Men are from Mars and Women Too: Gender similarities in self-confidence and altruism

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Gender differences in self-confidence are sometimes blamed for women's under-representation in high-income occupations and glass-ceiling effects. Indeed, 87% of surveyed economists from CEPR believe that the literature has found that men tend to be over-confident and women tend to be under-confident. However, only 19% of existing experiments on gender differences in self-confidence find that men are over-confident and women are under-confident, while the majority of experiments (69%) find that both men and women are over-confident.

We aggregate evidence from existing experiments using a Bayesian hierarchical model that – by estimating both average gender gaps as well as heterogeneity across studies – reveals to which extent each study is informative about a common phenomenon, versus its own context-specific effects. Based on the estimated posterior distribution of study-specific parameters, we cannot reject the hypothesis that gender differences in self-confidence are different from zero. The observed profession's beliefs about gender differences can be rationalized with the existing evidence under two scenarios: (i) full (naïve) pooling of estimates (which is not supported by the Bayesian hierarchical model); (ii) biased and very precise priors.