

The Undeniable Differences Between
HUSBANDS
&
Wives

INTRODUCTION

As explicitly stated in the Bible, the two genders are ordained for specific masculine and feminine roles that cannot be ignored. Men and women are equal, but not equivalent. We have equal human worth but are designed for distinctly different responsibilities.

Males and females differ anatomically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically, and biochemically; we differ in literally every cell of our bodies, for each sex carries a unique chromosomal pattern.

Nothing can be done to change the assignment of gender made by God at the moment of conception. That determination is carried in each cell, and will read “male” or “female” from the very beginning of life.

But while God created male and female as uniquely different, it’s also clear that He designed them to complement each other within a committed marital relationship. The following questions and answers highlight some of the most common

differences between husbands and wives, and how understanding these distinctions can make your marriage stronger.

DIFFERENT *Needs*

Question: Can you be more specific about how husbands and wives complement each other?

Dr. Dobson: The sexes are designed with highly specific—but quite different—psychological needs. Each is vulnerable to the other in unique ways. When reduced to the basics, women need men to be romantic, caring, and loving. Men need women to be respectful, supportive, and loyal. These are not primarily cultural influences that are learned in childhood, as some would have us believe. They are forces deeply rooted in the human personality. Indeed, the Creator observed Adam's loneliness in the Garden of Eden and said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). So He made Adam a helpmate, a partner, a love—designed to link with him emotionally and sexually. In so doing, He invented the family and gave it His blessing and ordination.

Unfortunately, millions of marriages are in trouble today because of an inability of husbands and wives to get along. Perhaps the fundamental problem is one of selfishness. We're so intent on satisfying our own desires that we fail to recognize the longings of our partners. The institution of marriage works best when we think less about ourselves and more about the ones we love. Again, the basic needs of each gender are straightforward. Women need to be loved all year round, and men need to be respected, especially when the going gets tough.

That understanding is hardly new. In fact, it is ancient. Here's the way the apostle Paul described it nearly two thousand years ago: "Each one of you [men] must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

Love and respect. It's an unbeatable combination.

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COMMUNICATION

Question: When my husband and I were dating, we could talk for hours about anything and everything. Now that we're married, we go out to dinner and have nothing to say to each other. What has gone wrong?

Dr. Dobson: Millions of couples experience that transformation. They talk endlessly before marriage but find themselves with little to say a few years after. When the courtship is over, some people find it very difficult to express their feelings openly and honestly. That is more true of men than women as a general rule.

Research makes it clear that little girls are blessed with greater linguistic ability than little boys, and it remains a lifelong talent. Simply stated, she talks more than he. As an adult, she typically expresses her feelings and thoughts far better than her husband and is often irritated by his reticence. God may have given her fifty thousand words per day and her husband only twenty-five thousand. He comes home from work with 24,975 used up and merely

grunts his way through the evening. He may descend into Monday Night Football while his wife is craving to expend her remaining twenty-five thousand words.

The inability or unwillingness of husbands to reveal their inner thoughts to their wives is one of the common complaints of women. A wife wants to know what her husband is thinking and what happened at his office and how he sees the children and, especially, how he feels about her. The husband, by contrast, finds some things better left unsaid. It is a classic struggle. You and your spouse can overcome this problem if you will get it out in the open and agree to work together on communication. It is a key to successful marriage.

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EMOTIONAL *Needs*

Question: How do men and women differ emotionally, and are these differences caused by cultural influences or genetic factors?

Dr. Dobson: No doubt, some of the differences in masculine and feminine characteristics are culturally induced. It is foolish, however, to discount the impact of genetics, physiology, and inborn temperaments in understanding the sexes.

The reproductive capacity of women results in greater needs for security and stability. In other words, because of their sense of responsibility for children, females are less likely to take risks and gamble with the future. Related to this is a woman's emotional investment in her home, which usually exceeds that of her husband. She typically cares more than he about the details of the house, family functioning, and such concerns.

There is typically a healthy tension between a man and woman. He likes excitement, change, challenge, uncertainty, and the

potential for huge returns on a risky investment. She likes predictability, continuity, safety, roots, relationships, and a smaller return on a more secure investment. These contrasting inclinations work to a couple's best advantage. She tempers his impulsive, foolish tendencies, and he nudges her out of apathy and excessive caution.

These genetic tendencies have far-reaching implications. Medical science has not begun to identify all the ramifications of sexual uniqueness. We see the wisdom of the Creator in the way the sexes interrelate at this point.

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SEXUAL DESIRE *and Intimacy*

Question: Is the felt need for sex the same in both males and females?

Dr. Dobson: Many men and women differ significantly in their sexual desire. Research seems to indicate that men can become excited more quickly than women. Men are primarily aroused by visual stimulation. They are excited by feminine nudity or partial nudity.

Women, on the other hand, are typically much less visually oriented than men. Certainly, they are interested in attractive masculine bodies, but the physiological mechanism of sex is usually not triggered by what they see; women are stimulated primarily by the sense of touch and by romantic allure.

Thus, we encounter the first common source of disagreement in the bedroom: He may want her to appear unclothed in a lighted room, and she wants him to caress her in the dark.

Second, and much more important, men are not very discriminating in regard to the person living within an interesting body. A man can walk down a street and be sexually stimulated by an approaching female, even though he knows nothing about her personality, her values, or her mental capabilities. He is attracted by her beauty itself.

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FINAL THOUGHT

The Most Important Ingredient in a Lasting Marriage

If I had the power to communicate only one message to every family in America, I would specify the importance of romantic love. It provides the foundation for a woman's self-esteem, her joy in living, and her sexual responsiveness. Therefore, men who are involved in bored, tired marriages—and find themselves locked out of the bedroom—should know where the trouble possibly lies.

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