

Gender Homophily and Feedback in Teams

We study gender homophily using a novel lab experiment with endogenous team formation. Participants choose partners from a gender-balanced pool to perform a real-effort task with a shared payoff. The experiment varies the visibility of individual mistakes across feedback treatments and elicits incentivized beliefs about performance. We find no gender differences in either performance or beliefs, but strong differences in homophily: high-performing women are more likely to choose female partners, whereas men and low-performing women exhibit no homophily. These results are robust across treatments. High-performing women do not believe that women perform better than men, suggesting that gender homophily might be preference-based.

Axe Discriminations et politiques catégorielles

Jose De Sousa

Professor of Economics at the University of Paris Panthéon-Assas. His primary fields of research are labor economics (discrimination and gender) and international economics. He is also an Associate Researcher at Sciences Po LIEPP.



Pauline Madies

PhD candidate in Economics at Sciences Po, specialized in Labor and Behavioral Economics, with a focus on gender segregation and homophily in the labor market.



Motivation and Research Questions

Gender homophily

- Tendency to associate with people of the same gender.

Pervasive evidence

- 68% of women name a woman as their closest friend.
- 84% of men discuss politics only with other men.
- Doctors refer more to specialists of their own gender.

- Affects opportunities, information diffusion, and labor-market segregation.

Research questions

- Does gender matter in team formation?
- Does partner-gender choice depend on feedback?
- Does gender homophily affect performance, beliefs, and well-being?

Our Approach

We study partner choice in a controlled lab setting where feedback is randomized.

Sample and setting

- 32 lab sessions, 512 participants in total.
- Session length ≈ 60 minutes; average earning ≈ €19.

Experimental Design

Real Effort Task

- Counting the number of 0s in a matrix of 0s and 1s.

Structure: 4 rounds

Round 1:

Individual Task

4 tables

Each of the next 3 rounds:

1. Partner choice

Rank 2 women & 2 men

2. Matching

Serial dictatorship

3. Belief elicitation

4. Team task

6 tables

5. Outcome

One answer selected as team answer

6. Feedback

Treatment-specific

Treatments

T0: Team score only

T1: Positive individual feedback

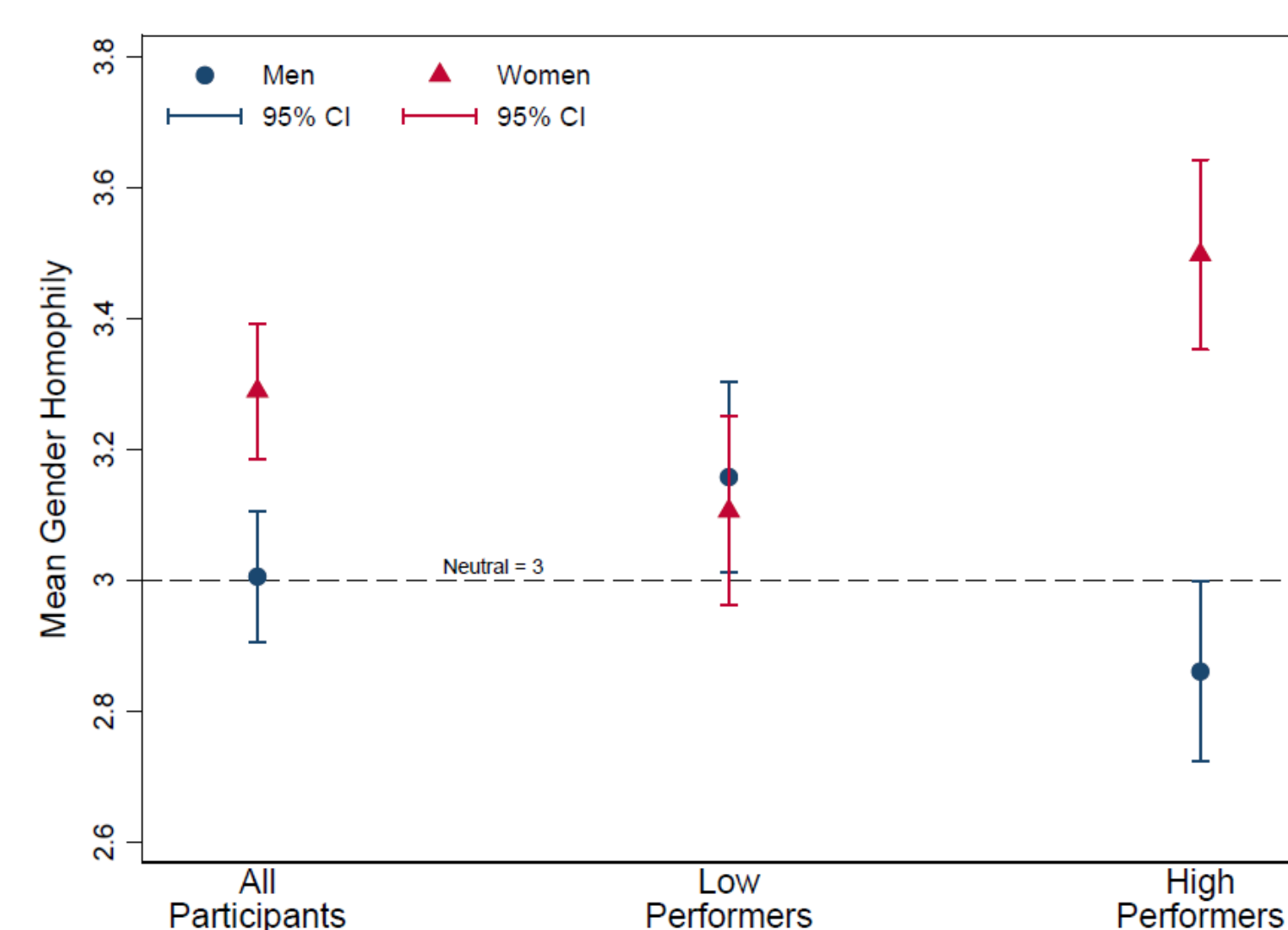
T2: Negative individual feedback

T3: Negative feedback + partner message

Main Result on Partner Choice

Only high-performing women exhibit gender homophily

- Men show no homophily
- Women rank same-gender CVs higher
→ Driven by high-performing women.
- Choices are stable throughout the experiment.



Note: Homophily index: 3 = gender-neutral; higher values indicate higher ranking of same-gender CVs.

What Is Driving Homophily?

Opportunities & constraints ❌

- The design equalizes the set of available partners, ruling out matching constraints.

Information & feedback ❌

- Homophily is stable across feedback regimes.

Beliefs about performance ❌

- No gender gap in performance.
- No differences in initial beliefs between homophilous and non-homophilous participants.

Preferences (suggestive evidence) ✓?

- High-performing women report greater satisfaction when paired with women.

Additional Results

Feedback

- Homophily is present in the control and stable across treatments
- Feedback affects performance, but does not explain homophily

Performance

- No gender gap in performance.
- No cross-gender differences in beliefs.
- Mixed and same-gender teams perform equally well.

Conclusion

- No gender homophily among men.
- Only high-performing women exhibit gender homophily.
- Homophily is not explained by differences in performance, beliefs, or feedback.
- Results are consistent with a preference-based mechanism.

Next step

- Elicit willingness to pay for partner gender
→ Do high-performing women remain homophilous when male candidates outperform female ones?