



Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus

A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships

By John Gray

12-minute read

Synopsis

Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus (1992) is the best-selling relationship book that helps men and women understand each other and reconcile their differences. The book's author, John Gray, uses the playful metaphor of opposite sexes being from different planets, and creates a translation guide that can help men, "Martians," and women, "Venusians," to understand each other better. This guide can help them build intimacy and create stronger relationships.

Who is it for?

- Anyone interested in relationship advice
- Men or women who want practical ideas for improving communication with their partners
- People curious about the best-known relationship guide of the modern era

About the author

John Gray, PhD, is a popular speaker and author. He has written over 20 books about relationships, and has appeared on *Oprah*, *The Dr. Oz Show*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, and many more.

What's in it for me? Discover relationship insights from the best-selling relationship book of the 1990s.

Few books have made such a splash in popular culture as *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. In fact, this relationship guide – centered around a story of extraterrestrials falling in love – was the highest-ranked work of nonfiction of the 1990s.

In many ways, perceptions of relationships have changed since its publication. But are the psychologies of men and women really that dissimilar?

Relationship counselor John Gray believes they are. But he also thinks that once men and women learn to understand each other's communication styles and emotional needs, they can strengthen their relationships.

The following blinks offer practical advice on how to navigate a relationship. Some women may relate more to the Martian examples, and some men may relate more to the Venusian examples. The author refers to this as "role reversal." Furthermore, if a certain generalization does not resonate, the author advises readers simply to move on.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- how to write a Love Letter to your partner;
- the six primary love needs of men and women; and
- why men are like rubber bands and women are like waves.

Men and women show love in different ways – and love thrives when we accept our differences.

When we're in relationships, we sometimes expect our partners to act exactly like we do. But, of course, they don't. It can feel frustrating and confusing, as though our partners were from a different planet.

The author, John Gray, focuses on heterosexual relationships. The question he asks is this: How can a man and a woman alleviate tensions and build intimacy? His answer? They need to learn to respect one another's differences.

The key message here is: Men and women show love in different ways – and love thrives when we accept our differences.

Imagine that all of us come from different planets. As the title suggests, "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus." Now imagine that Martians discovered Venusians through their telescopes, and invented space travel to visit them. The Venusians welcomed the Martian visitors with open hearts. Love triumphed, and Martians and Venusians lived together in harmony –

until, one day, they flew to Earth together and were hit by selective amnesia. Martians and Venusians completely forgot they were from different planets. And love was replaced by conflict.

So what happened?

Have you heard women saying that men just never listen? Why is that? Well, when a woman – a Venusian – feels overwhelmed, she gets relief from talking through her feelings. So she turns to her partner, hoping for an empathetic ear.

A man, however, mistakenly believes his job is to solve the woman's problem. In return, he expects appreciation and love. What happens, however, is very different. The woman doesn't receive the support she was seeking, and the man ends up feeling rejected. So how do you avoid this? Well, as a man, you should simply listen to your partner and give her your undivided attention.

Unlike Venusians, upset Martians prefer to withdraw to their caves when they have a problem. A consequence of this is that he may temporarily disengage from his relationship. He doesn't want his partner to worry, though, he simply wants to be left alone.

It can be hard for a woman to respect this need. After all, on Venus, you show somebody that you love them by offering ideas for improvement. But this type of unsolicited advice can trigger a man's latent insecurities.

Still, Martians and Venusians can achieve harmony once they become accustomed to each other's methods of dealing with stress. In fact, when a man gets good at listening, he may even begin to emerge from his cave more often, eager to offer his partner extra support.

Men and women empower one another when they understand how to talk effectively, and how to motivate their partners.

Before Martians and Venusians came together, they lived through a simultaneous wave of depression. Times were rough. But then the Martians glimpsed the Venusians through a telescope. They received an invitation to visit – and finally felt needed. So the Martians came out of their depression, emerged from their caves, built a fleet of spaceships, and traveled to Venus. Anticipating the Martians' arrival, the Venusians felt cherished. Their depression lifted and they began preparing.

Here on Earth, things are similar. When a man feels needed by his partner, he's motivated to be the best he can be. He is no longer selfish; instead, he acts out of true care, not for personal gain. On the other hand, a woman is motivated by care and validation. When she feels cherished by her partner, she has more love to give.

The key message here is: Men and women empower one another when they understand how to talk effectively, and how to motivate their partners.

But what happens if men and women fail to meet each other's needs? Well, they can lose the motivation to work on their relationship. For men, this happens when they no longer feel trusted. Women can feel the same when they give support without receiving enough in return.

A man may not give enough because he worries that his partner will disapprove – he fears rejection. In fact, he needs to listen to the woman and do small things that show how he cherishes her. This knowledge can help him overcome his fears.

The woman, on the other hand, can practice being more forgiving. When she shows appreciation for things that her partner already does, he'll be encouraged to give more.

Men and women can also learn to understand each other's communication styles. For example, men can learn not to take hyperbolic expressions of feeling so literally. A statement like "We never go out" may sound like an accusation. A man might respond combatively to this, thinking that his partner is disappointed in him. In reality, of course, she just wants to go out and do something fun together.

In addition, women can practice expressing appreciation for the ways in which their partners are fulfilling them. It also helps to remember that it can be normal for a man to become silent and withdrawn. This is not a sign that he no longer cares. Instead, he may simply be retreating into his Martian cave. And he, too, can use four magic words: "I will be back."

Men and women experience different intimacy cycles that affect their abilities to give and receive love.

Conflict between men and women can be caused by something that occurs in cycles: their different, and natural, reactions to intimacy. As we've learned, men sometimes need to pull away from their relationships. Women may instinctively want to respond by getting closer. But by forcing intimacy, they may actually undermine it.

It's entirely normal for women to feel low sometimes. Men may think that this hints at a problem, and rush to fix it. But problem-solving is not what women need in those moments.

The key message here is: Men and women experience different intimacy cycles that affect their abilities to give and receive love.

These feelings – of withdrawal, for men, and of fluctuation, for women – can come about in cycles.

A man's intimacy cycle is like a rubber band: he pulls away and then snaps right back. Once men have fulfilled their desire for love and closeness, their need to feel independent returns. In a relationship, a man can lose his sense of self. By pulling away, he gets back in touch with himself and his personal boundaries.

At this point in his intimacy cycle, men often seem withdrawn, unresponsive. Their partners may feel hurt and uncared for. But women shouldn't punish men for this; instead, they should support them by respecting their space.

When a man feels the need to pull away, he can reassure a woman quite easily. He should just tell her that he needs to be alone for a bit, that he will return, and when he does, will be fully present.

A woman's intimacy cycle is different. It looks more like a wave. When a woman feels good about herself, she's very giving and really appreciates her partner. But a wave can't stay up all the time. When it's hit its peak, it will inevitably come crashing down. For women, this is when they experience the phase of low self-esteem. They can feel empty, vulnerable, and in need of emotional support.

A man may mistakenly assume that a woman's crashing wave is his fault. But he shouldn't take it personally, or tell her how to solve her problems. Instead, the man can support her by offering unconditional love.

Most importantly, women and men must not repress their intimacy cycles. If they do, men may suffer from guilt, grow passive, or become too reliant on their partner. Women, meanwhile, may end up suppressing all their feelings – negative as well as positive.

Men and women have different emotional needs and "score relationship points" in different ways.

At different times in our lives, we all need different kinds of love. But do we always recognize what sort our partner needs most?

Relationships become easier when couples understand each other's six primary love needs. The author offers a list. For men, these needs are trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval, and encouragement. Women, for their part, need caring, understanding, respect, devotion, and validation.

These primary love needs work together. One encourages another. Take caring and trust, for example. A woman needs a man to care about her feelings sincerely. When he does, she feels that she can trust him.

The key message here is: Men and women have different emotional needs and "score relationship points" in different ways.

So how can couples ensure that they're meeting each other's needs? Men can start by practicing the art of listening. Instead of getting frustrated when they're unable to solve a woman's problems, they can remember that simply listening attentively helps.

And a woman can learn to empower a man. This means accepting his imperfections and not trying to change him.

Both men and women tend to "keep score" of how well their partners meet their emotional needs. But the score sheets couldn't look more different. Men often believe that they are best off doing one big thing, like paying for a lavish vacation. They think that this will give them enough points, and that they won't have to worry about doing anything else for a while.

But that's not how it works. Women actually rate little things just the same as big things.

Women need many small expressions of love. Things like help when they're tired, not always having to plan everything, and receiving suggestions. A woman can encourage her partner to keep offering her these little things by showing appreciation whenever he does so.

For men, the main thing is to feel appreciated. Some ways to score points with a man include not criticizing him when he makes a mistake, not punishing him when he disappoints, and being happy to see him.

Ultimately, it's all about showing love – but remembering that what each sex needs in love may be very different.

When negative emotions arise, it's important to communicate lovingly – because arguments can ruin a relationship.

We probably all know couples who argue all the time. We also know couples who appear quiet on the surface, though there's a lot of hidden stress and repressed feeling behind this façade. Both extremes can quash love.

The closer we are to someone, the more easily we can hurt them, and the easier it is for them to hurt us. So, the author recommends avoiding arguments altogether. But how do you do that? Well, he suggests starting with root causes of arguments.

The key message here is: When negative emotions arise, it's important to communicate lovingly – because arguments can ruin a relationship.

Men often initiate conflict by invalidating a woman's perspective. They may offer a flippant response to her concerns – like, "What's the big deal?" or "Don't worry so much." Why do they do it? They may secretly feel criticized, rejected, unappreciated, or even infantilized – treated like a child. The antidote to this, and the way

a woman can weaken a man's impulse to argue is simply to make him feel accepted, admired, encouraged, and appreciated.

Women, on the other hand, often start arguments by communicating disapproval. For them, the root cause can be feeling unsupported, judged, or unheard – "minimized," as the author puts it. But women are less likely to argue when they feel cherished, reassured, respected, and – above all – heard.

Another way to stop an argument in its tracks is to write a *Love Letter*. Gray uses this term to describe a specific technique that helps release negative feelings that people may be covering up, and that promotes healing.

So how does it work? First, you write a Love Letter in which you convey your feelings in five sections: Anger, Sadness, Fear, Regret, and then Love. Write a few sentences about each. You can use phrases like, "I feel frustrated . . .," "I feel disappointed . . .," and "I am sorry . . ."

Then write what the author calls a *Response Letter*. It should describe the type of loving response you'd like to receive from your partner. Because our culture tends not to teach men how to respond to a woman's feelings, a Response Letter can be especially useful for men; it can help them understand what their partners need.

If you want to, you can share both letters with your partner. You don't have to do that, though: this technique can also help you find focus before you begin a discussion with them.

Love Letters are the opposite of distraction from pain: they require you to reckon with it. So remember: you should only share these letters with compassion and good intentions. And, if you are the one receiving such letters, be sure that you make the writer feel safe and respected.

Knowing how to ask for support will keep your love alive.

Remember the Mars and Venus metaphor from the previous blinks?

On Venus, everyone instinctively looks for ways to support one another. The more a Venusian loves someone, the more she wants to support that person. The motto on Venus is, "Love is never having to ask!"

Martians, on the other hand, don't automatically offer support – they need to be asked for it. This can be frustrating, because if you don't time your request correctly, you can turn a man off.

Both men and women often fail to ask their partners for the help they need. But women find requesting support more difficult than men.

The key message here is: Knowing how to ask for support will keep your love alive.

The author offers women three steps to asking a man for support. First, ask him to do the little things he already does. Be brief and direct. Afterward, show lots of appreciation.

Then you can begin step two: asking him to do things that are new to him. Choose situations in which you'd appreciate support, but will feel comfortable if you don't get it. If he says no, say, "OK." Men don't respond well to demands – they feel like you're already expecting them to fail. When men know they can refuse without provoking resentment, they're more likely to say yes later.

After practicing steps one and two, it's time for the third step: assertive asking. Once you've made your request, remain silent. He may hem and haw, but don't explain yourself. This demonstrates your trust in his process of "stretching" – that is, considering your request. If he still says no, accept it. He'll remember how gracious you were, and be more likely to meet your request next time.

Finally, keep in mind that the more intimate we are with our partners, the more our repressed negative feelings can arise. In relationships, a paradox may occur: You feel safe with your partner, so your deepest fears and unresolved issues come to the surface.

Let's say your partner is having a bad day and being extra-critical. Normally, you'd be able to brush it off, but today you're taking it personally – it's triggering memories of how your parents used to criticize you when you were little.

You may feel afraid or unsure of how to explain your reaction to your partner. In these cases, a therapist can be extremely helpful. And if you sense that your partner is dealing with past trauma, never tell him he's overreacting. Instead, provide him with acceptance, tenderness, and unconditional support.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Men and women have different emotional needs. Men need to feel trusted and empowered, while women need to feel validated and cherished. When men are stressed, they prefer to solve their problems alone. Women, on the other hand, prefer to share. Couples should avoid arguing and instead communicate lovingly. Love can blossom when men and women accept their differences and learn how to support one another.

Actionable advice:

Write a Healing Letter.

One way to process past wounds and understand how you might be projecting them into your present is by writing a Healing Letter. If your partner upsets you,

start by writing a Love Letter, which you've just learned about. As you write, ask yourself how your feelings relate to your past. You might end up realizing that it's not your partner you wish to address – it's your mother or father. If so, continue writing, but now address your parent. When you finish, share the letter with your partner to give him or her an insight into your sensitivities around your family and your past.

Got feedback?

We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to remember@blinkist.com with *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* as the subject line and share your thoughts!

What to read next: *The Five Love Languages*, by Gary D. Chapman

Now that you've learned new ways to get what you want out of your relationship, why not take communication with your partner to the next level? *The Five Love Languages* by Gary D. Chapman explores the five different ways in which couples feel and express love. Dive into this classic read to help you improve communication in your marriage and identify your love language.