



USPTO Pilot Program Reduced Gender Disparities in Patenting

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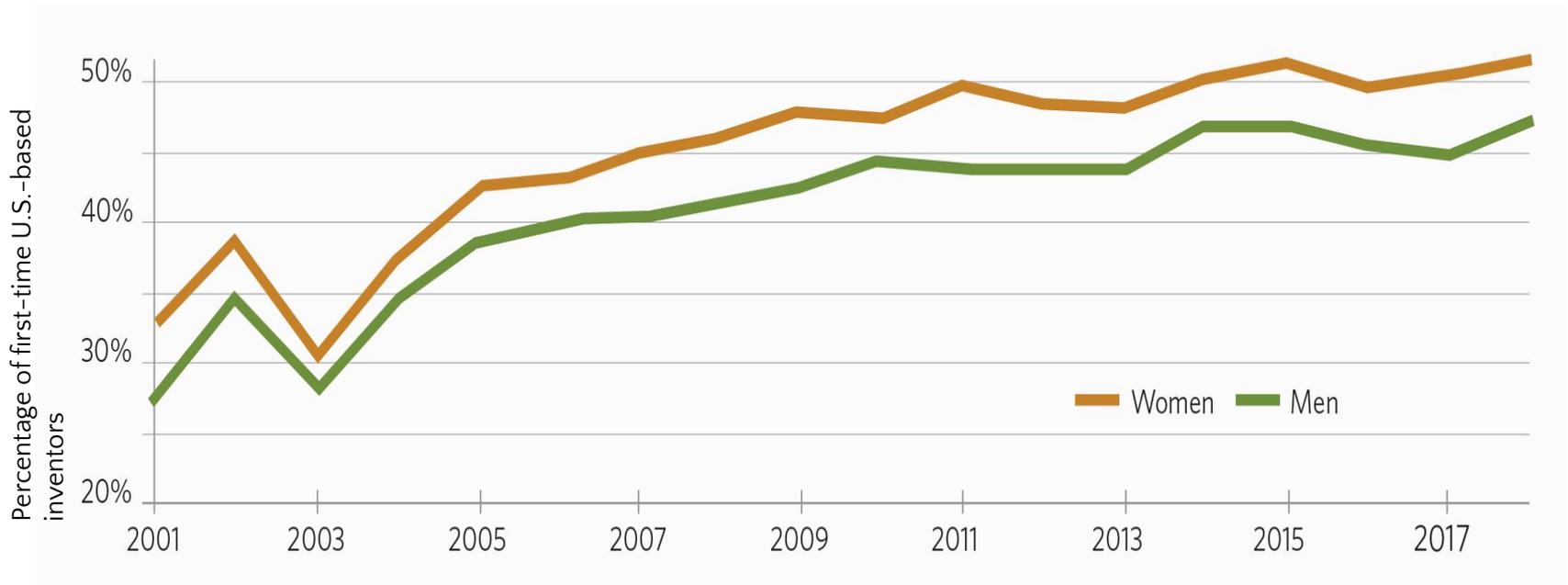


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Closing the gender gap in patenting

- 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.

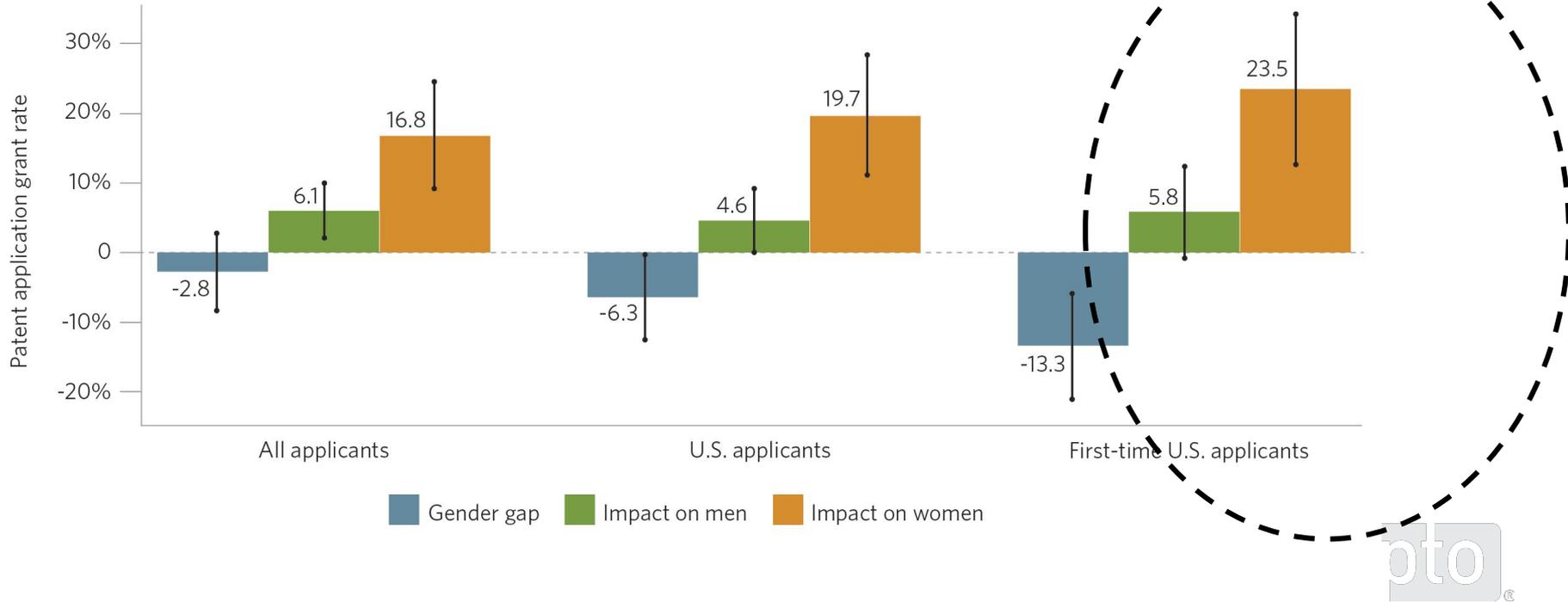


Research design

- 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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