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Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus:

An Analysis of a Potential Meme

by

JO HOWARTH NOONAN

Under the Direction of Jaye Atkinson

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover whether the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," from John Gray's book, had become a meme and to explore what its usage implied. Analysis of 510 references was guided by grounded theory. Coding over a decade of newspaper usage of the phrase into seven emergent themes allowed examination of usage against the theories of gender research, communication research, media research and meme theory research. This analysis revealed that this phrase meets the requirements to be considered a meme, and as a meme it has successfully assisted the survival, evolution and permeance of Gray's premise that communication differences are inherent and immutable. While this premise is not based on established clinical and academic principles, it is an example of how incorrect and baseless ideas can displace good reasoned thinking based on research.

INDEX WORDS: meme, memetics, John Gray, Mars, Venus, newspaper, gender, communication, media, cultural transmission, social learning, standpoint, social identity

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AN ANALYSIS OF A POTENTIAL MEME

by

JO HOWARTH NOONAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of

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Jo Howarth Noonan

2007

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College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2007

DEDICATION

To Patrick, for his boundless support on this “2-year” journey.

To Paul and Will, for doing their own laundry.

To Nelson and Mary, for never saying, “You can’t do that.”

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My thanks go out to my professors and fellow students at Georgia State University for going on this voyage with me. Thanks especially to Dr. Jaye Atkinson for direction and unflagging encouragement, to Missy, Anita, and Elizabeth for always answering the S.O.S. emails, and most of all, thanks to Lydia for being the editor and sister we'd all like to have.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1992, a book appeared on the national scene that took both the publishing world and the public by storm. John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* made its first appearance on the *New York Times Best Seller* list in April 1993, and it remained on the list continuously for the next six years (Publisher's Weekly, 2000). According to Gray's website, 30 million copies of the book have been published in 40 languages (2006). Its popularity was just the beginning of what would become for Gray a relationship counseling empire comprised of 15 titles (see Appendix A for a complete list), Broadway appearances, lecture circuits, a television series, a board game, and an interactive website (Gray, 2006). Appearances on television shows such as *Oprah*, *The Today Show, CBS Morning Show,* a two-hour *ABC News Special with Barbara Walters,* and *Good Morning America,* and profiles of Gray or references to his work in publications such as *Newsweek, Time, Forbes,* and *USA Today,* anointed Gray an expert in relationship counseling, a perception which persists today.

John Gray was born in 1951 in Houston, Texas. His website refers to him as Dr. Gray and identifies him as an expert in the field of communication, a former certified marriage and family therapist, and "the premier Better Life relationship coach on AOL," but it does not identify the field in which he earned a Ph.D. (Gray, 2006). In the paperback edition of his book, he identifies himself as member of the National Academy for Certified Therapists (Gray, 2004), but a search for this organization on the Internet brings forward no further information. He also holds membership in the American Counseling Association, which is open to all interested parties of any background. Gray attended both St. Thomas University and the University of Texas but did

not receive a degree from either institution. He received B.A. and M.A. diplomas in “Creative Intelligence” from the Maharishi European Research University, located in Seelisburg, Switzerland (Drum, 2004). In 1992, Gray was granted a Ph.D. from Columbia Pacific University (CPU), a distance learning or correspondence school located in Novato, California.

In 1997, CPU lost legal authorization to offer or award degrees and was closed by the California Department of Consumer Affairs. During an investigation and assessment of CPU, the Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (Bureau) found that CPU students had been awarded excessive credit for prior experiential learning, the faculty was under qualified, and the university failed to meet standard requirements for issuing Ph.D. degrees. “When an institution issues a degree to a student who has not received adequate training, knowledge, and skill, the student, employers, and the general public are harmed,” said Bureau Chief Michael Abbott (California, 01/2000, ¶2). In July 2000, the California Court of Appeals found that the Bureau, which regulates degree-granting institutions had presented substantial evidence to support the closure and CPU exhausted its right of appeal (California, 12/2000).

Degrees granted at CPU prior to June 1997 were declared “legally valid” (12/2000, ¶4) and Gray's website claims, "At the time John Gray graduated and received his degree, CPU was a highly respected school in its field" (Gray, 2006). In a press release at the time of the final judgment, however, California Department of Consumer Affairs Director Kathleen Hamilton referred to CPU as a “diploma mill” and declared institutions “…that manufacture degrees based on the ability to write a check, rather than the ability to master curriculum, will no longer make the grade” (California, 1999).

In *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus,* Gray claims that seven years of theoretical and field research, in which “90 percent of the 25,000 individuals questioned…

enthusiastically recognized themselves in the descriptions" (1992, p. 4) of relationships included in his surveys, went into the creation of his book. At the same time, he offers no empirical evidence of how and where this research was conducted, nor a list of references or citations. Instead, Gray, who says the inspiration for the different planet concept came to him while watching the movie *E.T.* (Peterson, 1994), stated in an interview with Weber that his theories were formed during his own seminars:

> "A man would make a complaint about his wife, and I'd ask my audience: 'How many men here feel that way?' And sometimes there'd be this big, 'Yeah! Yeah!' Or sometimes a woman would say something and all the women would clap. I would know that's a gold mine: This is something men don't understand about women" (Weber, 01/26/97).

Gray "shrugs off" (Goldman, 1994) the disdain of academics and journalists who question his methods and credentials. He refers to himself variously as a "spiritual athlete" (Good, 2002), a practitioner of "spiritual counseling" (Goldman, 1994), and a "spiritual healer" (Hamlin, 1999). Gray responds to criticism by saying, "I don't need to put a PhD by my name. I'm the most famous author in the world" (Washington Post, 2003).

To say that John Gray's credentials and methods are uncertain is not an exaggeration. Even so, there is no question that he hit the cultural mother lode when he came up with the title for his book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Something about this title resonates with people to the point that the phrase now appears in a multitude of contexts, from the title of a recent *New York Times* article that begins by discussing President Bush's decision not to fire Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (Steinhauer, 2006) to a Volvo commercial. The phrase is a part of our everyday lexicon to the extent that when hearing it, individuals do not pause to

consider its origin or to think of astronomy but assume valid differences between men and women (Zimmerman, Haddock, & McGeorge, 2001) that somehow endorse the opinion or sell the product to which it is attached. In becoming so well recognized, this phrase may have become a replicator that serves as a basis for the transmission of culture (Dawkins, 1976). It may have become a meme.

In *The Selfish Gene*, his 1976 book on evolution, zoologist Dr. Richard Dawkins brought forth the concepts for a theory of cultural transmission that he called meme theory or memetics. In his determination that the real difference between humans and other species is "culture" in the scientific sense, he wrote "cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution…all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 191). The name he chose for this replicator of human culture is borrowed from the Greek word "mimeme," which translates as "that which is imitated" (Oxford, 2004), and which Dawkins shortened to "meme" so that it would rhyme with gene. In meme theory, Dawkins proposes that the meme is to culture what the gene is to biology, a reproducible idea that serves as a basis for the transmission of culture. Memes survive in the "meme pool" (1976, p.193) for a variety of reasons. One reason is that a meme can have psychological appeal in the answers it appears to provide to deep and troubling questions (Dawkins, 1976).

The book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* seeks to address deep and troubling questions about why heterosexual couples have difficulties getting along and staying together. The answer it provides is that all difficulties arise from the *fact* that differences in communication between men and women are innate and so significant that men and women should stop pretending they are even from the same planet. This question of gender differences

and whether those found in communication styles are significant enough to be deemed valid is a long-standing point of contention among gender theorists. In their studies of communication in the workplace, Wilkins and Andersen (1991) and Canary and Hause (1993) found communication differences between males and females to be minimal and of little social significance. Extensive studies by Dindia (1987) and Dindia and Allen (1992) showed differences in verbal strategy choices (e.g. interruption versus self-disclosure) to be consistent and significant, but the caveats attached to these studies introduce questions about their findings. Julia Wood argues that while gender can and often does play a large role in communication styles, the findings of such workplace studies are generalized and do not rule out the idea that "gender is less useful than power in explaining many general differences between men and women" (Wood & Dindia, 1998, p. 21).

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are "our principal vehicles for understanding…they play a central role in the construction of social and political reality" (p. 159), and Morgan (1986) stresses that metaphors often reveal unarticulated understandings or assumptions. In the decade plus since Gray's book was published, the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" has become a metaphor for expressing the existence and acceptance of innate gender differences, despite a growing body of evidence that reveals such differences are not significant. Because memes and metaphors both have communicative power it is possible to examine the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" via metaphoric analysis and develop a sense of the social reality it endorses. Meme theory, however, affords a different perspective. It reveals how this phrase has successfully assisted the survival, evolution and permeance of a bad idea "commonly shared through social transmission" (Aunger, 2000, p. 2).

To date, most studies that invoke meme theory are discussions of the definition and arguments about the validity of the theory itself rather than applications of the theory to examine popular phrases, trends, or ideas (Jeffreys, 2000). Using Dawkins' definition and criteria, the purpose of this study will be to discover whether a replicator (Dawkins, 1976) such as the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" has become a meme since appearing on the scene in 1993 and to draw conclusions about where usage of this phrase leads. H.L. Mencken wrote, "There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong" (1917). If this phrase has become a neat and plausible excuse for not attempting to bridge an important communication gap between men and women, and if it reinforces the perception that an impossible bridge is required to span the distance from Mars to Venus, the consequence is an undermining of relationships between men and women rather their enhancement, and that is the wrong way to build better communication.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite the fact that John Gray's expertise and methodology are questionable, the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" appears to have become a shortcut for expressing an acceptance of the existence of innate gender differences and an explanation for any and all difficulties men and women encounter in their communication efforts with one another. To discover whether the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" has become a meme since coming on the scene in 1993, it is necessary to explore the research on meme theory and to develop of a list of criteria for defining a meme. In order to study the implications that the presence of this phrase may have for communication between men and women, it is necessary to examine Gray's theories against the work of recognized scholars who have done extensive research in the area of gender differences and similarities.

Theoretical Background

Meme Theory. When zoologist Richard Dawkins coined the term "meme," he proposed that the meme is to culture what the gene is to biology, a replicator – "a unit of information with the ability to reproduce itself using resources from some material substrate" (Aunger, 2000, p. 1) – that serves as a basis for the transmission of culture:

> Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution… Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. (Dawkins, 1976, pp.189, 192).

This explanation, which unleashed a firestorm of discussion on the validity of a biological comparison, was Dawkins's attempt to provide an analogy that would facilitate initial understanding of the meme concept. Dawkins did not intend a strict or literal comparison (1999), and has warned that the analogy "can be taken too far if we are not careful" (Dawkins, 1987, p. 196), but many scholars who debate the idea and the existence of memes persist in arguing a literal comparison with the gene (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Speel, 1996). Others debate what the definitive definition of meme theory should be (Hull, 1999) while still others question whether the theory has lasting value (Rose, 1998). The discussion of meme theory is so extensive and literal application is so rare that the lack of development of the meme concept has been "conspicuous" (Aunger, 2000, p.2) and meme theory has been called a "body of theory without evidence" (Marsden, 1998, p. 68).

Whether memetics is or can be declared a science with syntactic language or whether it is a merely a semantic classification (Dennett, 1995) is a question that will continue to rage among critics and devoted memeticians alike. While these debates are important, they do not invalidate the meme concept (Aunger, 2000) and they complicate what is intrinsically a concise and simple concept. A meme is not a fleeting impression or a random thought, and it is more than just an idea. It is an idea, a tune, a catch phrase, or even a fashion statement that self-replicates and is transmitted with purpose, with accuracy, and without reliance on the original host (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976).

> If a scientist hears or reads about a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain (Dawkins, 1976, p. 192).

In this example, Dawkins appears to bow to his learned colleagues by assuming that they will only be passing along "good" ideas, but he also acknowledges a meme need only be appealing. It does not, by necessity, have to originate from a good idea. "Selection favors memes that exploit their cultural environment to their own advantage" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 199). In order for any idea, tune, or catch phrase to become a meme it is only necessary that it take root in a society through self-replication and propagation, reproducing itself with fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). When Dawkins introduced the concept of memes in *The Selfish Gene,* his examples ranged from popular songs, to religion, to fashion and catch phrases such as the ubiquitous "Kilroy Was Here" that seemed to magically appear during World War II (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000). A devoted scientist himself, he did not make judgments about the validity of what becomes a meme, he simply reported that elements of culture "stick" and are passed along from brain to brain, "turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 192).

Dawkins also compares the manner in which memes spread to a computer virus (Dawkins, 1991). In order for a virus to spread from computer to computer it requires that a friendly, promiscuous environment be present. The virus must be accepted by an enormous number of contact points, which in turn push it along to other friendly points of contact. It is no longer reliant on its creator or original host for survival (Microsoft, 2005). For Dawkins, a meme operates in the same way because "minds are friendly environments to parasitic, self-replicating ideas or information" (Dawkins, 1991, ¶33). Humans come across millions of ideas each day via conversation, the media, literature, and in meditation. The tiny number of ideas that survive in the memory and the even fewer number that are passed along to others are the "survivors," the memes that shape our minds and cultures (Blackmore, 1999).

That the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" is now a part of the American lexicon is apparent in that use of the phrase is commonplace. It can be overheard in casual conversation and on television. It shows up in articles, in comics, and in advertisements wholly unconnected with John Gray or his empire. The humorist Dave Barry titled a book *Dave Barry is from Mars and Venus* because he was looking for a catchy title and, in his words, "nobody has any idea what it means" (1997, p. 11). Kristin Varela used "men are from Mars" in an article on Volvos for abc.com (Varela, 2005), and the *EmoryReport* of Emory University published an article about last year's "King Week" celebration under the title, "dual events geared to both Mars and Venus" (Lukens & Terrazas, 2006). An editorial in *Chest Magazine* (which caters to physicians) used concepts introduced in Gray's book to support a theory that sleep apnea is a "Martian" disease (Collop, 2001), and as recently as last spring, an article in the *New York Times* on how couples make decisions was titled "Never Mind Mars and Venus: Who Is 'the Decider'?" (Steinhauer, 2006).

In order for a replicator such as the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" to be considered a meme it must show high survival value via longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). Longevity illustrates the stability or durability of a meme over time (Comte, 2000). A replicator must survive long enough to effect how quickly it is replicated (Dawkins, 1982). Fecundity, or the ability to reproduce in abundance, gives a measure of the lasting value of the meme (Dawkins, 1976) and is, according to Dawkins, a particularly important quality. Fecundity serves as evidence of the meme's range of influence (Conte, 2000) and acceptability by a population. The spread of a popular tune through the meme pool, for example, may be gauged not only "by the number of people heard whistling it in the streets" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 194) but also by the fact that many people are whistling it in many different

places. Dennett refers to this as usage that spreads as quickly as the replication of yeast cells (1990). Copying-fidelity demonstrates replicator reliability (Boyd & Richerson, 2000). When it comes to copying-fidelity, Dawkins suggests that, at first glance, memes do not appear to be high-fidelity replicators since each whistler puts his or her own spin on the popular tune being transmitted. What is replicated, however, is the essence of the original tune (Dawkins, 1976). In the case of a phrase like "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," the essence is the original intent of John Gray's phrase and its transmission via news articles, humor, and advertising seem to purposely spread that essence (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976) in many different places. With the exception of Mr. Barry, what the publications noted above have in common is the assumption that the meaning of "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" is generally understood, and its essence is accepted by a population as a viable interpretation of communicative relations between men and women, whether it actually is or not.

Gender Theories. Theories of gender are biological, interpersonal, and cultural. Many gender theorists such as Julia Wood insist that biological theories are compromised because they must focus specifically on sex (male/female), which is innate, and not on gender (masculine/feminine), which is a social construction that designates cultural and social categories (Wood & Dindia, 1998). Advocates for biological theories of difference, however, attempt to advance their argument with research showing that hormones play a role in the sex development of a fetus, as well as research that says structural differences in the brain may or may not result in a difference in how males and females process information (Eisenberg, Martin, & Fabes, 1996). According to a recent article in *Newsweek,* psychiatrist Louann Brizendine's book, *The Female Brain*, argues that advances in neuroimaging and neuroendocrinology make it possible to understand real differences in male and female brains. In the article, Brizendine states that

different levels of certain hormones—such as estrogen, cortisol, and dopamine—in male and female brains, as well as the increased presence of neurons in the female brain devoted to emotions and memory can result in different male/female responses to stress (Tyre & Scelfo, 2006). Andersen protests that an atmosphere of political correctness makes it difficult to have a truly open discussion of probable biologically based differences. He argues that studies measuring a higher level of nonverbal sensitivity in grade school age females than in their male peers suggest either biological differences or extremely early development, which he views as implausible (Andersen, 1998).

Biological theories of difference do not always sit well with social scientists and medical professionals who tend to see such differences as minimal and who embrace the influence of social factors on the development of gender differences. Scientists such as psychiatrist and neuroimaging expert Nancy C. Andreasen point to extensive evidence that nurture is more important than nature in explaining differences in human behavior (Tyre & Scelfo, 2006). Andreasen views studies that ignore this evidence as flawed by claims for biological differences which are exaggerated insignificance. There is also the belief that such studies are ultimately detrimental to women's attempts to reach equal footing in the workplace and at home. In fact, according to Andreasen, "whatever measurable differences exist in the brain are used to oppress and suppress women" (Tyre & Scelfo, 2006, p. 47). In questioning why findings of dimorphic difference are viewed as fundamentally and innately important, Condit responds that studies on brain sex are too often based on "bad science" (1996, p. 87). She concludes that hypotheses for brain sex research are "framed in such a way that any finding of dichotomous difference outweighs all findings of similarity" (p.90).

Theories about how nurture or interpersonal influences affect gender differences include two psychological explanations. First, social learning theory, or cognitive social learning, holds that individuals learn "appropriate behavior" by observing others (Bandura, 1977). Adults offer primary reinforcement of appropriate gender-role behavior to children through everything from the toys they provide to their urging lady-like behavior and asserting that "big boys don't cry," to their own interaction with and reaction to the opposite sex. This theory states that children learn more by what they see adults doing than by what they hear the same adults say (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Second, gender schema theory also explains gender differences as based on interpersonal influences. This theory states that children form a network of mental associations about gender based on what they witness in the behavior of adults around them, which then provides a guide for interpreting any information gathered about males and females (Lips, 2001).

Cultural theories about gender differences include the anthropological findings of scientists such as Margaret Mead. In her work among the people of Papua, New Guinea, in the 1930s, Mead discovered that temperamental differences between the sexes were culturally determined rather than innate (Library of Congress, 2006). In response to criticism from a reader who complained that Mead attributed all differences between male and female personalities to environment, Mead replied:

> I nowhere say that there are no primary, i.e. biologically determined sex differences. I think there probably are. But it is as if one said: All Negroes have black skins and a special ability to sing in the high register, and the first statement were true and the second statement were false, and then tried to connect black skins and singing in the high register. Until we stop saying that differences which are differences between people, not between the sexes, are sex differences, we can

> not discuss such things as sex differences…let us not mix up the things which are temperamental, and vary between individuals, with the things which are sex determined and vary by sex" (Mead, 1937).

Another important point to consider when comparing Gray's work to scholarly findings is that individuals who argue there are inherently male and inherently female characteristics and behaviors may be guilty of gender stereotyping (Eisenberg, Martin, & Fabes, 1996). This assumption that certain distinct characteristics are the essence of woman while other, different and equally distinct characteristics are the essence of man is known as essentializing (Wood, 1993). Generalized statements that specific characteristics or behaviors are true for all men, while others are true for all women, are based in the idea that behavior is inherent and constant. Essentializing and gender stereotyping leave no room for individuality or for views such as those found in standpoint theory. Standpoint theory states that one's position in a culture is dependent upon one's social situation, including gender, race, and socio-economic standing (Hartsock, 1983; Wood, 2005). The foundation of standpoint theory is found in the work of German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel, who wrote that in any society where power exists, there can never be just one perspective of reality (1807).

Feminist theory offers another set of perspectives against which to gauge Gray's work. Feminist theorists have adopted the idea of standpoint to emphasize that power and unique experiences shape the attitudes, views, and understanding of the world held by different groups, such as men and women. Ruddick's (1989) research into mothering shows that maternal thinking or instinct is not an innate characteristic of women but comes about rather as a result of position as domestic and caregiver. This view is supported by Risman's (1986) work with single fathers, which showed that when forced by necessity into the position as primary domestic and caregiver,

men were as capable as women of assuming these roles. Research by Snodgrass (1985, 1992) disputed the idea that women are more sensitive of others' feelings than men. It showed that for both men and women, perception of social role and of subordination was a primary predictor of sensitivity to others' feelings.

Within feminist studies the roots of difference theories follow the winding path that is feminism itself. The simplest and most direct definition of feminism is "a movement for social, political, and economic equality of women and men" (Wood, 2005, p. 3) however, defining what that equality looks like is neither simple nor direct, in part because of individual and societal ideas about the meaning of gender. As Wood writes, "what gender means depends on a society's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life" (2005, p. 22).

Such values, beliefs and preferred ways of organizing collective life have changed again and again throughout the history of the feminist movement in the western world. Early feminists or first-wave feminists believed that women and men have different needs, abilities and communication styles and were adamant in their declaration that, by nature, women were more morally pure, nurturing, and peaceful (Wood, 2005). A hundred years later, radical feminists declared the personal is political, and that depicting women as giving, nurturing, and morally pure also portrays them as weak (Steinem, 1984). Separatist feminists take their belief in differences seriously to the point of declaring that co-existence is impossible and that the only way for women to thrive is to live apart from men (Wood, 2005). Liberal feminists argue that differences between men and women begin and end at anatomy, and that therefore, men and women should be treated equally in all ways (Wood, 2005). Cultural feminists promote a polarized picture of how men and women communicate (Aries, 1997). They avow there are differences that must be recognized and respected (Tannen, 1990). Lawyer and social critic

Wendy Kaminer (1990) suggests that women are constantly faced with the dilemma of a "historic conflict" between equality or liberal feminism, which demands equal treatment for men and women, and cultural feminism, which emphasizes differences and encourages women to celebrate the distinctions that make them women, such as the ability to bear children.

A group known as Revalorists (also known as anti- or "conservative feminists"[1]) proclaim that the personal is not political, and that the reason women today are frustrated in their relationships is because radical feminist values are destroying women's roles. Revalorists join with other conservatives and traditionalists in advocating that women who realize equality cannot also realize a happy relationship. They state that the only way to find happiness is to allow the man to lead the relationship and for the woman to act in a supporting role (Wood, 2005). Not only do Revalorists firmly believe that women speak in a different voice than men (Gilligan, 1982), they also proclaim that women's traditional role as caregivers leads them to have values more conducive to nurturing and relationship building than the values men learn in the public sphere (Wood, 2005). Not surprisingly, the Revalorist approach is of concern to feminist scholars who fear that supporting such differences between men and women will result in major setbacks for women in the workplace, in public office, and in the home (Wood, 2005).

Media and Social Science Research. While serious scholars freely acknowledge that the media is a key conduit for delivering information to the public (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004), the "uneasy partnership" between scholars and the media is long-standing (Condit, 1996; Weiss, Singer, & Endreny, 1988). There is an on-going perception that scientific findings are presented to the public prematurely and/or inaccurately. Some media accounts of scientific subjects are over-simplified or over-generalized, while others are sensationalized beyond recognition. (McCall & Stocking, 1982; Thompson & Nelson, 2001; Weigel & Pappas, 1981). According to

McCall and Stocking, this leads to a sense by social scientists, in particular, that "communicating to wider publics is a nasty business" (1982, p. 985). Because the media is seen as repeatedly fouling up the message, social scientists are less inclined to grant interviews and to attempt to communicate their findings, thus leaving a void to be filled by non scientists and pop psychologists who speak in ways that do not connect with or support the scientific findings (McCall & Stocking, 1982).

There is also a sense that journalists covering the social sciences often lack training in science or scientific writing, yet still feel qualified to write about serious research.

> Everyone, including journalists and editors, fancies himself or herself something of a psychologist, but not an astrophysicist. Results from psychology, but not from physics must therefore square with experience to be credible (McCall & Stocking, 1982, p.988).

At the same time, may journalists appear to regard scientists as "mostly irrelevant, obfuscatory, and incapable of forming a simple declarative sentence" (McCall & Stocking, 1982, p. 986). These same journalists may not understand that in the social sciences significant findings are published more often than null findings. In a study examining gender differences, for example, a discovery of difference is likely to be reported when it is found to be significant to a study, but not when it is found to be insignificant. Such reports seldom take into account effect sizes (Aries, 1997), whether the single report can be replicated (Hyde, 1994), or the way original hypotheses are framed, which may skew the results of brain sex research in the media (Condit, 1996). When the premise is to discover whether difference exists, the fact that a few minor differences are revealed can be amplified in the media to make it appear that all men are alike

and all women are alike, and that men are fundamentally different from women (Aries, 1997; Condit, 1996).

Thompson and Nelson declare that research findings in the social sciences are "commonly framed [by the media] in terms of broader public debates, even though the research is seldom designed to directly address these debates," and are "judged by their consistency with intuitive theories and prior beliefs" (p. 5, 2001). This allows the research to be interpreted by the media in ways that bring it in line with what journalists already believe is understood and accepted about human behavior (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979).

When it comes to getting out the message, scientists and scholars also find themselves at the mercy of media politics. This is of particular concern when scientific research is hijacked by "campaign journalism" and used to support a point of view put forth by a particular interest group, celebrity, or politician (Thompson & Nelson, 2001). In a study of how political orientation influences newspaper coverage of gender differences, Brescoll and LaFrance (2004) discovered that more conservative newspapers are more likely to attribute gender differences to biological factors, while more liberal newspapers publish accounts that explore other and less traditional explanations of gender differences. Unlike these articles which propose social and cultural influences as the cause of gender differences, the more conservative view reinforces the idea that human behavior is stable and innate, encouraging readers to see human traits as immutable and leading to increased gender stereotyping (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004; Levy, Dweck, & Stroessner, 1998).

Interpretations of social science research that are over-simplifications, over-generalizations, are sensationalized, or are based on media politics, can become the memes by

which misinformation is transmitted and perpetuated. In his original work, Dawkins asks his readers to consider the idea of God as a meme:

> What is it about the idea of a god that gives it its stability and penetrance in the cultural environment? The survival value of the god meme in the meme pool results from its great psychological appeal. It provides a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling questions about existence (1976, p.193).

While one might not agree with Dawkins's view of the "god meme" as a perpetuation of misinformation, this meme does function to perpetuate information that is not rooted in scientific proof, and belief in a higher power certainly brings deep psychological and emotional satisfaction to millions of individuals. And, as a meme, this belief can provide comfort to humans because it allows a "so that's why" explanation for behavior (Jeffreys, 2000). While the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" may not have the lasting power of the "god meme" nor provide the same level of satisfaction to those who repeat it, this simple phrase has psychological appeal to journalists and their audiences because it appears to explain what many journalists and audiences believe to be common knowledge about human behavior and problems in gender relationships (Noble, 1993).

Communication and Gender Research. In 1955, when Parsons and Bales opened the door to gender difference theory by describing women as expressive and men as instrumental, they laid the groundwork for Gilligan's (1982) declaration that women have a relational self that allows them to measure everything in terms of relationships, while men measure in terms of logic. Tannen followed this same path when she declared that scholars and individuals must acknowledge that men and women communicate differently. She reported that not to do so would be detrimental to women as well as to men who, "speak to women as they would to men,

and are nonplussed when their words don't work as they expected, or even spark resentment and anger" (1990, p. 16). Men, she claimed, are competitive speakers who are more likely to engage in conflict by arguing and issuing commands, while women are cooperative and likely to avoid conflict by agreeing and making suggestions rather than commands (Tannen, 1993). John Gray (1992) took Tannen's findings a step further and declared that men and women not only communicate differently, they have so little in common as to be from completely different planets.

Many gender scholars do not dispute evidence arguing that some differences exist in men's and women's approaches to relationships (Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003; Cole, 2004; Hekman, 1999; Wood, 1982, 2005). What Wood, in particular, objects to in John Gray's work are his efforts to essentialize women and men and his claims that communication practices are innate and unchangeable, claims that she views as extreme, misleading, and erroneous (Wood, 2001). Murphy (2001) concurs and argues that Gray's work provides a "disturbing interpretive framework" (p. 151) for understanding communication based on a "sexist form of anthropology" (p. 164). Murphy implies that what makes Gray's arguments dangerous is that there is an elementary nature to the solutions he presents as common sense. Dindia protests that the solutions Gray prescribes perform a disservice to the women and men who follow them because they are not based on theory supported by empirical research (Wood & Dindia, 1998).

Communication Style as an Innate Trait vs. Social Construct. Never veering from his premise that men and women come from different planets allows Gray to present communication practices as "innate and unchangeable" (Wood, 2001, p. 203). A significant body of research, however, points to evidence that differences in communication style are matters of degree rather than quality, and that biological differences affecting communication are minimal (Eagly, 1987;

Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Hyde, 1981; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1975; Twenge, 1997; Wood, 1982). Gray's metaphor also does not leave room for the long validated results of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Wong, 1990), which argues men and women can and do develop attributes in both masculine and feminine gender domains, nor for the empirically supported premise that human communication styles are a social construction which encourages women more and men less to develop traits that enhance interpersonal problem-based communication (Baird, 1976; Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003).

Gray does not leave room for such evidence or discussion because, while he acknowledges that some differences between individuals are related to personality, temperament, and the social influences of family and society, he argues that gender differences are "caused primarily by brain and hormonal differences" (2004, p. xx). Female readers who recognize themselves more in his descriptions of Martians than of Venusians are informed that the 10 percent of women who react this way do so as "the result of having been born with higher testosterone levels than most other women" (Gray, 2004, p. xix). Gray professes that men and women not only communicate differently, they "think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently" (Gray, 1992, p. 5). In Gray's solar system, men think and women feel.

Many gender theorists link gender differences to power differentials rather than to anything innate (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990). Power is the potential or ability to influence, control and/or modify another's behavior (Rollins & Bahr, 1976) and requires the perception that one party has some basis for power (Wolfe, 1959). Rollins and Bahr (1976) argue that for clarification, power should not be conceived as an "attribute of an individual but as a characteristic of social interaction between two or more persons" (p. 620). In terms of marital

couples, they further argue that power is the "relative potential of marriage partners to influence the behavior of each other when a conflict of goals exists between them" (p.620), and that when one partner perceives himself or herself to have more power in the relationship than his or her partner, he/she will step up attempts to control that partner (Rollins & Bahr, 1976). Wood argues that the learned practices that come with gender can and often do play a large role in communication approaches, but "gender is less useful than power in explaining many general differences between men and women" (1998, p. 21).

Gender role theory tends to divide married individuals into two categories, those who follow traditional roles and those who seek egalitarian roles (Greenstein, 1996; Hochschild, 1989). Men and women whose gender ideologies are traditional may view their relationships differently from those whose gender ideologies are egalitarian, regardless of whether the woman works outside the home or not. The number of married American women who have children and who are working outside the home has risen from less than half in 1975 to nearly three-quarters of all women today (USDL, 2004). According to the US Census Bureau (2004), only 30 percent of American families live on one income. Due to rising prices in food, housing, fuel and healthcare, it now takes two incomes for many families to get by, and thus a large percentage of women work from necessity. However, in households where husbands' salaries are ample enough that, "wives could be relieved of the stress of contributing to the family income," (Jalilvand, 2000, p. 26) women continue to enter the workplace. In some instances women work to raise the family's standard of living to a higher-level while in others, women work outside the home because it is what they want to do. The most common way that working mothers deal with the extra load, however, is to cut back on the hours they spend at their paying jobs, to seek a flexible work schedule, and/or to find employment close to their child's school or daycare

(Guzman, 2000; Silver & Goldscheider, 1994). The downside of this arrangement for many women is that it often severely limits earning ability and opportunities to advance in chosen careers (Crittenden, 2001; Kaufman & Quigley, 2000). At the same time, women working outside the home continue to do twice as much daily household work than their spouses and the majority of all work related to childcare (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). In fact, research shows that husbands tend to do less housework once there are children in the family (Greenstein, 1996; Kessler, 1982). In her book, *The Second Shift,* Arlie Hochschild (1989) concludes that between housework, childcare and their full-time paid jobs, mothers end up working approximately 15 hours longer each week than their spouses. Over the course of a year, this amounts to an extra month of 24-hour days.

A woman of traditional ideology who perceives housework and childcare as a measure of her value in the family, or as a way of maintaining a sense of control of and connectedness to the family is less likely to express dissatisfaction with career sacrifice or with a division of household tasks (Blair & Johnson, 1992). A woman of egalitarian ideology who now works fewer hours and earns less money in the labor force than her spouse may feel that she "owes" it to her spouse to make up for this inequity by performing the lion's share of household tasks (Greenstein, 1996). However, this woman may also more readily perceive such an exchange as inequitable (Blair & Johnson, 1992) and may harbor more guilt or resentment over having to make a choice between work and family which she perceives her spouse does not have to make (Barnett & Rivers, 2004; de Marneffe, 2004).

The fact that women who work outside the home also perform twice as much housework and childcare as their male partners directly corresponds with evidence that married women with children experience higher levels of stress, fatigue, and illness (Blair & Johnson 1992;

Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Jena, 1999; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). Greenstein reports that traditional wives, even those working full-time in the labor force, "might value stability and harmony in their relationships, while egalitarian wives might be more concerned with independence and autonomy" (1996, p. 1031). This seems to suggest that the only way for a woman with an egalitarian ideology to seek harmony and stability in her marriage is to forfeit the idea of establishing an equitable distribution of housework with her spouse. Indeed, in situations where the husband does not assume an equal share of household responsibility, women who have an egalitarian ideology may give up seeking an equitable distribution of household tasks for the sake of harmony in their relationship (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). This is particularly true if once there are children present in the family, the woman seeks a work schedule that limits her ability to seek a salary comparable to what her husband might earn. Couples who may have had a completely egalitarian relationship with regard to finances and household tasks prior to children now shift to a traditional division of labor. The new father now perceives his role as primary financial provider while the woman now assumes additional housework in as well as primary care for the child (Hare-Mustin, 1988). Understanding that she is now dependent on the husband for financial support, the egalitarian woman may refrain from demanding an equitable division of household tasks as a way to avoid the possibility of divorce (Crittenden, 2001). While research shows that women consider divorce as an alternative more often than men (Huber & Spitze, 1983), it is possible women are unwilling to press for an equitable solution because deep down they fear it is actually their spouse who will leave and cast the family into financial straits.

A social exchange perspective suggests that power and dependency influence assessments of fairness (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). If the idea of divorce or upsetting one's partner come at too high a cost, a woman's expectations of her spouse may shift completely to

the point where she simply does the work and no longer perceives the existence of any inequity. However, a woman who remains fully cognizant of the inequity may be unwilling to broach the subject because she has become reticent to talk. She now believes that she will lose more by talking than by remaining silent (Phillips, 1984).

According to research by Gottman and Silver (1999), the most effective and intimate relationships are those in which there is a sense of true partnership that includes autonomy and shared power. This leads, in turn, to perceptions of higher levels of nurturance, positive regard, affirmation, and empathy for one another (Steil, 1997). Scholars such as Risman (1986) and Steil (1997) argue that relationships based on power differentials are doomed to unhappiness but finding the balance is not easily achieved for either men or for women who seek to live outside culturally prescribed gender roles. Men who choose to stay at home with their children are often dubbed "Mr. Mom" by the media and their peers, indicating that they have crossed—or perhaps stepped down—into a realm formerly reserved for women (Vavrus, 2002). Men who take on this role report that they feel judged by other people including, at times, their own spouse, as having done something odd or unmanly. They feel they have "lost power" and are now doing a job that could be done by anyone (Crittenden, 2001; Hochschild & Machung, 1989)

Young men and women entering into marriage and committed relationships today appear to be seeking change from traditional roles. According to Astin's (2005) 35-year analysis of trends in the attitudes of college freshman, the number of young men and women who expect to have or would prefer to have a relationship based on traditional gender roles has dropped significantly. At the same time, information on how to create a nontraditional relationship based on true partnership is not easily obtained. The vast majority of research on social relationships of college men and women is not focused on positive role models for equitable relationships (Kerr,

1999) and offers no information on structuring an egalitarian relationship with regard to finances and household once a couple has children. This leaves popular literature as the most accessible source for relationship information and the leader among popular titles remains *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*.

Gray's support of traditional, power-based relationships is evident. He writes, "men value power, competency, efficiency and achievement" (1992, p.16). Women, on the other hand, are completely at the mercy of their hormones and feel no connection between self-esteem and their own accomplishments: "A woman's self-esteem generally rises and falls in a cycle… not necessarily in sync with her menstrual cycle, but it does average out at twenty-eight days" (1992, p. 21). Women who go out of the home to work are "putting on Martian suits" (1993, p. xi) and leaving behind daily tasks such as housework and childcare that are their primary responsibility. Men are encouraged to help with domestic tasks on an occasional basis strictly as a method of "keeping her love tank full and the score even" (1992, p. 186).

Specific Communication Characteristics. Gray fails to cite any empirical evidence to support his theories about specific communication characteristics, and his findings frequently conflict with reputable scholarly research in these areas. For example, Kim and Bresnahan (1996) examined the determination of intention or motive behind verbal strategy choices and found no significant differences in what men and women perceive as important in communication. Men and women, across four cultures, both found constraints such as interruptions and self-disclosure to be important in communication behavior.

When Gray writes that men constantly interrupt their partners and offer solutions while "Venusians never offer solutions while someone else is talking" (1992, p. 22), he perpetuates a now disputed finding of studies on sex differences in communication. While studies exist that

found men interrupt women more often than women interrupt men, often as a show of power (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987), a meta-analysis of studies on interruptions by Dindia (1987) found that such studies failed to account for the fact that communication behavior is often interdependent, so those who interrupt may have an effect on the their partner's interrupting behavior. She discovered that both sexes interrupt, that men do not interrupt significantly more often than women interrupt, especially in mixed-sex dyads, and that women's interruptions are no less assertive than men's interruptions. In fact, Dindia coined the metaphor, "men are from North Dakota, women are from South Dakota" (2006) in an effort to emphasize that any existent differences between male and female communication practices are not planetary. Johnson (1994) found that men and women display similar patterns of conversation when they are formally granted the same level of authority in their work, thus further supporting the theory that "gender is less useful than power in explaining many general differences between men and women" (Wood, 1998, p. 21).

In Gray's world, women continually self-disclose, sharing their "process of inner discovery" (1992, p.19) with anyone who will listen, while men quite often stop communicating all together and become silent. A Martian world never "burden" another man with his problems and would rather watch TV or work on his car than discuss his problems with a woman. Gray states, "instead he becomes very quiet and goes to his private cave to think about his problem, mulling it over to find a solution. When he has found a solution, he feels much better and comes out of his cave" (p. 30).

Dindia's and Allen's meta-analysis (1992) on sex differences in self-disclosure concurred with previous findings that women disclose more than men but revealed that this is only true in same-sex dyads. When talking with men, women do not disclose any more than their male

partners disclose. Dindia and Allen conclude, "it is time to stop perpetuating the myth that there are large differences in men's and women's self-disclosure" (p. 118).

Reissman's research (1990) on the root causes of divorce, found that most marriages dissolve because each party feels that their spouse no longer cherishes them. While it is true that women and men may experience or express the concept of cherishing differently this is determined to be insignificant when compared with the realization that the desire to feel cherished is of equal importance to each sex (Reissman, 1990; Wood, 1982). In contrast to Reissman's findings, Gray (1992) states that men and women have different values when it comes to intimacy and only a woman needs to feel cherished. He declares that "a man feels empowered when he is trusted, accepted, appreciated, admired, approved of, and encouraged" (p. 136) and yet "a woman thrives when she feels adored and special" (p. 145). He does not acknowledge the possibility that these may be two approaches to the same end.

Summary. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" had become a meme and to explore what this implied, particularly for communication between men and women.

A meme can be an idea or a phrase that self-replicates and is transmitted with purpose, with accuracy, and without reliance on the original host (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976). The replicator must show high survival value via longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity (Dawkins, 1976).

An "uneasy partnership" between scholars and the media exists (Condit, 1996; Weiss, Singer, & Endreny, 1988). It appears that researchers dismiss the popular press as incompetent and irresponsible and feel that some scientific subjects are over-simplified or over-generalized, while others are sensationalized beyond recognition. (McCall & Stocking, 1982; Thompson &

Nelson, 2001; Weigel & Pappas, 1981). At the same time, journalists regard scientists as "mostly irrelevant, obfuscatory, and incapable of forming a simple declarative sentence" (McCall & Stocking, 1982, p. 986). In the end, over-simplified, over-generalized, or sensationalized interpretations of social science research can become the memes by which misinformation is transmitted and perpetuated.

John Gray did not conduct any scientific research nor are his pronouncements based on theory supported by empirical research (Wood & Dindia, 1998). They are, in fact, contradicted by the findings of many respected scholars. While Parsons and Bales (1955) described women as expressive and men as instrumental, Gilligan (1982) asserted that women measure everything in terms of relationships and men measure in terms of logic, and Tannen (1990) declared that scholars and individuals must acknowledge that men and women communicate differently, many others see these determinations as limiting. Wood (2001) objects to efforts to essentialize women and men and claims that communication practices are innate and unchangeable. She argues that gender is a social construction, which designates cultural and social categories (Wood & Dindia, 1998). A significant body of research points to evidence that any differences in the communication styles of men and women are matters of degree rather than quality, and that biological differences affecting communication are minimal (Eagly, 1987; Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Hyde, 1981; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1975; Twenge, 1997; Wood, 1982). Eisenberg, Martin, and Fabes (1996) contend that theories based on the idea that inherently male or inherently female characteristics and behaviors exist may be guilty of gender stereotyping, and that it is power and unique experiences that shape the attitudes, views, and understanding of the world held by men and women.

Chapter 3: Method and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore usage of the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus." This study employed a qualitative content analysis to determine whether the phrase had become a meme and also to explore what this usage implied, particularly for communication between men and women. The content analysis entailed several steps: selection of newspapers, selection of specific articles, and coding of the sampled articles.

In Krippendorf's definition, content analysis is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (1980, p. 18). Using content analysis as the research method in this particular study allowed discovery of whether the phrase had taken root in society through self-replication and propagation and whether it reproduced itself with fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). Content analysis also allowed examination of attitudinal and behavioral responses to the phrase (Berelson, 1952), or more specifically, examination of how and where individual, group, institutional, or social attention was focused in the sample text (Weber, 1990). According to Frey, Botan, & Kreps (2000), content analysis was developed "primarily as a method for studying mass-mediated and public messages" (p. 237), and while studies are usually quantitative, they contend that a qualitative approach is entirely acceptable when researchers want to focus on major themes and stories contained in texts and are "more interested in the meanings associated with messages" (p. 237) than with the number of times message variables occur.

Krippendorf asserts that viewing messages as containers of meaning (Berelson, 1952) implies that every message contains a sole meaning that will be interpreted the same way by all receivers (1980). He encourages researchers to view analysis as the "process of a researcher analyzing a text relative to a particular context" (1980, p. 19). Patton states that qualitative analysis "draws on both critical and creative thinking—both the science and the art of analysis"

(1990, p.434) Bliss, Monk, and Ogborn (1983) suggest that the meaning of a phrase is the result of choices made by the researcher about its significance in a given context. In this study, texts were viewed in the contexts of the literatures of gender theory and meme theory. A qualitative analysis provided an opportunity to examine the context in which the phrase, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," was used and to draw inferences about the intended effect of the message by reading between the lines (Krippendorf, 1980; Mayring, 2000).

Text Selection

To address the research question, a qualitative content analysis was undertaken of articles in 13 newspapers during the decade following the publication of the book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus,* 1992-2003. It was important to secure a set of newspapers that were widely read and geographically representative; therefore, 13 newspapers were selected from among the top 25 newspapers with the largest daily circulation in the United States (infoplease.com, 2006), including the top three newspapers; *USA Today, The Wall Street Journal*, and *New York Times*. New York City is home to three daily papers that all rank in the top 25. The *New York Times* was specifically selected to represent the region not only because it is the third most widely read newspaper in the nation, but because it is recognized as a major influence on other media (West, 2001). The *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* were included as national newspapers. The final list of13 newspapers represented general United States (*Wall Street Journal, USA Today),* the northeast (*New York Times*), the mid-Atlantic *(Washington Post),* the south (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Houston Chronicle*), the midwest (*Chicago Sun Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch),* the upper midwest *(Minneapolis Star Tribune)*, the mountain west (*Denver Rocky Mountain News),* and the west coast (*Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times)*. Using the Lexis/Nexis and Pro-quest full-text database, articles covering the period of January 1993 to December 2003 were gathered from each newspaper. The

time perimeters were chosen to coincide with the first time the book appeared on the bestseller list and the subsequent decade. Each of the selected newspapers was searched using a Boolean term designed to capture every article that contained "men and Mars" and "women and Venus." Consequently, most articles pertaining to men from Mars and manned missions to Mars were excluded in the first search. Bestseller lists were also removed from the final research sample. The total final sample included 446 articles with 510 references to the complete phrase or some part of phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus."

Qualitative Coding Process

Analysis of the text was guided by grounded theory, which Strauss and Corbin define as "theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered, and analyzed through the research process" (1998, p. 12). Babbie further defines grounded theory as "an approach that attempts to combine a naturalistic approach with a positivist concern for a 'systematic set of procedures' in qualitative research (2004, p. 291). The positivist approach directs the researcher to trust that both rational and nonrational human behavior can be understood and predicted as long as true research procedures, such as "systematic coding to achieve validity" (Babbie, 2004, p.292) are followed, thus ensuring that conclusions are continually being directed by the actual data and not by personal biases. An inductive approach was taken to code over a decade newspaper usage of the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" into seven emergent themes. This allowed a deductive examination of different instances of usage, at different times, in different cities, and by different people (Miles & Huberman, 1994) against the theories of gender research, communication research, media research and meme theory research.

In examining usage of the complete phrase or some part of the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," all documents were read in their entirety numerous times. The

phrase or any references to the phrase were highlighted as they appeared. The complete articles were examined for possible insight into the inferences and attitudes of a particular speaker, as modeled by Stemler (2001). Once specific references were extracted from the articles, they were read twice to seek emergent themes or categories within usage. A third reading was done to group references into seven emergent themes. A fourth reading ensured that all possible themes had been discovered and that all references had been coded properly. Additionally, documents were examined to see if there might be some relationship between these themes that would offer insight into the social phenomenon that is the intended effect of the message (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Notation was made of the gender of each article's author, but this information was rejected as insignificant when it was discovered that men and women wrote nearly the same number of articles. References to gender differences or gender similarities were immediately identified, especially as they related to the communication and gender research cited in the literature review (e.g., innateness, power, media, and scientific research).

As the reading continued, an inductive approach led to four themes about the phrase and three themes about the articles. The first four themes related to the phrase and how it is used within the article:

- Explicit reference to Gray's work
- Implicit reference to Gray's work
- Indication of unbridgeable gap (either between men and women or in general)
- Indication of gender differences

The remaining themes dealt specifically with the articles and the presentation of Gray by the media:

- Gray as expert

- Popularity of Gray's work
- Criticism of Gray and his work on innate gender differences

To determine whether the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" had become a meme, all references within the seven themes were examined for high survival value via longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). Longevity of the phrase was initially revealed by the length and breadth of Gray's publishing success. Specific longevity of the phrase was determined by noting the frequency of phrase usage. Fecundity was gauged by the number of references found and the ease with which the phrase is employed – the equivalent of the number of people "whistling it in the streets" (Dawkins, 1976). Dawkins suggests that copying-fidelity of the phrase usage could be determined by examining whether the essence of the original phrase was replicated. In the case of "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," this was determined by revealing the original intent of John Gray's phrase and examining whether its transmission via news articles was done with the purpose of spreading that essence (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976).

Analysis

Themes

Explicit reference to Gray's work. Use of the phrase with explicit reference to Gray's work included any time John Gray's name was used in connection with the phrase or when phrase use was an obvious reference to his book and or one of his products – including video, television, stage production, radio and/or board game. Authors employing explicit reference also relied on their readers' understanding that use of the phrase was a reference to Gray's claim that men and women are innately different.

Movie reviewers used explicit references as a conduit for understanding the premise of a particular kind of movie. Several papers used the phrase in connection with the Mel Gibson movie, *What Women Want*. For example, "If it turns out that author John Gray was right that 'men are from Mars, women are from Venus,' whoever holds the Venusian distribution rights to *What Women Want* is going to make a killing" (Minneapolis Star-Tribune, 12/15/00). It was also used as an adroit explanation of the premise behind *What Planet Are You From*, "In this movie variation on 'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus,' male earthlings also tend to be pathetic imitations of human beings (*San Francisco Chronicle,* 03/03/00).

Explicit reference was also used to express gender differences:

> The one aspect uniting the five is that they are all men. When complaints about that reached Angela Browning, the Conservatives' leader in the House of Commons, she suggested that they read John Gray's "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" to learn how to attract voters of the opposite sex (*New York Times*, 07/10/01).

When the speaker or author wanted to put forth Gray's work as expertise, explicit reference was often employed:

> Recalling "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" author John Gray's observation that men get the "same number of points" whether they give a single rose or a dozen, it might be better to give a single rose 12 times a year. In other words, recognize employees throughout the year for their accomplishments. Make it part of your culture, and if you can afford it, make it part of your business plan and budget."

Implicit reference to Gray's work. Use of the phrase with implicit reference to Gray's work included any reference to Mars and/or Venus. Specific references to astronomy or astrology were eliminated in the original search process. When reference to Gray's work was implicit, authors were clearly relying on their readers' understanding that use of any part of the phrase was a reference to Gray's claim that men and women are so far apart in their communication styles as to be from different planets (Gray, 1992). For example, in this criticism of the movie *Love Stinks* use of implicit reference allows the author to succinctly make the point that this movie is about relationships gone awry, "In this painfully bad "women from Venus, men from Mars" comic romance… (Washington Post, 02/04/00). In this *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* article on the women's football team, The Minnesota Vixens, the author also assumes the reader does not need clarification to understand that the reference is to Gray's work:

> Unlike men, women don't respond to being told to do something—they want to understand it. "We want to know why we do certain drills," said (player) Gwen Gunter. "We want to know how it fits in the game. As soon as we're shown, we get it right away. If we're not shown, we just think it's a dumb drill." "…It's the Venus-Mars thing," (coach) Duncombe says later (12/09/00).

In an article about gender differences, this author made implicit reference to the phrase to help emphasize a point about inequity, "You don't have to look to Venus or Mars to find the differences in men and women. Just look at their paychecks" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* 11/10/96). Further support of the claim that additional explanation of the reference was not needed was found in an article that explored differences in male and female approaches to interior decorating, "…when it comes to furnishing a house, men and women aren't from Venus

and Mars. They're from Alderon and Alpha Centauri" (*Denver Rocky Mountain News,* 06/22/97).

At times, implicit reference to the phrase was made to illustrate a claim of general difference in fields such as sports and journalism as in these four examples from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Da men may be from Mars, women may be from Venus, but, well, Pistol Pete is from Detroit" (02/06/96), "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus. Rich Gould (columnist) is from Branson" (01/31/96), "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus and…the Cardinals are from Jupiter" (12/14/97 & 02/15/97), and "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus and kickers are from the Great Nebula in Orion" (12/31/00).

Phrase used to indicate an unbridgeable gap. The phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" was most frequently used in the sample to describe the existence of a immutable gap between men and women, but it was also used to emphasize unbridgeable gaps in general, as seen in those four examples from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. Additional examples of this type of usage include, "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus and Vladimir Zhirinovsky is from Planet Clueless" (*Houston Chronicle,* 02/02/95), "Men Are From Mars, Typos Are From Venus" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 08/05/96), "I don't understand this debate over creationalism vs. evolution. Everybody knows that men are from Mars and women are from Venus" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10/01/02), and "If women are from Venus and men are from Mars, editorial writers must be from Pluto" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 03/11/03). This father used the phrase to defend his unwillingness to attempt communication with his teenage daughter, "'It's harder to be a father to a daughter than a son,' he explains. 'I subscribe to the theory that women are from Venus and men are from Mars, and we can't understand certain things about each other because of that'" (*New York Times,* 07/24/94).

Authors often employed the phrase in discussions not only of how male and female interests differ but to support the assertion that their interests are divergent. This was especially true in articles about interior decorating, "Not only are men from Mars and women from Venus, but the houses look different from one planet to the other" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 07/21/01). "In other words, men shop on Mars, and women shop on Venus" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 12/22/02). "If 'men are from Mars and women are from Venus,' how on Earth can starry-eyed couples transcend their differences long enough to pick a home of their dreams" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 08/30/96)? Sports were another prime target, "If you're still disappointed that you didn't catch every minute of the U.S.-China match in women's soccer…chances are you're from Mars. If you think the one-minute version shown in prime time was just fine, you're probably from Venus" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 09/20/00).

As a stand-alone metaphor, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," doesn't appear to go far enough for authors who seek to take the essence of John Gray's unbridgeable gap further than Mars and Venus. "When it comes to furnishing a house, men and women aren't from Venus and Mars. They're from Alderon and Alpha Centauri" (*Rocky Mountain News*, 06/22/97). "I have recently made a discovery that suggests that as a metaphor, Mars and Venus understates it. Try Mercury and Pluto" (*Houston Chronicle*, 03/07/96). "Men may be from Mars, but women are not from Venus. They're from BPM37093. That's the name of a star that astronomers at Iowa State University believe is made entirely of carbon and crystallized oxygen, the same material as diamonds" (*Los Angeles Times,* 05/04/98).

A number of articles used the phrase in a discussion of American politics to indicate an unbridgeable gap between the two main political parties, asserting that "Republicans are from Mars, Democrats are from Venus" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 11/10/96). In a letter to the editor, a

reader used the phrase derisively to support his opinion that political divisions are media constructs, "Men are from Mars; women are from Venus. Conservative Republican senators are fierce firebrands; liberal Democratic senators are compassionate activists. More biased journalism" (*New York Times*, 02/23/97). Then Senate majority whip Trent Lott's use of the phrase to illustrate the unbridgeable gap caught the attention of several writers:

> Or was the Senate majority whip (Trent Lott) using his head when he claimed the other day on network television that Republicans and Democrats, allegedly just like men and women, employ 'different sides of their brains' when addressing current issues? And what about his insight that the GOP is 'the party of Mars' while Democrats hail from Venus? (*Washington Post,* 06/28/95)

This unbridgeable gap was made more specific by the fact that Democrats were usually portrayed as female/Venusian and Republicans as male/Martian. An article on Newt Gingrich's resignation as Speaker of the House implied Republicans are male-centric while Democrats are female-centric and encouraged Representative Gingrich to come up with a "whiz bang" title for his memoirs like "Republicans are from Mars, Democrats are from Venus" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 11/10/98). By 2000, the implication had become explicit, "The competition between Bush and Gore for white working-class voters has a Mars vs. Venus quality: while Gore is primarily targeting women, Bush's strategies are focused on men" (*Los Angeles Times*, 08/20/00). Columnist Ellen Goodman disagreed that the unbridgeable gap was party-specific but acknowledged that a gender gap existed, "I don't believe that Republicans are from Mars and Democrats are from Venus, but when I focus my telescope on the presidential political campaign, there's enough of a gender gap to make me wonder if men and women inhabit the same political planet" (*Washington Post,* 02/03/96).

At times, use of the phrase in political descriptions bordered on the extreme and might have ended up offering more confusion than clarity, except for the fact that authors felt confident of their readers' complete understanding of the essence of John Gray's work behind this usage:

> Kemp comes from Venus, Dole from Mars…Moreover, while Dole has tended toward a Mar's-like [*sic*] approach to the budget—adding up the ledger, trimming wasteful spending—Kemp's focus on expanding the economy by cutting tax rates appeals to the Venusian values of boundlessness, creativity and hope. …Kemp's third Venusian virtue is his reputation as a "bleeding heart conservative." …Till now, Clinton could claim a monopoly on Venus voters…While both Clinton and Kemp have mastered the Venus vocabulary, Kemp means it (Los Angeles Times, 08/14/96).

Phrase used to indicate gender differences. The phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" was frequently used in the sample as shorthand to represent a difference between men and women based on gender and not on biology. Confidence of the readers' understanding of the essence of the phrase became even more obvious when a pairing of the words "Mars" and "Venus" were used in place of saying men/women, male/female, or boy/girl. In this article on plastic surgery, the author easily switched "men" and "women" to "Mars" and "Venus" without explanation. "The men thought women are less sexy after they go through the invasive procedure of breast augmentation—presumably to become sexier. Once again, Mars and Venus ain't on speaking terms" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 02/16/03).

Using "Mars" and "Venus" in this manner could be interpreted as a reference to the mythological gods who became conventional symbols for male and female known as the Shield of Mars and the Mirror of Venus (Stearn, 1962). It seemed apparent, however, that modern

authors who referred to men and women as Mars and Venus stopped short of ancient works, and were far more likely referencing Gray's work rather than mythology. For example, a political consultant pointedly connected Mars and Venus to relationships:

> This is not about the difference between Mars and Venus. This is about keeping the majority of the House. I'm not there to tell them how to improve their relationships with their wives and daughters. I'm there to tell them that 53 percent of the electorate is female (*Washington Post,* 07/17/96)

Shortened versions of phrase "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus" were often used in headlines. This allowed readers a quick assessment that the following paragraph, article, or letter to the editor would be on gender issues. The *Chicago Sun Times* appeared particularly fond of this tactic. A pairing of "Mars and Venus" led readers into a letter on women in the military (04/16/03). Other letters to the editor were titled, "Not so Mars & Venus" (01/17/02) and "The Mars/Venus Thing" (04/21/99). An article on office politics in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was titled "Bringing Mars, Venus into the Office" (01/30/02) and "Venus and Mars in the Gym" introduced an article on gyms as the new meeting place for men and women (09/05/97). The *San Francisco Chronicle* used explicit reference as a cut-to-the-chase heading for a paragraph stating that women in Congress were more likely to criticize Representative Gary Condit's behavior than their male counterparts (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 07/16/01).

In the *Denver Rocky Mountain News,* an article about men and women working together in the Navy referred to a recommendation that "sailors learn cross-gender communication skills" because post-landing debriefings "were one area where Mars and Venus talked past each other" (08/15/97). A male author decided to explore the world of purses, or as he puts it "this chic thing," by asking strangers to allow him to explore the contents of their purse. In the end he

concludes, "…this little experiment won't help us solve the 'men-from-Mars, women from Venus' thing. We may have to accept that we may never get closer than the same solar system" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 06/14/01). An article about local radio used the phrase to describe the conclusion of a "he said—she said" type of program, "KSTP has pulled the plug on Jack Rakowski and Laurie Townsend, who had been doing a Men-Are-From-Mars-Women-Are-From-Venus shtick" (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 12/17/97).

In discussions of issues of popular and national interest, the phrase was employed to describe touchstones of gender differences, whether the topic was the death of Princess Diana ("Men didn't get it, both male and female therapists said, making the death of Diana yet another skirmish in America's gender wars, a new chapter in men are from Mars, women are from Venus" [*New York Times*, 09/13/97]), or the war in Iraq ("On the question of invading Iraq, men really are from Mars and women from Venus" [*New York Times,* 03/30/03]).

In a lighter vein, the author of an article on co-ed teams in the America's Cup, used the line "Oops, Mars & Venus on the foredeck!" as a comment on the "inherent" problems these teams face because of the gender mix (*Washington Post*, 04/04/95). Another author used the phrase to sum up male/female approaches to interior decorating, "The way men view rooms is why someone wrote the book *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus"* (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 04/07/96).

A movie producer attempted to excuse herself from what she saw as the cliché of the phrase while, at the same time, using it to describe her bewilderment at the response of male actors to a character's pain, "I'm not one of these men are from Mars, women are from Venus people, but I was amazed when male actors kept seeing the character as weak. I didn't see him

that way at all. They couldn't find a place in themselves to respond to someone so mournful or grief-stricken" (New York Times, 10/13/96).

The first four themes related to the phrase and how it is used within the article; as an explicit reference to Gray or his work, as an implicit reference to Gray or his work, to express or describe an unbridgeable gap, or to express or describe gender differences. The remaining three themes related to the articles and the presentation of Gray by the media.

Gray as expert. While only two articles referred to Gray as Dr. John Gray (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 06/07/96; *New York Times*, 02/11/01), a number endorsed his claim that he earned a doctorate in psychology. As part of an introduction of Gray, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* said, "Gray, who holds a doctorate in psychology…" (11/16/98). The *Los Angeles Times* referred to him as "Mill Valley psychologist John Gray" (05/29/95). The *New York Times* stated that he is "a marriage counselor with a doctorate in psychology" (01/26/97) and referred to him as "Mr. Gray, a Ph.D." (10/25/98).

Gray was variously called a "guru" (AJC, 09/10/98), and a "relationships guru" (*Denver Rocky Mountain News,* 03/22/03), he was lauded as "first among equals" (*New York Times*, 10/25/98), dubbed a "supertherapist" (*New York Times*, 01/29/97), "that maharishi of mating" (San Francisco Chronicle, 02/11/00), a member of Oprah Winfrey's "stable of experts" (10/25/98), "Dr. John Gray…relationships expert" (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 06/07/96), a man who "clearly excels at communication" (*Denver Rocky Mountain News,* 10/28/94), a "self-help superstar" (*Los Angeles Times*, 09/12/94), an "empire builder" (*Houston Chronicle*, 02/17/98), and "the Martha Stewart of relationships" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 08/20/00).

In an article speaking to the history of gender difference, this author presented Gray as a modern day mythology expert, perhaps even the Aristophanes of modern relationships:

> In Plato's Symposium, Aristophanes says that man and woman were a single hermaphroditic being until Zeus split them in two, resulting in an endless quest for the matching half…Dr. John Gray, a latter-day mythologist of the sexes, put his own "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus" spin on this conflict (*New York Times*, 02/11/01).

His work was given a sense of credibility as science when it was called a "theorem" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 09/20/00) and a "syndrome" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 10/20/03). In a letter to "Ask Rhona" in the *Chicago Sun Times*, a writer stated that the book was recommended to him by his therapist as a way to better understand his wife (07/26/98*)*. (02/16/95; 07/26/98*)*.

Popularity of Gray's work. Gray's popularity has been compared to that of "rock superstar" (Chicago Sun Times, 08/19/03). His enormous "psychobabblicious" (Washington Post, 12/10/93) success was attributed to the fact that he offered solutions to people who did not want their relationships to fall apart. "We don't want to sit on the couch in our rattiest housecoats eating TV dinners wondering what went wrong" (*Los Angeles Times,* 02/15/00).

Numerous articles referred to John Gray as the best-selling or "most notable" (San Francisco Chronicle, 06/18/95) author of the "enormously successful" (Rocky Mountain News, 09/05/97) and "phenomenally popular gender primer" (Rocky Mountain News, 07/21/96). The title of the book was borrowed by a group of photographers for a showing of their work (Chicago Sun Times, 10/28/94), and by the band "Curve" for a song on their second album (Washington Post, 12/10/93). *The Tonight Show* host Jay Leno referred to the book while taking a poke at NASA, "Have you heard NASA has a new book released today? 'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus, Where the Hell Is the Polar Lander?'" (*Washington Post,* 12/09/99).

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus was offered up by a reader as expert guidance for intimate relations and suggested reading for President and Mrs. Clinton in an article soliciting advice on repairing damage to a marriage, "After reading *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, they should go to a spa for full-body massages, facials, and intimate conversation" (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 02/02/99). In an article on how a teenaged son of divorced parents learned to parent his own child, "He studied up on relationships, even reading *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, although he's a little embarrassed to have anyone know it" (San Francisco Chronicle, 07/01/00). The book was described as "chronically returned late" to public libraries because "apparently men and women are so perplexed by one another that they need to contemplate the book's insights for a long, long, long, time" (*Seattle Times*, 01/30/00).

Gray's fans sang his praises and did not appear to "care much where he got his education" (*Los Angeles Times,* 09/12/94). Fans received a lot of credit for the success of his empire and, in terms of this study, the perpetuation of the meme:

> Gray has ascended to self-help superstardom despite non-traditional academic credentials and less-than-wholehearted endorsement from the psychological community. His success has been fueled by word of mouth and talk show appearances (*Los Angeles Times,* 09/12/94).

Authors acknowledged the popularity of the book and the metaphor in lines like, "Well, in case you're one of the 27 people in the country who hasn't read 'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus'" (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 05/02/98). In an article on the ubiquitous nature of catch-phrases and metaphors like "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," this writer grumbled, "They seemed silly at first. Then they were suddenly part of our vernacular" (*Houston Chronicle*, 12/08/02).

Criticism of Gray and/or his work. While John Gray is a best-selling author and lecturer, a multi-millionaire and one of the most famous pop-psychologists in the world, he is not without his detractors. Gray's theories were disparaged as having encouraged the public to employ simple answers to the complex questions of relationships. This 1999 review of Susan Bordo's book *The Male Body* made it clear that Bordo did not agree with Gray's view of gender differences:

> She stands essentially against both the intransigent view of men taken variously by Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin and John Gray's easy pop psychology shrug about men from Mars and women from Venus. Ms. Bordo's planet is our own small green one (*New York Times,* 06/16/99).

In an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article, in which the author interviewed people from across the political spectrum on the state of feminism today, Mindy Strombler, a lecturer in sociology at Georgia State University responded, "Feminists today are breaking down the idea that men are from Mars and women are from Venus" (06/23/02). Professor Leora Auslander of the Center for Gender Studies at the University of Chicago concurred, "Well, we're not from different planets. I think that men and women are more alike than people often think" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 10/18/96).

In an article titled "Common Ground After All: Men and Women Do Come From the Same Planet," writer Mark Wolf began his review of Samuel Shem's and Janet Surrey's book *We Have To Talk*:

> Men are from Earth. Women are from Earth *(Article title)*. And they need to talk. John Gray's Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus *(sic)* marketing empire notwithstanding, men and women want the same thing – connection with their

> partners – according to a husband-and-wife therapy team. "Gray is a masked return to the stereotypic 1950's couple…" (*Rocky Mountain News*, 09/27/98).

In this review of *Philosophy of the Flesh* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the reviewer warned against the inherent dangers in oversimplification via metaphors:

> Metaphors can reduce perceptions—"Life is a box of chocolates" certainly does—or can expand them—as in "Life is a mortal coil." The crucial difference is the relationship to the world not to our bodies. But for Lakoff and Johnson, there is no leaving home; the metaphors keep being pulled back to the body. …For if similar bodily experience were the main criterion for shared metaphors, we would be doomed to private languages that only coincidentally overlapped. Men would really be from Mars and women from Venus, and we would all be cultivating our metaphors in isolation, hoping to find companion bodies that precisely replicated our own (*New York Times,* 02/21/99).

An additional example of the argument against the simplistic danger of Gray's work was found in Judith Shulevitz's *New York Times* article *Love in the 21st Century: A Brief History of Bad Advice:*

> Why are marriage manuals so bad? On the face of it, they shouldn't be. Marriage is an institution integral to almost every human society and the most important relationships in most people's lives. The didactic literature on the subject seeks to instruct us on the fundamentals of getting along in this genuinely perplexing situation. And yet instead of this enlightenment on the turbulences of marital intimacy, we get "Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus" (10/14/01).

Professor Steve McCormack of Michigan State University offered a straightforward, assessment of John Gray and his work when he said Gray promotes "myths based on stereotypes, unsupported by scientific research…sound-bit recipes for romance." In McCormack's opinion, relationship "pundits" like Gray, "make millions off our eagerness for easy happiness" (*Houston Chronicle,* 12/27/98).

In this 1997 review of John Gray on Broadway the author quoted Dr. Annabeth Benningfield in a warning against the risks of accepting Gray's theories. At the time of publication, Dr. Benningfield was president-elect of the 23,000 member American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy:

> In this confessional age, theater is, perhaps, a natural extension of the Mars-Venus universe. What Mr. Gray does in print is deliver verbal balm for relationships in crisis.… "John Gray's emphasis on different communications styles is very helpful for some people but it's a very complex undertaking to understand why two people who care about each other can't get along. There is a risk to oversimplification," she said.… "Over simplification can also lead to the impression that knowing there are differences between people makes it easy to live with them" (*New York Times,* 01/26/97).

Many criticisms of Gray were warnings against his theories as overly simplistic and easy pop psychology, but a good number were just slams of Gray. In an article about self-help books, a writer warned potential buyers: "Avoid any book by any author who knows he has a franchise. John Gray is a prime example of someone who had a mildly interesting idea, then proceeded to club us over the head with it" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 04/07/01). The writer of an article about Mark Levinson (husband of *Sex in the City* actress Kim Cattrall with whom he co-authored

Satisfaction: The Art of the Female Orgasm) compared Levinson to Gray and declared that each, "walks a fine line between knowing what women want and being a complete sexist" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 11/03/02). Another author found Gray's entire presentation to be over the top:

> You have to get past a certain I-love-me-and-doesn't-everyone mentality to hear John Gray's message. …Gray now offers what should be complex case studies but are instead just testimonials to His Great Vision. …You'd think Gray would be squeamish about seeming self-serving with these testimonials, but he lards it on (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 06/20/96).

John Gray strikes some as self-centered and pompous, others as bombastic, and some he just rubs the wrong way. One author interviewed a number of women to discover their opinion of John Gray's assessment of gender differences in the bedroom. When told that Gray describes sexual timing as "Men are blowtorches, women are crock-pots," this interviewee responded, "…if John Gray thinks I'm a crock-pot, do you know what appliance he is? John is a vacuum cleaner. He sucks" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 05/03/95).

Memetic Value of Phrase via Themes

Dawkins states that a meme is "a unit of information residing in the brain" which must demonstrate high survival value determined by longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). To determine whether the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" had become a meme, all references within the seven themes were examined against this criteria (See Appendix B).

Longevity. Longevity illustrates the stability or durability of a meme over time (Comte, 2000). A replicator must survive long enough to effect how quickly it is replicated (Dawkins, 1982). In this study, longevity was most specifically established in the themes "implicit reference

to Gray's work," "explicit reference to Gray's work," "Gray as expert," and "popularity of Gray's work." A quantitative approach to frequency of annual usage of the phrase in 13 newspapers during the decade examined specifically supported the criteria of longevity. Usage climbed from 8 references in 1993, the first year of the sample, to a high of 71 references in 1997 and 76 references in 1998. Usage then tapered off to 59 references in 1999 and held steady at 43-44 references over the last three years of the sample. This tapering off was not taken as evidence of the waning longevity of the phrase, however, because it was important to note that usage continued even 10 years after the title of Gray's book first appeared on bestseller lists around the country.

Longevity of the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," was further supported through initial research into Gray's exceptional success as an author (Publisher's Weekly, 2000), lecturer, and promoter (Gray, 2006), as well as by references to Gray as an expert, and support for his claims of a legitimate Ph.D. in psychology (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 11/16/98; *Los Angeles Times,* 05/29/95; *Minneapolis Tribune*, 06/07/96; *New York Times*, 10/25/98; 02/11/01). Longevity was also established via articles that specifically acknowledged the popularity of Gray's work with references such as "Well in case you're one of the 27 people in the country who hasn't read *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 05/02/98)* or "Next to the Bible, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* is the biggest-selling hardcover book of the decade" (San Francisco Chronicle, 11/07/97).

Fecundity. Fecundity, or the ability to reproduce in abundance, gives measure to the lasting value of the meme (Dawkins, 1976). Fecundity serves as evidence of the meme's range of influence (Conte, 2000), acceptability to the population (Dawkins, 1976), and capability of

generating more than one copy of itself (Boyd & Richerson, 2000). In this study, fecundity was most specifically established in the themes "implicit reference to Gray's work," "explicit reference to Gray's work," "indication of unbridgeable gap," "indication of gender differences," "Gray as expert," and "popularity of Gray's work."

Even after excluding several hundred best seller lists from the sample, a decade's study of 13 of the top selling newspapers in the country yielded 446 documents containing 510 implicit and explicit references to the phrase, or some part of the phrase, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," thereby establishing that the equivalent of the number of people "whistling it in the streets" (Dawkins, 1976) was significant. References appeared in a variety of newspaper sections including book reviews, movie and television reviews, editorials, letters-to-the-editor, and humor pieces. Phrase usage was applied to the topics of entertainment, sports, politics, home decorating, shopping, and relationships.

Because John Gray and the book served as methods a transmission of this meme, Gray's reputation as an expert – "There's Winfrey on Wednesday with her new 'change your life' guru John Gray" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 09/10/98), "…John Gray, one of the country's most notable authors…" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 06/18/95) – and the popularity of the book – "'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus' is in its 39th printing" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* 10/11/94), "The Queens library system tries to give its customers what they want…'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus' in Chinese" (*New York Times,* 05/31/98) – also served to illustrate the meme's range of influence (Conte, 2000) and acceptability to the population (Dawkins, 1976).

That the phrase had propagated itself into many copies and had become acceptable to the population (Dawkins, 1976) was evidenced by statements of unbridgeable gap – "…there was

generally a lot of interest among both men and women in buying all the latest high-tech gadgets they could get their hands on. But as Mars is different from Venus, so are their reasons for picking one gadget over another" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 10/31/05) – and gender difference – "But it also is every mother's wish…that she raises sons who are a little more tuned to the Venusian way of thinking…Sometimes I sneak up on my own Martian when he's alone and kiss his cheek" (*Houston Chronicle*, 12/23/97).

Copying-fidelity. Copying-fidelity demonstrates replicator reliability, in that even after many copies "the replicator remains almost unchanged" (Boyd & Richerson, 2000, p. 155). In this study, copying-fidelity was most specifically established in the themes "explicit reference to Gray's work," "implicit reference to Gray's work," "indication of unbridgeable gap," "indication of gender differences," and "popularity of Gray's work."

Explicit reference to John Gray or to his work through use of the phrase was the most obvious evidence of copying-fidelity as this demonstrated accurate transmission of the replicator. Explicit reference was most often applied when authors noted the popularity of Gray's book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, "The couple wrote 'promises' to one another, stealing ideas from John Gray's best seller 'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus'" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* (07/23/95), and "…John Gray's 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' reigned on the best-seller list because it explains why your husband doesn't act like your best girlfriend" (*USA Today,* 02/22/01).

Evidence of copying-fidelity was also supported by recurrent employment of implicit reference to John Gray's work, such as and "The difference between men and women has inspired poets and philosophers for eons—and of course, a slew of popular books of the 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' ilk" (*Washington Post,* 11/09/97). In doing this,

reporters and editors displayed confidence that John Gray's name or work no longer needed to be attached to the phrase in order for their audiences to understand meaning, thus transmitting the essence of the original phrase with the purpose of spreading that essence (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976). For example, if readers did not already comprehend the essence of John Gray's original work, the following examples of unbridgeable gap and gender differences would have had less impact: "This 'desire gap' is the biggest news in American marriages since Mars and Venus" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 05/18/03). "What's funny to a guy usually is appalling to a woman…It's the old 'Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus' thing." (*St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 06/09/03)

Criticism of Gray. While the theme "criticism of Gray" would appear to negate any memetic value of the phrase by nullifying its credibility, at times it actually enhanced the longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity of the meme. While it is necessary to cite a stereotype in order to dispute it, a critical statement such as, "Feminists today are breaking down the idea that men are from Mars and women are from Venus" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 06/23/02), elevated Gray's position of authority to that of a key player in gender difference discussions and, in doing so, perpetuated the longevity and copying-fidelity of the meme. Another author's criticism employed a broad-brush rhetorical technique that grouped Gray's work with 12-Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, "In an era of the feel-good, 12-step, Venus-Mars approach to life's crises…" (*Los Angeles Times,* 09/09/96). This sort of "criticism" not only elevated the salience of Gray's argument to that of a world-renowned and highly respected organization, it continued to spread the essence of the meme via longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity.

Summary

Dawkins states a meme must have high survival value determined by longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). This analysis clearly reveals that this phrase meets the requirements to be considered a meme. Each time the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" appeared in the press, whether as an explicit reference to John Gray's work or an implicit reference, it spread the essence of his work, the idea that gender differences present an unbridgeable gap, and that John Gray has something of value to say. Even criticism of Gray plays a role in spreading the meme because, as Brendan Behan has been attributed with saying, "There is no such thing as bad publicity except your own obituary" (1958). The next chapter will explore the implications of this phrase being labeled a meme.

Chapter 4: Discussion

"Next to the Bible, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* is the biggest-selling hardcover book of the decade" (San Francisco Chronicle, 11/07/97). Statements such as this are testimonies to the popularity and phenomenal success of John Gray's book. That the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" goes beyond being the title of a successful book and has taken on a life of its own was an argument supported by this research. A qualitative content analysis determined that the usage of the phrase fell into one of seven themes, some overlapping, and that the phrase had become a meme with longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity (Dawkins, 1976). After discussing the themes and the memetic value of the phrase, this chapter will also explore possible dangers of such a meme, particularly for communication between men and women. This chapter concludes with limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Themes

Explicit reference to Gray's work. Use of the phrase with explicit reference to Gray's work included any time John Gray's name was used in connection with the phrase or when phrase use was an obvious reference to his book and or one of his products – including video, television, stage production, radio and/or board game. In this sample, explicit reference was used in relation to movie plots, to simple gender differences in politics, and when the speaker or author sought to describe the popularity of the work, or to cite Gray and/or his work as expert. While explicit identification of Gray or his work was not necessary for understanding that the essence of the phrase – men and women are so far apart in their communication styles as to be from different planets (Gray, 1992) – was being transmitted, authors often mentioned his name or the book to support their own claim of differences between men and women, "If Men Are

From Mars and Women Are From Venus, as best selling author John Gray states, you'd expect gender differences to develop in every area, including home decorating" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 08/07/98).

This theme emerged for several reasons including the popularity of the work, the marketing skills of the man, and the existence of an uneasy relationship between the media and science. John Gray's vast "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" empire has not brought him succès d'estime from serious scholars, but no one can deny that it has brought him success in terms of wealth and fame. John Gray has been referred to as a consummate marketer who attracts a cult following that "treats him like a rock superstar" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 08/19/03). To promote his own longevity in the marketplace, Gray has created a marketing empire out of the idea that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, consisting of 15 titles (see Appendix A for a complete list), Broadway appearances, lecture circuits, a television series, a board game, and an interactive website (Gray, 2006). He runs a highly successful public relations operation that includes appearances on television, radio, and in newspapers and magazines. Gray makes certain that explicit reference to both him and to his products is continual. He is helped in this by the media who find his theories are in line with what they already believe is understood and accepted about human behavior (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979).

Implicit references to Gray's work. Use of the phrase with implicit reference to Gray's work included any reference to Mars and/or Venus that was not an explicit reference to Gray's work, to Gray, to astronomy or to astrology. In this sample, implicit reference was used in relation to movie plots, gender differences in approaches to sports, to real estate and home decorating, in discussions of gender inequity in salaries, and as a framework to describe general difference.

This theme emerged because the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" had become a meme. The essence of John Gray's work had self-replicated and was being transmitted with purpose, with accuracy, and without reliance on the original host (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976). In becoming a meme, the phrase was ubiquitous and was accepted as a clever way of stating a stereotype that many believe to be an accurate description of human behavior (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979). Explicit identification with Gray was no longer needed because judgments based on stereotypes are made quickly (Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995), and the writers, editors, and speakers in this sample had confidence that their readers understood that the essence of Gray's work – men and women are so far apart in their communication styles as to be from different planets (Gray, 1992) – was being represented. When implicit reference was used as a framework to describe general difference the implication was that readers already understood the origin and essence of the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" and would therefore accept a statement such as "and the Cardinals are from Jupiter," to imply that an unbridgeable gap existed between the Cardinals and other baseball teams.

Unbridgeable gap. In coining the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" John Gray stated that men and women not only communicate differently, but that they are biologically programmed to "think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment" (1992, p. 5). In short, Gray described the existence of an immutable or unbridgeable gap between men and women. In this sample, unbridgeable gap was used in relation to gender differences in sports, in interior decorating, in shopping, and in

communication. It was also used as a framework to describe difference in politics—particularly between Democrats and Republicans—and as a framework for describing difference in general.

Use of the phrase in relation to gender differences stemmed from the fact that as a meme, the essence of Gray's meaning behind the phrase was continually being transmitted. Its use in relation to difference in politics and in general was because the Mars and Venus unbridgeable gap had become a clever and immediately understood lead into descriptions of any and all unbridgeable gaps. For example, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, At Least One Teletubby is From the West Village" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 03/20/99). This occurred because use of the phrase allowed individuals to immediately identify themselves as belonging to or not belonging to a group that accepts the idea that an unbridgeable gap exists between men and women, between Democrats and Republicans, and between those who reside in the West Village and everyone else. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests one of the ways that individuals define themselves, is first to define the social boundaries surrounding a particular group and then to self-categorize as either belonging or not belonging. When a particular identification becomes significant, social identity proposes that individuals tend to respond on the basis of their group membership rather than their personal identity (Pugh & Wahrman, 1983). This in-group/out-group frame of reference has the potential to emphasize an unbridgeable gap between these groups. It makes intuitive sense, then, that various group differences are now highlighted by the use of a phrase originally identifying only gender differences. It also makes sense that this theme overlapped with Gray as expert only once since Gray is not acknowledged as an expert in other differences cited such as politics or in sociology. This serves as further evidence that the meme self-replicated and was transmitted with purpose, with accuracy, and

without reliance on the original host (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976).

Gender differences. Gender differences included those instances when the phrase was used explicitly or implicitly to represent differences between men and women based on gender and not on biology. In this sample, the words "Mars" and "Venus" were often employed in place of men/women, male/female, or boy/girl and used in relation to differences between men and women in communication styles including emotional expression, in voting preferences, in personal interests, and in shopping habits. All newspapers in this sample used the meme to express gender differences, which may contradict a claim that media politics (Thompson & Nelson, 2001) plays a role in the depiction of gender as either biological or a social construct; however, this study did not determine the conservative or liberal political leanings of the sample newspapers (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004).

Gray's use of Mars and Venus to symbolize men and women is certainly not original or unique. Invoking Mars, the Roman god of war and Venus, the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility provided him with a legitimate starting point that linked his ideas of male and female differences back to ancient superstitions about astronomy and astrology. From this beginning, Gray added a layer of modernity and pseudoscience that resonated with many to the point that the words Mars and Venus no longer immediately evoke thoughts of planets (Zimmerman, Haddock, & McGeorge, 2001) but they also do not bring to mind gods and goddesses. Because of John Gray, thought goes immediately to men, women, and gender differences.

This theme emerged because maintaining distinct sex roles is perceived as familiar, or as Hare-Mustin stated, "these ideas preserve the status quo and do not demand that either society or individuals change" (1988, p. 23). A review of Simon Baron-Cohen's book *The Essential*

Difference: The Truth About the Male and Female Brain assures readers that Baron-Cohen's book will confirm what is already "known" about gender differences:

> We 'know' men and women are different; we know it in our collective consciousness, our collective gut. It's the stuff of "Mars and Venus" and myriad advice columns in the newspapers and weeping wives on "Oprah" flanked by stone-faced, shifty eyed husbands" (*Washington Post*, 10/05/03).

Recognition of oneself and one's partner in Gray's generalized descriptions of male and female communication characteristics affirms perceptions of social identity (Tajfel, 1971; Turner, 1999) and makes more likely, a conducive reception to his premise that these descriptions are universal. Accepting the concept of gender differences as truth has appeal to those who believe that maintaining distinct sex roles is key to preventing disruption in relationships (Gray, 1992; Schulman, 2004; Wood, 2005).

Use of the phrase by the media in serious news articles, in editorials, in humorous pieces and in reference to advertisements—"If Men Really Are From Mars and Women From Venus, Where on Earth Do They Go Together to Relax?" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 02/03/02, advertisement for a resort) perpetuated a point of view about gender differences that the media already believed was universal (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979), while also offering reinforcement of gender stereotyping (Eisenberg, Martin, & Fabes, 1996) and essentializing (Wood, 1993).

Gilligan (1982) declared that women have a relational self that allows them to measure everything in terms of relationships, while men measure in terms of logic. In this sample, Gilligan's ideas were translated to "Men (from Mars, a grim place) talk to obtain and convey information…Women (from Venus, a pretty nice place) talk to share feelings and build consensus" (*San Francisco Chronicle,* 02/09/94). Tannen (1990) stated that for scholars and

individuals to not acknowledge that men and women communicate differently would be detrimental to women as well as to men. Writers in this sample said, "Men may not actually come from Mars, nor women from Venus, as John Gray asserts – but they do react differently to stress" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 4/18/99). Recent and highly publicized research claimed male and female brain structure is different and can result in different male/female responses to stress (Tyre & Scelfo, 2006), which is right in line with Gray's claim that men and women speak different languages and that their communication practices are innate and unchangeable. Writers in this sample said, "Venus has rooms painted light green, yellow or rose, filled with soft furniture and weathered wood. Rooms on Mars are black, white and beige and furnished with simple contemporary furniture and stainless steel appliances" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 07/21/01). In other words, "Once again, Mars and Venus ain't on speaking terms" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 02/16/03). The idea that no man wants a light green living room and no woman would like to have stainless steel appliances is ludicrous, but the meme "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" repackages such sweeping generalizations as biological fact and survival of the meme via the media encourages individuals to see human traits as immutable. This leads to increased gender stereotyping (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004; Levy, Dweck, & Stroessner, 1998) and essentializing (Wood, 1993) and directly contradicts standpoint theory, which states that one's position in a culture is dependent upon one's social situation, including gender, race, and socio-economic standing (Harsock, 1983; Wood, 2005).

Gray as expert. Gray as expert alluded to any time the media referred to Gray or Gray referred to himself as a person with expertise in communication between men and women or in interpersonal relationships between men and women. In this sample, Gray as expert was used in relation to Gray's appearances on a popular television program, in comparing him to other

popular experts, and to confirm his place as a person with expertise in gender communication and in interpersonal relationships. Articles citing his expertise tended to be highly complimentary. He was variously referred to as Dr. John Gray, as a spiritual athlete (Good, 2002), a spiritual counselor (Goldman, 1994), or a spiritual healer (Hamlin, 1999). This theme emerged because referring to Gray as an expert propagated the myth that his work is "fact" supported by "research" (Gray, 1992), which both journalists and the public may readily presume to be based on established clinical and academic principles (Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001). When reporters referred to him as a "supertherapist" (*New York Times*, 01/29/97), "the maharishi of mating" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 02/11/00) and "the Martha Stewart of relationships" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 08/20/00), they continued to spread the meme by promoting what they think the general public already believed to be true about John Gray and his work (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979). At the same time they were able to sell papers and deflect responsibility for bestowing the mantle of "expert" on someone with shaky credentials.

Popularity of Gray's work. Popularity of Gray's work included those instances when Gray was explicitly or implicitly referred to as popular and/or successful. In this sample Gray's popularity was used in relation to Gray, his success as an author, and his fans' belief in his expertise. This theme emerged from the fact that Gray sold a lot of books and was being portrayed as expert in the field of relationships, as well as the fact that the self-help industry and books like Gray's are "influential and pervasive" (Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001, p. 122). Gray sold a lot of books and his success has been "fueled by word of mouth and talk show appearances" (*Los Angeles Times,* 09/12/94) because his followers did not "care much where he got his education" (*Los Angeles Times,* 09/12/94). They wanted him to be an expert who would provide easy solutions to troubling problems in their relationships. As Murphy said, "Self help is

a powerful discursive formation" (2001, p. 160). Self-help books such as Gray's reflect certain cultural beliefs and values and act as instruction manuals for "achieving personal and relationship well-being" (Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001, p. 122). His fans purchased his books, attended his seminars, watched him on television and assessed Gray's expertise by the fact that his ideas were consistent with what they already believed (Thompson & Nelson, 2001), along with his phenomenal success and the continued promotion of him as an expert by the press. In speaking of Foucault's use of rules, Littlejohn and Foss (2005) wrote "in matters of 'fact,' most people prefer the form of 'objective studies' over the form of conjecture or myth" (p.330). Because Gray presented his studies as objective fact, his work is imbued with a certain authority, and he is trusted. Like the snake oil salesman of the old west, however, his credentials are dubious ("Seems best-selling author John Gray's academic credentials may be a bit lacking…Gray claims about receiving degrees from the American branch of a university in Switzerland could not be verified by the university registrar" [*Chicago Sun Times,* 11/14/03]), science does not back up his medicine ("Sound research, then, does not support Gray's simplistic, dichotomous claim that in times of stress men seek caves and women seek dialogue" [Wood, 2002]), and the hype that surrounds him drowns out criticism ("Gray has ascended to self-help superstardom despite non-traditional academic credentials and a less-than-wholehearted endorsement from the psychological community" [*Los Angeles Times,* 09/12/94]). As Gray himself said, "I don't need to put a PhD [*sic*] by my name. I'm the most famous author in the world" (Washington Post, 2003).

Criticism of Gray and/or his work. Criticism of Gray and/or his work included those instances when Gray and/or his work were explicitly or implicitly criticized. In this sample criticism was used in relation to gender differences, to stereotypes, to the dangers of using

metaphors to oversimplify complicated matters, and the self-help industry. This theme emerged because Gray's theories contradicted empirical evidence, because Gray's work was seen as simplistic, because Gray was seen as self-centered, pompous, and prone to stereotyping (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998), or because writers viewed Gray's success or the self-help industry with skepticism. Most criticism of Gray was strong ("Some of his oberservations were so obvious and retro…that they could have been uttered on a tame edition of 'The Newlywed Game'" [*New York Times*, 01/29/97]), but came forth as disgust or disdain and did not have roots in serious scholarship. Gray's ideas were viewed as returning men and women back in time to "the stereotypic 1950's couple…" (*Rocky Mountain News*, 09/27/98), Gray, the "pop psychologist," was dismissed as someone who "walks a fine line between knowing what women want and being a complete sexist" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 11/03/02), and Gray, the successful author, was dismissed as knowing "he has a franchise" (*Chicago Sun Times,* 04/07/01).

It was interesting to note that "criticism of Gray and/or his work" overlapped as often with explicit reference as with implicit reference such as "Feminists today are breaking down the idea that men are from Mars and women are from Venus" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* 06/23/02). While it might have seemed more likely that criticism of Gray would be done via explicit reference to Gray, the fact that authors feel comfortable enough with reader recognition of implicit reference is strong evidence that the phrase has become a meme.

"Gray as expert" did not overlap with "Criticism of Gray," because articles praising his work, lauding his success, or supporting a claim of expertise were complimentary of Gray. "Criticism of Gray," however, did intersect with "Gray as expert" because articles criticizing Gray and/or his work also cited him as the gold standard against which other books on relationships should be measured ("At first reading, his work sounds a bit like that of pop

psychologist John Gray, but it's different on many levels" [*Minneapolis Star Tribune,* 05/27/98]), thus further supporting his position as a key player in gender discussions. Such reactions have roots in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). While at first it may seem a bit extreme to link disdain for Gray and or/his work to a theory that is often used to examine matters such as the roots of prejudice, Brewer reports "most contemporary research on intergroup relations…appears to accept, at least implicitly, the idea that ingroup favoritism and outgroup negativity are reciprocally related" (1999, p. 430). Individuals critical of Gray were not also complimentary of Gray thus signifying that ingroup/outgroup behavior exists when it comes to evaluating Gray and/or his work.

Importance of phrase as a meme

Unlike most articles to date that invoke meme theory, this study was more than a discussion of the definition and argument about the validity of the theory itself. This qualitative content analysis applied the theory to analyze an extremely popular phrase (Jeffreys, 2000), to determine the validity of the memetic claim, and to consider the implications of that determination.

The phrase, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," is more than just a clever and catchy title for an empire. If taken literally, it is nonsensical because of course men and women are all from Earth. As a metaphor, the phrase tells a story that men and women are so different as to require an interplanetary bridge just to reach one another. As a meme, the story self-replicates and is transmitted with purpose, with accuracy, and without reliance on the original host (Bjarneskans, Grønnevik, & Sandberg, 2000; Dawkins, 1976). The metaphor "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" is important as a meme because it is persistent and it has had an

impact. It is of particular importance because "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" is a bad meme and as such it affections the reproduction and promotion of sexism in our culture.

Longevity. While John Gray's marketing skills certainly assisted the transmission of the meme "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," this study of 13 newspapers from different regions of the country showed that the stability and durability (Comte, 2000) of the meme is no longer dependent on Gray's presence. In fact, it was discovered that phrase usage that did not directly connect to or refer to John Gray or his empire was sometimes more frequent even a decade after the book was first published. The meme survives because there is an elementary nature to the solutions it presents as common sense (Murphy, 2001). The meme assures that men and women have trouble communicating, not because of individual issues, but because they are biologically incapable of communicating with ease. It is less problematic to fall back on a "so that's why" explanation for behavior (Jeffries, 2000) than to embark on a process of change.

Fecundity. The fact that these references appeared in a variety of newspaper sections including book reviews, movie and television reviews, editorials, letters-to-the-editor, and humor pieces was evidence of the range of influence of this meme, the propagation of itself into many copies, and its acceptability to the population (Dawkins, 1976). Fecundity is the ability to reproduce in abundance and the promise of conditions that are ripe for reproduction. In the case of the meme, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," conditions during the time period of this study were very ripe for this meme's propagation. Ten years prior to publication of Gray's book, Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, in which she declared that only women have a relational self, which allows them to measure everything in terms of relationships, while men measure in terms of logic (1982), was lauded as "a profound and profoundly important book" (Douvan, 1982). This book had an immense impact on the field of gender studies and, in a sense, plowed

the field in which the meme would take root. In 1990, two years prior to Gray's book, publication of Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand*, in which she stated that lack of acknowledgment of the "fact" that men and women communicate differently would be detrimental to women as well as to men who, "speak to women as they would to men, and are nonplussed when their words don't work as they expected, or even spark resentment and anger" (1990, p. 16), further ripened conditions for the meme. In fact, it could be claimed that the premise for John Gray's statements about difference in the ways men and women communicate bears an uncanny resemblance to the findings Deborah Tannen put forth in her book, *You Just Don't Understand* (See Appendix C). It is important to note that while Tannen's work has met with criticism for being light on scholarly research (Goldsmith & Fulfs, 1999; Wood, 2002), scholars are quick to point out that unlike the wildly popular Gray, whose academic credentials are from non-accredited Columbia Pacific University (Hamson, 1996), Tannen earned her Ph.D. from the University of California Berkley and is a respected Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University (Wood, 2002).

Copying-fidelity. Whether references to the replicator "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" were implicit or explicit, the replicator itself remained "almost unchanged" (Boyd & Richerson, 2000, p. 155). During the original sample gathering, a Boolean term designed to capture references that contained "men and Mars" and "women and Venus" resulted in a sample of 513 references that all pertained to the meme. It did not matter if the phrase was used in its entirety – "Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus, But We All Have to Live on Earth" (*Houston Chronicle,* 02/06/00) – or if just a portion of the phrase appeared – "I've hear from readers on both sides of the 'Venus/younger boss, Mars/older workers' issue'" (*Chicago Sun Times*, 09/13/98) – the replicator remained reliable and the essence of meaning behind the meme

remained unchained. This occurred, in part, because the meme is clever but the majority of its survival relies on both assumption of scientific credence (Zimmerman, Holm, & McGeorge, 2001) and on the strength of personal experience (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979).

The idea that John Gray planted has survived and taken root. It is a meme that shapes our minds and cultures (Blackmore, 1999). Gray's meme has successfully assisted the survival, evolution and permeance of a bad idea (Aunger, 2000). The metaphor as meme continues to infiltrate the public consciousness as some sort of truth because it appears to provide "a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling questions" (Dawkins,1976, p.193) about human behavior and problems in gender relationships (Noble, 1993).

Meme theory for communication scholars

Dawkins states that memes survive not because they are of benefit to their human carriers, but because they benefit themselves (Sperber, 2000). "My own feeling is that (a meme's) main value may not lie so much in helping us to understand human culture as in sharpening our perception of the genetic natural selection" (Dawkins, 1982, p. 112). Rhetorical criticism demands that scholars "figure out what is really (*sic*) going on, behind or beneath the surface appearances" of rhetoric (Johnson, 2007, p. 31) and is a potent methodological tool for assessing discourse. According to Johnson, the meme is "a valuable methodological tool that is particularly suited to the analysis of popular culture discourses that transform social practices in spite of their apparent superficiality and triviality" (2007, p. 28). Memes – while having the advantage of including an array of discursive activities that are not limited to words – do not provide deep interpretation of meaning or understanding of the ideological underpinnings of larger, sociological issues. Meme theory alone does not provide the reasons why one particular replicator of culture such as "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," possesses sufficient

appeal to survive and spread, nor do memes demand universal understanding or acceptance. In fact, Johnson states that memes "are aided by an apparent slipperiness or ambiguity because these debates over their meaning demand and command attention, the critical factor in memetic selection" (2007, p. 42). In the case of "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," meaning appears to be understood and yet the phrase itself contains no meaning or content and is, in fact, nonsensical. The meme does not care about such debates. As a meme this phrase only cares that it attracts enough attention to be adopted into frequent use. In other words, "the meme must influence us to alter our environments in such a way that its chance of survival are increased" (Johnson, 2007, p. 45). Meme theory allows analysis of the transmission of culture. It would be as if one were studying an actual virus that, like West Nile, say, was becoming endemic among birds in the US. Observation may be made of its growing prevalence and characteristics of the virus that, when coupled with some basic properties of birds, make the virus so successful. Some knowledge of, and reference to, the biology and behavior of birds is necessary, and while an ornithologist would point out that there is a lot of other more detailed information going on in the bird side of the picture, nonetheless, analysis of the characteristics of the virus per se would be of value.

Implications of danger

If John Gray were a social scientist, he would probably be an entity theorist because he believes that traits are fixed, he makes extreme judgments from limited information, and he's prone to stereotyping (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). If Gray were a scientist, however, he would have a body of documented and peer reviewed research to support his theories. John Gray is not a scientist and for Murphy to say that he performs a "sexist form of anthropology" (2001, p. 164) is, in fact, a discredit to hardworking anthropologists. This study revealed that Gray's

credentials are suspect bordering on fraudulent, his research is non-existent, and his conclusions contradict current scholarship (Murphy, 2001; Walls, 2003; Wood, 2001). Gray fully admits that he did not read other materials before or during the writing of his book and says, "I don't read that much…I do everything through my own personal experience." He mocks the academic world, which requires evidence, "You've got to have a huge reference list…My source for this (the book, etc) and the validation of my information is that this is common sense" (*Los Angeles Times*, 09/12/94).

Serious scholars such as Murphy, Wood and Dindia do not care much for Gray's methods or his pronouncements. At the same time, the number of respected scholars who have given this work attention is relatively small. As Wood writes in a 2001 article, "serious scholars typically do not devote substantial time and thought to debunking popular psychology" (p. 203). The danger lurking behind the fact that there is only a smattering of scholarly challenge to Gray's premise is two-fold. The book has been enormously popular while the ideas it puts forth are, as Mencken succinctly put it, "neat, plausible, and wrong" (1917). Mencken is speaking broadly of superstitions, which comes from the Latin "superstes," meaning, literally, "a survivor." Supersitions are survivors from an earlier set of beliefs or opinions that continue to influence men's actions "though they have lost their basis or supposed basis in truth" (American Medical Association, 2006, p. 113). Superstitions are most often endorsed when people are under stress (Padgett & Jorgenson, 1982) or when they observe phenomena in nature that cannot easily be explained or figured out (Case, 2004). Thompson and Nelson (2001) declared that research findings in social sciences are "judged by their consistency with intuitive theories and prior beliefs" (p. 5) including superstitions. In an attempt to understand such complicated experiences,

individuals make cause and effect judgments that are not based in science but in what seems right or what someone they trust tells them is right (Noble, 1993).

Gray's premise that communication differences are inherent, immutable and based in biology, so neatly represented by the meme "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," is not founded on established clinical and academic principles, and is an example of how incorrect and baseless ideas can displace good reasoned thinking based on research. As Zimmerman, Haddock, and McGeorge point out, "Unfortunately, for a book with such immense influence, much of the material is potentially detrimental to its readers and to their intimate relationships" (2001). John Gray is, as Professor Steve McCormack of Michigan State so directly stated, making "millions off our eagerness for easy happiness" (*Houston Chronicle,* 12/27/98), and he's doing it with relatively little challenge from the social science community.

Gray's ideas are inconsistent with the empirical findings of highly respected scholars that show differences in style are matters of degree rather than quality, that biological differences are minimal (Eagly, 1987; Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Hyde, 1981; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1975; Twenge, 1997; Wood, 1982) and that standpoint theory, which states that one's position in a culture is dependent upon one's social situation, including gender, race, and socio-economic standing (Harsock, 1983; Wood, 2005) cannot be ignored. Gray's ideas are further contradicted by scholars whose studies find communication differences between males and females to be minimal and of little social significance (Canary & Hause, 1993; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Wilkins & Anderson, 1991). When John Gray tells women not to put on "Martian suits" to go out of the house to work and suggests men should help out with domestic tasks only to keep "her love tank full and the score even" (1982, p. 186), he perpetuates a perception that power differentials are necessary to maintain a relationship. This advice does not pretend to recommend that couples

maintain even a perception of equity in their relationship (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994) and is in direct opposition to decades of research showing that power differentials account for the most significant differences in communication styles (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; Ruddick, 1989; Wood, 1998) and that clear and honest communication (Barnett & Rivers, 2004; Murphy, 2001; Wood, 2001; Zimmerman, Haddock, & McGeorge, 2001) and shared power are key to a lasting, rewarding and true partnership (Gottman & Silver, 1999; Risman, 1986; Steil, 1997).

It this study Gray's meme was used as a reasonable explanation for difference, as a sexist and potentially damaging explanation of men and women, and perhaps most seriously, as a seemingly harmless bit of humor. The continued circulation of a meme that flies in the face of science, promoted by an individual with no real credentials, and spread by the general public, also has political and social implications beyond the home. Affirmative action questions, childcare responsibilities, and the realities of the glass ceiling are all susceptible when such "intellectually impoverished" (Condit, p. 100) information such as that conveyed by this meme is amplified as fact and allowed to spread.

Dawkins stated that memes survive, even bad memes, because they offer something that is appealing (1976). The function of a meme is to survive and it does not care whether the information perpetuated is rooted in scientific proof or not. Gender research that targets difference and memes such as "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," which promote difference, are detrimental to communication between genders because, as Hare-Mustin writes, such findings "limit human opportunities for both males and females" (1988, p. 39). Some may perceive maintaining distinct sex roles as key to preventing disruption in relationships (Gray, 1992; Schulman, 2004; Wood, 2005) but individuals are more complex than such simplistic

distinctions will allow (Hare-Mustin, 1988; Wood, 2001). At the same time, a meme based on this good, reasoned thinking has thus far not taken root.

Limitations

The sample in this study presented several limitations. First, while 13 major newspapers, from five different regions of the country and two national newspapers, were examined for one decade ending in 2003, it is not possible to generalize the results to determine the extent to which the phrase has infiltrated other forms of media such as magazine articles and print ads or television, film, and radio. It is also not possible to determine the scope of the phrase in current media or the survival of the meme over a longer period of time.

Second, this study does not determine whether young men and women embarking on serious relationships fifteen years after the publication of Gray's book find validity in his ideas and are continuing to spread the meme. Dawkins writes, "Some memes, like some genes, achieve brilliant short-term success in spreading rapidly, but do not last long in the meme pool" (1976, p. 194). At this time, in this study, it is impossible to determine whether "men are from Mars, women from Venus" will be a short lived meme or will continue to propagate itself for generations.

Third, while this content analysis indicates that journalists commonly use the phrase or some variation of the phrase to indicate an unbridgeable gap between genders, it is difficult to determine a level of common usage among the general public. The phrase was originally created as a marketing tool to sell books. It is by nature clever and appealing to anyone seeking a way to quickly transmit a simplistic "so that's why" explanation for behavior (Jeffries, 2000). Its use by journalists also implies an expectation that their audiences share a common belief in the whys and wherefores of problems in gender relationships (Noble, 1993) and will accept Gray's

planetary explanation as truth, but this study cannot determine the actual reach of the meme or whether that expectation is fully justified.

Future Research

This research makes the claim that "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" has become a meme, and in doing so, has serious implications that perpetuate dangerous power disparities detrimental to communication between genders. It more specifically makes the claim that "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" is a bad meme. As long as it remains in popular use, the stereotype of unbridgeable difference that it promotes will continue to flourish and the possibility of equitable relationships will suffer.

There is some evidence that today's heterosexual couples may have increased interest in discovering points of similarity rather than dissecting differences. Research released by the Pew Research Center in 1990 revealed that only 47 percent of respondents felt sharing chores was key to a happy marriage. In a survey released July 1, 2007, however, the number had risen to 62 percent (Pew, 2007). Clearly, something has changed in the 17 years between the surveys, but exactly what is not clear. Perhaps the change indicates a new level of cooperation in marital partnerships, but it may indicate only a longing for it, or express dissatisfaction with the relationships promoted by the Mars/Venus meme as the only kind possible.

In order to further investigate the longevity of the meme and the lasting validity of the claims of this research, it would be interesting to conduct a survey and or focus groups with the general public today to examine various interpretations of the phrase and whether it is seen as an accurate explanation for communication difficulties between genders. To investigate recognition of the validity of this claim with a younger generation, it would be of particular interest to conduct such surveys and or focus groups with mixed gender groups of undergraduate age

individuals in heterosexual relationships.

Stereotyping men and women into certain behavioral patterns based on their gender avoids the fact that homosexual couples face just as many joys and problems living together in harmony with one another as do heterosexual couples (Patterson 2000). Extending gender stereotypes to same-sex couples might suggest that this is because one partner plays a traditionally male role while the other plays a traditionally female role but research does not support this theory. In fact, the majority of homosexual and lesbian couples report that they share equal power and equal responsibilities in the home (Patterson, 2000). Even in these egalitarian relationships, however, one of the top reasons reported for difficulties remains the perception of power in such areas as income and the division of household tasks (Kurdek 1994). Given this information, it would also be interesting to investigate the memetic value of the phrase "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" among those involved in same sex relationships.

To investigate the survivability of the meme in the meme-pool, additional studies should be conducted of subsequent decades since publication. Additional studies might also be made to see if and how the phrase is used in television, film or radio, magazine articles, and advertising, and to discover whether there is a decline in the spread of the meme following the release of the recent Pew study. Such expanded studies would allow additional testing of the longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity of the phrase to determine its survival as a meme.

In a study of how political orientation influences newspaper coverage of gender differences, Brescoll and LaFrance (2004) discovered that more conservative newspapers are more likely to attribute gender differences to biological factors, while more liberal newspapers publish accounts that explore other and less traditional explanations of gender differences. In order to further to test the validity of the claim of general spread of the meme via the media, the

newspapers included in this sample should be further examined to determine whether they are conservative or liberal and what, if any, impact such media politics (Thompson & Nelson, 2001) has on the results.

Because findings from a study of societies with equalitarian cultural norms concerning power, such as the United States, cannot adequately support the validity of the claim for couples from non-equalitarian cultural backgrounds and traditions (Rollins & Bahr, 1976), it would be interesting to expand this study to include recent immigrants from other cultures. It was informative to note that Gray's book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* was among the first American titles to be issued in Iran (Washington Post, 10/27/98) and is in high demand by Chinese speaking immigrants in Queens (*New York Times,* 05/31/98). In 2005, the Chicago Public Radio program "This American Life," aired a show that explored the break-up of an immigrant Iranian couple after 25 years of marriage, and their subsequent reunion after the husband read *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*:

> "I can't believe I'm saying this," said their daughter, "but *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* changed my father's life. …The book offered simple advice. …In (one) passage the word 'listen' appears eight times. For my dad, who'd never been exposed to the idea that wives need to be listened to, this was revolutionary" (Rafsanjani, 2005).

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that few serious scholars give their attention to pop psychologists such as John Gray (Wood, 2001; Zimmerman, Haddock, & McGeorge 2001). Messages that come via the media have the power to persuade, so when academics choose to avoid "debunking" misinformation that appears in the popular press, they leave the field wide open for nonscientists,

life-style reporters and pop psychologists to step in (McCall & Stocking, 1982) and "create a parody of science" (Goldacre, 2005). Murphy (2001) states, "it is easy for an academic audience to dismiss the language in which John Gray writes as drivel, but this cursory criticism underestimates the power of his prose" (p. 160). Scholars such as Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1990) argue that "points of similarity between women and men do not make news, nor are refutations of exaggerated claims of male-female difference considered newsworthy" (p. 43-44), but this is not an adequate excuse for a lack of sufficient scholarship. If, as McCall and Stocking state, "The golden age of science, when the public revered science and thought it contributed immensely to is over" (1982, p. 986), then it is of particular importance for scientists to learn how to communicate science from marketing masters such as John Gray.

Speaking from a feminist perspective, Hyde says:

> Psychologists will surely continue to do research on gender differences, the media will continue to publicize and glamorize the findings and the lay public will continue to be fascinated by these reports. It would be unwise in the extreme for feminist psychologists to abandon this area, thereby losing their power to influence it (1994, p.510).

It is interesting to note that the Pew Center for Research titled its study "As Marriage and Parenthood Drift Apart, Public is Concerned About Social Impact" while the Associated Press, titled their article about the study, "Key to a Good Marriage? Share Housework" (Crary, 2007). This time, the social science community should take a cue from the media. There is no need to change the research that is being done, but there is reason to change the relationship between academic scholars and the media. How the Pew study was reported by the media suggests that people would take an interest in hearing about equitable relationships, how they can be healthy,

happy, and based on real similarities between the sexes. Conceivably getting into the "nasty business" (McCall & Stocking, 1982, p. 985) of simplifying complicated research for the wider public can be as straightforward as encapsulating the important message within a positive and productive meme. If that is accomplished, then perhaps good memes could survive and spread.

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End Note

[1] In feminist literature and essays, the term “conservative feminist” usually appears in quotation marks to indicate that other feminist groups view this title as an oxymoron.

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APPENDIX A: Books by John Gray

What You Feel You Can Heal (1984) Heart Publishing

Men, Women and Relationships (1993) Beyond Words Publishing

Mars and Venus In the Bedroom (1995) Harper Collins

Mars and Venus Together Forever (1996) Harper Perennial

Mars and Venus In Love (1996) Harper Collins

Mars and Venus On a Date (1997) Harper Collins

Mars and Venus Starting Over (1998) Harper Collins

Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus Book of Days (1998) Harper Collins

How to Get What You Want and Want What You Have (1999) Harper Collins

Children Are from Heaven (1999) Harper Collins

Practical Miracles for Mars and Venus (2000) Harper Collins

How to Get What You Want at Work (2002) Harper Collins

Truly Mars & Venus (2003) Harper Collins

The Mars and Venus Diet and Exercise Solution: Create the Brain Chemistry of Health, Happiness, and Lasting Romance (2003) St. Martin's Press

Source: MarsVenus.com Store. Retrieved March 15, 2006 from http://www.marsvenus.com/xcart/search.php?mode=search

APPENDIX B: Analysis of Themes via Meme Criteria

THEMES/CRITERIA	Longevity	Fecundity	Copying-fidelity
Implicit reference to Gray's work	+	+	+
Explicit reference to Gray's work	+	+	+
Indication of unbridgeable gap		+	+
Indication of gender differences		+	+
Gray as "expert"	+	+	+
Popularity of Gray's work	+	+	+
Criticism of Gray and/or his work	+/–	+/–	+/–

Key: Did themes meet criteria
blank = did not meet criteria; +/– = met criteria is negative way; + = met criteria

APPENDIX C: Comparison of Deborah Tannen's work and John Grey's work

You Just Don't Understand	***Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus***
There *are* gender differences in ways of speaking, and we need to understand them. Without such understanding, we are doomed to blame others or ourselves—or the relationship—for the otherwise mystifying and damaging effects of our contrasting conversational styles…Many women and men feel dissatisfied with their close relationships and become even more frustrated when they try to talk things out. Taking a sociolinguistic approach to relationships makes it possible to explain these dissatisfactions without accusing anyone of being crazy or wrong, and without blaming—or discarding—the relationship. If we recognize and understand the differences between us, we can take them into account, adjust to, and learn from each other's styles (Tannen, 1990, p.17).	Men Are from Mars, Women are From Venus…reveals how men and women differ in all areas of their lives. Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment. This expanded understanding of our differences helps resolve much of the frustration in dealing with and trying to understand the opposite sex…When you remember that your partner is as different from you as someone from another planet, you can relax and cooperate with the differences instead of resisting or trying to change them (Gray, 1992, p. 5).