

For centuries, the differences between men and women were socially defined and distorted through a lens of sexism, discrimination, and ignorance. Recognizing, understanding, discussing as well as acting skillfully in light of the differences between men and women can be difficult. Our failure to recognize and appreciate these differences can become a life long source of disappointment, frustration, tension, and eventually our downfall in a relationship. Not only can these differences destroy a promising relationship, but most people will grudgingly accept or learn to live with the consequences. Eventually they find some compromise or way to cope. People tend to accept what they don't understand when they feel powerless to change it.

Relationships between men and women are not impossible or necessarily difficult. Problems simply arise when we expect or assume the opposite sex should think, feel, or act the way we do. It's not that men and women live in completely different realities. Rather, our lack of knowledge and mutual experience gives rise to our indifferences. The prejudices of childhood are hard to outgrow. Anne Roiphe, author of "Confessions of a Female Chauvinist Sow," illustrates how stereotyping men with her mother as a child developed her own hidden prejudices, class assumptions, and an anti-male humor that gave her a sense of superiority. "Boys were fickle and likely to be unkind, my mother and I knew that, as surely as we knew they tried to make you do things in the dark they wouldn't respect you for afterwards, and would spoil your rep." Anne Roiphe continues, "Boys appeared to be hypocritical, self-seeking, exploitative,

untrustworthy, and very likely to be showing off their precious masculinity.”(Roiphe, Anne 504).

Men are equally exposed to gender typing of women at an early impressionable age. Boys are taught an unspoken code of conduct by which to live. “ The brittle male conducts his life by his ideas about masculinity. Living up to the image is the important thing. Though the moment-to-moment experience may be painful and generally unsatisfying for him. His mind is continually telling him what he is supposed to be. As long as he is able to be that way, he can fend off the inner demons that threaten him with accusations of not being a real man.” (Goldberg, Herb 510). His efforts are directed at proving to himself, his father, as well as others what he is not: not feminine, not dependent, not emotional, nor passive, and defiantly not weak. Men and women have in their minds a mental picture of what is perceived to be typically masculine behavior and what is perceived to be typically feminine behavior. These mental images are constructs, based upon social and cultural values. Once such a mental frame of reference or stereotype has been formed, it becomes authoritative and will be difficult to abandon. Even when faced with new information that contradicts these stereotypes.

Men and women approach problems with similar goals but with different considerations. While men and women can solve problems equally well, their approach and their process are often quite different. For most women, sharing and discussing a problem presents an opportunity to explore, deepen, or strengthen the relationship with the person they are talking with. Women are usually more

concerned about how problems are solved than merely solving the problem itself. For women solving a problem can profoundly impact whether they feel closer and less alone or whether they feel distant and less connected. The very process of solving a problem can strengthen or weaken a relationship. Men are less concerned and do not feel the same as women when solving a problem. “Silent, uncommunicative, emotionally barren; these are a few of the unflattering adjectives that women often use to describe the men in their lives.” (Chiles, Nick 45). Chiles finds that men are not as closed off as some women might think. Communication between the sexes is not hopeless. Though we express our feelings in different ways, we forge ahead finding ways to make our feelings and relationships work.” (Chiles, Nick 46). Men approach problems in a very different manner than women. For most men, solving a problem present an opportunity to demonstrate their competence, their strength of resolve, and their commitment to a relationship. How the problem is solved is not nearly as important as solving it effectively and in the best manner possible. Most men have a tendency to dominate and assume authority in a problem solving process. Men set their feelings aside and do not attend well to the quality of the relationship while solving problems. They just fix what is broken.

“Men have no problems expressing themselves- we just may not want to do it on the women’s’ cue. If only women could become bilingual and see that love is a demonstrated language as well, and men are giving all kinds of communication of love everyday.”(Chiles, Nick 47). Women and men communicate very differently. It is sometimes said that women and men

communicate so differently from one another that they must come from other planets. Although at times differences in women and men's communication styles seem to be constant and overwhelming, they really are quite minor. For example, both men and women can be nurturing, aggressive, task-focused, and sentimental. What is important to think about, however, is that women and men sometimes perceive the same messages to have different meanings. This may be the reason for the battle of the sexes, miscommunications and misunderstandings. "Without anyone directly coming out and saying so, some women are gathering that men are sexy, powerful, very interesting, but not very nice, not very moral, human, and tender." (Roiphe, Anne 505). The task that faces men and women is to learn to accept their differences, and avoid taking their inconstancies as personal attempts to frustrate each other, and to compromise whenever possible. The idea that one gender can think and feel like the other is absurd. Sure, a man or women could act in consideration of the other's needs, but this would not necessarily be rewarding and honest. Holding the benefit of another above our own is rewarding, but from time to time, and more often for most of us, it is important to be our self and to be accepted and willing to accept others. When men are confronted by a long list of unflattering adjectives they usually will respond by shutting down. "We become more fragile and tentative. Deep down we want our women to look at us with pride, we want to feel at ease about sharing intimacies, but often we don't know how to get to those places. We close it down, keep our emotions on mute." (Chiles, Nick 46). Nick Chiles continues, "Of course in our silence, no matter how well meaning often draws a predictable response from sisters," What

are you thinking about?” we often bite our tongues. They really don’t want to know what we are thinking. If there is anything growing up male has taught us it is to avoid fights we can not win”. (Chiles, Nick 49).

“In the end, we have to remember that women and men have different styles of communication. For men talking is a declaration of our thoughts, not a processing of our thoughts. After I know, I speak. Women on the other hand speak to know.” “ We may not understand them, but we know we can’t be without them.” (Chiles, Nick 51). Men and women have always behaved differently, had different emotions, even cared about entirely different things. These dissimilarities are universal because they are biological in origin. Male and female roles cannot be changed, nor should they be, since they counterbalance and interface with one another in ways that make the family and hence society possible. Anne Roiphe agrees as stated on page 506, “ A better style of life may develop from an assumption that men are as human as we, hard as it is for women to believe, women are not really superior to men in intelligence or humanity, they are equal.” Equal not one better than the other, just different.