



# **USPTO Pilot Program Reduced Gender Disparities in Patenting**

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Innovator Diversity Pilots Conference  
Santa Clara University  
November 18, 2022

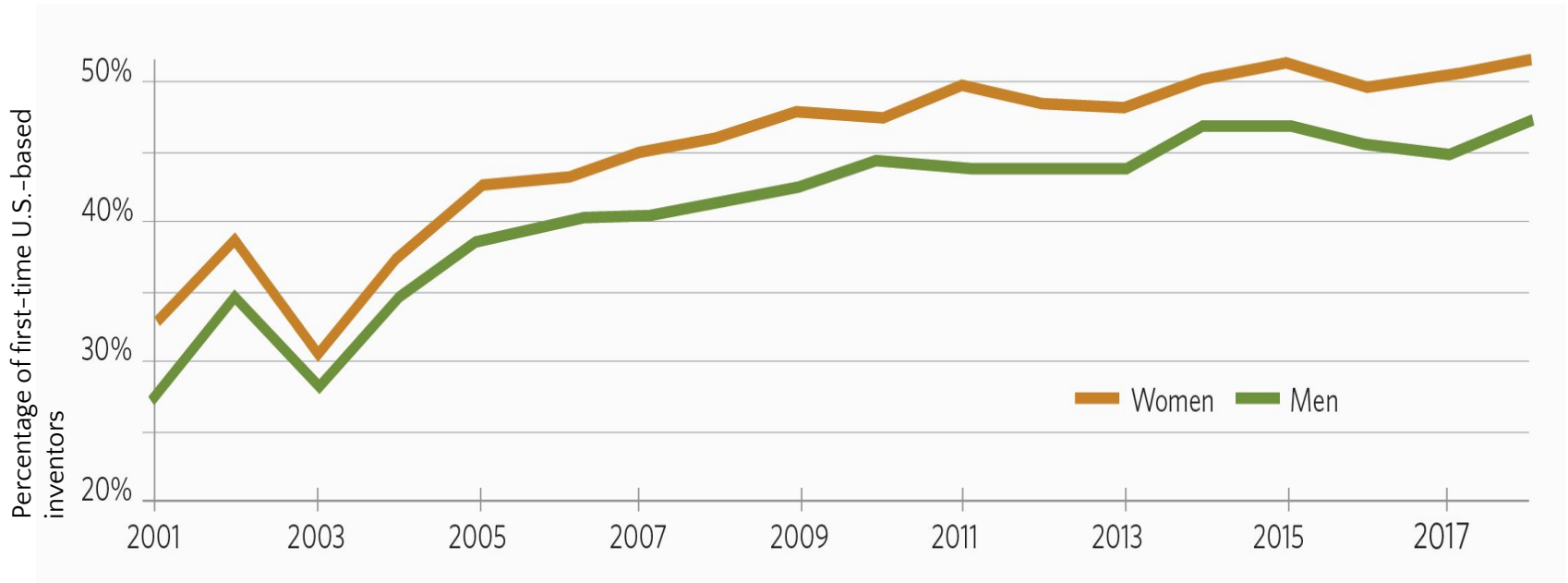


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# Closing the gender gap in patenting

- The percentage of inventors that are women was less than 5% in 1976, rising to 13% in 2020 (Toole et al. 2020).
- The gender gap likely leads to
  - a lower rate of invention, and
  - fewer resources that address unmet needs, particularly for women consumers (Koning et al. 2021)
- The gap is not closing quickly, suggesting a role for policy
- Major challenge: there is very little causal evidence on the sources of the gap

# More and more first-time U.S. women inventors file as small or micro entities



# The Pro Se Pilot

- In October 2014, USPTO launched the Pro Se Pilot Program, consisting of a Pro Se Assistance Program and a **Pro Se Examination Unit**.
- The Pro Se Pilot Examination Unit was a new intervention or “treatment” for pro se patent applications. The differences were:
  - Experienced examiners working as generalists in their respective disciplines.
  - Specialized training that focused on clear and effective communication.
  - Encouraged applicants to discuss issues or request interviews in the Office actions.
  - Emphasized providing additional guidance and information during examination.

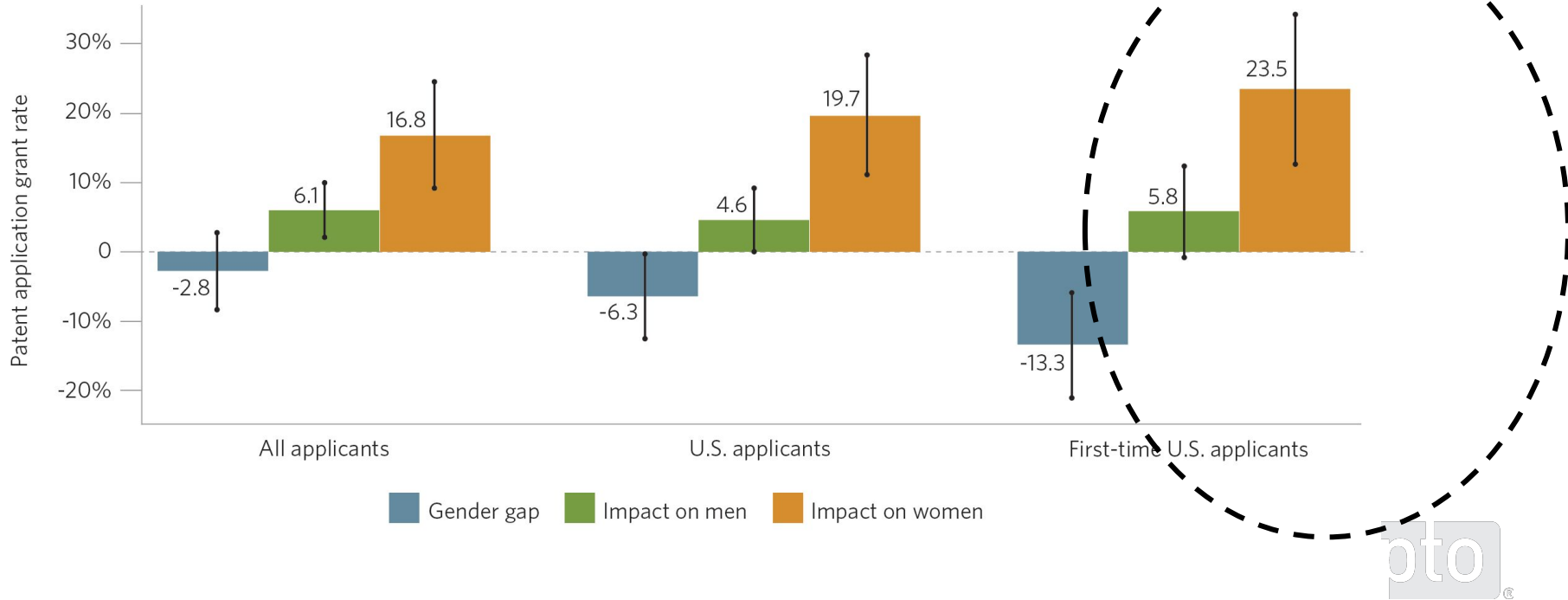


# Research design

- Pro se applications were randomly assigned to the new examination unit (treatment) and the comparison group (regular examination) using stratified randomization within technology centers



# Pilot treatment completely offset the observed gender gap



# Takeaways

- The Pro Se Examination Unit improved patent outcomes for women relative to men, with largest effects in tech areas where women had the worst relative outcomes in the comparison group.
- Policy summary available in an [Economic Note](#) on the USPTO's Office of the Chief Economist reports webpage.
- Academic paper available on SSRN: "*Closing the gender gap in patenting: Evidence from a randomized control trial at the USPTO*" at: [USPTO-RES :: SSRN](#)







# Thank you!

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