



He Said, She Said: Understanding the Impact of Gendered Language on Perceived Confidence

Mandi Nerenberg, Psychology Department, University of Pennsylvania
Honors Thesis Advisors: Angela Duckworth, Ph.D. & Louis Hickman, Ph.D.



Introduction

- Public speaking is a necessary skill for success in academia and employment (i.e presentations, interviews, debates)
- Confidence is one of the main metrics public speaking is evaluated on
 - Men tend to be more confident public speakers
- Prescriptive gender stereotypes expect:
 - Men to present agentically = competent, independent, assertive
 - Women to present communally = helpful, kind, empathetic, polite
- Usage of gendered language reinforces gender stereotypes
 - Masculine language reflects agentic behavior
 - Feminine language reflects communal behavior
- Role Congruity Theory: individuals who violate the standards for their gender may be evaluated negatively

Ratings of Speaker Confidence



This speaker...

- is a confident public speaker
- a capable public speaker
- 's verbal communication skills are strong

1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Gendered Language



Masculine Lang.

Challenging
Independent
Competitive
Dominant
Ambitious



Feminine Lang.

Supportive
Honest
Understanding
Compassionate
Kind

Elocution



How clear & articulate word utterances are, as measured by computer transcription confidence

In public speaking, are men & women judged as more confident by enacting role-congruent behavior?

Method

Video Collection $n = 178^*$ Recorded video through undergraduate research pool
 $M_{age} = 20.3$, 42% Female, 53% White

Confidence Ratings $n = 707^{**}$ Recruited through Prolific & undergrad. research pool
Rated confidence for 3 participants' videos
 $M_{age} = 23.7$, 47% Female, 78% White

Prompt:

Please tell us about yourself as you might be asked during a first introduction in a professional setting



Record Public Speaking Video

Watch Other Participants' Video

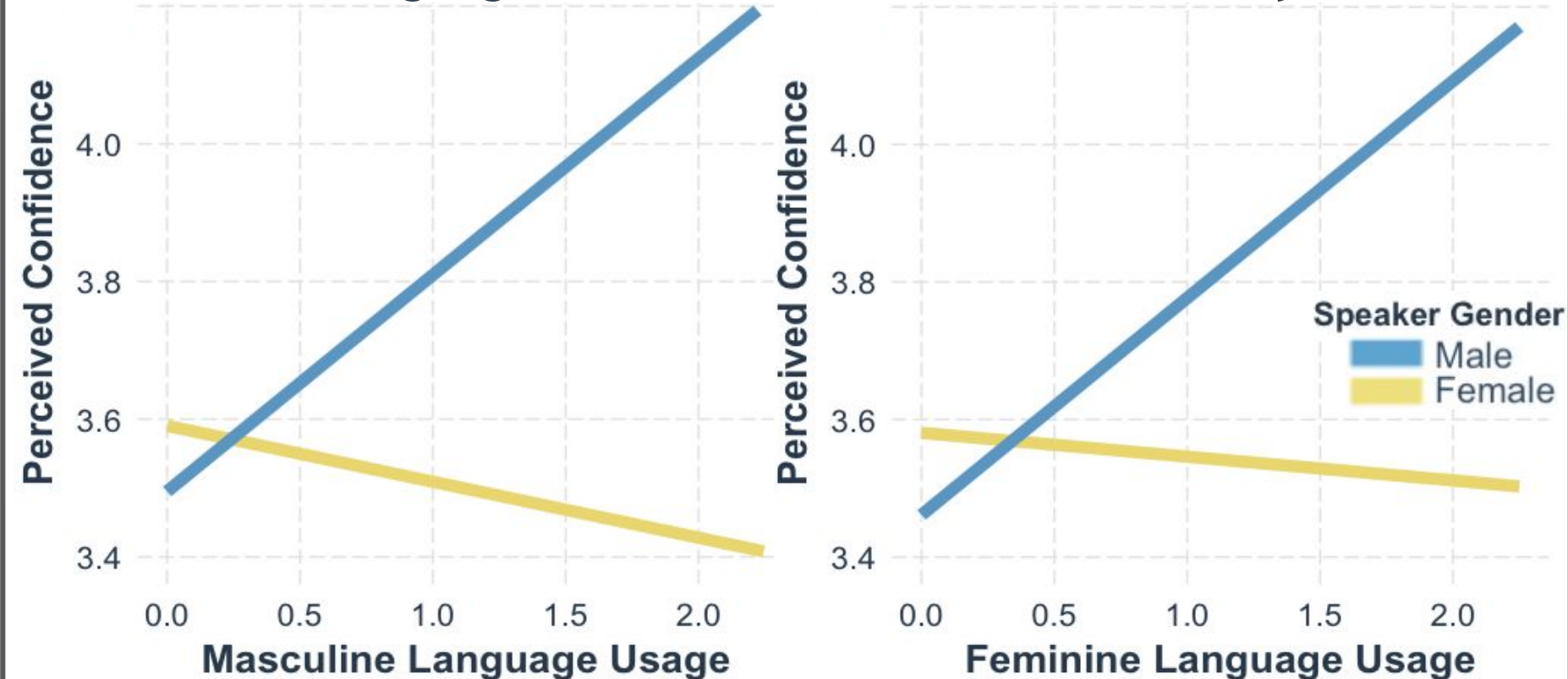
Rate Other Participants' Confidence

*Originally recruited 205 participants, but 19 were removed due to exclusion criteria

**Originally recruited 988 participants, but 279 participants were removed due to exclusion criteria

Results

Gendered Language Increases Perceived Confidence Only for Men



Discussion

Enacting agency & communality increases perceived confidence for men
Gendered language usage does not affect perceived confidence for women

Men seem to benefit from engaging in both role congruent & violating behaviors, whereas role congruent & violating behaviors do not benefit women. This suggests that Role Congruity Theory may not be accurate when it comes to public speaking.