

Why women and men talk different:

Deborah Tannen, a social psychologist, has studied how men and women talk to each other. Her findings are most revealing: Her stereotypes about men and women are uncomfortably close to the mark. She has found that women and men speak in different ways. When women talk they usually are looking for connection and agreement. Conversations then become a way to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation. Women are more concerned with friendship than of power and accomplishment.

Men, on the other hand, engage in the world as individuals in a social order in which they are either one-up or one-down. When talking, men try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to push them around. Conversations become contests.

Intimacy, therefore, is key in the world of connection for women. Intimacy says we are the connected and the same. Independence is key in the world of status for men. Status says we are separate and different.

A man will be fearful of putting himself in a situation where he is vulnerable to being placed in lower-status. A woman will, however, be comfortable in a similar situation because status is not at stake - e.g. counselling. Therefore, a man dreads the thought of being ordered around by his wife in public. A woman will calmly respond to man's request with no such fear.

Because of this, women are often labelled 'nags' by men. While women are inclined to do what is asked of them, they will, in dealing with their male partners, repeat a request when it does not get a response. This is because she is convinced that her husband would do what she asked if only he understood that she *really* wants him to do it. So she keeps asking!

Men, however, are inclined to resist the slightest hint that anyone, especially a woman, is telling them what to do. A man who wants to avoid feeling that he is following orders may instinctively wait before doing what she asked, in order to imagine he is doing it of his own free will. Nagging is the result because each time she repeats the request; he again puts off fulfilling it.

The message behind giving and receiving help speak of both status and connection: For a woman to give help is an effort at connection - it can be experienced by the man as a statement of status. Imagine John's reaction if Mary, his wife, gets the man-next-door to repair gate in order to help John, who can't get around to it!

Men's silence at home is a disappointment to women. Girls are socialized into using talk as the glue that holds relationships together. For women, home is a place where they hope to be free to talk, and where they feel the greatest need to talk, with their partners. They can talk without being judged. He says, "She does not listen to me". Yet though women say their best friend is their girlfriend, most men say it is their wives. When a man says "No news" he means no personal news. Men are socialized as boys into believing that relationships are held together by activities - by doing. You talk in order to impress or to negotiate status. For men, the comfort of home means being free from having to prove oneself and impress others through verbal display.

Many men accuse their partners of not being logical - because they base their arguments on personal experience - the neighbours. His logic is a more public endeavour - more like gathering information, conducting a survey, devising arguments. However, she makes sense of the world as a more private endeavour - observing and integrating her personal experience.

Status and connection are achieved through talking styles. By understanding gender differences, one can have a better appreciation of what is happening and not blame men for pulling rank or women for failing to stand up for themselves. Being admitted as an equal is not itself an assurance of equal opportunity in conversations. In conversations the dance between his wanting status and her wanting connection is

always present. At times women seem to not speak up for themselves - men seem to not speak at all.