

Why everything you've heard about women and negotiation might be wrong

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University of Florida student Samantha Miller was listening to a lecture on a commonly held trope about negotiation—that women are bad at it—but the conventional wisdom didn't fit with her experience at all.

"I always ask what I feel I'm deserving of," she said. "I had an idea that women in my generation were similar."

So Miller, an undergraduate business major, approached UF associate professor Yellowlees Douglas, suggesting they replicate a 2008 study often cited to show that women avoid negotiating or lowball salary requests. Their findings, published in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Business Administration in March, upend the assumption that men are inherently better negotiators.

Miller and Douglas discovered that women who had experience with successful [negotiation](#) were superior negotiators to men, even when they rated themselves as only average negotiators.

"The results were a near inversion of the previous study," Douglas says.

The researchers concluded that women who avoided negotiation or negotiated poorly were likely influenced by a lack of experience—not by anything inherent in their gender.

In the study, 25 MBA students completed a survey and were asked to name the amount they would receive on a Starbucks card for

participating. Douglas and Miller were surprised to see that women, on average, asked for amounts twice as large as those requested by men, and every woman who participated asked for a reward. Of the three highest amounts requested, two came from women.

"The women who negotiated well were likely recalling instances when they negotiated high-paying jobs or competitive bids," Douglas said.

Because men are more likely than women to have held high-paying jobs, they are more likely to have previous successful negotiations to draw on, which could explain why previous studies showed women to be less skilled at negotiating. But landing a high-paying job isn't the only way to practice negotiation, Douglas says: College career-services offices could add mock negotiations to mock interviews to give new grads experience to draw on, and job applicants—male or female—can take time to reflect on their previous successes before heading into a negotiation.

"I hope people shut up about gender and talk about the framework that informs gender bias—the forces that work on us subconsciously and affect men and women alike," Douglas said.

Miller wants to repeat the study with a larger sample size, but hopes her initial findings will introduce a new understanding of gender and negotiation.

"I think it's very telling of a new generation of empowered [women](#)."

More information: "Availability Bias Can Improve Women's Propensity to Negotiate." *International Journal of Business Administration*, 6(2). [DOI: 10.5430/ijba.v6n2p86](https://doi.org/10.5430/ijba.v6n2p86)

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