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# Gender Difference in Willingness and Capacity for Deliberation

Afsoun Afsahi  \*

This article examines the gender gap in deliberation, focusing on three facets: willingness to deliberate, capacity for deliberation, and facilitation techniques aimed at reducing the gender gap. It hypothesizes that women will be less willing to deliberate but more likely to engage in strictly defined desired deliberative behaviors. Relying on original survey and experimental data, this paper finds women to be more willing to deliberate. However, men's negative deliberative behaviors—particularly cutting others off or dominating speech—undermine women's efforts to be effective deliberators. Finally, the two innovative facilitation methods outlined in the article eliminate the gender gap.

Scholars have long identified deliberation as crucial for healthy democracies. Deliberative democracy, “or decision making by discussion among free and equal citizens” (Elster 1998, 1) has been gaining popularity among both scholars and practitioners interested in improving and increasing citizen engagement. In part, this popularity is driven by the promises of deliberation: better-informed and more engaged citizens who are aware of their own interests and tolerant of the values of others. Furthermore, deliberative democracy promises to eliminate “the discriminatory effects of class, race, and gender inequalities” (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 48, 50)—an important goal in any society.

Despite the promises of deliberative democracy to eliminate “the discriminatory effects of class, race, and gender inequalities” (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 48, 50), when it comes to gendered behavior, deliberative democratic scholars often pay only passing attention. Few works, with notable exceptions, have engaged in an examination of gender and deliberation (Hickerson and Gastil 2008; Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012; Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Goedert 2014; Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Oliphant 2014). In particular, there is a gap in the literature looking at whether gender has an effect on willingness to deliberate or the capacity to engage in positive deliberative behaviors within deliberation. This is a

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particularly glaring gap considering that many scholars have raised concerns regarding whether women will have an equal voice in deliberative democracy (Cornwall and Goetz 2005; Fraser 1990; Hall 2007; Kapoor 2002; Sanders 1997; Williams 2000; Young 1996). I examine this issue focusing on three key facets: gender difference in willingness to deliberate; gender difference in the capacity for deliberation or to engage in positive deliberative behaviors identified by deliberative democrats; and facilitation techniques that can reduce the gender gap in deliberation.

By incorporating the literature on deliberative democracy with that on gender and political behavior, I identify a number of contradictions and antithetical perspectives on whether we can expect a gender gap in willingness and capacity for deliberation. I hypothesize that men will be more willing to deliberate and will engage in more negative deliberative and communicative behaviors during deliberation. I further hypothesize that facilitation methods developed with this gender gap in mind will mitigate some of the effects of this gap. The first facilitation technique is a simulated representation exercise, which gets participants to switch places by learning, presenting, and defending one another's views for a portion of deliberation. The second is a deliberative worth exercise, which asks participants to rate each other based on their behaviors and choose the best deliberators of each round of discussion.

Next, I combine this analysis with original survey and experimental data gathered using student samples as proof of concept for the hypotheses advanced in the article.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to expectations, I find that women are significantly more open to attending a deliberative forum to discuss difficult topics than men. Congruent with expectations, I find that men engage in more negative communicative behaviors in deliberating groups. However, facilitation practices can mitigate these negative communicative habits. While exploratory, the effect of these techniques is the most important contribution of this article.

In the first section of the article, I bring together the literatures on deliberative democracy, political behavior, and gender and politics to assess whether we can expect to see a gender difference in willingness and capacity for deliberation. I highlight the seemingly antithetical positions within the literature which point to the need for further study of the gender gap in deliberative democracy. In the second section of the article, I offer the results from the proof of concept study of willingness to deliberate. In the third part of the article, I briefly provide and comment on the results from the deliberative experiments that looked at the effect and efficacy of the facilitation techniques described above. The article concludes with a discussion of limitations and key findings.

## Gender and Deliberative Democracy

Scholars have long documented a gender gap in political participation and ambition to run for political office.<sup>2</sup> Many have examined the various

difficulties that women face before and upon entering politics. Often, women “have . . . found themselves relegated to lower levels in hierarchies and to community mobilization work” (Cornwall and Goetz 2005, 788). Alternatively, they have been pressured to forgo their “feminist sympathies” (784) in order to gain and maintain their political office. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that with the increased scholarly interest in deliberative democratic theory and practice, some scholars have looked to such engagements and their promise of inclusiveness and equality as a space for women to participate without the burdens imposed by unequal power relations. Indeed, some scholars have even identified deliberative democracy as a way to empower women within minority communities (Benhabib 2002; Deveaux 2006; Song 2007).

However, many have argued that deliberative democracy is not the panacea it appears. There remains a concern that “an unequal division of labor” means that “women’s inclusion in . . . deliberative democracy would be no guarantee of the representation of their concerns in decision making” (Kapoor 2002, 470). Nancy Fraser (1990, 64) has gone further to argue that “deliberation can serve as a mask for domination” based on gender as well as “class or ethnicity.” The challenging arguments lodged against deliberative democracy’s promise of eliminating power imbalances fall into two broad groups: (i) critical (feminist) theorists who take issue with the conceptual requirements of deliberation; and (ii) political scientists studying gender and political behavior who challenge the empirical assumptions of deliberative democracy.

When these sets of challenges are examined together, we are left with the conclusion that we can expect a gender difference in both willingness and capacity for deliberation. This difference is skewed in favor of men whom we can expect to be more willing than women to express interest in participation in deliberation. While we can anticipate women to more closely adhere to the norms of deliberation, these conclusions are not without alternative and challenging accounts. In this section, I evaluate these claims as they relate to willingness and capacity for deliberation and formulate a series of hypotheses.

### **Willingness to Deliberate**

According to many scholars, politics is still seen as a masculine arena (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). This accounts for the lower levels of knowledge of, interest in, and willingness to engage in politics by women (see Hayes and Bean 1993; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Burns 2002; Stolle and Gidengil 2010; Tolleson Rinehart 2013; Fraile 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister 2018). These lower levels of interest and willingness to engage in politics leads to “differences in attitude expression and . . . persuasion” (Rapoport 1981, 44) of “political ideas and values” (Hansen 1997, 75). Therefore, when it comes to “deliberations over public policy issues,” we expect women to participate less than men

(Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999, 200). There is further evidence to back this claim. Research shows that women are less likely than men to follow politics or discuss political issues with others (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Jennings and Niemi 2014).

Participation in a deliberative engagement—particularly one that asks for time and cognitive commitments—entails high costs and effort; even more so than other forms of political and social participation. This is because expressing divergent views and defending them in a (semi-)public setting, particularly when they concern deeply held values or are likely to challenge or draw attention to one's identity, can be “a source of discomfort” (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, 142). Most individuals prefer “the warm feelings generated by consensus” (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005, 234). Therefore, they favor talking to those with whom they agree as opposed to those with whom they (may) disagree (Eveland and Hively 2009; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Mutz and Martin 2001; Mutz 2006).

Furthermore, scholarship on psychology and management shows that women are more conflict-avoidant than men (Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber 2002; Davis, Capobianco, and Kraus 2010; Gottman and Levenson 1992; Rahim 1983; Thomas, Fann Thomas, and Schaubhut 2008; Valentine 1995). Therefore, we would expect women to express less willingness to deliberate than men in order to avoid conflict. Belenky et al. (1986), in particular, made a case that women are more likely to shun political conflict partly because they are more concerned than men with maintaining relationships (Belenky et al. 1986; also see: Hansen 1997; Djupe, Sokhey, and Gilbert 2007). This results in “men [being] more disposed to join in talk about controversial topics than . . . women” (Noelle-Neumann 1993, 24). Therefore, deliberative democratic practices can be less appealing to women.

Based on a review of this literature, it would be easy to conclude that we can indeed expect women to be less willing than men to express willingness to deliberate, particularly on more contentious issues. However, there is evidence to the contrary. Neblo et al. (2010, 574), looking at willingness to participate in deliberative democratic engagements, showed that “younger people, racial minorities, and lower-income” individuals “expressed significantly *more* willingness to deliberate.”<sup>3</sup> They also showed that “women, less partisan people, and non-churchgoers” expressed more willingness to deliberate (Neblo et al. 2010, 574). While the latter result is statistically insignificant, it highlights that gender difference in willingness to deliberate might be more complicated than the literature suggests. Based on a review of the literature, I hypothesize:

**H1A:** Despite the finding by Neblo et al. (2010), women will be less likely than men to express willingness to deliberate.

**H1B:** This unwillingness will be more observable for issues that are, at least ostensibly, more *contentious*.

### Capacity to Deliberate

A number of critical (feminist) theorists have raised concerns with the basic conceptual requirements of deliberative democracy. They argue that since deliberative democracy is not equipped to eliminate the structural inequalities within society, “democratic processes that appear to confirm the norms of deliberation are usually biased toward the more powerful agents” because they have been set up and supported by those with more power (Young 2001, 671). They have expressed apprehensiveness with both the emphasis on rationality and reason-giving as well as with the more general style of argumentation desired by deliberative democrats.

Deliberative democracy asks of individuals to provide reasons to one another. The problem, however, is that not only have we historically associated reason with “masculinity and whiteness,” it is often the “white, male, and economically well-off” portion of the population that have “perfected the art of appearing calmly rational” (Hall 2007, 85, 83). This exact point is echoed by Lynn Sanders and Nancy Fraser as well (Fraser 1990, 59; Sanders 1997, 349).

Many scholars highlight additional problems with the overall style valued by deliberative democrats. This, too, can marginalize women in deliberative democracy. Melissa Williams argues that deliberative democracy tends to “favor forms of expression which are not characteristic of marginalized groups” including women (Williams 2000, 135). Emphasis on these forms of expression “functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the plebian classes” in the early manifestations of the public sphere (Fraser 1990, 63). Even now, women talk in more “tentative, exploratory, or conciliatory” ways, while men are more “assertive and confrontational” (Young 1996, 123). This can not only be perceived as being more persuasive but it can “silence or devalue some people and groups” (120). As Cornwall and Goetz succinctly summarize:

Despite the promise of deliberative institutions as more inclusive and participatory, the challenges faced by women are effectively little different to those in more formal arenas. Gender-based inequalities are embedded even in the range of permissible subjects for deliberation and the language and culture of public debate (Cornwall and Goetz 2005, 793).

While these scholars claim that the norms of deliberation, as a whole, can work to disadvantage women, the literature on gender role and gender norm behavior provides evidence that women might be better than men at adhering to the norms of institutions, including those of deliberation. In particular, this literature shows that women often engage in more “communal behaviour,” while men engage in more “agentic behaviour” (Eagly 1997, 1381). This creates a “tendency for women to adopt a more democratic and participative style than men” (Eagly et al. 1994, 149). Some argue that women’s more

“collaborative style requires not only the soliciting of suggestions from one’s peers and subordinates, but also the preservation of good relationships with them when evaluating and perhaps rejecting their ideas” (Eagly and Johnson 1990, 248).<sup>4</sup> This suggests that women might actually be more suited to the demands of deliberative democracy. There is further evidence to suggest that this might be true. In her study of gender differences in behavior in legislatures, Lyn Kathlene showed that women “made fewer interruptions than men” (Kathlene 1994, 565), which corresponds to the norm of respect upheld by deliberative democrats as desirable. This literature, at least, hints that women could be just as successful, if not more successful than men, at adhering to the norms of deliberation.

Despite this, we also know that there are gender gaps in both conversation time and ease in deliberation as well as “in voice and authority” (Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012, 533). Examining the empirical literature on gendered political behavior provides an explanation of why women are disadvantaged within deliberation.

Once again, scholars focus attention on the continued characterization of politics as masculine and argue that when deliberations concern political or public policy issues, we can expect men to “be more influential . . . [to] be more assertive and be less inclined to agree” (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999, 200–01). Research on women in the legislature provides evidence for this ongoing bias. For example, Bäck, Debus, and Müller (2014, 513) argue that even within the Swedish parliament where women have descriptive representation, there is a distinct gender gap: “[M]ale MPs deliver more speeches in debates on ‘hard’ policy issues, while women in parliament can ‘close the gap’ in the number of delivered speeches when ‘soft’ topics.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, research has also shown that “both men and women perceive women to be less knowledgeable about politics and men to be more knowledgeable, regardless of the actual level of knowledge each discussion partner holds” (Mendez and Osborn 2010, 269). This means that within a deliberative engagement, women are seen as less knowledgeable and, therefore, are less persuasive (Beauvais 2019). Since “political issues and activities have come to be equated with male political issues and activities,” “men choose other men for political discussions, and devalue the competence of women” (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, 204). Based on this literature, I hypothesize:

**H2A:** Consistent with the literature on gender role and gender norm behavior, women will be more likely to engage in strictly defined desired deliberative behaviors including reason-giving.

**H2B:** Consistent with Mendelberg and her colleagues, the gender gap in the deliberative behavior will persist and result in a decrease in the voice and authority of women in deliberation.

## Addressing Gender Inequality: Facilitative Techniques

This means that even if women are able to adhere to the desired deliberative behaviors outlined by deliberative democrats at the same levels as men, if not higher, we can expect to see a gender gap.

Research by [Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Oliphant \(2014, 18\)](#), demonstrates that “decision rules interact with the number of women in the group to shape the conversation dynamics and deliberative authority” in unfacilitated deliberations. In particular, “when women are outnumbered by men,” unanimous rule helps balance the conversation time and authority by ensuring that women “take up their equal share of the conversation” ([Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012, 544](#)). However, when women form a majority within a deliberative setting, majority rule ensures the same. Their research demonstrates that “deliberative design can avoid inequality by fitting institutional procedure to the social context of the situation” ([Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012, 533](#)). This article considers another institutional design approach in the shape of two innovative facilitative techniques aimed at reducing the gender gap. These facilitative techniques are deliberative worth and simulated representation exercises.

Deliberative worth exercises are based on the need to keep and maintain reputation and are rooted in the scholarly works on “face-saving” from sociology which highlight the degree to which people generally try to maintain their image ([Goffman 1967](#); also see: [Lim and Bowers 1991](#); [Ting-Toomey 2009](#)). Face-saving can motivate people to act in a way that would protect their face and promote its continuation and acceptance by others as well as oneself. Within a deliberative setting—especially one with explicit ground rules regarding the positive deliberative behaviors—participants can be encouraged to engage in face-saving strategies based on the need “for others to acknowledge their friendliness and honesty” and to see them as “‘likeable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘friendly’, ‘agreeable’, ‘cooperative’, ‘alike’, and ‘affiliated’” ([Huang 2014, 180](#)). They work as follows: at the end of each round of deliberation, participants will be asked to write down the name of a fellow participant they deem to have been best at engaging in positive deliberative behavior and refraining from engaging in negative deliberative behavior as well as a one-sentence rationale for their choice. This is followed by the facilitator collecting the names and reasons, reading them to the group, and keeping a tally during the deliberative process.

The facilitative technique of simulated representation is based on the insights of scholars of both psychology and education. Within psychology literature, perspective-taking and imagined contact has proven to be good technique in changing the stances and cognitive outlooks of people in a more *positive* way ([Galinsky et al. 2008](#); [Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000](#); [Ku, Wang, and Galinsky 2010](#); [Shih et al. 2009](#); [Wang et al. 2014](#); [West, Turner, and Levita 2015](#)). Role-playing in classrooms as a way to teach students the ability to understand one another and the motivations of different historical,



fictional, and imagined characters is widely practiced at different levels of education (Douglas and Coburn 2009; Jarvis, Odell, and Troiano 2002; Kodotchigova 2002; Sumler-Edmond 2013; Wender 2014). The purpose behind this facilitative technique is to get participants in deliberation to try to better understand each other and the ways in which they may be defining certain key terms and then to represent those views as if the views were their own.<sup>6</sup> It works as follows: after one round of deliberation, participants are paired up or put in groups of three. An interview process will follow with the participants asking each other about their positions and reasons for them; as well their motivations and feelings. After this interview process, deliberation will resume, but for the next round, instead of each participant presenting and defending their own viewpoints, they will be asked to present and defend views and opinions of the other. For example, Participant A will be asked to present and argue for the positions, reasons, and feelings of Participant B as if they were her own and vice versa. After this, deliberation resumes in a normal fashion. Based on a review of the literature, I hypothesize:

**H2C:** Facilitative techniques will increase instances of positive deliberative behavior for all participants and decrease the gender gap in deliberative behavior.

In the next sections, I present and discuss the results from a survey experiment as well as a series of deliberative experiments looking at the efficacy of the facilitative techniques. The empirical examination in these sections is designed as a proof of concept for the hypotheses advanced above. This examination is part of a larger research project that looks at deliberation under conditions of cultural and religious diversity. Both the survey discussed in this section as well as the experiment discussed in the next rely on data collected from students at a large research university in Vancouver, British Columbia (see [Supplementary File](#)).

## Study 1: Willingness to Deliberate

In this section, I examine whether gender plays a role in determining the willingness to deliberate. This examination contributes to the literature in two distinct ways. First, it estimates the gender difference in the willingness to deliberate across different topics by proposing both general and unidentified policy areas as well as specific policy issues as potential topics of deliberation. Second, it uncovers the origins of the gender gap in willingness to deliberate by looking at young adults.

### Analysis

The data were collected through an online survey of 437 undergraduate and graduate students from a large public research university. The decision to

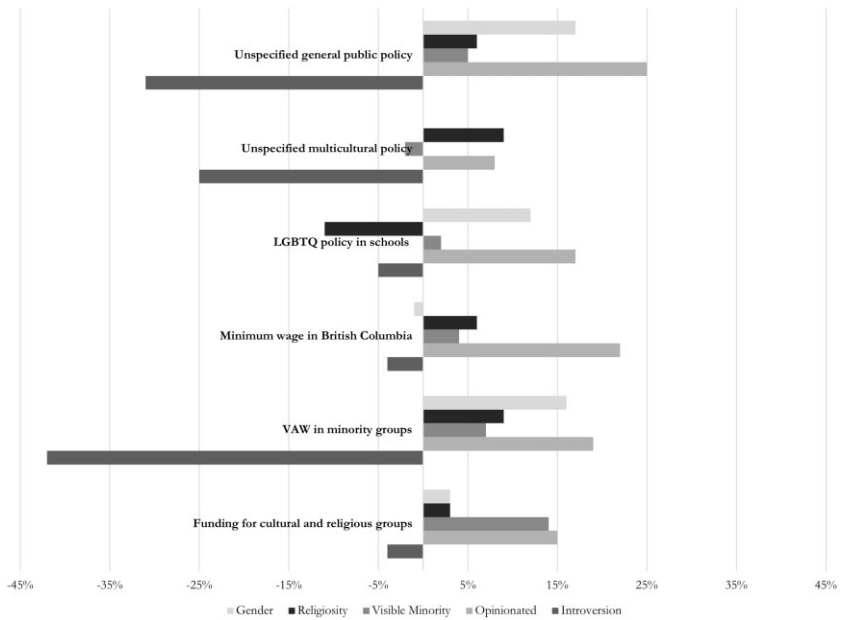
rely on a student sample was made based on a number of reasons (see [Supplementary File](#)). The use of students, however, does not problematize survey and experimental research (discussed below) especially in a proof of concept case such as this ([Druckman and Kam 2011](#)). Druckman and Kam note, “students and the nonstudent general population are, on average, indistinguishable when it comes to partisanship (we find this for partisan direction and intensity), ideology, the importance of religion, belief in limited government, views about homosexuality as a way of life, the contributions of immigrants to society, social trust, degree of following and discussing politics, and overall media use” (85–86). The sample is comparable to the underlying population (see [Supplementary File](#)). The study was approved by Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the university prior to the recruitment of the participants.

This study has six dependent variables. All of the dependent variables have four response options and are coded from 1 to 4: I definitely wouldn't participate; I don't think I would do it, but maybe; I would think about it; and I would do it for sure if I was invited.<sup>7</sup> Half of the participants were asked about their willingness to deliberate on a public policy issue and half were asked about their willingness to engage in a deliberation on a public policy issue pertaining to multiculturalism and accommodation.<sup>8</sup> All the participants were then asked about their willingness to participate in a deliberation on four specific policy areas: instituting a LGBTQ policy in the Vancouver School Board, looking at increasing or maintaining the minimum wage in British Columbia, examining the causes and solutions to violence against women in cultural/religious minority communities in BC, and funding for cultural and religious groups in British Columbia through programs such as Embrace BC.<sup>9</sup> All four of these specific questions concerned local politics and were featured in the news in the run-up to the survey. The rationale was that participants were more likely to be interested and knowledgeable about these issues (see [Supplementary File](#) for full text of variables).

The independent variables in the study are gender, religiosity, and self-identification as a visible minority as well as two variables capturing the respondents' assessments of their personality and capacities: introversion and opinionated.<sup>10</sup> The [Supplementary File](#) includes full descriptive statistics of all variables. The relationship was modelled with an ordinal logistic regression as opposed to ordinary least squares because while the categories of the dependent variable have a meaningful sequential order, they are not interval.<sup>11</sup>

## Results

[Figure 1](#) summarizes the calculated predicted probabilities for a participant choosing the response category “I would do it for sure if I was invited” for each of models, going from the lowest to the highest value in the independent variables.



**Figure 1** Change in predicted probabilities “I would do it for sure if I was invited” for each independent variable

Table 1 includes a more detailed account including the statistical significance of the models.<sup>12</sup> The results show that, across all the statistically significant models, women were more willing than men to participate in deliberations. They were 17 percent more likely than men to express willingness to deliberate on a general, but unspecified, public policy issue. On two issues that can, ostensibly, lead to more impassioned dialogue—LGBTQ policy in schools and violence against women in minority communities—women were, respectively, 12 percent and 16 percent more likely than men to express willingness to deliberate. Finally, women were not less likely than men to express willingness to participate in deliberation on the other topics (this final set of results is not statistically significant).

The results disprove both of the hypotheses proposed above. Even controlling for variables such as introversion and being opinionated, women appear more interested and willing to participate in deliberative engagements. This finding confirms and strengthens that of [Neblo et al. \(2010\)](#) and challenges the conventional research, discussed earlier, which indicates that women have lower levels of interest and willingness to engage in deliberations. It also adds support to the finding of Hansen and Goenaga who show that “women assign more importance to . . . direct participation (i.e., referenda), public justification of government decisions, and the protection of social rights” ([Hansen](#)

**Table 1.** Change in predicted probabilities “I would do it for sure if I was invited” for each independent variable

Willingness to deliberate on:	Unspecified general public policy issue (%)	Unspecified multicultural policy issue (%)	LGBTQ policy in schools (%)	Minimum wage in British Columbia (%)	Violence against women in minority groups (%)	Funding for cultural and religious groups (%)
Gender <sup>a</sup>	<b>+17</b>	0	<b>+12</b>	-1	<b>+16</b>	+3
Religiosity	+6	-9	<b>-11</b>	+6	+9	+3
Visible minority <sup>b</sup>	+5	-2	+2	+4	+7	<b>+14</b>
Opinionated	<b>+25</b>	+8	<b>+17</b>	<b>+22</b>	<b>+19</b>	<b>+15</b>
Introversion	<b>-31</b>	-25	-5	<b>-4</b>	<b>-42</b>	-4

<sup>a</sup>Male = 0; Female = 1.

<sup>b</sup>No = 0; Yes = 1.

Bold numbers signify statistical significance in the original model.

and Goenaga 2019). Furthermore, women also appear to be much more willing than men to express willingness to discuss issues that, at least seemingly, are likely to lead to a more intense deliberation.<sup>13</sup> This finding runs counter to much of the literature and challenges the essentialist view of women as conflict avoidant.

These results are interesting and important. A few other factors can be at play here. First, the sample includes female students who are comparatively less burdened with responsibilities at work and home. This might explain higher levels of willingness in women in this study than those found by Neblo et al. This, however, suggests that the unwillingness of women to partake in politics and political discussion might have less to do with their innate sensibilities and more with the gender gap in society and labor.

Second, some of the willingness can be due to gender difference in issue importance.

The literature on gender and issue importance consistently identifies education, health care, and domestic violence as women’s issues (Bratton 2005; Campbell 2004). Both deliberation on LGBTQ policy in schools and violence against women in minority communities can be seen as issues in which women would particularly be interested. The same literature identifies the economy as a man’s issue—which would lead us to expect men to be more interested and willing to talk about the minimum wage. There is no evidence of this.

## Study 2: Experiment on Deliberative Capacities

In this section, I examine whether gender plays a role in determining the capacity for deliberation. I define capacity for deliberation as engagement in

**Table 2.** Indicators of positive deliberative behavior in deliberation**Reason-giving**

Justification

Explanation to make the meaning more intelligible

**Respect**

Absence of negative statements in expressing disagreement

Absence of interruptions in longer speech acts

Asking others what they think

Rephrasing/repeating what someone else has said

Apologizing for a divestment

Using “we” or “our”

**Reflection and incorporation**

Expressing change or amending of one’s view

Connect one’s point to general ideas

Connect one’s point to others’ ideas

Asking clarifying questions

**Sincerity**

Admittance of ignorance or lack of knowledge

Consistency in reasons given

**Empathy**

Identifying one’s own emotions

Acknowledging/communicating the feelings of others

Connecting one’s own feelings to others’ emotion (can be an example)

**Productive dialogue**

Offering concessions

Offering mediating proposals

Separating personal feelings from positions

positive deliberative behaviors and refraining from negative deliberative behaviors identified by deliberative democratic theorists.

Positive deliberative behaviors include reason giving, respect, reflection on and incorporation of the views of others, sincerity, empathy, and productive dialogue.<sup>14</sup> Table 2 provides a list of the positive deliberative behaviors as well as the indicators for each behavior.

Negative deliberative behaviors, as seen on Table 3, consist of instances where participants do not offer a justification for their positions, when they share or process information in a biased manner, or when they engage in cognitive apartheid, disrespect, hermeneutical exclusion, rhetorical action, and unproductive dialogue.<sup>15</sup>

The positive and negative behaviors have been identified and discussed in the literature on deliberative democracy. Instead of detailing why each of these behaviors, positive or negative, can contribute to or reduce the quality of

**Table 3.** Indicators of negative deliberative behavior in deliberation

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**Unsupported claims**

- No justification
- No attempts to make a point more intelligible

**Biased information sharing and processing**

- Pushing for false consensus
- Presenting or being swayed by arguments evoking fear
- Logical fallacy

**Cognitive apartheid**

- Ignoring what others are saying—changing the flow drastically
- Not taking into account any of the others' real concern

**Disrespect**

- Ad hominem attacks or hypocrisy
- Cutting others off

**Hermeneutical exclusion**

- Using the same term to mean different things
- Misunderstandings without resolution

**Rhetorical action**

- Dominating speech
- Overconfidence in one's view
- Repetition of the same idea in the face of challenges
- Silencing of speech acts opposed to one's view

**Unproductive dialogue**

- Rejection of mediating proposals
  - Rejection of concessions
- 

discourse, this article takes them as cornerstones of deliberative democratic scholarship and instead provides a guideline for the particular indicators for each of these behaviors.<sup>16</sup>

The empirical examination in this section contributes to the literature in two distinct ways. First, it examines the difference in the tendency to engage in certain behaviors within deliberation instead of simply looking at conversation time and deliberative influence. Second, it demonstrates the efficacy of different facilitation techniques as tools for improving discourse quality and eliminating the gender gap irrespective of the context and the number of women within deliberating groups. These techniques can be more easily adopted in deliberation because, unlike the decision-making rule changes discussed by Mendelberg and her colleagues, they are not directed solely at increasing women's influence within deliberation.

**Analysis**

The data were collected through three deliberative experiments involving forty students at the same public research university. The [Supplementary File](#)

includes a full account of the demographic makeup of the participants. The study was approved by Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the university prior to the recruitment of the participants. The students were randomly divided and assigned to three groups for three different sessions of deliberation on three separate days.<sup>17</sup> The first group of participants—fourteen participants—constituted the control group. The control group benefited from facilitators without any particularly designed facilitative techniques. The second group, made up of sixteen participants, deliberated while the facilitative technique of deliberative worth exercise was utilized. The facilitative technique of simulated representation was used with the third group of ten participants.

The topic under deliberation for all three sessions was whether or not British Columbia should allow the resolution of some civil cases through the process of religious arbitration. A week before each of the deliberation days, participants were sent an information pamphlet on religious arbitration, a timetable for each day, as well as rules of deliberation. All events started at 10 am and ended around 2:15 p.m. Audio-recording devices were used at each table. All of the sessions were moderated by trained facilitators.

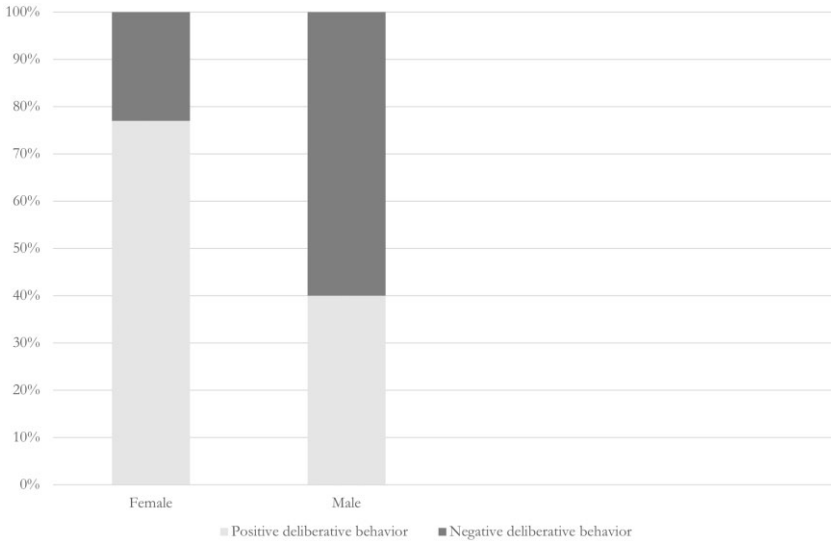
A preliminary round of coding was done on the transcription pages. Afterwards, the coder entered a series of “hypothesis codes” into the nVivo program—a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The [Supplementary File](#) includes an account of these hypothesis codes. Three more rounds of coding, days apart, took place during which time both the identifying information of participants as well as previous coding was stripped from the document. This was done to reduce coder bias and to check for the accuracy of the codes.

## Results

Are there differences between men and women in their respective tendencies to engage in positive versus negative deliberative behaviors?<sup>18</sup> [Figure 2](#) summarizes the percentage of positive and negative deliberative behavior by gender under control conditions.

As can be seen in [Figure 2](#), there were significant gender differences in the percentage of positive and negative deliberative behaviors in the control group. In the control group, 77 percent of all coded speech acts by women were identified as positive deliberative behaviors. This number was significantly lower, 40 percent, for speech acts uttered by men. Instead, men were much more likely to exhibit negative deliberative behaviors than women: 60 percent compared to 23 percent, respectively.

Despite the exploratory nature of these results, two conclusions can be drawn from this finding. First, women display a higher capacity than men to engage in positive deliberative behaviors by upholding the norms of deliberation. This finding substantiates the earlier hypothesis (H2A) and is congruent with the concerns of scholars who see deliberation and deliberative norms as



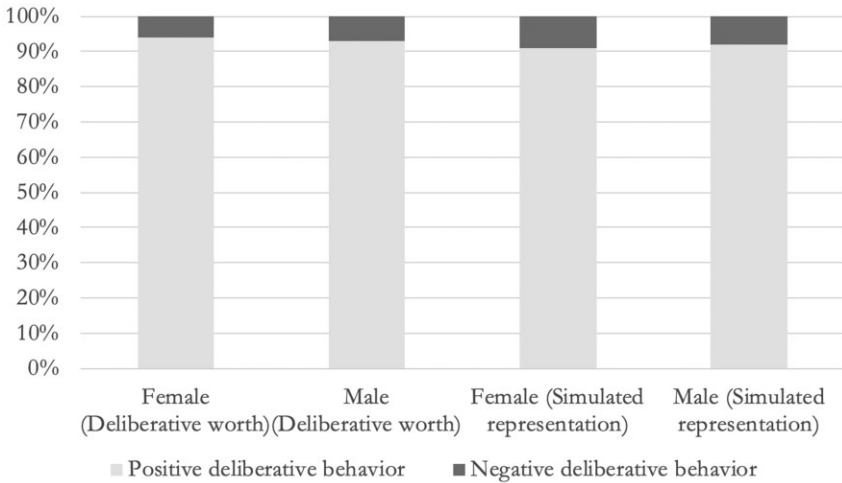
**Figure 2** Gender difference in positive/negative deliberative behavior under control conditions.

masculine and biased towards a male-centric style of interaction and argumentation biased towards men. Furthermore, it is consistent with the literature on gender role/norm behavior, that women would be more likely to uphold the norms of deliberation.<sup>19</sup>

The second conclusion is that power dynamics outside of deliberation affect the dynamics of interaction within. The tendency of men to engage in negative deliberative behaviors—in particular by cutting others off or dominating speaking time—reduces women’s speaking time and confidence. Such behaviors, particularly interruptions, are “indicators of power displays among group members” (Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller 2004, 407). This tendency corroborates the earlier hypothesis (H2B) and is congruent with existing literature which shows that “men tend to interrupt women more than women interrupt men; men also tend to speak more than women, taking more turns and longer turns; and women’s interventions are more often ignored or not responded to than men’s” (Fraser 1990, 64).<sup>20</sup> These interruptions are often gendered with men “interrupting women much more often than men” (Smith-Lovin and Brody 1989, 430) and reduce women’s voice and authority within deliberation. This finding points to the need to for us to democratize deliberation. This is where facilitation techniques can be used.

Are the facilitative techniques discussed earlier successful at increasing instances of positive deliberative behavior and reducing the gender gap in capacity for deliberation? Figure 3 summarizes the percentage of positive and





**Figure 3** No gender difference in positive/negative deliberative behavior under facilitative techniques.

negative deliberative behaviors by gender for the techniques groups using facilitative techniques.

As it can be seen in [Figure 3](#), these two facilitation techniques had a significant and easily observable effect on, first, increasing the percentage of positive deliberative behaviors for all participants, and, second, eliminating the gender gap observed in the control group and discussed more broadly in the literature.

With the facilitative technique of deliberative worth in place, 94 percent of all of the coded speech acts by women and 93 percent of them for men were determined as positive deliberative behaviors. A similar pattern can be seen when the facilitative technique of simulated representation was used. In this case, only 9 percent of all speech acts by women and 8 percent by men were coded as instances of negative deliberative behavior. More importantly, these techniques appear to be effective at eradicating the gender difference between men and women in their tendencies to engage in positive and negative deliberative behavior.

These experiments serve as proof of concept for the efficacy of these facilitation techniques. Simple mediation is often not enough to eradicate the gender differences within deliberation as seen in the results from the control group. The results from the treatment groups clearly indicate that these facilitative techniques are efficacious tools in democratizing deliberation by reducing the differences in the behavior of women and men. While they are

particularly useful at discouraging negative deliberative behavior in both men and women, they have a bigger effect for men because, perhaps, they need these treatments more.

## Conclusion

This article has considered the gender gap in deliberative democracy by looking at three key facets: gender difference in willingness to deliberate; gender difference in the capacity for deliberation or to engage in positive deliberative behaviors identified by deliberative democrats; and facilitation techniques which can reduce the gender difference in the behavior of men and women in deliberation.

While the empirical studies in this article serve as proof of concept tests, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the studies. Both studies have relatively small sample sizes of students who may be more willing than other young adults to partake in politically oriented conversations. Moreover, all the participants are residents of Vancouver, BC or surrounding cities, creating a geographical limitation to the study.

Moreover, university students may be better trained to accept diversity and act respectfully in dialogue with others. As a result, this article recognizes and accepts that they would be more likely even under control conditions—to engage in and demonstrate positive rather than negative deliberative behaviors. However, the results indicate that they still engage in negative deliberative behavior and, therefore, the effect of the facilitative techniques on the behavior of participants signals their effectiveness. Therefore, these results should be applicable more broadly.

Despite these limitations, I have shown a lack of scholarly consensus on whether we can expect a gender gap in willingness and capacity for deliberation. Furthermore, by using original survey and experimental data as proof of concept, this article has established the presence of a gender gap in both willingness and capacity for deliberation. Women are shown to be more likely than men to express willingness to participate in deliberative engagements including on topics that are ostensibly more contentious. Furthermore, women also appear to be better than men at engaging in behaviors that are identified as positive by the deliberative democratic literature. However, men's negative deliberative behaviors—particularly the tendency to cut others off or dominate speech—undermine women's efforts to be heard and to be effective deliberators.

Most importantly, this article has provided a case for utilizing facilitation techniques such as deliberative worth exercises and simulated representation as methods of improving discourse while reducing the gender gap in deliberation. The results, while not conclusive, are highly suggestive of the efficacy of these techniques. More work needs to be carried out to not only examine

gender differences in deliberative democratic practices but also to devise ways of reducing such imbalances in order to increase the quality of such engagements. In a large-scale and real-life setting, the author expects to see similar results. However, it is likely that the percentage and frequency of positive deliberative behaviors would be reduced across all treatments. There would also likely to be a corresponding increase in negative deliberative behaviors, particularly under control conditions. However, the author expects the facilitative methods to operate in a similar fashion and reduce negative behaviors while increasing positive behaviors.

## Supplementary Data

[Supplementary data](#) are available at *SOCPOL* online.

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## Notes

1. The empirical study is part of a larger project that looked at willingness to participate in and dynamics and methods of facilitating deliberations under conditions of cultural and religious diversity.
2. For an account of the gender gap in political participation, see [Beauregard \(2014\)](#), [Childs \(2004\)](#), [Franklin \(2004\)](#), [Gidengil \(2007\)](#), [Harell \(2009\)](#), [Inglehart, Norris, and Ronald \(2003\)](#), [Schlozman, Burns, and Verba \(1994\)](#), [Verba, Burns, and Schlozman \(1997\)](#). For an account of the gender gap in political ambition, see [Costantini \(1990\)](#), [Fox and Lawless \(2004\)](#), [Fox and Lawless \(2014\)](#), [Fulton et al. \(2006\)](#), [Mattei and Mattei \(1998\)](#).
3. This is a significant finding considering that participants in deliberations are most often “wealthy, educated, and professional” ([Fung 2003](#), 342) as well as “whiter [and] older” ([Goidel et al. 2008](#), 801).
4. It has to be emphasized that even if participants are not substantively equal in a deliberation (i.e., some will be more influential or talk more,

etc.), the systematic and explicit hierarchy discussed by Eagly and Johnson as a characteristic of business organizations is absent within deliberative settings.

5. Hard policy issues include areas such as: macroeconomics, energy, transportation, banking, finance and commerce, and space, science, technology, and communications. Soft policy issues, meanwhile, concern topics such as healthcare, labor, employment, and immigration, education, and social welfare (Bäck, Debus, and Müller 2014, 510).
6. Within deliberative democracy, Michael Morrell has also showed how empathy exercises can change the perspective of participants to be more inclusive and empathic (Morrell 2010).
7. While these categories are non-standard, they were chosen to get the best possible measurement of the grey area between intentions of non-participation and participation. The language is purposefully colloquial.
8. This was an attempt to see if there was a difference between the two groups. Participants were randomly assigned to each question.
9. The order of these questions was randomized.
10. Education, age, and income are left out due to the particularities of the sample. Since the respondents are all students, education and age do not vary significantly. Most were unsure in the assessment of the income of their parents and, therefore, the variable of income had too many missing values.
11. In order to test the assumptions of the model, omodel logit and Brant tests were carried out.
12. The regression table is included in the Supplementary File.
13. While we would need to do further studies to see if the LGBTQ policy proposal and violence against women are contentious issues for participants, it is not difficult to imagine, based on similar discussions in the larger public sphere and in the media, that these topics are more likely to bring up deeply held values and be more difficult to discuss.
14. Each of these norms have been well established and discussed in the literature on deliberative democracy. For an account of justification—or reason-giving—see, among many others, Bohman (1996), Gutmann and Thompson (2004), Habermas (1996), Steenbergen et al. (2003). For a review of the literature on respect Bohman and Richardson (2009), Dryzek, Bächtiger, and Milewicz (2011), Forester (2009), Gastil (2008), Steffensmeier and Schenck-Hamlin (2008). For an account of the importance of listening in deliberative democratic literature, see Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002), Jungkunz (2013), He (2010). For a fuller account of the discussion of reflection within deliberative democratic literature, see Chambers (2009), Dryzek (2010), Goodin (2003). For a more comprehensive account of the way sincerity has been discussed within the literature, see, among man others, Fishkin (2011), Lenard (2008), and Warren (2006). For ways that scholars have incorporated the concept of empathy in their discussion of deliberative democratic theory and practices, see Mansbridge (1980), Morrell (2010), and

- Williamson and Fung (2005). For a discussion of productive dialogue—offering counter proposals or compromises, see Bohman (1996), He (2010), Steenbergen et al. (2003).
15. Once again, these negative deliberative behaviors have been discussed in the literature. Sometimes, they represent the absence or antithesis of the positive deliberative behaviors. However, some have been discussed separately. For example, conversational or “cognitive apartheid” refers to a “[failure] to engage with one’s interlocutor as a person of intelligence” by “[reconsidering] her views on basis of reasons” (Bohman and Richardson 2009, 270). Similarly, when hermeneutical exclusion happens, “[arguments] are not extended because they go past each other by using incommensurate terms and meanings. [...] Key terms for one side are passed over as unimportant by the other or are defined and used differently” (Pearce and Littlejohn 1997, 72). Finally, rhetorical action refers to engaging in deliberation in order to simply “justify [one’s] own standpoint” instead of engaging in a real back-and-forth with others (Bächtiger et al. 2010, 51; see also Schimmelfennig 2001).
  16. These lists are similar to the effort by Steenbergen et al. in putting together the Discourse Quality Index (DQI). However, these lists provide a more detailed account of the various indicators of each of the behaviors and do not include a ranking of the degrees of the presence or absence of the deliberative behaviors. For more information, see Steenbergen et al. (2003).
  17. The deliberations were held on November 1, 7, 8, 2015 in Vancouver, British Columbia.
  18. This article took into consideration the unequal ratio of females and males within each deliberative setting. In order to do this, the number of instances of positive and negative deliberative behaviors for each category made by female participants was divided by the number of females in each group and the same was done for males. This was the easiest way to standardize the numbers and see the average number for each category for each demographic group.
  19. It is important to emphasize, however, that while women displayed “communal behaviour,” they were not any less likely than men to express their views and rationales in deliberation—in other words, display “agentic behaviour” (Eagly 1997, 1381). Furthermore, the researcher considered critical mass theory as a possible explanation of these results. Critical mass theory holds that “only as their numbers increase will women be able to work more effectively together to promote women-friendly policy change and to influence their male colleagues to accept and approve legislation promoting women’s concerns” (Childs and Krook 2008, 725). However, in all of the sessions women outnumbered men. Therefore, the critical mass of women in the control group was not enough on its own to achieve gender parity in deliberation. This finding confirms that of Mendelberg et al. (2014) who similarly found that greater numbers do not necessarily lead to parity.

20. Research on deliberation dynamics within both courts and juries confirms this as well. Lynn Sanders points to four decades of research that consistently show “that men talk more in juries; jury leaders, already more likely to be men, are also inclined to participate more than other jury members in deliberation” (Sanders 1997, 365). Similarly, in a recent study on the interactions in the Supreme Court in the United States, Jacobi and Schweers find that “judicial interactions at oral argument are highly gendered, with women being interrupted at disproportionate rates by their male colleagues” (Jacobi and Schweers 2017, 1379, 1443).

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