

# Holiday decisions- Gender identity in interaction

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## Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

### Background and keywords:

Identity and self-concepts have an enormous influence in decision-making processes. Some individuals show a natural tendency for leadership, making important decisions easily, while others shy away from it. Traditionally, making decisions has been in the male domain and women have found difficulties in taking decisions in both public and private spheres. This may lead to negative consequences for women both at work and home. Team work and leadership with equal opportunities for men and women are important values in today's society. For these reasons it is essential to foster the skills needed to be a positive member of a community, regardless of sex.

Keywords: Gender identity, community, team work, decision making, class discussions.

### Similar topics:

See key words

### Materials:

- Computers with internet access
- A sheet of paper and pen
- Magazines and travel brochures to cut out

### Duration:

3 one-hour class sessions

### Number of participants:

- Five or more
- The ideal size for a group would be 20-25 students divided in groups of 5.

### Age:

10 till 11 year old students

### Aims:

To understand the factors involved in making decisions. To learn the skills needed to be a positive member of a community. To be able to hold class discussions.

### (Short) Explanation:

By planning holidays on an island, students have to agree on decisions as a group in order to work as a community. Sharing their individual thinking, they learn about their identities and the importance of each individual in team work.

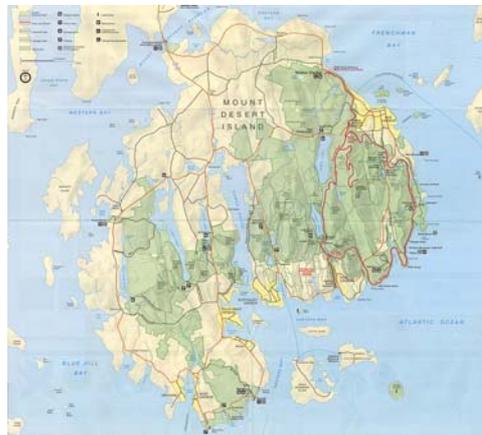
### Guidance for the game or exercise:

Students have to plan a holiday on an island of their choice in groups of five. They are encouraged to focus on skills including ranking priorities, selecting a leader and establishing rules. The activity is designed to teach students the skills needed to be a positive member of a community, and to help them understand the importance of every individual in team work and their role in effective decision making.

The group is given the scenario of planning holidays on an island of their choice. They are encouraged to focus on skills including ranking priorities, selecting a leader and establishing rules.

The activity is designed to teach students the skills needed to be a positive member of a community, and to help them understand the importance of effective decision making.

1. In groups of five, choose an island for a week holiday. You can use maps and internet (google maps) to find its location



2. How would you travel to this island? Each member of the team can give their opinion verbally or write it down.
3. Once you have agreed on the itinerary, find the best airport and calculate the price for the journey from your house. (You can use [www.rumbo.com](http://www.rumbo.com) or any site for ticket sales on the net.)
4. What else do you have to find now? Write a list of essential things you have to plan for the holidays in advance.
5. What would you need to take to your destination? Classify the things you need into one of these groups and add other groups if necessary:
  - Clothes
  - Toiletries
  - Leisure
6. Once you have planned your holiday, try to persuade another team to go with you. What reasons would you give to persuade them? Discuss as a group and write a list.
7. Make a brochure with pictures from magazines and travel brochures.

8. At this stage, choosing a leader may facilitate discussions for persuasion. Choose a leader and give reasons why you chose him. What are their qualities that make them good leaders?
9. Help your leader to plan a short presentation on your holiday plan.
10. Group leaders make their presentations and students vote the best of each plan.

### **Reflection:**

Making decisions and holding class discussions on them reveal a lot of the individual's identity and helps to foster the skills needed to be a participative member of a community, regardless of sex. As taking decisions has been in the male domain, it will be essential to train girls and students together in team work and leadership with equal opportunities for all.

Questions for the reflection could be:

- What are your experiences with different talks?
- How do you judge your parents/ brothers/ sisters/ friends' styles?
- Have you recently experienced frustration or disappointment from other's behaviour? Could you recall the situation and explain briefly what happened?

### **Variations (Continuation):**

The group is given the scenario of being stranded on a desert island. Desert islands are commonly featured in literature and popular culture, as a place where individuals or small groups of people find themselves cut off from civilization. The theme of being stranded on a desert island has inspired novels, films, radio and reality shows among others. It is linked to topics that reveal a lot of the individual's identity such as decisions on the items they would take with them to a deserted island or the reasons why they would voluntarily stay behind on a deserted island to evade the world.

Alternatively, the group can plan a day out that fits in the class schedule.

## **Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information**

Identity and self-concepts have an enormous influence in decision-making processes. When people talk, they communicate information but also images of themselves, as sociologist Erving Goffman has illustrated in his work (see, for instance, Goffman, 1959). Moreover, the way people talk results in judgements about personality. Tannen, (1984: 9) elaborates this idea, long ago expressed by Sapir, (1958: 542). Another important issue raised by Sapir, is that "it is necessary to know what is "unmarked", that is, what is conventionalized within a community, in order to know what is special meaning an individual may be intentionally or unintentionally communicating by diverging from convention", (Tannen, 1984: 9). The way people talk differs not only from person to person but also from group to group, as Gumperz (1982a & b) has illustrated. Differences lie in features such as:

- pausing
- turn & overlap management (when to start/stop talking; talk at the same time than others; interrupt)
- rate (speed)
- tone of voice
- indirectness
- preference for particular lexical or syntactic forms
- preference for particular politeness strategies

These are some of the *conversational style features* that we can observe in people around (including our students and ourselves).

Gender, ethnicity, class, regional background and individual habits, are some of the factors that account for conversational style differences. Regarding gender differences, Tannen found that, due to differences in the education of women and men, they show different conversational styles. *Conversational styles* are “ways of speaking”, (Tannen, 1984: 8). Tannen uses *style* including the term *register* (Hymes, 1974: a,b), accounting for what is often thought of as *formal vs. informal* speech, but also rules of alternation, i.e. choices resulting in the mix of devices that speakers use in different contexts. Therefore, conversational styles could be defined as “ways of speaking characterized by the speakers’ choices of linguistic and paralinguistic devices used in different contexts and featuring different degrees of formality”. For instance, women and men show different conversational styles in their orientation to the expression of troubles and, consequently, feel frustrated by the other’s way of responding to their trouble telling. Moreover, they are frequently further hurt by the other’s frustration. When facing a problem, men acquire a tendency to offer solutions to problems (and women resent this tendency) while women report problems asking for understanding instead of solutions (and men resent that women do not take action to solve their problems). Tannen (2001: 51-53) reports several cases such as the following:

One man reported disappointment when his girlfriend talked about problems at work but refused taking his advice.

Another man says he always changes subject when his girlfriend tells problems: “What is the point in talking about that anymore?” “You can’t do anything about it”.

Yet another man commented that women seem to wallow in their problems, wanting to talk about them forever, whereas he and other men want to get them out and be done with them, either by finding a solution or by laughing them off.

Once different conversational styles are identified, it is essential to explore the reasons underlying speakers’ choice of style. According to Lakoff (1973) there are two basic and contradictory human needs in conversation accounting for speakers’ choice of style:

1. to be connected to other people (responding to danger of isolation)
2. to be independent (responding to danger of being engulfed by others)

Lakoff (1973) observes that speakers regularly refrain from saying what they mean in service of the higher goal of politeness, and devises a system in an attempt to explain the logic underlying specific linguistic choices (i.e. indirectness, preference for particular lexical or syntactic forms). The system includes 3 strategies oriented to maintain the basic human needs in conversation.

1. Don’t impose (Distance)
2. Give options (Deference)
3. Be friendly (Camaraderie)

In choosing the form of an utterance, speakers observe one or another of these rules with a particular *stylistic effect* (indicated by the terms in brackets). That is preference for honouring one or another of these politeness principles results in a communicative strategy that makes up style.

## Examples:

- Don't impose (Distance)  
Speaker A: Would you like something to drink?  
Speaker B: Thanks, that would be nice

In B, we can see indirect expression of preferences, so as not to impose one's will on others. However this kind of response is considered friendly among people who expect this strategy.

- Give options (Deference)  
Speaker A: Would you like something to drink?  
Speaker B: Whatever you are having/ Don't go to any trouble

In B, the option of decision is given to the other. These kinds of responses are considered friendly among people who expect this strategy.

- Be friendly (Camaraderie)  
Speaker A: I'm so thirsty, dude! Do you have any juice?

The speaker assumes the addressee will be pleased with the closeness of the relationship.

Brown and Levinson (1978), building on Lakoff's work on *politeness* and Goffman's (1967) notion of *face*, identify two aspects of politeness as *negative* and *positive face*. Their notion of negative face corresponds to Lakoff's defensive function of the distance strategy and the principle "don't impose":

*Negative face* is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction –i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition".

*Positive face* corresponds to deference and camaraderie: "the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of", Brown and Levinson (1987: 61).

When speakers use a fast rate of speaking, with almost no pausing between turns, and with some overlap or even completion of other's turn, together with camaraderie, the style is characterized as high involvement style. On the contrary, speakers who use longer pauses between turns, do not overlap, and avoid interruption or completion of other's turn, use a "high considerateness style" Yule (1996: 76).

Conversational style, then, results from the need to serve basic human needs in interaction, as Tannen (1991: 19) points out. Each person's decisions about which strategy to apply and to what extent in a given situation results in her/his characteristic *style*. The impression made by the choice of strategy will depend upon the extent to which speakers share the expectation that it is appropriate to employ a particular strategy in a particular situation. For instance, in 3 above, ("I'm so thirsty, dude! Do you have any juice?") the speaker's utterance may give the impression that s/he is pushy.

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