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SCS 334

Gender Differences in Human Communication

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Interview Paper

For the purposes of this paper I decided to interview someone from a different generation to mine in order to gain an insight into their opinions and experiences with and about the topic of gender. As discussed in the prologue of the text *Gender Speak,* gender roles have undoubtedly changed throughout the ages. Therefore, one would assume that people of different generations would have different ideas about gender and the role it plays in society. In order to get a deeper insight into the concept of people’s views on gender and how people’s lives are effected by their gender, I thought that it would be interesting to not only interview someone from a different generation but also from different genders within that generation. This led me to interview my Mother and Father. What I discovered was interesting, to say the least. In this paper I have highlighted and discussed some of the answers to my questions which I found to be most interesting. A full copy of both interviews for each participant is also included.

My parents are young and quite liberal so I was interested to see if their responses matched their general outlook on life, for the most part I would say that they did. My Mother is 44 is years old and my Father is 46 years old, they were both born in the late sixties and consider themselves 80’s kids at heart.

The first question I asked my parents was the first question I was asked on the first day of this gender communications class. Can you define gender? Both of them gave the definition of sex in place of the accurate definition of gender given in the text *Gender Speak.* They were both surprised to learn that gender is actually defined as the “cultural construction that includes biological sex (male or female), psychological characteristics (femininity, masculinity, androgyny), attitudes about the sexes, and sexual orientation.” (Ivy, 2012. p 25).

This definition began to make more sense when I asked them questions pertaining to whether or not they had been “gendered” as children and if their communication is “gendered”. When I asked the question do you think your communication is gendered, i.e. do you speak differently when speaking to a man than when speaking to a woman? My Mother replied “No not generally, I am a very straight talker and find sometimes I do need to tone down a little as not to offend a female. Generally I find them more emotional.” When asked this same question my Father replied “It can be. Sometimes it can happen especially in a sales environment.” Both of these answers seem to allude to women as being the more emotional of the two genders. Although my father does not include it in his answer he often describes to me how his sales tactics change depending on whether his buyers are male or female. When it is a male he usually gives more facts and figures for example what they will save, or what the product will be worth in a few years. Whereas when he is selling to woman, he usually tries to play more on their feelings by showing them how much more appealing the product is in comparison to the competition. These methods seem to coincide with the theory of rapport verses report talk that is described in the book *Gender Speak.*

I also asked my parents if the term feminism conjured up negative ideas or images for them? My Mother replied “No, I am in favor of equality and understand the need to have a voice and express beliefs for justice and equality”. Whereas my Father’s response was “It may have, when I was younger but certainly not now.” The fact that my father indicated that he may have had negative ideas about feminists when he was younger may be reflective of the time period in which he was born and grew up. No doubt the images and stories (whether true or untrue) of radical feminists known as “women’s libbers” (Ivy, 2012. p 28) from the 1960’s would have been very fresh in mind of someone growing up in the 1970’s.

Given the fact that both of my parents worked full time jobs for the duration of my childhood, I decided it would be interesting to ask questions pertaining to how their gender impacted their working lives.

Firstly I asked if they had ever experienced prejudice based on their gender? My father simply replied “no”. However, my Mother replied “Yes when I was 19. I was chosen to represent my country in my sport, but was advised not to go to the competition because the men on my team were not chosen. My coaches said I would be going against my team if I went ahead on my own. I often wonder if it was one of the guys chosen would we have been told to support him to represent our club.” Although this is example is not related to my Mother’s working life it hits on another very topical issue, gender inequality in sport. This is just another of countless examples of how men a favored over women in sporting activities. Although work has been done to even the playing field in the form of legislation such as “Title IX” which states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (<http://www.titleix.info>), there is still a lot more to be done to ensure equal opportunities for both male and female athletes.

I asked my parents what was the rate they earned per hour in their first job? My Father said he earned “3 euro per hour” which is approximately $4.00 per hour. My mother stated that she earned “five euro per hour” which is approximately $6.60 dollars per hour. This is unusual since men typically earn more than women. I also asked my parents how much they earned per hour in their most recent job? My Mother said she earned around “30 euro per hour” which is approximately $40 dollars per hour. My Father stated that he earns around “25 euro per hour” which is around $33 dollars per hour. These figures do not seem to coincide with the statistics given in the book *Gender Speak* where it states that “women still earn on average 77 cents to the man’s dollar”. (Ivy, 2012, p30). However, in order to fully understand the differences in these two individuals earnings one must look at some of the other contributing factor apart from gender. Education for example, also plays a big part in what one is paid. My Mother’s highest level of education is a post bachelor’s diploma, whereas my Father’s highest level of education is a diploma which is the equivalent of an associate’s degree. Therefore, it seems as though my father actually earns a lot of money in comparison to his level of education. Whereas mother who has completed 3 more years of higher education than my father does not earn that much more money than him. It would lead one to ask the question what if the roles were reversed? What if my Father had a post graduate diploma and my Mother had an associate’s degree? Would their earnings still be so similar, or would my Father earn a lot more than my Mother because he would have a higher level of education and also because he is a man?

These questions are almost impossible to answer but the ideas and images that they conjure up are vital to this class. I would like to imagine that if my parents educational achievements were reversed so too would be their income levels however there is no way to say for sure. All that we really can do for the remainder of this class and in our lives beyond this class is to continue to raise awareness of issues and themes such as the ones described in this paper and ultimately strive for a truly gender equal society.

In conclusion, it is clear that gender and all things associated with it affect all people from all generations and all genders in a multitude of ways. It was most interesting to see how these themes affected my parents’ lives and subsequently my life, since I learned that most of my parents’ views on gender are very similar to my views on gender because they were my first “gender teachers”. I think they were pretty good teachers, despite their own experiences and opinions they managed to instill the notion that “I can do whatever I set my mind to, if I work hard enough at it.” That is something I try to live by, and it is something I will strive to instill in my own children whether they are male, female or androgynous.

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**References**

Ivy, D (2012). *Gender Speak.* New York: Pearson.

*The living law, Title IX History*. Retrieved from: http://www.titleix.info/History/The-Living-Law.aspx

