Initial Salary Expectations: Influences of Gender and Cognitive Style

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Abstract. Male and female college students evaluated the salary prospects of male and female recent graduates in a job application scenario. Both males and females indicated the belief that female applicants can ask for more money, and can be offered more money, than male counterparts. After 4/15/15, posted at **http://uiminerva.org/rmpa2015/**

Introduction

With respect to salaries, and in particular starting salaries, the prevailing wisdom, supported by data, is that women do not fare as well as men. Many explanations have been offered for the discrepancy including overt discrimination, implicit bias, and gender role/gender identity. In the last of these cases, it has been proposed that, compared to men, women are more likely to make employment negotiation decisions based on social and interpersonal comfort/risk, and are less likely to engage in aggressive salary negotiation (because it might disturb organizational interpersonal dynamics).

Additional boundary conditions worth exploring are (1) the perceptions of male and female future job applicants regarding starting salaries that are fair and reasonable (i.e., perhaps the starting positions are believed to be different); and (2), the potential role of differential cognitive styles.

We examined subjects' understandings with respect to the salary prospects of college students in the context of first job salary expectations.

Methods

Male and female subjects (N=101) were presented with one of two scenarios that described a recent graduate's job application and interview. For some subjects, the applicant was female, for others male. The applicant in both cases was presented as a recent graduate with a liberal arts major, a business minor, and a completed internship in his/her field. The subjects were told that the interview went well, and the applicant was offered the job. The low end of the salary range for the job, subjects were told, was $40,000, but the employer was authorized to go higher.

Methods (contd.)

The subjects were asked to estimate (a) the starting salary the applicant should request, (b) what salary level would have been too much for the applicant to have suggested, and (c) what was the upper anchor available to the employer. They were also asked to rate the importance of the following in the final hiring decision: the salary request itself, applicant qualifications, applicant gender, and applicant age.

In a different context, subjects completed the Category Width scale (CW; example item left, below) and Brickman's Internal-External Correspondence scale (IE, e.g., right, below) which served as potential cognitive style covariates.

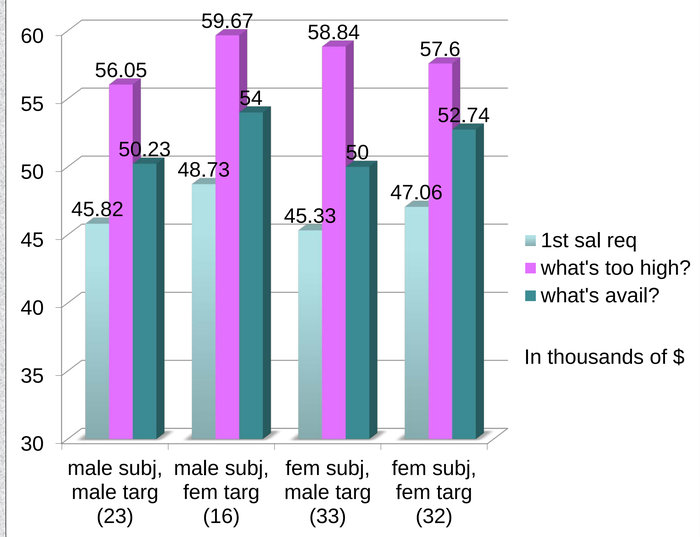
Ornithologists tell us that the best guess of the average speed of birds in flight would be about *17 mph*. What do you think
a. Is the speed in-flight of the fastest bird
1) 25 mph 3) 73 mph
2) 105 mph 4) 34 mph
b. Is the speed in flight of the slowest bird
1) 10 mph 3) 12 mph
2) 2 mph 4) 5 mph

Which alternative, X or Y, would you prefer
X. Do something you are extremely well paid for.
Y. Do something you like.
A. I would much prefer alternative X to alternative Y.
B. I would slightly prefer alternative X to alternative Y.
C. I would slightly prefer alternative Y to alternative X.
D. I would strongly prefer alternative Y to alternative X.

Results & Discussion

The data were subjected to a series of 2 X 2 gender of subject X gender of target (i.e., scenario character) GLM analyses of covariance. The covariates, CW and IE did not impact the results, so only subsequent analysis of variance data are reported. CW had an impact on subjects' understanding of risk (i.e., "what's too high"), but this did not lead to a significant change in outcome for that variable

With respect to the direct questions about the importance of the salary request itself, qualifications, age, or gender, there were no differences due to either gender variable, and no interactions.



Results & Disc. (contd.)

Means for the three salary estimates are presented in the figure below, left. The GLM ANOVA revealed no significant effects for the "what's too high?" variable, although both genders seem to believe that the other-gendered applicant had a safer upper bound. The "first salary request" and the "what's available" data mirror each other. There was a significant gender of target effect for the "what's available" variable and a marginally significant matching trend for the "first request" variable. In both cases, the pattern shows that both male and female subjects believed that females can ask for more money, and that employers have more money available to offer females. There was a marginally significant gender of subject effect for the "first salary request", with males advocating a higher salary request than females for both male and female applicants.

Conclusion. It seems unlikely that differences in negotiated salaries between males and females are the result of lower expectations (by both genders) about what salaries female applicants can get. This conclusion adds strength to the notion that the differences are a function of interpersonal caution by female negotiators.

References

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