

# Gender, Influence, and Group Composition: A field experiment

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1 May 2020

## 1 Extended Abstract

Despite notable gains by women in education and labor force participation rates over the past five decades, most high-paying professions remain dominated by men. Not only are women persistently underrepresented in such fields as STEM, government, law, and business, but when they do enter them, they often face significant social and cultural barriers that limit their career development and undermine their authority and influence.

Prior research suggests that one such barrier to women’s ability to thrive in professional careers may be the dynamics of workplace teams. While team work can be an efficient way to coordinate production, growing evidence suggests that when women are a minority in teams, they are viewed as less competent and are able to exert less influence over team outcomes than men.

In this paper, we present the results of a two-year field experiment aimed at measuring the effects of team gender composition on individual and group-level outcomes, including grades, participation, influence, and group dynamics. In collaboration with

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one of the top undergraduate accounting programs in the U.S., we randomly assigned each student in the program to a five-person group consisting of either one woman (1F), or three women (3F). Throughout the semester, we collected data from weekly team meetings, monthly surveys, administrative records, and laboratory sessions where we observed the groups and recorded their interactions.

We find that across a wide variety of survey and lab measures, women are less likely than men to be evaluated by other team members as influential and to be voted as team leaders. In addition, despite equal academic performance and preparation, women perceive themselves as less influential and empirically exert significantly less influence than men. Importantly, for almost all indicators of leadership status, this deficit in influence and authority is significantly higher for women in 1F groups than in 3F groups. Across multiple measures of influence within the lab, results corroborate the aforementioned survey findings, with one important exception: in our lab measures of influence, we find no improvement in influence over time. Women in 1F groups are less likely to be voted as most influential, less likely to be chosen as a team leader, less likely to speak up, and less likely to be able to influence the group outcome on a collaborative task. These influence deficits in 1F groups are always larger than what we find in the 3F groups.

The observed lack of authority and influence occurs despite the fact that in many ways, both men and women report a positive experience in their groups. Still, even though the women enter the program with considerable leadership experience and academic performance that equals or exceeds that of men, they have trouble converting their past experience into leadership roles within their groups when they are a clear minority.