

Women may be struggling to climb career ladder because of their beliefs about competition

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Women might be less likely than men to go for opportunities in competitive workplaces because they don't see as much of an upside to competition as men do, research by UCL School of Management (<https://www.mgmt.ucl.ac.uk/>) and London Business School reveals.

Women are on average less competitive than men. This gender difference has been explained largely by external factors such as the different evolutionary and social pressures men and women experience. Extending our current understanding of the gender difference in competitiveness, Dr. Sun Young Lee and Dr. Selin Kesebir reveal beliefs about competition as one source of the gender differences in competitive attitudes and behaviours.

In a set of studies with a total of 2,331 participants, they find that women attribute fewer positive outcomes to competition than men do. Particularly, women are less likely to believe that competition improves performance, builds character, and leads to creative problem solving. People who hold less positive beliefs about competition, who are disproportionately women, also describe themselves as less competitive and, importantly, are less willing to compete when they have the option.

These findings suggest that qualified women may be opting out of important career opportunities such as applying for grants, running for office or seeking coveted promotions, partly because they do not believe that such competitions can bring positive outcomes to the self and others. Moreover, women who don't believe that competition improves performance may end up performing worse in competition, simply because expectations have the power to shape outcomes.

Women's belief-driven reluctance to compete can be costly not only for themselves but also for their organizations and society at large. Based on their research, Dr. Lee and Dr. Kesebir offer a way to make women less likely to shy away from competition:

"Many beliefs are known to be more malleable than we think. Women may develop a more balanced view of competition and become more aware of competition's potentially positive outcomes, if we create more opportunities for them to experience healthy competition from early on in their life."

The findings were published in one of the prestigious academic journals, *Motivation and Emotion*.

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