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FAS 204 Gender Relations

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Topic #10: There are several common communication problems that may occur when people from different gendered speech communities interact. List and describe 3 of them. (Chapter 5)

Communication Problems

Daily, many men and women find it a difficult or tedious task to communicate with each other, which is unfortunate because open communication is a key to a healthy relationship, whether it be a familial, friendship or romantic connection. Learning about gendered communication patterns and “rules”, especially the misinterpretations that can occur during mixed-gendered conversations, facilitates the flow and keenness of the dialogue. Common misunderstandings that take place when different gender communication styles converge, include: Showing Support, Troubles Talk, The Point of the Story, Relationship Talk, and Public Speaking (Wood 132). Masculine and Feminine communication styles are very distinctive of one another, thus creating a confusing, uninteresting, and/or frustrating conversation between the two genders.

A very common frustration which arises in a masculine and feminine conversation pertains to “showing support”, or the lack there of. Men and women demonstrate encouragement in different ways. In feminine groups, demonstrating sympathy is the primary means of showing support and care in the conversation (Wood 132). In contrast, masculine speech rules attempt to solve the problem by offering opinions, advice, and suggestions (Wood 132). Most of the time, women voice they simply need someone to listen to them—“lending a shoulder to cry on,” and

when men begin to offer their advice, women feel overwhelmed. Men on the other hand, feel vulnerable when sympathy is offered to them, and thus prefer advice or a “solution” *if* they decide to voice their predicament in the first place. When these two means of communication meet in conversation, problems arise because both parties involved do not feel they are understood or being heard.

The confusion in offering sympathy and showing support relates closely to the dissatisfaction found in “troubles talk”. The issue in “troubles talk” is that in feminine conversation methods, the rule is to show interest and understanding, often by relating to the experience; on the contrary, in masculine conversation, one shows respect by “assuming that others don’t need sympathy...and [matching experiences] is an effort to steal the center stage” (Wood 133). It was established that women feel the need to show sympathy, thus men might feel that they are being probed and imposed on, when she is simply trying to help—in the way with which she is familiar. Masculine speech rules teach that speaking of troubles shows vulnerability, whereas feminine conversation rules provide a secure place to express feelings and frustrations.

The concern that feminine conversations involve feelings and details, and men’s disinterest in these discussions, is further examined in the issue of “relationship talk”. Author Julia T. Wood describes the underlying issue that distinguishes feminine and masculine communication styles stating,

The difference here grows out of the fact that masculine speech communities view communication as a means to doing things and solving problems, whereas feminine speech communities regard the process of communicating as a primary way to create and sustain relationships (Wood 135).

Women rely on conversations to nourish and strengthen a relationship, thus their interest in speaking of the details of a relationship is exciting and a means to bond with her significant other. Men, however, feel there is no need to talk about the relationship unless there is a problem to solve (Smith). Women find it a necessity to communicate with her significant other about the actual relationship and mutual feelings; men might seem uninterested and this could be misinterpreted as a dilemma in the relationship.

Misinterpretations, such as the previously portrayed, are main examples and demonstrations caused by differences between feminine and masculine speech patterns (Smith). Learning and understanding the differences of each style, is an exceptional way to grow closer to one's partner and display affection with attention and understanding, in the way he or she will appreciate it.

Works Cited

Wood, Julia T. *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*. 10th ed. Australia:

Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011. Print.

Smith, Lani T. *Gendered Free*. New York, NY: Smith, 2011. Print.

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