Do Single-Sex Schools Make Boys and Girls More Competitive?

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**Abstract**

We examine whether students in single-sex schools and those in mixed-sex schools differ in their selection into a competitive environment. We use a field experiment in South Korea where middle school students are randomly assigned either to a single-sex school or a mixed-sex school. Participants solve a real task, adding up sets of five two-digit numbers, first under a noncompetitive piece rate and then a competitive tournament incentive scheme. Although there are no gender differences in performance, girls in single-sex schools select the tournament twice as much as girls in mixed-sex schools when choosing their compensation scheme for the next performance. In contrast, boys in single-sex schools show no difference in their selection compared to their counterparts in mixed-sex schools. The gap in tournament entry between girls in mixed-sex school and those in single-sex schools is not explained by performance, family background, and risk aversion. This is assessed through a second task, where participants decide on the payment scheme of a past performance. This final choice measures, among others, risk aversion, but not competitiveness, since subjects do not have to perform in the task anymore (see also Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007). In that task there is no difference in choice between mixed and single sex schools, for both boys and girls. Furthermore, the difference in tournament entry for girls between mixed and single sex schools is significantly greater than any such difference found when subjects simply decide on how to be paid for a past performance. The results suggest that being educated in a single-sex school rather than a mixed-sex school makes girls embrace competition more.