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Equality-Efficiency Trade-off within French and German Couples – A Comparative Experimental Study

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Abstract

We present the results of an experiment measuring social preferences within couples in a context where intra-household pay-off inequality can be reduced at the cost of diminishing household income. We measure social norms regarding this efficiency-equality trade-off and implement a cross-country comparison between France and Germany. In particular, we show that German households are more inequality averse and are thus less efficient than French households. A decomposition of this difference reveals that approximately 40% is driven by diverging sample compositions in the two countries, while 60% of the initial French/German difference remains unexplained. Beliefs differ significantly from observed behavior in both countries. Efficient choices are overestimated in the German sample and underestimated in the French.

JEL Codes: C71, C91, C92, D13

Keywords: Intra-household allocation, Inequality aversion, Pareto efficiency, social norms

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1. Introduction

France and Germany are close neighbors, sharing many economic and cultural traits. However, there remain fundamental behavioral differences concerning gender roles in the family. Most French mothers remain closely connected to the labor market whereas many German mothers reduce their employment hours and take up a larger share of household work[1]. Intra-household income differences thus tend to be lower in France than in Germany. Differences in either institutions or values may explain these facts. Regarding institutions, family policy is somewhat different in the two countries. The supply of subsidized child-care for children less than three years old is largely insufficient in Germany, (in Western regions covering only 10% of the demand), while public institutions provide more facilities for external child-care in France (BMFSFJ 2008 and OECD 2011a). Regarding values, as asserted by Hofstede et al. (2011), the French society presents 'feminine' traits, i.e. (emotional) gender roles overlap. The German society is said to be more 'masculine', i.e. material success matters and gender roles appear more differentiated. Since these differences can give rise to larger income inequalities within German couples compared to French couples, they may also be the cause of different norms concerning equality among spouses. To test this hypothesis we present an experiment designed to measure social preferences within the family using a simple allocation task that implies an intra-household equality-efficiency trade-off.

Many econometric studies measure cross-country variations of income inequality aversion using survey data (Clark, Senik 2010). However, cross-cultural experiments based on actual behavior are scarce[2]. A specificity of our approach is that we focus on *intra-household* income inequality tolerance which may be of importance in understanding the gender biased arrangements within families. In our design, reducing intra-household inequality has a household cost that hinders maximization of household income. In this respect, our analysis is also related to the experimental literature that aims at experimentally testing the efficiency of household decision-making. While Iversen et al. (2006) run a field experiment to analyze a social dilemma game between couples in rural Uganda, Peters et al. (2004) perform laboratory experiments where the participants are involved in a public good game with varying counterparts. The latter study finds that family members contribute more to the public good when grouped together than when playing with strangers. Cochard et al. (2009) generate similar results when analyzing cooperation within couples: spouses' internal cooperation in a Prisoner's dilemma is also higher than when paired with strangers. However, cooperation within the couple is still not at its maximum. Munro et al. (2008) provide a test of Pareto efficiency which is closest to

[1] 43.7% (resp. 65.1% and 67.5%) of working mothers in Germany work part-time if the youngest child is less than three years old (resp. less than six years and less than 15 years). The respective numbers are 24.6%, 21.8% and 25.4% in France (OECD 2011b).

[2] Oosterbeek et al. (2004) compare the results of an ultimatum game run in different countries. However, the difference between France and Germany is not tested.

ours. Like Ashraf (2009), Carlsson et al. (2009), Mani (2008) and Robinson (2008) they find inefficiency in couples' decisions, whereas Bobonis (2008) does not reject the efficiency assumption. Further, as shown by an experiment in Germany by Beblo and Beninger (2012), if couples are forced to cooperate, intra-household distribution of resources depends strongly on each spouse's contribution to the household budget, although pooling is positively related to total household income. This result indicates egoistic behavior of the spouses, potentially explaining inefficient decision-making in couples.

2. Task and Predictions

The task (see Table 1) consists of five consecutive rounds concerning a payoff allocation between spouses. For rounds 1 and 2, efficiency implies a self-sacrifice. Both spouses respond to this task but only one of the two is later randomly selected as decision maker. No interaction between the spouses is allowed. Each round consists of selecting either an equal allocation to both partners (option A: 200 units for the couple split equally) or a higher joint payoff for both partners where inequality between partners varies across rounds (option B: 300 units for the couple).

Table 1: Intra-household allocation task

	option (A)		**option (B)**	
round	share for self	share for other	share for self	share for other
1	*100*	*100*	*0*	*300*
2	*100*	*100*	*75*	*225*
3	*100*	*100*	*150*	*150*
4	*100*	*100*	*225*	*75*
5	*100*	*100*	*300*	*0*

Decisions in this task may be related to well-known economic models of household behavior (for an overview see e.g. Chiappori and Donni, 2009). Efficient models (whether 'unitary', issued from cooperative game theory, or 'collective') predict the maximization of household income. Non-cooperative models predict similar results to a game played amongst strangers where joint income is not necessarily maximized. Behavior would depend on social preferences amongst spouses. Hence, our task allows the classification of participants based on their revealed preferences for either joint income maximization, own income maximization or partner's income maximization. Participants that prefer option A for the extreme rounds and option B for the middle rounds can be further classified as having some concern for equality.

In addition, participants were also asked to predict the average behavior of all participating men and women from their country. These questions consisted of the same five rounds presented above and participants were asked to indicate how many participants out of 100 they believe to have chosen

either option A or option B. We use beliefs about behavior from other participants as an indicator of perceived social norms in either country.

3. Experiment

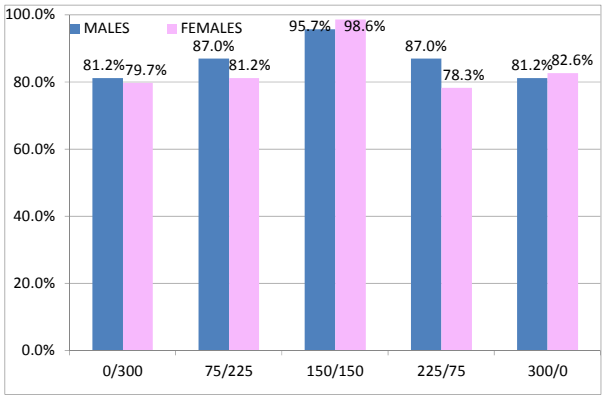
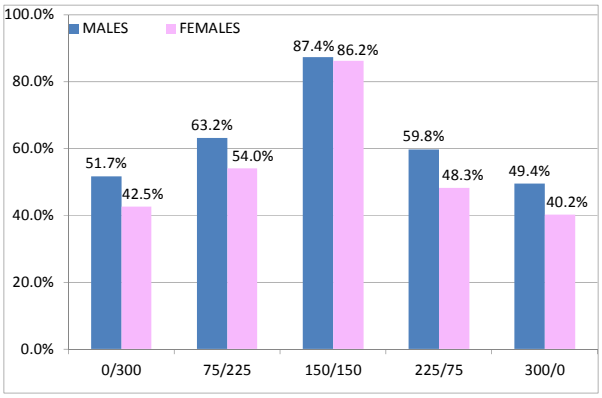
The experiments were held in May and June 2010 in two medium-sized cities in France and Germany (Mannheim and Toulouse). In both locations, established, heterosexual couples were invited to participate in an economic study, promoted through newspaper reports and flyers. Only couples living together for at least one year were eligible to participate. A total of 156 observations were involved (France: 69, Germany: 87), i.e. 312 participants. In France, the average age for men was 36 years and for women 35 years. In Germany, the average age for men was 41 years and for women 39 years. In France, 45 % of participating couples were married, with an average relationship duration of 10 years, while 52% of German couples were married, with an average relationship duration of 13 years. 71% of the French, but only 37% of the German participants achieved a university degree.

In Germany, the experiment was conducted by paper and pencil, with sessions involving twelve couples. In France, the experiment was computerized, and limited to six couples per session. Instructions for the experimental sections were identical in both countries. Payoffs from the experiment were converted into euros in the two locations according to an exchange rate specified at the beginning of the experiment (10 units = 1 euro in Germany and 20 units = 1 euro in France). For more details on the experimental design see the appendix.

4. Decisions

We firstly present the aggregate results of choosing the higher joint income option (option B) for each of the five rounds of the distribution task. Figure 1 illustrates the outcomes by gender for both countries. Results in France are very similar to earlier results obtained by Cochard et al. (2009). Approximately 74% of participants choose the efficient option for each of the five rounds. Decisions are symmetric concerning the inequality in option B. The difference compared with the German sample is particularly noteworthy. Choices are also symmetric concerning inequality in option B, however a much larger proportion of participants selected the equal outcome, i.e. option A. Specifically for the extreme rounds less than 50% of participants selected option B, and for the two intermediate rounds only slightly more than half selected option B. In both countries, we observe that men selected the efficient option B generally more often than women. However, the gender difference tends to be more pronounced in Germany.

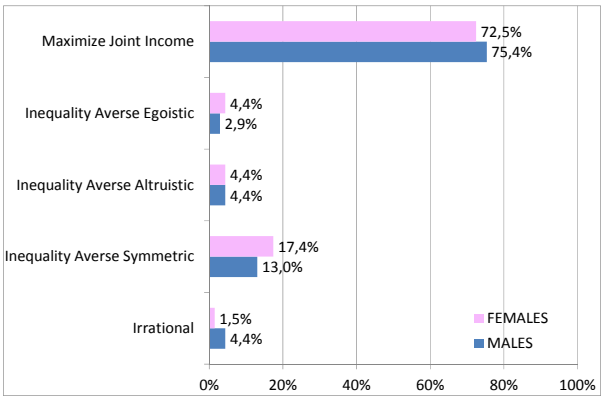
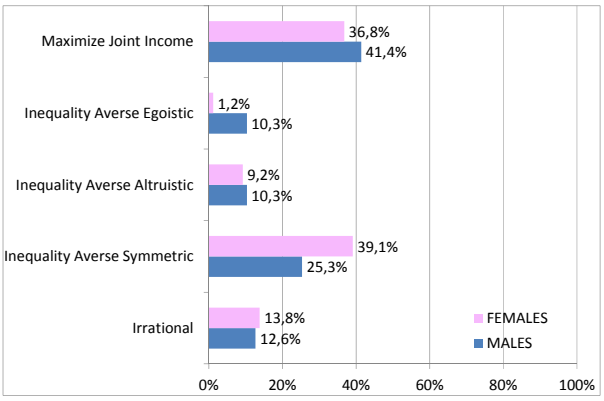
Figure 1: Female and male decisions across countries

French sample	German sample
	

Note : These graphs illustrate the percentages of women and men in each country sample that have opted for option B (higher total income but varying unequal shares between me/spouse) against option A (lower total income, equal shares). For example, in the first columns the participant receives 0 and the spouse receives 300 when choosing option B, instead of receiving 100 each when choosing option A.

We can further use data from the decision task to classify participants into different categories. We present the distribution of these types for the French and German sample in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Types of decision makers

French sample	German sample
	

Note: Subjects who 'Maximize joint income' are those who always choose option B; 'Inequality averse symmetric' subjects are those who sometimes choose option A (100/100), but behave the same way whether self or spouse is disadvantaged by the inequality in option B; 'Inequality averse egoistic' subjects are more inequality averse for themselves than for their partner; 'Inequality averse altruistic' subjects are more inequality averse for their partner than for themselves. Participants who select option A in the third round when option B (150/150) would be more beneficial for both are classified as 'Irrational'.

Approximately 74% of participants in the French sample always choose B and can thus be classified as joint income maximizers. Again the difference compared with the German sample is noteworthy. In the German sample less than 40% of participants can be classified as income maximizers. An almost equally large group can be classified as having some concern for inequality aversion.

The asymmetry in preferences across countries is also reflected in the outcomes on the couples' level. When we look at both spouses' choices, we find that in 59% of French couples both spouses maximize household income. In the German sample, both spouses maximize joint income in only 22% of the cases. By contrast, for 26% of the German couples both partners act in a manner demonstrating inequality aversion.

Table 2: Logistic regression on choosing Option B in round 1 by French and German participants

	France		Germany	
	Coef.	St. err.	Coef.	St. err.
Dummy female	**.787**	**.450**	-.342	. 329
Age	-.023	.041	**-.026**	**. 013**
Duration of relationship	-.023	.047	-.008	.030
Dummy married	.025	.592	-.398	.442
Number of children	.058	.361	**.558**	**.295**
Dummy university and college degree	.650	.472	**.884**	**.363**
Dummy high income (household)	.665	.594	-.297	.398
Dummy female earns more than male	**1.66**	**.933**	.433	.481
Dummy male earns more than female	**1.02**	**.843**	-.229	.427
Dummy female works more than male	-.021	.621	.099	.454
Constant	-.195	1.54	1.02	.740
Number of observations	138		174	
Log Likelihood	-67.918		-108.973	
Pseudo r-squared	.1066		.0802	

Notes: Coefficient estimates at the 10% significance level are in bold type. Estimations based on Probit or OLS regression equations yield very similar results.

In order to assess the importance of various socio-economic variables for the individual efficiency-equality trade-off decision we apply a multivariate regression analysis. In Table 2 we present the estimation results of two logistic regressions – for each country sample separately. The estimates show

that the preference for option B in the first round (I receive 0, my partner receives 300) is explained by very different factors in the two countries[3].

Among the German participants we see that younger and more highly educated participants with children are more likely to choose efficiency over equity, whereas among French participants the preference for efficiency is positively related to unequal incomes within the household. Other characteristics do not seem to be statistically related to the choices made.

Both the descriptive statistics presented above (Figure 1) and the regression results regarding the participants' decisions reveal marked differences in behavior in both France and Germany. This may in part be due to differing mean characteristics between the French and the German samples. For example, 71% of the French but only 37% of the German participants achieved a university degree, and the mean age in France was 35.5 years while German participants were 40 years old on average. We are able to control for these differences by the use of the decomposition technique initiated by Oaxaca (1973) and Blinder (1973). Here the mean difference between French and German choices is rewritten as the sum of two terms. The first term reflects that portion of the differing decisions which arises from differences in the average characteristics between both samples. The second term is the portion due to differences in the estimated coefficients, i.e. it represents that part of the observed mean difference between choices in France and Germany that is due to systematically differing preferences in both countries. For this purpose, we introduce the counterfactual variable $\overline{choice}^{1}_{FR}$ which gives the imputed choices of the German participants as if they had the same average characteristics as the French sample:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\overline{choice}_{DE} - \overline{choice}_{FR} &= \left(\overline{choice}_{DE} - \overline{choice}^{1}_{FR}\right) + \left(\overline{choice}^{1}_{FR} - \overline{choice}_{FR}\right) \\
&= \left(\hat{\beta}_{DE}\overline{X}_{DE} - \hat{\beta}_{DE}\overline{X}_{FR}\right) + \left(\hat{\beta}_{DE}\overline{X}_{FR} - \hat{\beta}_{FR}\overline{X}_{FR}\right) \\
&= \hat{\beta}_{DE}\left(\overline{X}_{DE} - \overline{X}_{FR}\right) + \overline{X}_{FR}\left(\hat{\beta}_{DE} - \hat{\beta}_{FR}\right).
\end{aligned} \tag{1}
$$

When applying Equation (1) to the estimated coefficients (see Table 2) and average characteristics (see Section 3) of our data, we find that almost half (41.4%) of the mean difference in choices between French and German participants can be explained by differences in the estimated coefficients in both samples. We may therefore conclude that preferences towards equity vs. efficiency do indeed differ between our French and German samples, even when holding characteristics constant. The conditional difference, however, is less prominent than observed at first glance.

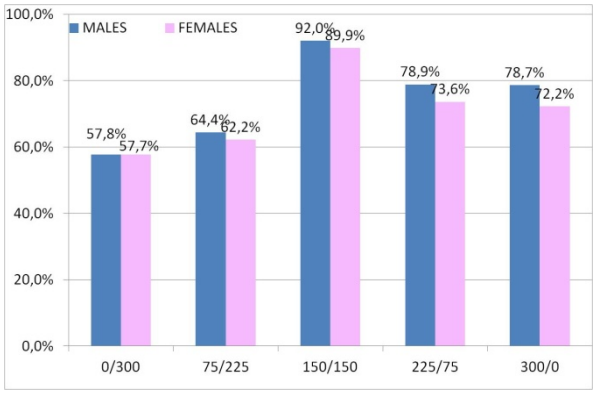
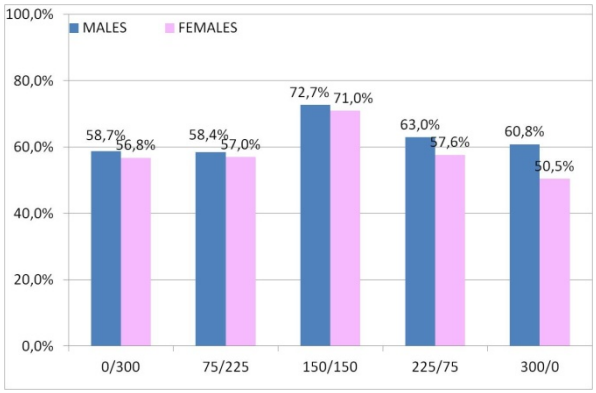
[3] This observation is also confirmed when analyzing the remaining four rounds.

5. Beliefs

In this section, we analyze beliefs by men and women concerning the average behavior of all participating men and women (from their country) in the study. We observe that beliefs differ significantly from observed behavior. Moreover the type of mistakes made differ across the two countries and gender.

From Figure 3 we see that gender differences in beliefs appear to be negligible for rounds 1, 2 and 3 in both countries, although men are always expected to be more prone to select the efficient option. However, women are expected to be less selfish on average than men, in particular in Germany, as half of the German women, but 60% of the men, are expected to choose option B in round 5.

Figure 3: Beliefs about female and male decisions in whole population

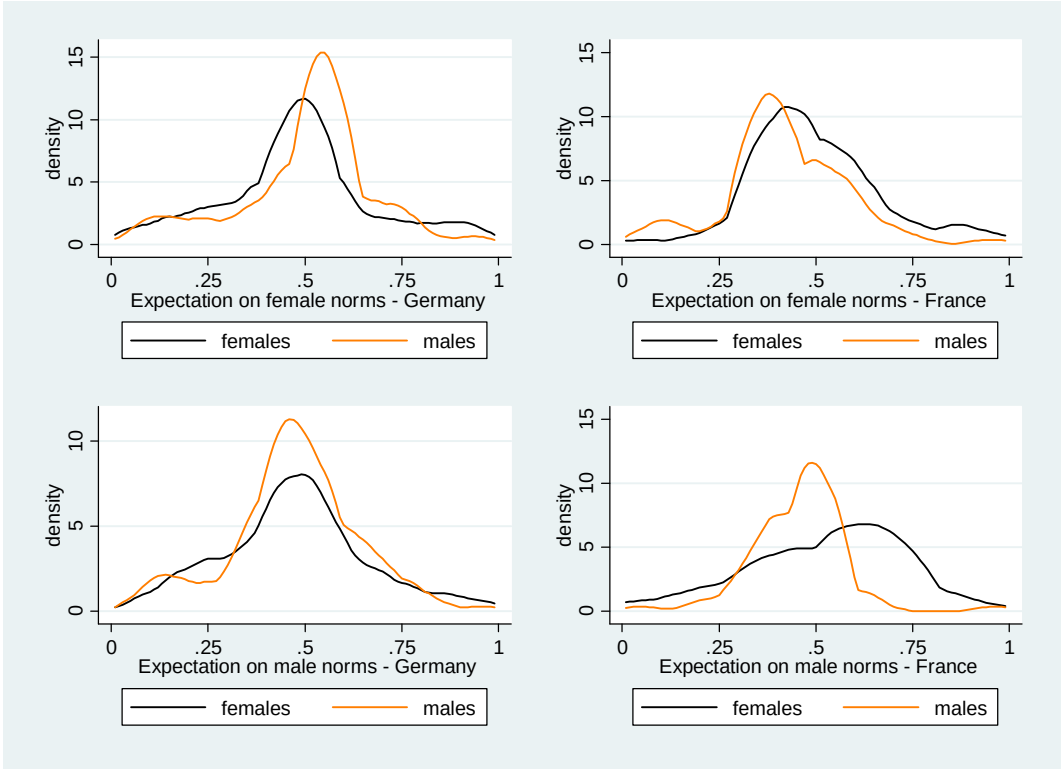
French sample, whole population	**German sample, whole population**
	

Note : These graphs illustrate the mean beliefs (in percentages) for women and men in each country sample for choosing option B. For example, French participants believe that 57.8% of men and 57.7% of women choose option B in round 1.

Figure 4 shows even more differentiated gender- and country-specific patterns. The graphs show the distribution of an indicator of asymmetry in female and male expectations regarding female and male choices in rounds 1 and 2, relative to expectations for rounds 4 and 5. Specifically, the more the lines are skewed to the left, the more the participants are expected to be egoistic. On the contrary, the more the lines are skewed to the right, the more the participants are expected to be altruistic. The figure reveals that in Germany, women are believed to be more egoistic particularly by men, whereas in France, men are expected to be significantly more egoistic on average by women than by themselves. Jarque-Bera tests show that the normality assumption is rejected at the 5% significance level for female expectations on female choices and male expectations on male choices in France, and male

beliefs about female behavior in Germany. At the 10% level the normality assumption is also rejected for male beliefs regarding female behavior in France. For the remaining gender- and country-specific subgroups, we can accept statistically the hypothesis that participants believe in people behaving symmetrically. Hence, we measure significant differences in gender-specific beliefs across and within countries on individual preferences for equity vs. efficiency. This leads us to conclude that the social norms concerning these beliefs differ between men and women on the one hand, and France and Germany on the other hand.

Figure 4: Beliefs about average female and male payoff shares



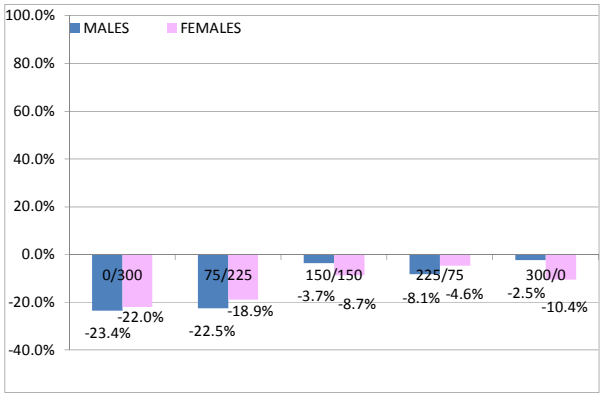
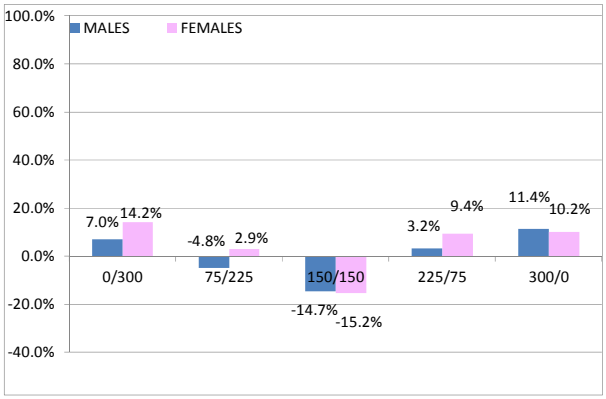
Note: The graphs show the kernel density functions of the indicator of asymmetry in mean female and male expectations on female and male choices in rounds 1 and 2, relatively to expectations on female and male choices in rounds 4 and 5, separately for France and Germany. Example 1: Value 0 for female in the upper left graph means that all German women are expected by the women to choose option B in rounds 1 and 2, and option A in rounds 4 and 5 (women are expected by German women to have a fully altruistic behaviour). Example 2: Value 1 for male in the upper right graph means that all French women are expected by the men to choose option A in rounds 1 and 2, and option B in rounds 4 and 5 (women are expected by French men to have a fully egoistic behaviour). Example 3: Value .5 means that the expectations are the same for rounds 1 and 2, and 4 and 5.

Beyond this, in France, people are expected to be *less* efficient than they actually are, whereas in Germany people are expected to be *more* efficient than they actually are (except for round 3), as

illustrated by Figure 5. It shows, for each round and country samples, the differences between expected and actual behavior (i.e. subtracting Figure 1 from Figure 3). For example, in France altruistic behavior by men is underestimated by 23.4 percentage points (round 1), respectively 22.5 percentage points (round 2). The numbers for French women are similar, but somewhat smaller. In Germany, women's altruism is overestimated by 14.2 percentage points, respectively 2.9 percentage points, while men behave more or less as expected when averaging over the first two rounds. Interestingly, errors in expectations tend to be symmetric in Germany, whereas they tend to be asymmetric in France, reflecting the belief that French participants are egoistic, although they actually have symmetric choices.

Beliefs concerning egoistic choices by others can be linked to the observation that general trust in France is somewhat lower than in Germany (World Values Survey, 2011, Cahuc and Algan, 2007; Willinger et al., 2003).

Figure 5: Difference between beliefs and actual behavior

French sample	**German sample**
	

Note : These graphs illustrate the mean difference between beliefs and actual behavior for women and men in each round and country sample in opting for option B. For example, for France in round 1 (i.e. "I get 0/my spouse gets 300"), 81.2% of French male participants choose option B, though only 57.8% are expected to do so. Hence, altruistic behavior is underestimated by 23.4 percentage points.

Conclusion

In summary, there is a substantial difference in French and German couples' efficiency-equality trade-off decisions. While approximately three quarters of French participants always choose the efficient option for the couple instead of the equal repartition between spouses, this is the case for less than half of the German participants. Inequality aversion seems symmetric in both samples. When making the

country samples more comparable by controlling for socio-economic variables, around 60% of the initial French/German difference remains unexplained. Notably, the difference in behavior between the two countries does not seem to be driven by existing real-life income inequalities within couples, as spouses are not more inequality averse as earnings diverge between them.

Furthermore, beliefs differ significantly from observed behavior in both countries. In the German sample efficient choices are overestimated, while in the French sample they are underestimated and people expect much more egoism than actually exists. Having shown that spouses' behavior can differ widely between two neighboring countries of reasonably similar economic and cultural background, we can therefore stress the importance of taking into account cross-cultural differences when considering the potential effects of social and family policy measures.

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Appendix:

Part 1: Instructions (translation) and screen shots from experiment in Toulouse

Translation of text below:

You will make a number of decisions.

Each numbered line, proposes two different distributions of FT (Franc Toulousain) between you and your partner.

For each line you have to choose one of the two options:

option A or option B

Consider for example the first line. In option A, each of you earns 100 FT. In option B, the man will earn 0 FT and the woman will earn 300 FT.

For each line you will therefore have to check one of the boxes. At the end of the study we will randomly select one of these lines. In addition we will randomly determine whether the decision of the man or the woman will be used for the final distribution of earnings.

[screen for the female version]

Résumé des instructions:

Vous allez effectuer une série de décisions.
Chaque ligne, numérotée, propose deux répartitions possibles de FT entre vous et votre partenaire.
Pour chaque ligne, vous devez choisir une des deux répartitions :

la répartition A ou la répartition B

	Répartition A:			Répartition B:		
	mon partenaire		moi-même	mon partenaire		moi-même
1 :	100 FT	A : ○	100 FT	0 FT	B : ○	300 FT
2 :	100 FT	A : ○	200 FT	75 FT	B : ○	225 FT
3 :	100 FT	A : ○	100 FT	150 FT	B : ○	150 FT

Considérez par exemple la première ligne. Dans la répartition A, chacun obtient 100 FT. Dans la répartition B, l'homme obtient 0 FT et la femme obtient 300 FT.

Pour chaque ligne, vous devez donc cocher une case. A la fin de l'enquête, nous tirerons au sort une de ces lignes. Nous tirerons ensuite au sort qui de l'homme ou de la femme décidera de la répartition effective des gains.

[in the following we present the screens for the male version]

Situation 1

Choisissez pour chaque ligne une des deux répartitions.

	Répartition A:				Répartition B:		
	 Ma partenaire		 Moi-même		 Ma partenaire		 Moi-même
1 :	100	A : ○	100		0	B : ◉	300
2 :	100	A : ○	100		75	B : ◉	225
3 :	100	A : ○	100		150	B : ◉	150
4 :	100	A : ○	100		225	B : ◉	75
5 :	100	A : ○	100		300	B : ◉	0

Suite

Translation of text below:

What do you think that your partner chose? Select for each line, whether you believe that your partner chose option A or option B.

Question 1 sur la situation 1

Que pensez-vous que votre partenaire a choisi? Choisissez, pour chaque ligne, si vous pensez que votre partenaire a choisi la répartition A, ou la répartition B.

	Répartition A:				Répartition B:		
	 Moi-même		 Ma partenaire		 Moi-même		 Ma partenaire
1 :	100	A : ○	100		0	B : ◉	300
2 :	100	A : ○	100		75	B : ◉	225
3 :	100	A : ○	100		150	B : ◉	150
4 :	100	A : ○	100		225	B : ◉	75
5 :	100	A : ○	100		300	B : ◉	0

Suite

Translation of text below:

What do you think did other women participating in this study decided? Given 100 women participating in this study, indicate for each line how many women chose option A. Option B will be automatically completed.

Question 2 sur la situation 1

Comment pensez-vous que les femmes participant à cette étude ont décidé? Pour 100 femmes participant à l'étude, indiquez pour chaque ligne, combien de femmes ont choisi la répartition A. La répartition B se complètera automatiquement.

1 :	100	A :	5	100	0	B :	95	300
2 :	100	A :	10	100	75	B :	90	225
3 :	100	A :	0	100	150	B :	100	150
4 :	100	A :	15	100	225	B :	85	75
5 :	100	A :	10	100	300	B :	90	0

Valider

Question 3 sur la situation 1

Comment pensez-vous que les hommess participant à cette étude ont décidé? Pour 100 hommes participant à l'étude, indiquez pour chaque ligne, combien d'hommes ont choisi la répartition A. La répartition B se complètera automatiquement.

1 :	100	A :		100	0	B :		300
2 :	100	A :		100	75	B :		225
3 :	100	A :		100	150	B :		150
4 :	100	A :		100	225	B :		75
5 :	100	A :		100	300	B :		0

Valider

Part 2: Instructions (translation) and sheets from experiment in Mannheim

Translation of text below:

In this task you decide about the distribution of money between yourself and your partner by choosing either option A or option B. There are five lines. Please tick one of the options in each line.

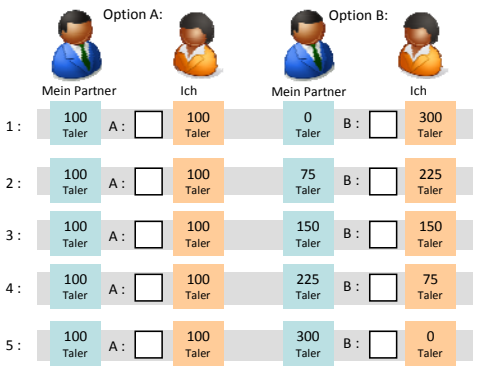
Each woman and each man makes five decisions. At the end of the study we will select one of these decisions and you will receive the respective compensation.

[screen for the female version]

Aufgabe 1

In dieser ersten Aufgabe entscheiden Sie über die Aufteilung von Geld zwischen sich und Ihrem Partner, indem Sie entweder Option A oder Option B wählen. Es gibt fünf Zeilen. Bitte kreuzen Sie in jeder Zeile eine der Optionen an.

Jede Frau **und** jeder Mann trifft fünf Entscheidungen (eine pro Zeile). Aus allen Entscheidungen wird am Ende der Studie nur eine ausgewählt und Sie bekommen die dort angekreuzte Auszahlung.

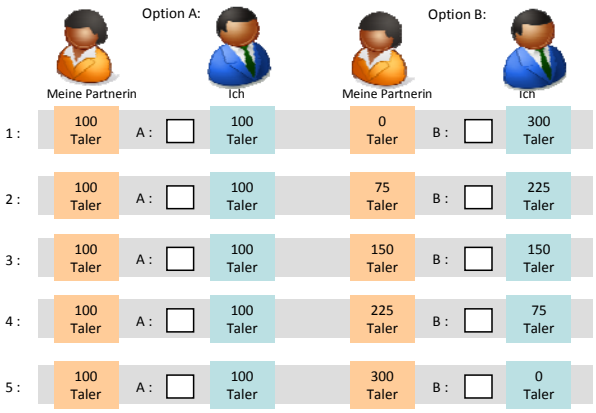


Translation of text below:

What do you think your partner has chosen? Select for each line, whether you believe that your partner chose option A or option B.

1. Frage zu Aufgabe 1

Was meinen Sie, wie hat Ihr Partner entschieden? Setzen Sie in jeder Zeile Ihr Kreuz für Option A oder Option B so, wie es Ihr Partner wahrscheinlich getan hat.

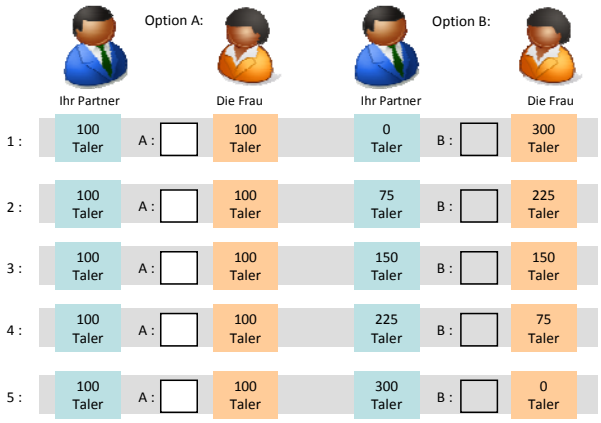


Translation of text below:

What do you think did other women participating in this study decided? Given 100 women participating in this study, indicate for each line how many women chose option A.

2. Frage zu Aufgabe 1

Was meinen Sie, wie entscheiden die weiblichen Teilnehmer in dieser Studie insgesamt bei dieser Aufgabe? Tragen Sie in jeder Zeile ein, wie viele der 100 Teilnehmerinnen **Option A** wählen. Option B müssen Sie nicht ausfüllen.



Translation of text below:

What do you think did other men participating in this study decided? Given 100 men participating in this study, indicate for each line how many men chose option A.

3. Frage zu Aufgabe 1

Was meinen Sie, wie entscheiden die männlichen Teilnehmer in dieser Studie insgesamt bei dieser Aufgabe? Tragen Sie in jeder Zeile ein, wie viele der 100 Teilnehmer **Option A** wählen. Option B müssen Sie nicht ausfüllen.