Gendered discourse about climate change policies

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ABSTRACT

Extending theory and research on gender roles and masculinity, this work predicts and finds that common ways of talking about climate change are gendered. Climate change policy arguments that focus on science and business are attributed to men more than to women. By contrast, policy arguments that focus on ethics and environmental justice are attributed to women more than men (Study 1). Men show gender matching tendencies, being more likely to select (Study 2) and positively evaluate (Study 3) arguments related to science and business than ethics and environmental justice. Men also tend to attribute negative feminine traits to other men who use ethics and environmental justice arguments, which mediates the relation between type of argument and men's evaluation of the argument (Study 3). The gendered nature of public discourse about climate change and the need to represent ethical and environmental justice topics in this discourse are discussed.

1. Gendered discourse about climate change policies

The way environmental problems are framed sets the stage for how the problems are assessed and addressed. In economically wealthy countries, climate change tends to be framed as a problem caused by technology (e.g., industrialization) and understood through science. Climate change problems are, therefore, perceived as solvable via technological advances, the management of natural resources, and economic expansion (Caniglia et al., 2015). By contrast, in economically poorer countries, climate change is framed as an issue of ethics and environmental justice (Caniglia et al., 2015). The latter framing separates those who cause the problems from those who are unjustly and disproportionately harmed, placing responsibility for solving the problems and remedying harm on those who caused the problems (Swim and Bloodhart, 2018).

Frames may influence discourse about climate change in several important ways. First, a science and business frame may allow powerful countries and industries to reinforce, maintain, and expand their economic and social power. In contrast, an ethical and justice frame may deconstruct and challenge current power structures (Caniglia et al., 2015). Second, framing may influence characteristics of policies considered worthy of development and implementation. For example, different frames suggest different prioritization of impacts addressed by climate change policies (e.g., emissions vs. health, economic growth vs. social equity; NAACP, 2012). Third, framing may influence who is included in decision making. If those concerned about environmental justice – perhaps those most detrimentally affected by climate change – do not have their concerns expressed, they may perceive their views as disrespected or deprioritized. This sense of exclusion can challenge perceptions of procedural justice and, as a result, the perceived legitimacy of decision making processes (Tyler and Blader, 2003). Thus, it is important to determine what influences preferences for these two different frames.

We propose that the dominant frames used in discourse about climate change are gendered and the gendered natures of these frames, in turn, influence men's and women's (a) impressions of those use differing frames and (b) subsequent willingness to use the different frames. Below we explain why the science and business frames are likely to be perceived as congruent with men's roles, whereas ethical justice frames are likely to be perceived as congruent with women's roles (Eagly et al., 2000). Then we consider how these perceptions might influence men's and women's preferences for the two frames based upon gender role congruity theory and research on masculinity. Gender role congruity theory proposes that men and women engage in behaviors that are congruent with traditional gender roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000). A reason for this gender matching is to avoid social penalties for deviance from these socially prescribed roles (Diekman and Eagly, 2008; Eagly et al., 2000). Research on masculinity suggests that men's preferences for gender congruent frames will be stronger than women's preferences for gender congruent frames due to different characteristics of male versus female role norms and prescriptions (Kimmel, 2008; Vandello et al., 2008).

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1.1. Gendered nature of frames

There are at least three reasons to predict that scientific and business frames are more likely associated with men than women. First, the domains of science and technology are more strongly associated with men than women (Hill et al., 2010). Second, men are more likely than women to be in high status positions, such as leadership roles in business and government (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Third, like displays of masculinity (Bosson et al., 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Rudman and Glick, 2008; Vandello et al., 2008), scientific and business frames are associated with power, status, and agency − all of which are stereotypes of men (Caniglia et al., 2015; Diekman and Eagly, 2000).

By contrast, ethical and justice frames are more likely associated with women than men. Ethical and justice frames focus on the impacts that environmental problems have on others and concern about others is congruent with traditional stereotypes of women and female gender roles (e.g., warmth, tender mindedness, benevolence; Diekman and Eagly, 2008; Eagly et al., 2000; Wood and Eagly, 2012). In fact, during the progressive era of the late 1800′s and early 1900′s people made these associations with women who were particularly likely to argue that it was important to preserve resources so that children and future generations could have clean and healthy homes (Rome, 2006). More currently, women have been found to be more pro-environmental than men (Zelezny et al., 2000) and less likely than men to deny the existence of human caused climate change (McCright, 2010; McCright and Dunlap, 2011). Further, people expect that women to be likely than men to be concerned about climate change (Swim and Geiger, 2018).

Our first prediction follows from the research reviewed above (*Hypothesis 1*). We predict that the framing of climate change in terms of science and business frames will be associated with men (vs. women), whereas framing in terms of ethical and justice concerns will be associated with women (vs. men).

1.2. Gender matching

Grounding our research in gender role congruity theory, we further suggest that the gendered nature of the framing of climate change discourse could contribute to gender differences in frame preference. First, gender roles are behavioral norms that define appropriate, gender-specific, and culturally prescribed behaviors that press people to engage in gender-role congruent behaviors (Diekman and Eagly, 2008; Eagly et al., 2000). This gender matching has been demonstrated in a range of preferences, attitudes, and behaviors, including political behaviors (Diekman et al., 2013; Diekman and Schneider, 2010; Eagly and Diekman, 2006; Eagly et al., 2003). Second, strong incentives for role-congruent behavior, potent punishments associated with role incongruent behavior, and possible internalization of these gender-based expectations, perpetuate matches between one's gender and role-congruent behavior. Those who enact gender role incongruent behaviors are likely to be perceived as gender deviants–atypical members of their gender. Many studies indicate that both female and male gender deviants are often socially excluded and economically punished providing motivation to not be a gender deviant (e.g., Carli et al., 1995; Eagly et al., 1992; Holland et al., 2016; Hunt et al., 2016; Pascoe, 2011; Rudman, 1998; Rudman and Fairchild, 2004).

This theory can be applied to attitudes about argument frames. First, those who use frames that are associated with their gender would be behaving gender congruently and those that use frames associated with a different gender would be behaving gender incongruently. Pressures for gender matching would result in men preferring the stereotypically masculine science-business frame and women preferring the stereotypically feminine ethical-justice frame. Second, those who use gender incongruent frames would be considered a gender deviant and pressures to avoid being seen as a gender deviant would motivate attitudes toward the argument frames. Gender deviants are likely expected to have personality traits stereotypically associated with the other gender

and/or lack attributes stereotypically associated with their own gender (cf Deaux and Lewis, 1984; Haines et al., 2016). Additionally, because gay and lesbian people are stereotyped in cross-gender terms (Kite and Deaux, 1987), perceived gender deviance is likely associated with assumptions about homosexuality, with gender deviant men being assumed to be gay men and with gender deviant women assumed to be lesbian (Rule and Alaei, 2016). Thus, ascribing feminine traits and homosexuality to a man who uses an ethic-justice frame more than a man who uses a science-business frame and ascribing masculine traits and homosexuality to a woman who uses a business-science frame more than a woman who uses a science-business frame would be diagnostic that this man and woman were being seen as gender deviants. Further, avoidance of being seen as a gender deviant would be revealed if gender deviant ascriptions subsequently influenced how favorably the two different frames were perceived.

Historically, consistent with this logic, men who supported environmentalism, which had been construed in stereotypically feminine terms as concern for others, were treated as gender deviants (Rome, 2006). In the late 1800′s, a tactic used to argue against environmental reasons for building the Hetch Hetchy dam characterized male reformers, including John Muir, as effeminate and unmanly. Moreover, men during the progressive era purposefully choose to use science and economic terms to promote environmentalism because it countered the association between femininity and environmentalism (Rome, 2006). Yet, this form of mockery continued into in the late 1900′s. For example, men who supported Rachel Carson, author of the book "Silent Spring" which is credited with starting the environmental movement, were concerned that they would receive the emasculated characterization of "birds and bunny boys."

Integrating the foregoing points leads to two additional hypotheses. We predict that men will prefer science and business frames over ethical and justice frames and women will prefer ethical and justice frames over science and business frames (*Hypothesis 2*). Thus, while Hypothesis 1 is about perceiving arguments to be gendered, consistent with gender role congruity theory, here we predict that men's and women's preferences will follow these stereotypes. Further, we predict that people who choose gender incongruent frames when discussing climate change will be perceived as gender deviants and, also consistent with gender role congruity theory, these perceptions will account for gender differences in preferred ways to discuss climate change (*Hypothesis 3*). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is about the psychological mechanisms that underlie gender matching.

1.3. The personal and societal importance of masculinity

An important caveat to the aforementioned predictions is that tendencies to avoid being perceived as gender deviants may be stronger for men than women. Thus, Hypothesis 2 and 3 may be more applicable to men than women. This suggestion is supported by three lines of converging research. First, although both women and men experience negative consequences for gender deviance, in the last 60 years, gender roles have expanded more for women than men, allowing women to behave in more variable ways than men can before violating gender expectations and facing punishment (Diekman and Eagly, 2000; Diekman and Goodfriend, 2006; Twenge, 1997). Thus, a narrower set of behaviors deemed appropriately masculine makes men more vulnerable than women to being seen as a gender deviant. Second, because dominance and one's place in social hierarchies is frequently challenged, particularly by other men trying to be dominant, men's ability to establish that they are masculine is more precarious than women's ability to establish that they are feminine. To achieve and maintain one's status as a "good man" requires much behavioral monitoring and consistent behavioral acts of dominance and status. In contrast, femininity is awarded through physical maturation (Vandello et al., 2008). Third, masculinity is associated with respect and status which could help with the ability to influence (Deaux and Lafrance, 1998). Thus, women may