RESEARCH ONLINE

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Commerce - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Business

2009

Have they learnt to interrupt?: Comparing how women management students and senior women managers in Australia perceive workplace communication dilemmas

Mary Barrett
University of Wollongong, mbarrett@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

Barrett, M. (2009). Have they learnt to interrupt?: Comparing how women management students and senior women managers in Australia perceive workplace communication dilemmas. Gender in Management: an International Journal, 24 (6), 432-454.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

RESEARCH ONLINE

Have they learnt to interrupt?: Comparing how women management students and senior women managers in Australia perceive workplace communication dilemmas

Abstract

Purpose - Changing language ideology and the decreased popularity of overt feminism suggest that aspiring female managers may be less influenced than senior women managers by the gender of the speaker in evaluating whether specific communication strategies are effective and probable. The study investigates this issue. Design/methodology/approach - 255 second-year female management students evaluated strategies for the same workplace dilemmas as senior women managers (Barrett 2004). Findings - For short and medium term dilemmas students, like senior women managers, regarded masculine communication strategies with a feminine element as effective. They were less influenced by the speaker's gender than senior women managers in evaluating the strategies' probability. But when seeking promotion, students avoided some strategies they considered effective, and believed men would use. Students' confidence as communicators affected their personal choice of strategy. Research limitations/implications The study investigated a limited number of dilemmas and sought information about a limited number of demographic factors, limiting the results' generalizability. Nevertheless it suggests future women managers could learn from their senior counterparts if they want to advance at work. Future research - Future research should investigate whether future male managers' reactions to these dilemmas are similar to women students and senior managers, and whether scenarios using female dyads yield similar results. Cross-cultural extensions of the research are also possible. Originality/value - This is the first study comparing aspiring and senior women managers' reactions to classic workplace communication problems. The findings show similarities between aspiring managers and their senior sisters, but also differences which could affect aspiring managers' career success.

Keywords

comparing, interrupt, learnt, they, have, workplace, australia, managers, students, women, dilemmas, communication, perceive, senior, management

Disciplines

Business | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Barrett, M. (2009). Have they learnt to interrupt?: Comparing how women management students and senior women managers in Australia perceive workplace communication dilemmas. Gender in Management: an International Journal, 24 (6), 432-454.

This journal article is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers/615

Have they learnt to interrupt? Comparing how women management students and senior women managers in Australia perceive workplace communication dilemmas

ABSTRACT

Purpose Changing language ideology and the decreased popularity of overt feminism suggest that aspiring female managers may be less influenced than senior women managers by the gender of the speaker in evaluating whether specific communication strategies are effective and probable. The study investigates this issue.

Design/methodology/approach 255 second-year female management students evaluated strategies for the same workplace dilemmas as senior women managers (Barrett 2004).

Findings For short and medium term dilemmas students, like senior women managers, regarded masculine communication strategies with a feminine element as effective. They were less influenced by the speaker's gender than senior women managers in evaluating the strategies' probability. But when seeking promotion, students avoided some strategies they considered effective, and believed men would use. Students' confidence as communicators affected their personal choice of strategy.

Research limitations/implications The study investigated a limited number of dilemmas and sought information about a limited number of demographic factors, limiting the results' generalizability. Nevertheless it suggests future women managers could learn from their senior counterparts if they want to advance at work.

Future research Future research should investigate whether future male managers' reactions to these dilemmas are similar to women students and senior managers, and whether scenarios using female dyads yield similar results. Cross-cultural extensions of the research are also possible.

Originality/value This is the first study comparing aspiring and senior women managers' reactions to classic workplace communication problems. The findings show similarities between aspiring managers and their senior sisters, but also differences which could affect aspiring managers' career success.

Keywords Gender, Workplace communication, Communication dilemmas, Communication strategies, Linguistics, Women managers, Women students

Gender and communication at work

Both academic research in linguistics (for example Brenner *et al.*, 1989; Eagly *et al.*, 1992; Mulac and Bradac, 1995; Tannen, 1994; Thim *et al.*, 2004) and popular management advice sources (for example Bolinger, 1980; Harragan, 1976; Hennig and Jardim, 1977; O'Brien, 1993; Rosener, 1993; Tannen, 1986; 1990) have been preoccupied with women's and men's communication styles at work, particularly how women's communication styles adversely affect perceptions of them as leaders, innovators and problem-solvers. Popular commentators have frequently appeared to accept a view that women's communication styles are 'naturally' and thus appropriately different from those of men, that is, that women's speech is inherently more indirect, quieter, more narratively focused, and oriented towards the private rather than the public sphere. Cameron (2005) points out the centuries-long history of this ideology, and ongoing efforts to influence how women speak, a practice she refers to in other work as 'verbal hygiene' (Cameron, 1995). Yet As Tannen (1994, p. 10) and Cameron (2005, p. 450) point out, there is nothing *essentially* subordinate about women's typical communication styles, rather women's styles are *constructed* as subordinate in women's interactions with men, the dominant group in our society and in most societies. Wilson (1996), in her critique of the gender-blindness of organization theory, makes a similar point. She endorses the suggestion of House and Singh (1987) that where there is variation to found, it is the stereotypic sex-role expectations of women that causes the variation (Wilson, 1996, p. 832). As the research by Acker (1990; 1994), and Acker and Van Houten (1974) shows, sex-role expectations play themselves out in organizations to create unequal, persistent and yet invisible – because seemingly natural – gender-based patterns in employment. Calás and Smircich (1996; 2000) categorise these authors' work under the heading of socialist feminism, which regards women as oppressed by both capitalism and the patriarchy. These authors also provide a comprehensive summary of other feminist accounts of women's disadvantage, many if not all of which aim to make visible the only apparently natural disadvantage of women as managers and employees (Calás and Smircich, 1996; 2006).

Whatever they believe about the 'naturalness' of gender differences in communication, many of the management advice sources mentioned earlier either explicitly or implicitly advise women about how gender-related speech practices can help or hinder their progress at work, both in short-term situations and longer term ones, such as achieving promotion. Some advise women to adopt the more powerful, direct speaking styles which are stereotypical of men, but others argue that changing women's speech styles will merely make them uncomfortable and self-conscious (for example Weiss and Fisher, 1998). Case (1993) argues that imposing male norms of direct speech on women means women may be penalized for not conforming to recognized norms of female behaviour.

Disadvantages may also ensue from imposing U.S.-based, male norms of speech on women and men in other cultural contexts, as is likely to happen when Western-oriented management norms and practices – including ideas about the changing status of women – are transferred to non-Western cultures. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) point out the close and reciprocal links between interpersonal communication style and national culture, in particular the four cultural dimensions described by Hofstede (1980): Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity/Femininity, Power Distance, and Individualism/Collectivism, and between high-context and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976). According to Hall (1976), people from high-context cultures leave many things unsaid; they are 'explained' by the culture. People from low-context cultures in contrast explain things overtly, in detail. For example, individuals in moderate Uncertainty Avoidance, high-context cultures tend to use an elaborate style of verbal communication, whereas individuals in low Uncertainty Avoidance, low-context cultures typically use an exacting style of verbal communication. People in the high Uncertainty Avoidance, high-context cultures common in Asia tend to use a succinct style of verbal communication. In high-context cultures, face-negotiation (that is, how individuals or groups manage their public image (Ting-Toomey, 1985)), is aimed at achieving *musayra* or the accommodation of another's needs and wishes, or *wa* (group harmony), whereas this is often less important in low-context cultures. Numerous studies of discourse, syntactic features, proxemics and other paralinguistic features of specific non-Western languages, for example Chinese (Young, 1982), Japanese (Okabe,

1983; Ramsay, 1984) Korean (Park, 1979; Yum, 1987), Puerto Rican (Morris, 1981), Arabic (Adelman and Lustig, 1981; Cohen, 1987) and Burundi (Albert, 1972), as well as studies of the conversation styles of speakers from different cultural backgrounds in their use of one language (for example the studies of Indian and British speakers of English by Gumperz, Aulakh and Kaltman (1982) and Mishra (1982)), demonstrate that in collectivist, high-context, high Power Distance countries in north and southeast Asia and Africa, a personal, affective-intuitive, status-oriented style of communication is preferred to the direct, personal style of interaction favoured in the U.S. and in north European cultures. All this suggests that imposing U.S. or north European speech norms on these cultures may lead to misunderstandings, even hostility, and that women's traditionally more indirect, inclusive, even 'rambling' speech and negotiation approaches might actually be an advantage (Weiss and Fisher, 1998).

A previous study

A previous study (Barrett, 2004) investigated whether a group of organizationally very senior women managers in Australia valued masculine, feminine or mixed, 'adaptive' communication strategies for a specific set of workplace dilemmas, and to what extent their perceptions of the strategies' effectiveness and probability were subject to gender-related norms and expectations. It found that, overall, senior women managers valued masculine approaches to workplace communication but that the strongly masculine approaches commonly recommended in the 'communication advice' literature were valued less than might have been expected. In addition, senior women managers still drew on gender-based expectations in evaluating these strategies. This raises the question: how do the 'next generation' – aspiring women managers – see the best way to deal with workplace communication dilemmas, that is, problems that occur at work or work-related goals a person seeks to overcome using communication? According to several Australian press commentators, younger women now reject the overt feminism of the 1970s as unnecessary, outdated and rather boring. They regard the battles to improve women's position at work which began in the 1970s as essentially won, and that to be an overt feminist is to espouse a view of women as powerless victims (Albrechtsen, 2008; Brown, 2008; Neill, 2008; Wolf, 2009).

There are various explanations for the decline in popularity of 1970s feminism. One is that many women are simply nostalgic for the certainties and male-female courtesies of the past. An example is Maureen Dowd, who lamented in the *New York Times* in 2005:

> *Little did I realize that the feminist revolution would have the unexpected consequence of intensifying the confusion between the sexes, leaving women in a tangle of dependence and independence as they entered the 21st century.*

Earlier analysts such as Faludi (1992) argue that feminism in the U.S. was battered by fundamentalist family values which returned with the Reagan and Bush conservative governments in the 1980s. Moreover, Faludi says, women were frightened by well-publicized studies from ostensibly reputable sources asserting that adhering to feminist ideals led to a variety of ills, for example that women's chances of marriage were diminishing as they became more educated, that they risked infertility by delaying child-bearing, and so on. Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* (2002) found a similar theme in her analysis of messages that permeate everyday life through television, movies, fashions and advertising, arguing that they mediated an anti-feminist backlash by reverting to images of women in subordinate poses, a renewed emphasis on cosmetic surgery, exaggerated slimness and so on.

Faludi, Wolf and other popular analysts of the changing face of feminism have their supporters and detractors among both avowed feminists and those who reject the label. Historians of the women's movement in the U.S. such as Friedlin (2009), Ryan (1992; 2001) and Schlenker *et al.* (1998) and in Australia (Grieve and Burns, 1994) point out that feminism has never been a unified movement. Its emphases and directions have changed over time so disagreements about its proper focus are inevitable and healthy. In fact Douthat (2005) argues that the very confusions Dowd and others complain of are evidence of feminism's success. The world has changed as a result of women's struggle for equality, and it is only commonsense that more complexity in inter-gender relations is the result.

Another, related area of evolution which has created ongoing academic and popular debate is the link between language and gender, including at work. Cameron (2004) argues that workplace language ideology – that is, society's ideals concerning language itself, what it is for, and what constitutes skill in using it – has changed to a position of female verbal superiority. Dominant stereotypes of men's and women's linguistic behaviour have not changed, she argues: men are still stereotyped as speaking loudly and directly and to the point, whereas women are still seen as indirect and more softly spoken communicators. Value judgements, however, influenced by modern styles of management, have changed to favour verbal activities such as cooperative problem-solving, rapport-building, emotional self-reflexivity and self-disclosure, 'active' listening, and the expression of empathy (Cameron, 2004, pp. 458-59). These are all stereotypically feminine approaches to communication. The present study focuses on the strategies women and men use to solve workplace communication dilemmas. It investigates whether the changes in general language ideology Cameron (2004) discerns, coupled with the fact that many aspiring female managers (as women management students are likely to be) are reluctant to call themselves feminists, mean that aspiring women managers evaluate workplace communication strategies differently from their senior sisters whose workplace experience was formed against the background of 1970s feminism. As a secondary concern, the study investigates whether having lower confidence in communicating (as some women students may have compared to experienced managers), and less work experience (as young women management students would be expected to have compared to their senior sisters), has an impact on their evaluations to the dilemmas.

Method

The survey instrument

The present study used a similar scenario-based questionnaire instrument to that in Barrett (2004). As explained there, presenting survey respondents with a specific work-related communication dilemma, and a set of specific responses to it avoids the inter-rater reliability problems of previous research which has typically used natural language samples. Analysing natural language samples is difficult

because utterances, like all linguistic strategies, are often ambiguous (Tannen, 1994). For example a speaker who interrupts someone else may be trying to dominate the conversation or, on the contrary, express enthusiasm for and solidarity with the first speaker's idea. Wilson (1996, p. 832) cites Carli's (1990) finding that the hesitations and apparent uncertainties of so-called 'women's speech', for example the use of rising intonation on declaratives, in fact characterise the speech of people of both genders who lack power. More recent research (for example Swann, 2004) points out a further ambiguity of this speech feature: it can signal support and cooperativeness rather than uncertainty and powerlessness. Similar problems of interpretation arise with attempts to decide the goals of a person who raises a new topic, or engages in indirectness or even silence. In the absence of a known strategic goal, no linguistic strategy can be seen as indubitably indicating conversational dominance or submissiveness. Specifying the speaker's goal removes this ambiguity.

The scenarios

The instrument in Barrett (2004), which was also used in the current study, presents three workplace scenarios, short, medium and long-term, where it has been argued women tend to be disadvantaged by 'feminine' communication styles. The scenarios were:

- *Short-term* A speaker has been interrupted during a workplace meeting and wants to regain the floor.
- *Medium-term* A speaker believes he or she is not being given sufficient credit for an idea put forward in a meeting and wants to make sure of getting credit for the idea.
- *Long-term* A speaker wants to ensure her or his work achievements are recognised by people influential in determining promotions.

For each scenario, between five and seven communication strategies were presented for the speaker to achieve the goals. The strategies had been graded by independent academics for their level of 'masculinity' or 'femininity', using general Western norms in English. In the current context, the

strategy's 'masculinity' refers to the extent to which it conforms to stereotypically male norms in English in a Western country, such as its degree of assertiveness, directness, even confrontation. Similarly, 'femininity' in this context refers to stereotypically female norms in English in a Western country, such as its degree of passivity, indirectness, avoidance of confrontation. Thus a response graded 'MM' indicates a highly masculine response, for example loud, clear direct talk. An 'FF' response indicates a feminine style, for example quiet, indistinct and indirect talk. Mixed responses were also included, for example an 'Mf' response has some elements of both masculine and feminine speech but with masculine predominating. The strategist's name (for example Jim or Jane) indicated their gender. As in Barrett (2004), two versions of the questionnaire were used which varied only in the gender of the speakers' names. The three scenarios (in one of the two versions presented to participants) and the graded response strategies for each of them are in the Appendix.

Rating the communication strategies

Participants were asked to rate the communication strategies presented using five-point scales to indicate, first, how *effective* they believed each strategy would be for achieving the speaker's goal and, second, how *probable* they believed each strategy was. They were also asked to indicate which strategy they would be most likely to choose themselves. Further, participants in Barrett (2004) had been asked to indicate their position on the 'organisational ladder' and their level of confidence in expressing their opinions in workplace meetings. In the present study participants were asked about their work experience and how confident they were in expressing their opinions at work or, if they normally worked less than 30 hours per week, their confidence in expressing their opinions in tutorials. For the earlier study the questionnaire had been piloted on a group of ten women managers at varying levels of seniority and three female academics. A further five female management students piloted the survey before it was administered for the current study. No difficulties were found with the instrument's clarity or ease of use.

Administering the survey

The participants in the earlier study had completed the survey during a businesswomen's networking breakfast held in an upmarket location in an Australian capital city. Useable responses totalled 157. Because the participants all completed the questionnaire as part of an audience activity during the breakfast, a response rate of virtually 100 per cent was obtained. The questionnaire for the present study was administered in class time immediately following the mid-term examination for a second-year management subject. The number of useable responses was 255. Again, because close to the entire cohort of students attended the examination and completed the questionnaire before leaving the examination hall, a response rate of virtually 100% was obtained. To ensure an adequate sample size the survey was administered to cohorts of students in two consecutive years. Because students were in their second year of management study and also because of their youth (see 'number and demographic characteristics of respondents' below), it was thought they were likely to have some theoretical knowledge of management, but relatively little management experience.

Analysis

Demographic information about the participants as well as frequencies and distributions of responses for each scenario were calculated. T-tests for differences in the mean for the perceived effectiveness and the likelihood of each strategy in each of the three scenarios were carried out. Before this, Levene's test for equality of variances was carried out for each strategy. Where results for the test showed equal variances could not be assumed, the T-test took account of this. Chi-square tests to see whether there were differences in the strategies highly confident or less confident students say they would choose for themselves are described later.

Results

For convenience in presenting results, women management students are referred to as 'students' and senior women managers are referred to as 'managers'.

Number and demographic characteristics of respondents

The total number of useable responses in the present study was 255, with roughly half for each 'gender version' of the questionnaire. Only three per cent were over the age of 21 and only one per cent were over the age of 30. Analysis of whether students were currently working or had ever normally worked 30 or more hours a week and, if so, their position on their organizational ladder, confirmed that the vast majority of students had had little or no management experience. Information had not been sought about the managers' ages because the study focussed on organizational rather than chronological seniority. The overwhelming majority of managers had reported being at or near the top of their organizational ladders. They reported a variety of different work situations, including employment in private and public sector organizations, and self-employment. Only one participant in the manager sample reported being currently between jobs. The student sample was thus judged to be an adequate contrast with managers in terms of organizational seniority and management experience. As graduates with management degrees from the university in question typically find employment in a similar range of organizations to those the managers had worked in and some also start their own firms, the student sample was judged to adequately present a cohort of aspiring senior managers.

Scenario 1: Regaining the *floor after an interruption*

Table 1 summarizes the results for students' and managers' judgements about how effective and how probable the strategies in scenario 1 are.

Place Table I about here.

Effectiveness

Table I indicates that, like managers, students believe that the second, Mf strategy ('You may not have realised you were interrupting me…', means 3.58 and 3.50) is the most effective for regaining the floor after being interrupted. However they rate the stronger MM strategy ('I insist on finishing my point…', means 3.23 and 3.31) as the second highest for effectiveness, followed at some distance by the MF strategy ('Jim, your turn will come. Now as I was saying…', means 2.68 and 2.93). This reverses managers' second and third preferences. Students see the mF and FF strategies as least

effective, again a similar result to managers. They rated one of the strategies they see as fairly effective (the balanced, MF 'palm turned outwards, 'your turn will come' strategy) as more effective when used by a woman than by a man. The older generation had made a similar judgement about the second, Mf strategy ('you may not have realised you were interrupting me…').

Probability

Here there were fewer similarities between students and managers. Managers had regarded two strategies as significantly more probable when used by a woman than by a man: the highly effective Mf strategy, and also, curiously enough, the most ineffective, FF strategy of saying nothing after being interrupted and simply sitting there fuming. Students, by contrast, made no significantly different assessments about the probability of any strategy depending on the gender of the speaker. Interestingly, however, and in contrast to managers who had rated the *most effective* strategy (the second, Mf: 'You may not have realised you were interrupting me…'), as the most probable regardless of the speaker's gender, students rated the strategy they saw as *least effective*, 'say nothing, sit fuming', as the most probable, again regardless of the speaker's gender. In fact, with probability means around 3.44 students see this strategy as highly probable, and just as probable for men as managers had seen it for women. In the earlier study managers had rated it as significantly less probable for a man (probability mean 2.81) than for a woman (probability mean 3.45).

Discussion

In short-term situations like 'regaining the floor' in a meeting following an interruption, neither students nor managers regard the most masculine strategy as the most effective. They agree that it would be too strong, perhaps rude. The second, slightly more feminine Mf strategy seems to be about the right strength for both. Students and managers are also similar in how they rate specific strategies' effectiveness: both see the first three strategies as more effective than the last two. Thus students and managers both regard a 'mixed, assertive' strategy, that is, one with a strong masculine element but with a feminine component, as the most effective. They also each see one strategy as more effective for women than for men, but differ as to which one: students choose a more feminine strategy than

managers as more effective for women. Moreover, students are less influenced than managers by the speaker's gender when they make judgements about how probable the strategies are. In fact, in contrast to managers, they see men and women as equally likely – and indeed very likely (probability mean 3.44) – to fall victim to 'losing the floor' in meetings. In terms of Cameron's (2004) and Tannen's (2004) discussion of language ideology, this result suggests that at least in this common workplace situation – the need to regain the floor after an interruption – students subscribe less to the prevailing ideology that men and women speak markedly differently. They are relaxed enough to believe that men have similar problems to themselves when trying to get heard at work.

Scenario 2: Gaining sufficient credit for an idea expressed in a meeting

Table II summarizes the results for students' and managers' judgements about the effectiveness and probability of the strategies in scenario 2. The format is similar to Table I, except that respondents evaluated seven strategies rather than five.

Place Table II about here.

Effectiveness

Here again both students and managers regard masculine strategies with a feminine element (strategies 3, 4 and 5) as much more effective than stereotypically feminine responses (strategies 6 and 7). Also like managers, students did not rate either of the highly masculine responses (strategies 1 and 2) among the three most effective responses, rating them as less effective than the mixed MF or Mf strategies. One difference appears: while managers had rated the fourth response, the balanced: 'That sounds a lot like the idea I suggested earlier' as more effective when they thought a woman was using it than a man, students made no such distinction, rating its effectiveness around 2.90 regardless of the speaker's gender.

Probability

Again like managers in the earlier study, students' ratings of the strategies' probability initially echo their ratings of the strategies' effectiveness. Both students and managers also see the very feminine strategies 6 and 7 as rather probable, despite ranking them low for effectiveness. As with scenario 1, managers' judgements about some strategies' probability varied depending on the gender of the speaker, but students did not make this distinction. Managers had seen one highly masculine response (strategy 2) as being more probable for a male than a female speaker (the jokey, 'I'm taking that idea back – you guys are butchering it'). They had also seen the mixed, Fm response (5) ('saying nothing at the meeting but going to the other person's office afterwards and saying you'd appreciate a footnote next time they borrowed one of your ideas') as more probable for a female than a male speaker. By contrast the speaker's gender did not significantly influence students' ratings of any strategy's probability.

Discussion

Again, students and managers agree on what is effective: masculine strategies tempered by a feminine element. They also make similar judgements about the strategies' probability. Highly feminine though rather ineffective strategies, such as strategies 4 and 5, seem moderately probable to both students and managers, however. This suggests that some of the same strategy 'traps' remain for students as managers had wrestled with. That is, both students and managers think that many people would choose strategies that do not work. However unlike managers, students do not distinguish between any of the strategies' effectiveness or probability depending on the speaker's gender. As with scenario 1, and more than managers, students see men and women as being similarly effective (or ineffective) if they use a specific strategy, and equally likely to use it. As with scenario 1, at least for the common dilemma of getting sufficient credit for one's ideas discussed at a meeting, the absence of significant differences in students' results for both the strategies' effectiveness and probability suggests that students are less influenced by the prevailing ideology that men and women use different communication strategies, or that either gender has any special advantage or disadvantage as a result. Both genders, they seem to say, have similar communication problems at work. Overall, in the view

of these students, the gender climate appears more 'relaxed' than it was for managers whose careers developed against a background of 1970s feminism.

Scenario 3: Making sure one's achievements get noticed by people influential for promotion

Table III summarizes the results for students' and managers' judgements about the effectiveness and probability of the strategies in scenario 3. The table follows a similar format to Tables I and II.

Place Table III about here.

Effectiveness

Compared with the previous two scenarios, there was little spread in the probability ratings for scenario 3's strategies. Both students and managers rated strategy 3 ('sending a copy of the good figures to the boss with a note drawing the boss's attention to one's achievements'; students' means 3.23, 3.24; managers' means 3.58, 3.81), as the most effective way of getting noticed and increasing one's chances of promotion. Beyond this, however, students and managers diverged markedly. Students rated the indirect, stereotypically female strategies including the Fm ('say nothing other than to direct the boss's attention to the good figures and hope the boss will make the connection between the figures and one's performance', means 3.09; 3.28), and the FF ('say nothing at all and just keep working harder and more cooperatively next year', means 2.93, 3.01) as less effective than strategy 3, but more effective than strategy 4 (sending the figures to the boss and the boss's boss, with a note highlighting one's achievements, means 2.88, 2.97) and strategy 5 (describing the feat to five colleagues including the boss, means 2.96, 2.62). In contrast, managers had rated both strategies 4 (means 3.18, 2.85) and 5 (means 3.06, 2.85) ahead of students' second and third choices for effectiveness.

In the earlier study, managers did not consider any strategy for this scenario as significantly more or less effective depending on the speaker's gender. However students did make this distinction: the MM ('openly talking about their achievements to the next five colleagues they meet') had a mean of 2.96

for effectiveness with a male speaker but only 2.62 with a female speaker. Thus students regard this approach as moderately effective for a man but significantly less so for a woman. Given the low overall spread of the effectiveness ratings in this scenario, this difference stands out strongly.

Probability

As with the previous results for managers, students rated the probability of all scenario 3 strategies fairly closely. However, unlike managers and unlike the pattern established in scenarios 1 and 2 of ranking highly effective strategies as also highly probable, students actually ranked the FF ('say and do nothing, just work harder and more cooperatively next year') as the most probable for *both* male and female speakers (means 3.43 and 3.43). Moreover for students, this strategy's probability outranked its effectiveness.

Managers had ranked the strategy they saw as *least effective*, 'say nothing, just work harder', as significantly more probable for a woman than for a man. They also thought their second most effective strategy ('drawing the boss's boss's attention to the good figures') was more probable for a man than a woman. In contrast, students strongly indicated the strategy they saw as *most effective* ('writing a note about one's achievements to one's boss') was much more probable for a man than a woman.

Discussion

Considering how similar students' and managers' results were when they ranked the effectiveness of strategies in the first two scenarios, it is noticeable how much students and managers diverge in their results in the 'getting noticed for promotion' scenario. While students and managers both see the moderately direct MF strategy ('drawing one's boss's attention to one's achievements'), as the most effective (means 3.23 and 3.24), students see this strategy as significantly more probable for a man than a woman. Where the results for scenarios 1 and 2 suggested students subscribe less to the ideology of gender-based language differences, here – in the scenario with a high-stakes, long-term goal: promotion – the ideology of gender differences based on stereotypical notions of how men and

women communicate reasserts itself. Students seem to say men are more likely than women to use the effective strategy of drawing their boss's boss's attention to their achievements. Accordingly men have an advantage over women when seeking promotion. Perhaps students think women who use this approach would be seen as aggressive. This is a surprising view, especially in a Western country such as Australia where the feminist battles of the 1970s were aimed at ensuring women and men were equally well recognized for their achievements at work. It is redolent of the pre-feminist perspective that women who draw attention to their achievements will be perceived as pushy and hence unfeminine. This result is all the more remarkable when we remember that in the previous two scenarios students generally had *not* been influenced by gender when they assessed the strategies' effectiveness or probability. In the earlier scenarios students regarded men as having much the same communication problems as themselves, and as likely to react in similar ways. In the third scenario, by contrast, beyond a 'do nothing, say nothing, just work harder' strategy which students see as probable for both men and women, gender-based differences re-emerge in students' views of effective and probable strategies. The differences in significance levels indicate that these differences are actually stronger than for managers than for students, and attached to different strategies. Overall then, experienced managers group stereotypically masculine strategies together as effective for getting noticed for promotion, and students do the opposite, grouping stereotypically feminine strategies together as effective.

Work experience

It is possible that the students' lack of work and management experience affects their responses, especially to the third scenario. When rating the responses to the first two dilemmas, students with limited exposure to the workplace might have relied on analogous experiences of regaining the floor or getting their ideas acknowledged, for example through taking part in class debates or via casual employment. However students are unlikely to have had much experience of securing promotion, certainly less than senior managers. This difference in experience might explain why, despite having the same view as managers about the most effective strategy for getting their achievements recognised, the strategies students choose as second, third and fourth most effective move in the

opposite (more feminine) direction from managers' ratings which leaned towards more masculine alternatives.

As noted earlier, students feel strategy 1 in scenario 3 is both quite probable (means 3.43) and equally probable for a male as a female strategist. This suggests that students' ideology of workplace language – to use Cameron's (2004) terms, their idea about what language *is and ought to be* – is that feminine approaches ought to work. It ought to be possible, in students' view, for both women and men just to work harder and be rewarded for their efforts without actively drawing influential people's attention to them. However the view of experienced, and perhaps savvier, managers who have reached the top of their organizational ladders coincides with the notion that promoting oneself, actively advertising one's achievements, is more likely to bring the desired results. Promoting oneself falls within the range of related tactics that Jones and Pittman (1982) call self-presentation, Schlenker (1980) calls impression management, and Snyder (1974) calls self-monitoring. A wealth of research has examined impression management and similar behaviours aimed at organizational advancement, including its purposes (for example Ashford and Northcraft, 1992, Bolino *et al.*, 2006; Feldman and Klich, 1991; Kipnis *et al.*, 1991; Rao *et al.*, 1995; Rosenfeld *et al.*, 2002), its settings (for example Roberts, 2005; Stevens and Kristof, 1995; Tsai *et al.*, 2004; Varma *et al.*, 2006) and its dimensions (for example Bolino, 1999; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Avoiding appearing to be pushy and unfeminine has been argued to be a dimension of impression management (Stires and Jones, 1969; Vonk, 1999). However the message of scenario 3's results is that experienced managers believe that modesty – simply working harder while saying and doing nothing to make sure one is noticed – is ineffective for getting formal recognition. In scenario 3, strategy 1, the person seeking promotion does not even speak modestly or self-deprecatingly about their achievements – because they do not speak at all.

Does confidence affect the strategy respondents say they would personally choose?

Students were asked to indicate on a five-point scale ranging from 'not at all true' to 'very true' how confident they were in expressing their opinions in tutorials, work meetings or other situations where they did not know the other people well. In addition, for each scenario they were asked to indicate which communication strategy they would choose for themselves. In the previous study, virtually every participant regarded herself as a confident or very confident communicator, and no significant differences appeared between the responses confident participants said they would choose for themselves and the choices of the few less confident participants (Barrett, 2004). However students with little or no management experience might be less confident communicators than senior women managers and, if so, they might choose different communication strategies for themselves.

In the same way as for the earlier study, participants were separated into a 'high-confidence' group (points 4 and 5 on the scale for the question about level of confidence in expressing their opinions) and a 'low confidence' group (points 1, 2 and 3). Unfortunately about one-third of respondents did not indicate which strategy they would personally choose for each situation. However, and in contrast to managers, about two-thirds of the students who did indicate what strategy they would personally choose said they were not confident communicators. To determine whether the frequency of personal strategies differed between high and low confidence students, a single sample chi-square test was performed for scenarios 1 and 3. (The test was not performed for scenario 2 where having seven responses meant the low expected values of some cells would be too small for the test to be valid. For each of scenarios 1 and 3 there was a somewhat low expected value in one cell, which means the results could be slightly inflated.) The results of the Chi-square analysis for scenarios 1 and 3 appear in Tables IV and V below.

Place Table IV about here.

Recall that for scenario 1, both managers and students considered the Mf strategy ('you may not have realized you were interrupting me…') to be the most effective for regaining the floor after being interrupted. However Table IV shows that there are differences between students who regard themselves as more confident communicators and those who see themselves as less confident. More

confident communicators are more likely than would be predicted by chance to choose a strategy with a strongly masculine element (Chi-square = 11.05, df = 4, $p < 0.05$).

Place Table V about here.

For scenario 3, both managers and students rated the MF strategy ('send a note to the boss drawing his or her attention to the good figures') as most effective. A similar pattern of differences between more confident and less confident communicators appeared as occurred for scenario 1 (Chi-square = 8.83, df = 4, $p < 0.1$). The results for scenarios 2 and 3 suggest that students who are confident communicators are more likely than their less confident peers to make personal choices of communication strategy which resemble those of experienced managers.

Conclusions

The results for students – the female managers of the future – present a mixed picture. On the one hand, for short and medium-term dilemmas, students make mostly similar judgements to experienced managers in terms of which strategies they see as effective and probable. They also resemble experienced managers in valuing a masculine approach tempered with a feminine element. This suggests students and managers have a broadly similar ideology about communication at work. However students seem more likely than senior managers to believe that men experience similar short and medium-term communication difficulties to women, such as 'losing the floor' after being interrupted, or failing to get credit for an idea in a meeting. Moreover in the first two scenarios students seem more relaxed than managers, perceiving fewer gender-based differences in a strategy's effectiveness or its probability. Like senior managers they are sceptical about the advice to 'do as men do'; they want to manage workplace communication problems in their own way. For short and medium-term dilemmas they seem to have 'learned some moves': they are less likely than senior managers were to see very masculine or moderately masculine strategies as improbable when a woman uses them and – if they are confident communicators – sometimes see strongly masculine strategies as both effective and something they would choose for themselves.

Students' relaxed attitude to workplace communication dilemmas like the ones addressed in this paper may sometimes work to their advantage. Simply expecting to be treated similarly to men may deflect many problems, whereas expecting bad things to happen may tend to make them happen. Indeed, appearing relaxed about whether one will get one's way in work situations, entitled to this just as men are, should be seen as evidence of feminism's success. That being so, the argument that aspiring managers are oblivious to the struggles of the second-wave feminists of the 1970s may be simply a case of grumpiness on part of earlier feminists, who would like the societal changes they achieved to be acknowledged by the women who come after them. An anonymous comment reported in a recent post to Feministing.com makes the case neatly:

> *When older women are happy with younger women, they refer to them as empowered. When they're irritated, they call us entitled. The real meaning of entitlement is "a belief that one is deserving of certain privileges or rights." Sounds like what feminism had in mind all along, no?*

Source: Martin (2009)

On the other hand, 1970s feminists may still have a valid point. Students' lesser experience of corporate life – their trust that feminine communication approaches will be rewarded – might cause them problems when they confront workplace realities including the glass ceiling. This view, coupled with an understanding of younger women's viewpoint, has the support of no less a figure than Gloria Steinem, a leader of U.S. second wave feminism:

> *I wasn't a feminist in my 20s either. […] It's always been the older women who are more radical than the younger women. […] Women have more social power when they're young, and also they haven't experienced what's wrong with the world yet. They haven't been in the labor force. Aging, hitting the middle-management ceiling happens 10 years later. The red-hot center of feminism has never been on campus – it was always somewhere else.*

Source: Gibbs *et al.* (1992)

Recent Equality of Opportunity in the Workplace Australia (EOWA) statistics suggest the glass ceiling is still firmly in place in Australian organizations. Despite a small increase in the percentage of female CEOs in EOWA reporting organisations[1] since the 2006-07 reporting period, the percentage of female CEOs remains low at 10.6 per cent (EOWA, 2008, p. 7). This is echoed in a female-male pay gap at senior organisational levels. EOWA's *The Top Earners Report* found that women hold just seven per cent of top earner positions in the ASX200 and that at top earner level, the overall median pay for women is just 58 per cent of that for men. Female Chief Financial Officers and Chief Operating Officers earn half the wage of their male equivalents, while in Chief Executive Officer positions, a female earns just two-thirds the salary of her male counterpart (EOWA, 2008, p. 8). Similar results are found in the *2009 Annual Business and Professions Study* (Beatons Consulting, 2009). Similar results are to be found in other countries. Thus students' belief that the major problems feminism attempted to solve are in the past may mean they are not alert to the subtle ways women can be shut out of conversations, meetings and other workplace communication settings, and hence be less well recognized and rewarded at work. The results of Barrett (2004) suggest that organizationally senior managers' long experience has alerted them to these unpalatable realities.

The contrast between managers and students is particularly apparent in the results for the third communication scenario where women students are still giving themselves less scope for strong, effective action than they give to men. They see both men and women as likely just to 'do nothing and work harder' and believe this is reasonably effective. That is, they think both men and women can justifiably hope their achievements will be recognised without any form of 'advertising'. Senior managers saw this strategy as much less effective than students did. They also thought it was significantly more likely that women would adopt it. However when it comes to a balanced (MF) strategy which students judge more effective than working hard and staying quiet, for example

[1] Organisations currently required to report annually to EOWA include all private sector employers with 100 or more employees, all higher education institutions, group training schemes, trade unions, non-government schools and community organizations. This requirement will shortly be made more lenient with organizations being required to report only biennially.

sending figures indicating one's achievements to the boss with a note drawing his or her attention to the achievements, students seem to be making judgements according to the old rules: the ones that say women will lose if they are too aggressive, and women have more to lose than a man since for him aggressive behaviour is to be expected or at least forgiven. They appear to lack the confidence of senior managers to take even this moderately forceful, masculine approach, even though they are convinced at the same level as senior managers that at least a moderately masculine approach would be effective. Perhaps after all it is too early to relegate yesterday's feminist struggles to the history books. Recalling the feminist battles of the past, and noting the minimally changed, low levels of women's representation at the top of their organizational ladders, could still be useful for aspiring women managers dealing with the rough and tumble of workplace communication.

Limitations and further research

Similar limitations apply to the present study as for the earlier one. For example, given time constraints in a post-examination, classroom setting, the questionnaire only allowed investigation of a small number of communication dilemmas. A study dealing with more communication dilemmas in more detail might have produced more fine-grained results. Other demographic aspects of the student sample were not investigated which may have affected the results. For example students, like senior managers in the original study, were not asked about their awareness of gender-focussed debates in linguistic and management research, and this may have affected the results. Similarly they were not asked questions which would indicate the extent of their adherence to traditional 1970s feminist ideals. However the way such questions are framed would almost certainly influence responses. For example, questions which entailed the idea that the feminist movement of the 1970s sought to secure for women the economic, political and social rights and protections that men had always enjoyed would be likely to bring supportive responses, whereas questions which presuppose that feminism had basically been about encouraging women to denigrate motherhood, pursue selfish goals and wear a suit, would be likely to cause respondents to distance themselves from traditional feminism. An open-ended, qualitative study of views about the appropriate place of women in today's society may need to avoid the term 'feminism' altogether, given the varying understandings the term now evokes. Students

were also not invited to comment in an unstructured way on their perceptions of their own communication styles and how this might link to the results. Future studies could usefully undertake this qualitative work.

The scenarios used in the study presented studied male-female interactions (scenario 1) or one gender interacting with a mixed-gender group or a group of unspecified gender (scenarios 2 and 3). The scenarios did not include scenarios presenting female-female or male-male interactions in workplace communication dilemmas. The scenario survey was also administered only in the Australian context. It would be useful to extend the study to include scenarios presenting male-female, single-gender/mixed gender and same-gender interactions where the strategists are perceived to have different types and levels of power. After all, women in certain community and social contexts who use aggressive communication styles that even in U.S., Australian or north European cultures would be considered rude, are very well accepted among their colleagues and superiors. In some Western contexts, including the context of senior management, some women are privileged in their use of aggressive communication styles (Mavin, 2006a, b), but prevent other women from doing the same. It would be useful to investigate whether aspects of their social situation, for example their membership of social or political elites or other sources of power available to them somehow protect their 'aggressive' styles.[2]

It would also be useful to extend the study to compare reactions to the scenarios by speakers of different Englishes within one culture, in the spirit of the studies by Gumperz, Aulakh and Kaltman (1982) and Mishra (1982), to see whether the culture-based differences between the speakers these researchers found are maintained across short, medium and long-term problem-solving scenarios. It may also be valuable to devise scenario-based studies in languages other than English to see how speakers in quite different linguistic cultures evaluate the effectiveness and probability of specific communication strategies at work, and how this relates to research on cultural differences.

[2] The author is indebted to an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this paper for suggesting this extension of the research.

The results for scenarios 1 and 2 suggest some cracks are appearing in the ideology of male-female language difference, especially for women students tackling short and medium-term communication dilemmas. Women students believe men are likely to be subject to the same problems as themselves. However the results for scenario 3, the long-term 'get noticed for promotion' scenario, suggests students still judge the effectiveness and probability of some communication strategies differently depending on the speaker's gender. Here traditional ideologies of gender-based language difference seem to remain in place. In view of this, it would be useful to test reactions to this and other long-term, high-stakes scenarios on a longitudinal basis to see whether, over time, this ideology's strength diminishes. Over time managers may become less likely to believe that women and men communicate differently and that this is part of the natural order of things. Moreover, with time, women may be less inclined to regard highly masculine strategies used by women as less effective than more feminine strategies. To date, however, research by Mavin (2006a, b; Mavin and Bryans, 2002) suggests this is unlikely to happen soon. The gendered nature of senior management and the contradictions women who attain it are subject to, mean that an element of female misogyny comes into play: a reluctance on the part of senior women to act in solidarity with more junior women and, conversely, a tendency for more junior women to blame women who get to the top for being 'more male than men'. Longitudinal work on the 'get noticed for promotion' strategies of scenario 3 would contribute to knowledge of this thorny issue.

Research is continuing into male students' perceptions of these communication dilemmas and ways of tackling them. Since, as this study shows, the perceptions and judgements of aspiring women managers sometimes reflect and sometimes diverge from those of their more senior sisters, comparing both sets of female views with those of men who aspire to management will further increase our understanding of gender and communication at work.

References

Acker, J. (1990), Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 139-58.

Acker, J. (1994), "Gender, capitalism and globalization", *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 17-42.

Acker, J. and Van Houten, D.R. (1974), "Differential recruitment and control: The sex structuring of organizations", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 19 No. 2 (June), pp. 152-63.

Adelman, M.B. and Lustig, M.W. (1981), "Intercultural communication problems as perceived by Saudi Arabian and American Managers", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 5 (4): 349-63.

Albert, E. (1972), "Cultural Patterning of Speech Behavior in Burundi", in Gumperz, J. J. and Hymes D. (eds), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: Ethnography of communications*. Holt, New York, NY, pp. 72-105.

Albrechtsen, J. (2008), "Slapped down by helping hand", *The Australian*, 19 November, p. 14.

Ashford, S.J. and Northcraft, G.B. (1992), "Conveying more (or less) than we realize: The role of impression management in feedback seeking", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 53 No. 3, pp. 310-34.

Barrett, M.A. (2004), "Should they learn to interrupt? Workplace communication strategies Australian women managers forecast as effective", *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 19 No. 8, pp. 391-403.

Beaton Consulting (2009) *Australian business and professions study: Respondents report*. Copies available from www.beaton.com.au.

Bohra, K.A. and Pandey, J. (1984), "Ingratiation toward strangers, friends and bosses", *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 122 No. 2, pp. 217-22.

Bolino, M.C. (1999), "Citizenship and impression management: good soldiers or good actors?", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 82-98.

Bolino, M.C., Varela, J.A., Bande, B. and Turnley, W.H. (2006), "The impact of impression-management tactics on supervisor ratings of organizational citizenship behavior", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 281-97.

Brown, J. (2008), "F-word is about choice, not power", *The Australian*, 22 August, p. 13.

Calás, M.B. and Smircich, L. (1996), "From the woman's point of view: Feminist approaches to organization studies", in Clegg, S.R., Hardy, C. and Nord, W.R. (eds), *Handbook of Organization Studies*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 218-58.

Calás, M.B. and Smircich, L. (2006), "From 'the woman's point of view' ten years later," in Clegg, S.R., Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. and Nord, W.R. (eds), *The Sage handbook of organization studies*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 284-346.

Cameron, D. (1995), *Verbal hygiene*. Routledge, London and New York.

Cameron, D. (2004), "Gender and language ideologies", in Holmes, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (eds), *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 447-67.

Carli, L.L. (1990), "Gender, language and influence", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 59 No. 5, pp. 941-51.

Case, S.S. (1993), "Wide verbal repertoire speech: Gender, language and managerial influence", *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 271-90.

Cohen, R. (1987), "Problems of intercultural communication in Egyptian-American diplomatic relations", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 29-47.

Douthat, R. (2005), "Has feminism failed? *The Weekly Standard*, 7 November 2005. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/11/07/opinion/main1020616_page2.shtml 16 April 2009.

Dowd, M. (2005), "What's a Modern Girl to Do?" *New York Times*, 30 October. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/30/magazine/30feminism.html?pagewanted=7&_r=1 16 April 2009.

Eagly A.H., Makhijani, M.G. and Klonsky, B.G. (1992), "Gender and the evaluation of leaders: a meta-analysis", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 3-22.

Equality of Opportunity at Work Australia (EOWA) (2008) *EOWA Overview*. Retrieved from http://www.eowa.gov.au/Information_Centres/Resource_Centre/EOWA_Publications/Annual_Reports/EOWA_Annual_Report_07_08/Intro_and_overview.pdf 27 April 2009.

Faludi, S. (1992), *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women*. Crown, New York, NY.

Feldman, D.C. and Klich, N. (1991) "Impression management and career strategies", in Giacalone, R.A. and Rosenfeld, P. (eds), *Applied impression management: How image-making affects managerial decisions*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA, pp. 67-80.

Friedlin, J. (2009), "Second and third-wave feminists clash over the future", *Women's enews*, 26 May 2002. Retrieved from http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/920/context/archive 16 April 2009.

Gibbs, N., Blackman, A., Painton, P. and Taylor, E. (1992), "The war against feminism", *Time Magazine*, 9 March. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,975019-3,00.html 14 April 2009.

Grieve, N. and Burns, A. (eds) (1994), *Australian women: Contemporary feminist thought*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Gudykunst, W.B. and Ting-Toomey, S. (1988), *Culture and interpersonal communication*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Gumperz, J.J., Aulakh, G. and Kaltman, H. (1982), "Thematic structure and progression in discourse", in Gumperz, J.J. (ed.), *Language and Social Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 22-56.

Hall, E.T. (1976), *Beyond Culture*. Doubleday, New York, NY.

Harragan, B.L. (1976), *Games Mother Never Taught You*. Warner Books, New York, NY.

Hennig, M. and Jardim, A. (1977), *The Managerial Woman*. Pocket Books, New York, NY.

Jones, E.E. and Pittman, T.S. (1982), "Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation", in Suls, J. (ed.), *Psychological Perspectives of the Self*. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 231-62.

House, R.J. and Singh, J.V. (1987), "Organisational behaviour: Some new directions for I/O psychology", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 38, pp. 669-718.

Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S. and Wilkinson, I. (1980), "Intraorganizational influence tactics: Explorations in getting one's way", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 65 Vol 4, pp. 440-52.

Leary, M.R. and Kowalski, R.M. (1990), "Impression management: A literature review and two-component model", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 107 No. 1, pp. 34-47.

Martin, C.E. (2009), "Notes from an intergenerational conversation", posted to www.Feministing.com on 19 March. Retrieved from http://www.feministing.com/generational-analysis/ 16 April 2009.

Mavin, S. (2006a) "Sisterhood, queen bees and female misogyny in management", *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 359-64.

Mavin, S. (2006b), "Venus envy: problematizing solidarity behaviour and queen bees", *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 264-76.

Mavin, S. and Bryans, P. (2002), "Academic women in the UK: Mainstreaming our experiences and networking for action", *Gender and Education*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 235-50.

Mishra, A. (1982), "Discovering connections", in Gumperz, J.J. (ed.), *Language and Social Identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 57-71.

Morris, M. (1981), *Saying and meaning in Puerto Rico: Some problems in the ethnography of discourse*. Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Mulac, A. and Bradac, J.J. (1995), "Women's style in problem solving interactions: powerless, or simply feminine?" in P.J. Kalbfleisch and Codey, M.J. (eds), *Gender, Power and Communication in Human Relationships*. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 83-104.

Neill, R. (1998), "Girl Power", *The Weekend Australian* (Review section), 30-31 August, pp. 4-5.

O'Brien, P. (1993), "Why men don't listen… and what it costs women at work", *Working Woman*, February, p. 56.

Okabe, R. (1993), "Cultural assumptions of East and West: Japan and the United States", in Gudykunst, W.B. (ed.), *Intercultural Communication Theory: New Perspectives*. Sage, Beverly Hills, CA, pp. 21-44.

Park, M. (1979), *Communication styles in two different cultures, Korean and American*. Han Shin Publishing Co., Seoul.

Rao, A., Schmidt, S.M. and Murray, L.H. (1995), "Upward impression management: Goals, influence strategies and consequences", *Human Relations*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 147-67.

Ramsey, S. (1984), "Double vision: Nonverbal behavior: East and West", in Wolfgang, A. (ed.), *Nonverbal behaviour: Perspectives, applications, intercultural insights*. C. J. Hogefe, Lewiston, NY.

Roberts, L.M. (2005), "Changing faces: professional image construction in diverse organizational settings", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 685-711.

Rosener, J.B. (1990), "Ways women lead", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 68 No. 6, (November-December), pp. 119-25.

Rosenfeld, P., Giacalone, R.A. and Riordan, C.A. (2002), *Impression Management: Building and Enhancing Reputations at Work*. Thomson Learning, London.

Ryan, B. (1992) *Feminism and the women's movement: Dynamics of change in social movement ideology and activism*. Routledge, New York, NY.

Ryan, B. (ed.) (2001), *Identity politics in the women's movement*. New York University Press, New York, NY.

Schlenker, B.R. (1980), *Impression Management*. Brooks/Cole, Monterey, CA.

Schlenker, J.A., Caron, S.L. and Halteman, W.A. (1998), "A feminist analysis of *Seventeen* magazine: Content analysis from 1945 to 1995", *Sex roles: A journal of research,* Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 135-49.

Snyder, M. (1974), "Self-monitoring of expressive behaviour", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 30, 529-37.

Stevens, C.K. and Kristof, A.L. (1995), "Making the right impression: A field study of applicant impression management during job interviews", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 80 No. 5, pp. 587-606.

Stires, L.D. and Jones, E.E. (1969), "Modesty vs self-enhancement as alternative forms of ingratiation", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 172-88.

Swann, J. (2004), "School language: Language and gender in education settings", in Holmes, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (eds), *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 624-44.

Tannen, D. (1986), *That's Not What I Meant*. Dent, London.

Tannen, D. (1990), *Talking from 9 to 5.* William Morrow, New York, NY.

Tannen, D. (1994), *Gender and discourse*. Oxford University Press US, New York, NY.

Thimm, C., Koch, S. and Schey, S. (2004), "Communicating gendered professional identity", in Holmes, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (eds), *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 528-49.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1985), "Toward a Theory of Conflict and Culture", in Gudykunst, W.B., Steward, L.P. and Ting-Toomey, S. (eds), *Communication, Culture & Organizational Processes*. Sage, Beverly Hills, CA, pp. 71-86.

Tsai, W.C., Chen, C.C. and Chiu, S.F. (2005), "Exploring boundaries of the effects of applicant impression management tactics in job interviews", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 108-32.

Varma, A., Toh, S.M. and Pichler, S. (2006), "Ingratiation in job applications: Impact on selection decisions", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 200-30.

Vonk, R. (1999), "Impression formation and impression management: Motives, traits and likeability inferred from self-promoting and self-deprecating behaviour", *Social Cognition*, Vol. 17, pp. 390-412.

Weiss, E.H. and Fisher, B. (1998), "Should we teach women to interrupt? Cultural variables in management communication courses", *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 37-44.

Wilson, F. (1996), "Research note: Organisational theory: Blind and deaf to gender? *Organizational Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 5, pp. 825-42.

Wolf, N. (2002), *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Harper Perennial, New York, NY.

Wolf, N. (2009), "Waving not drowning", *Australian Financial Review* (Review section), 15 May, p. 8.

Young, L. (1982), "Inscrutability revisited", in Gumperz, J.J. (ed.), *Language and social identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 72-84.

Yum, J. (1987), "Korean philosophy and communication", in Kincaid, D.L. (ed.), *Communication theory: Eastern and Western perspectives*. Academic Press, San Diego, pp. 71-86.

Table I Results for Scenario 1

Problem is to 'regain the floor' after being interrupted in a workplace meeting

Strategy	Speaker's gender	Effectiveness mean, students	Effectiveness mean: mgrs	Probability mean, students	Probability mean, mgrs
1 MM I insist on finishing my point…	**M**	3.23	2.72	3.08	2.78
	F	3.31	3.05	3.09	2.67
2 Mf You may not have realized…	**M**	3.58	3.42*	3.25	2.92**
	F	3.50	3.74*	3.18	3.30**
3 MF Palm outwards, 'your turn will come…'	**M**	2.68*	3.00	2.66	3.13
	F	2.93*	3.16	2.70	2.78
4 mF Just a minute… trails off	**M**	2.01	1.74	2.95	2.93
	F	1.93	1.88	2.89	2.91
5 FF Says nothing, sits fuming	**M**	1.59	1.32	3.44	2.81**
	F	1.56	1.30	3.44	3.45**

- T-tests for differences in means according to speaker's gender: significant at $p<0.1$; ** = significant at $p<0.05$.

Table II Results for scenario 2

Problem is to make sure of getting credit for ideas discussed at a meeting

Response	Speaker's gender	Effectiveness mean: students	Effectiveness mean: mgrs	Probability mean: students	Probability mean:mgrs
1 MM Get your own idea…	**M**	2.61	2.17	2.46	2.47
	F	2.62	2.48	2.46	2.35
2 MM I'm taking that idea back…	**M**	2.14	1.91	2.29	2.34**
	F	2.12	2.02	2.09	1.92**
3 MF That plan sounds a lot like the idea I mentioned earlier	**M**	3.54	3.23	3.80	3.70
	F	3.34	3.29	3.70	3.47
4 MF At office later: 'Two can play that game…'	**M**	2.88	2.44*	3.19	2.87
	F	2.90	2.84*	3.13	2.80
5 Fm 'I'd appreciate a footnote…'	**M**	2.84	2.92	3.31	2.84*
	F	2.86	2.92	3.25	3.22*
6 FF Says nothing, injured look	**M**	1.91	1.36	2.97	2.73
	F	1.71	1.34	3.05	3.02
7 FF Says nothing, gives no indication of any problem	**M**	1.60	1.34	2.65	2.42
	F	1.43	1.29	2.82	2.76

- T-tests for differences in means according to speaker's gender: = significant at $p<0.1$; ** = significant at $p<0.05$.

Table III Results for scenario 3

Problem is to get achievements noticed by people who are influential for promotion

Strategy	Speaker's gender	Effectiveness mean: students	Effectiveness mean: mgrs	Probability mean: students	Probability mean: mgrs
1 FF Says nothing, just works harder	**M**	2.93	2.50	3.43	2.88*
	F	3.01	2.35	3.43	3.42*
2 Fm Suggests boss looks at figures, boss will make the connection	**M**	3.09	2.89	3.30	3.19
	F	3.28	2.82	3.40	3.39
3 MF Sends figures to boss with a note	**M**	3.23	3.58	3.27***	3.51
	F	3.24	3.81	2.96***	3.44
4 fM Sends figures to boss and boss's boss, with the same note	**M**	2.88	3.18	2.50	3.18*
	F	2.97	2.85	2.62	2.49*
5 MM Describes the feat to five colleagues, including boss	**M**	2.96**	3.06	3.20	3.25
	F	2.62**	2.85	3.08	3.52

Differences in means according to speaker's gender: * = significant at $p<0.1$; ** = significant at $p<0.05$; *** = significant at $p<0.01$

Table IV

Low-confidence and high-confidence students' personal choice of strategy for scenario 1

Confidence level		**Strategy 1 MM**	**Strategy 2 Mf**	**Strategy 3 mF**	**Strategy 4 Fm**	**Strategy 5 FF**
Low (N=113)	Expected	18.5	59.4	14.7	7.9	13.9
	Observed	14	55	15	11	18
High (N=59)	Expected	9.5	29.6	7.3	4.1	7.1
	Observed	14	34	7	1	3

Table V

Low-confidence and high-confidence students' personal choice of strategy for Scenario 3

Confidence		**Strategy 1 FF**	**Strategy 2 Fm**	**Strategy 3 MF**	**Strategy 4 Mf**	**Strategy 5 MM**
Low	Expected	28.8	35.5	22.8	7.4	21.5
(N=116)	Observed	35	36	21	8	16
High	Expected	14.2	26.0	11.2	3.6	10.5
(N=57)	Observed	8	17	13	3	16

Appendix

The three scenarios and their communication strategies, rated for masculinity/femininity

SCENARIO 1: The scene is a staff meeting. The two people talking are colleagues; neither is subordinate to the other, and there is no formal chairperson. The agenda item **Jane** is discussing is something she knows a great deal about.

Jane: What I think we should [do is…]
Jim: (*interrupting her*): [We can] deal with that issue later. On the Singapore deal, though, we'll just move ahead right away – if we don't our competitors will grab it.
Jane: I'd just like to finish [this point…]
Jim: (*interrupting again*): [I want] to be sure we get the Singapore matter resolved today.

THE PROBLEM: **Jane** wants to "regain the floor" and continue talking about her topic.

	Strategy	**Masculinity/ femininity**
1	**Jane:** "Jim, you've just interrupted me for a second time. I insist on finishing my point, which is …" (*She continues talking about her topic*.)	**MM**
2	**Jane:** "Jim, you may not have realised you were interrupting me, but you were. What I was saying was…" (*She continues talking about her topic*.)	**Mf**
3	**Jane:** (*holding her hand palm outwards in Jim's direction*): "Jim, your turn will come. Now, as I was saying…" (*She continues talking about her topic*.)	**MF**
4	**Jane:** "Jim, just a minute…." (*She trails off and doesn't revert to her topic*.)	**Fm**
5	**Jane** says nothing but sits there fuming as Jim continues talking about the Singapore deal.	**FF**

SCENARIO 2: The scene is a staff meeting. **Paul** has just brought up an idea which **Sally** had thought of first and mentioned earlier in the meeting. **Paul** talks about the idea as if it had not been mentioned before and as if it were his own.

THE PROBLEM: **Sally** wants to make sure that people at the meeting realise the idea was hers.

	Strategy	**Masculinity/ femininity**
1	**Sally:** "Paul, get your own idea. That one was mine. When I proposed that plan I had something slightly different in mind."	**MM**
2	**Sally:** "I'm taking that idea back. You guys are butchering it."	**MM**
3	**Sally:** "That plan sounds a lot like the one I mentioned earlier."	**Mf**
4	**Sally** says nothing at the meeting, but goes to Paul's office afterwards and says to her, "We can work well together, Paul. Just remember to give credit where it's due. By the end of the meeting, I think everyone thought my project upgrade idea was yours. You know, two can play that game."	**MF**

5	**Sally** says nothing at the meeting, but goes to Paul's office afterwards and says to him, "I don't know what you were thinking in that meeting today, Paul. I'd appreciate at least a footnote next time you borrow one of my ideas."	**Fm**
6	**Sally** says nothing, and does not go to see Paul after the meeting, but turns away from him with an injured expression when they next meet.	**FF**
7	**Sally** says nothing and gives no indication to Paul that there is any problem.	**FF**

SCENARIO 3: Steve has just finished a meeting in which he closed an important deal which took skill and determination to bring off.

THE PROBLEM: Steve would like to increase his chances of promotion this year.

	Strategy	**Masculinity/ femininity**
1	**Steve** says and does nothing but works even harder and more cooperatively over the coming year. Working hard and getting results will eventually be noticed.	**FF**
2	**Steve** says nothing straight away, but a couple of weeks later suggests to his boss that he might like to take a look at the performance figures for their profit centre before the next board meeting. Presumably his boss will make the connection between the healthy figures and Steve's hard work.	**Fm**
3	**Steve** sends a copy of the figures to his boss with a memo drawing his attention to his achievement at the meeting and its positive effect on the figures.	**MF**
4	**Steve** does the same as in response C, but also sends a copy of the figures and the memo to his boss's boss.	**Mf**
5	**Steve** comments to the next five colleagues he meets following the meeting – one of whom is his boss – "You won't believe what happened in that meeting today…". He follows this with a description of the challenge and how he accomplished it.	**MM**