

# EXPLORING GENDER SPEAK

*Personal Effectiveness in Gender Commu*

Diana K. Ivy & Phil Backlund

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## *Personal Effectiveness in Gender Communication*

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*To Important Women*  
*Hazel, Carol, and Karen*  
*DKI*

*To My Family*  
*Judy, Shane, Ryan, and Matt*  
*PB*



# Preface

When we first discussed with our friends and colleagues the idea of writing a textbook on the topic of gender communication, many responded, “I really hope you write it, because I could do well to read a book on that topic.” This common reaction convinced us of something we had detected in our own gender communication classes: in increasing numbers, people are coming to realize just how complex yet pervasive communication between women and men is in our professional and personal lives. One can rarely tune into a television talk show or open a newspaper without being bombarded by the topic. Traditionally male-dominated businesses and institutions are attempting to diversify their workforce to parallel the diversity in our society. Since the roles for women and men, as well as the rules that govern their behavior, have changed dramatically and continue to change, an understanding of the complexity that gender brings to communication becomes increasingly important. Anticipating how men and women will think, talk, and respond in a variety of situations represents one of our most challenging activities.

*Exploring GenderSpeak: Personal Effectiveness in Gender Communication* goes beyond a description of how men and women are communicatively alike and how they are different. It encourages students to consider the myriad of influences—from physiology to culture to media—that affect their communication with women and men. Most important, as students explore the information presented in the text, they are challenged to learn about themselves, in terms of attitudes, gender-role identity, and communication ability in their relationships.

In our own teaching of a variety of communication courses, we find that students seem to be searching for the concrete, the applicable, the reality based. If your students are like ours, they are cognizant of the fact that they need a theoretical, research-driven background on a given topic. But what they really seek is a translation of that information into a recognizable, useful form. For example, an interesting discussion developed in one of Ivy’s gender communication classes surrounding proactive versus reactive approaches to communica-

tion and relationships. While students understood theoretically the notion of proactively communicating to have an effect on other people, rather than assuming a pattern of reactivity, they wondered how this notion would actually work, in terms of initiating dating or romantic relationships. Did this mean that everyone should aggressively initiate relationships, rather than hoping that “Mr. or Ms. Right would find them”? Or was it more a philosophy or way of viewing relationships than an actual style of communication? The class came to realize how proactive communication, stereotypically associated with masculinity, and reactive communication, stereotypically associated with femininity, are translated into ingrained, socialized roles that people tend to assume in their relationships.

From this example and many others, it has become obvious to us that, in the area of gender communication especially, students continually seek empowerment. They seek ways they can use what they learn to more effectively establish and improve their relationships with others. Often textbooks merely report research results without offering a possible interpretation of the findings or an application of the information. The result of this practice is that the reader or you, the instructor, must act as an interpreter, making sense of research findings that are often contradictory and providing avenues for practical application to daily life. One of the things we have tried to do in *Exploring GenderSpeak* is to transfer the classroom discussion of the kind we described above onto the page. We have attempted to depict realistic events in the lives of students, to offer explanations for those events via cutting-edge research, and then to provide a range of communicative options students may employ for enhanced personal effectiveness in their interactions and relationships. We view this approach as a real strength of the text.

We also attempt in the text to speak to college students, using language and examples that they will find provocative. Our rationale is that if students are going to embrace this content and allow it to challenge their relational lives, they will be much more likely to do so if the language is accessible, current, and engaging. The text has been written primarily for college undergraduates enrolled in courses focusing on the effects of gender on the communication process. Such courses may be represented in university curricula as upper-division courses, while at community colleges, for example, they may be more introductory in nature. We believe that this text is appropriate for both these levels. While some prior exposure to basic concepts and theories of interpersonal communication will serve the reader well, we do not view this exposure as requisite to an understanding of the content of this text.

## ***Organization of the Book***

*Exploring GenderSpeak* is organized into twelve chapters within four major sections, with a logical progression from section to section. Part One, “Communication, Gender, and Effectiveness” contains a brief overview of the communication

process, including our emphasis on the receiver of communication. We then explore key terminology related to the topic, such as the difference between *sex* and *gender*. The opening chapter concludes with a description of the various components within the personal effectiveness approach.

Part Two, “Influences on Our Choices,” encourages readers to explore the many influences that shape their identities, attitudes, expectations, and communication as women and men. This section is based on an assumption that students must first understand what is influencing them—in terms of choices they make about themselves and about communication—before they can work to improve their communication skills and their relationships. Specific topics of discussion include the “nature versus nurture” argument (how biology and society shape one’s perception of gender), sexism in language, and communication about the sexes via media. Our approach to the media chapter represents a departure from most gender texts in that we present media as an *influence on* behavior rather than as a *context for* behavior. Other texts tend to offer a treatment of gender communication within the mediated context, along with other contextual chapters such as the workplace. The media chapter in *Exploring GenderSpeak* details ways in which advertising, prime-time television programming, soap operas, talk shows, film, song lyrics, and music videos affect our perceptions of who men and women should be and how they should communicate.

“Let’s Talk: Initiating and Developing Relationships” is the title of Part Three, one of the most unique aspects of the text. When we have taught gender communication courses in the past and used other texts, we have detected an oversight in content—content representing a primary interest of college students. Students continually want to know about relationships of all sorts: how to initiate them, how to establish the type of relationship each person wants, how to move a friendship into a romance, how to change a romance back into a friendship, how to know if a romantic partner is “marriage potential,” and so on. Most gender communication texts currently on the market omit or slight a discussion of the “nuts and bolts” of how gender communication operates relationally. These texts tend to jump too quickly to discussions of how gender affects communication in specific contexts, such as the workplace or the classroom. In contrast, the first chapter in this section of *Exploring GenderSpeak* offers a discussion of how women and men tend to communicate for different purposes and to use language differently—both important relational components. The two remaining chapters focus on the role of gender in the initiation and development of interpersonal relationships.

Once the building blocks of gender communication and relationship development are conveyed, students proceed into the final section of the text. In Part Four, entitled “The Contexts for Our Relationships: Personal Effectiveness in Action,” five chapters explore ways in which gender communication affects and is affected by the following contexts or life-situations: friendships (same-sex versus cross-sex), intimate or romantic relationships, the marriage and family context, the workplace, and educational setting. Suggestions for personally effective communication within each context, given the complex effects of gender, are provided.



## *Pedagogical Features and Resources for Instructors*

Each chapter contains six pedagogical features to serve as aids for instructors and students alike. A *Case Study* appears at the beginning of each chapter. In most instances, these case studies represent actual events that occurred within the gender communication classrooms of the authors. The case study device is used not only to gain attention from readers as they delve into a new topic, but to orient or alert the reader to the nature of the discussion that lies in the next pages. Case studies also operate as realistic illustrations of gender communication in various contexts.

The *Overview* section within each chapter contains bulleted phrases that serve as topical outlines of chapter content. Students can check these phrases against *Key Terms* sections at the end of each chapter, as a means of studying for exams or simply checking their understanding of chapter content. *What If?* boxes within each chapter are designed to provoke student thought, to cause students to envision something commonplace or ordinary in a completely different way, or to spark class discussion about a controversial idea or topic. Many of the topics for the What If? boxes stem from our in-class discussions that encourage students to challenge basic assumptions and expectations about the sexes. A series of *Discussion Starters* appear following the listing of Key Terms for each chapter. Instructors may use these questions as a means of generating class discussion over chapter content, as actual assignments, or as thought provokers for students to consider on their own time. Finally, complete *References* to research cited within the text appear at the end of each chapter. Students may find these references useful as they prepare assignments and/or conduct their own research projects. Instructors may use the references to gather additional material for their own research or to supplement instruction.

An *Instructor's Manual* accompanying *Exploring GenderSpeak* provides the following:

- Sample syllabi and schedules for both a quarter- and a semester-long course
- Perforated outlines of chapter content (which can be used as class lecture notes)
- Suggested activities and exercises that spark discussion and illustrate concepts in the text
- Information regarding potential areas of controversy, termed "Paths of Resistance"
- A comprehensive test item file with computer software for test generation

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*Diana K. Ivy  
Phil Backlund*

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