Advancing Women for the Presidency in Higher Education: Communication Competencies and Gender

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ABSTRACT

The typical image of the academic president is shifting, with women occupying more presidential offices at colleges and universities, constituting an upward trend toward gender equity. An analysis of communication competencies and behaviors of academic presidents and governing board members in the context of hiring was conducted via interviews and surveys. Universities and colleges in the U.S. that had recently hired new presidents were sampled. Communication skills were identified as important factors that influenced board member's perceptions of the candidates.

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Higher education is embroiled in a "perfect storm" that is impacting its highest levels of leadership. Presidents of colleges and universities are facing shrinking tenure, high turnover rates, an anticipated tidal wave of retirements, insufficient transparency, and mounting expectations around leadership and collaboration. Some presidents are even forced to step down amid discursive controversies (Schmidt, 2016). According to the American College President Study, as of 2016, more than half of college presidents planned to leave office by 2022 (Gagliardi et al., 2017), producing a major vacuum in top tier university leadership. Moreover, individuals are becoming less interested in wearing the mantle of the presidency, considering the aforementioned issues along with additional pressures to maintain funding and increase enrollment (Luna, 2012; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).

This is particularly relevant with respect to women, given the many risks and the potential for negative consequences inherent in the presidency, compounded by the challenges indicated in research suggesting that women are more likely to be punished or evaluated more harshly than men for their leadership failures (Fisk & Overton, 2019). This discrimination damages their current leadership, and also demotivates women from seeking future leadership positions. Governing boards that select university leadership are also affected by these embedded challenges because they evaluate candidates for the presidency. During this process, board members have to consider the leadership skills that presidential candidates possess and what they need to be successful at their particular institutions. Historically, a crucial skill that has received significant attention from board members has been the president's competency in communicating, although not the focus of recent research, especially quantitively (Birnbaum, 1992; Kauffman, 1980; Freeman & Kochan, 2012).

Communication is critical for leadership because leadership is "a process of social influence that is constituted through both verbal and nonverbal communication" (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). Also, surveys of board members and presidents conclude that many problems may be avoided through more effective communication (Brewer et al., 2016). Communication competency is a key issue because poor communication between boards and presidents is often a contributing factor that paves the way for problems in institutions of higher education (King, 2015; King, 2006).

Perceptions around communication competencies are often immersed in gender-based assumptions. Scholarship on gendered communication practices indicates that women may communicate in ways that are perceived as feminine, for example by speaking more tentatively than assertively, compared with men (Kendall & Tannen, 2001). These differences in communication behavior by women have been linked to evaluations of women as being less competent, according to Kendall and Tannen. More than half the women presidents of four-year universities and colleges indicated that their gender factored into others' perceptions of their competency (Caton, 2007). Even when speaking in a similar fashion, men and women are perceived differently, with women viewed less favorably than men who have the same communication style (Tannen, 1990). Both men and women believe that there is discrimination against women leaders in general (Fisk & Overton, 2019).

These uneven gendered expectations and evaluations are widely discussed by role congruity and agentic backlash theories (Carli, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Hunt et al., 2015), which our study draws from. Both theories broadly discuss challenges faced by women when they step out of their stereotypical roles, which can cause them to be disliked and less likely to be hired (Carli, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Hunt et al., 2015).

Through interviews and surveys with presidents and board members, the findings of the current study add to the literature by discovering how certain competencies such as public speaking and writing skills of prospective presidents are scrutinized through a gendered lens, which was supported by role congruity theory and agentic backlash. Moreover, there is a wide range of other competencies identified as being critical for presidents, some of which are gender neutral, while others, such as expressions of emotions and assuming a communal approach, are not. Moreover, board members were more prone to expressing a gender-neutral approach, even when identifying these gendered expectations, while presidents discussed the discrepancies more openly.

Literature Review

Employee Selection Decisions and Similarity

The heart of the process of selecting a president is the reciprocal communication in which boards engage with current and prospective presidential candidates. Although academic research and newsletters point to communication competence as being related to presidential selection issues, there is a lack of research investigating the general communication between presidential candidates and boards (Barden, 2016; Tolliver & Murry, 2017). The American Association of

State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) also studied this and concluded that to optimize succession planning and leadership development, an assessment of leadership competencies, including communication, is important (Rupp et al., 2016). Additionally, in interviews, presidents often remarked on the importance of communication, particularly writing and public speaking, and indicated that training programs developed their communication competence, which helped them in their jobs (Freeman & Kochan, 2012).

Preliminary qualitative research indicates that boards want presidents to excel at verbal and nonverbal communication, filter information, and resolve disputes through discourse (Author, 2019). In that same research, board members' communication concerns revolved around quality, whereas in contrast, presidents focused on the quantity and openness of communication that they had with their boards**.**

Employee Selection and Gender in Higher Education

Gender parity occurs at various (mainly lower) levels in the university hierarchy, but it does not exist at the presidential level. In 2019, 57% of higher education students were women and postsecondary enrollment projections for 2020 indicated that 59% of students would be women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020). Yet, according to a 2016 study of college presidents, only 30% of university and college presidents were women and just 8% led doctoral granting institutions (American Council on Education, 2017). To represent all the institutions' stakeholders equitably, one may expect that since most students are women, most presidents should also be women. Yet the numbers indicate that the reverse is true and that women are still essentially "minority members crossing into university leadership" (Reis & Grady, 2020, p. 37).

 Communication skills are a key competency identified in a study of the literature on women and leadership in higher education (Turner et al., 2013). Although women are reaching the presidency in gradually increasing numbers, they are still reporting to and communicating with predominantly male governing boards (Association of Governing Boards, 2021). In addition to calling for investigating higher education governance and communication, scholars have long expressed a need to explore a potential nexus between gender and communication (Canary & Hause, 1993; Putnam, 1982). Most of the research done in this area has been qualitative in nature. In one qualitative study, female presidents often cited communication as an important facet of their presidential skill set (Wolverton, 2009). Other qualitative research found that some stakeholders may have an implicit bias regarding gender during the interview and selection process that could keep women out of the presidency (Sussman, 2019) and subject them to inferior treatment (Campbell et al., 2010).   In Reis' qualitative research on four university presidents, all four indicated that their greatest barrier to advancement was their gender, with one president stating that she was criticized more often and described as "powerful" and "distinguished" less often (2015, p. 14).

Role Congruity Theory and Agentic Backlash

In order to understand the competencies and how gender-based assumptions may be formed around university presidents, we draw from role congruity theory and agentic backlash. Multiple

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research studies have found that gender stereotypes influence our perceptions and evaluations of leaders (Eagly, 2002; Offerman & Foley, 2020; Sussman, 2019), particularly when women apply for leadership roles (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2009). These stereotypes perpetuate hegemonic male dominance via a "vicious cycle" in which society's stereotypes of abilities according to gender prevent individuals from obtaining jobs in certain fields (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). This reinforces set perceptions, which become more entrenched and resistant to change (Badura et al., 2018; Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

Likewise, role congruity theory posits that when women step outside their stereotypical role of nurturing and caring to become assertive or agentic, they are regarded unfavorably (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This may affect perceptions of their leadership skills, since women are less likely than men to be considered good leaders. Women who communicate in a non-communal or agentic style are disliked and less likely to be hired, via a phenomenon called "agentic backlash" (Carli, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Hunt et al., 2015). This agentic backlash creates a dilemma for women leaders in that they need to be both communal in order to be liked, but agentic in order to get the job done (Hoyt, 2010). In communicating, they succeed by "tempering their competence with displays of communality and warmth" (Carli, 2001, p.725).

According to Bowles (2006), the possibility of unconscious bias does exist and may affect hiring choices. BlackChen's review of the literature and theory finds that women face barriers to leadership in higher education both attitudinally and organizationally (2015). Sussman (2019) found that all six of the women in their study faced either explicit or implicit bias from search committees or governing boards. They experienced these biases in the sense that their "readiness" "experience" and "aptitude" for the job was considered less favorably than that of male job candidates and co-workers (p.158).

Governing Boards and Similarity

Focusing next on a related aspect of the presidential selection process, we turn to the governing boards at these institutions. Originally, these boards were comprised of "clubby men" (Strauss, 2015) and although time has passed and there is some increase in diversity, these boards remain fairly homogeneous in terms of demographic characteristics, including gender, with women constituting only about 30% of board memberships (Kramer & Adams, 2020; Strauss, 2015). Therefore, female presidents need to communicatively negotiate a situation in which they report to boards with few female members.

Rationale and Potential Outcomes

This study seeks to address the gaps in the literature related to the nature of the relationship between higher education leadership, and gendered communication issues involved in hiring a president, as well as the inconsistent expectations found in the authors' review of the research. The intent is to use this information to support and advance women in leadership positions in colleges and universities.

In short, the existing knowledge in this topical area is limited because little to no quantitative or mixed methods empirical research examining the relationships between presidential selection

process, communication, and gender (Lapovsky, 2014; Williams, 2015). Therefore, the goal of this research is to explore issues of communication and gender in the selection of presidents by governing boards using this research question as a guide:

RQ1: What is the relationship between communication competencies, gender, and the presidential selection process?

Methodology

A two-part study starting with qualitative, in-depth, personal interviews, followed by a quantitative segment consisting of online surveys was conducted. Both phases of the research were part of a larger project.

Sampling

Participants were recruited and interviewed using purposeful sampling of board members and presidents involved in a presidential search at a public or private, religiously affiliated or non-affiliated, two-year or four-year college or university in the US within a five-year period. Recruiting for all interviews and surveys, was done using "New Presidents or Provosts" from *Inside Higher Ed*. Each institution's president and governing board were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Research was conducted according to the institutional review board's guidelines and approval.

Qualitative Phase

A total of 8 participants completed the interviews, which consisted of three female and one male university president and one female and three male board members because boards are primarily male and we needed the perspectives of both the female presidents and the male boards members to whom they report (See table 1). These interviews were helpful in informing the survey questions and the selection of the survey scale. Interviews were conducted by telephone.

First, presidents and board members involved in the presidential search were asked to describe any memorable events that led to the advancement or rejection of a female candidate for the presidency, the communication skills that they believed to be important in a presidential candidate, and any instances of discord involving communication between the president and the board and a few classification questions. These two respondent groups provided the perspective of those doing the hiring as well as those being hired. Presidents responded from their perspective as interviewees and employees, while board members responded from their perspective as interviewers and employers.

 In accordance with the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), two questions were designed to elicit specific watershed moments in the respondent's memory of the hiring process (Flanagan, 1954). Time permitting, other questions were also asked to ascertain if there was a gendered perception of presidential communication competencies, or if an example of the competencies that made a candidate appropriate for the presidency could be provided. Personal demographic and institutional status questions ended the questionnaire.

The constant comparative method of analysis was used in coding the interviews, and memos were completed (Charmaz, 2014). Analysis using SPSS indicates strong inter-coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa = .82).

Interview Results

Three major themes emerged in our qualitative findings: communication behaviors, conveying emotions, and communal and agentic communication.

Communication Behaviors

Thoroughness, Transparency and Conciseness. Participants stressed the importance of assessing and possessing communication skills for the presidential position. They focused mainly on three competencies, namely thoroughness, transparency, and conciseness. They equated thoroughness with transparency, which was not influenced by the gender of either board members or presidents; however, president's ideas around conciseness were influenced by gender.

Thoroughness and Transparency. Thorough Communication focused on the amount of detail in presidents' communication with board members. Boards and presidents consider thorough communication to mean including all important details, being transparent and not hiding anything or being secretive. Board M1's (male) comment epitomizes their concern when transparent communication is lacking:

> I think where communicating breaks down, especially among a president or a board of trustees, is when that information is not passed on and so you have a president who's out doing something, and the board of trustees thinks something else is happening.

Transparency was mentioned in this study's interviews more than most other characteristics by both board members and presidents (six times each). From the presidential perspective, both male and female presidents realized the value of transparency to their boards, as articulated by this female president: "I think they're looking for a communications style that is straightforward, honest, ... No surprises."

Gender and Transparency. There were no gender-based differences found here. Recognizing communication's critical role in developing transparency and reassuring the board can offer the president a tactical advantage.

> I was going to be a different kind of president in terms of transparency …and the board was suddenly privy to a lot of information they never had before… …And I would say across the board, men and women, there has been an appreciation for that … (President 1 - female)

Board members did not necessarily associate transparency with one president's gender more than the other.

Conciseness. Concise communication is defined as being succinct and omitting irrelevant information, as illustrated here:

> … you're looking for someone who can take those difficult, complex issues, boil them down, … get you the information you need… and communicate to you where we need to go, how we're going to get there and what the options are. If they can do that very precisely and concisely, then you tend to have better success. (Board M4 - male)

Gender and Conciseness. For two female presidents, gender played a role in impressions of concise communication, with women seen as taking a deeper dive into detailed information than their male board counterparts, as described by female President 2: "I think I've also noticed when we do presentations, the women tend to want more details. They would ask -- on average, they would ask more questions about our presentations than the men did." This remark's context indicated that this information-seeking behavior was neither negative nor positive, just simply different.

President 3 (Female) agreed, adding that not all women behave this way: "members of the board who want more information rather than less from me, would be a handful of women who tend to have leadership roles in committees. And I don't have that same experience with the men.*"*

Conveying Emotions

Emotions were often mentioned by both board members and presidents. This manifested in two ways: first as communicating passion, and second as communicating emotions and facts.

To communicate emotions, one must be aware of their existence, therefore the behavior of communicating emotions and facts incorporates other aspects of emotional sensitivity and awareness mentioned by presidents and board members. An example illustrates the importance board M1 (female) placed on managing one's own and others' emotions: "Being calm, focused, having a skillset that says, 'I'm comfortable with conflict; I can talk with people when they're upset.'"

Passion. Communicating passion was defined as conveying the emotions of love and strong affinity.

Three board members and two presidents talked about passion and love for their institution or its goals. They sought presidents who, like themselves, had an emotional commitment to the school and a passion for the school and its mission, plus the ability to express that, according to Board M3. This was not lost on presidents, as President 3 (male) explains:

> ...the ability to articulate the heart and soul of [this university], why we exist, what our story is, what our values are, that was very central to the board. That was very key to the board.

This also indicates that public speaking is an important skill that boards seek in presidents.

Gender and Passion. Successful female candidates for leadership positions were able to convey confidence without being arrogant, which was also interpreted as indicating *passion or sincerity*, according to male Board M2: "I think of women leadership positions and the successful candidates … are very self-confident, but not in an arrogant manner. They're sincere …about their feelings for the institution and why they want to lead."

Emotions and Facts. Communicating emotions and facts consists of conveying information that includes both subjective feelings and objective data. Two board members wanted their presidents to inform them of emotions along with facts, as male Board M4 indicates: "What's the current sentiment of our staff, …of our faculty, of our students, of our community, …. it takes somebody that can roll all that up and give you a precise and objective view of what's going on."

Also, he indicates that while discussing emotions is needed, it must not be overdone; conciseness is necessary.

Some board members acknowledged that campus and other stakeholder emotional reactions to board decisions need to be considered. Board members noted that presidents informed them about these emotions, as this example from President 3 (male) illustrates:

> …one particular board member who would -- a female, who is more concerned with sort of some of the soft skills and the how students perceive or feel about the things that are going on."

Therefore, female presidents were considered more likely to possess soft skills and be better at communicating emotions tethered to facts.

Gender, Emotions and Facts. It appears that, for both presidents and board members, gender may be a differentiator when it comes to discourse around emotions. President 3 (male) intimates that innate female thinking patterns were shaped into more male-typical thinking patterns by training and experience in a financially oriented discipline: "…I'm thinking of a couple of female board members who are accountants by training, which would almost put them in the category of thinking and asking questions the way men most oftentimes do; sort of bottom line." Board M4 (male) also noted a subtle difference by gender: "Where the differences might lie is women can tie a little bit more of the emotion to a subject. I think men, we're a little more objective and sometimes leave out the emotional aspects."

Communal and Agentic Communication

Communal Communication. Communal communication was also mentioned very frequently. This behavior is defined as anything that "conveys a concern for the compassionate treatment of others. It includes being especially affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, and sympathetic, as well as interpersonally sensitive, gentle, and soft-spoken" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Three presidents and three board members cited either inclusion, supportiveness, collaboration, or non-autocratic leadership behaviors, which are all communal communication behaviors. Board members expected presidents of all genders to take a communal approach, as stated by

Board M1 (female): "… everyone in the organization needs to know that that person [the president] values them, and so the president needs to be able to demonstrate that they can make an immediate connection and a genuine connection. Female Board M1 had the impression that some presidential candidates gravitated toward communicating with the most valuable persons and those persons were not generally female:

> …the first thing I notice is how people introduce themselves…some people will make eye contact with every person in the room…Others will pass over [some] and seem to choose people that they might value more than others, for example that might be a white male.

She does not, however, indicate that this is a characteristic of either male or female presidential candidates.

Gender and Communal Communication. This is important because the literature on gender and communication points to gendered judgments of the appropriateness of communal communication and agentic communal communication. Being female was associated with communal, inclusive behaviors, and fostering relationships, according to female Board M1:

> …Women tend to make more of an effort to establish a personal relationship at the very beginning. So, they will be the ones to come around and shake hands,…make eye contact…. some men are, but I feel like in general, I see more men that are less attuned to establishing that relationship.

Communal communication extended to having a team approach as opposed to focusing on oneself alone, as explained by male Board M4, in discussing the entire board's reaction to a female candidate, adding that this was also a trait of male candidates.

> When she came into the interview, what struck us all as a board is that she felt obligated to tell us all the things she had done and how well she had done them… You want confidence in a college president, and you want them to be aggressive when it's time, but you've also got to realize it's a team effort when you're looking for leadership roles and partnership buildings and so forth. Her approach … hurt her. …I'll be honest, this was not a female trait. We saw it in a couple of our male candidates where they kind of oversell themselves.

However, as articulated by the others, this was still predominantly a female trait. Finding that there is a very subtle, nuanced difference between male and female candidates, the same board member saw the male candidates in academia as having a more communal leadership style than in other industries and felt that this made it difficult to see many differences between male and female candidates for the position of president in higher education.

Agentic Communication. In contrast, agentic communication is that which "conveys assertion and control…includes being especially aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self-confident, and forceful, as well as self-reliant and individualistic" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Agentic or aggressive behavior, especially if it rejected teamwork, was undesirable in the opinion of two

presidents, as these remarks from female President 4 suggest: "I think they were not interested in someone who was going to be a very top-down, autocratic kind of leader."

Gender and Agentic Communication. We see another contrast between the earlier commentary on overselling communication in which a woman is the grandstander, and this comment in which men are also considered grandstanders, including the perception that men tend to grandstand more. President 2 (female) voices this: "The difference I see is that the men tend to what I call grandstand more. They like to hear themselves talk and give long reports of everything they've done that month. I would say that was significantly less in the women."

Even among themselves, board members noted a difference between male and female leadership communication styles and their comfort levels with those persons. Board M3 (male) explains this difference between the previous female board chairperson and the current male board chairperson although he is careful not to over-generalize from one instance to the overall universe of boards and presidents in higher education:

> The current chair, … he's the individual who owns his own company, and I think is accustomed to just making decisions and having everybody just [say], "Okay." And I don't always view him as much of a consensus builder as I viewed her. But…it's hard to put people in boxes like that.

Some viewed gendered differences in communication as more of a stereotype than a reality. Male Board member 2 explains this: "I think the communication, and though women are by gender or supposedly more sensitive communicators or better listeners, I frankly see it as pretty even."

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The study found the competencies of transparency, thoroughness, conciseness, expressions of emotions and facts, and communal and agentic approach to be important. While there was a consensus among board members that most of these required competencies were gender neutral, some board members suggested that reflection of emotions and communal traits were almost always thought of as a female trait. However, even those board members erred on the side of caution when discussing these as generalized gender differences. On the other hand, presidents were more inclined to discuss gender differences, especially as they reflected on the uneven expectations which were sometimes perpetuated by and reconstructed by other female board members or other women in leadership positions.

Quantitative Phase

Each survey began with an open-ended question asking participants to describe the top communication skill that the president demonstrated in his or her interactions with the board. It was coded by the lead researcher, using constant comparative methods. Another person coded a random sample of 10% of the responses. There was very good inter-coder agreement (Cohen's Kappa = .96, T = 16.05, p < .001).

The communication competency module of the "Leadership Competencies Scorecard Inventory (LSC) 2.0", was used to assess the competencies that boards seek in a president (Ruben, 2014). The module contains seven items: credibility and trust; influence and persuasion; interpersonal relations and team building; listening, attention, questions-asking and learning; writing and public speaking; diversity, intercultural relations, and facilitation; and negotiation and conflict resolution (Ruben, 2014).

Respondents assessed the importance and the president's effectiveness on each competency using an eleven-point Likert scale. Board members rated their presidents' effectiveness and presidents rated their own effectiveness. Everyone also ranked the importance of each competency. Additional questions on the emic communication behaviors that emerged in the qualitative interviews and in the literature were placed into the questionnaire and evaluated similarly. Towards the end of the survey, assessment of the effectiveness of board-president communication in general was assessed.

Questionnaires were accessed via a Qualtrics secure server, resulting in usable surveys from 70 board members and 73 presidents. Completion rates were 68% for presidents and 71% for board members.

The lead researcher computed frequencies, means, cross-tabulations, and t-tests using SPSS.

Participant Demographics

The archetypal board member was a 62-year-old man with a masters' or doctoral degree and non-academic leadership experience, and the archetypal president was a 56-year-old man with a doctoral degree and academic leadership experience.

Board members were typically elected to predominantly male college or university governing boards where they remained for an average of 9.4 years. They usually supervised one president at a time, although in a few cases they supervised the presidents of several schools within the same college or university system. As an artifact of the study design, the typical president in this study held office for an average of three years. The president was typically the sole president reporting to a predominantly male, elected or appointed governing board.

The overall sample of presidents and board members (N=140) was 67% male and 33% female. Sixty-nine percent (N=73) of presidents and 66% (N=67) of board members were male. Women were presidents at 42% (N=33) of two-year colleges and 23% (N=40) of institutions granting B.A., M.A. or Ph.D. degrees.

With respect to education, nearly all presidents (96%, N=73) held a Ph.D. or J.D. degree, while 45% of board members (N=69) had a Ph.D. or J.D., 29% had a master's degree and 22% had a bachelor's degree. Presidents' leadership experience was often in academia (73%, N=73) while board members' leadership experience was often in non-academic sectors (70%, N=69).

Profile of Institutions

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All the institutions are charitable and nearly all are co-educational. Just under half these institutions offer associate's degrees while slightly more than one-quarter offer doctoral degrees. Enrollments are distributed among small, medium and large institutions; the majority of these colleges and universities are public institutions.

Quantitative Analysis

All ratings of the importance of communication competencies and behaviors were cross-tabulated by president's gender and board member's gender after the scale-level responses were recoded into binary categories. Frequencies for each variable were divided as close to the 50th percentile as possible into a low and a high category. T-tests were conducted to check for differences in the importance of the competencies by gender. There were no statistically significant differences for the importance of any of the competencies by gender. Furthermore, we examined which communication skills board members believed female and male presidents possess and lack. To determine this, crosstabs were computed for the importance and the president's effectiveness on all competencies and behaviors by the gender of the current president using only responses from board members. To avoid small cell counts, all competencies were recoded into binary variables by splitting them as close to the 50th percentile as possible. The only attribute that showed any difference in board members' opinions of effectiveness by president's gender was writing and public speaking, with men considered better at these than women. This is based on evaluations of 53 male presidents and 13 female presidents. Among all board members, 23% rated women and 60% rated men as highly competent for this skill (Pearson Chi Square = 5.831, 1df, $p < .016$; Phi = 2.97, $p < .016$; Cramer's V=2.97, $p < .016$). There were no other differences by gender with respect to the importance and effectiveness of the competencies or emic behaviors.

Summary of Quantitative Research

Just one difference emerged from cross tabulation of board ratings of the importance of communication competencies and presidents' effectiveness by the president's gender. Male presidents were rated as better writers and public speakers.

This discovery was surprising because Role Congruity Theory and Agentic Backlash (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rudman & Glick, 2001) along with our qualitative data, indicate the likelihood of a gendered assessment of multiple behaviors, particularly communal or agentic communication.

Qualitative Versus Quantitative Results

In the qualitative phase, board members anticipated more emotional and communal communication from women. Presidents noticed more gendered differences, indicating that female board members wanted more information. However, no discussion of public speaking and writing emerged from the interviews, yet it was the only thing that showed a gendered difference in the surveys. Conversely, the prominent discussion of emotional and communal communication and the gendered need for information did not appear in the surveys.

Discussion

Regardless of the differences just described, the qualitative findings and some of the quantitative findings sync with the assumptions of the Role Congruity, which posits that when persons of different genders say the identical words, perceptions of those individuals may not be identical (Rudman & Glick, 2001, Tannen, 1990). This theory explains why boards evaluated women presidents as less capable public speakers and writers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This also presents a dilemma for women because to avoid agentic backlash, they must be both agentic and non-agentic when they write and speak, which is a challenging course to navigate (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Also, as reflected in these interviews, these expectations form hegemonic stereotypes, such as assumptions that men are better at public speaking and writing, which can prevent women from obtaining jobs due to these assumptions (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). To protect against any potential biases, it may be helpful for women interviewing for the role of president to focus on presenting their writing and public speaking as a strength.

In addition to this, our qualitative data also places emphasis on gendered perceptions around other competencies such as conciseness, expressions of emotions, and attention to elements of communal and agentic expressions. While the board members discussed some of these gendered differences, they tried to refrain from over-generalizations. This is not surprising because their involvement in the hiring process and the potential for litigation requires them to project an unbiased image. However, presidents were more apt to discuss these differences, especially in terms of their knowledge being interrogated more intensively.

It was interesting to see how many of the competencies were not found to be significant in our quantitative analysis. All scholarship in this area agrees that detecting distinctions in leadership style by gender may sometimes be nuanced and seeing subtle differences can be difficult in small samples where statistics that can measure distinctions between the genders on communication competencies and behaviors are not practical. Therefore, we advocate for further qualitative and quantitative research with larger samples. Additionally, the participants in our quantitative research were predominantly male, and the scarcity of women may be responsible for any lack of distinctions. Finally, it is possible that no differences were detected because the participants provided politically correct responses to the questions posed.

Additionally, we learned that transparency is important to good board-president communication. Little research and theory on this exist. That gap in our knowledge represents a clear opportunity to investigate further.

Practical Implications

Using "scorecard" evaluations of communication and other leadership competencies during the hiring process may facilitate making egalitarian comparisons among candidates. If scorecards are blind-coded, so that it is unknown whether the applicant is male or female, it may decrease the effect of personal or political biases on hiring and improve the odds that members of under-represented populations will reach the presidency.

Conclusion

While exploratory in nature, this mixed methods research added to communication scholarship by discovering how certain competencies and behaviors impact the hiring of college and university presidents. We saw agreement between board members and presidents that thorough and transparent communication was a gender-neutral expectation for presidents. However, expressions of emotions and communal approach were associated with female more than male candidates. Gender did not receive adequate consideration, which is important because of the anticipated shortage of presidential candidates. Therefore, doing more to prepare and promote women to take on the challenges of the presidency in colleges and universities is vital.

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Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Participants and Institutions

Gender	Male: 4 Female: 4
Age	55-81 years
Race	Caucasian = 6 Latina – 1 African American =1
Leadership Experience	Corporate and Academic – 7 Academic Only - 1
Degrees Held	Doctoral Degree - 5 Master's Degree -2 Bachelor's Degree - 1
Board Composition:	Primarily male: 5 Equally split between male and female: 1

Institutional Demographics
 	
Note: Information is provided on a total of six institutions because two individuals were from the same institution were interviewed, and one board member was affiliated with several colleges in a state college system.
	Co-ed: 6
	Non-profit: 6
	Historically Black Colleges and Universities: 0
	Public: 2
	Private: 4
	Degrees granted:
	   Master's/Doctorate: 5
	   Associate: 1
	Enrollment:
	   Under 3,000: 3
	   3,000-9,999: 3
	Board Status:
	   Self-selected: 4
	   Appointed by state governor: 1
	   Elected by community and campus: 1