



**You Just Don't Understand.
Women and Men in Conversation**

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Author Bio and Credits: University Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University and author of widely acclaimed *That's Not What I Meant*.

Noteworthy info regarding contents and chapter titles: The author starts immediately with the difference the two genders desire from conversation: women- connectedness, men-status. Chapter two develops this premise using the terms asymmetry versus symmetry. Chapter three speaks of the two different types of talk: rapport talk (women) and report talk (men). Chapter four looks at the two different gender perspectives on gossip. Chapter's five and six describe speaking style differences: lecturing vs. listening, community vs. contests. Chapter seven tells us how to understand the significance of interrupting given different talk styles. Chapter eight goes into disadvantages women have because of gender stereotyping. Chapter nine explains the big mystery: why men don't look at their partner when talking! And Chapter ten says: ok, now what? How can we better communicate now that we know these differences?

Author's Main Points:

- Women seek connection in conversation; men seek status. This drives the styles used in conversation.
- Meaning in conversation is filled in by the person listening. Interpretation depends on the hearer's own focus, concerns, and habits rather than on the spirit in which the words were intended.
- It all starts in childhood. Boys, from an early age learn to get what they want- higher status- by displaying superiority and combativeness. Girls learn that displaying superiority will not get them what they want-affiliation with their peers (connectedness and intimacy).
- So often the man takes the role of problem solver, whereas the woman just wants confirmation of her feelings. Women think men are showing a lack of sympathy- a failure of intimacy.

- When we see others acting as if the world were an entirely different place from the one we inhabit, we are shaken. Being able to understand that we respond differently to events is a crucial step toward feeling that our feet are planted on firm ground.
- The real problem is conversational style: women and men have different ways of talking. For women, the essence of friendship is talk. For men, talk is for information.
- When a woman has a conversation with a man, her efforts to emphasize their similarities and avoid showing off can easily be interpreted, through the lens of status (the man), as relegating her to a one down position, making her appear incompetent or insecure. (feeling of independence and status by the man). Interdependence is symmetrical: both parties rely on each other so neither is one up or one down.
- Men remember jokes so they can repeat them to their buds, thus showing dominance, one up man ship, status, independence, “having the knowledge”, Women just want to laugh in order to maintain connectedness and symmetry in the conversation and relationship.
- Listening: some men don’t want to listen because it frames them as subordinate.
- Hope for the future: women who find themselves unwillingly cast as the listener should practice propelling themselves out of the position rather than waiting patiently for the lecture to end. If women learn that they don’t always have to listen, men learn they don’t always have to have interesting information to impress.
- You have to be careful not to stereotype speakers by gender and ethnicity when their way of communicating has to do with their different style: high considerateness and high involvement.
- Male-female conversations are more like men’s conversations than they are like women’s. So when women and men talk to each other, both make adjustments, but the women make more. This helps explain why women are dissatisfied with communication in their relationships with men.
- Women in authority find themselves in a double bind: if they speak in ways expected of women, they are seen as inadequate leaders. If they speak in ways expected of leaders, they are seen as inadequate women.
- *Term: Complimentary Schismogenesis*- a mutually aggravating spiral by which each person’s response to the other’s behavior provokes more exaggerated forms of the divergent behavior.
- Seeing a pattern against which to evaluate individual differences provides a starting point to develop not only self-understanding but also flexibility. 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.
- The best style is a flexible one. By being aware of our ways of talking, we can override our automatic impulses and adapt our habitual styles when they are not serving us well. Once you figure out that men and women often have different assumptions about the world and about ways of talking, people are very creative about figuring out how this rift is affecting their own relationships.

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About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

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