

The conversation equation

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This is the time of year where we all invariably find ourselves at holiday gatherings. Have you ever noticed how the crowd at these things almost naturally separates into groups of men and women? Do you wonder why this happens?

The popular reasoning is that men want to talk about "men things" and women want to talk about "women things" so this separation is logical. However, if you observe closely, you'll notice that not only is the men's group not talking about men things they're almost always not actually talking at all. If a TV sports event is on, there's dead silence.

There is a "scientific" reason for this. I was listening to ESPN Radio host Colin Cowherd recently week when he espoused the basis for this lack of conversation by men. It goes like this.

Men are pre-loaded with 2,000 words per day. Once they use those allotted words their conversations are pretty much over for that 24-hour period. Women, on the other hand, are pre-loaded with 6,000 words per day. In case you're keeping score at home that's three times more than men have at their disposal.

Now, both men and women use up about 1,800 words at work on a given day. When they arrive home they burn another 200 words with things like: How was your day, what do you want to do for dinner; Suzie has a soccer game tonight, do you want to walk the dog, and other mundane items.

At that point the man is out

of words for the day, but the woman still has 4,000 left! It's this imbalance that explains all sorts of things.

For instance, have any men out there ever been criticized because "we don't talk to each other any more?" Well, this is the reason. One side has used up their allotted words for the day. It's not that they don't WANT to talk; it's that if they do, they'll have to dip into tomorrow's allotment and then they won't have enough for work the next day. You can't argue with science.

Have you ever seen a table at a restaurant with men at one end and women at the other end? Have you noticed the men basically eat and exchange a few quips and that's about it? They may as well be eating in a prison cafeteria. Meanwhile at the women's end, there's 16 conversations overlapping and everyone has words to burn. Now you know why this is so.

My wife and I like to ski and we often go skiing with two other couples. Sometimes the men ride the chairlift together and the women ride together. If the chair happens to be a four-seater a stranger will often fill in the fourth seat for the ride.

By the time the women's chair reaches the top of the hill our wives know all about the stranger riding with them: where they're from,



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what they do for a living, the names of all their kids, what elementary school they attended, what they had for dinner last night, and their shoe size.

On the men's chair the conversation goes something like this.

"Good snow."

"Yup."

"When we get to the top are you turning right or left?"

"Right."

"OK."

That's it. We men

have all the information we need. The guy is having a fine time because he thinks the snow is dandy. When we get off the chair we won't be tripping over each other. We're good to go.

I'm sure the women in the audience will think this theory is pure balderdash. On the other hand, I'll bet the men out there can come up with all sorts of situations illustrating this concept. They'll be printing this column and handing it out to other men because that's easier than using up their daily word quota trying to re-explain obvious scientific principles.

OK, so I know that men may be at a loss for words at holiday gatherings, but in some cases conversation can't be avoided. So now we turn to the knotty problem of what to actually talk about. Let me offer two suggestions.

For the politically minded, go check out PolitiFact's 2010 Lie of the Year awards (www.

politifact.com). They picked out 10 "pants on fire" lies and let readers vote for the biggest whopper. This is sure to get chuckles from every Republican at the gathering.

For the sports-minded, have fun with the exhibition football schedule (otherwise known as the college football bowls). Ask the question: "In what cities are the following 10 bowls played?"

The list: Humanitarian, Beef O'Brady's, Maaca, Pinstripe, Meineke Car Care, Chick-fil-A, TicketCity, GoDaddy.com, BBVA Compass, Fight Hunger. These are all real bowl games. Answers below.

At this point I want to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and Merry New Year. Remember to check out www.neffzone.com/holidays.htm for all sorts of holiday cheer for your children.

And kids, if your parents or grandparents need help on the computer, go to www.teachparentstech.org. It's a site where you can select from 50 how-to videos designed to teach simple tasks to your technology-deficient elders. Once you have the videos selected, you can then e-mail them a tech support care package.

Answers: Boise, ID; St. Petersburg, FL; Las Vegas, NV; Bronx, NY; Charlotte, NC; Atlanta, GA; Dallas, TX; Mobile, AL; Birmingham, AL; San Francisco, CA.

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