

Primary Love Needs of Men And Women In Relationships

It is very important to understand how men and women generally contrast in the ways they experience love in a romantic relationship—and even how they value others and feel valued in a close work relationship. In using the ideas that follow, it is most important to explore your partner's specific preferences, and not be stuck rigidly to these general expectations, since these common perceptions do not fit everyone. These ideas, though, can be a way to start a discussion with your partner and to assess how you are each doing at perceiving and satisfying the other's needs.

John Gray (Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus) and others have found that men and women prioritize their primary love needs differently. **Women** often prioritize their love needs as:

1. Feeling cared about (implying specialness)
2. Feeling understood
3. Feeling respected
4. Feeling their partner's devotion
5. Feeling validated
6. Feeling reassured

Men often prioritize their relationship love needs as:

1. Feeling trusted (implying competence)
2. Feeling accepted
3. Feeling appreciated
4. Feeling admired
5. Feeling approved of
6. Feeling encouraged

Unless we understand the often different needs and expectations of our partner, we will typically try to give our mate what we ourselves would want, usually to find we are not being acknowledged or appreciated. For example, a husband whose wife is upset with him might back off in order to give her space (trusting her to work things out, just as he would do for another man and would want for himself). His wife would likely feel abandoned, not cared about.

A woman, sensing her boyfriend upset, might push him to talk about his feelings (showing she cares about him, as she would with another woman and would want for herself). Her boyfriend would likely feel pressured, not trusted to work things out himself.

An advantage that gay men and lesbians have in relationships is that they instinctively understand what their partner needs, since it is the same set of priorities that they value themselves – unless, as is often the case, their particular partner is different from the stereotype in one or more ways. If so, this needs to be discovered;

otherwise one partner will treat the other in the way he or she feels is right, only to find out that what was being lovingly offered was not being correctly perceived or appreciated.

Looking closely at these two lists of priorities, we can see that they represent two important, but distinct, approaches to showing and experiencing love: the first involving **embracing and protecting**, and the second focusing on **letting go and freedom**. Both are supportive and nurturing, the first providing **security and stability** and the second providing **permission to be independent**. Of course, both aspects of love are necessary to a healthy, balanced relationship, just as they are both necessary to the raising of a healthy child. Couples must communicate specifically, unapologetically, and frequently about their needs, and partners must believe what the other says despite how they themselves feel.

Another useful exercise for couples: Select from both lists the love needs most important to you and your partner, and then rate independently the degree to which each of you are receiving what you need and think you are providing what is needed by your partner. You can then share and discuss your perceptions.