

Women and Competition

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The disadvantages for women in their career still catch the headlines: women are underrepresented in upper management positions or earn on average less than men, even when having the same qualifications. Due to this fact numerous scientists discuss several reasons for this divergence (compatibility of career and family, diverse preferences or plain discrimination of women). Recent findings in economics highlight another important factor: the tendency of women to shy away from competition. It has been shown that even women of the same skills as their male counterparts are less willing to enter competitive environments than men. This is reflected in the finding that men seek competition in many situations, while women try to avoid it. This discrepancy may explain a big part of the fact that women are disadvantaged in their career.

Previous research was only done with adults and did not take into account how this difference should be handled or how this problem could be tackled in order to achieve a well-balanced gender ratio in competitive environments. The latter questions are taken up in our project 'Women and Competition' and therefore we formulate three main research questions:

1. How do preferences for competition develop with age?
2. What are the causes of gender differences in preference for competition and how (with which actions) can we achieve a well-balanced gender ratio in competitive environments?
3. How do the actions to be developed in step 2 influence the behaviour of men and women in competitive situations.

Young researchers from two Tyrolean schools – supported by researchers from the University of Innsbruck – will plan, prepare, conduct and analyse economic experiments to study gender differences in competition. They design and implement a questionnaire on the attitude of men and women towards competition and develop actions on how to encourage women to take part in competition. In the last stage of the project the young researchers will write a working paper on the results of the project and present it at a research seminar and an international conference at the University of Innsbruck.

Project leader

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