RUNNING HEAD: Competency Evaluations Based on Gendered Messages

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Chapter One: Introduction

The study of sex and gender differences in communication has garnered the attention of popular culture and academic researchers alike. For example, an internet search of major media retailers resulted in over 31,000 print sources aimed at bettering communication within romantic and family relationships, nearly 7,500 print sources focused on understanding gender and communication, and 7,000 print sources directed at sex and communication (Amazon.com, 2009). Furthermore, in a recent study conducted by Palomares (2008), the *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Good Morning America* and *20/20* as well as popular newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, among a host of other highly circulated media were found to explore differences between the sexes and genders regarding communication (for specific examples in media, see: Kornblut, 2008; Stossel, 2006; Tierney, 2007; Winfrey, 2008).

Researchers from many disciplines have explored similarities and differences as a result of gender and/or sex. For example, linguists have researched differences between men and women in language, including word choice and rate of development in children (Bradley, 1981; Carli, 1990; Crawford, 1995; Mulac, Incontro, & James, 1985; Mulac & Lundell,1980). Psychologists have explored the psychological differences present between gender and sex regarding interpersonal communication (Ashmore, 1990; Eagly, Hyde & Frost, 1993; Hyde & Plant, 1995; Wood & Johannesen - Schmidt, 2004), early childhood gender - typed play (Thorne, 1993) and mate selection (Buss, 1989; Buss, Abbott, Angleitner, Asheriam, et al., 1990). Sociologists have explored gender differences across cultures (Wood & Eagly, 2002). Finally, communication scholars have

identified gender differences in nonverbal skills and behaviors (Donaghy & Dooley, 1994; Findley & Punyanunt - Carter, 2007; Hall, 1984; Hall, 1978; Menzel & Carrell, 1999), sex and gender differences in self - disclosure (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Putnam & McAllister, 1980), differences between the genders in small group behavior (Aries, 1976; Grob, Meyers, & Schuh, 1997; Large, Beheshti, & Rahman, 2002), and differences between the genders regarding compliance gaining behaviors (Baxter, 1984; Guowei, Pettey, Rudd, & Lawson, 2007). Indeed, some researchers and popular authors go so far as to argue that women and men are radically different in nearly every socio - communicative element conceivable (Gray, 1992; Tannen, 1990).

Another area of particular interest to communication scholars, and no doubt important in interactions between men and women, is communication competence (Bakan, 1966; Block, 1973; Eagly & Karau, 1991; Wood & Karten, 1986). Communication competence has been defined as an individual's ability to enact communication behaviors that are both appropriate and effective for a communication event (McCroskey, 1982). Research has shown evaluations of communication competence to be a strong correlating factor in the perception of overall communication success (Rudman & Glick, 2008) and may be contingent upon the biological sex of those being evaluated and those evaluating other's communication competence (Wood & Karten, 1986).

While research has provided much insight into both psychological gender as a construct and the relationship between gender and communication, a research area still in need of further exploration is an understanding of the interplay between psychological gender, biological sex, and evaluations of communication competence. To date, research

has not fully explored the role biological sex and psychological gender plays in evaluations of another individual's appropriateness and effectiveness as they relate to communication competence. Furthermore, research has not explored whether males and females are evaluated differently in the areas of appropriateness or effectiveness when enacting masculine or feminine communication behavior.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the different sexes evaluate communication competence as well as how the different genders (i.e., masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated) evaluate communication competence. College students were used as the primary participants in this study, in order to more fully understand the complex interplay between psychological gender and biological sex as they relate to evaluations of communication competence. Researching this population is valuable in that it will explore the evaluations of competence among a population that has been exposed to messages about sex and gender since birth (Bates, 1992) and has likely begun to formulate opinions about how sex and gender ideals should function within society. College students are exposed to many situations involving a complex interplay between sex and gender. By exploring students' perceptions of consistent and inconsistent gender - typed behaviors, this research may illuminate one of the potential factors contributing to evaluations of communication competence.

As a foundation for this work, I feel it is necessary to first engage in discussion that expands our: 1) understanding of the complex interplay between psychological gender and biological sex in communication interactions; and 2) knowledge of how expectations and perceptions of sex/gender related communication can be linked to evaluations of competence. Next, I will explain the methodological aspects of this study.

Finally, I will analyze and discuss the results. Any significant findings will be

extrapolated and explored within the context of previous and future research.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Psychological Gender and Biological Sex

Sex, gender, masculinity and femininity are all unique constructs with clear distinctions. In this study, I will refer to sex as the respective biological categories of "male" or "female," as determined by genetics. In contrast, I will refer to gender as the set of learned behaviors culturally associated with being male or female (Leaper & Ayres, 2009). According to Leaper and Ayres (2009) there are two main gender classes in terms of language features: masculine and feminine. Thus, the categories of masculine and feminine refer to the labels attached to a person's gender - related behaviors. As such, masculinity and femininity are extensions of the socialized gender distinctions of male and female.

Individuals have been shown to classify themselves on the basis of their respective gender in everyday interactions by adhering to what they perceive as socially acceptable examples of their gender, also known as ideal gender behaviors (Cohen, Berger, & Zelditch, 1972). Ideal gender behaviors provide structure for understanding the social world and tend to produce meaningful outcomes for communicators (Palomares, 2008). Ideal gendered behaviors are a manifestation of our understanding of gender, and what it means to be masculine or feminine. They are created through communication in the family, at school, at the workplace, in intimate relationships, and through the mass media (Bates, 1992; Schultz, Briere, & Sandler, 1984). Masculinity and femininity, as defined by cultural norms, are an archetype of socially acceptable examples of enacted gendered behaviors (Unger, 1978).

Biological sex plays a large role in the cultural makeup of ideal gender behaviors. Within society, for instance, people formulate opinions of appropriate gender-typed behaviors and pressure individuals to adhere to masculine and feminine stereotypes based upon perceived biological sex (Lippa, 2005). According to Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons (2001), our social system reinforces behavioral expectations for members of particular gender groups. Research exploring socialization tendencies has demonstrated that the pressure to adhere to gendered norms, including ideal gendered communication, typically begins at birth, or shortly after (Campenni, 1999). Parents or primary caregivers play a major role in the socialization of their children. In fact, research has shown that parents tend to expect and encourage gendered behavior according to the biological sex of their children (Langolis & Downs, 1980). To illustrate parents' tendency to reinforce gender norms, Mulac, Bradac, Palomares and Giles (2009) used a prototypical case in which a female child watched a television program and was told by her mother that little girls don't talk like that. In this case, the female gender's respective appropriate communication style and language was reinforced.

Indeed, several researchers have suggested that ideal gender roles are pervasive and employed persistently in many settings (Deal & Stevenson, 1998: Ruble, 1983; Werner & LaRussa, 1985). Sherriffs and McKee (1957) have stated that beliefs about ideal gender behaviors are persistent and unchanging. Other scholars have reinforced Sherriffs and McKee's (1957) original findings that gender - role ideals are indeed consistent over time, leading to an increased understanding of the depth to which stereotypes are ingrained in our societal belief systems (Bem, 1993; Werner & LaRussa, 1985). Borisoff and Merrill (1992) agreed, suggesting that ideal masculine and feminine

behaviors have "been with us for centuries" (p. 16).

These socially acceptable ideals of gendered behaviors for men and women play an important role in society as a cognitive category since they are used to classify individuals and govern perceptions in everyday interactions. In fact, research has found that people in all societies tend to make social distinctions based upon ideal gender traits (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) as well as place a great deal of emphasis on ideal gender traits in social interactions (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1992). This research points to the ubiquitous nature of expected social behaviors pertaining to gender within all societies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Indeed, research also indicates that these ideal gendered stereotypes and behaviors are widespread (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Ruble, 1983). As such, the persistant use, and subsequent reinforcement of these gendered behaviors, contingent upon biological sex, tends to blur the distinctions between sex and gender. That is to say, the perceived sex of a person often dictates predicted gender, thus resulting in the reinforcement of ideal gender - related behaviors.

According to Molm and Hedley (1992), gender is a system of social classification. Therefore, by definition, gender necessitates that distinct group categorizations occur, based upon predicted gender - typed behaviors (Molm & Headley, 1992). Gender salience, as defined by Palomares (2008), is a cognitive state in which an individual explicitly or implicitly self - categorizes as a member of their respective gender group. Recent research has found that situations involving language are more likely to elevate the salience of gender and tend to activate ideal gender stereotypes (Reid, Keerie, & Palomares, 2003).

A study by Fiske, Hasalm, and Fiske (1992) reinforced the concept of gender salience in communicative acts during cross - sex communication. In their study, participants were asked to watch a video of a mixed - sex discussion group and were subsequently asked to recall which group member said what. Results of this study indicated that participants exhibited a tendency to privilege biological sex above that of other demographic variables, since they were more likely to remember and categorize people of the same sex above that of other categorical distinctions (e.g., age group, race, or name) (Fiske, Hasalm, & Fiske, 1992).

Individuals engaged in gender salience tend to enact behaviors consistent with gender ideals (Palomares, 2008). These ideal gender behaviors assume there are qualities unique to males and females in general (Deaux & Kite, 1993; Eagly, 1987; Smith, 1985). For example, male - expected behaviors typically include qualities such as aggression, ambition, dominance, forcefulness, independence, self - reliance, and individualism (Lindsey & Zakahi, 1998; Mulac, 2006), while female - expected behaviors typically describe women as nurturing, affectionate, helpful and emotionally expressive (Lindsey & Zakahi, 1998). Deaux and Kite (1993) suggest that male expected behaviors typically ascribe an agentic quality to men and female expected behaviors ascribe a communal quality to women. Research on communication behaviors supports these expected gendered behaviors (Colley, et al., 2004). For example, research has shown that during conversations women tend to be more inclusive and encouraging then men (Lindsey & Zakahi, 1998); in addition, women have been shown to be more likely than men to smile, be attentive, and make eye contact in interpersonal communication encounters (Basow, 1986; Dindia, 2006).

According to Aries (1996), research on interpersonal communication encounters typically reports men as more communicatively direct than women. For instance, Mulac, Bradac and Gibbons (2001) found statistically significant differences in the use of language features by male and female communicators. Specifically, females tended to produce indirect speech, and males tended to produce direct speech. A similar study by McKelvie (2000) also found that males organize linguistic phrases using primarily direct communication strategies, while females most often use indirect communication strategies. Furthermore, research has suggested that males and females interpret communicated messages differently contingent upon the use of direct or indirect speech (Cleary, 1996; Roberts, 1991).

Interestingly, it may be the case that the mere presence of the opposite sex can elicit specific gender - linked communication behaviors (Palomares, 2004). For example, women tended to interrupt more in groups where men were the majority than in groups where women were the majority (Karakowsky, McBey, & Miller, 2004). Furthermore, research that examined mixed - sex dyadic communication from the female perspective found that women may actually adopt stereotypical behaviors in order to be effective communicators with men. For instance, one study showed that women use more speech qualifications in mixed - sex groups than in same - sex groups (Carli, 1990). This study also found that women who prefaced their remarks with self - deprecating comments (e.g., "I may be wrong") while communicating in mixed - sex groups, had greater influence over male group members (Carli, 1990). Individuals who conform to ideal gender norms have been shown to elicit more favorable communicative acts and enact greater social influence (Carli, 2001). A study conducted by Carli (2001) showed that

when women conformed to ideal gender norms by prefacing their remarks with self deprecating comments, they were considered better communicators than women whom did not conform to any specific gender norms. Furthermore, Carli's (2001) study revealed that by prefacing remarks with self deprecating comments, women were more likely to be acknowledged and heard.

With regard to interpersonal and group communication, men are typically more hierarchically minded (Aries, 1996; 1987). Men have also been shown to exhibit dominance in groups by talking more than women (Goldshmidt & Weller, 2000). Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller (2004) found that men interrupted more in groups in which their gender was the majority. In addition, research has found that men place a greater emphasis on displays of dominance than women when communicating with other male group members (Ellis, 1982), while women emphasize openness or self - disclosure (Aries, 1976; Ellis, 1982; Miller, 1997). However, when interacting with women, men place less emphasis on dominance than when communicating with other men (Aries, 1976). Conversely, research has shown that women tend to be more expressive, supportive, facilitative and cooperative than men (Aries, 1996). In addition, women tend to enact egalitarian group communication behaviors as well as communicate more personally with others (Aries, 1987; Janssen & Murachver, 2004).

Research has shown that the sex of a conversational partner can affect a speaker's behavior and emotion, such as willingness to disclose (Lippert & Prager, 2001). For instance, women self - disclose more than men when communicating with same - sex partners (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Mulac, Seibold, & Farris, 2000). The highest levels of self - disclosure are found to occur between women, moderate levels of self - disclosure

occur within mixed - sex dyads, and the lowest levels of self - disclosure occur between men (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Consistant with gender salience, Aries (1996) posits that men's lack of disclosure when communiating with other men suggests that males are simply more likely to disclose to a woman, rather than risk the socially unacceptable alternative of disclosing to another man.

Some researchers attribute these differences in communication to a theoretical claim that men and women are raised in separate subcultures, thereby learning to communicate and use language differently from one another (Gilligan, 1982; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001; Palomares, Reid, & Bradac, 2004; Tannen, 1994). The separate cultures approach to explaining communication differences between the sexes suggests that men and women, as a result of socialization, tend to interpret the same respective linguistic features as carrying different meanings (Maltz & Borker, 1982). Tannen (1990), further articulated her cross - cultural position by suggesting that women use communication to establish connection and intimacy, while men communicate in order to gain status and independence.

Recent research has also shown that there are more, or at least as many, similarities in communication behaviors between women and men as differences (Eagly & Koenig, 2006; Fox, Bukatko, Hallahan, & Crawford, 2007; Hyde, 2005; MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Burlson, & Gillihan, 2004; Mulac, Wiemann, Widemann, & Gibson, 1988). For instance, by analyzing 20 - minute problem - solving interactions of 48 randomly assigned male/female dyads, Mulac, et al. (1988) found that similarities in specific language features (e.g., directives, intensive adverbs, and interrupting behaviors) between men and women exist to a greater degree than do differences. In another study

using same - sex and mixed - sex dyads, there was no significant difference in the degree to which men and women interrupted, used directives (e.g., "write that down), or used intensive adverbs (e.g., "really") (Mulac, 2006). Furthermore, research has suggested that without the physiological cue of biological sex, individuals cannot distinguish between the speech of a male or female (Hyde, 2005; Mulac & Lundell, 1994; Mulac, Studley, & Blau, 1990). For example, multiple studies have shown participants' inability to guess the sex of a speaker when presented with transcribed speeches (Mulac, Incontro, & James, 1985; Mulac & Lundell, 1982; 1980). From these results, we can infer that communicative differences between men and women are found primarily when the biological sex of interaction partners is known and gender salience is perceived.

Some scholars, particularly those in the communication discipline, have claimed that academia has fallen victim to expected gender ideals and has reinforced overplayed sexual stereotypes (Aries, 1996; Canary & Hause, 1993; Dindia, 2006). For example, Dindia (2006) has argued that many analytical reviews of the literature find significant differences between males and females by purposefully exploring only gendered communication variables, thereby eliminating the risk of actually finding potential differences in personality, social behavior, and developmental or cognitive psychology. In fact, she argues that post - analyses of effect sizes in meta - analyses of sex differences tend to provide a lack of evidence for differences (Dindia, 2006). It may be the case that a majority of research focused on sex differences in communication does not attend to contextual situations or influences that are inevitably present in these interactions (Crawford & Kaufman, 2006). Furthermore, recent meta - analyses of applied communication behavior suggest that sex differences in communication behaviors are

small, and chiefly moderated by other variables (Allen, Preiss, Gayle, & Burrell, 2002).

According to Leaper and Ayers (2009) linguistic similarities and linguistic differences are equally present because of the presence of these other variables such as status (O'Neill & Colley, 2006), sex - composition (Savicki & Kelley, 2000), age (O'Kearney & Dadds, 2004), conversation partner (Thompson, Marachver, & Green, 2001) and means of communicating (Fox, Bukatko, Hallahan, & Crawford, 2007). It may also be the case that gender ideals have been misconstrued for sex differences in communication. Canary and Hause (1993) reviewed 15 meta - analyses of sex differences and concluded that sex accounts for only about 1% of the variance in communication variables. It may be that the variable of "sex" actually interacts with other variables, thereby producing a type - I error. This interaction effect may explain why the results of sex on communication patterns and differences are not consistent across many studies (Dindia, 2006).

A popular critique of research espousing sex - related communication differences involves perceived limitations of quantitative methods. According to Aries (1996), a large sample size coupled with a very small mean difference can provide a statistically significant outcome (assuming $p < .05$). Statistical significance is a widely used criterion; however, a statistically significant difference may not necessarily mean a large or practical difference (Aries, 2006). Aries' (2006) position supports Canary and Hause's (1993) argument that statistical significance *and* effect size must be taken into consideration. Once statistical significance and effect size are accounted for, results for sex differences in communication style amount to less than 6% of the difference in behavior, according to a study by Canary and Hause (1993). Aries (2006) claims that,

according to her meta - analyses, typically less than 1% of the differences found between men and women are actually a result of their communication behaviors. In applying this research, it seems clear that, while gender differences exist, they are not solely the result of sex differences in communication style. It seems that both ideal gender and sex may play a significant role in the presence of differences in communication between men and women.

Thus, we are left with the following conclusions: 1) ideal gendered behaviors are a manifestation of our understanding of gender, and what it means to be masculine or feminine; 2) through socialization, ideal gender behaviors are enacted and reinforced in society based upon perceived biological sex; and 3) it is likely that differences in communication exist regarding ideal gender behaviors and biological sex.

Communication Competence

Due in large part to the ubiquitous nature of ideal gender behaviors and the tendency for gender salience to take precedence in interactions, it stands to reason that individuals are evaluated and judged based upon their own psychological gender and biological sex. Therefore, deviation from socially acceptable gender behaviors may cause a decrease in positive evaluations of communicators. One of the ways in which to evaluate communicators is to judge their communication competence.

Communication competence is the ability to choose a communication behavior that is both appropriate and effective for a given situation (McCroskey, 1982). Practically defined, Trenholm and Jensen (1996) describe communication competence as "the ability to communicate in a personally effective and socially appropriate manner" (p. 11). Spitzberg and Cupach (1994) suggest that appropriateness and effectiveness are two

major components of interpersonal communication competence. Appropriate behavior refers to those actions that receive social rewards and fulfills others' expectations, and effective behavior refers to those actions that accomplish the communication goal.

Research suggests three broad categories for organizing communication competence research (Bachman, 1990). These categories are organizational competence, including both grammatical and textual competence, pragmatic competence, including sociolinguistic and performative competence, and finally strategic competence, including the ability of a speaker to employ communication strategies. For the purposes of this study, I will primarily focus on pragmatic and strategic competence as they relate to perceptions of a speaker's biological sex and psychological gender.

Exploring communication competence with regard to perceptions of sex and gender is important. According to research conducted by Rudman (1998), for instance, gender influences the evaluation of communication competence due to a direct link between the two. The "gender - to - competence link" states that men tend to be perceived, both according to themselves and other group members, as typically higher in general competence than women. This link, as suggested by Wood and Karten (1986), begins to illuminate the power that ideal gender behaviors have over evaluations of competency.

As suggested in research explored earlier, men and women are products of gender - typed socialization. Thus, agentic (i.e., task oriented or instrumental) qualities like self - assertion and self - expression tend to become more developed in males and communal (i.e., social - emotional or expressive) qualities like selflessness and concern for others are more often exhibited in females (Bakan, 1966; Block, 1973; Eagly & Karau, 1991).

These qualities have been shown to have an effect on perceived competence of group members (Wood & Karten, 1986).

Agentic and communal traits may lead to predictions of competence in many different situations (Rudman, 1998). For example, Patrick, Yoon, and Murphy (1995) found that typically male gender - typed characteristics (e.g., assertiveness, independence, leadership) were most strongly related to positive competency evaluations for children at multiple grade levels, both in the home and in school. Conversely, the ideal gender role of femininity may result in diminished perceptions of a woman's competence in social situations (Borgida, Hunt, & Kim, 2005). Results of a study with undergraduate participants interviewing and evaluating male and female applicants showed higher competency ratings for men than women (Rudman, 1998). However, some typically female gender - typed characteristics (e.g., cooperativeness and caring) have been found to be important for positive competency evaluations although to a significantly lesser degree than male gender - typed characteristics (Patrick, Yoon, & Murphy, 1995). This research shows that ideal male characteristics are generally more likely to elicit positive competency evaluations than ideal female characteristics.

In order to explore the interplay between sex and gender with regard to communication competence, Wood and Karten (1986) formed four - person, mixed - sex discussion groups. In each group, members were unable to see or hear one another, and were given only information about other members' names and sex. When group members were explicitly presented with the sex of other group members, men tended to engage in a greater amount of active task behaviors than women, while women tended to exhibit a greater amount of positive social behaviors than men. This research suggests that

individuals engage in typical gender behaviors, thereby assimilating their behavior with what they perceive to be competent social behavior.

Research indicates that those who deviate from typical gender behaviors are subject to diminished communication evaluations (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999; Rudman & Glick, 2008). For instance, women who engage in active task behaviors and present themselves as more agentic (e.g., directive and assertive) are typically viewed as gender - role deviant and without interpersonal skills usually attributed to females (Rudman & Glick, 2008), while women adhering to socially acceptable feminine roles are viewed as normative and in possession of feminine interpersonal skills (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Furthermore, women who speak directly about their strengths and intentionally speak about past successes are typically seen as qualified, but less socially attractive than women who refrain (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Thus, socially acceptable gender roles enacted during communication encounters tend to elicit a potentially false perception of males being more competent than females.

Consistent with these findings, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) argue that gender stereotypes form socially desirable traits in society. In their study, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) found a general preference for male - typed characteristics at higher levels of political office and found that women tended to be viewed as less competent and aggressive than men. Aggression is an agentic quality that is present in ideal male behaviors and has been shown to correlate with higher competency evaluations (Borgida, Hunt, & Kim, 2005).

In support of research suggesting that specific gender - typed traits tend to elicit higher competency evaluations, Rudman and Glick (1999) found that applicants to major

organizations who are agentic are perceived as more competent for managerial positions than communal and androgynous candidates. In situations in which agentic, communal or androgynous traits are left ambiguous, people are more likely to infer that applicants who are women are less capable than applicants who are men (Rudman & Glick, 1999). The findings of this study are consistent with the argument that gender - role stereotypes of females significantly decrease a woman's chances of being perceived as having the agentic qualities and attributes needed to be successful managers and leaders (Rudman & Glick, 2008). Rudman and Glick (2008) also found that participants who associated women with communality and men with agency tended to view agentic females as interpersonally deficient.

In order to assess the role of sex and gender respectively as independent categories, Wood and Karten (1986) manipulated an experimental condition by providing the group members with only competency status (e.g., a capable leader or nurturing pleaser) of the other members. The researchers provided false feedback to each group member, suggesting high or low relative competency. Results indicated that assigned high status (i.e., positive competency traits) group members were likely to be perceived as more competent than assigned low status members (i.e., less positive competency traits) (Wood & Karten, 1986). Wood and Karten (1986) also found that regardless of member sex, high status individuals engaged in more active task behaviors and less positive social behaviors than low status members. Thus, the gender - to - competence link was subverted when group members were not privy to the sex of other group members. More specifically, direct information regarding group members' intellectual and moral competence, and not gender, was shown to play a role in blocking the

perceived gender - to - competence link (Wood & Karten, 1986).

Nevertheless, with the sociologically ingrained belief that biological sex should correlate to psychological gender, females have been shown to elicit diminished evaluations of competency solely on the basis of their biological sex (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001). In a study by Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, and Tamkins (2004), gender stereotypes were shown to affect perceptions of competence of female job applicants. According to the study, participants read a job description and a background description of employees holding the same position in a major organization. When asked to evaluate competency without a rating of candidate's prior job performance, men were generally selected as more competent than women. However, when participants read an upper - level management's evaluation of the female candidate as extremely competent, participants rated the men and women candidates equally on competency (Heilman, et al., 2004).

Collectively, this research evidence illustrates the function ideal - gendered roles and socially acceptable gender behaviors play in influencing perceptions of communication competency. The communicative behaviors employed in any social situation play a direct role in how others judge or rate the competency of the speaker. Therefore, studying the interplay between sex and gender with regards to communication competence is worthy of empirical study. This study extends previous work in that it examines gender and competence within the context of interpersonal interactions. The question remains, will male and masculine communication behaviors continue to be rated as more competent in an interpersonal context or will female and feminine communication behaviors be evaluated as more competent? When a man enacts feminine

communication behaviors and a woman enacts masculine behaviors, what is the impact on evaluations of communication competence? The results of this study may lead to a deeper knowledge about the impact ideal gender behaviors have on evaluations of other's communication behaviors in the interpersonal communication context

One of the most effective methods for studying communication competence is from the perspective of the perceiver (Pavitt & Haight, 1986). Researchers have created multiple measures specifically designed to explore perceiver assessments of competence (e.g., Monge, Bachman, Dillard & Eisenberg, 1982; Rubin, Martin, Bruning, & Powers, 1995). Haselwood, et al. (2005) assert, "using a perceiver - oriented approach to measuring communication competence reflects the individuals' verbal and nonverbal interactions and provides rich insight into the real - world evaluations of communication competence" (p. 218). Therefore, this study will employ a third - party perceiver - oriented approach to measuring communication competence, with participants acting as third - party evaluators of the communication scenario.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the constructs of sex, psychological gender, and perceived communication competence as they relate to stereotypical gender communication. Therefore, this study will assess whether there are significant interactions between psychological gender and biological sex during evaluations of communication competency. Because communication competence plays a critical role in the evaluation of conversations, this study will analyze evaluations of communication competence using sex and gender as primary constructs. Specifically, participants' will be self categorized in one of four psychological gender categories and asked to read

transcripts presenting a male and female engaging in socially acceptable and socially

unacceptable stereotypical gendered communication. The participants will then complete

competency evaluations for the communicators presented in the transcripts.

Therefore, the following questions are posed:

RQ1: Are males and females evaluated differently in regards to appropriateness and

effectiveness during interpersonal interactions?

Specifically:

A) Is there a difference in competency evaluations when interactants are enacting

communication behaviors consistent with their gender ideals?

B) Is there a difference in competency evaluations when interactants are enacting

communication behaviors inconsistent with their gender ideal?

RQ2: Are sex and gender factors that influence competency evaluations?

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study explores the role that psychological gender and biological sex may play in perceptions of communication competence during interpersonal encounters. To answer the study research questions, individuals were presented with two types of communication scenarios in which the gendered communication was manipulated. Specifically, in Scenario 1 (see Appendix A) the gendered communication behaviors were congruent with the biological sex of the communicators; and in Scenario 2 (see Appendix A) the gendered communication behaviors were incongruent with the biological sex of the communicator.

As defined in the previous chapter, sex refers to the respective biological categories of male and female as determined by genetics, while gender is comprised of learned behaviors culturally associated with being male or female (Leaper & Ayres, 2009). These learned behaviors typically include qualities such as aggression, ambition, dominance, forcefulness, independence, self - reliance, and individualism for males, while female behaviors typically include being nurturing, affectionate, helpful and emotionally expressive (Lindsey & Zakahi, 2006).

This study explored sex and gender, and its impact on communication competence within the collegiate population. College students provide a population that has been exposed to messages about sex and gender, and has likely begun to formulate stable beliefs about how sex roles and gender ideals should interact within the interpersonal context today. Research has shown the significant impact the constructs of sex and gender have on communication interactions. Cleary (1996) illustrated how

students begin to formalize opinions and negotiate beliefs about sex roles and gender ideals with their teachers. Other research suggests that school is a primary agent in the socialization of sex roles and gender ideals within interpersonal communication (Bates, 1992). Furthermore, I believe research with college students is valuable in that it explores a population that represents a future generation. For instance, college students are likely exposed to a variety of social and professional situations matching those present in the adult world in which they must decide upon how they feel the complex interplay between sex and gender should occur (e.g., professional job training and application, experiencing superior/subordinate roles, experiencing competition with other inter - sexed groups for superiority in academic/professional goals and interests). I feel that exploring students' perceptions of consistent and inconsistent gender - typed behaviors allows academia further insights into some of the potential factors contributing to evaluations of communication competence.

Design and Participants

The population for this survey study was recruited from a large general education class at a medium sized Midwestern University. An estimated 1,300 students enrolled in the spring 2010 semester of a basic communication course provided the participant base for this study. A majority of students in the course were freshman and sophomores, although some juniors and seniors attended as well. The typical demographic statistics of sex regarding students enrolled at the study location is 51% female and 48% male.

Procedures

Per IRB suggestion, I read a recruitment script at the start of the large general education course. Next, graduate - teaching instructors for the course were asked to

forward an e - mail to their respective students. Due to the fact that data was collected via an online website called Survey Monkey, participants received an e - mail in their university e - mail account from their communication instructors complete with instructions for navigating the online instruments, as well as a direct link to the instruments. The survey could be accessed at anytime and from anywhere computer and Internet access were present.

The participants first completed a shortened version of the Bem Sex - role Inventory (S - BSRI; Bem, 1974) to determine their placement in 1 of the 4 distinct sex - role classifications. They then were asked to read a series of 2 different scenarios. The scenarios presented participants with fictitious dyadic interactions featuring a biological male communicating with a biological female. Gender congruency in the message (e.g., stereotypically masculine or feminine communication behavior from the male or female speaker) was manipulated to create situations in which the biological sex was not necessarily indicative of the gendered communication of the characters. Biological sex was implied by the strongly gendered names of the fictitious characters, Eric and Julia. In each of the 2 scenarios, the characters communicated using stereotypical gender - typed behaviors as defined in Bem's (1974) seminal work on sex roles.

For example, an inconsistent gender - type communication scenario presented Eric (a biological male) interacting with Julia (a biological female). In this scenario, Eric displayed stereotypically feminine gender - typed communication behaviors (e.g., affection, compassion, gentleness, yielding behaviors) and Julia displayed stereotypically masculine gender - typed communication behaviors (e.g., aggression, assertiveness, competitiveness, dominance, independence). In contrast, a gender consistent

communication scenario presented Eric (a biological male) interacting with Julia (a biological female). In this scenario, Eric displayed stereotypically masculine gender - typed communication behaviors (e.g., aggression, assertiveness, competitiveness, dominance, independence) while Julia displayed stereotypically feminine gender - typed communication behaviors (e.g., affection, compassion, gentleness, yielding behaviors). After reading each scenario, participants evaluated the communication competence of each actor in the scenario using modified versions of the Conversational Appropriateness Scale, and the Conversational Effectiveness Scale (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987).

Once participants completed the study measures, they were awarded 5 - extra credit points toward their final grade. The participants' names, without corresponding data, were collected and a list was disseminated to their respective instructors in order to award the extra credit points. In the event a student was unable to access the online measures or did not wish to be a study participant, an alternative assignment was provided so that all students had the opportunity to earn extra credit. The alternative assignment was a 2 - paged reaction paper to gender stereotypes in society.

The use of Survey Monkey was beneficial in that the online data collection procedure was fully integrated with SPSS. Specifically, data from the online measures were exported in a comma separated (Microsoft Excel) file and was imported in SPSS and used accordingly. Therefore, results from the online instruments were easily transferred from the study website to the statistical software for analysis.

Study Measures

Participant Sex Differentiation. The most widely used measurement of biological sex is a self - report item on a survey or questionnaire, presenting the

participant with a choice between categories of either male or female. This measure was

quick and, due to the fact that most individuals know their biological sex, highly reliable.

This demographic characteristic was important as a primary construct of interest in this

study in that it served as an independent variable in the evaluations of communication

competence.

      Participant Gender Differentiation. Masculine and feminine communication

styles can be assessed through measures of gender - differentiating traits (Bem, 1974). In

an attempt to understand gendered distinctions, I used a modified version of the Bem Sex

- Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) in this study. The original BSRI was designed to

facilitate empirical research on sex - roles, and consisted of sixty items describing gender

- typed characteristics (20 feminine, 20 masculine, and 20 non - gender related items). It

has been widely used as a measure of sex role stereotyping (Calvo - Salguero, Garcia -

Martinez, & Monteoliva, 2008) and gender role elucidation (Colley, Maltby, Mulhern, &

Wood, 2009). The BSRI has also been used to ascertain categorical distinctions between

gender - typed behaviors (Colley, Gale, & Harris, 1994). The shortened BSRI (S - BSRI)

I used in this study contained 10 masculine, 10 feminine, and 10 neutral items (Bem,

1981; see Appendix B). Participants were asked to rate the degree to which each

characteristic item was true for them on a 7 - point Likert - type scale. The items were

selected for the shortened BSRI due to their ability to maximize internal consistency

regarding scales of masculinity and femininity, while simultaneously boosting the

independence of the two scales (Beere, 1990).

      As a method of conceptualizing sex - roles, Bem (1974) identified four common

typologies, which are used to classify individuals based upon results from the BSRI and S

- BSRI: masculine, feminine, psychologically androgynous, and undifferentiated. These classifications specifically reflect an individual's viewpoint of themselves regarding societal characteristics deemed desirable and typical of men and women (Hittner & Daniels, 2002).

According to Bem (1981), an individual classified as masculine would naturally tend to enact personal characteristics socially deemed as part of the masculine gender role. The participant's BSRI designation would be high masculine and low feminine. Some masculine - gender role characteristics include assertiveness, competitiveness and forcefulness (Bem, 1974). Likewise, a feminine individual would be classified as such based upon a high feminine and low masculine BSRI score. They would tend to enact personal characteristics socially deemed as being part of the feminine - gender role, such as affection, gentleness and cheerfulness (Bem, 1974). Bem (1977) suggests that femininity and masculinity are not polar opposites of each other. Rather, individuals can be psychologically androgynous or undifferentiated. One is classified as Androgynous when he or she simultaneously enacts highly masculine gender - typed traits and highly feminine gender - type traits, according to the BSRI. Undifferentiated classifications occur when neither masculine nor feminine traits are highly enacted.

While the inventory has been widely used as a means of identifying masculinity and femininity, the BSRI has been the source of some scrutiny. Indeed, some scholars have questioned the current viability of the BSRI (Choi & Fuqua, 2003; Colley, Maltby, Mulhern, & Wood, 2009; Pedhazer & Tetenbaum, 1979). For example, Spence (1993) argues that the BSRI actually measures global self - concepts inherent to masculinity and femininity. In support, some argue that the scale measures self - perceptions in relation to

socially desirable agentic and communal traits, and thus, cannot objectively measure an individual's gender categorization (Spence & Helmreich, 1981). Some have even questioned the relevance of the BSRI by suggesting that gender roles have changed perceptions of the items (e.g., childlike or loyal) presented within the instrument (Holt & Ellis, 1998).

Although these criticisms exist, researchers have reported moderate to high internal consistency ratings (.75 - .90) for the BSRI (Blanchard - Fields, Suhrer - Roussel & Hertzog, 1994; Colley, Gale, & Harris, 1994; Holt & Ellis, 1998). Interestingly, researchers have found the S - BSRI to be a more accurate representation of true gendered behaviors (Holmbeck & Bale, 1988; Holt & Ellis, 1998) and to posses higher construct validity regarding the measurement of instrumentality and expressiveness (Campbell, Gillaspy, & Thompson, 1997). Specifically, Campbell, Gillapsy, and Thompson (1997) reported goodness - of - fit indices of .88 and a comparative fit index of .87. The authors state "given both our comparative fit index and alpha coefficients, it is suggested that scores on the short form of the BSRI may have more utility for the purposes of future research" (Campbell et al., 1997, p. 123). In a recent confirmatory study, Namok, Fuqua, and Newman (2009) found that women who took the BSRI scored higher on feminine factors than men, while men scored higher on masculine factors than women. Based upon high construct validity and relative support for categorizing true gendered behaviors, this study will use the S - BSRI in order to establish participant psychological gender.

Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scale. In order to evaluate perceptions of communication competence, participants completed modified versions of

the conversational appropriateness scale and the effectiveness scale (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985). The original scales each contain 20 items. According to Canary and Spitzberg (1989) the scales provide an established method with which to gather participant evaluations of study scenarios. Research has shown internal consistency on each scale, with coefficient alphas for the effectiveness scale ranging from .87 (Canary & Spitzberg, 1990) to .92 (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987); and alphas for the appropriateness scale between .80 (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987) to .92 (Canary & Spitzberg, 1990). These scales have been used primarily in studies of conflict (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; 1989; 1990).

This study assessed the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of fictional characters enacting socially acceptable or socially unacceptable gender roles. During data collection, the two scales were shortened and combined to provide one set of items for participants to read and respond to (see: Appendix C). Items from each scale were chosen based upon researcher determined face - validity. The modified scale used a seven - point Likert - type participant response. The responses ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, and were used by observers to indicate the level of appropriateness and effectiveness for each character they observe during a conversation. Each scale took less than 3 minutes to complete, thus minimizing the chance of participant fatigue.

Data Analysis

Using SPSS - 16 software package, the descriptive statistics of sex, age, race/ethnicity, and year in school were examined. Next, dependent t - tests were run to determine whether the male and female presented in each scenario were rated differently on the communication appropriateness and effectiveness scales. Finally, a statistical analysis of the interaction between participants' sex - role category as indicated by the S -

BSRI (1981), their biological sex, and their evaluations of the characters' competency was explored using a multivariate analysis of variance - - specifically, a 2 (sex of participant: male, female) x 4 psychological gender of participant: masculine, feminine, androgynous, undifferentiated) between subjects factorial design.

Conclusion

In order to answer the research questions, this study sought to explore the role that psychological gender and biological sex may play in perceptions of communication competence during interpersonal encounters. Once participants accessed the measures online, participants first completed the S - BSRI, thus categorizing them into four distinct gender categories. Next, participants read two types of communication scenarios in which the gendered communication was manipulated and evaluated the communication appropriateness and effectiveness of the male and female in each scenario. Finally, the participants submitted their names so that extra - credit could be awarded. Chapter four presents the results of this data collection and analyses procedures.

Chapter Four: Results of the Investigation

This chapter reports the results of the analyses described in Chapter 3. Included in this chapter is a description of the sample, data entry and analysis procedures, and results of the statistical analyses which included chi - square tests, paired samples dependent t - tests, and a multivariate analysis of variance with subsequent univariate tests.

Sample Description and Demographics

Following the sampling procedures described in the previous chapter, approximately 1,300 students received the instruments and 971 submitted completed instruments. This resulted in a final response rate of 74.7%. The sample consisted of undergraduate students representing the following academic years: Freshman (n=586, equaling 60.4% of the total sample), Sophomore (n=259, 26.7%), Junior (n=72, 7.4%), Senior (n=29, 3%). The sample was comprised of 353 males (36.4%) and 597 females (61.5%). Participants self - identified as belonging to the following racial categories: White (n=836, 86% of the total sample), Black (n=57, 5.9%), Spanish/Latino (n=18, 1.9%), and Other (n=39, 4.0%). The mean age of participants was 19.47 with a standard deviation of 2.41 (Mode = 19, Median = 19.00).

In order to place participants into psychological gender categories, participants completed the S - BSRI, a self - report scale measuring participant gender roles (Bem, 1977). Reliabilities were run for the masculine items and then for the feminine items. Results indicated that reliability coefficients were high for both masculine items (Cronbach's Alpha= .839), and feminine items (Cronbach's Alpha= .900). The number and percentage of the sample in each of the four psychological gender categories was as

follows: Androgynous n= 376 (38.7%); Masculine n=92 (9.5%); Feminine n=334 (34.4%); and Undifferentiated n=168 (17.3%).

Additionally, in order to explore participants' evaluations of communication appropriateness and effectiveness, participants completed the Communication Appropriateness Scale and the Communication Effectiveness Scale (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1994). Reliabilities were run and the results indicated that the reliability coefficients were sufficient for Eric, the male presented in each scenario, on the measure of appropriateness in Scene One (Cronbach's Alpha= .786), and Scene Two (Chronbach's Alpha= .783). Reliability coefficients for Eric on the measure of effectiveness were poor in both Scene One (Cronbach's Alpha= .290), and Scene Two (Cronbach's Alpha= .564).

Reliability coefficients were also run for Julia, the female character presented in each scenario. Results indicated that reliability coefficients were sufficient for Julia, on the measure of appropriateness in Scene One (Cronbach's Alpha= .732), and Scene Two (Cronbach's Alpha= .829). Reliability coefficients for Julia on the measure of effectiveness were poor in both Scene One (Cronbach's Alpha= .424), and Scene Two (Cronbach's Alpha= .387). Consequently, I will not be examining effectiveness as a component of competence given the study measures did not reliably measure effectiveness.

Data Analysis Procedures

Chi - square analyses. The Pearson's Chi - square analysis explored the proportion of representation across the categorical data present within the study: participant sex (i.e., male or female), and participant psychological gender (i.e., masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated). The Pearson's Chi - square

analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in the proportion of representation across the categorical data collected in this study. Specifically, the Pearson's Chi - square analysis regarding sex revealed a significant test value ($X^2_{(1)}$=62.669, p<.001), with 353 males (36.4%) and 597 females (61.5%). Additionally, the Pearson's Chi - square analysis for psychological gender revealed a significant test value ($X^2_{(3)}$=224.309, p<.001), with most participants being placed into the gender category Androgynous (n=376, 38.76%), followed by Feminine (n=334, 34.43%), Undifferentiated (n=168, 17.32%), and finally Masculine (n=92, 9.48%).

When looking at the intersection of sex and gender regarding the proportion of representation some interesting findings presented themselves. According to the results of a crosstabs analysis there was a significant difference in the proportion of psychological gender representation across the two sexes ($X^2_{(3)}$=80.04, p<.001), with only 58 males out of a total of 353 (16%) classified as masculine, 81 classified as feminine (23%), 93 classified as undifferentiated (26%), and121 classified as androgynous (34%). Review of the results for female participants in the study indicated that 32 females out of a total of 597 females were classified as masculine (5%), 71 classified as undifferentiated (12%), 246 classified as feminine (41%), and 248 classified as androgynous (42%).

Paired samples dependent T - tests. To answer research question one, dependent t - tests were run in order to determine whether the male and female presented in each scenario had different mean values on the appropriateness scale. Because I computed multiple t - tests and have a large sample size, I employed a Bonferroni adjustment to minimize the possibility of committing a Type 1 error. Therefore, the p value was set at the more conservative $p \leq .013$.

The first set of t - tests run analyzed Eric and Julia's communication appropriateness evaluations by comparing each character's communication appropriateness scores in Scene One to his or her communication appropriateness scores in Scene Two. The paired samples data revealed a significant difference between the mean communication appropriateness scores Eric, the male character, received in Scene One (Mean= 40.55, SD=9.29) versus the communication appropriateness scores Eric received after participants read Scene Two (Mean= 48.76, SD= 9.02; t(951)= - 20.13, p<.001). These results indicate that participants evaluated the male, Eric, as significantly more appropriate when enacting stereotypically feminine communication behaviors than when he enacted stereotypically masculine communication behaviors. No significant difference, however, was found between the mean communication appropriateness scores when Julia, the female character, was enacting feminine communication behaviors in Scene One (Mean=34.22, SD=8.76) and when she was enacting masculine communication behaviors in Scene Two (Mean=33.46, SD=10.38), t(950)=2.045, p=.041.

The second set of t - tests run explored differences in ratings of communication appropriateness between Eric and Julia respectively, thereby comparing Eric's communication appropriateness scores in Scene One to Julia's Communication Appropriateness scores in Scene One, and Eric's communication appropriateness scores in Scene Two to Julia's communication appropriateness Scores in Scene Two. The analysis revealed significant differences.

The data show participants evaluated Eric, more communicatively appropriate when he was enacting masculine qualities in Scene One (Mean=40.56, SD=9.31) than

when Julia, the female character, was enacting feminine qualities in Scene One

(Mean=34.20, SD=8.74) (t(958)=14.14, $p<.001$). Interestingly, the data showed

participant evaluations of Eric, the male character, to be more communicatively

appropriate when he was enacting feminine qualities in Scene Two (Mean=48.75,

SD=9.02) than when Julia, the female character, was enacting masculine qualities in

Scene Two (Mean=33.49, SD=10.38) (t(950)=29.322, $p<.001$).

Multivariate Analysis of Variance. To answer research question two, I

conducted a multivariate analysis of variance to determine if participants' psychological

gender and biological sex influence evaluations of communication appropriateness. The

results of multivariate analysis of variance using biological sex and psychological gender

as the two independent factors along with four[1] ratings of communication appropriateness

resulted in non - significant *p* - values ranging from .154 to .986. Follow - up inspection

of the univariate tests for biological sex and psychological gender factors revealed non -

significant *p* values ranging from .060 to .906. There were, however, 2 univariate tests

which resulted in a significant *p*: There were significant differences between male and

female participants in their ratings of Eric's appropriateness in Scene Two (F = 7.747,

p=.005) and among the four psychological gender categories ratings of Julia's

appropriateness in Scene Two (F = 3.297, *p*=.020). However, in looking at the

corresponding means (See Tables 1 and 2), the resulting significant difference between

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[1] Eric's ratings of appropriateness (variable 1) in Scene One when he is enacting masculine communication behaviors and Eric's ratings of appropriateness (variable 2) in Scene Two when he is enacting feminine communication behaviors. The same variables were measured for Julia in the two scenarios resulting in the four dependent variables.

males and females and among the different psychological gender categories is likely

spurious and an artifact of the large sample size.

Table 1

Eric's Appropriateness Scores in Scene Two

	M	*SD*
Male	47.16	8.91
Female	49.72	8.39

Table 2

Julia's Appropriateness Scores in Scene Two

	M	*SD*
Undifferentiated	33.27	9.14
Masculine	33.66	10.88
Feminine	34.07	10.16
Androgynous	32.99	10.95

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of data collection and analysis for this study.

Results were obtained through the use of the SPSS Statistical Data Analysis Program by

performing the following tests: chi - square, paired samples dependent *t* - tests, and

multivariate analysis of variance. The results lead to the following observations:

1.   According to the paired sample dependent t - tests, participants

evaluated the male character higher in the area of appropriateness when

he was enacting stereotypically feminine communication behaviors than

when he was enacting stereotypically masculine communication behaviors.

2.   According to the paired sample dependent t - tests, participants evaluated the male as higher in the area of communication appropriateness than the female regardless of enacted gender - stereotypical behaviors.

3.   There were no differences in ratings of appropriateness as a result of participant biological sex and psychological gender.

The following chapter will discuss and expand upon these observations, connect the findings to previous research, and discuss the study strengths as well as limitations

Chapter Five: Discussion of the Investigation

In this final chapter, I will extrapolate three major findings. First, the data showed that general competency evaluations differ between males and females; specifically, the female biological sex was consistently evaluated lower in communication appropriateness than the male biological sex. Second, for males, the feminine communication style was clearly privileged over the masculine communication style. Finally, there was no interaction effect between participant biological sex and psychological gender as they related to evaluations of communication appropriateness. After this discussion, I will explore the possible reasons why communication effectiveness did not yield sufficient reliability coefficients and was subsequently dropped as a measure of communication competence, as well as pose a critique of the S - BSRI instrument. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with an exploration of the strengths and limitations of the study as well as propose suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Results

    Differing competency evaluations for males and females. Communication appropriateness has been shown to be a major contributing factor in evaluations of overall communication competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1994; Trenholm & Jensen, 1996), and has been used as a crucial element in the definition of overall communication competence (McCroskey, 1982). Communication appropriateness refers to the upholding of societal expectations for a given situation. The data revealed differences in regard to evaluations of communication appropriateness between males and females. Test results found Eric, the male presented in each scenario, to be rated statistically higher in

communication appropriateness than Julia, the female presented in each scenario, on communication appropriateness regardless of the type of gender communication behaviors exhibited.

This finding is consistent with Berry et al.'s (2001) suggestion that negative evaluations of female communication competency may be the result of a sociologically ingrained belief that men are more communicatively competent than women. The implications of this finding suggest that the male sex is privileged in evaluations of communication appropriateness because, for females, evaluations of competency may not be linked to enacted gendered behaviors, but may be primarily a result of their biological sex. Indeed, research supports this assumption; it has been shown that sociological belief can elicit negative evaluations of female's communication competency based solely on the basis of their biological sex (Berry et al., 2001).

As suggested with research presented in Chapter Two, a "gender - to - competence link" may be present in participant evaluations of communication appropriateness for females. According to research conducted by Rudman (1998), for instance, gender influences the evaluation of communication competence due to a direct link between biological sex and perceived competence. The "gender - to - competence link" states that men tend to be perceived, both according to males and females, as typically higher in general competence than women (Wood & Karten, 1986). Interestingly, even with the significant overrepresentation of female respondents in this study, the "gender - to - competence link" is still present. Participants consistently rated the male as more communicatively appropriate than the female.

For males, feminine style privileged in communication appropriateness. The data revealed that, for males, a feminine style of communication was scored higher than a masculine style of communication when evaluating communication appropriateness within the interpersonal context. These results may provide insight into perceptions of what is socially deemed as "appropriate" communication for men. Communication appropriateness refers to "communication that avoids violation of relationally or situationally sanctioned rules" (Papa & Canary, 1995, p. 154). According to Canary and Spitzberg (1990), appropriateness is a composite of two factors: situational appropriateness and specific appropriateness. Situational appropriateness relates to the evaluation of a speaker's behavior over an entire communication situation. It focuses exclusively on the ability of the speaker to conduct polite conversations and adapt to a situation (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001). Specific appropriateness relates to the evaluation of particular behaviors enacted by the speaker during a communication situation. It focuses exclusively on behaviors that are generally deemed prosocial and constructive in nature (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001). Thus, the second finding of this study is that evaluations of communicative appropriateness with regard to the male are statistically higher when the male is enacting feminine characteristics, than when he is enacting masculine characteristics.

The evaluation of males as higher in communication appropriateness when enacting feminine communication behaviors may stem from the expectation that masculine gendered behaviors are inherently less communicatively appropriate than feminine gendered behaviors. Indeed, scholarship seems to have reinforced the privileging of feminine communication behaviors as more appropriate for men than

masculine communication behaviors. For example, some early scholarship urged men to develop feminine communication skills, suggesting that if men would begin to enact behaviors such as empathy, self - disclosure, and emotional expressiveness, they could begin to overcome what researchers assumed to be a communicative deficit (Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). Balswick (1988) suggested that men should learn how to be verbally and emotionally expressive to communicate effectively. Furthermore, Douvan and Adelson (1966) reported that adolescent males are less interested in and less competent at friendships than females, while Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) stated that women's communication tendencies make them more "emotionally mature" and "interpersonally competent" than men (p. 51). Thus, it seems a feminine style of communication is generally perceived as higher in interpersonal competence and typically assumed to be more emotionally involved than a masculine communication style.

In support of the privileging of the feminine style in an interpersonal context, research has shown that men and women typically engage in more feminine gender - typed behaviors when providing support for a friend. For example, within the interpersonal context, men and women are equally likely to be responsive, provide emotional comfort, listen, and empathize with a friend (MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Gillihan, & Burleson, 2004). Furthermore, there are typically no sex differences in the receiving of support from others (MacGeorge et al., 2004).

Thus, it seems likely that when males enact feminine characteristics they are engaging in behaviors deemed appropriate within the interpersonal context. For instance, a male enacting feminine characteristics such as affection, compassion, warmness, tenderness, and gentleness may be perceived as engaging in polite conversation. When

males enact feminine characteristics such as being sensitive to the needs of others and understanding they may be perceived as possessing an ability to adapt to a communication situation. Finally, when males enact feminine characteristics such as being eager to soothe hurt feelings, they may be perceived as being prosocial and having goals that are constructive in nature. In contrast, it may be that when males enact masculine characteristics such as being assertive, forceful, dominant, aggressive, or possessing a strong personality, they are perceived as engaging in impolite conversation. When males enact masculine characteristics such as defending their own beliefs, being independent, possessing leadership abilities, or being willing to take a stand, they may be perceived as possessing an inability or unwillingness to adapt to a communication situation. Finally, when males enact masculine characteristics such as possessing a willingness to take risks, they may be perceived as having goals that are not constructive and antisocial in nature.

No interaction effect with regard to sex and gender. A third finding was that there is no relationship between participant psychological gender (e.g., Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, and Undifferentiated) or biological sex (e.g., Male, Female) with regard to evaluations of communication appropriateness when reading gender - typed scenarios consistent and inconsistent with the speaker's biological sex. This lack of interaction effect may be due to two factors: there *is* no relationship between participant biological sex and psychological gender, or measurement error. First, there simply may not be a relationship between participant biological sex and psychological gender when evaluating communication appropriateness. Other factors, independent of sex and psychological gender, may be at play during evaluations of appropriateness.

Second, a measurement issue could have prevented the detection of any significant findings. For instance, it may be that the considerable overrepresentation of females in this study provided an unbalanced sample, thus mitigating any significant effects. Or it may be that participants' biological sex and psychological gender was not made salient when evaluating scenarios as a third - party, thereby eliminating the role of participant biological sex or psychological gender. In support of this explanation for a lack of interaction effect between participant biological sex and psychological gender on evaluations of communication competence, research has shown that the evaluative outcome of an interpersonal communication situation can differ significantly contingent upon the relative salience of sex or gender in a communication situation (Fiske, Hasalm, & Fiske, 1992; Reid, Keerie, & Palomares, 2003). Specifically, these studies showed that gendered behaviors become more pronounced or more harshly judged once biological sex is made salient. This study may have unintentionally removed the constructs of participants' own sex and gender from their evaluative judgments by focusing explicitly on the fictional interaction they were asked to read, thus resulting in the insignificant test results.

Communication Effectiveness. As with communication appropriateness, communication effectiveness has been shown to be a major contributing factor in evaluations of overall communication competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1994; Trenholm & Jensen, 1996), and has been used as a crucial element in the definition of overall communication competence (McCroskey, 1982). Therefore, communication effectiveness was also measured in this study. However, after analyzing the poor reliability measurements obtained in the study for the Communication Effectiveness Scale

(Spitzberg & Cupach, 1994), it became clear that the method of communication

assessment provided in this study did not allow for accurate evaluation of communication

effectiveness.

Specifically, it may be that the essential compontents of communication

effectivenss could not be determined from the scenarios read by participants. The

definition of positive communication effectiveness is comprised of three distinct

components: the successful achievement of objectives, the successful achievement of

personal goals, and possession of the motivation to communicate in an effective manor

(Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Communication competence evaluations rely on the

speaker's "situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their

achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to

generate adaptive communication performances" (Friedrich, 1994, p. 131). Due to the

fact that evaluations of communication effectiveness must assess the ability of a

communicator to effectively accomplish their communication goals, it may be that

participants could not properly or consistently evaluate the communication goals of the

actors presented in each scenario simply by reading segments of fictional communication

scenarios.

Participants were likely unable to determine if the characters presented in this

study's scenarios effectively accomplished the objectives of their communication

encounter, achieved personal goals, or possessed knowledge of themselves, the other, or

the context of the communication situation. Due to the poor reliabilities and the scenario

design limitation, the effectiveness instrument was dropped from this study.

S - BSRI. After analyzing the proportions of male and female participants across the four psychological gender categories respectively, some interesting results were found. As was expected, a higher proportion of males were identified as Masculine (n= 58, 16% of total males), than females (n= 32, 5%). Similarly, a higher proportion of females were identified as feminine (n= 246, 41%), than males (n=81, 23%). These results seem consistent with the purpose of the S - BSRI, and appear to fit social convention regarding gender roles assigned to specific sexes. While reliability coefficients of the S - BSRI were high for both the masculine items (Cronbach's Alpha= .839), and the feminine items (Cronbach's Alpha= .900), there was some unexpected assignment of psychological gender categories. In analyzing the data pertaining to participant biological sex and psychological gender, it became clear that this scale may not accurately measure gender roles as they are understood today. Specifically, a statistically significant proportion of total participants were identified as Androgynous (n= 376, 38.7%). Furthermore, within the sexes Androgynous categorizations were presented in statistically higher proportions than any other category (males: n=121, 34%; females: n=248, 42%). Interestingly, the smallest psychological gender category represented by males was Masculine (n=58, 16%), with more males identifying as Androgynous (n=121, 34%), Undifferentiated (n=93, 26%), and even Feminine (n=81, 23%).

The unexpected gender assignments may be a result of changing social convention regarding gender norms. According to Bem (1987), a gender - typed individual is someone whose self - concept incorporates prevailing cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. The S - BSRI instrument consisted of 10 stereotypically

masculine items (e.g., independent, forceful, dominant) and 10 stereotypically feminine items (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic, gentle). These items are intended to represent socially desirable traits for each gender respectively (Bem, 1974). Being that this measure of gender roles was first published in 1974, and was intended to represent socially desirable stereotypically gendered traits as prevailing cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, it may be that current participant perceptions of these traits deem them no longer indicative of a specific sex. It may be that some traits identified as feminine on the S - BSRI (e.g., compassionate, understanding, sympathetic), and some traits identified as masculine (e.g., independent, leadership abilities, willing to take a stand), are more socially desirable for both sexes than when the measure was initially developed. This conclusion is supported empirically given the greatest proportion of participants in this study were classified as androgynous (n=369, 38.76%).

To some extent, the critique of being inaccurate has been previously lodged against the S - BSRI. Researchers have scrutinized the current viability of this measure questioning whether its masculine and feminine items represent current perceptions of masculinity and femininity among college undergraduates; the results have been mixed (see Ballard - Reisch & Elton, 1992; Harris, 1994). The results of this study also provide mixed support for the current accuracy of the S - BSRI. While the masculine and feminine gender categories were generally representative of expected biological sex (i.e., males were masculine, females were feminine), this study showed that most participants identified as high on both masculine and feminine gender categories. This finding provides evidence for the argument that masculine and feminine gendered behaviors may have changed since the inception of Bem's original sex - role scale.

In summary, the results presented in this study provide insight into perceptions of a crucial element of communication competence: communication appropriateness with regard to biological sex and gendered messages. It is evident that in some cases participants do evaluate communication behaviors differently based on enacted masculine and feminine behaviors. However, it seems factors other than participant biological sex or psychological gender are influencing participant evaluations of communication appropriateness. Furthermore, overall competence evaluations may be strongly influenced by a sociologically ingrained belief that males are more competent than females in general, thereby producing higher communication appropriateness evaluations for males than females. I also engaged in a critical exploration of why communication effectiveness was not reliably captured in this study as well as posited a suggestion that the S - BSRI does not provide current insight into gender traits. Specifically, stereotypically feminine - typed gender traits, as indicated by the S - BSRI, may represent more faithfully the behaviors associated with communication appropriateness than stereotypically masculine - typed gender traits.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

It is necessary to recognize the strengths and limitations of the research design and to determine their possible impact on the results and conclusions of the study. This discussion will begin by addressing the strengths of the study. The first strength of this investigation is that it incorporated a large sample size. As with any study utilizing a larger sample size, there is a greater chance of attaining statistical power and detecting differences. Second, this study was able to provide insight into the differences in evaluations of communication appropriateness based on biological sex and gendered

messages within the interpersonal context. Heretofore, investigations into sex and gender as factors in perceptions of communication competence have been largely relegated to the organizational setting (Wood & Karten, 1986) and the superior/subordinate relationship framework (Rudman & Glick, 1999). A final strength is that the results of this study contributed to the measurement dialogue regarding the current applicability of the S - BSRI.

There were three limitations to this study. First, although the sample size was large, it consisted of primarily college - aged students. College students do provide an adequate and appropriate sample for the investigation of evaluations of communication appropriateness in regards to biological sex and psychological gender; however, it may be the case that the information obtained is not generalizable to different populations. Furthermore, a preliminary examination of participant sex proportions revealed a significant difference with regards to the number of males (n= 353, 36.4%) and females (n= 579, 61.5%) represented in this study. The typical demographic statistics of sex regarding students enrolled at the study location is 48% male and 51% female. Thus, this study presents data with roughly 12% underrepresentation of males and 10% overrepresentation of females.

Second, the approach for gathering data utilized in this study was a self - report, online survey. The self - report method has been criticized because it requires that participants be able to understand the investigator's questions. In addition, it requires participants to identify and interpret behaviors, thereby potentially subjecting responses to participants' biases and thus questioning the validity and reliability of the information. Although self - report data has been criticized, research has found self - report

instruments to be an effective tool in gathering participant data (Harvey, Hendrick, &

Tucker, 1988). The self - report instruments used in this study allowed data to be

collected from a large sample population and attempted to capture participants' sense

about the communication scenarios they read. It would have been difficult to obtain this

amount of perceptual data using observations or interviews and Harvey, Hendrick, and

Tucker (1988) suggest that self - reports provide a valid means for capturing participants'

sense about situations as a way of understanding their experience.

Finally, social desirability may have played a role in participants' self - reports on

the S - BSRI. This study did not explicitly address the possible influence of socially

acceptable behaviors or expected norms. Future research could employ a social

desirability scale in order to assess the influence, if any, of social desirability on the self -

report S - BSRI. It may be that participants were less likely to self - identify as strongly

stereotypical gendered trait that may be viewed as poor social behavior (e.g., forceful or

dominant).

Directions for Future Research

The aim and purpose of this study was to explore the effects of biological sex and

psychological gender on evaluations of communication appropriateness. Due to the fact

that no support was found for an interaction effect regarding these variables, an area in

need of further study is discerning why we evaluate messages and speakers differently.

This area of research is important in the communication discipline in that it lends insight

into how society may interpret gendered messages. By engaging in future research,

scholarship may begin to explain why males and females are evaluated based upon

different criterion and why the feminine style of communication is privileged for males in an interpersonal context.

Future research could use a more current psychological gender scale, as the S - BSRI used in this study may not accurately place individuals in gender categories as they exist today. With a clearer and more accurate characterization of participant gender categories, perhaps significant effects may be found with regard to the influence of psychological gender on evaluations of communication competence.

This area of study could also benefit from the inclusion of a theoretical framework from which to ground the constructs of biological sex and psychological gender as well as provide an intelligible structure for interpreting the results. Social learning theory (SLT, Bandura, 1977) could provide a way of conceptualizing the socialized gender - typed preferences exhibited in this study. Specifically, SLT emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling behaviors, emotional reactions and attitudes of others. According to Bandura (1977), "learning would be laborious… if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them of what to do" (p. 22). Bandura (1997) suggests, therefore, that human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. Humans observe others in order to form an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and subsequently, uses these new behaviors as a guide for future action. Chapter Two presented research suggesting a large majority of gender expectations are a result of socialization (Bates, 1992), that this socialization begins at a young age (Campenni, 1999), and is reinforced in the home, at school, and in the workplace (Langolis & Downs, 1980; Mulac, Bradac, Palomares, & Giles, 2009).

Future research could strengthen our understanding of competency evaluations by rooting participants' expectations in SLT. For example, sex and gender research is consistent with SLT in that it has shown that society forms opinions of appropriate gender - typed behaviors for the sexes, and pressures individuals to adhere to these masculine and feminine stereotypes (Lippa, 2005). Research could focus upon the ubiquitous nature of gender socialization in schools (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992), in media (Arnett, 1995), and in the family (McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 1999) as potential factors reinforcing evaluation tendencies. It may be that societal norms, however antiquated, have instilled a tendency to equate males with higher communication competency, while simultaneously suggesting that females are inherently less competent. Therefore, it seems extremely likely that evaluations of competency can be explained by SLT and the human tendency to model socially acceptable behaviors, cognitively categorize these behaviors as distinctly male or female, and reinforce these behaviors through social rewards or punishments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of biological sex and psychological gender in evaluations of communication appropriateness, a critical component in communication competence. After presenting the relevant literature on the relationship of biological sex and psychological gender to evaluations of communication competence, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: Are males and females evaluated differently in regards to appropriateness and

effectiveness during interpersonal interactions?

Specifically:

Is there a difference in competency evaluations when interactants are enacting

communication behaviors consistent with their gender ideals?

Is there a difference in competency evaluations when interactants are enacting

communication behaviors inconsistent with their gender ideal?

RQ2: Are sex and gender factors that influence competency evaluations?

The information obtained through the data collection measures, and subsequent statistical

analyses revealed new insights and reinforced past research regarding the role of

biological sex and gendered messages in evaluations of communication competence.

Specifically, significant results were found with regard to RQ1, and no significant results

were found with regard to RQ2. These results suggest there are differences in

competency evaluations based on the biological sex of the speaker and gendered

messages, while an *evaluator's* biological sex and psychological gender may not impact

perceptions of communication competence.

When exploring the complex world of sex and gender as they relate to evaluations

of competency, many areas for future research exist. The results from this study have

created as many questions as they have answered (e.g., Why do we evaluate males as

higher in communication competence, while privileging feminine communication

behaviors?). The inclusion of a strong theoretical foundation and continued empirical

studies can provide the research community with new insight and knowledge into these

intriguing phenomena.

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Appendix A

Communication Scenarios

Key:

Sex/Gender communicating to Sex/Gender

Bold indicates specific gender items as recorded in the BSRI (attached below).

Italics indicate speech

Male/Female speaker distinction refers to sex of speaker.

Socially Acceptable Gender Behaviors: Male/Male to Female/Female

Male: *Julie! Wait up!* **(Assertive, Forceful)**

Female: *Oh, hi Eric! Its good to see you! How are you doing?* **(Compassionate, sensitive to needs of others)**

Male: *Good. Quit walking so fast! Just slow down!* **(Dominant)**

Female: *We're going to be late to class, Eric. Aren't you afraid you're going to miss points?*

Male: *Don't worry, it's fine, I'll get us there. I know a shortcut through campus.* **(Leadership, self - sufficient/reliant, decisive)**

Female: *Okay, we can go that way I guess. I should have known you'd have a way to get us there on time, you're so good Eric.* **(Yielding, affectionate, gullible, loyal, warm)**

Male: *That's what I'm here for. Did you ever doubt me? It's under control, Julie.*

Female: *Oh no, I would never doubt you, Eric. Thanks for helping me out!* **(Eager to soothe hurt feelings, compassionate, affectionate, sensitive)**

Key:

Sex/Gender communicating to Sex/Gender

Bold indicates specific gender items as recorded in the BSRI (attached below).

Italics indicate speech

Male/Female speaker distinction refers to sex of speaker.

Socially Unacceptable Gender Behaviors: Male/Female to Female/Male

Female: *Eric, were going for a run!* **(Assertive, leader)**

Male: *Okay, if you want to go for a run we can.*

Female: *It's a nice day and we've got time. Lets get out there!* **(Athletic, dominant, forceful)**

Male: *Yeah, it is a nice day. How much time do you have? I know you like the lake; we could drive down and run around it. Does that sound like something you would want to do?* **(Sensitive to needs of others)**

Female: *No, let's run down to the park and back. The lake will be too busy. We don't want to run through crowds. Besides, the park will give us a longer run!* **(Assertive, makes decisions easily, takes a stand)**

Male: *Okay, you're right, running through crowds is pretty annoying. Well, whenever you're ready we can go. Just let me know when to get my shoes on!* **(Yielding, understanding, gentle, loyal)**

Appendix B

Short Bem Sex - Role Inventory

BEM SCALE FOR PSYCHO - SEXUAL ANDROGYNY
DIRECTIONS:

To the right of each word place a number from I through 7 corresponding to the degree to which that word describes the behavior or attitude of {Eric or Julia}. Please ask if you do not know the meaning or understand the concept of particular words or phrases.

Values: (1) never or almost never true (2) usually not true (3) sometimes but frequently true (4) occasionally true (5) often true (6) usually true (7) always true.

1. Defends own beliefs_____
2. Moody_____
3. Independent_____
4. Affectionate_____
5. Assertive_____
6. Strong personality_____
7. Forceful_____
8. Reliable_____
9. Sympathetic_____
10. Jealous_____
11. Has leadership abilities_____
12. Sensitive to other's needs_____
13. Truthful_____
14. Willing to take risks_____
15. Understanding_____
16. Secretive_____
17. Compassionate_____
18. Eager to soothe hurt feelings___
19. Conceited_____
20. Dominant_____
21. Warm_____
22. Willing to take a stand_____
23. Tender_____
24. Aggressive_____
25. Adaptable_____
26. Loves children_____
27. Tactful_____
28. Gentle_____
29. Conventional_____
30. Conscientious_____

Short BSRI Masculinity/Femininity/Neutral Items:

Masculine Items	Feminine Items	Neutral items
Defend my own beliefs	Affectionate	Moody
Independent	Sympathetic	Conceited
Assertive	Love children	Conscientious
Strong personality	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Reliable
Forceful	Compassionate	Jealous
Have leadership abilities	Understanding	Tactful
Willingness to take risks	Warm	Truthful
Dominant	Tender	Secretive
Willing to take a stand	Sensitive to the needs of others	Adaptable
Aggressive	Gentle	Conventional

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Appendix C

Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scales

Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scale (modified)

Instructions: Complete the following items about a person with whom you have just read a conversation. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

7 = Strongly agree

6 = Moderately agree

5 = Slightly agree

4 = Undecided

3 = Slightly disagree

2 = Moderately disagree

1 = Strongly disagree

1. Eric/Julia said several things that seemed out of place in the conversation.

2. Eric/Julia was a smooth conversationalist.

3. Everything Eric/Julia said was appropriate.

4. Eric/Julia's conversation was very suitable to the situation.

5. Some of the things Eric/Julia said were awkward.

6. Eric/Julia's communication was very proper.

7. Eric/Julia said some things that should not have been said.

8. Some of Eric/Julia's remarks were inappropriate.

9. Some of the things Eric/Julia said were in bad taste.

10. Eric/Julia said some things that were simply incorrect things to say.

11. Eric/Julia did not violate any of my expectations in the conversation.

12. The WAY Eric/Julia said some of her/his remarks were unsuitable.

13. The things Eric/Julia spoke about were all in good taste as far as I'm concerned.

14. Some of Eric/Julia's remarks were simply improper.

15. Eric/Julia interrupted Eric/Julia in the conversation.

16. At least one of Eric/Julia's remarks was rude.

17. Eric and Julia's conversation was very beneficial.

18. Eric/Julia was more active in the conversation than Eric/Julia.

19. Eric and Julia's conversation was useless.

20. Eric/Julia was in control of the conversation.

21. Eric/Julia was effective in the conversation.

22. Eric and Julia's conversation was unsuccessful.

23. Eric/Julia just let the other person talk most of the time.

24. Eric/Julia got what s/he wanted out of the conversation.

25. Eric/Julia was an ineffective conversationalist.

26. It was a rewarding conversation for Eric/Julia.

27. Eric/Julia dominated the conversation.

28. Eric/Julia talked most of the time.

29. Eric/Julia controlled the conversation.

30. The conversation went pretty much the way Eric/Julia wanted.

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