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MALE AND FEMALE DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATING CONFLICT

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BY

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Abstract

Research suggests that males and females communicate using different styles of interaction. Men and women are biologically different, but evidence also demonstrates a social difference. The patterns displayed in cross- sex communication often reveal how men and women interact interpersonally. In conflict situations the contrasting behaviors between the sexes become more evident. This is a collection of research defining and explaining the differences which exist between males and females and how those differences develop within communication. Conflict is a prevalent element of all relationships and the manner in which it is handled is crucial to the survival of those relationships. This research can help those in troubled relationships understand how the opposite sex communicates in conflict scenarios. There is no study proving whether males or females are more effective in handling conflict. Further research on the exact mannerisms of males and females in conflict situations would improve current scholarship.

In the book, *Men are From Mars and Women are From Venus*, John Gray (2004) wrote:
Men mistakenly expect women to think, communicate, and react the way men do;
women mistakenly expect men to feel, communicate, and respond the way
women do. We have forgotten that men and women are supposed to be different.
As a result our relationships are filled with unnecessary friction and conflict. (p. 4)

The saying “men are from Mars and women are from Venus” correctly denotes that males and females are different. Men and women are from the same planet, but often communication between the sexes, called cross-sex communication, displays otherwise.

Communication is a process of sharing information between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior. The manner in which people communicate often depends on their sex which is either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species that are distinguished as either male or female highly reflecting the basis of reproductive organs and structures. For the purposes of this discussion, the primary difference between the male and female sexes will be considered physiological (e.g., reproductive organs, hormonal differences, etc.). Whether rooted in physiology (nature) or environment (nurture), it is also acknowledged that both sexes behave in distinct ways that are the basis of common stereotypes and observations. These sex differences in communication often are revealed during conflict, or can even serve as a catalyst for conflict.

Communication is an element of everyday life and often conflict is difficult or impossible to avoid. Conflict is often created when people share different beliefs about a specific issue. Many factors shape personal beliefs—such as a person’s sex can play an influential role in their opinions and, consequently, their course of action.

Inter-sex communication can make interacting complicated because of differences in communication styles. Whether the cross-sex relationship shared is romantic, a friendship, or a co-worker, the manners of communication will most likely differ in numerous ways. Men and women develop differently, both biologically and socially during early childhood, causing divergent actions. How do men handle conflict in comparison to women? Do either of them seem to be more rational than the other?

Literature Review

Development

Before pointing out the differences in males and females during communication, their stages of development are critical in understanding the various forms of communication. The first perceptions of communication begin before the ability to speak. As young children observe the actions of others which help them identify who they are. Julia Wood (2011) states that, “[w]e are born into a gendered society that guides our understanding of gender and shapes our personal gendered identities” (p. 160). At a young age, children begin to form ideas about who they are and how they are supposed to act based on their observations. Wood discusses the idea of self-as-object, or the ability to think about, reflect upon, and respond to ourselves as well as the monitoring what takes place inside of us as we observe and regulate our attitudes and behaviors. These observations, paired with societal gender norms, shape who we become and how we perceive ourselves.

Wood (2011) explains that men and women grow in different gender speech communities and, thus, develop different communication styles. Wood stated, “a speech community exists when people share understandings about goals of communication, strategies for enacting those goals, and ways of interpreting communication” (p. 125).

Males grow up learning that the following elements are essential to masculinity: do not be female, be successful, be aggressive, be sexual, be self-reliant, embody and transcend traditional views of masculinity (Wood, 2011). Inversely, females learn that appearance is important, showing sensitivity and care is a must, negative treatment by others is to be expected, superwoman abilities are anticipated, and there is no single meaning of feminine. Wood believes that “[t]hrough communication with others, we come to understand how society defines masculinity and femininity” (p. 184).

According to Wood’s research (2005), gender roles are the source of differential communication between males and females. In her article entitled “Feminist Standpoint Theory and Muted Group Theory”, Wood introduced the theory of Feminist Standpoint. This theory claims that because women are repressed in society, their behaviors differ from those of men. According to this theory, “patriarchy naturalizes conventional male and female divisions, making it seem natural, right, unremarkable that women are subordinate to men” (p. 61).

Wood (2011) discussed the verbal communication roots of males and females and focused on the idea that “language is a primary means by which we express our gendered identities” (p. 124). Our communication styles are a product of the speech communities we were socialized into as children.

According to Wood (2011), boys’ games are competitive, have clear goals, involve physically rough play, and are organized by rules and roles that specify who does what and how to play, while girls’ games lack the use of rules and guidelines and rather focus on communicating more intimately). Boys’ games involve participation in large groups with less one-on-one communication, while girls participate in small groups focusing on talking one-on-one.

Wood (2011) also discussed the characteristics of feminine speech as well as those of masculine speech. The most important aspects of female communication revolve around the establishment and maintenance of relationships with others. Other feminine communication styles include establishing equality, supporting others, promoting participation, responsiveness, being personal and disclosing information, and tentativeness. While females are concentrated on learning about their communication partners, masculine speech is geared more toward accomplishing concrete goals, exertion of control, perseverance of independence, entertaining, and enhancing status. Men use communication to develop a higher status among peers by accomplishing instrumental objectives, communicating on command, being direct and assertive, abstractness, and no emotional response.

According to Thune, Manderscheid, and Silbergeld (1980) sex-roles are a cause of differences existing between male and female behaviors. They argue that a second model, called status-role, is also assumed to be the cause of differences in male and female communication. This status-role explanation “attributes the observed variation to the differential hierarchical status of males and females” (p. 51). The researchers also mentioned the idea that in mixed sex interactions, females “assume a socioemotional or expressive role, and males, a task or instrumental role” (p. 52). After studying two different groups of mixed sex interactions (one with teachers and the other with couples), the findings imply that “male-female differentials in expressive and instrumental behavior were consistent with the *status-role* rather than the *sex-role* explanation” (Thune et al., 1980).

In “Sex Differences in Social Behavior,” J. Archer compares the ways in which sex differences in social attributes are explained by the social role theory versus the Darwinian perspective (1996). Archer’s article also mentions the idea of male and female behaviors being

formed by society: "...the psychological explanations were often regarded as implying that the two sexes possessed natural abilities fitting them for traditional roles, whereas the content for socialization was viewed as arising from sociohistorical forces" (p.909). Archer continues to discuss the idea that "[s]ex differences in social behavior are viewed as having arisen historically from the societal position of women and men..." (p. 910). Archer explains that since women are regarded as inferior a difference in communication depending on sex, referred to as Social Role Theory, often occurs.

Wood, Thune, Manderscheid, Silbergeld, and Archer all suggest that childhood interaction, sex and status roles, and society in general dictate the way a male will communicate in comparison to a female. As children, males and females interact by different means, and it serves a different purpose. Thune et al. affirms male communication to be geared toward instrumental ends, while females communicate for emotional connections with others. These elements derive from Archer's proposal that society and the positions males and females hold dictate the behaviors of males and females.

Verbal Communication Behaviors

The roles which males and females enact in their lives are reflected in the ways they carry themselves, including their method of interaction. Wood (2011) discusses the characteristics of feminine speech as well as those of masculine speech. The main element existing in the communication ideals of most women is that of establishing and maintaining relationships with others. This seems to be the most popular way to define the feminine use of interaction. Wood labels talk as "the essence of relationships" and the use of language as a means to "foster connections, support, closeness, and understanding" (p. 128). Wood claims that women value the idea of establishing equality while communicating with others by "achieving symmetry" through

phrases such as “I’ve felt just like that”. Females, according to Wood, are also believers of demonstrating support by expressing emotions that show understanding of another’s feelings. Women are also known for the use of intensive adverbs to stress their feelings, such as “that’s really exciting” . According to Wood, females also “sustain conversation by inviting others to speak and by prompting them to elaborate their ideas” in a speech style known as “maintenance work” (p. 129).

Wood (2011) says that females express attentiveness by being responsive in the conversation. Women are personal in their interactions and use concrete styles of communication that “cultivate a personal tone, and they facilitate feelings of closeness by connecting communicators’ lives” (p. 129). Conversations continue on and on with women because they use what Wood describes as “tentativeness” to “leave the door open for others to respond and express their opinions” (p. 129).

Females are always worrying about how the other person will feel during their interaction, while males typically care only about their social status. According to Wood (2011), “[m]asculine speech communities tend to regard talk as a way to accomplish concrete goals, exert control, preserve independence, entertain, and enhance status” (p.130). The word “instrumentality” is used in Wood’s explanation of masculine speech as a means to “accomplish instrumental objectives”, in other words, make their intelligence known. Men have been found to interrupt each other in conversations more frequently and thus are noted for conversation command and speaking for longer lengths of time. Though they may talk for a longer amount of time, Wood says that “masculine speech tends to be direct and assertive” (p. 131). Compared to feminine speech, masculine speech also tends to be more abstract, as well as less emotionally responsive, than feminine interactions.

While Wood points out the differences that exist between feminine and masculine speech patterns, Holmstrom (2009) interprets the communication values of men and women based on whom they are interacting with, whether it be someone of the same or the opposite sex. Holmstrom's research found that "women's greater value for affectively oriented skills in both same-sex and cross-sex friendships is explained, in part, by their greater femininity" (p. 235). According to this study, women value affectively (expression of emotion) oriented skills more than instrumentally (competitive) oriented skills, which explains why women are less content with their cross-sexed relationships than men. It was found that the sex of the friend also has an influence on communication values. There were, however, no differences in the men's instrumental skills values and those of females.

Both Wood and Holmstrom's research compare the value of communication to males and females. The worth of communication to a male is not equivalent to the significance a female places on interaction. According to Wood and Holmstrom, men are less emotionally responsive with others, while females' conversations thrive on establishing and maintaining relationships by expressing their feelings. Due to the differing views of communication the content of conversation may differ from one sex to another.

Wheelan and Verdi's study (1992) investigated communication patterns in all-male, all-female, and mixed-sex groups. In their study, they found that men are task oriented, while women are still friendlier and more personally oriented. Their research results are consistent with previous research suggesting that men have task-oriented communication patterns while women communicate socio-emotionally.

Clark, Dockum, Haze, Huang, Luo, Ramsey, and Spyrou's (2004) article, "Initial Encounters of Young Men and Women: Impressions and Disclosure Estimates", is based on a

study examining male-female interaction. Since males are less emotional in their conversations, this study investigated the disclosure by males in comparison to information shared by females. Women disclosed more information than their male partners. In the participants' descriptions of their interactions, the men regarded their interaction as more disclosing than the women's notes expressed. Researchers found that there was no significant difference between men and women in the level of social attractiveness to their partners. There was also no significant difference in the measure of their attributions of positive traits to their partner and both sexes viewed their partner positively. "[M]en and women assumed that they had conveyed an equally positive impression of themselves to their partners"(Clark et al., 2004, p. 705). In their results, researchers also found that "[t]here is a consistent pattern for both men and women: the more the partner was perceived to have disclosed, the more positively the partner was viewed, both in terms of social attractiveness and positive attributes" (p. 705).

Newman, Groom, Handelman, and Pennebaker (2008) also studied the differences male and females possess in communicating. Their text entitled "Gender Differences in Language Use" examines various studies to determine whether or not men and women use language differently and if so, how and why. Their research led them to identify that gender differences in language use reflect a complex combination of social goals, situational demands, and socialization. Their findings suggest that previous research found that men use language to give information instrumentally, while women use verbal interaction to simply socialize without any underlying purpose. They found that as women discussed their thoughts, emotions, senses, other individuals, negations, and utilized verbs in present and past tense, male conversations consisted primarily of occupation, money, sports, articles, prepositions, and long words.

While men and women differed in the latter areas, Newman et al. (2008) discussed their similarities as well: “[c]ontrary to popular stereotypes, men and women were indistinguishable in their references to sexuality, anger, time, their use of first-person plural, the number of words and question marks employed, and the insertion of qualifiers in the form of exclusion words (e.g., but, although)” (p. 229).

Kim and Jin (2000) studied a more specific area of communication between males and females, the use of cell phones. In their article, “In a Different Voice”, they question the interpersonal motives for using mobile phones and whether or not a gender specific difference in the use of phones exists. Their research found that women use text messaging more than men and men use verbal phone communication more than women. The ideas of expressive versus instrumental communication, as well as communal and agentic dimensions, are also discussed. Their research indicates that women use cell phones more than men because it is their way of maintaining close, personal relationships and establish their intimacy with others who are far away.

In “The Gender Linked Differences in the Use of Linguistic Strategies in Face-to-Face Communication” (Samar & Alibakshi, 2007), researchers examined the differences between male and female communication strategies. Unlike Kim and Jin (2000), they studied the linguistic differences that exist in face-to-face interactions. After conducting research from data gathered from 20 face-to-face conversations, in both mixed and same sex interactions and educated and less educated participants, Researchers found significant differences between male and female use of linguistic strategies. In non-mixed settings there is a significant difference between educated and less educated participants. Higher educated subjects’ use of linguistic strategies is different from that of the less educated. When considering linguistic strategies in

mixed settings, there is no significant difference between males and females when they have equal education.

Instrumentality is discussed in the research regarding the content of communication in the articles of Clark, Dockum, Haze, Huang, Luo, Ramsey, Spyrou, Newman, Groom, Handelman, Pennebaker, Kim, and Jin. The instrumental means of communicating leads to different types of interpersonal communication from the female connecting purpose of interaction. All of these researchers found that males communicate to establish and maintain a prestige of power and dominance. These authors also seem to agree that women communicate with others in mind, constantly trying to find ways to improve their relationship by relating to the other person. Samar and Alibakhshi, as well as Clark et al., found that when speaking face-to-face, males and females can be expected to act differently. Kim and Jin's research on the use of mobile phones is concrete evidence that females and males communicate through media differently just as if they were face-to-face.

Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1985) said that on average female managers were two times as accessible to employees as were male managers, and nearly all females admitted to having difficulty saying no to subordinates while males did not find it difficult to deny employees' requests. Morley and Shockley-Zalabak also found that female managers and support personnel sent more regulative and informative messages to peers while the males send more innovative messages.

Nonverbal Communication Behaviors

The differences in communication are not just identified in verbal interaction. Research on non-verbal behaviors and gestures also demonstrate variation by sex. In chapter six of *Gendered Lives (2011)*, Wood concentrates on the use of nonverbal communication by males

and females and how techniques may differ between the two sexes. Wood believes these nonverbal behaviors are learned based on gender and culture. In chapter six, Wood's main concern is nonverbal communication and the reflection and expression of sex: "[C]ompared to women, men tend to use greater volume and stronger inflection to highlight their ideas and add to the force of the positions" (p.142). According to Wood, men also take up more personal space, while women usually keep themselves in close, being careful not to stand out too much, which is probably why women are more likely to surrender their space than men. Wood also uses the non-verbal interactions of haptics, kinesics, paralanguage, and physical appearance to define the differences between males and females in nonverbal behaviors. One major difference between men and women in regard to reading nonverbal cues is that "females exceed males in the capacity to decode nonverbal behaviors and more accurately discern many emotions that others may feel" (p. 153).

Prinsen and Punyanunt-Carter (2010), focused on the differences in nonverbal communication within intimate relationships. The authors argue that a significant difference in specific nonverbal behaviors between men and women exists in relationships. They also found differences among the relationship types in certain responses. Their research supports the idea that there is a difference in nonverbal communication between gender and the different stages of relationships. They came to these conclusions by the means of a questionnaire that had participants reflect on their current or past relationships and answer questions regarding their nonverbal perceptions based on 16 Likert-type questions.

Wood, Prinsen, and Punyanunt-Carter study the existence of nonverbal communication within interactions. Both pieces by these authors address the sex differences of non-verbal use

found in interaction, just as the others interpret verbal communication by males in comparison of females. These non-verbal cues all lead back to the purpose of the communication.

Relationship Values

If the ways in which men and women communicate differ, then the underlying meaning of masculine relationships must differ from those of feminine relationships. In chapter nine of Wood's *Gendered Lives (2011)*, the gendered styles of friendships are broken down. The masculine and feminine socialization beginning in childhood cause men and women to form different ways of communicating as well as valuing different aspects of relationships. The chapter discusses the theories of how men and women form and maintain relationships, on both friendship and romantic levels.

Wood introduced the "Male Deficit Model", which discusses the cultural assumption that "men are less skilled in developing and sustaining personal relationships" (Wood, 2011, p. 208). Wood also discusses the male inability to express yourself in relationships. The "Alternate Paths Model" is discussed, which suggests that masculine socialization causes men to be reluctant to share feelings which limits their ability to practice emotional talk. Wood goes on to explore the differences in male relationship development versus that of females. Wood reveals that men and women look for different qualities in their significant other.

Issues may exist in cross-gendered relationships because men and women value different aspects of communication. Once again, the research of Prinsen and Punyanunt-Carter (2010) is relevant. Their research found "women rated items concerning nonverbal communication statistically higher on most of the items compared to men," while "men rated the importance of nonverbal communication as more important and it has to change and increase in the relationship

in order for the relationship to work” (p. 4). The sex differences in nonverbal communication can also cause the messages to be misinterpreted in cross-sex interaction.

Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, and Christensen (2007) demonstrated the issues that may arise in cross-gendered relationships due to the conflict of communication interests. The study concentrated on demand- withdraw theory. Demand-withdraw occurs when one person is prodding for a conversation while the other is avoiding interaction. According to Eldridge et al., “research on [demand-withdraw theory] consistently demonstrates that women are more often in the demanding role and men more often in the withdrawing role”, meaning that women seek interaction while men resist partaking in dialogue.

The result of demand may differ based on the relationship, but “the partner who has the burden of making change may find these demanding behaviors aversive and may resort to withdrawal and avoidance to reduce conflict and avoid change” (Eldridge et al., 2007, p. 219). Researchers found that wife demand and husband withdraw were the most popular. These behaviors are also found to be prevalent in relationships in distress.

A study by Rynes, Rohbaugh, and Shoham (2004) investigated males and females and demand- withdraw. Their research found that women are typically responsible for making demands in the relationship while men tend to withdraw, which causes a problem in their relationship. According to researchers, the “social structure” hypothesis suggests women are often more demanding because men are more easily satisfied than women.

Demand-withdraw is also discussed in a study by Siffert and Schwarz (2011). They define spousal demand as “a behavior characterized by criticizing, nagging, and making demands of the other partner” (p. 263). They also defined withdrawal as “avoiding confrontation and becoming silent” (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen,

2007). They associate demand with attacking and having hostility and withdrawal to avoidance. Both styles of communication were associated with one's own subjective well-being (SWB), or their feeling of content with their relationship. Thus, Siffert and Schwarz stated that "both spouses demand and withdrawal styles are expected to be inversely related to their own, as well as their partner's, SWB" (2011). They found that the more a woman engaged in conflict, the lower the man's SWB became. This result ran congruent with a study by Marchard and Hock (2003), which "found a positive relation between women's attacking styles and men's negative affect" (p. 264).

When trying to understand a foreign language, interpretations may be skewed. The same risk exists in cross-gendered interaction. Wood (2011) described some gender-based misinterpretations of communication in chapter five of *Gendered Lives*. Wood highlighted five specific troublesome scenarios of cross-gendered communication: showing support, troubles talk, the point of the story, relationship talk, and public speaking. Showing support is a difficult task to uphold in a male-female relationship because men offer each other support differently than women support women. When men "support" women they often seem as though they are dismissing the female's feelings because they are not sympathetic. The intentions for engaging in troubles talk for men and women differ. Men relate the issue at hand to previous experiences when women just want sympathy, and women offer an interest of the man's problem in a way that is excessive to men and makes them feel intruded upon, causing them to withdraw.

Men and women also share information differently. According to Wood (2011), masculine speech is linear and gets to the main point right away without elaborating on details, while feminine speech embeds information and details because they value the relationship level of meaning. These differences in dialogue structure often cause barriers in male-female

communication, “Because feminine and masculine rules about details differ, men often find feminine accounts wandering and tedious”, while “the masculine style of storytelling may strike women as leaving out all the interesting details” (p. 134).

In regards to the maintenance of relationships, women find it very important to discuss the relationship. However, “men are interested in discussing relationships only if there is a particular problem to be addressed” (Wood, 2011, p. 143). With all of these communication differences and interpretations, it is hard to transmit positive messages to one another, but more drastically in times of depression.

Harper and Sandberg (2009) questioned if a correlation exists between depression in one or both spouses and poor affective problem solving communication. The main purpose of their article, “Depression and Communication Processes in Later Life Marriages”, is to show that if either the husband or the wife is more depressed, affective communication and problem solving processes are impaired for the couple. In circumstances when both the husband and the wife are depressed, affective communication and problem solving are worse than when only one partner is depressed. Communication scores are worse on behalf of both the husband and wife when one or both partners is depressed than when neither of them are depressed. Even though long term married couples develop an ability to handle challenging situations, Harper and Sandberg’s study shows that when one or both spouses is depressed or has signs of depression affective communication and problem solving deteriorates.

Sullivan (2004) stated that there are significant differences between the sexes in areas such as self-disclosure, anger, and nonverbal communication. According to Sullivan, “self-disclosure refers to those messages through which the person sends information about himself of herself” (p. 122). Sullivan explained that males argue and communicate anger, more than

females. While females are reluctant to express aggression and anger males view this as acceptable behavior and thus males engage in more aggressive interactions than women (Fehrs, Baldwin, Colins, Patterson, & Benedict, 1999; Kinney, Smith, & Donzella, 2001; Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 1998). In Sullivan's study of athletes, he found that "females exchanged more nonverbal messages overall, but they also displayed quite different nonverbal behaviors than males" (p. 123). It was also found that male athletes were more likely to communicate anger and be confrontational.

Fehrs et al. (1999) researched the manners both males and females displayed during times of anger. Their research states that women and men display anger similarly under some conditions, while other times they do not. Their research stated, "Specifically, women's and men's scripts for anger in heterosexual relationships were similar in situations in which the angered person chose to express anger in a positive or prosocial way" (p. 309). Therefore, their research defends the idea that men and women may act differently, but depending on the situation at hand they may act in the same manner.

Research by Kinney et al. (2001) disclosed the idea of how power effects the way a male or female may handle their emotions. While women tend to display more powerlessness with the display of their emotions, men display more power. Kinney et al.'s research found that "[o]penly admitting one's sadness, fear, and disappointment, and openly crying can be seen as clear signs of powerlessness, whereas yelling or calling names is assumed to reflect a motive to maintain or regain power" (2001). The repression of males' emotions indicates their reluctance to display signs of powerlessness. Women would rather vent about their anger emotions to a third party rather than displaying their power in fear of ruining their relationships with those responsible for the angry feelings.

Research by James Averill (1983) expresses that in terms of biological differences, males of most primate species are more aggressive than the females of that species. This is conclusive in humans cross-culturally. Averill went on to say that, “men are also more prone to anger than are women” (p. 1152). In terms of female actions when dealing with anger Averill’s research states that females are capable of experiencing anger, but due to the history of inequities within our society they repress their feelings. According to Averill, “[a] women’s anger, therefore, tends to be experienced and expressed in indirect and often self-defeating ways, including lethargy, depression, and so on” (p. 1152).

Afifi, McManus, Steuber, and Coho (2009) discussed research done on conflict avoidance. Just as Harper and Sandberg’s research (2009) showed that depressed couples have less affective communication, Afifi et al.’s article shows that a couples’ distress and dissatisfaction often causes avoidance in conflict communication. Couples are “likely to become dissatisfied with their relationships when they are unable to openly address issues that concern them” (Afifi et al, 2009, p. 357).

The work of Prinsen, Punyanunt-Carter, Wood, Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, Christensen, Harper, Sandberg, Rynes, Rohrbaugh, Shoham, Sullivan, Siffert, Shwarz, Fehr et al., Kinney et al., Averill, and Afifi et al. all study different behaviors expressed by males and females in communication. Men and women have different histories in communication and thus when they are paired together misinterpretations are likely. Wood, Prinsen, and Punyanunt-Carter’s articles focused on nonverbal interpretations differed by sex. Wood and Eldridge et al. describe the innate differences in communication from male to female, leading to friction in cross-sexed relationships. Eldridge et al., Siffert, Shwarz, and Rynes et al. each discuss demand-withdraw theory and demonstrate the harm a female’s incessant need for troubles talk has on a

relationship when paired with a males lack of emotional disclosure. According to Wood (2011), males regard female conversation as wandering and tedious because they like to keep details to the minimum, which creates more conflict between males and females. Harper, Sandberg, Sullivan, Afifi's research demonstrates that under stress and depression the communication between a male and female becomes even more impaired. When dealing with anger, Fehr et al., Kinney et al. and Averill all highlight how males communicate their anger versus the manner females deal with their anger.

As John Gray (2004) wrote, "Just as communication is the most important element in a relationship, arguments can be the most destructive element, because the closer we are to someone, the easier it is to bruise or be bruised" (p. 150).

Findings and Conclusions

Neurological Findings

The pre-existing research concentrated on the differences of males and females' communication patterns. In short, the research gathered provides evidence that males and females are constructed by society in different ways, causing these differences to be reflected in their means of communication. Before society shapes males and females, each individual's brain is already developed depending on that person's sex.

Reasons behind male and female communication differences exceed beyond environmental factors and are embedded in neurological structures and chemical reactions. Lieberman (2000) breaks down brain functions which ones influence the ways in which males and females absorb and apply information. The basal ganglia is the portion of the brain that is capable of learning and remembering predictive events of significance through repetitive exposure. This is how our intuitions are formed. The basal ganglia notifies parts of the brain of

the occurring event in order to help the brain perform in a manner appropriate to the occurrence. For example, if a child burns his or her hand after touching a space heater, the next time he or she is near the space heater the basal ganglia will notify him or her of the last occurrence, avoiding the reoccurrence of getting burned.

According to Lieberman (2000) there are studies which suggest the basal ganglia plays a role in the production and comprehension of nonverbal communication. Lieberman describes encoding as “the process of translating a mental state into an externally visible signal like a facial expression” (p.111). Decoding “involves drawing inferences with little effort or attention about the internal mental states and dispositions of other individuals on the basis of subtle sequences of nonverbal cues” (p. 111). In other words, the decoding process allows people to unknowingly pull from encoded information to reconnect the idea from a previous instance.

The caudate, found in the striatum portion of the brain, plays a large role in decoding nonverbal cues. The putamen, another area found in the striatum, helps to produce or encode nonverbal cues. The striatum is an area of the brain which dopamine (DA) is released. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter responsible for transmitting signals from one portion of brain to another (Newton, 2009).

Estrogen, a hormone found in greater quantities within the brains of females, directly affects the amount of dopamine that is released into the striatum. Lieberman (2000) stated, “DA release into the striatal in conjunction with reward should lead to the development of stronger ...relationships that form more quickly, thus resulting in women’s intuition” (p. 126).

The scientific evidence presented by Lieberman (2000) explains why females are more intuitive when it comes to interpreting nonverbal cues. The scientific findings of brain functions

within the striatum and dopamine levels provide substantial evidence that women decode and encode information more effectively than males.

Males and females communicate with others in different manners; thus, the way they communicate interpersonally during disputes also differs. Even though there is extensive research comparing male and female communication, no study distinguishes one communication style more effective than the other. The research highlights that males and females communicate differently, but at this point they are seen as equitable communication styles.

The literature on male and female manners of interaction support the claim that men and women communicate in different ways. From day one, young boys are socialized differently than young girls. Our social identities then become more developed when we enter gender speech communities. These speech communities help individuals to develop skills of interaction that will be prevalent throughout their lives. Whether in a romantic relationship, a co-worker relationship, or a friend-to-friend relationship, these styles of communication will be reflected in our interactions.

Conflict is an area lightly touched on by literature, but it is a major part of everyday interaction. Research suggests that women differ in leadership roles from men, but nothing can attest to whether one gender is a more effective leader than the other.

In the study by Sullivan (2006), verbal and nonverbal behaviors of males and females during conflicts were observed. The author stated that, “it appears that males argue and communicate anger more than females” (p. 122). According to Sullivan, the males were engaging in more aggressive interactions than the females. Sullivan’s research also states that “females exchanged more nonverbal messages than male athletes, particularly after negative game events” (p. 123).

In *Gendered Lives*, Wood (2011) explained that cultural codes of gender are established at an early age in life. Sullivan's research displayed that female athletes and male athletes expressed their feelings differently during negative events. These differences in display of emotion are due to the way they were socialized by our culture.

In conflict the male-female interaction differences cause a complex problem in interaction. Siffert and Schwarz (2011) defined and explained the existence of spousal demand and withdrawal in relationships. These two elements can affect the happiness they feel within their relationships. In Holmstrom's study (2009), she discusses that those who share the same communication values are more satisfied with their relationship whether they are male or female. Thus, when males and females communicate with aspects of demand or withdraw the value of the relationship will fall with the use of two different communication styles. Harper and Sandberg (2009) determined that when either the husband or the wife is more depressed affective communication and problem solving processes are impaired for the couple. Depression inhibits the communication behaviors of those in the distressed relationship.

The display of anger, as described by Averill (1983) can vary based on sex, but sometimes both sexes act in the same ways when angry. Kinney et al. (2001), attributed the repression of female anger to the history of lacking power when compared to men. Men tend to display their power when they are angry while women feel that they do not have such power.

Conflict is a factor which can tear relationships apart. It is vital to understand the ways in which people communicate while dealing with conflict. Understanding the differences between male and female conflict communication would be beneficial to people in relationships, whether they are romantic or just friends, as well as members of organizations.

Further research showing the exact mannerisms of the typical male and female in a conflict scenario would be more helpful. It is hard to generalize all males and females, but since it is true that men and women are socialized differently based on their sex, then their ability to handle conflict situations should also differ in some way.

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