



2017-04-26

Speaking of Gender, Generally: Analysis of Gendered References and Speaking Opportunities in LDS General Conferences

Devon Tenney

Brigham Young University, d3tenney@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Tenney, Devon, "Speaking of Gender, Generally: Analysis of Gendered References and Speaking Opportunities in LDS General Conferences" (2017). *FHSS Mentored Research Conference*. 300.

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/300

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Family, Home, and Social Sciences at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in FHSS Mentored Research Conference by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



Speaking of Gender, Generally: Analysis of Gendered References and Speaking Opportunities in LDS General Conferences

Student Researcher: Devon Tenney
Faculty Mentor: Jay Goodliffe
Political Science Department

Introduction:

This study seeks to examine the changing role of women in LDS General Conferences. Through text analysis and an exploration of speaking opportunities at General Conference, we find that women have been discussed more frequently and provided more opportunities to speak over time.

Research Question:

How has the involvement of women in Latter-day Saint General Conferences changed over time?

Methods:

This study is two-fold. The first portion relies on text analysis of references to men and women in General Conference Addresses from 1880 – 2011, looking at changes in proportion of gendered references over time by comparison of the Conference Report with dictionaries of male and female words.

The second portion attempts to provide an overview of changes in gender composition of the speaker pool of General Conferences from 1971 (when no women spoke) to 2016, when five women spoke. These changes will be further analyzed. First, though, the text analysis.

Dictionaries:

The following dictionaries were used to run frequency comparisons between male and female references. The original male dictionary returned very high frequencies for “man”, “he”, “him”, and “his”, probably in part due to references to deity. The analysis was run a second time with those words removed for comparison.

Female:

"woman", "women", "female", "she", "her", "hers", "feminine", "femininity", "girl", "girls", "sister", "sisters", "daughter", "daughters", "mother", "mothers", "womanhood", "motherhood", "sisterhood"

Male (original):

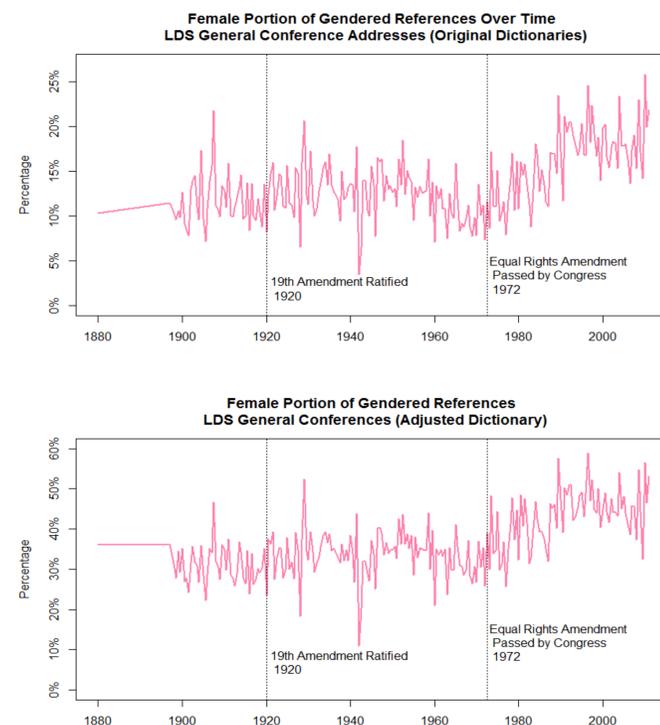
"man", "men", "male", "he", "him", "his", "masculine", "masculinity", "boy", "boys", "brother", "brothers", "son", "sons", "father", "fathers", "manhood", "fatherhood", "brotherhood"

Male (Adjusted):

"men", "male", "masculine", "masculinity", "boy", "boys", "brother", "brothers", "son", "sons", "father", "fathers", "manhood", "fatherhood", "brotherhood"

Text Analysis:

Using the original dictionaries, it appeared that women went from holding about 10% of the total amount of gendered references in General Conference in 1900 to about 20-25% in 2011. After the male dictionary was adjusted to limit references to deity, women appeared to shift from 30% of the gendered comment share in 1900 to about 55% in 2011, around double what was estimated by the original dictionaries. Since not all of the references removed in the adjusted dictionary were to deity, it is likely that the true share of references lies somewhere between the shares depicted by the following graphs.

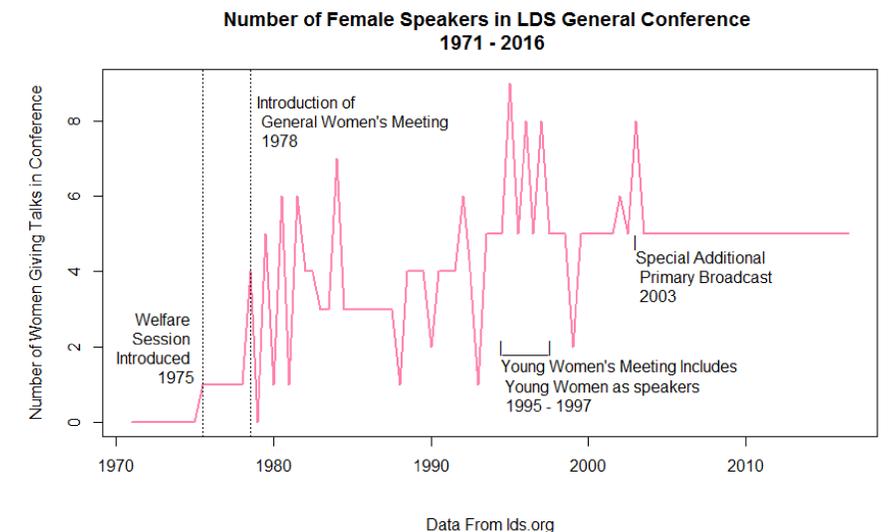


As can be seen in the graphs, regardless of the inclusion or exclusion of words from the original male dictionary, the graph of female reference share looks almost exactly the same, simply shifted on the y-axis. This suggests that the relationships we found are somewhat robust in nature.

It is also worth noting that there is very little overall change in reference share for women from 1900 to about 1960, when there is somewhat of a drop. We don't see much movement after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which may be due to Mormons' general support for women's voting rights. Around 1972, though, and likely with important policy moments in American history such as the Equal Rights Amendment and the Roe v. Wade decision (both of which the LDS church opposed) the female share of references begins to rise sharply. It may be that as feminism and women's rights became increasingly important topics on the world stage, they became especially pertinent topics for LDS leaders to address in General Conference.

Speaker Opportunity Analysis:

This analysis concerned the number of female speakers at each General Conference from 1971 – 2016 using data available on lds.org, the official website of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We can see that the number of female speakers has increased over time, especially when special sessions or changes in program occur.



The graph shows how much the number of female speakers has changed over time, and it is worth noting that the time covered by this graph coincides very well with the period of increased reference share shown by the text analysis after 1972. Whether or not the shift in reference share is a consequence of an increased number of female speakers should be explored in future research.

Conclusion:

Over time, the gendered reference share in Latter-day Saint General Conference addresses has shifted in favor of more equality between men and women. Depending on which particular words you look for, the beginning and end points are certainly different, but there has definitely been a shift. With speaking opportunities as well, the LDS church seems to be slowly moving in a direction of greater equality and opportunity for the expression of female voices. Equality in this church seems to be on the rise, at least in these measures.