

Information and Perception of Trustworthiness: Evidence from a Trust Game

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ABSTRACT

Scholars in business and the social sciences have long studied the determinants of trust and social capital. In this paper we use the results from a “Trust Game” experiment (Berg et al. 1995) to address three topical questions: (i) What are the links between trust and gender, racial and ethnic identity? (ii) To what extent is trust reflexive? (iii) What is the link between trust and trustworthiness? Our experimental method generates data on participants playing the trust game as both proposer and recipient, in both uninformed and informed environments. This permits us to isolate the effects of new information about recipients on proposers’ choices. We find no evidence of gender, racial, or ethnic patterns within the trust game. Similarly, we find no evidence of reflexive behavior, with the exception being participants’ self-described giving or donation behavior. Finally, those participants who are the most trustworthy are also the most trusting in an uninformed environment, but they are no more likely to respond to new information. The recipient traits most favored by proposers are unrelated to trustworthiness.