

International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: Communication Styles Between Genders

Gender Roles and Communication

According to Dictionary.com, gender is defined as the state of being male or female, typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. In other words, gender has to do with how we behave and communicate as male and female. This discussion will focus on communication.

Deborah Tannen coined the term 'genderlect' to describe the way men and women talk with each other. It seems genders speak different dialects, thus the word, "genderlect." In her book, *You Just Don't Understand*, she points out differences in the way men and women talk. Her goal is to help men and women understand each other better. The following represents her research and conclusions.

Connection and Status

Boys are concerned about their status with one another. This comes out in their conversations with young boys where one boy says, "I can hit the ball high." The next boy says, "I can hit the ball up to the sky." Another boy says, "I can hit the ball up to heaven." Finally, a boy brags, "I can hit the ball up to God." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8yhG1ft8Q8&t=4s>

As adults, men, according to Tannen, impress people with their status by talking about their jobs or achievements, often in public settings.

Girls are more interested in connecting with one another rather than talking about their status. They will look for ways to connect with one another over shared experiences or interests. They will not challenge each other to prove to be better or greater. Their communication tends to be in more private settings.

Do you think that men in general, talk more about their jobs or status than women? Give some examples.

Do you think that women in general, try to build bridges with each other rather than challenge each other? Give some examples.

In general, when men in your country get together, what do they like to talk about?

In general, when women in your country get together, what do they like to talk about?

Direct and Indirect

The theory of genderlect suggests that men are more direct in their communication styles and women are more indirect. For example, if a couple is out the woman might say, "Oh look, there is the new ice-cream store." She might be really saying, "Let's stop for an ice-cream." However, the man will not understand the indirect reference. If he wanted an ice-cream, he would just stop and get one.

Do you think that men are direct and women tend to be indirect in their communication?

Give an example.

In your country, are men more direct than women about communicating what they want or need? Give an example.

Report and Rapport

According to Tannen, in conversation, women tend to be more interested in sharing emotions and feelings, relating stories and listening than men tend to be. Women are interested in building relationships. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more assertive to win control of the conversation. They are interested in getting things done. In a research video, children were brought into a room where they were instructed to talk to each other, girls with girls and boys with boys. Beginning with children of about 5 years old and continuing through about 14 years of age, boys, and girls related to each other in a very distinct style. The girls faced each other, leaned into each other, and talked directly to each other. The boys sat facing outward, not toward each other. They spoke much less and rarely looked at each other.

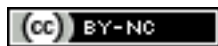
Have you seen children interact this way with each other?

Do you think that men are mainly more task-oriented than women?

Do you think that women are mainly more interested in developing relationships than men?

How can knowing communication styles help men and women communicate better?

Do you have advice for men and women to become better at communicating with each other?



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