4-16-2021

Lost in Translation: The Communication Differences of Men and Women in Dating and Marriage Relationships

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Recommended Citation

SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

"Lost in Translation: The Communication Differences of Men and Women in

Dating and Marriage Relationships"

written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

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April 16, 2021

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I.   Introduction

Communication between men and women may sometimes lead to confusion, frustration, misunderstanding, disagreement, or doubt. This is not because of the incompetency of one gender compared to the other, but in fact has much to do with the way in which males and females generally communicate and the reasons for why they do so. Communication styles develop beginning in infancy and are influenced by the interactions between the child and their parents and peers. Parents are highly instrumental to early childhood development; through both verbal and nonverbal communication with their children, they shape norms, values, and beliefs that are highly influential to one's life as an adult. Additionally, relationships with peers also serve as learning environments for communication patterns that extend into adulthood. This thesis will analyze the differences in how men and women communicate, how these differences affect the inner workings of dating and marriage relationships and will examine some of the factors that influence these differences through the lifelong process of socialization.

In interpersonal relationships, specifically marriage and dating relationships, men and women utilize different styles of communication in order to establish intimacy within the relationship. Deborah Tannen, Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University and an internationally recognized scholar, has intently studied communication styles of men and women, having written several books and academic publications. In her book, *You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation,* Tannen explains the major distinction between the communication worlds of men and women. Men, who primarily subscribe to "report talk," see facts and directness as the most effective way to sustain interpersonal relationships while women primarily utilize "rapport talk" to share feelings and emotions in order to develop intimacy. Misunderstanding and miscommunication may sometimes occur because of these

different communication styles, leading to frustration between a couple as each perceives differently the appropriate way to communicate with one another.

Men and women utilize different communication styles because their often-gendered upbringing and agents of socialization encourage their language to develop discordantly; it is almost as if they are from two different worlds. Men naturally view communication as a means in which to maintain and assert an upper hand or avoid being put down. Relationships are emphasized as hierarchical in nature; therefore, communication is used as a tool to retain an advantage during interactions. This male "world" is characterized by power and independence. Women live in a different "world" in which communication is a means for connection and relationship building. By establishing a network of connections, women utilize communication in order to develop and maintain support and closeness as well as cultivate friendships. This "world" is characterized by community rather than hierarchy (Tannen 25).

Before progressing further into this thesis, it is important to note that the views expressed adopt the idea of a gender binary, meaning that gender is classified into two distinct genders, male and female. The major studies and works cited in this thesis have been conducted on cisgender individuals, those who identify with the gender assigned them at birth. With respect to the evolving society and the changing of social norms and beliefs as it relates to sex and gender, this thesis addresses only the traditional view of gender (the gender binary) and does not address gender identities such as transgender, agender, bigender, omnigender, polygender, genderfluid, and nonbinary. Additionally, this thesis is limited to the study of heterosexual dating and marriage relationships and, therefore, does not address the interpersonal relationships of lesbian or gay couples. Due to limitation of materials, the resources studied utilize a sociological frame rather than a biological frame, therefore this thesis only addresses communication style

differences affected by socialization rather than biological differences between males and females, such as influence from hormones on behavior and communication. Thirdly, in regard to cultural norms, this thesis addresses the communication style differences in the English language, specific to culture within the United States of America. This thesis does not address cross-cultural communication. Lastly, it is imperative to note that the arguments within this thesis are not definitive, meaning that women and men do not only communicate in one particular manner. As diverse as modern society is, men and women may subscribe to multiple communication styles, changing their styles depending on the audience, location, context, and other factors. This thesis addresses common patterns that men and women commonly subscribe to but does not delineate the only way in which men and women may communicate.

II.   Interpersonal Relationships

A. Intimacy and Independence

1. Communication Motivations

The driving factor for interpersonal relationships, specifically dating and marriage relationships, is the establishment of intimacy between partners. Men and women typically approach the establishment of intimacy in different ways, but both address the formation of intimacy through verbal and nonverbal communication. Tannen describes two distinct motivations for communication, intimacy and independence, arguing that women focus primarily on intimacy as the motivation behind communication while men view independence as the motivation behind communication. However, it is important to note that just because men and women typically subscribe to these motivations, it is not correct to state that women may not be concerned about status or independence, and it is not accurate to contend that men may not be concerned about connection or intimacy. Men and women are both affected by these internal

factors, as well as countless other external factors that play a role in daily communication. Tannen denotes intimacy and independence as the two driving forces behind communication motivations with women focusing on the former and men on the latter.

Hence, the argument is that men are typically motivated by their need for independence in terms of communication while women are motivated by their need for intimacy. Women prefer to display intimacy in conversation, especially in regard to communication within dating and marriage relationships. For example, a wife may tell a fellow female friend that she will have to consult with her husband before agreeing to plans for a future dinner outing. The motivation behind the communication with her husband is not that the wife seeks permission from her husband, but rather that the wife would like to discuss the matter with her husband since their lives intertwine with one another, and she feels that the husband deserves to know of her plans. Men, on the other hand, often may not consult with their wives before making plans with a friend. Doing so would show that the husband must first gain permission from the wife, which would be seen as a sign of weakness or inferiority by his male friends. By extension, the husband is concerned that he may be seen as lacking independence, similar to a child. So, to preserve their autonomy, men will reinforce a hierarchical communication pattern driven by independence rather than intimacy (Tannen 26-27).

Another motivation linked to independence is the establishment of status. Men, in social interactions, feel uncomfortable when having to operate from the inferior position. Tannen cites the example of a male and female both attempting to ask their bosses about the possibility of a promotion. The man worries, loses sleep, and frets having to ask his superior for a promotion, highlighting the hierarchical nature of the relationship. The woman, on the other hand, who is typically regarded as more insecure than her male counterpart, sees no issue in asking her

superior for a promotion. The hierarchy of the relationship is not as unsettling to the woman as it is to the man (Tannen 30).

Women, who are more inclined to view communication as a means for connection, are much more likely to accept offers of protection or offers of chivalry compared to men, who become uncomfortable because it puts the man in a position of submission rather than dominance. Because men are more apt to view communication in terms of status, they are not likely to accept seemingly polite offers. A helpful way to understand these differences is to think of men and women both looking through their respective lenses; men view communication through a lens of status while women view communication through a lens of connection.

2. Communication Framing

In addition to situations involving clear hierarchy between parties, men and women react differently in situations framed to imply dominance. Framing within communication is simplified as the phenomenon in which a metamessage is presented in conjunction with the message being sent. Interpreting the communication, fulfilled by the receiver within communication, is a driving factor that determines the meaning of the message. Tannen explains why the interpreter, and the gender of the interpreter, determines much of what the message will imply.

> Much—even most—meaning in conversation does not reside in the words spoken at all, but is filled in by the person listening. Each of us decides whether we think others are speaking in the spirit of differing status or symmetrical connection. The likelihood that individuals will tend to interpret someone else's words as one or the other depends more on the hearer's own focus, concerns, and habits than on the spirit in which the words were intended (Tannen 37).

Therefore, the way in which the communication is framed reveals why men and women may respond so differently in similar situations.

Tannen cites two examples that depict the difference between men and women's reaction to framed communication, or the different lenses in which men and women view communication. If a man were to drive along a road and notice a stopped car waiting to pull out, he may stop to yield the right-of-way to the waiting car. If the driver of the waiting car is a woman, she is likely to smile or wave to the driver, thanking him for the polite gesture, and drive down the road. If the driver of the waiting car is a man, he is likely to return a wave, signaling a "thanks, but no thanks" response to the male offering to let him pull in front. The waiting man looks through the lens of status, interpreting the act as the driver granting permission for him to pull out rather than offering a polite gesture. If the waiting man were to accept the driver's offer, this would place him in a position of submission to the driver. Even though the driver was offering a polite gesture, the waiting man understands the communication in terms of status, and he would rather wait for another opportunity to drive into traffic rather than accept the driver's gesture. The woman, who interprets communication in terms of connection, sees no issue in accepting the gesture or perceiving the communication in a negative way. The woman, viewing the gesture through the lens of connection, does not see the driver as offering her permission to proceed or placing her in a submissive position. Regardless of the male driver's actual intent when offering to let the cars pass in front of him, men and women view the situation differently through their respective lenses (Tannen 33-36).

The second example cited by Tannen involves a protective frame rather than a chivalrous or polite frame. In terms of protection, modern culture keeps a traditional view. Men protect women and women protect children. Tannen explains that these traditional views are why protective gestures that stray from deeply rooted traditional ideas cause discomfort to men. She states, "That's why many men resist women's efforts to reciprocate protectiveness—it can make

them feel that they are being framed as children. These underlying dynamics create sense out of what otherwise seem to be senseless arguments between women and men," (Tannen 35).

To explain one example of a "senseless argument" that may occur, Tannen describes a situation involving a couple riding in the car together. The woman was driving while the man sat in the passenger seat. When the woman noticed she needed to brake suddenly, she extended her right arm in front of the man. The gesture was instinctual – she remembers her father always extending the same gesture to her. The woman, using the connective lens, showed care and concern for the male passenger. Even though she knows her right arm would probably not be able to restrain the man had a collision occurred, she alerts the man that she is stopping suddenly and automatically provides a barrier, attempting to protect her passenger. The man riding in the passenger seat became very angry with the woman stating that she should have kept both hands on the wheel in order to retain control of the vehicle. The woman knew she would not lose control of the car when braking suddenly so the two could not see eye-to-eye on the issue.

Although the man explained his concerns in terms of safety, he was actually already uncomfortable since he was riding passively in the passenger seat instead of driving, interpreting the situation as a matter of status. Then, when the woman extended her arm across him, the man felt uncomfortable with this gesture of protection, feeling as if he is being protected like a woman would protect a child. The deeply rooted view is that women only protect children, not their male counterparts. Therefore, the man felt belittled and uncomfortable, rejecting the woman's gesture (Tannen 35-36).

Regarding these two examples, men and women view the situations through their respective lenses and respond in the way in which they feel they are being framed. In the first traffic example, the woman does not see herself as being in a submissive position. Instead of

viewing the gesture as if the man is granting her permission to pass, she receives the communication as a polite gesture and proceeds, unbothered by the hierarchical nature that could be implied. The man sees himself as being submissive to another, and so in order to preserve his independence and status, he rejects the offer and will proceed on his own terms. The protective example returns a similar outcome. Because the woman communicates the protective gesture, the man perceives the communication as being treated like a child and belittled, again rejecting the gesture because of the status it implies. The woman does not frame her communication in terms of status but rather in terms of connection, but the man feels he is being framed into an inferior position, resulting in his negative reaction to a considerate driver.

B. "Rapport-Talk" and "Report-Talk"

Moving from the motivations behind communication and the ways in which men and women may feel framed by communication, Tannen explains the practical ways in which the motivations are carried out, referring to the separate communication styles, or "languages," that men and women primarily subscribe to. To summarize the different languages that men and women speak, Tannen presents the idea of "report-talk" and "rapport-talk," typical of men and women, respectively. Describing the language that men primarily subscribe to, Tannen defines report-talk as "primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as story-telling, joking, or imparting information," (Tannen 77). Because young men practice this kind of talk beginning in childhood, they are much more comfortable speaking in large groups with people they do not know deeply, approaching communication in the manner of public speaking. However, the report style of talk can occur in settings that are not formal speeches to an audience. The use of the term *public*

speaking refers to conversations in which there is a greater status difference between the messenger and the receivers, meaning that there is less intimacy and less familiarity between the speaker and the audience (Tannen 89).

The language of women is one of rapport, which Tannen defines as "a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships. Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences," (Tannen 77). Women begin using this language as young girls, beginning their closest connections at home or in environments that feel like "home." Therefore, girls become most comfortable with one-on-one or small group communication, developing an approach of communication in the manner of private speaking (Tannen 77). This does not imply that women are not effective public speakers or that they become nervous when speaking to large groups. The argument is that women are much more comfortable communicating to a small group of people, typically people they know intimately, and would subscribe to private talk more than public speaking. Tannen explains this difference of setting stating that "The fewer the [number of] people, the more intimately you know them, and the more equal their status, the more it is like private speaking or rapport-talk," (Tannen 89).

To simplify the two different languages, Tannen states "The difference between public and private speaking, or report-talk and rapport-talk, can be understood in terms of status and connection," (Tannen 94). Understanding that status and connection influence men and women's conversational motivations helps explain differences in their conversational styles. It follows that women feel most comfortable among close friends that they trust and feel safe with, therefore subscribing to private, rapport-talk to build intimacy and connection. Men are more likely to turn to public, report-talk in order to establish credibility and status within the group, where the hierarchical nature of the interaction is deemed more important than the connection.

If men are more comfortable doing "public speaking" and women are more comfortable doing "private speaking," it is unclear why the stereotype is that women talk more than men. Tannen contends that one explanation for this thought is that men notice women speaking in situations where men typically do not, including at home, on the telephone, or in social situations with friends in which topics are discussed that men do not deem important. In private settings, Tannen summarizes the communication differences as "the wordy woman" and "the silent man."

To illustrate this idea, Tannen describes the typical American setting of a husband and wife at home after work. Both parties have come home from a long day and are tired. In this private setting, the woman asks her husband about his day. He replies without much elaboration. The woman then explains to him the details of her day, what she accomplished at work, what she ate for lunch, who she ran into and conversed with at the office, and the traffic she encountered on her way home. The wife becomes frustrated by the husband's silence. Normally a talkative person in a group setting, the man has nothing to say at home with his wife. The woman, who is more comfortable in the private setting, is using the communication as means to build intimacy through connection to the day's events. To tell her partner about her thoughts and feelings of the day supports the building of rapport within the relationship. When he does not respond, she perceives his behavior negatively, believing he may be hiding something, has lost interest in the relationship, or is pulling away emotionally. However, the man is not silent because he is uninterested in the relaying of details by his wife. The "silent man" is unresponsive because it is not the forum in which he feels the inclination to speak. The rapport-talk is not the language that the man deems necessary for establishing intimacy (Tannen 78-86).

In addition to rapport-talk, women commonly subscribe to a conversational style that can be summarized as gossip. Although the term carries a negative connotation, gossip among

women builds connection and intimacy, and it brings a positive aspect to the strengthening of relationships between women although the message within the act itself may be harmful to an outside party. During gossip, women most often discuss the details of other people's lives, and this is partly because women so often tell the details of their own lives to their friends, who then carry the information to others. Tannen relates adult gossip to communication between young girls, describing gossip as, "Telling what's happening in your life and the lives of those you talk to [which] is a grown-up version of telling secrets, the essence of girls' and women's friendships," (Tannen 97). Tannen argues that the telling of secrets is not only evidence of a friendship but serves to create one. Not only is the sharing of information a privilege among female friends, but it is seen as an obligation in that women are expected to share important stories and details with their close friends or they risk losing intimacy built within the friendship. Therefore, it becomes a problem within female relationships when there are no secrets or details to be shared. Without content to be discussed, the growth for intimacy through the process of gossip is stunted; thereby, damaging the relationship (Tannen 96-99).

Men also discuss details of their lives and others' lives with their friends, but not to the same degree that their partners do. If they have casual conversation with other male friends, they are more likely to discuss political power, institutional power, the stock market, advancement and decline, current business tactics, politics, or sports rather than personal relationships. Their topics focus on entities that place an emphasis on competition, status, and hierarchy, rather than details of the lives of people they know. If they do mention their wives and families or a personal situation, men are more likely to make a brief and vague comment rather than provide depth and detail (Tannen 101).

It is important to note that women do acknowledge the difference between talking about someone during gossip compared to talking against someone during gossip. The negative connotation of gossip, and the view in which most men view gossip, involves the discussion of others' weaknesses, failures, and character flaws. Women do acknowledge when this takes place, also recognizing that when others talk against a third party who is not there, the speaker is also likely to talk about the listener when they also are not present. It should be noted, however, that a pattern is sometimes present when women talk against someone else. Tannen cites the work of Christine Cheepen who noticed a pattern which she calls "scapegoat." Cheepen analyzed conversations that took place when two individuals joined together to talk against their boss who was not present in the room. By doing so, the two established parity and connection while acknowledging an imbalance of power between them and the scapegoat (Tannen 119-120).

    C. Asymmetries

In addition to "rapport talk" and "report talk," Tannen explains several asymmetries between male and female communication, meaning aspects of communication that are not shared between the two genders. Often, it is the asymmetries of male and female communication that are to blame when misunderstanding and conflict arise. For example, men and women may become frustrated with each other when presenting problems to one another. Tannen refers to this type of communication as "troubles talk," in which men and women present negative feelings to one another, addressing problems that have affected their lives. Men, seeking a direct approach to communication, will often respond with advice or problem solving when their partner presents an issue. Thinking that the female partner needs help, a man feels it is his duty to provide a solution, when in reality, the woman may be voicing an issue and simply wants her partner to actively listen to her. In order to build rapport, the woman explains a concern she has,

desiring her partner to show concern as well. The woman may become offended by the man's

response of providing solutions to the problem presented, and the man may become frustrated,

not understanding why his help was not taken graciously. The woman intended the troubles talk

to provide a means of establishing sameness between the couple, providing the metamessage that

both partners experience troubles and share empathy for one another. Instead, the woman

receives her partner's communication, interpreting the metamessage to be "We're not the same.

You have the problems, I have the solutions," (Tannen 51-53).

Tannen explains the other side of this issue, stating, "If women are often frustrated

because men do not respond to their troubles by offering matching troubles, men are often

frustrated because women do. Some men not only take no comfort in such a response, they take

offense," (Tannen 51). Women comfort one another by offering empathy, explaining that they

too have experienced something similar. When women offer the same empathy to men during

troubles talk, men may take offense and feel belittled because it denies the man the uniqueness of

his experience (Tannen 51). The woman is attempting to build rapport, stating she has been

through a similar experience and understands the emotions of her partner, sending the

metamessage of sameness and empathy. The man interprets the communication to mean that

everyone experiences problems like his, feeling left without validation to be upset.

Requesting information is another asymmetry of male and female communication which

may lead to conflict. When asking a question or requesting information, the action implies a

hierarchy. The person with the information is framed as superior, and the person requesting the

information is framed as less knowledgeable or less competent, seemingly inferior. A widely

common and highly relatable example among many couples in intimate relationships is the topic

of asking for directions. Many men find it uncomfortable to ask someone else for directions

when they are lost. Doing so would place the man, who views communication through the lens of status, below the party providing the directions. Women, seeking connection in communication, do not mind asking for help, and become frustrated by the man's unwillingness to request information. Because men and women do not share symmetrical approaches to communication, the situations that call for differing responses may lead to confusion and conflict between the partners, not understanding each other's inner motivations to how they view communication (Tannen 61-64).

The approach to helping others and receiving help is another asymmetrical approach to communication between men and women. Unlike the nature of men to turn down help from others, Tannen states "many women not only feel comfortable seeking help, but feel honor-bound to seek it, accept it, and display gratitude in exchange." Although men are unlikely to ask for help, they do "feel honor-bound to fulfill the request for help whether or not it is convenient for them to do so" (Tannen 65). In addition to providing help, men seek to help others because it also may place them in a superior position. When providing knowledge or demonstrating a skill, the man takes a one-up position, sometimes including technical terms or explaining in a way that is difficult for the receiver to understand, therefore framing the interaction into one of status.

Asymmetrically, women bring the motivation of connection to the action of helping others. Even when a woman is more knowledgeable of a topic or skill, she will often bring her communication down to the level of the receiver, minimizing the disparity between the levels of understanding. Tannen explains this concept, also adding that women still acknowledge the hierarchical nature of giving information or help to others but respond differently than men.

> "Since women seek to build rapport, they are inclined to play down their expertise rather than display it. Since men value the position of center stage and the feeling of knowing more, they seek opportunities to gather and disseminate factual information. If men often seem to hold forth because they have the expertise, women are often frustrated and

surprised to find that when they have the expertise, they don't necessarily get the floor" (Tannen 125).

This claim is not to say that men only focus on status when helping others and ignore the connection that may be built or that it is uncommon for women to resist asking for help. This asymmetry explains the differences in emphasis that men and women place on status and connection and why men and women respond differently to giving and receiving help (Tannen 65-71).

        D. Living with Asymmetries and Conflict

Asymmetries may prove to be difficult within marriage and dating relationships due to the fact that men and women have difficulty understanding the underlying motivations behind each other's communication approaches. Misunderstandings and conflict naturally arise due to these disparities in communication styles. Conflict is yet another aspect of interpersonal relationships that men and women handle differently. Tannen explains the main difference in conflict approach between the genders, stating "To most women, conflict is a threat to connection, to be avoided at all costs. Disputes are preferably settled without direct confrontation. But to many men, conflict is the necessary means by which status is negotiated, so it is to be accepted and may even be sought, embraced, and enjoyed" (Tannen 150).

One instance in which men and women take different approaches to conflict is when one partner makes a request of the other. Because women are typically less comfortable with conflict than men, they make suggestions rather than tell others what to do, especially within partner relationships. For example, in order to propose that the kitchen needs to be tidied, a woman may say to the male partner "Let's go clean the kitchen" rather than telling him to "Go do the dishes." Although the request was made in the form of a suggestion, the male still views the communication as a command. Regarding men's view of communication in a hierarchical sense,

status is gained when an order is given and followed. Therefore, to preserve independence and freedom, the male is more likely to resist the suggestion. He feels he is being manipulated into doing something rather than being asked directly. The woman, in an attempt to avoid conflict due to her motivation of connection and intimacy, may actually be facilitating it (Tannen 150-155)

To live with asymmetries and prevent the conflicts that may result, Tannen suggests that men and women would greatly benefit from trying to understand the motivations of their partners. She states, "Many women could learn from men to accept some conflict and difference without seeing it as a threat to intimacy, and many men could learn from women to accept interdependence without seeing it as a threat to their freedom" (Tannen 294). Gaining insight from the behavioral patterns of the opposite gender may not only benefit the individual, but it could possibly benefit the individual's relationship with their partner.

In order to live with the difficulties that asymmetries may cause within interpersonal relationships, Dr. Les Parrott, along with his wife, Dr. Leslie Parrott provide guidelines to keep in mind when navigating interpersonal communication within marriage and dating relationships. In their book, *Real Relationships: From Bad to Better and Good to Great,* the authors address the "gender gap" that exists between men and women in relationships. Leslie Parrott provides numerous statements addressing the most impactful differences that women should acknowledge when navigating relationships with men. She argues, "Men are not as in touch with their emotions as [women] are" stating that men are raised to express their emotions to a lesser degree than women and are deserving of more patience in regard to identifying and processing emotion. Secondly, she states that men are more independent than women and actively work to escape the feeling of being smothered by close companions. Although men may not express their

dependency as explicitly as women, Leslie Parrott advises women to understand the asymmetry at work and ignore the metamessage that may imply that women are not needed. Lastly, she cites Tannen's idea of rapport-talk and report-talk, stating that "While [women] are more likely to talk about our fears, feelings, and experiences, men are more likely to talk about ideas, concepts, and theories" and advises women to hold lower expectations of men when engaged in rapport-talk since they will not respond in the same way that women do. By keeping these guidelines in mind and holding accurate expectations of their partners, women are better equipped to navigate more fulfilling relationships with their partners (Parrott and Parrott 68-70).

Dr. Les Parrott addresses this concept from the opposite perspective, explaining a few ways in which women are fundamentally different from men. First, he repeats his wife's statement that women are not as independent as men and instead subscribe to a life characterized by connections and intimacy with others. Les Parrott advises that men should voice their appreciation of the relationship with their partners even though their instincts value freedom and independence to a higher degree. Secondly, he addresses Tannen's concept of report- and rapport-talk, advising that men should realize the woman's motivation to focus on the "here-and-now" of their present emotions and experiences rather than the man's emphasis on the problem-solving, futuristic motivation for communication. Lastly, Les Parrott acknowledges that women are not as competitive as men, explaining that the type of play children engage in affects their communication styles as adults. Little boys, who often play in large groups, focus on competition and status, while little girls often play in intimate groups, with an emphasis on cooperation and limiting hostility. He argues that in order to build a more successful relationship, men must acknowledge their partner's cooperative style, focusing on connection and intimacy rather than status (Parrott and Parrott 70-72).

Tannen argues that once couples are able to understand the conversational styles or "genderlects" of one another, "they are inclined to accept differences without blaming themselves, their partners, or their relationships" (Tannen 297). Couples' abilities to understand one another's conversational styles may not prevent conflict from arising, but it will greatly stall the conflict from progressing to an unmanageable level. Addressing the differences in motivations for communication and conversational styles allows couples a "giant leap across the communication gap between women and men, and a giant step toward opening the lines of communication" (Tannen 298).

III.   Communication Origins

Tannen jokingly states that men and women speak different languages. "If women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence, then communication between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles" and refers to the styles as "different genderlects" (Tannen 42). However, it can be difficult to understand how these differences come about, and how two different communication worlds can co-exist in the same units of society. It is obviously true that effective communication is possible—and common—between the genders. Men and women work together in their homes and family units, in their workplaces, in their recreational activities, and in other aspects of society. Yet, sons and daughters can be raised in the same family by the same parents, going to the same places and doing the same activities, and still be raised in two different worlds of communication. This section will explain where these differences in gendered communication arise during socialization, examining the socialization of children by the family and peers.

A. Socialization by the Family

Tannen states that "the seeds of women's and men's styles are sown in the ways they learn to use language while growing up" (Tannen 79). This argument is amplified by researchers of gendered parenting from Leiden University, studying how differences in parenting styles towards boys and girls reflect differences in the children's behavior. The researchers, Judi Mesman and Marleen Groeneveld, state, "The earliest nonbiological origins of children's gendered behavior are likely to lie in their first social experiences—interactions with their parents" (22). Studying gendered parenting, defined by the researchers as "the guiding principle for minor and major socialization decisions regardless of their children's individual characteristics and behaviors," (22) serves as the means of communication in which children understand how boys and girls should and should not behave. Therefore, it is important to first look at the socialization that occurs by the parents, which is the primary factor in the development of children into their respective communication worlds.

1. Gendered Parenting

In the findings of the research conducted by Mesman and Groeneveld, it is stated that "most parents use similar broad parenting styles with sons and daughters" (22) resulting in few differences in the ways that boys and girls were raised. They contend that gendered differences in behavior that result from parenting are influenced by specific parenting practices rather than broad, overarching parenting styles. These specific practices begin as soon as the child is identified as a boy or a girl, forming "expectations about the child's interests, skills, and behaviors" (22). The researchers contend that within societies dominated by gender egalitarianism, these expectations are rarely explicitly stated due to the fact that gender stereotypes are often communicated unconsciously and thus are implicitly implied. Parents are

blind to this fact and are often reluctant to admit they use gender stereotypes as part of their parenting approach because these are not accepted norms in gender-egalitarian societies (Mesman and Groenveld 22-23).

Because gendered parenting results more from implicit messages rather than broad parenting styles, the study focused on the "covert behaviors and statements by parents that convey messages about differential expectations of girls and boys," (23) especially the behavior occurring during early childhood since many milestones related to gender development occur in the early years of life. Their research further examined direct messages, regarding the child's behaviors, skills, and interests, and indirect messages, which "convey information that concerns others or reflects general observations regarding gender that reach the child vicariously" (23).

Direct messages experienced during the child's socialization include the exposure to gendered messages, allowed but not always endorsed by the parents. Exposure may include the entertainment that children are allowed to watch, the toys that are provided to the child, and the commercial products used on the children. To illustrate one example of how a message may be conveyed, parents who often buy female-stereotyped toys for their daughters, such as kitchen sets or baby dolls, convey to the girl that her gender is linked to stereotypical gender roles such as cooking and caring for the family. Additional direct messages include the parents' specific responses to the children's behaviors, such as a mother discouraging her daughter's roughhousing more intensely than the rough play of her son. Gender differences in children may also affect specific parenting practices, for example, parents may be more likely to use physical punishment on their sons compared to their daughters since boys are seen as more physically active, therefore reinforcing the message that boys should be more aggressive than girls (Mesman and Groenveld 23-24).

Indirect messages convey information about general expectations of gender rather than communicate a message directly to the child about how he or she should behave. This is most often communicated implicitly by parents evaluating and commenting on stereotypical and counter-stereotypical behaviors. Additionally, parents send indirect messages through their own model of behavior. Mesman and Groeneveld assert that children most often identify more with their same-sex parent, therefore, imitating and internalizing behaviors and actions that their same-sex parent makes. Although a parent may never state that girls clean the dishes and boys take the trash out, children may internalize these types of beliefs by observing the chores and behaviors that their parents carry out in the home. Citing the gender schema theory, the researchers state that "parents' gender-stereotypes predict the extent to which they engage in gendered parenting, which in turn predicts children's gender stereotypes and gendered behaviors" (Mesman and Groenveld 24). Therefore, it follows that the communication carried out by the parents in the home directly affects the communication styles developed by the children, most often following the communication patterns of their same-sex parent.

2. Parent-Child Communication Socialization

In addition to the specific behaviors in which parents enact during the child's development, the communication between the parent and the child affects the ways in which young boys and girls view communication and the motivations behind it. In a longitudinal investigation, researchers from Emory University, Susan Adams, Janet Kuebli, Patricia A. Boylen and Robyn Fivush, studied gender differences in parent-child conversations about past emotions. The researchers specifically studied children at 40 months and 70 months. The study cites how, through discussion about emotion, individuals are better able to interpret and evaluate emotional experiences. If adults guide children through conversations about past experiences,

then children are better equipped to "label, evaluate, and understand their emotions in culturally appropriate ways," (Adams et al. 310). The study cites that children begin using emotional terms (sad, angry, happy) to explain their feelings as early as 13 months and regularly use emotional terms by 20 months. It also finds that mothers who use more emotional talk with preschool-aged children typically raise individuals who later use more emotional talk as adults. The study also notes that mothers use more emotional talk with their daughters than with their sons at the preschool age, providing some explanation for Tannen's premise that females have a need for intimacy in communication. The findings of the study support that socialization of children by their parents influence how children "evaluate and interpret emotional situations" and "how often and in what kinds of situations [they want] to talk about [their] emotions" (Adams et al. 310).

The researchers explain how talking about past experiences and emotions drive the emotional socialization of children. Revisiting the emotions experienced after time has passed allows children to reflect on and interpret why they felt the way they did. During these conversations, "the parent and child reconstruct the emotional experience together," (311) with the parent guiding the child to process the experience and frame the emotions that were felt in socially acceptable ways. The researchers argue that by "recalling emotional reactions to past events, we identify the types of experiences that are important to our selves and that ultimately through such recollections our self-concepts evolve" (311).

The study also examined the differences in which parents spoke to their children about past emotional experiences. The researchers cite in a similar study that the emotional talk varied with the gender of the child, specifically how mothers were more likely to discuss sadness with their daughters than with their sons and that mothers discussed anger with their sons more than with their daughters. They also found that mothers were more likely to use a greater number and

variety of emotional terms with their daughters than with their sons and that the girls in the study used greater amounts of emotional talk than the boys, suggesting that females receive a greater emphasis on learning that "emotions are important aspects of past experiences to discuss with others" (Adams et al. 311). The examination of father-child relationships resulted in similar findings. Fathers use a greater degree of variance of emotional talk between sons and daughters than mothers do and are more likely to differentially socialize their sons and daughters, specifically regarding discipline, play, and language. However, when the children were 40 months old, the study finds that fathers did not differ from the mothers in their use of emotional language; they also used more emotional talk with their daughters than with their sons (Adams et al. 311-312). In support of this idea, Tannen notes that fathers communicate differently to their children when giving instruction. She cites the psycholinguist Jean Berko Gleason who studied how parents talk to their young children and includes the research finding that fathers issue more commands to their children than mothers do and they issue more commands to their sons than to their daughters (Tannen 154).

C. Socialization by Peer Groups

In addition to socialization by family, children are heavily influenced by the ways they interact with their peers. Peer socialization occurs when engaging with neighborhood friends, school friends, or friend groups from extracurricular activities. Tannen examines several studies and provides an in-depth discussion on the differences in the group dynamics of male and female groups as well as the types of play in which boys and girls typically participate. Tannen explains that although boys and girls may often play together, it is more common for boys and girls to play in same-sex groups. They may engage in similar activities at times, but it is more often that the most favorite types of play for the groups are different in the way that they are structured and

that there are clear differences in the ways that the boys and girls communicate with one another in their respective groups (Tannen 43).

To describe the type of play dynamic that is characteristic of boys' peer groups, Tannen explains that they are most often structured in a hierarchical nature. The groups are often larger than girls' peer groups and there is typically a clear leader that instructs the others on what to do. In order to maintain status within the friend group, the leader issues orders that the other peers follow. Likewise, they reject suggestions made by the followers of the group. By doing so, the members monitor who is issuing orders and who is following them, establishing a hierarchical nature to the group dynamic and negotiating the status within it. Within these peer groups, activities are centered around competition, where there is a clear winner and loser. Rules must be followed within these activities so that there is a clear hierarchy maintained, which often leads to arguments or conflicts within the group since the boys are often trying to challenge one another to gain status. It is also during young boys' play that they primarily utilize their public form of speech. By engaging with a large group of friends in which there is not as much intimacy established, boys are comfortable engaging in the report-style of talk. To earn the approval of their peers, boys often attempt to take the "center stage" and tell jokes and stories to their friends, receiving approval by the laughs the audience offers and challenging the jokes and stories told by others (Tannen 43).

Girls engage in a very opposite dynamic within their peer groups. Rather than status and hierarchy, girls focus on connection and intimacy. Their groups are typically much smaller when compared to boys' peer groups, and one will often find girls playing in pairs rather than in a group. Tannen states that "the center of a girl's social life is a best friend" (Tannen 43). Often, girls simply sit around talking with one another. In fact, just as Tannen describes the aspect of

gossiping between adult women, little girls engage in the same type of talk with their peers. Girls discuss the details of others' lives as well as their own. By telling secrets to one another, girls strengthen their friendship with one another, signaling that a higher amount of trust and intimacy is shared (Tannen 80). Rather than participate in competitive activities, girls engage in activities in which everyone receives a turn or can participate at the same time; these activities do not warrant winners and losers, rather they serve to build relationships and connections with one another. Even when one member of the group may be more skilled than the other, it is not pointed out among the members. In fact, unlike typical male peer groups, it is looked down upon if a girl boasts her skills or is perceived that she thinks she is better than the others. Additionally, unlike boys, girls do not typically negotiate leadership status within a group. Although one member may be the most popular or well-liked, their group activities focus on collaboration. Rather than giving instructions to the others, girls propose suggestions for the group, which are likely to be accepted. Their communication with one another is motivated by connection rather than status (Tannen 43-44).

Beginning as early as age two, boys and girls begin using language differently within their play which is linked to differences in the communication styles of adults (Tannen 152). In the text, Tannen includes a discussion of two studies conducted by researchers studying children's play, both finding that young girls offer suggestions for play while boys give each other commands. The first study, conducted by psychologist Jacqueline Sachs and her team of colleagues, studied the play of preschoolers between the ages of two and five. While playing "doctor," the little girls offered proposals for activities by saying "Let's," such as "Let's sit down and use it." The boys used commands such as "Get the heart thing," and "Gimme your arm." When playing the different roles, being the doctor, the patient, the mother, or the baby, the boys

would argue over who would play the high status of the doctor, with researchers documenting that the boys wanted to play the doctor role 79% of the time. The young girls only wanted to play the doctor one-third of the time; they more often favored the role of the patient, mother, or baby. The girls would propose taking turns in playing each of the roles or suggesting ideas, such as "We both can be sick," or "I'll be the doctor for my baby and you be the doctor for your baby." By doing so, the girls kept equal status among each other during play while the boys fought for the high-status role of issuing the doctor's orders (Tannen 152-153, 155-156).

The second study Tannen discussed was conducted by the linguist Marjorie Harness Goodwin. Goodwin studied an older group; children between the ages of six and fourteen. The boys and girls were in separate groups, both working on different tasks. The boys, preparing for a fight, were making slingshots. In order to accomplish the task, the boys gave orders to one another in the group setting, using phrases such as "Gimme the pliers!" and "After you chop 'em, give 'em to me." By giving orders and ensuring the orders were followed, the leaders within the boys' group established superior positions while the followers were inferior. The task was structured in a hierarchical nature. The girls were making glass rings out of bottle necks, and instead of commanding one another, the girls made suggestions again beginning with "Let's," saying "Let's go find some," and "Let's ask her, 'Do you have any bottles?'" Using collective language, the girls established a sense of community within the group. The girls still made suggestions to fulfill their desires, but they justified the reasons for making their requests. When one of the girls stated that the glass bottles needed to be cleaned, she justified her desire by also stating that the dirty bottles had germs. Another member responded in agreement, signaling collaboration rather than following an order. The structure of the group of girls was centered on community rather than hierarchy. Beginning at a young age and continuing through childhood,

boys and girls subscribe to different styles when working with their peer groups, carrying over into conversational styles as adults (Tannen 153-154, 156-147).

Goodwin also studied the types of activities that the older children preferred. Boys typically chose activities that warranted competition, such as football and basketball. Even when participating in activities that were not structurally competitive, the boys would decide to break into teams to create competition amongst each other. They ranked themselves based on their skill level of the various sports and activities and were much more likely to boast about their abilities to others. It was common for boys to threaten and insult one another, and they would vocally express their complaints to other boys that they did not like. The girls, however, chose to participate in jump rope and hopscotch, activities that did not warrant a winner and a loser. These types of activities could be participated in by all. While boys openly bragged to one another about their skills, girls were criticized if they were perceived as acting better than others. Instead of voicing frustrations directly to one another, the girls would complain to one another when the unliked member of the group was absent. Ironically, speaking behind one's back was seen as more desirable than openly expressing complaints because a direct confrontation would cause a rift between the group members, signaling a break in the bonds of friendship (Tannen 157-158).

When studying the types of play that boys and girls engage in, it is clear that they also focus on the two motivations—status and connection. Little boys center their play around status. There is typically one clear leader of the group telling the others what to do and how to do it. The members monitor one another and look for shifts in hierarchical dynamics between the group members seeing who is the one giving orders and who are the ones following them. The status level is the "chief commodity that is bartered in the boys' hierarchical world" (Tannen 47). Girls are not driven by this hierarchical nature and are instead motivated by connection. Instead of

bartering for status, little girls share intimacy instead. They monitor one another's alliance to other members of the group since having a best friend is more important than being a member of a large group. Girls do still pay attention to status, however. Often, girls seek out relationships with the most popular girls. Although these relationships are founded on connection, having the relationship also signals a sense of status since girls seek to be aligned with the most well-known girl. Also, girls acknowledge status when playing "house" with one another. Girls will role play as mothers and daughters, giving chores to the daughters and daughters seeking permission from the mothers. Young girls acknowledge the hierarchy of the activity but find it appropriate when acting out parent-child and familial relationships rather than in large group games (Tannen 46-47).

Unlike the common expression of aggressiveness and competition that is descriptive of boys' play, girls navigate a more complex system when interacting competitively. Tannen includes the work of developmental psychologist Linda Hughes who studied a group of fourth- and fifth-grade girls playing foursquare. The game is designed to be played as individuals, but Hughes noted the cooperation of the girls to work as teams. Four individuals play the game at a time, so in order to have friends join the game, the girls would have to compel one of the players to mishandle the ball, causing them to exit the game and letting one of their friends join in to take the previous player's place. According to the girls, it was considered "mean" to purposely get one of the other players out, but it was not considered wrong if the purpose of getting a player out was to let another player in the game. In order to play competitively, the girls would justify their actions of getting other players out by alerting their friends that they were doing so in order to allow them into the game. This dynamic allowed the girls to mask the competitiveness of the

game and replace it with "niceness," therefore avoiding the competition nature of the game and still being able to establish connection and intimacy with their friends (Tannen 171-172).

IV.   Conclusion

Many factors contribute to the conversation style differences between men and women, but highly influential is the socialization individuals experience as children from families and peer groups. Also, the approaches that mothers and fathers use to communicate to their children about emotions influences the ways in which individuals process their emotions. The emotional talk that parents engage in with their children affects not only the ways children internalize the emotions they feel, but also how they will process and communicate their emotions as adults within interpersonal relationships. In addition to the socialization by the family, the peer groups in which children spend significant time also heavily influence the communication patterns of individuals. The activities they participate in and the group dynamics of their peer relationships contribute to the different conversational styles that men and women subscribe to.

Although communication styles may often blend or change throughout one's lifetime, men and women seem to subscribe to one language style; report-style talk for men and rapport-style talk for women. Men, motivated by status, hierarchy, and directness view communication through a lens of independence, communicating as a means of establishing credibility. Women, motivated by connection, relationships, and empathy, view communication through the lens of intimacy, and utilize communication in order to build and maintain close relationships.

Because of these different motivations behind communication, men and women may frequently experience miscommunication and conflict because of the asymmetric differences in the ways men and women communicate. Because the two genders view communication through two different lenses, they often frame communication in a way that causes the opposite party to

become uncomfortable. Different situations invoke different responses among men and women, and often it may feel impossible to understand one another within dating and marriage relationships. However, by recognizing the asymmetric motivations and stylistic differences, men and women may evaluate the message that the sender intends rather than the message that the receiver interprets. By doing so, men and women may resolve conflict or miscommunication that may arise by understanding the true motivation of the other party. Although the process may involve difficulty, it is very probable that men and women may communicate with one another effectively within interpersonal relationships when understanding the common language styles of each gender.

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