

A man of his word? An experiment on gender differences in promise keeping

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Motivation & Research Questions

Cooperation and economic efficiency enhanced by informal agreements

- Theoretical perspective: promises are cheap talk
- Experimental evidence: promises are more than cheap talk (e.g. Sally, 1995)
- Motives to keep a promise can be rooted in social preferences:
 - Theory of guilt aversion (e.g., Charness and Dufwenberg, 2006)
 - Social norms (e.g., Vanberg, 2008)
- Gender differences in social preferences and related fields (e.g., Croson and Gneezy, 2009)

Research Agenda

- Are there gender difference in promise keeping?
- Specific research questions on gender differences
 - in the share of kept promises?
 - in the motives for promise keeping?
 - in the understanding of promises?
 - in mixed and single gender interactions?

Related Literature

Gender differences in..

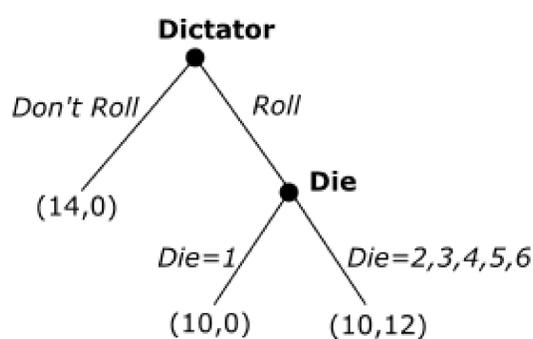
- Social preferences (e.g., Croson and Gneezy, 2009): equally pronounced for men & women, but womens' social preferences have a higher range than those of men
- Trust (e.g. Chaudhuri and Gangadharan, 2003): men trust more (or at least equally) than women, whereas women are more (or at least equally) trustworthy than men
- Lying and honesty (e.g., Rosenbaum et al., 2014): women are more (or at least equally) likely to tell the truth
- Group composition: most studies find single gender teams to be more (or at least equally) cooperative than mixed gender teams (e.g., Dufwenberg and Muren, 2006)

Experimental Design

Basic game (Vanberg, 2008)

- Random matching into pairs
- Communication within pairs: both can send two messages (160 characters)
- Assignment and information about roles (dictator and receiver in each pair; roles determined by nature and equally likely)
- Partner switching (in half of all pairs)
- Review own conversation /conversation of new partner
- Dictator decision
- Belief elicitation (first order and second order beliefs)

Dictator decision

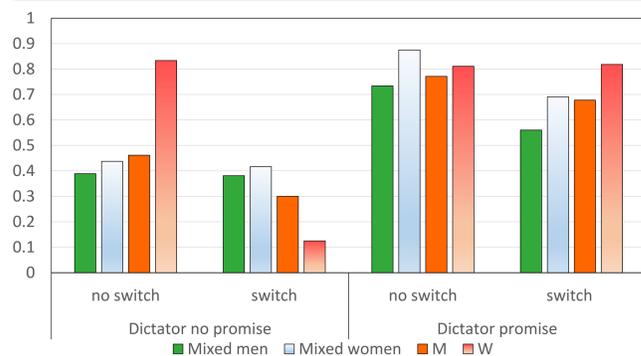


Procedure

- Basic game played for eight rounds (perfect stranger protocol); subjects learn (potential) payoff at the end of each round
- Elicitation of socio-demographic variables (controls): social preferences (Murphy et al., 2011; Crosetto et al., 2012), trust (Yamagishi and Sato, 1986), risk attitude (Dohmen et al. 2005), happiness, number of siblings, age
- Payment: one of the dictator decisions + beliefs in each round (except for the one chosen for payment) + payment of SVO
- Treatments: Treatment *Mixed* (men and women; 96 subjects), Treatment *M* (only men; 48 subjects), Treatment *W* (only women; 48 subjects)

Main Results

Roll decisions contingent on promise and condition



No switch

- Mixed: women keep promises more often than men ($p < .01$)
- Men behave equally in Mixed and M
- Women in W prefer to Roll in any case

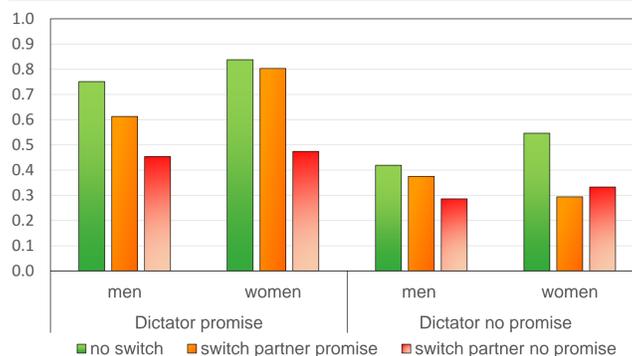
Switch

- More promises are broken in switch than in no switch

Share of promises

- No gender difference in *Mixed*: 82.5% (women) vs. 82.6% (men)
- Higher when women are amongst themselves: 92.7% (*W*) vs. 82.5% (*Mixed*), ($p < .01$), for men there exists no difference

Motives for promise keeping



No promise

- Decision to roll does not depend on whether new partner received a promise (no gender difference)

Promise

- Men's decision is not significantly different when the new partner received a promise
- Women roll more often if the new partner also received a promise

Beliefs

First order beliefs

- Promises raise expectations (FOB promise received > FOB no promise received, $p < .01$)
- More pronounced for women (FOB promise received (women) > FOB promise received (men), $p < .01$)

Second order beliefs

- Dictators anticipate that promises raise expectations:
 - Own promises (no switch: SOB promise > SOB no promise, $p < .01$)
 - Own promises as well as promises made by others (switch: SOB partner received promise > SOB partner received no promise, $p < .01$)
 - No differences between own promises and promises made by others (SOB promise in no switch = SOB partner received promise in switch, $p = .17$)
- No gender differences → Differences in promise keeping cannot be explained by different beliefs about receivers' expectations

Summary

Promises are a predictor of cooperative behavior

- Women keep more promises than men (own promises)
- Men and women differ in their motives for promise keeping

Men:

- promises are a commitment only to a specific subject
- behavior does not differ across mixed and single gender interaction

Women:

- the own promise and the expectations of the receiver matter
- in single gender interactions it is sufficient that women communicate and interact with the same partner or they made a promise

Understanding of promises

- Promises raise expectations of receivers (more for women)
- Own promises and promises made by others are understood as promises

Selected Literature

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