

Role of gender in workplace negotiations

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A study conducted by Columbia Business School Professor Michael Morris, Chavkin-Chang Professor of Leadership, and Emily Amanatullah, now an Assistant Professor of Management at McCombs School of Business of the University of Texas at Austin, finds that while women fare worse economically than men in many distributive negotiations, including salary negotiations, women do not lack the capability or motivation to bargain effectively. Instead, women are simultaneously negotiating social approval in light of gender role expectations and hence hedge their assertiveness in some contexts, such as when bargaining for themselves. They do not hedge or do worse when bargaining on behalf of others, a context where assertive negotiation reads as caring and therefore consistent with the feminine gender role.

The research appears in the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#) of the American Psychological Association. It reflects part of Prof. Amanatullah's recent doctoral dissertation at Columbia, advised by Prof. Morris, which was recognized as the best psychology-related dissertation of the year by the New York Academy of Sciences and also was similarly recognized by the Society of Experimental [Social Psychologists](#) and the [Academy of Management](#).

The research involved survey studies of executives' experiences as well as [laboratory experiments](#). For the experiments, Profs. Morris and Amanatullah created a computerized negotiation, which incorporated photographs and voice messaging in order to heighten the realism of the interaction. Participants were led to believe that they were negotiating with another individual about their starting salary at a new job; in reality,

all participants were negotiating against the computer program. The test subjects were randomly assigned to one of two negotiation roles: one in which they advocated for themselves, and one in which they served as an agent, bargaining for a colleague. The survey responses showed that women did not aspire to lower salaries than men –they also did not aspire to higher targets when they were advocates for others versus themselves, implying that lower aspirations are not the mechanism for women's lower negotiation outcomes. Results suggest that the mechanism driving women's lower outcomes is heightened concerns about social backlash.

The experiments revealed that the advocacy role uniquely affected female negotiators – male performance was unaffected by this factor. Self-advocating female negotiators made larger concessions than male negotiators or other-advocating female negotiators. The magnitude of this difference in negotiation assertiveness was striking, with female negotiators in the self-advocacy context conceding away nearly 20 percent of the total value of the salary in just the first round of negotiation. Results of the current study support the argument that women negotiating economic outcomes in the workplace are simultaneously "negotiating" social approval, hedging their assertiveness in contexts where it could be seen as running afoul of gender expectations. Other experiments in the dissertation suggest that their concerns are not paranoid – observers are more likely to form negative impressions of a self-advocating negotiator if the negotiator is female rather than male.

The study's findings uncover one source of the wage gap between men and women. Professor Michael Morris explains, "The current research has uncovered a missing link in the effect of gender on negotiations. Though women seemingly fare worse than men in most distributive negotiations, they are not less capable bargainers. Rather, women are savvy impression managers who consciously negotiate gender role

expectations."

Professor Amanatullah continues, "The present results suggest a different remedy than training female negotiators to behave assertively. Training programs should focus coaching on role shifting. It may be fruitful to teach female negotiators how to reframe self-advocacy negotiations as situations of other-advocacy." For example, the researchers comment that when negotiating her salary, a woman might frame it as bargaining on behalf of her family. When negotiating budgets at work, a female manager might frame her actions as bargaining on behalf of her division or team. Also, women can swap negotiation roles with others to avoid self-advocacy. One woman can ask another manager to make the case for her promotion, and she can reciprocate.

Finally, the findings suggest possible remedies for ongoing salary negotiation inequality in organizational policies. Organizations that strive for salary equity must develop and implement policies for giving raises on the basis of objective performance criteria rather than on bargaining. When objective metrics are not available, peer or 360 degree ratings provide more accurate reads, reducing women's need to self-promote to achieve equitable pay. Overall, the findings imply that organizations can more effectively reduce problematic gender inequities if and when human resource procedures remove the need for employees to bargain assertively on their own behalf.

Provided by Columbia Business School

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