

Am “I” a Part of a “We”;

A STUDY OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION WITHIN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Throughout college, it is critical to be involved in organizations to define oneself, develop relationships, and build resumes (Holzweiss, Rahn, & Wickline, 2007). To influence students' involvement, organization leaders need to maximize a sense of community and minimize the factors that cause people to leave organizations (Nepstad, 2004). Studies show that the stronger the organizational identification of coworkers, the more likely they are to stay (Apker, Propp, & Zabava, 2009). Based on Social Identity Theory (Hogg, 1988) and linguistic studies, leadership language impacts members' feelings of organizational identification (Hornsey, Blackwood, & O'Brien, 2005; Mayfield, 2009). This study aims to discover if the use of inclusive language within one career-focused and one faith-based organization is associated with members' organizational identification, and whether or not the nature of an organization determines the relationship between inclusive language and organizational identification. In addition, the study will analyze the rhetoric used in the organization's meetings to determine the use of inclusive language. Results showed there was no association between the frequency of inclusive language use and members' organizational identification.



American Marketing Association



InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

METHOD

The student organizations at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, American Marketing Association (AMA) and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IV), were chosen based on their career and faith based goals respectively. In addition, the membership total of each organization were considered comparable.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

A 34 question survey including portions adapted from Cheney's Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ) as well as original content questions which pertain to social interaction outside of the organization and membership details, was created using Qualtrics. Sample items from the OI Scale are as follows; this scale was reliable. $\alpha = .86$ $M = 94.53$ $SD = 11.20$

- *In general, the students within my organization are working toward the same goals.*
- *I become irritated when I hear others outside my organization criticize the organization.*
- *I feel that my organization cares about me.*

Survey participants totaled 73 University of Wisconsin Eau Claire students who are members of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship on-campus organization or the American Marketing Association on-campus organization.

22% of participants were freshman ($n = 16$), 29% ($n = 21$) as sophomores, 22% ($n = 16$) as juniors, and 27% ($n = 20$) as seniors. 33% of participants were within the range of 18-19 years of age ($n = 24$), 47% ($n = 34$) within 20-21 years of age, 19% ($n = 14$) within 22-23 years of age, and 1% ($n = 1$) being 24 years of age or older. 40% of participants identified their sex as male ($n = 29$) and 60% ($n = 44$) as female.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Messages of leaders in AMA and IV, defined as any person who spoke publicly to the full organization within a given meeting were coded by researchers. Using previous research studies from Senden, Lindholm, & Sikstrom (2013); Hornsey, Blackwood, O'Brien (2005); Seyranian (2014), a document of inclusive terms was developed. This document was used to acquire data regarding the frequency of messages. Below are the terms used in the coding process:

Us, We, Ours, Ourselves, Everyone

Coders attended two meetings per organization, individually recording numerical frequency and context of the aforementioned terms. Researchers' discussion concluded that the inclusive words were only to be recorded when members were directly addressed. The medium of each message was also noted. The contextual categories are as follows:

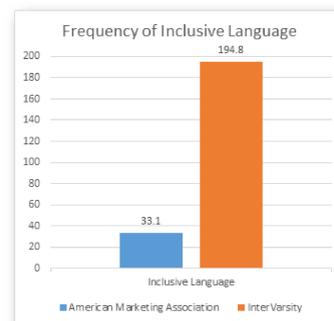
Student Emcee, Worship Leader, Staff Speaker, Student Leader

RESULTS

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the frequency of inclusive language use and members' organizational identification in (a) secular student organizations (AMA) and (b) non-secular (IV) student organizations?

It was found that organizational identification is not associated with the frequency of inclusive language, yet an independent samples t-test neared significance at $p = .06$

Organizational Identification
OI mean and standard deviation
AMA: $M = 5.73$, $SD = .61$
IV: $M = 5.44$, $SD = .67$



NATURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

RQ2: Does the nature of the student organization moderate the relationship between the frequency of inclusive language use and members' organizational identification?

No test of moderation was conducted due to lack of association between organizational identification and inclusive language.

American Marketing Association:

- (1) Focus on career driven individuality by presentation of various awards and scholarships.
- (2) Elements represented a nature of self-focus.
- (3) Non-student speakers (advisor and guest speakers) often did not identify as part of AMA.

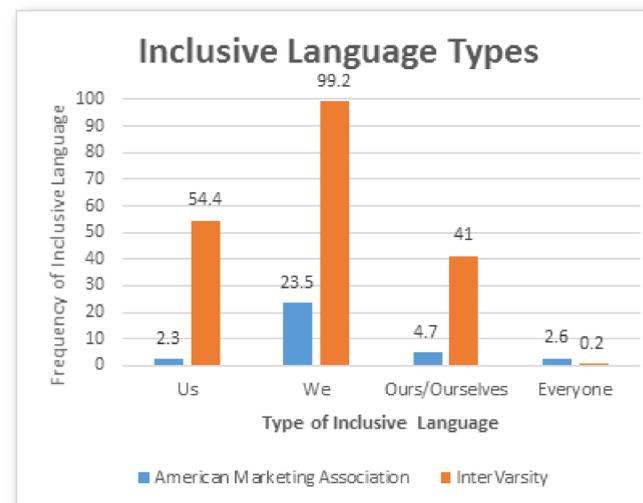
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship:

- (1) Focus on religious driven collectivism by communal worship, prayer, and scripture reciting.
- (2) Elements represented a nature of group-focus.
- (3) All speakers identified as part of InterVarsity.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Average Frequency of Rhetoric -
AMA: (Us) = 2.3, (We) = 23.5, (Our/Ourselves) = 4.7, (Everyone) = 2.6
IV: (Us) = 54.4, (We) = 99.2, (Our/Ourselves) = 41, (Everyone) = 0.2

Frequency of Inclusive language -
AMA: 33.1 Inclusive words used per meeting
IV: 194.8 Inclusive words used per meeting



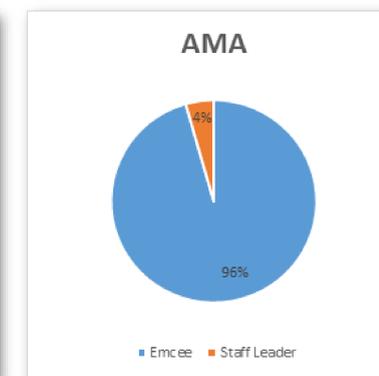
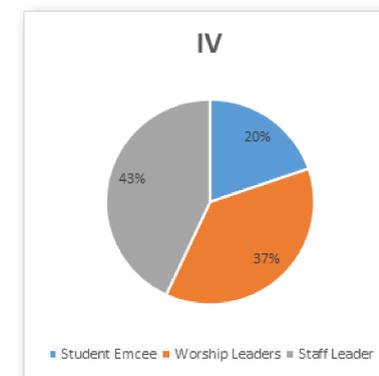
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover if there was a connection between participants identification with the student organization which they are a member, and the frequency of inclusive language spoken from those in a leadership position in the organization. This association would offer a potential reason for why students chose a certain organization over the other available options on campus. In addition, a secondary purpose was to learn if there was a connection between the nature of the organization and the frequency of the inclusive language.

After reviewing the results of this study, it was found that organizational identification is not associated with the frequency of inclusive language. Since these two variables are not associated, it was determined that the nature of the organization did not affect the organizational identification but it was considered to be a factor in the amount of inclusive language used by leaders within the given organization.

Speaker Usage (%) -

AMA: Student Emcee = 19.7%, Worship Leaders = 37.2%, Staff Leader = 43.1%
IV: Student Emcee = 95.6%, Staff Leader = 4.4%



Within AMA meetings, the speakers representing the organization used language primarily focused on the individual. Also the guest speakers that presented were brought in from outside organizations and any inclusive terms stated were in reference to an industry that was not AMA. This individualistic nature of AMA may explain the low frequency of inclusive language used. In contrast, the nature of IV is observed to be collectivist. Within IV meetings, all speakers presenting information to the group were considered part of the organization. This allowed for the use of inclusive language terms to be from IV, not from an outside source. This collectivistic nature of IV may explain the high frequency of inclusive language used.

After conducting additional tests it was determined that the amount of social interaction and the reported individuals organizational identification were positively correlated. Specifically interactions during meetings, in class, in social settings (Bars/Restaurants), extra curricular activities, and "other" were shown to be associated with higher OI. This could be interpreted as the socialization in an intimate setting such as a home or dorm room, required a higher level of interaction between members calling for a higher reported OI from participants.

This study implies that the nature of the organization is more influential on a members organizational identity than the frequency of inclusive language used by leaders. It would be beneficial for student and faculty leaders of student organizations to understand these findings in order to increase membership retention during college.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies should include...

- Larger sample size - InterVarsity has a membership population much higher than that of the American Marketing Association on the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire campus.
- Examine more organizations of different categories (e.g. Secular, non secular, academic, intermural, recreational, etc.).
- Code a greater number of meetings over a longer period of time

CONCLUSION

There was no association between higher levels of inclusive language and organizational identification. Since there was no known association between these variables it is thought that another factor must guide the relationship. Two possible variables would include:

- 1) The nature of the organization studied
- 2) The frequency and quality of the social interaction inside and outside the organization.

Future study must be done to determine this unknown variable.