

# Homophily and Political Interest

## How Do Peer Groups Create Gendered Political Interests?

Alexandre Fortier-Chouinard

## Contents

<b>1 Data Analysis</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Issues Most Often Discussed with Female Friends . . . . .	1
1.2 Issues Most Often Discussed with Male Friends . . . . .	2
<b>2 Discussion</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 References</b>	<b>4</b>

## 1 Data Analysis

Questions are also asked about students' peers and interests. First, students are asked "What is the gender of most of your friends?" They can choose either girls, boys, or "About the same for both genders". Second, the following question is asked: "Among these five topics, which one do you discuss most often with your male friends?" Each of the five topics is listed, and the same question is then asked for female friends.

Gender homophily holds among the sample of students: when excluding students who say they have as many friends of both genders, no less than 95% of boys and 91% of girls report that most of their friends are of the same genders as theirs.

### 1.1 Issues Most Often Discussed with Female Friends

Table 6 shows students' interest in a specific topic depending on it being the topic they most often discuss with their female friends. For both boys and girls, interest in law and crime is related to their female friends discussing law and crime ( $p < 0.05$ ). If a girl's female friends discuss mostly law and crime among the five topics, her interest in law and crime is expected to increase by 1.6 points on the 11-point scale. For boys, the expected increase is 1.1 points. For girls, interest in international affairs and partisan politics is also related to their female friends discussing the issue with them ( $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.01$  respectively), but not for boys. If a girl's female friends discuss mostly international affairs among the five topics, her interest in this topic is expected to increase by 1.2 points. If her female friends discuss mostly partisan politics, her interest in that topic is expected to increase by a large 6.4 points. All other relationships are non-significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

Table 6: Interest in topic most often discussed with one's female friends

	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
<b>Results among boys</b>					
(Intercept)	4.474*** (0.273)	6.297*** (0.242)	5.068*** (0.250)	4.459*** (0.316)	4.576*** (0.250)

	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
Health care	-0.078 (0.547)				
International affairs		0.267 (0.486)			
Law and crime			1.605* (0.659)		
Education				0.752 (0.458)	
Partisan politics					-1.114 (1.127)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.745	0.034	0.625	0.638	0.400
SD (Observations)	2.568	2.630	2.564	2.756	2.896
Num.Obs.	155	157	157	157	157
R2 Marg.	0.000	0.002	0.036	0.017	0.006
:_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:
<b>Results among girls</b>					
(Intercept)	4.246*** (0.268)	4.687*** (0.238)	5.477*** (0.251)	4.249*** (0.296)	3.376*** (0.201)
Health care	0.151 (0.423)				
International affairs		1.195* (0.533)			
Law and crime			1.085* (0.511)		
Education				0.274 (0.400)	
Partisan politics					4.624** (1.570)
SD (Intercept Class)	1.010	0.567	0.478	0.946	0.000
SD (Observations)	2.214	2.616	2.788	2.506	2.698
Num.Obs.	183	182	181	184	184
R2 Marg.	0.001	0.027	0.024	0.002	0.045
:_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:

**Note:** ^ +  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Note:** ^^ Multilevel regression with random effects at the classroom level

## 1.2 Issues Most Often Discussed with Male Friends

Table 7 shows students' interest in a specific topic depending on it being the topic they most often discuss with their male friends. For boys, interest in law and crime is related to their male friends discussing law and crime ( $p < 0.001$ ), but not for girls. If a boy's male friends discuss mostly law and crime among the five topics, his interest in law and crime is expected to increase by 1.5 points on the 11-point scale. Interest in international relations among boys is also related to their male friends discussing the issue with them ( $p < 0.001$ ), but not among girls. If a boy's male friends discuss mostly international relations, his interest in that topic is expected to increase by 1.6 points. For girls, interest in partisan politics is predicted by their male friends discussing the issue (2-point gain,  $p < 0.05$ ), but not for boys. All other relationships are non-significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

Table 7: Interest in topic most often discussed with one's male friends

	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
<b>Results among boys</b>					
(Intercept)	4.432*** (0.232)	5.474*** (0.239)	5.023*** (0.197)	4.449*** (0.230)	4.175*** (0.239)
Health care	-1.111+ (0.669)				
International affairs		1.586*** (0.356)			
Law and crime			1.503*** (0.397)		
Education				0.626 (0.443)	
Partisan politics					1.509+ (0.810)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.860	0.301	0.000	0.528	0.685
SD (Observations)	2.365	2.673	2.604	2.743	2.900
Num.Obs.	230	233	232	232	231
R2 Marg.	0.011	0.079	0.058	0.008	0.014
:_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:
<b>Results among girls</b>					
(Intercept)	4.387*** (0.211)	5.133*** (0.298)	5.876*** (0.293)	4.313*** (0.289)	3.592*** (0.231)
Health care	0.070 (0.656)				
International affairs		0.871+ (0.512)			
Law and crime			-0.343 (0.462)		
Education				0.638 (0.515)	
Partisan politics					2.033* (1.000)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.410	0.858	0.000	0.961	0.000
SD (Observations)	2.297	2.595	2.768	2.444	2.751
Num.Obs.	153	149	149	152	150
R2 Marg.	0.000	0.019	0.004	0.010	0.027
:_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____:

**Note:** ^ + p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

**Note:** ^^ Multilevel regression with random effects at the classroom level

Patterns from Tables 6 and 7 are somewhat complex to understand and do not seem consistent with gender homophily theory. While having male friends who discuss international politics strongly increases boys' interest in that topic, for girls, having female friends who discuss the issue also increases their interest. For boys, having friends who discuss law and crime strongly increases their interest, while for girls, the same can be said about partisan politics. Therefore, gendered factors seem to be at play, but hypothesis 2 cannot be confirmed on the basis of these results.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tables 11 and 12 in Appendix III reproduce Tables 6 and 7 while adding controls for age, age squared, language, immigrant status and race. The same relationships are found. Female friends–girl law and crime interest transmission loses statistical significance, while male friends–boy partisan politics transmission becomes statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

For the two topics for which adult women report more interest than adult men — health care and education — peers seem to have no effect on the development of interest in these topics. It could be the case that health care and education become relevant to women as they grow older and start caring for children and elderly people — something quite different in nature than the kinds of conversations teenagers presumably have about education and health care.

## **2 Discussion**

For gender homophily theory, again, the main descriptive results highlight the importance of this phenomenon: among those who say their friends are mostly of one gender, more than 90% of students, both girls and boys, report they have more friends of their own gender. Yet, multilevel regression results are not straightforward to analyze. Girls and boys seem to be interested in some topics their peers discuss but not others, and these topics tend to be different for children of both genders.

## **3 References**