



How Prepared Do You Have to Be? The Role of Goal Orientation and Gender

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INTRODUCTION

Failing to get started is one of the most significant challenges that hinder successful attainment of goals². While it may benefit individuals to jump into a new job and learn as they go, many people hold back until they think they are fully prepared with the complete skill set. Meanwhile, previous findings on women's lack of confidence or initiatives such as women's systematic underestimation of their own abilities¹ or lack of negotiating in workplace³ suggest that women might be more vulnerable to holding back and wanting to be more prepared when they get started on their professional goals. The present study aims to examine who wants greater preparedness for initiating professional goals, focusing on a gender difference. The study further attempts to uncover the driving factor for such difference, which may shed light on how to boost women's initiatives in professional settings.

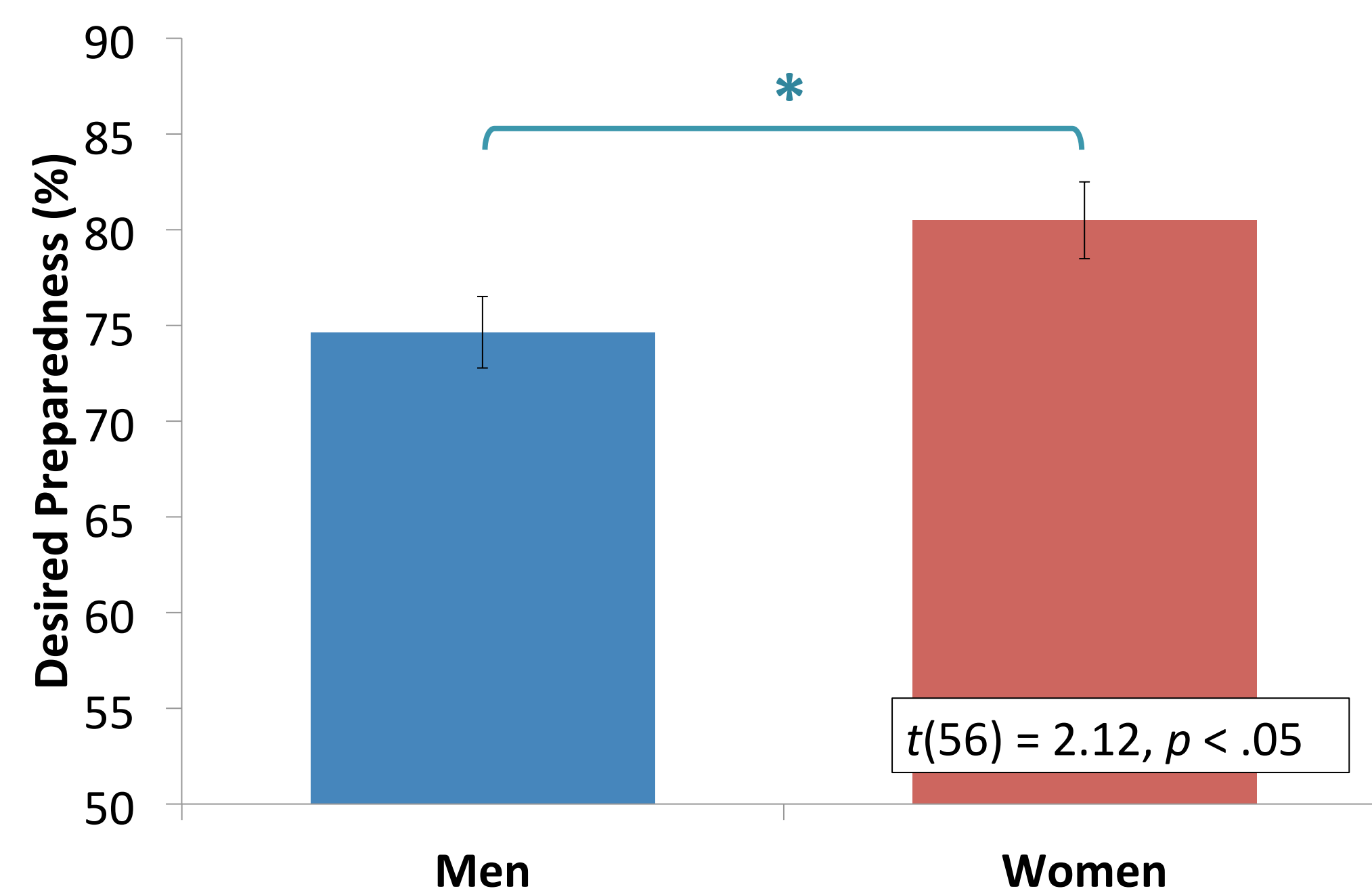
STUDY 1: Do women want to be more prepared than men?

Methods

- **Participants:** 58 Mturk workers (Women: 31, $M_{age} = 39$ yrs).
- **DV: Desired Level of Preparedness**
 - "You are looking for a new job to apply for. You will apply for a job if you think you have ____ % of the skills and knowledge that the job requires."

- **IV: Personality Questionnaires**
 - **Goal Orientation**
 - **Learning goal:** "I strive to constantly learn and improve."
 - **Ability goal:** "It is important to me to confirm my intelligence."
 - **Outcome goal:** "A major goal I have is to perform really well in what I work on."
- Women wanted to have a greater skillset (80%) than men (75%) when they apply for a new job.
- Ability and outcome goals were correlated with wanting to be more prepared, while learning goal was correlated with less of such need.

Results



DISCUSSION

- **Women persistently wanted to be more prepared before they apply for a new job than men** (Study 1 & 2).
- **Learning goal predicted wanting less preparedness, while ability goals predicted wanting more preparedness when applying for a job** (Study 1).
- However, **women did not want a greater level of preparation for other women** (Study 2), and they also did not think other women should be more prepared than other men. It suggests that wanting more preparation might stem from self-doubt rather than from one's general belief about women.
- **Women wanted significantly less preparation when they considered applying for a company valuing learning (vs. ability).** It suggests that organizations can encourage people to take on more challenge at the beginning of their career development if they communicate their values on learning, which can be especially empowering for women.
- These findings are particularly relevant for emerging "start-up" industry where it is virtually impossible for potential employees to have a complete skillset when they join a team, and where the lack of female work-force is pronounced.

STUDY 2: Do all women want to be more prepared or just for oneself?

Methods

- **Participants:** 102 Mturk workers (Women: 52, $M_{age} = 35$ yrs).
- **DV: Desired Level of Preparedness (IV: Within-Subject)**
 - **Self:** "You are considering applying for a new job...You will apply for a job if you think you have ____ % of the skills and knowledge that the job requires."
 - **Other-Female:** "A friend is considering applying for a new job...You advise **her** to apply for a job if **she** thinks **she** has ____ % of the skills and knowledge..."
 - **Other-Male:** "A friend is considering applying for a new job... You advise **him** to apply for a job when **he** thinks **he** has ____ % of the skills and knowledge..."
- **IV: Personality Questionnaires (same as Study 1)**

Results

- Gender difference from Study 1 was replicated for "Self" condition: Women wanted to be more prepared than men for the self when they apply for a new job ($t(100) = 2.52, p < .05$).
- Paired t-test showed that **women wanted themselves to be more prepared than a female friend** ($t(51) = 2.27, p < .05$), but they did not indicate that a female friend should be more prepared than a male friend.
- Men did not show such a difference between desired preparation for the self and others.

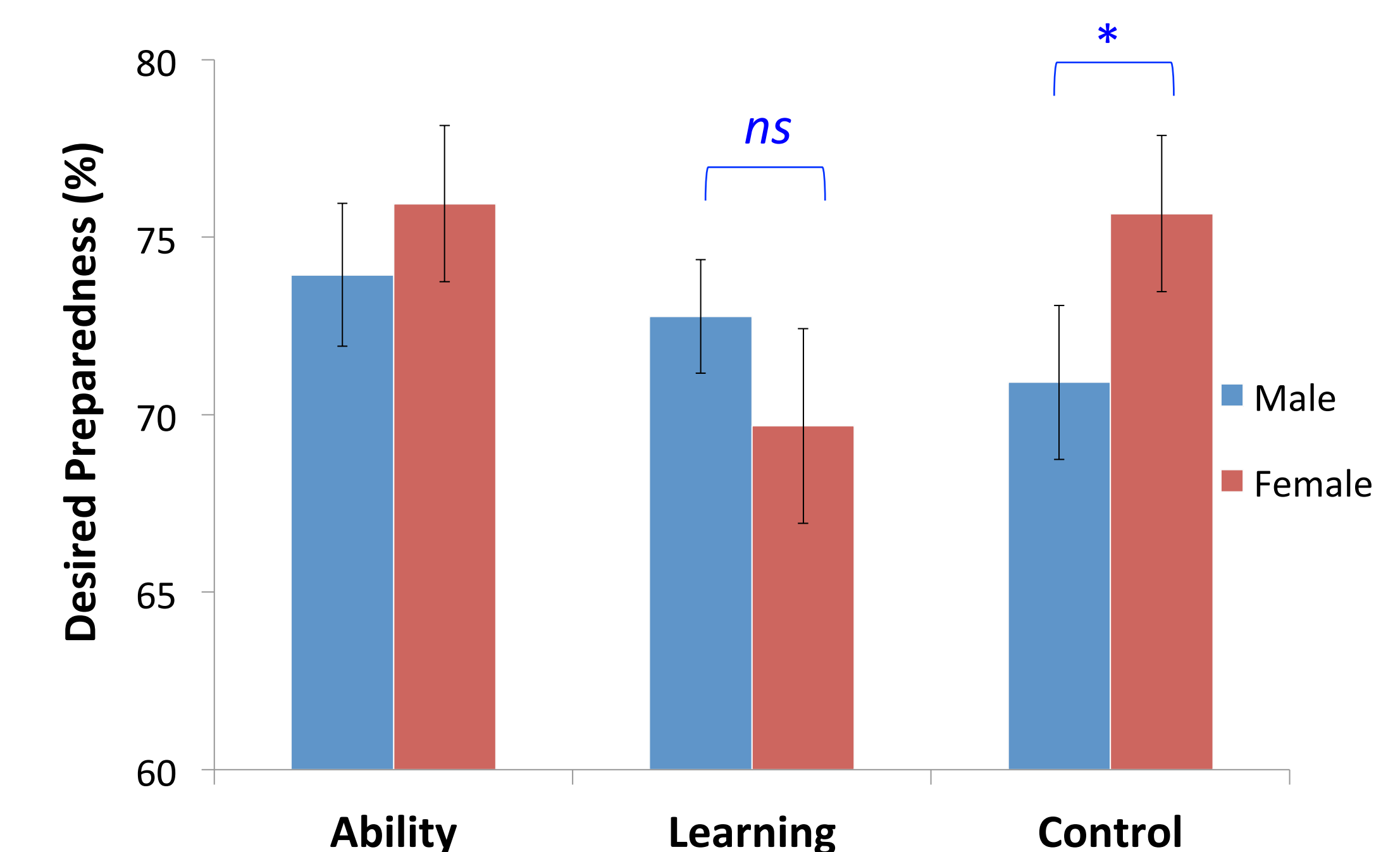
STUDY 3: What would encourage women to take more initiative?

Methods

- **Participants:** 240 Mturk workers (Women: 105, $M_{age} = 35.7$ yrs).
- **IV: Organizational Value (manipulated)**
 - **Ability Condition:** "[...] values **objective assessment** of employees' **intrinsic ability** and **competence** [...]" it tracks employees' work and provides **critical quarterly evaluation** on their performance [...]."
 - **Learning Condition:** "[...] values **learning experience** of employees [...]" it runs **mentoring program** [...] and hosts a **bi-weekly workshop** [...]."
 - **Control Condition:** "[...] values **health** of employees [...]."
- **DV: Desire Level of Preparedness**
 - "You are considering applying for a job in **this company**. You will apply for a job if you think you have ____ % of the skills and knowledge that the job requires."

Results

- **Women needed less preparedness in learning condition compared to ability or control condition.** Men did not show significant difference in their need for preparedness between conditions.
- In ability condition, we observed an upward trending in men which was just enough to close the gender difference.



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