

We are so different!

In most cases, you and your wife have differences in both personality and basic orientation to life. These differences can be enjoyed or they can fuel dissatisfaction.

Personality differences

During your time together your differences may have felt delightful or intriguing. You feel that your spouse's nature can complement your own. With some exceptions, your differences seem to draw you together.

After you marry the weakness side of the strengths may lead you to the wrong conclusion (i.e. that you married the wrong person or that they hid their evil nature from you).

Remember that the weaknesses are flip sides of the strengths that you do admire. Focus more attention on the strengths and discuss ways to modify the impact of the weakness.

(You married the life of the party AND the person who gets bored easily)

(You married the stable person AND the person who doesn't want to do things that excite you)

Focusing more on the positives increases the likelihood that your marriage will grow and mature in a healthy way.

It's dangerous to impose your meaning on their behavior (e.g. if you tend to tune people out when you don't care, it doesn't mean that your spouse doesn't care if they forget what you asked them to do).

What about significant weakness issues...this is a sanctification priority that you work together on.

Gender differences

The differences between men and women are part of God's brilliant design. Just as He is three different persons in one, you are two different people who are becoming one.¹

While these differences are not absolute (i.e. some women and some men may be more like the opposite gender) they are often true.

What are these differences?

Differences in communication

While there may be significant overlap and even role reversal, women are often more skillful and subtle communicators than men.

They may be more able to relate while functioning

They may rely more heavily on verbal communication

They may be more alert to the emotional content of what is being said.

They may have a much lower fight or flight response to verbal conflict even when they are yelling.

They may be much more skillful at the use of language

As a result:

Men's communication	Women's communication
Men tend to offer solutions to problems raised by their wife. (She concludes that her feelings don't matter to him)	Women may have the same tendencies to offer unsolicited advice and direction but his feelings about it may differ from hers. (e.g. He feels demeaned vs. unloved)
Many men can become hyper-rational in conflict (this may serve a defensive function; they want to keep things simple and controlled)... Men's bid frequency drops when they are unhappy in the marriage.	Many women can become hyper-emotional in conflict (this may serve a defensive function; keeping him off balance)... Women's bid frequency stays nearly the same when unhappy in the marriage; they just skew

¹ [Genesis 1:28] God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

But this approach communicates relational coldness instead of acceptance – the very area where their wife may feel most vulnerable (uncherished). ²	toward functional & situational stuff and toward relational negativity. But, this tends to communicate disdain instead of disagreement – the very area where their husband may feel most vulnerable (disrespected).
Men tend to pull away and silently think about what's bothering them.	Women tend to talk about what's bothering them.

Differences in motivation and focus

Men	Women
<p>Significance – men are motivated when they feel needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to know they can make a difference in the world • Accomplishing is very important • Deepest fear – being incompetent & failing • Submitting by sacrificially extending himself for the sake of the relationship (i.e. notice how this addresses her most prominent motivation). <p>He may be more alert to what 'I need to accomplish'.</p>	<p>Acceptance – women are motivated when they feel cherished.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to know they are valued and cherished • Relational closeness is very important • Deepest fear – unloveable & unimportant • Submitting by being respectful (i.e. notice how this addresses his most prominent motivation). <p>She may be more alert to what 'our relationship' needs to thrive.</p>
<p>Single-minded – one thing at a time; like windows in a computer program. When he's finished with one window, he closes it and moves to the next one.</p> <p>He may find it very confusing to follow a conversation that jumps from topic to topic. For him, it's like going to a web site that starts opening window after window. He's tempted to ctl-alt-del.</p> <p>Sexually women find it disconcerting how intentional and focused he seems to be. She may conclude that, 'he only has one thing on his mind.'</p>	<p>Shifting focus – a little here and a little there; To get to a particular issue, she may meander from window to window.</p> <p>She might assume that you know what she's talking about when starting a thought in the middle of a story.</p> <p>She may find it very cold and impersonal for him to keep pressing for a conclusion – a bottom line when she's sharing.</p> <p>Sexually men are bothered by how easily distracted she seems to be during sex. He may conclude that she's disinterested in him or that he's a poor lover.</p>
<p>Mr. Fix-it – he feels the need to solve every problem she brings up, not realizing that most of the time her feelings about the problem ARE the problem.</p> <p>Her feelings may be what's keeping her from engaging the problem effectively.</p>	<p>Ms. Discuss-it – she feels the need to talk about problems; finding solutions may be less important or completely irrelevant in that moment. Feeling heard is at least as important to her as finding a solution.</p> <p>His problem solving habit may be what's keeping him from understanding the problem.</p>

A few suggestions concerning your differences:

- **Regard your POV's as complementary rather than competitive**

There may be more true/less true aspects to each of your views but taken together your perspectives provide a better account of things.

You don't have to win the POV war and she doesn't have to lose it.

Explore how her perspective interfaces with and clarifies your own.

² Gottman tells a story of a neurosurgeon who's wife asks, "How do you think we're doing?" He launched into an objective and accurate assessment. She left the room in tears.

- **Ask her to help you listen**

Let her know that you want to be a better listener but it would help if she would make sure you are tuned in before she starts (e.g. in the same room; asking if you can talk {if you are not free...make sure you get free as soon as you can}; physically touching you can help as well)

If she begins talking before you're tuned in, tell her that you want to listen but that your head was somewhere else when she started talking but that you are ready to hear her out now.

If her timing is bad, let her know that you want to hear what she's thinking and feeling but will need to do it later – suggest a time. OR just stop what you're doing and listen if you can.

Be patient with her approach; ask clarifying questions and summarize what you believe she's said from time to time.

If you feel swamped by details or the length of the monologue tell her you need a few minutes to process what she's said. Jot your thoughts/questions down on paper while you process.

- **Practice depersonalizing her behavior/attitude** (c.f. A.N.T.'s handout)

e.g. her anger, sadness or anxiety is not necessarily an indictment of your performance – even if she thinks it is. You answer to God and her answer is God.

e.g. her meandering talk is generally not meant to 'pile on' more responsibilities for you to manage; she's downloading – verbally processing her life with you; that doesn't make it your responsibility, so set the, "what is she asking me to do?" question aside and listen.

- **Relate to her in a way that fits her style.**

Prioritize understanding over fixing.

Communicate that you cherish her (making repair attempts)

Translate general, negative statements into more specific & positive ones.

"We never spend time together"

(He hears, 'You're indicting my performance') "Really! Never!" "Not true, just last week we went to the Clippers game"

"OMG like that was a date. You hung out with Bob the whole time."

...this can go on for a long and tedious time.

(He hears, 'She wants to spend time with me and believes that she doesn't matter to me') "I've missed being with you too." "Let's go _____ tomorrow night. I really want to reconnect"