

Can gender-disposed personality traits explain who initiates salary negotiations?

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A University of Houston psychology researcher is reporting that the salary gap between men and women may be due to certain personality traits, specifically—assertiveness.

"We found that [women](#) are higher in politeness and compassion than men, but neither of these personality traits were related to the propensity to initiate a negotiation," reports Denise L. Reyes, assistant professor of psychology in the journal *Group Decision and Negotiation*. "Rather, assertiveness was positively related to initiating negotiations." The study extends the literature on [individual differences](#) and negotiation by testing how the "Big Five" [personality traits](#) may contribute to salary negotiation initiation. Those traits include agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism. Her study included 246 full-time employees as participants.

Reyes also found [gender differences](#) in initiating a negotiation depending on the [gender](#) of the negotiation counterpart.

"We found that the gender difference in initiating negotiations (men are more likely to initiate than women) is larger when interacting with a male [boss](#). However, rather than women initiating like men when they interacted with a female boss, it turned out that men initiated less when interacting with a female boss," said Reyes.

In other words, women were unlikely to initiate a negotiation in either condition, but men differed based on the gender of the boss. Female bosses may be perceived as violating gender norms by holding a more agentic role as opposed to a more communal one.

"This incongruence with gender norms may, in turn, decrease men's comfort to negotiate with a woman supervisor," said Reyes.

Despite the ever-present opportunity to negotiate wages in the professional world, there remains an obvious gender wage gap. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics compared the median earnings of full-time wage and salary workers and found that on average, women earned 83% of their male counterparts' compensation in 2014. Additionally, starting wages have been found to be higher for men than women.

"An extensive body of work has identified the role of gender differences in initiating [negotiation](#), however, there is scant research on individual differences that can explain who initiates and successfully performs negotiations," said Reyes. "In other words, although there is stark evidence of gender differences in initiating negotiations, there may also be interesting individual differences in the women who do initiate negotiations and the men who do not."

More information: D.L. Reyes et al. Can Gender-Disposed Personality Traits Explain Who Initiates Negotiations? *Group Decision and Negotiation* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s10726-021-09747-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10726-021-09747-w)

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