CHAPTER ONE

WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Here is a scenario that plays out every night, everywhere:

Susan balances her laptop and the grocery bags she is carrying as she opens the door to the condo she shares with her husband, Marc.

“Hi, sorry I’m late. What a day!” she calls out over the sound of the TV coming from the den.

“Hi, hon,” he responds. “I’ll be there in a sec. Just want to watch this play.”

Susan drops the bags on the counter and begins to sort through the mail Marc left there. She pulls a bottle of water from the refrigerator. “I picked up some salad makings to go with the leftover turkey chili,” she calls to Marc, who saunters into the kitchen.

“Oh, I finished the chili when you called to say you’d be late. I was starving.” He leans in to give her a kiss. “Are you ready for your presentation?”
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

“I was looking forward to having it for dinner, before I do more work on the PowerPoint. I don’t feel it’s as good as it could be. My supervisor is really counting on me. I’m so anxious about this.”

“I’m sure it’s great! You’re overthinking it,” he says, trying to reassure her. “You’re such a perfectionist.”

“Not really. I just don’t feel it’s right yet. This is really important.”

“Maybe we should go out for a bite—it will relax you. I can skip the game.”

“Are you kidding? I have too much on my mind, and I want to get a good night’s rest.”

“Well, we could order in—”

“I’m trying to eat healthy food—pizza won’t do it. I’ll make scrambled eggs or an omelet and toast. I could use some comfort food.”

“What ever . . .”

“By the way, did you remember to pick up my black pantsuit?”

When she sees Marc’s expression, her blood boils. “I can’t believe you forgot. I planned to wear that suit tomorrow.”

“You have a walk-in closet packed with clothes—”

“That’s not the point—I even reminded you.”

“Well, I’ll get up early and be there when the dry cleaner’s opens in the morning—I was too tired to do another thing.”

“Just forget it. I want to leave early.”

“I’m really sorry, Susan—it slipped my mind.”

“Right. Thanks a lot. All I wanted was a little help so I can be prepared for an important day tomorrow.”
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

It is clear from this exchange that the evening ahead will not be relaxing for Susan and Marc, who are headed for a fight. At the very best, they will certainly not be in the mood for romance. What happened between Susan and Marc demonstrates friction points that are common in relationships today. Susan’s high-pressure job, her expectations regarding her husband’s contribution around the house, his forgetfulness, his dismissal of her anxiety, and his attempt to offer solutions to her problems make for an explosive situation.

As you read Why Mars and Venus Collide, you will learn to recognize the assumptions we make every day that fail to take into account how different men and women really are.

We need to challenge our assumptions about how men and women should be and begin to appreciate in practical terms who we are, what we can offer each other, and how we can team up to solve the new problems we face today. We can create a new blueprint for male and female roles that can bring us closer together harmoniously.

Our biggest problem at home is that women expect men to react and behave the way women do, while men continue to misunderstand what women really need. Without a correct and positive understanding of these differences, most couples gradually begin to feel they are on their own rather than relying on the support they felt at the beginning of their relationship.

---

Women mistakenly expect men to react and behave the way women do, while men continue to misunderstand what women really need.

---

Men love to solve problems, but when their efforts are misdirected and go unappreciated, they lose interest over time. When this
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

challenge is correctly understood, men become much more skillful in helping women cope with the burden of increasing stress in their lives. This book helps to explain this dilemma in a way that most men can understand and appreciate. Even if a woman’s partner doesn’t read this book, there is still hope. Why Mars and Venus Collide is not just about men understanding women. It is also about women understanding themselves and learning how to ask effectively for the support they need. Women will learn new ways to communicate their needs, but more important, women readers will learn how to avoid pushing away the support men already want to give.

Here’s another scenario:

Joan is cleaning up the remains of the children’s dinner when she hears Steve’s car pull into the garage. He comes through the mudroom, having an urgent conversation on his cell phone.

“I can’t believe they did that. The papers were supposed to be filed at the end of next week. How are we supposed to pull it together by this Friday? Think we can get an extension until Monday? Do your best. Let me know.”

He drops his briefcase and slouches against the counter, ready to check his BlackBerry messages.

“Your day sounds as crazy as mine,” Joan says. “Would you like to have some wine? We can sit and talk. So much happened today.”

“Wine—er, no,” he says, distracted by a text message. “I think I’ll just grab a beer and watch the news for a bit.”

“I couldn’t help overhearing your conversation.” Joan pulls a bottle of beer from the refrigerator for Steve. “Does this mean you won’t be able to go to Kyle’s hockey
tournament this weekend? He’ll be so disappointed. And I have to take Melanie to her dance lesson, and Jake to basketball practice and tutoring. I can’t be in three places at once.”

“I don’t want to think about it right now. It might not even be an issue. If we can’t get that date postponed, I’ll have all the time in the world this weekend, but I’ll be a basket case. We’ll work it out—don’t worry.”

“But I have commitments, too. When do you think you’ll know?”

“I don’t think we can do anything about it until the morning.”

“What would you like for dinner? The kids were so ravenous, they devoured the chicken.”

“Doesn’t matter—whatever you’d like.”

“Well, we could have pasta or—”

“Really, Joan,” Steve cuts her off. “Whatever you want. I don’t want to think about it.”

“Lovely—I’m glad you appreciate the meals I shop for and prepare—and I worked today. I’ll throw something together for us.” She opens a cupboard and surveys its contents. “When we’re done, Kyle needs some help with his algebra. His grades are starting to suffer, because he’s at practice all the time—”

“All I want to think about now is that soft couch and a droning anchor.”

“Dad, you’re home!” Little Jake runs into the kitchen with his new basketball. “Want to play catch?”

“Hi, buddy!” Steve greets his son wearily.

“Not now, Jake,” Joan says. “Your dad is exhausted. And you should be doing your homework!”

“You guys are never any fun!”
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Joan and Steve look at each other and know their son is right. There seems to be no downtime in their lives to kick back and to enjoy the fruits of all their hard work. So many couples today, like Joan and Steve, experience increasing frustration and confusion as they cope with the stress of their day-to-day lives.

In this scenario, rather than considering each other’s unique needs to de-stress after a demanding day, Joan and Steve are locked into their own Mars/Venus coping mechanisms, which causes considerable friction between them.

Our Differences Are Intensified by Stress

Relationships are suffering because men and women deal with stress differently. Men are from Mars and women are from Venus, and our differences are intensified by stress. When we do not understand our different coping mechanisms, Mars and Venus collide.

Our greatest challenge today is that men and women cope with stress differently.

Since men and women do not respond to stress in the same way, the kinds of support we require to relieve stress differ. What helps men release stress can be the opposite of what helps women feel better. While he withdraws into his cave to forget the problems of his day, she wants to interact and discuss things. When she shares her frustrations, he offers solutions, but she is simply looking for some empathy. Without a clear understanding of their unique needs and reactions to stress, they will inevitably feel unsupported and unappreciated. By remembering that men are from
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Mars and women are from Venus, we can overcome this tendency to collide and instead come together in mutually supportive ways. Rather than being another source of stress, our relationships can be a safe haven in which we can expect support, comfort, and ease. We need to understand our differences if we are to support each other in overcoming this challenge. This new understanding of how men and women react differently to stress will allow our relationships to thrive rather than just survive.

Recent scientific research, which is covered in the next two chapters, reveals that these different stress reactions are actually hardwired into our brains, and to a great extent are determined by the balance of our hormones. These reactions become more extreme under greater stress. In Why Mars and Venus Collide, we will use these scientific insights along with common sense to guide our way. Being aware of our innate biochemical differences frees us from the unhealthy compulsion to change our partners and eventually leads us to celebrate our differences. Instead of resenting each other, we can laugh at our differences. In practical terms, we cannot change the ways our bodies react to stress, but we can change the way we respond to our partner’s reactions to stress. Instead of resisting, resenting, or even rejecting our partners, we can learn new ways to provide the support our partners need as well as to get the support we need.

When hopelessness turns back to hope, the love in our hearts can flow again. We all intuitively know that love includes acceptance and forgiveness, but sometimes we just can’t find it. With these insights, you will discover a new level of acceptance and love that will transform your life. Instead of trying to change what cannot be changed, you will be able to focus on what is possible to change. In this process, you will discover that you have the power to bring out the best in your partner.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Rather than dwell on what you are not getting or what you don’t want, you will begin to focus on what you do want and what you can get.

This important shift will provide a new foundation for you to create a lifetime of love. The scenarios in this chapter demonstrate some of the many ways men and women commonly collide. See if you can relate to any of these common complaints or hot spots I hear when counseling both single or married women and men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPLAINTS FROM VENUS</th>
<th>COMPLAINTS FROM MARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He leaves things all around the house. I am tired of cleaning up after him.</td>
<td>There is always something that I haven’t done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We both go to work. When we get home, why doesn’t he pitch in and help more?</td>
<td>She always finds something new to complain about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She wants everything done right now. Why can’t she just relax?</td>
<td>She sits in front of the TV while I do everything. I am not his personal maid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t believe he forgets everything. I can’t depend on him for anything that matters to me.</td>
<td>I can’t believe she remembers all my mistakes and continues to bring them up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to juggle so many things, and he doesn’t seem to care or even want to help.</td>
<td>When I offer to help, she always finds something wrong in my suggestions. Why bother?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— 8 —
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPLAINTS FROM VENUS</th>
<th>COMPLAINTS FROM MARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The only time he helps me is when I ask. Why can’t he just pitch in like me?</td>
<td>She expects me to be a mind reader and know what she wants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I try to talk with him, he is either distracted or he continues to interrupt with solutions.</td>
<td>When I take time to relax or spend time with my friends, she complains that we are not spending enough time together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When he does talk, he goes on and on and is not interested in what I have to say. I wish he would give me less advice and help more.</td>
<td>I help out around the house, but she is still exhausted. What I do is never acknowledged or appreciated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He becomes so moody and irritated. I don’t know what to do to help. He just shuts me out of his life.</td>
<td>I never know when she is going to erupt with a list of complaints. I feel like I have to walk on eggshells around her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He used to be more affectionate and interested. Now he ignores me unless he wants something.</td>
<td>She is always complaining about something. Nothing can make her happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He doesn’t even notice how I look anymore. Is it too much to expect an occasional compliment?</td>
<td>She makes such a big deal out of things. Why does she have to get so emotional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t talk about how I feel and what I think we should do without him feeling as if I am controlling him and telling him what to do.</td>
<td>She either complains that I work too hard, or that we don’t have enough money. There is no way I can win.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We never have time for romance anymore. He is either working, watching TV, gone, or sleeping.</td>
<td>When I am in the mood, she is either too tired or overwhelmed with too many other things to do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPLAINTS FROM VENUS</th>
<th>COMPLAINTS FROM MARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The only time he touches me is when he wants sex.</td>
<td>I feel like I have to jump through hoops to have sex with her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend all day with the kids, and then he comes home and wants to tell me what I do wrong.</td>
<td>When I spend time with the kids, she corrects what I do. She says she wants a break, but then she keeps telling me what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every time we talk about finances, we get into a fight. What I say doesn’t seem to matter.</td>
<td>When we go over the bills, she questions me about the way I spend money. I don’t want her telling me what to do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do any of these complaints sound familiar? They are only the tip of the iceberg, but they represent a new trend in relationships. If we can see our differences in a new light, we will not only enrich communication in our relationships but also make our relationships a solid base to support all the other areas of our lives. Equipped with new insight, we can actually come closer together while coping with stress instead of being torn apart.

Why We Are Stressed

A dramatic new source of stress in our lives during the past fifty years has been the shift in the roles of men and women. A man used to go to work to provide for his family. The sense of pride and accomplishment he felt, along with the love and support he received when he returned home, helped him to cope with the many stresses of his day.

Women used to spend most of their days creating a beautiful home and family life, while nurturing friends and contributing to the community. Though being a homemaker was demanding, having
time to focus on what she had to do enabled a woman to pace her life to minimize stress. There was men’s work and women’s work. Any additional demands on her partner beyond being a good provider were few, and usually involved heavy lifting.

With today’s rising costs, this lifestyle is no longer a choice for all women. More often than not, a woman is expected to contribute financially to provide for a family. At the same time, the women’s movement has awakened women and inspired many to find a fulfilling career in order to develop all their talents. When a woman returns home from work feeling responsible for creating a beautiful home and nurturing her family, she has to do this around the demands of her job. This is a new stress, and it requires a new kind of support. No wonder women feel so overwhelmed as they balance the demands of work and home.

Having a job or career is often no longer a choice for most women, but a necessity.

Men need more support as well. Instead of coming home to rest and recover from a stressful day, a man faces a wife and family who need more from him. His wife expects more help from him to run the household and to participate in their children’s busy schedules. No longer enjoying the sense of accomplishment that comes from being a provider, he returns home to his next job. He attempts to provide some measure of support, but he has not had the time he needs to recover from his daily stress. Eventually he, too, becomes tired and irritable. After tending to the many duties of domestic life, there is little time or inclination for couples to concentrate on their relationship. This new male-female dilemma has created an undercurrent of stress that affects all areas of our lives.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Even when a woman chooses to stay at home, she is often too isolated to get the support she needs. More than half of all married women work, and the pool of available friends and organized activities for the nonworking woman has shrunk. In addition, work demands on a man who is the sole supporter of the family are extreme, because raising a family on a single salary has become increasingly difficult. He has neither the time nor energy for his marriage or relationship to be his top priority, to cater to the needs of a partner who seems to be demanding too much of him.

Today, at home we are dealing with the side effects of women becoming more like men in the workplace. Success in the workplace often requires an enormous sacrifice for most women. Without enough time during the day to nurture their feminine side, women commonly become tired, drained, and resentful. At home, natural feelings of comfort, ease, appreciation, and grace are often overshadowed by anxiety, urgency, and exhaustion.

Without new skills for coping with this stress and nurturing their emotional needs, women inevitably expect too much from their male counterparts. This puts an even greater stress on their personal relationships. Habitually and instinctively acting out outdated roles that were created in a far distant past for a different world, both men and women today relate in ways that increase stress rather than lessen it.

Women Want Men to Become Like Women

What we have learned from the workplace is that women can do any job that a man can do. Just because a woman is different and may resolve problems in a unique manner, that does not mean she cannot be just as competent as a man. There is no need for a woman to change who she is to get respect in the workplace or at home.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Being equals does not mean that we have to be the same. To give equal respect, we must recognize that we are different and support those differences. Respect is honoring who a person is and being open to appreciate what he or she has to offer.

Just as women should not have to change themselves to be respected and appreciated in the workplace, men should not have to change who they are at home. Given their hours working outside the home or the increased demand on them as mothers and homemakers, women undeniably need more help at home, but that need should not require men to change their nature.

In our collective fantasy of an ideal relationship, men still want to return home to a happy partner, who has prepared dinner in their magazine-perfect home and who is responsive to his every sexual desire. Though most women today lack the time, energy, and inclination to live this fantasy, they have their own unrealistic expectations. When women today return home from work, they often wish a loving and supportive wife was there waiting for them.

Women today are so tired and stressed, they too want a happy wife to greet them at home.

This trend in relationships is creating a new area of conflict. In various ways and to different degrees, women want men to become like women. They want men to share equal responsibility at home
and in the relationship. It is no longer enough for a man to be a good provider. If she works outside the home, then to be fair, he should contribute to work inside the home and be more supportive in the relationship. If she is doing traditional “men’s work,” then he should do traditional “women’s work.”

This sounds good, but there is another point of view. Just as women want men to change, men want women not to change. Most men, to some degree, want their partners to be the domestic divas their mothers were. A man wants to come home and be supported by his loving wife. Since he is doing what his father did, his wife should do what his mother did. Oblivious to how much it takes to organize a smooth-running household, he expects the impossible from her.

Unrealistic expectations make changing gender roles nearly impossible.

As men cling to old expectations, women are creating new expectations that are equally unrealistic. To various degrees, women want a sympathetic partner, eager to talk about the stresses of the day, who will share all the domestic responsibilities and duties. She also wants her partner to be attentive and romantic, planning dates for her pleasure after solving the many unscheduled problems and emergencies that inevitably arise in family life. In short, she wants a wife to share with her all the domestic routines, and then she wants a husband who has the energy and motivation to romance her after doing all the things men usually do, like fixing things and handling emergencies. As men cling to old expectations, women are creating new expectations. These expectations are understandable but unrealistic.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

As men cling to old expectations, women are creating new expectations that are equally unrealistic.

Just as women can’t do it all, men can’t either. Women today carry a burden twice that of their mothers. They not only feel the new economic and social pressure to work outside the home, but they also experience an ancient genetic pressure to nest. A woman’s nurturing instincts and nesting urges produce needs and standards developed by a long lineage of women.

Returning home after work causes most women’s stress levels to increase.

Most men appreciate a beautiful and orderly home, yet they can easily return to an untended house and simply relax while watching TV. In his world, relaxing comes before tending to the home. After a long day at work, a man takes a deep breath and begins to relax at just the thought of going home. When a woman returns home, her stress levels go up. Every cell in her body says, “This house must be cleaned up before we can relax.”

Even if she wanted to rest, she couldn’t. Her mind is too busy with standards that she must uphold. This is also true of women who do not work outside the home. In a woman’s mind, there is a long to-do list. Until it is finished, it is very hard for her to rest, relax, or do something simply because she enjoys it.

Women are the CEOs of their homes, organizing the household and determining what has to be accomplished. A woman has to notice what needs to be done and then enlist her partner’s help.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Most husbands will happily do what they are asked to do eventually, but it is rare on Mars to notice that something needs to be done. Sometimes it takes so much nagging to get something accomplished, and when it is done, the task has been performed so halfheartedly that she begins to feel it’s easier to do it all herself. Women do not understand why their partners don’t feel the same motivation to share the responsibilities of the home, and they resent it.

Under stress, women feel the pressure of a never-ending to-do list.

Women are the custodians of love, family, and relationship. When women stop being women and are too stressed to carry out these functions, we are all lost. Women remind men of what is important in life. Women hold the wisdom of the heart and inspire men to act from their hearts. Men can have great vision, but women provide the meaningful foundation. When women are not happy, no one is happy.

When women become men, men lose purpose, meaning, and inspiration in life.

To resolve this source of conflict, men and women need to understand each other better. Men need to recognize what women are going through. A woman already feels enough internal pressure about domestic order. Any extra pressure from him can easily push her over the edge. At the same time, women need to
recognize and understand what men can and cannot do to be more supportive.

How to Ask for a Man’s Support

Most men are pitching in more with domestic duties when their wives work outside the home to provide for the family. For two-career couples, if the man is not helping out enough, the answer is to ask for his help in very specific ways instead of criticizing and rejecting him. Do not just expect a man to see everything that a woman might think needs to be done, and then to take action. Routine jobs around the house are not urgent in a man’s estimation.

One approach that works most of the time is to ask for his help in specific terms. Men love projects. Projects are specific. They have a beginning and an end. He can determine what he is going to do, how he is going to do it, and most important, when he is going to do it. Men will often do what they consider is most important first. When given a project to accomplish, he also senses that his efforts will not be taken for granted. All these ingredients help to give him energy and motivation. Here are some examples of how a woman can ask for a man’s support in specific instead of general terms:

If she is tired that night, she can say, “Would you please make dinner tonight, or pick up some takeout?”

If there are piles of laundry, she can say, “Would you help me fold this laundry tonight?”

If she doesn’t feel like cleaning up the kitchen, she can say, “Would you do the dishes tonight, please? I need to take a break.”

Or if she wants help with the dishes, instead of just expecting him to pitch in, she can simply say, “Would you bring over the plates?” or “Would you wash the pots and pans tonight? I would really appreciate the help.”
If she needs something from the grocery store, instead of doing it herself, she could ask, “Would you please drive to the grocery and pick up these items on this list?”

In each of these examples she is giving him a project that has a beginning and an end. Men tend to work best on projects rather than in routines, since routines have no clear beginning or end. When a man is tired, a domestic routine is rarely a priority, as it is for a woman. Even if he is tired, a project with a definite end point or solution will give him extra energy, particularly if a woman’s tone of voice or facial expression while making the request indicates that she will appreciate the result of his actions. When he does something to help her rather than because she expects or thinks he should do it, he then feels closer to her and is more willing to help out in the future. This willingness, based on satisfying many of her little requests or projects, actually gives him more energy at home to provide even more support. Eventually, he will get in the habit of helping more and more.

---

Men tend to work best on projects rather than in routines.

---

Realistic Expectations Lead to Real Love

Most men are not equipped to be the domestic/communicative/romantic partners women fantasize about. Although some men attempt to fulfill that fantasy, in the end both partners become frustrated and disappointed. He may try for years, but eventually he runs out of steam. Some men try during the dating stage and then give up, because they can’t continue to meet their partner’s expectations. When this is the case, a man may suddenly lose interest and not even know why. He is just not that interested in her, not because
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

she is not right for him, but because he is trying to meet unrealistic expectations. Lucky is the woman who is able to appreciate what a man can offer, for she continues to get more and more.

A man loses interest when he senses that he can’t continue to meet a woman’s expectations.

Likewise, most women are not equipped to be the domestic/communicative/romantic partners men want. It is unrealistic for a man to expect a woman to create a beautiful home without help and appreciation, always to be in a good mood, never to be needy, and to be romantically available at all times. Many women try to fulfill this fantasy but feel cheated and betrayed when their partners do not return their love.

When men begin to understand a woman’s new needs, they are naturally motivated to help out more. Men who make this change must make sure that they take the time they need for themselves as well; otherwise they will both end up overwhelmed and exhausted. Lucky is the man who is able to meet his own needs and then respond to a woman’s need for help around the house, good communication, and regular romance, for he comes home to a happy woman.

Fortunately, reality is much more wonderful than fantasy. We seek real love, and if we have the right expectations, we can find it. Together we can make small but significant changes to support each other more effectively. Adjusting, updating, and correcting our expectations can free us from feeling victimized or powerless to get what we need.

In addition, these new insights about our differences help us to recognize and remember the real problem: increasing stress. Instead of blaming our partners, we can blame stress. It is often a mistake to
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

conclude we are too different to make a relationship work. The truth is, stress can drive a wedge between us. By learning how to support ourselves and our partners at times of greater stress, we can learn to lower stress levels. When stress is removed from the formula, our differences are never a problem. When stress is reduced, our differences are a major source of fulfillment.

When stress is gone, our differences are never a problem.

Men and women don’t complain about their partners when they are feeling good. Problems and demands emerge when we are under stress. Our unrealistic expectations surface when we attempt to get our partner’s help to lower our stress. With a new understanding of how men and women experience and cope with stress differently, we can address the real problem in relationships today.

The problem is never just our partner, but our own inability to cope with stress. When we learn how we can deal with stress more effectively and help our partners cope, the grip of our unrealistic demands is easily released. We are then able to enjoy the feelings of acceptance, trust, and appreciation. It is only then that our relationships can thrive.

The problem is never just our partner but our own inability to cope with stress.

If a man was to yield to the pressure of a woman’s unrealistic expectations, he could become a domestic partner, but within a
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

few years all the romance and passion would be gone. When a man becomes more like a woman in a relationship, he will inevitably become overwhelmed, exhausted, and stressed.

To yield to a woman’s unrealistic expectations will eventually exhaust a man.

This role reversal can easily put a damper on romantic feelings. If a man becomes more feminine, the attraction she felt for him in the beginning is lost. Instead of becoming more sensitive, men need to become sensitive to the needs of women. This is what women are really looking for from a man. Certainly a man can be sensitive, but to meet her needs, he must consider her needs and not just his own.

Instead of becoming more sensitive, men need to become sensitive to the needs of women.

When a man displays a greater sensitivity regarding his own needs and feelings, a woman begins to experience maternal feelings rather than sexual attraction. Instead of feeling cared for, she feels her motherly instinct to care for him. Though this feels loving, it does not promote romantic feelings. On the other hand, when a woman displays sensitivity with appreciation and trust for a man’s support, it dramatically increases his sexual interest in her. A woman’s sensitivity, which gives her the ability to enjoy and appreciate the little things in life, is a major turn-on to men.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

A woman’s sensitivity, which gives her the ability to enjoy and appreciate the little things in life, is a major turn-on to men.

With new insights about what women need, a man can help a woman cope with stress without increasing his own stress. A man can give the domestic/communicative/romantic support a woman needs, but in ways that work for him as well. Without becoming like a woman, he can provide the support she needs even when it doesn’t look the way she thought it should.

A woman can learn ways to lower her partner’s stress by helping him feel successful in helping her. Though a man does appreciate domestic support, positive communication, and romance, what is most important to him is to feel he is providing his partner with some measure of fulfillment. Instead of thinking of direct ways to support him, she can actually do less and simply appreciate what he does for her. This works well, because women are already doing way too much. Wouldn’t it be great if a woman could do less, and a man would feel more supported? Well, it’s true. It is such a new concept for women that it takes a little time to sink in.

When a man takes action to support a woman’s needs, she feels supported, and her stress goes down. But the opposite is true on Mars. When a woman does less for him and allows him to do more for her, his stress is lessened. A man’s stress is reduced when he feels successful in meeting her needs. Instead of giving more to him, she just needs to help him be successful in meeting her needs.

By giving less, a woman can actually be more supportive of her partner.
“Helping him help her” as a strategy for success seems very foreign to most women. They don’t imagine that they are pushing away his support, but in many ways they are. Every time she complains, every time she makes demands, every time she gets upset, every time she doesn’t ask for help, every time she resents having to ask for support, she may be giving him the message that he is not a success. Unknowingly, she is increasing rather than lowering his stress and ultimately pushing his support away.

In short, “helping him help her” involves asking him for support instead of just expecting him to give it, and then requires that she acknowledges how much she authentically appreciates whatever she gets. This is achieved by feeling and being, not by doing. Her “feeling response” to his actions is much more important than anything she can ever directly do for him. By being grateful for what she is getting in her relationship, she is actually helping him to succeed. On the other hand, when a woman focuses on what she is not getting, she gives the message that he is not a success, and his stress goes up. He then has less to give. She is pushing away his love when she focuses on what she is not getting.

A woman’s response to his actions is much more important than anything she can ever directly do for him.

This simple principle can produce immediate results in any relationship. There are endless ways women fail to acknowledge a man’s sincere desire to provide his support, just as there are countless ways a man can respond to her needs to provide her with greater fulfillment. Finding authentic ways to give a man the message that his efforts are appreciated does not involve the old-fashioned
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

notion of sacrificing her needs to avoid demanding anything of him. Instead, it requires a greater responsibility to fulfill her own needs and to learn how to ask a man for support in small increments that are realistic and reasonable.

Even when a woman takes time for herself, she can help a man feel like a success in a relationship. When she is happy, he will always take credit and feel better. Without this insight, a woman would never think that taking time for herself could actually help her partner. When men take time for themselves, women often feel neglected. For this reason, a woman might find it hard to believe that taking time for herself actually supports him in giving more to her. Understanding our differences provides a completely new direction for men and women that not only brings out the best in our partners but makes relationships so much easier.

Why Women Need Men

Fully receiving a man’s support is not as simple today as it was in the past. Women today are confused when it comes to the role a man can play in their lives. She either needs him to be more like a woman, or she feels she doesn’t need him at all. Neither approach works. Being more independent and self-sufficient, modern women want a man to share their lives with but don’t really feel the need for a man. They want a man, but to need him makes them cringe. When they do need him, they often want him to be someone he is not and cannot be.

Ultimately, men want to feel needed and are most attracted to a woman who appreciates what they have to offer. When a man is needed, he can make a difference. A woman who can appreciate what a man has to offer automatically reduces the stress in his life. Women who clearly feel the need for a man attract them like bees to honey.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Women who are very successful and independent often remain alone, because they don’t realize why they need a man. Statistically, the more financially successful a woman is, the lower her chances of getting married, and the greater the possibility of divorce. Most of these divorces are initiated by the woman. These statistics change as women learn to feel their need for a man and appreciate what he can offer. It is challenging to appreciate someone you do not think you need. When a woman doesn’t open herself to a man in this way, she is pushing him away and increasing the stress in his life.

You can only appreciate what you have when you authentically feel a need for it.

Independent women don’t have to give up their freedoms to feel their need for a man. You can be independent about some things and depend on your partner for other things. It doesn’t have to be all or nothing. Some women watched their mothers deny their needs and submit themselves to please their husbands. They have vowed never to allow that to happen to them. By seeking a life of complete independence, they, too, are denying their needs and following in their mothers’ footsteps. To avoid submitting themselves in a relationship, they have denied their needs altogether.

For other women, the process of surviving or trying to get ahead in their careers distracts them from getting in touch with their feelings and need for a relationship. To get ahead in the workplace, they have to express their more independent selves and have difficulty shifting back to their feminine side that easily feels the need for a man. These women often think they need a more feeling or sensitive man, but they really need to connect with their own more feminine side.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

If he is more sensitive, such a woman might imagine that it will be safer for her feminine side to emerge. She has fantasies of talking with her partner the way she would with a girlfriend or with a wise mentor. Unfortunately, when a woman gets a “more feeling man,” it doesn’t help her connect with her own feelings. The more sensitive a man is, the more their conversations will center on him and not on her. A needy man is a huge turnoff to women. After a while, she doesn’t even want to talk with him, because she will have to listen to more of his sensitive feelings or his opinionated tirades. When she thinks she needs a more sensitive and vulnerable man, what she really needs is to express her more vulnerable self. What she really needs is to be heard, which all men can learn to do.

A needy man is a huge turnoff to women.

Other women, who are able to feel their needs but don’t understand how men are different, expect them to react and respond the way a woman would. For these women, determining what they need in a relationship and what is possible can be very confusing. The days of women needing a man just for survival and security are gone.

So what do modern women need? When I ask this question, single women often have no idea. At first, they don’t even want to admit that they need a man. They prefer to have a partner. They want to share their lives with someone, but they don’t need a man. Needing a man would make these women feel weak rather than just feminine.

Women need to rediscover the power and strength of their femininity. Women don’t have to be like men to be powerful and get what they want and need. Likewise, men don’t have to become like women to be loving and supportive in their relationships.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Many successful women are repelled by the idea that they might need a man.

Needing a partner is not a weakness. It is why we partner up. Men and women just have different primary needs. Men need to feel needed, and women need to feel they are not alone. Just as a woman is happiest when she feels she is getting what she needs from her partner, a man is happiest when he feels successful in meeting his partner’s needs. This is an important distinction. We certainly need each other, but for different reasons.

Men need to feel needed, and women need to feel they are not alone.

Feeling that he makes a difference reduces a man’s stress. It is what gives men a reason for living. On the other hand, feeling that she is not alone and that she can get what she needs reduces a woman’s stress. When a woman feels she can open up and depend on someone, her stress in life is greatly reduced. When a woman is unable to recognize her needs or get them met, she increasingly feels distress in her life, and then wonders why she doesn’t sleep well at night.

Independent and successful women often ask me why their husbands are so tired. With this new insight, it becomes clear. If she is unaware of her need for him, then he is not empowered by her love and appreciation. Instead, he becomes exhausted in her presence.

When a woman learns to feel her feminine side and identify her true needs for a man, her appreciation can bring out the best in
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

her partner. Rather than becoming tired when he interacts with her, he is energized.

Many women today are under so much stress that they are simply unable to feel their needs. Under stress, women tend to reach out and feel the needs of others rather than their own. With a little time and exploration, these strong and independent women discover and admit to a variety of needs, most commonly:

- She needs a man for romantic companionship.
- She needs a man to be faithful.
- She needs a man for simple companionship. She doesn’t want to come home to a big, beautiful, empty house or apartment.
- She needs a man for financial backup—someone who could support her if she couldn’t work.
- She needs a man around because she feels safer—two people are twice as good as one.
- She needs to have a partner to share fun times with.
- She needs a partner to share with who cares about her well-being.
- She needs a partner who misses her when he is away.
- She needs a partner to help raise the family if they have children.
- She needs a partner if she doesn’t want to have children alone.
- She needs a partner to have a family.
- She needs a partner to share the responsibilities of caring for the nest.
- She needs a partner to fix things when they break. She doesn’t want to do her own plumbing anymore.
- She needs a partner’s support to feel really great.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

The truth is, women today need men more than ever. They just need men in different ways. Men can provide special support that can assist women in coping with the new stresses of modern life, but most women don’t know how to get this support or to appreciate it properly when it is available. With a greater awareness of her needs, a woman can begin to appreciate what she is getting and focus less on what she is not getting. With a more realistic vision of what is possible rather than the Hollywood fantasy of a man who fulfills her every wish, she is better able to appreciate his efforts and not take for granted all the things her partner already does provide.

When she learns to appreciate what a man already offers, a woman holds the key to asking for more in small reasonable increments to get the support she needs and deserves. This is not only a formula for success, but it is also what real love is all about.

I remember when this idea became very clear to me about six years into my own marriage with my wife, Bonnie. After some particularly great lovemaking, I commented, “This was as good as it was in the beginning.”

Her response taught me something important. She said that making love that night was actually better than in the beginning, because, as she explained, “In the beginning, we didn’t really know each other. Now you have seen the best of me and the worst of me, and you still adore me. That is real love.”

Bonnie helped me to have a richer understanding of lasting love. Love is not a fantasy of perfection in which our every need is met, but sharing a life together, striving to meet each other’s needs as best we can. Forgiving our partners for their mistakes and accepting their limitations can be just as fulfilling as appreciating their many gifts and successes. Just as it was difficult for her to live with a man who didn’t always measure up to her expectations, it
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

was challenging for me to accept that I could not and did not provide everything her fantasy of a perfect relationship included.

Just as women need to let go of expecting men to be perfect, men need to let go of expecting women to think we are perfect. Together we have learned that our life does not have to be perfect for us to connect and support each other. Real love does not demand perfection but actually embraces imperfection. Sharing this kind of love enriches all aspects of our lives and brings increasing fulfillment.

Real love does not demand perfection
but actually embraces imperfection.

Intimate and truly loving relationships make up the fabric of a fulfilling life. The relentless demands in our lives to have more, go faster, and do better can distract us from this simple truth. The social changes that have expanded our freedoms have also created the need for new ways to keep harmony in our most intimate relationships. In the pages that follow, you will gain new insight, allowing you and your partner to come together in harmony, ease, love, and mutual fulfillment.
The first step in understanding and accepting our differences is to recognize that men and women are actually hardwired to be different. The way our brains are structured and function is not the same. Although some of our differences result from parental or social conditioning, we will explore how and why we are biologically different.

Acknowledging these hardwired gender differences helps us to identify and release our unrealistic expectations that our partners be more like us and to accept that we are not the same. At first, these differences may seem to be a hindrance, but once you fully understand the biology, it becomes clear that we complement each other perfectly. In fact, it is as if men and women were made for each other.

If we cannot find a way to embrace the differences and to achieve a balance, sustaining a relationship is difficult. Many couples never develop their relationships beyond dating. Others make a commitment, but over time, their differences erode their intimacy, and they split up. In these instances, both believe that there was not
enough common ground to make a relationship work. Though sometimes couples are not compatible, usually their problems derive from not understanding their differences. Here are some expressions of how we feel when we don’t understand our differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHE SAYS:</th>
<th>HE SAYS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“He was just too stubborn to change.”</td>
<td>“She used to appreciate everything I did, but gradually she wanted to change me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He was so self-centered. He wasn’t even interested in my life or my feelings.”</td>
<td>“She was too needy. Everything was about her.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He became so cold and detached. I didn’t feel safe to open up with him.”</td>
<td>“Everything was about her feelings. I felt completely controlled.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I used to be number one, but as soon as he got me, work became his number-one priority.”</td>
<td>“Gradually, the kids became more important than me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He never listens to what I say. All he wants to do is solve my problems.”</td>
<td>“She gets so emotional and then makes no sense at all.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He was afraid of intimacy. Every time we would get closer, he would pull away.”</td>
<td>“She was so responsive in the beginning. Now I feel like I have to fill out a form before we have sex.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Everything started out fine, and then he changed.”</td>
<td>“She was too high-maintenance. Whatever I did, it was never enough. There was always something I did wrong.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you have read my previous books, you know that the root cause of these complaints is a lack of understanding and acceptance of our basic differences. They are certainly legitimate complaints, but they emerge because we fail to take our differences into account.

If you have ever said, felt, or heard your partner utter one of the criticisms listed above, your resistance to natural differences may be at the root of many of your collisions. When you resist rather than support your partner’s needs when he or she is coping with stress, you will evoke the worst of your partner’s character. If you are single, this insight might make you aware that you have alienated a potential partner or that your behavior may have been misinterpreted by another. Whether you are married or single, a new understanding and acceptance of how we are supposed to be different will enable you to bring out the best in your partner and yourself as well.

Married couples with good relationships often report that they have stopped trying to change each other. But acceptance of our differences does not mean accepting any behavior, however negative. Instead, loving acceptance provides a foundation from which we can work with our differences, so that both partners get what they need most. Accepting our differences is not always easy, especially when we are under stress, but the advice in these pages can help to smooth the way.

Radically Different Responses to Stress

The responses to stress are very different on Mars and Venus. Men tend to shift gears, disengage, and forget their problems, while women are compelled to connect, ask questions, and share problems. This simple distinction can be extremely destructive in a relationship if it is not appreciated and respected.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

When a man needs time alone or doesn’t want to talk about his day, it doesn’t mean that he cares less for his partner. When a woman wants to talk about her day, it doesn’t mean she is excessively needy or high-maintenance. His detached manner doesn’t mean he doesn’t care, and her stronger emotional reactions do not mean she doesn’t appreciate all that he does to provide for her.

If a man forgets a woman’s need or a woman remembers his mistakes, it doesn’t mean they don’t love each other.

By understanding our differences, we can correctly interpret our partners’ behavior and feelings and give our partners what they need most, which will inevitably bring out their best side. Instead of seeing our different stress reactions as a problem, we need to recognize that our attempts to change our partners are most often the real problem.

Instead of seeing our different stress reactions as a problem, we need to recognize that our attempts to change our partners are most often the real problem.

Understanding the biological reasons for the different ways we perceive and behave in the world enables us to be realistic about what to expect from our partners.
Skills Are Different on Mars and Venus

As you have already noticed in daily life, men and women behave, think, feel, and react in dissimilar ways. It is obvious that men and women do not process language, emotion, and information in the same way. But now we have a way to make sense of this difference. Although happily married couples have already figured this out, finally the academic and scientific community has verified our different gender-related tendencies.

Edward O. Wilson, a world-famous sociobiologist from Harvard University, has systematically observed our gender tendencies. He found that women are more empathetic and security-seeking than men and have more developed verbal and social skills. In comparison, men tend to be more independent, aggressive, and dominant and demonstrate greater spatial and mathematical skills.

In practical terms, this means that situations that could be simple to resolve become very tedious and tiresome when we don’t understand and accept our differences. For example, when you discuss how you are going to invest your savings, a man is generally more of a risk taker and a woman will be more conservative. Certainly how we are raised will make a big difference, but generally speaking, men feel more comfortable taking risks, while women prioritize security. With an understanding of this difference, a man doesn’t have to take it personally when she asks more questions. She is not necessarily mistrusting him but simply seeking to meet her greater need for security. When he is more impulsive and wants to find solutions right away, she can realize this is his nature rather than misinterpret his tone by presuming he doesn’t care about what she feels, wants, or needs.

Studies confirm there are real differences in the way men and women estimate time, judge speed, do math, orient themselves in
space, and visualize objects in 3-D. Men tend to excel in these skills. Women have more developed relationship abilities, sensitivity to emotions in others, emotional and aesthetic expression and appreciation, and language skills. Women are adept at performing detailed, planned tasks.

Without an understanding of this last difference, a woman can feel neglected when a man waits to the last minute to plan time with her or when he doesn’t anticipate her needs. If a woman understands these differences, she no longer resents needing to ask for support, because she realizes that his brain simply doesn’t work the way hers does. In the event that her partner does something without her having to ask, she will appreciate the extra effort he is making rather than taking it for granted.

Women’s brains are designed to consider and anticipate the emotions, sensitivities, and needs of others. Men, on the other hand, are more acutely aware of their own needs, or at least their needs for achieving the goal at hand. Since men were hunters for thousands of years, they needed this ability to protect themselves in the wild. In the home camp, a woman’s life insurance was making sure she cared for others. If she did so, then they would care for her at her time of need.

When you write your will, you have the opportunity to donate your body organs to help others after you die. Faced with this option, nine out of ten women donate their organs, while nine out of ten men do not. By nature, women tend to be giving, even after their death. A woman’s greatest challenge in learning to cope more effectively with stress is to begin caring for herself as much as she is caring for others.

A woman’s greatest challenge is to begin caring for herself as much as she is caring for others.
Why Our Brains Developed Differently

Our brains might have developed the way they did because cavemen and cavewomen had very defined roles to ensure their survival. Our male ancestors hunted and needed to travel long distances in pursuit of game. Strong navigational skills allowed men to become better hunters and providers. A man had to depend on himself to find his way home. In those days, asking for directions was not always an option.

Our female ancestors gathered food near the home and cared for the children. They formed strong emotional attachments to their children and the other women, on whom they depended when the men were hunting. Women had to track their immediate environment as they gathered nuts and berries for survival. Maybe that’s why women today have the ability to find things around the home and in the refrigerator that their partners seem to be incapable of seeing.

Scientists speculate that women’s advantage in verbal skills could have resulted from their physical size. Men had the bodily strength to fight with other men. Women used language instead to argue and persuade. Women also used language because they could. When a man was in danger, he needed to stay quiet much of the time. To this day, faced with stress, a man will often become quiet. As a result, men go to their cave to recover from stress, while women have adapted by learning to talk about their stresses. By letting others know about her problems, she would make it easier to get their support. Unless she talked, others simply would not know what she needed.

Our brains developed with gender differences to ensure our survival. These adaptations have taken thousands of years to occur. It is unrealistic to expect our brains to change suddenly to adapt to the vast changes in our gender roles in the last fifty years. These
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

changes are at the core of the stress that is causing Mars and Venus to collide. If we are to thrive and not just survive, we need to update our relationship skills in ways that reflect our natural abilities, tendencies, and needs.

The advances in neuroscientific research have allowed scientists to discover significant anatomical and neuropsychological differences between male and female brains that explain our observable behavioral differences.

Single Focus on Mars / Multitasking on Venus

A woman’s brain has a larger corpus callosum, the bundle of nerves that connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain. This link, which produces cross-talk between the hemispheres, is 25 percent smaller in men. In practical terms, this means men do not connect feelings and thoughts as readily as women do. In a very real sense, women have superhighways connecting their feelings to speech, while men have back roads with plenty of stop signs. Some researchers believe that the integration of the two lobes may be the source of “women’s intuition” — in other words, whole-brain processing.

This stronger connection between different parts of the brain increases a woman’s ability to multitask. When she is listening, she is also thinking, remembering, feeling and planning all at the same time.

A man’s brain is single-focused, while a woman’s brain tends to multitask.

A man’s brain is highly specialized, using a specific part of a single hemisphere to accomplish a task. A woman’s brain is more
diffuse, using both hemispheres for many tasks. This neurological
difference allows men to focus and to block out distractions for
long periods of time. On the other hand, women tend to see things
in a broader context, from a larger vantage point.

Men tend to do one thing at a time in their brains and in life.
When a man is under stress, he can easily forget his partner and her
needs. He may be focusing on how to get that promotion, so he for-
gets to bring home the milk. A woman can easily misinterpret his
forgetful behavior as uncaring. After she has misunderstood his
behavior in this manner, it is even harder for her to risk asking him
for more support.

This insight can help a woman not to take it personally when
he is at his computer and seems annoyed when she asks him a
question. For her, it is a simple task to shift her attention when she
is interrupted, but for him it is much more difficult. If he seems
annoyed, she can remember that it is much more difficult for him
to shift gears rather than take it personally.

In a similar manner, women become annoyed when a man tries
to narrow down the focus of her conversation to a single point.
He may interrupt her and ask her to get to the point, or ask what she
wants him to do when she is still just connecting all the dots of what
she is talking about. Quite commonly men will say, “I understand,”
but a woman hears that he wants her to finish talking.

He feels she doesn’t have to continue, because he understands.
Since she is still in the process of discovering what it is she wants
to say, she knows he cannot fully understand. There is not just one
point when she is expressing herself. By taking more time to listen
to her many details, a man helps his partner to come back to a more
centered and stress-free perspective.

Likewise, when a woman minimizes her interruptions of a
man’s focused activities, she helps him to keep his stress levels
down. Leaving a man alone and ignoring him is sometimes the

— 39 —
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

best way to support him. Understanding that these tendencies are based on our brain differences frees us from taking things personally and reveals practical ways to support our partners in coping better with their stresses.

Leaving a man alone and ignoring him is sometimes the best way to support him.

Men separate information, emotions, and perceptions into separate compartments in their brains, while women tend to link their experiences together, reacting to multiple issues with their whole brain. This is one of the reasons a woman has a greater tendency to become overwhelmed with too much to do when she is under stress. While women tend to reach out to take in more information, under stress men tend to focus on the most important thing to do.

While women tend to reach out to take in more information, under stress men tend to focus on determining the most important thing to do.

This difference in brain structure between men and women has another important effect on stress relief. A man can more easily disengage from his serious, responsible left brain and allow it to rest and regenerate. When a man is stressed, he can simply change his focus to a hobby or watching TV and he begins to relax. He shifts from using his left brain, which is logical, practical, and reality-based, to his right brain, which is feeling, risk-taking,
and fantasy-based. By making this shift, he automatically disconnects from the stress of his responsibilities. In this manner, a man can shift gears and disengage from everyday worries with greater ease.

A woman does not have this luxury, since the connective tissue between the two hemispheres of her brain won’t allow her to disengage as easily. When she is on the right side of her brain, trying to relax or have a fun time, she is still connected to her analytical and rational left brain.

On a practical note, understanding this difference helps men to recognize the futility of making comments to a woman like “Just forget it” or “Don’t worry about it.” She can’t make this shift the way a man does, but she can talk about what is bothering her. On Mars, if a man can’t solve a problem, his way of coping is to forget about it until he can do something about it. On Venus, if a woman can’t solve a problem, then she feels, “At least we can talk about it.” Talking with someone who cares about her well-being has the power to stimulate the neurotransmitters needed to reduce stress levels in a woman’s brain. By remembering her problems, a woman can actually free herself from their gripping hold on her and her mood.

**White Matter vs. Gray Matter**

Men and women possess two different types of brains, designed equally for intelligent behavior. Men have approximately 6.5 times as much gray matter as women. Women have almost 10 times the white matter that men do. Information-processing centers are located in gray matter. The connections or networks among these processing centers are composed of white matter. These differences explain why men tend to excel in tasks involving gray matter local processing—like mathematics—while women excel at integrating and assimilating information from gray matter regions, required for language skills, because of their abundance of connecting white matter.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

This physical difference in our brain composition helps explain why we communicate so differently. A woman’s brain is busy connecting everything. The more she cares about something, the more she connects it to other things going on in her brain.

For example, when she sees a movie or visits a friend, she may have a lot to say about it. Meanwhile a guy may have nothing to say unless the movie happens to hit a particular area of interest. She assumes that he does not want to talk about the movie, but he actually has little to say. With this new insight, she can be assured that he is interested in hearing what she has to say, even though he has little to offer in return. When a woman gives up expecting her partner to talk more, not only does he appreciate her willingness to talk, but gradually he begins to share more.

When men have little to say, women often take it personally, as if he doesn’t want to share.

This same idea applies to asking a man about his day or a trip he has taken. When he has little to say, he is not intentionally hiding what happened; he just doesn’t think that much about it, and as a consequence he doesn’t remember much. She looks forward to explaining how everything connects. The process of communicating actually helps her brain reduce stress levels, while it has little benefit for him.

Why Talk Is Big on Venus

Two sections of the brain, Broca’s area in the frontal lobe and Wernicke’s area in the temporal lobe, are associated with language. These areas are larger in women, and that explains why women are
so verbal. Researchers have located six or seven language centers in both hemispheres of a woman’s brain, but for men, language is only located in the left hemisphere. Since men have fewer language centers, it is not only harder for them to express what they experience, but they do not feel the need.

A man’s language centers are particularly activated when he is solving a problem. Some men will talk more at the beginning of the relationship, because at that time a man is primarily introducing himself, and talking is a way to “solve the problem” of letting her know about himself and how he feels for her. Once that problem is solved, his language centers are not easily activated. Likewise, his listening center is most active when he is solving a problem.

Women’s brains are constructed to communicate and express feelings. Compared to a man’s brain, a woman’s is much busier, always articulating reactions and perceptions. Many parts of her brain are fully engaged when she is talking. Men have a harder time connecting their emotions with their thoughts and articulating what they feel. This difference is a source of much friction in relationships. Understanding that a man is not withholding when he is silent can release a woman from the frustration of getting her partner to talk about his day in greater detail.

With practice, a man can learn to be a good listener, which is actually one of the most potent ways to help a woman lower her stress levels. A woman may like it when a man opens up and shares, but unless she first feels heard, it will not lower her stress. As men get better at listening to women and women get better at appreciating this step, men become more open and share more.

Math vs. Feelings

The IPL (inferior parietal lobule) is a region on both sides of the brain, located just above the level of the ears. The size of the IPL
correlates with mathematical ability. An enlarged left IPL was found in Albert Einstein’s brain, as well as in those of other physicists and mathematicians. The left IPL, more developed in men, is involved with perception of time and speed and the ability to rotate 3-D figures. These abilities have a lot to do with the Martian love of video games. More than 90 percent of video game users are from Mars.

This is also why men seem to rush women to the point when they are talking or making decisions. He is acutely aware of the time she is taking to talk. While listening, he is also working hard to determine what needs to be done to solve her problem as soon as possible. This is not because he doesn’t care about her, but because he does. He wants to help, but doesn’t realize it would be an even greater help to ask more questions rather than rush to the point.

In women, the right side of the IPL is larger. The left side of the brain has more to do with more linear, reasonable, and rational thought, while the right side of the brain is more emotional, feeling, and intuitive. Men are typically drawn to solving problems, while women have the tendency to understand the dynamics of a problem, the various relationships between the different parts of a problem.

Women can also become frustrated when someone is taking too long to get to the point. By multiplying this frustration by ten, you have what the average man experiences listening to his wife complain about a list of problems in her life. This does not mean that she cannot share her feelings, but it does mean she has to do
so in a manner that will work for him as well. We will explore this art in chapter 9.

The IPL also allows the brain to process information from the senses, particularly in selective attention, like when women are able to respond to a baby’s crying in the night.

Studies have shown that the right LPL, dominant in women, is linked to the memory and manipulation of spatial relationships. It is also related to the perception of our own feelings—a driving force on Venus.

While men are particularly good at following the ball on a football field at a distance, women are adept at noticing subtleties of their own feelings and others’. One of the problems women have is accurately interpreting a man’s feelings. For example, he looks frustrated, and she thinks he is not interested in what she is saying. In truth, he is simply trying to make sense of what she is saying so that he can be of help. She is correct in noticing his frustration, but her interpretation can be completely off the mark.

Our Brains Differ in Response to Danger

The amygdala, an almond-shaped structure found toward the front on both sides of the brain just beneath the surface determines our brain’s response to danger. The amygdala operates differently in men and women. The right side is more active in men, with more connections to other areas of the brain, while the left side is more active in women. In a man’s brain, there are more connections from the amygdala to the visual cortex, which means men are more reactive to visual stimuli than women.

This explains why men have a greater tendency to stare at other women. Men’s brains are just more active in this way. When a man is presented with a challenge—and women are definitely a challenge to men—his visual cortex becomes activated. His instinct to
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

look at other women is not a sign he doesn’t love his partner, but a manifestation of what stimulates energy in his brain. This important insight is not an excuse for insensitive behavior. When a man looks at another woman, he should also be respectful of his partner and make it brief, and then show a little more attention or affection to his partner. If I look too long, my wife just gives me a friendly elbow jab to my side. Once she said, “It’s okay to look, just don’t drool!”

Looking at women is a healthy instinct in men.

This kind of attitude gives the right message to a man. It is accepting but also asks him to consider that it could embarrass her if her husband is staring too long at another woman. On one hand, she asks for what she would like, and on the other hand, she doesn’t reject or shame him for this tendency. It is a good thing he is attracted to women. That is why he is attracted to his wife. Just because he responds visually to other women, that doesn’t mean he is not attracted to or in love with his wife. If he doesn’t feel safe being attracted to women in her presence, his attraction to her will lessen as well.

In addition, the amygdala in a man’s brain is directly connected to the action center of the brain. This tends to make men more impatient or impulsive when there are urgent problems to be solved.

The amygdala, which in part determines our reactions to stress and danger, is directly wired to the visual and take-action part of a man’s brain.
In a woman’s brain, the more active left amygdala is connected to other regions of the brain, including the hypothalamus, which receives signals from sensors in the body, rather than external stimulation. A woman’s amygdala is directly linked to regions of her brain that are associated with feeling rather than action. The left-hemisphere connection in women controls the environment within the body, which adds to a woman’s sensitivity to what is going on inside her. Some researchers believe this difference developed because the female body had to deal with internal stressors like pregnancy and childbirth. In a man’s brain, the areas that connect with the amygdala react to the external environment.

This physiological difference helps us to understand why men become impatient when women talk about a problem, and want to do something about it. His amygdala, which is about twice as big as hers, is directly linked to a visual and action part of the brain that is “looking for a solution,” or something to do. Unlike a man, a woman’s amygdala is directly linked to other parts of her brain that are more feeling-oriented than action-oriented. While he wants to do something, she will want to explore her feelings about the problem.

Why Women Never Forget a Quarrel

Women’s brains are wired to feel and recall emotions more intensely than the brains of men. The process of experiencing emotion and coding that experience into memory is more tightly integrated in a woman’s brain, and her neural responses are more tightly integrated. Though scientists have not yet been able to identify the neural basis for the difference, studies have found that women tend to have more vivid and stronger memories of emotional events than men. Compared to men, women can recall more memories more quickly. Their memories are richer and more intense.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

When under stress, a woman’s mind can become flooded with these memories.

Emotions enhance a woman’s memory.

There is a physical explanation for why women are able to call up slights, wrongs, and fights from the past. The amygdala does play a key role in emotional responses and emotional memory. In the past, the amygdala was believed to be involved primarily with fear and other negative emotions. Recent studies have shown that the amygdala responds to the strength or intensity of both pleasant and unpleasant stimulation. Neural connections from this structure to the rest of the brain enable it to respond quickly to sensory input and influence psychological and behavioral responses.

Forming an emotional memory occurs in the left amygdala in women, and the right amygdala in men. In women, the brain regions involved in emotional reactions coincide with the regions that encode the memory of an experience. These processes occur in different hemispheres for men. Researchers suggest that the neural connections between the emotional and memory centers in women might explain why a woman’s emotional memory is more vivid and accurate than a man’s. Just as a woman can remember negative emotions, when stress levels drop, she has a much greater capacity to remember all the good things a man has done. It is this trait that can make women so attractive to men. While he easily forgets his greatness, her loving responses remind him that he does make a difference.

Women who expect men to express the same degree of intensity and accuracy as they do when it comes to relationships will be disappointed. Once she recognizes this distinction, a woman can
easily adjust her expectations. She is not “lowering her expectations”; she is simply adjusting them to what is realistic. For example, a woman might vividly remember and treasure a particularly romantic moment and become deflated when her partner has no recollection of an exchange that had become so important to her. Rather than feeling hurt or angry, she should understand that our brains are wired differently. As I have already pointed out, accepting reality, even though it doesn’t measure up to a Hollywood romantic script, enables us to know and experience the rich fulfillment of real love, a love that does not demand perfection in ourselves or our partners.

Depth of Feeling

The limbic system, which includes the hypothalamus, hippocampus, and amygdala, is the seat of emotion and motivation. A woman has a larger, deeper limbic system, which makes her more in touch with her feelings. A woman’s increased ability to bond and feel connected to others lies in this part of her brain. Researchers suggest the greater development of this part of the brain leaves women more susceptible to depression. On the other hand, when properly stimulated through loving support and nourished by healthy nutrients, a woman’s brain is capable of feeling a much greater degree of fulfillment than men. It is for this reason that men are so drawn to women. A woman’s enormous capacity for joy, delight, and fulfillment is the fuel that lets a man know that he makes a difference. By nurturing his spirit in this way, she also can find a greater peace deep in her soul.

A woman’s enormous capacity for joy, delight, and fulfillment is the fuel that lets a man know that he makes a difference.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

If we are to thrive and not just survive, we need to update our relationship skills in ways that reflect our natural abilities, tendencies, and needs.

Creating Harmony

This quick survey of our brain differences should convince you that expecting women to be like men and men to be like women is counterproductive. Understanding these fundamental distinctions in our hardwiring should assist us to interpret the behavior of our partners in a more positive light and free us from unrealistic expectations that they think, feel, and act the way we do.

By understanding our differences, we can begin today applying new insights and strategies to support each other in lowering stress levels. The most effective way to do this is to respect our differences—which are anatomical and hardwired in our brains. Instead of clashing to try to get more from our partners, we can focus on creating harmony by giving ourselves what we need so that we have more to give our partners.

By focusing on giving ourselves what we need, we will have more to give our partners.

Just as the planets do not collide when they assume their natural course around the sun, men and women do not have to clash. The conflict is over when we discover that even our brains are designed to balance each other. A woman wants to be happy, and her man wants to make her so. When she is happy, they are both happy.
HARDWIRED TO BE DIFFERENT

In the next chapter, we will examine the significant hormonal differences between men and women and how stress throws our chemistry out of balance. The result is that on Mars, stress stimulates the fight-or-flight response, and on Venus, the response is to tend and befriend.
Being in love stimulates a cascade of hormones that temporarily lowers stress levels. Hormones are chemical messengers that act as a catalyst for chemical changes at the cellular level that affect growth, development, energy, and mood. When we are in love, we feel on top of the world. We are filled with energy. We are euphoric. We are ardent about our new love, and consequently we are more generous in accepting or overlooking our differences. In the early stage of love, we are eager to support our partners’ needs. Taking care of his partner boosts special hormones in a man, while being provided for stimulates different hormones in a woman. When these hormones are abundant at the start of a relationship, the stress, clamor, and pressure of our daily lives dissolves into the background.

Once the newness of love wears off, familiarity and routine set in. Feel-good hormone levels begin to drop, and stress levels begin to rise. It is as if love gives us about three years of blissful hormones for free, but after the honeymoon period is over, we have to earn them. We have to manage our own stress levels as we interact with each other.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Adrenaline and Cortisol—
The Red-Alert Hormones

When we think about stress, we think about traffic jams, unpaid bills, messy homes, tension in the workplace, too much to do, deadlines, no one to turn to, crying children—the list is endless. These are certainly some of our daily causes of stress, but not what researchers refer to when they measure our bodies’ stress levels. The production of adrenaline and cortisol, hormones secreted by the adrenal gland, is how our bodies respond to outside stress. On a very physical level, these stress hormones can gradually deplete our supply of feel good hormones.

If we are in danger—let’s say, chased by a bear—the adrenal gland releases adrenaline (also known as epinephrine), cortisol, and other hormones to give us a temporary burst of energy and mental clarity. For our ancient ancestors, these hormones were a survival mechanism in dangerous situations. Either we escaped, or we were eaten. When adrenaline and cortisol are released, extra energy is directed to the brain and muscles, sharpening our senses and increasing our strength and stamina. This sudden focus redirects energy temporarily from other systems, slowing digestion and other secondary functions. When a bear is chasing you, your body automatically protects itself from being digested rather than digesting lunch.

Adrenaline and cortisol serve an important survival function in life-and-death situations, but the body is not designed to accommodate the continual release of stress hormones. When we are under unrelenting but not life-threatening stress, these hormones are still released, and over time they disrupt our digestive and immune systems, resulting in lower energy and susceptibility to illness. With long-term stress, cortisol and adrenaline create unhealthy fluctuations in our blood sugar levels that can produce
moodiness, mild depression, a sense of urgency, irritability, anxiety, and general distress. And all these can affect our relationships. These are some common examples of how stress affects us and thus our relationships:

1. Mild depression inhibits our passion.
2. A sense of urgency takes away our patience and flexibility.
3. A sense of distress, anxiety, or panic greatly diminishes our capacity to be happy.
4. Irritability overshadows our feelings of affection, appreciation, and tenderness.
5. Decreased energy limits how much we can freely give of ourselves.
6. With unstable blood sugar levels, our moods either become flat or fluctuate too much.
7. Men lose interest in the relationship, while women feel overwhelmed, with too much to do and not enough time or support.

When we understand the common symptoms of chronic stress, we can recognize why so many relationships fail today. Learning how stress affects our day-to-day behavior should motivate us to lower our own stress levels. By updating our relationship skills, we can convert our relationships to lower stress levels rather than being another source of stress.

Another Costly Side Effect of Elevated Stress Hormones

Scientists have found a link between cortisol and obesity and increased fat storage in the body. Stress and elevated cortisol levels tend to cause fat to deposit in the abdominal area, which is considered toxic fat, because it leads to strokes and heart attacks.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

High cortisol levels can also lead to poor eating habits. While studying eating disorders, some researchers discovered that women with stress-induced high levels of cortisol were more likely to snack on high-fat or highly refined carbohydrate foods than women who did not secrete as much cortisol. This new research provides a useful insight into how stress can affect food cravings that lead to unhealthy eating. Have you ever noticed that when you are tired or stressed, you reach for some processed carbohydrate like cookies, chips, or soda? This is because under stress the body gets its energy from carbohydrates.

Cortisol simulates insulin release, which results in an increase in appetite. This terrible cycle will cause you to gain weight and can eventually lead to diabetes and a host of other diseases. The effects of high cortisol levels make it clear how important a healthy diet is when you are under stress. You might feel you do not have time to eat and prepare healthy meals, but maintaining good eating habits is even more important when you and your family are rushing through your lives. One of the ways you can know what foods are not good for you is simply to observe what foods you crave when you are under stress. These are the very foods that will eventually make you feel even worse and put on extra weight.

And let’s face it, not only do we feel better when we are at a healthy weight, but we feel more attractive without the excess pounds. When you are feeling attractive, your partner becomes more attracted to you.

We have to learn to manage our stress so that we can grow old together both in love and good health. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and obesity have all been directly linked to chronically high levels of cortisol. If we learn to lower our stress levels, we will not only be healthier but will awaken our potential for increased energy, passion, patience, and happiness.
One of the big differences between men and women is that under stress, women produce much more cortisol than men. This helps explain why women have more challenges with weight gain. When cortisol is elevated, we only burn carbohydrates or sugars for energy rather than a healthy combination of carbohydrate and fat. When you cannot burn fat efficiently, it is not only more difficult to lose weight, but you have less energy. Burning fat gives you twenty times more energy than burning carbohydrate. Think of it this way: burning fat gives us the lasting energy of burning logs, but carbohydrates only give us the quick, temporary energy of kindling.

There is another costly effect of high cortisol levels on a woman’s body. The by-product of burning carbohydrates is lactic acid. If a woman’s body is burning carbohydrates instead of fat, her levels of lactic acid rise. With excess lactic acid buildup, calcium is leached from the bones to neutralize these acids. This helps explain why 80 percent of the people who have osteoporosis are women.

Billions of dollars each year are spent on antidepressants to assist men and women to cope with stress. Fortunately there are natural ways to reduce stress levels that do not have the dangerous side effects of taking medications. I have spent the last ten years researching this subject, and present a variety of ways for both women and men to cope with anxiety and depression using cleansing food plans, healthy fats, and natural supplements. More about this can be found at my Web site, www.marsvenuswellness.com, or in my last book, The Mars and Venus Diet and Exercise Solution.

Hormones Are from Heaven

At the start of a relationship, a man will get excited and motivated by the challenge of winning a woman’s affection. The challenge
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

automatically stimulates the production of testosterone, the hormone from Mars that contributes to a man’s sense of power and well-being. When his testosterone levels are at normal levels, he is pumped and is more attentive and attracted to his partner.

As routine sets in over time, and the challenge in the relationship decreases, his testosterone levels decrease. When this happens, the honeymoon is over, and a man looks to stimulate higher levels of testosterone. Work outside the home will almost always provide new challenges to capture a man’s interest and raise his testosterone levels. A man’s loss of passion occurs on a biological level as he shifts from being enraptured by a relationship to refocusing on work.

Similarly, when a woman gets to know her partner and feels safe with him, there is an increase in the production of oxytocin, known as the cuddle hormone. Just as a man responds to the levels of testosterone in his body, a woman experiences more energy, happiness, flexibility, and attraction for her partner when her oxytocin levels rise.

Over time, as reality sets in and her expectations are not always satisfied, she no longer assumes that all her needs will be met. The resulting decrease in hope, trust, and optimism will affect her oxytocin levels. Her daily routine loses some of its magic. She attempts to bring back the magic by giving more to their relationship, but when her attempts are not reciprocated, she eventually loses the glow, along with the motivation to give more. His detachment and her increased attention to their lack of connection will inevitably build tension in the relationship. A closer look at testosterone and oxytocin will explain how men and women respond differently to stress, and what you can do to accommodate those differences and achieve harmony.

The King of Hormones

Testosterone, the principle male sex hormone, is one of the key elements in determining sexual characteristics in men, including
dominance, emotional and physical strength, body shape, hairiness, deep voice, odor, and sexual performance. The hormone also plays a role in assertiveness and drive, competitiveness, creativity, intellect, and the ability to frame and execute new ideas. Women produce it too, but adult males produce twenty to thirty times more testosterone than do women.

Adult males produce twenty to thirty times more testosterone than do women.

Testosterone affects general health throughout life and helps to develop strong muscles and bones. Having the right level of testosterone helps men cope with stress. The right level is what matters—not too high nor too low. Testosterone can increase significantly with acute stress and may cause increased aggressiveness. Researchers have found that stress is chronic in so many of our lives today. This causes testosterone levels to plunge. A drop in testosterone has been associated with irritable male syndrome, characterized by withdrawal, irritability, and depression. A new study has found that levels of testosterone of men in the United States have been falling steadily during the past twenty years.

Researchers have found that testosterone levels have fallen in American men during the last twenty years.

Factors like aging, smoking, and obesity do not fully explain the decline. A diet high in meat and poultry might contribute to the downward trend, because the hormones used in meat production act
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

like estrogen in the body. Estrogen, the female sex hormone, inhibits the production of testosterone. Alcohol and soy products also have a negative effect on testosterone levels. Beer, for example, contains plant estrogens that can eventually reduce testosterone levels, one of the reasons intoxication and sex sometimes do not mix.

Achieving, Appreciation, and Success

Normal levels of testosterone are linked to feelings of success in men. To feel good in a relationship, a man needs to feel successful at providing for his partner’s fulfillment. Her responses of trust, acceptance, and appreciation not only nourish his soul but also counteract the effect of stress by stimulating a healthy level of testosterone.

A man in love is often consumed by thoughts of how he can make his partner happy. The challenge of the relationship creates an upsurge of positive feelings as well as higher levels of testosterone. When a man feels he can get what he wants, testosterone production increases. When he feels he cannot achieve what he wants, his stress levels become elevated, and his testosterone levels drop.

Success or the anticipation of success in a relationship fuels the rise of a man’s testosterone and sustains his interest in her.

Failure or the anticipation of failure in making his partner happy creates stress for a man and lowers his testosterone. The more successful or empowered a man feels in a relationship, the more his testosterone levels will increase to healthy levels. Confidence increases testosterone, and doing things that stimulate testosterone will increase a man’s confidence. It goes both ways. When a man
feels successful, his energy and well-being increase because his testosterone levels are normal. When he thinks that he can’t make a difference in his relationship, his energy and interest drop along with his testosterone levels. That is why being acknowledged and accepted are very important to a man’s well-being.

Appreciating and accepting what he does, or forgiving him for what he neglects to do, is the most supportive way a woman can treat a man.

When a man doesn’t feel successful at work, or worries about problems that he can do nothing to solve, his testosterone levels will begin to drop, and he will experience lowered spirits until his testosterone levels rise again. Depressed men have low testosterone levels.

Depressed men have low testosterone levels.

This dynamic is another reason why men will often back off from a difficult problem and forget it for a while. By engaging in another less challenging activity, he can easily rebuild his confidence and thus restore his testosterone levels. With this increased confidence, he can return to and more effectively solve the previous problem.

Shifting from one problem to an easier problem to solve can help rebuild a man’s testosterone levels.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

The conventional, male-dominated work environment supplies an abundance of activities, challenges, rules, and situations that can stimulate testosterone production. Testosterone-stimulating situations include:

- Goal setting
- Competition
- Problem solving
- Accountability
- Risk
- Danger
- Dominance
- Success
- Efficiency
- Urgency
- Money
- Results
- Projects
- Bottom line
- Power

If a man feels confident in his abilities, these kinds of situations will stimulate testosterone production and excite him, reducing the depleting effects of stress. These same situations can be a source of depression if he lacks confidence. Developing and sustaining confidence is one of the most important challenges in a man’s life, determining the difference between success and failure, enthusiasm or depression. Ultimately on Mars, there are no failures but only quitters who lose confidence. With lowered testosterone levels, a man’s confidence will weaken.
Making Testosterone at Home

In all men, testosterone levels fall during the course of the day. There is a natural cycle that peaks in the morning. During the workday, a man is depleting his testosterone. When the stress of his day is over, his body must relax to restore itself. This shift is often set off by the setting of the sun. In recovery mode, he is free from his innate drive to be responsible, so after a stressful day of work, testosterone levels have a chance to build. A man can elevate his testosterone level by taking a nap or doing simple, entertaining activities like watching TV or reading a newspaper.

When a man’s workday is over, a switch turns off in his brain, and he shifts to a passive, relaxed mode.

If a man doesn’t take the time to recover, the stress drives his testosterone levels down. Not only does his sex drive become low, but he becomes moody, grumpy, irritable, or passive. Women don’t instinctively understand this need, because their well-being is not dependent on rebuilding testosterone levels.

Often, women think their husbands are lazy, when in fact they have a biological imperative to rest. Though women produce testosterone, the hormone has little relationship to stress on Venus. Just as testosterone stimulates stress reduction in men, the hormone oxytocin stimulates stress reduction in women.

Oxytocin, the Cuddle Hormone

Oxytocin, known as a social attachment hormone, is produced in great quantity during childbirth and lactation and during orgasm in
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

both sexes. In women, oxytocin levels can rise during a relaxing massage and fall in response to feeling ignored or abandoned. The hormone affects social recognition and bonding as well as the formation of trust between people. Oxytocin stimulates in women maternal behavior as well as sexual arousal. It reduces blood pressure, cortisol levels, and fear. Studies have shown that animals and people with high levels of oxytocin are calmer, less anxious, and more social.

Though men and women have on average similar levels of oxytocin in their bloodstreams, women have more estrogen, which boosts the effectiveness of oxytocin. In addition, the testosterone in men counteracts the calming effects of oxytocin. The way that oxytocin interacts with estrogen and testosterone is at the root of the differences between the ways men and women respond to stress.

Researchers have discovered that oxytocin lowers stress in women, but does not have the same effect in men. Stimulating too much oxytocin in a man can actually reduce his testosterone levels. Likewise, too much testosterone in women can lower the effectiveness with which her oxytocin lowers her stress levels.

---

Oxytocin, the feel-good hormone from Venus, is the love and bonding hormone.

---

Oxytocin creates a feeling of attachment. Levels increase when women connect with someone through friendship, sharing, caring, and nurturing and decrease when a woman misses someone or experiences a loss or breakup or feels alone, ignored, rejected, unsupported, and insignificant. A woman in love has high levels of oxytocin. She is consumed by thoughts of giving freely of herself and sharing more time with her partner.

To feel good in a relationship, a woman needs to trust that her
partner cares for her as much as she cares for him. This kind of support directly affects her oxytocin levels, which in turn will lower her stress. Messages from him of caring, understanding, and respect can build trust and nourish her soul while stimulating higher levels of oxytocin.

How she interprets his behavior makes all the difference. If she interprets his behavior as caring for her, then her oxytocin levels go up, but if she interprets the same behavior as not caring, her oxytocin levels go down.

Oxytocin decreases when a woman feels alone, ignored, unsupported, or that she does not matter.

Trust in her relationships and the anticipation of getting her needs met as she meets the needs of her partner fuel the rise of a woman’s oxytocin levels. This positive anticipation is reversed when a woman expects more from a man than he can provide. Her disappointment restricts the production of oxytocin.

Trust and the anticipation of getting needs met is a potent oxytocin producer.

Expecting too much from her partner can also prevent a woman’s oxytocin levels from rising. Instead of looking to other sources of support, she expects her partner to do it all. By expecting her partner to be the main source of stimulation to produce oxytocin, she is setting her partner up to fail.

There are many ways for a woman to raise her oxytocin levels without depending on a man. Oxytocin levels rise in a woman
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

when she is helping someone, because she cares about that person and not because she is getting paid or because it is her job. When we give primarily to get, that causes testosterone, not oxytocin, to rise. When women begin to feel they are not getting enough in their relationships, they tend to give to their partner with strings. They give, but become more concerned about what they are getting or not getting in return. This kind of result-oriented giving does not stimulate as much oxytocin, because it is tinged with negativity and anger. Unconditional giving is a powerful oxytocin producer. Oxytocin levels go up when we are caring, sharing, and befriending without expectations. Just as oxytocin production increases when we are nurturing to others, it is also stimulated when we are nurturing to ourselves.

In the past, the community of women working side by side while raising their children and caring for each other presented a wealth of activities, manners, and situations that stimulated oxytocin production.

Potent oxytocin stimulators include emphasis on:

- Sharing
- Communication
- Safety
- Cleanliness
- Beauty
- Trust
- Teamwork
- Caring
- Shared responsibility
- Consistency
- Compliments
- Affection
- Virtue
STRESS HORMONES FROM MARS AND VENUS

- Nurturing
- Support
- Cooperation
- Collaboration
- Group efforts
- Routine, rhythm, and regularity

At home and in her relationships, a woman’s body produces oxytocin when she feels free to nurture herself or others. When she feels rushed, overwhelmed, or pressured to do everything, her stress-reducing hormones are depleted, and her stress levels increase.

Oxytocin levels begin to rebuild when a woman feels seen, heard, and supported once again. At the end of the day, the anticipation of a simple hug, conversation, and some affection can make a big difference on Venus. When a woman thinks she can’t get what she needs at home, her warm feelings dissipate, and her oxytocin levels fall.

The Most Stressful Time of a Woman’s Day

Taking part in testosterone-producing activities at work can diminish a woman’s oxytocin levels. When she gets home, without an abundance of oxytocin, her roles as a partner, mother, friend, and caregiver seem overwhelming. When she expects to have to do more without enough time or energy, her stress levels go up. Her experience is quite different from a man’s.

When a man’s day job is done, he begins to relax. If he feels pressure to do more when he returns home, his tendency to relax is thwarted. With more responsibilities and less time to recover his testosterone levels, he has less and less energy. Instead of coming home to a sanctuary of love and support, both men and women
today are confronted with a new stress. Women need more of their partners’ time and support, and men are running out of energy. Consequently, they both have less to give.

Women considering divorce commonly say, “I give and give, but I don’t get back what I need. He just doesn’t care, and I have nothing left to give.”

When a woman feels that her partner doesn’t care about her needs, she becomes increasingly dissatisfied and resents that she is giving more than she is getting. She may still love her partner, but she is willing to end the relationship, because she feels she has nothing left to give.

Being in his presence no longer restores her oxytocin levels after a stressful day at work. Just anticipating being ignored or rejected by him can cause her oxytocin levels to drop and her stress levels to rise. Instead of being a source of support, her partner becomes another burden for her to carry. If her partner understands her needs, it is a simple thing for him to give her a hug when they first meet after work and to spend a few minutes letting her talk about her day, both oxytocin boosters. Since she will be equally considerate of his needs, she won’t be too demanding and will allow him to have the downtime he needs.

Success in the workplace is important for women, but it will never improve the quality of her relationships unless she also takes time to balance her job-related testosterone-producing activities with oxytocin-producing activities and attitudes. Achieving success in a testosterone-producing activity can lower stress in men, but not in women. It is primarily the quality of her relationships that keeps a woman’s stress levels down.

Now that the hormonal differences between men and women are clear, we can begin to understand how very differently we respond to stress.
Fight or Flight

The fight-or-flight response is an automatic full-body reaction to a perceived attack or threat to our survival that prepares us to defend ourselves. The response is hardwired into our brains. When we are in danger, our brains activate the central nervous system. As described at the beginning of this chapter, adrenaline, cortisol, and other hormones are released into our bloodstreams, and our heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration are elevated. Blood is rerouted from our digestive tract and directed to our muscles and limbs to provide us with extra energy and fuel for running and fighting. Our awareness becomes more intense, our impulses faster. In this alert state, everything can be perceived as an enemy or threat to our survival. This physical response is a powerful emergency defense system in life-threatening situations.

With prolonged modern stress, toxic stress hormones flow in our bodies in response to events that do not present a real physical threat to us. We are not burning up or metabolizing the stress hormones with physical activity. We cannot flee from the threats we perceive or physically fight those we consider our adversaries. Instead, we have to stay cool when we are criticized at the office, be patient spending hours on the phone with tech support trying to fix a computer glitch so we can meet a pressing deadline, sit in traffic without succumbing to road rage. Many things that stress us every day fully activate our fight-or-flight response and can cause us to be aggressive and to overreact. This physical response can have a devastating effect on our emotional and psychological states. We feel as if we are going from emergency to emergency. The buildup of stress hormones leads to physical ailments, including headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, hypertension, chronic fatigue, depression, and allergies.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Dr. Hans H. B. Selye, the Hungarian-born pioneer of stress research who worked at McGill University in Canada, identified a three-stage response to this sort of stress on physiological, psychological, and behavioral levels. Physically, our bodies go into the alarm stage, then the resistance stage, when our bodies begin to relax, and finally the exhaustion stage. Our psychological response to stress leads to feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, tension, frustration, hopelessness, and depression. On the behavioral level, we attempt to relieve the bad feelings that stress can cause. We eat too much or too little, drink or smoke too much, take more medications, or display fight-or-flight behavior by being argumentative or withdrawn respectively.

When men experience the fight-or-flight response, vasopressin is released in their bodies and enhanced by testosterone. The combination of vasopressin and testosterone suppresses the production of oxytocin, so it is more difficult for men to calm down. As a result of the suppression of oxytocin production, men do not have the built-in tranquilizer that women have to deal with stress. In day-to-day activities, women have much higher levels of emotional reaction, but at times of great danger, when men are ready to fight, it is often women who can calm things down.

Tend and Befriend

Scientists believe that our female ancestors may have evolved their own stress response to protect themselves when pregnant, nursing, or caring for children. The tend-and-befriend response involves tending to the young and befriending others in times of stress to increase the likelihood of survival. Since a group is more likely than an individual to overcome a threat, bonding is a protective mechanism for a mother and her children. While the men were out hunting, befriending other females was necessary for women's
survival, because pregnancy, nursing, and child care made women more vulnerable to outside threats.

Creating a network gave women more protection and help in raising children. Working in groups enabled them to gather food and tend to housing more effectively. In prehistoric times, males were drawn to larger groups to aid in defense and war, while females were drawn to smaller groups that provided emotional and caregiving support to other women during times of stress.

Women did not have the strength, size, or muscle mass to protect themselves as men did. The flight-or-fight response would not have promoted the survival of women and their children, because they would find it difficult to fight or flee when they were pregnant and could not protect their young if they were nursing or caring for young children.

How Stress Takes Its Toll on Women

This response to stress is still evident today in women's behavior. Rather than withdrawing or becoming belligerent, women seek social contact, especially with other women, and spend time nurturing their children to cope with stress. As you have learned, the production of oxytocin is directly linked to nurturing reactions and behaviors. Situations and circumstances in which a woman is taking care of others or connecting emotionally are the most potent oxytocin stimulators.

Generating oxytocin in the work world outside the home can be disrupted by the demands of having to make decisions and set priorities based on the bottom line instead of the needs of others, and behaving in a professional manner. These are testosterone-producing situations. Though there is nothing wrong with stimulating testosterone, it does nothing to lower a woman's stress levels.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Even the stay-at-home mom’s nurturing behaviors of parenting and homemaking can become stressful if a woman feels that she is doing it alone without the community and support of other women. Some women even feel guilty or rejected by working women for choosing to stay at home rather than pursue a career. This sense of separation and abandonment only increases a woman’s stress levels.

Ultimately, women become stressed out when they do not take the time to do those things that will increase their oxytocin levels. To handle stress efficiently, a woman must integrate into her day a variety of oxytocin-producing experiences. She must cultivate a mindset and a support system of work, friends, and family who can stimulate the regular production of oxytocin. Without this support, she will expect too much of her partner. This insight releases a woman from depending too much on the man in her life to raise her oxytocin levels.

An understanding of oxytocin-producing behaviors can completely change the way a man interprets a woman’s behaviors. For example, when a woman complains she is not getting enough support, or feels the need to talk about the problems in her life, it does not mean she does not appreciate what her partner does. Instead, her behavior may be an indication that she is attempting to cope with stress by increasing her oxytocin levels.

Talking about problems with someone you love can elevate oxytocin levels on Venus.

Most men are not aware that talking and sharing can increase oxytocin levels to help a woman cope with stress. Without understanding this biological drive, a man mistakenly assumes that a
woman is looking for a solution from him. He interrupts her to
give his solutions. He does so because solving problems is one of
his ways to make himself feel better when he is stressed. He thinks
it will help her, too. Solving problems raises his testosterone levels
but does little for her oxytocin. Once a man understands that simply
listening to his partner is enough to make her feel better, his
testosterone levels go up as well, because he knows that he is actu-
ally solving a problem.

Stress and Sex

There is no rest for a woman, but if her oxytocin levels are optimal,
the resulting lowered stress produces an endless source of energy
as well as an ability to enjoy sex. Along with good communication,
sexual intimacy can be one of the most powerful ways for a woman
to lower her stress levels, because oxytocin is also produced by
sexual arousal and orgasm.

The problem with having sex to generate oxytocin is that most
women first need oxytocin to feel sexual desire. Women who are
very active sexually tend to want more sex, since sex produces a
beneficial hormonal cascade. Women who have not had sex for a
time often can do without it, because they become too stressed. It’s
the use-it-or-lose-it response.

After a stressful day, the last thing most women think about is
having sex. It is often the last thing on their to-do list. There are
certainly exceptions to this, but most of the time stress inhibits a
woman’s desire for sex.

Most women, unlike men, are not interested in sex
when they are stressed.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

There are some testosterone-oriented women who want sex even when they are stressed out and their oxytocin levels are low. They are more like men, who can use sex to release their stress. When such a woman has sex, she finds some relief, but for different reasons than a man.

Sexual climax temporarily raises her oxytocin levels and lowers her testosterone levels. For a brief period, she is on vacation from her high testosterone levels. Sometimes high-testosterone women have a strong desire for sex but an inability to climax or an inability to be satisfied with one climax. Though this might sound exciting, it can be frustrating for both partners. A man wants to feel he can satisfy his partner, just as she wants to be satisfied. Oxytocin gives us the feeling of satisfaction. Too much testosterone can interfere with a woman’s ability to have satisfying sex. Like eating a cookie laden with sugar, it tastes good but leaves her wanting more.

Sexual activity produces testosterone in men, but orgasm releases oxytocin. The calming effects of this hormonal cascade are why men often roll over and fall asleep afterward. After sex, a man’s testosterone levels can drop for a while, which is why a man sometimes feels a need for greater distance immediately following sex.

Men and women react in opposite ways after sex on account of their hormones. While a woman’s elevated oxytocin levels put her cuddle reflex in high drive, the dynamic of rising oxytocin and falling testosterone often causes a man to withdraw as his hormones return to their normal balance. Understanding and accepting that men sometimes retreat after sex, when women feel the most connected, can help avoid bad feelings.

Regular and satisfying sex is one of the great gifts of a loving relationship. To enjoy this gift for a lifetime, long after the newness wears off, men and women need to be creative in finding new ways to assist women in raising their oxytocin levels. When a woman is able to relax, she can once again enjoy her sexuality.
Hormones Make All the Difference

Giving our partners what we might want is often the opposite of what will work. Men and women have many of the same goals. We all want to be safe, happy, successful, and loved, but what we need to feel this way can be very different. It is our hormones that make all the difference.

This examination of the biological basis for the way men and women deal with stress sheds light on why Mars and Venus sometimes collide. Social conditioning, parental example, and education can have a significant effect on how men and women interact and respond to each other, but how we react to stress is hardwired in our bodies and brains.
The more stress a woman feels, the more overwhelmed she becomes. There are too many things for her to do before she can relax. Trying to do the impossible leads her to exhaustion. Unfortunately, it doesn’t stop there. The more exhausted she feels, the more urgent it becomes for her to get everything done.

In a woman’s brain there will always be more to do.

Stress leads to being overwhelmed, being overwhelmed leads to exhaustion, exhaustion leads to urgency, and finally, urgency leads to more stress. In this way, a negative cycle is created. When a woman undertakes activities that create oxytocin, her stress levels drop, her sense of being overwhelmed disappears, and her energy returns. When women have plenty of energy, they take great pleasure
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

from their responsibilities. She still has a never-ending to-do list, but it is no longer as daunting.

When women have plenty of energy, they take great pleasure from their responsibilities.

With her stress levels lowered and her energy restored, a woman is happy and proud to do it all. My mother raised six boys and one girl. My dad traveled a lot, but somehow she did it all when he was gone, and she didn’t become exhausted. She was part of another generation of women who could do it all. But they had a different lifestyle. They were not in the business world, making testosterone all day. Instead, they had a lifestyle and diet that sustained unending energy by producing plenty of oxytocin to lower stress levels.

The Real Reason Women Are Tired

Regardless of whether a woman has children or not, her body is designed for endurance. Recent research reveals that a woman’s body has almost twice the endurance of a man’s. A man has nearly 30 percent more muscle mass than a woman does, but his muscles break down much faster than a woman’s—at almost twice the rate. This distinction was discovered by NASA researchers. In space, men would lose so much muscle mass that upon landing they had to leave their craft in wheelchairs. When women went up, their muscles did not break down as men’s did.

A woman’s body has almost twice the endurance of a man’s.
This is one of the reasons a man needs to make so much more testosterone. Besides lowering stress, testosterone rebuilds a man's muscle mass. As we have already explored, it is rest that allows his body to rebuild testosterone levels.

The more stress a man experiences during the day, the emptier his mind becomes. It is inconceivable to women that a man can quite effortlessly sit and not think about things. He just needs one focal point, and his mind goes blank. This doesn't occur for women, because their muscles don't break down like a man's and rob the brain of the amino acids required to think. The more a man feels stressed, the more he needs to recover. Positive messages from his partner lower his stress and lessen the time he requires to recover.

A woman's body is very different from a man's in other ways. Having 20 to 25 percent more body fat than a man gives her the potential for lasting energy to remain active during her waking hours. A woman's higher fat-to-muscle ratio enables her body not only to make extra hormones for childbearing but also to provide additional energy. By burning the fat stored in her extra fat cells, she can produce up to twenty times more energy than a man. This extra energy supports her brain, which never rests, churning away nonstop to create a never-ending to-do list.

A woman has more body fat than a man, and that is what gives her lasting energy.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Women become exhausted not because their muscles are breaking down but because they are not making enough oxytocin. As their stress levels rise and their bodies produce more cortisol, their bodies are unable to burn fat for energy, but process carbohydrates and sugars. In their red-alert state, they are left with cravings for carbohydrates, caffeine, or sugar for short-term energy, which then very quickly leaves them even more exhausted. The solution for women is not taking more time to rest, but finding oxytocin-stimulating activities to lower stress levels.

Body Type and Stress

When a woman’s fat-burning capacity is disrupted by stress, her body type affects how she reacts. The three basic body types include endomorph, mesomorph, and ectomorph.

► **ENDOMORPH:** If her body tends to be a round shape, she will have more energy than most women, but her body will begin to store extra fat in unwanted areas when she is stressed. An endomorph feels too many people need her, and gradually she becomes more exhausted.

► **MESOMORPH:** If she has a more muscular body, she will store some extra fat in her muscles, but she will run out of energy when stressed. Without an abundance of oxytocin her stress levels rise, and she feels there is too much to get done.

► **ECTOMORPH:** If a woman is very lean with less fat and muscle than others, without an abundance of oxytocin she...
will experience increased feelings of anxiety or worry. An ectomorph has too much to worry about.

Most women will experience some weight gain, a loss of energy, and an overwhelmed feeling when their bodies are not producing enough oxytocin. Body type tends to determine to what extent a woman will experience the consequences.

The real reason women are tired today is not because they have too much to do. It is because they are not producing enough oxytocin to cope with stress.

A woman thinks her to-do list is causing her stress, but her low oxytocin levels are to blame.

Without this understanding, women focus on getting things done rather than generating more oxytocin to lower stress. They make the mistake of assuming that doing more will finally give them the opportunity to rest. Not only do they expect themselves to do more, but they expect their partners to do more as well.

The idea that finishing everything on her to-do list will take away her stress and distress is an illusion. Instead, it is her stress that causes her to feel overwhelmed and exhausted.

**How *Not* to Deal with a Woman in Stress**

Men often make the mistake of assuming that helping a woman solve her problems will make her feel better. It works for him, but does not work for her. More testosterone, which comes from solving problems, does nothing to lower a woman’s stress levels. What a man can do to help is assist her in creating more oxytocin.
More testosterone, which comes from solving problems, does nothing to lower a woman’s stress levels.

Without insight into the difference between the sexes, men make things worse by trying to solve a woman’s problems or shorten her to-do list. Here is a typical conversation you have probably had yourself:

“I feel so overwhelmed,” she says.
“Why, what’s the problem?” he asks.
“I have so much to do,” she responds with tension in her voice.
“Don’t worry about it.” He tries to calm her down.
“Just relax. Let’s watch TV.”
“I can’t watch TV,” she snaps. “I still have to make dinner, pay the bills, cancel my doctor appointment because of that last-minute meeting my boss scheduled. I want to run a load of wash, and I still haven’t mailed out my thank-you notes. I can’t find anything on my desk in the den—it’s such a mess. And I almost forgot that I promised to write up the invitations for the school play.” She sighs. “I am so behind. I have no time for TV.”
“Forget dinner,” he says in an attempt to help her reduce her list. “I can just pick up some burritos.”
“You just don’t understand,” she responds. “I have too much to do.”
“That’s ridiculous,” he says, dismissing what she is feeling. “You don’t have to do anything!”
“Yes, I do,” she replies, frustrated. “You just don’t get it!”
A WOMAN’S NEVER-ENDING TO-DO LIST

Instead of helping his partner, this man’s casual response and attempt to make her look at the situation from a different perspective leaves her feeling more stressed, and misunderstood as well. And he feels defeated as a result of this exchange. After a few years, he won’t even bother to try to help, because it seems that nothing he does works. She will eventually stop expressing her feelings to him, because he doesn’t understand what she needs to relieve her stress.

After a few years of listening to the same things, a man doesn’t even listen or bother to help.

Men are providers, and they are always prioritizing what they must do and how much energy they have so that first things get done first. Their single-task focus comes into play. This difference prevents men from becoming overwhelmed as women do, but it can also prevent them from being able to understand what a woman is going through.

Prioritizing prevents men from feeling overwhelmed, but also limits their ability to connect.

When a woman speaks, everything a man hears is filtered to determine what actions need to be taken. He constantly prioritizes and compares what she is saying with other problems that need to be solved. In the context of problems that need to be solved first or last, he is sorting out what she says as important or unimportant. If what she is talking about is unimportant in the
scheme of things that must get done, then it goes to the bottom of the list.

A woman may respond to this prioritizing by feeling that what she is saying is unimportant to him, which can get translated into feeling that she is not important to him as well. This is far from the truth, but it is how she perceives it. Certainly she would agree that in the scheme of problems that need to be solved, the problems she is talking about are not as important as the big ones. But that is not really the point on her planet. Women talk for a variety of reasons that can have nothing to do with solving a problem—they could be sharing to get close, to reconnect, to feel better, or to discover what they are feeling.

Women talk for a variety of reasons that can have nothing to do with solving a problem.

She could be talking about fifteen little things that happened to her. Though she just wants to be understood, he is busy dismissing these as less important than the big problems like planning deals to increase their income and improve the quality of their life together. While he is busy doing this, the quality of their conversation diminishes. Just as she has difficulty holding his attention, he has difficulty focusing his attention.

By changing the context of the conversation away from solving her many problems to just listening, one need he can actually help her with, he is able to maintain his focus effortlessly. By giving him concrete jobs to do, a woman helps keep her partner’s testosterone levels up.

Often, a woman simply needs to talk about her feelings and for her partner to listen and attempt to understand what she is going
through. She does not need him to solve all her problems or to help her sort out what she does and doesn't have to do. By sharing her feelings about what she has to do, she is trying to lower her stress levels by increasing oxytocin.

If she secretly hopes that sharing her frustrations will motivate him to do more for her, she is on the wrong track. Just as men should not try to solve women's problems when they share feelings, women should not expect men to listen and then make some change to solve her problems. Women need to be clear that if they are sharing, they are not indirectly asking men to help them with their to-do list. At other times, without all the feelings, she can be much more effective in asking him for help to get something done.

How to Get Help from Mars

Given the pressures of today's world and how thinly stretched women are, men cannot ignore the new burden that women carry. Without a doubt, women need more support today. Giving the kind of support their fathers gave to their mothers is no longer an adequate contribution from men. Even so, a woman needs to remember what makes her partner feel good to get more from him.

I first experienced the importance of this simple concept one day when my wife asked me to pick up three of my shirts lying by the side of our bed and to put them in the clothes hamper. I was happy to comply.

"See how much better that looks." She smiled with pleasure. "Thanks for cleaning up the bedroom."

I felt a great sense of pride, as if I alone had cleaned up the entire bedroom.

Easy victories motivate a man to do more.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

Having given me complete credit for the job had a dramatic effect. It was twenty years ago, and I still remember how I felt. The increased testosterone I experienced from being appreciated for cleaning the bedroom motivated me to continue to help out, doing more and more around the house. Her simple delight and acknowledgment reminded me of how I felt in the beginning of the relationship, when I could do no wrong and I received so much appreciation. This easy victory in making her happy boosted my testosterone, giving me more energy and drive, and motivated me to do more and feel more connected with her.

When a man can do little things and get a big response, he gets the energy and the drive to do more.

Without knowing how testosterone levels affect a man’s sense of well-being, a woman might read this example and think that men are needy little children. After all, a woman doesn’t need acknowledgment for everything she does around the house. She just wants help. Without understanding our hormonal differences, she would either overlook his need to be acknowledged, or be dismissive of it.

Men can misjudge a woman’s behavior in a similar way. When a man does not understand a woman’s need for oxytocin to relax, he might think a woman is too demanding when she seeks to have more intimacy. Her oxytocin-oriented need for more compliments, attention, affection, and hugs could easily be overlooked or judged as too needy. By understanding the hormonal roots of our behavior, we can begin to recognize why our attempts to support our partners in the past have not worked.
Giving Less to Get More

When a woman is stressed, she often makes the mistake of giving more instead of focusing on herself to get what she needs. Just as a man needs to rest and recover after a day of action and challenge, a woman needs to balance her hectic day by taking time during her day to receive the support she needs. Giving can only stimulate optimal oxytocin levels when a woman feels she is also receiving love, support, and affection as well.

When a woman feels supported, her oxytocin levels rise. On this foundation, she can continue to give and keep her stress levels down. Though this is a perfect cycle for increasing fulfillment, it can also go the other way.

When she is not getting what she needs, her brain remembers that giving more makes her feel better. Unless she makes a deliberate effort, she will feel a compulsive urge to give more instead of allowing herself to receive.

---

When a woman is not getting what she needs, she feels an urge to give more.

---

Unless she learns to put on the brakes, she can easily run herself into the ground. This is not true on Mars. A man loves her more when she does not feel she is making a sacrifice and when she accepts what he has to give. As she gets better at receiving the support he offers, a man feels increasingly successful.

---

Unless she learns to put on the brakes, she can easily run herself into the ground.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

“Giving less” is easy for a man but not so easy for a woman. To produce oxytocin, a woman needs to feel as good about receiving as she does about giving. Learning to say no to the demands of the world is just as important as being able to say yes. Since saying no to the needs of others is difficult for a woman, she can change her perspective by seeing that she is not saying no to others but yes to herself. By receiving more, she will be able to give from her heart without any resentment or feelings of self-sacrifice.

One common fear women have is that if they stop giving to take time for themselves, men will not love them. This is just not true. Men will always love a satisfied, fulfilled woman. As women realize this distinction, they can relieve themselves of the added burden of making a man happy.

When Sacrifice Is Good

All this is not to say that we should not make sacrifices for those we love. When a sacrifice is a burden, we can call that a negative sacrifice, but when a sacrifice is worthwhile, it is a positive sacrifice. A positive sacrifice is a wonderful and loving action. The word sacrifice is derived from the Latin root “to make sacred.” By putting aside our own wishes in order to support another, we make that person more special and grow in our ability to love.

To sacrifice is to make our partner special or sacred.

I can still remember the tremendous love I felt when I used to get up in the night to comfort my children when they were sick or crying. I had sacrificed a good night’s sleep, but it didn’t feel like a
A WOMAN'S NEVER-ENDING TO-DO LIST

burden. It was a positive sacrifice. I gave up what I wanted to do for a good cause. In that process, I grew in my capacity to love my children, myself, and my life.

Adjustments and compromises are needed to make a relationship work—and men are as happy to make them as women. If we remember that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, negative sacrifices can be easily transformed into positive or worthwhile sacrifices.

If I want to drive fast, and my wife wants me to slow down, I might feel that I have to sacrifice my need for speed for her need for safety. I might even feel controlled and resist a compromise. Driving fast might lower my stress levels, but it actually raises hers. I am happy to understand what she needs so that I can make a positive sacrifice as an expression of love and consideration. I don’t have to give up driving fast entirely. When I’m driving with her, I need to slow down a bit.

If I understand that my action is increasing her stress, the sacrifice becomes reasonable and worthwhile. As a result, slowing down becomes a positive sacrifice, a simple adjustment on my part because I care about her. What may have seemed like a nagging request takes on new meaning, because I understand what Bonnie needs to reduce her stress.

Understanding our different needs to cope with stress helps to make sacrifices become worthwhile.

It is only reasonable to respect her different need if I am doing the driving, and she is sitting in the front seat. Just because her comfort zone in a car is different from mine, it doesn’t mean that she doesn’t trust me as a driver or that she is trying to control my
behaviors. To lower her stress levels, she simply has a greater need for safety. Despite my initial grumbling response, this gesture can make me feel like a hero.

A man’s desire to make a woman happy is greatly underestimated by women, because women have such different motivations. A woman’s happiness and energy levels come from the oxytocin-producing acts of nurturing and being nurtured, while a man’s happiness and energy levels come primarily from the testosterone-producing act of making a difference.

Whatever makes a man feel successful
will grab his attention and give him energy.

Making a Man Happy Is Easier Than You Think

There is truth behind the maxim, “A man’s best friend is his dog.” A dog is always happy to see him. A man may have had a frustrating day, but at least his dog has no complaints. When he arrives home, the excitement and enthusiasm of his dog’s welcome lets him know, once again, that he is a hero. All a man has to see is his dog’s tail wagging, and his stress levels begin to decrease.

Whenever I arrive home, my dog is overjoyed to see me and will proceed to the family room, announcing my arrival with great glee and excitement. The returning and sometimes wounded hero has arrived. This exuberant response helps to make it all worthwhile. This is the way men want to be loved. A dog’s unconditional love and abundant appreciation mean a lot to a man. Understanding why a man bonds so deeply with his dog can illuminate the nature of men and their affections.
A Woman’s Never-Ending To-Do List

Men need love just as much as women, they just need it in different ways.

The success of a man’s actions and decisions is what increases testosterone and makes him feel good. That is why his dog’s enthusiasm at his return is so pleasing to him. A dog’s unquestioning loyalty and unrestrained appreciation make him feel as if he is being greeted by an entire cheering section after a major victory.

A man’s sense of self-esteem is centered around what he can do.

Acknowledgment of their actions and achievements is important to women, but this acknowledgment does not reduce their stress. Women often wonder why men make such a big deal of taking credit for things. Being appreciated for what he has achieved stimulates a man’s testosterone production. Women don’t readily relate to the importance of taking credit, because doing so does not lower their stress levels.

Both men and women deserve more credit for all that they do, but this credit doesn’t lower a woman’s stress levels.

This simple difference explains why men tend to avoid asking for directions in the car or put off getting medical help unless
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

absolutely necessary. Women are much more open to asking for this kind of support. A man will ask for help, but only after he feels he has done everything he can on his own. In this case, asking for help can be testosterone-producing, because it becomes the way he solves the problem. His timing is just different from a woman’s. He first wants to try to do it himself.

A man will ask for help, but only after he feels he has done everything he can on his own.

When I ask men in my seminars if they stop to get directions, most of them raise their hands. The women in the audience often laugh in disbelief. The truth is, men ask for directions all the time. They just do it when their partners are not around. In the car, she senses that he needs help long before he does. This adds extra motivation for him to prove to her that he is not lost and that he can save the day.

Getting help is more important to women, because it is an oxytocin-producing event. Someone offering to help her can put a big smile on her face. She is getting that support she needs. On Venus, the quality of relationships counts much more than how successful you are. In hormonal terms, the oxytocin produced from doing things together with others is more important to a woman than the testosterone produced by achieving things on your own.

In our romantic relationships, a man’s deepest desire is to make his partner happy. Biology predisposes men to want to make something happen and women to want to be affected. A man does not spend his life looking for someone to love him. Instead, he looks for someone he can be successful in loving.
A man looks for someone he can be successful in loving.

In this way, men and women are a perfect fit. She is happiest when he attempts to meet her needs, and he is happiest when he is successful in meeting her needs. With this kind of support a woman is released from the burden of her never-ending to-do list. Although there will never be a time when she doesn’t have more to do, his support comforts her so that she has endless energy and she doesn’t feel alone.

With this kind of support, she is able to relax and enjoy the many responsibilities of her life as well as appreciate the many ways he supports her. He is happy knowing that he can contribute to her fulfillment without her having to complete her never-ending responsibilities. Understanding this distinction can make a world of difference in our relationships, reducing tension and promoting peace.
When a woman’s oxytocin levels are low, it is only natural for her to seek out the support she needs at home to relieve stress. The problem with this picture is that women expect their partners to provide that support. For thousands of years, women did not rely on men to generate most of the oxytocin support they need. They counted on the help of women in their community, while their husbands hunted or later earned a living.

Historically, men have only provided a small percent of the support that women need. The man has been a provider and protector. Though men still hold that role, it is not as significant, because women can provide for and protect themselves.

In fact, a man can only fulfill a small portion of the support women need to cope with the stresses they face today. Imagine a woman’s need for oxytocin to be a well that needs to be filled; a man can only fill about 10 percent. The rest of the well is her responsibility to fill. When a woman is already almost full, a man is naturally highly motivated to bring her to the top. On the other hand, if the well is empty, and he provides his 10 percent, she is still quite empty. It feels to both that he has not made
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

much of a difference. By taking 90 percent responsibility for their own happiness and only expecting 10 percent from men, women can set up themselves and their partners for much greater success in the relationship. Remembering this 90/10 metaphor can help you create realistic expectations for yourself and your partner.

Men can fulfill only a small portion of the support women need for oxytocin production.

A man can stimulate the production of more oxytocin in a woman, but only when she is also taking responsibility to get what she needs in other ways. Instead of looking to a man to fulfill most of her needs, a woman must adjust her expectations. This attitude makes a huge difference in the dynamics of men and women in a relationship.

When a woman is already almost full, a man is highly motivated to bring her to the top.

If her well is almost full, and he does his 10 percent, it makes a big difference in how she feels. When she goes from feeling good to feeling great, she gives him full credit, and he feels great as well. When doing little things for her makes a big difference, that automatically motivates a man to do more little things. This sense of success lowers his stress levels, stimulates his interest in the relationship, and produces increased energy he can put into being romantic.
When doing little things for her makes a difference, a man does more little things.

Letting Him Top Her Off

Just as it is unrealistic to expect women to do all that their mothers did and hold down a job, it is just as unrealistic to expect men to compensate for the additional burdens women face and become the sole solution to the problem. Men and women can cooperate to relieve their stress, but only with realistic expectations and an appropriate sense of responsibility.

Men cannot ignore the additional responsibilities that women carry today and only give the kind of support their fathers provided their mothers, but most men do not understand what is really required. Relationship skills between men and women can help to raise oxytocin, but women also need to find ways to raise levels on their own. If she takes the time to feel good herself, a woman can then allow her partner to bring her up to feeling great. Oxytocin will increase if she adjusts her lifestyle so that she has more time to do things that she enjoys.

As discussed earlier, men are most motivated when they sense they can make a difference. Just the thought of spending time with her will give a man energy if he senses that he can bring her from feeling good to feeling great. A woman's romantic partner can only top her off when she is already close to being “full-filled.” To help a man help her, a woman should do her best to get the kind of support she needs to raise her oxytocin levels. There are many ways a woman can raise her oxytocin levels without directly depending on a man. By taking responsibility for lowering her stress levels in this way, she becomes increasingly receptive to and appreciative of his attempts to fulfill her.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

One Hundred Ways for a Woman to Create Oxytocin on Her Own

What follows is a random list of oxytocin-producing activities that can help a woman fill up her tank on her own. They are activities in which a woman treats herself well by doing things for herself that are rewarding, fulfilling, comforting, and involve connecting with others besides her partner. As you learned in chapter 3, oxytocin production is stimulated by tending-and-befriending behavior.

1. Get a massage.
2. Get your hair done.
3. Get a manicure and/or pedicure.
4. Plan a Venus night out with your girlfriends.
5. Talk to a friend on the phone.
6. Have a non-business-related meal with a friend.
7. Cook a meal with a friend and clean up together.
8. Meditate while walking or do deep breathing while exercising.
9. Paint a room with family or friends.
10. Listen to music.
11. Sing in the shower.
12. Take singing lessons.
13. Sing in a group.
14. Take a scented bath.
15. Light candles at dinner.
17. Visit a day spa or take a spa vacation with friends.
18. Give yourself a facial.
19. Work out with a personal trainer.
20. Take a yoga class.
21. Take a dancing class.
22. Walk for at least an hour.
24. Prepare a meal for friends with a new baby.
25. Prepare a meal for friends and family who are sick.
26. Plant roses and other fragrant flowers in the garden.
27. Buy fresh-cut flowers for your home.
28. Grow and tend a vegetable garden.
29. Go to a farmer’s market.
30. Prepare a meal from your own garden or with locally grown produce.
31. Take a hike.
32. Camp out in a group.
33. Hold a baby.
34. Pet, hold, and care for a pet.
35. Take a “girlfriend getaway.”
36. Ask someone to carry something.
37. Ask for help.
38. Take time to browse in a bookstore with no agenda.
40. Collect your friends’ best recipes.
41. Take a cooking class.
42. Get household help for cooking, cleaning up, shopping, and house care.
43. Hire a good handyman.
44. Plan fun family activities.
45. Make a meal a special occasion by using your best china and linens.
46. Participate in a Parent Teacher Association meeting.
47. Bake for fund-raisers.
48. Go to the theater, concerts, and dance performances.
49. Have a picnic with friends and family.
50. Plan special occasions to look forward to.
WHY MARS AND VENUS COLLIDE

51. Join or form a new mothers’ club.
52. Take care of children in some capacity.
53. Feed the hungry.
54. Read magazines about fashion and people.
55. Attend inspirational, spiritual, and religious gatherings regularly.
56. Keep updated on the lives of friends.
57. Watch your favorite TV show or DVD with a friend.
58. Listen to inspirational tapes or CDs.
59. Talk with or call a therapist or coach.
60. Study a new culture and taste its cuisine.
61. Spend time at the beach, a river, or a lake.
62. Learn to ski, play golf, or play tennis with friends.
63. Enjoy wine tasting with friends.
64. Demonstrate for a social or political cause.
65. Go to or participate in a parade.
66. Hire someone to help you remove the clutter from your house.
67. Offer to help a friend do something.
68. Take a class in nutrition, cooking, or wellness.
69. Read poetry, write poetry, and go to a poetry reading.
70. Get a bird feeder and enjoy the birds that come to feed.
71. Visit an art museum.
72. Go to a movie in the middle of the day.
73. Listen to an author speak at the local bookstore or library.
74. Keep a daily journal of your thoughts and feelings.
75. Organize a photo journal for each of your children.
76. Create an e-mail list of friends to whom you can send recent pictures.
77. Ask them to reciprocate.