

GENDER GAP FACTS

Gender Gap Facts Checklist

Directions: Discuss each of the following generalizations about men and women with your partner to find out if any apply to your relationship:

- Men are goal-oriented and depend on achievements for self-esteem.
- Women are relationship oriented and can overcome fears of being unlovable by doing for others. Self-esteem often depends on being involved with someone.

- Men value success, autonomy, independence, efficiency, and competence.
- Women value sharing, nurturing, supporting others, and being considerate.

- Men need acceptance, admiration, appreciation, encouragement, and faith in their ability.
- Women need understanding, interest, concern, reassurance, devotion, loyalty, commitment, and respect for their ideas and feeling.

- Men want the right to be free and often withdraw after periods of closeness to meet needs for autonomy. They may fear becoming dependent or need time alone to take a break from feeling responsible. Even irresponsible men rebel against an inner pull to take care of everything. Irritability or withdrawal is a sign that a man needs his “space.”
- Women want the right to be upset and need to release emotions to be loving. They get depleted from giving, “hit bottom”, and go all the way into the depths of their feelings before they can “come up.” A women may reexperience hopelessness, insecurity, and resentment over and over until she gets the understanding she needs. Talking in absolutes (“We never . . .” “You always . . .”) is a sign that a woman has hit bottom.

- Men release tension through activity: watching TV, driving, sports, or exercise. They become “entranced” with activity and use it to cleanse their minds of troubling thoughts.
- Women release tension through talking and crying. They talk to understand what upsets them and then they let it go. They cleanse their minds through releasing emotion.

- Men need to withdraw to think about what is bothering them, or they put their difficulties aside with activity (see above). Feelings are not part of a man’s problem-solving style so he is likely to tell a woman, “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
- Women seek a sounding board to process feelings that are flooding them. Solutions can interfere with emotional discharge but come automatically after releasing feelings.

- Men favor getting help as a last resort and talk about problems to find solutions or to place blame. Their pet peeve is being offered unsolicited advice.
- Women seek help at the first sign of or before a problem occurs to make sure they are on the right track. Their pet peeve is being given solutions instead of understanding.

- Men often ignore others’ problems unless they have been asked for help. In their world, it’s rude to offer help without being asked because that would imply the other person was incompetent. When a woman talks to a man about her problems, he assumes he is being asked for advice or that he is being blamed, so he will offer solutions or defend himself.
- Women monitor others’ problems to see if they are okay, offer help without being asked, and worry about how others are doing.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men give what they think is fair and assume women will do the same. They give only when asked and focus on big things such as paying rent or buying a car rather than little things like compliments or hugs. Even if a man is aware that a woman is in need, he may not know what to do unless he is told and avoid giving because it might not be “good enough.” Men need women to train them how to give and to appreciate any evidence of change. ◦ Women give freely without being asked and assume that men will do the same.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are comfortable saying “No” because they give only what they think is fair. The more freedom a man has to say “No,” the more likely he is to say “Yes.” Men assume that when a woman says “Yes” or agrees to do something, she wants to do it. ◦ Women can have difficulty saying “No.” They may say “Yes” even when something is difficult and give up their preferences to accommodate others. When women do say “No,” they may feel inclined to justify themselves with long lists of reasons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men can ask for what they want and have many models of being served. Because some men feel entitled, they tend to give orders instead of asking. Men assume a woman’s needs are being met unless she asks for what she wants. ◦ Women can have difficulty asking for what they want because of their training as caregivers. They may justify their needs and ask for things in indirect ways—”This needs to be done . . .” “Could you . . .?” Women often assume that if a man loves her, he will know what she wants without being told.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men can be resistant to therapy or making changes in themselves when they think they aren’t being accepted as they are. Their motto is: If it’s not broken, don’t fix it! ◦ Women frequently look for ways to improve themselves and enjoy having “makeovers.” Their motto is: Even if something works well, it can always be improved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are inspired to be loving when they feel needed. To be loving, men must overcome their desire for self-gratification. ◦ Women are motivated to be loving when they feel nurtured. To feel cared about, they must overcome their “need” to take care of others. Women are afraid to stop giving because they might not “have enough to offer.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men flee (withdraw) or fight (blame, criticize, yell). They typically start fights by invalidating a woman’s feelings—”It’s not important . . . Don’t worry.” When hurt, a man may hold things against a woman, give her “penalty points,” punish her, or get even. ◦ Women fold (give in) or fake it (pretend they’re not upset until they’re overwhelmed). They start fights with questions—”How could you . . . ? Why do you always . . . ?” “They interrogate with a negative tone of voice although they’re actually trying to teach.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men can be more comfortable with aggression than with sadness, hurt, fear, or guilt. ◦ Women can get stuck feeling hurt to avoid being mad. Resentments build up from suppressing anger.

These “facts” are adapted from *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray (HarperCollins, 1992).