

# The Dance of Conversation: Gender and Language in Metaphors for West Coast Swing Partnership

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### THE CONTEXT:

- West Coast Swing (WCS) is a partnered swing dance currently engaged in “degendering” the roles in the dance partnership.

	Traditional	Degendered
Partnership	1 man + 1 woman	Any 2 people
Leader	The man	The person leading
Follower	The woman	The person following

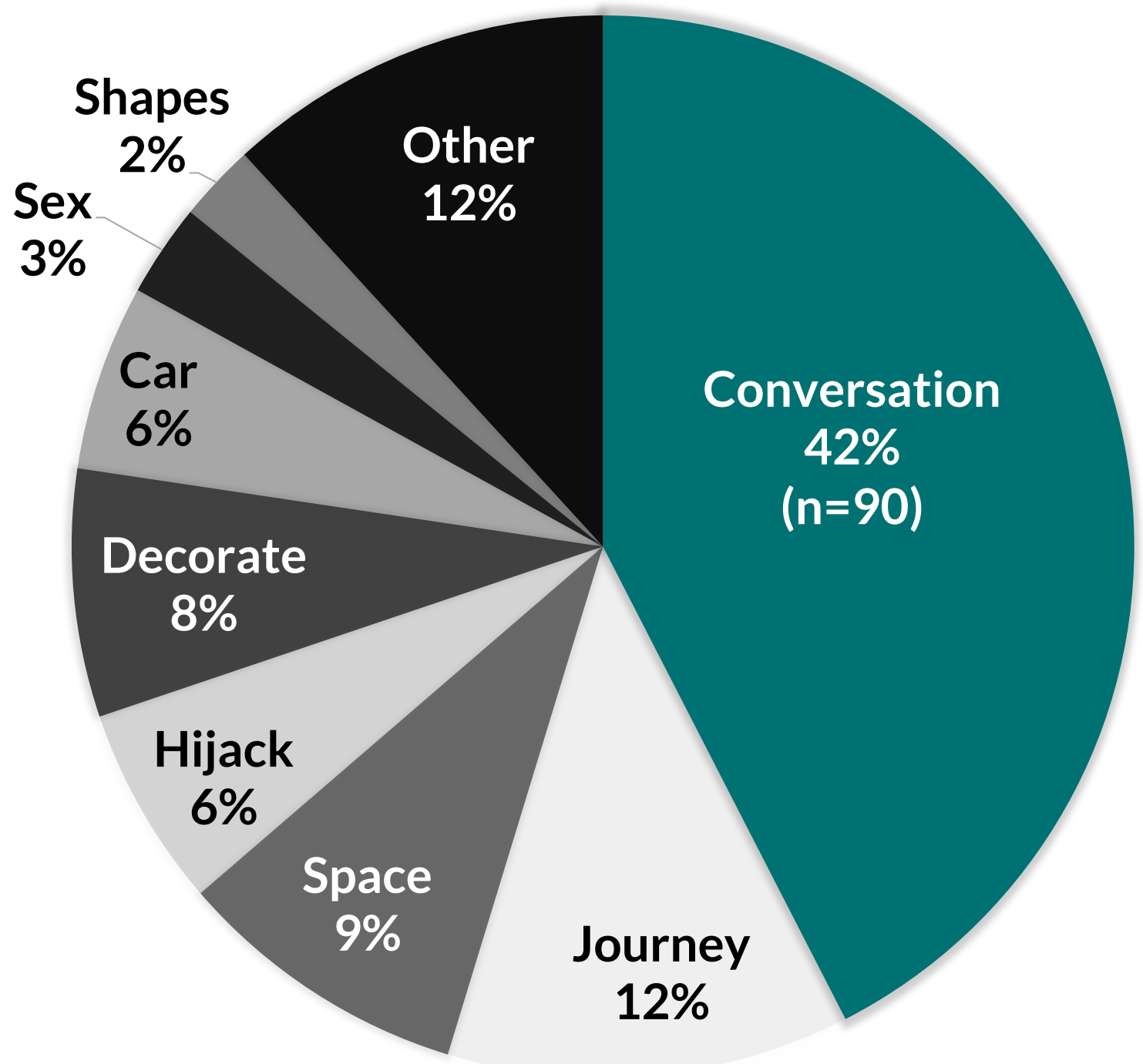
### THE DATA: The Naked Truth Podcast

- Episode: *Leading and Following* (93 min)
  - Released February 2019
- Hosted by:
  - Eric (E): A local organizer (pro-degendering; 94.29% degendered role nouns and pronouns)
  - Deborah (D): A top tier professional (ambivalent; 76.39% degendered role nouns and pronouns)

### THE APPROACH:

- “The overarching aim of critical metaphor research is, then, to disclose the vested interests influencing the choice of metaphor in text.” (Koller, 2004, p.9)
- Quantitative: Which metaphors are used in what proportions?
    - Segmentation: *lexical* vs. *phrasal* vs. *utterance*
      - set up/explanation vs. *application*
  - Qualitative: How are these metaphors used? Which characteristics are highlighted? Which are hidden?
  - How do these metaphors construct “leaders” and “followers”

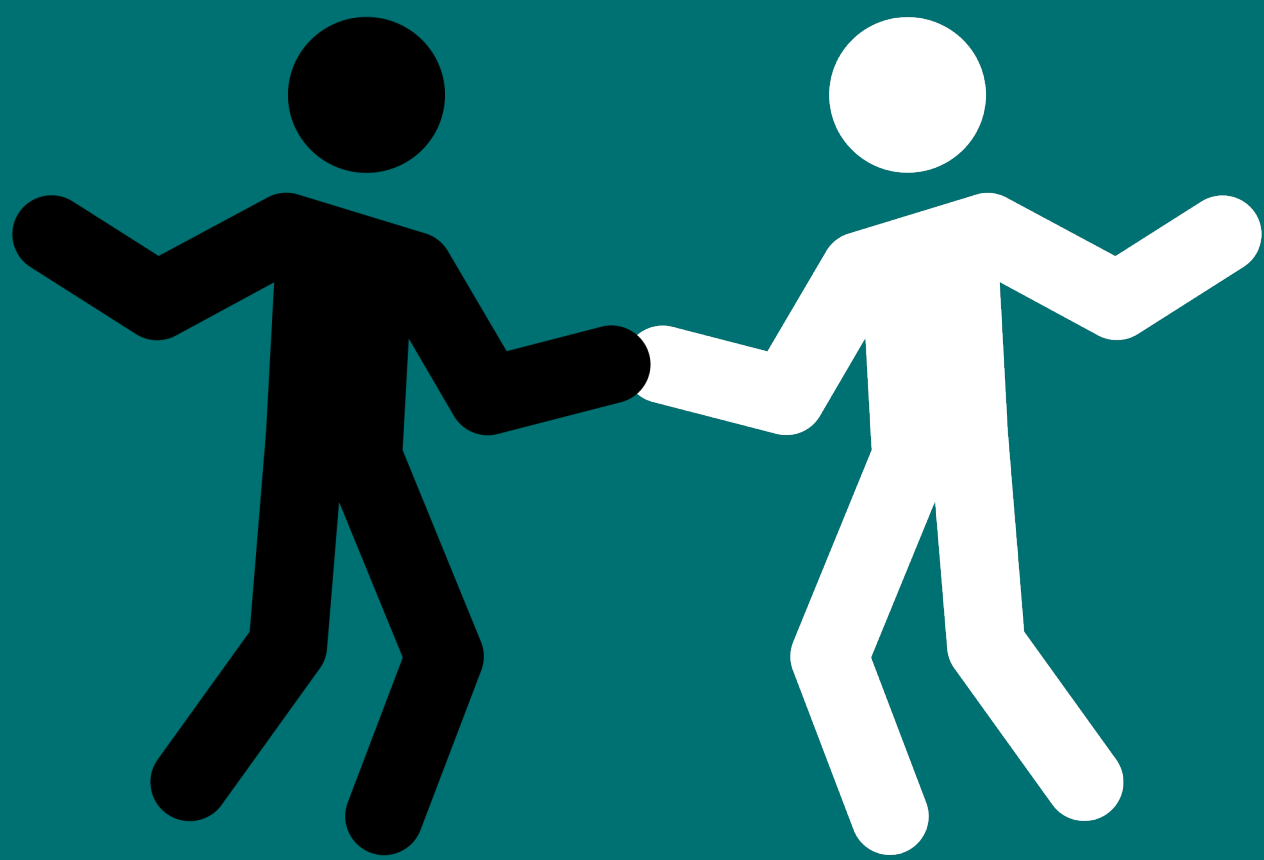
### THE FINDINGS (QUANTITATIVE):



- “I just tell them to stay in **idle** like a **car**” (D, In 1005)
- “we think that’s the way they are **in bed**” (E, In 368)
- “what **shapes** are you creating um for the follower to work off of” (E, In 26)

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The deployment of the WCS PARTNERSHIP IS CONVERSATION metaphor reveals and reinforces underlying heteronormative gender ideologies in conceptualizations of the two dance roles, even in the largely degendered speech of a progressive community leader.



Cameron, L. (2007). Confrontation or complementarity?: Metaphor in language use and cognitive metaphor theory. *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 5(1), 107-135. <https://doi.org/10.1075/arcl.5.06cam>  
Cox, N. (2012). A Skillful Breaking of Expectations: Embodied Knowledge, Communication, and Connection in West Coast Swing Dance. *Bryn Mawr*.  
Craggs, S. (2019, 6 March). These ballroom dancers teach a gender neutral way where both people lead. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/ballroom-dancers-1.5042158>  
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James, D., & Drakich, J. (1993). Understanding gender differences in amount of talk: A critical review of research. In *Gender and conversational interaction*. (pp. 281-312). Oxford University Press.  
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### THE FINDINGS (QUALITATIVE):

#### WCS PARTNERSHIP IS CONVERSATION

- Equality (see also Callahan, 2005; Cox 2012) and critique of “one-sided conversations”
  - “it wasn't supposed to be the leader just speaks and the follower just listens ” (E, In 201)

#### LEADING IS TALKING

- 39.3% of conversation metaphors for leaders are voicing actions as utterances (cf. 7.3% for followers)
  - “the leader has said don't move” (E, In 1011)
- Criticism of doing all the talking and never listening
  - “the leader shouldn't be dictating y'know a hundred percent y'know of the dance because then it's just him talking at her” (D, In 497)

#### FOLLOWING IS LISTENING

- “Straight up follower” vs. a follower who talks
  - “followers who are either a little more straight on the following others who are louder” (E, In 44)
  - “it’s a hard concept uh for me because I'm such a follower” (D, In 1077)
- Listening is necessary but not enough
  - “I want a follower who is paying attention and listening I do also want a follower who isn't afraid to respond or contribute ideas” (E, In 269-70)
- Hijacking, interruptions and other failures to talk appropriately
  - Only followers are accused of being disruptive (cf. Orcutt & Mennella, 1995)
    - “it's my job [as a follower] to find a way to bring that into the conversation...without being disruptive” (E, In 61)
    - “I don't want to be doing all the talking but I don't want them to be interrupting” (E, In 49)
  - Repeating like a parrot vs. stealing thunder
    - Follower: “E: as if everything I say they're just repeating back  
D: right like a parrot “ (In 584-586)
      - Leader: “they just steal the thunder away from the follower” (D, In 571)
- Commentary on volume and “dance tourettes” (cf. Cameron, 1995)
  - “when I think of followers I think of how much do they talk how loudly do they talk “ (E, In 39)
  - cf. one specific leader: “I feel like he's constantly screaming uh at the follower” (D, In 387)

### DISCUSSION:

- Who “should” be talking vs who should be listening?

Dance as conversation	Actual M/F dyadic conversation <small>(James &amp; Drakich, 1993; Lee &amp; McCabe, 2020; Orcutt &amp; Mennella, 1995; Zimmerman &amp; West, 1975)</small>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Leader mainly talks; follower mainly listens</li><li>The follower must wait to be offered an opportunity or supportively build on the leader’s “speech” OR be seen as interruptive</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Men hold the floor for more of the time</li><li>Women use more “supportive strategies”</li><li>Women interrupt less, but are believed to interrupt more</li></ul>

- Policing women/followers
  - Women’s speech:** traditionally heavily policed even when the same behaviour in men is unremarkable (Cameron 1995, 1998)
  - Followers:** policed for volume, relevance, timing of contribution, saying too much or too little; cf. *Leaders: only criticized for never letting followers speak; never described as interrupting*
- Dance, gender, and passivity
  - Passivity/following as feminine (de Beauvoir, 1989/1952; Craig, 2013)
  - Associations between following and non-heterosexuality
  - See also (feminized) DECORATE metaphor (Havenhand 2004) only used for followers

### LOOKING FORWARD:

- How does the deployment of the conversation metaphor vary with degendered language use and alignment to and stake in the degendering movement? (Ethnographic interviews)
- Alternative models of partnership: Switch dancing /Liquid lead (Craggs, 2019)
- Are there better methods of segmenting metaphors in speech?

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.University of Chicago Press.  
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Pickard, S. (2020). Waiting like a girl?: The temporal constitution of femininity as a factor in gender inequality. *British Journal of Sociology*, 71(2), 314-327. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12733>  
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