

Contextualizing the gender gap in democratic deliberation

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Introduction

In recent years, democratic theory has witnessed the rise of a new paradigm. The deliberative turn in political philosophy, as it came to be known, opposes the aggregative accounts of democracy, and advances a radically new mode for democratic decision-making (Dryzek, 2000). The quality of democratic decisions is no longer considered a function of mere compliance with aggregation rules. Instead, it is determined by extensive public discussion about political choices before voting on them, and takes a talk-centric approach to decision making which sharply contrasts with the vote-centric focus of earlier models (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

Moreover, from its very inception, deliberative democracy took a non-elitist stance, emphasizing the importance of deliberation in the wider public sphere (Akkerman, 2007, p. 272). It was therefore widely acclaimed to be more inclusive than aggregative democracy. This praise steadily declined, however, as deliberative democracy moved from a philosophical ideal into a working theory. Despite high normative expectations, deliberative capacities and opportunities turned out to be all but equally distributed among citizens (Hansen, 2010).

One of the most striking regularities found is that participation in public deliberation is unevenly distributed among the sexes (Hansen, 1997). The gendered character of political discussion could seriously undermine the ambitions of deliberative theorists. After all, in a deliberative democracy decisions are the consequence of talk, and when sex is a primary source of inequality, deliberative outcomes will tend to reproduce inequality within gender relations. As such, deliberative democracy seems far less desirable in practice, than its philosophical ideal pretends to be.

The present research takes these assumptions as a starting point, but attempts to contextualize the relationship between gender and deliberation from two different angles. The first question centers around the characteristics of the discussion setting, and asks more specifically whether women feel less at ease in discussion settings with a high level of antagonism. It is often suggested that women are more conflict avoidant than men, and that could impact their participation in deliberation. We therefore ask ourselves the following question: does the gender gap in political deliberation become more pronounced in antagonistic settings, i.e. when conflicts are deeper?

The second question shifts attention to the institutional conditions that might reduce these gender differences. After all, it was recently suggested that the implementation of strong

institutional incentives in deliberative mini-publics might strongly improve the quality and equality of deliberation (Bächtiger and Hangartner, 2007; Karpowitz, Mendelberg and Shaker, 2012; Landwehr, 2009; Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2006). This is why we should also ask ourselves what would happen if we put men and women together to deliberate under the institutional pressure of very demanding decision-making rules. Put differently: could stringent decision-making rules improve the participation of both sexes in deliberation?

Before turning to the empirical analyses, we review the literature on deliberative democracy and gender inequality. In section 2, we contextualize the gender gap in deliberation and argue why it is theoretically useful to look at the discussion setting and at institutional incentives. In the third and fourth sections, we go into detail on the research design of our experiment, and on the measurement of deliberative quality and equality. Finally, we report the results of our analyses.

1 Deliberative democracy and gender inequality

The steady rise of deliberative democracy on the political firmament propelled a renewed interest in the discursive basis of political life. The evolution towards a talk-centric approach to political life, however, largely overshadowed the silent revolution within deliberative theory itself. After all, deliberative scholars were initially strongly decision-driven. They focused exclusively on deliberation in formal institutions (Elster, 1998; Schudson, 1997; Thompson, 2008) whereas such a singular emphasis on institutionalized decision-making settings does not do justice to the comprehensiveness of public deliberation (Schauer, 1999; Young, 1996).

Deliberation should also be rooted in interactions between ordinary citizens (Wolf & Ikeda, 2010). Even though this public dialogue is often occasional and nonpurposive, it is the basis of any vibrant democracy (Barber, 1984, p. 173). Discussion between citizens on all issues politic, strengthens political life by allowing citizens to put their ideas to the test of publicity. As such, the process of reflecting on opinions and arguing back-and-forth adds to the value of democracy by instigating enhanced consideredness: it is through political talk that citizens find out what they value themselves and what is acceptable to others. Political deliberation therefore fosters “representative thinking”, i.e. the cognitive incorporation of other citizens’ standpoints (Arendt, 2005, p. 303).

Moreover, the “exploration of mutuality through conversation” (Barber, 1984, p. 185) is a necessary condition for developing thought-through political ideas at the individual level, and thereby collective preferences orderings at the aggregate level. Such a high level of consideredness makes citizens civic, and produces a more full-bodied version of democracy (Wyatt & Katz, 2000, p. 87). After all, the formation and transformation of identities, preferences and opinions through uncoercive deliberation at the level of ordinary citizens determines what formal institutional deliberation among politicians should be about (Gastil, 2000).

Despite its broad appeal, deliberative theory comes at a time when the feasibility of its potential for civic renewal is under serious threat. Wide academic agreement on the stratification of deliberative capacities along the lines of gender, class, and education raises questions about deliberative scholars’ claims to democratic advancement. After all, political preferences have to circulate in the wider public sphere before they can be picked up and put on the political agenda, but a socially differentiated engagement in public deliberation is diametrically opposed to deliberative democrats’ aspirations.

In real world politics, inequalities among the citizenry lead to unequally distributed deliberative capacities and opportunities. The renewed political interest in talk as a democratic attribute is thus confronted with the seemingly ineradicable inequalities that plague it. One of the most striking findings concerns the sex difference in political deliberation with the general trend being that women engage differently in deliberation. They are reported to feel less at ease with the rational and dispassionate nature of deliberation, and they allegedly feel uncomfortable with its rather public and confrontational character.

Because deliberative democracy puts such high demands on equal citizen participation, the gendered nature of political deliberation not only undermines its appeals to legitimacy, but also its claims to epistemic superiority (Bohman, 1996, p. 111). Extensive talk about political options reduces the possibility of errors, but when structural inequalities rule political discussions, biases at the micro-level will also affect their macro-level outcomes. As such, the cure would be worse than the disease: deliberation fulminated against power and exclusion as guiding decision-making principles, but if it allows grassroots inequalities to translate into unequal political outcomes, it is just as guilty for reproducing patterns of domination.

2 The impact of context

Before we can formulate such devastating conclusions, however, we should contextualize the gender gap in democratic deliberation. The gender gap might be a well-established fact, but existing research demonstrates limited sophistication. Most studies take an essentialist approach and reduce variations in political talk to mere discussions of frequency in function of individual attributes while disregarding the contextual factors. This is where the present contribution tries to provide an added value by looking at the interaction between the gender gap and the characteristics of the discussion setting, and the institutional requirements.

2.1 *Low vs. high conflict settings*

Scholars of deliberation are often stuck in atomistic assumptions of political behavior. They neglect the fact that deliberation is an interpersonal process; it is about one person talking to another. Sometimes conflicts within the group can be very deep, and this antagonistic character of some discussion settings could influence the quality and equality of deliberation. A focus on the embeddedness of deliberation in group settings or discussion dyads could therefore offer promising new perspectives.

We should make a distinction between two kinds of discussion settings. On the one hand, there are strong networks, which consist of people with relatively like-minded opinions. These cohesive dyads are characterized by smooth communicative interactions in which the threshold to speak up is relatively low. On the other hand, weak groups incorporate more diversity. They are more heterogeneous, and the chances of finding allies and like-minded discussion partners is much lower (McClurg, 2003; Zuckerman, 2005).

Both types of networks have their democratic merits. Cohesive settings provide citizens reassurance and meaning when faced with political complexity. Or as Knoke (1990b, p. 1042) contends: “the recurrent communications within these small, intimate networks construct the grand interpretive schemas that anchor people to larger social systems”. Despite their politically integrative function, these cohesive groups are problematic from a deliberative point of view. Deliberative democracy demands that arguments are put to the test of publicity; they have to be contested. In cohesive discussion settings, however, dissenting opinions are rare, and conflicts are few. This inevitably leads to “the prolongation and multiplication of

one's own position" (Arendt, 1958, p. 57). Talk among like-minded thus offers only a very limited added value for the quality of democracy (Scheufele, 2004; contra see Mutz, 2002).

Important democratic benefits are to come from deliberation in heterogeneous settings. Due to their internally diverse character, these networks are prone to stimulate disagreement and social learning. When opinions differ strongly, people learn from each other. Heterogeneous settings thus foster a discursive dynamic of arguing back-and-forth, of justifying one's position, and of changing one's point of view when confronted with better arguments; it avoids "informational inbreeding among politically like-minded citizens" (Huckfeldt, 2001, p. 426). Such argumentational cross-pressures foster the cognitive incorporation of other citizens' standpoints (Arendt, 2005, p. 303).

Despite its contributions to the quality of democracy, however, deliberation in heterogeneous settings struggles with the inclusion criterium. The process of arguing back-and-forth demands that people expose their opinions to criticism and choose sides (Mutz, 2002; Scheufele, 1999, p. 29). This antagonistic process of openly formulating and defending arguments is found to be less inviting towards women (Margolis, 1992). The confrontational character of political talk in non-cohesive networks could therefore be alienating to women (Caluwaerts 2012a; Hansen, 1997, p. 75; Lipsitz, 2004, p. 19).

These previous findings show that the antagonistic character of political deliberation in heterogeneous settings socially inhibits women more than men from discussing politics. Women feel more comfortable talking with relatively like-minded partners in a safe settings (Burns et al. 2001, p. 193; Zuckerman, Dasovic & Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 144). Our hypothesis is therefore that gender differences in political talk can therefore be expected to fade in less antagonistic, cohesive dyads and increase in heterogeneous discussion dyads (Bennett, Flickinger & Rhine, 2000, p. 111).

2.2 *Decision-making rules*

Despite the rather worrying finding that deliberative democracy has a hard time living up to its egalitarian ideal, submitting groups to strong institutional incentives could counter the equalities that characterize deliberation. If citizens participating in deliberative groups are asked not only to talk, but also to reach a joint decision under a pre-specified rule, there could be an institutional straightjacket forcing the participants to treat each other with respect and to treat everyone's voice and opinion equally.

In this context, it is often argued that unanimity rule could be a particular good lever for high quality deliberation (Guarnaschelli, McKelvey and Palfrey, 2000; Hastie, Penrod and Pennington 1983). After all, it enhances the quality and equality of deliberation because it requires that all participants in the deliberation approve of the decision. Unanimity thus fosters a thoroughly deliberative process where arguments pro and con a position are exchanged, and where everyone's opinion is given equal consideration. It installs a group norm emphasizing the fact that the group should behave as one, whereas majority rule symbolizes the fact that disagreement within the group is acceptable (Caluwaerts 2012b; Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2006).

Despite the generally positive appreciation of unanimity rule, Gastil (1993, p. 54) argues that unanimity can actually have negative effects on deliberation. Unanimity rule can improve inclusiveness, but it can also hinder deliberation because it gives minority members the absolute right to veto. Unanimity rule could thus induce a complete stalemate. Under such circumstances, majority rule might be more desirable. After all, no one can threaten to deadlock the discussion, which leaves the power of argumentation as the only viable strategy for the minority factions (Foss 1981, p. 1061).

However, the assumption that deliberation can be of superior quality under majority rule is heavily contested. A simple majority, it is argued, will reduce deliberative quality because only a limited number of people needs convincing (Meirowitz, 2007). The demands for inclusion are lower so that deliberants only selectively provide arguments to convince just enough people to reach the quorum (Hastie, Penrod and Pennington, 1983). Certain of victory, those in the majority position will also put less effort into listening to others and into formulating persuasive arguments.

The effect of other types of supermajorities is hidden behind a cloud of ambiguity. Hastie, Penrod and Pennington (1983) found that interactions under two-thirds majority were more inclusive than under majority rule because the threshold for a decision was raised, but the respect accorded to others and their arguments and justification of positions might still be less compared to unanimity rule. Other research has shown, however, that "a simple majority decision scheme was very nearly as accurate for juries assigned a two-thirds majority rule" (Davis, et al., 1975, p. 11), and that majority and supermajority rules generate equivalent deliberative outcomes (Gerardi and Yariv, 2007).

Our hypothesis on the impact of decision-making rules on deliberative quality is that supermajority rules foster argumentative, rather than power-based interactions, whereas ordinary majority rule leads to exclusion and disrespect (Diamond, Rose and Murphy, 2005).

More stringent decision-making rules therefore lead to higher quality deliberation demanding respect, inclusion, and the willingness to yield to the force of the better argument.

3 Research design

Testing these hypotheses requires of course the observation of communicative interactions between men and women. This explains why we opted for an experimental research design. In 2010 we organized a number of mini-publics with ordinary Belgian citizens to discuss the future of Belgium. In total nine deliberative experiments took place in a 3x3 factorial design, and for each experiment we invited 10 citizens¹.

In order to measure whether context mattered, we varied the group composition and the decision-making rules. On the one hand, we varied the group composition in order to have low and high-conflict groups. The low-conflict groups were homogeneously Dutch or French-speaking, whereas a divided group (in which citizens from both linguistic groups were represented) constituted the high-conflict condition. On the other hand, the decision-making rule also varied across the experiments. There, the simple majority rule functioned as the control condition, whereas the two-thirds majority and unanimity rules were treatment conditions to determine the effect of supermajorities.

Besides varying these experimental conditions, we also kept some potential confounders constant. We first of all foresaw simultaneous translation in the heterogeneous (i.e. bilingual settings). Also the number of participants per experiment was kept constant. We sampled small groups of ten persons to ensure that exclusionary tendencies are not built into the design because large groups risk to be dominated by those with the best communicative capacities (Young, 2000). We also ensured that each group consisted of 50% men and 50% women. As such, the gender composition of the different groups was comparable to avoid group composition effects (see e.g. Karpowitz, Mendelberg and Shaker, 2012; Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2006).

The role of the moderator was kept passive in each group. The moderator introduced the experiment, let the discussion begin, and closed it afterwards. In the second round, he also introduced the specific institutional issues under discussion. It was of the utmost importance

¹ Due to a very active follow-up of the participants, and the use of a flat participation fee, 83 out of the foreseen 90 participants showed up.

that the moderator didn't direct the debate in any way. He could not give participants the word, and he did not give any indications on how the group was supposed to act. As such, the data reflect only the true dynamics of the deliberative process (Myers, 2007).

The participants were recruited by drawing a random but disproportionately stratified sample to ensure the equal presence of both Dutch and French-speakers in the participant pool. Due to time and financial restrictions, however, these samples were drawn from an existing panel with over 110 000 individuals rather than official census lists. This panel resembles the socio-demographic composition of the Belgian population quite well, and was managed by a social research bureau specialized in organizing opinion polls.

The random selection was not paralleled by a random assignment of the participants to the groups. Given the small group size, random assignment has a high chance of generating groups that are internally homogeneous (Caluwaerts & Ugarriza 2012). This is not desirable from a theoretical point of view (Thompson 2008), nor in light of our research question. After all, it would have been useless to see whether division undermines deliberation if all participants in the divided groups shared the same opinion. The heterogeneity of preferences within each group was necessary, which is why the participants were assigned to the groups based on heterogeneity sampling. Using the latter technique, we ensured that a wide diversity of outgroup feelings and issue preferences was included in each group. These attitudes and preferences were measured in a pretest questionnaire.

4 Measuring deliberation

To assess the quality and equality of the interactions, we transcribed the discussions word-by-word, and subsequently subdivided into individual speech acts. This means that every time a speaker formulated a demand or an opinion, this was considered a speech act. For each of these speech acts, we coded how many words the speaker uttered, and this number functions as a measure for deliberative equality. The longer the participant speaks, the more he/she dominates the discussion, and the lower the equality.

In order to measure the quality of deliberation, we coded each of these speech acts with the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), which has been used before to determine the deliberative quality of parliamentary discourse (Steiner, et al., 2004). This index has widely acclaimed content validity, and even Jürgen Habermas “admires the inventive introduction of a

Discourse Quality Index for capturing essential features of proper deliberation” (Habermas, 2005, p. 389).

One critical remark should be made about the DQI. First of all, we should keep in mind that the index was developed for measuring parliamentary discussion. Such discourse is structured by formal rules that limit for instance speaking time and speaking order. These limitations are not characteristic of citizen discourse. We therefore needed to adapt the DQI to the specificities of the current setting. This is in line, however, with the way in which Steenbergen and his colleagues (2003) see their index, namely as a flexible instrument that needs to be adapted to specific research designs. Because of this, we added new coding categories that are particularly relevant in citizen deliberation, such as the use of respectful language.

Table 1 lists the items that were included in the coding. Interruptions, respect for counterarguments, the level of justification and constructive politics all capture an essential dimension of deliberation, and they were all part of the original DQI. To this we added, the use of respectful language and respectful listening, two dimensions that are crucially part of citizen deliberation. We also coded respect towards the ingroup and outgroup, and references to the common good, but these items showed less than five per cent variation, so that we had to exclude them from further analyses.

Table 1: DQI Items

	N	%
1 Interruption		
1 Speaker interrupts another speaker	278	16,7
2 Regular speech act	1386	83,3
2 Respectful language		
1 Use of foul language to attack participants at a personal level	13	0,8
2 Use of foul language to attack participants’ arguments without personal attacks	55	3,3
3 Neutral: no foul, nor explicitly respectful language	1427	85,8
4 Explicitly respectful language	169	10,2
3 Respectful listening		
1 The speaker ignores arguments and questions addressed to him or her by other participants.	200	12,0
2 The speaker does not ignore arguments and questions addressed to him or her by other participants but distorts these arguments and questions.	218	13,1
3 The speaker does not ignore arguments and questions addressed to him or her by other participants and engages these arguments and questions in a correct and undistorted way.	1056	63,5
<i>Missing</i> : no arguments were formulated yet	190	11,4

4 Respect toward counterarguments		
1 Counterarguments are ignored	206	12,4
2 Counterarguments are included but degraded	356	21,4
3 Counterarguments are included in a neutral way	467	28,1
4 Counterarguments are valued	400	24,0
<i>Missing</i> : no counterarguments were formulated yet	235	14,1
5 Level of justification of arguments		
1 Speaker presents no arguments	216	13,0
2 Speaker says that something is a good or a bad idea	252	15,1
3 Speaker justifies position with illustrations	395	23,7
4 Speaker presents argument, but no linkage is made why X will contribute to Y	179	10,8
5 Speaker presents one argument with explicit linkage	543	32,6
6 Speaker presents two or more arguments with explicit linkage	79	4,7
6 Content of justification: abstract principles		
1 Speaker does not refer to abstract principles	1523	91,5
2 Speaker refers to abstract principles	141	8,5
7 Constructive politics		
1 The speaker does not indicate a change in position and does not acknowledge the value of other positions heard.	951	57,2
2 The speaker does not indicate a change in position but does acknowledge the value of other positions heard.	691	41,5
3 The speaker indicates a change of position and does not acknowledge the value of other positions heard.	10	0,6
4 The speaker indicates a change of position and gives as reason for change arguments heard.	12	0,7

The next step would be to determine whether these individual items construe a genuine index for deliberation. After all, Steenbergen and his colleagues (2003, p. 30) “expect the coding categories to hang together reasonably well that a subset (or perhaps all) of [the DQI dimensions] can be combined to form a scale that can serve as an overall measure of discourse quality”. This means that if we didn’t check this unidimensionality, and when each single item would measure something entirely different, the index would lack construct validity.

In order to move from the items to the index, we used a factor analysis. The second table reports that there is only one factor, on which five out of seven DQI items load well. Respect for counterarguments, respectful listening and the level of justification are the three strongest items, but they are completed by the use of respectful language and constructive politics, which have slightly lower factor loadings. All of these items refer to a way of presenting one’s arguments, and defending one’s position. The way in which speakers listen to others and react to them, and the respect they accord to their arguments reflects the same underlying structure as the efforts speakers put into defending their own ideas and their openness towards better arguments.

Given the positive results of the factor analysis, we created an additive scale. After we excluded interruption and abstract principles, the scale has a good internal consistency and reliability (Cronbach’s alpha of ,739). Since each of the DQI items behaves empirically as we theoretically projected in a reliable manner, the index has high construct validity.

Table 2: Principal component analysis of the DQI items

	Component
Interruption	,309
Respectful language	,526
Respectful listening	,760
Respect counterarguments	,831
Level of justification	,709
Abstract principles	,323
Constructive politics	,608
Cronbach’s alpha (excluding interruption and abstract principles)	,739

5 Analyses

Before looking at the impact of the contextual factors on the gender gap in deliberation, we should turn to the two assumption that are often made about women’s participation in deliberation. These assumptions are that women participate less, and that they participate differently. Table 3 lists some very basic statistics regarding the deliberative behavior of men and women, and the first assumption is largely confirmed. Women’s speech acts are on average 13 words shorter than men’s, which points to some deliberative inequality. However, table 3 also shows that the quality of deliberation of both sexes is largely comparable. With an average DQI score of 5,14 out of 10, women are in general as deliberative as men.

Table 3: Gender differences in deliberative inclusion and quality

Sex	Deliberative inclusion (length of speech act in words)	Deliberative quality (Discourse Quality Index)
Man	71,49	5,32
Woman	58,28	5,14
Sign.	***	N.s.

When we disaggregate the DQI, and look at its different dimensions, we notice that there are some gender differences. Much in line with what difference theorists claim, women indeed seem to find it harder to live up to the rationality requirement (see table 4). The quality of women's justifications is generally lower than that of men. Whereas 41,6% of all speech acts by men contain at least one formal, rational reason, only 29,6% of all speech acts by women are this rational. Women, our data suggest, more often than men abstain from formal justifications and more often simply say that something is a good or a bad idea or rely more strongly on illustrations to make their point. We can therefore say that deliberative theory with its very strict requirement of rational argumentation normatively advantages men over women.

Table 4: Gender differences in rational justification

	Man	Woman
Speaker presents no arguments	12,7%	13,5%
Speaker says that something is a good or a bad idea	13,8%	17,5%
Speaker justifies position with illustrations	21,4%	27,9%
Speaker presents argument, but no linkage is made why X will contribute to Y	10,4%	11,4%
Speaker presents one argument with explicit linkage	35,4%	27,6%
Speaker presents two or more arguments with explicit linkage	6,2%	2,0%
	100%	100%
	Cramer's V= ,138; $\chi^2= 31,726$; $p=<,001$	

On the other hand, deliberative theory also requires deliberants to allow others to make their point, and to let them have their say. The results in table 5 suggest, however, that this is where men do worse. Of all speech utterances by men, 27,4% constitutes an interruption, whereas only 14,3% of the speech acts by women are interruptive. In this regard, female deliberators do better than their male counterparts.

Table 5: Gender differences in active interruption

	Man	Woman
Interruption	27,4%	14,3%
Regular speech act	72,6%	85,7%
	100%	100%

	Cramer's V= ,170; $\chi^2= 9,263$; $p=<,01$
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Another interesting perspective to assess the deliberative inclusion of women, is not by merely looking at who interrupts, but also at who is being interrupted. From table 5 we get that it's mostly men who determine the dynamics of the discussion, but in table 6 we see that it's mostly women who are interrupted. When women speak up during the discussion, they are interrupted one fourth of the time. A more in-dept qualitative analysis should be done to confirm this, but this fuels the finding from previous research that men tend to use an active silencing strategy when discussing important political or societal issues with women.

Table 6: Gender differences in being interrupted

	Man	Woman
Being interrupted	16,5%	25,3%
Full speech act	83,5%	74,7%
	100%	100%
Cramer's V= ,158; $\chi^2= 8,384$; $p=<,05$		

We thus find some empirical evidence for the assumption that women have fewer opportunities to participate fully in deliberation. They usually have less time to have their say, and when they do get to speak, they are more often interrupted. Moreover, deliberation favors men over women because it installs a specific norm of "rational" behavior and women have a harder time living up to this norm. All in all, there is evidence of a gender gap in democratic deliberation, but now it's time to turn to the potential impact of the discursive and institutional contexts on the differences between men and women in deliberation.

5.1 Does the group setting matter?

Before turning to the results of the multivariate analysis, several remarks should be made. First of all, as we mentioned in the methodological part, we organized three different types of groups: homogenous Dutch-speaking, homogeneous French-speaking, and linguistically divided groups. The analyses reported in table 7 were initially run with the distinction between Dutch and French-speaking groups as an independent variable. Levene's test for the

homogeneity of variances showed, however, that the model suffered from heteroscedasticity². The variances in the French-speaking groups were somewhat larger than under the other group compositions, which could be problematic. Allison contends, however, that “heteroscedasticity [...] has to be pretty severe before it leads to serious bias in the standard errors. Although it is certainly worth checking, I wouldn’t get overly anxious about it” (Allison 1999, p. 128). Nevertheless, we did follow the commonly suggested solution of model respecification by transforming the variables, in which we dropped the distinction between the Dutch and French-speaking groups, and dichotomized the discussion settings into linguistically homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. This meant that we lost some of the rich variation in our data, but it did provide us with a more robust model³.

Secondly, we should discuss which control variables we included in the model and why. The first set of variables contains the socio-demographic characteristics of those who utter the speech act. Besides gender, we included education and age. The speakers’ educational attainment was taken up as a control variable. As is usual in these kinds of deliberative events, only a limited number of lower educated participants turned up in our experiments, so that the data are skewed. We therefore turned the educational level into a dummy variable for our OLS regression, which distinguishes between those who are higher educated (code ‘1’) and those who received higher secondary education at most (code ‘0’). The hypothesis is that the higher educated possess much more resources for deliberation in terms of political knowledge and verbal skills to formulate high quality rational arguments and to fully comprehend others’ arguments (Hooghe 1999). Educational attainment is thus expected to be positively linked to deliberative quality.

The age of the speaker was also considered relevant because these discussions dealt with very controversial issues concerning the future of Belgium. Older generations were socialized in the turbulent post-war years in which the relations between the linguistic groups were very uneasy. Moreover, those that grew up in the 1970’s experienced severe political

² Even though we solved the heteroscedasticity problem by merging the homogeneous groups, the finding that the variances in the Dutch and French-speaking groups were heterogeneous, is interesting in itself. Additional analyses showed that there was somewhat of a difference in deliberative styles between the French and the Dutch speakers, with the French speakers exhibiting more characteristics of a so-called *Claro* deliberative culture (Gambetta 1998). This difference in deliberative culture explains the heteroscedasticity.

³ Besides the homogeneity of variances, we also checked whether the other assumptions of OLS regression were met. Collinearity diagnostics were run and multicollinearity between the variables proved to be no problem. Neither did we find any outliers on the DQI, and the residuals met the normality assumption.

instability due to the heated tensions between the north and the south of the country, whereas the younger generations grew up in times of relative peace. As such, older generations are hypothesized to behave less deliberatively because they experienced the conflict at its most intense, with both sides taking extreme and mutually unacceptable positions.

Besides socio-demographic variables, we added the language spoken by the participants, and their knowledge of the other national language to the models. Since Belgium is a multilingual polity, it is useful to control for the participants' mother tongue. After all, there is an upcoming literature on deliberative cultures, and the fact that different languages have different discursive characteristics (Pedrini 2011). The language was measured based on the pre-test questionnaire where we asked the participants which language they ordinarily spoke at home. French and Dutch were offered as answering categories, as well as an "other" category they could specify. None of our participants spoke any other language than Dutch or French. Moreover, controlling for bilingualism was important because active knowledge of the other side's language might lubricate deliberation in linguistically heterogeneous settings. Active knowledge of the two languages gives a great deliberative advantage because it is easier to listen to and communicate with the other side.

Now we will turn to the analyses of the data in table 7. In order to analyze deliberative inclusion, or full deliberative participation, we use the length of the speech act (in words) as a dependent variable. This is thus a count variable, which was moreover Poisson distributed, which is why we used a Poisson regression predicting the participatory inclusion of the participants in the deliberations.

We built up the analyses in a stepwise manner. The first model acts as a reference model and only includes the sex effect, to which the second model adds the direct effect of the context variable, in this case the discussion setting. The third model adds the control variable, and the final model adds the interaction effect, to see whether the size of the gender gap depends is conditional upon the discursive context.

On the left side of table 7, we see that both sex and group composition are significantly related to deliberative participation. As the previous crosstabs have shown, men usually utter longer speech acts, and the length of the speech act is negatively affected by a homogeneous group composition. This means that in mixed company (i.e. in the bilingual groups) the speech acts are generally longer than in the homogeneous groups, where there is often a very quick alternation of arguments pro-and-con. The dynamics of deliberation in the heterogeneous group settings is thus more conducive to deliberative inclusion, and model 3 shows that this effect of group composition remains intact even after controlling for

knowledge of the other language. The longer speech acts in the mixed groups is thus not (entirely) due to the fact that people didn't understand each other.

The final model, however, is most interesting for our purposes. In the theoretical part, we hypothesized that the gender gap in deliberative participation would be greater in the mixed groups than in the relatively safe homogeneous groups because women feel less at ease with giving their opinions when conflicts are deep. The interaction term in the fourth model confirms this hypothesis. Even though the effect of the interaction term is relatively weak, it is significant and positive, indicating that the sex difference in terms of participatory equality in the mixed groups is slightly greater than in the homogeneous groups. Women thus speak less when faced with strong antagonism.

Table 7: The impact of group setting on the gender gap in deliberative inclusion and quality

	Deliberative participation (length of speech act in words)				Deliberative quality (Discourse Quality Index)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	4,065 (,0054) ***	4,338 (,0066) ***	4,505 (,0128) ***	4,675 (,0133) ***	5,140 (,086) ***	5,724 (,117) ***	6,668 (,201) ***	6,777 (,222) ***
Men	,204 (,0065) ***	,241 (,0065) ***	,210 (,0066) ***	,170 (,0109) ***	,179 (,108) +	,246 (,106) *	,265 (,103) **	,067 (,199) n.s.
Homogeneous group		-,426 (,0063) ***	-,371 (,0065) ***	-,413 (,0111) ***		-,846 (,116) ***	-,716 (,115) ***	-,875 (,178) ***
Higher education			,241 (,0078) ***	,219 (,0079) ***			,641 (,124) ***	,661 (,125) ***
Age			-,003 (,0002) ***	-,003 (,0002) ***			,019 (,004) ***	,018 (,004) ***
French			,212 (,0062) ***	,214 (,0063) ***			,015 (,101) n.s.	,002 (,102) n.s.
Bilingual			,147 (,0082) ***	,149 (,0082) ***			,515 (,130) ***	,524 (,131) ***
Interaction. Men*homog. group				,064 (,0137) ***				,271 (,092) **
R ²					2,1%	3,8%	11,1%	13,2%
	Poisson regression				Anova			

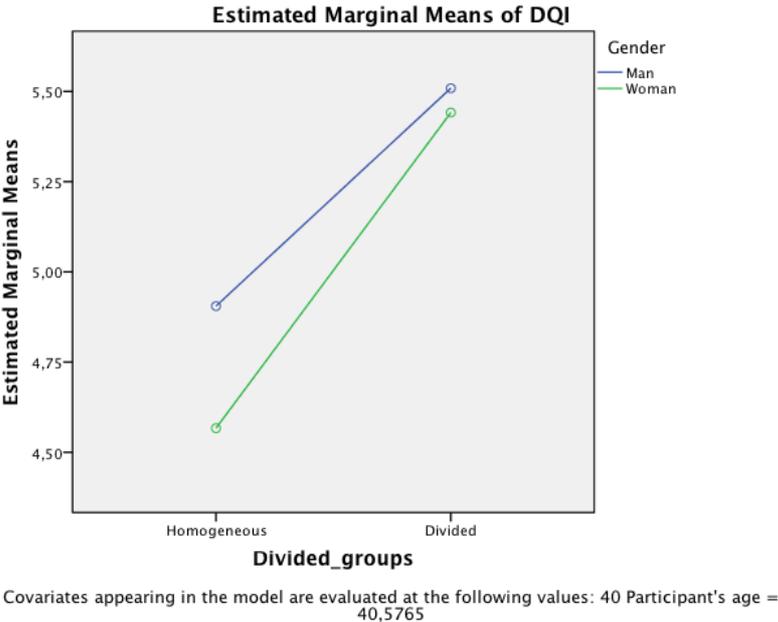
We reran the same models for predicting the quality of deliberation (which is normally distributed) on the right hand side of table 7. As we saw earlier on, the gender gap in

deliberative quality is initially non-existent: men and women are equally deliberative. They both show respect, they are rational, they listen to each other, and they are open to the better argument. However, as the fourth model on the right hand side of table 7 shows, the interaction between sex and group setting is significant, and relatively strong, whereas the direct effect of sex isn't.

This means that the size of the gender gap in deliberative quality depends upon the context, as we hypothesized. Interestingly, we find that women and men engage in the same type of deliberation when they are faced with a high-conflict setting. In friendly company, however, there is a gender gap as figure 1 illustrates: women behave significantly less deliberative in homogeneous settings. A mixed discussion setting thus seems to function as a lever for high quality deliberation, and deliberative equality, in the sense that it forces both men and women to act in an equally deliberative manner.

All in all, we can say that the mixed discussion setting has a double effect. On the one hand, women speak less when they are confronted with conflictual situations. Arguably this is because they feel less at ease with the confrontational and antagonistic character of the intergroup setting. But on the other hand, what they say in such settings is as deliberative as what men say. There is no sex difference in heterogeneous groups in the quality of deliberation.

Figure 1: Interaction effect between discussion setting and sex on deliberative quality



5.2 Can institutions foster equality?

Now that we have found that there is a gender gap in deliberative participation, and that the gender effect on deliberative quality is mediated by the group composition, we should turn to the institutional devices, which are claimed to be able to overcome the sex differences. Based on recent studies on deliberation under varying decision-making rules, we hypothesized that unanimity can act as “the great unifier” (Mansbridge 1983). Unanimity requires everyone to give his/her consent for making a decision so that equal participation and equal consideration for each opinion is crucial. Majority rule, on the other hand, fosters deliberative exclusion and a low quality deliberation because not everyone has to be convinced.

The results presented in table 7 partially confirm these assumptions. When we look at the equal participation of men and women in deliberation, we notice that there is a significant gender gap under each of the decision-making rules, but this gender gap is most pronounced under majority rule. Under two-thirds majority rule and unanimity, the differences in the number of words uttered by men and women remain the same, but they increase under simple majority. Applying supermajority rules in deliberative settings might thus be a good lever for ensuring deliberative equality, but the institutional straightjacket does not succeed in fully eradicating gender inequalities in deliberative participation.

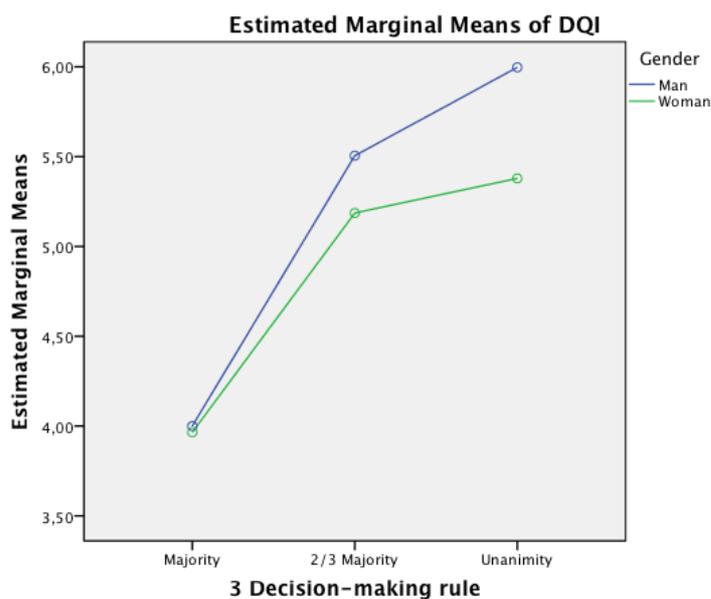
Table 7: The impact of decision rules on the gender gap in deliberative inclusion and quality

	Deliberative participation (length of speech act in words)				Deliberative quality (Discourse Quality Index)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	4,065 (,0054) ***	4,249 (,0067) ***	4,639 (,0126) ***	4,654 (,0134) ***	5,140 (,086) ***	5,858 (,106) ***	6,772 (,191) ***	6,598 (,205) ***
Men	,204 (,0065) ***	,224 (,0065) ***	,205 (,0066) ***	,173 (,0110) ***	,179 (,108) +	,282 (,098) ***	,296 (,095) **	,618 (,117) ***
Majority		-,317 (,0073) ***	-,319 (,0074) ***	-,391 (,0137) ***		-1,793 (,118) ***	-1,780 (,114) ***	-1,413 (,186) ***
2/3 majority		-,246 (,0074) ***	-,275 (,0075) ***	-,275 (,0127) ***		-,258 (,121) *	-,364 (,118) **	-,193 (,189) n.s.
Higher education			,277 (,0077) ***	,271 (,0077) ***			,675 (,112) ***	,703 (,113)** *
Age			-,003 (,0002) ***	-,003 (,0002) ***			-,013 (,004) ***	-,014 (,003) ***
French			,253 (,0062)	-,255 (,0062)			,039 (,093)	,024 (,093)

			***	***			n.s.	n.s.
Bilingual			-,165 (,0083) ***	-,164 (,0083) ***			,606 (,121) ***	-,599 (,121) ***
Interaction. Men*majority				,099 (,0164) ***				-,584 (,235) *
Interaction. Men*2/3 majority				,002 (,0157) n.s.				-,300 (,240) n.s.
R ²								
	Poisson regression				Anova			

Interestingly, however, supermajority rules seem to have the inverse effect on gender differences in the quality of deliberation. As the right hand columns of table 7 and figure 2 illustrate, men and women are equally (un)deliberative under majority rule, but the gender differences in deliberative quality increase as we move from simple to supermajority rules. The decision-making rules thus impact men and women differently. For men institutional pressure is a very strong stimulus for being rational, respectful and open-minded. For women this is much less the case. For them, a mixed group setting group setting might give more leverage, as figure 1 showed.

Figure 2: Interaction effect between decision rules and sex on deliberative quality



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: 40 Participant's age = 40,5765

7 Discussion

Deliberative democracy may well be alive and kicking in political theory, but as a practical means of making day-to-day binding decisions on a large scale it is but a distant aim, and given the results of our analysis, it might just as well be so. As our literature review predicted and our analysis has shown, gender inequalities still rule the deliberative interactions between citizens, and the decisions that come out of deliberation could therefore contain a significant gender bias. However, these conclusions do have to be qualified, because we also found that context matters. Who people talk to, and the institutional requirements all determined the width of the gender gap in democratic deliberation.

One interesting finding is that institutional devices can impact deliberation, and gender differences in deliberation. And as predicted, supermajority rules to some extent succeeded in improving the participatory inclusion of men and women in deliberation. However, these stringent rules did not fully extend deliberative opportunities and capacities to both sexes, because sex differences remained significant even under supermajority rules.

The most interesting contextual differentiation was, however, that the nature of political discussion networks determines to a large extent whether and how both sexes engage in deliberation. In mixed company women feel less at ease, and they consequently participate less, but when they do, they are just as deliberative as men. Social definitions of gender identities thus still define what types of political behavior men and women consider appropriate, and our findings also makes clear that future research should pay attention to the social context of political deliberation in order to catch the full story.

This finding has important normative implications because it reveals a trade-off between two of deliberative theory's core assumptions, namely publicity and inclusion. Deliberation requires discussion to be a confrontation between opposing ideas and arguments, but the more stringent this publicity requirement, the more the inclusion of all citizens is jeopardized. Since women are shown to engage less in antagonistic discussions than men, they risk being excluded from the process of public preference formation in the wider public sphere. The deliberative ideal type thus fails to acknowledge that not everyone feels comfortable with, or up to the task of talking about politics in public.

A hasty implementation of deliberative democracy in real world politics would soon challenge deliberative democrats' appeals to equal inclusion (Young, 2000). Proponents of deliberative decision-making should therefore address the issue of inequality before advocating a radical transformation of democracy on a deliberative basis.

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