Marianne LaFrance

Research Interests
My primary research concerns how gender and power are reflected in and maintained by subtle communication processes. Nonverbal behaviors are of particular interest because they lie out-of-awareness and typically operate off-the-record. Also, nonverbal cues can simultaneously reveal information about an individual's identity and attitudes as well as shape and sustain social relationships. My goal is to determine why facial expressions, like smiling, or linguistic strategies like apologizing, reveal clear gender differences. Our conceptual model, called Expressivity Demand Theory, aims at specifying when people display such behaviors and what functions they serve in social interaction. In related research, we are investigating how gender and power affect patterns of implicit causality resulting from verbal descriptions. Our studies have shown that attributions for interpersonal events are substantially altered by the inclusion of gender or power information. Now, we are interested in determining why agents are seen as more causal when they are described as behaving toward women than when they behave towards men.

I am also interested in exploring the effects of being the target of seemingly innocuous prejudice, such as that conveyed through humor, slights, or small provocations. For example, we are investigating how women react verbally and nonverbally, on-line and after the fact, to hearing sexist jokes or being asked sexually provocative questions in a job interview. We are also examining how individual differences in such areas as self esteem and sexist attitudes affect emotional and behavioral responses to being the targets of acts of mundane prejudice. The organizing theme of my research is to understand how subtle and implicit messages reveal, justify, and preserve unequal social structures.

Sample Publications

