

Athletic Trainers' Experiences With and Perceptions of Salary Negotiation Decision-Making During the Hiring Process

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Context: Appropriate salaries for athletic trainers (ATs) have been a contentious topic for decades. Although professional advocacy efforts to increase ATs' salaries have gained traction, little is known about ATs' experiences with negotiation during the hiring process.

Objective: To explore the reasons, influences, and factors influencing ATs' negotiation decisions.

Design: Qualitative study.

Setting: Individual video interviews.

Patients or Other Participants: Twenty-eight ATs who participated in a previous study and indicated a willingness to participate in the qualitative follow-up were interviewed (17 women, 10 men, 1 nonbinary individual; age = 37.8 ± 8.9 years, athletic training experience = 15.1 ± 8.3 years). Of the 28 participants, 18 did negotiate, whereas 10 did not.

Data Collection and Analysis: An individual video conference interview was conducted with each participant. After transcription, data were analyzed into themes and categories following the consensual qualitative research tradition. To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, we confirmed accuracy through member checks, triangulated the data using multianalyst research

teams, and confirmed representativeness by including an external auditor.

Results: Four parallel themes emerged during data analysis: factors for determining salary negotiation, reasons for negotiating/not negotiating, negotiation influencers/deterrents, and experiences with negotiation/impact of not negotiating.

Conclusions: Negotiators used a variety of data sources to support their requests, and their decisions were motivated by their own known value, the area's cost of living, and their current financial or employment situations. Negotiators relied on previous experiences to guide negotiations and provided successes and regrets from their negotiation experience. Nonnegotiators also used a variety of data types but were deterred by fear of not knowing how to negotiate, of losing the offer, or of offending those involved. Nonnegotiators highlighted a lack of confidence in their ability to negotiate and provided the financial consequences and personal regrets from not negotiating. More training, education, and publicly available data are needed to assist ATs in future negotiation attempts.

Key Words: wages, terms of employment, benefits

Key Points

- Negotiators cited lower-than-expected initial offers, the location's cost of living, their known value, and their current employment or financial circumstances as the reasons they chose to negotiate during the hiring process. They relied on professional or personal support systems and past experiences to influence their negotiation approach and were able to identify successes and regrets from their experiences negotiating.
- Nonnegotiators described fair or higher-than-expected offers or a lack of awareness as reasons they did not negotiate during the hiring process. This group often detailed the fear of losing the job offer or offending a future colleague as reasons they avoided negotiations. Lack of knowledge or confidence and advice received from others all served as deterrents for negotiating. These participants also described a lack of training or experience contributing to their avoidance of negotiations.
- Both negotiators and nonnegotiators described using public and private data sources to determine a fair salary amount. Some members from each group described not using any researched data in negotiations.

Salaries for athletic trainers (ATs) have been a consistent source of strife among those in the profession, with many citing peer health care professions such as physical therapy as the point of comparison, with which

athletic training falls short.^{1,2} Though we have not made nearly enough progress, salaries of ATs appear to have increased over the past few decades. In 1994, the average salary of an AT in the secondary school athletics setting was

\$19 547 and in the college setting, \$24 561.³ By comparison, in 2021, nearly 30 years later, ATs working in the secondary school or college athletics settings make an average of \$58 028 and \$53 455, respectively.² This represents a 197% average salary increase across 27 years for secondary school ATs and a 118% increase for collegiate ATs. These numbers, without the context of the concurrent inflation rate, can be misleading. In today's economy, the \$19 547 that secondary school ATs made in 1994 would equate to \$37 589 in January 2022, and the \$24 561 that collegiate ATs made would be \$47 231.⁴ In December of 2022, the lowest-paid position that included a salary on the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Career Center was at a National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I university, and the position was posted at \$33 000 to \$36 000, less than the 1994 equivalent salaries in today's economy.⁵ In spring 2023, another university athletics program posted a full-time (40+ hours a week) "internship" position for an annual salary of \$27 500.⁵ Therefore, despite the appearance of an upward trajectory in salary, when considering inflation, athletic training has remained stagnant at best and, in some cases, has regressed to lower comparative salaries from where we were 27 years ago.

Although the prospective employer maintains the majority of control over the associated salary of a position, the prospective employee bears a modicum of responsibility in negotiating and accepting a given salary for a position. It is necessary for ATs to understand common business practices employed in determining salaries, which involve assessing associated labor expenses, liabilities, contributed capital, and anticipated revenues and earnings.⁶ Those in a position to hire employees often aim to secure the prospective employee for the lowest competitive wage possible to benefit the employers' financial circumstances, placing the onus of increasing a position's offered salary on the prospective employee. Despite existing research that suggests salary negotiation as a general business practice is proven to increase the salary of prospective employees,⁷ previous researchers have identified that most ATs do not negotiate salary or benefits during the hiring process, and the most common reason for not negotiating was that they perceived the initial offer to be fair.¹ Considering that ATs have been essentially accepting the same salary, in terms of buying power, for 30 years, it is unclear how ATs are deciding whether to negotiate during the hiring process. In this study, we explored the reasons, influences, factors, and experiences influencing ATs' salary negotiation decisions.

METHODS

Design

We used a consensual qualitative research (CQR) design for this study. The CQR approach is well established in athletic training to explore ATs' perspectives and experiences, and it requires a multianalyst research team to mitigate bias during the rigorous data analysis process.^{8,9} This study was deemed exempt by the sponsoring university's human subjects review committee.

Participants

We recruited participants for the current study through a convenience sample of ATs who had previously responded

to a survey on salary negotiation and indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview.¹ To ensure that we collected robust data from participants, we recruited participants by group: those who self-reported that they negotiated salary during their most recent employment hire (ie, negotiators) and those who self-reported that they did not negotiate salary during their most recent employment hire (ie, nonnegotiators). We aimed to interview 10 to 15 participants per group to ensure saturation was achieved.

In total, 28 ATs (17 women, 10 men, 1 nonbinary individual; age = 37.8 ± 8.9 years, athletic training experience = 15.1 ± 8.3 years) employed in 8 practice settings across 18 states were interviewed before we achieved data saturation. Of the 28 interviewed, 18 negotiated during their most recent employment hire, and 10 did not. Participant pseudonyms and demographics are available in Table 1.

Instrumentation

Due to the lack of an existing instrument after an extensive literature search, 3 research team members (J.M.C., L.E.J., I.B.W.) developed 2 semistructured interview guides. One interview guide was used for the group that negotiated salary, and the second was used for the group that did not negotiate salary. After development, both interview guides were reviewed for face validity and content validity by 1 other member of the research team (K.R.D.) as well as the individual who would serve as the internal auditor (C.E.W.B.); neither the research team member nor the internal auditor was involved in the original instrument development. After review, minor wording edits were made, and some questions were reordered for better flow and clarity. The final version of each semistructured interview guide included 8 questions, with the opportunity to ask participants follow-up questions for additional detail if necessary (Table 2). Pilot testing of each interview protocol was conducted with 4 individuals (2 per group) who met the study criteria; because no changes were made to the interview protocol after pilot testing, all 4 pilot participants were included in data collection and analysis.

Procedures

Data collection occurred in 2 phases: recruitment and interviews with negotiators, followed by recruitment and interviews with nonnegotiators. The principal investigator contacted potential participants via email. The email included the study description and details of what voluntary participation would involve. Once a participant expressed interest, an interview day and time was scheduled. All individual interviews were conducted by the principal investigator using the Zoom video conferencing platform; the interview duration ranged from 25 to 45 minutes, depending on the thoroughness of responses provided by the participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed within Zoom and then reviewed by 1 research team member for accuracy. Any transcription errors were corrected, and all personal identifying information was redacted. Once the transcript was transcribed and proofed, it was returned to the participant for member checking. Participants were asked to review the transcript for accuracy and could provide clarification or additional information if necessary. However, participants were instructed not to change or remove any information from their initial responses.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Negotiation Group	Years of Experience	Gender	Ethnicity	Race	No. of Full-Time Employment Positions	NATA District	Work Setting	Year of Hire in Current Position	Current Salary Range, \$
Meredith George	Nonnegotiator	12	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	2	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2018	90 001–100 000
Amelia	Nonnegotiator	21	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	5	9	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2018	70 001–80 000
	Nonnegotiator	10	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	Prefer not to respond	4	2	Clinic—physician practice	2019	60 001–70 000
Richard	Nonnegotiator	20	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	Prefer not to respond	4	2	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2009	100 001–110 000
Miranda	Nonnegotiator	12	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	2	1	College/university—professional clinical staff (Division I, II, or III)	2012	40 001–50 000
Adison	Nonnegotiator	4	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	2	8	College/university—professional clinical staff (Division I, II, or III)	2019	50 001–60 000
Avery	Nonnegotiator	12	Nonbinary	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	2	9	College/university—professional clinical staff (Division I, II, or III)	2016	40 001–50 000
April	Nonnegotiator	39	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	3	College/university—faculty/academic/research	1988	80 001–90 000
Katherine	Nonnegotiator	29	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	5	1	Other	2017	50 001–60 000
Derek	Nonnegotiator	5	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	1	2	College/university—professional clinical staff (Division I, II, or III)	2019	Less than 30 000
Adele	Negotiator	7	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	6	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2020	90 001–100 000
Isobel	Negotiator	13	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	5	9	Amateur/recreational/youth sports	2015	40 001–50 000
Maggie	Negotiator	24	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	3	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2011	90 001–100 000
Ellis	Negotiator	7	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	2	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2020	60 001–70 000
Owen	Negotiator	29	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	8	11	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2016	70 001–80 000
Stephanie	Negotiator	5	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	0	3	College/university—professional clinical staff (Division I, II, or III)	2016	40 001–50 000
Arizona	Negotiator	12	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	Prefer not to respond	3	2	College/university—professional clinical staff (Division I, II, or III)	2013	60 001–70 000
Tom	Negotiator	15	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	5	3	Secondary school (middle and high school)—dual appointment (academic and athletic)	2016	90 001–100 000
Penny	Negotiator	17	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	4	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2018	70 001–80 000
Erica	Negotiator	14	Woman	Hispanic or Latino	White	3	3	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2018	70 001–80 000
Alex	Negotiator	18	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	2	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2016	70 001–80 000
Denny	Negotiator	12	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	9	Secondary school (middle and high school)—athletic only	2020	60 001–70 000
Christina	Negotiator	12	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	11	Industrial/occupational/corporate	2016	70 001–80 000
Jo	Negotiator	15	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	1	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2018	60 001–70 000
Preston	Negotiator	20	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	4	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2015	70 001–80 000
Teddy	Negotiator	24	Woman	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	3	2	Secondary school (middle and high school)—athletic only	2016	50 001–60 000
Mark	Negotiator	10	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	9	College/university—faculty/academic/research	2016	80 001–90 000
Nick	Negotiator	6	Man	Not Hispanic or Latino	White	4	1	Clinic—physician practice	2019	50 001–60 000

Abbreviation: NATA, National Athletic Trainers' Association.

Table 2. Interview Guides for Negotiating and Nonnegotiating Participants^a

Questions for Those Who DID Negotiate Salary During the Hiring Process	Questions for Those Who DID NOT Negotiate Salary During the Hiring Process
1. Please describe the reason(s) why you chose to negotiate salary during the hiring process.	1. Please describe the reason(s) why you chose not to negotiate salary during the hiring process.
2. Can you please walk me through any steps you took prior to deciding to negotiate to determine what a fair salary was for the position you applied for?	2. Can you please walk me through any steps you took prior to deciding not to negotiate to determine what a fair salary was for the position you applied for?
3. Please explain any experience or knowledge you have about salary negotiation.	3. Please explain any experience or knowledge you have about salary negotiation.
4. Please describe any formal or informal training about negotiation that you have received in the past.	4. Please describe any formal or informal training about negotiation that you have received in the past.
5. Can you recount how your employer reacted to your attempt to negotiate?	5. Were there any indicators from your employer that deterred you from attempting to negotiate? If so, what were they?
6. What resources, if any, do you wish you had that could have improved your negotiation attempt?	6. What resources, if any, do you wish you had that could have assisted your decision of whether to negotiate salary or not?
7. Describe any positive or negative impacts your decision to negotiate has had on your employment experience.	7. Describe any positive or negative impacts your decision not to negotiate has had on your employment experience.
8. When you reflect on this negotiation experience, is there anything you would have done differently? If so, what?	8. When you reflect on this hiring experience, is there anything you would have done differently? If so, what?
9. If you had a student, that you were supervising, that was about to begin the hiring process—what advice would you give them regarding salary negotiation?	9. If you had a student, that you were supervising, that was about to begin the hiring process—what advice would you give them regarding salary negotiation?

^a Reproduced in its original format.

Participants provided no additions or clarifications during member checking, and all transcripts were deemed finalized and ready for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The CQR tradition guided data analyses.^{8,9} Although the process was the same, the transcripts from each group (ie, negotiators, nonnegotiators) were analyzed separately to ensure that, if themes that emerged from the data were unique to negotiators or nonnegotiators, these were allowed to reveal themselves without bias from the other groups' responses. The data analysis team for the negotiators included 4 athletic training researchers (J.M.C., L.E.J., I.B.J., C.E.W.B.); 2 members were novice qualitative researchers, and the other 2 had expertise in qualitative research and CQR. The data analysis team for the nonnegotiators included 3 athletic training researchers (J.M.C., C.E.W.B., K.R.D.); the third member of this team was a novice qualitative researcher. Before data analysis, all novice qualitative researchers were trained on the CQR tradition and data analysis approach, as outlined by Hill et al.^{8,9}

Each data analysis team conducted analyses using a 3-phase CQR process.^{8,9} First, each team member independently reviewed 3 randomly selected transcripts, and initial themes and categories were identified. The data analysis team met to discuss each member's independent review of the transcripts and a consensus codebook was developed. Second, 3 more randomly selected transcripts were analyzed independently by each member of the data analysis team using the consensus codebook. The team met again to discuss the coding process and refine the consensus codebook until all members agreed on the final version. Third, all transcripts within the group were coded by 1 team member using the final consensus codebook and then reviewed by all team members. Edits and revisions to the coding process were made for each transcript until all team members reached a consensus on the final coding. The negotiator

group data were coded first, followed by the nonnegotiator group data.

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, we used member checking, multianalyst triangulation, and an internal auditor.^{8,9} Once the data sets were analyzed, codebooks and finalized transcripts were sent to the internal auditor for review. The internal auditor reviewed the findings closely to ensure the data were appropriately analyzed and multiple perspectives were considered.^{8,9}

RESULTS

Four parallel, or similarly aligned, themes with divergent categories emerged from analyzing transcripts from ATs who negotiated and those who did not negotiate. The first theme, *factors for salary determination*, provided insight into the mechanisms by which our participants identified what an appropriate salary would be for the position they were pursuing, including the use of both public and private information, self-perceived value (nonnegotiators only), and, in some cases, information not used. The second theme, *reasons for negotiating/not negotiating*, contained information on the intrinsic rationales as to why our participants chose to negotiate their salary or decided not to. *Negotiation influencers/deterrents* included a discussion of extrinsic factors that swayed participants' efforts toward salary negotiation, such as advice they received or previous education or training, or that steered them away from negotiating, such as a lack of education or experience or being intimidated by the person they would have to negotiate with. Last, participants relayed their *experiences negotiating* or the *impact of not negotiating*. Within this theme, categories that emerged were unique for negotiators and nonnegotiators. Categories within the *experiences negotiating* theme from negotiators included previous experience negotiating, employer reactions, and successes and regrets. The categories within the theme of *impact of not negotiating* from nonnegotiators included long-term financial consequences, regret, and none.

Table 3 provides the breakdown of themes with participant and quote frequency counts. Categories were deemed *general* (17–18 negotiators, 9–10 nonnegotiators), *typical* (9–16 negotiators, 5–8 nonnegotiators), *variant* (4–8 negotiators, 3–4 nonnegotiators), or *rare* (1–3 negotiators, 1–2 nonnegotiators). Additional supporting quotes are provided for each theme and category in Tables 4 through 8.

Factors for Salary Determination

Publicly Available Information. Regardless of whether they chose to negotiate salary, our participants described gathering data through publicly available repositories to determine what salary was appropriate for the position they were being hired into. For example, Meredith, who did not negotiate, said,

I had actually looked up some publicly accessible salaries for other folks, although [employment location] is not a state school, state employees have public records of what their salaries are. So I looked up some folks that I knew had very comparable positions in the state of [State] and took it from there.

Similarly, Maggie, who did negotiate, clarified that publicly available information might be more geographically relevant when she stated,

... and so I dug into that on individual level and knew what my peers were making at other state institutions. Just to make it more region-specific than just the NATA salary data, and then I look at links, yeah, I mean, I did a lot; looked at contract lengths and that kind of thing.

Private Information. Participants also described data gathering mechanisms through private means, such as their own compiled data, reaching out to peers to ask, or using the NATA salary survey data to determine appropriate salary levels if they were NATA members. Stephanie, who did negotiate, revealed that she relied on her patient care value when she said,

Although my EMR [electronic medical record] system, we use Sportsware, and they have a way of running reports ... Like for example, like we can't bill in my state, but I can still run it if I could tell this was what I could bill for. And my contract started August 1 and that's when I first, I believe I had my first patient contact. So, we're only looking at patient contact there. We're not looking at your phone calls or meetings or anything like that. August 1 to yesterday, I have had more, the billable amount is already higher at quite a bit at what my salary is. And I use that before to walk in and be like, if I could tell you, this is how much I can bill you for. You are getting literally 3 times my salary worth of treatment. And I'm seeing none of that.

Meredith, who did not negotiate, stated,

I looked at the NATA salary survey ... and then I asked around for some friends and colleagues that had recently started new positions to see what they were offered and what they were making, and what they thought was fair, and went from there.

Table 3. Themes and Categories With Associated Participant and Quote Frequency Counts

Theme	Categories	Negotiators			Nonnegotiators		
		Participant Frequency (n = 18)	Quote Frequency	Categorization	Participant Frequency (n = 10)	Quote Frequency	Categorization
Factors for salary determination	Publicly available information	9	18	Typical	7	14	Typical
	Private information	15	33	Typical	7	13	Typical
	Information not used	8	14	Variant	5	6	Typical
Reasons for negotiating/not negotiating	Low initial offer	12	22	Typical	6	7	Typical
	Cost of living	10	23	Typical	7	20	Typical
	Safety net	9	16	Typical	3	6	Variant
	Known value	13	33	Typical	8	23	Typical
	Change in responsibilities/title	9	15	Typical			
	Low benefits package	4	7	Variant			
Negotiation influencers/deterrents	Current financial circumstances	10	12	Typical			
	Support system	16	43	Typical	3	3	Variant
	Training/education	4	4	Variant	6	6	Typical
	Individuals involved in the negotiation process				4	4	Variant
	No previous experience, training, or education						
	Poor/inadequate advice received						

Table 4. Additional Quotes for Factors for Salary Determination

	Negotiators	Nonnegotiators
Publicly available information	That job that was at specifically at [University]. So it's a state school. So I was able to go onto their website, onto the state employees and look up salaries for previous years. So I did that for that job . . . I looked at that, that was probably my number 1 thing that I looked at. And then also looking at in general what the athletic trainer salaries were in [State]. And I knew that these high school ATs, we're making a 60, 70k. So it's like, okay, well, it's going to be a lot more I'm going to ask for a lot more than my \$29 000 than I'm making my current job, you know. So that was the number 1 thing, was just doing my research. (Isobel)	I kinda did the realtor thing and I looked at similar schools on Chronicle and on whatever, I don't think indeed—maybe indeed existed at that time—but whatever the website was there, salary.com or something and I looked at based on zip codes. And I had a spreadsheet, I probably still have it somewhere, and, you know, because I was looking at positions all over the country and I was looking at it based on the type of school and the comparable schools, what that school might be able to pay and then usually it matched up pretty closely to what was on Chronicle. And then I'd look at, you know, what is the cost of living in that area, so what would I need and what would the differences be if that similar salary was applied at a different zip code in a different state with a lower cost of living or higher cost of living. So I had this, and it probably didn't make any sense to most people, but it made sense to me. I had a system. (Richard)
Private information	<p>Since it's a state institution where I'm at currently, I was able to look at what people are similar rank, we can't look up experience obviously, but you can gauge usually, but looking up comparable rank and I don't know, I don't want to say task I guess role. If that person was also a tenure-track line and then looking at other institutions in [State] with that same, I guess rank and role. (Erica)</p> <p>I understand that some people don't like to talk about salary, but I also knew where I was at, in relationship to peers who were in a similar position with similar experience, and so, knowing their numbers and how many months of their job, etcetera, etcetera, and where they lived, and knowing how that matched up to NATA. (Ellis)</p> <p>So we um, there was the NATA obviously and we looked at that. The district that I was in had a salary survey too or the district that I'm in had been had a salary survey as well and then as a league, we decided to do a salary poll. So we did all of the independent schools in the area. So [states and cities] and that gave us a great range as to what the heads make versus their years of experience, what the associates, a lot of the schools have a second associate and/or an assistant. So I looked at all that data and then just figured what would be my best number, knowing what I know and I gave all of that to the head of school. I said, look, here's all the data, here's where I should be based on all of this and he essentially was like, okay. (Tom)</p>	<p>Because I think at the time with not having experience with negotiating and when I did apply for the job, I looked at other salaries because you get, in public institutions all the salaries are available. So I was able to go in and look at different salaries and then see where the one that I was offered being would fall on the scale. And I always thought it was fair. (George)</p> <p>Yeah, it was mostly conversations. And then at some of the national conventions, I got to meet some of the alumni from [University], talking to them. Again, it was more just communication. (Katherine)</p> <p>I think the NATA salary survey is a good tool so long as the employers are willing to hear that. Like my last, again, my last AD he was under the impression that well, the NATA is an advocate for athletic trainers so anything they put out is going to be for you guys and so that's not realistic. Whether that was like talking about sport coverage or how many athletic trainers are needed, whether that was salary, whether whatever it was, he didn't trust it because it was from NATA. But I still think it's a valuable tool to at least be able to, okay, well, if you don't believe it, but this is, you're paying me way under at least gives you kind of your own compass of if this job is worth it or not. (Avery)</p>

Abbreviations: AD, athletic director; AT, athletic trainer; NATA, National Athletic Trainers' Association.

Self-Perceived Value. In a category that was not present for those who did attempt to negotiate, nonnegotiators identified assumptions that they made about their perceived value that influenced their determination of what a fair salary was for the position. Katherine predetermined what she thought would be a fair salary based on what they had been making at their previous jobs, stating, “So to be honest, I went off of what my salary was at my previous position and added another \$5K for good measure.” Subsequently, when Katherine received an offer that exceeded that amount, she did not negotiate. Derek felt that the chaotic circumstances surrounding his hiring led to making assumptions about how his role would be valued when he said,

I looked at what the NATA had to offer on their website, and I was also working on a survey project at the same time, so it was . . . my mind was all over the place, and if

I would've been solely working as a clinician, I think I would have spent more time on, you know, like following that model. But I just, I guess I was more hopeful that they would understand my value after working during a pandemic, but I was . . . incorrect.

Meredith concisely summarized this by saying, “So, maybe that was a little naïve. Maybe I could have done more . . . but I just had my own ideas before I went into this process.”

Information Not Used. Although this was a variant response, some of our participants responded to questions about determining a fair salary by discussing information they did not have available or did not use. April, who was hired into her position in the late 1900s, did not have resources to use, saying, “I had not looked at any of it, and you have to remember that in those days, we didn't have the

Table 5. Additional Quotes for Reasons for Not Negotiating

Reason	Quote
Felt the offer was fair	The number was better than what I had hoped for. And when they explained the other benefits, it was all at or where, at or above where I would've asked to kind of move towards. I wasn't, I'm not on a research line, so I had no start-up package and so no room to even plan or try to negotiate in that. So it was really salary and continuing ed[ucation] money and things like that because the other general benefits are university HR specific. Um, and so when those were above where my current employer was and kind of where I'd hoped to be. I was really like I know what else to do here. (Meredith) Because it was a lot more than what I was getting in my previous position . . . I had an idea of what I wanted to make and this job exceeded it, and so I was basically thought, well, let's not be greedy, you know, about that. Let's take what I can get, you know, take the generous offer right now and that was it. I mean, that was it. When I, whenever I changed positions, I always had an idea of what I wanted or what I was worth and if it was met, I really didn't go beyond that. (George)
Unaware that negotiation was possible	I knew better how the hiring process worked, like if they extended a job offer and like that's the time to negotiate, like to know if I push and ask for things, can they then step away, versus like, right? Like how does that look? Like am I allowed to push but knowing that like we'll come back to the agreement and like they can't stop recruiting me or trying to hire me because I'm asking for more? Just like the knowledge of how that, how that process works and when to do things. And obviously, yes, like what's the, not the polite way but like, expected way or, right, steps of negotiation. But I truly had no idea. I was so nervous that like if I said the wrong thing, like they weren't gonna, they were just going to go on to the next. (Avery) But what I've noticed is that all these exercise science faculty that we bring in negotiate everything, and those of us that came in at a certain time we all look at ourselves like huh? Who knew you could do that? (Richard)
Perceived lack of leverage	So my first job . . . I did not negotiate at all. I had no experience and had no idea on what to do or how to do it, so, and I needed a job. And so when they offered me the job, I said, "Cool, thanks, I'll take it." (Meredith) I just wanted that job so bad, I took a pay cut. (April)

Abbreviation: HR, human resources.

internet," whereas Adison simply said, "Yeah . . . I didn't do any research." Isobel expressed that she did not think salary information was available for her setting, saying, "It didn't even come to my mind for DME [durable medical equipment setting]; I have used that before for other clinical jobs, but not for DME."

Overall, some of our participants identified sources of publicly and privately available information that assisted them in determining the appropriate salary for the position they were seeking. Some participants identified that there was information they either did not have access to or chose not to use. In the group of nonnegotiators, they identified assumptions about their value that influenced their perception of what the salary should be.

Reasons for Negotiating/Not Negotiating

Fair Offer/Offer Exceeded Expectations (Nonnegotiators). Nonnegotiators identified scenarios in which the offer they received seemed fair, either in comparison with what they were currently making or based on their research. Katherine simply noted, "[The offer] was actually significantly higher than what I had actually anticipated."

Unaware That Negotiation Was Possible (Nonnegotiators). Although this was a variant response, a few participants who did not negotiate indicated that it was partly because they were unaware that negotiation was an option. April said, ". . . it was really not even understanding that I could or knowing how. They just told me what they would pay me, and I wanted the job, so I said yes."

Perceived Lack of Leverage (Nonnegotiators). Almost all of our nonnegotiating participants described circumstances in which they lacked leverage, leading them to not negotiate during the hiring process. For example, Miranda based her decision on the stage of her career, declaring, "As a young professional, at the time I was in my late 20s I

think, I just was happy to be out of there and I was happy to be making more, so I just kinda didn't think about much else besides that." Avery was focused on the employment setting, asserting,

I didn't want to mess up this opportunity to get back in college athletics. And so, I was basically just . . . not pushing [the] envelope. I didn't want to, like, try really hard and then they turn me down and move on to the next.

Low Initial Offer (Negotiators). Many of our negotiating participants identified that an initial offer that did not align with their expectations led them to attempt the negotiation process. Erica succinctly addressed this, proclaiming that she negotiated "because the salary was low for the position."

Cost of Living (Negotiators). Our participants frequently brought up the cost of living of the area where their prospective employer would be located as one of the reasons they negotiated. Ellis did research before approaching negotiations and described,

And so, we took the cost of inflation and then multiplied that for my position and where I should be, and also with an admin[istrative] position, how that all wrapped up . . . I also was moving from a fairly large city but to an even more expensive city, so I did the cost-of-living calculator to determine the differences and what I knew I needed for the cost of living here.

Adele added, "You know, I knew what it took for me to be comfortable and not have to feel like I was living penny to penny every month."

Safety Net (Negotiators). Some of our participants indicated that the fact that they already had a job, or had multiple offers for jobs, made them feel more confident

Table 6. Additional Quotes for Reasons for Negotiating

Reason	Quote
Low initial offer	So, I had met with a mentor prior, like when I got the offer, was talking about the job and wasn't happy with the salary initially. (Ellis)
Cost of living	The initial salary that they presented, I did not feel as commensurate with my level of experience or the cost of living in the area and so I felt like I needed a little bit more to be able to live comfortably. (Adele) I do have horses and that's a large part of my life so things like looking at the cost of feed and the cost of vet care, those are things that you can usually calculate fairly easily. And then started looking at houses and rental opportunities and what I may have in terms of bills from that standpoint that just determined what I felt like it would take for me to people to live comfortably in and base my negotiation off of that. (Adele) Also living in a huge city, expensive city, there were certain things that like I had to make, right? So that was number 1. (Isobel)
Safety net	I had a job. Yeah. I had a job. I had it renewed for the next year if I wanted it to be. But jumped at an opportunity. (Ellis) Thankfully, I did and so I was, I felt confident enough because if that one didn't work out that I had others that I could have fallen back on, you know. (Isobel)
Known value	I just think I've gotten a better understanding of what my value is. You know, I, I'm kind of self-deprecating in a lot of ways, there's times where I've got some self-doubt, but I've, I've seen the work that I've done and how it's benefited the department, you know, and I've got a better sense of understanding . . . 10 of the working, you know, sad to say that I've been working in higher ed for pushing 20 years and I'm now back finally getting comfortable with my own place it in you know, what my role is and that I do have the respect of my colleagues and my superiors, that I'm a valued member in leading different committees are counseled on campus, that type of thing. So, I do think that my value is more than, than what I would kind of naturally believe it to be. (Owen) I was kinda like, I don't know, recruited is a strong word but recommended I guess would be more of the work to go to big-time [SEC] athlete trainer job. And it was like a dream job. And my interview, they flew me out there, blah, blah, and on my drive back, they're taking me by the end of the day, end of the interview and the guy who ultimately hire me hit like, "So you haven't asked me one question and it was a really important question," and I was like, "What are you talking about?" And he was like, "You didn't ask me how much the job pays." And . . . I'm thinking, "I don't think you're supposed to ask that on an interview and I'm like super super uncomfortable." This was a big-time job, you know. And, and I was like, "Oh, well," I said something along those lines, you know, "I didn't think it was really appropriate to ask." He's like . . . "What do you think you deserve" or something like that salary, why isn't it? Yeah, I was coming from \$29,000, you know, have a master's degree, working Division I, football and swimming by myself, like horrible. Okay. And that was negotiated up, you know. And I was like "\$40,000," you know. And he was he his response was, "Do you think you're worth that?" And I was like, stopped in my tracks because I never and he didn't say it in an a***** kind of way. He just literally bluntly said, "Do you think you're worth that?" and I was like, "Yes, yes, I do think I'm worth that." (Isobel)
Change in responsibilities/ title	I came from a school that is in the league, and I came as an associate athletic trainer to the head athletic trainer. (Tom) Um I think I think it was super positive for me, especially in staying with this role that I'm in. I was able to negotiate some different roles that I wanted to and advances in my career that I wanted to take. I was able to negotiate like supervising staff and getting a title change and being able to develop some new programming that like is led by me pretty much. So my new title is like Associate Director of Sports Medicine for Student-Athlete Wellness and I get to create my own wellness initiatives and kinda have free rein and in different ideas that we can bring to the student-athletes from outside of just your traditional athletic training. You know, I'm just worried about the injuries so that, that's definitely been a huge perk. Kind of reinvigorated me being in this position and wanting to stay here. (Owen)
Current financial circumstances	I think I was so tired of being broke that I didn't want to be in that in that situation again and move across the country essentially to be broke again. (Adele) So basically, at my personal was I can't make less than what I'm doing to pay off student loans and debt and housing and all that kind of stuff. (Ellis)

Abbreviation: SEC, Southeastern Conference.

in their ability to negotiate, as they had a safety net if the current position fell through. Adele said, "You know, I had other offers at the time . . . And I was feeling comfortable and willing to walk away from it at that point."

Known Value (Negotiators). Most of our participants pointed to their education and experiences when highlighting that they knew their worth, which motivated them to negotiate. Ellis stated, "So yeah, it was basically like, I knew what my worth in a position was, and what I could bring to the program."

Change in Responsibilities/Title (Negotiators). In a few instances, negotiating participants indicated that the job that they were hoping to secure involved increased

expectations relative to job responsibilities or job title, and that was why they chose to negotiate. Maggie described an increase in administrative duties within her academic institution,

Yeah, and the nature of the position that I was accepting was different than what I had been in and so it had increased. I was going from a program director within a department to being a program director and department chair. We were our own department and that makes I think people think that that's, those roles are the same but they're not at all. And so the responsibilities were increased, the contract length was increased, and so I knew my salary needed to be higher.

Table 7. Additional Quotes for Negotiation Influencers and Deterrents

Influence or Deterrent	Quote
Negotiators	
Support system	<p>... Not really colleagues, but definitely family and stuff. Discussing with them the offers and the salary and stuff and, you know, doing a comparison on especially going from a traditional setting to a clinical setting, you know, the different lifestyle and hours and stuff and working that out. Make the right decision for me and also make sure that I was getting compensated for the work that was being done. (Nick)</p> <p>Nothing formal and nothing informal other than talking to, asking advice from people that have negotiated before. But I've never sought out a home course, I've never sought out a YouTube video. I've never sought out, uh, you know, it's all been just either what I've gathered in my time working in different places and or talking with other people that either conduct salary negotiations for those that have negotiated previously, just having conversations with what's the best way to do this. (Preston)</p>
Training/education	<p>Formal, definitely not. Informal, I can't remember if in undergrad, in undergrad we might have done as part of like the intro to athletic training class. I actually think we might have done a unit on salary and benefits and I think there was information in there about how to negotiate, but it wasn't anything like no mock interviews or anything like that unless you asked for it. (Tom)</p> <p>My first job out of college, I worked at the clinic in [City, State]. And again, the first job you get, you're like, "Okay, I'll take money. You can give me work; you give me money." But I was there for three years and my third year, it was ... it was ... there's big turnover at that clinic because the wages are so low and they were trying to keep some of us around that were doing better. And they wanted to help grow the clinic. So, they came to me, offer me a promotion but with very little wage increase, salary increase. So, I was able to kind of go back and forth a little bit there. But that was the head of the athletic [trainers], but at my clinic was another athletic trainer who he had a really good rapport with, so, he was kind of able to guide me in a way that would help me get that salary increase without it because I didn't know what to do, honestly. And he is just kind of like here, this is what you need to say to [supervisor]. So that's your experience, which I pulled down a little bit too, but it was a different circumstance other than being offered a promotion. I was trying to get in the door with a higher salary. (Teddy)</p>
Nonnegotiators	
Individuals involved in the negotiation process	<p>The dean at the time, I don't know, this is more of just reading into the way that she came across. It almost seemed like she was pleased about the amount that she could offer. Like, maybe she had talked to HR and the provost and "Hey, this guy is going to help us out. He probably will be here for a while." But she had a really, a real talent for reading people and being insightful and kinda making predictions, I guess to go along with your theme of logistic regression. But she was really good, and for some reason we just kinda hit it off. I mean, we had a fantastic relationship that was kind of more one as she saw me as somebody that was kind of like a son or maybe a nephew or something, I don't know. But she seemed like, you know, that the offer was such that they didn't always put everybody at the top range within the rank and give them credit for experience. So I just, I didn't ask, but I kind of, there was something in her voice that suggested that maybe this is the offer you ought to take. (Richard)</p> <p>So at my last job, my supervisor was around the same age as me. We graduated, I know this because we graduated the same year from our undergrad[uate program] and when I found out that she made the same that I made and I was an assistant and she was the head, I knew like, I knew that all the rumors and everything that everyone has said about the profession was true unfortunately, and we were just paid based on what age we were when we were hired. And she was hired the year before I was and then she eventually had stepped into the head role when former head left. So, and then she also told me, she said, "Yeah, they gave me the head title, but I didn't negotiate a salary and that was wrong, and I should have done it." So like her and I were like one and the same when we're making the same amount of money but the way I looked at it was she was the head of the room but I was the head of football. So based on the injury risk and all the hours and travel and how much, how important it was that I was in that position, I kind of took it a little bit as a compliment, but also like for her and to look at the administration there and be like, "Yeah, well, it isn't right that we're getting the same amount." So I think in retrospect too, with the way she managed me as a strong B-type personality female. She didn't like it if I went above her head to go to the AD to negotiate. So that deterred me from doing it too, because in her mind, she was supposed to be the one that was negotiating salaries for all of us including her and all her assistants, which I fell under that category. So, I think that was another reason at my last job that I didn't negotiate up higher and why I ultimately left because it just didn't seem fair. (Miranda)</p>
Poor/inadequate advice	<p>They didn't go into detail as to what you would base your counter-offers on, but they just simply kind of alluded that you can negotiate, that you don't have to take the initial offer. (Richard)</p> <p>I mean, at my last job we just kinda complained about it as a group, but we never really did anything about it. And before that, I worked at a job where when I was looking to leave and asking current coworkers for references, someone told me at that last job she said, "Look, I worked here for 10 years. I didn't get one raise. They just have a flat fee for coaches. This is what I made. I could make extra if I helped out in the summer at the fitness center to like be a pool supervisor or whatever, but that that's what this job is." And I think unfortunately a lot of the college setting, maybe a lot of schools are just at that, you know, stagnant level where it's like this is your position and this is what the pay is. And if you don't like it, then don't take it. (Miranda)</p>
No previous experience, training, or education	<p>They sure didn't give me any advice or any help in that way at all. (April)</p> <p>[Colleague] who was the physical therapist there, he helped me make like a little manuscript to call and say, "Hey, I would love to accept this position, but I need this, this, and this." And so that was the extent of the training that I got. But it wasn't because like they gave me any indications that I couldn't negotiate. It was more for myself being a little bit uncomfortable to do so. (Adison)</p>

Abbreviations: AD, athletic director; HR, human resources.

Table 8. Additional Quotes for Experiences Negotiating and Impact of Not Negotiating

	Quote
Experiences negotiating	
Previous experience negotiating	<p>I've always negotiated, so in every job I've ever had as an athletic trainer, I've always negotiated something. Whether it be like I lived in a dorm so dorm responsibility versus weekend duty, stuff like that so I've always negotiated, so this was not my first time. (Tom)</p> <p>I have negotiated on every, I mean, literally even from my very first internship. First job out of undergrad, I negotiated then. So I have negotiated literally every single full-time position or part-time and full-time position I have except for my graduate assistantship. And I've been athlete trainer for 14 and a half years, so, so I guess just experience. (Isobel)</p>
Employer reactions	<p>I've had negative interactions there, but with my employers no. Positive, yeah. I mean, especially in this instance, he said that he was happy, hired me, said I went about it the right way. He was glad I advocated and things of that nature. I don't know if it actually had an impact on our relationship to this day but we've always had a good relationship and, you know, the—a lot of people in my position have, you know, no relationship with the head of school at all and I talked to him frequently and he's pulled me in, you know, admin committees and things of that nature so maybe that helped, I don't know. (Tom)</p> <p>So with my current employer, I think it was received really well. They were trying not to lose me so I think they were open in negotiating and trying to make it fair for everyone. (Arizona)</p>
Successes and regrets	<p>I mean, I don't know really why I started negotiating. I think my first my internship was a \$9000 internship, 10 month, whatever. And I got them up to 11, you know. So, but I had other offers and so I felt like I had a little bit of because of the competitive nature of it, I decided to negotiate because I felt like I could and then I just kind of kept doing that. (Isobel)</p> <p>Obviously, once you get into roles, you know, once you're hired and you go through and serving on a search committee and seeing what other candidates. There's definitely been times when I've been in on a search committee where I've listened to the applicant that we are interviewing or have offered to you and have them come back with some pretty significant demands. And I'm thinking, boy. I didn't even think about asking for startup cost for equipment or anything like that. (Owen)</p>
Impact of not negotiating	
Low salary	<p>I had no idea that when I moved from [region, State 1] to the suburbs of [State 2] that I was going to lose my shirt . . . I had no idea. I was living really well down in [State 1]. I was banking money. And then I get to [State 2] and after my first year I'm living alone in a studio apartment and I said to my parents, "I can't make it." And so I started rooming with people and had roommates and changed apartments or living conditions about every year. For 5 years I was there, I lived in 6 different places trying to decrease my cost of living . . . (April)</p>
Long-term consequences/financial struggles	<p>My workload increased but my pay never changed and like I said, they actually took it away at one point or reduced it. And so I think the fact that I, I started to get bitter, that I didn't push for more with how much, how I end up being treated. And knowing that there wasn't any end in sight, like it wasn't like I could all of a sudden like okay, no, I'm not doing this anymore like, you can take these off the table because you only pay me this much. Expectation had already been set and I also knew that they weren't gonna pay me more anytime soon because they're trying to get more staff athletic trainers, not pay more those that were there. So probably just led me to be bitter. (Avery)</p> <p>I think the decision to, or the lack of negotiation, in my [University] salary really didn't necessarily hurt me or make me super uncomfortable or those kinds of things because I ended up being fine. But like, I think I could have been happier and more comfortable, especially like me, myself, as a single person, I was fine. But then all my coworkers are complaining all the time about their salaries and those kinds of things. And I think if we as a whole, and I'm not trying to put words in their mouth either, but like had negotiated or if we had an employer, a boss, who would negotiate to our employer for us that we need more than a super base level salary, then maybe we all would have been happier as a department kind of thing. So it's less of a negative impact on myself, but like hearing my coworkers complain about salary all the time was a negative impact. (Adison)</p>
Regret	<p>Oh, [I] definitely wish I negotiated my salary. I was just so naive then I wanted so badly to get out of one job and into another. (April)</p> <p>Hindsight is 20/20 and it was a little less comfortable than I thought, mostly because housing there is so expensive. (Adison)</p>
None	<p>I don't really think that there was much of an impact because I still don't think coming in I would have, like I said, it was higher than where I had planned and it was better than the institution that I was at previously that I needed that they needed to get out of anyway. (Meredith)</p> <p>When I left that last job and I told the football coaches I was working with that I would be making more money and only working 10 months, they all understood and they said, yeah, like we'll help you pack. (Miranda)</p>

Low Benefits Package (Negotiators). Although this was a variant response, a few participants indicated that the low benefits package of their position motivated them to negotiate higher salaries to compensate for the increased burden of paying for benefits themselves. Owen detailed how transitioning from a state university with state benefits to a private university made him consider the value of the benefits package:

Yeah so, I was leaving a state university to [go to] a private university and a lot of it came down to the benefits of a, of a large state university system with health care. Dental, vision was much cheaper from a premium standpoint than what I would be going into as far as looking at not just the premiums, but deductible prescription plan, the eye and dental, we're pretty much a wash but the health care premium . . . But just looking at evenly, even the

retirement contribution was significantly less than what the state system offers. And being in [State], if you have any history with [State], that's a constant topic and in the press about how lucrative the state retirement system is in [State].

Arizona balked during the hiring process when employers tried to describe the benefits package misleadingly, saying,

And then also like the benefits package was significantly different. At my current position, I have like an 8% retirement match and this new role, there's going to be a 0.5%. So I, yeah, what was even better about it is that they listed it as 50% of 1% of your salary and I was like just say that's the 0.5%, like stop trying to make it sound fancy.

Current Financial Circumstances (Negotiators). Some of the participants who did negotiate pointed to their current financial circumstances as the reason they were motivated to negotiate their salary. Stephanie indicated that student loan amounts contributed to her need to negotiate, stating,

We also took into account that I have student loans and I was in school, and what did I need to be able to live? Then I would go, "You know what, I need to be able to live comfortably and start building some savings," because I was so young out in my career.

Student loans and other financial circumstances, including their current savings, prompted some participants to negotiate salary.

Overall, our participants had varying reasons for negotiating or not during the hiring process. Both negotiators and nonnegotiators had situational factors that influenced these decisions. Still, nonnegotiators tended to either be unaware of negotiation as an option or felt that the offer was fair enough to accept. Negotiators seemed to rely upon external data or motivating factors to justify their reasons for negotiating.

Negotiation Influencers/Deterrents

Individuals Involved in the Negotiation Process (Nonnegotiators). For nonnegotiators, there were scenarios during the hiring process that involved other people that ultimately deterred them from attempting to negotiate. This was more commonly described when the person on behalf of the prospective employer was known to the prospective employee. For example, Addison described a situation in which they were uncomfortable approaching their supervisor to ask for more money,

I was kind of shy to actually ask for more money. Like, that's a hard thing to do especially coming into this new position—me knowing and having experience with my boss, like knowing him when I was a student and knowing him as a resident, and like I've known this man for 10 years and being like, and he's kind of the scary dad figure of my department. It's like, "Man, I need to go ask Dad for more money?" Like that's not . . . That's uncomfortable. That's a hard thing to do.

No Previous Experience, Training, or Education (Nonnegotiators). Our nonnegotiating participants indicated they had no negotiating experience, which deterred them from attempting to do so. Miranda stated that she had been taught about negotiation but had no applicable practice in doing so, declaring, "I mean, they talked about it in school, but we really didn't practice it." When asked why he did not negotiate, George said, "If I had more training, or if I had more experience with it [negotiating] and, you know, that might change the answer."

Similarly, nonnegotiators described the lack of training or education as a deterrent to negotiating. Katherine recalled, "... But at the pay side of it, it was nothing that I ever was taught. It was a side that we didn't see when we were in school." Similarly, Meredith remembered,

I didn't really have any. I feel like we talked about it a little bit in graduate school, but it was never, it was this is what you should be. At one point I remember somebody saying this is what you should be making in your first position coming out of graduate school, the PhD. But it was never taught or explained like how to get to that point if they offer you less, and some of it was like well just say no, well, I need a job, right? So, like, and if they're close, how do you, we were never taught how to make that ask to go, to go higher. I think that we did a lot of prep[aration], even just with each other, on like job interview questions, but never like once you're offered how to take the next step. So I wasn't really prepped on that at all.

Poor/Inadequate Advice Received (Nonnegotiators). Some of our nonnegotiating participants acknowledged that they may not have received great advice in their education or professional mentoring. April recalled,

I had gone to grad school at [University] and [Colleague] was my advisor but [Colleague] really was my advisor. And they really, they really laid it out. They said if you want to be an athletic trainer you're not going to get rich. So if you really want to do this, you're going to struggle economically. If you want to be rich, go get a master's in something else. So I just figured I could do it. That's all the training I . . . was accept the fact that your salary is going to be low.

Support System (Negotiators). Conversely, our negotiating participants emphasized the support systems, in the form of family, mentors, or peers, that guided their decision to negotiate their salary. For example, Owen described how his support system was inside his home:

I have the benefit of having a wife that is in the financial planning world and helps me understand a lot more than I typically do about not just salary, but you know that the other factors that go into a compensation package and so we, we sat down together and kind of put, put the numbers out on the table.

Training/Education (Negotiators). Rarely did our negotiating participants acknowledge some salary discussion in their formal training or education. Ellis recalled some level of education in this area, saying, "We had it as part of the

concentration in my PhD, we had that in a course that I took. So it was kind of formal through that education point.”

Overall, our participants had many reasons for negotiating or not negotiating. Mostly, they attempted to support those decisions with data from publicly available sources or privately accessed data. Nonnegotiators cited more external deterrents to negotiation, and negotiators highlighted their support network and, in some cases, past training that allowed them to feel comfortable approaching negotiations.

Experiences Negotiating/Impact of Not Negotiating

Previous Experiences Negotiating (Negotiators). Almost all negotiators in our study indicated they had attempted negotiation in the past before attempting to negotiate their current position. Most negotiators indicated that they had had no formal training in negotiation before attempting negotiation for their current position, indicating that they based their negotiations on past experiences they had personally had. Preston shared, “I felt like I was pretty well prepared just because I’ve done it before . . . I gained experience on the fly and gained confidence in how to do it.” Several respondents indicated that their past experiences also included preparing to negotiate, and that had increased their comfort level when initiating negotiations.

Employer Reactions (Negotiators). Negotiators discussed both positive and negative reactions from potential employers when attempting to negotiate. Several participants said that during negotiations they felt confident the employer was interested in hiring them for the position, which made them more comfortable negotiating. Others expressed that once they had shared their desired terms of employment, the employer maintained a supportive and collaborative disposition. Christina shared,

In addition to some moving expenses and an increase in salary, I asked for a little bit more than she said her maximum was . . . and then the next day, calls back and says, “Okay, well, this is the max I can go to . . . but we can do everything else,” and so I said “Okay, that sounds good.” She was super supportive and she was like, “I wish I could give you more.”

Occasionally participants indicated that their employer provided positive reinforcement after accepting the position, commending them on their professionalism in the negotiation process.

Alternatively, some participants dealt with a negative response from their employer. Adele stated,

I do think that my initial asking being that firm that it did leave a bad taste in some people’s mouths here . . . But again, I was sick of being broke and I had started to learn my worth . . . there have been comments made about money, both from him [the dean] and some other people of you know, “You were really brave and that was really bold.” I just didn’t get the vibe of those were meant in a positive way.

Participants also shared that in some settings, there were inherent limitations in the hiring classification or structure of the department that limited the ability to negotiate.

Successes and Regrets (Negotiators). For ATs who did attempt to negotiate their salary, many expressed some level of

success in their negotiation. Ellis stated, “They gave me exactly what I asked for.” Although she was successful, she expressed some regret about not being more assertive in salary negotiations, sharing, “I always wonder how much more aggressive I could have gone before they would’ve been like, ‘Pump the brakes.’” A common sentiment among many negotiators was regret for not attempting to negotiate additional terms of employment in addition to salary. Erica shared,

I thought I knew how to negotiate and then kind of started the job and realized there are all these other things in addition to start-up, travel, CEU [continuing education unit] money, all those things. I didn’t know I could negotiate.

Several negotiators indicated they wished they had been more confident or more prepared and less afraid to ask for what they really wanted.

Long-Term Financial Consequences (Nonnegotiators). Although this response was rare, 1 participant who did not attempt negotiation expressed that her desire to be in a specific location resulted in choosing not to attempt to negotiate and that ultimately resulted in a low salary. April explained,

I just really wanted those jobs and I believed that I could survive on very little money, which is what I got. I took the jobs not realizing that one of them would lead me into a really low-income situation. So it was about the desire to have the job. And then with [University], it was the desire to get back to [State] and that job was the best job.

Starting a career with a low salary can have long-term impacts on an employee’s earning potential, and our participants highlighted that their lack of negotiation had done just that. George shared, “I’ve practiced for 10 years and I never got over 40 [\$40 000] where I was.” Another long-term consequence nonnegotiators described was “bitterness” and low morale in the workplace, not just for themselves, but among all AT staff, who perceived they were not being compensated fairly. Addison explained,

I think I could have been happier and more comfortable . . . All my coworkers are complaining all the time about their salaries and those kind of things . . . If we had an employer, a boss who would negotiate to our employer for us that we need more than a super base-level salary, then maybe we all would have been happier as a department kind of thing. So, it’s less of a negative impact on myself, but like hearing my coworkers complain about salary all the time was a negative impact.

Some nonnegotiators also feared their reputation might have been compromised in their new role if they had attempted to negotiate, indicating concerns about being resented or “labeled” for attempting to negotiate.

Regret (Nonnegotiators). Nearly all participants who did not attempt to negotiate expressed regret about their decision. Miranda shared,

Maybe I should’ve negotiated my salary a little bit more with that first opportunity because I know from talking to a coworker who was hired after me, she did negotiate her salary a little bit and she got paid a little bit more at the start.

Several nonnegotiators also indicated that they had underestimated the cost of living, which led to regret about not negotiating a more livable wage.

None (Nonnegotiators). A few participants indicated that they had not perceived any negative effects from their decision to not attempt negotiation. Katherine stated, “No, I have had no problems,” and Richard simply responded by saying, “Well, I’m still here.”

DISCUSSION

To address the historically abysmal salaries of ATs through salary negotiation practices, we must first understand the perspectives of those who do and do not negotiate during the hiring process. Our findings highlight the data needed for participants to identify an appropriate salary range for the position they seek, the motivations behind whether to negotiate, and how some external factors can encourage or deter a prospective employee’s negotiation attempts. Athletic trainers who attempted to negotiate salary reported feeling happy about their successful negotiation and expressed regret for not having attempted negotiation of other terms of employment in addition to salary. Nonnegotiators reported regret and negative long-term consequences from their decision not to attempt negotiation.

Notably, many of our nonnegotiating participants indicated that the offer they received was higher than what they had hoped for or expected, so they accepted outright. This confirms previous research in athletic training and other professions that suggests that most people who do not negotiate choose that approach because they feel that the offer they received was fair.^{1,10,11} In medicine, researchers suggest that this approach, while assuring that you will likely receive the lowest amount the employer is willing to pay for the position, could be particularly harmful to women or non-White applicants, populations that already face wage gaps in the employment marketplace.¹² All prospective employees should gather as much data as possible to fully understand their relative employment value as they enter into negotiations.

Our study’s findings emphasize that both negotiators and nonnegotiators rely on data from various sources to determine whether the offer is fair or appropriate or to convince prospective employers of their value. Interestingly, several of our participants indicated not relying on the NATA’s salary survey for this purpose either because it is not current or updated frequently enough to be relevant or because it is not specific enough to their job responsibilities or personal characteristics. One important finding relative to privately available data, such as in the case of the salary survey, is the lack of public access to it.

For instance, for the NATA’s salary survey, the website requires membership to access the search feature that allows specific input, such as gender, highest degree earned, or job title, to achieve specificity in results.¹³ Similarly, as participants described private surveys conducted within their athletic leagues or high school associations, these data are not available to those outside the organization, making it difficult for prospective employees entering the district or organization to view and consider this information when attempting negotiations. Business journals and websites recommend contacting people in positions who know the data to obtain private information relative to salary amounts.^{14,15} This might include

reaching out to current or former employees of the organization or contacting peers to the position being sought,¹⁴ such as other ATs in the athletic league or from peer institutions or organizations in the same geographic area.

Publicly available information for employees in the public sector, such as federal positions or within state-funded educational institutions such as public secondary schools or universities, is more readily available and thus easier to access. This is partly due to tax codes that require nonprofit entities to release salary information, although some effort may be required to find this information. In some cases, the publishers may charge interested parties to access it.^{14,16} The Bureau of Labor Statistics also provides public information about specific jobs, including ATs.¹⁷ As of May 2022, additional geographic details were added to make the data provided more location specific to interested parties.^{14,17} Lastly, employment websites such as Glassdoor or Payscale⁹ can provide searchable ways to determine appropriate salary amounts for positions in specific geographic locations.^{14,18–20} It is also important to note that, along with publicly available salary information, our participants relied on public data to understand the cost of living in the geographic region of the position.

Once prospective employees have secured the data needed to support their requests, they will need to engage in discussions with the prospective employer to discuss the data they have to support their requests for salary or benefits. Our nonnegotiating participants identified a lack of knowledge of or experience with negotiating as part of the reasons they did not negotiate, and our negotiating participants often identified the opposite. The lack of knowledge or confidence in negotiations has been identified previously in other health care professions.²¹ Although ideally, salary and benefits negotiation would eventually be covered in professional education, current ATs can prepare themselves for these experiences independently and potentially role-play the negotiation conversations with a trusted individual in their lives. Specific to the strategies that should be employed to support salary and other negotiable contract requests, the *Harvard Business Review* and *Medical Economics* have recommendations that can assist in this process. First and foremost, individuals should take the time to consider the entire offer.^{12,15} Salary negotiation and job negotiation are not synonymous terms, and although salary is frequently the most significant consideration, other job factors will ultimately affect job satisfaction.^{12,15} The *Harvard Business Review* explicitly identifies the need to negotiate all items of importance associated with a job offer at one time, as opposed to serially, in fairness to the prospective employer, but also emphasizes that prospective employees should make clear which items are most important.¹⁵

Our nonnegotiating participants also highlighted concerns over the people involved in the negotiation, fearing the interaction would sour a future working relationship. Negotiation experts suggest tackling negotiations differently depending on who is conducting the negotiations on the employer’s part. When negotiating with human resources, they may be less emotionally or professionally invested in ensuring the offer meets your expectations to get you to accept the position; therefore, a more objective and data-driven approach may be more successful.¹⁵ Conversely, a more personal appeal is warranted when negotiating with a prospective supervisor.²⁰ Still highlighting data, prospective employees are encouraged to justify requests. Experts suggest that this type of negotiation

requires the employee to balance being likable and avoiding sounding arrogant or demanding while ensuring priority needs are met.^{15,22}

Negotiators relied on their past experiences in negotiating to guide their negotiations, which was poignant given that both negotiators and nonnegotiators identified that they never received formal training on salary negotiation. Essentially, our findings highlight that currently in the field of athletic training, the only training that the majority of ATs experience in salary negotiation is the experiential training of attempting to do so, and once they have attempted negotiations, they are more likely to do so in the future. This finding is supported by the limited literature in athletic training, in which ATs were more likely to attempt to negotiate and were more successful in negotiations, if they had more experience with past employment hiring processes.¹ One remedy for this would be the inclusion of negotiation strategies within educational curricula to prepare new graduates for the negotiation process. Other health care education programs may include content specific to the financial management of a practice setting, such as billing and third-party reimbursement,^{23,24} but none require the instruction of negotiation tactics during the hiring process.^{23,25,26}

Another way to broadly address this across the profession would be to offer continuing education opportunities to improve ATs' knowledge and comfort with the negotiation process. Our participants from both groups indicated that they desired additional training as a resource that would benefit them in this process. Athletic trainers typically prefer hands-on or professional networking types of continuing education,²⁷ so a learning laboratory to practice actual negotiation skills with an experienced partner or a panel discussion with novice and experienced negotiators would likely be the best approach. Ideally, if negotiation strategies were taught in entry-level education and broadly disseminated to current ATs through continuing education, this would address this desired resource and increase comfort with the negotiation process for both new graduates and seasoned professionals.

Some participants indicated that the structure and hierarchy of the department they would be working in made a fair salary unavailable to them because their prospective employer would not hire a new AT at a salary that is higher than that of existing employees. These comments highlight the problem of salary inversion in our profession. *Salary inversion* is when salaries of newly hired employees are higher than salaries of current employees despite the current employees having more skills and experience.²⁸ This often results from changes in inflation and cost of living over time. To avoid salary inversion, either employers can refuse negotiation offers that allow a new hire to be paid more than existing employees, or they must assume an advocacy role in which they leverage new-hire negotiations to promote salary equity adjustments across an entire body of employees.²⁹

During the process of negotiating salary, negotiators experienced varied reactions from their employer, some negative and some positive. Interestingly, only women described negative responses from employers during or after the negotiation process; the men had only positive interactions when negotiating. Previous research has demonstrated that men and women are approaching equal likelihood of initiating negotiations, closing a decades-long

gender gap in which women were less likely to attempt to negotiate when being hired, which is also true in athletic training.^{1,30,31} Unfortunately, despite planning to negotiate and attempting to do so, women are less successful than men at achieving their desired negotiated outcome and are also more likely to be viewed negatively after negotiations.^{1,32,33} Researchers have determined that despite women planning specific strategies to employ during negotiations, they are more likely to experience discomfort, anxiety, and fear of judgment during the process and therefore revert to a less assertive approach and acquiesce to subsequent counteroffers more readily.^{1,34–36} Although some of our participants experienced positive interactions during negotiations, the gender disparity in this aspect of negotiations persists. This highlights a need for more opportunities for women to engage in professional development that incorporates experiential training in negotiation tactics.

Nonnegotiators who participated in our study described the impacts of not negotiating, which primarily influenced their financial well-being. This perception is validated by many financial experts. In an interview with National Public Radio, Linda Babcock, professor and economist at Carnegie Mellon University, stated,

I tell my graduate students that by not negotiating their job at the beginning of their career, they're leaving anywhere between \$1 million and \$1.5 million on the table in lost earnings over their lifetime.³⁷

This is because most employers provide raises as a percentage of an employee's existing salary, so starting at lower salary results in compounding earnings losses across the career lifespan.³⁸ To emphasize the impact of this finding, our nonnegotiating participants did not highlight any successes during our interviews with them, expressing only regret at not attempting to negotiate when they had the chance to do so. Conversely, negotiators highlighted many successes in negotiations, and the regrets that were primarily expressed among this group were that they did not negotiate for more.

Another interesting finding from our participants is that those who did negotiate often identified the existence of other offers or their current job that provided a safety net as giving them the confidence to negotiate, knowing that a backup existed. Conversely, nonnegotiators sometimes indicated that desperation for the position or fear of not having a job at all reduced their desire to negotiate for fear of losing the opportunity altogether. In this case, negotiators appear to have the correct approach. Experts recommend seeking alternative job options to ensure having multiple choices to select from^{11,15,39} and further encourage job seekers to disclose their alternative options during the salary negotiation process.^{11,15} These same experts also indicate that prospective employees have little to fear relative to losing a job due to negotiating but caution that jobs can be lost based on how negotiations are conducted.^{11,15,20} Negotiators should avoid ultimatums, threats, or other aggressive approaches to negotiation, as these will likely result in the rescindment of potential offers, not because more money was asked for, but because the approach turned the employer off to the prospective employee.^{12,15} Those who approach negotiation professionally face very

little chance of losing a job offer and increase their likelihood of a successful negotiation.^{12,15}

Limitations and Future Research

Like all studies, ours is not without limitations. Our interviews relied on honest responses from participants to drive the findings of this study. Additionally, our study focused on the prospective employees' perceptions of negotiations during the hiring process, and our findings were not corroborated by their prospective employers. Future researchers should examine the experience of employers in determining salary for ATs and consider employers' perceptions during the hiring process. Additionally, researchers should aim to explore the importance and benefits of negotiating terms of employment, such as medical insurance packages, retirement benefits, stipends, or contributions toward other professional expenses, including liability insurance, professional organization membership, or professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of whether they negotiated, our participants relied on various data types to determine what salary was appropriate for the position they sought. Reasons for negotiating circled the known value of the participant, the cost of living in the area the job was located, the expectations of the offer, and the current circumstances of the prospective employee, including current financial and employment circumstances. Reasons for not negotiating often included participants' fear of not knowing how to negotiate, fear of losing the job offer, or fear of offending the person with whom they would have to negotiate and then later work. Given the potential for a lack of experience or confidence to deter an AT from negotiating, additional efforts to prepare ATs to negotiate are warranted. Professional athletic training program educators should consider including the concept of negotiation within content directed toward graduating ATs' preparations to join the employment market. For seasoned ATs, continuing education providers should consider this a topic worthy of consideration for delivering to their stakeholders. Athletic trainers need to gather appropriate data to empower themselves in negotiating salary needs and desires. Before negotiating, they should prioritize their needs and wants, practice the negotiating process, and adjust their negotiation tactics to the person they will be negotiating with.

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