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An Analysis Of Cross-Gender Differences In Computer-Mediated Communication In The Workplace

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**An Analysis of Cross-Gender Differences in
Computer-Mediated Communication in the Workplace**

by

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication
Seton Hall University**

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Chapter One

Introduction

It is generally accepted that men and women are not only biologically and physically different, but they behave differently and, thus, also have psychological differences. It has become common knowledge that, compared to men, women are more intuitive, more interested in love and relationships, and experience different reactions to stress. In discussing their personal relationships, men and women express different types of complaints and problems. Many psychologists, and others who study human development and relationships, would agree that there are certain general communication differences that can be attributed when comparing men and women. When a man communicates he has already silently discovered, through pondering thought, the main idea he intends to communicate. On the other hand, a woman does not necessarily speak in order to communicate a main idea. She uses speech to assist her in finding the idea that she wants to communicate. Her verbal exploration of several thoughts that she is having will bring her to the final main point of communication (Gray, 1993). The predominant male communication pattern is focused on rationality while the predominant female communication pattern is focused on intuition (Gray, 1993). Furthermore, researchers have found women communicating in a more cooperative, intimate style (Tannen, 1990), while men lean toward a more fact providing style (Sorenson, 1997).

This study will look at the use of computer-mediated communication, which will here after be referred to as (CMC), in the workplace and its relationship to these traditional, gender-oriented, communication characteristics.

Background

Today it may be more difficult to observe these communication pattern differences because women and men no longer have the traditional work roles that began as the respective gatherers and hunters. Women do not stay behind to manage the home environment while men manage the economy. In the new millennium, more women work outside the home and are entrepreneurs than ever before in our nation's history. However, corporate leadership in America has remained a predominantly male bastion. Henly and Kramer (1991) point to the macro-level power of common linguistics: "Structural, male dominance favors the growth of faulty linguistic systems, including dominant metaphors, which express primarily male experience and further add to making women a muted group - leading to further problems in communication" (40-41). Has this male-led milieu forced women to feel compelled to deny aspects of who they are - their female side - in order to develop aspects of their potential normally attributed to men? Is the drive for success in the professional realm so great that women think they must "catch up" if they are going to achieve corporate leadership status? Thus, have women assumed male communication patterns? Or have the communication characteristics normally attributed to women remained constant regardless of their changing role? Have more men found their softer, more emotional, female side now that the playing field has changed? Men now accept a variety of roles in the home and family. Have these new roles changed traditional communication styles associated with men? To the contrary, as discussed by Poynton in Language and Gender:

Making the Difference, there is empirical data to verify that linguistic and lexico-grammatical differences do exist between men and women, such as:

1. **Interruption:** Men interrupt women and not vice-versa in mixed-sex conversation.
2. **Topic choice:** Men may (and do) reject women's topic choices in mixed-sex conversation, while women will talk on topics raised by men.
3. **Speech act choice and realization:** Men use many more commands than women and tend to realize them congruently by means of the mood choice.
4. **Imperative:** Women...are much more likely to realize them incongruently, by using the interrogative.
5. **Hedges:** Women use more 'hedges' than men.
6. **Slang:** Men use more slang than women do.
7. **Swearing:** Men swear more than women.
8. **Politeness markers:** Women are said to use these more than men.
9. **Intonation:** Among other characteristics, women have more vocal variety than men and are said to use the high rising termination, or question inflection, more than men (Poynton, 1989, pp. 70-73).

Other researchers point to the gender differences commonly seen in relational use of conversation. Jaffe, Lee, Huang, and Oshanga point out that women display a greater personal orientation than men, focusing on the self, revealing thoughts and feelings, and interacting with others (p.31). Maltz and Borker summarize research related to conversation purpose and gender differences and indicate that women use conversation primarily for negotiating and expressing relationships, while men use it as display. Men want to establish control, while women want to maintain interaction. Women also tend to be more supportive and focused.

CMC dominates our world and it especially dominates our workday where contacts and decisions need to be, and now with the use of technology, can be, facilitated quickly. With the use of the Internet we can communicate quickly, at any time of day, with our colleagues, constituents, and customers, who may be located throughout the world.

Because of women's increasing role in the world of work and the economy, women have wider lives and busier lives than ever before. In the book, The Time Bind, Dr. Arlie Hochschild reported that many working mothers are over-extended and hungry for friendships and make great efforts to seek friendships at work. She described the women she studied as having "tremendously intimate conversations" with coworkers and discussing everything going on in their homes (Hochschild, 1997, p.36). These conversations took place even though their coworkers did not know their families.

Studies show that men do not criticize their friends as much as women, but they also do not communicate the kind of acceptance women have come to count on from their female friends (Goodman and O'Brien, 2000, p. 54). Letty Cottin Pogrebin, in her book, Who We Like, Why We Like Them, and What We Do About It, said: "The average man's idea of an intimate exchange is the average woman's idea of a casual conversation" (1987, p. 45). Goodman and O'Brien reported that Richard Nixon, a traditional non-feminist male leader, said, "I never wanted to be buddy-buddy, even with close friends. I don't believe in letting your hair down, confiding this and that and the other thing...." When confronted with this intimate sharing style of women, do men respond differently via the Internet than they would in-person?

This study will include an examination of the current literature on the interaction styles among men and women during CMC. It will include the conduct of a focus group and the design of an instrument and its implementation with a study group of participants. These study activities

will seek answers to the following questions: Does e-mail communication between men and women increase the use of traditionally female patterns of communication, those that use intimacy, emotion and intuition, by men? Are women changing their characteristic, communication styles, those that exhibit intimacy, emotion, and intuition, to adapt to the male-dominated work environment; and are these changes exhibited in the frequent, and increasingly common, form of business communication - e-mail? If it is generally accepted that men and women talk about different things in different ways than are these differences sustained or diminished by use of this new means of communication?

Statement of the Research Question

Do cross-gender differences exist in computer-mediated communication (CMC) used in the workplace? In other words, if differences exist in the face to face communication patterns and styles of men and women, then are these same differences expressed in workplace computer-mediated communications?

Purpose/Need for the Study.

Many think that computer mediated communication is rapidly improving the way men and women interact. As the Internet quickly becomes a major medium through which all people interact, questions are being raised regarding professional interactions and the effects of electronic-mail (e-mail) on cross-gender communication in the workplace. This paper will review the available literature regarding computer-assisted cross gender communication. In addition, men and women who utilize e-mail for workplace communications took part in a focus group and others were surveyed regarding their own experiences and perceptions in communicating with colleagues of the opposite sex. Much of what has been reported and written regarding gender differences and the Internet has been about who dominates - men or women - in

the high-tech business world. Much less has been written about the communication patterns of average working men and women who for business purposes communicate often via e-mail. The perceptions, experiences and analyses of the men and women participating in this examination will augment the available published research and discussion that focuses primarily on gender differences and Internet communication patterns. The available literature on the subject does not look at how the gender differences, if any, that are found in computer-assisted communication have been experienced and perceived by those in the workplace.

Objectives

Using a focus group as well as a survey of men and women, randomly selected, who use the Internet during a regular workday, the author sought answers that would contribute to the current findings regarding the following questions.

1. Do the traditional communication characteristics attributed to men and women remain constant whether face-to-face or via the Internet?
2. How do gender differences effect on-line communication between men and women in the workplace?
3. Has the wide use of on-line communication between men and women in the workplace broken down traditional gender barriers?

A discussion of this topic and the survey findings will provide direction for those struggling in the workplace to understand cross-gender computer-assisted communication differences. The availability of this information can contribute to advancing positive workplace communication by increasing the understanding of on-line, gender-specific communication patterns.

Definition of Terms

1. **Cross-Gender Communication:** The way that men and women communicate with each other verbally and through thought the use of gestures.
2. **Triangulation:** The process of using three different forms of research to form a hypothesis.
3. **Computer-Mediated Communication:** For the purpose of the study it will be referred to as CMC, asynchronous e-mail communication

Limitations

The author used a survey instrument in seeking answers to these questions using both a focus group and an Internet survey, as well as a review of the literature to supplement the findings. Important assumptions are caveats associated with this survey. The survey was e-mailed to 10 colleagues, friends, peers, and associates who are administrators, professionals, or business people. In turn, they were asked to forward the survey to nine other colleagues who are administrators, professionals or business people. They were asked to include both men and women who use the Internet during their workday. Thus, although this format can be considered a study of convenience and not a random sampling, the author received completed questionnaires from men and women who he did not work with or know. This method was used in order to conduct the study with a semblance of randomness. Also, a random sample of all administrators, professionals, or business people who use the Internet for work-related communication would have been too costly to produce.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been a topic of researchers since society began using computers in the late 1960s. A review of the literature shows that scholars have only recently begun to study gender issues as they relate to on-line communication. The studies of Sharmila Ferris, Susan Herring, Debra Tannen, Gladys We, and Paolo Rossetti seek to explain central issues to analyzing communication between the sexes and this new interactive venue. These authors sought to answer the following questions: (a) How do men and women communicate via this new method of virtual contact? (b) Are computer-mediated styles of communication between men and women different from face-to face conversation?

This review of the literature shows that many believe that CMC is rapidly improving the way men and women interact. As the Internet quickly becomes a major medium through which all people interact, questions are being raised regarding professional interactions and the effects of e-mail on cross-gender communication in the workplace. The author has researched the findings of others related to e-mail in cross-gender communication.

Gender-Specific Communication Characteristics

Although on-line communication differs somewhat, in general, from verbal communication, the researchers have found that men and women utilize some of the same characteristics of communication when speaking both on-line and verbally. Herring found how

closely the verbal and non-verbal communication styles of men and women mirror their on-line classic gender differences. She first points out the verbal and non-verbal communication styles of men and women. Men often use adversarial language, such as sarcasm, self-promotion, personal insults, and authoritative, unyielding assertions. This is characterized as an attempt to get in the target's "face" and engage another person in "antagonistic debate." This "in your face" communication, often called flaming, is generally done in response to a communication that a user feels is stupid or otherwise useless (a very subjective measurement) (Herring 1993). Women, on the other hand, use attenuated assertions, make explicit justifications, have a more personal orientation, support others and use humor (rather than sarcasm).

Herring (1993) believes that these alternate styles of communication may stem from the ways boys and girls learn sex-appropriate behavior. Girls are taught to be nice and to wait their turn to speak. This may be why women often perceive verbal aggressiveness as a personal attack. Men, on the other hand, perceive this same verbal aggressiveness as a part of everyday conversation (Herring 1993).

In Herring's further research she discovered many of the same gender communication patterns when evaluating on-line communications. She elaborates on the different communication styles of men and women, noting that men are more adversarial and assertive; make more frequent and lengthier posts; engage in self-promotion; and, are sarcastic, authoritative, and self-confident. In contrast, women show more support and appreciation (Herring 1994). Women, more often than men, express more doubt, apologize more frequently, contribute more ideas, and ask more questions. Herring (1994) clearly points out that gender differences can clearly be seen as they relate to on-line communication styles. This is due, at least in part, to differences in the way men and women generally look at the world. Therefore, it

is no coincidence that women see talk as the essence of a relationship while men use talk to exert control, preserve independence, and enhance status (Herring, 1994, p. 25). The ways in which concepts of social relationships (and their accompanying communication patterns) differ between genders are parallel to gender differences in world view (Tannen, 1994). Women and men are like people who have grown up in two subcultures - they have two broad different styles of speaking and establishing social status (Rossetti, 2001).

Researcher Sharmila Pixy Ferris (1996) says there is a gender difference in relational communication, meaning that men and women have different conversational purposes. She claims that men want to establish control while women want to maintain dialogue. She says that women are also more focused on positive interactions.

If Ferris' research supports the theory that verbal and non-verbal communication styles differ for men and women, then there is a strong basis for believing that on-line communication patterns also differ by gender. It is widely assumed that women are more in touch with their feelings than men are - they react more emotionally and are better able to read emotions in others. Is there any truth to these assumptions?

The evidence does confirm differences between men and women when it comes to emotional reactions and ability to read others. Women show greater emotional expression than men do; they experience emotions more intensely, and they display more frequent expressions of both positive and negative emotions, except anger. In contrast to men, women also report more comfort in expressing emotions. Finally, women are better at reading verbal and nonverbal cues than are men.

What explains these differences? Three possible answers have been suggested. One explanation is the different ways men and women have been socialized. Men are taught to be

tough and brave and showing emotions is inconsistent with this image. Women, however, are socialized to be nurturing. This may account for the perception that women are generally warmer and friendlier than men. For instance, women are expected to express more positive emotions on the job, such as smiling. This same expectation is not placed on their male colleagues. A second explanation is that women may have a greater innate ability to read others and present their emotions than men. A third explanation of the differences is that women have a greater need for social approval and thus a higher propensity to show positive emotions, such as happiness. Simply put, women and men don't communicate well with each other, even though they may both be speaking the same language (Tannen, 1990).

We hypothesized that even though there is no physical presence with e-mail, many of the same face-to-face interactions still come into play.

Computer-Mediated Communication and Gender Differences

Other authors have added insights regarding the differences between men and women and their on-line communication styles. We (1993) and Truong (1993) have substantiated Herring's findings. They sent out a questionnaire and asked men and women if they reply to e-mail messages differently. Many of the men said that they do respond differently. Of the women who replied 45 percent reported they respond differently to men than to other women when communicating on-line. Researcher Gladys We (1993) hypothesized that even though there is no physical presence with e-mail, many of the same face-to-face interactions still come into play. However, Gerard van der Leun (1993), in the premier issue of the on-line magazine, Wired, reported that a previously "shy and retiring" woman, after flirting as "This is a naked lady" online, gradually became "her online personality: lewd, bawdy, sexy."

Conclusions of the Literature Review

The research conducted by these scholars demonstrates a definitive difference between gender communication styles in the work place, both verbally and through on-line communication. The common male communication characteristics, primarily brevity and abruptness, are also seen in on-line interactions. Common female communication characteristics such as politeness and the use of details are seen in both their e-mail and verbal communications. The analysis of the work of published researchers clearly demonstrates that cross-gender communication styles remain constant whether in face-to-face interactions or via the Internet. This review of the literature regarding computer-assisted communication was found on the Internet and in various publications. These sources serve as the base for comparing the perceptions, feelings, and experiences that have been reported by this author's focus group participants and survey respondents regarding the electronic communication patterns of men and women who are coworkers and colleagues in the professional/business arena.

Chapter Three

Design of the Study

The Survey Instrument and the Focus Group

The literature review verified that much has been written about gender accessibility to and use of the Internet. However, both on-line and published resources researched by this author did not generate information regarding gender communication differences as exemplified or negated in workplace Internet interactions. With this apparent lack of readily available information this author employed structured research methods that will help to answer the question, "Do Cross-Gender Differences Exist in Computer-Mediated Communication in the Workplace?" In other words, do the traditionally accepted gender communication differences remain constant in the workplace computer-assisted communication environment? Based on the literature review, a questionnaire was developed that would serve as the focus for securing the data (see Appendix A, The Survey).

In addition to the review of the literature and the survey instrument, the conduct of a focus group completes the cross-analysis, or triangulation of the data, that will assist in solving the hypothesis. Focus groups are commonly used as an effective means of conducting exploratory, qualitative research. The main purpose in using focus groups in research is to generate ideas, not numbers. Traditionally, focus groups are used to draw out subtle, complex aspects of the relationship between the issue and the general public. In preparing for the conduct

of the focus group, this author clearly defined the research objectives; worked with an impartial marketing moderator; was involved in the sample selection design; prepared to co-lead the focus discussion group; and prepared for the recording of the proceedings to be used for post-group-discussion analysis.

Population and Sample

The Survey Instrument

The survey contains 18 questions regarding cross-gender communication. The first eight questions focus on the use of the Internet and its relationship to gender in the workplace. This initial section included a question regarding the average amount of Internet time used weekly in communication with colleagues. The next three questions focus on cross gender communication among coworkers. Questions six through ten sought to analyze the differences between the genders and among coworkers through e-mail. The answers from these specific questions may highlight the gender differences observed through electronic mail communication. The survey also explores how the respondents view the differences in gender communication and if the answers are based on objective views or from their own experiences at the work place.

Remaining questions focus on areas that are more subjective, such as the question that asks the respondent to identify any gender similarities or differences in the communication patterns of colleagues in relation to on-line or face to face interactions. The other questions ask for the gender identity, occupation, and educational level of the respondent. All of these questions seek to determine key, baseline information that may contribute to the communication style of the respondent.

On May 1, 2001 ten colleagues working in real estate, higher education, advertising, marketing, publications, financial products sales, bank management, computer technology, and

health care system administration received cover memorandums requesting their participation as study respondents and included the survey instrument as an e-mail attachment. The memorandum explained the purpose of the study and the recipients were asked to complete the questionnaire within five business days and return it to the author via e-mail.

The Focus Group

In April, 2001 the author of this study conducted a focus group arranged by a colleague who is a member of a small marketing consulting firm in southern New Jersey. Typically a sample of six to twelve participants should be chosen in order to conduct a focus group (Tri-Media Marketing & Publicity Inc., <http://www.tri-media.com/>). Any number of people above twelve becomes hard to control in a guided focus group discussion. The sample should be members of the target market who, ideally, should be randomly selected by an unbiased third party. The random sample of eight participants, four men and four women, who all use computer-assisted communication in the workplace, had been previously selected by the marketing consultant. The group had participated in another group exercise, conducted by the marketing consultant, immediately preceding the author's guided discussion. The author reviewed the participants with the consultant to verify that each met the minimum criteria in terms of adding value to the achievement of the study purposes: male and female professionals who use the Internet for work-related purposes and who are equipped to discuss the issues in-depth.

Securing the Data

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was e-mailed to ten colleagues/business associates who are employed as administrators or other professional/business occupations. The participants were

asked to complete the questionnaire and forward the same to a combination of nine male and female business colleagues with whom they regularly communicate.

The ten surveys sent to the initial respondents were returned. In addition, fourteen of the 90 surveys sent on by the ten initial respondents were returned. In total, 24 completed surveys were returned to the author.

The Focus Group

The moderator is the most important component of an effective focus group. The ability of the moderator to keep the discussion group focused is key to the success of this phase of the study. The moderator should exhibit outstanding communication skills, understand the basic tenets of human behavior and psychology, have experience as a focus group leader, have a good understanding of the topic and be able to lead and control the group interactions and flow of conversation in a subtle manner (Tri-Media Marketing & Publicity Inc.). The marketing consultant met all of the above criteria and she also provided training and preparation to the author in order to facilitate the co-moderating experience.

The site used for the focus group meeting was a professional site used on a regular basis by the marketing consultant. It was a relaxed atmosphere and conducive to facilitating group discussion. The group was aware that the session was taped and would be transcribed for purposes of the study.

The moderators reviewed the literature research materials and the survey instrument in order to prepare the script and the sequence of probing questions. The moderators worked together to determine the exact order of questioning. They established the flow of questioning ranging from general use of the computer for workplace communication to specific issues related

to male and female communication characteristics and e-mail interactions. This method assists in ensuring that no biases are introduced to the participants early in the focus group process.

To facilitate the focus group experience, the moderators:

1. Introduced themselves and explained the purpose and process of the focus group.
2. Created familiarity by asking for the first name and profession of the participants.
3. Asked general questions first in order to warm up the group towards the issue.
4. Asked specific questions regarding gender differences and use of the Internet and asked participants to record their first reaction/answer to each question.
5. When all participants had recorded their answers, the issue was opened for in-depth discussion of each participant's answers.
6. Spread the discussion among all participants and did not allow anyone to dominate the discussion.
7. Ensured that the flow of conversation moved evenly around the group and allowed everyone to express their thoughts and feelings regarding each question.

Chapter Four

Analysis of the Data

Through the review of the available literature, the qualitative results culled from the conduct of the focus group, and the results of the Internet survey, the author began an analysis of cross-gender communication differences in computer-mediated communication in the workplace. This chapter provides an overview of the issue from the perspective of four professional men and four professional women who use the Internet for work-related communication: the focus group participants. This chapter also reviews the questionnaire responses received via the Internet. These responses provide additional insight regarding the way men and women communicate using e-mail in the workplace and its juxtaposition to traditional gender communication patterns.

The survey conducted by the author explored whether communication styles of men and women vary between face-to-face and e-mail communication. Most of the respondents characterized themselves as middle managers (18) and the respondents represent both the non-profit as well as for-profit sectors. All respondents surveyed use e-mail for work-related communication functions. Both male (12) and female (12) administrators participated in the eighteen-question survey (see Appendix A, The Survey). Based on the analysis of the survey and opinions offered by focus group participants, as well as the review of the literature that discussed commonly accepted gender differences in relation to communication patterns, the communication patterns of men and women appear to remain unaffected by the Internet medium. The on-line communication styles of men are similar to their face-to-face speech patterns. Men's

speech patterns in business are often characterized with brevity, assertiveness, and directness. The responses from the survey and the focus group further support the presence of these same characteristics in men's on-line communications. Men are reported to write brief e-mails, and there is no significant difference in the use of this communication pattern that favors brevity in relation to in-person communication. All of the male respondents view on-line communication as a quick and efficient way to relay messages in an uncomplicated manner. For serious, complicated conversations, men prefer to speak on a more personal level. These responses further support the research presented by Herring, We, and Truong.

The background research, the survey and the focus group data further substantiates the major differences in communication patterns between males and females. Men's assertiveness and directness are mirrored in their day-to day conversations, both through verbal and e-mail communication.

The on-line communication style of females is also reflected in their speech patterns in their daily work lives. Female respondents from the survey characterized themselves as writing lengthy e-mails. They stated they feel more comfortable expressing themselves through on-line communication, where they are less likely to be judged by other factors. Females, often characterized as nurturers, deliver personal, polite e-mails that contain a great amount of detail. Herring's observations further support these findings through her discussion regarding learned gender behavior. If Ferris' (1997, November) research supports the theory that verbal and non-verbal communication styles differ for men and women, then there is a strong basis for believing that on-line communications patterns also differ by gender.

The following focus group opinions and survey instrument responses also substantiate the theory that communication styles via the Internet and in-person differ according to gender.

Women on Women

Do you think women communicate differently than men by e-mail?

1. "Yes they are more assertive. Society judges people a great deal on how they look and, perhaps, without a visual image, women might come across more intelligent and the men would be more interested in the facts or the content of the e-mail."
2. "Yes, men, boyfriends, husbands don't want 'the full story' even in real time conversation. Long, creative, emotional e-mails by women to men are glanced at, if at all, or deleted by men. Then later, during the day a woman will get a call, 'You sent me an e-mail about What's going on'?"
3. "When communicating with a man in e-mail a woman can express herself more freely because you cannot see her facial expressions or the gestures she makes. Speaking to a man face to face women tend to keep their guard up by not revealing too much about themselves until they really get to know that person, but then again you should not reveal too much about yourself via e-mail either."
4. "I would say yes. Men tend to be more direct. They like to get to the point when it comes to business affairs."
5. "Yes, at work women seem to offer more details via e-mail than men."
6. "Women use e-mail to attempt to find out more information when communicating with men at work. Men do not always share details and using e-mail to talk to them...women may receive more information...information they need to do a better job."

Men on Men

1. "I am usually more informal with men than with women. I will frequently not correct my typos or use correct capitalization when I e-mail a male friend. For serious e-mail, I am more formal."
2. "I have not experienced men communicating any differently through e-mail. I do find that men don't hide behind e-mail to deliver controversial or confrontational information like some women do. E-mail for some women borders on 'road-rage' when they can hide behind a car window or computer screen, they sometimes get bolder."
3. "Men are brief, and get to the point with their e-mails. I tend to delete stuff that people in the office forward me."
4. "I would prefer to speak with male colleagues face-to-face. Usually there is something more that I need to discuss.... I generally keep my e-mails very brief so it's just easier to pick up the phone or walk over to the desk, if they are in my building, than to write some long e-mail message. "
5. "Men usually keep to the subject and get to the point via e-mail in the office."
6. "Sometimes people only hear what they want to hear in a face-to-face conversation. Using e-mail keeps the information clear and to the point. It also serves as documentation. It seems easier to communicate with men in-person and, for me, also using e-mail...you can just get to the point with men...women need too many details."

Are there differences in the way women and men communicate via e-mail versus face-to-face communication?

Women on Women

1. "No, women are very cerebral with each other. I think they communicate the same way with e-mail as they would face to face".
2. "No, women converse as if they were in-person."
3. "When communicating with a woman in e-mail, you write to her like you are talking to her in person so the communication lines are basically the same."
4. "No, they speak the same way they do in person as they do via e-mail."
5. "Women share feelings and insights in-person and on-line with each other."
6. "If communication is already open between two women, using e-mail only makes it more so."

Men on Women

1. "I don't think I have seen informal e-mails from women, certainly not to the extent that I have seen them from men."
2. "Women do not get to the point as quickly as men using e-mail. Too much detail."
3. "I receive more e-mail messages from women coworkers. They seem to like to express themselves more by e-mail than my male colleagues do."
4. "Women seem to be able to bring up more difficult topics using e-mail than through direct conversation in the office."
5. "Women in my office write longer, more detailed e-mails than their male counterparts."
6. "Women tend to use more expressive language in their e-mail communications."

Is it easier for men and women to communicate with each other in the workplace via e-mail or face-to-face?

Women Respondents

1. "Yes, it is easier because of the different communication styles of the sexes. There are pre-conceived notions, ideas about the person when communicating by e-mail. You're judged by the content of what's in the e-mail and not by what your wearing. How you speak, etc...."

Women's role in society has changed dramatically over the past 50 years or so, yet they are still defining their role in a very male-dominated society. Therefore, some of the old ideas regarding women often come up in face-to-face conversation, but with e-mail you can remain virtually anonymous."

2. "No, actually, I believe it is worse. Office e-mail leads to speculation and misunderstanding. Men and women communicate differently to begin with, using e-mail as a vehicle of communication only breaks down the message."

3. "Yes, e-mail makes communication between men and women easier because women can be more honest. You take the sex out of it. I believe women are less nervous and are more apt to speak their minds when they are writing e-mails."

4. "I feel using e-mail lessens the tension for women who may be apprehensive about approaching coworkers, especially men, in regard to controversial issues."

5. "It is easier to use e-mail at work. It is less intimidating and women can more freely express their concerns and issues to male coworkers without feeling that they will be put off or cut off."

6. "It is easier for women and men at work to use e-mail than communicate face-to-face because it is a quick form of expression. Men like to get to the point and keep it short, like 'What about the Smith Report?' – no, do it over, it stinks."

Men Respondents

1. "E-mail is necessary for office communication. However, when I have some serious or important or complicated communication, I will usually call or go see the person myself. E-mail is helpful for trivial communication, however for most men I do not think that it facilitates deeper conversation."
2. "E-mail might help men, more than women, to communicate in a situation where he is afraid to speak up in the workplace."
3. "Though some feel that it is more impersonal, e-mail is a quick and more efficient form of communication in the work place. It allows you to send information or ask a question of someone while they are in a meeting or behind closed doors. It also eliminates a lot of casual conversation that often transpires while getting to the business. For male supervisors, it's also a better means for delivering directives if the supervisor isn't comfortable in confrontational situations with those of the opposite sex. It is probably more helpful for men in the workplace than for women."
4. "E-mail keeps it short and to the point."
5. "E-mail is easier for men and women because it is a quick way to get to the issue – always important to men – all business – no gossip."
6. "E-mail makes it easier for men to correspond without going through a secretary or assistant. This helps to move things along and not waste time in the office."
7. "It is also a convenience for women managers; however, they seem to spend more time with their secretaries and assistants than male managers. Lots of touchy-feely interaction."

Chapter Five

Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of this endeavor was to study the classic cross gender differences of men and women and to discover if these differences surface in workplace computer mediated communications. Through a review of the available literature, information received from men and women who completed an Internet survey instrument, and an assessment of the opinions offered by a randomly selected focus group, the author has attempted to provide insight as to whether these differences are altered or remain constant using today's computer-mediated-communication vehicle commonly known as "e-mail."

The limited convenience research conducted by the author does seem to demonstrate a definitive difference between cross-gender communication styles in the workplace, both face-to-face and through computer-mediated-communication. The review of the limited literature available also indicates that e-mail communication between the sexes in the workplace closely mirrors those of cross-gender, face-to-face interactions. Women traditionally seek extensive information while men are strictly intent on obtaining information. The linguistic and rhetorical comparisons of e-mail communication parallel those of in-person conversations. For example, high school girls will speak to each other incessantly over the telephone for hours and hours. High school boys are satisfied to communicate with each other during the hours they attend classes.

The common male communication characteristics, primarily brevity and abruptness, are also seen in on-line interactions. Common female communication characteristics such as politeness and the use of details are seen in both their e-mail and verbal communications. The analysis of the work of published researchers demonstrates that cross-gender communication styles remain constant whether in face-to-face interactions or via the Internet.

Future Study

While this master's level study attempted to provide a cross-analysis of the topic, through a review of the literature, a convenience survey, and the use of a focus group, further exploration could provide richer data, more fluid processes, detailed analysis and a more complete justification of the research hypothesis. If this author were to continue to pursue the topic, further exploration might include using a large quantity of random data, purchased from an information source such as Dun & Bradstreet, and a software program, such as NVivo. This method will enable the author to assure the accuracy when making final inferences regarding the results that are used to justify the original research goals. This detailed, random research will allow the author to use proximity searches, to explore hunches, to test various hypotheses, to include all populations representative of the region, and to build a line of inquiry. Use of this research method will allow the author to scope the search as accurately as needed by filtering and selecting the appropriate material. These methods used in empirical research allow authors to draw models of data elements, concepts, relationships, and other thinking. This type of analysis is crucial to communicating results, stimulating exciting research discussions, and convincing the potential audiences of the importance of the research and its implications. The large amount of survey data that will emanate from a more empirical study will provide a textual analysis. For example, the author could quantify the number of responses - "hard," typically those made by

men, versus "soft" typically associated with females. The larger the number of respondents the less biased the study results. However, due to limitations of time and money, this study remains primarily a convenience study - one that cannot be generalized regarding the "general public."

The review of the literature indicated that little has been published comparing generally accepted gender communication differences with computer-mediated-communication between the sexes. For this reason, this study reported here provides additional data to support the findings of a limited number of researchers. However, because this study failed to employ the empirical scientific method, it should be considered the first step, the pilot study, in a more extensive research effort. A research effort, with the appropriate amount of dedicated time, tools, and resources has the potential to provide a greater understanding of how we communicate with each other in a world that transforms itself daily in response to rapid, technological advances. A world surging with new methods of communication conveyance and with inhabitants who have decreasing time for interpersonal interactions.

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Appendix A
Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

1. How knowledgeable do you feel you are about the Internet?
 - a) Novice
 - b) Somewhat
 - c) Very knowledgeable
 - d) Expert

2. Generally, do you use the Internet for more of a research tool or for more recreational purposes?
 - a) Recreation
 - b) Research
 - c) I use it for both purposes

3. Do you feel men have greater access to the Internet than women do?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Don't know

4. Do you feel women have greater access to the Internet than men do?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Don't know

5. Does the Internet have more of a "Male" or "Female" feeling to you?
 - a) It feels more "Male" to me
 - b) It feels more "Female" to me
 - c) It don't think it has any gendered feeling

6. Whom do you feel is more apt to use the Internet and e-mail?
 - a) Men
 - b) Woman
 - c) They both utilize it equally

7. How long have you been using the Internet?
 - a) Less than 3
 - b) 6 Months or more
 - c) One year or more
 - d) Two or more years

8. How many times a week do you use e-mail?
 - a) 1-5

- b) 5-10
 - c) 10-20
 - d) 20-50
 - e) 50 or more
9. How many times a week would you say you send e-mail?
- a) 1-5
 - b) 5-10
 - c) 10-20
 - d) 20-50
 - e) 50 or more
10. Which describes your use of e-mail best?
- a) At home for recreational purposes
 - b) At home for work purposes
 - c) At School for scholarly purposes
 - d) At work for school purposes
 - e) At work for recreational use
11. Which form of communication do you most commonly utilize?
- a) Face-to-face (FTF)
 - b) Telephone
 - c) Writing
 - d) Electronic-mail (CMC)
12. Do you feel it's easier to communicate with a member of the opposite sex with e-mail rather than in person?
- a) It's easier in person
 - b) It's easier communicating through e-mail
 - c) There isn't any difference
13. Do you feel men communicate differently in e-mail with other men the same way they do in person?
- a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always
14. Do you feel men communicate differently in e-mail with woman the same way they do in person?
- a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always

15. Do you feel women communicate differently in e-mail with other women the same way they do in person?
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always

16. Do you feel men woman differently in e-mail with men the same way they do in person?
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always

17. Do you feel the Internet is easier for men or woman to use?
 - a) It is easier for woman to use.
 - b) It is easier for men to use
 - c) I don't think there's any difference

18. Do you write your responses different for a man or woman?
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always

19. Are you on-line experiences with communication different from your FTF encounters?
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always

20. What is your Gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) female

21. What is your occupation?
 - a) Student
 - b) Clerical
 - c) Administrator
 - d) Professional
 - e) Unemployed

22. What is the highest education Level you've achieved?
 - a) High school
 - b) Associate's degree

- c) Bachelor's degree
 - d) Master's degree
 - e) Ph.D, M.D., J.D., etc.
23. I use manipulated text to increase the emotional context of my e-mails.
- a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always
24. I use manipulated text to increase the message of my e-mails, i.e. (Bold, Italics, spacing, emoticons, punctuation, etc.)
- a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Some of the time
 - d) Most of the time
 - e) Always
25. Why do you use e-mail?
- a) Work
 - b) Hobby
 - c) Socialization
 - d) Entertainment
 - e) School
 - f) Research

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction and Invitation

April 1, 2001

Hello,

Please allow me to introduce myself, my name is Stephen Duff.

I'm a graduate student enrolled in the Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication program at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. I'm in the process of writing my thesis, which is entitled: "Do cross gender differences exist in computer-mediated communication in the workplace"?

I would appreciate it if you could complete this survey and return it me by June 1, 2001. I'm requesting your participation in a brief survey which explores the various dimensions of e-mail communication.

Please cite any experiences or examples you have encountered or feel may be relevant.

Thank you for your participation.

Please e-mail your responses to sduff65345@aol.com or mail them to:

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