

Bridging the GENDER GAP

Men really are from Mars and women from Venus,
writes Carolyn Moody.

She's thinking, "He hasn't spoken all evening. I can see he's got something on his mind. What if he's having an affair?! How could he do this to me?! This is the most awful day of my life!"

He's thinking, "I wonder what that bumping noise is in the car. I had her serviced last week. Sounds like the mechanic left a spanner in there. Better take a look tomorrow."

Male and female miscommunication causes more unhappiness, separation and divorce than anything else. EU divorce rates, estimated at between 33% and 50%, reflect how hard people are finding relationships.

Brain research over the last 30 years shows that men and women really do think differently. Our brains are hardwired for different functions and are stuck in the Palaeolithic period when men hunted lunch and women gathered food and defended the nest. Men stalking their prey needed to be silent. They have fewer speech centres in the brain, and fewer connections between thinking, speech and emotional centres. Their brains are mono-tracking, wired for problem solving, and can focus on one thing at a time. When hearing speech they focus on the information being communicated with an impassive face that reveals little emotion because as a hunter, displays of emotion are a sign of weakness. Male thinking is hierarchical because a pack needs a leader and followers for successful hunting.

Women have multi-tracking brains. They can out talk a man because they have more speech centres, and more direct connections between

thoughts, feelings and speech. A woman's more sensitive brain has evolved for co-operative communication with other nest defenders and to detect changes in her children's health and wellbeing. She has the ability to speak more words than a man, and detect more subtle communication signals such as tone of voice, body language and facial expression.

When women communicate with each other they use eye contact, and many facial expressions and tones of voice to indicate their empathy and support. It drives a woman crazy when she is talking (sharing) with a man and he stares off into space, his facial expression doesn't budge and he says



nothing. She pushes him for a response. He doesn't answer because he is thinking about what she said and he can't speak while thinking. He is also trying to fix her problems, even though all she wants is for him to listen and empathise. As she gets upset her emotions connect with her speech centres and she verbalises her anger. At her emotional and verbal outburst, his anxiety levels rise and the connection to his speech centre is cut off. He is unable to articulate and either says something inappropriate or walks away angry. She feels unloved, frustrated and alone.

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Women's multi-tracking brains have evolved to follow a conversation that is constantly interrupted by children. Her brain is also wired to use more indirect speech as a way of avoiding confrontation with other nest defenders. Men get lost in conversations involving more than one thread and want women to get to the point. In business, which is modelled on male brain wiring, women who use 'female speak' with male colleagues are not taken seriously.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Where does this leave male female relationships? Do the genders expect too much from each other? A woman believes that to get her emotional needs met

she should communicate with her man the way she communicates with other women. A man expects a woman to think and feel the way he does. He gets angry and defensive when she makes demands that he can't meet. He hates to be wrong and feels a failure. They both lose out.

If men and women want to create harmonious and nurturing relationships they need to understand and respect their differences. Women can learn assertive and effective communication skills so she can talk to her man in direct speech, using phrases like, "I want, I would like, please do this," instead of hints and beating about the bush. 'Spelling it out' is an anathema to women, but men cannot fathom subtle communication.

Men can discontinue the outmoded belief that 'emotional stuff' is woman's work. A man can learn the simple things he can do to make his woman feel valued by taking the time to read the available information. It requires effort on both sides for Mars and Venus to find love and happiness, but it is worth it. The end results are an increased sense of self-worth and fulfilling relationships.

FURTHER READING

- *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by John Gray
- *Why men don't listen and women can't read maps* by Allan and Barbara Pease
- *The female brain* by Louann Brizendine, MD
- *Getting the love you want* by Harville Hendrix
- *How love works: How to stay in love as a couple and true to yourself even with kids* by Steve and Shaaron Biddulph
- *Don't sweat the small stuff in love* by Richard and Kris Carlson



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