

Vienna 2019 Abstract Submission

Title

Is wine tasting (perceived as) a male skill?

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

Wine tasting; Gender Prejudice; Priming; Experimental Economics

Research Question

Are there gender differences in the performance of students in a wine tasting task? Are such differences correctly anticipated by students participating in the task?

Methods

We experimentally study the performance of a population of students in a wine tasting task. We use monetary incentives to elicit participants' guesses regarding male and female performance.

Results

We find no gender differences in the wine tasting task, although both male and female expectations are weakly in favor of males. Priming against female tasters makes them perform worse.

Abstract

It has been often conjectured that wine tasting is usually perceived to be dominated by men. Thus, we address the following questions: Are there gender differences in the performance of students in a wine tasting task? If any, are such differences correctly anticipated by students participating in the task? Finally, can the information given to the participants ex ante affect their beliefs and-or their performance?

We experimentally study the performance of a population of students in a wine tasting task. We use monetary incentives to elicit participants' guesses regarding male and female performance. We find no gender differences in the wine tasting task, although both male and female expectations are weakly in favor of males. Priming against female tasters through a statement regarding male superiority in similar tasks (as opposed to a neutral statement) makes female participants perform worse than males and worse than they do under the neutral statement.

We address the question whether wine tasting tasks are performed better by males than by females. We face a population (N=40) of students with different levels of expertise in wine tasting with a wine tasting task, in which higher scores are obtained for correctly guessing a larger number of traits of the wine that has been tasted. Before the task, a wine expert (a Master of Wine, MoW hereafter) has instructed the participants on different aspects of wine tasting.

Once the wine tasting results are collected, the responses are marked by the wine expert (MoW). In the text preceding the instructions of the task to the participants, subjects are informed about gender differences on wine tasting performance in general, using a neutral statement or a statement which is favorable to males. The neutral statement informs students that males and females usually have similar scores in the wine tasting task in which they are about to participate. In the male-favoring treatment, the statement informs them about a weak superiority of male over female tasters.

Following this, participants are asked to guess their own performance, as well as the performance of male and female participants in the task. This guessing task is incentivised with monetary rewards, according to each participants' estimate accuracy.

In the baseline treatment, in which the neutral statement is used, our results show that males and females perform equally well in the task. On the contrary, females are outperformed by males in the treatment in which the male-favorable statement has been used in the introduction of the instructions.

Irrespective of the treatment, both genders predict similar performances for males and females, although a weak but not statistically significant difference in predictions exists (especially among female participants), favoring male tasters. Furthermore, subjects in general and subjects within each gender are quite successful predicting the average performance of the population, although there is a systematic bias regarding an expectation of higher scores for male tasters' performance.

Thus, the only significant gender effect concerns the performance of females when faced with prejudice against them, in which case they perform worse than under no such prejudice.

Our findings suggest that the hypothesis concerning the superiority of males over females in wine tasting tasks can be rejected. Similarly, the hypothesis regarding the prejudice among wine experts regarding the aforementioned male superiority in wine tasting tasks can also be rejected against the alternative of no gender differences in our participants' expectations. The actual negative effect on female performance of the male-favorable priming of the participants implies that the only gender difference observed in our participants' performance emerges from the fact that females are informed that some weak consensus exists predicting that they will perform worse than males. Interestingly, the male-favoring statement does not affect beliefs and does not create prejudice, limiting its effect on female performance.

Our results have important implications for strategies adopted in the instruction of wine experts. It seems that spreading the word that males and females perform equally well in wine tasting tasks is desirable for more reasons than because of the truth of the statement. It serves the purpose of not demotivating female tasters, leading their performance to drop below that of male tasters.

Further research is needed to explore whether the results reported here hold for lower levels of expertise, or whether they can be extrapolated to other types of skills, beyond wine tasting tasks. A different but equally interesting line of research would require to vary the terms of the wine tasting task, increasing or reducing the number of wines tasted by each subject and the number of traits subjects are asked to identify. Other interesting extensions can be inspired by general findings from behavioural and experimental economics regarding the structure of rewards to the tasters. In that sense, the validity of the well known competition aversion effect of females which is often reported for other types of tasks can be tested using the wine tasting task studied here in a context of a tournament.

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