

Don't Interrupt this Talk!

Analyses of Academic Engineering Job Talks

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Gender Gap in ECE Faculty: Many Causes

Not much studied: The Interview Day

1-hour research seminar

Job Talk



- **Questions & Interruptions during Job Talks**
- **Preliminary work: Analyses of Introductions**

Research on Interruptions in Conversation

Many contexts studied:

- Corporations
- Press briefings
- Parent-child
- Fictional TV
- Doctor-patient
- Supreme Court

Groups with different:

- Gender composition
- Knowledge level
- Status
- Size
- Setting
- Topics of discussion

- Interruptions indicate power & dominance
- Gender and status effects
- Many complex effects

How would you define an Interruption?

- Simultaneous speech more than two syllables before the end of someone's sentence
- Interrupting in midst of incomplete grammatical unit
 - It's raining outside so I am going to leave.
 - It's raining outside ...
 - It's...

→ Didn't raise your hand; didn't get acknowledged by the speaker



Definitions of Interruptions

Presenter is Presenting:

Raise your hand, get acknowledged

- ACKNOWLEDGED QUESTION

Otherwise

- INTERRUPTION

Presenter is Answering a Question:

Wait until the presenter has finished their answer, then ask another question without raising hand

- FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

Otherwise (ask another question without letting presenter finish, speech overlap)

- INTERRUPTION



Data Set: Video recordings of job talks

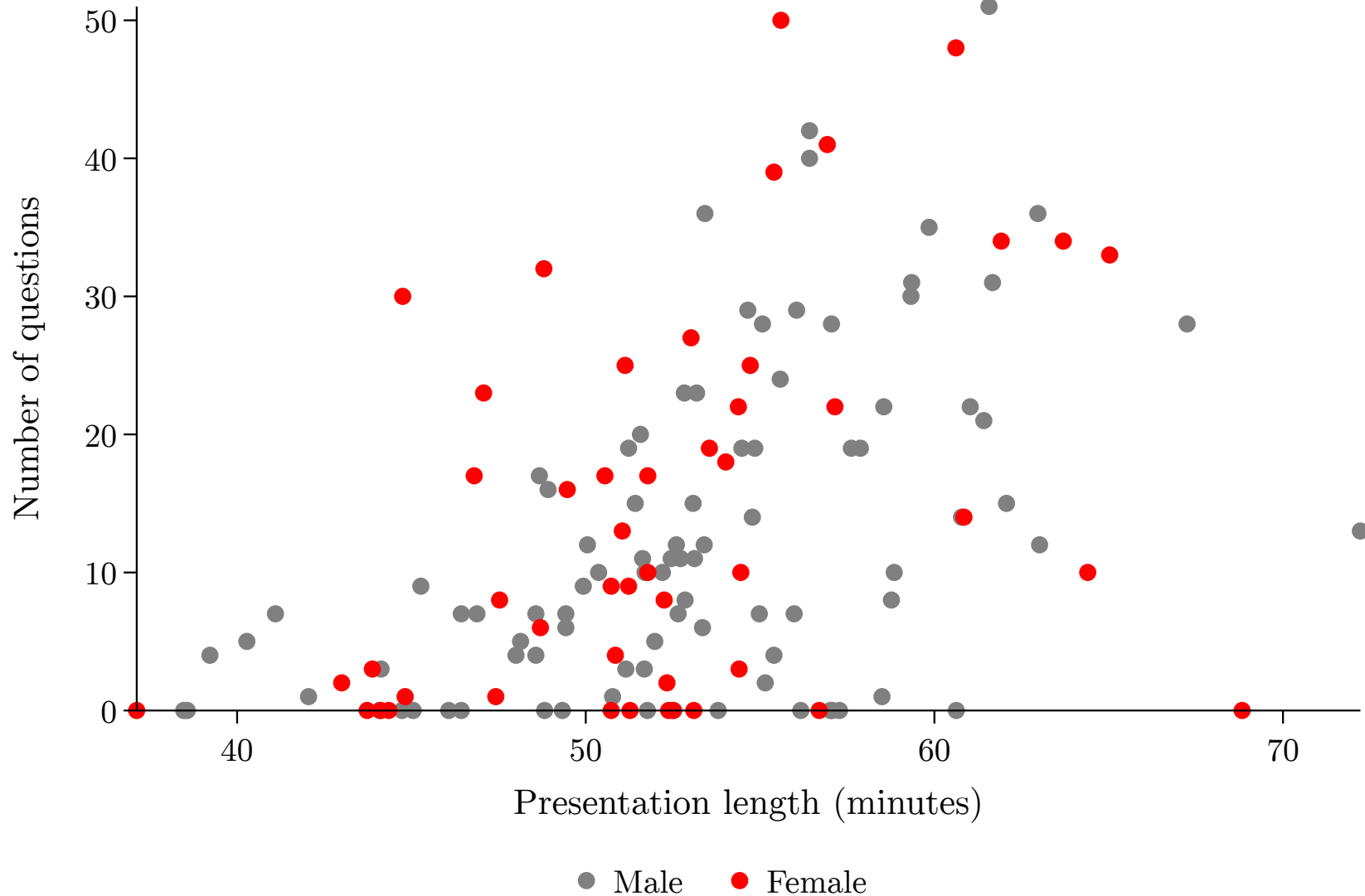
- 140 videos
- 91 men, 49 women
- Seniority:
 - PhD students: 44
 - 1-2 years out: 26
 - 3-4 years out: 28
 - 5-6 years out: 12
 - 7-21 years out: 30
- 2 large public R1 schools
- Multiple departments
 - EE, CS, ME, BioEng
- Use all available ♀ data
- ♂ Select approx. 2:1 seniority matched data
- Data analysis from pre-Q&A portion

Question: Is it Bad to get More Questions?

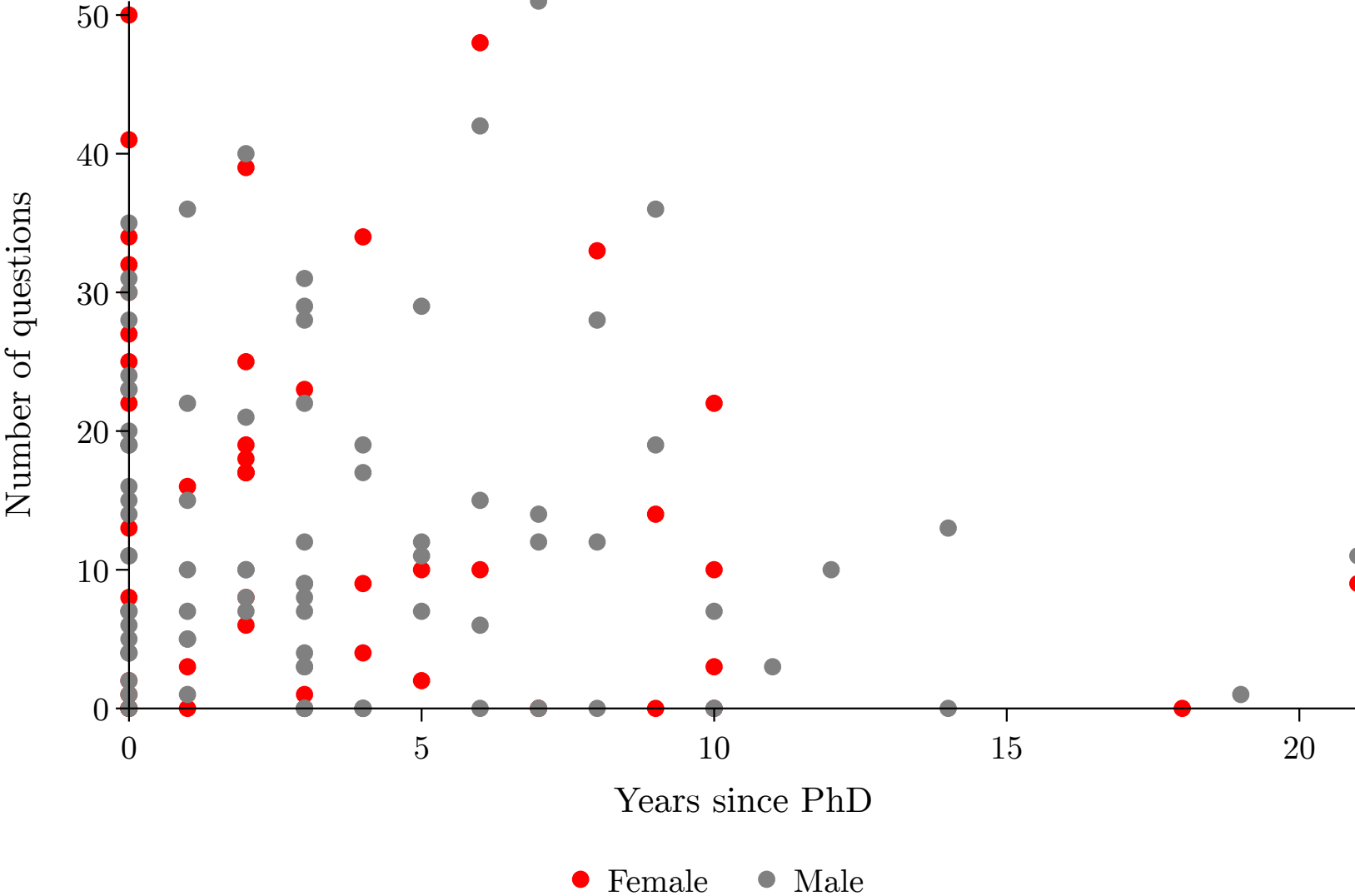
Sample Data

Female, PhD+4	Start	End	Duration
Presenting	0:01:22	0:11:25	10:03
Question (Acknowledged)	0:11:26	0:11:33	00:07
Answer	0:11:34	0:11:46	00:12
Presenting	0:11:47	0:15:40	03:53
Question (Interruption)	0:15:41	0:15:44	00:03
Answer	0:15:45	0:15:51	00:06
Question (Follow-up)	0:15:51	0:15:54	00:03
Answer	0:15:55	0:16:09	00:14

Number of Questions vs. Length of Talk



Number of Questions vs. Years since PhD



Descriptive Statistics (excluding BioEng)

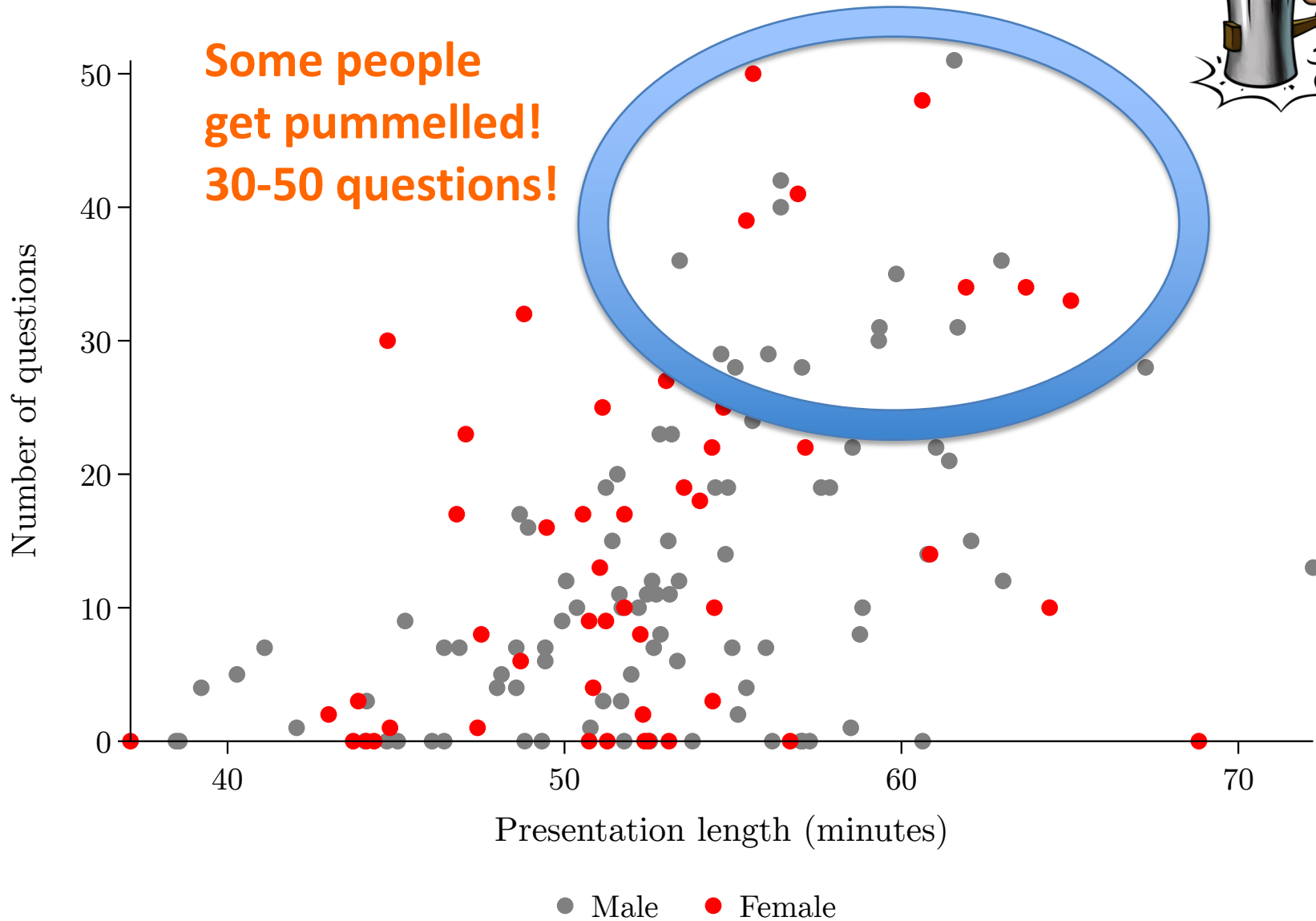
Dependent Variables	Men	Women
Interruptions	3.77	4.95
Ack. Questions	5.49	5.39
Follow-ups	4.83	6.66
Total Questions	14.1	17
N talks	78	41

- Gender effect:
 - Women get 3 more questions, on average
 - Women experience more talks with zero questions
 - Conditioned on getting any questions, women get 6 more questions than men, on average
- Slight seniority effect for both men and women
 - More senior people get fewer questions

Is it Bad to get More Questions?

- Could be a sign of audience interest
- No outcome information (offers, hires)
- More questions correlated with speaker rushing:
 - “For the sake of time, I’m going to skip this part”
 - “There’s not much time left; I will rush through this”
 - “I’m going to skip to the end”
 - “I’m going really quick here because I want to get to the second part of the talk”
 - “We’re running out of time so I’m not going into the details”

Didn't expect #1: So many questions!



Didn't expect #2: Department gender effect

- More women on faculty → fewer questions are asked
 - Both men/women candidates *receive* fewer questions
- Bigger effect than gender of speaker or seniority

Didn't expect #3: Interdisciplinary issue

- 81% of talks in Bioengineering have zero questions
- Unless it's a clarification question, save it for the Q&A
- Only 9% of talks in other departments do
- Culture clash:
 - Candidate can be shocked by unaccustomed aggressiveness
 - Risk for interdisciplinary candidates

Some Thoughts

- Analysis difficulty: Zero questions because of
 - Departmental effects
 - Candidate is super clear
 - Train wreck



- Possible double effect:
 - Women get more questions
 - Even with same number, women may view questions as more aggressive, unfriendly
- Many people seem to accept that their department has reputation for being mean



Suggestions of what to do

- Fix the Woman or Change the System




- Do both

Suggestions for Faculty

- Awareness: Not all candidates are comfortable saying: “Let’s hold remaining questions for the end”
- Search committee can agree on host who can step in and say it, if needed
 - Most natural for introducer to say it
 - But any faculty member in audience can step in
- No explicit formula
 - Some questions are good (elicit useful clarifications, convey audience interest, etc.)
 - Holistic decision based on Number/Content/Tone of questions, reaction of candidate, etc.



Discussion

- Have a departmental discussion about norms of behavior
- People say “*We don’t want a snowflake*” 
 - Ability to handle aggressive questioning required at age 27?
 - Are we really adding that to our criteria?
 - Or can a faculty member develop that skill on the job?
- People say “*Talk is useless if I don’t understand something early on*”
 - But everyone else may want to hear the talk
- Agree that audience will be reminded of behavioral norms at start of each talk
 - Especially important if faculty from other departments are present

For more information...

M. Blair-Loy, L.E. Rogers, D. Glaser, Y.L.A. Wong, D. Abraham, P.C. Cosman, "*Gender in Engineering Departments: Are there Gender Differences in Interruptions of Academic Job Talks?*," **Social Science**, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2017.

Preliminary research: Analyses of Introductions

- 85 Introductions transcribed
- Introduced by first name only:
 - 12.1% of women
 - 8.8% of men
 - Not significant
- Presenter refers to introducer by first name:
 - 11.5% of women
 - 30.3% of men
 - Marginally significant

Analyses of Introductions

- Count of positive comments in introduction:
 - Awards
 - Number of citations
 - h-index
 - Media attention
 - Influence of their work
 - Direct compliment
- Positive introduction = more than 1 positive comment
 - Men are four times as likely as women to have a positive introduction

Introductions

- Research awards:

	Listed in CV	Mentioned in Intro
Men	78%	52%
Women	73%	27%

Irrelevant or Inappropriate

- 6 introductions (5 for women) had an inappropriate item:
 - Elizabeth, Dr. Elizabeth ... went to [university] and I can tell you the place is like an awesome place. It's amazing. My first girlfriend was from [university].
- Counting irrelevant statements in introduction:
 - Things that wouldn't be found in the CV
 - Women: 40.9 %
 - Men: 14.5 %

Concluding Thoughts

- Be aware of cultural differences:
 - Departments & disciplines have different cultures
 - Especially an issue for interdisciplinary candidates
- Give strongly positive introductions for all candidates
- Remember:
 - *Department is interviewing the candidate*
 - *Candidate is interviewing the department*
- Engineering should have a more friendly, less aggressive culture!