De-biasing Performance Evaluations: Evidence from a Field Experiment on Student Evaluations of Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Biases in performance evaluations partly explain the persistent gender gap in labor market outcomes. Gender stereotypes in particular can lead to biased evaluations of women's competence in male-dominated fields and leadership positions. Eliminating gender biases in performance evaluations could therefore reduce the gender gap in labor market outcomes. While a few laboratory experiments using implicit association tests suggest that "de-biasing" strategies might be effective, there is scant evidence that these strategies work in the field. To start filling this gap, we conduct a field experiment to assess the impact of two different interventions designed to reduce gender biases in student evaluations of teaching (SET). In the first intervention, a normative statement was sent to students by email, in which students were reminded that they should not discriminate in SETs. In the second intervention, the normative statement was augmented with precise information on how other students in the exact same situation had discriminated against female professors in the past. While the pure normative statement had no significant impact on SETs, the informative statement appears to have reduced gender biases against female professors.

Keywords: student evaluations of teaching, gender biases, field experiment

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