

“There are some skills you must have, some ways you must be, and some things you must learn or unlearn if you want to have a healthy, fulfilling and loving relationship. Jed Diamond’s work in *The Enlightened Marriage* covers all of the ‘musts’ and then some. What a blessing!”

—IYANLA VANZANT, author of *Trust*, and host of *Iyanla Fix My Life* on OWN

THE
Enlightened
MARRIAGE

The 5 Transformative Stages
of Relationships and
Why the Best Is
Still to Come



JED DIAMOND, PHD

This is from Jed Diamond's latest book, *The Enlightened Marriage: The 5 Transformative Stages of Relationships and Why the Best is Still to Come*.

The full book can be ordered from your local bookstore or on-line here:
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Chapter 6

Male & Female Communication With and Without Words: Bridging the Great Divide

I had an “aha” experience when I recognized that I talk very differently when I interact with my wife than when I’m talking to close male friends. When Carlin and I talk there’s a certain tension. Although we’ve learned to communicate better and better through the years, I feel like our interaction is more like speaking a second language, rather than what is natural to me. I sense the same is true for her as well.

When I overhear her talking with female friends on the phone, they seem to easily go back and forth talking, talking, talking. It seems to go on forever and doesn’t seem to have a point. When I talk to my friend Lanny and plan our next racquetball game it sounds like this:

Me: Hey, Lanny, we on for Tuesday.

Lanny: Yeah. Got it.

Me: See you then.

Lanny: Gonna kick your butt, my friend.

Me: Not a chance.

That's it. Clean clear, quick and easy.

When I'm talking with a group of my buddies, we often joke, compete, and put each other down in playful ways. We can talk seriously, but there's also a lot of playful competition as we let each other know... "I'm top dog. No, *I'm* top dog!"

I never really understood the difference until I read a book called *Duels and Duets: Why Men and Women Talk So Differently* by John L. Locke, a linguistics professor at City University of New York. Although we often focus on difficulties in communicating between men and women, much less focus has been placed on same sex communication. Locke has found that the way we talk is not just driven by various cultural norms, but by deep seated, evolutionary-based, sex differences.

Step 1: Understand that males duel while females duet

"In birds and mammals, including the other primates," says Locke, "sexually mature males are prone to contend with each other in highly public vocal displays that are aggressive or 'agonistic' in nature."

He describes these male type communications as "duels."

"In many primate species, sexually mature females have an equally strong disposition to affiliate with other females in more private and intimate circumstances," says Locke.

He describes these female type communications as "duets."

When men and women come together they often employ communication styles that are appropriate to their own sex and difficulties often arise. See if you recognize some of these male-type communication traits:

- They interrupt each other.
- They issue commands, threats, or boasts.
- They resist each other's demands.
- They give information.
- They heckle.
- They tell jokes.
- They try to top another's story.
- They insult or denigrate each other.

Likewise, consider these female-type communication traits:

- They agree with other speakers.
- They yield to other speakers.
- They acknowledge points made by other speakers.
- They try and be polite.
- They cooperate.
- They collaborate.
- They empathize.
- They listen.

Of course, as with all male/female differences, these aren't totally separate categories.

Many men communicate more towards the female style and many women more toward the male style. We don't want to fall into the trap of thinking that "all men communicate this way" and "all women communicate that way." However, these differences can help us accept our own gender-specific style and help us better understand the other sex.

When my wife and I are having difficulties communicating, she often accuses me of interrupting her and not letting her finish her thought. I accuse her of taking too long to get to the point. Communication that is comfortable to me is either short and to the point, or rapid-fire back and forth that is familiar with my male friends.

Why Is This Important? Men are not aware of “women only talk” and women are not aware of “men only talk.” I’m never there when my wife is talking to her women friends alone and she’s never in my men’s group. As a result we each believe that *real* communication is the type we are familiar with and believe that communication would improve *if only* our partner would learn to listen and speak the way we do. Further, since women are generally more comfortable with verbal communication the female style has come to be viewed as “the right way to communicate.” As a result men often talk less and less and women assume men are not interested in “communicating.” Understanding the purpose and value of sex-specific styles can help us appreciate ourselves and our partner more fully. As we’ll see, it can also help us appreciate and honor both “male talk” and “female talk.”

Step 2: Appreciate that male/female talk has strong evolutionary roots

Our communication styles are not just culture-specific and easily modified. They evolved over millions of years to allow males and females to survive and thrive. Male talk and female talk are as different as they are because ancestral men and women competed for the things they needed in two fundamentally different ways.

Imagine that you are living as your ancestors did 500,000 years ago. If you were a man you spent a good deal of time hunting. You walked on animal trails away from the main camp.

You had to be quiet, communicating with hand-signals, head and eye movements, and short phrases. If you were a woman you stayed closer to camp, gathered food in an area close to camp, and dealt with noisy children while talking with female friends and relatives.

Men, not only competed to be the best hunter, but competed to be top dog so he would be seen by the best, most attractive women as a good catch. Women are inherently more valuable from an evolutionary perspective. They carry the babies. As a result they get to choose the man they want. As we saw in chapter 2, male genes, bodies, brains, and hormones, differ from those of females. It's not surprising that our communication styles and strategies also differed.

Why Is This Important? If we don't understand that differences are part of our evolutionary strategy of survival we tend to devalue the way the other sex communicates. I often hear my women clients complain that their man doesn't communicate with them. What they really mean is that he doesn't talk to her in ways that are familiar to her. When I point out he is communicating all the time, but perhaps with actions rather than words, she can better understand him. Further, when we can appreciate our differences we can recognize that they can be complementary. Locke says that these different strategies can cause men and women to *clash* when they communicate with each other. "The paradox," says Locke, "is that these same modes of speaking make it possible for males and female partners to *mesh* in their lives."

Step 3: Learn to speak the language of the other sex

Throughout evolutionary history men spent a lot of time with other men and women spent time with other women. There was an appreciation of the different roles and communication styles of the other. Now we spend more time together in work and in family

interaction. As a result we need to learn to speak the other's language and to be able to understand them when they speak.

For starters we need to recognize the importance of non-verbal communication. Words aren't the only means of communication and they may, in fact, be the least common. In her studies on gender differences in language use, Deborah Tannen estimates that as much as 90% of all human communication is nonverbal, including hand and eye movements, tone of voice, body posture, etc.

Women, as a group, are more fluent verbally, though as is true of all these sex differences, there are exceptions to the rule. In our society we've tended to look at female-type communication as the rule and viewed male-type communication as juvenile or less real. What's more we often don't recognize that we have a bias, so both women and men will often view female-style communication that is emotional, empathic, cooperative, and polite as "real communication." Male-type communication that is unemotional, analytic, commanding, and joking is seen as "less valuable."

Just as learning a foreign language can help us expand our understanding of other cultures and allows us to understand and communicate with others, so too can learning the foreign language of the other sex. There are times when female-type talk can be very helpful to both women and men. There are other times when male-type talk is most helpful. If we think of becoming bilingual rather than getting the other to learn our style because it's the right way to communicate, we will all be happier and enjoy a better love life.

Step 4: Don't freak-out if your partner says, "I love you, but I'm not *in love* with you

"I don't love you anymore. I'm not sure I ever did. I'm moving out. The kids will understand. They'll want me to be happy." When Laura Munson heard these words from her husband of twenty years, she did a very strange thing. She didn't cry. She didn't protest. She didn't fight back. She simply decided not to believe him.

In a *New York Times* article titled, ["Those Aren't Fighting Words, Dear,"](#) she offered this visual that many of us have experienced: Child throws a temper tantrum. Tries to hit his mother. But the mother doesn't hit back, lecture or punish. Instead, she ducks. Then she tries to go about her business as if the tantrum isn't happening. She doesn't "reward" the tantrum. She simply doesn't take the tantrum personally because, after all, it's not about her.

I often see men going through Manopause express similar sentiments to Laura's husband (Of course, this can happen to men as well when their wives announce that they've fallen out of love and it's over.) But few people have the insight and courage to do what Laura did. But her experience can help many.

We often recognize the ways children can tell a parent that "I hate you. I hate you. I wish you were dead," and the parent can hear the pain, but not get engaged with the child. It's more difficult when we hear a similar sentiment from an adult, but often it's the right way to handle the angry family member.

Here's what Laura said about her husband. "I'm not saying my husband was throwing a child's tantrum. No. He was in the grip of something else — a profound and far more troubling meltdown that comes not in childhood but in midlife, when we perceive that our personal

trajectory is no longer arcing reliably upward as it once did. But I decided to respond the same way I'd responded to my children's tantrums. And I kept responding to it that way. For four months."

I don't love you anymore. I'm not sure I ever did.

"His words came at me like a speeding fist, like a sucker punch, yet somehow in that moment I was able to duck. And once I recovered and composed myself, I managed to say, 'I don't buy it.' Because I didn't."

He drew back in surprise, she remembers. Apparently he'd expected me to burst into tears, to rage at him, to threaten him with a custody battle. Or beg him to change his mind. So he turned mean. He tried to engage her in fights, but she didn't buy in. It took all her strength not to engage.

She felt overwhelmed with anger and fear. She wanted to fight, to rage, to cry. But she didn't. "Instead," she says, "a shroud of calm enveloped me, and I repeated those words: 'I don't buy it.'" Something miraculous began to happen. As she listened to his pain she decided to give him what he needed, which turned out to be some distance to sort things out. He moved out of the house into a small apartment. As she was able to listen and allow him to work out his own problems, things began to shift in her and how she saw her situation. She wouldn't let herself fall into victimhood.

"I simply had come to understand that I was not at the root of my husband's problem. He was. If he could turn his problem into a marital fight, he could make it about us. I needed to get out of the way so that wouldn't happen."

She simply got on with her life. She planned fun outings for herself and her children. If she wanted him to join them, she offered an invitation, but didn't demand that he respond positively. What happened? Here's what she says:

“And one day, there he was, home from work early, mowing the lawn. A man doesn't mow his lawn if he's going to leave it. Not this man. Then he fixed a door that had been broken for eight years. He made a comment about our front porch needing paint. *Our front porch*. He mentioned needing wood for next winter. Little by little he began talking again about a shared future.

Why Is This Important? I've helped many people do a similar thing to what Laura was able to do on her own. I tell the women. Often when a man believes the “problem is my wife,” I remind them. “It's really with life that's the problem.” Too many fall into the trap of believing that “it takes two people to make a relationship work. If both people aren't willing to commit to the relationship, there's no hope. I've found that isn't true. In an article, “It Takes One to Tango: How You Can Save Your Relationship Even If Your Partner Wants to Leave,” I recall the words of the great George Carlin, “It takes two to tango,” mused Carlin. “Sounds good, but simple reasoning will reveal that it only takes one to tango. It takes two to tango together, maybe, but one person is certainly capable of tangoing on his own.” That's what Laura Munson did. Instead of buying into her husband's mid-life problems, she let him work it out himself while she learned to tango on her own. It's an important lesson we can all learn.

Step 5: Listen to the wisdom on marriage from the world's best animal trainers

We often get caught up in our partner's problems. One of my clients was forever misplacing his keys and yelling at his wife to help him find them. She would leap into action and everyone would be stressed-out until the keys were found. That kind of thing would happen to me a lot. Whenever Carlin had a problem, I thought it was my duty to fix it. I would often nag her to get her to do the right thing. Of course, I never considered it nagging. I thought of it as creative problem solving. Amy Sutherland had a similar problem with keys with her husband.

After seeing Shamu, the killer whale, doing amazing tricks at Sea World in San Diego, journalist Amy Sutherland spent a year following students at Moorpark College's Exotic Animal Training and Management Program, which she describes as "the Harvard University for animal trainers." What she learned changed her life. It taught her to better understand herself, and more importantly how to improve her relationship with her husband and deepen their love. What she learned was very helpful to me and I know it will be to you as well.

"The central lesson I learned from exotic animal trainers is that I should reward behavior I like and ignore behavior I don't," says Sutherland. I've found it is one of the most powerful tools in improving our relationship. Instead of trying to correct our partner and get them to shape up, it works much better to ignore behavior we don't like and reward the things that are in the service of our relationship.

"I followed the students to SeaWorld San Diego, where a dolphin trainer introduced me to least reinforcing syndrome (L. R. S.)," says Sutherland. When a dolphin does something wrong, the trainer doesn't respond in any way. He stands still for a few beats, careful not to look

at the dolphin, and then returns to work. The idea is that any response, positive or negative, fuels a behavior. If a behavior provokes no response, it typically dies away.”

Sutherland found it worked well with her husband. “It was only a matter of time before he was again tearing around the house searching for his keys, at which point I said nothing and kept at what I was doing. It took a lot of discipline to maintain my calm, but results were immediate and stunning. His temper fell far shy of its usual pitch and then waned like a fast-moving storm. I felt as if I should throw him a mackerel.”

It may seem strange to use techniques with our mates that animal trainers use, but remember we all want the same things. We want to please those that care about us. Nagging and negativity just brings on more negativity. It’s not easy to ignore behavior we don’t like and reward what we do like, but it works well. We are all mammals after all.

Step 6: Practice walking like a man can help men and women

I’ll often hear from women who tell me they can’t seem to communicate with their husbands. I suggest they go for a walk together. Here’s why. Just as I suggested there were two different ways men and women talk, remember men duel and women duet, there are two ways men and women engage with each other.

I’ve found over the years that women tend to be most comfortable communicating *face to face* while men tend to be most comfortable communicating *side by side*. I suspect it may have evolutionary roots that go back to our ancient hunters and gatherers. When men were out hunting they would often come sneak up on an animal with each man coming from the side. They would make hand signals to let the other men know their intent. Women would be closer to camp looking at each eye to eye and talking.

Imagine being a man out hunting away from camp. As he stalked the animal he hoped to kill for dinner, he had to worry that there might be other animals stalking him. We've all had the experience of having someone's eyes focused on us. My wife, Carlin, has told me often how it feels to have a man's eyes focused on her. "There are times when it feels frightening. Even if I'm not worried about an assault and rape, a man's eyes can feel predatory."

When men feel eyes focused on them, I think it stimulates body memories of being stalked by a predator. Face-to-face communication, with eyes intently focused, may feel threatening, even if the discussion is mild. Side-by-side communication feels safer, particularly when talking about emotionally charged issues.

"I was amazed at the difference," one of my women clients told me. "I did what you suggested. I asked to go for a walk with my husband when I had some concerns about our son. In the past when I'd sit him down to talk, he would always get angry. Walking side-by-side, he listened attentively and we came up with some new ways to help our son. It never occurred to me that side-by-side communication was something he would find more comfortable, but now I understand. Thank you."

This also works great when talking with teen-agers. When I have boys who I see in therapy, I'll often go for a walk and talk. Or we may toss a ball back and forth. Focusing on the ball, rather than sitting closely face-to-face, makes communication easier for many boys. Of course, there are always exceptions. Some boys and men very much enjoy face-to-face communication. One boy I counseled wanted to stop playing and sit down face-to-face so we could "get down to the important stuff."

Another benefit of walking, whether we talk or are silent, is that it seems to be a natural antidepressant. I've often wondered how our hunter-gatherer ancestors dealt with the stresses of life. They didn't have all the same stresses as we have in modern times, but they had to deal with issues of identity, sexuality, bringing home the bacon, and staying healthy. We've always had to deal with the losses and traumas of life.

In his wonderful little book, *Walking Your Blues Away: How to Heal the Mind and Create Emotional Well-Being*, Thom Hartmann asks, "How has humankind historically dealt with trauma for the past two hundred thousand years, before the advent of psychotherapy? His answer is that we walked. As we swing our arms left and right to keep rhythm with our strides, it helps the brain process and heal emotional wounds, without having to talk about them.

In my book, *Stress Relief for Men: How to Use the Revolutionary Tools of Energy Healing to Live Well*, I describe walking as the original energy healing tool. You can use it to connect more deeply in your relationship. It's good for healing body, mind, and spirit; as well as the inevitable relationship problems that we all face.

Step 7: Learn how to improve your marriage without talking about it

When there are relationship problems, it's almost axiomatic that we *know* we should talk about them. All the self-help books tell us that good communication is essential for having a good marriage and good communication, we are told, rests on learning good talking and listening skills. I'm a therapist and marriage and family counselor. I make my living talking to people.

But one of the most important things I've learned being married to my wife Carlin for more than 35 years is that talking about problems can cause more problems than not talking about them. I know this may sound like heresy to some of you. How can things get better if we

don't talk about them? "My husband just ignores our problems," a 52 year-old woman told me. "I've tried everything I can think of to get him to talk to me. I'm coming to the conclusion that he just doesn't care about the relationship.

This has been a conclusion that many women have drawn. I try to help them understand that men care deeply about their relationships and about their mate and family. They just don't believe that talking about problems will improve things. "Women want to talk about the relationship because they are upset and want to feel better," say Patricia Love and Steven Stosny, authors of *How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It*. "Men *don't* want to talk because talking *won't* make them feel better. In fact it will make them feel worse."

I learned this lesson from my wife. As is true of about 10% of the population, I have the more female-type brain. I love to talk. My wife has a more male-type brain. She is less comfortable with talking and expressing strong emotions, particularly anger.

People with male-type brains often become "flooded" when they talk about emotional-laden concerns and talking about the relationship is always emotion laden. That's why men will say the five words they dread the most are, "Honey, we need to talk." What often happens is that the more one person wants to talk about an issue, the more fearful the other person becomes. As a result they become more and more distant. The person who wants to talk despairs at getting more deeply connected and the person who resists talking feels alternately attacked and ignored.

Robert, one of my clients, talked about how it felt interacting with his wife. "I feel like she is always pecking at me. It's like a blue jay, peck, peck, pecking on my head. It feels like I can't do anything right, that nothing I do ever pleases her." His wife Sarah is equally frustrated. "If I don't keep at him, he just ignores our problems. I'm so afraid that we're drifting apart and if I don't get through to him our marriage is going to go under."

Here is what I told Robert and Sarah. This advice has helped thousands of other couples. It may be helpful to you. Please take what you find useful, and leave the rest.

Robert, Sarah, first take a deep breath. When things aren't going right in our relationship we all get scared. When we act from fear, rather than love, we usually make the problem worse. One of the good things about working with me is that I can help hold the relationship in the best possible light. You're no longer alone. You don't have to figure this all out yourself.

Both Robert and Sarah smile a little after taking a breath.

Second, you need to understand that all relationships go through these times when there are blocks to the flow of love and both people feel they are not getting what they need. It doesn't mean the relationship is on the rocks. Things are not as bad as they might seem.

Third, when we're afraid we often get locked in negative cycles. Sarah, you become afraid when you feel Robert isn't hearing your concerns and you work hard to get through to him. Robert reads your concern as a statement about his inadequacies as a husband and withdraws from the perceived criticism. When Robert withdraws, Sarah becomes even more frightened and works harder to get through. Robert feels he's doing battle with a "mad blue jay" who is determined to peck a hole in his head.

Both Robert and Sarah laugh at the image. So you need to break the cycle.

Forth, there are a number of ways to get reconnected without talking about it. As we've discussed, you can go for a walk together. You can simply sit and hold hands. One of the things that Carlin and I do is to exchange massages. She loves to have her feet rubbed and I love to have my head and scalp rubbed. Another couple I worked with would take regular baths together in a big tub. "It's impossible to stay angry and disconnected when you're in a bubble-bath together," they told me.

Fifth, when you do talk, remember to talk about what the other person is doing right, rather than what they are doing wrong. Remember, our minds are hard-wired to focus on the negative, so we have to work hard to ignore the negative and appreciate the positive. I carry a small stone around to remind me of that fact. It's a beautiful purple stone. Every day I reach into my pocket, rub the stone and think of something I appreciate about my wife. I also think about something I appreciate about myself.

Why Is This Important? When we are having problems, usually one partner, more than the other, may want to talk their way out of it. But talking can cause more problems than it solves. Remember we are all animals and the best animal trainers have learned many techniques that work without words. I'm not suggesting that we should never talk out our problems, but that there are other ways to connect without words. Sometimes words can help, but too often they get in the way. I've had to learn to talk less and find ways of communication that worked best with Carlin. I trust you'll find your own ways to live and love more fully and deeply.