

The Boston Globe

SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 1998

He meant, she meant

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Evanescent emotions and adolescent hormones have ignited many a poignant "summer romance," followed by sweet confusion and despair as lovers stagger back to workaday worlds. A "winter romance" can also complicate the lives of young adults home from school or, in this mobile society, visiting families from a workplace several time zones away.

For dysfunctional affairs and ill-fated flings, Jenny Lyn Bader and Bill Brazell have produced "He Meant, She Meant: the Definitive Male/Female Dictionary." The subtitle, "What Men Think They're Saying. What Women Really Mean," differs from New Age jeremiads on the loutishness of American males. The idea here is fun, a pursuit many 1990s guides ignore or forbid.

This interlinear translation is alphabetized and colloquial, which can mean ungrammatical, so let's start with **apologize**. She meant: "to indicate that a predicament is your fault so that the guilty party will admit it is theirs." He meant: "to cut an argument short." By **negative**, she meant: "unfairly critical without knowing what the hell one is talking about." He meant: "what a man is accused of being, if he tries to introduce realism to a conversation."

If Samuel Johnson had conversed with Nora Ephron, or Ambrose Bierce with Dorothy Parker, a similar vinegary concoction might have ensued. The delightful part of this dictionary is that the co-authors are each 29, with few solemn inhibitions. The guide owes more to "Friends" than to Freud.

A **telephone** is, to her, "life's central appliance." To him, it is "an easy way to avoid someone while seeming to stay in touch." Bader and Brazell stayed in touch electronically; she lives in New York, where she writes plays, and he lives here, where he went to graduate school and now edits copy for a computer magazine.

They met at Harvard and, answering the obvious first question, he says, "We've never been in-

involved." The book began when Bader wrote about inviting people to a cocktail party. Men, who said no, came in great numbers and women, who said yes, did not. "I realized that when men say no, they mean maybe; and when women say yes, they mean no," she wrote. "With the possible exception of Nancy Reagan, women don't adore just saying no. Women accused of 'leading on' men also 'lead on' their female friends by promising to show up — which stems from an impulse to please, not a desire to tease."

As a co-author, she chose her classmate. "Bill has a deeply hidden sensitivity," she says. He's 6 feet, 6 inches, lifts weights and would not go unnoticed on "Ally McBeal," Fox TV's demographically targeted single-life sitcom. His Archie-and-Jughead perspective is also clear under **conversation**. She meant: "the secret to meaningful interaction, meaningful sex, and meaning." He meant: "foreplay."

Today's gender-identity groups divide on competition, an attitude as old as Heloise and Abelard: men

want to be "cool" and women want to be "nice." Noting that there's no such word as "upwomanship," Bader writes:

"Women weigh, men measure. We thrive on surprises, they plot their course. We want the freedom to wonder, they want the freedom to wander. We enjoy people-watching; they enjoy car-watching."

Both are unclear on **need**, which, she says, can be "invisible but pressing." His response: "a word that elevates a whim to a moral imperative . . . In America, unmet desires become needs when they find a lobbyist."

Brazell grew up in Schenectady and bounced around from Brockton to Albuquerque, retaining a profound understanding, through summers and winters, of the word **beautiful**.

She meant "stirring, lovely." He meant: "an event or object exalted above the normal range. Carlton Fisk's home run in the sixth game of the 1975 World Series remains beautiful — it did not even need to be followed by a win the seventh game. Which was just as well."

Martin F. Nolan is a Globe columnist.

**Finally,
a fun
dictionary on
relationships.**
