

Studies classes in both arts and science

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



Studies on language and gender have tried to examine people's real experiences of how men and women communicate, both in single-sex and mixed-sex groups, in order to investigate the stereotypes we have: the trivia, chatting, nagging woman and the strong, silent, long suffering man. Men and women communicate and listen in different ways. In this essay I will be discussing how men and women communicate through language. Do females talk more than males? Do men and women follow different rules when they have a conversation, are women misrepresented through language? Contrary to the stereotypes of the female as the "overtalkative" sex who "gossips" and "talks a lot" (as reported by Kramer (1977) who surveyed attitudes in the USA), many studies have been carried out in Britain and the USA which show that, in a variety of contexts, it is men who talk more. Many studies carried out in educational contexts have shown that boys speak more than girls. For example, Sadker and Sadker (1985) found that in over a hundred classes in both arts and science subjects, boys have talked on average 3 times more than girls. In *You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation* (1991), Deborah Tannen argues that men are trained to become familiar with talking in public situations, learning how to hold center stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking and providing information. Women, on the other hand, are more comfortable with private speaking: for them, the language of conversation is more about establishing connections and negotiating relationships.

Males therefore might think that females talk a lot more because they hear them talking in situations where men would not such as on the telephone or in social situations with friends. Contemporary research on language and

gender does not suggest that male talk is “normal” while female talk is “deviant”, nor does it suggest that there is anything intrinsically powerful or powerless about male and female talk. What it does show is that men and women adopt different conversation styles because they are trained to understand and use spoken discourse differently as part of being socialized for different roles in society. This approach sees male and female groups as different cultures which, when brought together in mixed-sex situations, can clash and cause misunderstandings because the participants are applying different rules.

1. Information and consultation: Tannen suggests that many male-female conversations result in difficulty because men think they are simply exchanging information, while women think they are negotiating. For example a couple are driving home: Sue: Would you like to stop for a drink? John: No They do not stop, but when they get home they have an argument: Sue says John never takes her feelings into consideration, while John says he never knows what Sue really wants because she doesn't tell him –instead, she expects him to guess.

Tannen suggests that while John thought he was just being asked for information about his needs, Sue thought her question would open a conversational sequence through which they would reach a negotiated decision about whether to stop or not. 2. Topic raising, interrupting and reinforcing: Studies have shown that women do more work in conversation than men to raise topics and to take others to take them up;

also that women maintain others contributions by using reinforcers (back-channels like “ yeah, mm..., aha...”) more than men do.

At the same time, men appear to interrupt women more than the other way around. Tannen suggests that because women are trained to look for connections in their interactions, they make effort to get others to talk and to equalize speakers' turns, even downplaying their own subject knowledge in the process. In contrast because men are trained to look for power in their interactions, they compete to control topics – interrupting if necessary – and they work to hold their turn against others' interruptions, even when their own subject knowledge is poor.

When these different discourse rules are applied together, women's contributions are likely to be heard less than men's because men will be trying to take the floor and women will be encouraging them to do it. Tannen argues that neither side is deliberately dominating or giving way – each is simply what it has been trained to do within its own gender group. 3.

Reporting and Rapporting: According to Tannen, one of the major complaints women have about men as speakers is that they don't give enough information when they are telling incidents – they leave out all the exciting parts of any story, giving just the basic information. In contrast, men complain that women give too much information when they tell stories – they go on and on when they could really sum up the content of their discourse in one sentence. Tannen's explanation is that men and women think they are doing different things when they communicate information: Men concentrate on the information content alone (the message) because they

see the telling of incidents as reporting, while women pay more attention to the metamessage – telling experiences is a way to relate to the listener (rapporting). 4. Problem-solving and problem-sharing: Research has shown that men and women also respond differently in conversations when a problem is presented.

Because men are trained to be active and find solutions to problems, they adopt a problem solution approach when someone expresses personal difficulties. In contrast, women are encouraged to think of themselves as listeners. While listening is certainly not a passive activity, it does not necessarily involve making suggestions about how to change situations or take action. While talking about problems, women often take turns in comparing difficulties and in finding similarities between their respective situations. Example: Male Perspective: A man expresses a problem to his partner.

He expects problem solution, but receives, to his intense annoyance, problem sharing: Peter: I'm really tired. I didn't sleep well last night. Allison: I didn't sleep well either. Peter: why are you always trying to belittle me? Allison: I'm not! I'm just trying to tell you I understand how you feel!