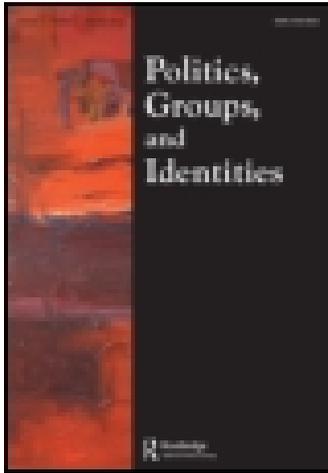


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How group forces demonstrate the malleability of gendered behavior

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DIALOGUE: GENDER, GROUP DELIBERATION, AND AUTHORITY

How group forces demonstrate the malleability of gendered behavior

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In this brief response, we take up several themes raised by the scholars who responded to our work, paying special attention to the interaction between individuals and group contexts. We argue that our study represents a productive first step in the attempt to understand how norms shape individual behavior, discursive dynamics, collective outcomes, and overall authority in small-group settings.

Keywords: gender; groups; political psychology; group dynamics

We are grateful to have four distinguished scholars read and respond to our work. We agree with them that much more remains to be done to explore the distinction between presence and power in group settings and to better understand the complex dynamics of small group discussion. It is our hope that the dialog here helps to provoke considerable additional research.

While the list of potential topics for discussion far exceeds our available space, one common organizing theme of these responses is the relationship between the individual and the group. Our approach is to unpack the *interaction* between individuals and contexts, and all reviewers focus on this interaction to some extent. Usefully, each respondent emphasizes different aspects of this relationship. We take up each key question in turn.

Is the approach too focused on individuals, neglecting collective identities?

Huddy (2015) argues that our study at least implicitly views decision-making groups as “atomized individuals, albeit individuals who have internalized norms of appropriate gender behavior.” She urges us to explore the extent to which groups form a cohesive unit with a common group identity that might strongly moderate gendered behavior. This sort of group cohesion and identity may be more likely in groups that interact repeatedly.

While it is true that our experimental groups were gatherings of strangers who were generally not practiced in the art of political discussion, this does not necessarily mean that our study leans too far in the direction of the individual, neglecting the group. For one, early patterns can carry into subsequent interactions. More broadly, there is a third possibility between the poles of isolated individuals and a robust common identity: the norms of interaction that develop as the group deliberates. Such norms, such as the patterns of interrupting behavior and the resulting sense of group rapport, render the group more than a collection of disparate individuals, even

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in the absence of some “external” collective group identity. In this sense, our analysis aims to move well beyond a consideration of atomized individuals.

Huddy adds that groups may take on the identity of the “emergent leader,” with that prototypical group member influencing the group based on traits that are completely orthogonal to gender. Krook (2015), too, urges greater attention to “critical actors” in group settings. Huddy’s suggestion is that group identities may form in ways that suppress gendered dynamics. We agree that this dynamic is possible. However, we find that whatever influence emergent leaders have, they are not enough to erase gendered dynamics. An implication of this finding is that common group identities or the actions of leaders might reinforce, rather than undermine, gendered behavior. In fact, as we explain in greater detail below, our experimental evidence showed that influence was strongly correlated with speaking behavior, meaning that in many mixed-gender groups, women’s influence was disproportionately absent and men were filling the role of “emergent leader.” If men are especially likely to take on leadership roles that shape the group’s collective identity, then it seems quite plausible that such collective identities will subtly (or overtly) subordinate women or, at the least, will fail to counteract gendered behavior. In fact, we think that this is exactly the sort of resistance to women’s full empowerment that Krook rightly identifies in her essay.

In addition, Huddy argues that some groups might be more fractious and fail to generate a sense of group cohesion at all, perhaps because of competing gender identities. Relatedly, groups might be best defined by cross-cutting cleavages that undermine gendered norms or minimize gender dynamics. Again, though, it is not clear that competing gender identities will always suppress gendered behavior or that cross-cutting cleavages wash out gendered patterns of participation. Still, we agree with Huddy that additional experimentation would be a promising way of exploring these different possibilities.¹ Systematic variation in the group’s sense of common identity, the group’s task, or the specific beliefs and attitudes of group members will surely generate additional insights into how gendered patterns emerge and shape group discussion.

In a larger sense, Huddy’s response raises the importance of avoiding essentializing either men or women. We agree that essentializing is a danger, but our findings also actively argue against essentialism by showing how gendered behavior waxes and wanes with the institutional procedures and the group’s composition – women act feminine, or subordinated, only when the situation cues that behavior. Thus, our results lead directly to the conclusion that such subordinate behavior is not essential, fixed, or unchanging – exactly the opposite. The group-level contexts that were at the heart of our study shape gendered behavior across many potential cross-cutting variables, including region, religion, ideology, class, age, and more. Moreover, we validate our experimental findings with a sample of actual school board meetings from across the country. These are groups with a strong collective identity with members who interact repeatedly about political topics. Notably, we find the same patterns of talk time in those boards that we found in the lab. The similarity in the findings, inside and outside the lab and even in the face of manifest differences in attitudes and location, tell us that in the USA, majority rule is bad for women when women are few, and unanimous rule likewise helps them, regardless of who those women are. That women are similarly affected in group settings regardless of cross-cutting cleavages is underscored by other studies both in the USA (Bryan 2004) and elsewhere (Besley et al. 2005; Ban and Rao 2009). Again, this is not evidence for essentialism, but rather for the power of the situation to change gendered behavior for many different types of intersected identities.

Have we overlooked gender itself as a topic of discussion?

Both Winter (2015) and Huddy (2015) urge us to explore the extent to which gender as a social category is salient in the discussion. We agree that this is an important question, and in our content

analysis, we looked for references to men and women and other related terms, specifically. We found few such references, meaning that neither women nor men tended to raise the issue of gender explicitly, nor did references to gender change substantially across the experimental conditions. Female subjects in more woman-friendly experimental settings did not talk more about “women,” “gender,” and so on than their counterparts assigned to less-friendly conditions.

Why is gender as an explicit topic of discussion absent? One possibility is that the topic our experimental groups discussed – redistribution to the poor – is not explicitly gendered. None of our experimental instructions referenced gender in any way, nor was there any attempt to prime gender in any part of the experimental protocol. We learn from this that people do not talk about gender – even in discussions of an issue that could implicate gender – if it is not introduced externally. So a discussion of poverty is devoid of discussion of the feminization of poverty even though people do talk about “single moms.” In the USA, at least, citizens will not draw general conclusions about gender from gendered examples such as single moms – they need help to do this from social movements, interest groups, and other elites.

Krook helpfully raises this theme as well when she urges us to focus on how men respond to growing numbers of women. What are the various forms of resistance men offer and how does such resistance undercut women’s ability to participate as equals? Krook advocates attending to both the importance of numbers and to the coordination strategies women might use to avoid backlash. Such coordination may require women to make gender salient – at the very least, behind the scenes as they prepare for authoritative participation during public deliberation.

We strongly agree that additional attention to women’s strategies for pursuing empowerment and avoiding backlash is needed. This necessarily means, as both Krook and Huddy advocate, more careful attention to when women raise gender as a topic, whether before, during, or after the meeting. For example, a recent article highlighting our school board findings raised the possibility that even if women speak less in some board meetings, they may carefully coordinate their behavior both before and after the meeting to achieve their aims (Sparks 2014). Such coordination, both inside and outside the meeting, deserves considerable additional study.

Men’s resistance to women’s empowerment is also an important topic for further exploration. Our experimental findings show that such resistance can be overt, as in sharply rising male talk time when men are outnumbered in groups using unanimous rule and in statements of disagreement when women advocate for more generous floor amounts. It can also be subtle, in the form of slight changes in the patterns of positive and negative interruptions men direct toward women. Whether blatant or understated, such responses can have large effects on the group dynamic. We also find that men do not always resist – for example, men sometimes respond to women’s rising frequency of care issues with additional discussion of those same issues. Still, we agree with all our respondents when they urge us to expand our view of the moderators – both individual and contextual – of men’s dominance behavior. Much more can be done to focus attention on how men respond, in both positive and negative ways, to changing group contexts.

Have we privileged groups and ignored the individual?

In partial contrast to Huddy’s urging to think harder about group identities, Winter pushes us to dig deeper at the individual level, to discover “how gender shapes the ways that participants perceive each other and how they perceive the conversational context.” For example, how are women who participate more (and less) than average rated by their fellow deliberators?

With the additional space provided in the book, we explore several of these issues. In contrast to the group-level overviews we have provided in our review of findings, many of our analyses in the book are conducted at the individual level. For example, we explore individual

post-discussion evaluations of the group's functioning and of authority within the group. We also asked our experimental participants a variety of questions about their attitudes and opinions prior to group discussion. This allows us, for example, to show how pre-deliberation confidence shapes patterns of participation during the group discussion. Here again, we find that the interaction of individual and context matters a great deal. For example, women's confidence was especially critical in settings where women's power was lowest (such as majority-rule groups with few women), while in settings where women were more empowered, pre-discussion confidence had no significant effect on women's participation in the group.

Has our research failed to appreciate the complexity and meaning of group interaction?

Hannagan (2015) takes the concern about ignoring individuals much further and, in contrast to the other respondents, ultimately sees little of use in our study. She argues that we commit two key errors: first, we have reduced social interaction to mere word counts, thus failing to capture the authentic meaning of words, oversimplifying the concept of authority, and overlooking the real people, embedded in social, linguistic and cultural contexts, who are at the heart of what we purport to explain. Second, she asserts that we have elevated rules to be the prime causal variable explaining differences across groups. This causal hierarchy, with rules at the top, again neglects the most important causal actors, who are human beings with agency. In the end, Hannagan concludes, we do little more than substitute our own interpretations and meanings for those of the participants in our study. In Hannagan's eyes, our study fails twice over: it exemplifies a broader set of problems within social science and simultaneously yields little real insight into gendered interactions in group settings.

Hannagan's first worry is that our word count approach neglects "meaning." We worried too. That is why with the additional space available in the book, we took pains to probe and validate the measure, including a comprehensive analysis of the meaning of the target words. For example, we found that when speakers mentioned the vulnerable or the needy, those mentions were unsympathetic only 5% of the time. Furthermore, the patterns of words correspond to the patterns we find with other measures of authority and status – talk time, negative interruptions, what policy outcomes participants argue for when they speak, and the content of what the group decides. For example, in the experimental conditions where women talk more about vulnerable populations (such as the needy, the poor, children, or families), they also take more floor time, receive fewer negative interruptions, advocate more generous support for the poor, and are far more likely to express public support for the redistributive principles they privately preferred prior to discussion. Multiple measures thus converge on a single conclusion about the meaning and function of the words we analyze.

Though we acknowledge the limits of word counts, we do not believe that our approach substitutes a contrived notion of social interaction for a more "authentic" version, especially if authenticity can only be found in non-replicable hermeneutic deconstruction. Far from stripping away any real notion of social interaction, we believe that in our careful attention to both the content of speech and the other forms of communication behavior, we have indicated how these are interwoven into the complex concept of authority.

And what about the hearer who is embedded in the group and, on Hannagan's telling, has the most direct access to meaning? Has he or she been left out of our analysis? Here again, our response is an emphatic no. For example, Hannagan worries that we have been far too quick to equate status and authority with speaking turns proportional to women's presence. However, that relationship is not an assumption; rather, it is an empirical result. Such empirical testing is needed because we recognize the possibility, to quote Hannagan, that

sometimes not speaking is a profound expression of authority. Sometimes people refrain from speaking to show dissent or solidarity. Sometimes the official decisions have been made prior to the public meeting in closed-door sessions. Sometimes people allow like-minded individuals to speak for them.

All of those outcomes are possible, no doubt. But they cannot explain the results. The findings show that silent authority is the exception. We know this because we asked each member of the group about his or her impressions of influence and authority after the discussion was complete.² We also asked each individual whether he or she felt a sense of efficacy during the discussion and a host of other questions explored in greater detail in the book. With those data in hand, the answer to the question of whether authority is correlated with speaking time practically jumps out of the analysis: those who spoke more were more likely to be seen by themselves and by other members of their groups as more efficacious and influential. The effect is huge, carrying the person from virtually no perceived influence to the highest level of influence. Numbers and rule exercise especially powerful quieting effects on lower-confidence women, again telling us that the analysis does not misattribute powerlessness to the powerful. These conclusions are not assumptions we imposed on the speaking time result: they are, rather, evidence for whether speaking time is correlated with influence in the judgment of other members of the group and of the participants themselves.

We have, in other words, done just as Hannagan and Harré recommend: “measure mental states and behavioral outcomes in response to conditions as set up by the experimenter.” In this sense, we have not neglected the individuals who comprise the groups. Individuals and their behavior are the heart of our analysis – their behaviors and interactions during the group deliberation and their attitudes and answers to our post-deliberation questions are the key dependent variables in every chapter of our book. Moreover, even when we focus entirely on group-level analysis, as we do for the sake of brevity and convenience in our summary article, such a choice does not imply that we do not care about individuals. It simply means that we are analyzing how certain features of the context affect other behavioral trends, on average. We agree with all the discussants that additional mediators and moderators are possible and must be explored going forward. But the need for such critical next steps should not imply that we have ignored the relationship between individuals and contexts here. Winter describes our approach well when he writes that one of our key theoretical and methodological starting points is an effort to “bring together the individual and the context.”

Hannagan’s second major criticism is that we have wrongly assumed that rules are unproblematic “causes” of behavior. She notes that people may interpret, selectively apply, modify, bend, or ignore formal rules. While the random assignment of our experimental approach allows us to argue that rules (as moderated by women’s numbers) cause individual behavior, we do not argue that they are deterministic or that they prevent agency.³ Rules can be ignored, modified, or changed because human beings have control over them. In fact, in our book’s conclusion, we recommend just such a course of designing group settings based on the “match” (or lack thereof) between rules and gender composition. For us, rules and numbers work together to shape the expectations for participation, interaction, and the use of power in groups. Such expectations – sometimes subtle, sometimes overt – are what we mean by norms, and they are not disembodied, impersonal features of the group. Whether consciously or subconsciously, they exist in the minds of the group members themselves. They include the worries, hopes, judgments, suspicions, and beliefs of individuals about how they can and should act.

To be sure, it is normatively troubling that group structures and their downstream norms affect individuals so powerfully and consistently. Rather than denying that this occurs, we aim to document these effects and locate their source. One key source in our story – rules – is eminently malleable. As Krook rightly urges us to explore further, women and their allies can mobilize

effectively to change the rules and thus create norms that support women's authority. Our story is thus empowering to women in the final analysis.

Our study has been but one step in the effort to understand the interaction between individuals and group contexts. In the spirit of the many productive ideas for further research that our respondents have rightly identified, what is needed, we believe, is not a retreat from our approach but rather more of it – more careful, systematic, replicable attempts to understand dynamic, discursive interaction in all of its contexts.

Notes

1. Huddy also worries that in our experiment, we have unwittingly ended up with groups of men and women who differ more starkly from each other than the population as a whole, though it is not exactly clear what aspect of our experimental design might have produced such an outcome.
2. In other words, we do exactly what Hannagan says in her first footnote that we have failed to do: when it comes to understanding how individuals responded to the discursive conditions, we “ask people and/or observe them acting in context.” Both asking *and* observing are important because self-reports are not always unbiased guides to motivation or causal explanations of behavior.
3. Technically, Hannagan's charge that we elevate rules over everything else is incorrect. We conceive of rules and gender composition as an interactive relationship, meaning that each moderates the effect of the other, with neither variable taking the dominant position. Every interaction can always be examined from the perspective of both variables.

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