

Self-promotion, stereotypes and gender inequality: Breaking the shackles of modesty

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Motivation: Social Image, Visibility and Modesty

In our social interactions, image concerns affect our actions and decisions

- We like others to perceive us as fair, charitable, honest, professional, successful *etc.*

Making good deeds visible is key to improving social image

- Self promotion, *i.e.* intentional action of making ones socially desirable attributes visible, is often required.
 - In competitive settings, the idea of “selling one’s achievements and good deeds” it can be crucial

However, self-promotion may be socially costly.

- It can signals other qualities about oneself that is not socially desirable.
 - for example immodesty, ambition *etc.*

Motivation: Gender Stereotypes and Behavior

The role of social norms and gender stereotypes in shaping choices

- Women are expected to behave differently from men.
 - Gender specific reproductive pressures, social role theory, mate selection theories.
- Men are expected to be *agentic*
 - assertive, boastful, independent, mastering their environments
- Women are expected to be *communal*
 - selfless and more caring for others, being more modest
- Pertinent is the trait of *modesty*.

Modesty norms and gender stereotypes

From a young age women are socialized to be modest, in line with their behavior expectations. (Bronstein, 2006)

Women face psychological costs when self-promoting

- Due to breaking modesty norms (Smith and Huntoon, 2013)
- Due to fear of backlash from peers for breaking modesty norms/gender stereotypes (Rudman & Glick, 2001)

Implications for social interactions

- Women may self-promote less or opt out of self-promoting.
- Puts them in a disadvantage in situations where visibility of good deeds and achievements are key.
 - promotions, scholarship, grant applications
 - seeking leadership positions in public office, organizations etc.

Our Research Questions

Using an economic experiment, we want to investigate

- 1) Whether is there a gender gap in self-promotion activity?
- 2) Whether systematically varying the intrinsic costs of self-promotion reduces gender gap in self-promotion, if it exists?

Our Experiment

Dictator game with charities: Each participant is given an endowment of \$15 and asked whether they would like to donate any amount to a charity from a list of charities provided to them

Donation Matching: Experimenter adds \$0.5 for every \$1 donation made conditional on any one of the following

- Posting a pre-specified (treatment dependent) message on their Facebook wall (making good deed visible)
- Pending the same message to themselves via chat on Facebook (*not* making good deed visible)

Self-promoting about donations vs achievements

- Achieving successful outcomes in experimental labor markets is more related to inherent qualities and preferences
 - which may be gender dependent.
 - not that easy to change in the presence of different incentives.
- The constraint imposed by modesty norms are similar.

Key features of the experiment

Two decisions are made simultaneously

- Decision to *self-promote* and Decision on *donations*
- Sequential decision may lead to bias in this case
 - Is the decision to not self-promote due to low donations or modesty norms?

Preset messages in a *non-artificial* environment (Facebook)

- Ensures control: everyone has to post the same message
- Potential audience of the message are people participant knows.
 - social image concerns more salient.

Treatments: First Strategy

Provision of a pro-social justification for self-promotion

T1 and T2: (B/R) “Just donated {amount donated} to {Charity Name} from my participation fee of 15 dollars in a research activity at uni.”

T3 and T4: (BM/RM): “Just donated {amount donated} to {Charity Name} from my participation fee of 15 dollars in a research activity at uni. *The organisers offered to match my donation if I posted this exact message on my Facebook wall.*”

R and RM treatments were introduced to check whether donations changed due to modesty manipulations (we do not discuss today).

Online Panel

Online survey of participants ($n=101$) from the same subject pool (as participants) suggests that the BM Message relative to B Message

- more modest (70% vs 30%),
- less boastful (66% vs 34%)
- more justified (83% vs 17%).

Treatments: Second Strategy

In our second strategy, we reduce the intrinsic cost of self-promotion providing a self-image rationalization for engaging in such actions

- The decision space is altered.

RC: Participants can *only* donate if they self-promote using the R message.

- No pro-social justification is provided *i.e.* modesty norm has to be broken.

However, *not* breaking the modesty norm now has a intrinsic cost associated with it.

- from breaking fairness norms or not deriving warm-glow *etc.*

Hypothesis

H1: In the B and R treatments, self-promotion rates for men would be higher than that for women.

H2: Making the messages more modest (B to BM and R to RM) will increase self-promotion for women at a higher rate than men.

- Assume publicizing each message type, t , poses some costs from breaking the modesty norm, c_t .
- For each individual i , this cost is internalized depend on a parameter $\gamma_i > 0$, which measures how each individual i values the net benefits from adhering to the modesty norm.
- Intrinsic cost to each individual i from self-promoting is $\gamma_i c_t$.
- If γ_i for females $>$ γ_i for males, then reduction in c_t will have a larger impact for women.

Hypothesis

H3: Self-promotion rates will be higher in RC relative to R.

Consider the subsample of individuals

- with a preference for making charitable donations &
- net benefit of making these donations public is not large enough to self-promote.

In R, treatment these individuals will donate, but not self-promote

In RC, treatment, these individuals will donate and self-promote.

Across Gender

- 1) Women face higher costs from not donating (Engel, 2011) → Higher impact for women.
- 2) Women face higher costs of self-promotion using R message → Lower impact for women.

Total Effect is not clear, thus an empirical question.

Experimental Protocol

282 Participants from RMIT BBL's database using standard protocols

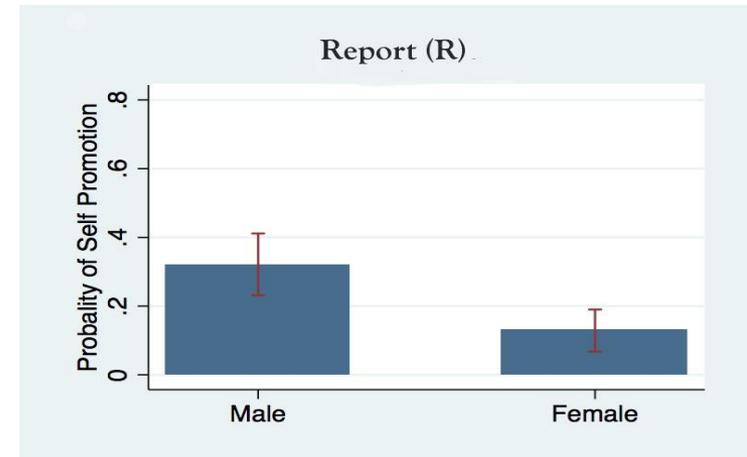
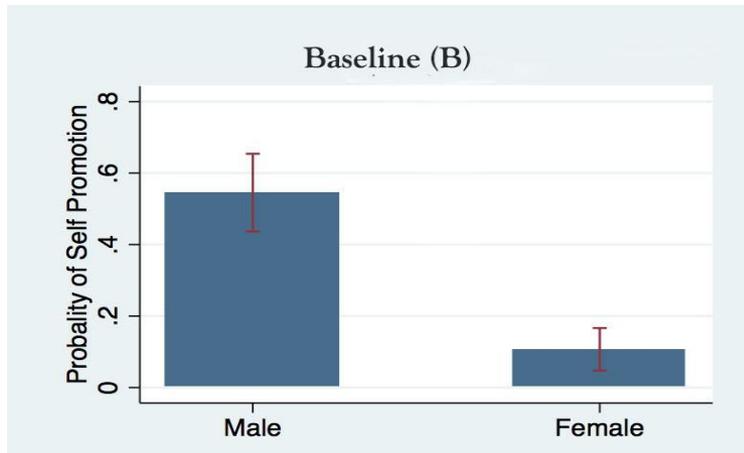
- 129 males and 153 females
- Facebook account was a requirement
- Data collected using *Qualtrics*.

\$5 show up fee and \$15 endowment.

Three decision tasks:

- Choice of donation amount.
- Choice to self-promote (messages were verified on the spot, but not recorded)
- Choice of Charity (from a list of Save the Children, Doctors w/o Borders, Salvation Army, Cancer Council, Bush Heritage)
- Incentivized belief questions.

Results: Immodest messages



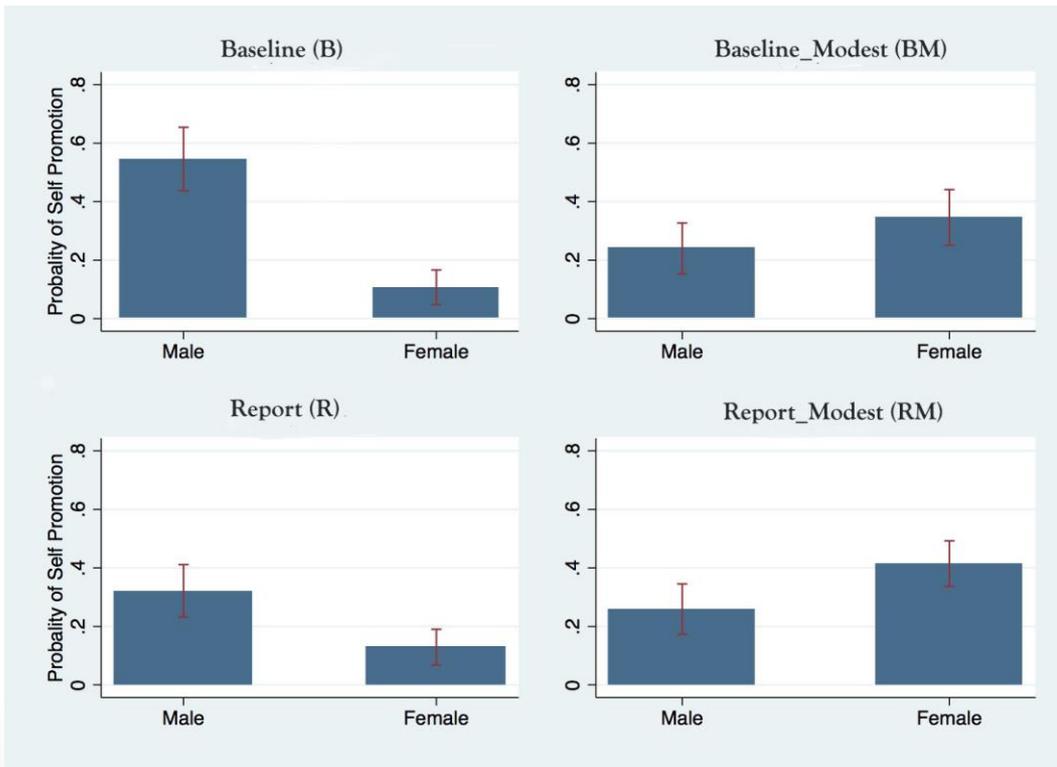
Self Promotion for men vs women

B: 54.5 vs 10.7 ($p < 0.01$, $n = 50$)

R: 32.1 vs 12.9 ($p = 0.08$, $n = 57$)

Result 1: When the self-promotion message provides no justification, men are more likely to self-promote relative to women.

Results: Modest vs Immodest messages



Males

- B vs BM: 54.5 vs 24.0 ($p = 0.03$, $n=47$)
- R vs RM: 32.1 vs 25.9 ($p = 0.61$, $n=55$)

Result 2: When costs are lowered, men do not increase self-promotion.

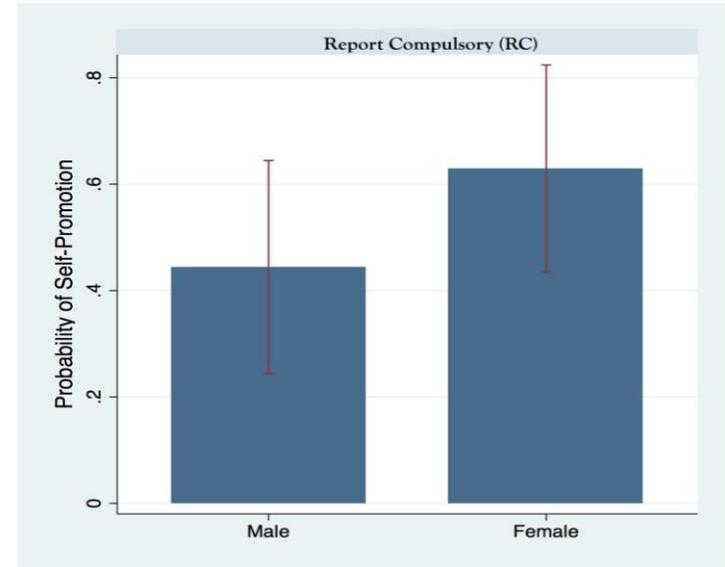
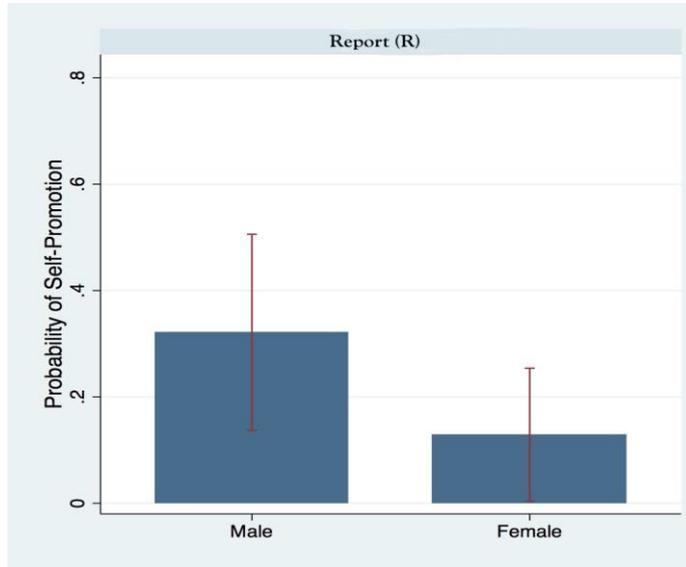
Females

- B vs BM: 10.7 vs 34.6 ($p = 0.04$, $n = 54$)
- R vs RM: 12.9 vs 41.5 ($p < 0.01$, $n = 72$)

Result 3: Option to justify self-promotion, increases self-promotion in women by over 3 times.

As a result initial gender gap no longer persists.

Compulsory Self-Promotion with Immodest Message



Self-Promotion Rates (R vs RC)

Overall: 30.0 vs. 53.7, ($p = 0.01$, $n=104$)

Females: 12.9 vs. 62.7, ($p < 0.01$, $n= 58$)

Males: 32.1 vs. 44.4 , ($p = 0.36$, $n=55$)

Result 4: When self-promotion is made compulsory, it increases for only females

Beliefs about Self-Promotion: Experiment Participants

We collected information on beliefs of play.

How many people posted message on Facebook wall?

Self Promoters vs Non Self-promoters

Males

B and R = 67.7 vs 31.5 ($p < 0.01$)

BM and RM = 65.1 vs 43.6 ($p < 0.05$)

Females

B and R = 46.1 vs 37.4 ($p = 0.41$)

BM and RM = 66.9 vs 38.1 ($p < 0.02$)

Male vs Females

B and R pooled

Self Promoters: 67.7 vs 46.1 ($p = 0.03$)

Non- Self-Promoters: 31.5 vs 37.4 ($p = 0.47$)

BM and RM pooled

Self Promoters: 65.1 vs 66.9 ($p = 0.68$)

Non- Self-Promoters: 43.6 vs 38.1 ($p = 0.33$)

- 1) Male self-promoters generally believe that others are also self-promoting more relative to male non-self promoters.
- 2) For females this is dependent on the message type.
 - When no justification is provided female self-promoters have same beliefs about overall self-promotion relative to female non self-promoters.
- 3) In the B and R pooled sample, men self-promoters have a more optimistic view about self-promotion relative to women self-promoters.

Beliefs about Self-Promotion: Survey Participants

For experimental participants, beliefs might be influenced by decisions.

Survey participants asked to predict behavior in the experiment

Predictions about experimental participants self-promotion rates: HC vs LC

For females: increase by 13 ppt. ($p < 0.01$)

For males: increase by 5.8 ppt. ($p < 0.01$)

Difference in rate of increase is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$)

These results are in line with beliefs results for experimental participants and can potentially explain the mechanism behind Result 2: making the messages more modest has a larger impact on women than men leading to the elimination of the gender gap in self-promotion behavior.

Final Remarks

Eliminating gender inequality has been a top priority but has been challenging.

- Gender stereotypes shape the choices of men and women in life.
- Women are significantly pre-disposed to self-promote when they perceive the action as immodest.
 - not an inherent limitation.
 - social and self image justifications can be useful.

Policy applications

Pro-social incentives for making achievements/good deeds public via newsletter

- both self-image and social image justifications will be at play
- women should respond positively to this.

Is there a gender gap in self-promotion about achievements?

Reuben (2014) show that men are more likely to boast about their achievements in a labor market experiment.

We don't test this formally and want to do this in the future.