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Rethinking Appropriateness: A look at Hegemonic Ideals as Related to Perceived Communication Competence In Women

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Kristi L. Meade for the Master of Science in Speech Communication were presented February 11, 1997, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Kristi L. Meade for the Master of Science in Speech Communication presented February 11, 1997.

Title: Rethinking Appropriateness: A Look at Hegemonic Ideals as Related to Perceived Communication Competence In Women

The author argues that the hegemonically-constructed criteria of "appropriateness," as related to communication competence, is not palatable or functional for female communicators much of the time for it serves a social milieu which marginalizes women. Spitzberg and Duran (1993) state, "appropriateness seems spring loaded towards the status quo" and may work against the interests of certain groups. In this paper, the author attempts to illuminate evidence of power imbalances covertly imbedded in the ideologically complex determination of appropriateness as a central criteria for communication competence in women. Competence theory is problematic and must be re-evaluated: it is contradictory and confusing, perpetuates hegemonic ideals and gender distinctions, and discounts feminine perspectives. Meade finds that, although the women in this study are aware of the hegemonic devices which work against them in academe, they continue to participate in their own domination. The findings suggest that the graduate school experience creates anger, frustration, and a lack of personal fulfillment in too many women. . . rather than overcoming through education. . . they must overcome their education. Meade makes pedagogical recommendations which serve to empower women and enhance their communicative outcomes.

RETHINKING APPROPRIATENESS: A LOOK AT HEGEMONIC IDEALS AS RELATED TO PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN WOMEN

by

KRISTI L. MEADE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
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1997

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO:

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT WOMEN IN MY LIFE. . . MY DAUGHTERS

BLAKE HADEN HEDINGER
and
BARKLEY HOPE HEDINGER

(You Go Girls!)

~~~

MY DEAR FRIEND AND CATALYST FOR THIS PROJECT

FAYE LEE ANDERSON

~~~

MY WONDERFULLY SUPPORTIVE COLLEAGUES
WHO HAVE SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCE, THOUGHTS
AND FEELINGS

I would like to acknowledge those who
discouraged, deconstructed and devalued
this project. . . they helped to instill in me
a passion to move forward. My special thanks
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encouragement, served to improve my words
rather than take them away.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

established codes of behavior have often served in unacknowledged ways as checks against a fully democratic order and in support of special interests, institutions of privilege, and structures of domination (Kasson, 1990, p. 3).

I sit in a church pew early one Sunday morning as I have for most of my life. It used to be that I found serenity in my sanctuary; today, I find discord. Listening to the words of the priest, and wondering why there cannot be at least one robed female before my eyes, words form inside of me: "May the women of the Catholic Church no longer sit in silence; instead may we stand up proudly and sing out loudly, demanding equal opportunities in this patriarchal system. For we are the collective womb of the church. Without women, there would be no Catholic Church. We pray to the Lord." As I attempt to say this prayer out loud, my body shakes - my palms are sweaty - my heart is pounding. I sit in silence.

For many months the above scenario repeats itself. The words are trapped and cause me to leave the sanctuary, again and again, feeling frustrated and unfulfilled. I keep going back, determined to do more than pray in silence. Finally, one morning, from the back of the sanctuary, I say the prayer out loud and clear. This time, the church sits in silence (for almost ten minutes). Not the priest, the choir, nor the parishioners knew what to do. Not one person turned around to look at me. In the eerie silence, I felt an overwhelming sense of fulfillment.

Spitzberg and Duran (1993) claim that in Judeo-Christian mainstream noncharismatic religions, most faithful members of a congregation are evaluated positively if their participation in prayer service is relatively submissive and passive. They state that such conforming behavior is viewed as relatively "competent"

behavior, and that the concept of competence is far more ideologically complex than has previously been recognized (p. 19).

While this study is not about the link between ideology and conforming behavior that is evaluated as competent behavior in the church (or boardroom, or bedroom) it is about such a link in education, in the discipline of speech communication. In this thesis I focus on hegemonic ideals of communication competence in the discipline of speech communication; and look, in particular, at how they influence the individuals involved.

STUDY PURPOSE

The introduction points out the extreme cognitive discomfort experienced by one woman due to institutional expectations of passivity and relative submission. I argue that such patriarchal expectations and practices cause similar discomfort for women in our own discipline. I seek to better understand certain mechanisms of control and underlying ideologies in academe, and our own field in particular, which serve to reinforce the marginalization of women. More specifically, this inquiry concentrates on the criteria of appropriateness as related to communication competence in women. This study is important because those in power and control continue to define what constitutes appropriateness. For women, this can lead to disappointment, distress, and a lack of personal fulfillment.

I think of myself as not only a feminist, but also as a researcher involved in critical practice. My feminist methodological commitment provides, as Bowen and Wyatt (1993) explain, a desire to work within an organization, studying real people in real situations, and working for changes that will improve the lives of the people involved (p. 154). I have chosen to engage in a critical exploration of attitudes and

perceptions underlying hegemonically-constructed competence ideologies and the criteria of appropriateness in particular.

I evaluate the traditional use of the word "appropriate" as it pertains to communicative competence. Appropriateness, as taught in our homes, churches, schools and the workplace often lies at the heart of women's oppression because we are expected to adhere to male models that silence our voices and block communicative effectiveness for many. I intend to illustrate how our own discipline contributes to these conditions, and provide illumination on how females can make choices and effect changes enhancing their conversational outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The springboard for this research was a paper by Spitzberg and Duran (1993) in which they claim there is no consensual definition of appropriateness. They ask several critical questions: "Is appropriateness defined by the presence of an outcome or the absence of an outcome; Is appropriateness a cognitive or a behavioral phenomenon; Does appropriateness imply only politeness and conformity, or can it entail behavior that violates rules while negotiating new acceptable norms of behavior?" And, "Can appropriateness be appropriately judged by self, or only by the person to whom the action is directed, as arbiter elegantiarum of the situation?" (p. 11) Spitzberg and Duran suggest that, in general, scholars define appropriateness as, "a judgment of the propriety of behavior, where propriety implies both correctness and fitness of behavior for a given context, as well as its avoidance of violating valued rules, norms and expectations" (p. 11).

In examining competence theory, Spitzberg and Duran (1993) take the position that ideological competence structures rest on a somewhat shaky foundation. My

position is that competence theory is problematic and must be re-evaluated for several reasons: (1) hegemonic competence ideals and gender distinctions have been perpetuated through educational reification; (2) feminist perspectives have been discounted in literature and research relating to communication theory; and, (3) the criteria for competence is contradictory, complex and confusing.

The following research questions are posed with respect to the preceding discussion and the literature review:

1. *What are the hegemonically constructed ideals of appropriateness which encourage women to put up with the status quo/be silenced in academe*?

2. *What are the mechanisms of control in the Discipline of Speech Communication*?

3. *How do women in our discipline negotiate patriarchy and the norms of appropriateness throughout the graduate school process?*

RESEARCH GOALS

This critical analysis focuses on mechanisms of control which serve to marginalize women, thus preventing satisfactory communicative outcomes. This project consists of three major components: (1) review of applicable literature; (2) sixteen individual interviews and the analysis thereof; (3) pedagogical recommendations.

(1) The review of applicable literature looks at: popular contemporary interpersonal communication textbooks in regard to communication competence and gendered stereotypes; related journal articles and conference papers; and applicable

extant literature. A brief account of the origins of communication competence will be presented. Although I dislike passing on outdated and ill-logical information regarding communication competence, a brief account of the concept, its criteria, and the rules, roles and norms of appropriateness related to perceived communication competence is necessary in order to shed light on how particular outdated ideals and related mechanisms of control continue to show up in the printed texts which are regularly used in communication classrooms. I argue that at this time there is no single good definition for the concept of communication competence in communication literature. Additionally, I provide alternative ways of conceptualizing communication competence based upon insights from the participants in this study.

(2) Sixteen face-to-face individual interviews are an integral and powerful piece of this study. The participants are women who: a. have graduated from our program or dropped out; or, b. are currently enrolled in coursework or writing a thesis. The data collected from the interviews provide abundant evidence of hegemonic hurdles which create much anger and frustration in too many women within our discipline of speech communication.

(3) This project is an exploration of: historical, relational and situational elements; attitudes within our discipline; and the identification of personal control needs from the female perspective. Based on information gleaned from textual materials and interviews, I make recommendations for pedagogical changes in our discipline. Such changes pertain to the need to identify and overcome the gatekeepers in the field of speech communication, and to engage women to use their ways of knowing and their voices as legitimate members of the "discipline." The changes suggested herein not only enrich and empower the lives of women, they serve a new goal for the common good which transcends polarity.

The study has heuristic value for me, and perhaps others, in that it pushes normative departmental practices. It re-visits conventional and habitual ways of viewing competence. . . ways which perpetuate dualism and dominance. In this project I intentionally use my own voice to critique my own discipline (a discipline which claims to produce competent communicators) and I stand firm in my commitment to women's ways of knowing. Because of my commitment to the voices of women; because this project is only as meaningful as the data I have collected; and, because I do not wish to simply replicate the work of others by following dictated norms and hegemonic ideals, I will be juxtapositioning data excerpts within the body of the literature review which follows.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF APPLICABLE LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a brief definitional review; followed by discussions on hegemonic competence ideals, feminist perspectives, and competence theory.

KEY DEFINITIONS

The following terms are important to this study:

1. *Interpersonal Communication*: The term "interpersonal" refers to relations that occur between people as opposed to relations in which at least one participant is inanimate (Schutz, 1967, p. 14). Canary and Cody (1994) identify interpersonal communication as "the exchange of symbols used to achieve interpersonal goals" (p. 32).

2. *Communication Competence*: Spitzberg and Duran (1993) define the criteria of communication competence as, "the basic definitional standards that competent action must fulfill to be considered competent" (p. 7). In contemporary communication textbooks the matters of style, clarity, efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness are the most commonly attributed criterion of competence, with appropriateness being the single most important criterion (e.g., Larson, Backlund, Redmond, & Barbour, 1978; McCroskey, 1982).

2(a). *Appropriateness*: When you engage in *appropriate* behavior, you avoid violating the rules, norms and expectations of others (Spitzberg, 1994a, 1994b). Most textbooks claim that appropriateness is present if, through our communication, we cause no loss of face to the parties involved. Wiemann and Backlund (1980) have

called such communicative behavior "verbal sensitivity." It would seem that there exists a called-for correctness and fitness of "behavior" which implies conforming. In other words, communicator's behaviors are competent only as long as they are confined to what others judge as socially appropriate (see Allen & Brown, 1976; Larson et al., 1978; Stohl, 1983; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980; Wood, 1994). Behavior that does not conform is often considered ab-normal and severely derided. As such, strict adherence to the criterion of appropriateness may stifle more creative or radical forms of social interaction. Furthermore, appropriateness may have the opposite biases of effectiveness. . . "appropriateness may work against the interests of certain groups" (Spitzberg & Duran, 1993, p. 12).

2(b) *Effectiveness*: Effectiveness is the "accomplishment of desirable or preferred outcomes" (Spitzberg & Duran, 1993, p. 13). Grove (1991) calls effectiveness the "improvement of communicative outcomes" (p. 115). It should be noted that effectiveness judgments have been challenged because they differ according to standpoint, self or other (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Brunner, 1984; Rubin, 1985; and Wiemann & Bradic, 1989).

3. Communicator Style: Mader & Mader (1993) say, "Style is competence in the selection and use of verbal and nonverbal language that enables people to create, maintain, and/or improve their relationships with one another." Goffmann (1961) calls this "impression management."

4. *Need*: A "need," according to Schutz (1967), is defined in terms of a situation or condition of an individual the nonrealization of which leads to undesirable consequences (p. 15). Schutz (pp. 14-24) claims that every person has three interpersonal needs: inclusion (the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to interaction and association); control (the need

to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to control and power); and affection (the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with others with respect to love and affection). It is Schutz's second interpersonal need, that of control (or, as Ursula Le Guin, 1995, says, "the C word,") which , I believe, is the foundation of the origins of appropriateness and centrally important to this study. Parks (1985) states that the concept of control is at the heart of almost all conceptualizations of communicative competence (p. 173). Finally, Cameron (1985) claims that control is a foundation stone on which feminist theories of women's oppression, alienation, and silence are built (p. 102).

(5) *Gatekeeping*: The term gatekeeping was originally used by Kurt Lewin (1947). It refers to (1) the process by which various messages pass through various gates, and (2) the people or groups that allow the message to pass (gatekeepers). Teachers, editors and publishing houses are perfect examples of gatekeepers as they allow certain information to get through and not other information.

(6) *Hegemony*: Refers to the various means through which those who support the dominant ideology in a culture are able continually to reproduce that ideology in cultural institutions and products while gaining the tacit approval of those whom the ideology oppresses. (Dow, 1994, p. 103)

HEGEMONIC IDEALS

In order to thoroughly explore the hegemonically-constructed criteria of appropriateness, we must carefully examine the taken-for-granted perspectives, value systems, and worldviews of men which continue to be privileged in academic, religious and political institutions. Spender (1980) argues that males have appropriated the means for advancing their worldview, and that to legitimize their

male perspective, they continue to control the mechanisms (p. 230). Here is what Mary has to say on the subject:

> Mary: I think that denies women their reality in the sense of what their knowledge is and their way of knowing that could terribly inform a thesis project. Yet, everything is grounded on this very male model. . . it is a male model! The academic system is a male model. "Prove it!" "Show me!" (she says in a low voice) "Show me another man who said it!" And then it is. . . "then you can say it." Clearly the whole process is like that. And the women professors have to buy into that as much as anybody else. . . whether they like it or not. . . or whether they question it or not. (13-14)

Cameron (1985) states that feminists must analyze the origins and mechanism of such control in various social and historical moments. Spitzberg and Duran (1993) interpret the components and structures of competence through an "expectancy-fulfillment model" which suggests similar expectancies and perceptions to those which underlie ideologies (p. 19). They claim that, "discursive formations of competence replace one another not due to their objective truth value but because one style seems more palatable or functional for a given societal milieu" (1993, p. 6).

The popular epistemic interpretation of communication competence is rather ill-defined, as are the theoretical underpinnings of how competence is learned. It is this author's belief that what is taught in our universities often blocks us from communication competence through hegemonic demands for unquestioning conformity. Along a similar vein, Vocate (1994) claims that children first internalize the perspectives or attitudes common to their community and take those views for their own because they are not yet self-aware, and are unable to develop any unique, individual outlook. . . "in a sense, the self begins simply as an abbreviated clone of its social milieu" (p. 8). Initially, the child confronts cultural and social norms vis-à-vis the family system and must accommodate. Similarly, later in life on a college campus, the woman confronts hegemonic mandates and often feels she must

accommodate to them. I would compare this to Clark & Delia's (1979) notion of a "system of constraints" which takes the form of shared understandings as to who is to be called what under what circumstances, who has the floor in a conversation. . . how behavior is to be organized and what actions are appropriate in alternative kinds of speech events, and so on (p. 188).

Hegemonic constraints regarding roles and rules for women in social institutions (eg. family, church, and university) continue to devalue women. The field of speech communication has historically been controlled by men and continues to be permeated with patriarchal ideology and the "subtle manifestations of hegemony." (Nothstine, Blair and Copeland, 1994, p. 103) Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994) have written an enlightening piece on "disciplinary" requirements in the field of communication. They expose an institutional apparatus that sets strict limitations on not only who counts as a scholar, but also what counts as legitimate inquiry within our "discipline" of speech communication. They argue that within our discipline there exists male-influenced paradigms which serve to "discipline the feminine" by enforcing conformity to "mainstream," "neutral," "deferential," and "scientific" modes of inquiry and presentation (p. 399).

Nothstine, Blair and Copeland state, "the teachers, role models, and gatekeepers are not the causes of the problem. They too are its symptoms, having themselves been caught up in the same historical, normative practices as all other critics" (p. 17). It is my belief that women must become more aware of the impact of gender stereotyping, and who the gatekeepers are and how they function hegemonically. In doing so, women will be better equipped to change the hegemonic devices which work against them.

The manifestation of hegemonic devices, such as "oughtness," has clearly taken a toll on the safety, health and happiness of women; this includes college professors. Spender (1983) believes that women have been initiated into a male-dominated society and have learned well the art of woman-devaluation. Such devaluation erodes our confidence and sense of self. She believes, as I believe, that it is time to revisit and reject the prevailing wisdom and begin to construct new meanings which are consistent with our own experience (p. 4).

Although most institutions have attempted, through more sensitive dialogue, to manifest a negotiated version of hegemonic masculinity, they continue to affirm patriarchal authority. Cultivation theory, which claims that television is a homogenizing agent in that it has the effect of providing a shared way of viewing the world (Littlejohn, 1989, p. 270) may help to explain what is occurring as academic institutions promote a shared way of viewing the world and literally socialize both men and women into maintaining the status-quo through their "technical expertise."

We seem to cling to outdated or incorrect constructs simply because those who came before us in our field did. One can see by looking at citation patterns that, in many ways, those who ruled the symbols in the subject of speech communication decades ago are still ruling us today. Ritchie (1991) speaks of "a tendency to take for granted previous researchers' conceptual interpretations" (p. 551). I am concerned that too many conceptual interpretations for communication competence are passed from one academic text to the next, having gone unquestioned for too long. In regard to the well-established textual definition of communication competence, I ask. . . "effective for whom," and, "appropriate to whom?"

Educators are often caught up in hegemonic discourses that perpetuate the dominant power structure marginalizing women. It has been my personal observation in graduate school that there are members of our discipline who assign textual authority and technical expertise to their published colleagues and serve almost exclusively as audiences for one another. This has been called "professionalization" by Nothstine, Blair and Copeland (1994, p. 20). I prefer to call it the "good-old-boy network." It is true that the "good-old-boys" have let a few women into their club (Burgoon, Fitzpatrick, Petronio, Vangelisti, etc.) but the women appear to be hanging on the men's coat-tails just to belong to the club.[1] I believe that this undemocratic network carefully guards the boundaries of many disciplines and often frustrates women in departments such as our own. "Disciplines thus quarantine academic experience from contamination by knowledge, practice, and experience from outside the discipline and the university" (Nothstine, Blair and Copeland, p. 21). This professionalization often serves to promote the truth of falsity and stifle our personal voices.

What I would define as "professional silencing" occurs in many forms to women in our field. Our texts espousing feminist views have been deconstructed into worthless shards or considered irrelevant. As a personal example, an instructor, under the auspices of championing feminists views, once insisted that I had to strictly adhere to one particular feminist approach, excluding all others.[2] On another occasion, I was told not to go forward with my feminist scholarship because I had an "ethical

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[1]A personal observation made at the International Communication Association Conference; Chicago, Illinois: May 1996: Chicago, Illinois.
[2]For works discussing the debates within contemporary feminism, see Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993; and Travis, 1992.

problem." Relatedly, we are sometimes told not to use our personal writing style if we want to be taken seriously. When words such as "intuitively," "I feel," or, "in my experience" are used, they are discounted as being feminine and unscientific. Some examples of silencing follow:

> Diane: My writing has been stifled. I am having to work very hard to give myself permission to put myself back into my work. (8-5.2)
>
> Lisa: And I think that there are some women there that have a lot to contribute and they are being frustrated, denied, and not valued because what they are bringing to it is not some traditional, white-male, academic whatever. (9-14)
>
> Helen: I would hear often the frustrations of people, that their writing style wasn't acceptable. That it was too personal. (Delete student's name) talks about how she is chastised because she is putting too much of herself into the writing. (10-5)
>
> Liz: They always question my writing. . . they still question my writing. I don't know why. I think it is because I tend not to be very creative in my perspective. And, (sigh) that is simply because that is the model I have. . . but trying to fit into that model is really difficult for me. Somehow I lost letting my imagination go in grad school. . . to be creative. I was trying to put it into this dry social science way of conveying what I wanted to say. . . clear, concise and straight-forward. I am not clear, concise and straight-forward. So my writing suffered, and I have always gotten bad feedback from it. (11-5)

Passion for our work is sometimes derogated as non-scholarly (anti-intellectual), non-objective, petty, riddled with personal bias, and inappropriate. We are sometimes told that certain subjects are off-limits or asked to be "congenial colleagues. . . playing the game in ways that do not challenge the structures of established authority" (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 28).

The foregoing paragraphs provide examples of gatekeeping practices which function hegemonically to take away women's voices in academe. Here is what Randi has to say regarding gatekeeping practices within our discipline:

> Randi: I realize that essentially any profession with any history has been predominantly male . . . and male oriented. It is hard to have women researchers when there aren't any. . . men are going to research men's issues. Women, if there were women researchers, would be doing more women's issue research... it just kind of makes sense that way. Given that it is a new trend. . . essentially. . . ya, equal rights my ass! But now there are more women in academe; there are more women with advanced degrees; there are more women doing research; there are more women focusing on the qualitative feeling end of things, as opposed to the quantitative, lets stick to the numbers, lets count this stuff up, lets group these cards, whatever. I think there will be more and more literature geared towards women; geared towards topics of interest to women. But since the ratio of that material is certainly not fifty-fifty at this time, then the research you have available to you is predominantly male. And if that is what you have, then that is what you look at and hopefully someday you do a better job than the men did. But I didn't necessarily feel that it was male-oriented material. I didn't necessarily feel that women's topics were particularly trivialized . . . I would have to say that they were more simply not there, and I think a lot of that is that the material itself is not there. I don't necessarily think it was entirely selective, and if it were, it wasn't from a conscious "Lets leave out all the feminist shit and just stick with the good-old-boy stuff." I think that some of the women in the department try really hard to pull from female researchers. However, when you have a department where the majority of the time I was there we had one woman on the faculty, another who was on sabbatical, and another who moved out of the department. . . had the common sense to run! (I laugh) You have to kind of look at that too. If you only have one woman in the department, there will be some inequity about how much material is presented from the female point of view. . . and how many female researchers there are out there who are being published. Of course that can bring up a whole other set of topics like who is reviewing the articles; who is critiquing them; who is on the journal's board of directors; and these blind reviewers. . . are they male or female? Because it may be that the females simply aren't getting published because whoever is critiquing the articles doesn't deem them worthy. (12-3)

The construct of females as "not worthy" or "less than" is of course not a new phenomenon. Griffin (1994) claims that as far back as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that the view of women's intelligence as weaker than that of man's was an artificial construction which could easily be remedied through formal education. I believe that education today continues to be inadequate as it reinforces gender specificity and gendered identities. The field of speech communication continues to

pass on conversational expectations which often differ for women and men. Stewart (1995) believes that such sex typing in conversational style is as debilitating as other forms of sex and gender stereotyping. He claims, "gender stereotyping gets in the way of successful, effective gender communication" (p. 240).

Over the last twenty years there has been an ongoing message in communication textbooks regarding gendered identities. Although social roles have changed for both women and men, and although the authors of communication textbooks do not necessarily agree with the assignment of such gendered identities. . . they continue to attach identities to women which are biased, marginalizing and often do not consider a woman in a role other than relationship-builder. Our textbook authors, researchers, theorists and teachers need to honor diversity among women and men. It is my belief that in observing and questioning a diversified populace we may find as many similarities as differences, and that in focusing on the similarities we can put a stop to the continuance of hegemonic ideals which serve to stifle competent communication.

Much contemporary literature conveys the strong message that men are perceived to have a far more powerful communicative style than females. According to Bradac et al (1981) those who exhibit a powerful style are rated much higher in attractiveness and competence. Such emphasis on sex-based, powerful, patterned behavior perpetuates gender bias and self-doubt. To say that women communicate to build relationships and to please others, while men communicate to problem solve and give information is simply not the whole picture. Both men and women are being labeled unfairly. Of course women communicate to build relationships. . . so do men. Women also solve problems and give information on a daily basis. Helen and Diane have interesting comments regarding the issue of gender subordination:

Helen states: But I think in my personal experience it does tend to be true that women speak in those patterns, and men speak in those patterns. . . but I think it is socialized. I think it is reinforced. I often wonder if the communication discipline is doing anything to change that or if they are not just re-entrenching it, because by saying it over and over and over again to all of the people who are in class. . .you know I did this too in my class. But it is one thing to observe it, but I think subtly you are saying to people that this stuff is appropriate. And I don't know if that is necessarily a service to do that. I also think that very clearly in the communication literature value is attached in the business realm to the male and in the personal realm to the female. And instead of talking about like these are two separate scopes of communication, which I think you could. I think you could talk about public and private communication and not call it gendered. I think that what it implies is that men are automatically going to be more competent in the business role, and women are automatically going to be more competent in the relationship role. And that to be in relationships men have to be more like women, to be in the business world women have to be more like men. I think fundamentally it is true. . . but I guess I don't see it as a gender issue. . . I see it as a public versus private issue. And ya, I probably did a great disservice to my class by placing expectations because people who need that stuff think that, "oh these are scholars. . . they must know the answers." This is how women are supposed to be. . . this is how men are supposed to be. (10-4)

In a related response Helen says: Clearly my way of being effective is not appropriate. (Sigh!) And if you think about that in relation to like gender roles, I mean if you think about what we teach about communication competence with what we teach of traditional male and female gender roles, what we are saying is to be effective you have to speak like a man, but to be appropriate you have to speak like a woman. . . if you are a woman. And, boy, I don't know how you are supposed to do that! Unless you are supposed to speak like a woman and not be effective or speak like a man and not be appropriate. I don't know. I was never able to strike that balance. . . quite clearly. And don't feel like I should have had to. (10-8.1)

Diane states: That was the beginning of my feelings of "what about me?" Contrary to many textbooks. . . I do not usually talk with my head tilted slightly, leaning forward, smiling, self-disclosing, and using tag questions and disclaimers, say. . . more than my male partner. I do not always communicate only to build relationships. I have a life. . . I have a job. . . I problem solve. . . I give information . . . I even have goals and aspirations! The perpetuation of nothing but gender *differences* is preposterous and downright dangerous. Where are the strong women in the literature? Where are the sensitive men? What about all the characteristics and behaviors that are similar between many

> women and men. . . where are the *similarities* in the literature? John Gray is societies' communication "boy-wonder." He is a popular guru who is doing society a grave disservice by telling women to go shopping because their Martians need time in their caves. Give me a break! I need to say one more thing. . . you know, I am perfectly capable of being a bloody bitch if I have to be. I simply don't choose to lead by command and control, but I too can do that! (8-4)

John Gray, who Diane mentions above, is an extremely popular contemporary lecturer and the author of a book titled, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.* In this book (1992), Gray makes one sweeping generalization after another. I believe that it is important to note that the first edition of this book came out in 1951; much of his rationale sounds like fifties' mentality when supposedly "father knew best." It is also important to note that some popular communication scholars are now including Gray's claims in their texts (Gamble & Gamble, 1996; Wood, 1996). In the book, Gray refers to men as Martians (not a terribly friendly term in my opinion). Here are just a few of his many claims about these Martians:

> 1. "Martians never offer advice unless asked. A way of honoring another Martian is *always* to assume he can solve his problem unless he is asking for help" (p. 20).
> 2. "Offering help to a man can make him feel incompetent, weak, and even unloved" (p. 19). . . "Men pride themselves on being experts, especially when it comes to fixing mechanical things, getting places, or solving problems. These are times when he needs her loving acceptance the most not her advice or criticism" (p. 21). (He actually advocates for the woman to sit quietly in the passenger seat of the car, keep her mouth shut, and let him drive around in circles for hours, if that is what it takes, until he figures it out for himself. She mustn't hurt his pride by telling him where to go.)
> 3. "When a woman resists a man's solutions he feels his competence is being questioned. As a result he feels mistrusted, unappreciated, and stops caring" (p. 25). (Sounds to me like he needs to grow up!)
> 4. "When a Martian gets upset he never talks about what is bothering him. He would never burden another Martian with his problem unless his friend's assistance was necessary to solve the problem. Instead he becomes very quiet and goes into his private cave to think about his problem, mulling it over to find a solution" (p. 30). "However, if he cannot find a solution to his problem, then he remains stuck in the cave" (p. 31). (How sad and lonely.)

5. "A man's sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results" (p.16).
6. Men's clothing is "designed to reflect their skills and competence". . . "they wear uniforms or at least hats to reflect their competence and power."
7. "They are more interested in 'objects' and 'things' rather than people and feelings" (p.16).

Equally amusing and unfortunate are Gray's sweeping generalizations regarding females (Venusians). Here are just a few:

1. "Venusians have different values. They value love, communication, beauty, and relationships". . . "A woman's sense of self is defined through her feelings and the quality of her relationships" (p. 18).
2. "They do not wear uniforms like the Martians (to reveal their competence). On the contrary, they enjoy wearing a different outfit every day, according to how they are feeling. . . they may even change outfits several times a day as their mood changes" (p. 18).
3. "To share their personal feelings is much more important than achieving goals and success" (p. 18). "Instead of being goal oriented, women are relationship oriented" (p. 19).

John Gray calls his book a "guide for improving communication" (p. 285). In this "guide" he points out that "men and women are *supposed to be different*" (p. 10). In his "guide" he says, "You will learn how men and women speak and even stop speaking for entirely different reasons" (p. 11). His key statement is this. . . "When you remember that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, everything can be explained" (p. 10).

Gray, in his dichotomous preachings of patriarchal ideology, is dangerous and demeaning to females. . . not to mention males. He is perpetuating gendered labels which might have worked in the fifties, but are no longer acceptable today. The same holds true for many authors of communication textbooks.

Labels that are biased against females serve to plant seeds of insidious self-doubt in many little girls and in grown women as well. The permeation of patriarchal

ideology can be incredibly subtle. Newcomb (1965) says, "Cognitive norms that do not correspond to any physical reality have effects that are just as real as those that do. Insofar as they are generally shared they come to constitute a kind of reality known as social reality" (p. 234). McLeod and Chaffee (1972) refer to social reality as the normative sharing of "oughtness" (p. 51). They claim that social reality emerges from "habituation" which becomes institutionalized into the social structure (p. 53). My concern is that this has been the situation in the speech communication discipline and is reinforced in popular literature such as that of Gray (1992), and Tannen (1990). Here is what Sara and Lisa have to say on gender differences:

> Sara: I know there are differences but I think too much has been made of those differences. . .especially in the way we use language. I think authors such as *Gray and Tannen perpetuate very broad stereotypes*. (7-4)

> Lisa: My personal opinion on these kinds of analysis of men and women. . .I think it is a copout, in a way, because I think that we are trained to communicate that way. It is not that men don't communicate to form relationships, but they have been taught not to and sort of the men are from *Mars* and the women from *Venus* thing. Well, that is all well and good and I think it is useful information, but it needs to go the step further than saying "well you are from Venus and I am from Mars and we can't communicate." I think that is a copout and I think that men and women can have more. . . it would be healthier if they had more similarities. That men realize the communication they need to build a relationship and women recognize using communication in problem solving and stuff like that. I think the awareness is a good first step. It is very helpful information to recognize okay we are communicating differently here. But then that is it which I say is a copout because then you need to take it a step further. (9-4)

Gendered norms for competent communication have been passed via communication textbooks for years. As a student of interpersonal and non-verbal communication, I spent hours memorizing how women communicate differently than men. I learned that males interrupt more than females, they talk louder than women,

they dominate mixed-gendered conversation, they are considered to have a more powerful conversational style; while women listen better, sit closer, make better eye contact than men, are far more empathic, considerate, cooperative, helpful, submissive, affiliative and supportive (Adler & Towne, 1996; Canary & Cody, 1994; Gamble & Gamble, 1996; Grove, 1991; Wood, 1994). If the research is correct, it would indicate that men are dominating conversation, and that women are far more thoughtful of others in their communication style (Stewart, Stewart, Cooper & Friedley, 1990). Perhaps women have followed the rules better than men.

While reading about such conversational style differences, which continue to appear in our textbooks and the popular literature, I often think that perhaps men simply need to be more respectful and less domineering in mixed-gendered conversation. Perhaps men can benefit by learning to participate in a more feminine style of communication. Rowe (1974) speaks of the benefits of a slower and quieter communication style. Scollon and Scollon (1987) also advise the adoption of the negatively stereotyped communication strategies that are supposedly more feminine in nature.

Cameron (1985) points out that the negative stereotyping of women's language only exacerbates the popular notion of women's communicating style as inadequate (p. 128). The deficiency model of women's language, as presented in our interpersonal communication textbooks, is "crazymaking" for women. If we follow the rules, roles and norms as presented in our textbooks, we are then labeled as being deficient in our communication style. And then to make matters even more crazy, as we are being told by communication scholars that our communication style is

deficient, much of society is rewarding us for passivity and submissiveness in our communication style.

If one wanted to continue to divide the sexes by arguing for a deficiency model, a case could easily be made that it is indeed the traditional masculine communication style which is in fact deficient because of a lack of empathic listening and other-orientation. I believe however, that perpetuating such divisiveness is dangerous. Our discipline must stop perpetuating universal sex differences in language styles. . . it only serves to maintain the status quo by covertly teaching male supremacy in the classroom.

Here is a partial review of such sex-based language styles, as presented in the contemporary communication textbooks reviewed for this study:

Typology of women:
- Women value love, communication, beauty and relationships
- Women share information and power
- Women sit closer and sit more directly in front of other interactants
- Women want to build rapport, thus, play down their expertise rather than display it

Women use:
- talk to build and sustain connections with others
- less space and emphasize their appearance which defines them as touchable
- apologies and disclaimers more than men
- more "sugar" words than men
- tag questions and disclaimers
- self-disclosure more frequently than men
- less personal space than men
- more eye contact (gaze behavior) than men

Women are:
- more comfortable in supporting others
- submissive
- overly polite
- more flexible & facilitative
- soft spoken
- more tactile than men
- deferential, decorative and relationship centered
- more likely to phrase their ideas as questions
- good listeners
- more cooperative
- overly descriptive
- less confident
- less direct

Women seek:

- interpersonal closeness
- love, communication, beauty and relationships

Typology of men

Men use:

- talk to convey information and establish their independent status
- power words
- louder voices
- likely to lead by command and control

Men are:

-independent
- competent
- problem solving
- precise
- more interruptive
- powerful
-achievement oriented
- status seeking
- information giving
-competitive
- more comfortable giving opinions and speaking in an authoritative way

We need to re-think some of the above typologies which tend to paint women as powerless and tentative. . . or as Cameron (1985) says, "inadequate communicators." Educators and authors must end the reification of outdated typologies which teach that women smile more and are kinder than men, the rationale being that women communicate primarily to build relationships, while men are the information givers and the problem solvers. Such typologies promote irrational social patterns and serve the interests of dominant groups. They are "bound up with the preservation of the status quo" (Giddens, 1983, p. 194).

Having looked briefly at hegemonic competence ideals and gender distinctions, it is now time to look at ways in which feminist perspectives have been discounted in our discipline.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Feminism has different meanings for various individuals in academe. But, as Bowen and Wyatt (1993) state, "The single element that seems to unite most definitions of feminism is the conviction that feminist critique and theory is driven by

a recognition of women's subordination in many personal and professional spheres. Feminists are concerned with the ways in which women live in, know, act in, and experience the world; interests that have not been represented in traditional, 'malestream' academe" (p. 7).

The feminist perspective is very limited in speech communication textbooks. Perhaps this perspective has been of little interest to speech theorists of the past, or perhaps it could threaten the preservation of male dominance in the discipline. Shulamit Reinharz (1985) says, "There are still many feminists (untenured) academics who are afraid to discuss feminism or do feminist research, lest they suffer academic punishment." (Kramarae, p. 429). Ten years later, such a consensus still seemed true for many attending gender and communication discussion panels at the Western Speech Conference.[3] Participants at three different discussion groups expressed significant confusion and frustration over dealing with feminist issues in the classroom. I heard women and men alike questioning how to influence the academy toward counterhegemonic discourses which challenge the structures of established knowledge and authority. The question was asked, "how do we incorporate feminist scholarship into our constraining 'discipline' and its closely guarded requirements?" One male professor said he did not dare use any text written by a female author if it was at all sensitive to feminist issues. He was searching for male authors sensitive to feminist pedagogical practices. Other instructors made suggestions on how to "safely" transform speech communication pedagogy through the utilization of engaging techniques such as: storytelling, narrative, and intuitive speaking assignments; video

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[3]February, 1995: Portland, Oregon.

tapes; role-playing; guest speakers; and family (small group) support structures.

Because the feminist perspective appears almost nonexistent in many of the most popular communication textbooks, and because it is also absent in communication classes, most of us must learn our feminism from other disciplines or through individual study. Bowen and Wyatt (1993) state, "Very few courses in speech communication incorporate either feminist reading or feminist principles and practices" (p. 9). Diane has strong feelings on the subject:

> Diane: I questioned time and time again, "Where are the other half of us?" Why must women have to take classes in women's studies to feel represented in the literature?

Women need to evaluate the academy's covert theft of our confidence, our sense-of-self, and our inner voice as well. Women (and many men) tend to be self-reflexive creatures, with all types of emotional and intuitive language going on inside our skin. Much of academia has forced us to bury these communicative tools. Emotion and experience often enhance our work, but as bell hooks (1994) says, we are usually expected to leave our personal experiences and biases behind when we cross over the threshold into academe. Comments on the subject follow:

> Jerri: We are treated, I believe, with the exception of one or two graduate students, as though our experience means nothing. I don't know what the average age of the graduate students is in our department, but most of them that I know are certainly over thirty. We have life experiences that we can bring to that program that the department would benefit so much from tapping into those life experience resources. But they have just said, "pooh-pooh, it is not worth anything." Well, I disagree. . . these women have experiences. . . they don't need to talk like men. . . disimpassioned, citing other disimpassioned men. (2-14)

> Jennifer: They act like you don't have life experiences. I don't think they even think about it. They assume you are a student, you want to get through so you can be at a different level, or you can do something else. But I don't think anyone looks at you thinking, "I wonder what types of experiences she has

had?" "I wonder where she has been, or who she has talked to, or what she has read, or what she has done, or how she was raised, or what she had to go through to get where she is now?" (6-9)

333: I know that the people who are my instructors still don't know what it is I do for my work. . . basically the fact that I have this knowledge isn't worth diddle to them. It is odd in my formal network, walking down the hall talking to someone, there is a tremendous amount of respect or credence for what I do as an individual. . . regardless of my gender. In the classroom however, whether I am talking about it or writing about it, it is like if anybody else didn't see it, it doesn't count that is my experience. It feels ridiculous. . . absolutely ridiculous! Again, my belief system is that each member of the party brings to the party something of intrinsic and inherent value. I love that in my world of work outside of college. I love that somehow serendipitously, a layperson always comes to the job. I love to have that layperson because they ask the obvious question that the rest of us have missed because we are too close to it. I learn something from their experiences. . . it is so valuable. (14-14)

As "333" states, we value experience. . .ours as well as others. Qualitative work is one venue encouraging the inclusion of personal experience and consequently allows women, as researchers, to be whole; it allows us to utilize integral instruments of inner knowing, inner seeing, inner hearing and inner sensing (Estes, 1992, p. 26). In many ways, the patriarchal perspectives of "science" have created a mind/body split. This split has forced us to bury these valuable tools, gained through age and lived experience, causing them to rust through decades of disuse.

If intrapersonal communication were more valued in our discipline, interpersonal communication skills could be improved. We would be much better educators if we realized that "Competence is found in the interplay between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal (Fisher & Adams, 1994, p. 223). Vocate (1994) states, "Because the inner speech processes of coding and /or dialogue underlie speech communication performance at any level, understanding them better is essential if we are to progress in either explaining or improving communication competence" (p. 26).

Several respondents had strong feelings on the importance of intrapersonal communication:

> Andara: I think that regardless of the definition that you use, that you have to have the communication with yourself in order to communicate with others. . . You have to have some sort of intrapersonal conversation. That has to be taking place. I don't see how it couldn't. (4-15)
>
> Sam: Intrapersonal communication is tremendously important in relation to communication competence. I notice that I have been feeling more competent in my communication with other people since I have been spending more time intrapersonally. . . learning about my own background, my own issues, and being able to pay attention to what is happening with me. I think it is not emphasized nearly to the degree that it could be. (5-15)
>
> Sara: Because of the reflexive component. . . the process. . . we need to reflect on our actions. And the honesty. . . we need to examine our honesty and our motives if we are going to be competent communicators. . . I don't think that the ethical part and the honesty part is considered as completely as it should be. There isn't much emphasis put on intrapersonal at all because it is a given and assumed. (7-15)
>
> Randi: What you say to yourself and television are the two greatest forces on the planet. And whatever those internal conversations are; whatever that internal level of trust and confidence is; it is absolutely reflected to everyone else you speak to. . . There is absolutely no aspect of the human that doesn't eventually turn back to what you say to yourself, even if it is at an out of consciousness level. I think that what you hear in your own head must be listened to and controlled twenty four hours a day. I think that until you have acute awareness. . . painful awareness of what you tell yourself, you don't have the potential to really succeed. If you can communicate competently with yourself, and honestly with yourself. . . I don't see how you can be less than competent with other people. (12-15)

Cheris Kramarae (1981) claims that women express less satisfaction with their communication experiences than do men. Women have been encouraged to stifle their inner voice; they also, according to Cheris Kramarae (1981), have been taught to understand men's meaning more easily than men understand women's meaning. As Jonathan Culler (1990) notes in his postmodern perspective on "Reading As A

Woman," we have been expected to identify with masculine experiences and perspectives at the expense of our own interests as women. This can become a "tangle of contradictions" when we are asked to identify against ourselves (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, p. 453). For Steinem (1992) it seems that education has historically separated the link between mind and emotion for women of all races and classes. What we are taught does not align with what we experience (p. 114). Women have been excluded in many ways from contributing to religious, political, and literary discourses; they often lack words for the female experience. This silencing of women Kramarae (1981) refers to as "muted group theory." This theory explores the underlying structures causing oppression, and sometimes invisibility, to particular groups in this society. Ursula Le Guin (1995) speaks of an "invisibility factor" in which all women are not seen. She claims that to break down this factor we need to talk together as women.

Robin Lakoff (1975) has written of such muting in the socializing process of little girls. Teachers are often unaware that they are teaching special linguistic uses to little girls. Lakoff states, "If the little girl learns her lesson well, she is not rewarded with unquestioned acceptance on the part of society; rather, the acquisition of this special style of speech will later be an excuse others use to keep her in a demeaning position, to refuse to take her seriously as a human being. Because of the way she speaks, the little girl -- now grown to womanhood -- will be accused of being unable to speak precisely or to express herself forcefully" (p. 5-6).

It takes a great deal of courage, inspiration and information for women to rise above limiting conditions which have robbed them of power and self-esteem. Steinem (1992) offers some insight regarding hierarchies that ration self-esteem. . . she claims women need to "demystify the forces that have told us what we should be before we

can value what we are" (p. 109). Steinem, however, does not go far enough in identifying the "forces" while speaking for "us." We must remember that when we do not understand our own belief system and where it comes from, we may stand by it steadfastly even unto our own demise.

Relatedly, because women have too often been excluded from masculine intellectual systems, and because we have been expected to take the "otherness" of the male sex for granted, our systems are "erected on an essential intellectual fault" (Rich, 1986, p. 81). For example, Culler (1990) points out that it is assumed by the male critic that his perspective is "sexually neutral," while a feminist reading is seen as a case of "special pleading." Such denigration of feminist perspectives must end; we must encourage women's contributions to scholarship by "excavating women's voices from their tombs" (Bowen & Wyatt, 1993, p. 3).

Campbell (1989) made an important contribution as a communication scholar by coining the term "feminine style." Feminine style is marked by the use of a "personal and tentative tone, a heavy reliance on examples, anecdotes and experiences, an inductive structure, a peer-like relationship between the rhetor and the audience, and an invitation to audience members to join in the rhetorical process." These stylistic devices enable women to overcome injunctions against women speaking out in public, and empower otherwise disempowered females (Hayden, 1995, pp. 1-2).

Traditionally there has been much emphasis on male criteria and other-oriented concepts in academe. Goffman (1961), for example, claims that style has as its objective what he calls "impression management." If others evaluate your stylistic choices as being both appropriate and effective, they will attribute communication

competence to you (p. 236). Campbell's "feminine style," in contrast, provides a "framework through which women can be judged on their own terms" (p. 2).

Dow and Boor Tonn (1993) say feminine style has the potential to "function philosophically as well as strategically, by creating alternative grounds for testing the validity of claims for public knowledge" (p. 291). Thus, both strategic and epistemological implications are inherent in what may be called a "feminine style" of communication. Hayden (1995) claims that feminine style provides the tools necessary for presenting and generating truths derived from an epistemology that privileges personal experience (p. 18). Such a non-patriarchal epistemology would allow women to be judged on their own terms. Bowen and Wyatt (1993) suggest that we can help people become empowered rather than oppressed by "checking existing research goals and practices to insure that they fit with women's experiences" (p. 10). Many respondents expressed a sense of frustration regarding the readings not relating to their own experiences:

> Sugar: The *readings were not relevant to my own life experience*, if that has any validity at all. They didn't speak to me not only from my own experience, but as a woman, the way I would learn and express. (3-3)

> Sugar: It wasn't difficult, *it was just so irrelevant in a lot of ways to everything*! And it was like being in another zone! An entirely different language set you know, and then it didn't relate to anything later. . . a lot of it didn't. (3-14)

> Jennifer: So over, and over and over again, I wanted to say, "Hey people there is another perspective out there. . . *this does not fit my experience*! (6-3)

> Lisa: I was completely offended by the book. I felt *it had no relevancy to me and my experience* and I thought it was dangerous. . . some of the ideas that were expressed in that book. (9-2)

> Lisa: All of a sudden I would just throw the book. I mean I would just be "listen to what this idiot is saying!" And um, and several times I would say "*this has nothing to do with me. . .* I mean *this is so irrelevant to my experience* and this is so offensive." (9-6)

> Liz: And again, if you are not applying the material to your own lives then you are getting a fucking degree you are not getting a fucking education is my standpoint on it. (11-14)

In discussing the concept of patriarchy in academe, Kramarae (1992) emphasizes the need for more research from the women's standpoint (p. 424). Lourdes Torres says, "Aside from the occasional consideration of their 'aberrant' speech behavior, studies in mainstream linguistics with women as their focal point are rare" (Kramarae, p. 281).

> Jerri: I think the structure of our program definitely *marginalizes* women in general. We don't have a women's study aspect or feminist component to any of the coursework that we are presented with at the graduate level. And I think that this definitely excludes the relational-feeling aspect of communication which is so important. I mean, it is a key component that we are missing. . . that we are not teaching students, that we are not addressing ourselves, and that we don't use in any of our work. (2-3)

> Randi: I think there will be more and more literature geared towards women; geared towards topics of interest to women. But since the ratio of that material is certainly not fifty-fifty at this time, then the research you have available to you is predominantly male. And if that is what you have, then that is what you look at and hopefully someday you do a better job than the men did. (12-3)

Catharine MacKinnon (1987) writes about what laws conceived by and for women might look like. She points out that "we should not be lulled into talking about differences between men and women when we are really dealing with dominance" (Kramarae, p. 419). MacKinnon (1987) believes that gender is first an inequality of power, and only as a result is it a question of difference. The meaning of gender is generally construed in terms of sameness or difference, but there is no neutral sameness, rather man becomes the standard from which sameness or

difference is measured. MacKinnon argues that we must therefore get away from the idea of "gender as difference" to the idea of "gender as dominance" (Kramarae, p. 287). I argue that we must strive to break gendered patterns, reinforced through socialization, and teach a "neutral sameness" so that communication competence is attributable to all regardless of gender.

I have looked briefly at how hegemonic ideals have been perpetuated in the literature, and how feminist perspectives have been discounted; now I consider some of the confusion surrounding the concept of communication competence.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Defining Communication Competence

Throughout my review of communication texts, I hoped to find agreement among communication scholars as to just what competent communication behaviors, traits and characteristics might look like. My findings have revealed the confusion among communication scholars. As Johnson says, "There is no doubt that research regarding communication competence has resulted in an endless series of academic debates" (Vocate, 1994, p. 184). In journals and texts one finds arguments over the distinction between performance and competence, the role of context, and the criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness. I have come to the same conclusion as did Phillips (1984) who claimed that conceptualizing competence is "like trying to climb up a greased pole" (p. 24).

Communication competence first gained wide exposure in the early seventies when Hymes (1972) used the term to refer to the knowledge an individual has regarding the use of language in communication. Since Hymes, communication competence has been written about by authors far too numerous to mention.

With regard to communication competence Wiemann and Backlund (1980) have stated that there is a lack of definitional and theoretical consistency. . . that current views are overlapping and often contradictory. . . and that there is a need for further clarification and elaboration of this concept if a useful theory is to be developed. Their claims were made seventeen years ago and the same statements certainly apply in 1997!

In offering one explanation for the definitional difficulty of communication competence, Wieman and Backlund (1980) claim that the origins of competence in the literature stem from two perspectives: cognitive and behavioral. The cognitive perspective conceives of competence as being "a mental phenomenon distinct and separated from behavior" (p. 187). Here competence is a matter of potential capability. Chomsky (1965) was most influential in contributing to the cognitive concept, focusing on competence as "pure" knowledge of structures. Wiemann and Backlund (1980) claim that in espousing the cognitive approach, theorists "seek to remove the limitations of both performance and of individuals so that an idealized, finite set of formal rules that underlie behavior may be developed" (p. 187). The behavioral perspective on the other hand, refers to actual communicative behavior. Many behavioral scholars have tied competence to *effective* behavior, seeking an idealized set of rules, and focusing on a repertoire of skills appropriate to a variety of relationships and contexts. Wiemann and Backlund (1980) claimed that for a meaningful theory of communication competence to be developed, both cognitive and behavioral processes must be included as interdependent aspects.

Wiemann and Bradac (1989) offer further explanation for the lack of definitional clarity in the literature. They believe that researchers and theorists have

generated certain hypotheses regarding communicative phenomena depending upon their "functionalist" or "structuralist" position. Functionalists are interested primarily in characterizing personal and societal message use or pragmatics. Structuralists are interested in characterizing message patterns. These two schools conceptualize effectiveness differently. The Functionalist School believes that relative ineffectiveness is rather normal and that effective communicators have learned skills and strategies well. On the other hand, the Structuralist School believes that communicators are usually successful in "making their intentions understood, in seeming coherent, in seeming communicatively usual, in eliciting communicatively relevant responses from others, etc. . . and that ineffective communicators are relatively rare" (Wiemann & Bradac, p. 265).

In reviewing many contemporary interpersonal speech communication textbooks, I found communication competence described in almost as many forms as there are textbooks. As Spitzberg (1994a) says, "So amorphous is the available research and scholarly thought about competence, that to apply the term paradigm seems an exercise in optimism" (p. 29). Most speech communication textbooks and scholarly articles state however, that competent interaction must involve the criteria of "appropriateness" and "effectiveness." (see Spitzberg, 1987, 1989, 1993, 1994a; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann & Bradac, 1985, 1989).

There is also a lack of terminological consistency for the concept of communication competence. Weaver (1972) explains that this dyadic concept has adopted the term "communication competence" because the primary concern is with communication behavior. However, I found, as did Wiemann (1977), that many behavioral scientists, textbook authors, and communication theorists have dealt with the phenomenon of communication competence under the rubrics of "social skill,"

"interpersonal effectiveness," "interpersonal competence," "relational competence," and, "communicative competence" (p. 195).

I turn now to the criteria involved in the concept of communication competence.

Criteria

I found the theorizing concerned with the criteria of communication competence by far the most contradictory and confusing aspect of reviewing communication competence in the literature. The "criteria" for competence has been variously labeled "dimensions," "traits," "attributes," "patterns," "skills," "style," "ability," "components," and "standards." It is easy to assertain the terminological confusion surrounding the criteria of communication competence with a look at what just a few scholars have determined to be key criteria:

(1) Mehrabian (1972) - a.affiliation, b.potency, and c.responsiveness.
(2) Allen and Brown (1976) - a.controlling, b.feeling, c.informing, d.ritualizing, and c.imagining.
(3) Feingold (1977) - a.adaptation to others, b.commitment to message, and c.empathic listening.
(4) Rushing (1976) - a.impression management, and b.transaction management.
(5) Ruben (1976) - a.display of respect, b. interaction posture, c.orientation to knowledge, d.empathy, e.self (versus other) role-oriented behavior, f.interaction management, and g.tolerance for ambiguity.
(6) Backlund (1977) - a.social insight, b.open mindedness.
(7) Wiemann (1977) - a.affiliation/support, b.empathy, c.social relaxation, d.behavioral flexibility, and e.interaction management.
(8) Kelly and Chase (1978) - a.empathy, b.task completion, and c.activity.
(9) Trenholm and Jensen (1992) - a.assign meanings to the world around them, b.set goals strategically, c.take on social roles appropriately, d.present a valued image of themselves to the world, and e.generate intelligible messages.

This plethora of criteria or standards by which interpersonal competence has been judged, seems to have been beaten to death by the scholarly community. They seem to presuppose a world that does not change and perceptions that are constant between communication partners. . . regardless of their gender.

As stated earlier, the most commonly attributed criterion of communication competence are effectiveness and appropriateness. If we stop to ask "why," a perfectly reasonable conclusion may be that Brian Spitzberg, who is looked to as the "Guru" of communication competence, has published four scholarly books; sixteen scholarly monographs or chapters; twenty-three scholarly articles; and nineteen pedagogical publications on the subject of communication competence in which he almost always mentions effectiveness and appropriateness as the most accepted standards by which it is judged. What communication scholars have yet to realize is that the "Guru" himself is now questioning his own writings which have referred to appropriateness as "adherence to situationally relevant norms and rules." Spitzberg (1996) says, "This tendency toward preservation of the extant interactional order as the safest bet on appropriateness makes this criterion an agent of conservatism and an enemy of communicative innovation" (p. 134)[4] Although Spitzberg has a long way to go, as we all do, before total enlightenment. . . at least he is evolving. The problem as I see it is this. . . as he is evolving, far too many other scholars are standing still.

SUMMARY

Thus far, we have been made aware by the above comments and literature review that there are institutionalized perspectives or assessments of communication competencies which seem to call for a correctness or fitness of behavior. And to the

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[4]*Ideological Issues in Competence Assessment*; Paper presented at Western Speech Association, San Diego State University: November 1996.

extent that people alter their behavior as a result of taken-for-granted societal norms, it then becomes an "ideology that is spring loaded towards the status quo" (Spitzberg & Duran, 1993). Stagnant hegemonic demands perpetuate societal or institutional standards having gone not always understood or even questioned by the scholarly community.

From the literature review we also discovered that the notion of communication competence has been aligned with hegemonic constraints regarding rules and roles for women in social institutions. Such hegemonic constraints cultivate patriarchal authority and take a toll on the health, happiness and productivity of women.

Communication scholars and authors of mainstream communication literature continue to contribute to a feminine model of communication which is biased and marginalizing. The feminist perspective continues to be of little interest to scholars in the discipline of speech communication. Women have been excluded in many ways from contributing to scholarship which includes female experience.

And finally, the literature review pointed out the confusion surrounding the conceptualization of communication competence, its criteria, and its situationally relevant norms and rules.

This project is not another victimology. . . for women have been, and will continue to be, effective agents of change. I will now describe the design of this project which encourages a pedagogy allowing women an equal say.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

A research *method* is of course a procedure or a technique for gathering evidence. There are basically three ways to gather evidence: listening to informants (participants); observing behavior; or examining historical traces and records (Harding, 1987). As a feminist doing research, I have participated in all of these techniques throughout the course of this project. I have listened carefully to how my female participants have described their graduate school experience; I have looked at how scholars have conceptualized certain concepts; and, for several years, I have observed the behaviors and actual experiences of women in their academic environment. It was the actual observation of such behaviors that created the inchoate seeds for this study. My rationale for conducting this study is simply this. . . I saw something that needed to be done! Marcus (1994) provides a niche for the work I set out to do when he addressed "messy" approaches which, "embrace experimental critical works that are always incomplete, personal, self-reflexive, and resistant to totalizing theories" (p. 183). This study hopes to move away from traditional theory building, focusing instead on a rethinking of traditional concepts which define how females communicate.

It has never been my intention to reject my disciplinary canon altogether. Instead, I am attempting to do research in a way that does not imitate the problems I have discovered. Reinharz (1992) states, " Feminist research, I believe, contributes to the disciplines, draws from the disciplines, and reacts against the disciplines in terms of data, methods, and theory" (p. 246). It is my belief that the extreme emphasis on methodology may in fact be just one more patriarchal ideal that researchers must overcome. Too many students get hung up on methodological dilemmas.

> Lisa states: I think that there are people so hung up in the method that nothing is getting done. (9-12)

My attempt to push departmental methodological boundaries is my small contribution to breaking a status quo which is often based on erroneous studies and men's assumptions about how best to do research. I am not interested in spending months pondering on "the perfect method," nor am I interested in going to the ever-revered thesis shelf and copying what someone else has done simply because *that* is the way to do it.

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Because I believe that feminist theory and communication studies can fruitfully inform each other, I have chosen a feminist critical perspective. I believe, as do Brock, Scott, and Chesebro (1990) that a feminist approach is particularly worthy of attention (p. 296), and, it facilitates the interweaving of the multiple voices of the women in this study.

Brock, Scott, and Chesebro (1990) define criticism as a "reason-giving activity." It posits a judgment, explains the judgment, gives reason for the judgment, and then supports the judgment with known information. Criticism is also action oriented in that it seeks to change the human condition and can affect future action (p. 13).

Ideally, I wish to create awareness in all women as to the discrepancies in the gender-based expectations of appropriateness in our society; for as Brummett says, "Criticism should be passed on to as many people as possible" (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994, p. 284). In particular, I want to speak to women in institutions of higher learning and the educators with whom they work. Most importantly, I hope to gain the attention of communication theorists and researchers encouraging them to re-

visit the issue of communication competence. Drawing also on female experiences will promote alternative ways of thinking and/or a corrective voice on communication competence, particularly the issue of appropriateness.

I appreciate Taylor's statement, "Writing, and thus criticism, I argue, are 'embodied' practices. They are always connected to the writer's unique history of pleasure and pain, and are grounded in the psychic traces of bodily experience within institutions (for example, the family, school, church). We write about what we love and what we fear, and although we may efface the fact with our 'academic' voice, we invent - and are invented - from other places, times, and voices" (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994, p. 419). This feminist criticism springs from my personal experience with the Catholic Church, parents, teachers, partners and a variety of social institutions. "Every organism must assess its circumstances and determine which forces act in its favor and against its survival" (Brock, Scott and Chesebro, 1990, p. 12).

As Roderick Hart notes (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, p. 72), "Criticism is not something I do; it is something I am." Hart believes we become critics because we often do not like the language our contemporaries speak nor the policy options they endorse. Hart also believes that we are critics because we desire to help others to move society forward. And ultimately, we are critics because we are citizens. I believe, as does Hart, that the way we learn greatly affects what we learn, and as critics, we must maintain an awareness of our personal history (NBC, p. 77).

My history is peppered with memories of messages such as "Don't say a word young lady!" I was frequently discouraged from showing anger or having opinions of my own. I, like most women, grew up with pressure to accept historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood - one common theme

being that. . . "women, like children, should be seen and not heard" (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 5). This is a long-persevering phenomenon demanding "attention," "description," "interpretation" and "evaluation." These are dimensions that merge into one another. . . and these are the "primary dimensions of rhetorical criticism." (Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, p. 12) The interpretation and evaluation of this phenomenon is served well by utilizing a qualitative method of inquiry.

QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

Philipsen (1982) refers to a qualitative inquiry as "in-situ, exploratory, openly-coded, participatory research" (p. 2). He describes the qualitative case study writer as more interested in "experience" than "experiment" (p. 11). In the qualitative portion of this study, I explore the self-reported experiences of sixteen women who are present and past graduate students in the Department of Speech Communication at Portland State University. I have gathered data on how this select sample of women perceive their own communicative experience in graduate school, and their thoughts on required textual material and academic expectations encountered throughout their graduate studies. In investigating the perceptions of these women, I have discovered their "experience of a particular topic or situation" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 12); the topic being appropriateness, as related to positive communicative outcomes, and the mechanisms of control which serve to block such outcomes and reinforce the problematic criteria of appropriateness. The qualitative component of interviewing has offered me access to other women's thoughts and memories. It is important to note that this way of learning from women is an "antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19).

In deciding to use PSU as a data site, I believe I have achieved my goal of collecting the "richest possible data" due to my "prolonged immersion" in, and

"intimate familiarity" of the program (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 11). I feel that questioning my colleagues has been extremely fruitful to my interests, because as Lofland and Lofland state, I am already a member in the setting, and naturally possess the "convert" stance. In other words, I have had easy access to understanding. As a participant researcher, I have maintained my sensitivity because, although I am somewhat familiar with many of the participants, I am not so enmeshed that I cannot see.

Throughout my graduate school experience, I was carefully trained to keep what McCracken (1988) calls "critical distance" (p. 22). Troike (1985, p. 120) mentions that my personal perspectives could influence what I see and hear. That is true. However, it is most important to note that although I am not producing phenomena, I have observed it, and as a female graduate student, I am also part of the phenomena being researched. And because I am committed to an epistemology that privileges personal experience (mine as well as others), I have included my own voice in this project while simultaneously attempting to maintain awareness of my assumptions and biases. One assumption of mine, that I am happy to acknowledge, is that we get carried away with literature reviews. Some scholarly texts are so filled full of citations that meaning-making is prohibitive.

On Literature Review

McCracken (1988) states, "The first step of the long qualitative interview begins with an exhaustive review of the literature" (p. 29). I am inclined to believe that the term "exhaustive" is well stated. Here is what one graduate has to say on what she calls "academic elitism" which traditionally perpetuates extensive literature reviews:

> Andara: It perpetuates this sense that you have to read all this stuff, and know all this stuff, and do the studies, and know the studies, and you have to

> understand the studies, and you have to know how to triangulate, and you know. . . all of it. And I think those things together are what complicate the thesis process. When I talk to people, they have a couple notebooks full of stuff. One student was going to the library every day. Journal article after journal article. . . I thought "Why?" And the answer isn't about their obsessing on it, its just thats the way you do it (4-14).

My goal has been to maintain a realistic literature review. It includes: relevant coursework readings; a review of a selected set of widely utilized interpersonal communication textbook chapters on communication competence and gendered stereotypes; a review of related communication journals, conference papers, and extant literature; and several texts by feminist authors. It is not my intention to replicate everything everyone has ever said on the subject. In an interview with Brian Spitzberg he states, "I have come to the belief recently that the literature review has become a waste of pages and time. A study can be justified in ten pages of literature review." [5] As I began to believe that I had ingested an adequate amount of literature on my subject, I then put together a pilot study.

The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted for this project in the Winter of 1994 while taking a Qualitative Methods of Inquiry class. To assure the feasibility of conducting research involving the experiences of my colleagues, and to test the reliability and validity of the interview guide and interview process, a pilot study was helpful prior to beginning the formal data collection. The pilot study involved four graduate students from our department. It was a useful exercise in becoming familiar and comfortable with consent forms,[6] demographic information sheets, my equipment, and the

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[5]San Diego State University; Dept. of Speech Communication: November 1996.
[6]Regarding consent forms, Seidman (1991) states, "even though an interviewer's research may not be funded by federal sources and an informed consent of participants is therefore not legally necessary, it is both ethically and methodologically desirable to seek it" (p.47).

interview process itself. It also provided me the opportunity to refine my interview guide, and, it helped me to understand how to deal with the sensitive issue of confidentiality. The pilot study left me better equipped to relax and enjoy the interview process, and to conduct research with enhanced meaning.

The Interview Guide

Kirk and Miller (1986) claim that there is good reason for calling my interview instrument a "guide" rather than a schedule or questionnaire. They refer to the guide as "a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person being interviewed. . .thus, interviews might more be termed 'guided conversations'." (p. 59) I like that approach!

Siedman (1991) says of the interviewing process, "it is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in others' stories" (p. 7). And key to this project, Siedman states, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). On a similar note, McCracken (1988, p. 34) reminded me that there are two general principles which are key in questionnaire construction: 1) To allow respondents to tell their own story in their own terms; 2) The questions should be phrased in a general and nondirective manner. These open and nondirective questions are called "grand tour" by McCracken, who states that they are efficient in sustaining testimony in an unobtrusive way (p. 35). The design of questions is also important to avoid validity errors. Spradley (1979: pp. 86-87) states, "Asking the wrong question actually is the source of most validity errors." I also used "mini-tour" questions asking respondents to reconstruct details about particular individual experiences (Seidman, 1991, p. 63).

In designing my interview schedule (see Appendix A), I remained aware that along with my interviewees I am a primary instrument for "meaning making" in this

study. For as Seidman (1991) says, meaning is to some degree a function of participant interaction with the interviewer. As the interviews proceeded, I observed differences among my interviewees which called for variations in the interview guide. This served to bring in useful information and tended to put the interviewee at ease. These asides produced variations in the duration of interviews. Reinharz (1992) states, "Because of the interviewee-guided nature of much feminist interview research, there frequently are large variations in the duration of interviews within a single project" (p. 25). My interviews varied greatly between fifty minutes and three hours.

The next issue of concern for this study has been the issue of confidentiality.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality for both participants and educators (see Appendix B) has been my central consideration in conducting this study. I assured my participants that no actual names would be used in transcriptions or the research write-up. To decrease participant concerns regarding confidentiality as much as possible, each participant selected a pseudonym that was used throughout the study; a copy of each completed transcript was mailed back to each participant asking her to eliminate or edit any identifying words or phrases as she saw fit; I guaranteed each participant that all recordings and notes would be stored in a secure place only accessible to me; and, that all interview tape recordings would be destroyed at the termination of this study. Now lets jump from talking about the termination of the study back to the beginning of this project and the issue of participant selection.

Participant Selection

Obtaining the participant pool was complicated for two reasons. One, many of the women have been out of the department for some time. And two, I was using outdated and incomplete records in trying to determine who was qualified for my

study. I went through the grueling process of trying to find names, and current addresses and phone numbers from 1992 through 1996 departmental rosters. Tracking qualified women down involved many hours of investigation, and some expense in long-distance phone calls. In conducting brief telephone interviews I tried to determine such things as how many hours of graduate studies these students, or former students, had completed; their status in the program; the names of other women who had left the department after completing the majority of their master's degree coursework; etc. After two months of detective work, I had a potential participant pool of forty four women. It was now time to move on to the next stage of participant recruitment.

Participant recruitment involved non-random judgment sampling (Honigman, 1970). The initial recruitment for all participants was by letter (see Appendix D). Before the individual interviews began, willing respondents signed a consent form (see Appendix B) and filled out the demographic information sheet (see Appendix C).[7] Out of a pool of forty four possible participants, thirty five women signed consent forms and returned them almost immediately by mail. Three other women contacted me saying, "call me if you need me." I was thrilled to receive an overwhelming positive response rate of over eighty percent. For the next two months I wrote or called the remaining women two or three times hoping to get more consent forms returned. I met with some success. . . but not much. It was now time to separate respondents into categories and draw my final participant pool.

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[7]The demographic information sheet will provide necessary "biographical realities" which inform the respondent's testimony, and assure that important material is readily at hand for the analysis stage (McCracken, 1988, p. 34).

The process of selecting a final participant pool seemed almost silly to me but it worked. This procedure was suggested to me in a course on qualitative methods. I set eight baseball caps out onto my office floor. The hats were labeled into eight categories based upon demographic sheet responses in which the women were asked if they preferred to participate in focus group or individual interviews: (1) Graduated / Focus group; (2) Graduated / Individual; (3) Thesis / Focus; (4) Thesis / Individual; (5) Proposal / Focus; (6) Proposal / Individual; (7) Left the program / Focus; and, (8) Left the program / Individual. A non-involved third party then drew names from the hats for the final participant pool. Due to participant status changes (participants moved from "proposal" to "thesis" / or, "thesis" to "graduated"), a new draw had to be made one month later. This draw was amazingly self-selecting in its reflection of appropriate age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status distribution.

Immediately after the draw determined who my participants were, I began to contact the sixteen women by phone to set up interview appointments. A problem popped up at this point. About two-thirds of my well-intentioned participants had returned their consent forms stating that they would be willing to perform *either* type of interview, but the majority *preferred* to participate in a focus group. McCracken (p. 10) points out that respondents lead "hectic" and "privacy-centered lives," and that even the best-intentioned have only limited time and attention to give the investigator. Where I did experience the hectic pace that some of these women experience was in trying to put together two different focus group sessions during the busy summer months of July and August. In each case, the sessions fell apart because two of the eight participants simply could not make it. Because trying to put together a focus group session was tedious and seemingly not probable, the names of the women who had volunteered to do either type of interview were put back in the hats and drawn

again. I now had sixteen names for sixteen individual interviews. I made more phone calls, and, in attempting to establish what Kirk and Miller (1986) refer to as "good rapport," I allowed each participant to choose both the time and location of the interview.

The Interview

At the time of each interview, I asked the respondent if she would mind wearing a clip-on microphone explaining that it enhanced the quality of sound for my transcription process. I then asked the respondent if she had any questions regarding the interview process and encouraged her to feel free to interrupt the interview at any time to ask for clarification or to take time to consider a response.

Again, in attempting to establish good rapport with my interviewees, I sorted some of the topics with the least sensitive material first. According to Lofland and Lofland (1984), placing the least sensitive questions first makes it easier to deal with more "tension-laden topics" (p. 55). My first question was extremely broad asking each respondent to simply reflect back on her graduate school experience. This was responded to in an open and relaxed manner in each interview and provided me with extremely useful information.

Post Interview

As stated earlier, the individual interviews lasted between one and three hours, including follow-up questions and responses after the tape was turned off. After completing each interview, I immediately sat down and wrote personal notes in a journal regarding the emotional tone, the difficulties, the joys, and so forth. Kirk and Miller call this log of insights and reflections a "comment sheet" (p. 58). I then transcribed the interviews as soon as I physically could hoping to be as accurate as

possible. Along with the exact transcription of the dialogue, I noted when and where the interviews were conducted and incorporated the personal notes mentioned above.

Lofland and Lofland (1984) believe that one should expect to spend about twice as long writing up the interview (including summaries, notes, verbatim transcription, ideas and emotional experiences) than conducting it (p. 62). Believe me I did. . . and a whole lot more! Upon the completion of the transcriptions, I conducted a thorough review and analysis which consisted of highlighting key responses and writing many notes in the margins. For as Lofland and Lofland state, "out of these bits and pieces of analysis you will be able to build the larger analysis that will become your research report" (p. 61).

RELIABILITY & VALIDITY

Lofland and Lofland (1984) address the issue of "prolonged immersion" or "intimate familiarity" and how it relates to qualitative research (p. 11). My personal history as a graduate student and teaching assistant in the Department of Speech Communication at PSU has caused certain awareness' and concerns both personally and in regard to my colleagues. In discussing the connection of "self and study" Lofland and Lofland acknowledge some methodological difficulties but claim that any such difficulties are a small price to pay for the "very creative wellsprings of the naturalistic approach" (p. 10). Lofland and Lofland (p. 25) discuss using "preexisting relations of trust" to remove barriers to entrance. As a participant observer, my colleagueship puts me in a fortunate position of trust. As females sharing common work-related and educational-related activities, interests, values and feelings, my colleagues were most supportive of this project.

I believe that interviewing my colleagues allowed for a rich source of data. And I believe that my personal experience within the department has guaranteed more reliability than if I were an unknown observer. Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 9) define reliability as, "the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out." Because of my routine, and face-to-face contact with many of the women in this study, I most likely possess what Kirk and Miller refer to as "built-in sensitivity" (p. 30). It was my "sensitivity" to the repeatability of many observed patterns that caused me to feel the merit of a study such as this. And it was the repeatability of so many responses. . . hearing the same thing over and over, that led me to believe that I had completed ample interviews.

Unlike reliability which relates to replication, Kirk and Miller (1986) define validity as the extent to which a measurement gives the correct answer (p. 19). They claim that the qualitative researcher in striving for validity, has to be concerned with "the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way (p. 20). To strive for validity in my study, I attempted to elicit from my respondents their personal opinions of their own experiences. I attempted to look, listen and ask without evaluation, even though I had apriori assumptions as to what my colleagues responses might be.

Johnson (1990) suggests selecting informants who are "knowledgeable, motivated, articulate, and accurate"(p. 44). I believe that due to the nature of this study (working with graduate students) I have been blessed with an entire pool of women who meet Johnson's criteria. In fact, many of the participants are, or have been, teachers at the college level. Johnson also states that informant selection is an involved process that includes establishing conscious criteria for selection, issues of informant rapport, and the protection of information sources, etc. (p. 21).

Trust is central to the validity of this study because without it I couldn't have elicited truthful testimony during the interviews. I am the major instrument of measurement in this investigation and without trust I have no quality control. Without quality control my reliability and validity issues are severely jeopardized. As the primary instrument of measure, I also realize as Kirk and Miller (p. 51) point out, that I am not completely a "neutral observer." My values, behavioral style, and personal experience as a woman must be considered. For that reason, I identified apriori, my own expectations, biases, and assumptions that could potentially affect reliability and validity. I also kept feeling notes, theoretical notes, methodological notes, and personal notes along with my observational notes. . . looking for issues that I otherwise might have taken for granted. I did not wish to "trivialize the familiar and therefore, forget that social science is largely concerned with explaining what is ordinary" (Sarett, 1984, p. 211).

LeCompte and Goetz (1982) believe that the value of scientific research is somewhat dependent on the ability of the researchers to demonstrate the credibility of their findings (p. 31). They also believe (as do I) that the admittance of the subjective experiences of both investigator and participants is a great contribution to scientific progress (p. 32). It is the inclusion of such subjective experiences that makes a qualitative method of data collection a perfect match for this study.

DATA ANALYSIS

I have been analyzing material for this study for some time now. Circumstances in our discipline and the information in our textbooks have been capturing my attention and stirring up a critical impulse within. As a feminist

researcher, I have attempted to evaluate, analyze, describe, and interpret every step of the way.

Lofland and Lofland (1984) state that ideally analysis and data collection run concurrently for the duration of a project, and that after all the data has been collected the researcher brings final order to her/his previously developed ideas. Throughout my literature review I identified "themes," constructed "typologies," and related many different pieces of data (from communication texts and feminist writings) to one another in order to enhance the meaning of this research.

My approach to analysis has been termed "analytic induction" by LeCompte & Goetz (1982). I believe this approach is complementary to the purpose of this research and appropriate to the research design, because I have worked inductively by first examining a situation and the behaviors involved, and then I developed insights about it. My primary strategy, "identifying categories and on generating statements of relationships" (p. 58); and my goal, "to construct the categories used by subjects to conceptualize their own experiences and world view" (LeCompte & Goetz, p. 54). I continually built propositions from the relationships I discovered in ongoing literature review; as I reviewed and wrote up personal notes and journal entries; and as I transcribed the responses given to each question during the interviews. As McCracken (1988) notes, my responsibility has been to determine overall patterns and thematic consistency and contradiction.

My ten-point method for analysis is as follows: (1) I personally transcribed all two hundred pages of interview responses. Not only does this save money. . . it provides more accuracy in conveying the feeling tones and the richness of the interviewees' words. I also suggest transcribing each interview as soon as is physically possible. . . this allows for better recall, and it keeps the feeling tones of the interviews

from getting enmeshed from one to the next. (2) This step was a thorough read of each interview without a writing utensil in hand (too soon to make any judgments). (3) This time I read each transcript and highlighted "passages of interest" (Seidman, 1991, p. 92). (4) In this third read, I underlined significant words or phrases asking: "what is the subject of the passage" . . . "is there a word within the passage itself that suggests a category into which the passage might fit?" (Seidman, p. 99). (5) This time, I went through each transcript with a different colored pen and put labels in the margins as to emerging categories. (6) In this read, I marked in the margins (with another colored pen) noting category-correlation or category-overlap between transcripts. (7) During this read, I used a different colored pen to mark certain passages or words that correlated to my literature review. (8) With yet another colored pen, I mark passages that stand out because they are decidedly different or contradict most of the others. These "different" (traditional research might call these atypical responses "deviant") cases must not get lost or tossed out as they would in quantitative research. Qualitative research calls for the identification and inclusion of such data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). (9) At this point, I compiled a list of tentative categories, but as Seidman points out, "Some categories that seemed promising early in the process will die out. . . New ones may appear. . . Categories that seemed separate and distinct will fold into each other" (pp. 99-100). (10) Under each category I noted each excerpt that was applicable by using a coding system which consisted of the interview number followed by the response number. For instance, if Sam in interview number five said something about her peers in response number two, under the category of "colleagues/peers" I noted a "5-2." Every other response by each participant that referred to peers was coded and noted in the same way.

It is at this point that the overarching themes emerged. In Seidman's words, I searched for "patterns and connections among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that might be called themes" (1991, p. 99). Aronson (1996) states, "Once the themes have been collected and the literature has been studied, the researcher is ready to formulate theme statements to develop a story line" (p. 3). The following chapter deals with the patterns and themes that emerged from the collected data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The rationale for this study stems from a personal observation that many women in academe negotiate hegemonic ideals in ways that are often not communicatively competent. This research explores the experiences of sixteen master's level students in the Department of Speech Communication at Portland State University. This research may have important pedagogical implications for graduate students and faculty members in our own department, and other departments as well. A summary of expected and unexpected exemplary data winnowed from the interviews follows.

EXPECTED MAJOR THEMES

The major themes emerging from the data have been grouped into three broad categories: cognitive; affective; and behavioral. The first category deals with the "experiential." As a result of the graduate school experience, and its mechanisms of control, significant cognitive constructs emerge.

COGNITIVE

1. Hazing

The overarching cognitive theme emerging from the data was the determination of the graduate school experience as an arbitrary *hazing*. "Hazing" is described in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1986) as "to harass by exacting unnecessary or disagreeable work; to harass by banter, ridicule, or criticism; to haze by way of initiation" (p. 557). Excerpts from nine different women exemplify the findings on the subject of hazing which encompasses other frequently used terms such as "*barriers*," "*criticisms*," "*games*," "*hoops*," "*hurdles*," "*obstacles*," "*roadblocks*" and "*struggles*:"

Andara: I would have liked it to have been more fun and enjoyable. It wasn't. It was *struggle* and frustration. (4-8.1)

Sam: I think that in order to get through and *jump through all the hoops* and do all the things you need to do to get through. . . I think you have to engage in that definition of appropriate behavior. (5-8.1)

Sam: When we *jump through the correct hoops* and we perform accordingly, we are their proud little accomplished students to show off to other people about how smart and how intellectual, and what a great standard we set. I don't appreciate being the pony show for someone else, which is what it feels like to some degree. (5-16)

Jennifer: You do something that is meaningful. Not just a **hazing**. I look at other departments and I think "why aren't we more creative about how we do this?" (6-14)

Jennifer: ". . . we all felt like we had, not a common enemy (she laughs), but we had a common goal and we had to overcome it by overcoming these common *obstacles*. We formed kind of a core and talked to each other about doing it. The thing that I have liked least is that I don't like the *games*. If I write something, tell me exactly what you want. And after I write it again, don't come back and say, "Oh, did I say that?" Just tell me what you want and we'll write it. You know the *games* and then the little *power struggles* between the instructors, or the posturing . . . it is unnecessary because I don't really care. I mean, that goes right over my head. I see it. I think it is silly. I don't care if one knows more that the other. If you can help me do this . . . help me do this! It is all a *game*. It is the biggest sorority or fraternity out there. Talk about **hazing**! Okay, if I was going through a sorority and I was seventeen, this might be fun. But, I have other stuff to do. (6-12)

Lisa: The thesis part I *struggled* with a lot. It felt like a **hazing**. . . and that is sort of my evaluation of it. . . it was a **hazing** and I wanted to be in the club. I wanted to be in the master's degree club and so I had to go through it. I fought it a lot with, "am I caving?" And by the end, the frustration was so high that I came this close to (holds her thumb and index finger very close together) saying, "Screw it! I don't care about your fucking master's degree" (she laughs). "I am not going to do it!" Because I really fought against being in the club then. Because on one hand I wanted it. . . on the other I felt I was being co-opted. So I *struggled* with do I want to have a master's degree or not? (9-1)

Lisa: Which is why I think I refer to the experience as a "**hazing**" because I think that they are teaching you the appropriate academic rules. And if you are going to be an academic, if you are going to be in the club. . . how you write. And if you want this master's degree. . . what you have to say and what you have to act like. (9-9)

Lisa: But then, I don't know that they are there to teach so much as to. . . I am saying the word "**hazing**" again. The introduction to graduate studies. . . basically I felt that that class was telling you how to "suck up" to each professor. And how to kiss ass in the department. I mean, basically that is what I felt was being told to me in not-so-hidden terms. . . it was fairly direct. And all this makes you shake in your boots about how you are going to have to pursue these professors to get them to be on your committee. If you are lucky I will be on your committee. . . you are going to have to beg. . . we are busy people and we don't really have time for these petty things. I mean this was the attitude I got from the class. (9-14)

Helen: I disliked the most sort of form-over-substance. . . they have to indoctrinate you or kind of send you through the *trial of fire* kind of thing. (10-12)

Helen: Because I kept running into *barriers*. It became very clear to me that the faculty were not going to advise a thesis that they were not interested in. . . that didn't somehow relate to their work. . . or didn't really peak their interest. (10-13)

Helen: Well, I think a couple of things. First of all, sort of the *hurdles* that everyone has to go through. I think the professors are more comfortable making the women go through them than they are the men. (10-14)

Randi: I had worked so hard and so long, and fought and you know. . . hit *obstacles* and *barriers* with every single stinking step of the process. And then to be where I really saw light at the end of the tunnel. . . have a date set. . . ready to go and be told, "No this isn't. . . no!" (12-6)

Mary: In fact (delete professor's name) once said it is the "quest for the holy grail." They love the *struggle*. . . I don't like the *struggle*. . . not anymore. I just want the done! (13-12)

Grace: And then the other *struggle* that I had was in the methodology itself (details deleted). I was glad that I had a group of people to help me. We had a lot to share. I think I learned a lot, but that was a *struggle*. We had to do everything by ourselves. (15-12)

Tracy: I would prefer not to have to go through these *hoops* in order to get what I want out of the program. (16-10)

Tracy: But I am not very comfortable with that, and yet at the same time, I realize that I am *playing the game* that they want me to play. I think that probably creates a *struggle* in terms of identity for a lot of people. . . people I have talked with also. . . not just my own experience. (16-14)

2. **Silencing of Voice**

The women of this study report time and time again ways in which they are not allowed to use their personal voices. The following responses are from what might be interpreted as a "muted group" by theorists such as Dale Spender and Cheris Kramarae:

Jerri: Or in class you are encouraged to speak your mind, but don't you dare use it in your work. (2-3)

Jerri: I find that in our work within our own field we are expected not to use our own opinions. You know, get rid of your own, "that is opinion, that is opinion!" So you have to cite. . . you have to go find someone to *cite rather than use your own words*. (2-5)

Sugar: I felt like I wanted to learn more about communication and find, I guess, my voice. I felt like *I lost more of my own voice*. I was surprised. . . I was frustrated. I felt like I had to learn a different language and in the process of learning a different language, I lost some of my own. (3-1)

Sam: There is an assertion that cuts me off and says I don't get to talk anymore and I didn't have a say in it. It wasn't a negotiable thing. And I have realized that this is how it happens. . . this is how I feel *silenced*. . . this is how I get the idea that men know everything and I don't know anything. (5-11)

Sam: I am angry that I felt humiliated and *silenced*. (5-16)

Lisa: But the whole process of proving the validity of what I was writing. . . nothing that I personally would write was valid. . . I had to back it up by so-and-so says this and this. And that just didn't feel very good. (9-1)

Lisa: I mean, I had to find a quote for everything rather than use my voice. (9-12)

Next, a look at behavioral themes which were found to be significant.

BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES FOR NEGOTIATING HEGEMONIC IDEALS

The participants in this study talked about *behaviors* that they and others exhibit as a result of their graduate studies. Some use purposeful strategies for negotiating the hegemonic ideals encountered in academe. Descriptions from many of the participants illustrate the six most obvious behavioral themes: Adapt; Manipulate; Cry; Do own thing; Fight; and Go to Peers.

1. **Adapt**: Change / Conform / Coalesce (do whatever professor says)

Sam: I learned to do what you have to do in order to get through the program. So I *conformed.* (5-5.1)

Sam: And you have to pretty much know what their norms, procedures and social rules are in order to succeed. So you definitely *adapt.* (5-8.1)

Jennifer: I want this to be my project, but since it is not going to be. . . *I will do whatever they want* and get the hell out! (6-12)

Lisa: And I think a lot of other people are maybe better able to let go of any reason that they are doing this from their heart, or anything that is important to them they are able to let go of it, and they *just do whatever their advisor says* with no resistance. (9-1)

Helen: I look weak now. In the communication department I was told I intimidated people. . . now I am asked, "Are you sure you can handle that?" You know if I have a project. . . "Are you sure you can handle that? You don't look very sure of yourself." I had never been told that! So that is how *I have changed* I think. I also haven't thought about (delete professor's name) since I stopped taking classes and honestly, since I came here I think of him about three times a week. I go home and I hate him for what he did to me. I hate him! I hate myself for letting him. But I don't know what I could have done more than what I did to sort of preserve myself in that. . . you have to *adapt.* (10-6)

Liz: Accomplishing my communicative goals? I usually *altered* those just to get through school. (11-8.1)

2. **Manipulate**: Role Switching / Impression Management / Tag Questions & Qualifiers / Please

Jerri: I have spent the last few years trying to be *the good person* so that the other ones can save face, when we are talking faculty-student interaction. (2-8.2)

Sugar: But at the time, I was trying to be the *good little graduate student*, and get through the program, and do what I was supposed to do, and get my little strokes. . . pats on the head. . . whatever. And that is what I did. (3-6.1)

Diane: If I had stressed playing the appropriate role less, that of being the *obedient little graduate student*. . . I could have been out of there a long time ago. (8-8)

Helen: But I think it was within two weeks that I was called into (delete professor's name) office and it was a downhill slide from there. I mean downhill. So I very quickly learned to *act unsure of myself*, to *raise my voice at the end of a statement* so it forms like a question, to say "um" and "ah," and to *drop my head* when speaking to authority. And to adopt all of their things that I was told to get out of my communication patterns before. . . absolutely! And also to be constantly unsure of myself. And also to *be not proud of myself*. I mean, I feel like there were systemic attacks on my identity. . . on how my way of speaking was not appropriate. (10-2)

Tracy: But I do feel that I use more *tag questions* and *generalizations* and that type of thing. I think that I do that more than men probably would. So that is probably characteristic of what I do. And I think I use that a lot within the discipline in terms of negotiating the system to allow people in power positions to sort of feel that they are, maintain that, and not threaten it, but still get what I want out of the situation. (16-4)

Tracy: No, but again, I think my general tactic is to use *qualifiers* and *generalizations*, and that kind of thing when providing that kind of information. So I still say it, but say it in a way that does the least in terms of creating defensiveness. (16-7)

Tracy: And what I was doing to get it was talking in a way that allowed the powers that be to still think that they were the powers that be, and were doing

what they wanted, even though what I was getting was what I wanted by using *tag questions and qualifiers*. . . that whole "face-work" kind of thing. . . not imposing too much, and allowing them to maintain their sense of power and authority. (16-8.1)

Tracy: At a certain level I am *manipulating* that professor or that instructor because I know what that person wants to hear and I can provide that in order to get what I want. (16-11)

3. **Cry**

Sugar: There are too many women, and it wasn't my experience. . . it is just not me. . . but I saw a lot of women going to class and come out *crying*. You know just *crying*. In class, out of class. (3-14)

Andara: And, there was one time when I got some written feedback from one of the professors, to a thesis document that I had written, that sent me into *tears* and I was angry and all kinds of things at the same time. (4-5)

Sam: There were a number of times that I would end up, like we all would. . . you know, *crying* in my office upset, or feeling like *crying* in my office after an experience that felt humiliating. (5-6)

4. **Do my own thing**

Liz: Then, after that, I pretty much wrote the thesis by myself. I mean, there wasn't a lot of input. . . *I just went out and did what I wanted to do*. So, as far as the thesis goes. . . without a lot of help or co-authorship from the advisor, it seems that my experience was probably a lot better than some others that I have heard about. (11-1)

Liz: But basically I had to mesh a project that interested my chair to a certain extent so they would sign on with it. . . they don't want to waste their time either. But basically once I had the proposal meeting. . . it was mine. No one else has done anything like it since or before. So it was "yes," "yes, I will do what you say," and then *I just went out and did whatever the hell I wanted to do*. (11-8.1)

Randi: Generally when an instructor had comments, I pretty much saw what they were getting at. . . saw it and chose to disregard it because I didn't think it added to the credibility of the paper. . . although it was certainly something worth considering. (12-5)

Tracy: And even though I didn't get the support I felt I needed, I think that enabled me to do more of it myself and get through it faster than I may have otherwise. Because as I looked around at other people I think that at those early stages they found it very stifling to be attached to the opinions of advisers and that kind of thing. It seems to cause people to spin in circles and get nowhere. . . that is just what it seems to me from the outside and I didn't have anybody second-guessing what I was doing or providing new topics. .. . that maybe I should consider this, or, maybe a better way to do it would be that. I just really *did it all on my own* and that was very satisfying, and it turned out that I went in a direction that was completely fine. (16-13)

5. **Fight**

Lisa: And that I squeaked by with enough of what I wanted in tact. . . but it was a huge *fight*. . . I am too stubborn. . . I couldn't let go like that so I *fought* a lot of it. (9-1)

Randi: However, if I hadn't *dug my heels in* and just been *pissy* about it, that would not have been the case. If I hadn't made a *fuss*, if I hadn't *caused a problem*, I would still be sitting in the basement re-writing that paper. (12-5)

6. **Go to Colleagues or Peers for Support**

Jerri: I really liked the support of the *fellow graduate students*, or female graduate students... you know the support of the other graduate students has been extremely positive, and the feedback from them, and the bouncing and the sharing of ideas. (2-12)

Sam: I felt in some ways it wasn't a very safe place with the professors. . . not all of them. But thank goodness I was in *a community of students* where there was a really safe climate built. (5-1)

Jennifer: I think I have most liked the fact that *we students* could all talk to each other about the process, so we didn't feel so alone. Being able to call somebody up and say this is what I am going through. . . you don't have to say anything. . . just let me vent. (6-12)

Diane: My saving grace was my *colleagues*. If I hadn't had *colleagues* who were going through similar torture, I could not have hung in. (8-1)

Randi: I made some pretty good friends, and I learned probably more from my *peers* than I learned from my course work. (12-1)

333: I feel as if I didn't have *my associate students*, I wouldn't have a clue. . . (sigh). (14-5)

333: What I liked the most about the thesis process was having an opportunity to read what I have come up with, to talk about what I have come up with my *other student friends*. . . the *collegiality*. . . and getting their honest opinions and specific direction from them on how to go about the next step. (14-12)

The above behavioral examples are representative of the findings which indicate that these graduate students are doing everything but communicate with their superiors in an honest, open and satisfactory way.

The third category of significant themes are the *affective* themes, or the reported *feelings* that were evoked from the graduate school experience.

AFFECTIVE / FEELINGS

The fact that the women of this study expressed significantly more negative "feeling" comments than positive comments caught my attention as a researcher. Four significant "feeling" themes emerged from the data: Anger, Frustration & Humiliation; Lack of Respect; Disempowered; and Stupid.

1. **Anger / Frustration / Humiliation**

Sugar: And it was *frustrating* to me that I had to run around and try to find people to be on my committee, and beg people to be on my committee. (3-12)

Andara: And there was one time when I got some written feedback from one of the professors, to a thesis document that I had written, that sent me into tears and I was *angry* and all kinds of things at the same time. And I didn't write, I didn't work on my thesis for six weeks. . . two months. (4-5)

Sam: I wish there had been less superior-subordinate kind of a relationship between student and professors. And, in some ways my growth really was supported. I mean I can't make this broad antagonistic criticism. Yet, I really went away with an *angry* feeling. And I still have that *angry* feeling. I am *angry* that I felt *humiliated* and silenced. I am *angry* that a task was set up for me that was so difficult and that I didn't receive help that enabled me to move

through that in a more positive manner. I am *angry* that I have so many friends who haven't completed their degree yet; who are wonderfully productive people; who are working now and are still trying to get through that stupid thesis process. I feel really *angry* because I think it is part of that system that limits and defines who gets to go to the top and who doesn't. The criteria by which that selection is made is bogus. (5-16)

Helen: The changes they were asking me to make are so fundamentally different from my experience and from my personality, to make them I couldn't just code switch. . . I mean I had to change! And I can't believe that I did because the whole time I swore I wasn't going to. I swore I wasn't going to let them do that, and I did! And I didn't find that out until I left. And I am *angry* for it. . . I am very *angry* for it. (10-6)

2. **Lack of respect**

Jerri: I think that the biggest problem, that we are not given a voice, or we are not *respected.* That is it. . . we are not *respected*! We are not *respected*! (2-14)

Helen: I also think that their idea is that men need to get through the program quick because they need to get out and get a job. And women are just kind of screwing around. (Delete professor's name) even said to me that part of the problem with the department is that women become too comfortable here. But I don't think that they have very much *respect* for women who go through that department. (10-14)

333: It is odd in my formal network, walking down the hall talking to someone, there is a tremendous amount of *respect* or credence for what I do as an individual. . . regardless of my gender. In the classroom however, whether I am talking about it or writing about it, it is like if anybody didn't see it, it doesn't count that that is my experience. (14-14)

3. **Disempowered: Shut Down / Leveled / Withdrawn**

Sugar: But I felt like I lost my confidence. I came into the program having had a lot of positive success behind me and it was like what I have heard other people say about going into boot camp. . . I felt like my dignity to some degree was *leveled.* And my confidence was *leveled.* I left very unsure of myself. (3-6)

Sugar: I really felt or experienced *giving up*. . . in some cases completely *abandoning my objectives and needs* and the very reason I was in graduate school. (3-8.1)

Andara: And that was kind of a regular cycle. . . I would work on it and work and work and work. Turn it in and the feedback was not very constructive or there wasn't a lot of you know throwing things out there "this is really good and this is what we want you to work on." There wasn't the guidance coming with the feedback, saying "this is what we want you to do next, or this is where we want you to go." I mean it was just overwhelming and that got really hard so I would go through that cycle. . . I would *quit* for a month. And I would have to get out of that depression and go "okay" and that is why it took me. . . (4-5)

Sam: I think my strongest reaction was to *withdraw* into myself. Sometimes I would feel stupid like I wasn't getting it. . . blaming self responses. And it was hard for me to think that it had to do with the situation or the way something in class was worded. I would tend not to blame anybody but myself. So I would *withdraw*. (5-6)

Diane: I usually *shut down* after the professor was not interested in what I had to say. (8-6)

Lisa: And they let you push the edges a little bit, but in the end you are pretty *worn down*. (9-9)

Lisa: I have seen colleague after colleague just *totally shut down*. The enthusiasm for their topics is absolutely beaten out of them. Their naive excitement in the beginning of doing a really neat thesis project is gradually just ripped out of them. (9-16)

[an ironic coincidence. . . as I am transcribing the above response, I get a call from a colleague who has just been to a thesis meeting with her advisor. Her words, "I walked in feeling totally confident about what I was doing. . . I left feeling totally at a loss as to where to go now."]

4. **Stupid**

Sam: Sometimes I ended up feeling really *stupid* because I assumed that was something I should be able to do myself and I didn't have enough background to do it well. (5-5)

> Randi: I would say some of the things that were not so positive were oftentimes feeling extremely *stupid* in the classroom setting. Feeling like for whatever reason you are just not bright enough to get the ideas and material. . . that somehow you are lacking because you don't understand what a professor may be talking about and come to find out nobody else knew what the hell they were talking about either. (she laughs) And perhaps they didn't even know but it sounded good at the time. That was a little hard on me because it was hard to feel capable when you continually feel *stupid* or like you are missing a point. (12-1)

It should be obvious, from reading the above "cognitive," "behavioral," and "affective" responses, that many were in the context of the thesis process itself. This overwhelmingly obvious aspect of the study was completely unanticipated by the researcher and deserves comment.

UNEXPECTED MAJOR THEMES

I was startled as a researcher to hear what I would consider to be a collective moan from the participants. It quickly became clear to me. . . when it comes to the thesis process. . . **they are not satisfied!**

1. Significant differences in satisfaction levels between coursework and the thesis

> Andara: It really wasn't until I got to the thesis process itself that the feedback wasn't always as constructive as I had been used to. . . like I said again, that *division* kind of crops up. Coursework, that was great. But with the thesis there was a lot more frustration and a lot less constructive feedback. . . a lot more difficult to work with. (4-5)

> Andara: In terms of again, the thesis process, which I think is a very *different creature* than the rest of the program, and I think it is the piece where a lot of the communication problems in the department itself stem from (big sigh). (4-8.1)

> Andara: Again, I like everyone in the department. I think they are a fine group of individuals. But *when it comes to that bureaucratic process of the thesis. . .*

something goes haywire. . . I don't know what has happened since I have been gone, but *I think that there is something that needs to be happening with the faculty and the grad students about that thesis process*. (4-12)

Lisa: Here I had gone through all of the required classes. . . I got straight As. . . one A-. . . that was the lowest grade I ever got in all of my graduate classes, and yet I felt completely ill-prepared for writing a thesis. . . and I question why did I do so well with all of the classes and yet struggle so much with my thesis? I mean something is not connecting here. *Either all of these As I got are totally bullshit, or something is very wrong with the thesis process*. (9-12)

Randi: But generally, I would say the feedback and the criticism were good, the points were relevant and there was some validity that it would have added to my writing. In my case, I think that all of that extraneous bullshit was saved up for the thesis and then kind of chucked out there. . . a bunch of shit that had nothing to do with anything. And then all of a sudden I am supposed to incorporate it. . . but as far as the actual coursework papers, I felt that the actual feedback was really pretty good. (12-5)

Mary: You know, at times it was frustrating, but I don't think I experienced the level of frustration with it as a lot of my classmates did. . . I loved it. *I didn't have a negative experience until I tried to do a thesis* ha, ha, ha. (13-1)

Mary: I mean, I have a little bit different attitude now trying to get through the thesis process. *Those are almost two totally different experiences*. (13-9)

Not only do the findings suggest that these women are not satisfied with the thesis process, the findings also suggest that the women in this study are lacking a cognitive map of how to maneuver through the process.

2. **Didn't have a Clue**

Sugar: But I still, when I was done, *didn't have a clue* what I did. . . I just got through it somehow you know. (3-12)

Randi: So that was the worst and probably the best. It was fun and it was interesting even though it was extremely perplexing because *I had no idea what I was doing* and also because I realized that it doesn't mean anything. (12-12)

> Lisa: Here I had gone through all of the required classes. . . I got straight As. . . one A-. . . that was the lowest grade I ever got in all of my graduate classes, and yet *I felt completely ill-prepared* for writing a thesis. (9-12)

> 333: So I have to say at this point, *I still don't have a clue* how I am supposed to write my thesis or these papers. Anyway, I know I am going to do it. (14-5)

The final unexpected finding had to do with the range of perceptions regarding marginalization.

3. **Marginalization**

At the very beginning of this research project I wrote a list of my "Assumptions & Biases." The second assumption was that "He/man language is separating and frustrating" for women within our discipline. Although that was certainly the case for most participants, it was not at all true for some. The category of marginalization had a very wide and unanticipated (by the researcher) range of responses.

First, a look at those who did feel marginalization in many forms:

> Jerri: I think that the structure of our program definitely marginalizes women in general. (2-3)

> Jennifer: I felt marginalized several times. . . a lot actually! (6-6)

> Sara: I actually feel that I was marginalized because I am a woman, and I feel that I was also marginalized because I was older. . . I think. Ya, I believe that is true. There are certain people in the department, I know, who really objected to older TAs. . . interestingly. It is funny that I think women have a hard time there, and I think especially older ones. (7-3)

> Helen: I felt marginalized because of differing views I might have. I felt like there was this constant striving in that department to be agreeable and to follow. To bow to the prescribed view of whatever the hell it was we were talking about, and certainly not discuss it, or debate it, or talk about it, or question it. By God. . . don't question it! And so that is the only way I felt marginalized. (10-6)

333: In particular, I felt marginalized when I had a personal event or crisis. (14-3)

Tracy: I think the thing that irritated me the very most, even in communication literature where they know. . . they talk about the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and language-creating reality, and all of that kind of thing; you still find texts where the second person is "he" all of the time. More than anything else that bothers me. I know that is supposedly not very significant in terms of looking at experiential types of things, but that, in and of itself. . . it always bothers me. I always feel like I am not included. (16-3)

As mentioned earlier, there are often responses that are different and must not be ignored by the researcher. The following are interesting responses from women who did not feel particularly marginalized, and all for very different reasons:

Willie (A woman who reported: serving her brothers their meals and then sitting down to eat afterwards; sixteen years of Catholic education; and, later marrying an alcoholic) said: Either it was out of my realm or I just wasn't picking it up. Or, I don't have the kind of story that would make me sensitive to those issues. (1-3)

Willie in a related response said: But then it might be because my position was so engrained in me to be accepting of this kind of thing; I may not have noticed it when it was there. Because for me, growing up and moving through my life, there was such an acceptance, I would have barely noticed it happening. (1-6)

Randi: I didn't necessarily feel left out of the literature for a couple of reasons. First of all, I realize that essentially any profession with any history has been predominantly male. And male oriented. It is hard to have women researchers when there aren't any. . . And if that is what you have, then that is what you look at and hopefully someday you do a better job than the men did. But I didn't necessarily feel that it was male-oriented material. And again, that may be because to some extent, I have a more male-oriented perspective than other people might. But I didn't necessarily feel that women's topics were particularly trivialized. . . I would have to say that they were more simply not there, and I think a lot of that is that the material itself is not there. (12-3)

Mary: Out of the three main instructors that I took classes from. . . none of them were feminists or would bring in a feminist perspective or feminist researchers. You know. . . how can I explain it? My experience is so different. . . and it could be part of being a person of color that makes it such a

> different experience. But, I was just damn glad to be there. You know, I was coming from a place of who am I learning from, or, I am so used to, I never stop to question that assumption. It really didn't matter. What mattered to me was getting the information. That just wasn't a priority or something I thought about. I was so stimulated by what I was learning and so happy about where I was that it just didn't occur to me. . . that these were all males that I was learning from. . . I didn't have much time to sit and think, oh man, these damn men. . . why can't they get it together and bring in some more varied viewpoints for us and value a feminist viewpoint more? (13-3)
>
> Grace: Probably because for me, if I feel any sort of marginalization it is not because I am a woman, but because I am a minority, or non-US. And I think I am more sensitive about that kind of issue more than the gender issue. So, I think that I felt that from the literature that I read in our discipline, but it is not an impression that is very strong so far. I think I have been socialized in a way that is taken for granted for women to be marginalized. (15-3)

In retrospect, it would seem that the above varied responses on marginalization are a direct result of the diversity of the participant pool in regard to their communication style, race/ethnicity, age, and class or socialization.

This chapter has served, more-or-less, as an ariel view or topographical map of the lived experiences of sixteen graduate students in the Department of Speech Communication at Portland State University. I will now begin the final chapter by sewing together the bits-and-pieces of those lived experiences into a tapestry which depicts the way/s in which these women negotiate patriarchy and the norms of appropriateness within our discipline.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Final Analysis

In reviewing literature for this research, I learned that fundamentally competence is the ability to effectively "adapt to the surrounding environment over time" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 35). Adaptability, along with effectiveness and, of course, appropriateness, has been considered a central feature or criteria of communication competence (Brunner & Phelps, 1979; Duran & Kelly, 1984; Foote & Cottrell, 1955; Hale & Delia, 1976; Hart & Burks, 1972). I point this out now because this research reflects a significant tendency by these women towards adapting behavior; behavior that comes as a result of their graduate school experience (see pp. 59-61). They "changed," "conformed," "did whatever their professor said," "pleased," "role-switched," and, used "tag questions and qualifiers." In reporting these adaptation behaviors, these women rarely mention feelings of satisfaction, or pride in their communicative prowess. . . quite the contrary. Some examples follow:

> Helen: The thing is , I *had to adapt.* And it is difficult to adapt during the day and then go home and say to yourself, "but I didn't really mean that." I guess their answer would be that I should be communicatively competent and be able to switch roles and be able to apply the correct communication in the proper realm. I kind of think that is a load of crap! (10-6)

> Helen: And anything that it goes beyond, like this appropriate communication, and appropriate for the situation. . . I think it gets into being disingenuous, and lying and misrepresenting who you are, and what you think, and what you feel. So if you don't fit what they want you to, then you are wrong. Not just you're wrong like an answer. . . but **you** yourself. . . as a person, are wrong. That is a really shitty feeling! (10-8)

> Tracy: It *feels like cognitive dissonance*, that struggle internally in terms of I have sold myself out by behaving this way. . . and qualifying something that I really don't feel like qualifying at all, but doing it in order to get what I want out of the situation. And what am I giving up, and what am I getting back from it? (16-10)

With respect to statements such as the above, the findings demonstrate that these women are doing things that do not fit with what they know, and how they want to be. Instead of communicating with their academic "superiors" in ways that are cognitively comfortable, or ways that are cohesive with their stylistic preferences, they continue to use adaptation behavior which is uncomfortable and potentially very exhausting:

> Helen: That is not the kind of person I want to be. I know that is what is prescribed by communication. I know that to go to a formal business thing I am supposed to dress a certain way, and act a certain way, and my facial expressions are supposed to be a certain way, and I am supposed to lean into the table a certain way. . . and that may work for a while but it is awfully *exhausting*. (10-8)

> Diane: I can't really explain to you why I did what I did throughout graduate school. I found myself consciously pretending to be who I was not. When I went to school I dressed differently. . . I even took off my jewelry. I was afraid that, if they really knew me, they would hold it against me. I just didn't think some of their egos could handle my reality. So I found myself role-switching and playing their power differential game. It was simply *exhausting* and it felt so deceptive. I was so pissed at myself. . . but I just kept doing it. (8-8)

Diane's last statement points to another significant issue. . . that of self-esteem. The findings suggest that the graduate school experience has served to diminish self-esteem. . . not enhance it.

> Sugar: I lost my voice. I began to *question myself*. . . had a lot of self-doubts. Wondered if I could think. And it took me a couple of years after that to realize that I had a good mind. And I had a lot to say. But it felt like *I lost my confidence.* I came into the program having had a lot of positive success behind me and it was like what I have heard other people say about going into boot camp. I felt like *my dignity to some degree was leveled.* And *my confidence was leveled.* I left very unsure of myself. I thought I would be in a better position to market myself. . . I ended up feeling like I was in a worse position to market myself. (3-6)

> Helen: I think I really changed a lot. . . a whole lot! *I began doubting myself*, God. . . lots! I never used to be uncomfortable like with my appearance or my presence. Now I am. I never used to be uncomfortable speaking out. . . or being afraid to be wrong. I was never afraid to be wrong! I figured that if I was wrong somebody would correct me. Now I am. I would rather not say something than to say something and be wrong. I constantly worry about what do other people think about me. . . what do I think other people are thinking about me? I never did that before. . . never! (10-6)

Criticism is a factor which can contribute to insidious self-doubt such as that just reported by Sugar. Here is what Sam and Randi had to say regarding their experiences with criticism within the department:

> Sam: In church today my minister was saying there are studies that show that parents give eight criticisms to every one piece of praise. And I feel that is also true of the communication department. It is hard to feel good about yourself when you have eight criticisms about your intellectual. . . you know, whatever it is that you are saying, and one praise. (5-5)

> Randi: But we got *continual criticism of what was wrong.* And despite what some people think about any attention being better than no attention. . . I don't necessarily think that is true. (12-1)

Summary of Analysis

It is now time to weave the last threads through this experiential quilt, tying it all together as the findings suggest. With respect to participant responses, the pieces go together as follows:

> 1. Sixteen women completed coursework in the Department of Speech Communication at Portland State University. They almost all had excellent grades. Most reported completing their coursework in a timely fashion. The majority encountered at least some obstacles, and reported feeling silenced, marginalized or stupid at times.

> 2. They entered the thesis process where they experienced a *hazing.* The hazing consisted of: Barriers -- Criticism -- Games -- Hoops -- Hurdles -- Obstacles -- Roadblocks -- Struggles.

Lisa: The thesis part I struggled with a lot. It felt like a *hazing*. . . and that is sort of my evaluation of it. . . it was a *hazing* and I wanted to be in the club. I wanted to be in the master's degree club and so I had to go through it.

3. The *hazing* brought about behaviors that did not necessarily feel open, honest, productive or healthy. The reported behaviors are: Adapt -- Manipulate -- Cry -- Do own thing -- Fight -- Go to Peers.

Helen: The changes they were asking me to make are so fundamentally different from my experience and from my personality, to make them I couldn't just code switch. . . I mean *I had to change*! And I can't believe that I did because the whole time I swore I wasn't going to. I swore I wasn't going to let them do that, and I did! (10-6)

4. The *hazing* and the consequent behaviors evoked feelings of: Anger, Frustration & Humiliation -- Lack of respect -- Disempowerment -- Stupidity. These factors together promoted feelings of low self-worth.

Sam: I had somebody ask me once, "you know when you look back on it you probably will think differently, you know you learned a lot." I have to honestly say, "NO!" It was a *humiliating, aggravating, frustrating* experience for me. And I would never encourage anyone to go through it like that. *It was not something that contributed to my self- esteem or positively to my self-concept.* (5-12)

5. The thesis process proved to be drawn out and exhausting.

Jerri: But my God, it is taking forever for students to get through and some of us are going to be old and gray and never able to work after we get these damn degrees.

Willie: And it was very tiring because it went over a long period of time. It seemed sometimes like it would never be over. (1-1)

6. The final product is too often meaningless and/or never again read.

Liz: I hated writing it up. Ha! Because it had to be written up in a prescribed way. . . it had to be acceptable in a prescribed way. What is the point? *No one is ever going to read it.* (she says laughingly) *No one will ever read it. . . no one will ever care.* (11-12)

7. Women reported a need to recover from the process itself.

> Sugar: It felt like "emotional rape" to me. I guess that is a strong word but that is how I felt. *I felt raped emotionally* as a woman, as a person. I learned a lot. . . and it took me a while to figure out what I had learned. But then *it took me a long time to get a sense of myself back*, my own voice back, my personhood back. I felt like I was lost. I felt dried up inside like a leaf that fell from a tree. It was green when it fell, and it laid on the ground and got discolored, and dry, and rumpled-up. That is kind of how I felt when I left. I just *felt dried out* as a person. (3-16)

8. Many women are stripped of the energy and passion to continue.

> Randi: And in all honesty, this whole business with the thesis got me to the point where *I have absolutely no desire to go on.* You know. . . that just doesn't say anything positive about the way that process gets handled. (12-6)

It would appear that this tapestry, woven from the stories of sixteen graduate students, represents a rather botched job of education, and proof that women are indeed participating in their own domination. The participants of this study have identified an institution which is value-laden. They report their personal involvement in the reification of a system which constrains and negatively judges them. They recognize the fact that, as Helen states, "the people who get to determine what is appropriate are the people who have the power" (10-8). In spite of how they might act in their homes, on the job, or among their peers, in their academic environment they generally communicate in ways that are "acceptable," "appropriate," and reinforcing to the dominant group.

The data gleaned from this research shows that the respondents have offered logical alternatives to the patriarchal modes of thought regarding communication competence. However, they are not practicing what they preach in their academic setting. Here are some examples of their strong opinions about what competent communication (appropriateness) looks like and feels like:

Jeri: So appropriate or competent communicators to me would have an integration of both (emotional and intellectual) components, with the ability to not only have their own needs met, but at the same time encourage others to have their needs met. (2-11)

Sugar: I think that we often times will accept external rules and norms just because that is the way it is. And we have to renegotiate and rethink what is appropriate and sometimes that means pushing the envelope a little bit. I think when you have a very strong tradition, a deep structure in academe that hasn't been favorable to women, that it really is very appropriate for women to question tradition and to question the type of literature we are reading. And to question the way discourse is structured in the class. That may not be polite sometimes. That may be construed as confrontive. But, that would be an example of appropriate behavior. (3-9)

Sugar: If we are to really be effective and competent, I think we have to ask ourselves "what do I think;" you know, "what are my reasons behind this;" "who am I and where is my voice?" (3-15)

Sara: I think we have to always remember consideration for others, but also consideration for self. . . I think there has to be an honesty component to competence. If you are true to yourself you are more honest with the other person. (7-11)

Diane: I believe that competent communication ideally leaves the interactants feeling better for having interacted. . . or at least no worse. There are times however, that just being open and honest in my conversations is enough. In some situations you just can't be heard by following the norms of appropriateness. . . in that case I can feel perfectly comfortable in judging the competence level of my conversations myself. (8-11)

Lisa: If I can tell you difficult words. . . something that is difficult for you to hear, but I can tell you so that you will hear it, and maybe not accept it or not agree with it, but at least you are not running screaming from it. . . then I would say that I was very competent. So there are two aspects of it. . . to say what I need to say, but say it in a way that you hear it. (9-11)

Helen: Clearly my way of being effective is not appropriate. Sigh! And if you think about that in relation to like gender roles, I mean if you think about what we teach about communication competence with what we teach of traditional male and female gender roles, what we are saying is to be effective you have to speak like a man, but to be appropriate you have to speak like a woman. . . if

> you are a woman. And boy. . . I don't know how you are supposed to do that! Unless you are supposed to speak like a woman and not be effective or speak like a man and not be appropriate. I don't know. I was never able to strike that balance. . . quite clearly. And don't feel like I should have had to. (10-8.1)
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> Liz: We know when they are interacting with us who's intent is to communicate with us and who's intent is to make themselves feel better. So, I think new forms of behavior certainly come about and aren't felt as appropriate or inappropriate if you feel the person is acting towards you like a person. (11-9)
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> Randi: Although I suppose this could be a definition of empathy, I think of it as slightly different. Appropriateness and effectiveness. . . competence takes into consideration the thoughts and feelings of the receiver. With that in mind, so that you are not essentially assaulting the other. . . not hedging or minimizing your own needs that you are trying to get met. You do no service when you minimize one's self, or marginalize one's self. (12-11)

The above responses show an emergent pattern which takes into consideration not just the rules, roles and norms of the situation, the context, or the receiver's feelings and needs; it also includes the speaker's needs, thoughts and feelings. The respondents point to the importance of not hedging your own needs, and not minimizing or marginalizing one's self. . . regardless of gender or perceived power.

The fact is, the women in this research are not putting their own theory into practice. Because the norms of appropriateness are so deeply engrained. . . these women, in spite of their knowledge, have not yet found the tools with which to "excavate their voices from their tombs" (Bowen & Wyatt, 1993, p. 3). These women do not comfortably articulate their own needs because they have been "socialized to get along" (Randi, 12-14). Consequently, they are not very honest and open when filling out course evaluations at the end of each term (3-7, 5-7,7-7,9-7,12-7,14-7); and, they do not make it apparent that their needs are not being met in terms of support and guidance (2-12, 2-13, 3-13, 4-5, 5-13, 6-14, 12-1, 12-8.1, 12-12, 13-13).

Limitations

It is not my intention to dwell on the limitations of this study, because it worked! Significant data emerged which can be helpful in promoting change and influencing future action. I will mention, with hesitation, that this study may be context bound and is not necessarily representative of all other speech communication master's programs. Portland State University is a large commuter school in an urban environment and may not be representative of the majority of speech communication master's programs across the country. That having been said, it is important to note that there is an emergent trend across the country for master's students to be older and female; and thus, the findings of this study may be important to a wide range of programs, and to those women negotiating the graduate experience.

Another limitation may be the fact that several of the woman have been away from the program for sometime and their recall may not be as accurate as that of the presently enrolled graduate students.

Probably the greatest limitation, and one I apologize for, is that it is beyond the scope of this study to delve deeply into the issue of "marginalization." I have called for a "rethinking of ways of knowing," and a "deconstruction of old epistemologies," but, I did not address the critical need for a "recognition of cultural diversity." For only when we address all of these issues together will we "restore life to a corrupt and dying academy" (bell hooks, 1994, pp. 29-30). Jennifer's poignant statement certainly applies here:

> Jennifer: The instructor may be out there living a gray flannel life not wanting to know some things. . . but I figure at this point and time, I shouldn't have to be the one to point things out all the time. And women shouldn't have to be the ones who feel marginalized all the time. In a university setting there is supposed to be an exchange of ideas; we are supposed to do critical thinking; but then, it all goes out the window. It is critical. . . but only to their perspective. I don't know how in our department it is so easy to forget the

> female perspective when you are sitting at a table with between six and fifteen females. (she laughs) How can you not want to bring that into your class? If nothing else, you get something out of the discussion. And if you are a female instructor, you can put your two cents worth in. You know, put another slant on it. It shouldn't have to be in women's studies. And it shouldn't have to be put into the curriculum during March, during "Women's Month." It should be in the curriculum all year long because we are here all year long. We don't just pop up in March. Its like all we do for Hispanics is Cinco de Mayo. Ha, ha. . . we go dance and then they don't exist the rest of the year. So put everything in the curriculum and we won't have to worry about it. (6-6)

A disappointment to me personally is that, due to self-imposed limits of time and scope, I am unable to bring to light all of the significant factors that have been reflected by the data.

Finally, this research may have limitations due to the fact that I am closely involved with the phenomena being studied. Consequently, there may be built in biases that have influenced the interpretation of the data.

Besides the limitations of this study, it is important to address what future research might be called for as a result of the project's findings.

Implications for Future Research

It seems to me that there are several obvious implications that need to be addressed. First, more research is needed to determine how the academy can help women to navigate the external factors which block them from completing a master's degree in a timely and satisfactory fashion. When asked about the most serious problem for women completing a master's degree in our discipline Mary said:

> Mary: Whether we have kids, and we have child care or kids getting sick, or whether you have dying parents. . . the reality is that shit happens! I think that happens for men too but men aren't the caretakers of the families. And so, I think that it may be easier for them to just put life aside, walk in, do the work, and get out. I think for women it is just much tougher. I think women have other responsibilities that get in the way more. And I think that many schools just aren't prepared for that, they don't know what to do with that or how to work with that. (13-14)

Relatedly, male students need to be questioned to see what their experiences in academe have been and how they differ (if at all) from their female colleagues. What hegemonic ideals might delay their progress? Do they feel the anger and frustration that their female colleagues have expressed?

And finally, I recommend additional research on family communication patterns to see how they contribute to the fact that some women are most comfortable in expressing ideas, needs, personal opinions, and anger with authority figures, while other women find it impossible to be open and honest in a power-differential situation. It is possible that speech departments can better equip or empower female communicators to improve their communicative situations and outcomes by encouraging them to study the communicative patterns of their family-of-origin to see how they may influence conversational styles all our lives. The following statement from Sam certainly provides the rationale for such research:

> Sam: I also realize that the way I talk perpetuates the gender roles and stereotypes. If I talk *as if* there is a masculine and a feminine way to communicate, I perpetuate that. That is a strong difficulty for me because of the way I learned to talk originally. Now I see that it is not very productive and I encounter this problem in my classrooms a lot. (5-4)

Pedagogical Recommendations

Because the respondents in this study confined the majority of their comments to our particular department and to the subject of the thesis project itself, I will follow suit. There are many pedagogical changes that could enhance the productivity and satisfaction levels within our department. My arguments for pedagogical changes are based upon the needs and frustrations expressed by the women interviewed.

First, I suggest that our department needs leadership regarding the thesis process. Faculty and students are flailing around with no cognitive map as to where to go or how to get there. Precious time and energy is being wasted by all. Clear

guidelines must be set regarding expectations for responsibilities, content, length and duration. The departmental mentality which seems to be based upon the old adage that "it takes as long as it takes" creates frustration and exhaustion for most everyone involved in the thesis process. Women are taking years and years to graduate (if at all). Women often report having far more thesis credits than the total hours required to graduate. Its insane! Move the students in. . . and move them out in a timely fashion. Time, energy, and resources are being wasted. Shorten both the length and duration of the project. I concur with the opinions of Brian Spitzberg, who, in an interview (Nov. 1996), said that a thesis can be written in six months, and a thesis need not be more than fifty or sixty pages. Strive for quality. . . not quantity. Encourage projects that are publishable and/or presentable. If the professor spends only one academic year advising each thesis candidate, instead of the often reported three to six years, s/he can give each student far more personal attention.

Let the student do his or her own work. Encourage students to follow their own interests and passions. . . this will make for a better project because the student with an intrinsic interest is less likely to burn out. Professor Yvonna Lincoln said it well, "Make it *juicy*. . . it will sustain you."[8] I believe that my thesis writing experience is a prime example of what can be done to enhance student satisfaction in the thesis process. Working with an adviser who recognized my intrinsic interest in this work, I was supported and encouraged in bringing in my own voice, and writing the thesis in a way that was personally satisfying. I was also encouraged to present the paper at an international communication conference; an experience that was rewarding and confidence-building.

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[8]*At the Contentious Edge*; Paper presented at Portland State University: March 1996.

Offer students encouragement, support and guidance. Create a nurturing environment which promotes honest and open communication, mutual respect and co-participation. A student who is believed in can be far more productive than a student who must navigate "obstacles," "hoops," "roadblocks" and "barriers."

An alternative explanation for the findings herein, could be that student/faculty expectations are not made clear. I suggest that the department needs to facilitate the articulation of student/faculty expectations at the time the student enters the graduate school process. Certainly a communication department is capable of promoting clear understanding, thus increasing satisfaction levels and student productivity.

Help all students to identify the ways in which silence and oppression are built into our discipline. This can be accomplished by bringing feminist writings, by authors such as Cameron, Spender, Kramarae, and hooks, into our classrooms and incorporating their perspectives into our textbooks. This will better equip women to recognize who the gatekeepers are and how they function hegemonically within our discipline.

These pedagogical recommendations would not be complete without hearing from the respondents themselves:

> Sugar: I would have liked more applied, your know, just practical. How you develop competence kinds of stuff. I would have liked to have seen more of it modeled quite frankly. (she laughs and goes on) In some cases I just felt like it was just a comedy of errors. Some of the people who were teaching some of the classes. . . I am going to say this. . . were teaching. . . probably like everybody does. . . drawn to the very thing that they couldn't do. It was so darned evident . . . and when you come so needy yourself as a student, feeling like you need to learn this, and you see the people that are teaching it don't have a clue. You think, "Oh my God. . . this is impossible!" I would like to have seen more theory applied to, "Okay, now we have a theory. How does this make a difference in your life not only as a person, as a woman, as someone who would go out and communicate with other people, you know. . . how does

this work?" I would like to have seen that. . . and modeled! More. . . not that some people didn't. . . but I would like to have seen it more! (3-16)

Andara: Speaking hypothetically, if I could change anything, I would make it more clear what that whole process involves. . . what the expectations are, and what you know. . . because I know that listening to other students and faculty, that different faculty have different expectations and have different ideas about what the process is about, what is required in it, what it should look like when it is done. (4-8.2)

Sam: It just felt endless and overwhelming. It would have helped if someone just would have said, "Hey Sam, this is really easy. . . you can do this. Just do this, this, and this. . . and this is so simple. . . it is not nearly so complicated as these darn books make it seem." Right? Because really what you are saying is do this, this, and this. If someone would have done that. .. . I would have been fine. (5-13)

Randi: Speaking for myself, and other people I have talked to have kind of mirrored this. . . or at least validated it for me. . . that they didn't feel, given some of the projects, especially when it came to the whole thesis process, that there was an adequate amount of support given; that there was adequate direction given; that we were advised up front about what something was supposed to look like. There are a lot of people who are very willing in handing out criticism and what you should have done, but not very willing to hand out advice up front so that you can do something one or two times and do it correctly instead of doing it ten times wrong. I don't think learning needs to be that painful a process. (12-1)

My last recommendation is more general in scope. I strongly urge communication scholars to work diligently to come up with a new construct of communicative competence. Appropriateness has got to go. . . for as this study shows, appropriateness is indeed "spring loaded towards the status quo" (Spitzberg and Duran, 1993).

CONCLUSION

My goal here has been to offer a critique of key hierarchical paradigms and mechanisms of control which encourage women to participate in undemocratic

ideologies. Much of the above text is related to issues of power and control. There is an ongoing debate among researchers and theorists as to whether or not women's language reflects a position of lower power than that which men possess, and whether or not they use linguistic forms (hedges, tag questions, politeness, etc.) which serve to lower their perceived power and control (Lakoff, 1975; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Mulac & Gibbons, 1992; Tannen, 1990). The "gender as power" vs. the "gender as culture" debate has not been a central issue here. Power has been robbed from women through hegemonic ideals in systems such as schools, church, and the family. Culture has trained women to be conforming, submissive, and too often silent. Because traditionally it has often been appropriate to sit in silence and put up with the status quo in our homes, churches, schools, or the workplace, should we continue to do so? I think not!

In a study on women's style in problem solving Bradac (1995) asks, "Do differences in men's and women's language both reflect and cause differences in social power?" (p. 5). To me, the important question is: If we, in fact, lived in a truly democratic society where all persons have a legitimate voice, would anyone (male or female) use as many intensifiers, hedges, or tag questions? I believe that language styles would become far more androgenous in a society of equity and fairness. Such a society reminds me of what Habermas (1971) described as the "ideal speech situation" where speech is free of constraints on what can be expressed, and where all speakers are recognized as legitimate. The only way to truly know if male/female differences are factual or mythical is to observe humankind in a society based not on social approval, but on equal decision making and participation. Only in the light of social

equality will emancipated definitions of appropriateness be attainable.

Effective communicators do not necessarily have to be concerned with maintaining institutionally-defined appropriateness in their interpersonal communicative encounters. Instead, they know they have a right to express opinions and anger, they ask for what they need, and make others feel no worse (unless they deserve to) for having communicated with them. We do not have to give up our femininity, nor our own voice, to be empowered. Women must believe they do not need to replicate the language behavior of men. Nor must we participate in male-dominated rules and roles that work against us. We have spent many generations in the dark, but in the darkness, the eye adjusts and begins to see. Women are becoming more self-aware and recognizing how we too often get caught up in institutional ideology. But, as this research strongly reflects, the mechanisms of control are so powerful that we continue to participate in self-imposed tutelage that guards the very systems which work against us. It is time for women to jam the mechanisms!

Speech communication scholars need to re-examine the history and current status of competence theory. This is not a subject to be taken lightly or pushed off only into the department of women's studies. Speech theorists must take female communicators seriously, and to do so, increased numbers of females must be questioned and observed. In order to understand the communicative experiences of female faculty and students, we must hear their stories. Women can "take back the talk" (Kramarae & Jenkins, 1985) through a re-examination of the hegemonic devices which work against them in the field of speech communication. This research shows that hegemonic ideals of appropriateness silence too many women in academe; silence is oppression.

Educators can encourage honesty and openness, and increase student productivity and satisfaction, by serving as nurturing role models and mentors. Honest

and open communication can be "a tool of empowerment" (Campbell, 1989; Dow & Bor Tonn, 1993) that can help to combat the unsatisfactory distribution of power in our hierarchical society. Educators must encourage the diligent examination of the hegemonic definitions of appropriateness, and the constant determination of who's interests are being served.

Women have been assigned a place in society -- a hard place to escape from. Kaplan (1992) states, "If the goal is to get beyond the socially constructed definitions of man/woman or masculine/feminine, then, antiessentialists argue, we need to know precisely how those social constructions are inscribed in the processes of becoming 'human'." (p. 252) Taking a symbolic interactionist perspective, this occurs in and through communication. Therefore, we must examine more closely communication processes in order to ascertain how this is accomplished as well as how this can be changed. Through emergent research by feminist scholars, and the publication of such research in mainstream communication journals and textbooks, we can then begin to reconstruct the faulty theoretical assumptions of concepts such as communication competence.

It is time for the field of speech communication to challenge the reproduction of patriarchal perspectives of appropriateness which cause cognitive dissonance and even exhaustion for too many women. Examining the hegemonic constructs of "communication competence" from a feminist perspective could be most helpful in determining why it is that for decades scholars have been unable to provide a well-accepted theory of communication competence (Spitzberg & Duran, 1993, p. 1). Conventional wisdom has thus far neglected to take into account the complexity of women's social roles. Consider. . . how can a female be an effective communicator

while simultaneously: interacting in a "socially appropriate manner" (Trenholm & Jensen, 1992); saving the "face" of another (Goffman, 1961); obeying rules and norms of considerateness; and maintaining the socio-historical roles of healer, nurturer, peacemaker and relationship builder? We must re-examine the norms and expectations that stand behind such hegemonic rules and social roles which tend to diminish wholeness, authenticity, and successful communicative outcomes for females.

Relatedly, communication theorists should focus more research on communication incompetence. Smith and Williamson (1985) claim most people do not take the time or the effort to observe their patterns of communication with others, nor do they have the words to describe their own behavior or the behavior of others. "Thus, most people end up victims of their own communication incompetence, letting other people write their life scripts for them and living lives that are not as productive and healthy as they could be" (p. 16). The notion of communication incompetence may lead to questions and observations of self-monitoring and self awareness (Littlejohn, 1989, p. 153) as prerequisites for the improvement of female communicative outcomes. Incompetence can be diminished by educating women to re-examine the hegemonic devices which work against them.

I suggest that the historical legacies of appropriateness are ideologically biased and that they empower men at the expense of women. The consistent habit by speech communication scholars of combining appropriateness with effectiveness, brings only one word to my mind... OXYMORONIC! For women, these are too often incongruent terms. Such dualism makes it impossible for women to be competent, or

to be perceived as competent, in their communication much of the time.

I would encourage scholars, from this point forward, to no longer think of communication competence in terms of appropriateness. As shown in this study, the perpetuation of the criteria of appropriateness stifles the voices of those with less power and promotes hegemonic ideals. The women of this study have suggested an interactive way of thinking about communication competence which encompasses consideration for others, as well as consideration for self. Competent communicators strive to have their own needs met, and, at the same time, encourage others to have their needs met as well. Competent communication ideally leaves the interactants feeling better, neutral, or at least no worse for having interacted. Competent communication is open and honest, both with self and with other. Competent communicators can certainly break the norms of appropriateness. . .they say what they need to say, but in ways that others can hear.

Women today are beginning to become as communicatively competent in the public arena as they are with each other. Institutional structures are being challenged against the status-quo as almost never before. They are being challenged because women are becoming less silent. A collective voice is beginning to be heard. One only needs to look at the Packwood resignation, the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, and the new awareness regarding spousal abuse vis-à-vis the bloody slaughter of Nicole Brown Simpson, to know that changes are in the wind. Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke for all women in her keynote address at the Women's Conference when she said "Women's rights are human rights." Women must use their own voices and inspire others to do so as well. Again, by "excavating women's voices from their tombs," we will become agents of change, seeking fairness and mutual care.

Just as I was somewhat of a heretic speaking out against the formal dogma of the Catholic Church, I urge women in institutions of higher learning to speak out

against hegemonic injustice. We need to band together as women, identifying our needs, serving as a support system for one another. We must reinforce in our colleagues the fact that speaking out is not a matter of being non-collegial or self-centered. . . it is a matter of survival.

The world has no idea of the song we're not yet hearing:
women singing out, in harmony with men and each other,
at full blast, at full volume. It's music we need.
Men long to hear it, and women long to join the choir.
Be very clear. The silence is a sick one.

---Marianne Williamson
1993

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

(1) How would you describe your graduate school experience?

(2) Can you tell me about your comfort level regarding the expression of personal ideas and opinions in the classroom?

(3) Communication theorist Dale Spender believes that meaning is literally man-made and is often at odds with the female experience. As a woman, how would you evaluate the readings within our discipline? Have you ever felt marginalized or left out of the literature? If so, how? If not, explain.

(4) There has been no shortage of terms for gendered communication styles written about in interpersonal communication textbooks. Females are thought to use communication primarily to build relationships, while males use communication primarily to problem solve and give information. How does this fit with your own communicative reality?

(5) Graduate students write many papers throughout the graduate school process. Some papers are for required classes, some are submitted as conference papers or to academic journals. How would you describe the feedback you've received?

(5.1) What impact, if any, has this had on your work?

(5.2) The way you write?

(5.3) The way you speak?

(6) If you ever experienced a graduate class in which you felt your views or voice were marginalized, what effects, if any, did this have on you?

(6.1) What action, if any, did you take?

(7) At the end of each term you have been asked to fill out course evaluations. Have you or have you not been rigorously honest in your evaluations and why?

(8) Communication competence, as described in contemporary interpersonal communication textbooks, is said to involve two major criteria. The first, "effectiveness", refers to the accomplishment of desirable or preferred outcomes. The second criteria is "appropriateness," which means we communicate in such a way as to cause no loss of face to the parties involved. As a woman, do these two requirements, or do they not, seem simultaneously accomplishable?

(9) Does appropriateness imply only politeness and conformity, or can it entail behavior that violates rules while negotiating new acceptable norms of behavior?

(10) From your experience, talk about the relationship between being "appropriate" and accomplishing your communicative goals?

(11) Can appropriateness be appropriately judged by self, or only by the person to whom the action is directed?

(12) What have you most liked or disliked about the thesis process?

(13) Have you stayed with your original thesis topic? If not, why?

(14) What do you believe may be the most serious problem for women completing a

master's degree?

(15) In thinking about our discussion, is there anything else you would like to add?

(15.1) Is there anything else you would like to add about the issue of communication competence?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, hereby agree to serve as a respondent in the research project entitled "Rethinking Appropriateness: A look at hegemonic ideals as related to perceived communication competence in women, conducted by Kristi L. Meade and supervised by Susan Poulsen, Ph.D.

I understand that the study involves verbal responses to questions asked by Kristi L. Meade among a group of current or former PSU graduate students.

It has been explained to me that the purpose of the study is to provide information regarding hegemonically-constructed ideals of appropriateness in academe and the ways in which female graduate students negotiate patriarchy throughout the graduate school process.

I may not receive any direct benefit from participation in this study (other than a meal), but my participation may help to increase knowledge which may benefit others in the future.

Kristi L. Meade has offered to answer any questions I may have about the study and what I am expected to do.

Kristi L. Meade has promised that my identity and all information I give will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. I too promise to protect the confidentiality of other participants in my focus group, and agree not to mention names of PSU personnel during the interview process.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time I so deem necessary without jeopardizing my relationship with the researcher, other participants or Portland State University.

I have read and understand fully the foregoing statements and agree to participate in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Kristi L. Meade at (503) 228-5400 or Dr. Susan Poulsen at (503) 725-3544. If you experience any problems that are the result of your participation in this study, please contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Research and Sponsored Projects, 105 Neuberger Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-3417.

APPENDIX C

Demographic Information Sheet Code # _____

1. What is your age? __ 21 - 30 / __ 31- 40 / __41- 50 / __51^

2. Race (answer if comfortable) African American __ / Asian __ / Caucasion __ / Native American __ / Hispanic __ / Other __

3. a. Are you presently a teachers assistant or have you ever been one? __ yes / __ no

b. If yes... for how many terms? ____

4. When did you begin taking graduate courses in the Dept. of Speech Communication?
year _____ / term _____

5. What is your current status in the program? proposal ___ thesis ___
completion of masters degree ___ former graduate student ___

6. How many hours of course work have you completed by the end of this term / or upon graduation from the program? ___

7. a. Are you employed outside of our department? yes ___ / no ___

b. If yes, for how many hours each week? 1 - 10 ___ / 11 - 20 ___ / 21 - 30 ___ / 31 - 40 ___

8. Are you married? yes ___ / no ___

9. Can you provide the name of any female graduate student who left our program after completing at least 35 hours of course work?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

APPENDIX D

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

March 30, 1996

Dear Graduate Student,

As you may know, I am a graduate student in the process of writing a thesis entitled, *Rethinking Appropriateness: A look at hegemonic ideals as related to perceived communication competence in women.* The study purpose is to better understand certain mechanisms of control and underlying ideologies in academe, and the ways in which female graduate students negotiate patriarchy.

My project will include qualitative data collection through the interview process. I intend to conduct a number of individual face-to-face interviews and one focus group interview. My participants will all be female graduate students who have: (a) completed at least 35 hours of graduate studies and are currently working on a proposal or thesis; or (b) have previously worked on and have discontinued, or have completed a masters thesis in the Dept. of Speech Communication at Portland State University.

I am most interested in having you involved in my project because by now you are familiar with: most of the graduate courses offered within our department; much of the required textual material and the academic journals within our discipline; classroom protocol; the advisor / advisee process; and the relational and situational elements within the department.

I know that your time is extremely limited and that there are well-justified concerns for confidentiality in this study. Under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be used in transcripts or included in the research report. I will also take every precaution to protect your identity even among my thesis committee. I believe this project has real merit and heuristic value for women in academe. I will call you soon to answer questions and concerns that you may have. If you decide not to participate in this project, it will in no way affect your relationship with Portland State University or the researcher.

I'll talk to you soon. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Kristi L. Meade
(503) 228-5400

If you have further questions concerning your participation, please contact Kristi Meade, Dr. Susan Poulsen at (503)725-3544, or the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 105 Neuberger Hall, Portland State University, (503)725-3417.