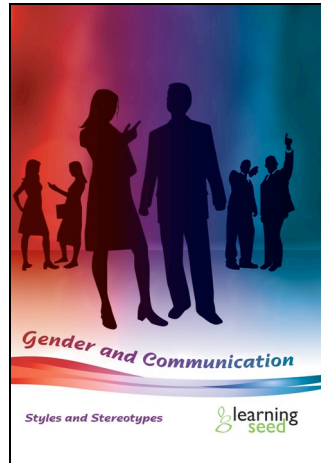


Gender And Communication



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Gender And Communication

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Closed Captioning

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Summary

It's hard to tell if a baby is a boy or a girl. But the second someone declares "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" the biological makeup of that child isn't the only thing that's being determined. Once that declaration is made, a process of gendering begins that will continue throughout that person's entire life. One aspect of that process is how a child learns to communicate. Babies are linguistic clean slates: they will learn whatever language their caretakers speak. They also learn from their caretakers the rules of communication, such as when it's appropriate to speak or remain silent, what topics of conversation are taboo, and with whom they should discuss specific things. Gender plays a role in those rules of communication.

This video looks at how the academic study of gender and communication has evolved over time and investigates what it means to "do gender," as opposed to being one gender or another. It looks into how communication styles and speech acts fall onto a continuum of "masculine" and "feminine." It features vignettes with men and women that have taken on roles that fall outside of what is standard for their gender in our society, and explores the impact that this has made on their styles of communication.

Key points:

- Learn the history of how researchers have studied gender and communication, including the deficit, dominance, difference, and dynamic approaches.
- Find out what it means to "do gender."
- Explore the range of masculine and feminine speech styles.
- Learn about tag questions, up-talk, one-ups, and competitive banter.
- Discover speech acts and what they mean for communication.
- Learn the most effective means of communication for managers and other authority figures.

Approaches To Gender And Communication

A baby is a linguistic clean slate. Language is learned, not inherited, and a baby will learn the way people raising him or her speak. Whether the child's caregivers speak English, Swahili, Japanese, or American Sign Language, her flexible mind will pick up that language. Gender is similar: when you see a newborn baby, it's hard to tell if it's a boy or a girl. At just a few days old, there's not much difference between the two. But the second someone says "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" a process of gendering begins that will continue through the child's entire life. The word **gender** refers to the social and cultural traits usually attributed to one sex or the other. For better or worse, society has different expectations, rules, and standards for men and women. Like language, these rules aren't hard-wired—they're learned. Many of these rules relate to language and communication: appropriate times to speak or remain quiet, taboo topics of conversation, and with whom it's acceptable to discuss certain subjects. What impact does gender have on the way that we communicate?

Just as society's ideas about gender have changed over time, so has the scientific study of gender and communication. Early research on the subject focused on the **deficit approach**. Researchers who took this approach assumed that the speech of women was inferior to that of men. They characterized the female voice as weak and lacking in substance. Their findings asserted that women didn't finish as many thoughts as men because they didn't plan out what they were going to say. They assumed, without supporting evidence, that men thought out their words before beginning to speak. Later researchers adopted the **dominance approach**, which assumed that men dominated women in conversation. According to this approach, women's speech was naturally passive, while men's was naturally assertive.

Both the deficit and dominance approaches developed during a time when women took a secondary role in society to men. But as women began to take on social roles of greater importance and influence, linguists took a more complex view of the role of gender in communication, developing the **difference approach**. This approach views men and women as belonging to different subcultures. They may live out the same experiences like work, parenting, friendships, and love, but they approach those experiences in ways unique to their gender. This means that men and women think and communicate in uniquely male and female ways. This approach attempts to explain some common stereotypes about men and women, such as men's reluctance to ask for directions.

The difference approach is popular, but some anthropologists and linguists fear that it focuses on differences and ignores some very important similarities between men and women. This isn't to say there aren't differences: for instance, women are likely to discuss doubts, fears and intimate relationships more than men, and men really do talk more about sports. But the most common topics of conversation are the same for men and women: work, family, finances, religion, and politics are topics that both genders discuss. Men and women can choose and change their speech patterns to fit different situations. Current research takes the **dynamic approach**. According to this viewpoint, gender isn't something that one *has*, but something one *does*. Gender identity is created by society and ever changing. Everyone uses a range of speech patterns that can be broadly classified as "male" and "female." As people challenge social roles and stereotypes, they adopt different speech patterns. This approach asserts a range of masculinity and femininity, rather than simple opposition. Overall, the dynamic approach represents a major shift in society's expectations of men and women.

“Doing Gender”

According to the dynamic approach and the concept of “doing gender,” styles of communication are classified as “masculine” or “feminine.” But it’s important to remember that, despite those terms, no style of communication is exclusive to one gender or another; all men and women use both kinds in different situations. What are the characteristics of masculine and feminine types of speech?

- Masculine speech is competitive, while feminine speech strives to achieve harmony.
- Masculine speech emphasizes independence, while feminine speech seeks consensus.
- Feminine speech is polite and indirect, while masculine speech is blunt and direct.
- Detailed descriptions are feminine, while brief summaries are masculine.
- Masculine speech is detached, while feminine speech is emotional.

Masculine and feminine styles of communication

Masculine speech styles are competitive and seek to establish a pecking order or hierarchy. Examples of this kind of speech include interrupting, competitive banter, and one-ups. An **interruption**, which occurs when a second speaker breaks into a first speaker’s discourse at a point when transition isn’t evident, violates the rules of turn taking. It can be used to disagree with, establish dominance over, or steal the floor from a rival speaker. **Competitive banter** is an exchange of playful, teasing remarks designed to challenge the status of another individual during conversation. Banter is often used in apparent jest, but it still creates and enforces an atmosphere of social hierarchy. **One-ups** are statements and boasts that are designed to keep a speaker in a higher status ranking than another individual. A conversation that uses these types of speech suggests a constant jockeying for position.

Feminine styles of communication seek to find common ground and make connections. Examples of feminine speech include back channeling, up-talk, tag questions, and hedges. **Back channeling** is the use of words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue. Common interjections like “right” or “mm-hmm,” or even a simple nod of the head, are back channeling. **Tag questions** are brief, rhetorical questions placed at the end of declarative sentences. Whenever you add an “isn’t it,” “okay,” or “weren’t you” to the end of a statement, you are using tag questions. They can be used to communicate slight uncertainty or to soften the severity of a request. **Up-talk** means speaking with a rising intonation at the end of a declarative sentence. Similar to tag questions, up-talk turns a statement into a question, but without altering the grammar of the statement. **Hedges** are modifying words such as “like,” “you know,” or “sort of” that are used to lessen the impact of what is said. All of these types of speech serve to find common ground in communication.

The deficit and dominance approaches lumped tags, up-talk, and hedges together as “women’s language,” using them as proof to women’s speech was full of inherent weakness and therefore “powerless.” But these types of speech are often used in ways that have nothing to do with power struggle. Tag questions can be used as a friendly way to start a conversation. And far from being powerless, tag questions are often used by the person in power to soften the impact of what is being said. They can often be used to increase the impact of a statement, as in: “You’re not going out dressed like that, *are you?*” This statement certainly doesn’t express uncertainty! Although these types of speech are classified as feminine, men use them just as often as women.

Speech Acts

All participants in a normal conversation practice **speech acts**: words, phrases, and statements that serve to move the relationship of the participants forward in some way. Common speech acts include greetings, invitations, commands, requests, apologies, complaints, insults, and compliments. Each of these kinds of speech acts invites a reaction or relational change. A speech act can be something minor, like the acceptance of a dinner invitation or a first hello to a stranger, or something of major consequence, like a judge's declaration of guilt or innocence in a court of law.

Gender plays a role in speech acts. Some research has suggested that “polite” speech acts, such as giving compliments or apologizing, are more commonly attributed to women than men. This research supports the stereotype that men rarely apologize: giving an apology means putting oneself “one down” rather than “one up.” When the difference approach to gender and communication was at its most popular, women were encouraged to use masculine speech patterns, to “talk like a man,” in order to level the playing field in male-dominated environments. However, more recent research suggests that women who use more feminine speech patterns may be even more successful in positions of authority than those who adopt masculine styles of management. Male and female managers alike who use typically masculine speech—making direct demands and abrupt statements—may prove less effective than those who use feminine speech patterns, putting a positive spin on tough requests and seeking to find common ground with their employees. Too direct a manner can make others feel resentful, while a certain level of indirectness comes across as less adversarial and more agreeable.

In the 19th century, gender theorist Margaret Fuller wrote:

“Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But in fact they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.”

It's true that there are differences between men and women, but everyone is able to go against linguistic stereotypes. Though we continue to label types of speech “masculine” and “feminine,” everyone uses both, regardless of gender. And as the role of men and women in society changes, so do our perceptions of gender in communication.

Review

- At birth, we are linguistic clean slates—we will learn whatever language is spoken to us. We also learn more subtle rules about how and when to communicate that are often influenced by gender.
- Gender means the social and cultural traits usually attributed to one sex or the other.
- Early researchers into the role of gender in communication adopted the deficit approach, which assumed that the speech of women was inferior to that of men, and the dominance approach, which assumed that men dominate women in conversation because women’s speech is naturally passive and men’s is naturally assertive.
- Later researchers adopted the difference approach, which treated men and women as belonging to different subcultures. Men and women could go through similar experiences, but would interpret them in ways unique to their gender.
- Recent researchers have adopted the dynamic approach, which views gender as something that one does rather than something one has. Both men and women adopt masculine and feminine styles of speaking in different situations.
- According to the dynamic approach, different kinds of speech are classified as “masculine” and “feminine.” Masculine speech is competitive, direct, brief, and detached, while feminine speech seeks consensus and is indirect, polite, detailed, and emotional.
- Examples of masculine speech include competitive banter, interruptions, and one-ups.
- Examples of feminine speech include hedges, tag questions, up-talk, and back channeling.
- Though masculine types of speech are *generally* more assertive while feminine types of speech are *generally* more passive, both have a range of uses. For instance, a tag question can serve to communicate frustration rather than uncertainty, or simply as a way to start a friendly conversation.
- Everyone who speaks practices speech acts: words, phrases, and statements that serve to move the relationship of the participants forward in some way. Examples of speech acts include greetings, invitations, commands, requests, apologies, complaints, insults, and compliments.
- Some research has suggested that managers and leaders who use feminine speech styles rather than masculine ones are more successful because their consensus-seeking style is less likely to make subordinates feel resentful.

Questions For Discussion

1. Discuss the development of research in gender and communication from the deficit approach to the dynamic approach. Why do you think researchers abandoned the deficit and dominance approaches?

As the role of gender in society changed, so did our understanding of gender and communication. Early researchers used communication to reinforce the subordinate role women held in society. As women came to hold more positions of influence in society, researchers adopted more complex approaches to gender and communication.

2. The video describes “doing gender,” arguing that both men and women adopt masculine and feminine speech patterns in different situations. Discuss the idea that gender is something you do rather than something you have.

Gender doesn't mean physiological sex, but rather the social and cultural traits that society attributes to the sexes. Gender is flexible spectrum, and both men and women adopt traits that are traditionally considered masculine or feminine in different situations.

3. According to the video, feminine speech patterns, such as tag questions and back channeling, may be more useful than brief and direct masculine speech for managers and other people in positions of authority. Why do you think subordinates might find feminine speech more agreeable?

Masculine speech is competitive and serves to establish and enforce a hierarchy. Feminine speech seeks harmony and consensus, which is less likely to create resentment in subordinates.

4. The deficit and dominance approaches viewed masculine speech as powerful and feminine speech as powerless. How has the dynamic approach changed this simple dichotomy?

The dynamic approach gives more room for context. For instance, a person in a position of power can use tag questions to soften a tough request. Some conversations that use masculine or feminine types of speech have nothing to do with power struggles—for instance, a tag question can be used as a friendly way to start a conversation, and back channeling is an essential element of polite conversation.

Suggested Activities

1. Every day for a week, keep a journal of your routine conversations. When do you use masculine and feminine speech? Be sure to note specific kinds of speech, such as competitive banter, tag questions, up-talk, and one-ups.
2. Watch a short clip of a conversation from a TV show or movie. Identify the masculine and feminine speech patterns used by the speakers. How would your interpretation of the conversation differ under the deficit, dominance, or difference approaches?

Gender And Communication

Fill-In-The-Blank

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the bank at the bottom of the page.

As our understanding of the nature and meaning of gender has changed, so has our understanding of the role of gender in communication. Early researchers adopted the _____ approach, which assumed that the speech of women was inferior to that of men. Later researchers took the _____ **approach**, which asserted that male speech was naturally assertive and female speech naturally passive. Later researchers took the _____ approach, which views men and women as different subcultures. Recent researchers have developed the _____ approach, which views _____ not as something that one has, but as something one does. Men and women use both male and female speech, depending on the situation. One example of masculine speech is _____, which are statements designed to inflate the speaker's status. Female speech includes _____, words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue. Both men and women use _____, words or statements that move the relationship of the participants forward in some way. Research has suggested that, though female speech was once considered passive, feminine speech patterns may be better in a management situation. Masculine speech, which is _____ and brief, may make subordinates feel resentful. But feminine speech, which seeks to find _____, may make tough requests seem more agreeable.

Word Bank:

Back channeling
Dynamic

Consensus
Speech acts

Gender
Dominance

Difference
Deficit

One-ups
Direct

Gender And Communication

Fill-In-The-Blank Answer Key

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the bank at the bottom of the page.

As our understanding of the nature and meaning of gender has changed, so has our understanding of the role of gender in communication. Early researchers adopted the **deficit** approach, which assumed that the speech of women was inferior to that of men. Later researchers took the **dominance** approach, which asserted that male speech was naturally assertive and female speech naturally passive. Later researchers took the **difference** approach, which views men and women as different sub cultures. Recent researchers have developed the **dynamic** approach, which views **gender** not as something that one has, but as something one does. Men and women use both male and female speech, depending on the situation. One example of masculine speech is **one-ups**, which are statements designed to inflate the speaker's status. Female speech includes **back channeling**, words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue. Both men and women use **speech acts**, words or statements that move the relationship of the participants forward in some way. Research has suggested that, though female speech was once considered passive, feminine speech patterns may be better in a management situation. Masculine speech, which is **direct** and brief, may make subordinates feel resentful. But feminine speech, which seeks to find **consensus**, may make tough requests seem more agreeable.

Gender And Communication

Multiple Choice Worksheet

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

1) The dominance approach viewed the speech of women as naturally:

- a) assertive
- b) dynamic
- c) passive
- d) dominant

2) The use of words or phrases that show agreement or comprehension or encourage the speaker to continue is called:

- a) back channeling
- b) tag questions
- c) interruption
- d) deficit approach

3) An exchange of playful, teasing remarks designed to challenge the status of another individual during conversation is called:

- a) dominance approach
- b) up-talk
- c) one-ups
- d) competitive banter

4) A statement, word, or phrase designed to move the relationship of two parties forward is called:

- a) the dynamic approach
- b) a speech act
- c) up-talk
- d) a hedge

5) Which approach to gender and communication views gender as something one does rather than something one has?

- a) deficit approach
- b) dominance approach
- c) dynamic approach
- d) difference approach

6) According to the dynamic approach, both men and women use:

- a) masculine speech
- b) feminine speech
- c) dynamic speech
- d) masculine and feminine speech

7) The difference approach views men and women as members of two different:

- a) sub-cultures
- b) worlds
- c) conversations
- d) languages

8) Which of the following is a speech act?

- a) an insult
- b) an apology
- c) the reading of a sentence in a court of law
- d) all of the above

9) True or false: Men use feminine speech just as often as women.

- a) True
- b) False

10) Feminine speech includes:

- a) competitive banter
- b) one-ups
- c) both of the above
- d) none of the above

Gender And Communication

Multiple Choice Worksheet Answer Key

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

1) The dominance approach viewed the speech of women as naturally:

- a) assertive
- b) dynamic
- c) passive**
- d) dominant

2) The use of words or phrases that show agreement or comprehension or encourage the speaker to continue is called:

- a) back channeling**
- b) tag questions
- c) interruption
- d) deficit approach

3) An exchange of playful, teasing remarks designed to challenge the status of another individual during conversation is called:

- a) dominance approach
- b) up-talk
- c) one-ups
- d) competitive banter**

4) A statement, word, or phrase designed to move the relationship of two parties forward is called:

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- b) a speech act**
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- d) a hedge

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- a) deficit approach
- b) dominance approach
- c) dynamic approach**
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- b) False

10) Feminine speech includes:

- a) competitive banter
- b) one-ups
- c) both of the above
- d) none of the above**

Gender And Communication Quiz

Match the words in the first column to the best available answer in the second column.

- | | | |
|-------|--|------------------------|
| _____ | An approach to the role of gender in communication that assumes that men dominate women in conversation | 1) difference approach |
| _____ | An exchange of playful, teasing remarks designed to challenge the status of another individual during conversation. | 2) tag questions |
| _____ | Statements and boasts that are designed to keep a speaker in a higher status ranking than another individual | 3) back channeling |
| _____ | Brief, rhetorical questions like “isn’t it?” or “right?” placed at the end of declarative sentences | 4) competitive banter |
| _____ | Speaking with a rising intonation at the end of a declarative sentence | 5) dynamic approach |
| _____ | An approach to the role of gender in communication that views men and women as belonging to different subcultures. | 6) dominance approach |
| _____ | The use of words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue | 7) up-talk |
| _____ | Approach to the role of gender in communication that argues that both men and women adopt masculine and feminine speaking styles in different situations | 8) one-ups |

Gender And Communication

Quiz Answer Key

Match the words in the first column to the best available answer in the second column.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 6) dominance approach | An approach to the role of gender in communication that assumes that men dominate women in conversation |
| 4) competitive banter | An exchange of playful, teasing remarks designed to challenge the status of another individual during conversation |
| 8) one-ups | Statements and boasts that are designed to keep a speaker in a higher status ranking than another individual |
| 2) tag questions | Brief, rhetorical questions like “isn’t it?” or “right?” placed at the end of declarative sentences |
| 7) up-talk | Speaking with a rising intonation at the end of a declarative sentence |
| 1) difference approach | An approach to the role of gender in communication that views men and women as belonging to different subcultures. |
| 3) back channeling | The use of words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue |
| 5) dynamic approach | Approach to the role of gender in communication that argues that both men and women adopt masculine and feminine speaking styles in different situations |

Glossary

back channeling	The use of words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue.
competitive banter	An exchange of playful, teasing remarks designed to challenge the status of another individual during conversation.
deficit approach	An approach to the role of gender in communication that assumed that the speech of women was inferior to that of men. Researchers who supported the deficit approach assumed that men planned out what they were going to say before speaking, but asserted that women didn't.
difference approach	An approach to the role of gender in communication that views men and women as belonging to different subcultures. They may live out the same experiences like work, parenting, friendships, and love, but they approach those experiences in ways unique to their gender
dominance approach	An approach to the role of gender in communication that assumed that men dominated women in conversation. According to this approach, women's speech was naturally passive, while men's was naturally assertive.
dynamic approach	An approach to the role of gender in communication that argues that gender isn't something that one <i>has</i> , but something one <i>does</i> . According to the dynamic approach, male and female speakers both adopt masculine and feminine speaking styles in different situations.
gender	The set of social and cultural traits usually attributed to one sex or the other.
Hedge	A modifying word such as "like," "you know," or "sort of" that is used to lessen the impact of what is said.
interruption	When a second speaker breaks into a first speaker's discourse at a point when transition isn't evident, violating the rules of turn taking.
one-ups	statements and boasts that are designed to keep a speaker in a higher status ranking than another individual
speech acts	Words, phrases, and statements that serve to move the relationship of the participants forward in some way.
tag questions	Brief, rhetorical questions like "isn't it?" or "right?" placed at the end of declarative sentences.
up-talk	Speaking with a rising intonation at the end of a declarative sentence. Similar to tag questions, up-talk turns statements into questions.

For More Information...

Internet Resources

The International Gender and Language Association→
<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/organisations/igala/index.htm>

This academic organization encourages research into matters of gender, sexuality, language, and communication. They also publish an academic journal entitled *Gender and Language*.

The Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender→
<http://www.osclg.org/>

The OSCLG is an academic organization with a specifically feminist mission. Its official publication is the journal *Women and Language*.

Print Resources

Aries, Elizabeth. *Men and Women in Interaction: Reconsidering the Differences*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

In response to several popular works emphasizing the difference approach (including John Gray's book below), Aries explores the complexity of relationships between the sexes.

Dindia, Kathryn and Daniel J. Canary, eds. *Sex Differences and Similarities in Communication*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006.

The essays in this collection explore both the similarities and differences in how men and women communicate, both verbally and nonverbally.

Gray, John. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Gray's book, possibly the most famous book on gender and communication, is an excellent example of the difference approach, which argues that men and women interpret the same experiences in ways unique to their gender.

Wood, Julia T. *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1994.

Wood, a leading scholar of gender and communication, explores the ways in which society shapes our ideas of masculinity and femininity as well as how those roles effect our communication.