

'Acting Wife': Marriage Market Incentives and Labor Market Investments

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Appetizer

- Men prefer female partners who are less professionally ambitious than they are (Fisman et al. 2006).
- When woman earns more than her husband, marital satisfaction is lower and divorce is more likely (Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan 2015).
- Promotions increase the chance of divorce for women, but not for men (Folke and Rickne 2016).

This Paper

- *Do single women avoid career-enhancing actions because these actions signal undesirable traits, like ambition, to the marriage market?*
- Four datasets on students in an elite MBA program:
 - 1 The survey
 - Anonymous
 - 2016 entering cohort
 - 2 Administrative data on students grades
 - Required introductory economics class
 - 2010-2016 entering cohorts
 - 3 The primary experiment
 - 2016 entering cohort.
 - 4 The supplementary experiment
 - Three month after primary experiment
 - 2016 entering cohort.

The Survey

- Survey on past behavior
- Question: “In the last two years, are there behaviors or activities at your work that could have helped you professionally that you didn’t undertake because you might have looked too ambitious, assertive, or pushy?”
 - ① Speaking up at meetings
 - ② Offering to make a presentation or sales pitch
 - ③ Asking for a leadership role in a team or task force
 - ④ Taking initiative in negotiating a raise or asking for a promotion

Survey Results

TABLE 2—AVOIDANCE OF WORKPLACE BEHAVIORS BY GENDER AND RELATIONSHIP STATUS (*Survey Data*)

	Taking initiative in negotiating a wage raise or promotion	Asking for a leadership role in a team or task force	Offering to make a presentation or sales pitch	Speaking up at meetings	Any behavior	Observations
Single women	63.5	40.4	25.0	51.9	73.1	52
Non-single women	39.4	24.2	15.2	33.3	60.6	33
Single men	25.3	23.0	18.4	27.6	43.7	87
Non-single men	30.3	23.6	6.7	29.2	50.6	89
<i>p-values of differences</i>						
Single versus non-single women	0.030	0.129	0.284	0.095	0.234	85
Single women versus others	0.000	0.014	0.031	0.002	0.002	261

Grades Data

- Compare students' participation and non-participation (midterm, final, and problem set) grades in their required first year economics course.
- Total grade includes participation grade
- Business school reports grades to potential employers
 - Grades can have direct labor market consequences.

Participation Grade

 TABLE 3—RELATIONSHIP STATUS AND CLASS PARTICIPATION (*Grades Data*)

	Participation	Exams and problem sets	Midterm exam	Final exam	Problem sets
<i>Panel A. Women, no controls</i>					
Unmarried	-6.12 (2.19)	-0.65 (0.95)	0.26 (1.25)	-1.85 (1.63)	0.36 (0.28)
Dependent variable mean: Married women	77.51	79.80	82.41	68.22	95.70
Observations	664	664	664	664	664
R ²	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Panel B. Women, with controls</i>					
Unmarried	-5.81 (2.08)	-0.78 (0.94)	-1.28 (1.35)	-0.99 (1.55)	0.04 (0.23)
Dependent variable mean: Married women	77.13	80.10	82.86	68.57	95.79
Observations	644	644	644	644	644
R ²	0.28	0.25	0.17	0.31	0.53
<i>Panel C. Men, no controls</i>					
Unmarried	0.87 (1.16)	-0.92 (0.51)	-0.33 (0.74)	-1.89 (0.83)	0.05 (0.15)
Dependent variable mean: Married men	75.02	82.91	86.03	72.81	95.94
Observations	1,461	1,461	1,461	1,461	1,461
R ²	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Panel D. Men, with controls</i>					
Unmarried	-0.08 (1.15)	-1.64 (0.51)	-1.26 (0.76)	-2.94 (0.83)	0.05 (0.11)
Dependent variable mean: Married men	74.79	83.08	86.25	73.06	95.94
Observations	1,442	1,442	1,442	1,442	1,442
R ²	0.21	0.26	0.19	0.27	0.54

Primary Experiment Design

- First day of the MBA program
- Conducted during a 45-minute session the career center hosted for the entire incoming class to discuss its role in student placement.
- They were told that the questionnaire would be used to help with summer internship placement.
- Two versions of questionnaire
 - 1 Public: Answers would be discussed in class.
 - 2 Private: Anonymous answers would be discussed in class.

The Questionnaire

- Questions designed to present a trade-off for single women: responses which would improve womens careers would have potentially negative marriage market consequences.
 - How often students are willing to travel for work
 - The number of hours per week they are willing to work
 - Their desired compensation
 - Their professional ambition relative to their most recent work colleagues (1-to-5)
 - Tendency to lead in day-to-day interactions (1-to-5)
 - Writing skills (*placebo test*)

Primary Experiment Results

TABLE 4—EFFECT OF THE PUBLIC TREATMENT ON REPORTED JOB PREFERENCES AND SKILLS
(Primary Experiment)

	Kling- Liebman- Katz index	Desired compensation	Days per month of travel	Desired weekly hours of work	Tendency to lead	Professional ambition	Comfort in competitive environments	Writing skills
<i>Panel A. Single women</i>								
Public treatment	-0.56 (0.13)	-18.12 (8.17)	-6.93 (2.35)	-3.89 (2.11)	-0.39 (0.19)	-0.75 (0.18)	0.12 (0.21)	0.13 (0.23)
Private treatment mean	-0.06	131.05	13.55	52.21	3.87	4.13	3.29	3.84
Observations	59	60	60	59	60	60	60	60
R ²	0.23	0.08	0.13	0.05	0.07	0.23	0.01	0.01
<i>Panel B. Non-single women</i>								
Public treatment	-0.15 (0.14)	-1.22 (7.77)	0.65 (3.14)	-4.06 (1.87)	-0.05 (0.18)	-0.14 (0.19)	-0.09 (0.24)	-0.07 (0.17)
Private treatment mean	0.00	134.72	9.67	52.54	3.89	4.26	3.63	4.11
Observations	51	52	52	52	52	52	51	52
R ²	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
<i>Panel C. Single men</i>								
Public treatment	0.04 (0.12)	-0.89 (7.57)	2.72 (2.36)	0.39 (2.09)	0.15 (0.15)	-0.07 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.15)	0.03 (0.18)
Private treatment mean	0.15	146.88	15.38	52.25	3.69	4.23	4.02	3.90
Observations	103	104	103	104	104	104	104	104
R ²	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
<i>Panel D. Non-single men</i>								
Public treatment	0.09 (0.10)	-7.13 (6.08)	2.39 (1.94)	3.34 (1.78)	0.11 (0.13)	-0.02 (0.12)	0.00 (0.14)	-0.12 (0.17)
Private treatment mean	-0.05	140.86	9.94	51.14	3.75	4.15	3.67	3.82
Observations	130	130	131	131	131	131	131	131
R ²	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Panel E. p-values: difference in the effect of the public treatment</i>								
Single versus non-single women	0.032	0.129	0.050	0.952	0.191	0.018	0.494	0.490
Single women versus others	0.000	0.101	0.000	0.042	0.018	0.000	0.471	0.475

Supplementary Experiment Design

- During the career class last meeting of the semester
- Three pairs of hypothetical jobs:
Asked to choose their preferred job in each pair.
- Pairs were designed to present a clear trade-off.
 - 1 A job with a high salary requiring 55-60 hours per week and a job with a lower salary requiring 45-50 hours per week.
 - 2 A job with constant travel, but with the opportunity of rapid promotion to partner and a job with no travel, but in which promotion was slower and less certain.
 - 3 *Placebo test*: A job with a positive social impact but little interaction with coworkers and a job with a collegial and collaborative work environment, but no social impact.

Supplementary Experiment Results

TABLE 5—EFFECT OF GROUP COMPOSITION ON SINGLE WOMEN'S REPORTED JOB PREFERENCES
(*Supplementary Experiment*)

	Kling-Liebman-Katz index	Prefers higher salary over fewer hours	Prefers promotion over less travel	Prefers social impact over interactions with coworkers
<i>Panel A. Peer gender</i>				
Male peers indicator	-0.77 (0.23)	-0.26 (0.14)	-0.42 (0.16)	0.01 (0.15)
Mean for single women in female groups	0.00	0.68	0.79	0.42
Observations	40	40	40	40
R^2	0.29	0.14	0.26	0.09
<i>Panel B. Marital status of male peers</i>				
Share of male peers who are unmarried	-1.20 (0.34)	-1.23 (0.19)	0.08 (0.27)	0.44 (0.33)
Mean for single women in male groups	-0.58	0.43	0.52	0.38
Observations	21	21	21	21
R^2	0.36	0.61	0.19	0.22

Conclusion

- When single female students expected their classmates to see their preferences reported lower desired salaries and willingness to travel and work long hours.
- Second experiment indicates the effects are driven by observability by single male peers.
- Therefore, obscuring certain actions could affect gender gaps.
- *Open question:* Whether women hold accurate beliefs about mens marriage market preferences.