Reading Notes for Gender Gaps in Performance

Introduction:

Authors find that male lawyers outperform female lawyers due to gender related differences such as responsibility of children caring and difference in aspiration. Based on these findings, the article addresses the problem of performance and pay differences due to gender gap and extend the conclusion to overall high-skilled profession industries.

Body:

The paper uses the data from After the JD, and the econometric techniques are very simple, OLS with controls and interactions, and some statistical analysis based on hours billed quantile, and other data reconstructions, such as breaking down hours billed into factors. The paper constructure other measurements for performance and aspiration as a way to capture a fuller picture of why the gender gap persists.

The analysis is very straightforward, and the results are revealing. While individual and firm characteristics accounts for half of the differences in performance, gender associated difference such as responsibility for child caring, especially the young children, personal aspiration, and possible discrimination towards female lawyers also contributes to the difference in partnership representation and payment. The paper concludes that these accounts for the other half of the gender and payment gap for female lawyers. However, I think the paper has a clear intend to satisfy feminists and social attitude toward gender equality as a way to get the paper published. First of all, the extend of lawyer to other high-skilled professionals are not comparable. While previous literature shows some evidence, most are papers published at least 5 years before this paper and the progressive in gender equality has not been fully captured. Moreover, the data monitors lawyers graduating 12 years ago, and I do not see how that is relevant to today’s legal job market. Also, personal aspiration seems to explain a lot of difference in payment especially when there are significantly more male lawyers who are aspired, and aspiration has a significant impact on performance. Lastly, for interacted terms, I wonder the authors do not include an interaction term of hours work with female. If the results of difference in performance/payment are simply due to working hours, then maybe the gender discrimination is not the key problem here. The table’s results also show decreasingly negative female performance coefficient as we add more controls into the model. Yet the author fails to address those.

Concluding Paragraph:

In conclusion, while the results may sound astonishing, the paper clearly tries to lead readers to believe that there are gender gap and possible gender discrimination in the legal industry as a way to get this paper published. I believe there are some data manipulations involved to make the results biased toward gender discrimination. I believe rerunning the data with interaction term of working hours and female would yield surprising results. In fact, among the three possible explanations: young children, aspiration, and discrimination, only the first one has a clear data support, and is unsurprising.