



University of Utah
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNAL

THE ROLE OF TEAM SELECTION IN COMPETITION PREFERENCES GENDER GAP

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Introduction

Women are statistically underrepresented in high-profile leadership positions. Female underrepresentation in teams and leadership roles has been attested to an observed reluctance to compete when compared to men (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011). Reduced female competition has been attributed to male overconfidence and risk tolerance. An idea raised by Niederle & Vesterlund (2007), is that girls are ‘nurtured’ differently than boys such that in professional life women shy away from competition. Niederle & Vesterlund observed child games and parental teachings as a source of competitive differences. This theory provides a social explanation in a historical context, but it doesn’t explain a persistent difference that is consistently observed in competition. The purpose of this study is to inquire into the potential existence of a gender bias in team selection which would, overtime, compound to discourage women from participating in competition with a selective outcome. Research exists that shows women opt to participate in co-operative team environments (Kuhn & Villeval, 2011, Healey & Pate, 2011). However, while women prefer to participate in cooperative environments their competitive aversion leads to under representation in leadership team compositions. Checchi, Cicognani & Kulic (2015) found that gender quotas work as an affirmative solution to alleviate male dominated selection committees. And while direct quotas will help composition, it is important to identify the root cause that deters females from entering competitive environments. The goal of this study is to examine if a negative gender bias exists that deters women from competition due to a historically learned disadvantage, even if their performance is equal to or superior to their male counterparts.

Method

Study Design

The study was composed of a participant based study that was performed at the David Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah. The sample was composed primarily of undergraduate and graduate business students. The study was completed with 12 participants. Every participant completed an online game consisting of two sections of timed two digit summation questions and a nametag selection step. After participants completed the math sections they were allowed to choose an alias between four names such as Matt, Mark, Megan, and Mia, where half are generally interpreted as male names and the other as female names. After participants select an alias their scores are sent to four randomly chosen ‘selectors’ from the room of 12 participants. The selectors are instructed to choose a team member between two participant aliases and their score from the first math task. After the selectors have made a series of decisions between all participants a random round is selected and used to calculate the payoff for the subjects participation in the experiment. The final payoff is a function of the participants score from the second math task and their status on a team.

Data Collection and Analysis

Once participants have completed the game a matrix is produced that links participants to their alias, scores, and round playoffs. Analysis is completed by observing the selection frequency of gender defined aliases and their respective scores.

Results

One pilot study was successfully completed with the outlined method. Without meaningful data no conclusions can be drawn about the hypothesis. However, the success of the pilot study demonstrates the feasibility of the study and proves that data can be collected in future studies.

References

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