



# Gender and Sport-Type Differences in Student-Athletes' Self-Talk Use

Erica Clancy

Psychology Department, Davidson College



## OBJECTIVES

- The purpose of this study is to
  - build upon the small area of self-talk sport psychology literature
  - investigate differences between male and female collegiate athletes' self-talk use
  - determine if there are differences between individual and team sport athletes' self-talk use

## INTRODUCTION

- Self-talk refers to the way you talk to yourself and can be classified in various ways:
  - Overt (out loud) or covert (in your head)
  - Positive or negative
  - First or second person
- Hardy, Hall, and Hardy (2005) conducted a study using the Self-Talk Use Questionnaire (STUQ).
  - Conducted analyses to investigate differences between gender, sport-type, and skill level at both practice and competition
  - Found that athlete self-talk was generally positive and said covertly
  - Also found some differences between gender and sport-type self-talk use
- The present study extends Hardy et al. (2005) by
  - adding measures of first and second person self-talk use to branch self-leadership literature with sports literature (as seen in Rogelberg et al., 2013).
  - including only team sports (basketball and soccer) and individual sports (swimming and cross country/ track and field) so the sport-type differences have a stronger contrast.

## METHOD

### Participants

- 79 student-athletes
  - 8 basketball, 21 soccer, 30 swim, 20 track and field/cross-country
  - 36 males, 43 females

### Procedure

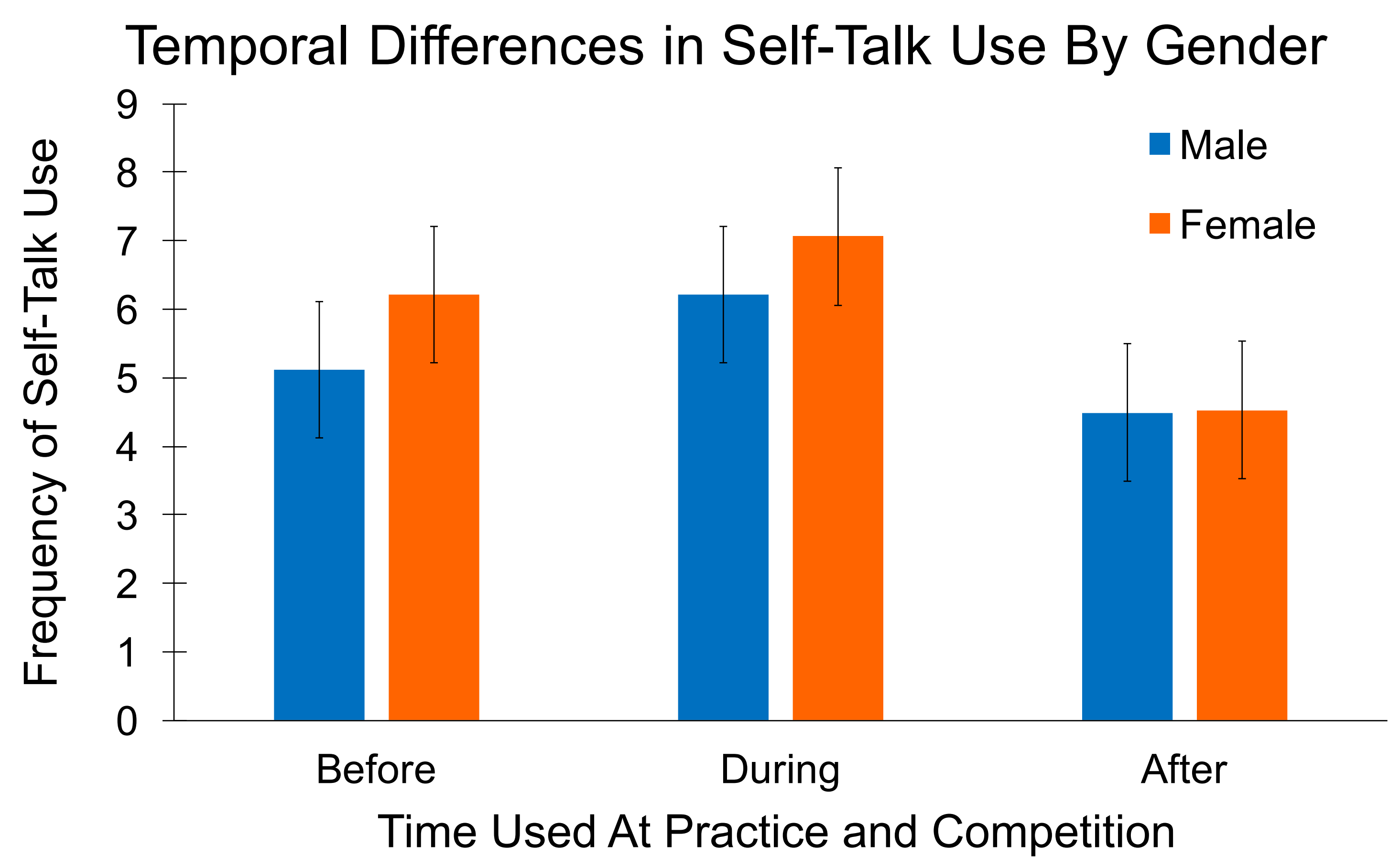
- Emails were sent to student-athletes at Davidson College explaining the study.
- Participants followed a link to a Qualtrics survey.
- After consenting to be in the study, participants responded to a revised version of the STUQ (Hardy et al., 2005).
- Participants answered 31 questions in relation to their self-talk in the following categories at both practice and competition:
  - Temporal aspects of self-talk (when)
  - Functions of self-talk (why)
  - Content of self-talk (what)
- For temporal aspects and functions of self-talk, participants responded using a scale from 1-9.
- For content of self-talk, participants designated a percentage from 0-100 for three levels of each category (including valence, overtness, and length).
- In addition to the STUQ items, 4 questions were added about whether the participant speaks in the first or second person when they use self-talk.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Thank you to Dr. Kello for his guidance and support throughout this project.
- Special thanks to all of the Davidson College students who participated in the pilot study and data collection.

## RESULTS

- Self-talk was mostly positive and said as covert phrases.
- Individual sport athletes ( $M = 0.78, SD = 0.32$ ) use significantly more covert self-talk than team sport athletes ( $M = 0.57, SD = 0.32$ ).
- Individual sport athletes ( $M = 7.01, SD = 1.61$ ) use significantly more self-talk during practice and competition than team sport athletes ( $M = 6.09, SD = 1.97$ ).
- Female athletes were significantly more likely to use self-talk before ( $M = 6.05, SD = 1.89$ ) and during ( $M = 7.06, SD = 1.72$ ) practice and competition than male athletes ( $M = 5.12, SD = 1.97; M = 6.21, SD = 1.97$ ), as shown in the figure below.
- No significant results were found for valence, use after practice and competitions, or first/second person use.



## DISCUSSION

- This study replicated results from Hardy et al. (2005): self-talk is mostly positive in nature and individual sport athletes use significantly more covert self-talk than team sport athletes.
  - Individual sport athletes are in less supportive environments, so they use self-talk more to regulate high anxiety states and provide support.
- Self-talk enhances self-confidence, increases effort, regulates mood and anxiety, and controls attention (Theodorakis et al., 2008), which explains why individual sport athletes and female athletes use more self-talk.
  - As noted in Hardy et al. (2005), female athletes tend to have higher anxiety and lower self-esteem than male athletes.

## LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

- The small sample size of Davidson student-athletes makes it difficult to generalize this study's findings.
  - Future research should include a larger sample of student-athletes from a variety of institutions.
  - Incentives could be offered to teams with high response rates to ensure a larger sample size.
- An objective measure of skill level, such as points scored, minutes played, or race times could be used to compare self-talk use with performance.
- Different measures of first and second person self-talk use, such as open-ended questions, could get a more accurate depiction of person use.

## REFERENCES

- Hardy, J., Hall, C. R., & Hardy, L. (2005). Quantifying athlete self-talk. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 23*(9), 905-917.
- Rogelberg, S. G., Justice, L., Braddy, P. W., Paustian-Underdahl, S. C., Heggstad, E., Shanock, L., ... & Fleenor, J. W. (2013). The executive mind: leader self-talk, effectiveness and strain. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 28*(2), 183-201.
- Theodorakis, Y., Hatzigeorgiadis, A., & Chroni, S. (2008). Self-Talk: It Works, but How? Development and Preliminary Validation of the Functions of Self-Talk Questionnaire. *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science, 12*(1), 10-30.