

Minding The Gap: Embracing Our Differences to Experience a Flourishing Marriage

Dr. Tom & Donna Pfizenmaier

Introduction: Are men and women really that different? YES!!!

- A. My family background: Raised with a mother and grandmother; 4 sisters; wife; 3 daughters.
- B. Story of Ann, Don and Nate
- C. Two types of Differences to touch upon: Embodied Differences; Personal Differences

I. Embodied Differences (All of these comments are aggregate—exceptions are many.)

- A. Sex (defined by chromosomes-- women XX, men, XY) Size (generally)
- B. Hormonal differences
- C. Brain Structure (the newest and most interesting stuff).
 - 1. Men use more gray matter, which gives them superior systems, math, and spatial skills.
 - Women have more white matter, which gives them superior language and relational skills.
 - Women also have a thicker bridge (corpus callosum)

Simon Baron-Cohen in *Essential Difference* sums it up this way: “The female brain is predominately hardwired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.” (*The Essential Difference*, p. 1).

- 2. Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn (*For Women Only* and *For Men Only*) describe these differences using an MS *Windows* analysis.
 - Their research indicates that women tend to be more adept than men at running multiple mental applications simultaneously (for example: working on a business proposal, keeping an eye on the kids, listening to music or thinking about her upcoming anniversary—and wondering if her husband will forget it again).
 - Some of these “windows” are present events, some past, some emotional, some factual, and women tend to be able to “click” in and out of them with ease. Men call this being “flighty” or “failure to focus.” Men tend to open only one or two windows at a time. Women call this “failure to multi-task.” Donna calls me “old on track.”
- 3. We could go on and on with these differences, and it’s really interesting stuff! It isn’t sexism, or social conditioning (ALTHOUGH THOSE DO PLAY A ROLE) there is a profound deep difference in the ways in which men and women are structured and process life.

- But the thing we want to recognize, and come to embrace, is that in order for the marriage partnership to flourish, to build a life together *requires* this beautiful strangeness; this deep mutual completing of male and female. We should live into it fully and freely.
 - This foundational importance of male female differences, which we'll see in a moment in Genesis, has application across the board; leadership teams, teaching teams etc, which leads us to the biblical narrative of Genesis whose immediate concern Adam and Eve's relationship aka marriage.
- D. God's Design for Marriage—the Adam and Eve Story
1. We are created male and female in God's image. (Gen. 1)
 2. God's creation is not finished until woman is born (Gen. 2)
 3. Man needs a "suitable helper" Hb. (ezer kenegdo), as in "he needs help!" "Eve is Adam's "beneficial ally" who "strives with him. She makes him better, fuller, richer, in his humanness.
 4. She comes out of him while he is asleep (unconscious)--some (Jordan Peterson) sees this as pointing to her role of revealing to Adam things he is unaware of.
 - Both sexes have liabilities and blind spots—we need each other to see the whole picture. So, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." We are literally built for each other—Physically, mentally, emotionally.

II. Personal Differences.

- A. Tom and I have a lot of similarities
1. Values (Faith, family, forgiveness, generosity, work ethic, child raising, moderate lifestyle, don't hold grudges, home bodies, hospitality).
 2. Standards of neatness, enjoyment of friends, exercise, politics, pets.
 3. We both like to Read (but different genres).
 4. Generally, we "wear well."
- B. Dissimilarities
1. Different Talents (Donna-- music, crafts; (Tom--studying, writing, food and wine)
 2. Processing (Tom internally; Donna externally) Tom's "great idea"
- C. Managing the Gaps "Pro-Tips"
1. Giving each other space and encourage that (no guilt trips).
 2. Have both common and separate friends (we need other friendships to meet our social and emotional needs—your spouse cannot meet ALL your needs).
 3. Encourage each other in individual pursuits—Helps them to grow and change as a person. As they grow, they bring more to the relationship.
 4. Calendaring wisely (check with spouse before making a commitment). Also looking for a balanced calendar which represents "yours, mine, and our needs."
- D. Checking in on a regular basis on all fronts.

Close: GOOD MARRIAGES MIND THE GAPS AND CAPITALIZE ON THEM! Both the biological gaps and the personal gaps.