Negotiating on Unequal Ground: How Identity, Inequality, and Power Shape Successful Strategies

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Image: Nathan Webster, using Midjourney (2025)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how negotiators operating from structurally marginalized positions — on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, or institutional status — achieve successful outcomes. These negotiators are not just disadvantaged because of what they are negotiating for, but also because of who they are and how they are perceived. Together, these overlapping challenges form what this research titles "compounded power imbalance". To examine how certain negotiators succeed where structural power is limited, this study draws on 13 in-depth interviews with Indigenous women working at the Women's Justice Initiative (WJI) in Guatemala. Instead of confronting power directly, these women succeed by strategically choosing when to work *within* the power structures around them. The research identifies four key approaches: (1) multi-layered preparation (informational, emotional, and collective), (2) tactical reframing of narratives, (3) adaptive use of key skills and traits, and (4) a non-confrontational approach to harnessing power. These findings challenge dominant models that equate negotiation power with force or authority, offering instead a framework grounded in relational and adaptive strategies. By centering perspectives that are often excluded from negotiation theory, this research expands understandings of the strategies, and conditions, that lead to success in negotiations. It also aims to highlights the pragmatic, resourceful, and resilient negotiators who succeed against all odds.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Goals and Question

Skilled negotiators have shaped the world we live in, for better or for worse. They have structured institutions, crafted laws and constitutions, ended wars, and brokered deals that alter the course of history. Yet some of the world's most impressive negotiators do not work in high-profile arenas. They negotiate from positions of deep disadvantage. These people often face systemic barriers not only based on the content of what they negotiate, but on how they are seen, heard, and treated at the table (Peterman, 2024; Babcock & Laschever, 2003). However, some of them have learned how to regularly achieve favorable negotiation outcomes nonetheless (Olekalns & Kennedy, 2020). This research focuses on a specific group of such negotiators.

In this thesis, I will analyze the experiences of female negotiators who operate under what I term "compounded power imbalance": a combination of social disadvantages that stem from identity. These disadvantages can translate into low social, economic, and political status, institutional exclusion, repressive social norms, and cultural constraints. A substantial body of research underlines the fact that female negotiators around the world experience structural disadvantage and social marginalization based on their identities (Kolb & Williams, 2003; Olekalns & Kennedy, 2020; Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Yet, some find leverage where none seemed to exist. For example, research shows that women may skillfully reframe their identity to gain community trust, invoke moral or communal obligations, strategically leverage informal relationships, or combine a variety of strategies to adapt to each unique context (Olekalns & Kennedy, 2020). Further research that explores and compiles their tactics has the potential to demonstrate highly effective, and understudied, techniques.

An investigation of this kind is overdue. Mainstream negotiation theory, including foundational texts like *Getting to Yes* (1981), has generally failed to account for those facing multi-faceted

power imbalances. While this literature addresses a wide range of strategies and recommends dozens of diverse tactics, authors have largely assumed an equal footing for all negotiators, in terms of identity. Factors such as implicit bias, pre-existing stereotypes, or repressive social norms are left out of the discussion (Fisher et al., 1981; Voss & Raz, 2016; Bazerman & Neale, 1992; Shell, 2018). Further, while nearly every central negotiation author has written about power dynamics, many have done so narrowly. Though they acknowledge that power may come from varying sources — such as relationships, information, status, or BATNAs — these authors primarily frame power as a resource negotiators may build and wield, not a dynamic factor shaped by social norms, identity, or institutional exclusion (Lewicki et al., 2010; Shell, 2018; Fisher et al., 1981). Even literature on gender in negotiations, though attentive to power imbalances and the unconscious dynamics of negotiation, remains overwhelmingly Western, professional-class, and focused on providing individual advice (Kolb & Williams, 2003; Olekalns & Kennedy, 2020; Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Very few studies ask: how do marginalized negotiators, facing severe social, cultural, or institutional constraints, still manage to win? Even fewer ask how female, non-Western negotiators do it.

The goal of this research is to address exactly these gaps. In this thesis, I will therefore by guided by the key question: ***What factors allow marginalized negotiators to achieve successful outcomes despite compounded power imbalances?***

1.2 Academic and Societal Relevance

Answering this research question carries substantial academic and societal significance. Academically, this research will contribute to the growing field of negotiation scholarship by outlining practical, empirically grounded, context-specific accounts of how marginalized negotiators operate under multi-layered disadvantages. Further, it addresses a gap in current negotiation theory, which has long been dominated by Western, professional, and individualistic frameworks. In doing so, this thesis builds on the work of recent authors such as Peterman (2024),

Olekalns & Kennedy (2020), and Federman (2023), who have strongly emphasized the urgency of expanding traditional negotiation models and one-size-fits-all frameworks.

What's more, this study aims to expand theoretical and practical understanding of adaptive, relational negotiation techniques, and deepens knowledge about *power-use* and *power-changing* tactics, which will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 3 (Kim et al., 2005). The concept of "compounded power imbalance" is introduced as part of theoretical framework that scholars and practitioners can use to better describe and analyze the experience of marginzalized negotiators. Finally, this thesis contributes to different understandings of how power dynamics can be pragmatically identified, navigated, and harnessed, based on the testimonies of negotiators who do it on a daily basis. Their use of power, and perceptions of positive outcomes, suggest that an expansion of classical, material-based definitions of success may be necessary.

On a societal level, this research is significantly relevant for practitioners working in contexts ranging from advocacy to mediation, community development or buisness. As touched upon, this work is particularly applicable for those negotiating from marginalized positions or alongside underserved populations. While grassroots organizations and global institutions aim to empower women and open meaningful avenues towards securing more rights, public debates around gender are only becoming more polarized and hostile. This thesis offers a practical overview of strategies that are not only effective, but closely responsive to local contexts and shifting power. The strategies and tactics presented here reveal how negotiation success can be achieved through adaptation, resilience, emotional regulation, strategic reframing, and collective preparation, rather than by head-on confrontation.

Further, focusing on gender in this thesis amplifies underrecognized expertise and highlights the agency of women who consistently defy expectations. An understanding of their successful strategies may serve to improve the perception of women's competence in negotiations and increase their inclusion at the table. Nonetheless, while gender is central to this thesis, it is only one of the many identity factors that define compounded power imbalance. Negotiators, educators,

and leaders all around the world face multi-layered disadvantages in their daily and professional lives, and one-size-fits-all negotiation techniques from Western academia may not be as applicable to their situations. Growing a base of knowledge on this subject can be of great use to any negotiators operating with less structural power than their counterparts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I begin by providing an overview of foundational negotiation literature, along with definitions of success and failure. While several of the books in this review were written decades ago, they remain relevant to this analysis as they form the bedrock of modern-day negotiation theory. Considering their continued impact on the field of negotiations, providing an overview of their key concepts and diverse ideas contextualizes the space that this thesis aims to contribute to. I subsequently summarize more specific literature on power, identity, inequality, and gender in negotiations, as described in the introduction.

2.1 Foundational Negotiation Theory

In the 1980's, experienced practitioners and scholars began to evaluate and document the strategies that lead to the best results in negotiations. In *Getting to Yes*, Harvard Professors Fisher, Ury, and Patton introduce the revolutionary concept of interest-based negotiation, which looks beyond each person's stated position to uncover win-win solutions (Fisher et al., 1981). Their simple but groundbreaking recommendations on how to achieve better outcomes revolutionized public understandings of how to negotiate. With over 10 million copies sold in dozens of different languages (Ury, 2025), *Getting to Yes* continues to influence the way the scholars and practitioners understand and teach negotiations today. Fisher and Ury's work is based on four key tenets of negotiation: "separate the people from the problem, focus on interests rather than positions, invent options for mutual gain, and use objective criteria to make agreements" (Fisher et al., 1981). Fisher and his colleagues stress the importance of empathy, emotional awareness, active listening, and the ability to truly understand your counterpart. They define effective negotiators as those who skillfully identify underlying needs and strategically manage perceptions to generate "win-win" solutions (Fisher et al., 1981).

Since *Getting to Yes*, negotiation literature has diversified and evolved. Many books build on its foundation, while others challenge, adapt, or sharpen its core principles. Over the years, scholars and practitioners have also worked to bridge theory with real-world complexity, incorporating insights from social psychology, behavioral science, and their own personal and professional experience. For example, in books like *Never Split the Difference* (2016) author Chris Voss recommends strategies and skills for the chaotical reality of high-stakes negotiations. His suggestions include changing the tone of your voice in high-stress situations, framing proposals to demonstrate value, labeling emotions, applying tactical empathy, and even mirroring key words in an opponent's sentences to uncover new information (Voss & Raz, 2016).

Alternatively, Richard Shell's *Bargaining for Advantage* (2018) emphasizes the importance of aligning negotiation strategy with your own personal style, natural skills, and situational context. Kolb and Williams (2003) introduce the idea of the "shadow negotiation," highlighting how subconscious power dynamics, biases, and stereotypes shape negotiation outcomes. Leigh Thompson's *The Mind and Heart of the Negotiator* (2020) draws on cognitive and social psychology to identify common decision-making traps, and address both the analytical and emotional components of negotiating (Thompson, 2020). On the other hand, books like *Everything is Negotiable* (1990) take on a more assertive, pragmatic approach to negotiations, which is more focused on "getting a deal" in a competitive business environment than understanding the underlying needs of another party (Kennedy, 1990). The varying perspectives and ideologies behind these texts emphasize the growing diversity of the field and provide context for the approaches that will be uncovered in this investigation.

Further, importantly to this thesis, several authors have also clarified the conceptual tools that negotiators may use. Lewicki, Barry, and Saunders (2015) distinguish *strategies* – the overarching plans used to guide a negotiator's decisions and approach – from *tactics* – the specific behaviors or actions used to execute parts of those plans. This distinction helps explain how negotiators may prepare before negotiations, or adapt their behavior to shifting dynamics or unpredictable interactions.

2.2 Success and Failure

Since 1980s, the concept of success in negotiations has also evolved and expanded with the field. Classic negotiation literature often measures success in terms of tangible outcomes, where a "win-win" solution means securing mutually beneficial agreement terms in a professional setting (Fisher et al., 1981). Scholars like Kolb & Williams (2003) and Peterman (2024) have since widened definitions of success to incremental gains, coalition-building, or perception management. These authors note that for some negotiators, success may even just mean the preservation of future negotiation opportunities (Kolb & Williams, 2003). They recognize that the goal of a quick "win-win" solution may not always be feasible due to layered social and cultural dynamics that at times can only be broken down by repeat interactions (Kolb & Williams, 2003).

Despite diverging definitions, other authors have aimed to better understand success by categorizing it into two sections: procedural success and outcome success. Procedural success focuses on *how* the negotiation was conducted and not necessarily on what was achieved (Hollander-Blumoff & Tyler, 2008). For example, if the participants experienced the process as fair, legitimate, efficient, or inclusive, then this would signify procedural success, also defined as "procedural justice" (Hollander-Blumoff & Tyler, 2008). Outcome success on the other hand focuses on the substance of what was accomplished. Outcome success could depend, for example, on how tangible benefits were distributed, whether an agreement was reached, or if the parties' goals were met (Hollander-Blumoff & Tyler, 2008). The distinction between outcome and procedural success provides a key mechanism for better understanding how different negotiators evaluate their results.

In the solution-driven culture of negotiation theory, failure has generally been explored less frequently than success. Success is easier to celebrate and study, while failure is often messy, with causes that are difficult to isolate or clearly define. Nonetheless, in *Unfinished Business: Why*

International Negotiations Fail (2012) Cede writes that depending on one's goals at the outset of a negotiation, failure could mean anything from forced concessions, a breakdown in talks, or an unfair outcome that damages relationships. According to Robert Mnookin, moral and strategic dilemmas are at the root of many failed negotiations, particularly when opposing parties are considered to be evil, illegitimate, or unfair (Mnookin, 2010). Others argue that negotiations fail simply because they were poorly designed. Process design, which can be defined as "the set of decisions that shape the structure of the negotiation," is highly dependent on the context and conflict (Arévalo, 2023). Agenda, location, motivations, actors, and timing all have significant impact on negotiations. Several authors argue that each of these factors can lead to failure if not sufficiently analyzed and addressed (Cede & Zartman, 2012; Arévalo, 2023).

2.3 Power

In explaining success and failure, many scholars wrestle with power as a key influence on outcomes (Cede, 2012 ; Weiss, 2025 ; Schranner, 2018 ; Galinsky et al., 2017). According to Galinsky et al. (2017), power in negotiations is defined by the likelihood that a negotiator can influence the negotiation outcome towards their ideal goals. Fisher et al. (1981) suggest focusing on "objective criteria", coming highly prepared, and developing a good BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) to balance power. Galinsky et al. (2017) expand the sources of power from BATNAs, to include factors like status and social capital, and explain that each of these power sources protect negotiators from the bargaining tactics employed by their counterparts (Galinsky et al., 2017). Kim et al., (2005), Haugaard (2012), and Molm (2015) have challenged classic theories on negotiation power sources by addressing the dynamic and relation-based aspects of power. These definitions will be further addressed in the Chapter 3, as the core of the theoretical framework.

While many authors do address power imbalances, the majority fail to identify effective strategies to combat compounded asymmetries linked to structural disadvantages and identity. In *Negotiating*

While Black (2024) Damali Peterman explains that developing solid alternatives or arriving well-informed may yield tactical success for white male negotiators. However, the same tactics may not actually increase power for women, people of color, or others marginalized groups (Peterman, 2024). Peterman argues that this is because these tactics presume an equal playfield that does not exist. She explains that due to biased perceptions, marginalized negotiators may not be seen as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible, regardless of preparation (Peterman, 2024). While a male negotiator asserting that he has strong alternatives may be perceived as strategic, Peterman notes that a black women acting the same may be seen as difficult and aggressive, based on the pre-existing stereotypes held consciously or subconsciously (Peterman, 2024).

Peterman is not the only author who noticed the literary and practical gaps for those who negotiate from a socially marginalized position. Related contributions are limited. In *Ask for More*, Alexandra Carter (2020) addresses this issue by explaining how negotiators who feel underestimated or disempowered can ask the right questions and build confidence. *Everyday Negotiations* (2003), offers evidence-based techniques for addressing socialization and subconscious power dynamics in negotiation, particularly in the professional world. While *Getting to Yes* (1981) recommends focusing on "the problem, not the people", these authors assert that leaving "people" and identity out of the equation fails to address the underlying power inequalities that many face.

2.4 Gender

Gender is highly contested term, and its definition has been debated for decades (Butler, 1990). However, for the purposes of this thesis, gender will be defined not as a fixed trait, but as a social identity that is shaped by performance, interaction, and norms (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). For both men and women, gender is itself negotiated in context. It is formed through relationships, structured expectations, and intersectional influences (Connell, 2008; Collins, 2000).

While this definition may seem fluid, this is reflective of the constantly evolving understanding of the term. This thesis relies on gender as an identity in order to best analyze its impact on negotiations and build on existing literature centered around gender, intersectionality, and identity in negotiations.

Further, it is important to note that gender is one of the most globally prevalent and deeply embedded axes of inequality (Ridgeway, 2011). Gender bias, stereotypes, and discrimination exists across countries and cultures, with multi-faceted consequences in economic development, health outcomes, educational opportunities, political participation and more (UN Women, 2025). Gender inequity is particularly hard to dismantle because it is deeply rooted in pervasive cultural beliefs, social norms, religious ideologies, and power structures (Ridgeway, 2011). For these reasons, gender is a particularly salient identity to consider in negotiations. The factors that make gender so intertwined with behavior, perception, and human interaction make it especially useful in analyzing multi-faceted power imbalances in negotiation.

Most authors who touch on gender in their work have regularly emphasized gender's intrinsic links to power (Olekalns & Kennedy, 2020; Kolb & Williams, 2003; Federman, 2023). As mentioned, *Everyday Negotiations* (2003) explains that negotiation also occur on the "shadow level" of unconscious biases and expectations, particularly for women. *Women Don't Ask* (2003) also identifies key systemic factors that prevent women from self-advocating, and highlights the potential long-term consequences when women do not feel empowered to negotiate. The *Research Handbook on Gender and Negotiation* (2020) offers a comprehensive outline of the implicit biases, structural inequalities, and cultural norms that determine how gender influences negotiations. The authors synthesize decades of research and incorporate intersectionality to analyze organizational environments (Olekalns & Kennedy, 2020).

Nonetheless, even throughout the *Handbook on Gender and Negotiation* (2020), the authors point to gaps in the field and propose new areas of research. They highlight the fact that as seen in *Ask for More* (2020)*, Women Don't Ask* (2003)*,* and *Everyday Negotiations* (2003), gender-negotiation

research has historically focused on educated Western women negotiating in professional settings. Unfortunately, other current gender-negotiation work tends to remain superficial and recommendations lean towards "self-help" by repackaging the same one-size-fits all negotiation strategies that were given to men (Kolb & Williams, 2003). As emphasized by these key scholars, the lack of literature that specifically investigates identity, gender, and multi-layered power imbalances in negotiations present a significant opportunity for research.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter develops a layered theoretical framework to analyze how marginalized negotiators achieve successful outcomes under compounded power imbalance. Building on existing literature on intersectionality, power, gender role theory, adaptative negotiation, and relational negotiation, the chapter defines compounded power imbalance as a distinct analytical concept and connects it to several potential answers to my research question.

3.1 Defining Compounded Power Imbalance

This thesis introduces "compounded power imbalance" as a key element of its theoretical backing. As previously defined, this term refers to negotiation contexts in which multiple layers of disadvantage stem from a negotiator's identity. This could mean anything from gender to race, religion or class, and could correlate to low social status, cultural marginalization, economic, legal, political, or institutional exclusion, or internalized biases. In negotiation, these factors may interact to undermine a negotiator's power, legitimacy, and credibility. The concept builds on intersectionality theory, which can be defined as the ways in which race, gender, or other identity simultaneously shape experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) explains that intersectionality is not static, but a concept that can manifest in various ways, from structural intersectionality to political and representational intersectionality.

This thesis uses compounded power imbalance to capture the complexities of similar dynamics in power relations. It therefore relies on power-dependence theory, which posits that, like identity itself, power is not necessarily a fixed trait of individuals, but a function of relationships and social definition. This theory goes on to explain that the dependency created between people is a key form of power (Molm, 2015). Haugaard's (2012) work supplements this relational theory by distinguishing between power *to*, power *over*, power *with,* and power *within*. As Haugaard notes,

power does not need to just be understood as a form of domination, but it can be enabling for action and empowerment (Haugaard, 2012). These relationship-based theories tie into the fluid and multi-faceted social dynamics that can shape a negotiator's perceptions, dependencies, and power.

Kim et. al's (2005) work adds depth to this concept by conceptualizing power as an ever-shifting process. Their framework distinguishes between:

- **Potential Power**: The underlying ability to gain from a negotiation.
- **Perceived Power**: How much power each party believes the other has.
- **Power Tactics**: Behaviors used to influence power dynamics, including:
  - *Power-change tactics* (e.g., building alternatives, reducing dependence on other)
  - *Power-use tactics* (e.g., exerting pressure, coalition building, persuasion)
- **Realized Power**: The extent to which actual benefits are secured from the negotiation.

These categories allow for a more fluid, context-sensitive understanding of how negotiators can analyze and use power over time (Kim et al., 2005). This idea of perceived power can also be understood next to the term "situational power", which explains that a negotiator's power sources are context-dependent and can shift with the perceptions of each party (Watson, 1994). This term comes in contrast to the concept of "structural power", which can be defined as power that stems from a person or group's position within a system, institution, or social structure, rather than from individual traits or relationships. Structural power is often explained as the capacity to influence others or control outcomes (Pustovitovskij & Kremer, 2011). For marginalized actors with low-structural power, perceived and situational power become a particularly important leverage point, as it can be shaped through tactical and strategic action before, during, and after the negotiation itself (Kim et al., 2005).

Unlike traditional models that treat power as static or resource-based, the concept of compounded power imbalance harnesses these theories to emphasize how intersectional identity, social perceptions, relational dependency, and situational context all influence a negotiator's capacity to

act and be heard. This theoretical framing helps illuminate why traditional negotiation tactics may fail for those who may have less structural power – and it points towards the dynamic forms of perceived and relational power that may be more likely to succeed.

3.2 Gender Role Theory

Gender role theory is essential for this theoretical framework as it helps explain why gender can cause power imbalances in negotiation. According to gender role theory, the social identification of gender causes people to inhabit different roles in social structures (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Consequently, they face different judgements and expectations. For example, women tend to be socialized to avoid conflict and prioritize social harmony (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Fear of backlash for violating gender norms may make them less likely to act aggressively or negotiate assertively (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Further, implicit biases and social expectations may cause women to be seen as less credible, competent, or powerful in negotiation. This could limit their ability to advocate for themselves as effectively (Ridgeway, 2011). Gendered external and internal standards can also cause a "double bind". Women who violate gender norms by negotiating firmly risk being perceived as "unlikeable" or too aggressive, while those who abide by agreeable female norms may not be able to advocate for themselves effectively (Weiner & Burton, 2016).

For women, entrenched gender roles often reinforce male-dominated power structures (Ridgeway, 2011). As discussed, intersectionality can compound this structural disadvantage, as racial, ethnic, or economic identities may marginalize women even further (Loets, 2024). However, gender-negotiation authors Babcock & Laschever (2003) and Kolb & Williams (2003) explain that women have developed ways to adapt to their complicated social circumstances. While gender itself does not control negotiation style, research shows that women tend to prioritize cooperation, long-term goals, and a "relational view" while negotiating (Kolb & Williams, 2003). Further, women define themselves through their relationships more often than men and may pursue "relational ordering",

by creating a negotiation environment where parties have the space to learn about and understand one another (Ingerson et al., 2015). For these reasons, "relational negotiations" may be particularly applicable, and well received, when employed by female negotiators. Relational negotiation theory centers on the benefits of negotiators who tend towards altruism, respect for other's welfare, social awareness, and relationship building (Ingerson et al., 2015).

For female negotiators, adaptive negotiation can complement relational strategies. Adaptive negotiation strategies are widely recognized in negotiation theory, and refer to a negotiator's ability to tailor their approach, communication style, and tactics to the specific context, power dynamics, and goals of each negotiation (Heunis et al., 2024). Heunis (2024) emphasizes that negotiators who are skilled at adapting to new information, deadlocks, or the opponent, can benefit from better negotiation outcomes. Heunis's (2024) framework emphasizes the importance of situational awareness and flexibility in strategy and approach. In combination with relational negotiation, this helps construct a framework for how female negotiators obtain successful results.

To summarize the various theories and approaches above, Table 3.1 provides an overview of the central tenets of this theoretical framework.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Lens	Key Insight	Relevance to Study
Compounded Power Imbalance	Overlapping forms of marginalization reduce negotiation power	Core concept to analyze structural and identity-based disadvantage
Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991)	Identity categories intersect to shape disadvantage	Explains how multiple identity factors compound social challenges
Power-Dependence Theory (Molm, 2015)	Power arises from relational interdependence	Shows how low-power actors can gain leverage through relationships
Negotiation Power Model (Kim et al., 2005)	Differentiates forms of power: potential, perceived, tactical, realized	Helps categorize how power is used or transformed
Four Dimensions of Power (Haugaard, 2012)	Power operates: to, over, with, within	Clarifies how power can dominate or empower
Gender Role Theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)	Gender norms shape behavior and expectations	Explains how role expectations affect female negotiators
Relational Negotiation (Ingerson et al., 2015)	Empathy and trust as strategic assets	Supports importance of emotional and relational strategies
Adaptive Negotiation (Heunis et al., 2024)	Strategic flexibility and adjustment	Explains success through contextual adaptation

Table 3.1

3.3 Hypothesis and Argument

Ultimately theoretical understandings of power dynamics, gender role theory, adaptive techniques, and relational negotiation all play a vital role in uncovering the mechanisms behind successful tactics to combat compounded power imbalance. Based on these combined concepts, several possible explanations for women's success emerge. These include but are not limited to the fact

that (1) their strategies are flexible and adaptive to each circumstance (2) they are constantly attentive to situational and perceived power – and how to leverage it (3) their tactics are relational and long-term oriented.

However, while previous research provides several plausible explanations for successes, I will not begin with strict a hypothesis, argument, or specific variables. Instead, this thesis is guided by an exploratory, interpretive approach that seeks to understand how participants themselves define and achieve negotiation success under conditions of compounded power imbalance. This theoretical framework ties the concept of compounded power imbalance into established literature and provides a more coherent foundation for the analysis to follow. Nonetheless, patterns or propositions are intended to emerge from the data rather than being imposed in advance.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

To best answer the research question: ***What factors allow marginalized negotiators to achieve successful outcomes despite compounded power imbalances?***, this study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology. Interpretivism posits that reality is shaped by individuals' lived experiences and social meanings (Rogers, 2020), making it well-suited to understanding negotiation under structural constraint. This lens enables the research to center participants' own perceptions of strategy, power, and success. To analyze the data, I combine thematic analysis to identify shared patterns and interpretive process tracing to explore causal mechanisms within individual cases (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Collier, 2011).

4.1 Case Study & Selection Rationale

This thesis focuses on the staff of the Women's Justice Initiative (WJI), a Guatemalan NGO led primarily by indigenous Maya Kaqchikel women. WJI provides free legal services, rights-based education, and community empowerment programs to indigenous women and girls across 96 Guatemalan communities (WJI, 2025). WJI reports that since its founding in 2011, it has directly reached over 10,000 women and girls (WJI, 2024). According to WJI's most recent impact reports, these programs have contributed to significant shifts in outcomes: for example, the rate of early marriage among adolescent girls who completed their programs is 3%, compared to the national average of 30%, and participants who had completed their legal and rights-based programs were 10x more likely to seek legal support than at the baseline (WJI, 2024). As WJI emphasizes, there is desperate need for this work in Guatemala. The small Central American country is ranked 3rd lowest in Latin America on the gender equality index, and has the 3rd highest rate of violent death among women worldwide. In Guatemala, 40% of the population is indigenous, and discrimination and racism against them has been historically prevalent (Menjívar, 2008; Borzutzky, 2011). This

suggests not only the relevance, but the effectiveness, of WJI's work in an extremely challenging context marked by poverty, institutional exclusion, racism, and gender-based violence.

WJI was selected for three key reasons. **First,** it is revelatory (Yin, 2018): In their roles as lawyers, paralegals, educators, and advocates, WJI's staff regularly engage in negotiations with male community leaders, institutional actors, and local families. These women successfully navigate compounded power imbalances daily, shaped by patriarchy, racism, and institutional exclusion. As seen in their impact report, 79% of WJI's staff are indigenous Maya Kaqchikel women themselves (WJI, 2024). The organization's internal emphasis on linguistic and cultural access ensures that staff members reflect the communities they serve — yet this also means they personally face the same repressive norms they work to dismantle.

Second, it is representative (Yin, 2018): is also broadly representative of a wider universe of cases involving frontline female negotiators in the Global South who operate successfully under intersecting inequalities related to gender, class, and ethnicity. Comparative cases in India, Liberia, Colombia, and Kenya demonstrate that such patterns are not isolated, but often understudied in negotiation literature. This case offers the opportunity to explore how effective strategies are formed from lived experience in these environments.

Universe of Cases:
Women's Negotiating Successfully Under Power Imbalances

Country	Case Study	Key Power Imbalances	Negotiation Context	Outcomes
Guatemala	WJI (selected case)	Economic, legal, and social exclusion; gender and ethnic discrimination	Negotiations with community leaders, authorities, and clients	Legal protections, community access, cultural/norm change, violence decreased
India	Barefoot College (Shaikh, 2024)	Gender norms, illiteracy, restricted access to education and work	Local-level negotiations to gain training and work	Community acceptance, access to education and jobs
Kenya	Kenya Women's Consultative Group (Castillejo, 2022)	Political, gender-based, and economic exclusion	Peace and legal negotiations with leaders and state	Land rights, greater participation, constitutional change
Liberia	WLMAP (Shulika, 2021)	Gendered, political, and economic exclusion; wartime violence	Peace negotiations during and post-civil war	Peace agreement, female political inclusion
Colombia	League of Displaced Women (Lemaitre et al., 2014)	Patriarchal norms, displacement, legal and social exclusion	Negotiations with state and local actors for safety and rights	Created "City of Women," housing and legal recognition

Table 4.1

Together, these factors make WJI an ideal anchor case in a wider universe of marginalized female negotiators across the Global South. While the research on the cases above may not even be intentionally examining negotiation itself, these instances show that women are not only participating in negotiation processes under demonstrable constraints around the world, but they are still securing procedural success, outcome success, or both.

4.2 Data Collection

This study draws on 13 semi-structured interviews with staff members at WJI. The sampling was purposive (Campbell et al., 2020), targeting participants with direct experience negotiating in their

roles as legal representatives, educators, community coordinators, or advocates. Interviews were designed to reflect the diversity of negotiation settings at WJI, including community access (negotiating with local leaders to enter new communities), legal advocacy (informal agreements on family law issues), and institutional coordination (partnering with government and NGO stakeholders). These three categories represent the most frequent and complex types of negotiation staff members engage in and reflect the range of roles across WJI.

Table 4.2 below provides an overview of the 13 participants and their roles at WJI. One participant, who preferred to remain anonymous, is listed as Respondent 13. All others consented to be named. While some voices appear more frequently in quotes, all interviews contributed substantively to the analysis. Considering several interviewees have similar names (e.g. Sandy, Sindy, Sandra), this table can always be referred to for each participant's role.

Overview of Participants

Name	Position at WJI
Carmelita	Attorney
Yesi	Notary Area Coordinator
Vilma	Attorney
Sandy	Promotion and Training Coordinator
Sandra	Adolescent Girls Program Coordinator
Blanca	Attorney
Evelyn	Attorney and Family Area Coordinator
Sindy	Attorney
Lidia	Women's Rights Training Program Coordinator
Elvia	Director of Programs
Rosa	Legal Training Coordinator
Viviana	Legal Director
Participant 13	Adolescent Girls Program

Table 4.2

Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were conducted in Spanish. The semi-structured format and open-ended questions ensured consistency, while allowing for flexibility in reflection and follow ups. Questions focused on who participants negotiate with, the power dynamics involved, strategies used, and perceptions of effectiveness (see Appendix A for the question list). Follow-up questions traced negotiations from the planning stage through to outcomes and reflection, in order to support both thematic coding and process tracing analysis. Participants were also invited to define success in their own terms — offering insight into both procedural and outcome-based understandings.

While the emphasis of this research was on successful negotiations, participants were also asked about challenges, failures unsuccessful strategies, and the influence of external factors. This helped limit self-reporting bias and deepened insight into how success was achieved.

4.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the interview data, this study combines thematic coding and interpretive process tracing. Together, these methods make it possible to identify broad patterns across cases while also exploring how causal mechanisms unfolded in specific negotiations. This dual approach aligns with the thesis's interpretive orientation, which prioritizes participant meanings and context-specific findings.

Thematic Coding

Thematic coding was conducted using Atlas.ti and followed an open–axial–selective structure (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this research, each code represents a specific moment, whether a phrase, sentence, or paragraph, in which the interviewee describes a certain phenomenon in relation to negotiation (see Appendix C for the full codebook with definitions, and Appendix E for additional quotes selected to support findings). During open coding, I reviewed each transcript to identify recurring actions, concepts, or expressions described by participants, generating a broad list of codes such as *resilience*, *emotional control*, and *preparation*. In the

axial phase, these were clustered into relational categories by identifying links between context, strategies, and outcomes. For example, *highlighting common ground*, *presenting negotiation as the better option*, and *strategic reframing* were grouped under the broader tactic of *narrative control*. In the final selective coding stage, overarching themes were identified, resulting in six main categories: *Key Challenges, Essential Qualities, Tactics, Strategies, Sources of Power,* and *Perceptions of Success*.

To assess relevance and reliability, I considered how frequently each code appeared and how widely it was distributed across participants. High-frequency codes such as *advanced preparation* (56 instances across all 13 participants) and *tactical reframing* (50 instances across 11 participants) emerged as key perceived drivers of success. Less common codes like *highlighting men as part of the solution* (5 instances), or feeling of *internal peace/satisfaction* (2 instances), were maintained when they offered unique insight into specific strategic approaches despite their lower frequency. This step-by-step refinement ensured that dominant voices did not skew results, while allowing for diversity in the data. Code frequency graphics were generated in Atlas.ti and re-created in Canva for clarity and translation to English.

Interpretive Process Tracing

To complement cross-case coding, I conducted interpretive process tracing on three focal cases: Sandra**,** Rosa**,** and Blanca — each representing a distinct type of negotiation (community access, institutional engagement, and legal deterrence). This thesis adopts interpretive rather than formal or Bayesian process tracing. The goal was not to test probabilistic hypotheses, but to trace the participant-defined causal pathways from Time 0 (before negotiation) to Time 1 (a reported successful outcome), and to examine how participants interpreted key turning points along the way (Collier, 2011; Beach & Pedersen, 2013). While 3 cases might seem like a small number, scholars such as Beach & Pedersen (2013) note that even a small number of well-selected cases can yield strong theoretical insight when process tracing is applied systematically. For that reason, the three cases in this thesis reveal variation in counterpart, context, and outcome, while

consistently reflecting the overarching challenge of navigating negotiations under compounded power imbalance.

Four major analytical contributions emerged from this approach:

1. **Revealing causal mechanisms**: By tracking detailed sequences of action, process tracing revealed how strategic combinations — such as emotional control and legal credibility — produced success incrementally in contexts of low formal power.

2. **Reconstructing practical reasoning**: Rather than applying universal models, I traced how participants reasoned through their options and adapted strategies within cultural and institutional constraints.

3. **Centering participant-defined causality**: The method foregrounds how participants themselves explain what worked and why, including references to trust-building, timing, identity, or institutional response.

4. **Assessing contextual and alternative explanations**: By examining whether other external factors (e.g. third-party support, institutional stereotypes, or favorable timing) contributed to the outcome, I tested whether strategies alone explain success.

As mentioned, in Appendix A one can find several questions on the interview list that allowed participants to walk me step by step through examples of specific negotiations, providing the data used for process tracing.

4.4 Ethics & Limitations

Before conducting interviews, secured informed consent was secured. Participants received detailed information in Spanish — their preferred language — about the study's purpose, data handling, and their right to withdraw. They were also given the choice to remain anonymous (see Appendix B for the consent form).

To uphold ethical rigor, I practiced reflexivity throughout data collection, identifying and mitigating personal and cultural biases (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). I made sure to check for deviant cases (Vogl et al., 2019), and strengthened credibility through synthesized member-checking (Birt et al., 2016), by sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify accuracy. Trustworthiness was further supported by comparison between interviews, process-traced cases, and the institutional data highlighted in section 4.1 from WJI's impact reports and website.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, while the study aims for theoretical transferability, its single-case design clearly limits statistical generalizability. The reliance on self-reported data and retrospective accounts introduces the risk of selective recall or interpretation, while the absence of direct observation or archival triangulation may constrain analytic depth. Additionally, translation from Spanish to English could result in subtle loss of nuance, despite efforts to preserve meaning through member-checking and cultural consultation. Lastly, the focus on successful negotiations may also underrepresent failure, and my prior connection to WJI may shape interpretation — though reflexive practices and peer review were used to mitigate bias.

Despite these constraints, I aimed to uphold rigorous standards of trustworthiness and accuracy to ensure this research meaningfully reflects the participants' experiences. In Chapter 6, these limitations and others will be more fully outlined, and connected to the ways in which this study opens up the possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This chapter presents the key findings from 13 semi-structured interviews conducted with indigenous Guatemalan women who work at the Women's Justice Initiative (WJI). This chapter begins by outlining results around definitions of success, followed by the key findings across interviews. The findings, derived from thematic coding and interpretive process tracing, cluster into four key focus areas: (1) Preparation as an informational, emotional, and collective act, which equips negotiators to anticipate challenging dynamics and build internal and external alignment. (2) Tactical reframing, which enables negotiators to reshape dominant narratives and reposition themselves as legitimate actors — without triggering direct confrontation. (3) A reliance on specific traits and skills, such as emotional regulation, resilience, and pragmatism, that function as core elements of persuasion and relationship building. (4) Harnessing existing power structures rather than opposing them head-on, allowing negotiators to subtly redirect institutional or social momentum in their favor.

After an analysis of these four key areas, I will trace causal sequences in three select cases from Sandra, Rosa, and Blanca, to illustrate how these negotiations unfold in practice, as described in the previous chapter.

The table below provides an overview of the key strategies and tactics found in this study, in relation to the four overarching groups. There is some overlap between them, as different overarching groups may align with some of the same tactics and strategies. As seen throughout this chapter quotes from participants have been provided to support these findings and will appear highlighted in blue boxes with the participants name attached.

Overview of Groups, Strategies, and Tactics

Overarching Group	Strategies	Tactics
Preparation	• Advanced preparation of each case • Mental and emotional preparation • Contextual knowledge • Setting long-term goals • Maintaining flexible objectives • Clarity of goals and limits • Maintaining personal/professional separation • Internal organization and coordination • Coordination within organizational networks • Mentorship, advice, & supportive community	• Gathering information from locals and their client • Practice scenarios with colleagues • Coaching from more experienced team members • Researching history/culture • Leveraging personal connections • Use of key data points
Reframing	• Confident self-presentation • Clear communication • Knowledge of context • Persuasion without confrontation • Fostering participative spaces • Clarity of objectives & limits • Support of allies, mediators, or third-parties • Self-control & emotional stability • Raising awareness	• Highlighting men as part of the solution • Negotiation as the better option • Offering services • Strategic language use • Use of data points • Addressing discrimination outright • Respectful & diplomatic tone • Validating counterpart's perception • Moral or emotional appeal • Making a moral or emotional appeal
Traits and Skills	• Friendliness/kindness • Self-control & emotional stability • Analytical perceptiveness • Creativity & determination • Empathy • Flexibility & adaptability • Emotional intelligence • Pragmatism • Resilience	• Active listening • Strategic language use • Respectful & diplomatic tone • Using identity to build trust • Leveraging personal connections • Direct communication • Validating counterpart's perceptions
Harnessing Power	• Confident self-presentation • Knowledge of context • Long term objectives • Informal negotiations • Organization & coordination • Advanced preparation • Flexible objectives • Raising awareness • Fostering participative spaces • Persuasion without confrontation • Language (Spanish-Kaqchikel)	• Highlighting common ground • Making a moral or emotional appeal • Offering their services • Leveraging personal connections • Strategic language use • Highlighting men as part of the solution • Respectful and diplomatic tone • Validating counterpart's perspective • Direct communication • Using identity to build trust • Tactical reframing

Table 5.1

5.1 What is Success?

A key part of this investigation hinges on understanding successful outcomes, based on what participants define as success themselves. When asked what success in negotiations meant to them, a significant number of participants cited results that were tangible, such as getting access to a new community, negotiating a satisfactory childcare stipend for their client, or convincing male leaders to prevent early marriages in their communities. However, the majority of interviewees also described intangible results as their definition of success, such as building community trust or new relationships, or noticing a mindset shift among participants in a workshop.

> I think I would see [success] in two ways - if the objective was achieved, I think it is a successful negotiation. But if not, it could also be the fact of having a nice professional relationship and communication with this person that I tried to negotiate with."- Yesi

Figure 5.1

Lastly, WJI's staff members often specified success as accomplishing the goals their clients set out for them. No matter what outcome they had wanted for the case, seven participants reported that if their client was happy and satisfied with the result, that meant a successful outcome for them as well.

> "Well, I feel that [a negotiation] is successful when we achieve what the clients or the women who come to us need, For example, in this case it could be that if you see it from a very legal point of view, you say that it was not successful. But I see it as successful from the point of view that she wanted it, she wanted it to be like this." -Vilma

5.2 Preparation is Informational, Emotional, and Collective

Throughout this research, it became clear that no matter which form of success participants were seeking in their negotiations, preparation was essential. In relation to the other codes under the category of "Negotiation Strategies", *advanced preparation* emerged as the most frequently cited. As seen in Figure 5.3, it was coded between 2 and 10 times more than any other variable (see table below). This in itself is not surprising. Across every style of negotiation literature, good preparation is highlighted as essential. The more, the better.

However, the findings of this study suggest that for marginalized negotiators, preparation holds an expanded meaning. While *advanced preparation* was the most cited, *mental & emotional preparation* was coded 40 times as well. *Advanced preparation* refers to the informational, logistical, or case-based preparation that participants mention in relation to their negotiations. On the other hand, *mental & emotional preparation* signifies any moment that a participants specifically touched upon the psychological preparation they must do leading up to a negotiation. To underline how widespread this code was, Figure 5.2 provides an overview of how many times it came up in each interview.

Advanced Preparation: By Participant

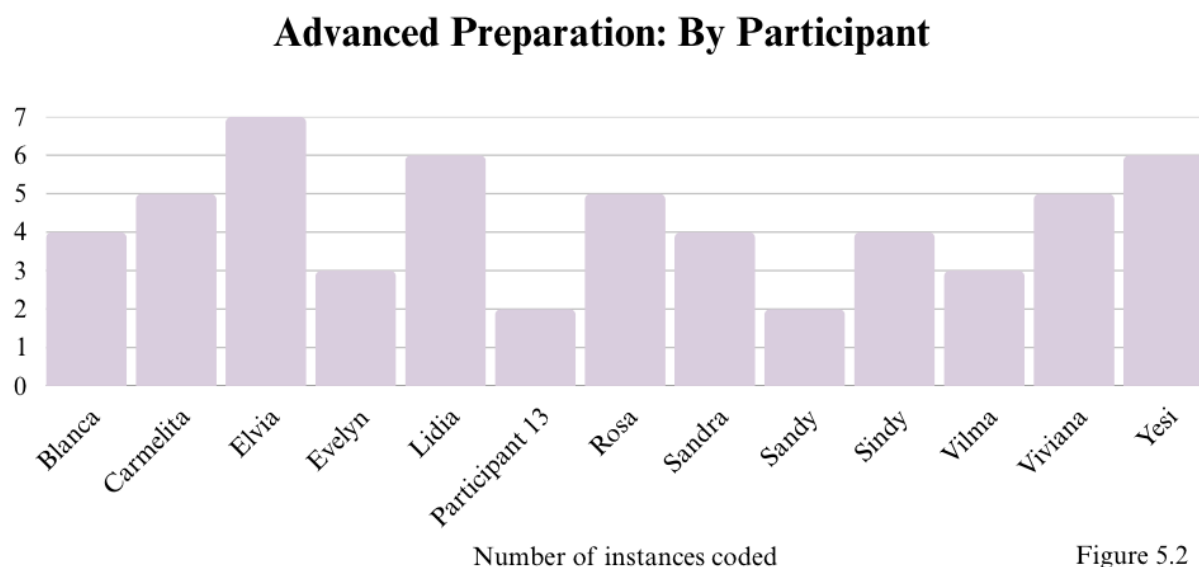Number of instances coded   Figure 5.2

For the interviewees, preparation tied closely into a collective process as well, involving clear communication, good coordination, and organization. While four of the participants in the legal field discuss needing to prepare themselves personally before a case, their position also requires an extensive preparation process with their clients as well. Preparation extended across all sectors of their activities, from diving into the technical legal details of a case, to chatting with locals to get extra contextual information, to coordinating the right amount of space and food for unpredictable group sizes. The fact that each participant mentioned advanced preparation practices at least twice throughout the interview provides strong evidence that participants consider it central to negotiation outcomes. Figure 5.3 below visually represents all of the strategies that participants mentioned and highlights the frequency with which preparation appeared.
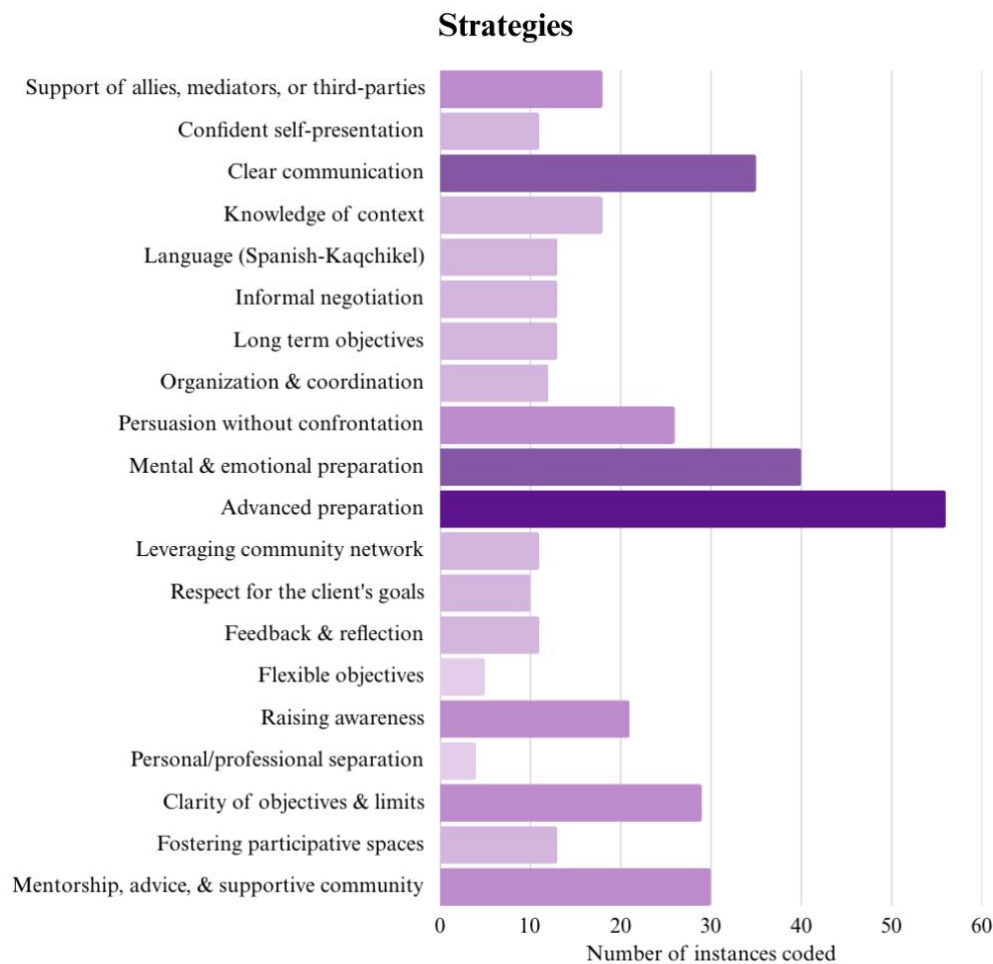
Strategies

Figure 5.3

Informational

In order to unpack the three layers of preparation that emerge from this investigation, it is important to begin with the code *advanced preparation* itself. Throughout the interviews, the participants described various methods for coming prepared. On the informational level, six participants reported they do extensive historical and cultural research on each new case, workshop, or intervention, including investigating the social and gendered norms of the region they will be negotiating in. This form of informational preparation is aimed at understanding a new context, legal case, and counterparts as thoroughly as possible.

> "I deeply study the historical context of a place, how the people are culturally, and what things are most important and fundamental for them, because these are the most important factors for them and sometimes there are subjects you should not touch.
>
> It's not the same when I enter a new municipality, for example, [in one community], I know that the women are direct, very strong, and expect a lot, and if I enter a negotiation not knowing that I will certainly not be able to do my part successfully." -Viviana

Arriving to negotiations historically, culturally, or socially unprepared can have direct consequences. Interviewees indicate that each community in Guatemala is unique, and many are sensitive to outside interventions. Being in tune with cultural norms is just as important as coming prepared with detailed knowledge of the legal and informational elements of the case. Nonetheless, gathering information before entering a negotiation in a distant, rural, or simply unfamiliar community is not always straightforward. The participants highlight several creative and adaptive tactics for meeting the challenge.

> "I prepare myself first by asking who my counterpart is. There are occasions where you don't know, because you don't know anyone [in the community] but we have try right?
>
> It may seem like something basic, but when I arrive into a community, sometimes I stop at the first shop and tell them, 'Hi I'm looking for the community major to send an invitation – are you from area x or y?'… Then I buy something from the store, and ask a couple other questions." - Rosa

Four participants report using the tactic of *local information gathering*, by calling friends or community contacts or identifying and contacting local officials and any staff members working in the region they plan to enter. One interviewee notes that in her department, they begin planning in October or November for events happening the next year. The time in between is dedicated to logistical coordination, delegation of responsibilities, information sharing, and even building the personal connections which can be used for deeper insight into the cases they may be dealing with.

To get a clear view of the required knowledge to successfully address their case, all six participants from WJI's legal department also underlined the importance of extracting key information from their clients. Many of WJI's lawyers and paralegals represent women who are taking up cases against their ex-partners for various reasons. Considering the emotional and personal implications of these cases, it imperative that WJI's staff obtain not only the most important objective facts in the case, but the subjective perceptions of either side. Three participants report the vital practice of interviewing their clients about what their ex-partner may say about them or accuse them of.

In one case, experienced WJI attorney Vilma explains that during a negotiation over childcare payments, her client's ex-partner began accusing the woman of being a bad mother. He repeatedly blamed her for the fact that the child occasionally got sick. However, because Vilma's client had already informed her that he might make these accusations, she was not taken off guard. Vilma emphasizes the importance of this kind of preparation, because here she was able to escalate the case from a negotiation to a legal procedure, and smoothly agree to opening a case of child mistreatment in court as well. Upon going to the hospital to verify the child health and investigate the man's claims, everything appeared normal, the mistreatment of minor's case was closed, and within 15 days they had moved back to the negotiation phase and decided on a monthly childcare payment that satisfied her client's needs.

Mental & Emotional

Entering negotiation in patriarchal and often discriminatory contexts, the staff of WJI underlines the importance of mental and emotional readiness. Vilma's recently mentioned example aptly links information gathering to this facet of preparation.

> "[It was important that] we went prepared, because [the client] had already told me that he will say [she] doesn't take good care of the baby.
>
> Nothing happened with the mistreatment of minors case, and [it is important that] we can give [our clients] the confidence that nothing will happen if they are accused of that, not while they are doing their part as good mothers." - Vilma

Here, Vilma highlights the importance of maintaining the mental stability and safety of her clients during emotionally intense cases. Like WJI's staff, the overwhelming majority of the women they serve are indigenous. They are often from rural or economically disadvantaged communities and social positions. In another interview, Sindy adds that preparing herself and her clients ensures that she can stabilize the negotiation and maintain control without disrupting the flow of conversation or derailing the points that she must make on behalf of her client. In the legal context, WJI's work is not only done with sharp and well-prepared representation during an informal negotiation, or trial, but it also begins with helping a client analyze, explore, and cope with what the realities of the experience itself may be like.

Further, while many interviewees underline the essential nature of protecting their clients, 10 of them also mention the emotional and mental stages that they themselves go through before taking on a negotiation. Four participants say that they deal with nerves, stress, and self-doubt before a negotiation. No matter how informationally prepared they may be, several women voice feeling concerned about whether or not they will be listened to, how they will be perceived, and how they will be treated by their counterparts. Interviewees explain this situation largely through the fact that as women and indigenous people, they face greater emotional hurdles.

Nine participants in this investigation report facing discrimination as indigenous women, in the form of biased treatment or stereotypical assumptions held by those they will be negotiating with. As Figure 5.4 represents, *ingrained machismo*, or a sexist/patriarchal culture, is by far the most frequent obstacle that these women face when negotiating. While machismo translates to a tangible, structural, and deeply rooted form of patriarchal societal control, it has multi-faceted psychological ramifications. The *ingrained machismo* codes were generally found in sections that also contained codes like *gender socialization from childhood, intersectional discrimination, intimidation, lack of recognition of the problem, fear/lack of confidence,* or even *women with patriarchal mindsets* (see Appendix E for further quotes of machismo, and Key Challenges).
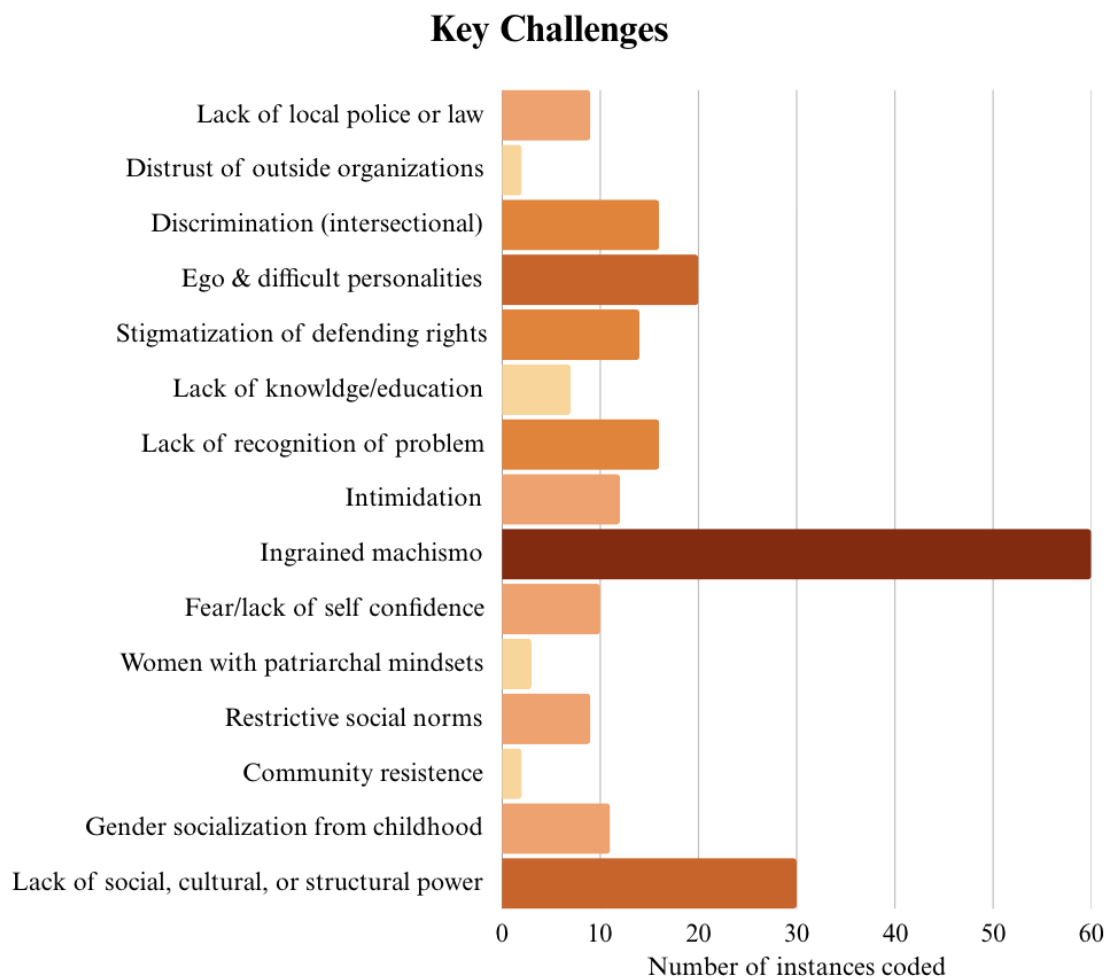
Key Challenges

Figure 5.4

To off-set the negative effects of machismo, maintain emotional balance, and project an unshakable calm during negotiations, the participants apply several preparational tactics. As Evelyn says, while she mentally prepares to give her absolute best to fight for her client, she is able to shield herself personally by maintaining complete professionalism and separating her job from herself as a person. Sindy, who facilitates workshops on gender-based violence prevention for WJI, explained that she has been able to overcome her nerves both by herself, and with the help of colleagues.

> "Sometimes you really have to consider how you will say something to [the group]. I [tell myself] that I have to say calm, and the truth is that mentally I do start preparing myself by thinking of what they might ask me. I start to write out a ton of questions.
>
> Before one workshop, I asked my colleague for help. I told her 'Look, I'm scared that they will ask me this or that and I won't know how to respond to it, or be able to respond in the right way to not offend [them]. But I do need them to understand me. What do I do?" - Sindy

In this case, Sindy explains that her co-presenter was nervous as well, considering that sometimes the attendees do not share their way of thinking. Together, the two imagined all of the possible questions they could be asked in the workshop, and prepared responses to each one. Across the ten interviews in which *mental & emotional preparation* was coded, two participants report asking more experienced colleagues about the most difficult questions that they were asked in their previous workshops, and how they responded. In her interview, Lidia even mentions creating a guide on conducting meetings in difficult spaces, and on answering charged questions about women's rights, legal protections, and gender-based violence. She drives home the fact that emotional preparation makes the difference in whether you can effectively deal with the male participants. She explains that sometimes she is intensely confronted in meetings, and is only able to avoid fighting with them because of her prepared composure.

These individual and communal practices on preparation ensure that all staff members are mentally and informationally ready to confront whatever difficult questions or emotionally painful reactions that may be waiting for them.

Collective

As the previous sections reveal, preparing for negotiations when facing compounded power disadvantages often means you cannot take on the situation alone. The code *collective learning* was coded 22 times across eight interviews, underlining the importance of sharing knowledge and experiences. The term *mentorship, advice & supportive community* was found 30 times, further emphasizing the importance that participants place on feeling heard, seen, well-advised, and emotional reassured by their colleagues and community at WJI.

Beyond the knowledge sharing and emotional support that participants rely on to prepare for negotiations, the participants highlight the other collective aspects of preparation as well. At WJI, many negations are interrelated, and the stakes for all of them may be connected. Evelyn notes that occasionally a man will refuse to provide any childcare payments to her client as a form of revenge for filing another suit against him. However, she notes that her close collaboration to other staff members and coordination with justice department officials allowed her to prepare for these situations, with the full knowledge of how they are handling the interconnected case.

Further, WJI often partners with other existing community networks, service providers, or law enforcement officials that are responsible for giving local services to women and children. The strategy code *support of allies, mediators, and third parties,* tagged 18 times through six interviews supports this fact. However, these external groups may have their own agendas and projects. Preparing together to ensure the groups work in alignment is key to maximizing efficiency between them – particularly when networks continue expanding over time.

> "We met with various organizations and institutions each month… When WJI started, we were just called the Network for Protection of Girls and Adolescents, but we incorporated other institutions fighting for gender equality and protection of women, and the numbers grew and grew...
>
> We had to negotiate with them [about our goals, and name] and now we are called 'The Network of Protection of Girls and Adolescents, Municipal Pact of Gender Equality, Responsible Motherhood and Fatherhood'." - Sindy

Community networks are huge accomplishments for WJI, yet the participants reveal that preparation is complicated. Following the quote above, Sindy further explains that after negotiating the network's name, the members had to engage in various other negotiations to clarify their goals and streamline their activities. The strategy code *coordination & organization*, appearing in eight interviews, further demonstrates that creating alliances and networks in itself does not intrinsically lead to success. Collective action requires consistent effort, communication, and logistical planning. Just as collaborative teamwork within WJI leads to staff that are better prepared to handle any unexpected mental or emotional challenges, this investigation shows that effective coordination between organizations, even those who share the same goals, is vital to effective, sustainable, action.

Final Notes

As a final note, six interviwees emphasize the fact that to them, preparation also means finding crisp clarity in terms of objectives – and limits.

> "How does one prepare for a negotiation? First, you choose the topic, and decide whether it is actually negotiable for you or not.
>
> At WJI we can negotiate various things because both parties are willing, and they don't violate anyone's fundamental human rights. But in regards to violence, my position is that there is no possible negotiation… There is no possibility to negotiate about rights that have been violated when an aggressor will always try to justify their actions, in our experience." - Viviana

Viviana firmly explains that when deciding whether a topic is negotiable in circumstances like these, it is important to plant fundamental pillars that cannot be violated too. She highlights that successful negotiation is about coming prepared with an understanding of what you are willing to give up, and what you want to gain. However, fundamental rights should never be on the table.

In summary, this investigation showed that preparation for these negotiators is not only about anticipating dynamics, crafting plans, and mapping out the case. It involves a multi-layered process including extensive research, emotional preparedness, and coordination with clients, community leaders, and outside organizations. As opposed to only gathering data, it also means mentally and psychologically stepping into the necessary space to confront whatever power relations, gendered biases, or structural resistance lays ahead. For the women involved in my study, preparation is a vital steadying mechanisms to maintain poise, emotional balance, and control of the negotiation despite the unpredictable challenges they face.

5.3 Reframing the Narrative

This study affirms that the ability to effectively reframe issues can quickly gain a negotiator influence and power. As seen in Figure 5.5 and 5.6 below, the data from this research reveals that *tactical reframing* is the overwhelmingly most frequently used tactic for most of the negotiators.
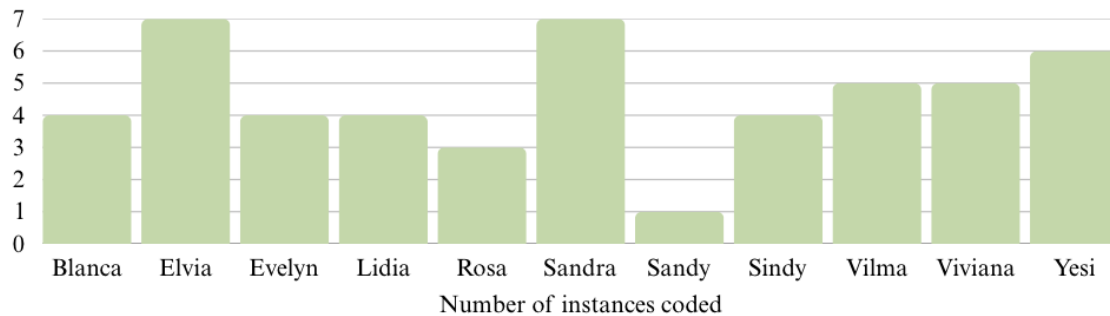
Tactical Reframing: By Participant

Figure 5.5

However, as underlined by these results, the benefits of tactical reframing can only be fully realized based on the success of a sequence of tactics that come before, and after that intervention. Participants emphasize that in order to shift and dominate the narrative in negotiations, it is first of all vital to assess and understand the narratives that already exist. This statement is supported by the code *analytical perceptiveness,* which is a trait that was mentioned 11 times throughout four interviews as various women recognized the importance of being able to analyze one's counterpart. These interviewees explained that a prepared knowledge of their specific perceptions is vital to directly addressing and diffusing tension. In her interview, Sandy explains that WJI team members know that male community leaders may have heard of their work empowering women, and instead perceive WJI to be breaking up families, turning women against their husbands, disrupting their traditional ways of life, or directly challenging their religious values. Recognizing this viewpoint also participants to either directly combat their perceptions *using strategic language*, *key data points*, or *making a moral/emotional appeal,* or use tactics like *validating counterpart's perception*, and pivoting from there. The tactics participants report using most, often in combination with each other, can be seen in Figure 5.6.

Tactics

Figure 5.6

After focusing on analytical perceptiveness, the process of deploying tactical reframing and related tactics continues to take on different forms. Due to the frequency and diversity of *tactical reframing*'s recurrence in the data, the table below provides several key examples to further categorizes how the women in this study were successfully able to reshape a given negotiation into one that facilitated successful outcomes.

Overview of Types of Reframing

Source of Tension	Type of Reframing	Reframed Quote
Marital violence against women	Emotion-based or moral reframing	"What would you do if your daughter's partner hit her? How would you want that handled?" – Elvia
Empowerment of women	Role-based reframing	"Couldn't you use a little extra help in your community? Wouldn't it be nice to have happy, energized women supporting you too?" – Sandra
Man refusing to legally recognize children or pay childcare	Pragmatic (legal/economic) reframing	"If you're unsure, the court can order a DNA test — but it costs time, money, and could lead to more legal action. Isn't there another way we could handle this?" – Vilma
Perception that WJI lifts women above men	Institutional reframing	"We're not here to lift women above men, we're here to protect everyone's rights and offer legal support to the whole community." – Lidia
Early/child marriages	Evidence-based reframing	"It's great you don't know of any early marriages — that's our goal too. But municipal data shows many births to girls under 16, which harms communities in serious ways." – Sandra
Perceived challenge to community leadership	Role-based and moral reframing	"We recognize your leadership. Even if we brought in the police, people would still look to you. This will only strengthen your respect if you help protect everyone, including women." – Lidia

Table 5.2

Types of Reframing

As laid out in the table above, figuring out how to redefine a given narrative is dynamic and adaptive. This research highlights various types of reframing, from moral reframing, to evidence-based, to pragmatic/economic. For example, Elvia found that when raising awareness about domestic violence, it might come across as accusatory to broach the subject directly with a group

of male community leaders. She explains that women experiencing violence in their community might be the wives of some of their friends, colleagues, or family, and their sympathies would likely remain with their male connections. However, when Elvia quickly shifted the situation by referring to a "daughter" who was being harmed by a partner, this activated a completely different angle of the male community leaders' identity.

> "So then you hear a totally different response, and they say 'Well, if my daughter was beaten by her husband or by her partner, I would go and talk to the man and return my daughter home, right away'.
>
> In order not to tell them that they are violent, we give them this other example and they start to analyze and think [differently], even though they may have macho and violent attitudes and thoughts towards their own wives." - Elvia

The **emotion-based reframing** that Elvia describes was applied with the correct timing and an emphasis on non-confrontation. Coded 26 times through seven interviews, *persuasion without confrontation* is the most prominent strategies that these women report relying on in order to tactfully, but effectively reframe. According to Carmelita and Rosa, *persuasion without confrontation* is also crucial to WJI's team ability create trust, build personal connections, and foster communicative, safe spaces. The codes *strategic language use* and *active listening* also appeared next to tactical reframing four and seven times respectively. Instead of fighting each ideological battle for women's rights directly, Elvia mentions that she and her colleagues consistently seek to avoid moments of outright accusations and blame.

In this way, Elvia notes that they are best able to figure out which emotional, moral, or logical levers are most effectively convincing each person. When Elvia recognized she had suddenly tapped into a completely different moral codes about daughters, from there she moved on to raise their awareness about violence not as only a family problem, but as a societal problem. She then successfully provided them with tools to help support their daughters if a case like this were ever to arise. Further, she underlines the fact that this form of emotional reframing spurs self-driven action. When Elvia requested recommendations from the men on how they would handle a

situation where their daughters are being hurt, they themselves proposed certain actions and community protocols to help women and care defend themselves and their rights.

Evidence-based reframing, despite being data-driven and appearing more logic-heavy, relies on these same tactics. When faced with hostile accusations of purposefully breaking up families, or perceptions that the come from an organization that wishes to subjugate men instead, WJI's staff report respond with grace, respect, and diplomatic answers that cool tensions, instead of stoking them. As evidenced by this research, emotional/moral reframing only works if it is done in the right tone and emotional setting. *Respectful and diplomatic tone* was another strategy that was closely correlated with instances of reframing and appeared eight times next to cases of emotional/moral narrative shifts. Sandra affirms that when using a diplomatic tone, friendly personal connections, and maintaining the goal of non-confrontation, evidence can be used to successfully, but indirectly, challenge assumptions and clarify the importance of a problem.

> "They resisted [us] and they said 'No, there are no cases of early unions here', but we had the statistics, precisely provided by the municipal health center. We had some statistics of early pregnancies, and if most of these girls are pregnant, they are in an [early] union.
>
> We didn't want to contradict [them] totally, but we arrived having the context of this community."
> - Sandra

In a negotiation where she describes using evidence-based tactic, Sandra reported a very positive result at the end. Even directly after their group conversation, men can up to her saying they might have heard of one case she could check in on, or another they wanted to talk to her about. She notes that if these interventions are done with a confrontational attitude, they risk backfiring.

Pragmatic reframing itself on the other hand, relies more on *legal or technical knowledge*. This code was found 31 times in the data, and reflects the single strongest source of power that WJI's staff were able to draw on (see Figure 5.8 on Sources of Power). Though also employed with a

calm and respectful tone, six interviewees communicate that this form of reframing centered as much on moral obligations, as on legal consequences.

"As a legal advisory program, [we] come in and explain all the legal responsibilities. So we are also introducing this as, 'Look, early unions are prohibited under Guatemalan law, and this carries crimes'. We make it a little bit personal, [and say] 'Imagine one of your children well, he falls in love with a 12, 13 year old girl and gets her pregnant… Even if you want to hide it, teachers, parents, doctors they will find out.

When she gives birth, your son would be a rapist under Guatemalan law'. We explain to them how many years that would be in prison and what the damage would be." - Sindy

In various other cases, WJI's legal staff members report using this frank, practical approach to convince men to legally recognize their children and pay monthly childcare stipends. When they lay out each legal step, Evelyn states that many men simply chose to negotiate with WJI's staff directly. She explains that by conducting these informal negotiations and avoiding court processes, she is able to accomplish her client's goals in a matter of weeks, instead of years. Both parties save themselves the effort and cost of going through the lengthy legal process, which is a key marker of success as affirmed by in the code *avoiding waste of time, resources etc* (see Figure 1.1).

Lastly, **institutional reframing** plays an important role in how WJI's staff allow themselves and the organization to be understood. As previously mentioned, the participants are all aware of the stereotypes and misperceptions that precede them when entering a new community. Further, in some cases, the first contact they make with new leaders or male counterparts is through the phone. Two participants mention that the personal connection and other strategies related to building trust and safe spaces during a face-to-face negotiation are more difficult to establish. Faced with this circumstance, one interviewee explained that she has occasionally tweaked WJI's name over the phone, opting for *The Initiative of Women* (in Spanish) to initially avoid stereotypes or closed-minded reactions from the mention of "women's rights" in the full name: *The Initiative of the Rights of Women.* However, when in person, WJI's staff describe just as much need to reframe the organization. As previously presented in Table 5.2 above, Lidia explains that she frames WJI as

an organization for "everyone's rights" aimed towards community-wide equality instead of lifting women at the expense of men. Ultimately, these findings reveal that these different forms of reframing are essential to WJI's ability to quickly and efficiently get the results that they and their clients are looking for.

Final Notes

WJI's team consistently has to think of these new ways to present information on their feet, and in challenging, high-stakes environments. As Sandra, explained in her interview, it is not uncommon to meet with 18-20 male community leaders at a time to get permission to run their programs in new communities. An example of this will be further addressed through process tracing. In another instance, Sandra described a meeting between just one colleague, and 28 men. The interviewees describe their negotiations as at times extremely difficult, stressful, emotionally taxing, and exhausting. However, all 13 of the interviewees affirmed that they have nearly always left a negotiation, intervention, community visit, or workshop, with very positive results. Participant 13 notes that from what she can remember, she has only received a flat-out refusal to meet a new community once. While some refusals end up turning into success stories after persistent and creative efforts, in that case, the community leader continued to adamantly refuse their invitations. Nonetheless, Sindy, Sandra, Rosa, Vilma, Evelyn, and other participants report that in nearly all cases the male community leaders grant them access, thank them for their work, and even have voiced regret that other male leaders missed out on the meeting and new information.

> "We let them know about the services we provide, how we work with them, and I see that this is what raises their awareness, and many of them arrive when we finish with a lunch and make more of a connection with [us].
>
> Many of them come and say, 'Thank you very much, this helped us a lot, we are very convinced that this should not be normalized', some of them even ask us, 'Oh, could you come again on other days?' - Sindy

As shown in this section, the results emphasize that tactical reframing in a multi-layered process, that overlaps with good preparation. These non-confrontation approaches also depend on the emotional control and poise of the women, as will be further discussed in the following section.

5.4 Essential Traits and Skills

While different negotiations require different skills, this data reveals a set of nine characteristics that recurred most frequently in the context of these interviews (see Figure 5.7 below). Out of these, the four most highly coded and prominent in this data are *self-control & emotional stability, flexibility & adaptability, resilience, and pragmatism.* The following sections will center around these four qualities, with a combined section on *flexibility & adaptability, and resilience* due to their interconnected results.
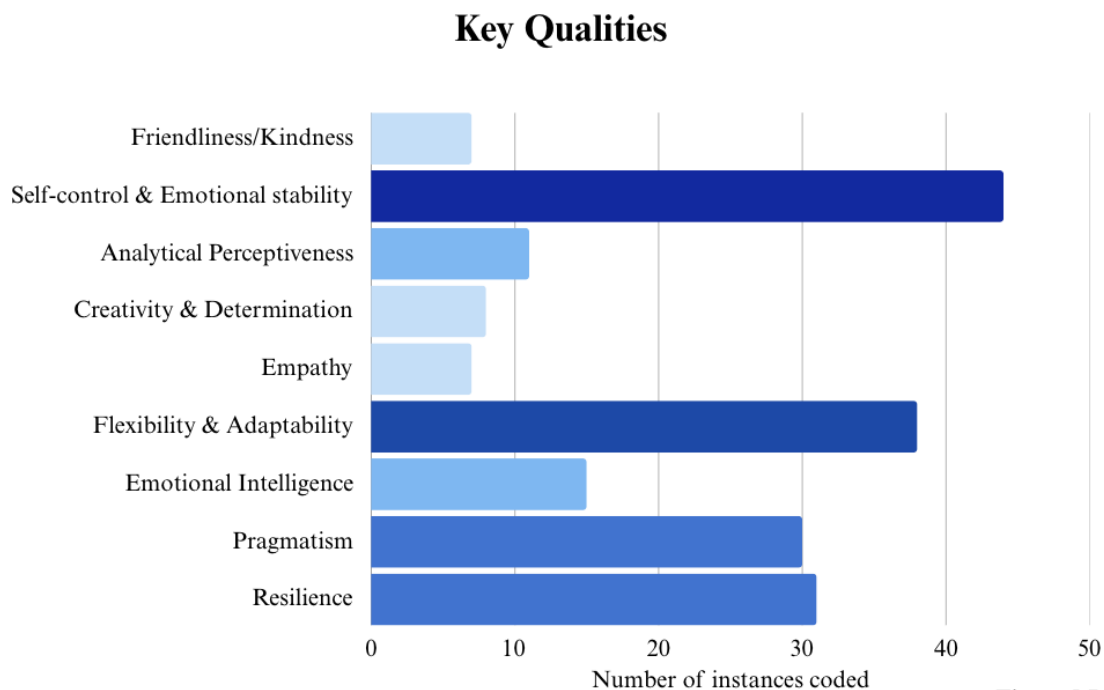
Key Qualities

Figure 5.7

Self-Control & Emotional Stability

As evidenced in Figure 5.7 the most frequently cited trait that the WJI team employ for successful negotiation results is emotional control. *Self-control & emotional stability* was coded 44 times throughout 12 interviews, emphasizing the centrality of this finding. Often found in relation to *mental & emotional preparation*, self-control in these negotiations refers to the applied ability to not respond to attacks and maintain calm throughout emotionally challenging moments. These 12 participants spoke directly about emotional stability during negotiations, which they tied closely to self-confidence and *confident self-presentation* as a strategy for succeeding in negotiations.

> "I think the most important thing in these situations is to be calm and very professional when presenting the case and not to take it personally... I think it is something that little by little, I developed to know when and how to make the intervention right."
> - Yesi

These findings illuminate how maintaining emotional balance helps negotiators in a wide variety of situations, with both male and female counterparts. In her interview. Lidia explains that in certain workshops she has being verbally attacked or criticized by groups of men who hold different viewpoints. She notes that it is absolutely essential to keep an emotional balance, not just to be best communicate, but also to ensure that general tensions lower as well. Several participants explain that when they remain calm they can keep control over the mood of the negotiation, and prevent things from spiraling out of control. They also note that emotional stability is not only necessary for difficult conversations with men. In some cases, female participants start to become very discouraged or sad based on the topics of violence and discrimination in workshop. Lidia reports that it is extremely important to keep her energy up to figure out how to effectively convince the women to continue in a more hopeful way.

> "We were really afraid, the truth is, when they were attacking us, that's how I felt. We were scared, but we tried to have an emotional balance so that it would not be reflected and we could dominate the conversation. [We were] not reflecting the fear, so that it is clear that we have authority and are the right people to [share this information]." - Lidia

Three participants describe the skill of emotional control as being a challenge to develop, but vital to projecting authority and credibility. According to Yesi, this skill is also tied to the code *personal & professional separation* which allowed her and another participant to differentiate their own identity and worth from any results of a negotiation. Further, Carmelita notes that the strategy of *fostering participative spaces* is tied to a feeling of psychological security, for themselves as WJI staff, and for those who they work with. Keeping their own emotions in check and remaining positive, clam, and practicing the strategy of *active listening* instead of quick reaction allows WJI to not only reframe narratives, but to continue learning about their counterparts and building relationships.

> When things get tense, I think that in those moments we all get upset and some of us may react differently. But I think it is very important to have self-control and also to reach a middle ground, where we all agree or where we all say that we should not take decisions lightly and then regret them.
>
> I think it is very important to keep calm in these meeting, and to work on emotions. Feeling psychological security is very important in all the spaces where we are to reach good agreements with good negotiations, and understand what we are all [have] in common." - Carmelita

Flexibility, Adaptability, and Resilience

Closely linked to the emotional control that participants rely on, is the profound resilience demonstrated by WJI's staff. Despite the fact that the majority of interviewees describe the emotional and strategic stamina required in negotiations, they return again and again. Even after facing hostility, disrespect, or ignorance, WJI's staff report always seeking to end on a positive

note. This kind of resilience is not only presented as a simple personality trait, but as an intentional orientation toward long-term change in the face of any setbacks.

> "There have been situations that maybe have not worked out as expected. So, if this time it did not work out well, the next time we will detect what did not work or where we were having the failures, right? Then we prepare ourselves for the next activity or the next situation in a better way. I believe that we learn from what does not go well. Then we will always improve with each of the things we dedicate ourselves to." - Carmelita

Several of the participants firmly held the mindset of "never taking no for an answer." In this sense, resilience was linked closely with one of the other essential qualities, *creativity & determination*. To provide an example, Sandra describes a moment in which she and her colleague decided that they absolutely needed to find a way to speak with a group of community leaders, despite repeated rejections for invitations to talk. As seen in the quote below, the pair refused to give up, and decided on a creative new tactic to get an audience with the leaders.

> "In some moments we are really surprise ourselves! Recently it also happened to us where our colleagues tried to convince the authorities to receive us and 'no, no, no'. The strategy that they came up with was to find out when their meeting was going to be, and arrive by surprise … It was a risk, but we still asked [the leaders] for 5 minutes, they said 'Okay, no problem, we have a half hour!'
>
> They were very happy in fact, and at the end we have an activity called red feria, which is the total closure of our intervention and all the authorities came to witness this activity and they were asking when are you coming back to the community again?…" - Sandra

This steady commitment to achieving their goals reflects a belief in cumulative gains. This is supported by the strategy codes *long-term objectives* and *flexible objectives*, which together were tagged nearly 20 times. Rather than being discouraged by delays or partial outcomes, six participants frame these natural setbacks of negotiating as ways to push forward rather than withdraw. Further, in response to obstacles, the resilience that WJI's practitioners demonstrated was never rigid. Rather, it was interwoven with a strong sense of *adaptability & flexibility*—the ability to recalibrate strategy, language, and tone in response to shifting contexts. Participants

routinely described how they adjusted their approach and *strategic language use* based on who they were speaking to, how the community was responding, or what opportunities emerged mid-negotiation. The findings reveal that flexibility of goals and strategies is a deliberate choice aimed at maximizing impact without compromising their core message.

> "I believe that when you start a negotiation you certainly need to have an objective, but be open to that objective changing, because in the negotiation what is required is that both parties are able to give and give, as well as take right? That is extremely important to what I consider [a negotiation]." - Viviana

In the context of WJI's work, resilience and adaptability are mutually reinforcing**.** Resilience ensures that participants keep returning to the table, while adaptability allows each return to be informed, responsive, and better suited to the context than the last. Together, the interviews showed that these traits allowed WJI staff to maintain legitimacy, foster trust, create relationships, and build on positive results over time.

Pragmatism

One of the final consistently emphasized traits was pragmatism. Seven participants described an orientation toward realistic, grounded negotiation goals — prioritizing outcomes that were viable and respectful of the constraints they faced. Rather than insisting on ideal or immediate outcomes, the participants recognized that there was room to start with smaller results, and build up from there. As Evelyn describes in her interview, it is important to see the bigger picture in each case, as this can result in better long-term gains. She notes that in Guatemala, child support payment is legally allowed to increase per year as the person's need increases. Therefore, in certain cases when they are not able to negotiate the monetary result that the client wished in that moment, they do not take this as a failure because of the personal empowerment and legal foundation that it provides for the future.

> "So there are cases where on some occasions we have had to say 'Well, okay, let's accept this', but we don't take it as a loss either, we don't take it as something totally negative, because in this there is also the emotional part of the woman and her part of empowerment.
>
> In telling her well, if we couldn't legally obtain this now, but you can get ahead on your own, you can look for how to do this, it can serve as an impetus for [her] to look for some other way to generate an income too." - Evelyn

Intentionally objective, step-by-step strategies like these make WJI's go hand-in-hand with WJI's resilient and flexible team characteristics. Viviana explains that being objective has also gained her respect and credibility on both sides of a negotiation. This allows for more honest negotiations, where both sides recognize where they can be flexible and find points in common. Practicality also influences many of the informal negotiations that WJI's other lawyers have with the men who have refused child support payments. As described in the Pragmatic Reframing section, when laying out the entire legal process and direct consequences for refusing to comply with the law, WJI's staff report using clear, easily understandable language that is tailored to each context and easy to understand. While maintaining the diplomatic tone and calm presence, four participants say pragmatic and realistic dialogue consistently gets their counterpart to see men to see negotiation as the most practical option.

> "So what I tell [him] is, 'Well, if you don't set alimony voluntarily today, then we're going to initiate a process, a trial where you're going to hire a lawyer, you're going to spend, you're going to wear yourself out emotionally or psychologically, economically as well.'
>
> I try to tell them that it is better for them to set it, because if not, then through a judge the amount will be imposed and they will no longer be asked if they have the capacity to give or not. - Blanca

Final Notes

Lastly, the findings of this study reveal that pragmatism is related to the way in which WJI relates to power. When faced with a group of powerful men or legal authorities, the participants report

using previously discussed strategies and themes like *persuasion without confrontation*, a *respectful & diplomatic tone*, *active listening*, and high levels of emotional control. This is due to their practical understanding that society is the way it is now, and will only change gradually over time. The participants focus on using power as they can in the moment, with a focus on pragmatic and achievable goals. In an example that will be more fully discussed in the following section, Elvia explains how involving male colleagues in their work is both practical and effective. While WJI's team recognizes that their male partners do not have the expertise in this area, or speak with as much authority on the issues of women, they assess the positive impact of just have a man with them for some interventions

> "One of the strategies that we take into account is also to involve a male partner, for example, if we have a meeting, perhaps the partner who accompanies us also participates. He does not have the [information], and we make the intervention. But when they see that there is a man accompanying us, it lowers their level of anger and annoyance, because somehow there is a man who wants this too. We sometimes include this in our meetings or also in our workshops." - Elvia

As discussed in the next section, this pragmatic approach to power relations is a fundamental part of WJI's success as well.

5.5 Harnessing Existing Power

As mentioned by 3 interviewees, one of the first steps WJI's negotiation processes is effectively identifying the most powerful figures in each new community. Then, making them feel respected, and slowly gaining their support in return. When Sandra and her colleague arrived into a room of 18 hostile male community leaders, their goal was not to convince the men to immediately give up their seats at the table, and allow women to take over providing services. Instead, Sandra explains that her first move was to affirm and respect the authority and reputation the leaders had

built in their community. Appealing to their morals, Sandra and her partner brought the community leaders to understand that they would gain even more support from their people by providing better services for everyone (see Process Tracing Case 1 for a full analysis of this negotiation). Instead of challenging them outright, the WJI team took a more subtle and effective approach, by creating a new win-win scenario in which women in the community get better access to rights, empowerment services, and justice, and the male community leaders build loyalty and gratitude from a whole section of the population. As mentioned, for this strategy to be most effective, WJI has become extremely adept at figuring who is most important to talk to in each community, and inviting them all.

> "We try to invite almost all the leaders, whether they are religious leaders, community leaders, auxiliary mayors, leaders, midwives, teachers, the parents who are on boards, or Parent Organization, they are called." - Sandra

This approach is supported by the code *highlighting men as part of the solution,* present in four interviews. In another example, Elvia describes a moment where she was not sure how the men would react to the concepts she was about to lay out in a workshop. So, as mentioned above, she decided to bring a male colleague along with her. During the workshop, he was able to participate with her, to very positive results. At one point, he noted that he had helped his wife change their baby's diaper once, and his wife was very happy with him. From there, another man shared that he helps his wife sweep the house sometimes. The cycle of positive reinforcement took off, and other men started to feel positively about their own household contribution too. While Elvia knew she was the most informed person on the subject, she was not in the right cultural or social position to suggest that men should help more around the house. However, another man was. By harnessing the cultural power that he could provide based on his identity, she was able to amplify WJI's message and her own situational power as well.

As is coded 21 times in the data, *raising awareness* is a central part of WJI's work here as well. In order to break down the power dynamics that exist around them, three participants mention recognizing that those in power must understand the issues too. The key challenge code *lack of*

awareness of the problem marks 16 instances in which participants pointed out that their counterparts did not see gender-based violence or discrimination as an issue in their community, and were openly hostile to the suggestion. To Viviana, this means remaining open-minded, kind, diplomatic, and building trust with even the male community leaders and service providers they work with. Instead of trying to level the structural playing field in every instance, the participants emphasize their focus on strategically shifting mindsets and perspectives. From there, they report beginning the work on appealing to their sense of leadership and morals, using respectful, diplomatic language, and tactically reframing wherever they can.

> "So I think that these negotiations are at a social level and when we achieve [our goals], the community leaders, they join the process of being able to say if it is important for the community that women know about their rights.
>
> Iin many of these negotiations we don't confront, of course. We know that we are in a patriarchal society, but we know that many of [these men] do not know it either because they exercise it in practice, that is, they are not aware of the attitudes that they hold." - Viviana

The participants of WJI describe this strategy becoming even more helpful as they broaden their networks of powerful allies. This includes not just male colleagues, but male police, legal authorities, and government officials.

> "Another of the strategies that we have had is rapprochement with the diverse allies. When I speak of allies I include community leaders, the National Civil Police, for example, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the peace court when it is within a municipality, or various courts, various organizations. And we have achieved a lot [through] offering workshops to service providers…
>
> We train them in certain topics, we create communication, we get to know the people and this also facilitates the issue of being able to coordinate with them [in the future]." - Yesi

This strategy does not exactly involve coalition building, and may not even begin as allyship. Often, as described by Rosa in her interview, these powerful actors may have even stronger stereotypes and pre-existing biases against WJI, and indigenous women. For that reason, these findings show that process of convincing male leaders to mobilize their power for WJI's goals is

not immediate. When Yesi describes connecting with powerful male figures, the strategies coded next to this example include *long-term objectives, fostering participative spaces, leveraging personal connections,* and *support of allies, mediators & third parties,* which are cited 13, 28, 13, and 18 times in the interviews respectively. Nonetheless, as seen in Sandra's example above, even just one workshop intervention can be enough to create more open-mindedness, and bring the men closer to using their authority to support WJI's mission in their own community.

Sources of Power
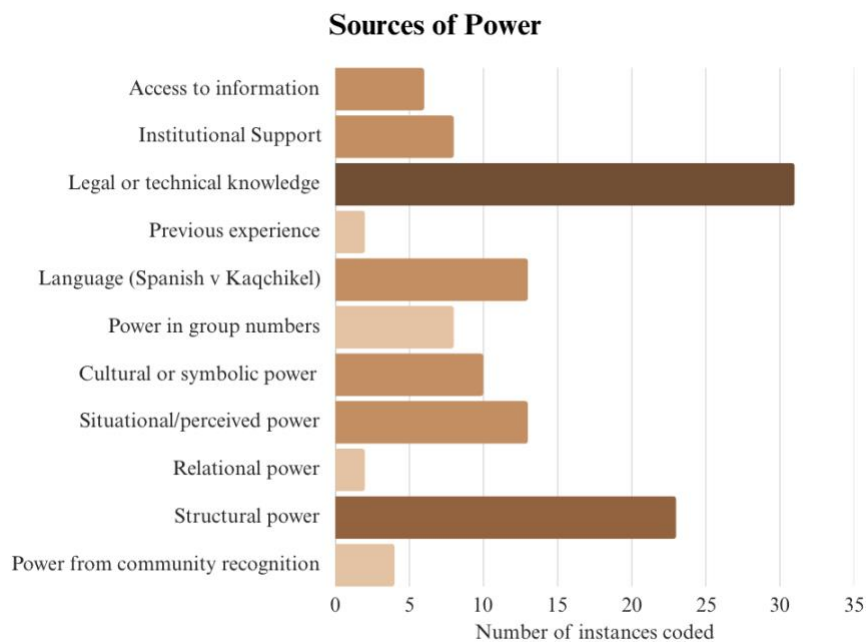
Figure 5.8

Yesi goes on to mention that when providing workshops for authorities, WJI's staff often offers them something in return. First, WJI's staff members must go through the process of building credibility, and tactically reframing key issues. However, by then offering their educational and legal services, or community support programs, WJI creates new win-win options that these actors in power had never considered before. Figure 5.8 represents the major sources of power found in this study and underlines this finding as well. Considering the fact the WJI's participants find their legal and technical expertise to be their own biggest source of power, they combine it with the clever use of tactics such as *persuasion without confrontation, tactical reframing, active listening, validating counterpart's perceptions,* and *leveraging personal connections* in order to great more attractive partnerships for those in power.

Rather than seeking to dismantle hierarchies or accumulate power in order to challenge dominant actors head-on, the female negotiators at WJI demonstrate an alternative path: to strategically harness power rather than confronting it.

Their approach is not about submission, nor about self-erasure. Participants report that it is tied to the strategy *confident self-presentation* and involves maintaining a strong personal presence, clear subject expertise, and firm boundaries, while also avoiding open opposition. As Rosa explains, she always asserts power where she can, whether it is my shaking the men's hands, which is not typically done by women in Guatemala, or maintaining her posture, tone or voice, and attitude in a way that projects authority.

However, Rosa combines this with diplomatic behavior and says she complements the work that the authorities have done in their community, and she occasionally points out nice things about the location they are meeting in, from a painting on the wall, to a picture with family. While the relationship may start off a cold, she describes these strategies as breaking down barriers between them, while maintaining her stance as their equal. After the workshop, negotiation, or intervention that comes next, Rosa notes that she has even had scenarios where she hears that a male community leader has told other men in the community to "watch out" and treat their wives well, because WJI now has the ability to prosecute those crimes. Coming man-to-man from a trusted community leader, Rosa recognizes that the words carry exponentially more weight.

Final Notes

The act of harnessing power relies on each key emotional and strategic component that participants have reported as central to their work, and their success. Interacting with structurally powerful, and initially hostile participants is emotional strenuous, and requires high levels of self-control, advanced preparation, resilience, and quick adaptability to reframe each new attack. However, Rosa and Viviana add nuance to this strategy by explaining that it is not applied in all cases. As

previously discussed, Viviana states that when there is violence or the violation of human rights involved, negotiation and diplomatic conversation is not an option. Rosa notes she is always quite thoughtful about when WJI would benefit from engaging in this way, and when they would not. She explains that before pursuing a strategy that is dependent on the other party's power, she first of all assesses whether she should care about their power or not.

> "I see two issues, one is whether I should be interested in their power, because if I need to have something. Or the other, is that I am not interested in their power because it is not necessary, and whether they say yes or no it is not going to have much of an impact." - Rosa

Ultimately, these participants lay out a subtle, pragmatic, emotionally intelligent, and relational-driven strategy towards using the systems of power around them. With long-term objectives in mind, the participants illuminate an intentional effort to work around within, and through, the system depending on what best serves WJI's goals in each instance.

5.6 Causal Mechanisms from Process Tracing

In this section I will outline three distinct cases of negotiation that were reported by participants during the interviews. To provide a reminder, process tracing will contribute valuable and complementary insights to this thesis by:

- Revealing Causal Mechanisms and Enabling Within-Case Inference
- Reconstructing Practical Reasoning in Context
- Centering Participant-Defined Causality
- Assessing Alternative and Contextual Explanations

In the following sections, I will first provide a summary of each case, followed by a table laying out the key phases of the process. In the final Cross-Case Analysis section, I will provide an

analysis of the conditions and mechanisms in each processes and compare cases for key takeaways. Figure 5.9 provides a visual example of the steps that are highlighted in process tracing.

Process Tracing

| Initial Conditions | Trigger | Intervention | Turning Point | Outcome |

(Time 0) → → → → (Time 1)
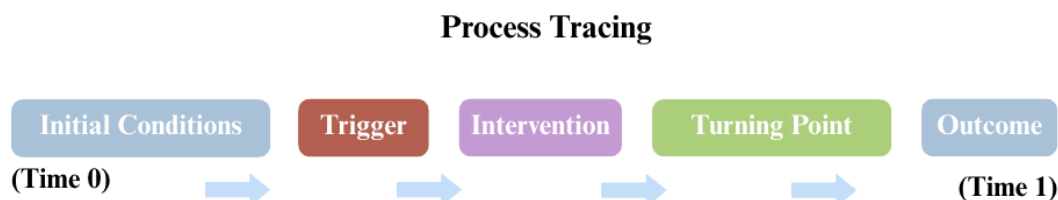
Figure 5.9

Case 1: Sandra

This case traces how Sandra, the Adolescent Girls coordinator at WJI, navigated layered power imbalances during her first visit to a rural Guatemalan community. Her goal was to secure access to work on preventing early marriages and unions. Faced with initial hostility from 18 male community leaders who viewed WJI's focus on women's rights as a threat, Sandra reframed the conversation to emphasize gender equity as a shared community benefit.

Instead of confronting resistance directly, she used calm, respectful dialogue, presented local data on early pregnancies, and grounded her message in shared legal and developmental goals. Through emotional regulation, relational diplomacy, and tactical reframing, she was able to transform the opposition into collaboration, and even secure an invitation to lead another community workshop.

The following table presents a step-by-step process tracing analysis of Sandra's negotiation and the mechanisms leading to this outcome.

Process Tracing: Sandra

Stage	Description	Evidence (from transcript)
Initial Conditions	Two WJI women enter a hostile, male-dominated space	"They received us in a very arrogant, even threatening way—just the two of us in front of 18 community authorities."
Trigger	Mention of WJI and gender rights sparks resistance	"From the moment we introduced the organization, there was confrontation. They felt threatened, thinking we came to change their way of life, where machismo still prevailed."
Reaction	Male leaders express disapproval and reinforce gender roles	"They gave concrete examples... 'Here, women are to be at home. Only men work and generate income.'"
Intervention	Institutional reframing: rights and development for all	"We explained we weren't there to destroy the community, but to promote development and awareness—for both women and men. The goal was equality through equity."
Reaction	Continued resistance and denial of early unions	"They weren't satisfied. When we mentioned early unions, they insisted, 'No, there are no cases of early unions here.'"
Turning Point	Evidence-based reframing with use of local data to challenge denial	"We brought stats from the health center—data on early pregnancies. Most of the girls were in unions."
Action/Tactic	Calm awareness-raising, emotional regulation	"We gave small insights to ease the tension and managed our emotions to stay composed and not show fear."
Outcome	Shift in attitudes and invitation to return	"They apologized for misjudging us, shared cases of early unions, and invited us to lead a workshop—24 leaders attended."

Table 5.3

Case 2: Rosa

This case examines how Rosa, WJI's Legal Training Coordinator, negotiated with 20 powerful male leaders of Guatemala's agricultural union—many of whom held national-level positions and came from mestizo backgrounds. Entering a space marked by blatant gendered and racialized power asymmetries, Rosa recognized that ignoring these dynamics would undermine the negotiation.

Rather than beginning with advocacy or project goals, she and her colleague opened with a brief sensitization session, sharing personal experiences with discrimination and inviting interactive reflection. This pre-negotiation intervention acknowledged the imbalance without direct confrontation, shifting the atmosphere from towards curiosity and openness.

The result was an improved dynamic: the men engaged with the reflection, treated them with more respect during the negotiation, and ultimately invited WJI to deliver follow-up workshops to their teams. This case illustrates how deliberate framing, identity recognition, and emotional intelligence can transform even the most hierarchical settings.

The following table presents a process tracing analysis of the mechanisms that enabled this shift.

Process Tracing: Rosa

Stage	Description	Evidence (from transcript)
Initial Conditions	Two Indigenous women prepare to negotiate with 20 mestizo male agricultural directors	"The guild of agricultural engineers is very macho and economically powerful... We had to negotiate with their national directors, all men... they were mestizos and we were two Indigenous women."
Trigger	Anticipated dismissal based on gender and ethnicity	"If we didn't name it, it would just float in the room and block the negotiation."
Action	Opened with acknowledgment of discrimination, using emotional control and diplomacy	"I said, 'I'm happy you received us, because there have been complex spaces.' We told an anecdote... They asked, 'Why do you think discrimination happens?' I said, 'I can't say why—I'm an Indigenous woman—but maybe those who aren't can see it better.'"
Intervention	Facilitated a brief reflective exercise with emotional and institutional reframing	"We asked reflective questions... You don't usually do dynamics with men like this—but we did, and they responded."
Turning Point	Shift in tone and openness	"It was successful—they didn't change in 10 minutes, but became more aware and said, 'Let's give them the opportunity to show us their work.'"
Outcome	Institutional buy-in and follow-up collaboration	"We worked with them and it was very successful... They asked us to continue with their men's teams—because they needed it the most."

Table 5.4

Case 3: Blanca

This case traces how Blanca, a WJI attorney, intervened in a child support dispute involving a man who had abandoned his family and was preparing to migrate to Canada. Rather than escalating the situation immediately through legal enforcement, Blanca began with moral appeals and tactical reframing. When these failed, she pivoted to find legal leverage.

After the man claimed he was no longer migrating, Blanca stated she would file a travel restriction order—framed as a procedural step, not a threat. His emotional reaction exposed his lie, and Blanca was able to get him to negotiate again.

By grounding the exchange in legal fact and avoiding escalation, Blanca diffused defensiveness and secured the man's cooperation. He agreed to a payment plan within hours, avoiding court proceedings. The case illustrates how perceived legal authority, paired with emotional control and adaptability, can generate success in power-imbalanced negotiations. The following table maps the mechanisms at play through process tracing.

Process Tracing: Blanca

Stage	Description	Evidence (from transcript)
Initial Conditions	Man abandoned family, refused to pay support, and was planning to migrate; client sought justice	"The users come for consultation… In this case it was child alimony. The gentleman went to another region and refused [to pay]."
Action	Pragmatic reframing, emotional appeals, and awareness-raising used to persuade	"I go as positive as possible… make him see his family won't survive without support. I try to persuade him that if no pension is set, we'll start a legal process—especially if he travels abroad."
Trigger	Man claims he won't migrate, to justify low pension	"He said, 'I am not going to travel to Canada anymore, so I cannot give a high pension.'"
Intervention	Legal leverage presented with calm, pragmatic tone	"I told him, 'Well, since you say you're not going to travel, we'll request an arraigo so you can't leave Guatemala.'"
Turning Point	He reacts, realizes bluff is exposed, and agrees to terms	"He said, 'Do you want to harm me?' I said, 'No—it won't affect you if you're not traveling.' He was upset, but responded, 'I'll give what the lady is asking for.'"
Outcome	Informal agreement reached; client's needs met quickly	"That same day, he accepted and said he'd deposit the 2000 quetzals the next day. Reaching that in 1 or 2 hours is quite effective."

Table 5.5

Cross Case Analysis

Cross Case Overview

Case	Negotiation Type	Key Mechanism(s)	Outside Factors of Influence	Outcome
Sandra	Community access	Reframing + Emotional intelligence and regulation	WJI's institutional stereotypes/misperceptions	Trust built, social norms shifted, access secured, new workshop invitation
Rosa	Access & Institutional cooperation	Pre-negotiation reflection + Diplomatic intervention	WJI's institutional stereotypes/misperceptions, Bias against indigenous women	Perceptions shifted, follow-up workshop requested
Blanca	Legal compliance for child alimony	Emotional appeals + Pragmatic reframing	The man's migration plans to Canada	Full child support payment secured

Table 5.6

A cross-case comparison of Sandra, Rosa, and Blanca reveals how WJI staff negotiated from structurally disadvantaged positions by tactically constructing legitimacy, credibility, and leverage. While the contexts varied, all three cases demonstrate how strategic framing, emotional intelligence, and adaptive reasoning allowed participants to reconfigure power dynamics. Process tracing clarifies how specific actions and turning points produced successful outcomes, illuminating shared patterns that thematic coding alone could not reveal.

First, each case followed a distinct causal pathway in which power was gradually reshaped. Sandra shifted initial hostility into cooperation by reframing WJI's mission, introducing local data, and regulating her emotional response. Rosa preempted resistance by opening with a personal and reflective exercise, diffusing bias and negative perceptions without confrontation. Blanca, facing deflection and denial, shifted from moral persuasion to a firm but respectful assertion of legal

authority. In each case, success was not immediate but achieved through deliberate sequencing and adaptive moves that made each woman a credible actor, despite an imbalanced field.

Second, the practical reasoning behind each woman's choices shows practical reasoning based on each specific social and institutional context. Rather than following predefined scripts, Sandra, Rosa, and Blanca assessed evolving dynamics and adjusted their strategies accordingly. Sandra interpreted initial hostility not as fixed opposition but as fear-based defensiveness, leading her to effectively reframe her message to emphasize community benefit and avoid escalation. Rosa anticipated took action before the negotiation begin, recognizing that her perceived credibility and legitimacy would be a fundamental factor in the negotiation. In Blanca's case, she only shifted to legal action after confirming that her counterpart had undermined his own credibility. This put him on the defense, while she gained nearly all situational power. These decisions were not based on abstract reasoning, but on a grounded reading of power, culture, and institutional norms in the moment.

Third, the cases center participants' own understandings of causality, and how they made sense of what produced success. Outcomes were never attributed to just one strategy. Whether before, during, or after the actual negotiation had begun, the three women were constantly assessing which levers would be the most effective to get their audience on their side. These reflections reveal how participants themselves constructed causal meaning: power was not claimed outright but built through shifts in perception, emotional response, and legal positioning.

Finally, contextual factors helped shape enabled, or constrained the effectiveness of individual strategies. Sandra's use of data was more persuasive because the community did happen to know of several cases of adolescent pregnancy, and when she laid out the consequences, she happened to find a shared concern. In Rosa's case, she was immediately affected by factors out of her control — firstly her identity, and secondly, the reputation that WJI already had with that group. Informed by past experiences, she was able to call out other groups of men and refrain from confronting those in front of her, while cleverly landing the same point. Blanca's authority was enhanced by legal norms that gave her leverage, but her success also depended on the man's intent to migrate,

which made the threat of a travel restriction meaningful. These contextual variables did not diminish the role of each participant' agency but help clarify when and why certain strategies worked. Overall, this reveals that the mechanisms for success were produced through the interplay of external conditions, and shaped by the level to which each participant was able to react to them in real time.

5.7 What about failure?

This thesis is intentionally centered on successful negotiations, as emphasized in the methodology, because it aims to understand the strategies that work, and why participants believe that they do. As can be seen in Appendix A several questions were specifically designed to elicit successful examples, and walk through the steps that shaped their outcomes. Nonetheless, each interview included a targeted question on failure in negotiations as well. Beyond this, moments of failure or unexpected outcomes also surfaced organically. Three participants, even when not directly asked, shared experiences where negotiations did not go as planned — workshops that were canceled at the last minute, invitations that were repeatedly declined, meetings with community leaders that failed to gain traction, or client cases that stalled due to dynamics beyond their control.

> "Well, it is worth remembering that we do everything possible to carry out these activities, but there are things that no longer depend on us, that are no longer in our hands. We are disapointed because we would like to reach all the communities, but it is like 'Well, this is a lesson learned and then let's breathe and move forward again'." - Participant 13

However, these moments appeared not as contradictions to the study's focus, but as important complements to it. They revealed the fragility of negotiating under compounded power imbalances, where interviewees affirm that progress may be influenced by unpredictable relational or institutional shifts. Despite the participant's explanation that complete failure is rare, which is

corroborated WJI's documented high growth rate across its programs, these reflections highlight that the process is not uniformly linear. Four participants underline that outcomes are sometimes partial, delayed, or contingent on external actors.

What is striking, however, is that each participant did not often describe these moments just as "failures". Instead, all 13 of them framed setbacks or rejections as part of a longer, iterative process toward effectiveness. Rather than discouragement, these experiences often sparked reflection, strategy revision, and deeper engagement. Quotes supporting the trait *resilience* underline this. Moments of "failure" tie closely to the traits found to be most essential in this study, including flexibility and emotional stability. Participants emphasized the importance of learning what does not work in order to refine what might, and many shared how initial resistance or rejection later informed more effective approaches. In this way, failure is not absent from their accounts, even in positive ones. However, according to the participant's experiences, failure becomes less about a lost outcome and more about a recalibrated path forward, based on what they describe as persistence, creativity, and the conviction that accomplishing their objectives is still possible.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of how marginalized negotiators achieve success while navigating compounded power imbalances based on gender, ethnicity, and culture. This discussion chapter will center on the same four findings: (1) the informational, emotional, and collective nature of preparation, (2) tactical reframing to control narratives, (3) the essential traits and skills for negotiation, and (4) harnessing power instead of confronting it. The interpretation of results will be followed by an overview of limitations, and areas of future research.

6.1 Interpretation of Results

Expanding Classic Metrics of Success

The findings of this study suggest that conventional models of negotiation success, typically centered on measurable outcomes such as legal wins or material gains, may be insufficient in contexts marked by compounded power imbalances. For WJI's staff, success was often defined not as a final resolution, but as relational and procedural shifts, seen in improved attitudes, recognition of women's rights as an important issue, or the opening of communicative spaces. The frequently found *relational or normative results* code aligns more closely with procedural success than outcome success. The participants' definition of success was often based on long-term, flexible goals, relational objectives, and a steady process of smaller steps forward challenges classic negotiation literature.

Though mainstream negotiation theorists have acknowledged the value of relationship-building, they often have described it as instrumental, in the way that it increases leverage, trust, compliance, or joint-problem solving, while decreasing emotional interference (Fisher et al., 1981; Voss & Raz,

2016; Lewicki et al., 2010). Relational and procedural successes were not only instrumental for negotiators for the participants, they were vital to better long-term outcomes. This is an important distinction — considering that the women's ability to be heard, seen, and taken seriously in the process is in itself a negotiation. These findings therefore align more closely with negotiation authors like Kolb & Williams (2003), Ingerson et al. (2015), and Peterman (2024), who suggest that traditional outcome-driven approaches are not as applicable for marginalized negotiators. Further, Hollander-Blumoff & Tyler (2008) and other scholars work on procedural success reveals that participants are more likely to accept negotiation outcomes when they all consider the process to be fair. This has interesting implications for WJI's negotiators, as it suggests that they are creating agreements that are better, and more sustainable for everyone involved.

Preparing for Compounded Power Imbalance

Preparation for the participants in this research tied clearly into Kim et al (2005) and Watson's (1994) concepts of perceived and situational power. Participants in this study undoubtedly came prepared with information, community context, and cultural knowledge. However, preparation also revolved around understanding the counterpart's perception. For marginalized negotiators, the findings suggest the importance of deeply anticipating the interpersonal, emotional, and cultural dynamics of each setting. Preparation in this study was shaped by the intersecting power imbalances they confronted based on gender, ethnicity, class, and institutional background.

The results of this research add to literature and theory on preparation in two key ways. First, they contribute mental/emotional nuance to traditional negotiation literature which has historically spent more time explaining preparation in terms of informational content, clarity, goal prioritization, and BATNA calculation (Fisher et al., 1981; Lewicki et al., 2010). For these negotiators, preparing emotional control, self-confidence, and adaptability was not just a preference but a way of constructing situational power and building a public image of calm authority. This multi-layered preparation also ties into work by Babcock & Laschever (2003) who

note that for women, self-confidence in itself can be a major obstacle in negotiations. These findings directly support their work in which they mention that practices like role-playing with trusted colleagues or imagining responses to difficult questions can greatly help decrease these concerns (Babcock & Laschever, 2003).

Second, it affirms preparation as a collective process. Coalition-building has long been cited as a powerful and valuable tool for marginalized negotiators to build power (Goodpaster, 1997). However, as this research touches on, it is not without risks. As Sindy mentioned when discussing the long acronym, partnerships are negotiated in themselves and can lead to unexpected challenges if not correctly managed. These findings highlight the fact that coalition or relationship building requires a huge amount of effort, coordination, logistical communication, and planning. Further, mainstream negotiation literature tends to frame coalition-building as a tactical tool to increase leverage, influence, or structural power in negotiations (Goodpaster, 1997; Lewicki et al., 2015; Shell, 2018). However, the participants in this study used collective preparation for more relational goals. WJI participants most often used partner organizations and institutions to co-construct legitimacy, discover more information, navigate exclusive institutions or people, and gain access to new communities or services. Their coalitions were not aimed at immediately increasing leverage in formal negotiations, but at securing access and sustaining presence in spaces where individual actors lacked institutional standing. These nuances can contribute practical and intuitive insights to future negotiation literature on how marginalized negotiators prepare before any power imbalanced situation.

Why Reframing is so Effective

Based on Kim et al (2005)'s definitions of power, reframing was a strong example of a *power-change* tactic. *Power-change* tactics change the power structure itself, as opposed to *power-use* tactics, which use a negotiators pre-existing power to influence a counterpart. Participants highlighted reframing as a key way to tactically bridge their legal, rights-based, or organizational

expertise with the local norms, cultural realities, and morals of their counterparts. Despite entering a negotiation with low power, these results suggest well-executed reframing as a vital mechanism for marginalized negotiators to flip the balance of perceived power.

In negotiation literature, reframing is often treated as a strategic move to maximize the persuasiveness of an appeal (Lewicki et al., 2010). In contrast, the women in this study used reframing to not just persuade, but to de-escalate conversations and emotions. While Fisher et al., 1981 do famously encourage "separating the people from the problem" and reframing issues as a mutual challenge, this approach actually aligns more with typical mediation practices than with classic negotiation (Moore, 2003). Seen through this lens, it makes sense that reframing was always angled towards diplomacy and non-confrontation. While it was impossible to untangle the people from problems that are in fact based on identities, reframing as a quasi-mediation practice allowed participants to cool tensions and avoid backlash in conversations. In turn, this led to more open participation and greater mutual understanding in spaces that could easily have been shut down by a defensive response.

Reframing also helped participants develop situational power by contributing to their credibility. They reframed issues like gender-based violence, early marriage, and child support through a lens that resonated with local authority figures by positioning them not as "women's problems" but as community development concerns, legal compliance issues, or moral responsibilities. Having established a point of both legitimacy and expertise, WJI's staff are therefore in a much stronger place to make requests. Critiques on classic negotiation theory by Peterman (2024) and Kolb & Williams (2003) affirm that conventional tactics (such as anchoring or making firm demands) would themselves be ineffective in situations where negotiators are not seen as credible, legitimate actors in the first place. Ultimately, reframing allows participants in this study to preserve emotional safety in their conversations, and gain better institutional access to communities who are able to see their work as mutually beneficial. More investigation would be valuable in order to assess reframing as not merely a linguistic or persuasive tool, but an emotional, strategic, and demonstrably effective tool for marginalized negotiators.

The Nuances of Ideal Traits

Negotiation scholars and practitioners have long theorized about an array of ideal traits for negotiators, from assertiveness to empathy to confidence to creativity. However, these characteristics are often detached from context. The women in this study reveal a nuanced set of competencies, that are closely linked to their social positioning, job function, and the cultural reality that they navigate. In contexts of extreme power imbalance, tapping into the right characteristic at the right moment can also be a significant *power-change* tactic. These findings suggest that participants use all tools at their disposal, including their personalities, to shape successful outcomes in negotiation (Kim et al., 2005).

While not new to negotiation literature, the fact that emotional intelligence, flexibility, and resilience emerged as essential is a valuable insight. These traits are not easily measured, but they reflect a clear type of adaptative personal competence that seems key to success under conditions of power imbalance. This findings aligns with authors like Thompson (2020) who argue that emotional intelligence and responsiveness to the situation are more likely to produce with successful outcomes, than rigid assertiveness or competition. Thompson (2020) and others like Babcock & Laschever (2003) remind readers that women have been socialized to display emotion in gendered, and often "gentler" ways. Nonetheless, the traits mobilized by the women in this study outlined the power in intentionally balancing diplomatic tone, curiosity, and flexibility with firmness around fundamental values.

In practice, well-known negotiators are applauded for their assertiveness, ability to generate trust, or their charisma (Voss & Raz, 2016). However, as described by interviewees like Elvia and Sandra, staying composed in negotiations is not easy, but it is a matter of survival in negotiations where feeding into anger or conflict may cause irreparable harm to the situation. This investigation points to the delicate nature of balancing personality and gendered characteristics in power

imbalanced positions. In light of these findings, further research on character traits in negotiation could also aim to be less one-size-fits all to incorporate these perspectives.

The Argument for Harnessing Power Structures

Nearly all literature focused on empowering marginalized negotiators helps them identify, define, accumulate, and assert power - whether through building coalitions, training individual skills, developing good relationships, or challenging norms directly (Peterman, 2024; Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Shell, 2018; Goodpaster, 1997). This work is vital: marginalized negotiators must have a well-developed toolkit of strategies and tactics. This toolkit must also be rooted in their ability to accurately assess and adapt to the power dynamics around them.

However, this research offers a different angle. These findings suggest that successful negotiation under asymmetrical conditions is not just about amassing your own power to balance out or challenge the power of others. In contrast to resistance or confrontation-based models, in which empowerment means fighting oppressive powers directly, the participants here aimed to first work within the structures they encountered. Importantly, when rights are violated, violence is used, or a counterpart has acted in bad faith, WJI takes unbending action, no matter the power or norms that they face. However, the practice of identifying and thoughtfully engaging authority figures, navigating institutional procedures with grace and cooperation, and using formal legal protocols to establish legitimacy, has established high levels of access, legitimacy, and success.

This ties into Kolb & Williams' (2003) concept of the "shadow negotiation," in which the unspoken dynamics of power and perception must be deftly navigated alongside the issues of substance, and addressed differently in each situation. It also resonates with Peterman's (2024) that the "equal playing field" assumption does not hold for most marginalized negotiators. Instead, some must rely on alternative methods to achieve their goals (Peterman, 2024). In this study, WJI's staff often opted for strategic alignment, instead of abrupt system disruption, as the most viable path forward in a society directed by repressive patriarchal and ethnic norms.

This approach was not a retreat from justice or an acceptance of what the system around them looks like today. Each participant still described going to great lengths to present themselves with personal confidence, strength, authority, and expertise. Nonetheless, it is a redefinition of what strategic action can look like in the face of immense and long-standing power structures. WJI's staff have an eye on long-term access and change, rather than short term satisfaction. Far from submitting to the power structures as they are, this research suggests that the approach of harnessing power is meant to meet society where it is now and bridge the gap to where it should be. For the participants, the personal connections and trust building with male authorities lead to access for women's empowerment workshops and rights training, in turn leading to more women who are eventually able to match their husbands in terms of education and confidence. These findings seem to point to a reality where a critical mass of women and their allies will eventually be able to shift the tide of social norms, gendered traditions, and power structures that were built to exclude them.

Further, harnessing power instead of directly fighting it ensures that the backlash to this shift has already been neutralized, by getting the most important male community figures on their side from the beginning. What's more, the positive cycle works for everyone. As Sandra and other participants mentioned, when female community members are able to stand up for their rights and contribute better to their communities and families, their male leaders become trusted figures who win even more respect and power from that support. Further, male community leaders are able to influence difficult or compel resistant men much more effectively than if a woman had tried to.

Other negotiation literature highlights similar strategies to harness power as well. In *Transformative Negotiations* (2023), Sarah Federman offers a simple but profoundly effective technique in a similar vein: ask for advice. Ingerson et al. (2015) echoes this, highlighting how even within hierarchies, relationship management and mutual recognition can open space for negotiation and progress. In a situation of power imbalance, this act may create connection, affirm the other's authority, and simultaneously open space for collaboration. In WJI's case, this approach can look like telling a male authority figure that you believe in his leadership, and that you know he would never allow harm to his community. Consistently, these findings show WJI's power to

disseminate its messages as increasing exponentially. As participants reveal, this approach has aligned closely with WJI's staff's vision of success. Further research in this space could contribute information on whether other marginalized negotiators have found the same to be true.

6.2 Limitations

While this thesis provides in-depth, empirically grounded insights into how indigenous Guatemalan women successfully navigate gendered, cultural, and institutional power asymmetries through negotiation, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Limited Generalizability

The research is based on a small number of carefully selected cases within a single organizational context—the Women's Justice Initiative (WJI). While the rich and detailed data from over 13 hours of interviews enables analytical and theoretical insights, made more rigorous by process design and thematic coding with over 100 codes, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable. In this specific context, the women's strategies are shaped by specific legal, cultural, and institutional dynamics in Guatemala, and therefore of course may be not universally replicable. Nonetheless, the value of the study lies in its contribution to theoretical generalization about negotiation under compounding power asymmetries. The universe of cases in which this case is situated highlights the fact that while this case is evidently limited in terms of scope and context, other understudied cases in this category may benefit from a similar analysis of strategies and tactics.

Reliance on Retrospective Self-Reporting

The interviews in this study draw on participants' retrospective accounts of negotiation experiences, which introduces the potential for recall bias, framing of results, or selective emphasis on certain parts of the experience. Participants may unintentionally reinterpret events as more successful in hindsight, or may contribute parts of the encounter that appear more interesting for the study. While retrospective narratives are critical to understanding and tracing the process of negotiation and what success looks like for participants, they limit the ability to verify the full causal chain of events that happened in each case.

Limited Triangulation and Absence of Third-Party Perspectives

All data was derived from interviews with WJI participants, with no complementary data from the institutional counterparts they negotiated with (e.g., community leaders, government actors, male family members). Considering the fact that WJI has not tracked its rate of success in negotiations themselves, more internal data or analysis of counterparts' perspectives would further strengthen findings. While it would be difficult to ask these types of participants the same questions, understanding whether the strategies and tactics used by WJI's team came off as well to them would be very valuable in gaining a more complete picture of successful outcomes. Despite coming from the same organization, data from WJI's annual reports and Impact & Evaluation team was incorporated to add statistics into at least a fuller picture of WJI's perception of success.

Translation and Interpretation

Interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English by myself as the researcher. the translation process inevitably risks the loss or distortion of culturally embedded meanings. However, terms related to emotion, negotiation, sexism, or social hierarchy at times carry layered connotations in Spanish, or more specifically in Guatemala. These nuances resist direct translation,

particularly when describing subtle negotiation maneuvers. Nonetheless, accurate transcription was ensured through the use of Fireflies.ai, and through personal verification. Great care was taken to preserve nuance, as all of the coding was done through Atlas.ti in Spanish as well. This allowed for a closer translation of the key themes and codes, once they had already crystalized through the process of analysis.

Researcher Positionality and Interpretive Bias

As an external researcher who had a direct relationship as a previous intern with WJI, my position likely shaped both data collection and interpretation. Personal relationships, previously built trust, and shared purpose may have influenced participants' willingness to speak candidly. In many ways my personal connection with WJI is what made this research feasible and fruitful, however interpretive research always carries some degree of subjective bias which may limit the most objective results.

Selective Case Sampling and Positive Bias Toward Success

This study deliberately focused on *successful negotiation experiences* — cases in which WJI staff described a turning point or positive outcome. While this design choice allowed for the in-depth reconstruction of causal mechanisms using process tracing, and a thematic analysis of the strategies that work the best for WJI's staff, it focuses less on failed or stalled negotiations. This creates a selection bias toward agency and effectiveness, possibly overestimating the efficacy of the strategies analyzed. Participants were all asked whether their successful strategies failed at times as well, in order to counteract this bias and address illusions that a single strategy is foolproof. As presented in the results section, this question allowed participants the opportunity to explain that naturally each situation is different, and flexibility and adaptability are at times more

important that just focuses on one single tactic or strategy for success. Nonetheless, a lack of focus on unsuccessful cases may miss constraints, missteps, or external limits to successful tactics.

6.3 Avenues for Future Research

Based on the core insights of this thesis, and the limitations listed above, there are various different avenues that future researchers could take.

Comparative Analysis of Success and Failure

As mentioned, this study focuses on successful negotiations, however future research could employ a structured, comparative case design to examine both successful and unsuccessful negotiation efforts. Comparing cases of success vs those of failure could help identify not only what works, but why certain strategies fail. Whether due to difficult individual personalities, resistance beyond the negotiator's control, or the influence of institutional stereotypes on a counterpart's perception, this research did reveal instances in which good strategies may fall short. Further research could draw these situations out further, and refine theoretical understandings of what strategic adaptation looks like in asymmetric contexts.

Comparative Research Across Contexts

Future studies could apply a similar methodological lens to other contexts where marginalized women negotiate for rights, resources, or access in the face of compound power asymmetries. Several of the cases cited in the Methodology chapter would be a fascinating place to start, in order to understand how women negotiating on behalf of their own organizations in rural India, Colombia, or African states, may be able to succeed. Comparative case studies could also help strengthen or challenge the findings of this research, by assessing whether the negotiation

strategies observed in Guatemala are context-specific or reflect more generalizable patterns across Global South settings.

Longitudinal Research on Outcome Durability

Another avenue for future research would be to examine the long-term outcomes of the negotiation instances described. Considering research corroborates the fact that women in peace processes or political transitions led to more durable, high-quality outcomes (Krause et al., 2018), it would be interesting to examine whether the negotiations they navigate on a personal, day-to-day basis, benefit from similar dynamics. A guiding question could do the moments of cooperation, collaboration, trust-building, and positive social connection, described by participants result in sustained access, accountability, or behavioral change? Or does cultural, gender-based, or institutional resistance grow back over time? A longitudinal design could evaluate the durability and practical effects of both the strategies identified in this study, and the results they produce. This would allow for an understanding of whether "success" in this study is short-term, or lasting.

Incorporating Counterpart and Third-Party Perspectives

To triangulate the data and broaden the analysis of negotiation dynamics, future work could also incorporate the perspectives of outside actors as well. As mentioned, community authorities, local government officials, and other male actors involved in the negotiation process would be very interesting to interview as well, to understand what their perceptions of the negotiation process were, and what moments were really "turning points" for them. A study like this would require a different set of questions and expectations for the male participants, so as to not add bias to the data or make the men feel like they were being manipulated or outplayed. However, getting outside perspectives and more data on negotiations conducted with marginalized negotiators would not only test the internal validity of participants' accounts, but also reveal how marginalized actors' strategies are perceived and interpreted by those in power.

Deepening Intersectional Analysis

This study focused primarily on gender and indigeneity, but future research could examine how other identity markers — such as class, education level, religion, language, or sexuality — impact negotiation dynamics and perceptions. A more explicitly intersectional approach could illuminate how different compounded identities open up distinct risks, constraints, or opportunities. Research like this would also contribute to this thesis' strength of generalizability, considering that marginalized negotiators each face unique circumstances based on their contexts, but may have some overlap in the broader strategies and tactics that they utilize the successfully accomplish their goals nonetheless.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

> "Of course, I like negotiating very much. I think that it has been a great opportunity for me to transcend certain conflicts and find solutions. And above all it allows me to continue trusting in the human being, who is capable of using his/her voice to solve differences." – Viviana

Today, we are living through increasingly polarized and volatile times in the fields of negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution. Across contexts, practitioners face rising hostility, eroding institutional trust, and hardened identity divides. As the very institutions committed to peace and dialogue are weakened, the need to develop negotiation skills among local and marginalized actors becomes more urgent than ever. In this context, effective negotiation skills offer the ability to genuinely hear, understand, and respond to others. Good negotiation allows people to navigate difficult relationships, diffuse tension, and find solutions that work in real life, not just in theory. For those who operate without structural forms of power, these skills can be essential to survival, legitimacy, increased rights, and long-term impact.

This thesis explored how female indigenous negotiators in Guatemala succeed despite confronting compounded power imbalances, in their case rooted in gender, indigeneity, socio-economic background, and institutional exclusion. Through thematic analysis, this research revealed that negotiation success in these contexts is not won through dominance or positional strength, but through pragmatism, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and multi-faceted preparation. Participants from WJI did not try to overpower or dismantle their counterparts' power. They harnessed power by building trust, reframed narratives, regulating emotions, and strategically leveraging their legitimacy to slowly open space for collaboration, agreement, and allyship.

The three process-traced cases — Sandra, Rosa, and Vilma — highlighted how causal pathways unfold in real time. Early-stage emotional control and framing shifted power dynamics made just enough to make room for dialogue. Mid-stage tactics like leveraging legal authority nudged, or

forced, counterparts toward cooperation. In the late stages, participants Sandra and Rosa, who were in the position to do so, created opportunities for further cooperation, learning, and long-term gains. Importantly, these mechanisms did not operate in a vacuum. Their success was conditioned by contextual factors like institutional perception, credibility, timing, and community norms. This underscores that negotiation outcomes are co-produced by strategy and external factors that are ideally assessed and understand before each process. When that is not possible, the results here suggested ways that outside factors can adapted to and leveraged.

Taken together, this thesis challenges mainstream negotiation theory to broaden its lens. It pushes back on one-size-fits-all models of power and success, and instead proposes a dynamic view grounded in the experience of each participant. It argues that we must take the strategies forged under power imbalance seriously — not just because they are inspiring or because inclusion is important, but because they are effective. These women are entering into negations that they could fail at countless moments, but instead, they report success much more often than failure. For future research, as mentioned, these findings open several pathways. How do strategies like tactical reframing, harnessing power, or applying legal leverage operate across different cultural and institutional settings? What structural or relational conditions make these approaches more or less viable? And how can negotiation training and policy design center the expertise of marginalized actors rather than try to squeeze dominant models into their contexts?

Ultimately, the women in this study are not waiting around to be empowered, they are already negotiating with skill, courage, and creativity. As institutions and individuals continue to face multi-layered, inequal, and volatile conflicts, the findings from this thesis offer both warnings and hope. The warning is that negotiation literature and theory must stop assuming equal footing at the negotiation table. The hope is that once we recognize this, we open space for strategies that are more adaptive, relational, and resilient — ones that are already being practiced by the women in this study and surely many others around the globe.

Their work reminds us that negotiation is not only a matter of skill, it is a matter of resilience, determination, and creativity. These findings speak not only to the specific realities of these

participants, but to a wider class of negotiators navigating power dynamics worldwide. They reveal that far from needing self-help or top-down guidance, their skills should be highlighted, studied, and shared. Marginalized negotiators have undoubtedly already been honing their skills through decades of challenges, and improbable success. Now, their lessons deserve to be recognized not as inspirational side stories, but as central contributions to the future of negotiation.

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APPENDIX

A. Finalized Interview Questions (Translated from Spanish)

Introduction:
"Before I begin, I want to clarify that when I say 'negotiation', I am not referring only to official meetings or legal processes. I'm also talking about any situation where you've had to reach an agreement, resolve a disagreement, convince another person or group to support something, change their mind, or accept a proposal—all to achieve some goal of your work with WJI. That can be when you talk to community authorities, leaders, families, government officials, or even within the community to get something passed, a right respected, a program implemented, or some change achieved. Does it make sense?"

Warm Up
- Could you briefly introduce yourself, such as where you're from, and your current role in WJI?
- In your work, who do you negotiate with, and why?

Understanding Success and Effective Strategies
- What does success in negotiations mean to you?
- Could you share an example of a memorable negotiation that you successfully participated in?
- Follow up:
    - What were your objectives when starting that negotiation?
    - Can you walk me through the process you went through, before, during and after the negotiation?
    - What other factors did you take into account?
- What strategies or approaches have worked best for you in that negotiation?
- Follow up:
    - Why do you think they were effective?

Failures or Unexpected Results in Negotiation
- Have you ever participated in a negotiation that didn't go as you expected?
- Follow up:
    - If yes, what happened?
- Have you tried to use a strategy that worked in one situation, but failed in another?

- Follow up:
    - If yes, what do you think was the reason for this?
- How do you manage conflict or tension when a negotiation becomes difficult or emotionally intense?
- Follow up:
    - What kinds of things help you most in during difficult times?

Identity Based Experiences
- Are there any aspects of your identity that influence the way you negotiate?
- What factors do you think influence how you're perceived in negotiations?
- Do you think that being part of the WJI has influenced your negotiation style?
- Follow up:
    - How has your perspective changed compared to when you were negotiating on an individual level?

Power Inequalities and Structural Barriers
- What are the biggest challenges or barriers that you face in negotiations, and why?
- Follow up:
    - What strategies helped you manage that situation?

- Have you ever felt an imbalance of power in a negotiation?
- Follow up:
    - If so, why? And how have you managed it?

Future Prospects and Advice
- What is one thing you wish you had known about negotiation at the beginning of your career?
- In the various negotiations in which you have participated, can you think of any other strategies or tactics have been generally most effective for you and why?
- Do you think that any other factor, apart from your strategies and your personal interaction, influences the results of the negotiations?
- What are the most important skills that women negotiating under difficult conditions should develop?

Wrap Up
- Based on your past experiences overall, do you like to negotiate?

- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your negotiation experiences that I haven't asked about?
- Follow up:
  - Do you have any questions or anything you're wondering, to ask me?

Questions asked at the end of each interview for internal WJI data, but *not* included in results:
- How has your perspective on female leadership changed after working at WJI?
- Are there institutional resources that would help you strengthen your leadership, but you do not currently offer WJI? What are they?
- Do you feel that WJI supports you in your negotiations with community leaders?
- What have been contributions from WJI that have helped you strengthen your negotiation skills?

B. Consent form (Translated from Spanish)

Negotiating on Unequal Ground: *How Identity, Inequality, and Power Shape Successful Strategies*

Thank you for considering participation in this study. This research explores the negotiation tactics used by women facing structural disadvantages, particularly those working in advocacy and women's empowerment. Your participation will help highlight effective negotiation techniques and contribute to academic and practical knowledge in this field.

What data are being used?

As part of this study, I will collect and analyze:

- Your responses to the interview questions regarding your personal and professional experiences in negotiation.
- General demographic information (such as age and professional role) to contextualize responses.
- No sensitive personal information, such as financial records, health status, or contact details, will be collected.

How will my data be used and protected?

- Upon your request, your name and any other identifying information will be anonymized in all published materials.
- The data will be used exclusively for this research project and academic purposes.
- Only the researcher and authorized academic supervisors will have access to the raw data.
- The anonymized data will be securely stored and retained for one year after the completion of this research, after which it will be permanently deleted.

Do you wish to remain anonymous in published results?

- Please check the applicable box:
  ☐ **Yes, I wish to remain anonymous in all published results.** My name and any identifying information will be removed.
  ☐ **No, I agree to be identified in the research results.**

What happens if I change my mind?

If you decide to withdraw from the study at any time, you can send an email to Elise at elisewebster05@gmail.com or a message at +1 408 656 7499 requesting the removal of your data. Your name and any information that could identify you will be deleted immediately.

Please check the applicable box:

If you agree to allow your data to be used in this study on women's negotiation techniques, please indicate your preference below.

☐ I do not consent to any use of the information collected about me.

☐ I consent to the use of the information collected about me for the purposes of this research project

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Signature: _____

C. Final Codebook

Key Challenges

- Instances in which participants describe structural, cultural, or interpersonal barriers that complicate negotiation efforts.

Essential Qualities

- Personal traits or capacities participants attributed to successful negotiators, or demonstrated by participants in successful instances.

Tactics

- Concrete, situation-specific actions or communication strategies used to influence counterparts or navigate resistance.

Strategies

- Broader, often pre-planned behavioral patterns or orientations guiding negotiation

Sources of Power

- Forms of leverage recognized or used by or against participants

Perceptions of a Successful Negotiation

- Participant descriptions of what constitutes a good outcome

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Key Challenges

- **Lack of local police or law**: Absence of accessible state protection or formal justice structures, often in rural areas.
- **Distrust of outside organizations**: Community suspicion toward NGOs or external actors, often due to past experiences or misinformation.
- **Discrimination (intersectional)**: Prejudices based on gender, indigeneity, language, or class that intersect and amplify exclusion.
- **Ego & Difficult personalities**: Resistance from individuals in power due to pride, status, anger, machismo, or defensiveness.
- **Stigmatization of defending rights**: Social backlash faced by women or community members who advocate for legal or human rights.
- **Lack of knowledge/education**: Limited awareness of legal rights or options due to minimal formal education.
- **Lack of recognition of problem**: Denial or minimization of issues like domestic violence, early marriage, or gender inequality.

- **Intimidation**: Efforts to instill fear or silence advocates through verbal or non-verbal threats.
- **Ingrained machismo**: Deeply rooted cultural and gendered norms that position men as dominant and women as subordinate.
- **Fear/lack of self-confidence**: Internalized hesitation or doubt among women negotiators, often felt before and during negotiation
- **Women with patriarchal mindsets**: Female community members who uphold gendered norms that limit women's rights.
- **Restrictive social norms**: Cultural expectations that constrain women's behavior or public participation.
- **Community resistance**: Collective pushback or skepticism toward programs or negotiation efforts.
- **Gender socialization from childhood**: Long-standing behavioral conditioning that assigns roles based on gender, beginning from norms set at home
- **Lack of social, cultural, or structural power**: Limited access to influence within formal and informal decision-making arenas.

Key Qualities

- **Friendliness/Kindness**: Warm and open demeanor that helps build trust with counterparts and clients.
- **Self-control & Emotional stability**: Ability to manage emotional responses and maintain composure during tense negotiations.
- **Analytical Perceptiveness**: Capacity to read the room, understand power dynamics, anticipate reactions, and pick up on pre-existing misconceptions held by a counterpart.
- **Creativity & Determination**: Willingness to find unique paths forward and persevere despite barriers.
- **Empathy**: Sensitivity to others' emotions and perspectives, enabling trust and cooperation.
- **Flexibility & Adaptability**: Readiness to adjust one's tone, framing, or approach based on shifting dynamics.
- **Emotional Intelligence**: Overall skill in recognizing and regulating emotions in self and others during negotiation.
- **Pragmatism**: Focus on achievable outcomes rather than ideal ones, balancing goals with real-world constraints.
- **Resilience**: Persistence in returning to the table and continuing dialogue after resistance or failure.

Tactics

- **Highlighting common ground**: Emphasizing shared values, experiences, or goals to foster cooperation.
- **Active listening**: Attentively hearing others' points and listening to their concerns.
- **Presenting negotiation as better option**: Framing dialogue as a practical alternative to conflict or legal escalation.
- **Offering services**: Providing useful support as an entry point to build trust.
- **Highlighting men as part of solution**: Engaging male counterparts as allies rather than adversaries.
- **Strategic language use**: Careful selection of words to avoid conflict and align with audience values.
- **Use of key datapoints**: Using relevant facts or statistics to create legitimacy and persuasion.
- **Tactical reframing**: Shifting the narrative to reduce defensiveness and redirect the conversation.
- **Addressing discrimination outright**: Naming and unpacking bias directly, often to disarm or reframe the power dynamic.
- **Respectful & diplomatic tone**: Maintaining politeness and professionalism even during disagreement.
- **Using identity to build trust**: Leveraging shared cultural or gender identity to gain credibility.
- **Leveraging personal connections**: Drawing on personal relationships to access or influence decision-makers.
- **Validating counterpart's perception**: Acknowledging the logic or feelings of the other party before countering.
- **Direct communication**: Avoiding ambiguity by using clear, firm, and open tone.
- **Practice scenarios with colleagues**: Rehearsing possible negotiation scenarios with trusted peers to refine messaging, anticipate challenges, and build confidence.
- **Self-calming exercises**: Using techniques before or during negotiation to regulate emotion and maintain composure.
- **Researching history/culture**: Gathering contextual knowledge about the community, institution, or counterpart's cultural background to tailor strategy and avoid missteps.

Strategies

- **Support of allies, mediators, or third-parties**: Seeking help from neutral or influential actors to build legitimacy or reduce tension during negotiations, or to accomplish goals afterwards.

- **Confident self-presentation**: Using composure, body language, or speech to assert presence and gain credibility.
- **Clear communication**: Speaking in a direct, understandable, and concise way to ensure alignment and avoid confusion.
- **Knowledge of context**: Demonstrating awareness of community dynamics, history, and norms to tailor the negotiation approach.
- **Language (Spanish vs. Kaqchikel)**: Switching between Spanish and Indigenous, and often more communal language to improve inclusion, clarity, or cultural connection.
- **Informal negotiation**: Engaging in spontaneous or unofficial conversations outside formal meetings to try for voluntary agreements, or to build rapport.
- **Long-term objectives**: Approaching negotiation with a focus on gradual progress rather than immediate wins.
- **Organization & coordination**: Preparing logistics, team roles, and timing in advance to support a coherent negotiation strategy.
- **Persuasion without confrontation**: Influencing others through logic, empathy, or emotional appeals — without triggering defensiveness.
- **Mental & emotional preparation**: Readying oneself psychologically and emotionally before entering tense or challenging dialogues.
- **Advanced preparation**: Researching the case/community/issue, preparing informationally, and anticipating dynamics beforehand.
- **Community network support**: Drawing on relationships with local actors and stakeholders to reinforce credibility, get information, or foster support.
- **Respect for the client's goals**: Ensuring that negotiation objectives align with the client's preferences, not only legal outcomes.
- **Feedback & reflection**: Actively learning from each negotiation and applying those lessons to future interactions.
- **Flexible objectives**: Maintaining a willingness to adjust demands or framing depending on what is achievable.
- **Raising awareness**: Educating clients or counterparts about overlooked issues as a way to shift perceptions, change mindsets, and expand possibilities for cooperation.
- **Personal/professional separation**: Managing emotional boundaries to avoid burnout or internal turmoil during sensitive negotiations.
- **Clarity of objectives & limits**: Being explicit about desired outcomes and knowing where compromise is or isn't possible.
- **Fostering participative spaces**: Creating settings where all participants feel safe to contribute and be heard.

Sources of Power

- **Access to information**: Possessing relevant facts, data, education, or local knowledge

- **Institutional support**: Drawing strength or legitimacy from affiliation with WJI or other respected organizations.
- **Legal or technical knowledge**: Understanding the law or specific processes that can be used to advocate effectively.
- **Previous experience**: Drawing confidence or legitimacy from past successes or lived expertise in similar negotiations.
- **Language**: Ability to communicate in culturally relevant or locally accepted ways that enhance credibility.
- **Power in group numbers**: Gaining influence by negotiating as a team or coalition, rather than as an individual (often men in this case, who arrive in large groups).
- **Cultural/symbolic power**: Drawing on broader meanings—such as representing a marginalized group or embodying justice—to enhance influence.
- **Situational/perceived power**: Power that emerges from how others view the negotiator in that specific moment, regardless of their formal status.
- **Relational power**: Influence gained through trust-based relationships, familiarity, or social capital.
- **Structural power**: Power derived from formal systems, policies, or authority structures that privilege certain actors. Based on identity factors, that are often used to try to influence the negotiation process or outcome
- **Power from community recognition**: Influence rooted in being known and respected by the community.

Perception of a Successful Negotiation

- **Reaching a voluntary settlement**: When the outcome is mutually agreed upon without coercion, and all parties accept the terms willingly.
- **Avoiding waste of time, resources, etc.**: Success defined in practical terms — saving energy, effort, or money by resolving a conflict efficiently (outside of the courts).
- **Accomplishing client's goals**: When the client's specific needs or wishes are met, whether legal, emotional, or social.
- **Relational or normative results**: Outcomes that may not be material but shift relationships, change perceptions, or reinforce shared norms (e.g., dignity, respect, openness to future collaboration).
- **Tangible results (access, services, etc.)**: Obtaining concrete benefits such as legal protection, access to a community, or a childcare support payment
- **Feeling of internal peace/satisfaction**: The participant or client's sense of closure, validation, or emotional calm with the process or outcome.
- **Win-win solution achieved**: When both parties feel they have gained something of value

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E. Additional Supporting Quotes

Success

"A process that would have taken us at least a year, was reduced to 15 days. So that is a success story for us, because this first part was achieved, because the objective was not really so much the issue of recognition, but it was more the economic contribution of the father for the success of the children." - *Vilma*

"I think [it is successful] when those involved are satisfied, they know what they saw and they know what they didn't give, as well as, what they received. So I think it's something that is seen in practice where you say 'I'm satisfied with what happened, I've been discussing it for a while, but I'm calm, I'm clear in what I gave and what I received, right?'
So I think that this is also very important, it is the ultimate satisfaction that those of us who have participated in negotiation processes, because people begin to identify what they let go of and what they got in return." - *Viviana*

"Well, I feel or see that it is successful when we get the clients or the women who come with us to achieve what they need, they manage to solve that part of what they need." - *Blanca*

Strategies

"Well, I believe that we are in constant learning, so we are not always prepared for all situations. There have been times when I can't make a decision, right? Which would be best? So in my case I always go to someone I trust to consult with. Because I don't always know what decision to make, so I think that with other opinions, maybe I can make a better decision." – *Carmelita*

"One of my strategies is that I start a conversation about a painting that is there, about the roof of the house, about things like that. So I generate trust and it's not like 'You're one side and I'm another side and we're going to clash here.' - *Rosa*

In the last workshop I had, they ended up asking me about real estate, right, that they had problems with land and everything, it was not a real issue, but they already had the confidence that I am a lawyer. That is why one has to go prepared and this makes them have that trust to say 'Well, if they have this legal advice and they can support us' and then that makes it possible to achieve a lot in these workshops." – *Sindy*

"On the other hand, as well as preparing personally, we are preparing people in case like 'If this happens, we are going to proceed in this way, please do not make comments that make us turn against each other, because that also destabilizes the negotiation' and then make a sort of guide to specific things that must be mentioned or not. Even if things are true, we cannot say them as they will take the conversation off topic. I think that is like the most basic thing we need for a negotiation." - *Sandy*

Qualities & Traits

"I think that self-confidence is very important, because I think that if I don't trust myself, how am I going to get other people to do it too, right? It is a constant work on oneself and always looking in the mirror and saying 'Well you can do it, you will achieve it.' We have to overcome the nerves that sometimes you get when you are in this type of negotiation and above all self-training, which is very important. We ourselves have to worry about ourselves, look for tools on how to strengthen both our skills and our knowledge." – *Carmelita*

"So when I think about I take I will take my first steps it is the same for any other woman, it is the fear of how they are going to treat me, how they are going to take my participation in these processes. But each experience is different and each experience makes us grow, makes us understand, makes us learn too, because what worked for me at a certain time is not going to work for me always, So it will depend a lot on each case and that is like trying to study and analyze each of the situations that we are presented with and also having that humility to say 'I don't know how to handle it'. I think that in the Legal Advice Program we have achieved that strength of feeling supported by each other as part of the program. - *Vilma*

"So when we arrived, I believe that the men had forgotten they told us not to bother them before. When we show up, they thank us and say they will be at our next workshops. I believe that the experience makes us realize that, sometimes we feel defeated, but when we don't give up it can work out very well. In the end some [of the men] are very grateful we took them into account." - *Sandra*

"The first time you are told 'no', you should not feel defeated, you get [up] again and again. We have mediation and conciliation processes, but before that we have negotiations. For those we are always acquiring new tools, from pure practice of doing it.' - *Rosa*

"Trying to get and be objective and realistic about what's going on is important. I say, 'Well, getting to that middle ground is knowing that the other side has their point of view too and for them it's true. So you have to have a lot of like the ability to perceive what this person is saying, that it is real or it is not real. Perception then has a very important element for these negotiation processes." – Evelyn"

Tactics

"Personally, the first thing is how to locate the common points. I consider it extremely important to locate the issue, that is, to invite the parties to say this is what we are going to discuss, this is the objective of our negotiation, that is why we are here." – *Viviana*

"In these spaces information is shared with them, they are trained on certain topics, communication is created, people are known and that also allows me to facilitate the issue of being able to coordinate and that finally is also what I see as a type of negotiation with them, because we know that we can offer them something and they can also offer us the service they give.

So it is an exchange that we carry out in the services we offer both as organizations and as justice entities. So it has been a very nice exchange with them and I think they have been opportunities where we have gained a lot for women, also for the organization, because we are already recognized as IDM, as an organization that can accompany women and give them the respective legal advice." – *Yesi*

When we talk with them we use very clear examples focused on reality. Where we say, for example, 'In the community, imagine, if you would be a little more supported. On the part of women, if they were in positions of authority, they could help, but there are none here. And it is also good to recognize our needs and our opinions and our creativity, precisely as women.' And I think they lead [the men] to see, 'Well, they're right, it is not a threat.'" - *Sandra*

Sources of Power

"In short, I feel that support, first of all because WJI in the communities is already enough of a presence, so first they recognize WJI when we get there. On the other hand, I think this is a double-edged sword, in certain communities. It is not something that has happened to me directly, but I remember that on one occasion a colleague said that they told [her] that separate couples, and families." - *Yesi*

"So having the power of knowledge also makes women see a situation that they always saw as normalized, now they understand it as this is violence and this is happening, so it is like that awakening that in some will come soon and in others it will come a little bit later. That makes them start to take the role that corresponds to them in communities, because also being a leader carries its responsibilities on their actions, on how they can also generate those changes at the community level, but mainly in their homes, because that is where they have to start from first." - *Vilma*

"If I have for example, with men who are extremely aggressive, if I see the opportunity that it is possible, but the character of this person is very strong, then I also adapt to exercise a slightly stronger negotiation, right? I position myself in a relationship of power above to be able to dominate this part with my body language, my verbal language has a lot to do with demonstrating, let's say, that I have enough character to be able to talk to him." – *Viviana*

Key Challenges

"There are definitely some difficult personalities we come across. I remember another case where I called the gentleman on the phone he told directly me 'I am not going to give anything.' We started a lawsuit and he kept calling the lady and telling her, 'Take that lawsuit away from me, I am not going to give you anything.' And the lady called me and told me, 'What am I going to do?'"

So sometimes it is the gentlemen who either out of resentment towards their ex-partner simply say 'Well, if she wants to get a pension, then she should also suffer, to get it.' They are few personalities that I have come across like that, but yes I have also come across people or who sometimes offer a very small amount.'" – *Blanca*

"One negotiation could be, in this case with the community leaders, when they oppose and say that the work we do does not really have a positive impact for their communities, because for them development means offering roads, structures and therefore offering skills workshops, not strengthening the knowledge of girls and women, because they do not see it as positive for their communities.

So in some cases they oppose it because they also have the sexist mentality of saying that 'There is no violence here, because women also have the obligation to obey their husbands, women have the responsibility to take care of the children and to do the housework and take care of their husbands as they should and that is like the term for them of being a good woman.'" – *Elvia*

"This is something very serious, here it has been very difficult because Guatemala is a discriminatory country, it is very racist and it has been difficult, but then when that happens you swallow the bitter pill and you say I have to, 'Yes, I have to continue' because there is no [other option]. - *Evelyn*

"Sometimes we really leave meetings emotionally, thinking 'Why do they think like that, why are they like that?' But nevertheless, [machismo] is the reality that women here live with and for that reason that many [women] do not go out, they do not have the right to free expression, to participation, to leadership and all that, well, it is difficult. But it is the reality." - *Lidia*