The (Im)Moral Man?
An Experimental Study on Hypocrisy and Gender in Dictator-Game Giving

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A. Introduction

The dictator game (DG)–due to its very simple design–is a powerful tool to systematically vary the conditions that affect altruistic behavior and explore behavioral heterogeneity (Engel, 2011). In the standard version of the game, the dictator is provided with an amount of money (the pie) she can distribute between herself and the receiver, who does not make any decision and cannot react to the dictator's proposal (Forsythe et al., 1994). Roth (1995) notes that the dictator's allocation "… can be interpreted as a pure expression of her preferences" (p. 270). Totally selfish dictators are expected to keep the whole pie. Yet, Forsythe et al. (1994) and later behavioral studies report the existence of other-regarding dictators allocating shares of about 20 % to 30 % to receivers in incentivized standard versions of the DG (e.g., Camerer, 2003; Engel, 2011). The literature following Forsythe et al. (1994) altered experimental conditions to understand when and why altruistic behavior is observed by analyzing, e.g., repetition, stakes, anonymity, proximity, or gender effects (e.g., Camerer 2003; Engel 2011). Having conducted–to the best of our knowledge–the first meta-analysis of dictator game experiments, Engel (2011) concludes: "Dictator games are helpful for exploring human sociality, because the situation can be tightly controlled, because the simple game can be played with all classes of participants and, of course, because decisions are incentivized." (p. 608).

In recent years, Roth's (1995) notion that dictators' seemingly other-regarding behaviors express true altruistic preferences was questioned, for instance, when a wiggle room exists (e.g., Dana et al., 2007; Fischbacher & Föllmi-Heusi; 2013; Abeler et al., 2014; Cerrone & Engel, 2019), when people have image concerns (Andreoni & Bernheim 2009; Lönnqvist et al., 2014), or when they have normative expectations believing that others

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expect them to conform to a given norm, although they would like to behave differently (e.g., Bicchieri, 2005; Bicchieri & Xiao, 2009; Bicchieri, 2016).

This study focuses on a situation in which there is a wiggle room for the dictator. In our experiment, the dictator has the option of flipping a fair coin to determine how the pie is divided, with the result of the coin flip being private information known only to the dictator and unverifiable by the receiver and the experimenter. These types of (seemingly) fair procedures, in which, on the one hand, the dictator has control over the outcome of the coin flip and, on the other hand, asymmetric information exists about how the ostensibly fair procedure was actually carried out, are often used in practice. For example, consider social auditing companies whose activities cannot be monitored from the outside. These companies typically act on competitive markets and depend on the auditee they are supposed to monitor to give the assignment to do so. The auditor therefore has an incentive to achieve an audit result that does not conflict with the audited company's objectives. Other examples include influencing and selecting expert commissions, or arranging seemingly fair elections.

Lönnqvist et al. (2014) and Apffelstaedt et al. (2025) analyze this topic in a specific variant of the DG where the dictator can directly choose either an equal split of the pie, a payoff in favor of herself, or use the coin to determine the allocation (Batson et al., 1997; Bucciol & Piovesan, 2011). If dictators use the coin honestly, the outcomes should reflect the 50%-probability of payoffs favorable to themselves. Lönnqvist et al. (2014) and Apffelstaedt et al. (2025) report that most dictators take advantage of the wiggle-room option as much more than half of the reported coin-flip outcomes favor the dictator. This result suggests that many dictators are not primarily motivated to *be* altruistic or fair (also report an equal-split coin-flip outcome or choose the fifty / fifty split directly) but to *appear* altruistic (choose the coin but report only favorable outcomes).

To raise non-selfish and honest behavior, Lönnqvist & Walkowitz (2019) in a similarly structured DG employed perspective taking (Batson, 1991; 2011) to increase the dictator's empathy for the receiver. Before their decision, dictators were asked to write three sentences about how they imagined the matched receiver's feelings and how their decision would affect the receiver. In the control condition, dictators had to write three sentences about the weather of the previous day. Finally, empathy-concern was measured by having dictators in both treatments rate on a scale from 0 to 6 their feelings towards the receiver (Davis, 1980; 1983). Al-

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though the average empathy-concern measure was significantly higher in the empathy treatment compared to the control treatment, Lönnqvist & Walkowitz (2019) did not find a significant effect of the empathy priming on dictators' other-regarding behavior.

In the papers mentioned above, gender has not been analyzed. Yet, some of the reported effects regarding altruistic behavior and/or honesty in DGs may have been driven by gender as women are expected to be more other-regarding than men. The evidence, however, is inconclusive. For instance, Bolton & Katok (1995) and Frey & Bohnet (1995) find no gender differences, whereas Eckel & Grossman (1998) and Andreoni & Vesterlund (2001) do, the latter in either direction depending on the cost of altruism. Based on his meta-analyses, Engel (2011) concludes that women are significantly more generous than men. Another gender difference may relate to honesty. The evidence, again, is inconclusive, see the meta-analysis of Gerlach et al. (2019) and the literature cited therein. The review analysis suggests, however, that men behave slightly more dishonestly in the coin-flip task than women do, and this difference is statistically significant. Given these findings, we take the conclusion of Andreoni & Vesterlund (2001) seriously that gender differences in economic experiments may be a factor that researchers have to examine carefully.

Our study contributes to the literature on gender effects in the dictator game by combining the above strands. We analyze how gender affects behavior when besides a direct choice the option exists that the private flip of a fair coin decides on an even (fair) distribution of the pie or a selfish allocation favoring the dictator. We further analyze whether, and if so, how empathy priming affects behavior.

B. Experiment

I. Experimental design

The dictator is provided with a pie of 10 € he has to distribute between himself and the receiver. All dictators also receive a coin labeled "8/2" on one side and "5/5" on the other side. The dictator can choose from three options. First, he can directly choose the selfish option "8/2" (8/2d) yielding 8 € for himself and 2 € for the receiver. Second, he can directly choose the equal split "5/5" (5/5d) yielding 5 € for both. Third, he can toss the coin and determine the distribution according to the outcome

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of the coin flip ("8/2c" or "5/5c") (Lönnqvist *et al.* 2014). The dictator is then asked to indicate his choice and whether he flipped the coin ("Yes" or "No"). Neither the experimenter nor the receiver could observe whether the dictator actually did flip the coin or whether he only reported having tossed it. The receiver does not make any decisions, and the game is played only once. 8/2 is chosen as the selfish option because the mean transfer in dictator games is approximately 20 % of the endowment (Camerer 2003), suggesting that many dictators feel comfortable with this division.

We conduct two treatments. Before dictators had made their decision and after being told their role (dictator / receiver), they are primed in the following ways. As in Lönnqvist & Walkowitz (2019), in the *Empathy* treatment, each dictator is asked to imagine the receiver's feelings, the well-being and how the dictator's decision would affect the receiver (perspective taking, see Coke *et al.* 1978; Fultz *et al.* 1986; Batson *et al.* 1988). Further, each dictator has to write at least three sentences about what he / she imagines. In the *Control* treatment, subjects are asked to think and write about yesterday's weather. Participants are confronted with this scenario to keep the procedure in both treatments as equal as possible. To analyze the empathy concern of the dictators, we ask them after their decision to indicate their feelings towards the receiver by rating on a scale from 0 to 6 for each of the following items whether they felt "understanding, soft-hearted, warm-hearted, compassionate, loving, moved" (Davis, 1980; 1983).

II. Procedures

Upon arrival, participants were randomly seated in computer cubicles that secured anonymity. At the beginning of the experiment, all participants received written information about the structure of the dictator game. Then each participant was assigned the role of either dictator or receiver. For reasons of cost efficiency only two participants per session were chosen to be receivers (see Walkowitz, 2021), since only decisions of dictators were of interest in our study. For payment implementation the two receivers were matched with two randomly chosen dictators and paid according to the corresponding dictator's decision. The computer-based experimental sessions were conducted at the University of Cologne (Germany) on the experimental platform z-Tree (Fischbacher 2007). The experiment lasted for about one hour including parts of the session not included in this paper. 234 participants of different majors participated.

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They were invited via the mailing list of the Laboratory of Economic Research. Eight experimental sessions were run, four per treatment. On average, dictators were paid a decision-dependent amount of 7€ and a show-up fee of 4 €.

C. Results

I. Descriptives

In total, 234 subjects participated in two treatments, 114 in the treatment *Control* and 120 in the treatment *Empathy*. The percentages of females are rather similar in both treatments (*Control*: 58.77; *Empathy*: 56.67, p= 0.745, Chi^2 test). Subjects are also comparable with regard to average age (23.41 vs. 23.27 years, p=0.788, Fisher-Pitman Permutation Test, two-tailed, FPPT in the following) and the share of German natives (86.84 % vs. 85.83 %, p=0.822, Chi^2 test). The average empathy-concern score in *Empathy* (2.74) is significantly higher than in *Control* (2.20) for the whole sample (p<0.001, FPPT) and separately for males (2.47 vs. 2.05, p=0.080) and females (2.95 vs. 2.31, p=0.004, FPPT). This suggests that perspective taking was effective and increased the empathy concern for the receiver. Further, we find a gender difference in *Empathy:* females state higher empathy concern scores than males after having been primed (2.95 vs. 2.47, p=0.026), but not in *Control* (2.31 vs. 2.05, p=0.285).

Regarding dictator behavior, reported coin use is very similar across treatments (45.83 % in *Empathy* vs. 41.23 % in *Control*, p=0.478, Chi^2 test). Although the fraction of dictators who choose an 8/2 allocation decreases in *Empathy*, and tends to be lower for females, we find no evidence that it differs significantly, neither between treatments for the whole sample (p=0.160, Chi^2 test) nor separately for men (p=0.221) or women (p=0.401). As to average monetary transfers to the receiver we find a similar picture. They increase in *Empathy*, and tend to be higher for females; yet, there is no significant difference between treatments for the whole sample, for men and women ($p\geq$0.157) separately, and also not between genders ($p\geq$0.238, both FPPT). Table 1 provides an overview over the characteristics of the dictators and the transfers in € to the receivers differentiated by gender and treatment.

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II. Gender-specific treatment effects

We now analyze how *Empathy* affects the distribution of the four outcomes for males and females. See Figure 1 for the percentages of chosen options.

Table 1: Dictators' characteristics and behavior by gender and treatment

Gender	Male		Female	
Variables/Treatment	Control	Empathy	Control	Empathy
Age	24.13 (3.66)	23.42 (4.59)	22.91 (2.72)	23.14 (4.35)
German (%)	82.98	84.62	89.55	86.76
Empathy concern (Avrg.)	2.05 (1.31)	2.47 (0.98)	2.31 (1.26)	2.95 (1.39)
Reported coin use (%)	36.17	50.00	44.78	42.65
8/2 allocations (%)	76.60	65.38	68.66	61.76
Monetary transfer (Avrg. % of 10€-pie)	27.02 (12.83)	30.38 (14.41)	29.40(14.02)	31.47(14.69)
Observations	47	52	67	68

Note: This table shows per treatment and differentiated by gender: average age, share of German natives, average empathy concern, share of reported coin use, share of 8/2 allocations and the average monetary transfer to the receiver in percent of the 10€-pie. Average empathy concern displays the average over five items of the empathic concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) developed by Davis (1980, 1983). The items (understanding, soft-hearted, warm-hearted, compassionate, loving, moved) are adjectives used in the stem of the Empathic Concern scale (e.g., "I am often quite touched by things that I see happen") or ratings (0 to 6) of how well each adjective describes oneself. Standard deviation in parentheses.

Result 1 (Gender-specific treatment effects):

Empathy shifts behavior of males from direct 8/2 choices towards coin-based 8/2 allocations, and, partly, to 5/5 outcomes. For females, *Empathy* induces weaker reductions in direct 8/2 allocations and instead encourages more direct 5/5 outcomes.

Support males:

Empathy priming reduces the frequency of 8/2d significantly (p=0.006, FPPT) compared to *Control*, while 8/2c and 5/5d tend to increase (p=0.157, p=0.203, FPPT, respectively). Among those dictators who implement the selfish allocation, reported coin use increases significantly in *Empathy* (p=0.014).

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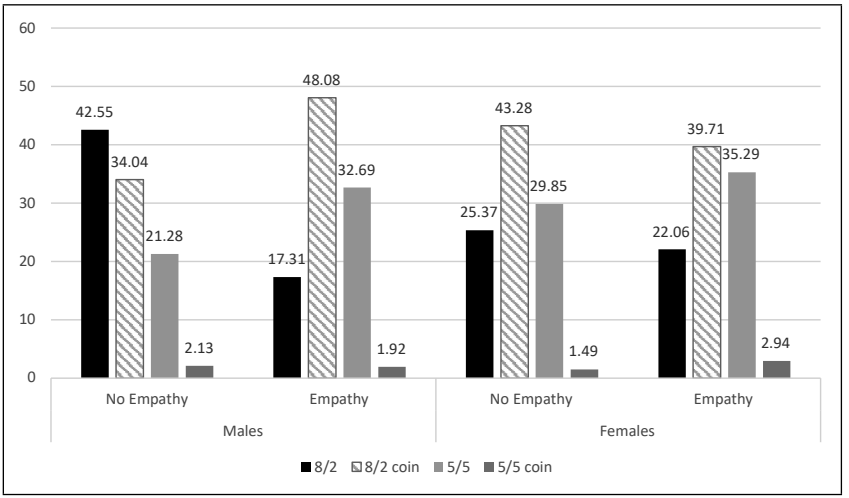

Figure 1. Allocations and Reported Coin Use across Treatments for both Genders

Support females:

Empathy lowers 8/2d and 8/2c outcomes relative to *Control*, but only slightly ($p \geq 0.651$, FPPT). Although we observe the highest increase in percentage points in 5/5d choices, this is not significant ($p=0.500$, FPPT). In contrast to males, reported coin use does not change in *Empathy* for those female dictators who choose the selfish allocation ($p=0.904$). Note that both, males and females, are cheating when reporting the coin-flip results. 8/2c occurs highly significantly more often than would be expected by the toss of a fair coin ($p<0.0001$, binomial test). 5/5c is reported very seldom and stays unchanged.

III. Mechanisms

In the following, we investigate for both genders the mechanisms behind their choices in *Empathy* compared to *Control* by regression analyses. We first analyze the determinants for reporting coin use of dictators across males and females. Secondly, we examine the drivers of selfish 8/2 choices in the two treatments for each gender.

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1. Reported coin use

We estimate a series of probit-regression models (Table 2), and restrict our analysis to those dictators who chose the selfish 8/2 outcome, as 5/5c was almost never chosen. To analyze the impact of empathy concern on coin use, we generate the variable "High-empathy-concern", which is gender specific and is coded = 1 if a male (female) dictator has a higher average empathy-concern score than the median of all average empathy-concern values for males (females). It is coded = 0 if the average empathy-concern score is lower or equal to the median of the gender-specific values.

Result 2 (Reported coin use):

We find a notable behavioral difference between genders. Whereas the variables Empathy and High-empathy-concern emerge as significant and robust predictors of coin use in the male sample, there is no discernible effect for females. Females' reported coin use appears not to be driven by treatment or high empathy concern.

Support males:

The probability of choosing 8/2c increases significantly in *Empathy* compared to *Control* (Table 2, Model 1), suggesting that for men, the empathy priming increases the probability to engage in coin use. High-empathy-concern also has a significant positive effect on the probability to use the coin compared to low-empathy concern subjects (Model 2). When both variables are included in the regression (Model 3), empathy-priming and high-empathy-concern remain positive and significant, indicating that these factors exert independent effects on the likelihood of coin use. Model 4 introduces an interaction term between *Empathy* and high-empathy-concern. Both coefficients remain positive and (weakly) significant, whereas the interaction term is negative, and not statistically significant. This indicates that the effect of empathy-priming on coin use does not vary substantially by levels of empathy concern. Age has a negative impact on reported coin use.

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Table 2: Probability of coin use when choosing the selfish option, differentiated by gender

	Males				Females			
Variables/Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Empathy	0.779**		0.788**	0.828**	0.055		0.050	-0.032
	(0.329)		(0.335)	(0.422)	(0.278)		(0.279)	(0.333)
High-empathy-concern		0.753**	0.762**	0.815*		0.298	0.297	0.155
		(0.337)	(0.348)	(0.457)		(0.317)	(0.317)	(0.435)
Empathy x High-empathy-concern				-0.127				0.301
				(0.729)				(0.640)
Age	-0.087**	-0.099**	-0.081*	-0.084*	-0.080	-0.086*	-0.086*	-0.093*
	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.044)	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.050)
German native	0.469	0.381	0.646	0.620	0.029	0.073	0.079	0.061
	(0.535)	(0.607)	(0.632)	(0.643)	(0.408)	(0.408)	(0.408)	(0.417)
Constant	1.491	1.925	0.909	0.979	2.146*	2.185*	2.168*	2.379*
	(1.303)	(1.323)	(1.406)	(1.443)	(1.189)	(1.165)	(1.170)	(1.225)
Observations	70	70	70	70	88	88	88	88

Notes: Differentiated by gender, this table shows results from probit regressions on the probability of coin use when 8/2 is chosen. Standard errors clustered at subject level in parentheses. The reference category for treatment is *Control*. High-empathy-concern is a dummy coded 1 if the empathy-concern score is above the median for males (females). Empathy x high-empathy-concern is the interaction term of the two variables Empathy and-High empathy-concern. 70 males (88 females) report coin use. Age and being a German native have a negative impact on the probability to use the coin, which however, is not robust.

Support females:

In contrast to the male subsample, empathy priming does not significantly affect the probability of coin use in any specification (Models 5–8). Likewise, high-empathy-concern and its interaction with *Empathy* fail to achieve statistical significance (Models 6 to 8).

2. Selfish 8/2 choices

Next, we estimate a series of probit-regressions to study the determinants of 8/2 choices in the two treatments differentiated by gender (Tables 3 and 4). We analyze how reported coin use and high empathy concern affect the probability of choosing the selfish allocation.

Result 3 (Selfish behavior of males and females):

For males, reported coin use has little effect in *Control*, but becomes a strong predictor of selfishness in *Empathy*. For females, reported coin use is already a strong predictor of selfish allocations in *Control*. For both genders, high-empathy-concern consistently reduces the probability of choosing the selfish option. When differentiating by reported coin use,

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Table 3: Probability of males choosing the selfish allocation 8/2 when reporting coin use, differentiated by treatment

	Control				Empathy			
Variables/Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)*)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Coin use	0.820		0.814	-	2.322***		2.890***	4.873***
	(0.585)		(0.710)	-	(0.509)		(0.678)	(0.503)
High-empathy-concern		-1.202**	-1.201**	-		-1.484***	-2.172***	-2.168***
		(0.508)	(0.562)	-		(0.486)	(0.674)	(0.680)
Coin use x High-empathy-concern				-				-1.987**
				-				(0.831)
Age	0.004	0.018	0.029	-	0.044	-0.060	0.006	0.006
	(0.065)	(0.072)	(0.071)	-	(0.048)	(0.043)	(0.052)	(0.052)
German native	1.075*	1.380**	1.088**	-	-0.010	-0.371	-0.860	-0.859
	(0.555)	(0.561)	(0.538)	-	(0.631)	(0.531)	(0.784)	(0.784)
Constant	-0.429	-0.095	-0.376	-	-1.474	3.112**	1.415	1.412
	(1.721)	(1.851)	(1.778)	-	(1.520)	(1.452)	(1.863)	(1.865)
Observations	47	47	47	47	52	52	52	52

Notes: Differentiated by treatment, this table shows results from probit regressions on the probability of males choosing the selfish option 8/2 when reporting coin use. Standard errors clustered at subject level in parentheses. 47 (52) males chose 8/2 in *Control* (*Empathy*). Age and being a German native have no impact on the probability to choose 8/2. See the notes of Table 2 for further variable definitions. *)We could not estimate the full Model 4 including the interaction term "Coin use x High-empathy-concern", because all but one male dictator in the high-empathy-concern group who reported coin use, implemented the selfish allocation.

high-empathy-concern is associated with a lower probability of a selfish allocation for those who use the coin and for those who don't. For low-empathy-concern coin-users, selfish allocations are more likely.

Support males:

In *Control*, coin use does not exert a significant effect on selfishness in any of the models 1 to 3. By contrast, high empathy-concern consistently reduces 8/2 choices (Models 2 and 3, Table 3). Note that in *Control*, we could not estimate a model including the interaction term "Coin use x High empathy concern", because all but one dictator in the high-empathy group who reported coin use, implemented the selfish allocation. German natives tend to behave more selfishly. In *Empathy*, reported coin use emerges as a positive predictor of selfish behavior, with large and highly significant coefficients in Models 5, 7, and 8. High-empathy-concern significantly reduces selfishness (Models 6 to 8). Model 8 conveys that the effect of coin use on choosing the selfish allocation is weaker for people with high empathy concern, i.e., high empathy moderates the probability of choosing the 8/2 outcome when the coin is used.

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Table 4: Probability of females choosing the selfish allocation 8/2 when reporting coin use, differentiated by treatment

	Control				Empathy			
Variables/Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Coin use	2.022***		2.195***	5.405***	1.816***		2.104***	4.344***
	(0.504)		(0.552)	(0.340)	(0.413)		(0.535)	(0.547)
High-empathy-concern		-1.058***	-1.168***	-1.105**		-2.335***	-2.645***	-2.637***
		(0.346)	(0.419)	(0.455)		(0.487)	(0.572)	(0.583)
Coin use x High-empathy-concern				-3.349***				-2.246***
				(0.724)				(0.754)
Age	0.060	-0.012	0.055	0.055	0.003	0.036	0.057	0.056
	(0.074)	(0.062)	(0.073)	(0.074)	(0.035)	(0.044)	(0.041)	(0.041)
German native	0.051	-0.477	-0.214	-0.232	-0.415	-0.271	-0.635	-0.634
	(0.546)	(0.550)	(0.463)	(0.471)	(0.504)	(0.549)	(0.582)	(0.581)
Constant	-1.552	1.679	-0.670	-0.686	-0.021	1.287	0.722	0.716
	(1.702)	(1.517)	(1.722)	(1.748)	(0.939)	(1.172)	(1.204)	(1.208)
Observations	67	67	67	67	68	68	68	68

Notes: Differentiated by treatment, this table shows results from probit regressions on the probability of females choosing the selfish option 8/2 when reporting coin use. Standard errors clustered at subject level in parentheses. 67 (68) females chose 8/2 in *Control* (*Empathy*). Age and being a German native have no impact on the probability to choose 8/2. See the notes of Table 2 for further variable definitions.

Support females:

In *Control*, coin use is a strong and consistent predictor of selfish behavior, with significant positive coefficients (Table 4, Models 1, 3, and 4), which is in contrast to the male sample. In line with the male sample, however, high-empathy-concern significantly reduces selfishness (Models 2 to 4). The inclusion of the interaction term in Model 4 shows a moderation effect: The strength of the relationship between coin use and selfishness is reduced. Very similar effects can be found in the *Empathy* treatment (see Models 5 to 8 in Table 4), which is also in line with men's behavior.

D. Concluding Remarks

Taken together, we find that the empathy treatment significantly shapes dictators' allocation behavior, but in gender-specific ways. Males' choices shift away from direct selfish 8/2 choices toward coin-based 8/2 decisions and, to a lesser extent, toward equal 5/5 outcomes. For females, the reduction in direct 8/2 allocations is weaker, with empathy priming promoting more direct 5/5 choices instead. Robust predictors of reported coin use in the male sample are empathy priming and high-empathy-concern, while no such effects are observed for females, whose reported coin

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use appears unrelated to treatment or empathy concern. Furthermore, coin use strongly predicts selfish allocations for males only in the empathy condition, whereas for females it is already associated with selfishness in *Control*. For both genders, however, higher empathy concern consistently reduces selfish behavior, mitigating the link between coin use and selfish allocations.

Our results relate to previous findings on altruistic behavior by showing that empathy influences fair choices in distinct, gender-specific ways. Prior research highlights empathy as a key driver of prosociality and reduced selfishness (Batson, 2011; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987), yet our results suggest that the way this prosociality is manifesting itself differs across men and women. For men, empathy appears to displace direct selfish allocations toward coin-based decisions. For women, empathy promotes a shift toward more 5/5 allocations. This difference could be explained by the fact, that women are generally more prosocial than men (Engel, 2011), i.e., the underlying distributions of men and women in terms of their prosociality are different. This assumption is supported for empathy priming by significantly higher empathy scores of females compared to males (see Table 1) and by the fact, that males tend to choose 8/2d (5/5d) more (less) often than females in *Control* (p=0.054), FPPT.

Due to the different underlying distributions of prosociality among men and women, empathy priming has a different effect across genders: Because many men in *Control* choose 8/2 directly, the empathy priming primarily results in a shift toward 8/2c. Men use the coin as a strategic device to eschew responsibility for their actions and to reduce/avoid cognitive dissonance (Hertwig & Engel, 2016). Thus, they preserve their image without losing money if their image is important for themselves, vis-à-vis the receiver or the experimenter. Our regressions have shown that among men, the coin report is associated with higher empathy-concern values and that coin use in the empathy treatment predicts selfish behavior. Contrarily, in *Control*, many female dictators already choose 8/2c or 5/5, so that after being primed with empathy, a shift from 8/2c to 5/5 seems feasible, but this comes at the cost of € 3 – a higher cost compared to men who switch from 8/2d to 8/2c. Woman's reluctance to take this costly step is supported by our regression results conveying that, unlike for men, empathy priming and empathy concern have no influence on coin use while the interplay of coin use and high-empathy-concern in predicting the selfish outcome is similar to men's behavior.

We have to acknowledge some limitations of our study. Arguably,

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with an increased sample size the reported effects are expected to be stronger. Moreover, our design cannot distinguish whether empathy concern is a personality trait or whether it is induced by the empathy priming, i.e., whether it is trait based, or state based. Further studies measuring empathy concern before and after priming would have to clarify this open question.

Reported coin use further connects to the literature on honesty and moral wiggle-room. Previous studies show that randomization devices allow individuals to maintain a prosocial self-image while behaving selfishly (e.g., Fischbacher & Föllmi-Heusi, 2013; Lönnqvist et al., 2014; Apffelstaedt et al., 2025). Our results indicate that reported coin use operates differently by gender: for men, its link to selfishness emerges mainly under empathy priming, whereas for women, coin use already predicts selfish allocations even absent treatment. Furthermore, we find that both men and women who claim to have used the coin to decide on the choice option, are very likely to be lying. Across both groups, however, high empathy concern reliably counteracts selfishness, reinforcing the view that empathy serves as a stable internal barrier on exploitative behavior. Taken together, these results suggest that empathy not only promotes altruism but also shapes the strategies through which individuals balance fairness, honesty, and self-interest.

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