

ARE WOMEN BAD NEGOTIATORS?

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COULD THE BITTER run-up to the Iraq war have gone any differently if it had been women, not men, sitting in those blue chairs around the UN Security Council round table? You don't need to be a full-time foe of the patriarchy to consider it a tempting counterfactual.

In the prewar maneuverings, says Richard Shell, a negotiation specialist at the Wharton School of Business, "there did seem to be a notable number of testosterone moments." Scholars have long suspected--and some have documented--that men and women bring different styles to the negotiating table, with men viewing themselves as mortal combatants and women seeking "win-win" outcomes and the maintenance of long-term relationships: the usual Mars-and- Venus stuff.

But perhaps the real question is who gets to the table in the first place. "Everything we know about gender is about when a negotiation is already taking place," says the Carnegie Mellon economist Linda Babcock, who is coauthor, with freelance writer Sara Laschever, of *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide* (Princeton), to be published in October. "There'd been nothing asking the question: 'Do women negotiate in the first place?' My research says a resounding 'no.'"

The idea for Babcock's book came a few years back when a group of female grad students came to her office to ask why the men in their program got to teach their own courses while the women had to labor as graders for senior faculty members. The dean explained to Babcock that every student who asked to teach and offered a reasonable proposal was invited to give a course. Simply put, he said, "More men ask."

Babcock soon discovered that in the public policy master's program where she taught, men landed average starting salaries that were 7.4 percent, or \$4,000, higher than those of women. Surveying newly employed graduates, she found that even though the career services office urged everyone to negotiate their salary, only 7 percent of women did so, as against 57 percent of men. How much more money did the men bargain for? About \$4,000.

Next came the direct experiments. Babcock and some colleagues invited 74 unsuspecting male and female Carnegie Mellon undergraduates into a lab, telling them they'd be paid between \$3 and \$10 to play a few games of Boggle. In private wrap-up sessions, the experimenters were deliberately chintzy: "Here's \$3. Is \$3 okay?" Everyone griped at the lowball figure, but nine times more men than women mustered the courage to ask for more cash--which they immediately got.

Everyone knows that you should negotiate the price of a used car, but the modern workplace is full of subtler scenarios--from overtime to vacation to working conditions--in which one has to ask in order to receive. And with unions on the decline and job-hopping on the rise, the importance of speaking up for one's interests is increasing.

Women Don't Ask is full of interviews with women saying things like, "I think it's up to the people that you work for" to figure out what you're worth. (That's "Christine," an investment banker.) Strikingly, young women seem as afflicted by the bargaining jitters as their mothers.

The authors, however, omit some suggestive results that don't jibe with their thesis. One 1984 study, cited in Shell's 1999 book *Bargaining for Advantage*, found that female undergraduates were less competitive and more compromise-oriented than men, but that 10 years into their careers, the differences had evaporated. And Babcock and her coauthors rarely mention that differences among individuals swamp aggregate gender differences.

"The one way you can guarantee you'll get yourself in trouble is if you expect behavior from any individual based on their group," cautions Bruce Patton, deputy director of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School and a coauthor of *Getting to Yes*, which set the standard for negotiation books.

Inauspiciously for women (or the timid generally) the latest trend in negotiation seems to be chest-thumping hypermasculinity. Pop authors like Jim Camp, whose *Start With No* came out last summer, argue that the Harvard getting-to-yes men put far too much emphasis on congeniality, mutual interests, and compromise.

A real negotiator, Camp suggests, rides to victory over the bones of his enemies, savoring the lamentations of their loved ones. In fact, too much niceness at bargaining time, Camp told *Inc.* magazine recently, is "killing corporate America." Fortunately, however, he thinks women, too, can learn to be Conan the Negotiator.

Critical faculties: Academic News & Reviews Christopher Shea's column appears in Ideas biweekly.