THE SOCIAL ROOTS OF THE PARTISAN GENDER GAP

BARRY C. BURDEN

Abstract  I suggest that the gender gap in party identification is dependent on question wording and asymmetric stereotypes about men’s and women’s partisan preferences. A 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 to shrink. This happens in part because the “feel” questions find women to be less Democratic than did the “think” questions. Moreover, reduction of the gender gap occurs mostly among highly sophisticated women and 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.

The gender gap in party identification has drawn a great deal of interest from journalists, politicians, and academics.1 It 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

1. The “gender gap” should more accurately be called the “sex gap” since it deals with differences across biologically rather than socially defined groups (Mueller 1988). Nonetheless, the traditional terminology will be used here out of convention. Although there are actually many gender gaps in issue preferences, electoral participation, and voting behavior, I am focused on the gap in party identification as one important manifestation of sex differences.

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understand the intersection of gender and mass politics. In this paper, I take gender gap research in a new direction by opening up the possibility that the gap itself has been misunderstood. In particular, I suggest that the asymmetric nature of news coverage and priming of stereotypes about women have 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 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 contrast to other question wording effects in the literature, the largest changes occur among the most sophisticated women. I also show that sophistication is correlated with endorsement of the stereotype that women are Democrats. These results are used to reconsider standard notions of men and women’s approaches to politics, focusing in particular on why women are less Democratic when affect rather than cognition is primed.

Explaining the Gender Gap in Party Identification

The gender gap became the subject of public discourse following the 1980 presidential election. In earlier elections, the voting patterns of the sexes were nearly identical (aside from a slight reversal of the contemporary gap in the 1950s). Although initial interest was in voting behavior, researchers have now identified multiple gender gaps in participation, political knowledge, and issue attitudes (e.g., Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). In this paper, I focus on gender differences in partisan self-identification. 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. Circles indicate when cross-tabulations of sex and party identification were statistically significant at the .05 level using a $\chi^2$ 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.

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. This inquiry has essentially been a hunt for independent variables.

First, women and men have different positions on issues that shape party identification. Women are more liberal than men on matters of economic redistribution, use of military force, and some domestic programs and cultural issues (Alvarez, Chaney, and Nagler 1998; McCue and Gopoian 2000; Schlesinger

2. The term “gender gap” has also been used to describe phenomena such as the disparity in wages between men and women (Blau and Kahn 1997). As the review below reveals, some research seeks to connect sex differences in economics with sex differences in political attitudes and behavior.
Social Roots of the Partisan Gender Gap

Figure 1. The Partisan Gender Gap from 1952 to 2004. NOTE.—Gender gap in party identification computed from the National Election Studies. Circles indicate gaps where the $\chi^2$ statistic is significant at $p < .05$.

and Heldman 2001; Kaufmann 2002; Alvarez and McCaffery 2003). These sex differences derive from socialization and socioeconomic differences (Conover 1988; Trevor 1999; Edlund and Pande 2002; Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004). Second, men and women also weigh the same issues differently when they evaluate candidates and parties (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Howell and Day 2000; Kaufmann 2002). For example, while men and women might have similar positions on abortion, it is a more important criterion for women. Third, women are simply more likely than men to identify as partisans. Part of the gender gap is simply due the greater share of independents among men (Norrander 1997; Burden and Greene 2000; Greene and Elder 2001). Although not much theory has been offered to explain the “independence gap,” accounting for it reduces the gender gap in party identification.

While 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. This approach treats the outcome as fixed and then seeks explanations. Sometimes these variables can “explain away” the gender gap, but often the gap remains even after accounting for other factors. As a result, there may be more to be learned from a re-examination 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. Drawing upon previous research on stereotypes, priming, and measurement, I suggest that gender gap may be sensitive to both the nature of media coverage of gender stereotypes and the wording of the party identification questions themselves.
Asymmetric Stereotypes

The measurement of party identification may be more consequential for women than men if media coverage of the gender gap is unbalanced. I contend that media portrayals of sex differences in partisanship have been strongly asymmetric. In presenting stereotypes, press 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. As a result, the possibility of embracing a stereotype is greater for women than men.

I provide initial evidence for this premise in figure 2. The graph shows the number of stories about the gender gap in six different newspapers and magazines from 1981 to the present. I coded every story as focusing mostly on women as Democrats, men as Republicans, or a mixture of the two. Details of the coding appear in the appendix. For each print story about gender differences in partisanship, I determined whether it attributed the gap to women, men, or both sexes equally.

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 emphasize one of these stereotypes, a full 93 percent of all

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stories focus on women as Democrats.\textsuperscript{4} Coverage of the gender gap over the last 20 years has been decidedly one sided.\textsuperscript{5}

Having been exposed over the past two decades to stories about how Democratic women have created a gender gap makes this stereotype widely known and accepted, particularly among the politically attentive (Mueller 1988).\textsuperscript{6} Why the media treat gender stereotypes asymmetrically is not immediately clear, although Miller, Taylor, and Buck (1991) believe that journalists treat men as the model of “normal” behavior and then focus on female voters as aberrations to be explained. This would occur because men are treated as the default while women are viewed as the “other” sex that deviates from the male standard (Beauvoir 1989). As a result, journalists write much more about why women are Democratic rather than why men are Republican.

Because of the unbalanced coverage, this female stereotype is more likely to be salient when the context primes politics or otherwise has to do with public affairs. Psychological research nicely documents that how people view themselves depends heavily on context (Brewer 1991). Self-categorization theory holds that social identities are more likely to be applied when group stereotypes are salient (Turner et al. 1987; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002). The phenomenon of “stereotype threat” is but one manifestation of self-stereotyping (Steele 1997; Wheeler and Petty 2001). The theory has been used to explain race-of-interviewer and gender-of-interviewer effects in survey research (Davis and Silver 2003; Garand, Guynan, and Fournet 2004). Stereotype threat often is shown to affect task performance, but priming of stereotypes also heightens simple group identification (Abrams, Eller, and Bryant 2006). In fact, while these identifications are seldom measured by psychologists, the activation of group stereotypes must precede any behavioral consequences such as performance in tests (Wheeler and Petty 2001). Importantly, the literature posits that group stereotypes are more likely to be applied when subjects are conscious of them (Schmader, Johns, and Barquissau 2004). Thus, I expect self-stereotyping to be more prevalent among politically sophisticated women who have been more exposed to news coverage of the gender gap. The effect is

4. I also searched for stories that were counterstereotypic. Only 22 total stories over 24 years ever portrayed women as Republicans and just two stories portrayed men as Democrats. Since these stories comprise only 3 percent of the total, I omit them from the analyses.

5. 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.

6. 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 (Wirles 1986; Kauffmann and Petrocik 1999).
more pronounced for women than men because media stereotypes are so heavily asymmetric.

Particularly because women are more socially oriented and less comfortable in and knowledgeable about politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Mondak and Anderson 2004; Garand, Guynan, and Fournet 2004), it would seem that the dominance of the female-as-Democrat stereotype should result in some individual level attitudinal consequences. As a first step, I suggest that women who regularly attend to the media will become disproportionately aware of the stereotype and will be more likely to fulfill it. Politically sophisticated men, in contrast, might learn about stereotypes of women but will encounter few generalizations about their own partisan preferences in the press. Although the bases of men’s and women’s identities may well differ in other important ways, it is the unbalanced nature of news stories that facilitate differential responses to questions about their partisan identities. This naturally turns one’s attention to the measurement of party identification itself.

Measuring Party Identification

Like all attitudes, party identification is a combination of affect and cognition (Greene 1999, 2000, 2002; Burden and Klofstad 2005). It is possible that sex differences in the mix of the two components 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. Because partisanship is an identity, questions must ask respondents to categorize themselves. Other primes offered in the questions could have unintended consequences. A peculiarity 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.

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, p. 121, emphasis added). The New American Voter reaffirms some 36 years later that “party 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, p. 120, emphasis added). The Michigan school’s discussion of partisanship suggests that it is

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

Academic surveys 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.8

Even though respondents are theoretically expected to “feel” their partisanship, survey questions tell them to “think” about it instead. To reconcile the inconsistencies between the theory and measurement of party identification, I modified the existing questions slightly to emphasize feelings. Ideally, one would shift the emphasis from thinking to feeling while displacing as few words as possible.9 In an effort to meet these criteria, I suggest the following item:

“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

8. The seven-point scale has been criticized for not being a truly ordinal, unidimensional measure of party identity (Petrocik 1974; Weisberg 1980; Keith et al. 1992), a concern that I shall seek to minimize below by focusing on a recoded version of the scale.
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. Although both are attitudes, evaluations of parties as attitude objects are different from self-identifications with a party since the latter requires self-categorization (Greene 1999; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).
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 are identified 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. Because of the word “call,” I 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, I am 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. Although standard wording experiments affect the least sophisticated respondents, I predict 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 counterargue against inconsistent new information (Zaller 1992). Because endorsement of a stereotype requires exposure to it in the first place, the effects should be monotonically increasing with political awareness.

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 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 survey was the same for all respondents and included questions about political behavior, terrorism, and demographics. The appendix provides additional information about the survey’s administration.

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. The experiment has already been analyzed to verify that the randomization succeeded.\(^\text{11}\)

Distributional Results

The analysis begins by simply reporting the raw data: the distribution of party identification by sex. Here the gender gap is the difference between the party identifications of men and women. In full disclosure of the most basic results, table 1 presents the complete 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 are identical.

The null hypothesis of no experimental effect on gender differences is easily rejected. The clear gender gap observed using the traditional items diminishes with the new items. A \(\chi^2\) test of independence shows sex and partisanship to be strongly related when the “think” questions are used (\(p = .001\)) but statistically 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 more Republican than women. This nicely replicates existing work on the gender gap; it reproduces the gap that existed at the end of the Clinton era and confirms that national patterns are mirrored in Ohio. Assuming for the moment that the scale from 1 (Strong Republican) to 7 (Strong Democrat) is continuous,

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 Klofstad 2005). Aside from party identification, differences of mean tests on some 50 variables in the dataset were never statistically significant.
men are on average at 3.77 while women are at 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 and the bivariate relationship between sex and partisanship actually falls to statistical insignificance. Men might be affected by the experiment too, 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 after using the new wording (a significant difference at $p = .006$). Although both sexes appear to become somewhat more Republican in the “feel” condition, in fact the question wording does not affect men ($p = .28$). Although women and men had significantly different means on the “think” scale, the difference is not statistically significant by conventional standards when the “feel” questions are asked ($p = .094$).12

One might wonder whether these results are due to the use of a faulty full seven-point scale. Norrander (1999) argues convincingly that the gender gap can only be understood after “leaners” are coded as partisans, an advice that also fits with others’ (Petrocik 1974; Keith et al. 1992) concerns about the intransitivity in the seven-point scale. But Norrander’s advice is more specific; the recoding is necessary to avoid spurious effects due to differences in the numbers of Independent men and women. As explained above, this “independence gap” is correlated with the gap in partisanship. As a result, the

12. Similar results are found using a regression framework that is more appropriate for the ordered dependent variables. I estimated ordered logit models of party identification separately for men and women using a dummy for the experimental condition as the sole explanatory variable. For men, the coefficient was statistically insignificant ($p = .23$) but for women it was a highly significant $- .45 (p = .009)$. 

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party identification</th>
<th>Think (%)</th>
<th>Feel (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Strong Republican</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Weak Republican</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Independent Republican</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pure Independent</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Independent Democrat</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Weak Democrat</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Strong Democrat</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\bar{x}$</td>
<td>4.53$^{a,b}$</td>
<td>3.77$^{a}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE.—Pairs of letter superscripts indicate means that are significantly different from one another at $p < .05$. 

...
results from the three-category analysis will be more appropriate than those using the full seven-point scale. Although collapsing into a smaller number of categories sacrifices information available in the original scale, it may be necessary to prevent artifactual results. All of the analyses to follow rely on the three-point party identification scale. Table 2 reports the same tests using the three-point scale.

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. Rather than computing means for what may be not be true interval-level scale, an alternative way to consider these results is to reconfigure tables 1 and 2 so that question wording effects can be observed within sex. Using the full seven-point party identification scale, chi-square tests for independence of partisanship and experimental conditions are again statistically insignificant for men ($\chi^2 = 9.66, p = .140$) but marginally significant for women ($\chi^2 = 10.80, p = .095$). As Norrander suggested, the effect is more substantial when moving from the seven-point scale to the three-point scale. The question wording effect is far from significant for men ($\chi^2 = .18, p = .916$) but highly significant for women ($\chi^2 = 10.12, p = .006$).

The careful reader would 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 percent of women and 11.1 percent of men are Independents ($p = .01$). 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 validate the generalizability of the statewide survey used to conduct the experiment.

The results suggest that the conventional understanding of the partisan gender gap is at least partly a product of a particular measurement strategy. Although my question wording experiment does not provide direct evidence of the causal mechanism suggested by the theory, the data so far are consistent with the view
that unbalanced media coverage of stereotypes might be reflected in different question wordings. In the following sections I provide additional evidence to further evaluate the theoretical argument in terms of political sophistication, a requirement for awareness of stereotypes.

**The Role of Political Sophistication**

Researchers usually find 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 is women who are most affected, and women are less knowledgeable and less comfortable talking about politics. Alternatively, one might expect those with moderate levels of awareness to be most open to persuasion (Zaller 1992). Yet I expect neither; only politically sophisticated women will be aware of the strong stereotypes about their partisan preferences and thus will 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. With some luck, the inadequacies of any given measure should be overcome by using several distinct indicators.

One way to show the effects is 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 summarize measures of the gender gap. I compute the following quantity suggested in the work on the gender gap by Norris (2003):\footnote{13. Alvarez, Chaney, and Nagler (1998) use a nearly identical measure that differs only in that is not divided by 2.}

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

By including leaners as partisans, this measure provides a convenient summary of gender differences. This is the figure shown to increase over time in figure 1. For example, in table 2, the overall gender gap for the “think” condition is \((60.0 - 35.7) - (37.3 - 51.6) = 19.3\). 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 and not a statistic, which makes it difficult to determine how big it must be to be statistically meaningful.
Table 3. Gender Gap by Political Sophistication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Think</th>
<th>Feel</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>−3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any college</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads newspaper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–2 days a week</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–6 days a week</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>−9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 days a week</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now and then/hardly</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE.—First two column cell entries are gender gaps computed using the formula described in the text. Bold entries are for tables where the $\chi^2$ value is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

I have highlighted entries where the relationship is significant using a $\chi^2$ test of independence as was done in figure 1.14. 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 as “feel” primes replace “think” primes, but the differences are greatest at the highest levels of political awareness. 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 which measure is used, the experiment has a larger impact among the sophisticated. This result is striking because it runs against two dominant approaches in the literature on question wording effects that expect effects among either the least aware or moderately aware respondents.

I have suggested that question wording has a larger effect on sophisticated women because they are most aware of the stereotype that women are disproportionately Democratic. Although it would be difficult to explain the coun-

14. Focusing on individual-level effects rather than the overall gender gap, a researcher might consider estimating regression models in which party identification is a function of sex, experimental condition, political sophistication, and interactions of these variables. This approach is unfortunately not practical in this application because it requires one three-way and three two-way interaction terms for each measure of sophistication (of which there are three). The high degree of correlation among these many interactions coupled with the modest sample size makes it difficult to have much confidence in the estimates produced by the models. In addition, running one of these models for each measure of sophistication would result in dozen of coefficients that are not easily digestible.
terintuitive results in Table 3 another way, I draw upon one more piece of evidence to test this assumption. The evidence comes from a survey conducted in mid-2005 by Harris Interactive. Harris asked a subset of its online panel about partisan stereotypes. If my conjecture is correct, the data should reveal that awareness of the stereotype of women as Democrats among women should increase with levels of sophistication.

With regard to women, the survey asked, “What do you consider their political party preference to be?” The options were “generally Democratic,” “generally Republican,” and “no clear preference.” This is the way of asking about the stereotype of women’s partisanship without implying positive or negative connotations.

The survey measured political sophistication in three ways. One is a simple measure of formal education. A second item asked, “How much do you like to learn about political issues?” A third question asked, “How knowledgeable do you feel you are about political issues occurring in the United States?” These measures are not identical to the items used above, but together they provide a reasonable, if somewhat rough, accounting for political awareness and thus exposure to media portrayals of gender stereotypes.

Table 4 shows the distribution of responses to the stereotype question by levels of political sophistication. The results support the theory’s assumption that highly sophisticated women are more likely to endorse the view that women tend to be Democratic. As education levels raise from no more than a high school education to postgraduate work, the percentage viewing women as “generally Democratic” rises from 32 percent to 47 percent. More dramatically, those who devour news about political issues are more than twice as likely as those who do not like learning about political issues to view women as Democratic (49 percent versus 23 percent). Finally, half of women who report themselves as extremely knowledgeable recognize the stereotype while only a third of those who are not knowledgeable do.

These results add the final piece to the puzzle. Media content analysis over the last 20 years showed that stereotypes about the partisan preferences of men and women have been heavily asymmetric. For every story about men being Republican, a dozen stories run that focus on women as Democrats. Changing question wordings to be more consistent with the original theory of party identification also changes the overall distributions of partisanship among women and as a result, the gender gap. Interestingly, these effects are magnified, not weakened, as one moves up the scale of political sophistication. It seems that highly sophisticated and knowledgeable women most likely to be

15. This yielded an extremely large sample size of 130,968 respondents. Although AAPOR does not provide exact guidance on reporting response rates for internet polls like this one, I can report that the response rate was 10.9 percent among those panelists invited to participate in this particularly survey.

16. Due to large sample size, $\chi^2$ tests show all three of these relationships to be highly statistically significant ($p < .001$).
Table 4. Women’s Awareness of Stereotype by Political Sophistication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women’s political party preferences are (%)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generally Democratic</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>Generally Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like to learn about political issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not like at all</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As much as possible</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How knowledgeable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE.—Data are drawn from roughly 75,000 women surveyed as part of a Harris Interactive online poll.

exposed to the stereotype in political discourse are precisely the respondents most susceptible to endorsing it. This finding modifies Green et al.’s (2002) argument that stereotypes about what groups are comprise the two major party coalitions that are widely known. When it comes to sex, I find that partisan stereotypes are asymmetric and endorsed more by those with higher levels of information.

Conclusion

The empirical conclusions of this paper are rather modest. Using a survey experiment, I demonstrated that altering the party identification questions to mention feeling rather than thinking causes a shift among women in the Republican direction. Since men are not affected in the same way, the new wording has the effect of shrinking the gender gap in partisanship. Moreover, this effect is greatest among the most sophisticated women, those who attend to news, have more formal education, and express more interest in politics. A content analysis of news coverage of the gender gap showed it to be unbalanced, with far more coverage of the women-as-Democrats stereotype. In addition to
showing directly that politically sophisticated women are more aware of this stereotype, this finding strongly suggests that asymmetric media coverage may be responsible for the variable party loyalties of the most aware women in the electorate. The degree to which gender stereotypes are reflected in actual party identification depends in part on how partisanship questions are worded.

A naive assumption made in the literatures on gender and political behavior is that sex differences exist 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 of men pushes them toward the Republicans. This is not to say that affective decision-making is necessarily inferior to cognitive processes (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000), although it is sometimes implied in journalistic treatments. Regardless, the analysis presented here turns the conventional wisdom on its head.

The gender gap might or might not be due sex differences in the use of affect and cognition, but it does seem to be related to the ways in which the mass media treat sex differences in partisanship. Instead of assuming that the sexes differ because women are feeling politics while men are thinking about it, I find that the gender gap is more prominent when respondents are given cognitive prompts. When primed to feel their party attachments, as the original Michigan 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 party loyalties on social-cognitive rather than personal-affective grounds. While it seems that Ohio is fairly representative of the nation in terms of demographics and partisanship – having voted for the winner of presidential election in all but two elections since 1896 – it is still possible that the experimental effects would not be identical in other samples. Perhaps the historical tendency of the state to support Republicans somehow affects the identities of politically aware women there. Data from other jurisdictions will be instructive since one study already suggests that a similar effect holds for parties in Britain (Johns 2006).

While the evidence presented here is consistent with my theoretical expectations, it is also circumstantial. I lack direct evidence on the mechanism of self-stereotyping, yet the larger effect among sophisticated women is quite suggestive. Other explanations are possible and more research is needed to evaluate them all. For example, it is possible that the “think” questions encourage respondents to consider specific politics and politicians while the “feel”
question promotes a more abstract response. Zaller’s “stop-and-think” (or perhaps “stop-and-feel”) methodology might be a useful extension since it probes respondents to report their considerations after hearing the survey question but before providing a response. Future experiments might also provide stronger primes than have been introduced here. As in studies of stereotype threat, introductory scripts might be manipulated to make stereotypes more or less salient before asking about party identification. Instructions could be introduced that specifically encourage individuation or collective thinking.

More enigmatic is that the gender gap can be reduced 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. Why? To begin, there is a gap between the activation of a group stereotype and its effects on behavior that has yet to be explored sufficiently by psychologists (Wheeler and Petty 2001). Psychologists have long been fascinated by the disjunction between attitudes and behavior. So although further research is required to answer this question definitely, I might hypothesize 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. The act of voting typically requires going to a local school gymnasium or church basement to engage in civic behavior and so provides a political context that could prime public stereotypes among those who have been previously made aware of them.

Rather than arguing that one measure is necessarily superior to another, I suggest that they are simply measuring different aspects of an attitude, in this case, a sense of identity with a party. The standard “ABC” model of attitudes recognizes affective, behavior, and cognitive components, two of which were measured here. They should not relate perfectly to one another because they are three perspectives on the construct of partisanship. Like so many attitudes, the partisan gender gap depends on the social context, as stereotype threat and self-categorization theories predict. Future research ought to explore these questions in different social environments and in different time periods.

Appendix

CONTENT ANALYSIS

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 percent of all stories. Stories presented them equally accounted for another 14 percent. Counterstereotypic stories (men as Democrats or women as Republicans) were extremely rare at just 0.2 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively.

QUESTIONNAIRE DETAILS

The special Buckeye State Poll was conducted from October 16 to October 30, 2001 and interviewed 806 Ohio adults. Questions were fielded using an RDD telephone survey with a unit response rate of 46.2 percent (AAPOR RR5). Survey administrators took the usual precautions to account for differing numbers of phone lines in each household and randomly selected a respondent within each household. The sample nonetheless overrepresents women, replicating a tendency found elsewhere. Survey administrators provided a poststratification weight to correct for differential response rates by sex, race, and income. Since this weight does not change the substantive results appreciably, my analyses rely on unweighted data. The survey lasted approximately 30 minutes and included about 50 items. The first half of the survey mostly asked respondents about the causes and consequences of terrorism. The second half of the survey led off with party identification questions and was followed by a large battery of demographic items. The survey was administered about a month after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Immediately following the attacks, surveys revealed that Republican Party identification increased slightly and that the gender gap in partisanship shrunk slightly. It is possible that the experimental effect would be more muted in a different context, although only further research can determine whether this is the case.

References


