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**Gender Differences in the Propensity to Initiate Negotiations:
A Meta-Analysis**

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Abstract

We present a meta-analysis exploring gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations. It adds to the discourse, which suggests that gender differences regarding negotiations are a source for the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities in organizations. Our results confirm that women in comparison to men are less prone to initiate negotiations. This effect is robust to methodological artifacts as shown in moderator analysis.

Gender Differences in the Propensity to Initiate Negotiations:
A Meta-Analysis

Research has repeatedly highlighted that women in comparison to men are less effective in negotiations (for meta-analytical reviews see Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999; Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998). This phenomenon is of great relevance, as negotiations are part of most people's professional lives. Negotiations are not only part of individuals' tasks on the job, it is also essential to negotiate one's own salary, benefits, and career advances. Recent developments in the workplace have even fostered the need to negotiate in order to advance one's career. For example, frequent job changes (individuals born 1957-1964 held on average 11.3 jobs from age 18 to 46 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) and idiosyncratic work arrangement (e.g., Rousseau, 2006) are becoming the rule. Consequently, the gender difference in negotiating has been discussed as possible source for phenomena such as the gender wage gap (cf., in the USA in 2012, the median weekly earnings a for full-time working women was \$691, compared to \$854 for men according to Catalyst, 2013) and the glass ceiling (cf. in the USA in 2012, women held 14.3 percent of Executive Officer positions at Fortune 500 companies and 8.1 percent of Executive Officer top earner positions according to the Catalyst, 2012) (e.g., Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006; Greig, 2008; Small, Gelfand, Babcock, & Gettmann, 2007).

These gender effects would be even more alarming if women were less prone than men to start negotiations in the first place. It would imply that women in comparison to men are less effective in fewer negotiations. Even though the initiation of negotiation is crucial for a negotiation to unfold, little attention has been paid to this phase in general and to gender effects in particular (e.g., Babcock et al., 2006; Reif & Brodbeck, 2010a; Small et al., 2007). The topics relevance also becomes apparent when considering that employees are more and more expected

to be proactive (Crant, 2000; Griffin, 2007), to take initiative in shaping and customizing their on-the-job activities (Hornung, 2008) and actively negotiate work arrangements that fit their needs (Rousseau, 2006). Thus, gender differences regarding the propensity to initiate negotiations could be an important underexplored explanation for the asymmetric distribution of resources, such as compensation, opportunities, or upper management positions within organizations.

The two dozen studies that explored gender differences regarding the initiation of negotiation have found mixed results. Whereas some studies report that women are less likely to initiate negotiations (e.g., Babcock et al., 2006; Greig, 2008), others don't find evidence for this differences (e.g., Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; O'Shea & Bush, 2002). Given these conflicting results, it seems that this research area would benefit from a meta-analytic investigation. Thus this paper offers a meta-analysis exploring gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations. Besides this main effect for gender several methodological moderators are explored.

Gender Differences and the Initiation of Negotiation

Gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations have been discussed from several perspectives. First, intra-individual factors have been considered, which are thought to determine the tendency to initiate negotiations. For example, women are thought to expect less, to recognize fewer opportunities and to feel less entitled to negotiate (Babcock et al., 2006, Gerhard & Rynes, 1991; Kaman & Hartel, 1994). It is further suggested that these differences stem from conforming to stereotypical gender roles and societal norms. Consequently a second theoretical perspective focuses on societal influences and gender stereotypes. For example Bowles, Babcock, and Lai (2007) argue that men and women are treated differently when they attempt to negotiate because self-promoting behaviors are more normative and acceptable for

men than for women (Ruderman, 1998). More precisely women encounter more social resistance than men when initiating negotiations and are thus less likely to show this behavior. Third the influence of gender stereotypes has been considered in relation to the immediate situation that is potentially negotiable. For example, Small et al. (2007) argue that women are threatened by a situation framed as negotiation, but might be less threatened by a situation framed as opportunity for asking. Other approaches focusing on the immediate situation consider the negotiation partners and suggest that the social costs are higher for women, who initiate a negotiation with men than with other women (e.g., Bowles et al. 2007; Eriksson & Sandberg, 2012).

The empirical evidence testing gender differences in the propensity to negotiate and their potential reasons is heterogeneous. Investigating about intra-individual factors, Babcock et al. (2006) found an influence of gender on the propensity to initiate negotiations which was mediated by the recognition of opportunities. Even though Enders (2011) also found gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations, the author could not support this mediating effect. Neither of the two authors found evidence for the mediating role of the feeling of entitlement or the assertiveness to negotiate. In addition, gender differences in expectations about the negotiation as well as in the initiation of negotiation were found by Kaman & Hartel (1994) but not by Gerhart and Rynes (1991). Several authors have focused on the societal influences and gender stereotypes when initiating negotiations. In general, Bowles et al. (2007) and Bowles (2013) found that females were penalized more for initiating negotiations than males. Whereas Bowles et al. (2007) report that this gender effect was larger when women negotiate with a male counterpart, Eriksson and Sandberg (2012) find the opposite. Exploring the frame of the situation the studies by Small et al. (2007) supported the assumption that women were more likely to negotiate when the situation was framed as opportunity to ask than as opportunity to negotiate. Interestingly Beninger (2009) found the opposite results.

Several other studies reported their results on gender and the initiation of negotiation as a side effect or while focusing on other research questions than those described above. Again the overall picture is inconsistent, as several studies support the assumption that women are less likely to initiate negotiations than men (Greig, 2008; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007; Reif & Brodbeck, 2010a; Schneider, Rodgers, & Bristow, 1999) and other don't find gender differences (Crothers, Hughes, Schmitt, Theodore, Lipinski et al., 2010; Kong, Tuncel, & Parks, 2011; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Mitchell & Helsi, 2013; O'Shea & Bush, 2002; Reif & Brodbeck, 2010b; Volkema & Fleck, 2012; Volkema, Kapoutsis, & Nikolopoulos, 2013).

Given these conflicting results, this paper contributes by meta-analytically testing whether a gender difference in the propensity to initiate negotiations exists across all studies. We base our hypothesis on the heterogeneous results of the empirical studies as well as other meta-analysis that have found small but robust gender difference in other aspects of negotiations (negotiation outcomes and negotiation competitiveness, cf. Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999; Walters et al. 1998):

Hypothesis 1: Women in comparison to men show less propensity to initiate negotiations.

However this effect is small.

The theoretical considerations, which were outlined above, suggest several interesting moderator analysis about intra-individual, societal and contextual factors. However, the studies, which have been conducted so far, are too heterogeneous to test these moderators meta-analytically. Therefore our moderator-analysis will be restricted to methodological moderators.

Moderators

In our meta-analysis we consider several methodological moderators (i.e., artifacts of the sample and study design that may explain the observed heterogeneity, Lipsey & Wilson, 2001).

We consider characteristics of the study, the design and the sample. However, we assume that the main effect as proposed in Hypothesis 1 is robust and not substantially influenced by methodological differences of the studies. We base our expectation on the findings of previous meta-analyses on gender differences in the area of negotiations (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999; Walters et al., 1989) and hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: The gender difference in the initiation of negotiation will not be substantially influenced by methodological differences between the studies.

Nevertheless we test the moderators to rule out the possibility that the main effect is due to methodological artifacts. Below we argue why considering those moderators is especially relevant in order to show that the proposed effect is robust.

Study characteristics. In their meta-analysis on gender and leadership style, Eagly and Johnson (1990) suggested and found that gender stereotypic behavior is more prevalent in simulated or laboratory settings than in actual field settings. In field settings participants have many different roles (e.g., the role of a manager), which influence their perceptions and behaviors over and above their gender role. In contrast, in laboratory setting gender is one of the obvious characteristics of participants, and is thus thought to be more influential.

Sample characteristics. The same rationale also applies to characteristics of the sample, namely whether the participants are professionals or students. Walters et al. (1998) in their meta-analysis on gender difference in negotiator competitiveness argue that professionals in comparison to students are less likely to act in accordance to gender role stereotypes due to their experiences in different roles at their work.

Negotiation characteristics. Walter et al. (1998) in their meta-analysis found that the gender difference in negotiator competitiveness diminished when there was no (or little) possibility for the parties to interact and communicate. Stuhlmacher and Walters (1999) argue

that actual communication between the parties increases the likelihood of gender stereotypic behavior to surface. We include the negotiation characteristics in our meta-analysis and infer that in real negotiations communication was possible, whereas in studies using scenarios without a counterpart communication was not possible.

Context characteristics. Countries differ largely in terms of the average gender gap (Hausmann, Ryson, & Zahidi, 2012). As the gender gap is often discussed in the context of gender differences in negotiating, (e.g. Babcock et al., 2006), we consider the country in which the study was conducted. We categorize the countries according to their rank in the gender gap report (Hausmann et al., 2012).

Further we explore the influence of the year of the study as a potential moderator. It is argued that gender stereotypic behavior changes in time to the effect that counter-stereotypic behaviors are more accepted today than in former times (cf. Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999; Walters et al., 1998).

Methods

Literature Search

To identify empirical studies, which explored gender differences in the initiation of negotiation, we conducted an electronic search in PsycINFO, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. The entire text was searched for the following keywords: *propensity to initiate negotiation, initiation of negotiation, initiation of bargaining, initiation of conflict resolution, initiation of mediation, avoidance of negotiation, avoidance of bargaining, avoidance of conflict resolution, avoidance of mediation, choosing to negotiate, choosing to bargain, and choosing to mediate*. The search was performed in the beginning of 2012 and once more updated in the fall 2013. If articles focused on the initiation of negotiation, but did not report findings on the variable “gender” we contacted

the authors. Further we directly emailed authors of published papers and other researchers in the field and asked for working papers and unpublished results.

Criteria for Inclusion

First of all we included studies that studied the initiation of negotiation of individuals rather than groups, organizations, or nations. Second the following criteria were used to determine the sample of studies for our meta-analysis: (a) the study reported results that allowed the calculation of effect size and direction of gender differences in the initiation of negotiation; (b) the effect sizes were independent; (c) the study indicated results on the initiation of negotiation rather than other aspects of the negotiation (e.g., the negotiation strategy or negotiation outcomes) (d) the study assessed the propensity to initiate negotiations rather than perceptions of potentially preceding factors such as feeling of entitlement, the recognition of opportunities, the apprehensiveness about a potential, or the reaction when faced with an initiation of negotiation. Studies that did not fit these criteria were excluded.

The search yielded 23 studies (see Table 1) describing 29 independent subgroups that met the criteria for inclusion with a combined total of 6,480 participants (3,033 men and 3,010 women; gender distribution is not specified in the studies by Bowles & Al Dabbagh, 2013; Kaman & Hartel, 1994; Magee et al., 2007).

Coding and Interrater Agreement

In addition to excerpting the gender effect on the initiation of negotiation, each study was coded for the following aspects in order to perform the moderation analysis: study characteristics (field vs. laboratory), sample characteristics (professionals vs. students), negotiation characteristics (real vs. imagined), and context characteristics – namely the year of publication and the country in which the study was conducted (the countries were classified according to their rank in the The Global Gender Gap Report 2012 published by Hausmann et al.,

2012, depending on their rank among the top 10% with smallest gender gap, the 30% with the smallest gender gap or among the 70% with a larger gender gap). In addition the negotiation topic was coded as well as the type of assessment (questionnaire vs. observation), which enables us to describe the studies more precisely. For an overview see Table 1. The coding was performed by two independent coders, which resulted in an initial interrater reliability of 94%. All Discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

Analysis

The meta-analysis was conducted using the computer program Comprehensive Meta-Analysis, which follows the method suggested by Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, and Rothstein (2009). We tested all effects with a random or mixed effects model, which takes both, subject level and study-level sampling error into account. Moderator analysis was performed with a random effects model analogue to the ANOVA; meta-regressions were used for continuous moderators (Borenstein et al., 2009, Hedges, 1982).

We report the Q statistics, which partitions the overall variance into a portion that is explained by the independent variable and an unexplained residual portion. The Q test can be interpreted analogue to the F test in ANOVA or regression analysis. Moderators are indicated by heterogeneity between the groups (significant Q_{between}) and homogeneity within the groups (nonsignificant Q_{within}).

Results

The overall mean effect was significant (see Table 2), which suggests that women show less propensity to initiate negotiations than men. The effect size of Cohen's $d = .21$ indicated that the effect was small (Cohen, 1992). Thus our hypothesis 1 was supported. The effect size corresponds to an odds ratio $OR = 1.47$., which implies that men roughly initiate one and a half

times as many negotiations than women. In addition the overall effect indicated substantial heterogeneity between the studies, suggesting the existence of moderators.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that this effect is robust and thus it is not substantially altered by methodological moderators related to the characteristics of the study, the sample, the negotiation, and the context. This hypothesis could be supported as well. First the categorical moderators (for details see Table 2) did not yield significant heterogeneity between groups nor resulted in homogeneity within groups. In addition, the gender difference regarding the initiation of negotiation was significant in all subgroups. Solely in the group of countries with the larger gender gap the effect was not significant, which is a surprising result; however due to the small sample size $N=3$ it would be inadequate to draw conclusions upon this result. Second the year of the study (a continuous moderator) showed no significant influence on the proposed gender effect in a meta-regression ($B=-.02$, $Z=-1.83$, $p=.07$).

Discussion

In this paper we meta-analytically showed that women have a lower propensity than men to initiate negotiations. This effect was robust to methodological artifacts as methodological moderators did not affect the effect. Thus the effect can be considered “real” and raises questions about the antecedents and the consequences for men and women. With regard to the consequences, the result seems even more alarming in combination with other meta-analysis: women are less effective (cf. Stuhacher & Walters, 1999) in fewer negotiations (cf. they have a lower propensity to initiate negotiations). Hence this study adds to the discourse about the unequal partition of resources and opportunities in organizations, which – among other things – have been attributed gender differences related to negotiation effectiveness (Babcock et al., 2006; Greig, 2008; Small, et al., 2007). Even though the overall effect was small (Cohen’s $d=.21$) the gender difference itself is meaningful. As expatiated in the literature (e.g., Babcock et al., 2006;

Gerhart & Rynes, 1991) small initial differences exacerbate over time. If women more often than men (even if it is only a few times) refrain from initiating a negotiation, this small difference becomes evident over the course of a professional life. However such conclusions can only be speculated and not be drawn from this study. Future research is asked to explore the consequences of the gender difference in the initiation of negotiation – not only for the individual itself but also for groups or even for entire organizations.

Furthermore research is asked to explore antecedents of the gender difference in the initiation of negotiation – another area, which is beyond the scope of this meta-analysis. As described in the introductions the empirical results are heterogeneous and require further elaboration by future research. Last but not least theoretically derived moderators in relation to the individual, the negotiating parties and the broader context should be subject to future investigations. This is especially important, as the results of this meta-analysis indicate a considerable amount of heterogeneity between the studies.

Concluding we hope that this meta-analysis stimulates more research, which helps to generate a more holistic understanding of the gender difference in the initiation of negotiation. Building on this research, interventions should be derived that support women to initiate negotiations, because as the saying goes: “it pays to ask”.

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Table 1

Brief Descriptions of Included Studies

| Study | Study | Sample | Negotiation | Context | Topic | Assessment |
|----------------------------|------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Babcock et al. (2006) | Field | Professionals | Real | USA | Not specified | Questionnaire |
| Beninger (2009) | Laboratory | Students | Real | USA | Compensation | Observation |
| Bowles et al. (2007) | Laboratory | Professionals & students | Imagined | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Bowles & Al Dabbagh (2013) | Laboratory | Students | Imagined | Saudi Arabia | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Crothers et al. (2010) | Field | not specified | Real | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Enders (2011) | Field | Professionals | Real | Germany | Not specified | Questionnaire |
| Eriksson & Sandberg (2012) | Laboratory | Students | Real | Sweden | Compensation | Observation |
| Gerhart & Rynes (1991) | Field | Students | Real | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Greig (2008) | Field | Professionals | Real | USA | Compensation | Questionnaire |
| Guthrie et al. (2009) | Field | Professionals | Real | USA | Not specified | Questionnaire |
| Jung et al. (2010) | Laboratory | Students | Real | USA | Compensation | Observation |
| Kaman & Hartel (1994) | Field | Students | Imagined | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Kong et al. (2011) | Field | Not specified | Imagined | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Lammers et al. (2008) | Laboratory | Students | Imagined | USA | Price | Questionnaire |
| Magee et al. (2007) | Laboratory | Professionals & students | Imagined | USA | Price & voucher | Questionnaire |
| McLaughlin & Hesli (2013) | Field | Professionals | Imagined | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| O`Shea & Bush (2002) | Field | Students | Real | USA | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Reif & Brodbeck (2010a) | Field | Students | Imagined | Germany | Salary | Questionnaire |
| Reif & Brodbeck (2010b) | Field | Students | Real | Germany | Grade | Questionnaire |
| Schneider et al. (1999) | Field | Professionals & Students | Other | USA | Price | Questionnaire |
| Small et al. (2007) | Laboratory | Not specified | Real | USA | Compensation | Observation |
| Volkema & Fleck (2012) | Field | Students | Not specified | Greece & Brazil | Not specified | Questionnaire |
| Volkema et al. (2013) | Laboratory | Students | Imagined | Greece | Imagined | Questionnaire |

Table 2

Overall Meta-Analytical Effect of gender on the initiation of negotiation, Moderator Effects, and Statistics in Subsamples

| | Statistics in subsample | | | | | | | Moderator analysis | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|--------|------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>k</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Z</i> | 95% CI | | Heterogeneity Q (df) | Q _{between} (df) | Q _{within} (df) |
| | | | | | | LL | UL | | | |
| Overall effect | 29 | 6,480 | 0.21 | 0.05 | 4.09** | 0.11 | 0.31 | 70.38 (28) | | |
| Study characteristics | | | | | | | | | 0.00 (1) | 69.76** (27) |
| Field | 16 | 5,194 | 0.22 | 0.06 | 3.52** | 0.09 | 0.34 | 37.35 (15) | | |
| Laboratory | 13 | 1,286 | 0.21 | 0.10 | 2.13* | 0.01 | 0.41 | 32.41 (12) | | |
| Sample characteristics | | | | | | | | | 1.26 (1) | 55.85** (20) |
| Professional | 5 | 2,189 | 0.35 | 0.15 | 2.26* | 0.04 | 0.65 | 20.13 (4) | | |
| Student | 17 | 3,195 | 0.16 | 0.07 | 2.26* | 0.02 | 0.30 | 35.72 (16) | | |
| Negotiation characteristics | | | | | | | | | 0.75 (1) | 65.26** (25) |
| Real | 15 | 3,421 | 0.27 | 0.08 | 3.24** | 0.10 | 0.43 | 35.98 (14) | | |
| Imagined | 12 | 2,736 | 0.17 | 0.08 | 2.10* | 0.01 | 0.33 | 29.28 (11) | | |
| Country | | | | | | | | | 3.43 (2) | 67.38** (26) |
| 10% with smallest gap | 7 | 1,794 | 0.34 | 0.14 | 2.42* | 0.06 | 0.61 | 14.96 (6) | | |
| 30% with smaller gap | 19 | 4,339 | 0.21 | 0.07 | 2.96** | 0.07 | 0.34 | 51.85 (18) | | |
| 70% with larger gap | 3 | 347 | 0.08 | 0.07 | 1.08 | -0.06 | 0.22 | 0.58 (2) | | |

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Cohen's *d* measures effect sizes. Effects are based on the random-effects model.