The Influence of Physical Attractiveness and Gender on
Ultimatum Game Decisions

Summary by Simo Tukiainen
simo.tukiainen@helsinki.fi

October 5, 2011

In the goods and labour market, the influence of gender and physical attractiveness to prices and wages has been confirmed by earlier studies, but the details remain unknown. The article\(^1\) by Sara J. Solnick and Maurice E. Schweitzer attempts to clarify this influence by setting up a bargaining experiment with the ultimatum game. In the two-player game, the first player – the proposer – makes an offer to the responding player on how to split an amount of money between them. If the responder rejects, neither gets anything.

In the experiment, players played the game either by deciding their offer (as proposer) or the minimum amount they would not reject (as a responder). Part of the group played while viewing a photograph – which was separately scored for attractiveness – of their opponent. The study found that though the player’s own characteristics did not affect the decisions, the opponent’s appearance significantly influenced the bargaining behaviour: while attractive people and men did not demand more, they were nevertheless offered more by proposers; also less was demanded from unattractive people and men.

In conclusion, the authors suggest that the gender gap and ”beauty premium” in the market might exist partly because men and attractive people are simply offered more. In another context, however, attractiveness might well be a hindrance as more is expected of you.

\(^1\)Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Vol. 79, No. 3 September, pp. 199–215, 1999