

Let's face it, we are different

Shopping. One little word that can create World War III between the sexes. Take a moment to think about some generalised gender-based attitudes to the S-word. Cliches don't account for all types, but they can often contain some accurate assumptions.

A guy thinks to himself, I need clothes. So I'll go to the menswear sale and get three pairs of pants, 10 shirts, two ties and be in and out in 15 minutes.

But if our Romeo takes his Juliet along, she will want to compare all the different prices, the relative quality and value, and what looks best. They she may want someone else's opinion and insist on checking out a couple of different stores to get the best deal.

Meanwhile, Romeo has left the shop in disgust and is standing outside tapping his foot impatiently, while Juliet is finalising the purchase of his wardrobe.

But wait a minute. Change the shop to the local hardware store and the positions are reversed.

Romeo is suddenly like a kid in a toy shop, busy exploring every aisle and comparing the merits of this and that electric saw. This is important stuff to Romeo, and shouldn't be rushed.

This time it's Juliet who is standing out the front of the store, dying to sit down and have a coffee and get away from the big boys' toy store.

So perhaps we aren't so different in the way we shop, just in the kind of shop that is important to most of us.

Fashion is a topic that is often big news for women and lower down the totem pole for men. Compare the floor space in large department stores to make some obvious deductions about the relative importance of fashion and clothes for men and women – which section takes up most of the floor space? Certainly not the blokes' clothing area.

Communication is another area where the sexes tend to differ. Women like to sit and talk and get involved in things like relationships and clothes shopping, while men prefer to be doing things rather than talking about them.

However, this generalisation falls down when it comes to a topic close to most blokes' hearts – sport. Men will talk forever about the composition of footy teams and they will analyse football in as much depth as women will discuss personal relationships.

The difference is that men's talk will tend to be analytical rather than emotional; another significant gender difference that may be observed.

As with other gender differences, we need to learn to value the difference rather than denigrate it.

Men and women often complement each other, and it can be useful to have a partner with a very different perspective from your own.

Men can be good at helping women take a step back from an all-encompassing situation when necessary. But it's all in the approach that they take. If Romeo simply tells Juliet that she is overreacting, he is likely to get his head bitten off.

But if he tells her that he understands that she is upset, and that she has good reason to be upset, but should think about how she wants to handle the situation, he is likely to get a better hearing.

And if Romeo and Juliet are due somewhere for drinks in half an hour and he is totally absorbed in finishing the last bit of paving on the patio, Juliet has two choices. She can berate him and tell him he's selfish for not dropping everything and getting ready, ensuring Romeo will arrive at drinks in a grumpy mood.

Or, the smarter way would be to understand that it's in Romeo's nature to want to finish what he has started, for Juliet to perhaps go alone to the party and explain that Romeo is going to follow in half an hour, once he's finished paving the patio.

This is a compromise where everyone wins. Each partner has given a little ground and met in the middle, instead of turning this example of their different approaches into grounds for divorce.

Like so many things in life, it all depends on how you look at it.

Perhaps the French have it right when they say "vive la difference".

Survival tips

- **Realise that most men and women are likely to have different passions**
- **Learn from each other and value our different approaches**
- **Find a way through conflicting needs – compromise is always better than criticism.**