly, many of the arguments that interviewees advanced for more diverse teams in terms of gender were mentioned in the context of other dimensions of diversity. According to one interviewee, "Diversity is key. This goes much beyond gender issues." One head of delegation stressed that diversity was crucial in terms of enabling the formulation of a more comprehensive strategy ("people with different backgrounds contribute different perspectives to establish a strategy"); the institution's image ("the message we convey"); and the ability to send the person who would be best accepted by interlocutors ("within your team you need enough nationalities to be able to choose"). Another head of delegation concurred that diversity was primordial, both in terms of the "perception of the institution" and in terms of having people with a better understanding of the contextual subtleties of individual negotiations. A

participant in a leadership position concluded, “I believed mixed teams are better—we are simply different, and so different people can be more effective depending on the situation. But in most cases we don’t develop an explicit strategy to take advantage of this diversity—except in exceptional situations, such as hostage releases, and then it is the negotiator’s relationship with the counterpart that matters most.”

#### **IV. Towards an Intersectional Study of Humanitarian Negotiations?**

This section, in light of the case study presented in the previous section, revisits the key issues extrapolated from the review of literature on gender and negotiation offered in Part II. It recapitulates how the expectations formulated at the end of that section played out in Part III and explores the implications for the relevant bodies of literature.

First, this study corroborates aforementioned research in the field of mediation theory showing that men and women conceive of the influence of gender on their negotiation and mediation practices differently. Second, the fact that respondents saw female participation in humanitarian negotiation as stymied less by the traditional societies in which they have operated than by the ICRC’s institutional biases confirms similar findings in the field of peacekeeping. Third, comments by interviewees on the lack of variation in their gendered experience of humanitarian negotiations according to the cultural context are consistent with the literature on gender and war. Fourth, these preliminary observations seem to be consistent, to a large extent, with previous studies of negotiation theory arguing that gender can have a high differential impact in face-to-face negotiations, especially if the relevant topics are stereotypically masculine in nature. Humanitarian negotiations arguably represent an extreme example of this phenomenon, since they typically involve an important relational dimension and occur in conflict environments that extol masculinity and exacerbate gender stereotypes. According to all of the female participants of this study, gender has affected their negotiation practice significantly. However, it appears that in a humanitarian context, other dimensions of diversity (e.g., nationality, religion, and ethnicity) are also highly relevant. As outlined above, these broader diversity issues sometimes nuance and in other instances transcend the gender dynamics at play.

Finally, these observations also provide further evidence for research showing that women can be very successful at advocating for others, and an interesting case study for a situation where prescriptive gender stereotypes can be leveraged to the advantage of female negotiators. While, in many corporate settings, typically masculine attributes are thought to be more valuable than feminine ones, in humanitarian negotiations, women can be perceived as more legitimate *because* they are thought of as selfless caregivers and potential mothers. The prevalence of these stereotypical narratives also



corroborates previous literature on gender and war, including the “beautiful soul” theory, according to which the portrayal of women as pure, virtuous beings, immune from the baser drives that impel men to battle, and therefore in need of protection serves to recreate and secure women's social position as noncombatants and men's identity as warriors. It manifests itself in all the interviewee observations relating both to the perceived non-threatening character of female delegates, who are also seen as more “credible,” “sincere,” “naïve,” and “genuine,” and to the prevalence of rivalry and power/positioning considerations in negotiations between two men. Interestingly, negotiations between two women were not systematically associated with increased rivalry. That they could also lead to mutual recognition and greater bonding in environments of exacerbated masculinity is another tribute to the particular salience of gender in conflict settings.

If, as critical feminists have argued, the practice of war itself relies on differentiated gender ideal-types, meaning that there is something that fundamentally links the “beautiful soul” narrative and the justification of modern warfare, then one can expect gender to have continued relevance in conflict settings, despite the increased presence and different roles of women in war. Therefore, further study of gender in humanitarian negotiations is crucial. The preliminary results of this study, however, call for exploring the impact of gender in humanitarian negotiations in conjunction with other dimensions of diversity. Intersectionality studies have shown that individuals have many different identities that place them within structures of constraint.<sup>41</sup> Depending on the particular context, some aspects of their identity privilege them, while others oppress them.<sup>42</sup> Because organizations in the humanitarian field overwhelmingly operate in post-colonial contexts where race, nationality, and religion also constitute salient—and sometimes oppressive—identity traits, the fact that a female humanitarian practitioner is a white European, for instance, cannot be ignored when assessing the impact of gender on her practice. In the words of one interviewee in this study, “Being white is like a third gender.” Rather than studying the impact of gender in isolation, further research should thus explore how the intersectionality of different diversity dimensions, such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and religion affect humanitarian negotiations.

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<sup>41</sup> See Folbre, Nancy. 1994. *Who Pays for the Kids?: Gender and the Structure of Constraint*. London: Routledge, p. 51, which defines structures of constraint as “sets of asset distributions, rules, norms, and preferences that empower given social groups. These structures locate certain boundaries of choice, but do not assign individuals to a single position based on ownership of productive assets. People occupy multiple, often contradictory positions, because they belong to multiple groups.”

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Williams, Kimberlé Crenshaw. 1994. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” Pp. 93-118 in *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, edited by M. Fineman and R. Mykitiuk. New York: Routledge.

## V. Policy Implications on Gender Diversity for Humanitarian Organizations

The preliminary results of this research point towards a number of policy implications. First and foremost, they underline the importance of ensuring negotiating teams' gender diversity. As this paper has described, the gender of negotiators impacts their counterparts' perceptions of them, and consequently, their willingness to cooperate with organizations such as the ICRC. Some male counterparts are less likely to concede to the demands of male, as opposed to female, delegates. Other times, the opposite scenario is true: counterparts do not take female delegates seriously or do not wish to interact with them at all. Some female interlocutors cooperate more readily with female humanitarian practitioners on the basis of gender-based solidarity; others respond better to male delegates. In some particular contexts, gender was unanimously recognized as being an indispensable factor, either requiring or excluding male/female delegates. In order to maximize the chances that humanitarian organizations can achieve their negotiation objectives, humanitarian organizations should situate themselves to have the capacity to adapt on a case-to-case basis. As one participant put it, "It is essential to have several strings to you bow." Furthermore, practitioners saw a great added value in a diverse team's ability to consider an issue more creatively. Different viewpoints "enrich our work," one interviewee said. According to another, "The option of male homogenous demographics is a recipe for disaster, it is a guarantee for *inside of the box* thinking. And the same can be said of delegations where there are too many women." This largely echoes the large body of literature calling for greater involvement of women in peace talks. In addition to gender, this paper has argued that other dimensions of diversity are also crucial in this regard.

The interviews conducted in this study also show that, even in situations that are traditionally thought to be difficult operating environments for women, female delegates have been able to negotiate outcomes successfully, sometimes more successfully than their male colleagues. Consequently, it is important for humanitarian organizations to overcome gender-based stereotypes and fears when deciding on the allocation and distribution of their staff. This echoes findings in contexts of peacekeeping. It appears that the ICRC has progressed enormously in this respect in recent decades, in part thanks to the successes of accomplished female delegates in countries and regions where, previously, widespread perceptions deemed humanitarian negotiator roles for women to be inappropriate. The experience of the ICRC, therefore, might offer useful insights for other organizations' efforts towards mainstreaming in relation to gender, as well as other elements of diversity.