



Amplification

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Uncategorized](#)

Date : October 27, 2016



[The Washington Post had an article in September](#) about a strategy used by female staffers to be heard in meetings during the first term of the Obama administration. Even when they got into meetings, their voices were being ignored. They called the strategy “amplification:” “When a woman made a key point, other women would repeat it, giving credit to its author. This forced the men in the room to recognize the contribution—and denied them the chance to claim the idea as their own.” According to the original article, President Obama noticed and began calling more often on women in the meetings. A [follow-up article](#) this week reported that the amplification strategy has gone viral. The second article also mentions a related issue faced by women—men interrupting and talking over them in meetings.



Jessica Bennett, an award-winning journalist and author of [Feminist Fight Club: An Office Survival Manual for a Sexist Workplace](#), observes that “[s]ince the dawn of time, we’ve been taught that it is men who lead and women who nurture—and so our workplace structures, our belief systems, even our expectations are still very much rooted in that belief.” One organization shared the amplification strategy with women during a leadership training program, and it also “is enlisting men as well as women in addressing this issue.” In addition to giving voice to women, “we want to make sure men have the skills to listen and hear.”

We have made good progress over the years in hiring women into faculty and other professional positions at the School. It is unfair to our female colleagues if we engage in behaviors that fail to recognize their contributions, whatever the reason. It also is bad for the School if it also means that we are not realizing our full potential by encouraging strong contributions from our impressive women.



All of us should be on the lookout for these behaviors in our interactions with one another. Men also can use amplification to acknowledge the contributions of women if they are being ignored in meetings. And we can point out when someone interrupts and talks over another person. A lot of this involves practicing the communication skills we learned during our training from Peg Carlson a few years ago. Increasing our awareness of negative practices, especially in terms of their impact on women, is a first step toward making them disappear from our culture. I promise to work on my own behavior in meetings, which is far from perfect, and I encourage everyone else to do the same. It will make us better and stronger.