

The Role of Gender in Public Speaking in Social Layers: A Thorough Examination

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Abstract

Speaking in front of an audience has always been an essential part of leadership, communication, and social impact. However, a number of characteristics, including gender, affect how well one can communicate and be viewed across social strata. The impact of gender on public speaking is examined in this article, which also examines how prejudices connected to gender affect audience reaction, trustworthiness, authority, and speech delivery. This article clarifies how gender impacts public speaking across social strata by looking at study findings, linguistic theories, and real-world examples. It also provides methods for overcoming communication hurdles based on gender.

Keywords: public speaking, gender dynamics, gender stereotypes, speech delivery, communication barriers, implicit bias, cultural norms, rhetorical strategies, political speech, social activism, voice pitch and intonation, audience perception.

The majority of leadership positions in academia, business, and politics have historically been held by males, making public speaking a traditionally male-dominated field. Aristotle and Cicero, among other ancient rhetoricians, prohibited women from engaging in public conversation (Gibson, 2004). For centuries, social conventions and legal limitations prevented women from speaking in public. Persistent preconceptions still hinder women's ability to lead and communicate in public, even in contemporary societies (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006).

Working-class communities may have different views on gender and public speaking, according to research. According to Holmes (2018), women are encouraged to communicate in a more collaborative and loving manner, whereas men are frequently required to be assertive and authoritative. By limiting women's access to leadership roles in both social and professional contexts, this duality perpetuates traditional gender norms. According to Lakoff (1975), women in leadership positions are frequently expected to "masculinize" their speech patterns by assuming direct, aggressive, and confident speech patterns in corporate settings where middle-class standards predominate. But this kind of behavior might set off harmful preconceptions, making women seem "bossy" or "aggressive" (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

In prestigious intellectual and political circles, women's public speaking practices are constantly examined. Women politicians who have been commended for striking a balance between warmth and authority include Jacinda Ardern and Angela Merkel. Nonetheless, there is a gender-based double standard in public speaking since male counterparts are rarely evaluated on their emotional tone (Jamieson, 1995). According to Lakoff (1975), women are more likely than men to employ hedges, politeness markers, and tag questions in their speeches, such as "don't you think?" In formal settings, these techniques might weaken the speaker's perceived authority even when they foster a collaborative tone (Holmes, 2018). Many female public speakers purposefully decrease their vocal pitch since research indicates that lower-pitched voices are linked to competence and authority (Klofstad et al., 2012). Political figures like Margaret Thatcher, who had vocal coaching to appear more authoritative, have been known to exhibit this phenomena (Atkinson, 1984).

Another crucial element is nonverbal communication. According to studies, men are more likely to project dominance when speaking in public because they prefer to dominate physical space and make broad gestures. However, because of social training, women tend to adopt smaller, more reserved body language (Goffman, 1979).

When assessing public speakers, audiences frequently harbor unconscious prejudices. Women who speak a lot in mixed-gender meetings are seen as less competent than men who speak just as often, according to a 2011 study by Brescoll. These prejudices are present in both corporate boardrooms and classrooms, spanning social strata.

Stereotypes about gender are reinforced in large part by the media. According to Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2019), men are evaluated on the basis of their content and delivery, whereas women are often evaluated on

their beauty, attire, and emotional expression. Women's career progression prospects and public perception are distorted by this unfair assessment.

Case Studies and Practical Illustrations

1. Politics: During her presidential campaigns, Hillary Clinton was subjected to a great deal of gender-based criticism. According to Jamieson (1995), some people saw her assertiveness negatively, highlighting the delicate balance that female politicians must maintain between being likeable and competent.
2. Sheryl Sandberg (Business): Sandberg, a corporate leader, addressed gender stereotypes in business communication by using personal stories and a confident speaking style in her public speeches advocating for gender equality (such as her TED Talk, "Why We Have Too Few Women Leaders"; Sandberg, 2013).
3. Social Activism's Malala Yousafzai: Even in fields that have historically been controlled by men, Yousafzai's addresses at the UN serve as an example of how emotionally driven pleas and personal stories may defy gender norms in public speaking (Yousafzai, 2014).

The relationship between gender and public speaking is always changing as society grows more conscious of the difficulties presented by ingrained preconceptions and social norms. While speech delivery, gender identity, and societal acceptance are intricately intertwined, contemporary examples from politics, business, and social activity show that traditional gender norms have long governed who speaks and how they are viewed. For example, in politics, women such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have become well-known for their ability to challenge conventional conventions of female speech in addition to their eloquence.

According to Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2019), her outspoken comments in political discussions have drawn praise and criticism, highlighting the delicate balance that female public speakers must maintain between coming across as confident and coming across as unduly aggressive. Similar to this, the success of former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi in the business sector demonstrates how culturally sensitive communication techniques can improve leadership. Nooyi has frequently attributed her success as a leader to her ability to combine empathy and assertiveness, in contrast to her male competitors who might not be held to the same standards for demonstrating emotional intelligence in their speeches (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Cultural norms influence public speaking difficulties in international settings. Women may be more closely scrutinized for their appearance and manner of speaking in patriarchal cultures. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and other African women activists have been praised and criticized for their vocal support of gender equality. According to Adichie (2014), her speech "We Should All Be Feminists" received widespread acclaim for its audacity and clarity, but it also provoked criticism in conservative circles where strong female voices are not as valued. The public's more balanced assessments of female politicians like Sanna Marin, on the other hand, indicate a movement in society toward embracing strong female voices in Nordic nations like Sweden, where gender equality is a legislative priority (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019).

Additionally, the emergence of social media has changed the gender dynamics of public speaking by giving underrepresented voices new outlets. Influencers like Luvvie Ajayi Jones have amassed enormous fan bases by using their persuasive internet communication skills to avoid traditional speaking engagements that are frequently dominated by men. The problem of gender-based harassment persists, though, even in online settings. Research indicates that compared to their male counterparts, female public speakers encounter a notably greater number of disparaging remarks on the internet that focus on their trustworthiness, voice, and looks (Brescoll, 2011). This emphasizes how difficult it is to maintain authority and authenticity in a public setting when gendered norms still influence behavior. Furthermore, gender dynamics in public speaking go beyond simple male-female classifications. It is very difficult for non-binary speakers to build their reputations and be accepted as respectable public personalities. By purposefully fusing traditionally male and feminine speaking styles, activists like Alok Vaid-Menon have utilized their public speaking engagements to question social notions of gender. Despite being novel, this tactic frequently sparks divisive responses, underscoring the ingrained prejudices that still exist among audiences around the world (Holmes, 2018).

Gender biases continue to exist even in settings like academia that are often friendly. Students' course evaluations frequently give female professors lower ratings when they use aggressive speaking techniques,

which reflects the persistent notion that women should be accommodating and caring (Brescoll, 2011). However, male instructors who employ the same communication style are often seen as smart and capable. These prejudices impact leadership opportunities, pay fairness, and career advancement, perpetuating a cycle of low visibility for women in leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Last but not least, exploring language subtleties like tone, pitch, and prosody shows other levels of gendered speech norms. According to Loftstad et al. (2012), speaking in a deep or monotone voice is linked to masculine power, but the capacity to adjust pitch and tone for emotional appeal is frequently perceived as a feminine quality. The former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's lower-pitched voice contributed to her commanding presence, demonstrating how this dynamic has led many female public speakers to receive vocal training (Atkinson, 1984). Such modifications, however, can undermine speakers' authenticity, therefore they are not always desirable or feasible.

These findings highlight how crucial it is to redefine what makes a public speaker "effective" by expanding evaluation standards to include a wider range of speaking styles from both genders.

Examining these diverse instances makes it evident that addressing gender dynamics in public speaking calls for more than just personal adjustment. To level the playing field, structural adjustments are necessary, such as developing gender-sensitive public speaking instruction, rewriting media narratives, and promoting inclusive evaluation criteria. Long-standing stereotypes can be broken down by concentrating on speech content, rhetorical skill, and audience participation rather than making superficial remarks about look or vocal tone. In addition to helping individuals, this change fortifies democratic processes by guaranteeing that a range of voices can engage in and influence public discourse without worrying about gender-based discrimination. We must adapt our understanding of public speaking as a gendered practice that is influenced by social, historical, and cultural factors as societal attitudes change.

Recommendations

and

Solutions

Individuals and groups can use the following tactics to address gender-related issues in public speaking:

1. **Training and Coaching:** According to Atkinson (1984), public speaking courses should concentrate on voice training, confident delivery, and non-verbal communication techniques in order to break down gendered communication barriers.
2. **Awareness and Representation:** By making more women role models visible in the media, commercial, and political spheres, stereotypes can be dispelled and future generations can be motivated.
3. **Education of the Audience:** Speaking settings can be made more fair by awareness efforts that try to lessen latent biases among audiences.
4. **Policy Implementation:** Companies should implement diversity policies that guarantee equitable opportunities for speaking at leadership meetings, conferences, and events (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Conclusion

Social layers' gender characteristics in public speaking expose long-standing disparities influenced by social, cultural, and historical standards. Despite the advancements, there are still major obstacles to overcome. A more inclusive public speaking environment where all views are heard and valued can be established by society through the application of gender-sensitive language theories, the addressing of latent biases, and the promotion of equitable representation.

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