GENDER GAPS IN PROMOTION: Evidence from French economics departments

Women apply for promotion less often than men, according to new research by Clément Bosquet of the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP). His study with Pierre-Philippe Combes and Cecilia García-Peñalosa, which is forthcoming in the Scandinavian Journal of Economics, analyses the promotion gap between men and women among academic economists in France. The results show that:

- In any given year, women are less likely to be candidates for promotion, with the probability of applying for promotion 50% lower for women than for men.
- This gap is only partially explained by differences in academic productivity, which implies that women apply less often than men even with similar academic CVs.
- Women are also less likely to be promoted conditional on being a candidate, although this gap is small.
- Overall, the promotion rate of women is driven by differences in research quantity and a lower propensity to apply on the part of female economists, with the latter accounting for between 50% and 76% of the promotion gap.

Noting that women account for 26% of academic economists but only 13% of full professors, the researchers try to understand some of the reasons for this gap.

In France, promotions to senior positions in academia take place through national contests rather than being the decisions of individual departments. As a result, data are available on who applied for promotion and who was promoted, as well as on the whole pool of junior economists who were potential candidates for promotion.

To examine how differences at the two stages affect the observed overall promotion gap, the researchers use data for two types of contests over the period 1992 and 2008, analysing the gender gap in promotion in terms of both the likelihood of applying for promotion and the likelihood of being promoted conditional on applying.

The data include individual characteristics such as age, gender, department, type of position held and, crucially, academic productivity measured by the quantity and quality of publications. Female potential candidates have fewer publications than men, but the two groups do not differ in terms of the quality of their research output.

Potential mechanisms

Having data on the two types of contests, which have different requirements in terms of both what is involved during the contest and on promotion, makes it possible to examine potential explanations for these results.

The authors find no evidence that the application gap is due to a higher cost of promotion for women nor to women having a different trade-off between wages and department prestige than men.

They conclude that the expectation of discrimination and a dislike for entering competitions (possibly due to a lack of self-confidence) are the remaining possible explanations.

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Policy recommendations

The authors comment:

‘Women’s lower propensity to take part in contests is observed in actual labour markets – and it can have important consequences for observed outcomes.’

‘Building confidence and changing aspirations is a difficult process and probably starts in early childhood, but changes in the way in which deciding whether to enter a competition occurs could facilitate women’s probabilities of climbing up the rank ladder.’

‘Policies that could help to close the promotion gap include a system of mentoring, whereby junior faculty are assigned a mentor that proposes them as candidates for promotion, or a system in which the default is that an individual will be considered for promotion after x years and the individual has to opt out instead of opting in.’

ENDS

Notes for Editors:


2. Clément Bosquet is Assistant Professor in Economics, Thema, University of Cergy-Pontoise and an Associate Researcher at the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science.

3. The Centre for Economic Performance is an independent research centre based at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Its members are from the LSE and a wide range of universities within the UK and around the world.

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