

Gender Differences and Similarities in Dominance Hierarchies in Same-Gender Groups Based on Speaking Time¹

Marianne Schmid Mast²

Northeastern University, Boston

This study aimed at investigating whether all-women and all-men groups differed in their hierarchical organization and stability of their rank orders across time. One hundred and sixteen European, middle-class, noncollege women and men (average age: 38) participated in small-group discussions twice within a week with the same group members. Speaking time served as the behavioral dominance indicator on which group hierarchies were based. Additionally, group members rank ordered each other on dominance after each interaction. In the first session, all-men groups were more hierarchically structured than all-women groups. During each session, all-women and all-men groups showed a similar significant increase in hierarchical structuring. For both women and men, rank orders remained stable during interactions and from the first to the second session. Results are discussed in terms of three theoretical models describing dominance hierarchies.

INTRODUCTION

Dominance is an important dimension of social interactions (Gifford, 1991; Wiggins, 1979) and the emergence of dominance hierarchies in small groups is well documented (e.g., Bales, 1950; Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977). Research has mainly focused on how dominance hierarchies are formed (Mazur, 1985; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986) and much less research effort was invested in the question of *gender differences* in the

¹Parts of the reported data has been presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, EPA, Baltimore, 2000.

²To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Psychology, Northeastern University, 125 Nightingale Hall, Boston, Massachusetts 02115; e-mail: MMAST@neu.edu.

formation of dominance hierarchies. Are men and women equally prone to build dominance hierarchies or are men more likely to organize themselves in a hierarchical way compared to women? This investigation aimed to shed light on the potential gender differences and similarities of dominance hierarchy structures in same-gender groups. Because conversational cues play an important role in dominance processes in face-to-face interactions (Mazur, 1985; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986), speaking time served as the behavioral cue to capture exhibited dominance in this study. Time talked is a widely used and validated indicator of dominance (Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989; Schmid Mast, 2001; Stein & Heller, 1979). Nevertheless, group members' reports about how dominant they perceived each other were collected as well.

Origins of a Gender-Stereotypical View About Dominance Hierarchies

Dominance is a concept that has been used in a number of different ways (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985). In this study, dominance is understood as the extent of influence and control one person exerts in a group interaction. Hierarchy stands for the relative dominance difference among group members. If one person is more dominant than another person, they are in a hierarchical relationship. The stereotypical view of men being inclined to form dominance hierarchies and women building egalitarian structures is widely accepted (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Moskowitz, Suh, & Desaulniers, 1994). Although it has never been empirically tested whether women are organized in a more egalitarian way than men, there is some *indirect* evidence that seems to bolster this stereotypical belief. Men, for instance, are more successful than women in gaining high-dominant positions in direct opposite-gender encounters and emerge as leaders more often than women do even if women are more dispositionally dominant (e.g., Golub & Maxwell Canty, 1982; Hegstrom & Griffith, 1992; Megargee, 1969; Megargee, Bogart, & Anderson, 1966). And, research on leadership style showed that women possess a more democratic or participative leadership style whereas men use a more autocratic or directive style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Troemel-Ploetz, 1994). Furthermore, men showed a stronger motivation to lead than women did, at least in the context of competitive games and assertive situations (Eagly, Karau, Miner, & Johnson, 1994), and have been found to be more competitive and dominant than women in general (e.g., Adams & Landers, 1978; King, Miles, & Kniska, 1991; Knight & Chao, 1989; Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998). Men being more motivated and successful in competitive encounters than women seems to suggest that they are more prone to form dominance hierarchies than women. This, however, remains to be tested. The only research that looked at gender differences in terms of *hierarchies* is research concerned with social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius,