

Agents of Change or Cogs in the Machine? Re-examining the Influence of Female Managers on the Gender Wage Gap*

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Abstract

Do female managers act in ways that narrow, or instead act in ways that preserve or even widen, the gender wage gap? Although conceptual arguments exist on both sides of this debate, the empirical evidence to date has favored the former view. Yet this evidence comes primarily from cross-establishment surveys, which do not provide visibility into individual managers' choices. Using longitudinal personnel records from an information services firm in which managers had considerable discretion over employee salaries, we estimate multilevel models that indicate no support for the proposition that female managers reduce the gender wage gap among their subordinates. Consistent with the theory of value threat, we instead find conditional support for the cogs-in-the-machine perspective: In the subsample of high performing supervisors and low performing employees, women who switched from a male to a female supervisor had a lower salary in the following year than men who made the same switch.

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