Negotiating Gender Roles: Gender Differences in Assertive Negotiating Are Mediated by Women’s Fear of Backlash and Attenuated When Negotiating on Behalf of Others

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The authors propose that gender differences in negotiations reflect women’s contextually contingent impression management strategies. They argue that the same behavior, bargaining assertively, is construed as congruent with female gender roles in some contexts yet incongruent in other contexts. Further, women take this contextual variation into account, adjusting their bargaining behavior to manage social impressions. A particularly important contextual variable is advocacy—whether bargaining on one’s own behalf versus on another’s behalf. In self-advocacy contexts, women anticipate that assertiveness will evoke incongruity evaluations, negative attributions, and subsequent “backlash”; hence, women hedge their assertiveness, using fewer competing tactics and obtaining lower outcomes. However, in other-advocacy contexts, women achieve better outcomes as they do not expect incongruity evaluations or engage in hedging. In a controlled laboratory experiment, the authors found that gender interacts with advocacy context in this way to determine negotiation style and outcomes. Additionally, process measures of anticipated attributions and backlash statistically mediated this interaction effect.

*Keywords:* gender, negotiation, backlash, advocacy

Negotiations are among the most materially consequential of social interactions, so understanding how gender influences negotiations is crucial to establishing fairness and equity in the workplace. Gender research on social behavior began with trait approaches focused on women’s internal characteristics (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) and evolved to social interactional approaches focused on how women are affected by observers’ descriptive stereotypes and injunctive gender norms (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Recently several researchers have synthesized these traditions and turned the focus back inside the actor, highlighting the strategies women use to respond to the signals and sanctions from their social environment (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005). We follow in this recent tradition by proposing that women are aware of gender-role in-junctions and adjust their bargaining behavior to avoid role-violation backlash. Specifically, we argue that such impression management strategies and the gender effects that result from them depend on the context of the negotiation.

Past research suggests that women fare worse than men in competitive negotiations, particularly salary negotiations, yet there is little research testing theories of how gender influences outcome differences. To derive predictions about how gender influences negotiations, we drew from research on perceived incongruity between gender and organizational roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and research on the social disapproval or backlash suffered by women who deviate from gender role expectations (Rudman, 1998). In the past, researchers have examined gender role incongruity in cases in which women display stereotypically masculine behaviors, such as aggressive self-promotion (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 2001), or expertise in stereotypically masculine domains, such as automobile engines (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), house construction (Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003), or war games (Vescio et al., 2005).

We propose that gender role incongruity works differently in cases like bargaining that are not inherently masculine domains. This difference is crucial because it suggests that there are ways that women can bargain assertively and successfully without incurring backlash. Many instances of assertive bargaining come across as stereotypically masculine, such as when a junior manager marches into the boss’s office and demands a raise. Yet other instances are more readily associated with feminine roles, such as haggling with a butcher or defending one’s falsely accused child. We argue that a fundamental structural issue in negotiations—whom the bargainer advocates for—is pivotal in determining how assertive bargaining is interpreted. When a woman negotiates on behalf of herself, assertive bargaining is encoded as incongruent.
with communal prescriptions of the feminine role. When a woman negotiates on behalf of others, it is encoded as congruent with communal femininity. Preliminary research shows perceivers engage in both social and financial backlash against self-advocating women but not against other-advocating women (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2009). Thus, we expect that situations of other-advocacy free women from fears of backlash and enable assertive bargaining leading to favorable outcomes.

Accounts of Gender Differences

We offer an alternative to past explanations about when and why women fail to assert themselves as much as men when negotiating. Most research has centered on internal traits (that men and women are inherently different) or external situations (that men and women are treated differently). We argue instead that women’s behavior may reflect their tactics in a meta-negotiation—their negotiation of the social sanctioning that women face for assertiveness in particular kinds of negotiation contexts as a result of gender roles.

Trait Models

In early gender research, many studies focused on identifying inherent personality differences between men and women. Macoby and Jacklin (1974) proposed that men are generally more aggressive in their social behavior (e.g., Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Feingold, 1994; Hyde, 1984). Such gender differences in personality traits could reflect nature, such as genes or hormones (Eysenck, 1992; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Zuckerman, 1991), or nurture, such as socialization into different values (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1991).

Two gender-linked personality traits that are claimed to influence negotiations are entitlement and self-construal. Past research has shown that with regard to salaries specifically, women indeed felt less entitled compared with men (Callahan-Levy & Messe, 1979), likely due to patterns of socialization. Further, this lack of entitlement is self-centered, not necessarily extending to similar others (Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984). This translates into lowered expectations, which in turn negatively affects actual salaries (Major, Vanderslice, & McFarlin, 1984).

Alternatively, some researchers hypothesize that women develop primarily interdependent self-construals (seeking to affirm their identities as members of a collective by attending to others) and men primarily independent self-construals (seeking to maintain their independence from others by attending to the self; e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997). Therefore, at the bargaining table, women may be less motivated to advance their own self-interest for the sake of maintaining a positive relationship with their counterpart.

Social Cues and Sanctions

An alternate perspective on gender affecting social behavior focuses on differences between how women and men are treated by and subsequently respond to their social environment. Cues to a stereotype can cause targets to behave in ways that fulfill the stereotype (e.g., Steele, 1998). Subtle cues to the stereotype that women are unassertive negotiators lead women to behave unassertively (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001), while blatant cues can produce reactance (Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004). Thus, behavioral differences between men and women may not reflect inherent differences in personality but may stem from their experienced social environment, which is shaped by pervasive gender stereotypes.

Other accounts go beyond stereotypes to posit gender roles (Eagly, 1987). Female gender roles are centered on the expectation of communal behaviors, such as nurturing, helping, and expressing concern for one’s ingroup and significant others (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Eagly, 1987; Spence & Sawin, 1985). Gender roles have a descriptive function that shapes perceptions and also a powerful prescriptive or injunctive function that shapes expectations. Injunctive norms are consensual beliefs about how members of a group ought to be (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Because female communality is prescribed by the role, observers generally approve of communal behaviors by women and disapprove of noncommunal behaviors (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Williams & Best, 1990; Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997). When women violate gender roles, they experience backlash in the form of negative evaluations and treatment (Helmman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Self-promoting women tend to be evaluated higher in performance yet lower in likeability than more reticent women (Powers & Zuroff, 1988). Dominant behavior by female managers compared with male managers is more likely to evoke impressions of hostility or irrationality (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995). In short, many behaviors needed to gain power and resources are encoded as noncommunal, so women doing them risk backlash from observers (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman, 1998).

Strategic Responses to the Social Environment

In more recent research, women have been portrayed less as victims of a prejudiced social environment and more as savvy impression managers navigating the environment (Goffman, 1959; Jones, 1990). Their behavior is based in realistic perceptions of the environment. Women and minorities tend to notice subtle discrimination to a greater degree than high-status White men (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). We propose that women as negotiators may consciously adjust their level of assertiveness situationally to avoid the realistic threat of backlash in some contexts.

Research comparing impression management tactics of men and women shows that women are more likely to engage in protective strategies to minimize negative impressions, such as hedging (Carli, 1990; DePaulo, 1992; Tannen, 1994) and apologies (Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999). Early in life, women become experts at managing impressions and relationships (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007). Vallacher, Wegner, and Frederick (1987) found that when individuals believed their interaction partner valued modesty, they altered their behavior to match the expectations. While many impressions can be heightened through verbal claims, the impressions of modesty or other-orientation are better managed by hedging one’s behavior than by boasting. Rudman and Fairchild (2004) directly explored how anticipation of backlash contributes to stereotype maintenance. They found that both men and women who believed they had violated traditional gender roles
feared negative backlash and tried to hide their role-violating performances from others.

**Contextual Contingency in the Gender-Role Implications of Bargaining Assertively**

To date, research on the backlash effect has been almost exclusively in behavioral domains that inherently violate gender roles—“counterstereotypic” behaviors (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & colleagues (Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001) studied reactions to overtly agentic female job applicants. Further research used knowledge in masculine domains (football) as an experimental manipulation of gender role violation (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). However, many important domains of behavior are not inherently tied to masculine or feminine themes. The congruity of these behaviors, such as negotiation, with the feminine role may depend on aspects of the context that imbue it with communal or agentic connotations.

Negotiation is an interaction with incomplete information making behavior attributionally ambiguous. Assertive bargaining can be attributed to personal competitiveness, greed, or situational constraints, such as accountability to constituents (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Morris, Larrick, & Su, 1999). A woman perceived to be bargaining assertively to attain resources needed for the welfare of her family would come across as communal, not as personally greedy. Hence, assertive bargaining is interpreted as violating female gender roles in some contexts, whereas in other contexts it is interpreted as conforming to communality prescriptions. For example, consider assertive self-interested distributive negotiating. In salary negotiations, this behavior is perceived as incongruous with the injunctive norm that women should be kind, gentle, and communal. However, the same bargaining tactics performed by a woman striving to attain an affordable rent for her family’s apartment may be considered highly appropriate and consistent with gendered expectations. Given that the same behavior can be perceived in a dramatically different light and subsequently have different social repercussions for targets, we sought to explore whether female negotiators are able to capitalize on this ambiguity, behaving assertively when perceivers are less likely to impose social backlash and hedging their assertiveness when backlash is probable. Preliminary evidence suggests that advocacy is an important moderator of perceivers’ attributions of assertive negotiating as violating gender norms (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2009). This research has found that perceivers engage in backslash against women who assertively negotiate on their own behalf but do not penalize similarly assertive women negotiating for others.

**Advocacy: The Social Context of Negotiation**

Gender differences do not exist in every negotiation context (for review, see Kray & Thompson, 2005). However, for single-issue distributive negotiations, meta-analyses have shown that women are less competitive and agree to lower outcomes relative to men (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999; Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998). Nonetheless, an important contextual factor is that studies have predominantly focused on negotiations in self-advocating contexts. Recent empirical research indicates that in similar single-issue distributive negotiations, women who negotiate on behalf of another fare better (Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005). This advocacy factor was explored in a recent study with experienced negotiators (Amanatullah & Morris, 2009, Study 1), executives who were assigned to negotiate salary on behalf of self or on behalf of another. Results found that advocacy context mattered for women; women negotiating on behalf of another secured significantly higher salaries than women negotiating on their own behalf. Advocacy did not matter for men; men performed equally well as self-advocates and other-advocates.

However, past research has left open the key question of what causes women to perform well in one context (other-advocacy) but not the other (self-advocacy). One prior study exploring advocacy as a moderator of gender differences in single-issue distributive negotiations hypothesized that the mechanism of the effects was based on sex differences in interdependent self-construal (Bowles et al., 2005). Similarly, Wade (2001) theorized that women behave differently as self-advocates than as other-advocates because of stable orientations toward noncompetitive behavior. We think these trait models mistake women’s strategies for personalities.

We diverge from these lines of research by hypothesizing that women are aware of the potential for backlash, on the basis of the likelihood that assertive negotiating would be viewed as incongruent with injunctive gender norms and subsequently behave less assertively in contexts in which backlash is likely to occur—namely, in self-advocating rather than other-advocating contexts.

Several past findings provide indirect evidence for our argument. In a study of executives’ preferred conflict resolution styles (Amanatullah & Morris, 2009, Study 2), women engaging in conflicts in which their own interests were at stake reported significantly lower inclinations toward competitive conflict modes than men, whereas women engaging in conflicts in which another’s interests were at stake were equally inclined toward competitive conflict modes as men. Bowles, Babcock, and Lai (2007) found that the reduced propensity of women to initiate negotiations is reinforced in part by the social backlash they experience when they do initiate (see also Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2009). In an unpublished manuscript, Wade (1995) reported that when salary requests were made in a public context in which the potential for evaluation and subsequent backlash was present, women asked for higher salaries for others rather than for themselves. However, when salary requests were made in a private context in which the potential for backlash was eliminated, women were freed from normative expectations of selflessness and asked for higher salaries for themselves. These findings suggest that women’s reticence to negotiate assertively in some contexts may be a strategic sensitivity to the risk of social backlash.

We sought to extend prior theory and research primarily through the proposal of anticipated backlash as the mechanism leading women to hedge their assertive behavior in negotiations and more fully developing the rationale for why advocacy moderates this relationship. We tested these predictions in a controlled laboratory experiment. We found the moderation of gender differences in negotiation behavior by advocacy, showing that other-advocacy empowers female negotiators to behave more assertively and achieve more favorable economic outcomes. Further, we measured and tested the predicted mediator of this effect, anticipated backlash.

Our protocol simulated a dyadic salary negotiation. Participants were told to play a job candidate negotiating via networked computers with a randomly assigned negotiation counterpart. In actu-
ality, the counterpart was a computer program. By constraining the behavior of the counterpart, this study allows for clearer measurement of gender differences in negotiators’ proactive and reactive moves in self-advocacy and other-advocacy contexts. We did not expect that women would proactively capitulate when self-advocating but that they would be wary and prepared to concede upon receipt of signals that backlash may be imminent.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 59 participants recruited on campus at a major university (M age = 22.6 years). The sample consisted of 53% men and 47% women; 44% of the participants were White, 25% were Asian, 15% were Hispanic, 10% were Black, and the remaining 6% were of other descent.

Procedure

A computerized negotiation, adapted from Van Kleef, De Dreu, and Manstead (2006), was developed for this study. The design felt like a real negotiation, incorporating photographs, voice messaging, and turn taking to heighten the realism of the interaction. Participants were led to believe that they were negotiating with another individual; in reality, all participants were negotiating against the computer program. This deception was convincing in that only three participants reported any suspicion that their negotiation counterpart was not another participant negotiating with them in real time. We analyzed the data excluding the responses of those three participants and found no differences. Therefore, we report results from the full data set below.

Prior to starting the exercise, we took a digital photograph of each participant and loaded it onto the computer. These images were later used to visually introduce participants with their negotiation partner. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two negotiation roles: the recruit (self-advocacy) or the agent (other-advocacy). No participants were assigned the role of the hiring manager because this role was simulated by the computer program. After reading through their role information, participants were given a hard copy of their role to keep with them for reference during the negotiation. On this hard copy, participants were asked to report on some prenegotiation preparation numbers.

When they were ready to begin the negotiation, participants were told the computer would randomly select a counterpart participating in the same study at another university. At this point, participants were presented with a screen displaying both their picture and a picture of their counterpart, and they were introduced by name to one another. All participants negotiated against the same counterpart, “Brian,” who made the opening offer in the negotiation. The computer presented a low opening offer from the hiring manager, accompanied by an audio message from the experimental confederate giving his reason for this offer. The participant received this number, listened to the audio message, and then chose how to respond: either accepting or declining the offer. If the participant accepted, the negotiation was over. If the participant declined, he or she was asked to record a message to send back to the partner explaining the decision. To maintain the believability of the counterpart’s recorded statements, we gave the participants a limited set of response options to send by audio message to their counterparts. Participants were asked to choose from one of five response options, read it out loud into the computer microphone, and send the audio message to their counterparts. After this task, participants were asked to send a numerical salary offer and record another audio message from a provided list of responses. The salary offer and audio messages were supposedly transmitted to the hiring manager, who was given the opportunity to respond. The negotiation continued in this manner for a maximum of five rounds. Upon termination of the negotiation, participants were asked to fill out a postnegotiation questionnaire reflecting on their experiences and impressions. Given that deception was necessary to maintain believability of the study design; appropriate measures were taken to thoroughly debrief participants following the exercise.

Variables

Advocacy condition. Self-advocacy and other-advocacy were manipulated in the role information assigned to the participants. The self-advocacy condition described a senior in college negotiating the salary for an attractive postgraduation job offer. The other-advocacy condition described a recent graduate who referred a friend, a senior at the university, for a job and was now responsible for negotiating the friend’s starting salary. This scenario suggests a future relationship with the partner, which makes it more similar to the self-advocacy condition. All other information was constant across conditions, including sample statistics on salaries in the marketplace. Participants were also told that the job candidate had another offer from another company that was non-negotiable and likely near the market mean of $40,000. Given this information, all participants were expected to enter the negotiation with a reservation point near $40,000. Our original study design included manipulating the gender of the person on whose behalf other-advocates were negotiating. We found no differences in participants’ prenegotiation reports or negotiation behaviors on the basis of this manipulation, so we collapsed across this condition in our final analyses.

Prenegotiation aspirations. Basic prenegotiation measures (reservation point, target point, and anticipated opening) were collected to assess expectations and motivation to negotiate favorable outcomes.

One’s reservation point in a negotiation is the lowest offer one is willing to consider before walking away from the table with an impasse. To gauge this lower limit for the negotiators in this study, we asked respondents to indicate in dollars,

What is the lowest salary you are willing to accept [for your friend] in this negotiation? In other words, what is the least you would agree [for your friend] to earn at Alpha before choosing [advising your friend] to take the alternative job offer at Lambda?

One’s target point in a negotiation is one’s desired negotiated outcome, typically an ideal aspiration. Respondents were asked to indicate in dollars,

What is the highest salary that you will strive to get [for your friend] in this negotiation? In other words, what is the ideal salary you want Alpha to agree to pay [your friend]?

An anticipated opening offer is typically an aggressive first offer above one’s target point to allow room for concessions during the
negotiation process. To measure anticipated opening point, we asked the respondents, “If you are given the opportunity to make the first offer in this negotiation, how much will you suggest Alpha pay for your [as your friend’s] salary?”

**Anticipated backlash.** Prior to starting the negotiation, participants were asked to answer two questions about perceived partner expectations: “How much do you think you can reasonably ask for without the hiring manager’s perceiving you to be a pushy person?” and “How much do you think you can reasonably ask for without causing the hiring manager to punish you for being too demanding?” Because these two items were highly correlated ($r = .91; p < .001$), they were averaged into a single measure of anticipated backlash. The wording of the questions and the response format (a dollar value) measured the threshold at which respondents expected to incur negative social consequences; thus, a lower score indicates greater anticipation of backlash.

**Concessionary behavior.** The salary offer in Round 1, in reaction to the hiring manager’s low opening offer, was used as the primary measure of concessionary behavior. It is predicted that self-advocating female negotiators would request a lower salary than the other three experimental groups.

The structure of the experiment, in which the computer-programmed hiring manager sent the same audio responses and made the same offers, allowed for analyses of salary offers across all five rounds of the negotiation. We conducted analyses for all rounds of the negotiation, but because the results for all five were nearly identical to the Round 1 analyses, we present only the results of the first salary request, both for brevity and for avoidance of violating assumptions of independence in the data.

**Verbal behavior.** During each round of the negotiation, participants were given two opportunities to record and send audio messages to their partner. Participants had to choose their message from a list of five options, from which to record an audio message, participants were provided five options, one statement from each of the five categories, from which to select their response. The order of the five statements varied with each exchange. We predicted that self-advocating women would choose assertive statements less often than the other groups.

**Negotiation style.** Following the negotiation, participants were asked to indicate, on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*) the extent to which they characterized their negotiation style as “competitive.” It was expected that self-advocating female negotiators would rate their style as less competitive, relative to the other three experimental groups.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for prenegotiation goals (reservation, target, and opening points) by gender and advocacy condition. There were no main effects of gender on these measures (reservation point: $\beta = -.09, t(57) = .66, ns$; target point: $\beta = -.13, t(57) = .99, ns$; opening point: $\beta = -.20, t(57) = 1.56, ns$), casting doubt on personality accounts such as entitlement, which imply that women generally aspire to lower salaries. Also there were no interaction effects, casting doubt on the self-construal account; female negotiators did not as aspire to more as other-advocates as opposed to as self-advocates (reservation point: $\beta = .33, t(55) = 1.41, ns$; target point: $\beta = .31, t(55) = 1.37, ns$; opening point: $\beta = .27, t(55) = 1.19, ns$) nor did males aspire to more as self-advocates than as other-advocates. These null results suggest that personality accounts are too sweeping to account for the nuances of gender differences in negotiation behavior.

To test the predicted account that women act on their anticipations of backlash for stereotype violation, we compared self-reported perceptions of anticipated backlash across experimental groups. Results from these prenegotiation reports indicate that self-advocating female negotiators did anticipate a greater likelihood of backlash for behaving assertively. As seen in Figure 1, self-advocating women perceived a lower threshold of how much they could ask for before incurring backlash than did negotiators in the other three conditions. Regression analyses were used to test this pattern of results. A significant coefficient for the interaction term supports the model (Table 2, Equation 2), $F(3, 53) = 3.01, p < .05; R^2 = .15; \beta = .52, t(56) = 2.37, p < .05$. Means, compared with $t$ tests, revealed that self-advocating female negotiators ($M = $43,250, $SD = $4,264) anticipated backlash at a lower threshold than each of the three other experimental groups—male self: $M = $50,813, $SD = $11,183, $t(28) = 2.38, p < .05$; female other: $M = $48,577, $SD = $5,094, $t(25) = 2.96, p < .01$; male other: $M = $47,357, $SD = $4,171, $t(26) = 2.58, p < .05$. Substantively, these results indicate that self-advocating female negotiators felt the need to ask for nearly $8,000 less than the other three groups to avoid social backlash. Further, the moderation of backlash fears by advocacy was unique to female negotiators as there was no difference in self-reported perceptions of anticipated backlash across experimental groups.

### Table 1

**Means and Standard Deviations of Prenegotiation Aspiration Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition/gender</th>
<th>Reservation point $M$</th>
<th>Reservation point $SD$</th>
<th>Target point $M$</th>
<th>Target point $SD$</th>
<th>Opening point $M$</th>
<th>Opening point $SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>40.47</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>49.88</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>52.65</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>38.54</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>46.77</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>49.15</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>38.64</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>49.86</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>39.43</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>50.20</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>52.40</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Table entries are in thousands of dollars.
prenegotiation aspirations would be pared down, commensurate with one’s perception of the threshold of assertiveness leading to backlash. However, we argue that anticipated backlash affects the negotiator’s likelihood of making large and quick concessions in the negotiation but not their wishes or expectations for desired outcomes. As such, self-advocating female negotiators still set their aspirations as high as others but are prepared to back down immediately when the potential for backlash becomes real.

In the next set of analyses, we tested whether these prenegotiation feelings of anticipated backlash translated into actual differences in negotiation behavior with the prediction that self-advocating female negotiators would concede more heavily in the negotiation. Linear regression analyses revealed a significant interaction of gender and advocacy in prediction of Round 1 counteroffer (Table 3, Equation 2), $t(3, 55) = 5.41, p < .01$; $R^2 = .23, \beta = .36, n(58) = 1.75, p < .10$. This interaction also shows that advocacy uniquely affected female negotiators because men were unaffected by the manipulation. Figure 2 depicts mean salaries offered by gender and advocacy, which were compared with $t$ tests. Self-advocating female negotiators ($M = \$42,000, SD = \$4,315$) offered salaries in Round 1 that were significantly lower than each of the three other experimental groups—male self: $M = \$48,441, SD = \$7,399, n(29) = 2.88, p < .01$; female other: $M = \$49,107, SD = \$4,377, n(26) = 4.33, p < .001$; male other: $M = \$49,821, SD = \$3,677, n(26) = 5.16, p < .001$. Further, this moderation by advocacy uniquely affected the negotiation behavior of female negotiators as there was no difference in the first offers made by men in the self- versus other-advocacy conditions, $n(29) = 0.64, ns$. It should also be noted that the mean salary offer made by self-advocating female negotiators was on average over $7,000 less (nearly 20% of the total expected value) and very near to their expected alternative job offer ($\$40,000$), making the possibility for further assertiveness minimal.

Given the greater monetary concessions of self-advocating women, we next tested for mediation of this effect by anticipated backlash. Following the steps to test mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), negotiation behavior was first regressed on the independent

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1.** Prenegotiation reports of anticipated backlash by gender and advocacy. Bars represent mean reports of how much salary negotiators can request before incurring negative consequences by gender and advocacy; vertical lines depict standard errors of the means.

### Table 2
**Regression Analyses Predicting Anticipated Backlash**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-3424.57</td>
<td>1954.04</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>759.65</td>
<td>1951.64</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-7812.50</td>
<td>2636.60</td>
<td>-0.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>-3455.36</td>
<td>2584.12</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender * Advocacy</td>
<td>8883.93</td>
<td>3751.60</td>
<td>0.52*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $R^2 = .06$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .15$ for Step 2. Gender is coded as 0 for men and 1 for women; advocacy is coded as 0 for self and 1 for other. $^*p < .10$. $^*^*p < .05$. $^*^*p < .01$.|

### Table 3
**Regression Analyses Predicting Round 1 Salary Offer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-3825.67</td>
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<td>-0.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>3742.27</td>
<td>1442.44</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1997.08</td>
<td>-0.53**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<td>1956.25</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<td>Gender * Advocacy</td>
<td>4965.90</td>
<td>2836.49</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
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</table>

*Note. $R^2 = .18$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .23$ for Step 2. Gender is coded as 0 for men and 1 for women; advocacy is coded as 0 for self and 1 for other. $^*p < .10$. $^*^*p < .05$. $^*^*^*p < .01$. |
variable (the interaction of gender and advocacy condition), as reported earlier. Next, negotiation behavior (Round 1 salary offer) was regressed on the anticipated backlash yielding another significant, positive effect—$F(1, 55) = 68.47, p < .001; R^2 = .56, \beta = .75, t(56) = 8.28, p < .001$. Also presented earlier, in Table 2, are the results regressing the mediator (anticipated backlash) on the independent variable (the interaction of gender and advocacy). Both the independent variable and the mediator were then entered simultaneously into a regression equation. The effect of anticipated backlash remained significant, $\beta = .67, t(56) = 7.67, p < .001$, while the effect of the interaction term dropped out of significance, $\beta = .03, t(56) = 0.17, ns$, providing evidence for full mediation, $F(4, 52) = 23.58, p < .001; R^2 = .64$. The result of this final step of the mediation test is presented in Table 4. To test the indirect effect of the interaction on concessionary behavior through anticipated backlash, we conducted a Sobel (1982) test ($z = 2.28, p < .05$). These results support the prediction that anticipating backlash leads women to hedge their monetary requests in negotiations.

In addition to the analyses testing our predictions, we also conducted supplemental analyses. Similar to the results for Round 1, in each of the other rounds, the interaction of gender and advocacy was significant, although only marginally so for the Round 2 salary offer ($Round 2: p < .10$; Rounds 3, 4, and 5: $ps < .05$). Mediation and Sobel tests also revealed that anticipated backlash mediated the relationship between the gender and advocacy interaction and concessionary negotiation behavior during each round. This result shows not only that self-advocating female negotiators were more likely to anchor heavily on the hiring manager’s low opening offer but also that they did not recover from this shock later on. Their subsequent offers followed the path set by their first offer. Analyses of the slopes of concessionary behavior across the negotiation rounds reveal that although there was a scalar difference between the magnitudes of the salary offers, the degree of concessions made by men and women within the advocacy condition was the same. There is no significant difference in slope between genders within the advocacy conditions—self-advocacy: $t(29) = 0.07, ns$; other-advocacy: $t(26) = 1.06, ns$. However, individuals in the other-advocacy condition have steeper slopes than individuals in the self-advocacy condition, $t(57) = 3.85, p < .001$. This may be because it is less painful for agents to continually concede across rounds, whereas individuals negotiating on their own behalf have a more salient limit below which they choose not to concede. This result provides an interesting insight into the key moment at which the gender difference arises. Female negotiators are not conceding more, or to a greater degree, than male negotiators; instead, they are anchoring more heavily on their counterpart’s signals, leaving them with less room to claim value and even pushing them below the value, on average, of their no-deal alternative.

Salary requests provide an objective assessment of how competitive participants were. We also collected a self-report measure of negotiation style as an estimation of each individual’s self-perception of their level of competitiveness. Results from these subjective appraisals were consistent with the objective measures. Linear regression analyses revealed a significant interaction of gender and advocacy in prediction of self-reported competitive negotiation style,

Table 4
Regression Analyses Testing Statistical Mediation of Gender/Advocacy Interaction on Round 1 Salary Offer by Anticipated Backlash

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>$-0.21$</td>
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<td>$0.23^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender × Advocacy</td>
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<td>$2076.13$</td>
<td>$0.03$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated backlash</td>
<td>$0.55$</td>
<td>$0.07$</td>
<td>$0.67^{***}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R^2 = .64$. Gender is coded as 0 for men and 1 for women; advocacy is coded as 0 for self and 1 for other.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$. ** $p < .001$. ** $p < .001$.

Figure 2. Concessionary negotiation behavior by gender and advocacy. Bars represent mean salary offers by gender and advocacy; vertical lines depict standard errors of the means.
$F(3, 55) = 2.90, p < .05; R^2 = .14; B = 1.49, SE = .73; \beta = .45, t(58) = 2.06, p < .05$. Self-advocating female negotiators ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.66$) reported behaving less competitively during the negotiation, relative to each of the three other experimental groups—male self: $M = 5.06, SD = 1.52, t(29) = 2.10, p < .05$; female other: $M = 5.14, SD = 1.32, t(26) = 2.33, p < .05$; male other: $M = 4.93, SD = 1.07, t(26) = 2.03, p < .05$. These results show that self-advocating female negotiators were aware that they were hedging their assertive bargaining behavior.

It was expected that the audio messages chosen by participants from the response set would reflect the tendency of self-advocating female negotiators to shy away from more assertive statements in favor of weaker ones relative to the other experimental groups. However, analysis of this data revealed no differences across gender and advocacy condition, which we will elaborate on more fully in the General Discussion.

General Discussion

Results of the current study support the argument that women negotiating economic outcomes in the workplace are simultaneously “negotiating” social approval, conceding on material issues in contexts in which their assertiveness would be seen as running afoul of gender expectations. The results of the laboratory experiment supported our predictions. Self-advocating female negotiators made larger concessions than male negotiators or other-advocating female negotiators. The magnitude of this difference in negotiation assertiveness was astounding, with self-advocating female negotiators conceding away nearly 20% of the total value in just the first round of negotiation. This finding puts into perspective the wage gap between men and women. In 2007, women earned only 77.8 cents on the dollar compared with what men were paid (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2008). This difference of less than a quarter adds up over the course of a full-time working life. According to the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the average working woman with a college degree will lose $713,000 to unequal pay during her working life (Arons, 2008). However, the results of our experiment not only provide evidence for how advocacy moderates the effect of gender on negotiation behaviors and outcomes; we further isolated the mechanism of this interaction. We showed that this effect was fully mediated by women’s stronger anticipation of backlash for gender stereotype violation. Postnegotiation reflection also revealed that self-advocating female negotiators were aware of their hedging.

Theoretical Implications

Gender influences on negotiation. Our findings disconfirm the view that gender differences in negotiated outcomes reflect women’s deficit in negotiation capacity or motivation. Rather, our evidence supports the account that gender differences reflect women’s strategic tradeoffs between economic and social costs—a hedging of assertiveness in contexts in which they anticipate incurring backlash. When these social costs are eliminated in conditions of other-advocacy, women exhibit the same assertive behaviors and successful outcomes as men. Understanding that gender differences in negotiation stem from strategic responses to social constraints provides insights about the boundary conditions of gender effects.

Another theoretical contribution of this work is the identification of contextual moderators that may explain inconsistent findings in past research on gender and negotiations. As shown here, with the content of the negotiation held constant, gender differences existed in some contexts (e.g., self-advocacy) but not in other contexts (e.g., other-advocacy). Close examination of situational variants that act as boundary conditions provides a better understanding of when and how gender will affect negotiation behaviors and outcomes.

Additionally, there may be other situations in which the gender difference is reversed, and women outperform men. For example, the current research may help to explain the finding that women bargainers outperform men in contexts in which negative stereotypes about women as negotiators have been made overtly salient (Kray et al., 2004). In this context, women may treat the negotiation as a symbolic contest in which they (communally) represent their social group, rather than merely themselves. As such, observed stereotype reactance might be explained as a contextual reframing to an other-advocacy context, leading women to exhibit more assertive behavior and a more favorable outcome. Further research is necessary to examine this suggestion and other cognitive processes that may be involved in reactance effects.

Contributions to gender role congruity literature. Evidence from our study sampling primarily undergraduate students in combination with other evidence on the moderating role of advocacy on graduate students (Bowles et al., 2005) and executives (Amanatullah & Morris, 2009) shows the pervasiveness of gender norms. These norms are learned early in life and consistently influence the way individuals make judgments about the appropriateness of the behavior of those around them.

Further, the current findings extend the insights of gender role incongruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) by highlighting that the congruity of behaviors to gender roles often depends on the social context in which these behaviors occur. The context colors the meaning of the behavior with regard to the basic gendered themes of communion and agency. In our experiment, women competed more and expected less backlash in other-advocacy contexts than in self-advocating contexts, even when the content of the negotiations was rigidly controlled. Female negotiators were able to successfully (both socially and financially) engage in assertive behaviors at the bargaining table when advocacy context aligned the connotations of assertive bargaining with the communal prescriptions of the feminine role. Thus, contexts that moderate this perceived incongruence alleviate the likelihood of backlash and subsequently free women to assert themselves without social repercussions. Given that gender roles and stereotypes are disappointingly resistant to change (see Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995; Leupott, Garovich, & Leupott, 1995), those who develop applied strategies for helping women negotiate equal salaries may do well to focus on more malleable contextual factors that moderate gender role incongruity.

Although past research on role congruity theory has explored moderators of perceived role congruity and backlash, these factors generally involve the content of behavior rather than changes in context. For example, adopting more participative management styles reduces backlash against female leaders because it includes behaviors, such as consulting about others’ preferences, that fit with the feminine theme of communion (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). The current research suggests that women can engage in the same behavior—assertive bargaining—when set in the context of other-advocacy.
Contributions to the backlash effect. Researchers have explored various ways that women suffer backlash and various strategies they use to address it once it occurs. The present research is among the first in which the focus was on the mechanism of anticipated backlash, that is, how the threat of backlash can operate before perceivers have even begun to act prejudicially (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). As a result, the present findings support backlash effects as an external cause of gender differences in negotiation outcomes.

Recent research has added nuance to the picture of backlash by identifying less overt prejudicial behaviors, such as patronizing behavior toward women (for a review, see Gervais & Vescio, 2007). Much of this research focuses on how women react to the treatment, such as internalizing rather than expressing anger. A direction for research suggested by the present findings is how women anticipate and try to manage this treatment proactively. Women may have strategies for avoiding or preempting patronizing interactions. In sum, as our understanding of backlash has become increasingly complex, so too should research explore further the dimensions of women’s strategies for proactively managing these reactions.

Recall in our results, though the prenegotiation planning measures did not show significant interaction effects of Gender × Context, there was a nonsignificant trend indicative of hedging behavior consistent with our predicted and observed pattern of behavior. The trends in Table 1 suggest female self-negotiators set lower reservation, target, and opening points relative to all three other groups. This observation may be an indication that women’s anticipated reactance to backlash potential when experienced at the bargaining table may pervade their actions even before negotiating, though to a much lesser degree.

Issues for Future Research

In the future, researchers should explore contextual variables beyond advocacy that may moderate the perceived incongruity between assertive bargaining and feminine role prescriptions. A woman assertively bargaining for her own salary may seem less incongruous in careers that are historically feminine domains (e.g., nursing) than in historically masculine domains (e.g., banking). The content of the negotiation issues may matter as well; assertive bargaining for parental leave, for example, may be perceived as less incongruous than bargaining for salary.

Also, it would be interesting to explore varied types of other-advocacy. For example, is backlash mitigated when women are negotiating on behalf of a group? Further, does membership in that group influence backlash potential? Take, for example, two different forms of group-advocacy: us-advocacy, a member of a group (e.g., a project manager negotiating the bonus for her team), and them-advocacy, an outsider with no personal stake in the group outcomes (e.g., a fundraiser negotiating donations for a charity). Some researchers have argued that us-advocacy may be especially empowering for women (Miller, 1991). Future research should explore these conditions more closely.

In addition, the interaction of women and their negotiation partners should be explored. We studied dyadic negotiations; however, the mediation tests were one-sided, looking solely at how negotiators adjusted their behavior on the basis of anticipations of social backlash. Another mechanism for gender effects may be the signals or sanctions coming from the counterpart during the negotiation. Clearly, outcome effects are a function not just of one negotiator’s actions but of the interaction that occurs between the parties. This factor could be explored by measuring the behaviors of both parties over time, rather than by empirically controlling the behavior of one to test variation in the other. Although our research goals were better served through experimental control to isolate the psychological mechanism, further insights may come from studying less constrained, more naturalistic negotiations.

In future studies, investigators could help to replicate our proposed mechanism, fear of backlash, beyond the mediational analyses we conducted. Specifically, by manipulating the closeness in the relationship between the female negotiator and the person on whose behalf she is negotiating, investigators might find that women are substantially more free to negotiate assertively when there is a clearer communal orientation, for example, with a close other, than when negotiating for a random other. Additionally, similar to the studies by Wade (1995), researchers conducting negotiations in a gender-blind context, such as via computerized media (e.g., instant messaging or e-mail), should find that the effect similarly disappears, as backlash would not be anticipated.

Practical Implications

Compared with most accounts of gender differences in negotiation outcomes, our account portrays women’s style in negotiations as defensively and socially strategic rather than based on internal abilities or beliefs. Although self-advocating female negotiators tend to behave less assertively and to agree to worse monetary outcomes than their male counterparts do, this strategy may be adaptive for them—at least in terms of their short-term personal self-interest (albeit not in the long-term interest of gender equality).

The present results suggest a different remedy than traditional training of female negotiators to behave assertively, as this behavior may be maladaptive, especially for self-advocating female negotiators. Instead, any training programs should focus coaching on role shifting. To the extent to which women can shift the contexts of negotiation to other-advocacy, they can avoid negative stereotyping. It may be fruitful to teach female negotiators how to reframe self-advocacy negotiations as situations of other-advocacy. For example, when negotiating her salary, a woman might reframe it as negotiating for money for her family. 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. Some managers make this role-switching a policy, and it is probably most effective when instantiated as a norm.

Last and not least, our 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. These criteria are more equitable when they include the performance of a manager’s subordinates, in addition to the manager’s personal performance; in this way, communal mentorship behaviors are rewarded. Thus, organizations need to adopt broad and objective measures of a manager’s performance and worth rather than using only self-report mechanisms. In situations in which objective metrics are not available, peer or 360° ratings provide more accurate reads, reducing women’s need to self-promote to achieve equitable pay. Overall, our findings imply that as human resource procedures remove the need for employees to bargain assertively on
their own behalf, organizations can more effectively reduce problematic gender inequities.

Conclusion

The current research has uncovered a hitherto 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, nor do they lack the sense of entitlement or motivation to pursue economically favorable outcomes. Rather, women are savvy impression managers who consciously negotiate gender role expectations. They are aware of and react anticipatorily to avoid a potential backlash for violating injunctive gender norms. In addition, they are aware that in an ambiguous domain (i.e., negotiating assertively) in some contexts (i.e., self-advocacy), assertive behavior will be perceived as a violation of gender roles, yet in others (i.e., other-advocacy) it will be viewed as consistent with communal expectations, and women can subsequently negotiate accordingly to maximize monetary value without risking penalties.

References


Appendix A

Verbal Response Options

Round 1

Response to Manager’s Offer

Your offer is insulting. It is way too low for me [my friend].
I am [My friend would be] disappointed with that offer.
I [My friend] deserve[s] to earn far more than that offer.
That offer does not sufficiently compensate my [friend’s] superior qualifications.

Thank you for that offer, but I [my friend] was hoping to earn more.

Justification for Counteroffer

You would be foolish not to seriously consider this counteroffer.
I hope you will find this salary acceptable.
I [My friend] deserve to be compensated significantly more than other candidates you may interview this year.

(Appendix continues)
You should pay me [my friend] at least this amount because I am [my friend is] a workaholic; I leave [leaving] no problems unresolved.
I believe this salary is fair to both you and me [my friend].

Round 2

Response to Manager’s Offer
I am [My friend is] highly qualified to succeed in this job and should be rewarded accordingly.
I am [My friend is] entitled to significantly more than that.
I appreciate your offer but unfortunately I [my friend] just cannot accept.
I have [My friend has] other offers that are looking much more desirable right now.
I [My friend] was hoping to make more than that.

Justification for Counteroffer
I am [My friend would be] a beneficial addition to the Alpha team so should be paid handsomely.
I [My friend] deserve[s] to earn substantially more than the average candidate.
I believe this number serves as a reasonable compromise.
If you do not consider this counteroffer, I [my friend] may be forced to accept a position at another company.
I [My friend] will be disappointed if you do not consider this offer.

Round 3

Response to Manager’s Offer
Your offer is unreasonable. I [My friend] refuse[s] to work for so little.
I feel we are making some progress, but unfortunately I [my friend] still cannot accept.
I [My friend] deserve[s] substantially more than your current offer.
I [My friend] wanted to make more money than that.
That offer certainly does not acknowledge how highly valuable my [friend’s] Ivy League education is to your organization.

Justification for Counteroffer
There is no way you can possibly expect me [my friend] to work for less than this.
I was hoping you might find this salary reasonable.
I am [My friend is] worth at least this amount, if not more.
I [My friend] would be disappointed if I [he or she] did not earn this amount.
My [friend’s] superior education and experience warrant a similarly superior salary.

Round 4

Response to Manager’s Offer
While I [my friend] cannot accept that offer, I feel we are nearing a satisfactory middle ground.
I [My friend] should be compensated highly because I am [my friend is] an outgoing, social person that gets along well with others.
I am shocked that you would offer me [my friend] so little. I [My friend] need[s] to be paid more.
I am confident that I am [my friend is] worth significantly more than you are currently offering.
I am [My friend would be] saddened by that offer.

Justification for Counteroffer
I think both you and I [my friend] will be happy with this salary. My [friend’s] award in a schoolwide creative problem-solving contest demonstrates the ability to think outside of the box.
I strongly suggest you accept this offer because I [my friend] refuse to work for less.
This salary better represents my [friend’s] worth and the amount to which I am [my friend is] entitled.
I [My friend] would be disappointed earning much less than this amount.

Round 5

Response to Manager’s Offer
You need to be more flexible. There is absolutely no way I [my friend] can work for a salary that low.
Your offer does not adequately reward my [friend’s] impressive resume.
I am grateful that you are willing to cooperate, but I [my friend] just cannot accept yet.
That salary is less than I [my friend] had originally hoped for. My [friend’s] worth exceeds the amount of your current offer.

Justification for Counteroffer
I [My friend] simply cannot and will not work for less than this. This salary is reasonable because I am [my friend is] a hard worker and am [is] intolerant both of mistakes in my [his or her] own work and that of others.
I feel this salary serves both your and my [friend’s] interests. I [My friend] had hoped to make more money than this working for Alpha.
I am [My friend is] entitled to significantly more than other candidates in a similar position.