Discussion:
The Gender Difference of Peer Influence in Higher Education (Li Han and Tao Li)

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1 Peer effects in higher education

- Results

  (a) There are (strong) peer effects in higher education

  (b) Only females experience peer effects

  (c) Effects are asymmetric: smart help stupid, stupid do not hurt smart

  (d) Results are robust across outcome and treatment variables

- Contributions

  (a) New dataset (Chinese college), better suited for the question

  (b) Careful analysis of a quasi-randomized experiment

  (c) Interesting results, different from previous studies

2 Why China?

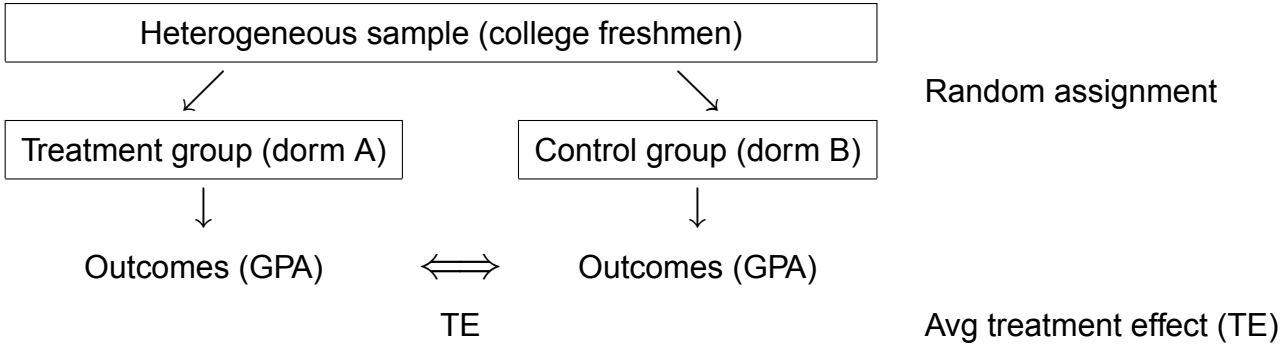
- Interesting in itself!
- Larger social interaction between students

$$\triangle \text{outcomes} = \text{PE} * \text{interaction} * \triangle \text{peers}$$

  - Students share small room for long period (4 years)
  - Few other opportunities for voluntary social interaction
  - Roommates in same year and same major
- Random component in dorm room assignment
  - Parents and students have no say in room assignment
  - Administration assigns students to rooms quasi-randomly
  - Room change strongly discouraged

3 Randomized experiment

- An ideal experiment:



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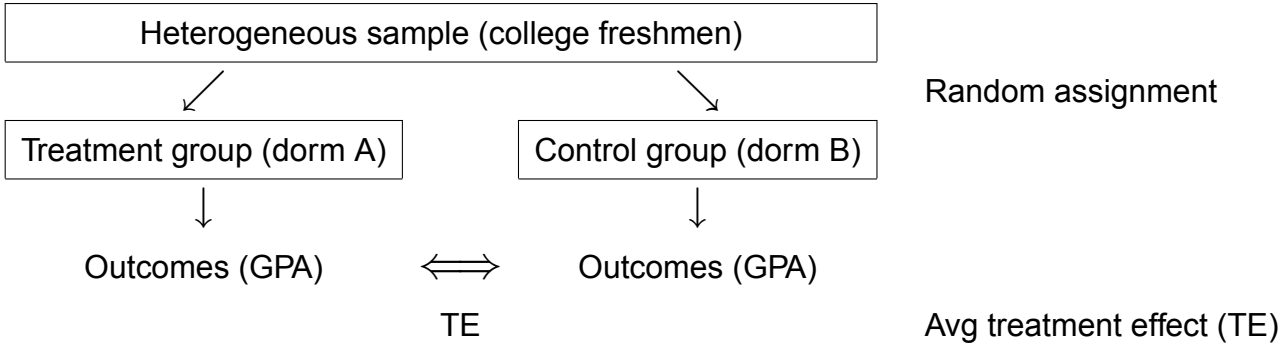
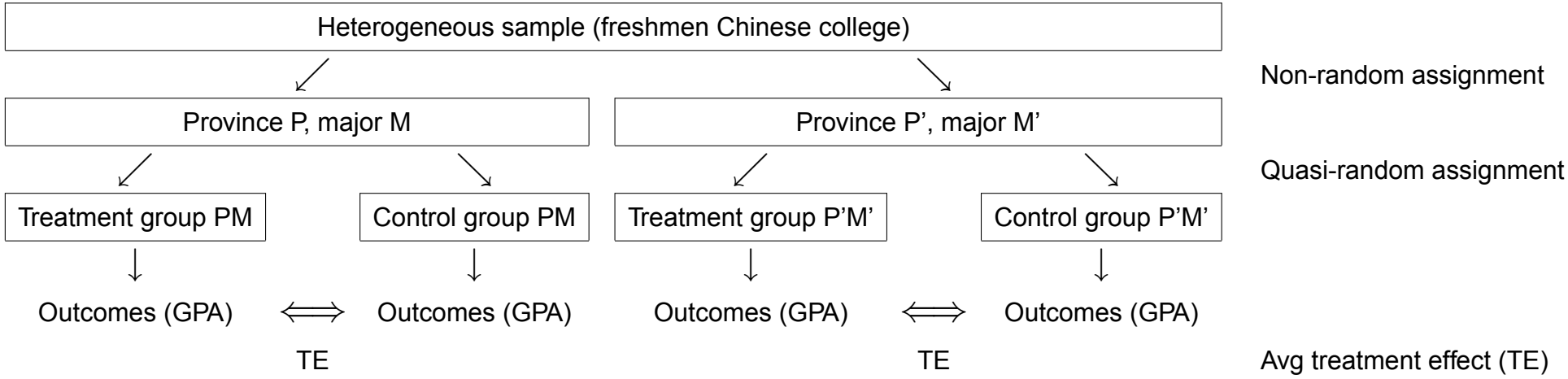


- The quasi-experiment in this paper:



5 Randomized experiment

- Quasi-random assignment of freshmen to dorms
  - Housing office copies student ID numbers from Excel file to vacancy list
  - Is this random?
  - Careful description of the process & randomization checks
  - Restrict to non-host-province subsample
- But: if assignment is random, then why is roommates' ability different?
  - cf twin studies
  - Sampling error?
  - Is this random?

6 Gender differences in peer effects

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- Results
  - Women: $\beta_1/\beta_2 = 0.71^{**}$
  - Men: $\beta_1/\beta_2 = -0.28$
- Technical remarks
  - Need standard errors on the estimates of interest, i.e. β_1/β_2
  - Is the *difference* between men and women significant?

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  - $*$ "Males obviously play more soccer"

11 Summarizing

1. A very nice paper!
   - Interesting topic
   - Carefully implemented empirical work
   - Provoking conclusions
2. Quasi-randomized experiment
   - Some doubts about the source of the identifying variation
3. Gender differences in peer effects
   - Need to test the difference
   - Can we directly test the hypothesis of interest?
4. External validity
   - The Gender Difference of Peer Influence in Higher Education *in China*

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