

SURVIVING LIFE DRAMAS

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Transcript

Part 7 of 12

Surviving Gender Difference



changing minds, changing lives

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**Surviving Life Dramas: Surviving Gender Difference
Part 7 of 12**

Dr. Mike Gosling:

Hello, I'm Dr. Mike Gosling and on behalf of the entire staff at Gosling International and the Emotional Wealth Academy, I'd like to welcome you to today's seminar in the ten-series seminars – Surviving Life Dramas.

The topic of today's seminar is Surviving Gender Difference. And Karen will help you to understand communication differences between men and women and how to manage unmet expectations. Karen Gosling is uniquely qualified to talk on this topic having helped thousands of people in over 30 years – to manage their gender differences. Expert counselor and Gosling International Counseling Director – Mrs Karen Gosling.

Karen Gosling:

So welcome today to the seminar on Surviving Gender Difference. You've probably heard or maybe even read about John Gray when he writes about Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus. Well, you know, he's right. John Gray has actually got a lot of good things to say in his work. Because there are very significant differences between men and women right from the time of conception.

The differences don't occur just after birth or the way the child is nurtured – that does play a part – but right from the time of conception there is a difference in the male and the female

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brain. In fact the research tells us that the sex-specific circuits of the brain are actually starting to take place when the foetus is 18 weeks old. So not even fully formed.

And what the research also tells us is that there is an astonishing array of differences in the brain. And the differences between the male and the female brain is in structural and in chemical ways. It's in genetic ways, hormonal, functional. The brains, in fact, are very different.

Now, the female brain – which is the one that the men, of course, are going to be interested in knowing about – is very affected by the hormones that the female body produces. And the female brain, with those hormonal changes, impact on every stage of her life – from infancy through to her girlhood, through to her teenage years into her womanhood and right through to menopause. Which in most cultures is round about the age of 50.

And the hormonal changes in the female brain actually create her reality. And so, her reality can change as her hormones fluctuate throughout the course of the month or, indeed, her life, depending on the stage in her life. Now, these fluctuations will occur from the age of three months and go right through to menopause. So this is right through her lifespan until about the age of 50 to 55 – there are going to be these fluctuations. And, because her reality is not constant it will seem as though the woman changes a lot.

And there are a lot of jokes and a lot of complaints about the woman always changing her mind or the woman being different from day to day. There's one joke that I do recall that goes

something like – a woman having a mind that is cleaner than a man's because she changes it more often.

The male and the female brain also has a lot of difference in the way it responds to stress and to conflict. There are different areas of the brain that deal with problem –solving in the men and the women. Also, in language. There's differences in the experience of emotion – of how a person experiences the emotion – and also where they store that memory. That is also in a different place in the brain.

A woman, for example, will remember details of dates. She'll remember the details about a fight that she had with somebody. And, if it's with her husband, she'll probably bring that up from time to time in arguments. Whereas the husband is very unlikely to even remember the incident, let alone the date that it happened.

And so, this is one of the reasons why the woman's memory and the things that she brings up from the past can create some relationship difficulties. Now, this area that stores both emotion and memory is called the Hippocampus and there is evidence now, with medical technology – where photographs can be seen – that the Hippocampus in the woman is more than twice the size of the man. And so, this larger Hippocampus will remember more things that have an emotion attached to it. It will remember those dates – the Anniversaries. And, if a woman expects a man to be the same, then she will get frustrated and disappointed when he doesn't view as important the things that she views as important.

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The woman also has a greater area of the brain that observes emotion in people. So a woman has a greater ability to observe emotion on faces. And this is particular and specifically designed that she can read the emotion on her offspring's face so that she can understand needs - and she can understand their wants. But, in a relationship, a woman will often be able to read the emotion of those people around her – including her husband – much more than the man can. And this can be very frustrating to men because, very often, it does seem as though she has this psychic ability to be able to tune in to what they're thinking – what they're feeling. The woman will be very observant about a husband's slight change of behaviour because of the fact that she has this hard-wired – this in-built ability – to read emotions.

She's also got a larger area of the brain that looks after language. And it's the reason why the female is much more agile – much more fluent in language. And much more able to use words because that part of the female brain is bigger than a man's.

Now, men have got their own big parts of the brain as well. Men are hard-wired differently. And again research shows that men have got an area of the brain 2.5 times bigger than the woman's that thinks about sex-drive. And so, men will typically think many, many times throughout the day about sexual things and the woman will probably, on average, think about sex once or twice a day – or if you're lucky and it's one of her hot days, it might be three or four times.

Now, the man has a larger core processing part in the Amygdala. The Amygdala is the part of the brain that picks up fear. And so, the core part of the Amygdala in a male - that assesses fear and is also responsible for his aggressive response - is big in a man. And that's the reason

why a male is much more quick to the fisty-fight and getting ready to protect and be aggressive than a woman is. Psychologically, a woman is much more affected by conflict so she is the one who will be quick to diffuse a situation and to try and calm things down.

The woman gets affected psychologically by conflict around her. And if you know that this is a biological response and if she knows that it's a biological response, then both the men and the women are in a better position to actually make decisions about whether or not they're going to run with that biological response - or whether they are going to change their behaviour.

Now, it's interesting to note that baby girls – I talked about the three month age – baby girls are actually born with this innate ability – this inborn ability – to observe emotions and to take meaning from what they observe. And they've done a lot of experiments to reveal this difference between infants – the boys and the girls. The girls take meaning from every look, and from every touch and from every interaction. So, right from the time they're very young, a female is adopting a sense of worth – am I worthy, am I approved of, am I lovable, am I getting favour? Just by every interaction that that baby girl has.

It's also been interesting in research to observe that baby girls don't tolerate flat faces. They keep on seeking information from the care-giver. And keep on having an interaction with the care-giver until they get a response. And so, if there is a flat face, that girl will think, 'I've done something wrong.' It's a hard-wired thing – 'there's something wrong with me, I've done something wrong'. And so, they take that as something wrong about them until they get a positive expression from the face of the care-giver.

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And so, this has proved to be extremely important information when researchers and behaviourists are talking with mothers who are depressed, for example. The mother who is depressed has got a very flat, very emotionless face. And this is actually impacting on her infant, particularly if the infant is female. There are some mothers who have had Botox and have got a slightly artificially changed face that isn't so expressive. That also makes a difference.

And this awareness of how the female brain is watching for reactions and watching for facial expression to assess their own self-worth also explains why a grown up woman will continue to seek a relationship with an emotionally unavailable man. That if the man isn't giving her feedback about her being worthy she will just keep on chasing that relationship. So a man who is a Narcissist or otherwise emotionally unavailable, might find that a woman keeps on coming after him and again it's explained with the biology that the woman will keep on going – keep on seeking interaction – until she gets a response.

There was one experiment that was done where they had a group of twelve month old infants. And put the mother of each infant in a room and the mother was instructed to tell the child not to touch a toy cow – there was a toy cow there. The mother, after giving the instruction, had to stand to one side. And what the experiment showed very, very clearly that the infant girls would come in and they seldom touched the toy cow. They would look back a lot at the mum to check for facial expression of disapproval or that glance that goes – no you mustn't. And there were very, very few girls who actually went anywhere near the cow once they'd got the look from the mum.

Now, the baby boys – the infant boys – very different. They're testosterone-driven. And they have an innate need to explore their environment and for action. So the boys would come in and they would hear the instruction. They'd go and look at the cow and touch it anyway. And even if the mother said, 'No!' he would just look back at her and almost give a giggle and touch it again.

So this is just all innate. The difference between the male and the female brain.

So the female brain, if we were to summarise, has got superior ability in its hard-wiring, for communication, because of that language part of the brain. For picking up emotional tones – women are very attuned to the tone - and again this is biological so that they can read the tones of their offspring. But it goes right through into adulthood when they're acutely sensitive to a husband's tone. They have got this hard-wiring for connection, for emotional sensitivity, for emotional responsiveness. The female has more ability because of this hard-wiring for empathy.

That is not to say that men do not have empathy. That would be wrong to generalise that. But a woman is more hard-wired to feel the emotion that somebody else might be feeling and to be able to put herself into somebody's shoes. Therefore, it makes sense that a woman will very often go into one of the helping professions – teaching, counselling, nursing – because she has that ability to step around into somebody's shoes and to feel the emotion that somebody else might be having. So, this ability that is hard-wired does tend to take her into those professions and it does develop her innate nurturing tendency.

During the teenage years when the female brain gets flooded with hormones – the changes that occur through her body in the teenage years – she has a massive increase in her need for emotional connectivity and also, her need for communication. So, it's during these years that girls spend a lot of time with girlfriends and spend time talking and sharing all about their changing emotions – the boys that they're interested in, the crushes that they're having – they just go talk, talk, talk, talk. And this is the way that they explore their feelings and discuss with girlfriends what they're feeling. And, at the same time, they're making a connection because this bonds them.

So, as females are increasing their need for emotions and emotional connectivity and for communication, the guys in the same age-group are actually decreasing their need for communication. What they are increasing in is the need for scoring – both in football matches and also in the back seat of the car.

So, how do these differences play themselves out in relationships? That's really what I want to look at today. I want to look at these communication differences, these brain differences – how do they impact on our relationships, on our marriages?

Well, early in a relationship, nobody really needs any instruction about how to behave. The chemicals that our body produces early in a relationship make it very easy to communicate. We are flooded with those, 'In Love' chemicals. Our bodies feel fantastic. You are adored by your partner. Communication is very easy; you talk about anything and everything because you don't feel judged. You feel very safe and your new partner is very eager to find out a lot about you.

If there's anything about your partner that you find a bit irritating during those early months or early years, you generally just put it down to some cute little idiosyncrasy. And it doesn't really bother you too much because we are designed as human beings to enter into relationships in order to keep the species going. If there was too much conflict we might never get together and be able to reproduce.

It's also true that, at the beginning of a relationship, when communication is very easy, we tend to admire in the other person – in the new partner – what we lack in ourselves. So, if you are a person who is a little bit shy, you're going to feel really proud and positive about the fact that your new partner talks a lot and sticks by your side at a party and does all the communicating for you.

Or if you are a person, as I was, who didn't like conflict and who very seldom was able to stand up for myself in a situation, it was wonderful to have a partner who would go in to my defence. And who would stand up for me – whether it was at the airport queue or the picture-theatre queue or even at the restaurant. And I felt very safe and very protected at that time.

So women will enter a relationship wanting this emotional stability and this emotional connectivity. They'll want a partner who will communicate with them, who will understand their feelings. And then when they feel perfectly safe with that, they will then be prepared to expose their vulnerability – which is their sexual side. So women come at a relationship through the emotional connectivity, having somebody who cares for them and then they will be prepared to seek sexual fulfilment.

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This is also the process that a woman will show after conflict. So, if there's been conflict in your relationship she will want to be able to talk through things, feel safe about talking, be aware that you understand her feelings before she will feel ready for a sexual reconnection.

So, communicating and talking is indeed the chief coping mechanism for women. Most women know this and many men actually know it and they get a bit frustrated by it. But I can only reiterate that it's through talking that a woman explores her range of feelings. She talks in order to discover what she feels. She talks in order to describe all the different sensations that her body has – which is what her feelings are. And, typically, after she's done her talking, she will feel differently at the end of the conversation than she felt at the beginning of the conversation. Which means her feelings have actually changed from the beginning to the end. And that's the reason why, if she is talking with somebody who is unresponsive and expressionless, she will keep on talking until she gets some awareness from that listener, that you've engaged and that you understand how she feels.

So, this is a strategy for you men in the audience - to know that if your wife keeps on talking and talking, just spend a little bit of time engaging with her and letting her feel as though she has got through to you and then the talking will probably stop.

For her, talking is a bonding experience and she believes that when she's actually talking it's a relationship connection. That's the way she relates to people. And, if she's doing the talking and the bonding with her husband, she will be one very happy lady because she feels that her identity now is fulfilled because she has a good relationship with her husband. You see, a woman's identity is actually formed through the relationship that she has with the man that she

loves. It is the reason why, across generations, women have left families and jobs and their home and followed their husband to another part of the world. Because her whole identity is built up in this need for a happy little family unit. If she has a good relationship with her husband and her little family is ticking along very nicely then she is a very fulfilled and happy lady.

That is somewhat different to a man whose identity is in fact built up through his ability and his success at being the provider and the protector. And he can actually cope with a relationship that is a little bit wobbly, and a little bit disconnected, so long as his identity is still fulfilled in that he has a good job and an ability to provide well for the wife and children that he loves.

If a woman is upset – and they do get upset, remember I said about the hormonal fluctuations – she will actually remain upset for as long as she feels she's not heard. Because what she wants to do in order to be less upset is to talk about her feelings and to be understood – or not even necessarily understood – she just wants to be heard, she wants to talk it out and then she will feel much better.

So, the man doesn't even necessarily have to agree with her. They just have to hear her. The woman is not necessarily seeking agreement, just a need to express her feelings and that's the way she gets it out.

If a woman brings in disappointment, or feeling of rejection or feeling of stress about a third person – maybe a mother or a sister – again she will actually want to talk with her husband

about that so that she can work out what she feels. And so that she can work out what she's going to do about that conflict, if anything at all. And so, she doesn't necessarily want her partner to offer suggestions, she wants him to hear and let her be upset. Because, by the time she's finished talking – which may be 20 minutes, maybe half an hour – she will have already worked out herself what she is going to do. And, for reasons I'll explain in a moment, it's very difficult for a man to just sit by and let her talk because he is hard-wired to come in to help.

If a woman feels as though she's got the right to be upset she will actually be less upset. So if she feels as though she's got permission by the listener to have those feelings, she'll actually be less upset which can be very confusing to the male who is trying to listen to her. And it's because feelings, for a woman, are not facts. That's a fundamental difference. Feelings to a woman are not facts, they are simply that – they are feelings, they are sensations inside of her body that she has a label for and she's trying to express them. And, once she's expressed them and the feeling changes, then she doesn't feel that feeling any more.

And if a woman is trying to express her feelings and senses that she is not being heard or she's being dismissed or she's not allowed to have those feelings – because her partner might say, "Oh stop talking now", "you can't do anything about that", "don't be so silly." Then she will feel more upset.

And women assume that men need what they need. So, women assume that, because they want to talk out their feelings, men want to do the same thing. So women will often invite their husband to talk, or want him to talk, or want him to say what's going on in his head, or say, 'I'll give you a penny for your thoughts.' But men aren't like that. Men do their thinking inside

their heads and can actually find the woman's incessantly wanting to get inside their head a bit annoying. Because they sort out things differently.

And that's why a woman needs to understand about men. And I will often, in counselling, say to wives, 'We need to understand men. We women need to understand how men operate.' Because they're not wrong, they're just different. And a lot of women don't know that. They think there's something wrong with the fact that their men don't talk about feelings or that they don't operate the same as them. And thank goodness we are different.

So, let's talk a bit about men. Men don't really want to talk much about relationship stuff and I teach women that. I say, 'Keep your relationship discussions short.' Men don't want to talk about emotional stuff very much because they're not really able to stay in that part of the brain and they don't have a need to talk things out. Men sit comfortably in the logical, problem-solving side of their brain - the part that thinks, the part that sorts, the part that considers. And a man will only speak after he's considered every aspect of the problem that he's thinking about. And then he'll speak if he thinks it's worthy saying something. But there are many times when he will do this thinking and not even necessarily say anything. So his wife has really no notion of what is going on inside his head. And so, when women assume that men are the same as them, they'll often think that his head must be empty – not so. His head is actually usually full of sorting things out, but he doesn't necessarily say it.

But, when a man does speak, then he is speaking fact. He has already considered all of the different angles. He's considered his feelings, he's considered other people's feelings, he's

considered other people's needs, he's considered their desires. And then he sorts all things out – and then he speaks.

So when a man speaks – he's speaking fact. And men assume that women are the same as them. And they're not. So, typically, when a woman speaks about her feelings, a man thinks that she's speaking fact. And that's why he comes in and tries to help her with her given problem. And it's not. Because feelings are not facts with women.

If a woman asks a man a question – and I'm sure you can think of situations where that has happened – she'll ask you something in the middle of her conversation and a man takes just a few seconds to be able to give a reply. That's because he actually has to shift areas in his brain. He has to go from his thinking part of his brain to the listening part first of all when she starts talking. Then, if she asks a question he has to move back to his thinking part of the brain to actually find an answer. Then after he's thought about an answer – during which time he can't listen, because he can't do those two things at once - he will then have to swap back to the language part of his brain to formulate the sentence to say the answer. Then he has to check if it's still safe to say it or if it's still on topic – and typically, the woman will have moved on to another topic by now – so then he doesn't bother to say anything. But, after he's done all that checking, which might take 4 or 5 seconds, he will then give an answer. And because of that lag-time which a man needs and boys need – so I would want mums to realise this about their teenage boys and their little boys as well – a woman will often jump in, 'Obviously you haven't got anything to say,' or, 'Obviously you're not interested in what we're talking about,' or, 'Obviously you're not participating.' – not so. A man just takes a little bit longer because he's got this changing to do.

You see, a woman sits almost all of the time in that language part of her brain. She's got a huge language part of her brain. Women tend to be able to talk and listen at the same time. They can talk on the phone to their girlfriend and listen to what their child is saying all at the same time. That's their hard-wired ability – it's what we call their Verbal Agility. And men aren't like that.

And so, women must give their man time to answer their questions – and to process and to think about what their answer is. It is not true when women say, 'He's trying to carefully calculate his answer to give me the answer that I want.' – not so. He's actually trying to participate.

So when men think and they consider all the things first and they tick all the boxes – if they've sorted it all out – he may speak. He may not. But he may – it's a maybe. And all of this time the wife may know nothing. Because a man can sort things out in his head and formulate a plan of action and think about what he feels about it all without uttering a word. And there are many times that wives will say, 'I didn't even know that!' and it's true – maybe she didn't.

Let me tell you the story about a couple that I saw one time for counselling. The wife was very upset because they were about to move house and the husband had got very cross with her and said, 'You can do all of the moving of the house by yourself. I'm sick of you always changing your mind.'

And so, she dragged him along to counselling and this was the story. Two weeks prior to the house move she had said to him, 'I'd like to change the covers on the sofa.' And he thought to

himself, 'Well that's a bit of a strange time to want to change the covers on the sofa because we're going to be moving house soon.' But he didn't say anything.

And she went on and she said, 'And I'd like to have a fresh start when we move to our new house. So I'd like the sofa covers to be different.' And he had his own thoughts about it but he said, 'Whatever.' And she took his 'Whatever' as 'Go ahead.' So she spent the next week – which, if you remember, was the week before they moved house – going and having a look at fabrics, talking to girlfriends about it, going on shopping sprees, comparing prices, looking at what was on sale. The girlfriends were putting some input in saying, 'Look, you're moving house soon and maybe the covers will get dirty when you move. Maybe it's best to move in and see what the décor of the new house is before you purchase. Maybe the kids will jump all over the place or the workmen might make the new covers greasy. Why don't you wait?'

She thought that was a good idea. After she'd had all this input from her girlfriends she thought – Good Idea! She'll wait.

So, a couple of nights before this particular counselling session – which was a week later – she went to her husband and said, 'I've decided not to get the sofa covers.' And she was expecting him to be thrilled – save money, keeping him informed about what she's thinking – but instead he exploded in a rage. And he said, "I'm sick of the way you always change your mind! First of all you want sofa covers, now you don't want sofa covers. First of all you want this house and then you want that house! And then you want those workmen to come and do the moving, you want these movers and then you say you want those movers. I'm sick to death of you always changing your mind!" He said, "Chances are, this is going to go on right through the

house move so, as far as I'm concerned, you do it all yourself. I'm out. You can look after the whole house move."

And that's what had caused her distress because she was completely taken aback by his reaction. She said it was over the top – and it was over the top. But he was actually expressing his complete despair at what he saw as her always changing her mind.

So, when they came to the counselling session and I went through this with them, she said to me, "I'm the one that went out and had a look at the sofa covers and I made the decision not to buy them. I thought he'd be very happy because he's a bit worried about the money. I thought it was a good decision and I was just keeping him informed." And, she said, "He doesn't pay any attention to what we do in the house anyway. He's never interested in the décor or the furniture." And he protested and said, "That's not true. I am interested." And she said, "When are you interested?" And he said, "I'm very interested in the fabrics and the cushions and the curtains but you never let me have a say." And she said, "But you're not interested at all", so then they now had this other battle.

So, I stopped and I said to him, "Tell me. What would you have said or thought when your wife came to you and asked about the sofa covers." And he said, "She came and asked me about the sofa covers and I thought, what a crazy idea. We're moving house in two weeks. It's going to cost money. They might get dirty. We don't know what the décor's like in the new house."

He had thought everything that the girlfriends had said. And he said, "And I thought all of those things and then I thought, there's no point in getting new sofa covers now. But there is no point telling her because she wants her own way anyway. And that's why I said, 'Whatever.'"

And that's what happens so often. The man thinks all of those things but never says a word. "I've had no idea that he thought all those things." And he then said to her in the counselling session, 'And that's the reason I never say anything about the fabrics or the cushions or what the children wear. Because you want your own way anyway.'

So the way that men do things – a man's coping mechanism is to sort through his thoughts and to clarify his priorities and to develop a plan of action – always without never necessarily saying a word.

Questioner:

Just one question with regards that story. In that conversation two weeks before, if he had said, "It doesn't make sense for this reason," or whatever, "It might get dirty." Wouldn't she have come back and said, "You're immediately offering a solution."

Karen Gosling:

Yes. She would have felt that he was telling her that no she couldn't. Because what she wanted to do was explore the option of having the new sofa covers and she came to her own

conclusion that it was not a good idea. And this is a very classic communication problem. Because he then feels that she always wants her own way - and the woman is actually quite okay about being disagreed with and having those other options put forward as long as she believes that her initial wish, her feeling, is considered.

Questioner:

But I had in mind – how does a man react in a situation like that? I can say that I disagree for this or that reason but you go out and try to figure it out for yourself.

Karen Gosling:

You could say that. That may even be interpreted as a little bit dismissive or a little bit patronising. A response in that case would be, "Hey, I hadn't thought about having new sofa covers just before we move. What's your thinking about that? Why would you like new sofa covers? Because it's something we could look at, it's not necessarily a good idea – tell me what you think."

And then she does her thinking and her husband has his input and 15 minutes later they've both agreed that it's really not a good idea. Because she actually does seek his input but often it is perceived as or interpreted as, 'He's telling me what to do.'

And, by the same token, men will often feel that the woman is telling him what to do.

Questioner:

Whereas, at the same time, she could also be an inflexible person.

Karen Gosling:

She may be, yes. The woman can also be inflexible and absolutely want her own way. I'm making general comments here because we do have different personalities where a woman will absolutely be rigid and want her own way and be a bit of a nag. But nagging is something that I'll talk about in a moment.

If we come back to talking about a man and his coping strategies. He wants to just sort his thoughts, clarify his priorities. The man, when he puts his feelings into action, will actually feel more in control. So, if he's actually thinking through things and wanting to feel in control and feel as though he's mastering the situation he will develop a plan of action and want to implement that.

The man also wants to be needed and appreciated. It's the reason why, when his wife comes to talk to him, he actually, initially, feels very good. Because he feels that she needs him. But then he gets very confused because after talking to him the wife will go, 'But, I don't want you to problem-solve for me. And I don't necessarily want you to do anything.' And the husband is hard-wired to do things. The husband – and again I try to explain this to women – is hard-wired to help. He is the protector, he is the provider. That is his male brain wanting to do that.

The male also will be very, very unlikely to speak about his feelings unless he is seeking advice. Men, generally, will only talk about their feelings either with a mate or with a mother or with a wife if he actually can't sort it out by himself after all his thinking and he is seeking advice.

So a man, in that instance, assumes that when a woman comes to him to talk about feelings that she is seeking advice because he assumes that she is the same as him - and she's not. So, she will come to talk about feelings and he will offer some advice and then get confused when the wife says, "I don't want your advice. I don't want you to solve the problem, I just want you to listen." Because that doesn't make sense to a man.

It's very often then that he will say, 'Well if you didn't come to me for advice, what are you coming to talk to me about?' He will show a bit of irritation and, because of her ability to read emotion and to read faces, she will know that you're upset. So then she will shut down and not talk any more. So then the couple stops talking – each one says, 'Why can't we communicate?'

And because the woman hasn't finished her talking, she will go and find a female to talk to. It might be her mother or a sister or a girlfriend – but she will then go and talk about the same topic and make comments like, 'Oh, I can never talk to him! He just doesn't understand my feelings.' And then, after she has the girlfriend agree with that, and say, 'Yeah, men are like that – they don't understand your feelings,' then she feels better.

Here's an example. A man might come home from work and the wife will tell him about what happened in her day. And she might say, 'You know, the baby didn't settle down for his sleep.

I was really frustrated about that. And my girlfriend was going to meet me for lunch and then she couldn't so I was really disappointed about that.'

And the husband will hear that she's upset – and he doesn't want her to be upset – so he will try to offer a solution. And he will say, 'Perhaps you can invite your girlfriend over on another day.' That's the wrong thing for him to say. Or perhaps he will say, "Never mind, the baby gets upset – that happens to kids." So he'll make light of it and that will also be wrong.

So, if he makes light of it it's wrong. If he offers a solution, it's wrong. If he gives priority to the other person and it seems like he's defending the girlfriend or the child – that's also wrong. It seems like everything he does is wrong. So then he feels not needed and not appreciated and he gets exasperated. He leaves, she feels abandoned and neglected and feels like, 'Oh, I can't talk to him. My partner's left.' And so the cycle goes on.

Now, women talk about their feelings but they need to learn how to talk about their feelings. Women need to talk about their feelings in terms of, 'I feel' not 'You make me feel.' It's very easy for a man, then, to feel blamed. Men will hear their wife talking about her feelings as a complaint. Even if she's talking about the girlfriend or the child. But it's especially so if she's talking about him. If she's saying, "You don't do this," or "You don't do that," he gets particularly defensive.

So he might come home and say, "Hi, how was your day?" He's feeling perfectly happy when he comes home from work. And she says, "The baby fell out of the high-chair. The ironing

lady burnt my shirt. Then the school rang and said that Laura was sick and I had to pick her up from school. And after all of that I was overwhelmed."

And he will say to her, "Why do you always have to be so negative?" And this happened once in a counselling session and I stopped the husband and I said, "Is your wife being negative?"

"Yes, she's got so much to be grateful for and all she ever does is complain." And I said, "She's not complaining actually. You asked her how her day was and she told you how her day was. That's what happened in her day."

"She always expects me to sort out these problems." I said, "No, she already sorted them out. She picked up the baby when it fell on to the floor. And she already did her crying over her burnt shirt. And she's already picked up the sick child from school and given her Panadol. She's already sorted it but you asked her how her day was. This is what happened in her day. And she's just describing her emotion."

And he said, "Well, what am I meant to do?" And I said, "You actually don't have to do anything other than put your arm around her and say, 'Wow! That must have been an overwhelming day you had.'"

And then she feels terrific because she feels supported. And she feels like you get it. She's happy to do all of those things but she feels supported when you say, "Wow! You must have had a really bad day."

So, to women I say that if you are going to talk about your feelings then tell them ahead of time that you are talking about your feelings – you're not actually complaining. Or say to him, "I'm not criticising you and I'm not telling you to do anything. I just want you to listen to me for ten minutes." Remember ten minutes, no longer - fifteen maximum. Otherwise men can't stay in that listening part of their brain. They will go back to their comfort zone of their logical thinking part of their brain and you will think – women – that he has tuned out.

It's also the case that a woman will often urge her husband to initiate things. And to initiate family activities. You know, she'll say things like, "It's always me that has to do the organising. Why don't you do the organising? You suggest something or you tell us where you want to go." And, men can come up with ideas. Men will often think things through and come up with ideas. But, very often men give up. And they stop giving ideas because they assume by their wife's reaction that she wants her own way and his idea isn't good enough.

And I think the easiest way to describe that is the story about the zoo. You see, if a husband comes to a wife - if you go to your wife on a Sunday morning and you say, "Let's take the kids to the zoo today." Then, by the time you say that, you would have already thought about the weather, your mood, the mood of everybody else in the family, your level of tiredness. You would have checked if the rugby was on television. And when everything is clear and all of the boxes are ticked, you will then go and say, "Let's go to the zoo." And that's exactly what you mean – let's take the children to the zoo.

Now, the wife will hear that as the beginning of an idea. She will hear that just as a feeling. And the feeling she thinks you've got is the feeling of being available to go for an outing. So

she will probably answer like this – she'll probably go, "Hey, that's a great idea. That's really good that you're available to go for an outing. Now, we could go to the zoo but, you know, it's quite busy there on a Sunday and it's also quite hot. So perhaps we could take the kids to the Botanic Gardens where there's a lot of shade. Or there's that special function on at the Science Centre that I've been meaning to take the children to. Perhaps we could take them there."

So, she'll come up with all of these alternative ideas thinking that it's the beginning of an idea and that this now needs discussion and consultation. Guess what the husband feels? The husband feels that she wants her own way. And so he'll say, "Why do I even bother?" And he'll withdraw from the conversation and say, "Do it your way!"

Other Voice:

Pretty much just, "Tell me what you want to do."

Karen Gosling:

"Tell me what you want to do," says the man. Indeed the wife is not bothered by going to the zoo. She really doesn't mind going to the zoo. She just never realised, by the way her husband talks, that he has considered all of the options first and that this is what he means – let's go to the zoo.

So, when it comes to communication difficulties – one of the difficulties of these communication differences is also that – and a woman knows this very much – that a man

thinks he's always right. How many times have you men heard your wives say, "He always thinks he's right?" And you know what; a man does think he's right. It's because of this biological difference that he thinks things through first. And he does this sorting out and this clarifying in his head before he says anything. And so, of course when he says it, it's such a well-considered fact that he does think he's right. Like the zoo story.

And, when a man is upset, he generally will remain upset until the person that he disagrees with agrees with him. And that's why women will say, "He always thinks he's right and I have to agree with him."

When a man thinks that a woman wants her own way that's actually not the case. Again, if we think back to the zoo story; she doesn't mind going to the zoo. But, what a woman gets upset about is the process. A woman will want to be consulted. A woman will want her opinion or her idea to be heard. And a woman will want some emotional support. She may even want to be told, "That's a good idea. However, I'd like to do this or this." Then she's perfectly happy. And so, it's not that a woman wants her own way and it's not that she's worried about being disagreed with – for her it's about how she is told. For her it's about the process. For her it's about the tone of voice that is used when the discussion is taking place.

So, if men know that and can say, "Tell me what you think" or, "What do you think about that?" or, "Have you got any other ideas?" and she feels like she's got a say, she can be very readily persuaded to do it your way.

I remember a time – again a counselling situation – when a husband and wife came almost at the stage of divorce. There had been huge rows at home. This was an ex-patriot couple living in Singapore who had been here for nearly a year. And what had happened during the week was that the husband had come home and made an announcement to his wife that the family was moving to Japan – he was taking a job transfer. And she was furious that she had not been consulted- furious that she knew nothing about this.

And in the counselling session what was sorted out was that, in fact, about ten months earlier she did know about a possible move to Japan. What had happened was this – the family had moved here to Singapore quite excited about the move. But it was a new move so they knew nobody when they arrived. And within a few weeks of coming to Singapore there was a mention that the husband might in fact be transferred to Japan rather than constantly travelling there with his job.

And so, he'd come home and said to his wife, "The company is talking about maybe sending us to Japan instead. What would you think about that?" And she said, "Let me think about it." And she thought about it for a few hours and she came back and she said, "I'd be okay with that. We don't really know anybody here. The children are only just settled into school. I haven't made any friends yet. If we have to move because of your job I'd be okay with that. It's all an experience whether we're here or whether we're there."

So he heard that as a 'thumbs up' – yep, we can go to Japan. Now the move never happened, it just stayed open. And he travelled frequently to Japan. And when he went to Japan he kept in his mind that they might be moving there sometime. So he checked out accommodation,

schools, work visa for his wife, ex-patriot groups that maybe she could socialise with. He checked about art classes that she'd love to do. He checked about transport. He checked about language schools. He checked about everything but never said a word to his wife because – as he explained later – nothing was definite.

In the meantime, because he was saying nothing about there still being a possibility of moving to Japan, she settled down into Singapore. She got involved with parent activities at the school. And she made friends with groups and went to various courses and classes. She really threw herself into being involved in this country and getting herself very settled here. Nothing was every said about Japan again. So she made an assumption that it was a closed book but it wasn't.

So, the week before when, at work, the husband's boss had said to him, "You are doing a tremendous amount of travelling up to Japan. We really should consider moving you and there's now an opportunity for that to happen."

He said, "Yes, we can do that. I've checked everything out." And the boss said, "Don't you think you should go home and talk about it with your wife first?" he said, "Oh, I've already done that. I've already spoken with her about it and she's cool with it."

So he accepted the job transfer and then went home and told his wife. And you can see exactly what happened. She felt completely not consulted. She had no idea what was going on during the intervening months. She was screaming at him saying, "Why didn't you tell me that you were checking out all of these things?"

And he said, "Because nothing was definite. Why talk to you about it and raise your hopes, or raise your concerns, when nothing was definite? All I remembered was that you had said you were okay about moving."

Now fortunately what happened in that counselling session and a couple that followed was that he was able to acknowledge her pain. He was able to acknowledge her complete sense of betrayal. She felt that he had betrayed her and not talked to her about it and had made this decision without consultation.

And, because he acknowledged her feelings, and because she was a reasonable woman, she recovered from that and the family, in fact, did move to Japan. But it was a wonderful example of the communication differences and the communication difficulties that husbands and wives have.

To women I say, "A man is the happiest when the woman he loves is happy." Is that true men?

Male Voice:

Yes.

Karen Gosling:

Whatever nationality you are, a man is happiest when the woman he loves is happy. Because, if she is happy, he feels that his job as provider and protector has been successful. If she is

unhappy he feels that he has failed. And so, for a man, hearing that his wife is unhappy, hearing those dreaded words, "We have to talk," will cause in him – will raise in him – this dreadful feeling of fear.

At the same time – men – when you hear your wife say, "We have to talk," know that it is most common and most likely that the woman will talk first. And there's a number of reasons for that.

One is her verbal agility. She will use language first to advise you of a feeling. She is more practised at talking about emotions because she does it all the time with girlfriends and has done since she was a child. She feels feelings at a lower intensity than men do. A woman will feel low-level discomfort and they will say, "I don't feel right. I feel uneasy. I feel not good." Whereas a man does not feel emotions at that lower level but at a higher level.

A woman is the one that has the feelings. The man doesn't necessarily have the feelings of discomfort in the relationship. The woman processes by talking – we've discussed that. The woman feels better by talking. So, if you let her talk she'll probably feel better. And she has the emotional language – she has the vocabulary to use in her discussion and men generally don't have such a big repertoire of emotional words.

So, if she was a man, none of those things would happen. If she was a man, she might think about some relationship problems – she might. And then she'd probably do some thinking on her own, if she was a man – and that might mean she'd decide to do nothing and wait to see if things got better. And she would do all of that without uttering a word.

A man doesn't like to be questioned. A man doesn't like to be challenged. He feels threatened by that. So, typically, when a wife is asking for information, the man will perceive that as him being challenged. So if, for example, a woman says, 'What time are you going to be home?' she'll get an irritable response because the man immediately feels as though he's being challenged about that. Really what she is seeking is information on the basis of which she can make another decision. So, "What time are you going to be home?", for her might simply mean – because I've got children to put to bed and, depending on where you are – still there or just around the corner – I'll make a decision about putting the kids to bed.

So, when women ask a question, it's generally just to seek information. But it's true that women need to ask questions differently. Not so long ago Mike and I moved to a different area and on one Saturday morning we were going to the local supermarket. I'd been to the supermarket twice before but, on the way, I realised that he was taking a different route. And so I said to him, "Why are you driving this way?" I was seeking information. I was thinking this might be faster, shorter, less traffic lights, maybe you get to the car park via a different, easier entry. But, Mike heard my question, "Why are you driving this way?" and you know his response? He said, "Do you want to drive next time?"

The man feels challenged.

So, there's lots to learn – that if men and women understood each other better, what a happier place this would be.

Dr. Mike Gosling:

Thank you Karen for an excellent explanation of Surviving Gender Differences - what the writer John Gray called, *Men Are From Mars And Women Are From Venus*. The next seminar in the 12-part seminar series *Surviving Life Dramas* is *Surviving Miscommunication* where Karen will help you understand the miscommunication between men and women and children. And how to give and receive love.

The complete *Surviving Life Dramas* seminar series is available on DVDs, Audio and E-books. Get your copy now at www.survivinglifedramas.com.

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I'm Dr. Mike Gosling for the Emotional Wealth Academy.