Listen to Her Gender Differences in Information Diffusion within the Household

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Efficient diffusion of economic information plays a critical role in the functioning of society, and, more specifically, households. We study information diffusion between spouses in a representative sample of the German population. We focus on an important economic belief: the household’s perceived rank in the income distribution. Our survey experiment consists of two waves. During each wave, all adult members of a household are interviewed separately with no possibility to communicate with each other. In the first wave, we randomly select a subset of respondents to receive accurate information about their household’s income rank. By chance, some members of a household, but not others, receive the information. A year later, we re-survey all members of the same households in the second wave, with the aim of measuring whether the information provided in the experiment had a long-lasting effect on their beliefs. We find that receiving information directly persistently affected household members’ beliefs. This direct learning worked similar for men and women. By contrast, for household members who did not receive information directly, we find striking gender differences in indirect learning. When information was provided to the husband, it affected his wife’s beliefs to a similar degree as if she had directly received the information herself. By contrast, when the information was provided to the wife, it did not affect her husband’s beliefs.

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