

Gender differences in face-to-face deceptive behavior

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ABSTRACT

We study the role of face-to-face interaction for gender differences in deceptive behavior and perceived honesty. In the first part, we compare women's to men's actual deceptive behavior using data from an incentivized income reporting experiment. Between the three treatments (i) the degree and (ii) the impact of the interaction varies from none (in a fully computerized baseline treatment) to a little (in a treatment where reporting happens face-to-face but a subject's perceived honesty has no impact on the individual audit probability) to much (in a treatment where reporting happens again face-to-face and a subject's perceived honesty does impact the subject's individual audit probability). Women report slightly more truthful than men in the computerized baseline treatment.

When introducing face-to-face interaction, only women's truthfulness increases. Interestingly, when additionally a subject's perceived honesty plays a role, it is men's truthfulness that rises way beyond the women's level. To elaborate on these gender differences, in the second part, a gender-balanced set of participants was asked to assess the honesty of videotaped statements from the last treatment of the first experiment.

Evaluating 9,280 assessments, reveals that both genders on average perceive men as less honest than women. In particular, the least honest-looking woman is still perceived as 3.5 times more honest than the most dishonest-looking man. Men assess women as significantly less honest than women assess themselves. Moreover, men's dishonest perception is independent of whether they are actually truthful or not. Hence, in a face-to-face reporting setting, the individual probability of an audit and, thus, the risk of getting caught lying, for men is much higher than for women. We conclude that men anticipate their low perceived honesty in a face-to-face setting and, therefore, deceive less whereas women take advantage of them being perceived as honest and deceive more than men. Our findings highlight the importance of the environment in which gender differences in deception behavior are studied.