

Test participation or test performance: Why do men benefit from test-based admissions to higher education?

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This study illuminates the male advantage in test-based admissions to higher education by examining whether this advantage is due to gender differences in test performance or, rarely studied, female avoidance of test situations (i.e., gender differences in test participation). We use register data for the whole population of more than 300,000 applicants to highly selective and prestigious medical programs in Germany. In contrast to many other countries, admission tests in Germany are optional. This fact offers the unique opportunity to disentangle the two mechanisms of test performance versus test participation on gender differences in admission chances. Our study reveals that men demonstrate better test performance and female applicants are more likely to withdraw from admission tests, however depending on their high school grade point average (GPA): the male advantage in test performance emerges only among test takers with lower GPA and female applicants'

>>> test avoidance only among female applicants with medium GPA. Together, both mechanisms generate a male advantage in test-based admissions (*ceteris paribus* of GPA), with better test performance being the major source for male applicants' higher admission chances. As the final outcome, we observe that this male advantage in testing is somewhat neutralized by on average higher GPA of female candidates. Implications of our findings on this test-optional regime for other social stratification dimensions, such as social background, are discussed in the concluding section.