



You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation

Deborah Tannen

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From the author of *New York Times* bestseller *You're Wearing That?* this bestselling classic work draws upon groundbreaking research by an acclaimed sociolinguist to show that women and men live in different worlds, made of different words.

Women and men live in different worlds...made of different words.

Spending nearly four years on the *New York Times* bestseller list, including eight months at number one, *You Just Don't Understand* is a true cultural and intellectual phenomenon. This is the book that brought gender differences in ways of speaking to the forefront of public awareness. With a rare combination of scientific insight and delightful, humorous writing, Tannen shows why women and men can walk away from the same conversation with completely different impressions of what was said.

Studded with lively and entertaining examples of real conversations, this book gives you the tools to understand what went wrong -- and to find a common language in which to strengthen relationships at work and at home. A classic in the field of interpersonal relations, this book will change forever the way you approach conversations.

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation Details

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From Reader Review You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation for online ebook

Renee M says

Absolutely fascinating. I found this to be the most helpful books on communication and relationships that I've ever read. Tannen keeps a lively pace, making her research accessible with clear examples from a variety of situations from the playground to the boardroom.

P.S. Do not bother with the abridged audio version. The presentation does not need to be abridged and the abridgment undercuts the impact of the material.

Alan says

Deborah Tannen made her reputation with this examination of the differences in the ways men and women communicate. As a novelist, I found it quite useful in terms of understanding how women think and speak. As a reader, I found it amusing and entertaining.

As a critic, I do find it a little simplistic. The main thesis is that women value community, empathy and friendship within a group while men are always struggling to find their place in a hierarchy and if possible raise it. According to Tannen, this colors how they think and speak.

Men are always trying to grab the leadership role by interrupting, hogging conversations and offering practical information. Women on the other hand find comfort in offering and receiving comfort and avoiding confrontation.

There's certainly some truth to this. Which husband hasn't had his wife say, "These shoes are killing me?" When he replies, "So get some new ones," she is offended and upset. What he should have said was, "Oh I know exactly how you feel. Mine are killing me too."

Am I alone in detecting some subtle prejudice in Tannen's analysis? Reading this book, I occasionally felt the discomfort of the unsubtle, brutish, less-evolved half of the species confronted with the superiority of the female. We're certainly living in a rapidly feminizing society. Tannen describes how little boys in school struggle to sit still, pay attention and follow instructions while their female peers have no problems whatsoever. All these boys want is to be boys. Eventually, given time, they will civilize themselves -- kind of.

What I say about gender variations of this kind is, "Vive la difference."

I find that being a man suits me quite well. I like finding practical solutions and communicating information in brief bursts. I'm comfortable reading the newspaper at the breakfast table in companionable silence. It doesn't mean I don't love my wife. It means there's room in my life both for my love for her and my desire to read the newspaper over breakfast.

Having read this book, I've decided to try being a little more empathetic in my interactions with women. But I will never, ever say my shoes are killing me, even if they are. I'll just change them.

Susan says

So far this is fascinating and enlightening. The only thing I'm unsure about is whether the author will provide good suggestions for how to bridge the gap between typical masculine and typical feminine styles of communication. But I love how she is careful to always point out how BOTH have to compromise some but

also BOTH have inherent value--one is not better than the other, one should not conform more to the other.

Lucia Pinizotti says

Forget Men are From Mars and Women are From Venus.... go right to the scholarly work that started it all. If you want to better understand what can, and often does, go wrong between men and women in conversation this is a must read.

Arminzerella says

Men and women have different ways of speaking. Men often try to one-up one another in conversation and take on a dominant role. This can be seen in them apparently lecturing in a teacher style (to show how much they know), something Tannen refers to as "report" type talking. Their styles of speaking show dominance, and independence. Women, on the other hand tend to try and build community and rapport. So while men's style puts a dividing wedge between people, women's may overlap and downplay things in order to bring people closer together. Problems may arise when women and men try to converse with one another, because women will feel that men's styles don't give them room to breathe, don't allow give and take, and automatically put them on the defensive (as men will use banter and argument as a way of establishing dominance, or merely having a good time). Also, even culturally there may be differences in styles of conversation/communication. Something as little as how long one pauses can cause offense among different peoples. Some require longer pauses in order to speak, some require (practically) written invitations. Changing the subject can also be construed as inattention, rudeness, dominance, or more positively, as downplaying the significance (which can be interpreted as being supportive by dismissing the problem as not being a problem) of something, or relating similar experiences (shifting the focus from one person to another). It's not even just that it's men and women who have difficulty talking with one another it's people with different (perhaps incompatible) styles that will have problems.

One way of thinking about it, before you blow up at how your conversation partner is communicating, is to ask yourself what their intentions behind the conversation are.

"Not seeing style differences for what they are, people draw conclusions about personality ("you're illogical," "you're insecure," "you're self-centered") or intentions ("you don't listen," "you put me down").

Understanding style differences for what they are takes the sting out of them. Believing that "you're not interested in me," "you don't care about me as much as I care about you," or "you want to take away my freedom" feels awful. Believing that "you have a different way of showing you're listening" or "showing you care" allows for no-fault negotiation: You can ask for or make adjustments without casting or taking blame." (p. 298)

What struck me was how similar a pattern folks get into when we get annoyed with one another. The man insists one thing, and the woman gets upset because he's forcefully trying to make her admit to something she never intended.

Tannen's example:

"An argument that arose between a real-life husband and wife shows the same pattern. In this argument, which was recorded and analyzed (from a different point of view) by Jane Frank, a husband returned home and called his wife to arms: "How would you like to eat humble crow?" She had said it would be impossible

to find a painting of a particular size and type that he wanted; now he had found one and wanted her to admit that she had been wrong. Instead, the wife claimed that she had said it would be difficult, not impossible, to find. She proposed a compromise: She hadn't meant her remark as he interpreted it. But he would have none of that. She had said it; he had proved her wrong; she should admit defeat. Their argument, which became very heated, could not be resolved, because he never wavered from the message level - the literal accuracy of what she had said - but she soon moved on to what seemed far more important to her, the metamessage that his position sent about their relationship: "Why do you always want to prove me wrong and rank me out?" (p. 176).

Scary how right on that is.

I read this while I was completely frustrated with one of my guy friends - who could not seem to talk to me without attempting to engage me in some kind of argument or verbal skirmish. It was completely exhausting for me, and I couldn't understand why he had to *win* all the time. In his case the "intentions" behind the arguments were to provoke some kind of response in me (he had little other entertainment). When I figured out that you can't argue with crazy and stopped trying, I immediately felt much better. Not sure how he's doing, though.

Iman Nazari says

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Kat says

Thank goodness, this book is terribly dated. Though she does acknowledge there are exceptions to gender-specific communication, You Just Don't Understand serves as another example that gender is on a sliding scale rather than on a fixed point. For instance, she writes, "Women feel it is natural to consult with their partners at every turn, while men automatically make more decisions without consulting their partners...Women expect decisions to be discussed first and made by consensus...men feel oppressed by lengthy discussions about what they see as minor decisions, and they feel hemmed in if they can't just act without talking first." The man's attitude in this situation has always been my own; I don't want a partner who expects me to consult or even inform them every time I plan to make a decision (it makes me feel suffocated), but one who both values my judgment and is secure enough in our relationship to trust me and respect my choices. Throughout the book I found myself relating to either what she describes as the traditionally men's point of view or a combination of both. For example, when presented with a friend's problem, Dr. Tannen illustrates that men will mitigate the problem by dismissing it as unimportant in order to decrease their friend's anxiety over it (there are several ways to do this) while women will show support and agreement with the friend's anxiety in order to make her feel that she's not dealing with it alone (there are several ways to do this also). I have done both, depending on the circumstances.

I recommend You Just Don't Understand for anyone interested in honing their awareness of different conversational styles, the ways our backgrounds influence our communication as well as our expectations of others' communication with us, the misunderstandings that arise from incorrectly interpreting the metamesages underlying verbal speech, and the ways in which it is possible to reduce the verbal conflicts which are caused by these differences, but only as it applies to individuals, regardless of their gender.

Leslie says

Deborah Tannen has a keenly tuned ear and a unique ability to see patterns of communication style of which most of us are unaware. In this book, she explains her insights into the vast cultural differences separating men and women which influence - and often complicate - nearly all of our daily communication both within and between genders. It should be read by anyone who has been frustrated by: (a) his male friends constantly one-upping him; (b) her female friends allowing too little individualization; (c) his girlfriend/wife offering help or condolence or seeming unduly controlling; or (d) her boyfriend/husband seeming aloof and unwilling to engage. Others will also appreciate its insights into dynamics they found strange, overwhelming, or difficult. It offers liberation from character assassination during conflicts in communication and the opportunity to understand others' perspectives so that we don't get hung up on communication style in our relationships or our communication about really important issues.

Nathan says

It's frustrating to agree with most of a book, but to come out the other end not liking it. It's as though every course of a meal was individually superb, but overall it was found lacking. In this case, I enjoyed the stories of men and women talking past each other and I like the explanation, but I quickly became tired of diagnosis and wanted some cure.

There may be no cure but understanding. Tannen's thesis is that men's minds operate in a hierarchical world of status, where independence and problem-solving rule day (because dependence has status implications, as do seeking and providing help). Women, the story goes, are about interdependence and equality. Misunderstandings come from statements and behaviour rooted in one style, interpreted through the lens of another: she wants small talk to maintain the bond of the relationship, he doesn't need it and views it as an attempt to control his time through meaningless prattle. These broad strokes don't do the explanatory power of the book justice.

Reading this hot on the heels of a book on how there's no such thing as innate gender differences, I was sensitive to the idea that men and women work differently. Tannen's not saying it's universal or that it's innate, but rather that these are the models behind the types of speech we think of as "feminine" and "masculine". It's still a frustratingly broad brush, because I could recognize parts of myself in the description of man talk (boring people with facts) and in the description of woman talk (eye contact, mmhmm, deprecation in speech).

As observer, she is impeccable: many of the conversations she describes feel like ones I've been part of. One of the first hooked me, for example:

... a conversation that took place between a couple in their car. The woman had asked, "Would you like to stop for a drink?" Her husband had answered, truthfully, "No," and they hadn't stopped. He was later frustrated to learn that his wife was annoyed because she had wanted to stop for a drink. He wondered, "Why didn't she just say what she wanted? Why did she play games with me?" The wife, I explained, was annoyed not because she had not gotten her way, but because her preference had not been considered. From her point of view, she had shown concern for her husband's wishes, but he had shown no concern for hers.

The independence/interdependence thing will stick with me, and I'll look at my own interactions with wife, friends, children, family through those lenses. But I'm not sure I buy into everything she's selling: the descriptions of how children play, for example, bore little relationship to the behaviour I've seen in my kids. The girls fight for status using outright control (using orders instead of the "let's" construction Tannen talks about), and the boys are not fidgety physical superficial horrors.

The best part of the book may well be the poem "In the Crook of His Neck" by Cheryl Romney-Brown:

Fine hairs on his shoulders gleam
like epaulets, reminding me of silk
mulberry threads Penelope used
for tapestries spun waiting
for her hero to come home.
We, women, always long for men
to step out of a myth or a Marlboro ad.

It begins all over again as he
caresses my back. I inhale the scent,
begin to relax. Once more I become
a defenseless girl wanting only
to close my eyes, bury my head
in the crook of his neck.

How old I was I the first time,
possibly three? It happened
when Daddy came home. "Please
hold me, protect me, werewolves
are out, their eyes burning hot.
If you don't I know I will die."
I closed my eyes, buried
my head in the crook of his neck.

When I was sixteen, ripe but pure,
down by the arbor on a hot summer's night,
my first beau's lips brushed mine. "My hero,
your Juliet's here." Pink tulle bound
my heart. I closed my eyes, buried
my head in the crook of his neck.

I am a grown woman, mother of men.
Experience fades; memory stills.
If only for a moment, I am saved.
My hero is here, for maybe an hour,
willing to do battle, kill all my foes.
Illusions, myths, whatever is true.
I close my eyes, bury my head
in the crook of his neck.

But it was a long read to find that gem.

Darcy Leech says

Chapter summaries written for Graduate Credit by 4.0 GPA student in 2015

You Just Don't Understand chapter summaries

1. In this chapter the author discusses the differences in communication styles between men and women. Men are said to focus on hierarchy, competition and independence. In contrast women focus on building intimacy and connection through conversation. These patterns seem to be built into our makeup, though they're only patterns. Men and women both have freedom to be who they are, but for successful communication, we must realize men and women have different patterns. In conversation there are multiple strategies, including building on status to hierarchy, trying to either 1 up or 1 down the person you are speaking with, or working to build connection through stopping wishing intimacy through similarities. To be a successful communicator it is important to realize that messages are framed through meta messages and different people, different genders, or different cultures may treat meta messages differently.

As a gifted facilitator this will be important for me to remember, as I will have meetings with parents where I must speak differently to the men than the women. I will need to speak differently to my boys and girls students. I will also have to balance relationships with teachers, building intimacy and status as appropriate to both seem like a confidante and resource and also a knowledgeable competent person.

2. Chapter 2 begins by discussing the difference of the gift of understanding and the gift of advice. Women seem to connect to buy the gift of understanding, building intimacy. A man would tend to rather build status by giving the gift of advice. Sometimes men and women talk at opposite purposes, for example if a woman were to offer understanding to a man's problem he would feel belittled. If a man were to offer advice to a woman's expression of a problem, she may feel objectified. Advice can be seen as a 1 up, giving one a superior position. When women engage in troubles talk they are sending the meta message of connection and building rapport.

Examples of these patterns for the different genders and communication can be seen in all age groups including when individuals are young. Even young men can see an expression of sympathy as potentially condescending and attacking the hierarchy of their status. Asking for advice can be seen as placing one lower on the hierarchy. This may make men less likely to ask for advice or directions, while a woman would do it without seeing it as upsetting her status in the hierarchy. There is also an asymmetry in offering to help. A man will be pleased to help a woman because it will establish him higher in the hierarchy. He may help or try even if he is not fully competent, and may feel obligated to help if asked by a woman.

There is a balance between seeking help and showing appreciation, and women should feel obligated to show appreciation when a man invests in helping. Men tend to feel strong when they are higher in the status system, when women will feel stronger when the community is strong.

Giving praise like giving information is also a symmetrical. To give praise is to express that you are high enough above the other to give a compliment. It is important to note that there are overlapping motivations. Well I am and desires to help to feel in control, he also would want to feel help to build connection and establish rapport. Meta messages balance between connection and control and intimacy and status. Women and men are different, and recognizing the different patterns helps women and men to understand each other and reach mutual goals. When the people around us do not seem to interpret the way we do, it can shake our core and make us feel confused. But if we understand that we are built to interpret things differently, we can

understand a different interpretation is coming from a different person and not against our views or values.

3. Chapter 3 discusses the difference between report talk and rapport talk. Men tend to focus on report talk and generally will talk more in public venues. Women focus on building continuity and connection, using rapport talk and are less likely to speak in public. Men think women are more talkative, because women will talk about relationships or things that men consider unimportant. However, studies find that men are more talkative in public settings, well perhaps women are more talkative at the home setting. Men also tend to take longer turns in speaking in public while women Stearns range in shorter periods.

Men silence at home can disappoint a woman, if she does not understand his nature and relaxing at the homestead and not talking about things she might consider relationship building. To a man it is likely that talk is for information, while for a woman talk is for interaction. These goals may not align in what the man and woman desire in their home relationships.

For girls talk is the glue that holds relationships together, wall for young boys friendships are about activities and doing things together. It can also be noted that women tend to use personal experience in argumentation while men tend to favor abstract argumentation.

4. Chapter 4 is about gossip, which the author describes as being talk about details that men might consider frivolous but women consider the core of sharing and friendship. The author differentiates between talking about someone and talking against someone. It is possible the traditional concept of gossip is more inclined towards talking against someone.

Women's gossip centers on details about events in life, clothing or relationships. Men's gossip centers on news, politics or sports. What men talk about as possib might be uninteresting to women, the same is true for what women speak about in the interest of men. Either way, the genders both use what the author labels as gossip to build relationships, particularly with those of the same gender.

The author also notes that gossip can be used as a form of social control, helping people avoid the behaviors that would be gossiped about. Women feel connected by sharing the details of their life with others, but also risk exposing their secret to someone who might possibly share it perhaps embarrassing them or punishing them. Groups of women will often ostracized a woman who has gossip available about her to socially control her, trying to change their behavior by their words.

People are pleased when others remember details, especially their name or notice what they wear. However, men can often find such details frivolous, while a woman would find Sports stats frivolous. Sharing or withholding details can be a sign of intimacy or rejection of intimacy. It is important to recognize that women and men both appreciate sharing details and having details recognized about them, but women and men chose different details to emphasize and different amounts of details to emphasize.

5. Chapter 5 is about lecturing and listening and the exchange of power between taking turns listening and taking turns listening. Women tend to try to take turns in lecturing and listening to establish rapport, while men will try to dominate with lecturing often in order to establish position or power. In addition women will often speak with stories or anecdotes while men will prefer impersonal fact based talk. Often to establish rapport, women world play down their expertise rather than display it. In contrast men will value the center stage and seek opportunities to show their knowledge. - women's focus will be on establishing a good perspective on being liked whereas men will search for being respected. Men and women look at the outcomes of lecturing often in different ways and will work towards what gains them something they innately desire. Men look to establish their place in a hierarchical order while women look for intimate connections inside the network.

Men are more comfortable than women and giving information while women are more comfortable in supporting others. Often individuals assume such rules when they are younger, then have trouble breaking out of them even when older. So stereotypes are gender roles and speaking as a child may impact an adult's ability later in life. Many men feel subordinate in listening too long and will choose not to. Many women desire reciprocal listening to build rapport and many become frustrated if they are always listening and not given a turn to speak.

6. Chapter six features styles of speaking and differencing in communities and ethnicities for acceptable speech behaviors. For many cultures or personality types, being in conflict is a sign of involvement, and thus intimacy or connection. Often, to women, conflict is a threat to connection but to men, conflict is necessary to negotiate status and power. This seems true even in the games of children as boys build friendships and enjoyment on competition and skill ranking while girls build games based on social interactions of popularity and alliances.

Sometimes ways of speaking can create unintentional conflict. Men will sometimes feel they are being told what to do and resent it when a woman is trying to make a suggestion but uses word choice that is misinterpreted. Women may feel they are being ordered by a man when he feels he is just offering a suggestion. An understanding and appreciation for variance in communication styles can help these feelings be less personal and focus on the content of the messages rather than a hierarchy implied but not meant.

In differences of viewing communication as either an ally or adversary activity, gender roles are important. Men often establish connection through opposition like in sports or competition, which may seem unfriendly but build a friendship. On the other hand, women can seem cooperative and affiliate with someone they are indeed competitive with and critical of. All forms of supportive communication can be used to undercut. Elaborate concern for someone can imply that someone is weak or a helpful suggestion can be used as criticism. For men, life is often viewed with power coming from individual strengths in opposition to opposing forces. For women, often strength is found in community; thus, to hurt a woman, other women may try to lower her place in the community through words. For many women, opposing the will of others is culturally unacceptable and they will not communicate opposition directly. However, such an approach can build frustration and depression. Ideally, more men would 'break their addiction to conflict' and more women who avoid conflict would learn 'that a little conflict wont kill them.'

7. Chapter 7 centers on interruptions and issues of dominance and control. Interruptions are common, but whether an interruption is wrong or not is interpreted by how the interruptions affects the speaker's communication rights. Context is important in dissecting interruptions. Overlapping conversation can be cooperative and supportive, or side tracking, domineering, and demeaning. If the conversationalists have similar habits and attitudes about overlapping speech, they will probably have successful communication. If the attitudes portray overlapping speech patterns of one speaker, the other will probably label the interruptor as rude in personality and perhaps a bad person based on their cultural speech patterns.

Men are more likely to overlap in report talk while women are more likely to overlap with cooperative rapport talk. Different expectations in pause time and when an interruption becomes rude can hamper to individual's ability to communicate with their different communication styles. It may be important to identify the speaker's styles, because if one person sees speech as interrupting while the other sees the same speech as supporting, the two will likely not communicate for long or like each other.

8. Chapter eight focuses on women leaders and the assertive style of communication generally labeled as male. Traditionally, bragging or being 'better than others' is a violation of what women aim for in creating affinity in a community. For a woman to be a leader, she should stand out. For people to acknowledge her as a leader, she might have to announce her credentials. Society and gender patterns to not accommodate women doing this naturally or without judgment. Even if a woman assumes an assertive leadership style that would be judged favorably if a male, she will be judged by the female communication patterns and

considered 'bossy' or arrogant or rude. Trying to placate these judgments, if a woman is more collaborative than authoritarian or more polite than direct, she may be judged by men to be less of a leader.

It is also noted in the chapter that men may use silence to exercise power over women, punishing with a lack of communication. Women who say sorry may be seen as admitting fault when indeed they are apologizing for the awkwardness of the situation and not admitting fault. Accepting an apology puts the apologizer in a clear one down position and is traditionally seen as rude. Instead, deflecting an apology or returning a like apology is the expected response in the female perspective. When in business settings, women adapt to men's norms so mixed gender meetings will carry male conversational styles. Women often do not compete for the speaking floor and therefore do not have as much time as speakers in meetings. Women who do adjust their speaking style to compete for the floor, being louder, speaking longer and with more assertion are judged as being masculine and may be disliked for the behavior. As Tannen claims "Whatever a man does to enhance his authority also enhances his masculinity. But if a woman adapts her style to a position of authority that she has achieved or to which she aspires, she risks compromising her femininity, in the eyes of others."

News outlets may use language with connotation that undermines the leadership role of women through metaphor. For women, communication in leadership roles is difficult because if they speak in traditionally female communication patterns, they may be seen as weak leaders and if they speak as strong leaders, they may be seen as inadequate women.

9. Chapter 9 makes comparisons in 'genderlect' through the life stages and examines body language and engagement. The author claims that "Women will anchor their gaze on each other's faces, occasionally glancing away, while men anchor their gaze elsewhere in the room, occasionally glancing at each other." Also, males will often position themselves in a way that they are not directly across from each other as to avoid possibly confrontational eye contact and body posture. Women, on the other hand, will often sit right across from each other and maintain eye contact that is viewed as a sign of closeness rather a sign on confrontation and have body posture that leans in as a sign of friendship and interest rather than aggression.

Often the boys were physically restless and their ideas of what to do in the experiment involved physical activities. The males showed more of an awareness of the hierarchical paradigm of conversation and were more likely to mock or resist the premise of the experiments. Boys teased each other of being wrong in the experiment while girls often supported each other in assurance that the other was right. Overall, through the ages and with the influence of society, boys and girls are raised with different communication styles and cross analysis between genders should avoid being overly negative through a gender biased lense. These gender differences include different views of friendship, with males often viewing friendship as a team up in an antagonistic world and girls viewing friendship as a mutuality in a complex social network. Men will often compete within a friendship while women will look to find ways to be similar to their friends rather than outstanding.

10. Chapter 10 is about "Living with Asymmetry" and accepting the principles that different 'genderlects' exist in a general pattern and that men and women truly do have different paradigms of communication built in by society, nature, and habit. Judging conversational patterns across styles can result in overly negative presumptions about personality or ideals that are rather instead conversational style differences resulting in a misunderstanding. The author claims "we enact and create our gender, and our inequality, with every move we make", that a power nexus exists which is reinforced with communication styles and decisions that rank both genders in a hierarchy between individuals.

Common conceptions of what it is to be 'a real man' or 'feminine' are based on asymmetrical alignments. The male being perceived as the protector puts the gender in a 'one up' position in the hierarchy similar to a parent protecting a child. Along with the protection comes a natural view of restriction, resulting in perhaps a loss of freedom and independence for the female gender cast in the public view as the object of protection.

The author does not claim to know why these perceptions exist, but that as such the perceptions do exist and are cyclically reinforced by society as to pervade other generations. 'Living with asymmetries' accepts a premise that there are basic gender differences, and differences in perceptions, that affect the way men and women communicate and the way those communications are judged. To open lines of successful communication, the whole world does not need to shift, but "even if no one changes, understanding genderlect improves relationships" and the power of the knowledge of gender pattern conversation difference can enhance personal lifestyle, marriages, work efficiency etc. Understanding the differences in communication styles can take the sting out of potentially offensive word choice or posturing, and not taking things personally can lead to happier, more productive lives with relationships that succeed more often in communication.

Rand says

her generalizations are too broad and she oversimplifies when she seeks to characterize male and female communication styles, but she struck a chord with me. Tannen, a sociolinguist, includes lots of dialogues between men and women, with focus on where they come to blows, verbal blows. Based on the notion that women seek social connections and men are looking for stature or position with respect to their interlocutors. Whatever its shortcomings, I had to smile for all the times her examples rang a bell in my own experience.

Anabananalisa Salomonis says

heterosexual and closed minded. If you can look past that I guess there's some interesting points, but so hard to look past.

Nancy says

I have owned this book for a number of years; I may have tried it previously, but put it down without completing it. I picked it up about a week ago. While I found some of it relevant and interesting, it is hard for me to buy into such gender generalizations. And although Tannen used a lot of anecdotes and literary references, the book still read like a textbook to me. On the very last page of the book (aside from the voluminous Notes), Tannen says that "Understanding style differences for what they are takes the sting out of them." (298)

Other points that rang true for me are:

"We look to our closest relationships as a source of confirmation and reassurance." (73)

"One situation that frustrates many women is a conversation that has mysteriously turned into a lecture, with the man delivering the lecture to the woman, who has become an appreciative audience." (125)

"...interruption is a hostile act, a kind of conversational bullying....And being accused of interrupting when you know you didn't intend to is as frustrating as being cut off before you've made your point." (189)

"...in a casual conversation among friends or family, it is acceptable to chime in when you think you know

Amanda says

I'm a big believer in fate and the universe. So when this book was literally dropped into my lap, I took it as a sign. I figured that by reading this book, maybe I could figure out what I was doing wrong, why I was constantly being misinterpreted. And how to make things work.

I liked this book a lot; it made sense. I like things that make sense. Deborah Tannen is a sociolinguist and in this book, she studies the conversational styles between men and women. She explains that communication between men and women are *cross cultural exchanges*. We have learned how to talk differently, the same phrases don't mean the same things, and what we intend are often mysteries. I guess instead of learned, I should say conditioned. She looks at how men and women perceive the world and their relationships. And it makes sense. I am a woman, and that is indeed how I perceive the world and my relationships.

She explains that women approach the world as an individual trying to make connections. We are trying to protect ourselves from others' attempts to push us away, we want to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation. Men, on the other hand, see the world as a hierarchy. Basically, they view everything as a battle, they want to preserve independence and avoid failure.

The idea that we are talking at cross-purposes makes sense to me too. She points out that men are annoyed when women talk about their problems, but don't take their advice. It's because we are not asking for advice, we are asking for sympathy, for the men to share a similar problem so we know that we are not alone. Men see things literally, she has a problem, i have a solution.

The friendship chapter was especially important to me. A woman-woman friendship is waaay different than a man-man one. Women have always shared their feelings, thoughts, and opinions with one offering a similar experience. To women, friendship means sharing secrets, trusting each other enough to reveal personal feelings, establishing intimacy. We expect reciprocity, I tell you a secret, you tell me a secret. Intimacy is what separates friends from acquaintances. Men, on the other hand, have relationships of action. They talk less to their friends because they share experiences by doing things or talking about sports or whatever. For women, talk is the glue that holds friendships together. Silence on the man's part is seen as distance, isolation. Women are afraid of that and they try harder to accommodate themselves so that they do not lose intimacy. Which, in turn, frustrates the male because he feels like she is trying to limit his independence. He doesn't see the need to talk about feelings, and when she talks about problems, he doesn't realize she's asking him to share, so he gives advice, which she sees as not trusting her to fix the problem on her own.

Which basically sums up every conversation that I have ever had with the opposite sex in my entire life. Okay. I'm exaggerating. But only a little.

She backs up all these observations with examples and when I hear the way I talk and the way other people talk, I see that she is totally right. At least on the woman's side. Or I guess, at least on my side.

There were two things wrong with this book: some of the conversational examples were extremely stiff and didn't read like a normal conversation and she doesn't really offer a way to fix things. Well, I suppose the second is not really her fault, it's just me looking for answers. She says, "When sincere attempts to communicate end in stalemate, and a beloved partner seems irrational and obstinate, the different languages men and women speak can shake the foundation of our lives. Understanding the other's ways of talking is a giant leap across the communication gap between women and men, and a giant step toward opening lines of communication." Which to me kind of says, I don't really know if things will ever be different, but by just understanding it should get better.

I found this book helpful and frustrating at the same time. While I understand now that that is how I feel and

that how I feel is not wrong, I feel kind of hopeless that I will ever be able to cross this gap. I mean, is it too much to ask for people to meet me halfway? While now that I can see how my assumptions and observations about past conversations could be wrong, I'm scared that I cannot negotiate an even deal in my relationships. That I cannot make them work. As it says in the book, it *hurts* when friends go away. And my fear of losing friends is not just mine own, but a similar fear that most women have. It's scary to think that that fear may not be understood. In the end, it's a book about the conflicting needs for independence and intimacy, and how simply by talking they way we know how, we may be making things worse—for ourselves and for other loved ones. It's scary to think that we can break things, just by being.
