

DIFFERENT BY DESIGN: Gender Differences in Marriage

Apostolic Christian Counseling And Family Services

877-370-9988 -- www.accounseling.org
info@accounseling.org



Men Are... Women Are...

Are Men And Women Always One Way Or Another?

Generalizations

- Note: Male-Female generalizations are true about 75-80% of the time.
- While generalizations are used (i.e., "Men are like..." or "Women tend to..."), please know **there will be exceptions.**
- Remember: regardless of what "most" men and women think, feel, or do, you need to learn about your spouse and how the two of you operate together.

Reversed Roles

- Some couples have "reversed roles" in the areas many couples find men and women differ.
- For example, the husband may be the more verbal, emotional one, while the wife is less expressive or more logical.
- If you and your spouse have "reversed gender roles" in a few or many areas, don't be concerned.
- Rather, work together to find effective, Christ-like ways to work things out in your marriage.

Design

- God created the male and female genders before sin entered into the world.
- It was by design, not by chance or error.
- Both males and females are created in the image of God, according to His design.
- **Genesis 1:27** "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

Design cont'd

- Take the opportunity to learn from each other.
- Your spouse is the best person to teach you about gender differences.
- Regardless of what you may see in anyone else's marriage, you have to learn to adjust to *your* spouse.
- **Proverbs 1:5** "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels."

Differences: Good or Bad?

- When two people come together in marriage, they will discover they have things in common and many differences.
- These similarities and differences stem from things such as:
 - Temperament & Personality
 - Gender
 - Culture
 - Family-of-origin
 - Life experiences

Differences: Good or Bad?

- Understanding some of the ways in which men and women differ is an important aspect of respecting and appreciating your differences.
- God can use your similarities and differences to strengthen your marriage and to teach you about Him.
- Satan desires to use differences to create misunderstandings and conflict in order to harm your relationship.

Differences: Good or Bad?

- You will either build bridges or polarize over differences.
- In order to prevent Satan from gaining an advantage with us we need to:
 1. Acknowledge Differences
 2. Seek to Understand Differences
 3. Appreciate differences
 4. Submit ourselves fully to Christ.

Differences = Strength

- As a married couple, you have the opportunity to appreciate one another's differences and the variety they add to the relationship.
- Gender differences help provide balance in a marriage and guard against the dangers of an unbalanced life.
- In addition, you can learn to compromise, work together, and submit to one another when differences try to keep you apart.

Differences = Strength

- Differing perspectives can shed light on unacknowledged aspects of an issue.
- The process of accommodating one another is all part of building a marriage.
- The respective qualities of masculinity and femininity in the husband and wife allow the couple to become more Christ-like together.

Differences = Strength

- Gender differences should not be taken to mean one gender is more loved by God than the other or has more ability to hear God.
 - **Galatians 3:26-28** "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."
- Rather, by God's design, gender differences allow husbands and wives to complement and support one another.

Differences = Strength

- Husbands and wives have been commissioned with unique roles to fulfill in marriage.
- Husbands and wives need to remember each spouse possess inherent value as a child of God.
- **1 Peter 3:7**, “...as being heirs together of the grace of life”
 - This infers both spouses having ability to connect with God and receive his blessings and gifts.

Differences = Strength

- The discovery of gender and individual differences can be humorous, frustrating, and surprising.
- When you are frustrated with each other, you will likely not see the benefits of gender differences as much as when you are calm and feeling connected.
- Try to see these differences as beneficial to the strengthening of the marriage and to the pursuit of holiness for each individual.



Love and Respect

Insight from *Ephesians 5*

Love and Respect

- In agreement with the scriptural teachings about husbands and wives, women and men generally receive love in different ways.
- Note: specific wording used in *Ephesians 5* point to the need and desire for men to be *reverenced* [respected] and for women to be *loved* [cherished].

Love and Respect

- Verse 21 “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”
- Verse 22 “Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”
- Verse 25 “Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

Love and Respect

- Verse 28 “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.”
- Verse 33 “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”



Application For Husbands

For Men

- The following section includes guidance and instruction that coincides with the typical gender differences.
- Some points may be applicable for your marriage and others may not.
- Focus on the points that will be helpful for dealing with the differences between you and your wife.

Cherish Your Wives

- The instruction to each husband to *“love his wife even as himself” (Ephesians 5:33)* coincides with the primary need of women to be loved.
- The Greek word for love in this passage is *agape*, which is unconditional, self-sacrificing love.
- In order to feel loved, women need to feel cherished, cared for, and secure.

Cherish Your Wives

- Just as taking care of your body allows for a healthy and long life, nourishing and cherishing your wife allows your marriage to be healthy and long-lasting.
- Husbands need to consistently give this kind of love regardless of the circumstances.
 - **1 Peter 3:7** *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”*

Cherish Your Wives

- Each husband is instructed to honor his wife, which means to treat her as a person with immense value.
- Your goal should be to communicate honor to your wife so clearly she concludes you cherish her and knows you believe she has great value.
- Keep in mind women can be particularly sensitive to actions that do not reveal love, such as angry silence or insensitive statements.

Cherish Your Wives

- After actively listening to your wife share her feelings, ask her if she wants you to continue listening or if she is requesting feedback or suggestions.
 - Many times men believe they have to “fix” the problem when what their wives really want is for someone to listen, understand, and acknowledge their feelings.
 - Often, just allowing your wife to express herself fully will help the situation.

Cherish Your Wives

- Women are often very relationship-oriented.
 - Therefore, men can honor their wives' strength in this area by realizing the importance of relationships in every aspect of her life.
- Your wife probably has a desire to hear about and share more details about things than you are used to.
 - Try to remember them and incorporate them into conversations with her.

Cherish Your Wives

- Demonstrate interest in the details of your wife's life.
- Regularly ask questions about the things going on in her life.
- It may be difficult for some women to understand the impact work can have on you.
 - Strive to separate work from home.



Application For Wives

For Women

- The following section includes guidance and instruction that coincides with the typical gender differences.
- Some points may be applicable for your marriage and others may not.
- Focus on the points that will be helpful for dealing with the differences between you and your husband.

Respect Your Husband

- The instruction to women to "*revere her husband*" (*Ephesians 5:33*) supports the need for godly order in the home and for men to perceive they are trusted, admired, and respected.
- Just as women need to feel loved, secure, and cherished, men need to feel respected.
- Giving him respect is both a way to show him love and point him to Christ.

Respect Your Husband

- Husbands need to feel their wives' support and admiration.
- Men can be particularly sensitive to words, actions, and situations that lead them to feel incompetent.
- Criticism can be particularly damaging to men because it leaves them feeling inadequate and disrespected.

Respect Your Husband

- In **Titus 2:4**, older women are instructed to *“teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands.”*
 - The Greek word for love in this verse comes from *phileo*, which refers to a love as a friendship.
- The influence of godly woman on a husband.
 - **1 Peter 3:1**, *“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives.”*

Respect Your Husbands

- Be aware when having a conversation that your husband may not be as interested in the details of an event or situation as you are.
 - This doesn't necessarily mean he doesn't care about you or what happened.
- Realize your husband may not be as intuitive as you and, therefore, may not pick up on subtle hints or be able to read people as well (including yourself).

Respect Your Husbands

- Understand your husband may like to focus on one task at a time rather than multitasking as much as you do.
- Try to understand whatever happens at work will strongly impact your husband's mood and feelings about himself.
- If something goes wrong at work, he will likely carry that burden home.
- Talk with him about how you can best help him refocus his mind on the things going on at home.

Respect Your Husbands

- Avoid giving too much unsolicited advice to your husband.
 - While your intent may be to help him, he may believe you think he is incompetent.
 - This doesn't mean you shouldn't speak up and share your thoughts with him.
 - Rather, be aware what you intend to say and how it feels to him may be very different.

Respect Your Husbands

- Realize your husband may be overwhelmed by expressions of emotion and may want to do something to lessen the emotion.
 - This may lead you to feel that he doesn't care; however, the opposite is often true.
 - Because he cares and doesn't know what to do, he may try to regain control of the situation by shutting down emotions.
 - Your husband may need time and experience to become more comfortable with how you express your emotions.



Gender Differences

Areas to Consider

A. Biological Differences

- Some gender differences can be explained with a look at brain structure.
- The left side of the brain is logical, concrete, and rational while the right side of the brain is more intuitive, emotional, and artistic.
- Women tend to have more connections between the two sides of the brain.

A. Biological Differences

- As a result, women more consistently use both sides of the brain while men tend to use one side at a time.
- This characteristic can help explain some of the differences between the genders in areas of emotional expression and communication.

B. Communication

- Women tend to express and verbalize more than men and, when communicating, they will ask questions more readily than men.
- Women often want to know the emotional, relational, and spiritual aspects of an issue (and not just the logical aspects).
- Women are also generally more perceptive and have an innate ability to “read” people because they are able to assimilate more information and process it together.

B. Communication

- Men tend to seek concrete facts.
- Many women view talking as the source for the solution for many predicaments in life.
- Conversely, while not true for all men, many men find that going away by himself (to his “cave”) and thinking things through is a more direct way to a solution.

B. Communication: “Helping”

Listen Men!!

- “Many times a woman just wants to share her feelings about her day, and her husband, thinking he is helping, interrupts her by offering a steady flow of solutions to her problems.” (p. 22)

Listen Women!!

- “Generally speaking, when a woman offers unsolicited advice or tries to “help” a man, she has no idea of how critical and unloving she may sound to him.” (p. 21)

From Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by John Gray

B. Communication: Problem Solving

- “To feel better [men] go to their caves to solve problems alone.” (p. 31)
- “To feel better [women] get together and openly talk about their problems.” (p. 31)

From Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by John Gray

B. Communication: Mistakes

Listen Men!!

- “A man tries to change a woman’s feelings when she is upset by becoming Mr. Fix-It and offering solutions to her problems that invalidate her feelings.” (p. 23)

Listen Women!!

- “A woman tries to change a man’s behavior when he makes mistakes by becoming the home-improvement committee and offering unsolicited advice or criticism.” (p. 24)

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C. Emotions

- Women often thrive on expressing and receiving emotionally rich information.
- Some men, however, can be easily overwhelmed by strong expressions of emotion and may perceive their wives as being “moody.”
- Men need to realize sometimes, a woman’s mood is outside of her full control (e.g., hormones).
- Husbands should try to be supportive and, at the same time, try not to take it personally.

C. Emotions

- Often, men need to think about feelings before sharing them. When these feelings arise, a man may have a tendency to want to act and do something about it rather than talk.
- Neither way of approaching emotional issues is wrong as long as they are not characterized by rigidity or excessiveness.
- Each spouse should strive to be respectful and accommodating of the other.

D. Achievement Orientation

- Men are often problem solvers and like to seize, attack, and conquer the issues life brings.
- Success and achievement are therefore strong motivators for men.
- Along the same lines, a man’s job is very important to his feeling of self-esteem. Whatever happens at work strongly impacts his disposition.

D. Achievement Orientation: Identity

For Men

- “A man’s sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results.” (p. 16)

For Women

- “A woman’s sense of self is defined through her feelings and the quality of her relationships.” (p. 18)

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D. Achievement Orientation: Motivation

- “Men are motivated and empowered *when they feel needed.*” (p. 43)
- “Women are motivated and empowered *when they feel cherished.*” (p. 43)

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D. Achievement Orientation

- Women have the ability to multi-task and tune into many things going on at one time.
- For many women, their thoughts and the issues going on in their lives are all connected.
- Men tend to have a greater ability to focus and concentrate on any one task. They tend to be task-oriented and single-minded.
- Many men tend to organize life by trying to break it up into compartments, so they can focus on one task or responsibility at a time.

E. Sexual Desire and Needs

- Differences in male and female sexuality are related to the various physical, psychological, and emotional differences.
- Men can become sexually aroused quickly and more consistently than women.
- Men tend to be stimulated by sight, while women tend to be stimulated by feeling “connected” to their husbands.

E. Sexual Desire and Needs

- For a woman, mood and situation play a large part in determining her ability to be open to being sexual.
- For example, hearing a baby cry will more likely hinder a woman’s interest in sex while not influencing the man’s interest as much.
- Learning about one another’s differences in the area of sexuality takes time and effort. Keep in mind, it is an ongoing learning process.



Primary Love Needs

For Men

- Trust
- Acceptance
- Appreciation
- Admiration
- Approval
- Encouragement

For Women

- Caring
- Understanding
- Respect
- Devotion
- Validation
- Reassurance

From Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by John Gray, 135-137

Primary Love Needs

His Needs

- Admiration
- Sexual Fulfillment
- Recreational Companionship
- Physical Attractiveness
- Domestic Support

Her Needs

- Affection
- Conversation
- Honesty and Openness
- Financial Support
- Family Commitment

From www.marriagebuilders.com by Willard Harley, Jr.

Personal / Couple Reflection Questions

Based on the list generated by the opposite gender group during the Gender Differences section of the seminar, what surprised you the most? Talk with your spouse about how they experience this specific gender difference.

Specify one area in your relationship where gender differences cause issues. Identify one thing you can do to manage this difference in a healthy, God honoring way.