

### **3. SEE A PINK AND BLUE DIFFERENCE THAT MANY HAVE TESTIFIED WAS AN "AH-HA" MOMENT THAT CHANGED THEIR MARRIAGE FOR THE BETTER.**

#### **What Is Your Male or Female Approach to Your Spouse During Conflict?**

Pink and blue perspectives lead to misunderstanding. It colors what we see, hear, and say.

#### **XX and XY Chromosome**

Though you and your spouse are equal as male and female, you are not the same. There is an XX and XY chromosome. There is a sperm and egg. If gender doesn't matter then why the warning on every alcoholic beverage: "According to the surgeon general, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects"? Gender differences are a reality that affect us physically, socially, and emotionally. For instance, the brain in girls in the womb is flooded with certain chemicals 400 percent more than the brain of boys, which contribute significantly to the nurturing nature in females. Estrogen and testosterone cannot be ignored.

Neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, who is both a researcher and a clinician, wrote in her book *The Female Brain*, "Out of the thirty thousand genes in the human genome, the less than one percent variation between the sexes is small. But that percentage difference influences every single cell in our bodies—from the nerves that register pleasure and pain to the neurons that transmit perception, thoughts, feelings, and emotions" (*The Female Brain* [New York: Broadway Books, 2006]).

She also wrote, "Males and females become reactive to different kinds of stress. Girls begin to react more to relationship stresses and boys to challenges to their authority. Relationship conflict is what drives a teen girl's stress system wild. She needs to be liked and socially connected; a teen boy needs to be respected" (pp. 34–35).

#### **Though Equal, Not the Same**

Have you drifted away from believing God established these differences to complement the other? Do you feel that any established difference will be detrimental to females? When you learn that a good-willed man needs to feel respected for who he is as a human being apart from his performance, do you remark, "This is rooted in his narcissism"?

Or, do you believe that God designed these differences to create teamwork, that both of you bring to the table something very special to reflect the image of God?

Think of it this way: When pink and blue are blended, you see purple, the color of royalty, the color of God. Together, as a husband and wife, you reflect His image. We read in Genesis 1:27, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

\$50,000 was recently spent on a major study of those who had engaged the Love and Respect material. Out of fifteen major categories that had proved helpful in our materials, research showed that the #1 area that was most beneficial to both husbands and wives was: "Valuing God's design of males and females."

These folks realized that though men and women are equal, they are not the same. Many of them made an adjustment during conflicts and disagreement. They changed their approach. Instead of judging their spouse as wrong and abnormal for feeling and seeing differently, they concluded that neither is wrong, just different. They pulled back during disagreements over preferences from a condescending tone that sounded unloving and disrespectful. They began to appreciate the male and female differences in solving conflict. He concluded, "She isn't trying to be disrespectful but seeking to do the loving thing." She realized, "He isn't trying to be unloving but wishing to do the honorable thing."

What did I share with these couples?

#### **Is She Loving or Disrespectful?**

When there is a conflict, a wife generally moves toward the husband to connect because she cares. The research on the nurturing nature of a woman is off the charts. She is a caregiver. Thus, she confronts because she cares. She offers her complaints and criticisms to help the marriage and to help him. However, the research points out that ongoing criticism, which she offers to help him, feels like contempt to the male. He feels she's using this topic as another opportunity to send him a message that she does not like who he is as a person, and that he needs to change and become more loving like she is. He feels she finds him inadequate and unacceptable as a man. However, as a woman and a wife, she thinks she sounds loving. She knows she is driven to do the loving thing in the relationship, yet to him she sounds disrespectful.

## **Both Are Right**

Who is right? The answer is yes.

It just depends on whether or not you're recording in pink or in blue. It comes down to the male and female views of the same situation (Matthew 19:4). Few conflicts are between good and evil. Instead, most conflicts arise between differing preferences over what is okay and what is best, such as, "Should we talk more about our issues or talk less about our issues?"

For example, many wives wish to talk about marital problems on a daily basis to keep the relationship up to date and prevent a major marital problem, whereas a husband feels if you are talking on a daily basis about marital problems you have a major marital problem! Neither are wrong for feeling as they do; they're just different, as pink is from blue. This is an honest difference among two people of goodwill. However, because the culture of intimacy is more pink in orientation, the wife is defended while the husband is viewed as wrong since he ought not to feel as he feels. In time both can nurse a resentment toward the other, and the tone of their conversations sound unloving and disrespectful, and this makes things worse.

### **Is He Respectful or Unloving?**

On the other hand, during a marital conflict many men sense the contention can escalate beyond what is appropriate. So, he tries to de-escalate the dispute by disengaging and dropping the matter. To him, it's not that big of a deal. In his blue view, withdrawing is an honorable way to protect the relationship. This is what he does with his best buddy when they get into an argument. Men can be lethal so they must avoid getting too riled. Thus, they withdraw to physically calm down. They need to drop it and forget it before it escalates out of control. Men value this approach. It makes sense to them. The friendship trumps the squabble.

This especially makes sense when understanding the male physiology. Research shows that during marital conflict a husband's heartbeats per minute can rise to ninety-nine BPMs. This is warrior mode. This is what happens to him physiologically just before throwing himself on a hand grenade to save his buddy in time of war. But because he knows he's not in a serious fight with his wife, there must be flight to calm down. He must pull back. He must withdraw.

By the way, a wife can look like she's on a warpath but her BPMs are normal! She feels comfortable in the ocean of emotion, particularly because she knows her goal: mutual apologies and connection.

Interestingly, research at the University of Washington studied two thousand couples for twenty years and reported that 85 percent of all husbands do this. There is something within the male temperament that processes life this way. This is not stereotyping the male but proving a gender difference. When it comes to marriage, men withdraw to help the relationship, not hurt the relationship. But most wives find this unimaginable.

However, the research points out that when a husband withdraws and stonewalls the vast majority of wives feel this is an act of hostility. She could not imagine pulling back over such a minor criticism. When he refuses to talk to her, she feels very unloved, especially because she cares and wants to connect because of love! She feels rejected when she chases after him and he tells her to leave him alone and to quit trying to pick a fight, which she knows she isn't trying to do! On the other hand, to him, she is violating the honor code in the face of him trying to do the respectful thing by dropping the matter. Thus, as a man and husband, he thinks he sounds respectful because he knows he is driven to do the honorable thing in the relationship. However, in her world as a woman this feels and sounds unloving.

## **Both Are Right**

Who is right? Again, the answer is yes. It just depends on whether or not you're recording in pink or in blue. Neither are wrong; they're just different. However, because the culture of intimacy is more pink in orientation, the wife is defended more often. The sentiments of the husband seem marginal at best.

Isn't it interesting that both feel they are doing the loving or respectable thing but come across to the other as disrespectful and unloving!?

This explains why we do not hear our tone. To him, he sounds respectful not unloving. To her, she sounds loving not disrespectful. Each knows that they are right within themselves and their spouse is wrong. This hinders their friendship. The marriage feels less positive. Both feel less satisfied about the relationship.

## **Successful Couples**

We ended the last email with these questions: "How do you deal with those disagreements when you know you are right and your spouse is wrong? What do you do when there has been, or could be, a pattern of strong disagreements that leave you frustrated, hurt, and angry?" My answer is that successful couples do not have less

conflict than other couples but they know how to deal with their conflicts, and one of the first lessons successful couples learn is that neither is wrong, just different—as different as pink is from blue. Both can be right based on their male and female perspective (Matthew 19:4).

**Today's Question: Will I refrain from saying my husband is unloving when he's trying to do the respectful thing? Will I refrain from saying my wife is disrespectful when she's trying to do the loving thing?**

**Today's Action: When my pink wife appears disrespectful, I will trust that she is trying to do the loving thing in most cases. When my blue husband appears unloving, I will trust that he is usually trying to do the honorable thing. I will start believing that most often my spouse is not wrong just different, as different as pink is from blue.**

With Love and Respect,

Emerson Eggerichs, Ph.D.

Founder and President of Love and Respect