

Understanding the Differences Between Men and Women

By Gary Smalley

I would venture to say that most marital difficulties center around one fact— men and women are TOTALLY different. The differences (emotional, mental, and physical) are so extreme that without a concentrated effort to understand them, it is nearly impossible to have a happy marriage. A famous psychiatrist once said, “After thirty years of studying women, I ask myself, ‘What is it that they really want?’” If this was his conclusion, just imagine how little we know about our wives.

You may already be aware of some of the differences. Many, however, will come as a complete surprise. Did you know, for instance, that virtually every cell in a man’s body has a chromosome makeup entirely different from those in a woman’s body?

How about this next one? Dr. James Dobson says there is strong evidence indicating the “seat” of the emotions in a man’s brain is wired differently than in a woman’s. By virtue of these two differences, men and women are miles apart emotionally and physically. Let’s examine some of the differences between men and women.

Mental/Emotional Differences:

Women tend to be more personal than men. Women have a deeper interest in people and feelings — building relationships —while men tend to be more preoccupied with practicalities that can be understood through logical deduction. Men tend to be more challenge-and-conquer oriented—competing for dominance —hence, their strong interest in sports such as football and boxing.

Why would a woman be less interested in a boxing match? Because close, loving relationships are usually not developed in the ring! Also, watch what happens during many family vacations. He is challenged by the goal of driving 400 miles a day, while she wants to stop now and then to drink coffee and relax and relate. He thinks that’s a waste of time because it would interfere with his goal.

Men tend to be less desirous and knowledgeable in building intimate relationships, both with God and with others. For example, women are usually the ones who buy marriage books. They are usually the ones who develop the initial interest in knowing God and attending church.

When a man realizes his wife is more naturally motivated to nurture relationships, he can relax and accept these tendencies and choose to develop a better marriage and better relationships with his children.

Do you realize that your wife’s natural ability for developing relationships can help you fulfill the two greatest commandments taught by Christ—loving God and loving others (Matt 22:36-40)? Jesus said that if we obey these two commandments, we are fulfilling all the commandments. Think of it! Your wife has the God-given drive and ability to help you build meaningful relationships in both these areas.

God knew you needed special help because He stated, “It is not good for the man to alone; I will make him a helper [and completer] suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). If you let her, your wife can open up a whole new and complete world of communication and deeper relationships.

Dr. Cecil Osborne, in his book **The Art of Understanding Your Mate**, said women become an intimate part of the people they know and the things that surround them; they enter into a kind of “oneness” with their environment. Though a man relates to people and situations, he usually doesn’t allow his identity to become entwined with them. He somehow remains apart. That’s why a woman, viewing her house as an extension of herself, can be hurt when it’s criticized by others.

Women tend to find their identity in close relationships, while men gain their identity through vocations.

Because of a woman's emotional identity with people and places around her, she needs more time to adjust to change that may affect her relationships. A man can logically deduce the benefits of a change and get "psyched-up" for it in a matter of minutes. Not so with a woman. Since she focuses on immediate consequences of a relocating, for example, she needs time to overcome the initial adjustment before warming up to the advantages of it.

Men tend to express their hostility through physical violence, while women tend to be more verbally expressive.

Physical Differences:

Dr. Paul Popenoe, founder of the American Institute of Family Relations in Los Angeles, dedicated his more productive years to the research of biological differences between the sexes. Some of his findings are listed below:

- Woman has greater constitutional vitality, perhaps because of her unique chromosome makeup. Normally, the female outlives the male by three or four years in the U.S.
- Woman's metabolism is normally lower than man's.
- Man and woman differ in skeletal structure, woman having a shorter head, broader face, less protruding chin, shorter legs, and longer trunk.
- Woman has larger kidneys, liver, stomach, and appendix than man, but smaller lungs.
- Woman has several unique and important functions: menstruation, pregnancy, lactation. Woman's hormones are of a different type and more numerous than man's.
- Woman's thyroid is larger and more active. It enlarges during pregnancy and menstruation; makes woman more prone to goiter; provides resistance to cold; is associated with her smooth-skinned, relatively hairless body and thick layer of subcutaneous fat.
- Woman's blood contains more water and 20 percent fewer red cells. Since the red cells supply oxygen to the body cells, woman tires more easily and is more prone to faint. Her constitutional vitality is, therefore, limited to "life span." (When the working day in British factories was increased from ten to twelve hours under wartime conditions, accidents increased 150 percent among women but not at all among men.)
- On the average, man possesses 50 percent more brute strength than woman (40 percent of a man's body weight is muscle; 23 percent of a woman's).
- Woman's heart beats more rapidly (average 80 beats per minute vs. 72 for man). Woman's blood pressure (10 points lower than man's) varies from minute to minute, but she has less tendency toward high blood pressure—at least until after menopause.
- Woman's vital capacity or breathing power is significantly lower than man's.
- Woman withstands high temperatures better than man because her metabolism slows down less

Sexual Differences:

- A woman's sexual drive tends to be related to her menstrual cycle, while a man's drive is fairly constant. The hormone testosterone is a major factor in stimulating a man's sexual desire.

- A woman is stimulated more by touch and romantic words. She is far more attracted by a man's personality, while a man is stimulated by sight. A man is usually less discriminating about those to whom he is physically attracted.
- While a man needs little or no preparations for sex, a woman often needs hours of emotional and mental preparation. Harsh or abusive treatment can easily remove her desire for sexual intimacy for days at a time.
- When a woman's emotions have been trampled by her husband, she is often repulsed by his advances. Many women have told me they feel like prostitutes when they're forced to make love while feeling resentment toward their husbands. However, a man may have NO idea what he is putting his wife through when he forces sex upon her.

After the Marriage:

These basic differences, which usually surface soon after the wedding, are the source of many conflicts in marriage. From the start, the woman has a greater intuitive awareness of how to develop a loving relationship. Because of her sensitivity, she is initially more considerate of his feelings and enthusiastic about developing a meaningful, multi-level relationship; that is, she knows how to build something more than a sexual marathon; she wants to be a lover, a best friend, a fan, a homemaker, and an appreciated partner.

- The man, on the other hand, does not generally have her instinctive awareness of what the relationship should be. He doesn't know how to encourage and love his wife or treat her in a way that meets her deepest needs.

Since he doesn't have an understanding of these vital areas through intuition, he must rely solely upon the knowledge and skills he has acquired prior to marriage. Unfortunately, our educational system does not require a training program for a husband-to-be. His only education may be the example he observed in his home. For many of us, that example might have been insufficient. We enter marriage knowing everything about sex and very little about genuine, unselfish love.

I am not saying men are more selfish than women. I'm simply saying that at the outset of a marriage a man is not as equipped to express unselfish love or as desirous of nurturing marriage into a loving and lasting relationship as a woman is.

...Now that you know WHY men and women cannot understand their respective differences without great effort, I hope you will have more hope, patience, and tolerance as you endeavor to strengthen and deepen your relationship with your wife [or husband].

The above article comes from the book, **If He Only Knew**, written by Dr Gary Smalley and Steve Scott, published by Zondervan Publishing, www.zondervan.com. This is a "how-to" book for men that clarifies distinctions between the sexes, giving a fresh outlook on building a stronger marital relationship.

In this book Gary Smalley explains a woman's deepest needs, shows a man how to meet those needs, and gives ten simple steps to strengthen any marriage. He helps men to understand not only how to respond to a woman's feelings, but also how to make her feel important. Using humorous and touching illustrations from his own life, as well as case histories and biblical examples, Gary Smalley maps a blueprint to a better marriage.