

I'm writing this to address an issue I have with the video we were required to watch on Sat. May 3rd.

As I watched the video I got the impression that it was what could be labeled as "pop psychology" so I did some research on Barbara De Angelis and her ex-husband, John Gray. I discovered that she had been married at least five times and, at the time the video was produced, had questionable credentials. (She and John Gray received doctorates from Columbia Pacific University which was later shut down by the California state attorney general's office for basically being a "diploma mill".) We were not given that information from what I recall.

There were many psychologists and experts that questioned John Gray's ideas about gender differences and the basis for his assertions. I also read that some feminists criticized John Gray's book, saying that it suggests that women need to adapt to men's ways of communicating instead of both genders co-operating. I mention that because I got a similar impression from the Barbara De Angelis's video, that she was basically saying that women need to compensate for men's shortcomings. It's apparent that their ideas are similar and, in essence, are founded on over-generalizations and negative gender stereotypes.

I initially agreed with what she said about women being "process driven" (in that women sometimes just want to talk about how they feel about a problem without really seeking a solution to it), and men, being "solution driven", assume that their mate is merely seeking help with solving the problem. However, once I thought about that some more, I realized that there were many times I wanted to just talk with someone about a problem I was having without just seeking a solution.

There was a study done which supports my realization by Erina MacGeorge, an assistant professor of communication at Purdue University entitled: "*The Myth of Gender Cultures: Similarities Outweigh Differences in Men's and Women's Provision of and Responses to Supportive Communication*". The study basically concludes that, (quote):

"When it comes to comforting, the Mars-Venus concept is not only wrong, but harmful," MacGeorge says. "For the most part, men and women use, and strongly prefer, the same ways of comforting others – listening, sympathizing and giving thoughtful advice. Yet books like John Gray's 'Men are From Mars and Women are From Venus' and Deborah Tannen's 'You Just Don't Understand' tell men that being masculine means dismissing feelings and downplaying problems. That isn't what most men do, and it isn't good for either men or women."

I was originally going to let this pass, but I decided that I needed to address this after your statement in response to what I said this last week (Sat May 17) about a study being done showing that both men and women are equally bad at multi-tasking.

Just as a reminder, you basically said that: "That's the problem with studies. There will be one that comes out saying one thing, but then there will be another that comes out afterwards contradicting the original." I don't disagree with that statement but in this particular case it isn't applicable. From what I understand, there may be *survey(s)* which reflect that women are better at multi-tasking, but no actual research studies. The difference between the two is apparent in their definitions.

I am aware that there are studies showing that when men and women *process language* both hemispheres of the women's brains were active but the men's weren't. I strongly suspect that it may have been one of those, or similar, studies from which it was surmised that women would therefore be able to multi-task better than men.

The study I was referring to was by Paul W. Burgess. The following is an excerpt from a New York Times blog:

"Paul W. Burgess, a neuroscientist at University College, London, says his studies have revealed scant performance differences between male and female multitaskers, though he has found that men and women perceive their multitasking capability differently/approach problems differently. Of course, when it comes to multitasking, there may be no real winner: In recent years, scientists have determined that it is nearly always more efficient in terms of time and energy to go through tasks one at a time, rather than all at once."

It is true (and supported by neurological studies) that women are able to process their emotions better than men. I think it's the most important difference that needs to be understood and accepted by men and women since it would have the largest affect on their ability to communicate in intimate relationships. I believe it is already understood that men need more time to process their feelings, and women would need to sometimes help men work through them. As far as any other differences, I think it should just be understood that there's no real difference in what they can do, just how they do it.

I'd like to present an example of a typical married couple who are having trouble communicating and are often arguing. They both feel like they're not being heard and, as a result, are both actually feeling oppressed. When fighting they have the tendency to resort to "one-upmanship" and outright insults. It's a natural human response for a person to feel vengeful as a result being (or feeling) oppressed. This phenomena is also evident on a larger scale, such as in racial and cultural relations.. That paradigm can also be applied to the ongoing struggle of gender equality.

I'm not trying to assert here that the idea that "women mult-task better than men" was derived and perpetuated by women in general in order to feel superior to men. It may have just came about from women's desire to not be considered inferior. (The idea is a little more timely and tangible than simply stating that "women process their emotions better than men".) Whatever the case, although this particular idea most likely wouldn't be the cause for any big rift between the genders, it is still counterproductive. If nothing else, it's actually merely exchanging old false beliefs with new ones. It's important that niether gender be considered, or feel, that they are biologically inferior or superior to the other. That is why I think it's importantant for anyone representing the psychological community to not perpetrate a popular myth such as this.

I realize that a discussion on gender differences may be a required part of the curriculum outlined by state guidelines, and the video was merely meant to be an educational (and possibly entertaining) presentation for the topic, but I think that a much better exhibition could be used. I would expect the information and material presented in the class to be generally accepted by the psychological community as being current, accurate, and credible since, in criminal convictions such as mine, the completion of this class is a requirement outlined by the state government.

I decided to write to you so I could express how strongly I feel about this without bringing negativity into the group or creating an uncomfortable enviroment for you or anyone else. I would expect that my disaccord regarding this would not, in any way, effect my ability to successfully complete the class.

Thank you,

~Scott Hughes

Sources:

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