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“Miss” Negotiation: Implications for Women Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

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OVERVIEW OF PROBLEM/ISSUE

Negotiation influences tangible work outcomes (such as pay) but is critical in many ordinary routines of distributing tasks, building networks, and claiming resources. One concern relating to women's success is research suggesting that men are more likely than women to negotiate at work. Our research focuses on this gender difference and the associated roles of negotiating for oneself and negotiating on behalf of others. This study examined negotiation orientation, anxiety, and confidence across men and women from different generations to understand how individual and situational factors drive negotiation and career outcomes.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Over 185 working adults across a variety of organizations responded to an online survey. Two forms of the survey were randomly administered with questions targeting either negotiating for *oneself* or negotiating for *others* in the work team. Participants were asked to consider the negotiation situation and rate their negotiation anxiety, negotiation self-confidence, negotiation goal orientation (mastery or performance x avoid or approach) as well as provide information on personal characteristics (age, gender, tenure, industry, number of promotions).

FINDINGS

- Women and Gen X/Gen Y'ers reported significantly more anxiety in negotiation than men and Baby Boomers.
- Women had significantly lower self-confidence in their ability to claim value in negotiation, but equal in creating value.
- Women and Gen X/Gen Y'ers reported a stronger *performance-avoid* negotiation orientation, or a stronger fear of looking incompetent in negotiation than men and Baby Boomers.
- Performance-avoid orientation was stronger when negotiating for oneself rather than negotiating for others.
- While women more often reported a performance-avoid negotiation orientation, this orientation had a negative relation with number of promotions for both men and women: those with a performance-avoid orientation consistently reported fewer promotions over their career.

IMPLICATIONS

Consistent with other research, *avoid* orientations had undesirable effects on motivation, psychological health, and performance. Of note is that women and younger individuals reported stronger avoid orientations, which then may hinder their opportunities both in the short term and cumulatively over time. This being said, organizations can cultivate environments where individuals (both young/old, male/female) can take on negotiations without a debilitating fear of “failing” or looking incompetent. Given the findings from the Baby Boomers, experience may make women less anxious and more confident negotiators later in their career; however, this assumes women can navigate the barriers that may already exist in their field. To this end, our data encourages women's early career and negotiation opportunities. Leaders should be aware of motivation differences and consider increasing negotiation confidence through mentoring or supporting women to learn and grow from negotiations. Early organizational and individual awareness of negotiation motivation may decrease anxiety and improve access to resources and opportunities for women throughout their careers.