

“Gender in the Pulpit: The Differences in Speaking Style for Men and Women”

Abstract:

One of the most important shifts occurring in the religious landscape is a significant increase in the number of churches that are ordaining and calling women to the ministry. While a tremendous amount of work in communication has studied the differences in speech by male and female speakers, that analysis has not turned to the level of the sermon. Using nearly 900 sermon transcripts collected from pastors of both genders, this paper uses a number of text analysis techniques including natural language processing and sentiment analysis to understand the differences in sermon delivery between the genders. Our findings note that while sermons delivered by males are significantly longer, that female speakers are more likely to use first person pronouns and tentative speech than their male counterparts. In addition, our sentiment analysis finds that women are more likely to use positive words, generally however sentiment varies dramatically across the entire arc of the sermon.

According to recent estimates, women make up between 17.6%-26.5% of the American pastorate (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016), which is up markedly from a 2009 estimate of 16% from the BLS (Djupe 2014). Because of this rapid and consequential increase in female clergy, the desire to understand the gendered differences in ministry should be of great importance to scholars of religion and politics. In fact, some scholars who study the sociology of religion have noted that an elevated presence of female clergy could lead to an increasing gulf between liberals and conservatives on culture war issues (Hunter and Sargeant 1993).

While clergy have a number of tasks they must attend to during the course of their job, one of the most visible and possibly most influential is delivering the sermon or homily during a worship service (Quinley 1974; Djupe and Gilbert 2003). This task gives parishioners a chance to gain insight into the pastor's personality, the issues that the pastor wants to emphasize to the congregation, and how his/her faith drew them to a life of ministry. Yet, while social scientists have endeavored to understand how female clergy can have an impact on the outlook and activity of the congregation at a broad level (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005; Djupe 2014), what topics and words that female clergy use during the weekly sermons is something that has not been systematically reviewed.

What follows is a brief summary of what both the fields of political science and communication bring to the understanding of homiletical discourse. While political scientists are interested in how a pastor can direct or amplify the political outlook of their congregation, scholars of communication are more interested in how men and women use language to convey information and meaning through both the written and spoken word. Each of these fields provide relevant insights to understanding the world of the gendered sermon. Following this summary, a dataset of 885 sermons will be analyzed containing transcripts of messages delivered by both male and female pastors. A number of text analysis techniques will be employed ranging from basic word counts to more sophisticated natural language processing to identify the sentiment of the words used by each gender and how that sentiment changes throughout the course of the sermon. Finally, implications and potential additional avenues for this research will be discussed.

Gendered Communication

The study of gendered language has a long history in the scholarly literature, with a number of theories regarding the emergence and maintenance of gender differences through communication literature (Wood 2012). Some of the most foundational work contends that men and women have different cultural rules for casual conversation. This “gender as culture” theory posits that children quickly learn that language is an effective way to differentiate themselves from the opposite sex and this results in each gender finding a different utility in communication (Maltz and Borker 1982). However, other scholars have contended that the speech differences may be more about maintaining a power structure where language reinforces subordinate positions for females in society (Henley and LaFrance 1984; Henley and Kramarae 1991). Some scholars believe that this “gender as power” theory extends not just across the male-female divide but also continues to stigmatize minority female groups (Tannen 1994).

To test the theory that men and women use language differently scholars have utilized a number of units of analysis, the most straightforward of which is an accounting of the number and variety of words that men and women use throughout the course of a day. There have been several meta-analyses published that aggregate hundreds of research studies, however their conclusions are mixed. For example, Hyde and Linn (1988) wrote, “We are prepared to assert that there are no gender differences in verbal ability...in the standard ways that verbal ability is measured” (pg. 62). In another meta-analysis of intersex communication James and Drakich (1993) found that men, despite the commonly held belief, spoke more than females in variety of formal and informal settings. Work that has focused on parental communication finds that mothers speak more to their children than fathers (Leaper, Anderson, and Sanders 1998), and female children do evince more verbal ability than their male peers (Leaper and Smith 2004). However, this analysis of word volume has not been extended to the realm of written communication between the genders (but see Warshay 1972; Mulac and Lundell 1994).

It is difficult to link these findings to the specific context of a Sunday homily, however. Sermon delivery can range from a pastor using nothing but his/her Bible and speaking extemporaneously to reading verbatim remarks that were prepared throughout the preceding week (Roland 2012). This is also constrained by the reality that different Christian traditions place a varying amount of emphasis on the typical components of a worship service (Haskell 2012). This could lead some sermons to be of a shorter length for reasons of tradition not gender differences. Nonetheless, understanding if sermons are of varying length, and the magnitude of this difference, can be an illuminating exercise.

Another well-established difference in gendered speech is the use of first person singular language. The vast majority of scholarship has indicated that women are much more likely to include such as words as “my” and “I” in a wide variety of speech contexts (Harley and Ritter 2002; Herring

and Paolillo 2006). This gap persists even when analyzing over 14,000 text files from 70 separate studies in a meta-analysis. But the authors of this analysis contend that the differences may be the direct result of the fact that women use language to refer to psychological or social processes, which lends itself to using first person singular pronouns. On the other hand men are more apt to discuss object properties and impersonal topics that are typically not related to first person pronouns (Newman et al. 2008).

The reality of the sermon, however, can provide an interesting window into this process as homiletical style can range from the extremely personal, to much more academic and less individually oriented. For example, an analysis of the worship style of Pentecostal churches in Appalachia concluded that the personal testimony was an effective form of preaching style (Titon 1988). On the other hand, expository preaching, a style that is focused on illuminating the original context and meaning of a biblical text is much more impersonal and often seen as an educational exercise (Goldsworthy 2000). While prevalent in both the evangelical and mainline tradition, the expository style is particularly well suited to pastors with significant theological education and therefore seems likely to be used more by the female clergy as they have an increased level of education in other samples (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 21).

In addition, there has been a tremendous amount of research in the area of tentative speech usage patterns by each gender. Dating back to foundational work by Lakoff, communication scholars have consistently concluded that female speech patterns exhibit more hesitation than those used by males (1973; 1975; 1977). More recent study of this phenomenon has reinforced the idea that women are more likely to speak with uncertainty (“not sure” or “I think”), use qualifiers in their language (“somewhat disappointing”), use hedges (“I guess” or “kind of”), and use intensifiers (“so hard”) (Palomares 2009; Leaper and Robnett 2011). While these differences have been found in a

number of communicative circumstances, no study has ever compared the sermons of each gender to see examples of this tentative language from the pulpit.

Finally, there has been a tremendous amount of work to understand the gendered differences in temperament and how it affects communication patterns. Foundational work has concluded that emotional temperament is apparent at very young ages (as early as toddlers) and can have a profound impact on daily activities such as eating and sleeping (Buss and Plomin 1975; Thomas and Chess 1977; Rothbart and Derryberry 1981). This temperament is highly sensitive to gender differences and can manifest itself in speech patterns and tone of voice. In turn, society sees men using anger in their speech and demeanor as a positive display of emotion, while females are looked down upon for expressing anger. For example, some research has concluded that individuals are quicker to pick up angry faces in males (Becker et al. 2007), while other studies have indicated that women are oftentimes punished for showing anger in job interviews while men are rewarded by receiving a job offer (Tiedens 2001; Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008).

The sermon is an interesting case study for the appropriate use of anger. Some of the most famous sermons of all time (i.e. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”) display a tremendous amount of anger regarding the unworthiness of humanity, yet God’s merciful love (Edwards 1992). Even popular 20th Century evangelists like Billy Graham used anger and the fear of eternal punishment to encourage parishioners to allow Jesus into their hearts (McLoughlin 2004). Oftentimes this anger and fear ramps up during the final portion of the sermon as pastors are looking to have a fruitful yield during the invitational time as evidence of the effectiveness of the sermon (Sunukjian 2007). However, one has to wonder if women would be more hesitant to use this rhetorical style knowing that it will be received differently than their male counterparts.

Political Communication

If one were to describe the relationship between clergy and politics, it would be tenuous. On its face, clergy are ideally suited to not only engage in politics themselves, but to also use the power of their pulpit to try to mobilize and persuade their congregations to support candidates of their political persuasion. Clergy are by and large highly educated (Guth, Green, Smidt, & Kellstedt, 1997; Perl & Chang, 2000; McDaniel, 2008), have many resources at their disposal (Djupe and Gilbert 2002; Finke and Dougherty 2002; Djupe and Gilbert 2006), make reasonable incomes (Perl and Chang 2000; Trawick and Lile 2007), and have great deal of latitude when it comes to how they spend their time (Brunette-Hill and Finke 1999; Andersen 2004) . This combination is exactly what most political scientists believe are ideal conditions for a political active individual (Nie and Verba 1987; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Despite this perfect opportunity for political action, clergy have been notoriously reluctant to speak publicly about political issues or engage in any sort of political participation outside basic civic requirements such as voting in primaries and elections (Djupe and Gilbert 2002).

When an individual decides to dedicate their career to religious service that is deeply rooted in a religious conviction that they have been anointed or called by a divine power to serve (Christopherson 1994). While each individual pastor feels the call into ministry, the way that their calling is evidenced in day to day life can be highly variable. Some pastors, for example, feel that the call to ministry does not end at being the religious leader for a community of faith but also the congregation's political voice to government officials (Owens 2007; Djupe, Burge, and Calfano 2016). One study of nearly one hundred Protestant ministers found that the pastors who did choose to speak out on political issues did so because they felt called by God to be prophets for their congregation and their denomination (Olson 2000).

This divine need is rooted in what scholars describe as “social theology,” which refers to how a member of the clergy views the role of the Church in relation to the rest of the world (Guth

et al. 1997). Many denominations and pastors have struggled with how to guide their congregation in engaging those outside the church in order to seek transformative change. Pastors who have a social theology that teaches separation create a strong sense of social identity among their flock (Burriss and Jackson 2000), however these churches often struggle with how to engage the larger culture and bringing in new converts (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Burge and Djupe 2014). This tension was described nearly five decades ago by Jeffrey Hadden, who called this “the gathering storm,” where the clergy urge the congregation to “move beyond the four walls of the church,” while the congregation, “seeks comfort and escape from the world in the sanctuary of God” (Hadden 1969, 99).

This friction between the two approaches to Christianity is crucial because it speaks to a larger concern that a member of the clergy must always consider: keeping congregants happy. The earliest scholars of clergy found that pastors and priests were overwhelmed with the necessity to maintain good relationships with members of their congregation and believed that if they spoke out on political issues that they ran the risk of alienating a significant portion of their membership (Campbell & Pettigrew, 1959; Hadden, 1969). These early works take special care to note that clergy’s positions are unlike any other in the workforce. He or she must walk into a parish that “has an ongoing social structure of its own” (Quinley 1974, 43). Having to quickly understand the unwritten rules of structure and culture is compounded by the fact that clergy are asked to be preachers, teachers, counselors, arbiters, and leaders all at once (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959).

To further complicate this situation, many female clergy have to navigate an additional set of concerns that are largely absent from their male counterparts: the reluctance to accept a woman in the pulpit, especially if that female wants to be politically vocal. For example, in a questionnaire responded to by female clergy, one in three women said that their gender did provide a constraint on

their ability to engage in any sort of political activity (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 49).

This wariness to speak politically is well summarized by a female pastor who stated in an interview,

“A man, particularly a white man, can stand for all of humanity, but a woman can only stand for being a woman. Because of that, when I make a statement or do an action, I am conscious that there are those who might dismiss me or marginalize me because of my gender” (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 50–51).

As a way to deflect this issue, many female clergy note that they do not speak directly about political issues or candidates, but instead to try to move the discussion toward issue statements that are focused on biblical principles (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 103).

Another practical issue that many limit female clergy’s ability or desire to engage in political discussion and political activity is their over commitment to other responsibilities. This so-called “second shift” problem means that women are still tasked with taking care of many of the household chores and therefore have less time to think about, speak about, and engage in political issues as members of the clergy (Hochschild and Machung 2012). This time constraint can be especially burdensome when a female pastor is also a single parent, as it sometimes the case with women in the ministry (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 51).

However, while many of these issues should make women less likely to speak about political issues and urge political activity from the pulpit, other factors may make that more likely. Take, for instance, the reality that female clergy have much higher levels of graduate level theological education than their male counterparts (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 21). Because of the reality that mainline denominations are the primary vehicle for female ordination in the United States (Djupe 2014), much of this graduate education takes place in denominations that have tremendous histories of political activity. For example, some female pastors note with great pride the fact that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or the United Methodist Church found their *raison d’être* by fighting for abolitionist causes during the buildup to the Civil War (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 44). Seeing themselves as the continuation of this tradition, many female clergy feel

the need to speak on issues of social justice and human rights (Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005, 59–60). However, some subsequent empirical evidence finds that the ability of female clergy to alter to the political participation of their congregations to be quite limited (Djupe 2014).

Taken together there are a number of potential avenues for exploration. Do female clergy speak longer during their sermons compared to their male counterparts? When they speak do women use more first person singular pronouns than their male counterparts? Do they use more examples of tentative speech? Are they more likely to use more positive words in their sermons or are they more likely to use words with an angry sentiment? Turning to politics, are women more likely to engage in political discussions than their male counterparts? Does this vary based on the proximity to consequential elections occurring on in the United States? To answer these questions, we will turn to a unique dataset of sermons from both men and women clergy in the United States.

Data

To answer these questions, we compiled a dataset of 885 sermons by a total 118 pastors from a variety of denominational backgrounds. These were collected in a convenience method using simple internet searches. Almost all of the transcripts were acquired from Sermon Central (an online repository of preaching material) or the websites of churches or pastors. Using this method will likely bias the sample toward larger churches or more professional pastors, however there is no reason to believe that the transcripts collected have theological or ideological content that differs greatly from that which an average church goer hears during a worship service. The bulk of these sermons are relatively recent (from the past few years), although some date to as early as February of 1997. Of the sermons included in our data, 288 are by women and 597 are by men. The average number of sermons by a given pastor included in our data is 7.5, though the number ranges from as few as 1 to as many as 78. Some summary statistics are shown in table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

To analyze this data, we employ various methods of text analysis, which range from simple word counts to natural language processing to identify sentiment and emotions within sermons. Our discussion of our analysis proceeds as follows: first, we explore whether there is a significant difference in the length of sermons by men and women; we then examine differences in the use of tentative speech and first person pronouns; next, we look at variation in emotions and sentiment used in sermons; finally, we explore differences in political speech.

Analysis

Volume of Words Used

As discussed previously, some research shows that a significant difference in the number of words used by men and women exists. It is therefore possible that differences in length are observable between men's and women's sermons. Though, as previously mentioned, there are possible causes beyond gender that might explain variation in sermon length, such as tradition and denominational differences, exploration of sermon length can still provide insights into differences in communication styles between men and women.

Consistent with the findings of James and Drakich's (1993) meta-analysis, we find that the sermons by men in our data tend to be, on average, longer than those by women (see figure 1). The difference is quite substantial, with men using on average more than 600 more words per sermon than women (mean word count for men = 2,225.58; mean word count for women = 1,585.52; $t = -11.61$; $p < 0.001$).¹ This runs contrary to popular wisdom that women speak more than men. Whether this difference is purely the result of gender is, nevertheless, unclear. Women pastors may belong to mainline traditions that, by convention, have typically shorter sermons. More work to control for denomination is therefore required.

[Figure 1 about here]

¹ We use a Welch two-sample t-test for all significance tests.

Tentative Speech and First Person Pronouns

Prior research indicates that women's speech tends to be more hesitant than men's (Lakoff 1973; 1975; 1977; Palomares 2009; Leaper and Robnett 2011). This may be the case because of anticipated differences in audience responses to the temperament of male and female speakers (Tiedens 2001; Becker et al. 2007; Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008). Women may feel leery of using strong language and thus prefer to qualify their statements. Our data supports this view. In terms of tentative speech, though differences are not substantial, women pastors tend to use certain qualifiers, such as "may," "might," "sometimes," and "maybe" more often than men. Although, men do appear to use "probably" more often than women.

[Figure 2 and 3 about here]

Because women are more likely to use psychological and social language, whereas men are more apt to rely on impersonal language, there is reason to expect gender differences in the use of first person pronouns in male versus female sermons as well. Our data supports this expectation; though, it is important to not overstate the magnitude of the difference (figure 3). Women more often use "we," "I," "our," and "my," for example, but the difference is not considerable. This is likely due to the fact that sermons frequently contain personal anecdotes, which often relate to first-person pronoun usage. Even so, women do use these pronouns slightly more frequently than their male counterparts.

Use of Emotion

The fact that women's language tends to be more tentative and reliant upon qualifying terms suggests that women also may be reluctant to display strong emotions in their sermons, such as anger and fear. Women may avoid using these emotions, particularly at the close of a sermon, recognizing that congregants will receive this differently from how they would receive it from a male

pastor. As mentioned earlier, anger is more quickly identified in men and can work in men's favor, while it can work to the disadvantage of women.

To explore differences in the use of emotion between sermons by men and women, we utilize the NRC Emotion Lexicon, which contains a crowdsourced dictionary of words and their associated sentiments and emotions. This dictionary contains the positive and negative sentiment of words, along with their association with eight emotions: anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, and trust.²

Figure 4 displays point estimates of the mean level of sentiment and of the eight emotions listed above, along with 95% confidence intervals, for men's and women's sermons. In terms of positive and negative sentiment, a significance in difference test reveals that women's sermons are more positive than men's; though this finding is only moderately significant at $p < 0.1$. Moreover, there is not a significant difference in negative sentiment between men's and women's sermons. In terms of the eight emotions, women use significantly less disgust ($p < 0.05$) and significantly less fear ($p < 0.05$) than men; however, there is not a significant difference in the presence of the remaining six emotions.

Broad differences in the mean sentiment and emotional valence between men's and women's sermons can be insightful, but exploring how the presence of sentiment and emotion varies across sermons from beginning to end can also be informative because seemingly insignificant differences in mean emotions and sentiment for entire sermons can mask significant differences between sentiments and emotions at certain pivotal points in the arc of a sermon.

Figure 5 displays point estimates of mean sentiment and emotions for five parts of a sermon: the beginning, middle, and end, along with parts in between. 95% confidence intervals are also included. In terms of sentiment, women's sermons contain significantly more positive sentiment

² We used the `get_nrc_sentiment()` function in the `syuzhet` package in R.

than men's in the first and latter halves of their sermons; however, there is not a significant difference in the middle of men's and women's sermons. There further is not a significant difference in negative sentiment.

[Figure 5 about here]

In terms of emotion, there is little difference in the use of anger between men's and women's sermons, save for the middle where women, contrary to what might be expected given how conveying anger can potentially work to women's disadvantage, use significantly more anger than men ($p < 0.01$) and, in fact, increase, on average, the amount of anger conveyed while men appear to ramp down, on average, the amount of anger they convey. Women also use significantly more anticipation than men at the beginning of their sermons ($p < 0.05$), and they increase anticipation relative to men from the middle to the end of their sermons.

As for the male pastors in our sample, they appear to convey significantly more disgust than women throughout their sermons ($p < 0.001$) with little variation in the amount expressed from beginning to end. Men also convey significantly more fear than women ($p < 0.05$); however, this difference, it is important to note, is observed at the end of sermons, the point of a sermon when pastors may choose to have an alter call or invitation time. It is further interesting to note that men, on average, appear to increase the amount of fear they use at the close of sermons while women, on average, appear to decrease the amount of fear they use.

Finally, women appear to use significantly more joy than men throughout their sermons. This effect is most significant and the greatest at the beginning and tail ends of their sermons ($p < 0.001$ in each instance) while its magnitude and significance declines slightly in the middle and just after the beginning ($p < 0.05$ in each instance).

The findings here suggest that there are real and important differences in the communication styles of female and male clergy. While the men in our sample convey more disgust throughout their

sermons and more fear at the close of their sermons, the women in our sample build anticipation throughout their sermons more so than men, convey more anger than men in the middle section of their sermons, and express more joy than men, particularly at the beginning and end of their sermons. Furthermore, while men and women use negative sentiment with similar frequency, women use significantly more positive sentiment throughout their sermons. These variations in sentiment and emotion expressed in men's and women's sermons no doubt have important implications for how audiences receive messages and also suggest differences in communication strategies taken by male and female clergy when in the pulpit.

Political Speech

As already discussed, clergy are uniquely situated for political action, yet they always must worry about the happiness of their parishioners, and political activism often comes with the risk of alienating members of one's congregation. Women pastors face an additional set of obstacles, namely that congregants may feel uneasy about a woman in the pulpit, making engagement with politics all the more precarious, and potentially polarizing. Women, therefore, may try to deflect conversation away from direct discussion of political figures or issues toward statements more obviously associated with biblical principles. The "second shift" problem may further constrain women pastors' political speech since women may simply lack time to consider and, therefore, talk about political issues.

However, some reasons why women might be more politically engaged than men also exist. Notably, as previously discussed, women pastors tend to have higher levels of graduate education relative to male pastors, which, in fact, may make them more likely to engage in political issues. Furthermore, many women pastors receive their graduate education from institutions affiliated with mainline denominations, many of which have storied pasts of political activism.

Our exploration of a handful of terms related to salient political and social issues suggests that the latter view may be more accurate; though, this finding is far from uniform. As figure 6 shows, women more frequently used the terms “government,” “vote,” “gay,” “USA,” “terrorism,” “lesbian,” and “LGBT.” As for the remaining terms, women and men appear to use with similar frequency “America,” “president,” “Trump,” “terrorist,” “homosexuality,” and “Clinton.” “America” and “president” are by far the most frequently used political words by men and women among the words included in figure 6.

[Figure 6 about here]

While women do use some political words more frequently than men, men more often use the word “politics,” and men exclusively use the terms “homosexual” and “abortion.” That only the men in our sample discuss abortion (directly at least) is interesting. It suggests that women in our sample may be reluctant to mention abortion in their sermons, while men lack this same hesitancy, even while it is an issue that uniquely affects women. As evinced by the statement by the female pastor highlighted earlier, women in the clergy have to contend with concerns that their engagement with political issues can be dismissed easily by congregants who may not view political statements by women as universal, as they would in the case of statements by a man, but as solely relevant to a woman’s perspective. Because of this concern, perhaps women avoid direct mention of abortion for fear that some congregants may immediately dismiss their statements or find the discussion alienating. Even so, the women in our sample do not appear to shy away from discussion of other, broader political issues, such as voting and the government, and divisive issues for a number of denominations like homosexuality.

[Figure 7 about here]

Mentions of political terms also appear to be time sensitive. As figure 7 shows, several political words are more frequently used during the period leading up to the 2016 presidential

election. “Clinton,” “Trump,” “election,” “politics,” “president,” and “vote” all were more frequently used by men and women in 2016, and some terms remained salient on into 2017. To the eye, there appear to be gender differences in how frequently pastors mention Trump and Clinton in their sermons. Clinton was mentioned by both men and women in 2016, but most frequently in sermons by women. However, following the 2016 election, Clinton was mentioned only in sermons by men (but with less frequency). Trump was mentioned by both men and women as well in 2016, but Trump was mentioned with greatest frequency by women in late 2017. It seems only natural that Trump would remain a salient topic for both men and women since he is the current US President; however, it is interesting that men, in particular, maintained some interest in Clinton well into 2017 while women, particularly most recently, have been especially vocal about Trump in 2017.

It further is important to note that while both men and women increasingly discussed the presidential election in the period leading up to the latter part of 2016, the most frequent mentions of terms related to the election were made by the women pastors in our dataset. This suggests, contrary to what might be expected given past research on gendered communication showing timidity in women’s speech, women in our sample engage in discussion about politics as frequently as men, and sometimes even more frequently than men. Perhaps it is through more frequent use of qualifying language, greater use of positive sentiment, anticipation, and joy, and by the avoidance of conveying disgust and fear, that women can more readily discuss political issues than men. However, denominational differences are an important confounding variable not controlled for here. Future research, therefore, should consider whether women might not also serve in congregations that are more receptive to political engagement.

Discussion

While the communication literature has done a tremendous amount of work discussing how men and women communicate, their word choices, and the sentiment of their language that analytic

lens has never been turned toward the medium of the church sermon. The sermon exists as one of the few instances in modern life when a speaker has the (somewhat) undivided attention of a large number of people for a significant period of time. However, while the sermon contains a great amount of potential for a member of the clergy, it is tempered with a tremendous degree of peril, as well. Understanding how women and men approach the precarious problem of how to maintain good relationships with their congregants while also exhorting them to change their beliefs and behavior can be a homiletical tightrope. We find a tremendous amount of evidence here that men and women walk this tightrope differently.

Our results provide some preliminary confirmation of a number of prior findings, while also providing counterfactual evidence in some cases. For instance, we note here that women use first person pronouns at a greater frequency than their male counterparts however those differences are not especially large. In addition, if one takes a more careful look at those first-person pronouns, the ones that are predominantly used by women are the more inclusive words such as “our” or “we”, while the more singular words such as “me” and “I” are used at the same frequency by both genders. In this way, we see that women use these first-person pronouns in a way to include other people in their message, whether it be the local church or the local community. This could be indicative of a different worldview being expressing through the sermon. If the audience picks up on these subtle differences, however, we are not able to ascertain at this time.

In the area of tentative speech, the results buttress the previous findings by communication scholars: women use tentative speech at a greater frequency than males do. The most obvious interpretation of this is the one that prior literature provides, that women’s communication styles evince lower levels of certainty than their male counterparts. That same interpretation could be explanatory here, however with a theological twist. For example, we know that there are very few evangelical female pastors in the United States as most evangelical churches strictly prohibit women

from gaining roles in leadership (Ammerman 1980). At the same time, the general consensus among scholars of religion is that biblical literalism is a hallmark of evangelical Christianity (Hackett and Lindsay 2008). On the other hand, mainline denominations, which are also more open to female pastors also teach an approach to the Bible that is less sure of its meaning and interpretation (Roof and McKinney 1987). As such, this reluctance to declare what the Bible says in direct and certain terms might be more prevalent among female pastors because this is what many of them were taught in divinity school.

There may be echoes of this mainline/evangelical divide in the sentiment results, as well. Our analysis indicates that female speakers, on average, use words that are more positive and more joyous compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, male speakers are more likely to use fear as a sentiment in their sermons. This could be rooted in the communication literature regarding how women are perceived when they express negative sentiment, especially anger. However, the fire and brimstone messages delivered from pulpits are by and large the product of an evangelical theology that places a great emphasis on converting souls for Christ, no matter what tactic must be employed. Obviously, the relationship between gender and religious tradition is a multi-dimensional one.

This speaks to a larger issue that arises when comparing the theological or political outlook of male clergy and female clergy. While it is relatively easy to find mainline clergy of both genders, it is not possible to do the same for those from an evangelical background. As such, this data collected may be more about the differences in evangelical and mainline homiletical styles than women vs. men, specifically. Take, for instance, the difference in word counts. As the previous literature indicates, women are more verbose than their male counterparts in a variety of situations yet here women deliver sermons that are 600 words less on average. As we have noted, this could be more of a function of differences in worship styles among mainline and evangelical religious traditions than

any sort of gendered difference. The most appropriate way to explore this hypothesis would be to collect sermons from all male speakers (to control for gender) from both mainline and evangelical churches. However, this task is made exceedingly difficult by the fact that it can be somewhat difficult, if not impossible, to identify a church's religious tradition from information available online.

This mainline vs. evangelical distinction could also play a role in the political speech of clergy, however if religious tradition drives up a certain type of word choice is not easily ascertained. For example, women are much more likely to use terms like "government" and "vote," two words that are politically neutral. On the other hand, two other politically neutral words, "president" and "America" are used equally by both genders. The reason for this difference is not easily ascertained. Some other differences may be more clearly explicated, though. In general, women were more likely to use terms referring to same sex attraction like "gay" or "LGBT," which could be a product of the mainline tradition which has been much more amenable to LGBT rights than their evangelical counterparts (Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006). On the other hand, women in our sample steered completely clear of abortion, while men discussed the topic somewhat infrequently. Obviously, these results paint a nuanced picture of how gender, religious tradition, and congregational context lead pastors to tailor their messages in specific ways.

What this research may speak to is a larger concern that is likely understudied by scholars of religion: how and why individuals chose to become ministers in the first place. While there has been a tremendous amount of work on how clergy behave once they are leading the congregation (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974; Olson 2000; Paul A. Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005), there has been a paucity of work that describes why individuals pick the religious tradition that they would like to lead. Obviously, a great deal of this would be tied up in the tradition an individual was raised in, but how do women who were raised Southern Baptist find their calling

to ministry and also find a new religious tradition to immerse themselves in? These questions are of great consequence to clergy generally, and women in ministry specifically. It is our hope that this research becomes the first of many to understand how those theological and political issues surface in the pulpit.

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Table 1: Summary Statistics

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Min.	Max.
Sermons	885	--	--	--	--	--
Pastors	118	--	--	--	--	--
Sermons/Pastor	--	7.5	5	11.45	1	78
Male	288	--	--	--	--	--
Female	597	--	--	--	--	--
Sermons/Male	--	7.02	5	10.67	1	78
Sermons/Female	--	8.47	4.5	13.37	1	70
Total Unique Words	38,838					
Date	--	2016/09/10	2016/12/04	--	1997/02/27	2017/11/28

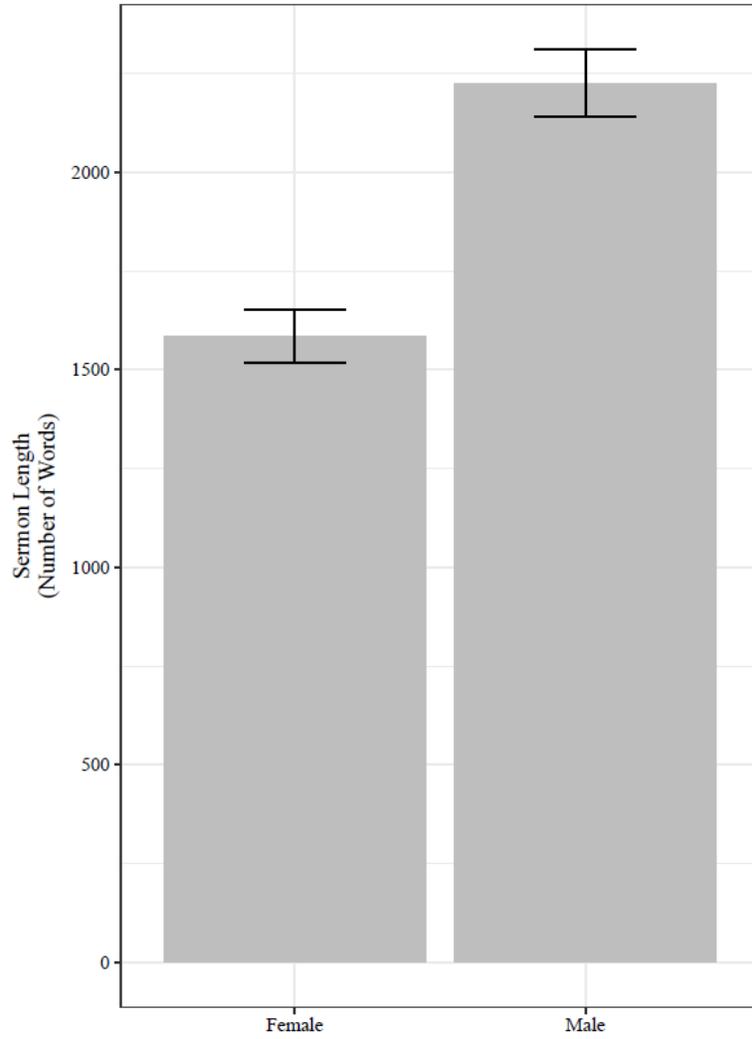


Figure 1: Comparison of Mean Sermon Length

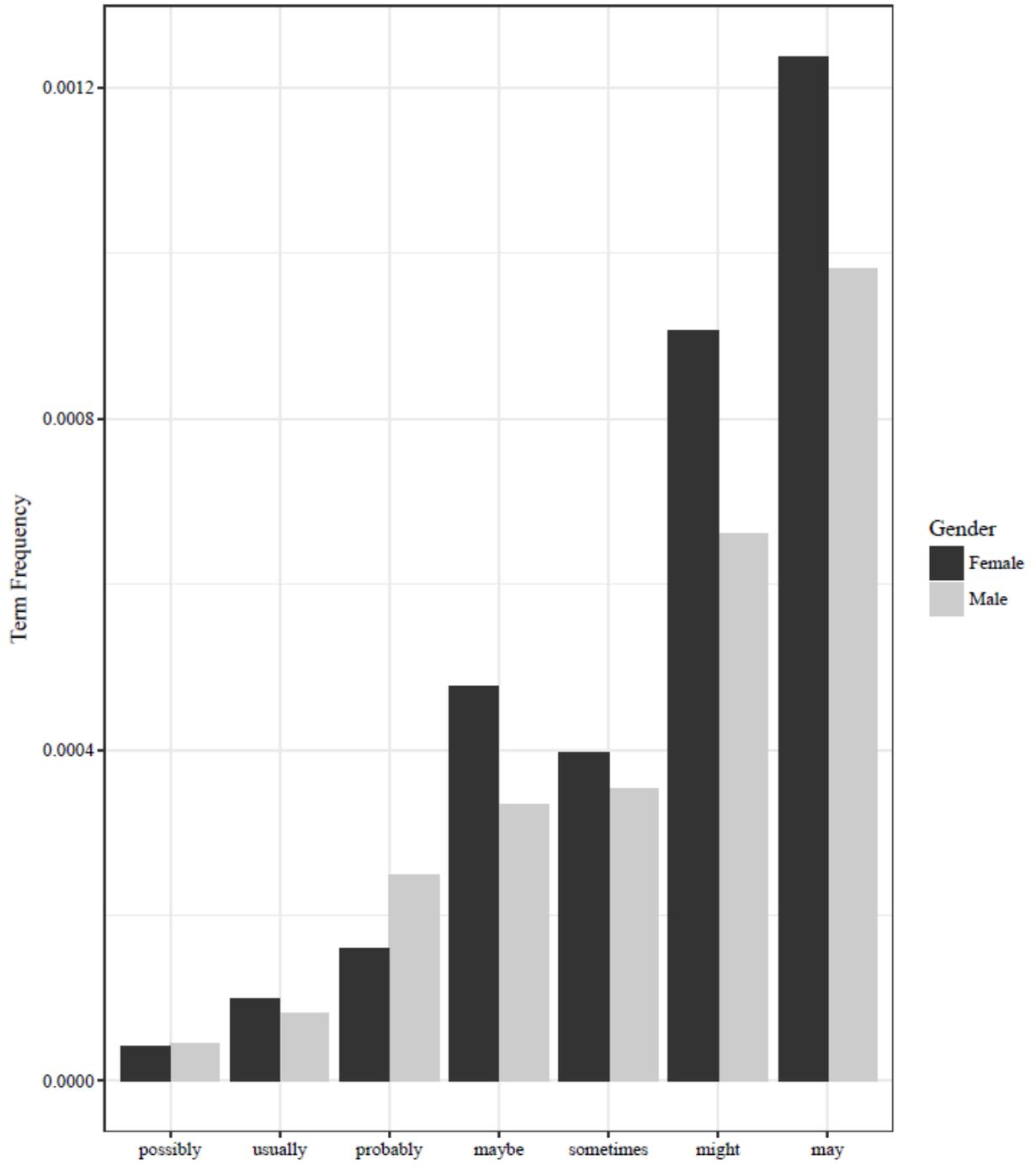


Figure 2: Frequency of Tentative Speech

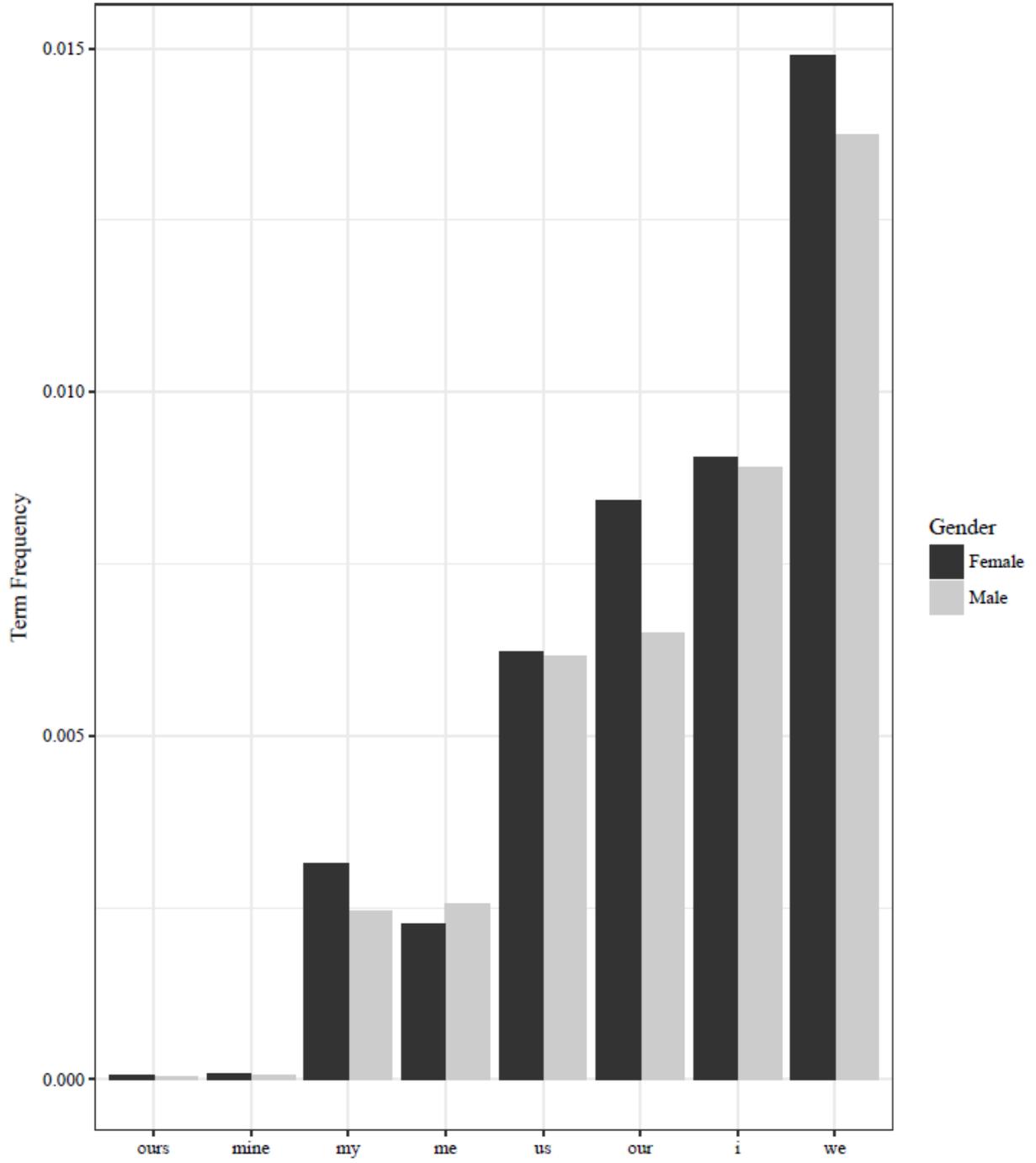


Figure 3: Frequency of First Person Pronoun Usage

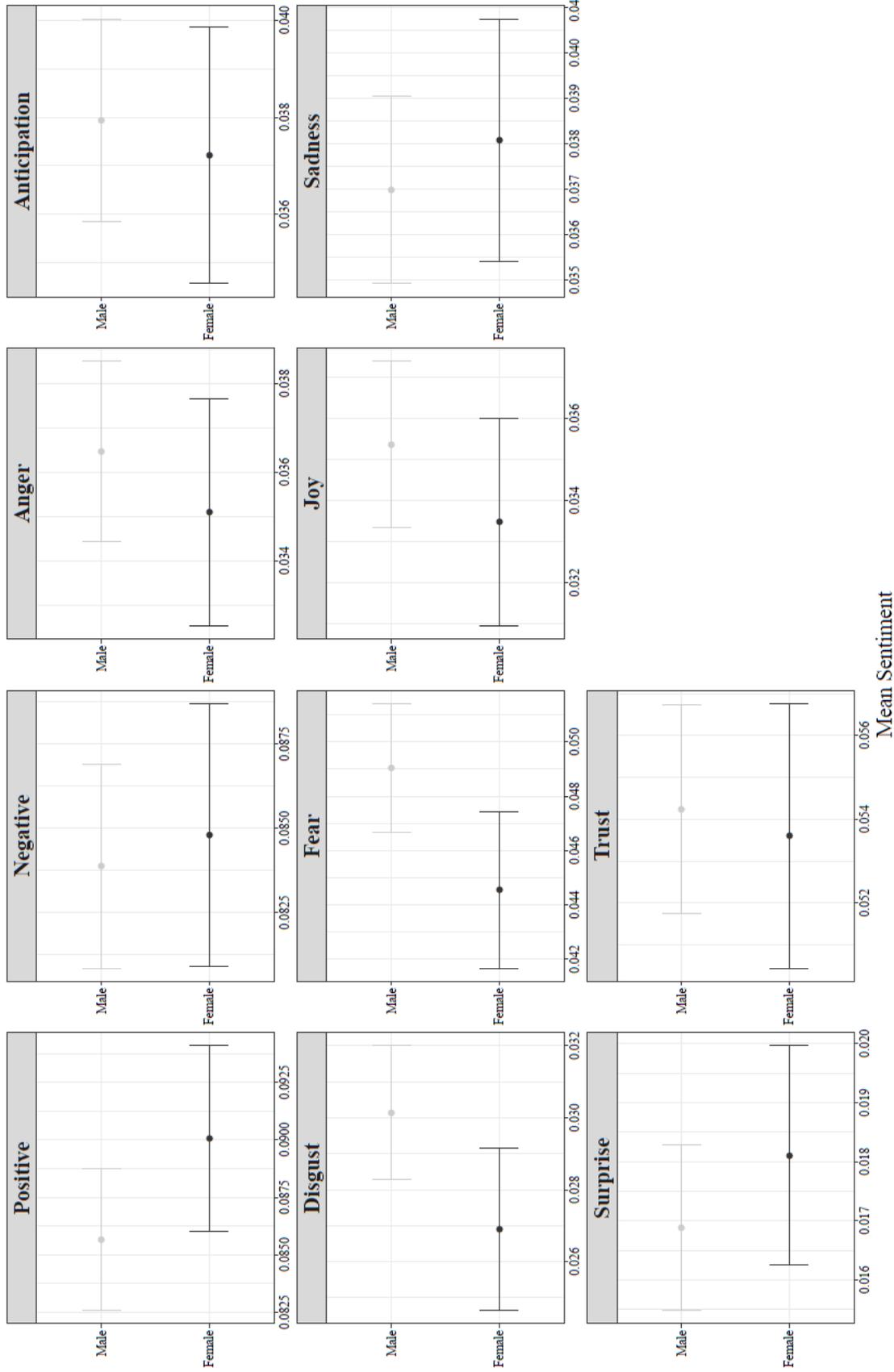


Figure 4: Differences in Sentiment

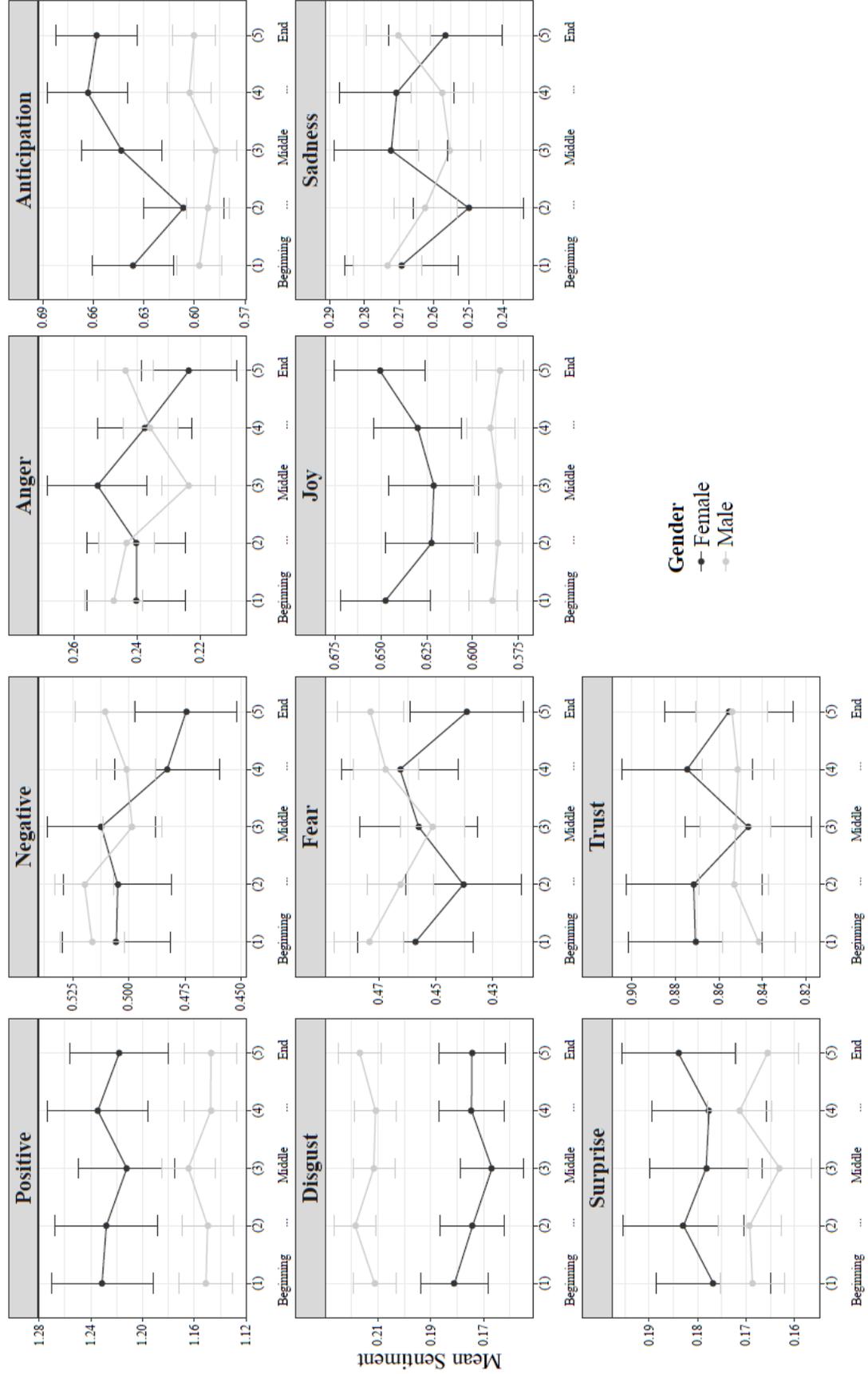


Figure 5: Differences in Sentiment over Sermon Arc

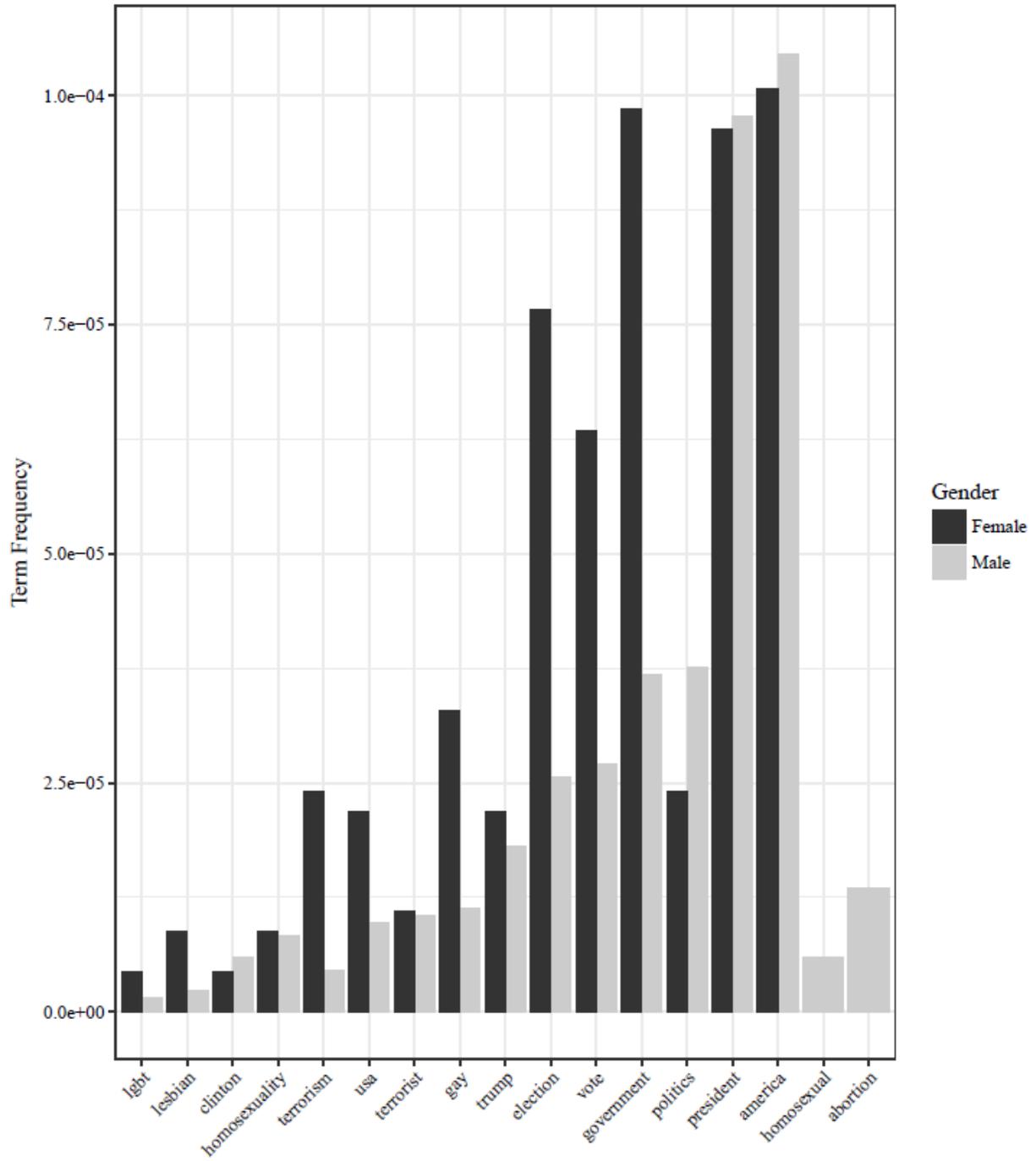


Figure 6: Frequency of Political Speech

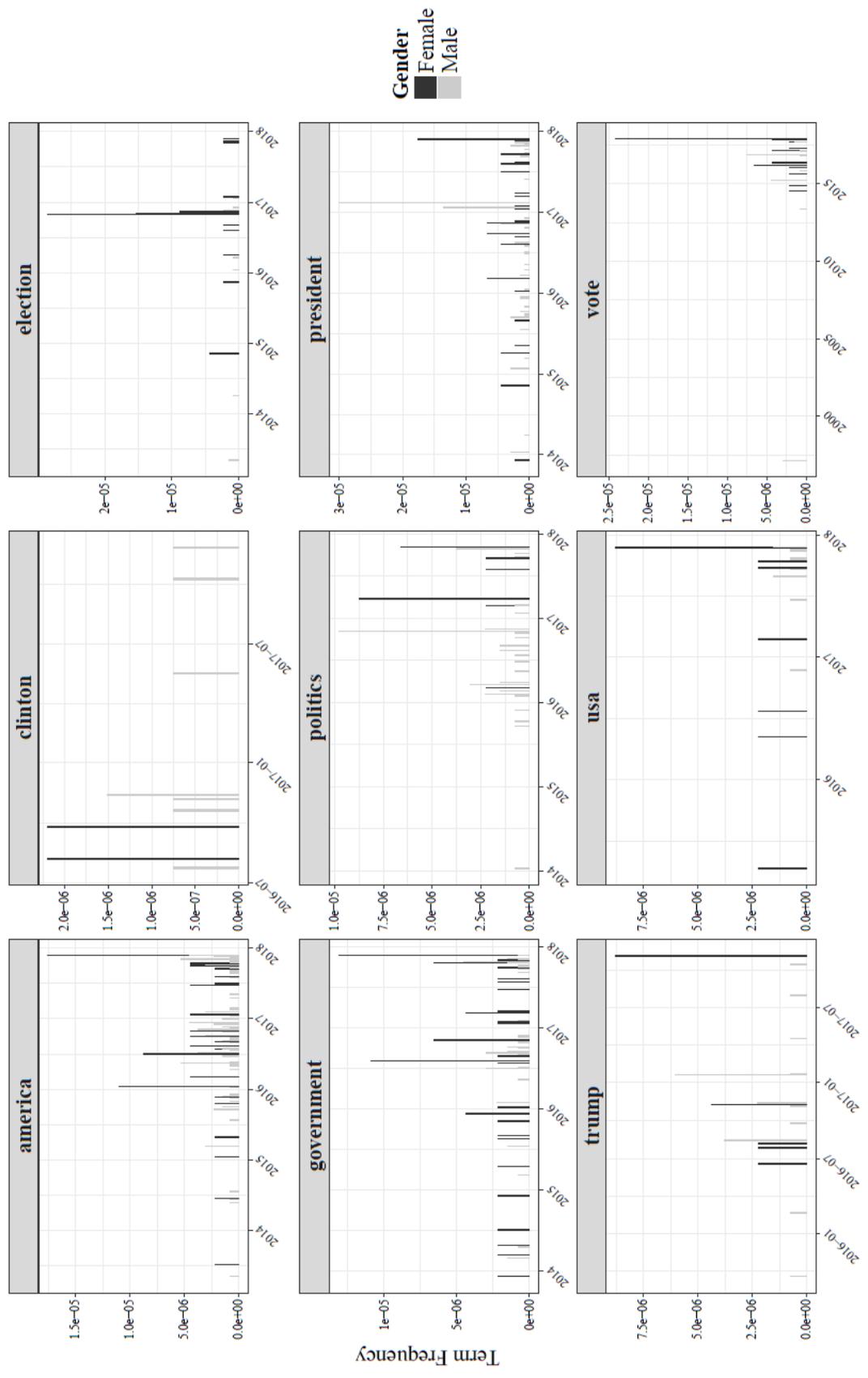


Figure 7: Frequency of Political Speech over Time

