

## **The Cure for the Knock down, Drag out Fights that Threaten our Love**

Sarah Elizabeth Malinak, M. Div.

Have you ever had one of those knock down, drag out fights where you knew when you opened your mouth to speak that you were going to wind up with raised voices, hurt feelings, and the belief that this argument would never be resolved? Chances are that the invitation to the fight came wrapped in a package that appeared innocent but turned out to be hiding anger that was just waiting to erupt; like a toxic bearing snake-in-a-can, blowing up in your face and wounding your heart.

There is a physiological reason for those kinds of fights that began the day you were born and dates all the way back to when humans first appeared on this planet. Before I tell you more, let me say that I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Patricia Love and Dr. Steven Stosny for writing the book, “How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It.” Their book was a big eye-opener for both my husband and me. I cannot recommend it highly enough! But now, let’s get back to the purpose of this article.

There is an innate difference between men and women that shows up in infants. Infant girls do not like lack of contact or isolation. They cannot tolerate it. As such, baby girls are experts in the art of eye contact and bonding rituals. It is a survival skill that keeps parents interested in them and their welfare. From birth through the rest of their lives, women are sensitive to the degree of separateness or closeness in all their relationships. It makes them sensitive to the consequences that will come if they do not behave well. It means that fear of abandonment is their biggest trigger.

Infant boys do not like sudden stimulation. They cannot tolerate it. They startle faster than girls and it takes less to startle them. Men are hard-wired for hyperarousal because of its great benefit in defeating predators. Throughout history, whether animal or human, our predators have been crafty stalkers and attackers. The hyperarousal of the males could mean the difference in whether an entire tribe flourished or was killed off. Because being over stimulated causes a cortisol dump that is quite painful to experience, even infant boys will protect themselves from it by avoiding direct eye-contact with their parents. Usually, this results in parents either turning their attention away from their baby boys or over stimulating them in order to hold the baby’s attention. That results in baby boys experiencing shame, which brings on a painful cortisol dump that takes hours to dissipate. It means that men avoid resolving conflicts with their women because those conversations so often mean hearing what he did wrong (in specific, excruciating detail), resulting in feeling shame and the pain of the cortisol dumps. It means that shame is a man’s biggest trigger.

In general, fear being a woman’s biggest trigger and shame a man’s isn’t a big deal. It is how we manage the fear and the shame that causes stress to a relationship, resulting in the knock down, drag out fights that deplete us of energy and threaten our love.

Here is the secret then to not only avoiding the knock down, drag out fights but communicating in a way that protects your weaknesses and builds on your strengths.

As a woman, if you are already feeling fear, you can bet he is already feeling shame. As a man, if you are already feeling shame, you can bet she is already feeling fear. This is true even if neither of you has spoken yet! If you can feel the feeling in yourself, *something* has occurred that is making each of you experience your biggest triggers; fear for her and shame for him.

Therefore, if you find you want to either confront your lover or run, do not say anything. Don't speak. Breathe, even step away, and consider a time when you felt love and pride with your partner. As you consider a time when you felt the opposite of fear or shame with your lover, you will relax and feel a little better. You can then move towards each other without words or with fewer, softer words and move forward in a healthier frame of mind and heart.

You can practice this with small things all the time, gaining expertise as you go! For those times when you cannot help yourself and you wind up in a knock down, drag out fight, you can still use this technique at the end to help you get back on track, repairing and healing the love that was momentarily, traumatically damaged.

And if you have children, especially infants, remember why your little boys avoid direct eye contact and mushy cuddling. While they are just trying to protect themselves, they actually need more touch and attention than little girls do. So be patient, hang in there with them, neither turning away nor insisting on your own way. Slowly but surely, their tolerance for attention will increase as they learn to trust that you will not shame them.

Men and women are complex, magnificent creatures! Understanding our physiological differences can help us take how we deal with each other a little less personally, giving us patience to learn how to deal with each other in more loving, supportive ways that speak to both sexes in the manner they best see and hear each other's love.

\*

There is a secret to relationship success that is direct, simple, and effective. We and others have used it to transform marriages that felt burdensome and hurtful into marriages filled with love and satisfaction.

You can discover this secret for yourself in the e-workbook called *Creating the Love You Want: Five Unique Steps to Improve Your Marriage*. Go to <http://www.CreateTheLoveYouWant.com> and order your copy right now. With it, you can begin making a difference for yourself tonight!

