

Siri Isaksson

ESSAYS IN GENDER ECONOMICS



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Over the past six years, I have been reflecting on how gender differences in everyday decision-making may translate into economic inequalities. Despite equal access to education, and institutional efforts to close the gender gap in most advanced economies, women remain disadvantaged in terms of hiring, wages, and promotions on the labor market. This seems to suggest that norms, preferences, discrimination, and behavior may be upholding the labor market gender gap.

For instance, if women systematically undervalue their contributions to shared work, this could lead to lower lifetime labor market outcomes. This thesis is my attempt to identify such behavioral channels. In particular, I study gender differences in group work, advice-seeking and retaliation. The first paper asks whether women claim less than appropriate credit for their contributions to successful group-work. A primary motivation for this study is that experimental research is typically conducted on the individual level, but professional life often happens in groups. How women value their individual contributions in a group setting may have a large impact on their working life, since individual contributions to group success are not transparent. This study also examines other related topics. It provides evidence on how gender composition affects team performance. In addition, it studies how men view the contribution of their female counterparts: are men less likely to trust the quality of their female team members' work? Does this affect the success of the group? The second and fourth paper, joint with Emma Heikensten, consider gender differences in advice seeking. Are women less likely to seek advice? Does advisor gender matter? The third paper, joint with Emma Heikensten and Sirus Dehdari Häfström, looks into whether men are more likely than women to seek revenge in a strategic setting. I use laboratory experiments and game show data to answer my research questions, and propose directions for future research on these topics.



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For my family and friends.

Foreword

This volume is the result of a research project carried out at the Department of Economics at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE).

This volume is submitted as a doctoral thesis at SSE. In keeping with the policies of SSE, the author has been entirely free to conduct and present her research in the manner of her choosing as an expression of her own ideas.

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Göran Lindqvist

Director of Research
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Tore Ellingsen

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Before I started the PhD, I spent one year in the masters program in Economics at Stockholm School of Economics. In that program, I met someone who made a great impression on me: Adam Altmejd. Even before we started class, I reached out to him on facebook, because I could not wait to get to know

him. He was just as amazing and as I thought, and the friendship that followed has been inspiring and rewarding. While our paths as researchers diverged in the PhD program, Adam has remained an amazing intellectual resource that I could always rely on both in Stockholm and later in Cambridge: to this day I have not encountered a problem which Adam was not able to magically solve. Later that same year, I met my frequent collaborator, Emma Heikensten. We were part of the same writing program and she immediately caught my attention for the radiating person she is. Emma and I have shared many memories as co-authors and friends. She is the type of person who makes you grow and challenge yourself. Being in her presence means working harder and being more inspired, and always pushing the extra mile. In the same formative year as I met Adam and Emma, I also met Elin Molin. While we never worked on research projects together, Elin has been the best of friends and colleague one could ask for. Through the program, I also met my collaborator Sirus Dehdari Håfström, with whom I have shared so many great memories and working days in various places, including at five guys. I am thankful for him both as an amazing co-author and teacher of econometrics. I also want to thank Julia Boguslaw, Clara Fernström, Eskil Forsell, Karl Harmenberg, Dany Kessel, Matilda Kilström, Hannes Malmberg, Elisabet Olme, and Erik Öberg for being such awesome colleagues and friends.

In the fourth year of my PhD, I had the immense privilege to be able to go to Harvard University as a visiting fellow in Economics and Computer Science. I am very grateful for Yiling Chen, who invited me. While there I started working on what would become my job market paper on gender differences in group-work. This project also led me to meet Adam Sam, another formative meeting in my life. Adam is an incredible problem solver, innovator, inspiration, and friend. He taught me so many things about the world, big and small: ranging from Marxist theory and automation, to neural networks, and a love for pretzel M and M's. After my first year at Harvard, I became a fellow with the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard Kennedy School. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to complete my job market paper that this program provided, and the incredible intellectual community of fellows. Clémentine van Effenterre whom I met through the program, became a very close friend and colleague, and we got to share some amazing moments across the globe since we ended up going on the market in the same year.

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Life is more than just work. In Cambridge, my life was made complete by the amazing house that I lived in, Dana McDonough and I went on countless adventures, work-outs, discovered new TV-shows, danced to new music, and generally did everything fun and healthy together. Dana has been the best of friends, and someone who I can always rely on – next birthday-month in Norway GF! The role that the house on Hingham 22 –created by Mike Sorriero – has played in my life in Cambridge can not be overstated, it is what has kept me grounded here and made me feel at home. For instance, the many cozy Sundays on the boat on the Charles will always stay with me. Before grad-school, I spent in college in Berlin and New York City, I am forever grateful to Laura Pantzerhielm, and Max Bach for always being there for me in Berlin, and Julia Burlingham, Oto Gillen and Isabelle Philippe for being my NYC family. Laura was my first intellectual hero and confidante, and she remains my harshest and most eloquent critic.

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¹Quote by Hungarian poet József Attila

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Stockholm, June 3rd, 2019

Siri Isaksson

Introduction

This thesis contains four papers. The overarching theme is gender differences in strategic decision making. Specifically, it covers gender differences in group work, advice seeking and retaliation. My quest in this work has been to identify and understand decisions women and men make differently on an everyday basis that may determine their economic success. I started working on this line of research together with Emma Heikensten. Initially, I thought that our research could be used to inform people of their biases, and perhaps help them to make better decisions as a consequence.

I want to be clear, that my role as a researcher is not to give people advice on *how* to behave, but rather to provide an understanding of some of the biases that may influence their decisions, and as a consequence, their success. To give an example, in my first paper, I show that there is a systematic downward bias in how much women think that they contribute to a shared success. This is important to be aware of: if women consistently attribute the credit for shared projects to their team-mates, they may not feel entitled to apply for promotions, or negotiate based on those projects. In the second paper, me and Emma Heikensten show that women seek less advice than men. If women consistently seek less advice than men, this may have a host of adverse effects: they might learn less, have smaller networks, and miss out on opportunities. Making women aware of the existence of these biases, may make them re-evaluate their importance in teams, or seek more help. However, I want to be clear that I do not think that the proper conclusion is that women should necessarily update their behavior and act as men in order to be successful. One important insight that I had during the course of my studies, is that often it is the social perception of behavior rather than the behavior *per se* that matters: the same action will often be judged differently depending on whether a man or a woman engages in it. What I mean by this, is that if women – for instance – were to speak up and claim their fair contributions, it does not automati-

cally mean that they would get appropriate credit as the attribution of credit is inherently in the hand of third party evaluators. The relevant question then becomes whether and why women and men who engage in the same behavior are judged differently in strategic settings: Are women who appropriately claim 80% of a contribution to a shared project less likely to be believed than men who do the same? Are women socially sanctioned and devalued when they are outspoken about having pulled the weight on a project? If the answer is yes, consistently claiming 50% - and getting 50%- may actually be a rational strategy rather than claim 80% and get 40% for women, even if your contribution was 80%. These are open questions that I intend to answer in future studies. I think bringing in this perspective of differences in social perception given the same actions by men and women is an important next step in my research. My goal is to understand both gender differences in behavior, the social norms surrounding these behaviors, the punishment and social sanctions associated with breaking these norms, and importantly how these norms can be shifted. I look forward to working on these and related questions in the future.

Below is a short summary of each the papers included in this dissertation. In the first paper, *"It Takes Two: Gender Differences in Group Work"* I ask whether women claim less than appropriate credit for their contributions to successful team work. I also consider related questions: are women less likely to correct the mistakes of their partner? Does gender composition matter for how successful teams are? In order to answer these questions, I introduce a new puzzle which is solved in pairs and permits a clear measure of individual contributions to joint projects. I first establish that there are no gender differences in ability in this puzzle: women and men are equally good at solving the puzzle both on their own and in pairs. I then turn to the question of credit claiming, and show that despite the fact that women and men contribute equally on average, women consistently and significantly claim less credit than men. Interestingly, I also find that women are less likely to correct their partner's mistakes, again despite the fact that they are equally good at this game. In the second paper – *"Simon Says: Examining gender differences in advice seeking and influence in the lab"* – which is joint with Emma Heikensten, I turn to the question of gender differences in advice seeking. Do women seek less advice than men? Does the type of question matter? In contrast to our initial beliefs, we do find that our female participants seek less advice. Interestingly, the type

of question seems to matter: men seek more advice on the female stereotyped verbal section. In the third paper – *“What Goes Around (Sometimes) Comes Around: Gender Differences in Retaliation”* which is joint with Sirus Dehdari Håfström and Emma Heikensten – we look at retaliatory behavior. In this paper, we wanted to understand whether women are less likely to seek revenge than men in a strategic setting. The answer is in line with our prior: women do retaliate less than men. Interestingly however, when women do in fact engage in retaliation, they are more effective in warding off future attacks than men. In the fourth paper, *“In Favor of Girls: Do Adults Trust Girls More Than Boys for Advice?”* me and Emma Heikensten turn to the question of who you would ask for advice: do adults trust boys or girls more for advice? Interestingly, we find that despite the fact that the girls and boys in our setting are equally good as advisors, girls are more likely to be selected first.

On a final note, I want to mention the importance of replication and emphasize that these results should be viewed as a first step towards an understanding of the topics covered in this thesis. I think that several questions that we ask in this thesis deserve more research attention, and that more studies are needed in order answer them. Ideally, the studies presented in this thesis should be replicated, and complemented with new designs to answer the follow-up questions that emerged during the course of this work.

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