

Gender Communication

PpD

(Personal and professional Development)

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Outline:

Communication is necessary in all aspects of human endeavour. This module looks at the difference in the way women and men communicate. It looks at social settings and attempts to provide an understanding of behaviours that will ultimately help people feel comfortable and be effective in mixed gender environments.

Objectives

- To provide an understanding of the basic verbal communication differences between men and women.
- To provide useful strategies in dealing with mixed gender situations.

Target

Any one interested in the area. People needing to mix in mixed gender areas. The unit is best dealt with in small groups of the same gender.



1 Different Communication styles

All of us have different styles of communicating with other people. Our style depends on a lot of things: where we're from, how and where we were brought up, our educational background, our age, and it also can depend on our gender. Generally speaking, men and women talk differently although there are varying degrees of masculine and feminine speech characteristics in each of us. But men and women speak in particular ways mostly because those ways are associated with their gender.

The styles that men and women use to communicate have been described as "debate vs. relate", "report vs. rapport, or "competitive vs. co-operative". Men often seek straightforward solutions to problems and useful advice whereas women tend to try and establish intimacy by discussing problems and showing concern and empathy in order to reinforce relationships.

Jennifer Coates, in her book *Women, Men and Language* (New York: Longman Inc., 1986) studied men-only and women-only discussion groups and found that when women talk to each other they reveal a lot about their private lives. They also stick to one topic for a long time, let all speakers finish their sentences and try to have everyone participate. Men, on the other hand, rarely talked about their personal relationships and feelings but "competed to prove themselves better informed about current affairs, travel, sport, etc.". The topics changed often and the men tried to "over time, establish a reasonably stable hierarchy, with some men dominating conversation and others talking very little".

Gender difference emerge in both social and professional settings. This is not surprising as at the core of all dealings whether they be social or professional is the art of conversation. Often the professional-social lines cannot be drawn. Do men and women behave differently?

2 Gender Split

by Rachel Rafelman

<http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/2052/partline.html>

"Everyone" was there - the media moguls, the so-called glitterati, the captains of industry, and , less importantly, the captains' wives - all elbow-to-elbow at a gala reception for the opening of a new arts centre. Flotillas of martinis on silver trays floated through the crush and were duly consumed, as gradually the crowd began to split up into discreet groups, each defined exclusively by gender: tipsy women talking "girl talk"; even tipsier men discussing business, sports and politics.

The time could have been 1956, but it was, in fact, last winter (the martinis were a nice retro touch). I was there, and not being accustomed to such gatherings, I was astonished. It wasn't supposed to be like this, the guys with the guys and the girls with the girls. That was what we did in junior high. Didn't gender splits like this disappear with whitewall tires? Apparently three decades of feminism and at least one of public programs like affirmative action and gender-sensitivity training had no impact, once a certain quantity of gin and vermouth had been imbibed.

"The gender split at parties happens, but it isn't planned," says writer and columnist Robert Fulford. "Suddenly you see six women in one group and another group of men standing in the opposite corner and this is among people who are often 30 years younger



than I am! I have to say this tendency hasn't declined the way I would have predicted 15 years ago, and I don't see a big decline in the foreseeable future, either."

"What can I tell you?" says Sondra Gotlieb, writer and wife of Allan Gotlieb, former Canadian ambassador to the United States, with what I interpret as being a sigh of deep resignation. "It's the same old story. The women gravitate to each other and talk about their personal lives. The men talk business."

Not much new here. Victorian men sent their women off to the "sitting room" while they smoked cigars, drank port and talked about...well, we'll never really know what they talked about. True, this practice has largely disappeared (though Sondra Gotlieb reports it is still standard dinner party protocol in Eastern Europe). Men no longer banish us. They don't have to. We do it all on our own. What's more, it seems we prefer it that way.

Here is a truly interesting fact: When you start canvassing men and women on the subject of their social conversational preferences, you find a great deal of agreement. Ten successful, self-confident men and women ranging in age from mid-twenties to 60-something concurred on two key points. The first, and perhaps most surprising, is that, in mixed company, men are boring. The second: Under similar conditions, women are not. The second point is kind of a corollary to the first. Given a choice, everyone prefers talking to women.

Of course there are boring women and interesting men. What we're dealing with here are broad strokes, generalities, even stereotypes. Okay? So now we can ask the following: Why are men boring? At least why are they so much more boring than women? The consistent answer from my interviewees is that women get involved in conversation. They get personal. Men do not.

"Men only want to talk about business. They don't want to get into personal stuff," says Bob Ramsay of Ramsay Writes, a Toronto communications firm. "I mean, God only knows what we would get into there!" For many men, a party is just a business meeting with food and drink, an occasion to trot their high-level contacts, deals and even resumes around the table with impunity (unless, of course, being deemed a dullard is an undesirable consequence). But for a woman to do the same would be breathtakingly inappropriate, even if she were the CEO of General Motors. Women downplay their accomplishments as a rule. "This is a good thing. It makes them more approachable. It's socially graceful," comments Margaret Wenthe, the editor of the Globe and Mail's "Report on Business." "Women are looking for a way to connect and that, in my opinion, is a strength." Wenthe, who's in the unusual position of being regularly chatted up by men who believe she has inside information, doesn't necessarily regard this as a perk. "I have to tell you, these business conversations are usually as boring as bad jokes."

Business, although it does literally make the world go round, just doesn't make for good party talk, unless of course it is approached in a personal way. For example: "I invested heavily in Bre-X and now I can't afford to ship Reginald Jr. off to boarding school next semester." A woman might say this; a man never would. Money, as one male wag once observed, is life's report card. For women, money's a grade, but only in one subject - and something second-tier like PE at that. Intriguingly, Wenthe, insists that at her own



parties the women often chat about mutual funds while the men discuss gardening. (I can hear it now: "My clematis is bigger than yours.")

No matter what the topic, girl talk entails the rapid disclosure of details, with the expectation of immediate and enthusiastic reciprocation. The male verbal strategy is to divulge as few personal details as possible, while assiduously avoiding all expressions of emotion that could be interpreted as weakness. "Loose lips sink ships," a popular Second World War motto, seems to rule male social discourse even 50 years later.

According to Geoff Pevere, a broadcaster and critic, "This personal/private thing is one of the last frontiers of gender distinction." The recent discovery of his own conflict in this realm took him aback: "I came home after spending an evening with an old [male] friend and my [female] partner asked about his partner and their baby. I couldn't answer. Those things just hadn't come up." This is the kind of omission few women comprehend since asking after spouses and offspring is nearly axiomatic in their social discourse.

A short time later, at a dinner party with friends, the women began to discuss an absent couple who were having marital problems. As Pevere remembers it, he and the men fell silent. "I felt it was inappropriate and yet I imagine the women felt they were sharing their concern for friends, and that the couple themselves - at least, the woman - might have interpreted it similarly."

Despite this, Pevere, who confesses to having been born "without the sports gene," prefers the conversation of women. Robert Fulford also finds the traditional male topics of little interest. "Most things are more interesting than business," he says. "And absolutely everything is more interesting than sports."

In fact, the increasing number of women now interested in competitive sports is one interlocutory development that neither welcomes. According to Pevere, it has "taken its toll on the quality of contemporary conversation." Fulford longs for the old days when "by God, at parties, you could rely on the fact that the women wouldn't know about the infield fly rule and all that stuff."

Kate Fillion, author of *How to Dump a Guy: A Coward's Manual* (HarperCollins), doesn't feel it matters what a man is talking about. "In my experience, men are usually monologuing at each other and at women. It's not an exchange of ideas; it's a competition." Writer Allan Fotheringham, who claims Canadian men are especially dull, agrees. He refers to male competitive chat, which politicians are particularly prone to, as "pecker stretching."

Fillion reports having attended many dinner parties where the men "hold forth and the women tune out," or else the women have a conversation among themselves. And if a woman declines to conform with the gender split, or genuinely finds herself interested in their topic and aligns herself conversationally with the men, Fillion says, a price is paid. "It can be seen as flirtatious or showing off. I've also seen the other women become annoyed because she is prolonging a very boring conversation."

Keeping a conversation going is one of the traditional female social functions. "It's part of what we do," observes Wentz. "We are the social grease people." Indeed, for



centuries women have been trained to draw people out, to get others talking about themselves, and to smooth over any alarming lulls in the conversation.

At the same time, the verbal capabilities of women have been undermined in almost every age and culture. This is probably the reason there are no celebrated female raconteurs. Speaking, especially in a social setting, is a method of asserting oneself, something women have rarely been taught (at least by example) to allow males to dominate in conversation and they, for their part, will do so - often without being conscious of it.

Moreover, from early childhood, females are spoken to differently than males. The content of their speech is correspondingly soft; declarative sentences are stylistically "unfeminine" and opinions are to be expressed obliquely, with an unflinching awareness of the feelings and sensitivities of others. It's amazing how tenacious this early training can be.

Even highly confident, accomplished women temper their speech (often by adding a qualifier to take the edge off an expression of power) and defer, often without being aware of it, to men. Women who are otherwise liberated and articulate can be heard uttering inanities like "Oh, really" and "How fascinating" in support of a male in mid-narrative. They will nod their heads, smile a lot, assume sympathetic expressions and, most important, keep their gaze fixed unwaveringly on the speaker's face.

"This has always worked well. It still does," says Gotlieb, who has seen many succeed against heavy odds in the corridors of power through their so-called conversational skills. "They absolutely hang on a man's every word and make him feel as if he's the centre of the universe." The man, almost invariably, walks away muttering something like, "Brilliant woman...great conversationalist."

Many of us find this very aggravating. I myself, who in the paraphrased words of Erica Jong, "can scarcely think of anything not to say," have witnessed similar scenes and been bewildered by them. How can a grown man not realise that while he's been talking non-stop for 20 minutes, his female audience has said virtually nothing? The men I polled were as perplexed as I. "Maybe it has something to do with conversation as performance, which it is for most men," says Geoff Pevere. "If you've made such a rapt audience of one woman, then you walk away feeling you've succeeded." I wasn't entirely convinced, and neither, I suspect, was he.

Evan Soloman, editor of Shift magazine, talks about the different male and female "social vocabularies." "Men talk loudly and opine with great certainty on issues they haven't got a clue about," he explains. "This is genetic stuff, developed over centuries of bragging and eating hors d'oeuvres." Women, who've presumably eaten fewer hors d'oeuvres and bragged less, have a different catalogue of social behaviour. There is no gene for pontificating on their double helix. "Women ask a question and actually listen to the answer, which is something men do not love to do," Solomon observes. "That is why, I think, we sometimes miss the point."

Listening is an important aspect of girl talk since it is at the very centre of reciprocal communication. Women require it of each other. "I'll converse on almost any subject, but I will no longer, not ever, participate in one-sided conversations," says writer



Katherine Govier. If this means chatting with women only, during the course of a four-hour cocktail party, well, so be it. "I finally feel comfortable moving away from an arrogant person who talks only about himself or herself. I don't encounter the situation as often as I used to, but I honestly have to say that lately, I've voted with my feet."

Not listening to women is embedded in our culture. Probably because historically, they haven't been credited with enough intellect to say anything worth hearing. And even current studies show conclusively that women talk less frequently than men, that they tell fewer narratives (especially lengthy ones) and that they are routinely interrupted by men - who just as routinely get away with it. Women who may no longer consciously believe that their silence is golden, will still instinctively endure almost any degree of conversational tedium if the speaker is male. What's more, in the very popular and egregious 1995 book *The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right*, authors Ellen Fien and Sherrie Schneider unabashedly advise single women to "follow [the man's] lead...be quiet and reserved..." Female loquacity, they warn, has dire consequences: "We know one man who stopped calling a woman he was physically attracted to because she simply didn't stop talking."

There is also still little gender parity in the realm of humour. Publicist Liza Herz finds herself reining in her slightly offbeat sense of humour when men are around. "I don't really want to do it, but witty women do make men nervous, and then things feel awkward. To them," Herz says, "a woman with a good sense of humour is one who laughs at their jokes." At a recent party, Herz, while talking to a man, made a quip that connected their current topic with an earlier one. "My remark wasn't even all that clever, but his reaction was 'Yeah. I get it. Oh, you're good!' as if I was trying to trip him up."

If clever women are resented, women without obvious professional status are baldly ignored. The simple statement "I'm an at-home mother with two kids" can clear a space faster than a backhoe, and here, women are just as guilty as men. Professional women can be quick to judge and dismiss another less career-oriented female. Full-time parenthood certainly isn't valued as highly as it should be, but this phenomenon is more complicated than that. It's that pesky early training persisting again. Women aren't taught to blow their own horns. In fact, they're not even supposed to admit to owning any instrument of that nature.

Some women actually go as far as to say deeply self-deprecating things like, "I'm just a housewife," accompanying the apology (and that's what it is) with a look of acute embarrassment.

And this knee-jerk humility can intensify when there are rampant careerists in the room. Once subjected to a barrage of dinner party introductions like "Mary Black, Merrill Lynch" and "Frances Hill, Union Carbide," a woman I know responded anxiously, "Janice Freeman, nowhere." Not only was she putting herself down, but she wasn't even being truthful in doing so. Janice was on sabbatical from her full-time professorship in medieval studies - a fact, needless to say, few people attending that evening ever found out.

Katherine Govier recalls attending a dinner party which dissolved almost at the outset into gender camps, with the women inside and the men outside, drinking beer around the barbecue. "I remember one man came in and wanted to talk to us. He hung around



for awhile, clearly intimidated, and eventually wandered away." There is more energy in female conversation she feels, "and there are men who want to interact that way, too."

Gender issues usually come down to a matter of perception, Evan Solomon feels. He considers his female co-workers to be strong and feisty; they tell him he dominates. "There's no way I can get it right because I'm a man, not a woman. The best men can do is ensure equality in areas like education and job opportunity and then if the men still talk more than the women, well, that's just the way it is. We can't tinker on that level."

So where do we go from here? It may be that John Gray was right and women are from Venus while men are from Mars. But maybe that's not so bad. It does give us a whole solar system to party in.

3 "Male Logic" and "Women's Intuition"

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8309/malelogic.html>

Men and women are, of course, biologically different. There are even significant differences in male and female brains; women, for example, have a thicker corpus callosum (the thing that connects the two halves of the brain). However, it is a giant leap from observing that there are neurological differences between the sexes to assuming that these differences correspond to the classic categorisation of men being logical and women being emotional.

The left hemisphere of the brain generally deals with linear processing, as found in language and some types of mathematics, and this hemisphere develops faster in girls than in boys. The old "11 plus" test of verbal reasoning used in British schools was actually adjusted to bring boys' scores up to the level of girls! Whatever the case, it is a mistake to look at people's brains and then decide that they must think in a certain way; it would be far better to try and find out how people actually think, and then to see if this corresponds to brain structure.

Since our main guide to how people think is their language, the fact that in most cultures men and women talk in different ways, and about different things, may lead us to false conclusions about the way they think in general. Women's conversation tends to emphasise feelings more, which may also mean that they think about feelings more. It does not, however, mean that women are more emotional. It is perfectly possible that men are just as emotional, but for social reasons they talk (and think) about their feelings less. Similarly, the fact that in most cultures men argue more about abstract things does not mean that men are naturally more logical, it just means that the things men prefer to talk about require logical argument more than they require expression of feelings. Obviously the more you argue, the better you get at it, hence the prejudice that men are somehow biologically more logical. This would be like assuming that I am biologically better at speaking English (my first language) than Turkish (my second).

Problems also arise with the actual words we use: logic, reason, emotion and intuition.

Logic: Logic is simply a set of principles for getting from something we already knew, to something we didn't. If we know that all cows eat grass, and we know that Daisy is a cow, we can use very simple logic to say that Daisy eats grass, even if we have never seen her eat anything. The more complex logic that we use in constructing philosophical arguments or designing computers is really only doing the same kind of thing.



Reason: Reason or being rational is a little more problematic, since it involves an assessment of aims and actions. If our aims are consistent with each other and our actions achieve our aims, then we can fairly say that we are behaving rationally. If we act in a way that prevents us from realising our aims, then we are behaving irrationally, or in other words, stupidly. For example, if I know that I will have a better relationship with my wife if I don't shout at her, but I still shout at her because I am in a bad mood, my problem is not that I am being emotional, it is that I am being stupid.

Emotion: The opposite of "rational" is not, then, "emotional" but "irrational". If we set up a pair of opposites, rational/emotional, we are likely to make the assumption that women are more emotional and therefore irrational, which is a polite way of saying that women are stupid. While having strong emotions can sometimes interfere with your thought processes, this is not automatically the case. For example, I often get quite excited when I am working on a new theory or project, but this usually makes my thinking better, not worse. Strong "negative" emotions such as rage, jealousy or depression are usually the result of irrational thinking as much as a cause of it, and men are just as vulnerable to this type of stupidity as women.

Intuition: "Intuition" is an even trickier concept. We usually say that we arrive at an idea or solution to a problem "intuitively" when we know something without knowing how we came to know it. A scientist may arrive at a new theory because the idea just "pops into" his or her head, or even turns up in a dream. You may get an "intuitive" feeling that a person is dishonest without actually having heard them say something you know to be untrue. In both these cases, what seems to be happening is that the mind stores and sorts information unconsciously, providing us only with the end result of this process. There is no guarantee, of course, that this conclusion will be true; a scientist would still have to perform experiments to prove their intuitive theory, and you would probably want some hard evidence to prove that the person you feel is dishonest really does tell lies.

There is therefore nothing particularly strange or mystical about intuition; it is something we do all the time. Why, then, do we talk about "women's intuition", as though men never arrive at a conclusion without consciously following all the stages that were necessary to reach it? Again, the answer is probably linguistic. As we have seen, traditionally women's conversation is less formal, less argumentative, and more concerned with feelings than men's conversation. Intuitive conclusions are therefore more acceptable in an all-female group. Men, on the other hand, are expected to argue more, and to argue more logically, presenting evidence in a systematic way to back up their conclusions. It is less socially acceptable in an all-male conversation (or a conversation where the men are doing most of the talking) to say "Well guys, I don't know why, but I just get this kind of feeling that $e=mc^2$."



4 Gender Differences in Communication

The following information comes from <http://saber.towson.edu/itrow/wmcomm.htm> and is based on a review of the research on gender and communication that was prepared by Dr. Beth Vanfossen for ITROW's Women and Expression Conference.

4.1 *Who talks the most?*

- In mixed-gender groups, at public gatherings, and in many informal conversations, men spend more time talking than do women.
- For example, in one experiment, the men with expertise talked longer than the women with expertise.
- Men initiate more interaction than do women.

4.2 *Who interrupts?*

- Men are more likely than women to interrupt the speaking of other people.
- A study of faculty meetings revealed that women are more likely than men to be interrupted.
- Some of the interruptions that women experience come from other women. (Women, when they do interrupt, are more likely to interrupt other women than they are to interrupt men, according to two studies.)
- Women are more likely than men to allow an interruption of their talk to be successful (they do not resist the interruption as much as men do).

4.3 *Gender patterns in formal group meetings*

- In meetings, men gain the "floor" more often, and keep the floor for longer periods of time, regardless of their status in the organisation.
- In professional conferences, women take a less active part in responding to papers.
- When women do ask a question, they take less time in asking it than do men. In addition, they employ much less pre-question predication, they are less likely to ask multiple questions, and they are more likely than men to phrase their question in personal terms.

4.4 *Gender patterns in informal group meetings?*

- When the floor is an informal, collaborative venture, women display a fuller range of language ability. Here, in the kind of conversation where women excel, people jointly build an idea, operate on the same wavelengths, and have deep conversational overlaps.

4.5 *Does it matter?*

- Those who talk more are more likely to be perceived as dominant and controlling of the conversation.
- Those who talk the most in decision-making groups also tend to become the leaders. Especially important are "task leadership behaviours," such as asking questions, helping to set up structures and procedures for the groups, giving information and opinions, and identifying and solving problems.
- Interrupters are perceived as more successful and driving, but less socially acceptable, reliable, and companionable than the interrupted speaker.



- In a study of trial witnesses in a superior court, undergraduate student observers saw both female and male witnesses who use powerful language as being more competent, intelligent, and trustworthy than those who use powerless language.

4.6 *Some of the ways women are affected by these patterns?*

- When someone is interrupted often or her comments are ignored, she may come to believe that what she has to say must not be important.
- Women are less likely than men to have confidence in their ability to make persuasive arguments.
- Many women feel inhibited in formal, mixed-gender groups.
- Some women participate in creating their own passive participation -- by allowing interruptions, by not taking advantage of natural pauses in the conversation, or by asking questions without explaining the context out of which the question emerged.
- Some women, when they do gain the "floor," talk too fast as though they know they are about to be interrupted.

4.7 *Gender differences in communication patterns and power*

- When people are strangers, they expect less competence from women than from men.
- But if women are known to have prior experience or expertise related to the task, or if women are assigned leadership roles, then women show greatly increased verbal behaviours in mixed-sex groups.
- A study of witnesses in a superior court found that educated professionals who have high social status were less likely to use "powerless language," regardless of gender.
- Thus, differences are linked to power, and are context-specific. Differences are socially created and therefore may be socially altered.
- Other studies have found that talking time is related both to gender (because men spend more time talking than women) and to organisational power (because the more powerful spend more time talking than the less powerful).

4.8 *Is assertiveness in women viewed negatively by others?*

- In several carefully-controlled studies using undergraduate students, assertive behaviour exhibited by females was evaluated as positively as the same behaviour exhibited by males (based on a study of employers who evaluated audio tapes showing direct assertive, empathetic assertive, and self-effacing assertive behaviours). The least-valued behaviour is the self-effacing assertive.
- Subordinates prefer a supervisor to balance a task-orientated style with a relationship-oriented style.
- Research further has suggested that the adoption of task behaviours (a focus on getting things done) enhances a female's adaptability in the organisation (but the adoption of relationship behaviours -- focusing on the relationships among people -- proves problematic for males). "The healthiest and best-liked individuals, male or female, were assertive, decisive, and intellectual, rather than nurturant, responsive and emotional"(Fitzpatrick). Therefore, women may want to focus on task- and impression-management goals in their interactions.



4.9 Other

- The use of tag questions ("It's really cold in here, isn't it?"), disclaimers ("I may be wrong, but . . ."), and question statements ("won't you close the door?") all decrease the perceived assertiveness of speech. However, research has not confirmed that women and men differ in the frequency of their use of these forms.

5 Some strategies, solutions, and practical ideas:

There are three competing goals every time we communicate. These goals will be given different weightings depending on the topic and the context of the conversation.

1. A task goal get the job done.
2. A relational goal..... do not do unnecessary damage to the relationships between you and others by your message.
3. An identity management goal make your communication project the image that you want.

In getting an appropriate balance on these three consider the following:

- Women should avoid using tag questions (That's an interesting idea, isn't it?") or disclaimers ("I could be mistaken, but . . ."; "This may sound strange but . . ."). These are fine for men as they are contrary to conventional patterns.
- To gain the floor in discussion, use strategic questioning. The careful use of questions in a conversation controls when a topic is changed and when a topic is extended and discussed at greater length.
- Women should not adopt male behaviour by greatly increasing their rate of interrupting others. Once a woman has the floor, she should resist giving it to another speaker until she has completed her points ("Just a moment, I haven't finished").
- Instead of asking open-ended questions such as, "How is the project going?," ask closed questions such as "when can we expect the report of the data structures?"
- Women should not undercut what they are saying with their non-verbal actions. They should adopt a slightly more relaxed posture, do less frequent smiling (and smile only when there is something to smile about), and less frequent nodding, head tilting and dropping of eyes in response to another's gaze. They should avoid using the intonation of a question (raising the voice at the end of a sentence rather than lowering it) when making a declarative statement.



The following points are adapted from *The Androgynous Manager*, by Alice G. Sargent, Amacom, 1981:

- Learn to state exactly what you want and face the risk of being cut down or wrong, especially at meetings. This is not a "safe" position, but it is an honest one. Be concerned more about stating your own position than about how the other person is reacting to you.
- State your own needs and do not back down even if the immediate response is non acceptance.
- Stop self-limiting behaviours, such as allowing interruptions or laughing after making a serious statement.
- Practice taking risks and overcoming fear.
- Learn to focus on a task and regard it as at least as important as the relationship among the people doing the task. This is particularly important for women.
- Stop turning anger and blame inward. Stop making negative statements about yourself. Make positive statements. Another point particularly relevant to women.
- Stop feeling comfortable with being a victim and suffering.
- Deal differently with women: If female yourself develop an "old girl" network, working more closely with other women. If male be prepared to listen and forthcoming with information.

6 Dominance, good for women but men face death

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Men who monopolise conversations, interrupt others and excessively compete for attention -- a personality trait known as social dominance -- have a higher rate of early death than men who have a more relaxed approach to communicating, according to Michael Babyak, a researcher at Duke University Medical Centre.

In a 22-year study of 750 white, middle-class men, Babyak and his colleagues at three other institutions found that men who were identified as socially dominant were 60 percent more likely than the other subjects to die of all causes during the study period. Babyak and lead investigator the late B. Kent Houston conducted the study while at the University of Kansas in conjunction with colleagues from the University of California at Berkeley and at San Francisco (UCSF).

The new study suggests that social dominance by itself is as much of a risk factor as hostility. Conversely, men who spoke calmly and quietly had lower than normal rates of heart disease and early death compared to all other personality subgroups in the study.

While social dominance and hostility are both traits of the Type A personality, Babyak said the two behaviours are different. Hostility is often a tool that dominant people use to get their way, but dominant behaviour can be an attempt to control without necessarily using hostility. "Interestingly, socially dominant women may be at less health risk than socially dominant men because dominance may mean something different for women," he said. "In men, dominance appears to involve getting ahead of other people strictly for the sake of getting ahead, and that seems to be a key aspect of its danger."

In women, however, dominance generally means gathering more support for one's cause and collaborating instead of competing.



Babyak says that social dominance is not the same thing as being excessively outgoing or achievement-oriented because dominance is driven by feelings of insecurity whereas the latter traits are driven by self-confidence and the desire for personal fulfilment. Socially dominant people tend to be attention-seekers who are trying to get ahead at the expense of others and are struggling to prove their self worth.

"Social dominance by itself is a moderate risk factor for early death, but it takes on even more significance when you combine it with other high-risk behaviours such as smoking, a poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle," he said. "Clearly, if you have these personality characteristics, it wouldn't hurt to modify them."

As with other personality traits, researchers don't know if social dominance is genetically or environmentally determined. But regardless of its origins, people can still lower their risk of disease and death by modifying their behaviour.



7 Instructor Notes and Handouts

The material is written very much from a woman's perspective but that in itself is important. It is important to stress the role culture has in forming communication norms and thus shaping social behaviour.

It is important to remember that the material and the examples given here are generalities. All men and all women are not the same. There is no right or wrong it is a matter of being aware.

A good example of different attitudes is the way women and men approach applying for a job. If the job has a detailed job description men will apply as long as they are convinced themselves they can do most of the things listed. There may be 40% of the tasks they have never done but will "bluff" their way through. A woman on the other hand will not apply unless she believes she can already do all the things listed.

This point goes along way to explaining why despite affirmative action policies being in place for a number of years the number of women in senior positions is still small.

Another point to make is the difference in the way women want to discuss a problem and the way men want to discuss it. Women are happy to simply verbalise a problem and will not during the course of a discussion seek to be given a solution. Simply talking about helps them find the solution. Men on the other hand want to get or provide a solution. This often manifests itself in relationships and how couples talk about and interact over work issues at home.