

Girls will be Boys: Gender, Beliefs and Selection in the Field

David Huffman, Collin B Raymond and Julia Shvets

Extended abstract

Growing evidence from, predominantly, laboratory experiments supports the view that women, compared to men, have a greater dislike for competitive environments and sometimes underperform in such settings. This literature typically points at differences in risk attitudes, confidence and dislike of competition as potential explanations.

We try to understand this further by looking at what happens in the field. We analyse a group of store managers who work for a firm with a highly competitive, high powered incentive scheme, which involves public circulation of league tables on a weekly basis, and quarterly gatherings to celebrate the winners. For our analysis, we combine historical data from the firm with a series of lab-in-the-field experiments with the managers.

In contrast with existing evidence, we find that women are not put off by the highly competitive nature of the firm's incentive scheme. Indeed, 60% of the firm's managers are women. Furthermore, when we analyse historical data from the firm, we find no differences in performance of men and women (Figure 1) or in retention. When we ask the managers to make incentivised predictions about their performance in the firm's next quarterly competition, as a group they reveal themselves to be overconfident. However, again, there are no gender differences (Figure 2). We also see no gender differences in the managers' risk-aversion, general confidence and job satisfaction.

These results demonstrate that women can be attracted in large numbers to competitive jobs and, once there, perform similarly to men, and have similar attitudes. One obvious explanation is that certain types of women self-select themselves into our firm. We show, however, that this cannot be the full story. We find a striking contrast between on-the-job results and behaviour of the

Figure 1: No gender difference in performance on the job

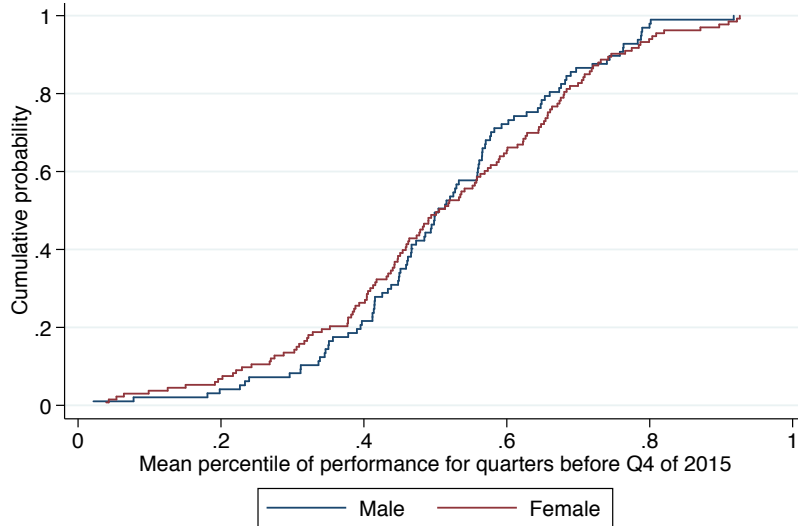
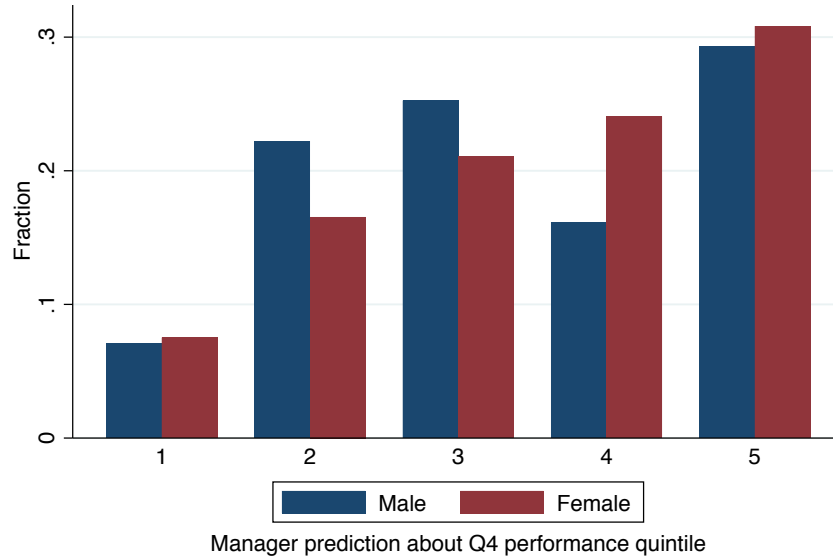
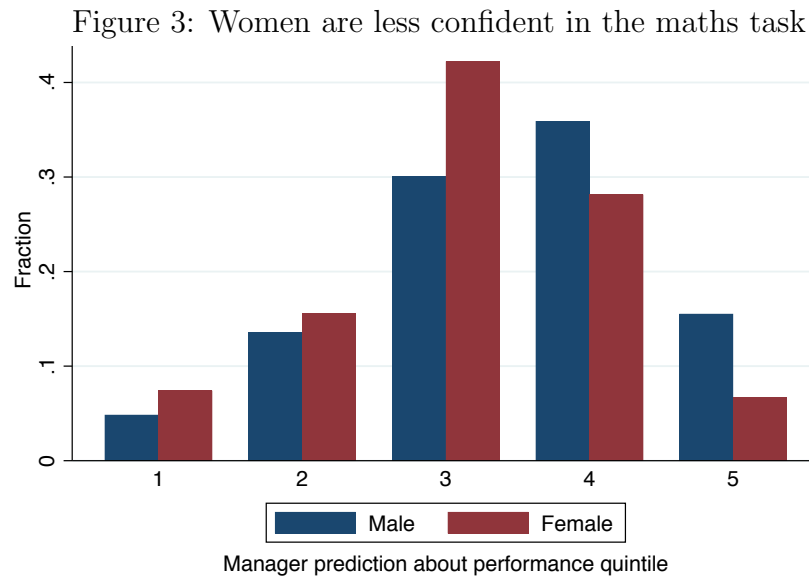


Figure 2: No gender difference in confidence about the job



same female managers in the lab, when we ask them to engage in a maths task, using Niederle and Versterlund (2007) design. We find that female managers who showed themselves to be confident and competitive in their job, nevertheless are significantly less willing to enter a competition in the maths task

than men: whilst nearly 1/2 of male managers opt for competition, for female managers this fraction is 1/3. Furthermore, the women are significantly less confident than men in their relative performance in the maths task (see their predictions in Figure 3), despite the fact that there are no gender differences in the actual performance in this task.



Taken together our findings show that competitive incentive schemes in the workplace do not necessarily imply gender differences in behaviour and attitudes. However, the simple self-selection argument cannot be the full story: we find that the nature of the task matters, and although gender differences may not be present in one domain, they may persist in other domains.