

The Social Roots of the Partisan Gender Gap

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Abstract

I suggest that the gender gap in party identification is partly an artifact of question wording and asymmetric stereotypes about men and women's partisan preferences. The Michigan model holds that party identification is fundamentally affective, yet surveys have always asked respondents to "think" when answering. The literatures on gender, identity, and stereotypes suggest that this slippage could be quite consequential. A new survey experiment reanalyzes the gender gap by comparing the standard partisan battery to an alternative version that emphasizes feelings rather than thoughts. Bringing question wording into closer alignment with theory causes the gender gap essentially to disappear. This happens because the "feel" questions find women to be less Democratic than did the "think" questions. Moreover, the disappearance of the gender gap occurs mostly among highly sophisticated women not those usually susceptible to question wording effects. Contrary to popular wisdom, men and women appear to be more, not less, alike politically when feelings are primed. Taken together, the findings raise new questions about why the gender gap emerged at all.

The gender gap in party identification has drawn a great deal of interest from journalists, politicians, and academics for at least the last 20 years.¹ Since the early 1980s, practically every survey done on the topic finds more women favoring the Democrats and more men favoring the Republicans. The gender gap has profound practical consequences for parties and politicians who angle to either take advantage of it or try to minimize its impact. It is also a serious academic matter for scholars who wish to understand the intersection of gender and mass politics. In this paper I take gender gap research in a new direction. Rather than embarking on a quest for the sources of the gender gap, I open up the possibility that the gap itself has been misunderstood. In particular, I suggest that the asymmetric nature of news coverage and stereotypes about women has created something of a self-fulfilling prophesy that perpetuates existing gender differences in partisanship.

I revisit the classic theory of party identification, arguing that the measurement of partisanship is likely to affect the size of the gender gap. I find that the sex gap in party identification nearly vanishes when new items are used. The paper proceeds as follows. I first briefly review the recent literature on the partisan gender gap. The review indicates that sex differences in party identification are due to such things as issue attitudes, views of the economy, and self-interest, though even these do not always account for the entire gap. Second, I turn to the psychological literature on attitudes to identify gender differences in affect and cognition. Women are generally found to depend more on their emotions, are better able than men to distinguish between emotions and thoughts in attitude formation, and are more susceptible to social influence. Self-categorization theory holds that cognitive identities are more likely to be collective in nature while affective identities are more likely to be personal. This suggests that a

¹ The “gender gap” should more accurately be called the “sex gap” since it deals with differences across biologically rather than socially defined groups. Nonetheless, the traditional terminology will be used here out of convention.

cognitive emphasis might encourage reliance on shared stereotypes rather than genuine identities. Third, in this context I revisit the Michigan theory of party identification. Though the original conceptualization stressed affect, surveys questions focus respondents on their thoughts, a difference the literature on gender and attitudes indicates will be consequential. The empirical section of the paper attempts to get a handle on these consequences.

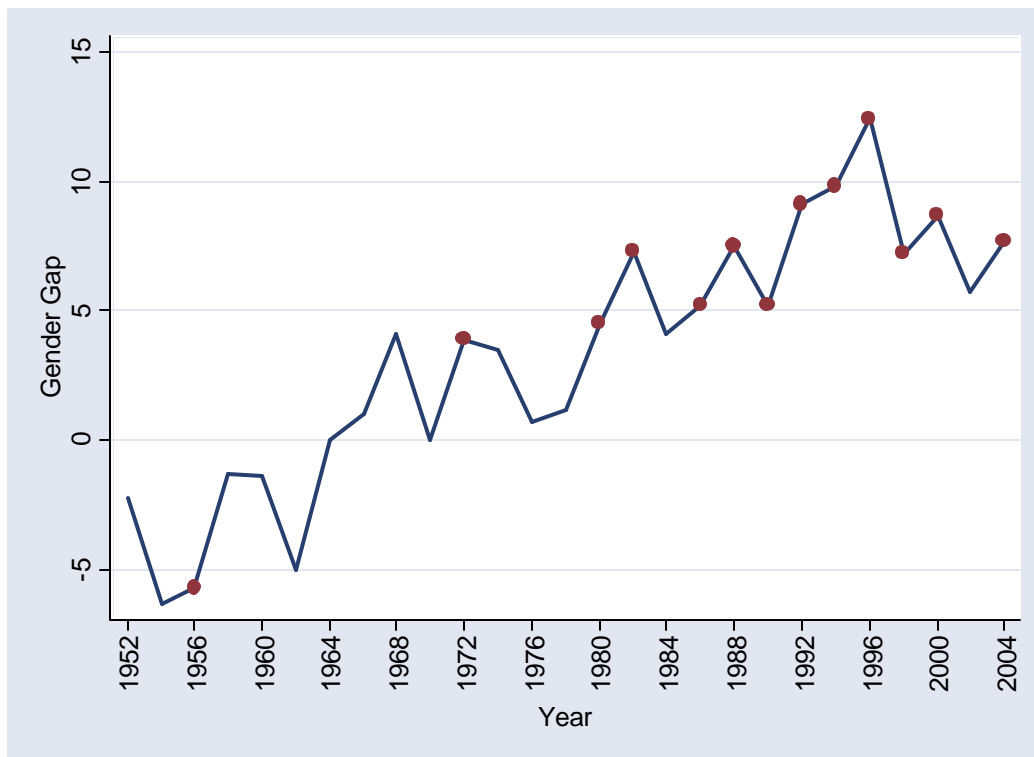
I conduct a survey experiment in which subjects are randomly asked either the standard party identification questions or new items that emphasize feelings rather than thoughts. The new questions show women to be more Republican, thus shrinking the gender gap. In sharp contrast to other question wording effects, the largest changes occur among the most sophisticated women. This occurs in part because the affect questions encourage women to devote more effort in responding, as indicated by response timers. Affective identities are based on a deeper pool of considerations, so it takes additional effort for women in the affect condition to personalize the question. When asked how they “feel” in politics, some women distinguish themselves from the stereotype of women as Democratic. Men, in contrast, are less likely to distinguish between thoughts and feelings, or between their personal and social identities, making them largely immune to the experimental manipulation. These results are used to reconsider standard notions of men and women’s approaches to politics, focusing in particular why women are Democrats in their heads but Republicans in their hearts.

Explaining the Gender Gap

The gender gap emerged as a phenomenon in the 1980 presidential election and became the subject of public discourse soon afterward. In the elections before 1980, the voting patterns of the sexes were nearly identical (with a slight reversal of the gap in the 1950s). Figure 1 displays the gender gap in party identification from 1952 to 2004 using National Election Study

(NES) data. The line shows the gap as computed from the data, but circles indicate when those cross-tabulations of sex and party identification were statistically significant at the .05 level using a χ^2 test. As the figure demonstrates, the gap was rarely significant until 1980, when it jumped several points. Aside from 1996, the gap has held steady at roughly seven points.

Figure 1. The Partisan Gender Gap from 1952 to 2004



Note: Gender gap in party identification from the National Election Studies. Circles indicate gaps where the χ^2 statistic is significant at $p < .05$.

My purpose is not to understand why the gender gap emerged. Existing research already provides a rich understanding of why men and women came to prefer different parties. It has essentially been a hunt for independent variables. Though the matter is not completely settled, the explanations boil down to a few points of consensus.

First, women and men have different positions on issues that are important determinants of party identification. It has been argued that women are more liberal on matters of economic

redistribution, use of military force, and some domestic programs and cultural issues (Alvarez, Chaney, and Nagler 1998; Alvarez and McCaffery 2003; Kaufmann 2002; McCue and Gopoiian 2000; Schlesinger and Heldman 2001). These sex differences might derive from socialization or values (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004; Conover 1988; Trevor 1999). Or they could derive from differences in socioeconomic status and dependence on government support (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004; Edlund and Pande 2002). Second, in addition to having different positions on the issues, men and women weigh those issues differently when they evaluate candidates and parties (Howell and Day 2000; Kaufmann 2002; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). For example, while men and women might have similar positions on abortion, it is a more important criterion for women. Third, women are more likely than men to identify as partisans. Part of the gender gap is simply due the greater share of independents among men (Burden and Greene 2000; Greene and Elder 2001; Norrander 1997). Though not much theory has been offered to explain the independence gap, accounting for it does tend to reduce the larger gender gap in party identification.

Although authors disagree about the precise origins of the gender gap, they share an approach: a search to identify independent variables that might explain party differences between men and women. It treats the outcome as fixed and then seeks explanations. Sometimes these variables can “explain away” the gender gap, but in other cases the gap remains even after accounting for other factors. I propose a different focus. There is as much to be learned from a reexamination of the dependent variable itself. It is possible that the nature of party identification itself, rather than factors outside of it, might be responsible for the gender gap. In the following section I begin building a case for this point of view.

Gender and Affect

Political scientists' hypotheses about the gender gap have largely ignored the vast psychological literatures on sex differences in attitudes. This is an important oversight since sex differences clearly exist, and these differences have consequences for party identification. The conventional understanding of attitudes presumes that opinions are always a mix of affective and cognitive information (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Indeed, most of the literature is aimed at identifying why some attitudes are more affective or cognitive than others, or why some individuals have attitudes more colored by affect or cognition. Party identification is of course just that, an identity with a party. But for any individual, the identity could be driven more by affective or cognitive elements.

The social psychological literature finds women are more likely to have emotion-laden attitudes and be more conscious of the affective content of an attitude (Robinson and Clore 2002).² As one analysis summarized, "Women report more intense experience of emotions than men, more intense expression, and greater comfort with and tendency to seek out emotional experiences" (Grossman and Wood 1993, 1010). This is not to say merely that women are merely "more emotional," though we shall see that this is a popular media explanation for the gender gap. Rather, women are more attuned to the differences between their feelings and thoughts. Men are less able to differentiate between the two, or perhaps there is just less difference for them to detect. The point is this: the degree to which an attitude is affective or cognitive often depends on the sex of the person holding the attitude.

² The major exception is that men are more likely to feel anger than women (Grossman and Wood 1993).

Personal and Social Identities

Layered on top of the affect/cognition dichotomy is the distinction between public and private attitudes. The degree to which we tie ourselves to social versus individual identities depends heavily on contextual priming (Brewer 1991). Some situations encourage identification with a larger social group while others encourage personalization. As psychologists Kampmeier and Simon put it, “a distinction has to be made between the collective self (or social identity) and the individual self (or personal identity), the former underlying and being reinforced by group formation and the latter underlying and being reinforced by individuation” (2001, 448). *Self-categorization theory* posits that social identities will become prevalent when the group stereotype is salient (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002; Turner et al. 1987). When social identities are salient, individual traits succumb to group traits when social group identities. This is commonly called depersonalization. “Depersonalization refers to the process of ‘self-stereotyping’ whereby people come to perceive themselves more as interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others” (Turner et al., 1987, 50).

People must be given opportunities to individuate themselves to avoid self-stereotyping. As a specific manifestation of social identity theory, self-categorization is well-suited to understanding the process of seeing oneself as part of a larger partisan group.

The “stereotype threat” hypothesis is one manifestation of self-categorization theory. Under this rubric, scholars expect that priming a stereotype can change the attitudes and behaviors of respondents to fulfill the stereotype. Steele (1997) has argued this point most convincingly, showing that black students perform more poorly on standardized tests when racial stereotypes about test-taking ability are mentioned. Elderly subjects exhibited improved memory

performance when positive aging stereotypes were presented but weaker memories when negative stereotypes were implicitly activated (Levy 1996). Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) found that Asian-American women performed better on a mathematics test when their ethnicity was primed but they performed worse when their sex was primed.

Davis and Silver (2003) argue that race-of-interviewer effects may be caused by the same mechanism. Black respondents are less likely to answer factual questions correctly when asked by a white interviewer. And this effect appears to extend to situations where women are interviewed by men (Garand, Guynan, and Fournet 2004). Women are more likely to answer knowledge questions correctly when interviewed by women, and are more likely to be wrong or avoid answering altogether when interviewed by men.³

Subjects must obviously be aware of the stereotype to apply it. Women who believe that a group stereotype is at least partly true are more likely to adhere to it (Schmader, Johns, and Barquissau 2004). Thus, I expect self-stereotyping to be more prevalent among politically sophisticated women.

Politics is still perceived as a predominantly male domain. Women often feel less comfortable in situations dealing with public affairs. As Atkeson and Rapoport's recent analysis concludes, "Despite prominent social and political gains, most women may still be trapped by a culture that sees politics as a man's world and keep women's political self-esteem low" (2004, 500). In such situations, social influence becomes more important. Respondents increasingly conform to prevailing norms rather than rely on their personal preferences. People with lower comfort levels or less experience might begin to identify themselves in public rather than private terms. It is well-known that women are consistently less knowledgeable about politics than men,

³ In the 2000 NES, the distribution of party identification is shifted 10 to 12 points when a female respondent is interviewed by a man, but other combinations of interviewers and respondents seem to have no effect.

a difference that persists even after accounting for guessing (Alvarez and McCaffery 2002; Atkeson and Rapoport 2004; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Garand, Guynan, and Fournet 2004). And sometimes women appear to be less knowledgeable because they believe their opinions are unpopular, creating a difference between privately-held and publicly-stated views (Berinsky 2004). Because women are less knowledgeable and less confident in the political realm, they are more likely than men to feel a tension between their personal selves and their social selves.

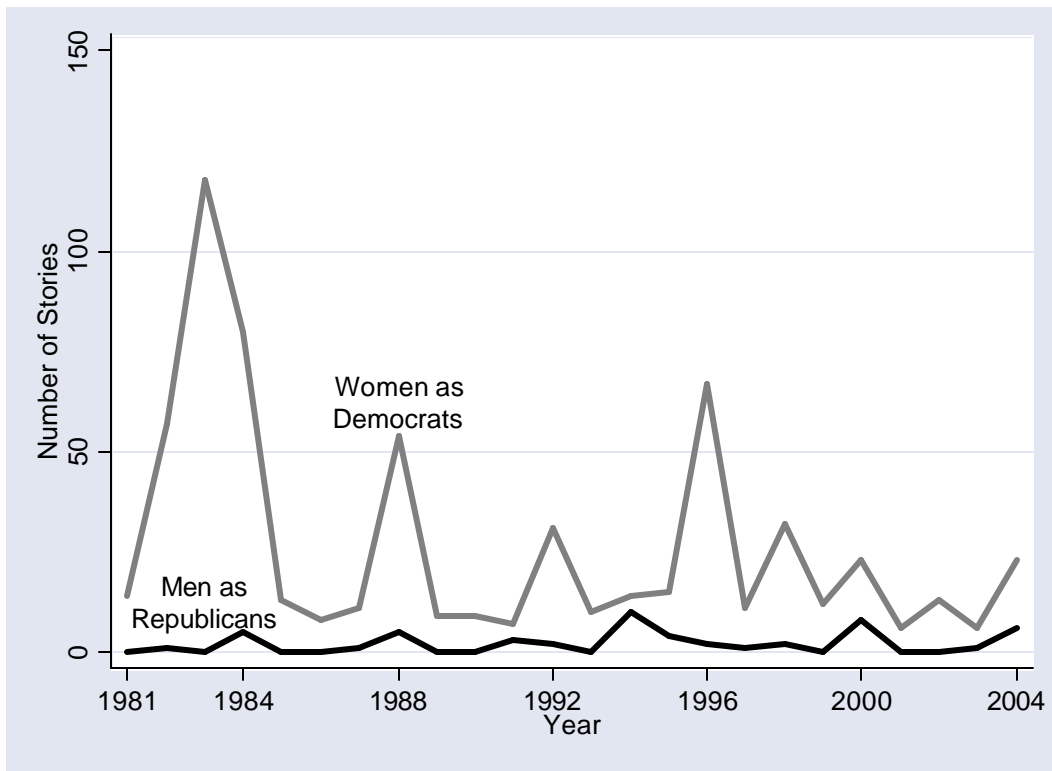
Moreover, there is evidence that women are more other-regarding than men. Not only are women more open to social influence (Eagly 1983), but they evaluate politics in less personal terms than men. Welch and Hibbing (1992) and Alvarez, Chaney, and Nagler (1998) find that women are more likely to vote sociotropically while men are more likely to vote egocentrically. Men tended to base their economic evaluations on personal experiences while women were more likely to look to the national economy, even after controlling for socioeconomic differences between the sexes. One explanation for this difference is that “men are more likely to see themselves and others as autonomous and independent, women tend to see the interrelatedness of people and things” (Welch and Hibbing 1992, 203).

Asymmetric Stereotypes

The difference between the social and personal selves is more significant among women for another reason: the nature of media coverage of the gender gap. I contend that media portrayals of sex differences in partisanship have been strongly asymmetric. In presenting stereotypes, the press does not acknowledge the equal roles played by men and women in creating the gender gap. Instead, coverage focuses much more on women than men. A typical reader of American newspapers would quickly learn that women are believed to be Democrats

but that stereotypes about men are much more ambiguous. Thus, stereotype threat looms larger for women than men. In Figure 2, I provide some evidence for this premise. The graph shows the number of stories about the gender gap in several newspapers and magazines from 1981 to the present.⁴ I coded every story as focusing mostly on women as Democrats, men as Republicans, or a mixture of the two. (Full details of the coding appear in the Appendix.) For each story about gender differences in partisanship, I determined whether it attributed the gap to women, men, or both sexes equally.

Figure 2. Media Coverage of the Gender Gap from 1981 to 2004



Note: See Appendix for coding details.

As the figure makes clear, the media are far more likely to portray the gender gap in terms of women being Democrats rather than men being Republicans. Of the stories that

⁴ The first story using the term gender gap appeared in the *Washington Post* in October 1981 (Bonk 1988).

emphasize one of these stereotypes, a full 93% of all stories focus on women as Democrats. These stories outnumber stories about men as Republicans twelve to one.⁵ The evidence that the gender gap has been heavily covered over the last 20 years and its portrayal has been strongly asymmetric.⁶ The stereotype is “in the air” for women much more than for men.

Even if women were not more socially oriented and less comfortable in political life than men, the drumbeat of the female-as-Democrat stereotype must eventually result in some attitudinal consequences. At a minimum, women who attend to the media will become aware of the stereotype. Some will even come to endorse it. Men, in contrast, might learn about stereotypes of women but will encounter few generalizations about their own partisan preferences. The gender gap thus becomes more consequential for women than men. Consider the following evidence.

A 1996 Knight-Ridder poll asked respondents how big a role they thought “gender differences” were playing in “dividing the American people.” While 24% of men said a “big role,” 34% of women did. (Democrats were also a bit more likely than Republicans to say “big role.”)

A 1990 survey by the National Women’s Political Caucus analyzed how voters perceive candidates who fit or do not fit existing stereotypes. The questions asked the respondent which of two candidates s/he would be more willing to support. One item proposed a male Republican and a female Democrat (the stereotype) while other offered a male Democrat and a female Republican (counter-stereotype). In the first situation, the candidates split the vote almost

⁵ I also searched for stories that were counter-stereotypic. Only 22 total stories over 24 years ever portrayed women as Republicans and just two stories portrayed men as Democrats.

⁶ The figure might suggest that the number of stories about women has declined over time, but this is illusory. There is a strong upward tick in 1983 and 1984 surrounding the nomination of Geraldine Ferraro for the vice presidency and there are cyclical upturns in presidential election years. Regressing the number of stories on dummies for both of these factors and a time counter shows that the number of stories was significantly higher in election years and sharply higher around Ferraro’s prominence, but the yearly trend is statistically insignificant.

equally: 26% for the man, 24% for the woman, with the rest undecided. In the second situation, support shifted asymmetrically to the male candidate. The male Democrat received 32% compared to the female Republican's 18%. Failing to fit the stereotype was more acceptable for the man than for the woman.

Finally, the 1985 NES pilot study asked respondents about the political stereotypes of several groups. People were asked whether the group's party preference is generally Democratic, generally Republican, or neither. Women were not included in the list of groups, but the others are nonetheless informative. For example, 69% knew that blacks are generally Democratic. More importantly, this percentage is significantly higher among black respondents (83%) than among whites (68%). (This difference is even stronger once educational differences are controlled.) Stereotypes are strongly asymmetric and these asymmetries are widely internalized by the group being stereotyped. In the case of blacks, the stereotype about the group is highly accurate while the counter-stereotype (that whites prefer Republicans) is not as accurate. Setting aside the accuracy of the gender stereotype, it is clear that media portrayals have defined women politically as Democrats without suggesting much about the partisan preferences of men.

Asking how a person "thinks" of themselves in the public domain, as the standard party identification batteries do, does not encourage individuation from social stereotypes. In this context, some respondents – particularly sophisticated women – will think about what their identifications "ought" to be, based perhaps on some prevailing stereotypes and "presentation of self" concerns (Goffman 1959). Having been flooded over the past two decades with stories about how Democratic women have created a "gender gap," making the stereotype of women as

Democrats widely known and accepted (Mueller 1988).⁷ Miller, Taylor, and Buck (1991) contend that the media treat men as the normal default group and focus on female voters as unusual. Journalists end up trying to explain why women are Democratic rather than why men are Republican. This stereotype is thus “in the air” whenever the context is political, whether it be as an NES respondent or a voter at the local polling place. Gender differences are thus implicitly primed by the situation. Using this stereotype as a cue, female respondents who are sophisticated enough to be aware of the stereotype but lack strong partisan attachments will report that they are Democrats, a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy. Such a statement will not generate much controversy as the media have portrayed most if not the vast majority of women to be Democratic. So it has the added benefit of not “rocking the boat” (Atkeson and Rapoport 2004). This dynamic creates something of a self-fulfilling prophesy.

But what if women were instead primed to personalize their preferences, to individuate themselves from the social stereotype? After all, much psychological research points to the importance of individuation in judging outgroup members (Fein and Hilton 1992). A question that emphasizes affect might encourage some differentiation from the group stereotype by prompting personal reflection. An emotional emphasis allows for a more personalized response. It is as if a question built on emotion is interpreted as “O h, you are asking me what I really am down deep.” If women with weaker party attachments fall toward the Democratic response based on group identity when thoughts are primed, they might fall back toward the Republican camp (if that is in fact where their preferences lie) when a feeling question is used. The aggregate results have been effectively constrained by questions that invoke a social stereotype.

⁷ Whether this stereotype is correct is another matter. Journalists could just as easily focus on why men are disproportionately Republican. And the media have actually misled the public at times by implying that the gender gap emerged because women moved toward the Democrats, not because men moved toward the Republicans (Kauffmann and Petrocik 1999; Wirls 1986).

In summary, we note three interrelated understandings. First, there is a widely acknowledged gender gap in party identification, so that sex is correlated with partisanship. Second, there are differences between men and women in the mix of feelings and thoughts that comprise attitudes, so that sex is correlated with the use of affect. Third, the social stereotypes about the gender gap are primarily about women, so that sex is correlated with the tendency to self-categorize based on stereotypes. I now suggest that a fourth factor – the measurement of party identification – causes these correlations to manifest themselves in heretofore unappreciated ways that could shape the gender gap itself.

Measuring Party Identification

Like all attitudes, party identification is a combination of affect and cognition (Burden and Klofstad forthcoming; Greene 1999; 2000; 2002). It is possible that sex differences in the mix could be responsible for at least part of the partisan gender gap. Focusing primarily on thoughts or feelings could magnify or diminish apparent sex differences. Decisions about precisely how to measure such important concepts should thus not be taken lightly.

An oddity of party identification is that the original theory clearly defines it as an identity that is *affective*, yet survey questions explicitly ask respondents to *think*. Few researchers have even recognized this disjunction between theory and measurement, let alone what its substantive implications might be (cf. Burden and Klofstad forthcoming).

The classic conception of party identification is found in Campbell et al.'s *The American Voter*. According to their oft-quoted definition, party identification is “the individual’s *affective orientation* to an important group-object in his environment” (Campbell *et al.* 1960, 121, emphasis added).⁸ *The New American Voter* reaffirms some 36 years later that “party

⁸ The phrase “affective orientation” has been cited in textbooks including Erikson and Tedin’s *American Public Opinion* and Wattenberg’s *The Decline of American Political Parties*.

identification is a concept . . . positing that one's sense of self may include a *feeling* of personal identity with . . . a political party" (Miller and Shanks 1996, 120, emphasis added). Party identification is thus analogous to religious affiliation (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Miller and Shanks 1996).

The starting point for this theoretical view takes party identification as a psychological attachment to a group. Party identification is not the same as legal registration with a party, or even which party a person votes for in elections (Burden and Greene 2000; Campbell *et al.* 1960; Converse and Pierce 1985; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Keith *et al.* 1992; Miller and Shanks 1996; Weisberg and Greene 2003). Rather, it is a long-term psychological tie, a bond that is fundamentally affective, or emotional. For most people, one knows which party he or she identifies with based primarily on feelings not thoughts. The Michigan school's discussion of partisanship suggests that it is not emotional in a "hot" or visceral sense; rather, it is grounded in long-term affective responses to the parties born through socialization and other experiences in politics.

If thoughts and feelings about party attachments are not equally connected for men and women, then the size of the gender gap must be influenced by the priming used in the party identification questions themselves. Men and women use different mixes of affect and cognitions to evaluate political objects, so the type of considerations prompted in party identification questions could influence the gender gap.

Academic surveys such as the NES and GSS have asked the same battery of party identification questions for over half a century now. The items follow a branching format where every respondent is first asked,

"Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

Respondents who identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans are then asked a follow-up:

“Would you call yourself a strong Democrat (or Republican) or a not very strong Democrat (or Republican)?”

In contrast, respondents who label themselves as Independents are then asked,

“Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?”

Combining all of the possible responses to these questions creates a seven-point party identification scale that ranges from “Strong Democrat” on one end to “Strong Republican” on the other. Independent Republicans and Independent Democrats are frequently referred to as “leaners” because they admit tilting toward one party or another.

Even though respondents are theoretically expected to feel their partisanship, survey questions tell them to “think” about it instead. The consequences of this disjunction are heretofore unknown (cf., Burden and Klobstad forthcoming). To reconcile the inconsistencies between the theory and measurement of party identification, I modify the existing questions slightly to emphasize feelings. In creating these new measures, it is important to retain the two central elements of the existing questions: a long time horizon and self-categorization (Converse and Pierce 1985). The only change will be to prompt respondents to base their responses on feelings rather than thoughts.⁹ Ideally, one would shift the emphasis from thinking to feeling while displacing as few words as possible. If responses to the question change after it is reworded, they can then be attributed *exclusively* to the new words since the rest of the question will be held constant.

In an effort to meet these criteria, I developed the following item:

⁹ Though “feeling thermometers” and other such evaluative scales might be appropriate for assessing more general aspects of partisanship, the standard – and most commonly used – questions ask only for identification with a party rather than its consequences. *Attitudes toward* parties are different from *identification with* a party (Greene 1999; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).

“Generally speaking, do you usually feel that you are a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

Note that the only difference between this question and the traditional one is that “*think of yourself as*” has been replaced by “*feel that you are*.” “Generally speaking” and “usually” are still present to invoke long-term dispositions rather than short-term preferences.

The follow-up questions are also modified to prompt affect instead of cognition.

Respondents who identify as Democrats or Republicans based on the first question are asked,

“Do you feel that you are a strong Republican (or Democrat) or a not very strong Republican (or Democrat)?”

Likewise, self-identified Independents are asked,

“Do you feel that you are closer to the Republican or the Democratic Party?”

In comparison to the traditional question, the only changes made are that “Would you *call yourself*” has been replaced by “Do you *feel that you are*” in the former and “Do you *think of yourself*” has been replaced by “Do you *feel*” in the latter. Again, cognitive prompts have been replaced by affective prompts while altering the original questions as little as possible. The term “call” used to identify party leaners is less explicitly cognitive than the term “think” used in the other two questions, but “feel” has been used in all three new items for consistency. One might expect smaller effects for the leaner question than for the identification and strength questions.

Compared to other question wording experiments, these changes are quite modest (Schuman and Presser 1981; Zaller 1992). By altering only a couple of words in three questions in a long omnibus telephone survey, we are surely stacking the deck against finding differences.

The distinction between cognitively and affectively defined party loyalties would have to be great indeed for any differences to result from such a modest experimental manipulation.¹⁰

But there is an important difference between the wording effects that are usually demonstrated and the differences I expect. Whereas standard wording experiments affect the *least* sophisticated respondents, I predict precisely the opposite. Typically one assumes that sophisticated respondents are best able to persevere through minor changes in framing and priming. This happens because highly aware individuals have more information (predispositions) that anchor their considerations and allow them to counter-argue against inconsistent new information (Zaller 1992). In contrast, I suggest that the experiment it should be felt most among women with higher levels of sophistication because they are most aware of the stereotype.

Party identification represents a strongly congruent and stable set of attitudes that are unlikely to waiver whether affective or cognition is primed. The experimental manipulation is more timid than most, further biasing the results in favor of the null hypothesis of no difference between the two wordings. Yet it should remain an empirical question as to the sex-specific effects of the experiment. The social psychological literature finds consistent differences between men and women in the emotional content of attitudes, and recent work on public opinion detects large differences in how men and women see themselves in the public sphere. It is at least possible that the contradiction between the theory and measurement of party identification will interact with known sex differences in attitudes, having rather substantial effects on the partisan gender gap.

¹⁰ A more thorough examination of the relationship between affect, cognition, and party identification could move outside the Michigan framework by asking for a variety of attitudes toward the parties (Greene 1999; 2002).

Data and Methodology

I compared the old and new party identification questions directly in a telephone survey experiment. A survey conducted in late 2001 in Ohio randomly assigned 806 respondents to receive either the traditional party identification battery or the new items. The remainder of the 30-minute survey was the same for all respondents and included questions about political behavior, terrorism, and demographics. To say that this experimental manipulation is subtle is surely an understatement. Only a few words in a couple of questions were altered within an omnibus survey. Because respondents are randomly assigned to conditions, no one knows the party identification questions are being manipulated.

The survey experiment is attractive because it combines the *external validity* of surveys with the *internal validity* of true experiments. Because the data come from a representative sample of adults in Ohio, a fairly typical state in terms of partisanship and demographics, one can safely generalize. The experimental design also generates high internal validity. Because respondents are randomly assigned and do not know they are participating in an experiment, any differences between the two conditions can be attributed entirely to the manipulation. Unlike purely correlational studies that must attempt to control for all confounding factors, these influences are automatically controlled by randomization. The experiment has already been analyzed to verify that the randomization succeeded.¹¹ Respondents in the two conditions do not differ in any respect except for their responses to the party identification items.

¹¹ A series of manipulation checks conducted by the author verified that all of the differences found between the conditions are due solely to the experiment itself (see Burden and Klobstad forthcoming). Aside from party identification, difference of means tests on some 50 variables in the dataset were never statistically significant. And the differing gender gaps between the think and feel conditions was not found in any other gender differences, even in presidential voting choices where the gap is exactly 22 points regardless of question wording.

Distributional Results

The analysis begins by simply reporting the raw data: the distribution of party identification by sex. The gender gap is simply the difference between the distributions of party identification for men and for women. Table 1 presents the seven-point party identification for men and women by experimental condition. The first two columns report the results for the standard questions (“Think”) and replicate results from the NES. The rightmost columns report data using the new questions (“Feel”). The null hypothesis is that the distributions should look the same regardless of question wording.

Table 1. Gender and the Seven-Point Party Identification Scale

Party Identification	Think		Feel	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Strong Republican	16.2%	17.7	21.6	24.8
Weak Republican	14.3	20.3	18.1	19.0
Independent Republican	5.2	13.7	8.3	10.2
Pure Independent	4.3	11.1	7.4	10.2
Independent Democrat	9.1	5.9	7.8	13.1
Weak Democrat	26.2	15.7	17.7	8.8
Strong Democrat	24.8	15.7	19.1	13.9
χ^2	24.11		9.75	
p	<.001		.14	
N	363		341	

The null hypothesis is easily rejected. The clear gender gap observed using the traditional items all but disappears with the new items. A χ^2 test of independence shows sex and partisanship to be strongly related when the “think” questions are used ($p < .001$) but insignificant using the “feel” measures ($p = .14$).

Consider the traditional “think” items found in the first two data columns. In this condition, using the standard NES party identification measures, men are clearly more Republican than women. This nicely replicates existing work on the gender gap; it reproduces

that the gap that existed at the end of the Clinton era and confirms that national patterns are mirrored in Ohio. On the continuum from 1 (Strong Republican) to 7 (Strong Democrat), men are on average slightly Republican 3.77 while women are a decidedly Democratic 4.53 (difference statistically significant at $p = .001$).

In stark contrast, the “Feel” prompts suppress the connection between sex and partisanship. The differences between men and women become much smaller. The bivariate relationship between sex and partisanship actually falls to statistical insignificance ($p = .135$). In short, when partisan feelings are primed, the gender gap all but disappears. The immediate reason that the gender gap disappears is that women become more Republican when affect is salient. Men move as well, but the changes are less dramatic and the pattern less orderly. In contrast, women’s mean position on the seven-point scale drops from 4.53 to 3.91 using the new wording (a significant difference at $p = .006$). In contrast, the question wording appears not to affect men ($p = .28$). Whereas women and men had significantly different means on the “think” scale, the difference is only marginally significant when the “feel” questions are asked ($p = .094$).

One might wonder whether these results are due to use of a faulty full seven-point scale. Keith et al. (1992) and Petrocik (1974) point to intransitivities in the scale while Miller (1991) argues that the entire scale was never intended to be used in this way and that a three-point categorization is more appropriate. Table 2 reports the same tests using the 3-point scale where leaners are coded as partisans. This follows Norrander’s (1999) advice to avoid spurious effects due to differences in the numbers of independent men and women (more on this below). Fortunately these concerns are not troubling; the relationships hold up even if one uses the three-

point rather than the full-seven point scale. The gender gap created by the “think” questions is due to real differences in the party attachments of men and women, not just their strength.

Table 2. Gender and the Three-Point Party Identification Scale

Party Identification	Think		Feel	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Republican	35.7%	51.6	48.0	54.0
Independent	4.3	11.1	7.4	10.2
Democrat	60.0	37.3	44.6	35.8
χ^2	20.13		2.93	
p	.001		.231	
N	363		341	

Note: Independent “leaners” are coded as partisans following Norrander (1999).

As before, the experiment influences women more than men. The effect of the “feel” prompt is to bring men and women closer together, shrinking the gender gap substantially. Gender and partisanship are thought to be related, a fact that reappears here using the traditional questions. But the affect prompts diminish this relationship to the point of insignificance. Women’s mean value on the three-point scale changes in the pro-Republican direction from 2.24 to 1.97 ($p = .003$) while men’s remains essentially the same, moving insignificantly from 1.86 to 1.82 ($p = .73$). This makes the traditional gender gap (2.24 versus 1.96, $p < .0001$) evaporate when affect is primed (1.97 versus 1.82, $p = .16$). These results reinforce the conjecture in psychological research that women are more likely than men to distinguish their feelings and thoughts about an object. More importantly, the results suggest that our identification of the gender gap in partisanship is largely a product of a measurement strategy that emphasized thought rather than feeling.

The Role of Political Sophistication

Researchers usually assume that question wording effects are strongest among the least sophisticated respondents. Because they have less information and experience in politics, these respondents are pushed around more by the wording. This hypothesis seems even more plausible because it women who are most affected, and women are less knowledgeable and less comfortable talking about politics. Yet I expect that only politically sophisticated women will be aware of the strong stereotypes about their partisan preferences and thus distinguish between social and personal identities.

Political sophistication has been measured many ways (Luskin 1987; Zaller 1992). I use three measures: level of formal education, how many days per week one reads the newspaper, and level of interest in public affairs. None of these measures is ideal, but factual knowledge items, which some researchers prefer, were not included in the survey. The inadequacies of any given measure should be overcome by triangulation of several of them to examine the same relationship.

One way to do this would be to rerun the cross-tabulations in Tables 1 and 2 for each level of sophistication to reveal how the gender gap grows or shrinks as sophistication rises. But doing this for each level of sophistication within each of the three measures would be overly cumbersome. Instead, I resort to summary measures of the gender gap. I compute the following quantity suggested by Norris (2003).¹²

$$\frac{(\% \text{ Women Democratic} - \% \text{ Women Republican}) - (\% \text{ Men Democratic} - \% \text{ Men Republican})}{2}$$

By including leaners as partisans, this measure provides a convenient summary of gender differences. This is the figure graphed over time in Figure 1. For example, in Table 2, the

overall gender gap for the “think” condition is $\frac{(60.0 - 35.7) - (37.3 - 51.6)}{2} = 19.3$. For the “feel” condition it is 7.4, the lower value confirming the drastic shrinking of the gender gap found using other tests above. Its main limitation is that the figure is a computation not a statistic, which makes it difficult to determine how big it must be to be statistically meaningful. This demonstrates that a value above zero might not be significant in any statistical sense, especially with the small sample sizes that relate to each subgroup. I have highlighted entries where the relationship is significant using a χ^2 test of independence as was done in Figure 1.

Table 3 shows this calculation for the old and new party identification questions for various levels of education, newspaper readership, and interest in politics. The gap shrinks in nearly every subgroup. But more interest is the following pattern: the gender gap is shrunk most radically at the highest levels of sophistication. For example, the gap among those with highest levels of interest drops 19 points. It recedes just two points for those with the lowest levels of interest. Regardless of measure, the experiment has a larger impact among the sophisticated.

Table 3. Gender Gap by Political Sophistication

Subpopulation		Gender Gap		
		Think	Feel	Difference
All		19.3	7.4	11.9
Education	High School or Less	2.9	6.0	-3.1
	Any College	30.9	8.1	22.8
Reads Newspaper	0-2 Days a Week	17.6	6.3	11.3
	3-6 Days a Week	8.7	18.1	-9.4
	7 Days a Week	25.9	3.8	22.1
Interested in Politics	Now and Then/Hardly	15.0	13.0	2.0
	Some of the Time	17.5	6.9	10.6
	Most of the Time	23.2	3.8	19.4

Note: First two column cell entries are gender gaps computed using the formula described in the text. Bolded entries are for tables where the χ^2 value is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

¹² Alvarez, Chaney, and Nagler (1998) use a nearly identical measure that differs only in that is not divided by two.

The careful reader will have noticed that the data in Tables 1 and 2 reproduce the so-called “independence gap” when the traditional partisanship questions are used. Using the standard NES battery, just 4.3% of women are Independents while 11.1% of men are ($p = .01$). Remarkably, this seven-point difference is exactly the same as Norrander’s estimates, even though they were drawn from different surveys conducted across different years (see also Burden and Greene 2000; Greene and Elder 2001.) If nothing else, the congruence of results helps to further validate the statewide survey used to conduct the experiment.

Like the partisan gender gap, the independence gap contracts in the “feel” condition. It shrinks from seven points to just 2.9 percentage points, an insignificant difference ($p = .35$). The percentage of men who are Independent declines by less than point while women increase by more than four points.

To understand why the independence gap disappears requires reviewing the common explanations for its existence. Norrander (1997) suggests that men are less prone than women to submit themselves to a party hierarchy. Perhaps the increasingly popularity of calling oneself “independent” (Keith et al. 1992), in the sense of being unbound by group labels, has greater appeal among men than women. But even this result seems dependent on the cognitive primes used in the “think” questions. Men are equally likely to report being independent in either condition; women are less likely only in the “think” condition. This fact alone points to self-categorization as the culprit. Social stereotypes about the Democratic leanings of women would be expected to influence responses in precisely this way since stereotypes about men are far more ambiguous.

Individual Response Times

One way to judge the immediate emotionality of survey responses is to time them. I used latent response timers to assess how quickly respondents answered the party identification questions. But the meaning I attach to responses times differs from the standard interpretation. The usual assumption is that shorter response times indicate greater levels of affect and/or attitude accessibility (Bassili 1995; Fazio 1990; Mulligan, Grant, and Mockabee 2003). Thinking, a deeper and more distracting way to tap attitudinal information, should naturally take a bit more time. Affect is “hotter” and more immediate. But I contend that this is true only if one assumes that the emotions under study are in fact more visceral and superficial than thoughts. The Michigan theory of party identification, in contrast, expects party attachments to be based on a deep reservoir of socialization experiences whereas thoughts about parties might be easier to summarize quickly. Identities are central to a person’s self-definition and are likely to be taken more seriously than other attitudes. If emphasizing feelings encourages personalization as I contend, we would predict that response times should increase using the new questions.

Table 4 reports mean response times by sex and experimental condition. The response times differ significantly occur for the first categorical question (“Generally speaking...” and the strength question (“Would you call yourself...”), but not the leaner item (“Would you call yourself...”). This is exactly what one would expect if it is affect and cognition differences that are leading to gender differences. As noted earlier, the use of “call” used in the leaner question is not as explicitly cognitive as the “think” prompts in the other two items. Replacing this ambiguous term with one that it is clearly more affective has little effect, which is to be expected.

Table 4. Party Identification Response Times

Party Identification Question	Think		Feel	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Category (3-point scale)	10.82 (.39)	11.13 (.56)	12.35 (.57)	10.98 (.71)
Leaning (Independents only)	9.56 (.70)	10.26 (.68)	10.65 (.71)	10.49 (1.02)
Strength (Partisans only)	6.83 (.33)	7.31 (.47)	8.32 (.63)	7.02 (.38)

Note: Mean response times are measured in seconds with standard errors in parentheses. Bold entries are significantly different across conditions (within sexes) at $p < .05$. There are no significant differences across sexes (within conditions).

While we cannot be certain that the *intergender* differences observed are statistically meaningful, there are genuine *intragender* relationships to appreciate. Though the experiment had no effect on men’s response times, women took more time responding when affect was prompted. The replacement of “think” with “feel” caused women to take one to 1.5 seconds longer to answer, depending on which part of the party identification battery is considered. Though a change of a second or two might seem minor, these delays make the response times 10 to 20 percent longer.¹³

These data make it difficult to conclude that women’s allegiance to the Democratic Party is due to a more visceral, less reasoned approach to party politics. When emotion is primed, women actually take more, not less, time to respond. Many women take the feel prompts at face value and survey their emotional histories with the parties more deeply when the new questions are used. This allows greater separation from the group stereotype. The fact that the experiment

¹³ It has been suggested that the “feel” question is somehow unnatural or awkward and that the longer response times are due only to the adjustment respondents must go through when facing such an unusual question. This hypothesis seems untenable for a couple of reasons. First, why would the effect exist only for women? If anything, it appears that men of all people answer a tad more quickly to the “feel” question (though insignificantly so). Second, the NES and other surveys ask many questions about feelings including the “feeling thermometer” ratings, “likes” and “dislikes” questions about the parties and candidates, and many others that ask respondents to give their “feelings” about an issue. It has never been argued that respondents have difficulty with these questions. In fact, the

had the largest effects on the most sophisticated respondents – the very women who are most Democratic and resistant to question wording manipulations due to their expertise – suggests that something more meaningful is happening.

Conclusion

A naïve assumption made in the literatures on gender and political behavior is that sex differences appear in part because women rely more on emotion while men rely more on thought. According to this view, women are more Democratic because of the “softer” nature of the Democratic platform, which emphasizes its communitarian roots and favors compassionate positions on domestic issues such as increased aid to families, education, children, and the welfare state generally. Men, in contrast, find the Republican Party more appealing because it values individual effort and emphasizes extrafamily issues such as the economy and foreign affairs. In short, the visceral, affective lens through which women evaluate politics makes them favor the Democrats at a gut level while the cold, cognitive viewpoint men take pushes them toward the Republicans. The analysis presented here turns this logic on its head.

The gender gap is not due so much to sex differences in the use of affect and cognition but that women distinguish between thoughts and feelings toward the parties while men apparently do not. Instead of assuming that the sexes differ because women are feeling politics while men are thinking about it, I find that the gender gap exists only when respondents are not encouraged to individuate. When prompted to feel their party attachments, as theory says people actually do, women become more – not less – similar to men. If anything, it appears that men and women are most likely to diverge politically when women are encouraged to evaluate their

percentage of both sexes answering “don’t know” to the party identification questions is actually a bit lower in the “feel” condition (though the difference is not statistically significant).

party loyalties on social-cognitive rather than personal-affective grounds. The more affective politics is, the smaller the party differences between the sexes.

That said, it is not obvious that the words “think” and “feel” actually prime cognition and affect. More research is required to understand precisely the degree to which party identification is emotional. I merely contend that the “feel” question encourages personalization from social stereotypes in way that the standard question does not. It also happens to conform more closely to the Michigan theory of party identification.

The gender gap might evaporate in survey questions about partisanship, but it continues to appear in voting behavior. Indeed, my experiment had no effect on the voting gap between men and women as reported in the survey. I suggest that the voting environment itself contributes to the gap. Much like the voting booth, a question that is not about feelings encourages identifications based on social rather than personal selves. For most voters, the act of choosing requires going to a local school gymnasium or church basement to engage in civic behavior. Having less information, less comfort, and stronger stereotypes with which to contend, women are not especially likely to personalize their partisan views in the voting booth. I do not take a position which version of partisanship is more genuine; the differences between question wordings, voting behavior, and other attitudes spotlight the importance of context in shaping gender differences.

The analysis offered here suggests that the rise of the gender gap could also be the result of changing bases of party evaluation among men and women. When affect rather than cognition is primed, women become as Republican as men. It suggests that somewhere amidst the decline and shake-up of party loyalties in the 1970s and 1980s, women and men either (1) became more likely to define their party attachments in terms of cognitions, (2) men’s thoughts

and feelings about their party identification became more internally consistent while women's did not, or (3) both of the above. We do know that media coverage of the gender gap, which had been nonexistent, sprung onto the scene in 1981. The asymmetry of the coverage has now penetrated the thinking of an entire generation of women and might have created something of a self-fulfilling prophesy that cemented the modest gap that first appeared in 1980.

Whatever the temporal dynamics that moved men and women to their current stations in mass politics, the results presented here could provide some practical guidance to parties interested in winning more votes in the future. The conventional wisdom about sex and emotion in politics ought to be discarded. Women are not disproportionately Democratic because of "bleeding heart" emotional issues, though their orientation toward compassion issues has often been highlighted (Gilligan 1983; McCue and Gopoian 2000). Women might prefer Democrats because of their closer proximity on these issues, but the reasons are far from emotional. It appears instead that women sometimes call themselves Democrats at a more cognitive, or at least public, level. The Democrats might be getting fewer votes than they assume based on appeals to women's hearts. It is what is in their heads that apparently contributes to a gender gap. Republicans might do better to avoid focusing on issue-based appeals to reluctant women and offer messages that are emotional and personal as it is in these domains that sex differences in party identification are smallest.

Appendix

The content analysis codes stories that appeared each month from January 1980 until December 2004. I included six print sources for stories about the gender gap: the Associated Press news wire, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Washington Post*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. (The *New York Times*' coverage in the Lexis-Nexis archives only begins in June 1980.) For each source, I identified stories in two ways. First, I found stories where the term "gender gap" appeared in headlines or lead paragraphs. Second, I searched for stories where the terms "men" or "women" and "voting" appeared in the headline or lead paragraph.

These stories were then vetted to be certain that they dealt with the partisan gender gap directly. Articles that concerned partisan differences between men and women (or the lack of them) in terms of political attitudes and behavior were retained. Articles that discussed differences between men and women generally, or that did not mention partisan differences in behavior were discarded. For example, stories about women being less likely than men to support Reagan were included in the coding, while stories about women being more likely to vote for female candidates because they were women (with no mention of party bias) were not included.

Each story was given one of five codes depending on the emphasis: women as Democrats, men as Republicans, women as Republicans, men as Democrats, or equal time to both. The two main categories of interest (women as Democrats and men as Republicans) accounted for 83% of all stories. Stories presented them equally accounted for another 14%. Counter-stereotypic stories (men as Democrats or women as Republicans) were extremely rare at just .2% and 2.6%, respectively.

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