

Georgetown University linguist and popular author Deborah Tannen studies the reasons why people of the same culture, even of the same family, sometimes feel that they are not understood. In her book, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (2007; original 1990), she argues that men's and women's conversational styles are different. Because these two genders have different goals and expectations in a conversation, talk between men and women can be challenging. (With the lack of specification, readers may assume her research focuses on cisgender men and women.)

Tannen studied the speech patterns of men and women on videos in order to understand the differences in cross-gendered communication. She concludes that female speech emphasizes "rapport." "Rapport-talk" focuses on how a speaker is feeling, shows empathy and understanding, and tends towards self-disclosure. Male speech, on the other hand, is more of a "report" style, in which information is stressed rather than emotion. "Report-talk" establishes power and status among speakers, and tends to be task oriented.

These different speech patterns develop as part of the socialization process of children. Since boys and girls "grow up in what are essentially different cultures ... talk between women and men is cross-cultural communication" (Tannen 2007:14). This results in the frustration that men and women may experience in a relationship when they try to communicate. It also has roots in unequal power relationships between men

and women in society, which find their way into language styles.

People with male speech habits may think their girlfriends, wives, sisters, or mothers are "demanding and needy." People with female speech habits may feel their boyfriends, husbands, brothers, or fathers "never tell them anything" or that they "don't listen." Tannen wants you to know that it's not you—it all just comes down to different styles of talking.

Sexual orientation can be essential to social identity, and therefore can become important in the formation of language patterns. For instance, "Lavender linguistics" is a term used to refer to the speech patterns of members of the queer community. Linguists conclude that most gay speech patterns are not natural in a biological sense, but are socially constructed as part of a speech community.

Because gay subcultures are diverse, certain features of language may be used to signal membership to others in the larger gay community. For gay men, clues signifying membership may include intonation, certain vowel and consonant modifications, or slang vocabulary. Some terms that signify insider status for gay men are *bear* (a large, bearded gay man), *slay* (to impress), and *queen* (a flamboyant gay man). For lesbians, it may include slang—such as an understanding of the terms *butch* (a masculine lesbian) and *femme* (a feminine lesbian)—but also forms of non-verbal communication such as a more androgynous or masculine style of dress and hair.