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# Women in Student Leadership: How Group Makeup Changes Communication Style

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# Women in Student Leadership:

# How Group Makeup Changes Communication Style

Katie A. Kuckelheim

# Genderlect Theory, Tannen (1990)

- 2 different cultural dialects or Genderlects
- Different motivations
- Disclaimer: Genderlect Theory only evaluates the binary genders.

### Rapport Talk (Women)

- Creating & maintaining connection
- Private, small groups
- Tell stories about others

### Report Talk (Men)

- Negotiate status & autonomy
- Public speaking
- Tell stories about themselves

# Genderlect Theory & Group Makeup

- Less jokes in mixed gender groups (Mitchell, 1985; Tannen, 1990).

- "Onstage" around men. "Offstage" around women (Tannen, 1990).

- Women around men raise their voices and are more assertive (Maccoby, 1990; Tannen, 1994).

- Girls adapt their communication styles so boys are more likely to listen (Leaper, 1991; Tannen, 1994).

# Research Questions

- **RQ 1:** Do female leaders **prefer report or rapport** communication style?

- **RQ 2:** Relationship between **communication style** and **gender makeup**?

- **RQ 3:** Relationship between **leadership style** and **gender makeup** ?

- **RQ 4:** Relationship between **communication style** and **leadership style**?

# Methodology

- **Sample: Female, OWU Student, leadership (now & last year)**

- **Online Survey**
    - Organizational information
    - Leadership Style
    - Communication Style

- **Structured Interview**
    - Mentions if communication style changes and why

# Methodology (Survey Measures)

- **Leadership Style: The Managerial Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1964)**

  - **Accomplishing tasks** v. **Care for subordinates**

  - 5 types including:

    - Country club -> rapport talk

    - Authority compliance -> report talk

- **Communication Style: Norton Communicator Style Measure (Norton, 1983)**

  - Measures 10 important communicator attributes

  - Categorized them by report and rapport, score for each participant
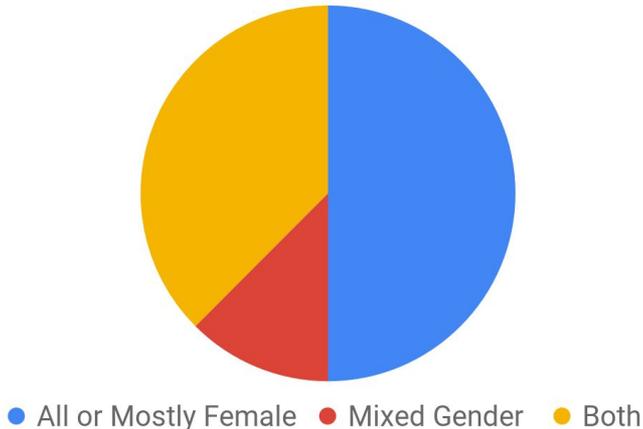
# Demographic Statistics

**Survey (n = 31)**

- Primary involvement: 74% (n = 23) led all women or a mostly women organizations
- Majority of respondents led a student club or sorority

**Interview (n = 8)**

- 6 led sororities
- 6 led student clubs

Gender Makeup of Groups Led by Interview Participants



● All or Mostly Female   ● Mixed Gender   ● Both

# RQ 1: Do female leaders prefer report or rapport communication style?

- Independent t-test
- Women prefer rapport talk (Tannen, 1990) theorizes, $t(31) = 2.938$, $p = 0.004$
- Substantiates genderlect theory

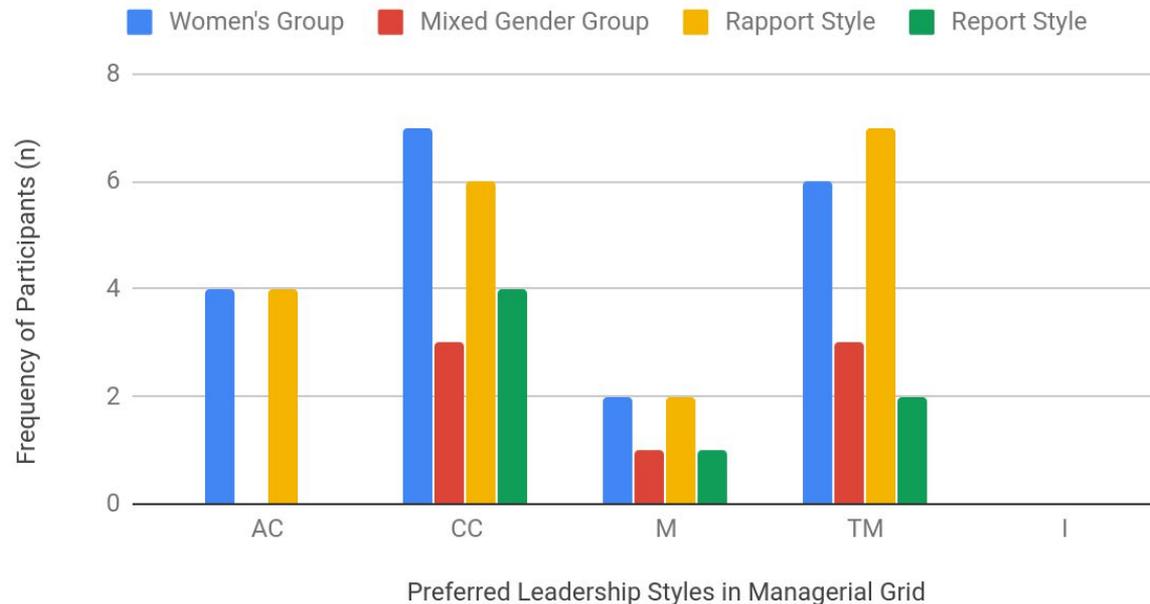**RQ 2:** Relationship between **communication style** and **gender makeup**?

- Pearson's r correlation test

- No connection between communication style and gender makeup, r = -0.091.

**RQ 3:** Relationship between **leadership style** and **gender makeup** ?

**RQ 4:** Relationship between **communication style** and **leadership style**?

- Descriptive Statistics

- Both group types & both comm. types prefer:
Country Club Management (Rapport)
&
Team Management

- No one in a mixed gender group and report style preference scored as authority compliance.

Leadership Style Compared to Gender Makeup & Communication Style



Bar chart legend: ■ Women's Group ■ Mixed Gender Group ■ Rapport Style ■ Report Style

Y-axis: Frequency of Participants (n), scale 0 to 8

X-axis: Preferred Leadership Styles in Managerial Grid — categories: AC, CC, M, TM, I

# Interview Results & Analysis

10 instances mentioned communication style based on gender makeup

- 8 instances: their communication style changes or would change

- 2 instances: their communication style does not or would not change

Women feel more "onstage" around men (Tannen, 1990)

2 more comfortable leading women

- "Awkward" and "embarrassed" if they had to lead a mixed gender organization

- Mention how they would struggle moving between communication styles in a mixed gender group

# Interview Results & Analysis

| | |
|---|---|
| Change style leads to better communication with boys (Leaper, 1991; Tannen, 1994). | 2 get to the point sooner |
| Change style so not perceived as negative female stereotypes (von Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011). | 3 mentioned style change because of resisting negative female stereotypes |
| Women rarely told jokes to mixed groups (Tannen, 1990; Mitchell, 1985) | 1 would tell less jokes and anecdotes if she lead a mixed gender group |
| | 1 maintains the style of the previous leader of the organization, a man |

# Limitations

- Genderlect theory is simplistic
- Sampling
  - Mostly leaders of all or mostly female organizations
  - Interviews: couldn't speak to both types of organizations
  - Small Sampling
- Evaluating Variables
  - Measuring behavior v. measuring preferences
  - Grouping of women's groups
  - Nature of the Managerial Grid questions (Another measure)
  - 4/6 managerial grid questions

# Importance

- Women in Leadership Issues
  - Passed up for leadership (Walker & Aritz, 2015)
  - Women don't always let other women rise to power (Baxter, 2015)
- Changing Style
  - Male style to avoid negative female stereotypes (von Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011).
  - Backfires: "rated as less warm and likeable, and evaluators indicate less willingness to comply with their requests" (von Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011, p. 1312).
- Why is this important?
  - Educating others that report and rapport styles have equal merits
  - Further understand how women work around these issues & share with others

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