

A Quantitative Review of Matching Papers in Economics: Evolution, Diversity, and Gender*

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Summary

Matching theory studies how agents pair and transact with each other in settings where preferences, complementarities, and sometimes frictions influence outcomes. Such environments, known as matching markets, include contexts where the identity of transacting parties matters, such as labour and marriage markets, school choice, organ donation, and so on.

Between 1975 and 2020, the field of matching grew rapidly within economics, with its share of total publications increasing tenfold. Matching papers represented about 2 per 10,000 economics papers in 1975, rising to 20 per 10,000 by 2020. The number of journals publishing research on matching markets expanded from under 1% to nearly 8% of economics journals, and the share of matching papers in Top-5 journals increased from 1% in 1995 to 5% by 2020. The number of researchers in the field increased continuously until the mid-2000s before levelling off, suggesting consolidation within a specialised community.

Textual analysis and hierarchical clustering organically reveal the field’s internal structure, identifying several subfields based on the concepts and the language used in paper titles and abstracts. The clusters correspond to distinct methodological traditions and application areas, such as macro-labour, market design, marriage and family economics, housing, and so forth, illustrating the conceptual breadth and specialisation within the field.

Collaboration patterns in the field evolved over time. Co-authorship became more common earlier than in the broader profession, with over 50% of matching papers being co-authored by 1990. However, economics overall then surpassed matching in team size and intensity of collaboration. By 2020, matching papers averaged 2.3 authors, compared to over 3 in economics more broadly.

Female representation increased but lagged behind the discipline. Around 10% of matching papers had at least one female author in 1990, rising to 25% by 2020, which is about a decade behind the broader trend in the profession. Growth in participation largely came through mixed-gender teams, while all-female authorship remained rare. Matching papers remained more male-dominated and less likely to feature mixed-gender collaboration than economics papers in general.

Keywords: matching markets, history of economics, co-authorship patterns, gender representation, text analysis