

Under-achievement and the glass ceiling: Evidence from a TV game show

We use a Colombian TV game show to test gender differences in competitive behavior where there is no opportunity for discrimination and females face no gender-specific external constraints. Each game started with six contestants who had to answer general knowledge questions in private. There were five rounds of questions and, at the end of each, one participant was eliminated. Despite equality in starting numbers, women earn less than men and exit the game at a faster rate. In particular, there are more voluntary withdrawals by women than men. We draw an analogy between the game and the process by which employees rise through the levels of a corporation. As such, we note that “glass ceilings” may result, in part, from women’s own behavior and this raises the issue of how women are socialized to behave. At the same time, our results illustrate that maintaining and promoting gender diversity at the lower/middle ranks of organizations is necessary to obtain gender diversity at the top