

Gender Differences in Communication Styles Among University Students: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This quantitative study looks at gender differences in how university students communicate (N=260). The research used a cross-sectional survey to measure four styles: emotional, assertive, passive, and analytical. T-test results showed that female students were more emotionally expressive, while male students scored higher in analytical and passive styles. There was no significant difference in assertive communication between genders, which may point to changing gender roles in higher education. Binary logistic regression showed that analytical and emotional styles best predicted gender, accounting for 41.7% of the variance. These results question traditional deficit models and show that universities are unique places where gender is expressed, calling for more flexible teaching and leadership approaches that go beyond strict gender categories.

Keywords: Communication, Gender Analysis, Psychology

Introduction and Literature Review

The university environment functions as a critical testing ground in which young adults transition into maturity, forming enduring patterns of self-identity and interpersonal relationships [1, 2]. Although communication styles have been thoroughly examined in corporate leadership and professional contexts, workplace-oriented models frequently do not address the unique socialization processes present among university students. Examining student communication is therefore essential for promoting effective teamwork and cultivating robust interpersonal connections during this formative stage.

The Dependent Variable: Communication Styles

Communication style refers to the cluster of linguistic and extra-linguistic behaviors that characterize individuals or groups [1, 3]. These behaviors can be categorized into four distinct frameworks: Expressive/Emotional, Assertive/Competitive, Passive/Tentative, and Task-Oriented/Analytical. The Expressive style emphasizes relational harmony and emotional openness, employing emotionally charged vocabulary to promote collaboration [2, 4]. In contrast, Task-Oriented or Analytical communication prioritizes informational efficiency, directness, and factual content [1, 4]. Assertive styles are used to establish dominance or authority [5]. Recent multicultural research demonstrates that the directness and elaborateness associated with these

styles vary considerably across speech communities, indicating that communication styles are adaptable strategies rather than fixed traits [7]. A 2024 study [6] examined communication skills among undergraduate students, highlighting the significance of active listening, cultural sensitivity, and practical communication strategies in both academic and interpersonal contexts. Although gender differences were not specifically addressed, the findings underscore the need to investigate how communication skills and interpersonal communication may differ among various student populations. Building on this foundation, the present study examines gender differences in communication styles among university students.

The Independent Variable: Gender

Contemporary sociolinguistic discourse conceptualizes gender as a “performed” social category, suggesting that individuals enact gender roles rather than inherently possess them [4]. This performance is shaped by socialization processes and dominant cultural expectations. Tannen’s “difference model” posits that men and women are socialized into distinct “speech communities” from an early age, which leads to divergent communicative objectives [2]. While traditional perspectives often associate females with greater expressiveness and males with increased assertiveness [1], empirical evidence regarding the stability of these gender roles across diverse social contexts remains contested [8]. Recent research emphasizes that these phenomena are determined by cultural and contextual factors,

rather than fixed biological traits [1].

The Research Gap

Existing literature predominantly examines professional environments and established leadership roles [1, 2, 5]. This emphasis creates a substantial gap in understanding the socialization processes of young adults. University students constitute a distinct group in which traditional communication cultures are either reinforced or modified. By examining this demographic, the present study seeks to address the paucity of empirical data on how young adults navigate gendered communication norms outside professional hierarchies.

Purpose and Hypotheses

The primary aim of this study is to assess whether significant gender differences are present in the communication styles of university students. Drawing upon foundational literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Female students will demonstrate higher scores in emotional or expressive communication.
- H2: Male students will demonstrate higher scores in assertive communication.
- H3: Male students will demonstrate higher scores in passive communication.
- H4: Male students will demonstrate higher scores in analytical communication.
- H5: There will be a significant overall difference between genders across all communication styles.
- H6: Analytical and assertive styles will be stronger predictors of gender than emotional style.

The subsequent section outlines the quantitative methodology used to translate these theoretical frameworks into a rigorous statistical evaluation of gendered communication patterns.

Method

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to capture perceived communication behaviors through standardized self-reporting. While convenience sampling is frequently criticized for its limitations in generalizability, it remains a pragmatic and necessary approach for exploratory demographic research within specific institutional settings to identify emergent trends in socialization.

Participants

The final sample consisted of 260 university students aged 18–25. The participant pool included 116 females (44.62%) and 144 males (55.38%). Participants were primarily recruited from a local student population in North Macedonia, supplemented by a global online student community to provide a broader exploratory reach.

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Materials and Measures

Data were gathered using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). The instrument comprised four subscales:

- Emotional/Expressive: Sharing feelings and emotion-related language.
- Assertive: Confidence in opinions and directness.
- Passive: Conflict avoidance and deference.
- Analytical/Logical: Focus on facts, evidence, and organized thought.

To ensure construct validity and mitigate response bias, several items within these subscales were reverse coded prior to data aggregation.

Procedure and Design

The survey was administered online via Google Forms. Participants were required to provide informed consent, acknowledging the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study, before proceeding. The independent variable was Gender, and the dependent variables were the mean scores from the four communication subscales. Collected data were cleaned and prepared for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. To lead into the Results section, the analysis focused on determining whether gender significantly predicted the variance in these communication clusters.

Results

The analysis employed a dual-pronged statistical strategy: Independent-Samples t-tests were used to identify specific mean differences, while binary logistic regression evaluated the predictive strength of each style. This methodology enabled identification of significant differences and determination of which communication behaviors most effectively distinguish between gender categories.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for both genders across the four styles.

Emotional/Expressive Style: Hypothesis 1 was supported. Levene's test for equality of variances was significant ($F = 11.25$, $p = .001$), indicating unequal variances. Female students ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.94$) scored significantly higher than male students ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.76$), $t(219.02) = 7.73$, $p < .001$.

Assertive Style: Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Levene's test was non-significant ($F = 0.21$, $p = .646$), so equal variances were assumed. No statistically significant difference was found between male students ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.63$) and female students ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.66$), $t(258) = -1.00$, $p = .316$.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Communication Style Scores by Gender

Communication Style	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Emotional	Female	116	3.8	0.9
	Male	144	3	0.8
Assertive	Female	116	3.5	0.7
	Male	144	3.6	0.6
Passive	Female	116	2.6	0.8
	Male	144	3.1	0.7
Analytical	Female	116	3.6	0.5
	Male	144	4.3	0.6

Passive Style: Hypothesis 3 was supported. Levene's test was significant ($F = 4.37$, $p = .038$), indicating unequal variances. Male students ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.71$) scored significantly higher than female students ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.79$), $t(234.42) = -5.31$, $p < .001$.

Analytical Style: Hypothesis 4 was strongly supported. Levene's test was significant ($F = 7.77$, $p = .006$), indicating unequal variances. Male students ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.62$) reported significantly higher scores than female students ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.53$), $t(257.43) = -8.69$, $p < .001$.

Predictive Modeling (Logistic Regression)

The binary logistic regression model was statistically significant, chi-square (4) = 97.16, $p < .001$, thereby supporting H5. The model accounted for 41.7% of the variance in gender (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .417$). Analysis of individual predictors indicated that Analytical style ($B = 1.528$, $p < .001$) and Emotional style ($B = -0.667$, $p = .001$) were significant predictors. Passive style was also significant ($B = 0.688$, $p = .011$), whereas Assertive style ($B = 0.240$, $p = .412$) did not reach statistical significance.

Therefore, H6 received only partial support. Although analytical style emerged as a robust predictor, assertive communication did not contribute significantly to the model. Additionally, the strong negative predictive value of emotional style suggests that it remains a primary differentiator of gender, which contradicts the hypothesized hierarchy that positioned assertiveness as the superior predictor. These findings, particularly the observed parity in assertiveness and the higher levels of male passivity, form the evidentiary basis for the subsequent theoretical discussion.

Discussion

The findings indicate that although gender socialization continues to strongly influence communication, the university environment serves as a moderating context that challenges traditional "two cultures" expectations. Application of the "performed gender" framework reveals that students adapt their communicative behaviors to address the specific interpersonal and academic demands of the higher education setting.

Interpretation of Findings

A notable finding is the absence of a significant difference in assertiveness between genders. Although workplace studies consistently report a male advantage in competitive speech [5], the university environment appears to equalize these behaviors. This outcome indicates that the "two cultures" model may not adequately account for the collaborative nature of contemporary academic settings, where direct participation and the defense of logical arguments are valued irrespective of gender. In this context, both men and women exhibit assertiveness as a prerequisite for academic success, rather than as an indicator of gender identity.

The observation that male students demonstrate higher levels of passivity is counter-intuitive and directly challenges Lakoff's deficit model, which historically linked tentative language to female subordination. This shift may suggest that contemporary male students employ passive communication styles as a strategy for conflict avoidance or face-saving within the complex and high-stakes social environment of the university. The enactment of passivity, alongside the persistence of gender-role consistency in domains such as emotionality [7], supports a more nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of gendered language, moving beyond the simplistic "aggressive male versus passive female" dichotomy.

Implications for Practice

These findings carry important pedagogical implications. Educators should acknowledge that male students may adopt passive communication styles in specific collaborative contexts, necessitating targeted strategies to foster their engagement without presuming that silence indicates a lack of knowledge. Additionally, given that both genders exhibit comparable levels of assertiveness, leadership and participation, initiatives in higher education should move beyond outdated stereotypes and prioritize the development of diverse communication competencies for professional readiness.

Study Limitations

This study is constrained by its reliance on self-report data, which reflects perceived rather than directly observed behavior.

Furthermore, the use of a convenience sample and the focus on binary gender categories restrict the generalizability of the findings to non-binary populations and other cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This research advances sociolinguistic literature by demonstrating that, although certain gendered patterns persist, others are highly context-dependent and subject to developmental changes during university years.

Directions for Future Research

- **Non-binary Inclusion:** Future research should incorporate diverse gender identities to move beyond binary frameworks and capture the full spectrum of communicative performance.
- **Observational Methods:** Incorporating behavioral observation in naturalistic settings would facilitate the validation of self-reported data against actual linguistic interactions.
- **Cross-Cultural Analysis:** Future research should examine how these patterns vary across national contexts to determine whether the equalization of assertiveness is a global or localized phenomenon.

Final Remarks

In summary, gender continues to play a significant role in communication among university students, yet its expression is marked by considerable complexity. The movement toward gender-neutral assertiveness indicates that gendered language is not an inherent biological trait but rather a fluid set of behaviors shaped by demographic and social environments.

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Appendix 1: Communication Style Assessment Tool

Gender Differences in Communication Styles

Section 1: Consent

You are invited to participate in a research survey about communication styles. Participation is voluntary, anonymous, and you may stop at any time. The survey takes about 5–8 minutes. By continuing, you consent to having your anonymized responses used for research.

Section 2: Demographics

1. **Age** (Short answer; required)
2. **What is your gender?** (Multiple choice; required)
 - Male
 - Female
 - Nonbinary / Other
 - Prefer not to say

Instructions: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

Section 3: Emotional/Expressive Communication

1. I openly express my emotions when talking to others.
2. I feel comfortable sharing how I feel in conversations.
3. I prefer to keep my feelings to myself rather than share them. (R)
4. People often say I am emotionally expressive.
5. I use emotion-related words when communicating.
6. I talk about my feelings during conflicts.
7. I avoid showing my emotions even when upset. (R)

Section 4: Assertive Communication

1. I express my opinions even when others disagree.
2. I state my needs clearly in conversations.
3. I feel confident speaking up in group situations.

4. I often hint at what I want rather than say it directly. (R)
5. I stand up for myself when necessary.
6. I ask for what I need in conversations.

Section 5: Passive Communication

1. I stay quiet to avoid conflict.
2. I hold back my opinions even when I disagree.
3. I let others make decisions to avoid tension.
4. I find it difficult to say "no."
5. I avoid expressing my true feelings.
6. I tend to go along with group choices to keep peace.

Section 6: Analytical / Logical Communication

1. I prefer logical arguments over emotional explanations.
2. I organize my thoughts before speaking.
3. I focus on facts rather than feelings in conversations.
4. I tend to analyze situations before responding.
5. I use evidence or examples when explaining my point.