

Planetary logic seems to work

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With the help of his immensely popular book, "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus," author John Gray has become a self-proclaimed ruler of the relationships universe.

Pretty much anything that creates stress in a relationship -- from quarrels to strained dinner conversation to 2 a.m. feedings with a newborn -- can be logically explained using the Mars/Venus ideology, first advanced more than a decade ago.

From that simple thought, Gray has spawned a series of books covering most scenarios that bring men and women together: "Mars and Venus in Love," "Mars and Venus in the Bedroom," "Mars and Venus on a Date," "Mars and Venus in the Workplace," "Mars and Venus Starting Over" and "Mars and Venus Together Forever."

Gray's latest enterprise is board games. "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus: The Game," launched in 1998, has been reintroduced this year with new questions and revised rules. The object is to get couples communicating in a fun and playful way, even without previous knowledge of the book.

Couples pair up and answer questions in four categories, depending on where they land on the board. A third party reads the question aloud and each person writes his or her answer down separately. The point is for the two lovebirds to offer the same answer.

A sample question: An office romance is: (a) playing with fire; (b) often inevitable or (c) no different from any other romance.

Or: It turns a man off when his partner: (a) corrects his behavior; (b) doesn't acknowledge what he does or (c) tries to control him.

Gray, who has a Ph.D. in psychology, says brain physiology is mostly to blame for friction between the sexes. When men are stressed, their dopamine levels go down, and they withdraw. When women are stressed, their serotonin or "well-being hormone" levels drop, and they crave conversation and collaboration.

Indeed, this relationships expert seems to have an answer for everything. Perhaps his confidence comes from years of writing books and a nationally syndicated column. Or perhaps it is merely faith in an idea that Gray says helps him and his followers cope with their love lives a little easier.

Q When a couple wins your board game, what does it say about their relationship?

A Winning is secondary with the board game. The key to the game is to get to know your partner. People get bored in relationships when they think they know everything about the other person. When you learn something you did not know, your partner seems more interesting.

Q What is an ideal setting for playing the game?

A Play the game with at least one other couple. Part of the game is storytelling, which helps couples get talking easily. Any time partners talk together in a playful way, it will bring them together.

Q Do you think the game starts lovers' spats?

A When you sell more than a million copies, I guess some couples may start fighting.

Q What was your favorite board game as a child?

A "Monopoly."

Q What is your take on online dating?

A I think it's a great thing, but I have one warning. In our society, passion and sex are very important; they need to be there for a relationship to survive. When you finally meet the person, there has to be actual physical chemistry. You think you feel chemistry by getting to know them via the Internet, but it is imagined.

Q Do you watch reality TV dating shows? Which is your favorite?

A We watch "The Bachelor" at my house. It's educational. In the show you find out what everybody is thinking and feeling. I am curious to see how these women take rejection without looking really bad.

Q When a woman on the show reacts badly, what does that tell you?

A The needy woman who has to have the guy takes it the worst. Those who do well on the show are women who can cope with the unnatural stress of falling in love with a man who is falling in love with other women.

Q Is neediness a big no-no?

A Neediness is when I come home and who I am is not enough. When you need a lot, whoever you are with is not enough. When you are not needy, you are happy with what you have.

Q Which is your least favorite reality TV show?

A "ElimiDATE." When my teenage daughter watches, I am sure to watch it with her. I want to be there so I can point out that people really aren't like that. It is so trashy.

Q What is your most disastrous encounter with the opposite sex?

A I was in a close relationship with a woman who was cheating on me. I knew it and she would not admit it. I had to follow her to prove it.

Q Your first marriage failed. What did you learn from the experience?

A My first marriage failed before I learned that men are from Mars. Once it was over, I threw out everything I learned in school and decided there was something else. It helped me develop the material for my first book. And I've been married to my second wife, Bonnie, for 18 years.

Q What is the secret to a successful relationship?

A Love is not enough. Good relationships have good communication. When a man is coping with stress, he does not want to talk about it. He will give short answers to his wife's questions. And she will misinterpret. Men and women speak different languages, but they do not know it.

Q Is misinterpretation what kill relationships?

A When a guy goes in his "cave," as I call it, the woman thinks that he does not care about her. She reacts and treats him the same way. It spirals downward from there.

Q Why does love -- if love is supposed to be such a good thing -- cause so much unhappiness?

A Love causes happiness. When it does not work out the loss of that happiness is so painful. If it did not cause so much happiness, it wouldn't cause so much suffering when you lose it.

Q In gay relationships, who is from Mars and who is from Venus?

A The same principles work for gay couples.

Q What if a woman is from Mars instead of Venus?

A There is nothing wrong with a lot of Martian, as long as she is true to her Venutian.

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