Gender Issues: Interpersonal Communication

Men and women seldom mean the same things even when they use the same words. –John Gray, Ph.D.

Woman: You *never* listen to me.
Man: Of course I listen to you.
Woman: I feel like you never listen.
Man: What do you mean? I can repeat everything you said.

REFLECTION
1. Do you think it’s true that the man never listens to the woman?
2. What more do you think the woman is trying to say to the man?
3. Do you think the man understands everything the woman is trying to say?
4. Can you think of times you say something and you are misunderstood by someone of the opposite sex?
Some psychologists think that the differences between men and women are as large as the differences between two different cultures. In his book *Men Are From Mars, women Are From Venus*, John Gray, Ph.D. talks about how English speaking men and women often misinterpret or don’t fully understand what the each other is saying.

He says when women use the word *never* or complain, they are often expressing strong feelings like frustration and that they need comfort. Men understand these expressions as an untrue statement. Because they misunderstood the intended meaning, they commonly react in an unsupportive manner. Chart A lists some of the women’s complaints that men often misunderstand and shows what the women really understood the woman’s complaint, then he would argue less and be able to respond more positively. He would offer the understanding, support and comfort she wants.

**CHART A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women say things like:</th>
<th>Men respond like this:</th>
<th>Women mean (Dictionary for men)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>We never</em> go out</td>
<td>That’s not true. We went out last week.</td>
<td>I feel going out and doing something together. What do you think? Would you take me out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The house is always a mess.</td>
<td>It’s not always a mess.</td>
<td>I am frustrated and I need a rest. I hope you don’t expect me to clean it all up. Would you agree with me that it is a mess and then offer to help clean up part of it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing is working</td>
<td>Are you saying it is my fault?</td>
<td>Today I am overwhelmed by all the things I still have to do. I am so grateful that I can share my feelings with you. It helps me to feel better. Would you hug me and tell me that I am doing a great job?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When a man is stressed, he generally does not want to talk and is trying to solve his problem alone. A man may start to feel smothered when a woman tries to comfort him or help him solve a problem. He may feel controlled or that she wants to change him. He may look for advice only after he has done what he can do alone. For this reason, John Gray say women shouldn’t try to get a man to talk before he is ready.

In Chart B he shows what a man really means when he says little.

**CHART B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A man says:</th>
<th>A woman may respond:</th>
<th>Men mean (Dictionary for women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm OK. It's OK&gt;</td>
<td>I know something's wrong. What is it?</td>
<td>I'm OK, I can deal with my upset. I don't need any help, thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's all right</td>
<td>Are you sure? I am happy to help you.</td>
<td>This is a problem but you are not to blame. I can resolve this within myself if you don’t interrupt my process by asking more questions or offering suggestions. Just act like it didn’t happen and I can process it within myself more effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm all right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's no problem</td>
<td>But it is a problem. I think we should talk. I could help.</td>
<td>I have no problem doing this or solving this problem. Please don’t talk more about it. That makes me more upset. It makes me happy to solve it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's no big deal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMPREHENSION:

1. Why would a woman say “never” when she doesn’t really mean that something never happens?

2. When women complain, what is a typical male response according to John Gray’s chart?

3. What does John Gray say women mean when they complain?

4. How can a man be more supportive when a woman complains?

5. If a man is obviously feeling troubled, what is the typical woman’s response?

6. What do the men really mean when they’re feeling troubled and don’t talk much?

7. How can a woman be more sensitive to a man’s need when a man doesn’t want to talk?

VOCABULARY

Linking verbs/Past participles used as adjectives

To be + Past participle:
   To be overwhelmed
   To be stressed
   To be frustrated
   To be upset
   To be wounded

To feel + Past participle
   To feel smothered
   To feel controlled

Others:
   To be sensitive
   To be supportive
ACTIVITY ONE

COMMUNICATION EXERCISE: Men’s Group Work

• Together fill out Dialog One using the “typical” male response according to CHART A.
• Fill out Dialog Two using a more “sensitive” response based on CHART A.

DIALOG ONE

Situation: Your wife, girlfriend or woman friend seems very upset. She has a big interview coming up and is feeling very pressured, but you don’t know this.

WOMAN: You never talk to me anymore. Why don’t you talk more?

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:

DIALOG TWO: Now you remember that maybe something else is bothering her. Write the dialog again and be more supportive.

WOMAN: You never talk to me anymore. Why don’t you talk more?

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:
COMMUNICATION EXERCISE: Women's Group Work

• Together fill out Dialog One using the "typical" female response according to CHART B.
• Fill out Dialog Two using a more “sensitive” response based on CHART B.

DIALOG ONE
Situation: Your husband, boyfriend or male friend looks very worried. You know he has a big interview coming up and want to support him.

WOMAN: What’s the matter?

YOU: Nothing.

WOMAN:

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:

DIALOG TWO: Now you remember that he probably needs to work on the problem himself first. Write the dialog again and be more supportive.

WOMAN: What’s the matter?

YOU: Nothing.

WOMAN:

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:
ACTIVITY TWO

SHARING EXPERIENCES: Now get together with a group of the opposite sex and:
• Compare your dialogues. Did your two groups fill out the two versions of the dialog in a similar way?
• With the new group, write a new dialog using the input of the people of the opposite sex. Be supportive.
• Read the dialog to the class.

SITUATION:

WOMAN:

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:

WOMAN:

YOU:

DISCUSS:

1. Did you agree that women and men don’t always say what they mean to say and, therefore, misunderstand each other and argue?
2. Is this similar in your culture? In what ways do men and women misunderstand each other in your culture?
3. How does it come out in your language?
REVIEWING VOCABULARY

To be overwhelmed  To be supportive  To be stressed
To be wounded  To be frustrated  To be upset
To feel smothered  To feel controlled

Add some more: _______________________  _______________________
_______________________  _______________________

Say how you feel in each of the following situations.

1. You work full time and go to school in the evenings. In class, you are given a lot of homework everyday.

2. Every time you get home late, your partner/spouse asks you again and again about your whereabouts.

3. You have been trying hard to make your relationship work, but nothing seems to work.

4. You’ve caught your boy/girlfriend lying.

6. You help everybody when they need it, but when you need help nobody is around to give you a hand.