

Genderlect

(Maryland Leadership Workshops – MLW)

As people with similar cultural backgrounds have similar ways of talking (dialect) that may be very different from other cultures, men's and women's ways of talking are very similar within their respective genders, but are very different when they are compared to each other. This difference may be referred to as "genderlect." The following are some interesting facts and findings from You Just Don't Understand, by Deborah Tannen, that may come in very handy to you in your roles as men, women, leaders, followers, partners, and just regular people!!

Women: Rapport-talk

For women, conversing is a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships by emphasizing similarities and matching experiences.

Men: Report-talk

For men, conversing is a means to preserve independence and negotiate status in a hierarchical social order by exhibiting knowledge and holding center stage.

o Despite the stereotype that women talk too much, studies show that men actually talk more at meetings, in discussions, and in classrooms. In general, men are more comfortable with "public speaking", while women are more comfortable with "private speaking."

o In public meetings, men tend to make *categorical statements* of fact about right and wrong. Conversely, women use *personal experience* as evidence or argue about the effect of policy on individuals. Neither gender tends to give much credibility to the other's style.

Interruption = Dominance?

Studies have found that men tend to interrupt women more, in contrast to the stereotype that women are always interrupting men.

In conversations, some people (namely women) are more focused on being **considerate**, while others (namely men) are more concerned with being **involved**. Thus, interruption may be an effort to dominate, or it may be an effort to simply become involved.

Overall, the problems that arise in communication between genders are not caused by men's styles or women's styles, but by the differences between these two styles. By recognizing these differences, both genders can make adjustments and open the lines of communication.