

# Why Can't A Woman Be More Like A Man

## Gender Differences

In the story of Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw, Professor Higgins says: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" He expresses this frustration as he is attempting to teach Eliza Doolittle how to speak and act correctly. The implication of his question is: Why do women have to be so emotional? Why do women seem at times to be so trivial, so inept at being logical or rational? The solution in Shaw's story was to attempt to remake a woman in the image of a man. Often I hear this from couples who come to me for counseling. If you were more like me we would get along better! Women who are initially attracted to men who seem strong, secure and knowledgeable can become unhappy in their marriage because their husbands are not emotional or sensitive enough and spend the rest of their marriage trying to get them to be emotional and sensitive. Men spend time in their marriage trying to get their wives to stick to the facts and come to the point. "Give me the bottom line and forget all the emotion!"

What are these differences between men and women that seem to cause so many problems in relationships? Is it simply that women are more emotional and men are more logical? I think it is a bit more complex than that. Men are very sensitive to status. They are concerned about who is bigger, wealthier, smarter etc. Men want to know how they stand in relationship to other men. One way of enhancing status for a man is through knowledge or expertise. In order to feel competent in relationship to other men, a man needs to know things whether it's about sports, cars, politics or his particular job. Men value independence, self sufficiency and expertise. They look at the opposite of this as dependence, which is often attributed by men to women.

On the other hand, women value interdependence or connectedness. Women talk to each other about the details of their lives. In listening to women's conversation emphasis is not placed so much on facts, but on who said what and what was said in reply. What did someone wear? How did someone look? What was someone feeling? Through these details women gain a sense of connectedness to each other. Being liked becomes a real value for women whereas with men the issue of respect is central. Women feel hurt when a man doesn't notice or pay attention to a detail such as the difference in the way she wears her hair, the way she is dressed or the stories she may tell about her friends or family. A man may see these things as boring gossip or insignificant details of no great consequence. A man may take offense at a woman's interest in what he is doing away from home. He may see this interest as a sign that she is checking on him or attempting to control him.

Both women and men need to learn each other's "language" in order to relate in a more harmonious way. Men can feel intimate with women by just having her nearby without much conversation. However men need to understand that a woman values conversation as a way of reassuring her of the man's interest and care. Men need to learn to talk to their wives about the details in their lives including who they

saw and what was said. This gives a woman a sense of connectedness which is very valuable for her sense of interdependence. In summary, the trouble that comes up between men and woman may be more a matter of style than an attempt to control or ignore. Being sensitive to and appreciating the differences between men and women creates a much happier relationship.

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