

We get in trouble when we treat people only as individuals instead of also as categories. (Of course the reverse is true & is the root & essence of prejudice. But that thought hardly needs development.)

CARBON: Coal is common, a diamond is rare.

SOUND: Talk is cheap, real intersexual conversation is rare.

Estrogens & androgens are on not just other, but opposing, kicks (or journeys).

So if I'm to be both intelligent & compassionate, I must remind myself, when talking with any woman, that her name is "Woman" as well as "_____".
Go & do thou likewise, woman, when talking with me.

Now somebody's gone & said it, why trillions of conversations across the sexual divide have misfired--or perhaps I should say, have fired instead of embracing.

Can we talk?

Sexes struggle in conversation

By SUSAN CAMPBELL
THE HARTFORD COURANT

A woman is talking to a female friend about a problem at work: Her boss doesn't want to let her have a particular day off.

Hmm, says her friend. That doesn't seem fair.

Her boss is even starting to insist that she work weekends.

That is really unfair, says her friend.

In general, this is how women talk to each other. They agree. They support. They empathize.

If two men were having the same conversation, the male friend might react very differently. In general, men use adversarial methods of communicating. They question. They cajole. They challenge.

Mix those completely different conversational styles, and you get conflict, hurt feelings and misunderstandings, says Deborah Tannen, author of "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" (William Morrow & Co., \$18.95), a book that is climbing best-seller lists. It placed No. 8 recently on a best-seller list based on sales at the Waldenbooks chain.

Different strokes

Tannen says differences in conversational style — not basic disagreements — account for most misunderstandings between couples.

For example:

- Many men resist asking for directions, help or other information. To women, this is tantamount to ignorance.

- Many women tend to apologize all the time and speak in tentative tones. To men, this is as if the women are begging not to be taken seriously.

- Both men and women accuse their partners of not listening when, in fact, they may be listening, but doing so in a style the other doesn't recognize.

"Women and men do not understand the world the other one is coming from," says Tannen, a linguistics professor at Georgetown University in Washington.

For example, a woman may tell a man about a problem that she is facing and be barraged with advice, which she interprets as criticism. Meanwhile, her male partner may feel that he is only being helpful, Tannen says.

"A man said to me on 'Donahue,' with total incredulity, 'She wants me to look at it from her point of view,'" Tannen says. "He didn't understand that he was supposed to be on her side."

Much of the confusion comes from the pull between intimacy and independence, she says. A woman may yearn for the former, a man for the latter. A woman, before agreeing to go out with friends, will say that she will check with her partner first. She probably expects the same from her partner.

But her partner, a male, would see checking in with his female partner as a threat to his independence. And so his female partner interprets that as a sign of not caring, Tannen says. And so it goes.

Another difference is in the way women and men approach talking. Conversation drives the wheel in women's relationships; actions do the same for men. Women can get together and chat. Men chat over an activity. How many jokes and cartoons have you seen where the man is hiding behind his newspaper, while the woman whines that he doesn't talk to her any more?

A no-fault approach

Where Tannen parts company with many of the current books on men and women is that she takes a no-fault approach. Women are only doing what they have learned, and so are men.

"Both styles are equally valid in their own terms," she says.

Typically, readers' reactions to Tannen's book have been similar to that of her mother, she says.

"She has been married to my father for 56 years, and she finally started reading my book instead of just sharing it," Tannen says. "She said, 'You mean there are other men like that? I thought it was just Daddy.'"

Tannen lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband. Despite her scholarly tomes and popular press on the subject of communication — four years ago, she wrote "That's Not What I Meant!: How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Your Relations With Others" (Ballantine, \$3.95) — in real life Tannen said she treads water like everyone else.

CCT
31 July 90