



Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): The Differences in Communication Styles Between Men and Women

by

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This paper and annotated bibliography is designed to inform members of the MWTC community of the differences in communication styles between men and women when using Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). CMC creates an environment where the primary source of communication is non-verbal, and many research articles claim that when men and women are in this type of non-verbal environment, they communicate in specific ways due to their gender. If this is true, are the differences in their communication styles attributed to how boys and girls are taught to communicate and behave at an early age?

You might believe that certain behaviors are tolerated from one sex and not by another. For example, boys yell, girls cry. These types of learned behaviors stay with us for life and become part of a pattern: "Generally speaking, in our society boys and men are seen as aggressive, independent and objective. Girls and women are seen as submissive, dependent and subjective" (Sachs).

Or do we believe that these perceived differences are a myth? Regardless of how much evidence there is to prove the contrary, myths will always persist. You might ask yourself, "What is the history of myths between men's and women's communication styles?" In the article, *Girls Are... Boys Are...: Myths, Stereotypes & Gender Differences*, the authors' state: "In earlier times women were the main food-gatherers and producers, there were matriarchal societies where women had high status, were preeminent as cultivators and were glorified as goddesses. As late as the 2nd century BC, the major deities in European culture were women."

So, what changed in society to make women lose their rank? Some theories would have us believe that: "With the evolution of private property women lost their place in productive, social and cultural life and their worth sank along with their former status"(Campbell, Storo).



Contemporary research articles explain how men and women communicate differently in CMC, showing certain gender characteristics that are present in their language. Even when gender isn't readily apparent in on-line communication, written words provide sufficient evidence to distinguish between genders. Studies show that "women's language makes more frequent use of emotionally intensive adverbs such as so, terribly, awfully, and quite" (Jaffe, Lee, Huang, and Oshagan). According to some researchers; however, men's language makes more use of directive and informative statements.

When men and women use CMC in an academic environment, findings show that males develop their own learning styles while females prefer connected learning. Additional research shows that when males and females are on-line, males tend to dominate and silence females. If women continue to exhibit less confidence in communicating on-line, they create barriers for themselves. Virginia Woolf and later research supported there are higher barriers for females than males: "Studies abound show that females have fewer computer skills and less access to computers in prior educational years" (Blum).

However, proponents of CMC believe that its anonymous nature provides an equal voice for all participants. In addition, they state: "CMC will eradicate prejudice in communication and give every voice equal time" (Gender Styles in Computer-Mediated Communication [CMC]).

Because there are communication style differences between men and women when on-line, research articles discuss these differences in order to explain why men are considered hierarchical and women are considered community-oriented. However, there are exceptions to all assumptions that researchers and society makes. Don't we all know someone who defies the stereotypical categories that research claim they fall into? So, are we to believe that no man or woman is capable of communicating non-verbally outside of his or her gender?

These false assumptions are important to MWTC students and faculty to recognize, because technology is taking classrooms into the world of computer-mediated communication, and within that world, the primary tool for one to be heard is non-verbal communication.



Annotated Bibliography

Blum, Kimberly Dawn. "Gender Differences in CMC-based Distance Education." *Feminista*, Volume 2, Number 5.
<http://www.feminista.com/v2n5/blum2.html> (accessed 28 Oct. 2002).

In this piece, designed to reveal how male and female students learn in CMC-based distance education, Blum suggests that male students display individual learning styles while females display a connected learning style. Blum supports these findings through several studies: Belenky, MacKerachers, Gilligan's, and Severiens and Ten Dam's. Blum shows how males tend to dominate on-line environments and silence females when on-line. Since classrooms are moving into a CMC environment, Blum unveils how men and women learn when on-line; in order to establish an optimum educational program that provides equal opportunity for male and female learning styles. Gender Differences in CMC-based Distance Education provides many findings for distance learning programs, and is aimed toward universities and state school audiences that provide distance-learning programs.

Campbell, Ph.D, Patricia B and Storo, Jenifer N. "Girls Are... Boys Are... : Myths, Stereotypes & Gender Differences." Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

This article, in which the context questions whether gender differences really exist, Campbell and Storo argue that girls and boys are more alike than they are different. Campbell and Storo show how common myths and stereotypes among boys and girls academic skills are incorrect. Because society makes assumptions based on one's gender, Campbell and Storo provide solutions to typical assumptions in order to break the stereotypical cycle society has created. Girls Are... Boys Are... : Myths, Stereotypes & Gender Differences contains factual information that gives a true representation of the academic skills between boys and girls, and is aimed toward elementary, middle, and high schools.

Jaffe, Michael J., Young-Eum Lee, Li-Ning Huang, and Hayg Oshagan. "Gender, Pseudonyms, and CMC: Masking Identities and Baring Souls." *Gender, Language, & CMC*.
<http://research.haifa.ac.il/~jmjaffe/genderpseudocmc/gender.html>
 (accessed 28 Oct. 2002).

This piece is designed to review studies based on how differently men and women use the English language, the authors claim that men and women use the same language, yet they converse differently. The authors review several studies and show how women tend to use emotionally intensive verbs such as "so," "awfully," and "quite". While on the other hand, men tend to use more directive and informative statements. Additional studies done in mock-jury deliberations, CMC, and computer related work, shows how women want to gain rapport and men want to report when on-line. Because men and women communicate on a daily basis, the authors point out other research studies that use pseudonymous CMC contexts in order to make gender-based differences less apparent. Gender Psuedonyms, and CMC: Masking Identities and Baring Souls contains pertinent information on various studies, and is aimed toward audiences interested in conducting or researching CMC studies.

Gender Styles in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).
<http://www.georgetown.edu/bassr/githens/cmc.html> (accessed 26 Oct. 2002).

In this on-line article, designed to identify with the proponents of CMC, the author claims that CMC provides an equal voice for its participants. The author states that the anonymous nature of CMC creates the ideal environment for all participants to have equal merit. Because gender issues may not be apparent in CMC, the author questions whether our impressions are influenced in this anonymous environment in order to make distinctions between face-to-face communication and CMC prejudices.

Gender Styles in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) contains a valuable argument in favor of CMC's anonymous nature, and is aimed toward the general public interested in the advantages of CMC.

Sachs, Marilyn A. Male/Female Communication Styles. <<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5280.html>> (accessed 28 Oct. 2002).

In this on-line article, designed to explain how heredity and one's environment attributes to male/female communication styles, Sachs suggests that language differences are due to genetic makeup and how society responds to boys and girls differently. Sachs shows how male and female brain growth develops at different rates and how social behaviors are tolerated by one sex and not acceptable from the other sex. Because men and women speak different languages, Sachs puts communication styles in their inherited and learned contexts in order to reveal how genetic and social behaviors become part of a pattern that stay with us for life. Male/Female Communication Styles contains facts stating why men and women communicate differently, and is aimed toward an academic audience interested in computer-mediated communication among children.

