

10d Complementarity

Learning Objective

To better understand the different levels of male/female complementarity which are all founded and united in the spiritual dimension.

Key Words

Complementarity: The differences between male and female becoming mutually beneficial.

Initiating: Taking the first step in a relationship of mutual love. It is in opposition to control.

Activity 1: Watch Humanum film series 1 up to 2:28 at <https://vimeo.com/136970979>. Discuss with class, 'the masculine and the feminine are more than just biological, they are cosmological'.

Step 1

We sometimes seem a bit stuck in our culture between two extremes: a narrow stereotype of the man working, drinking, making all the decisions and the woman staying at home, in the kitchen cooking and cleaning and doing as she's told on the one hand; and on the other, an aggressive stance that holds there is no difference at all between men and women, which focuses on competition and rights and everyone being an individual.

Christianity offers a more moderate vision: complementarity. In 2013 (updated 2015) Bob Grant published an article in The Scientist: 'Male and Female Brains Wired Differently'. He, and others, has argued from brain scans that women's brains have increased connections between left and right lobes, whereas men's brains have increased connections from front to back, within hemispheres, and that these differences only seem to emerge after the age of 14. This would seem to back up what is a common experience - that there are differences between the sexes, above and beyond the external biological ones.

Step 2

Many couples find the woman tends to be better at communicating her emotions, whereas the man is sometimes better at knowing when to move on from such analysis. Often, a simple but important issue arises in marriages regarding 'sharing' and 'offloading'. It seems women are more likely to prefer to de-stress by sharing about their day, whereas men often prefer some quiet time to process things, before sharing. This can cause misunderstanding when the two meet in the evening. Differing needs to share or be silent should be perceived as two different ways of doing things and nothing more.

None of this is fixed. You will have your own genuine strengths and weaknesses, and they are valid, because you are a unique person. Any talk of masculinity and femininity is there for us to understand general patterns, which offer helping understanding ourselves. Though we are definitely male or female, none of us are completely masculine or feminine, and one of the beauties of friendships with members of the other sex is that they can draw out a man's more feminine traits and vice versa. And that is how it is meant to be: mutual enrichment. We help each other grow and we work together in cooperation.

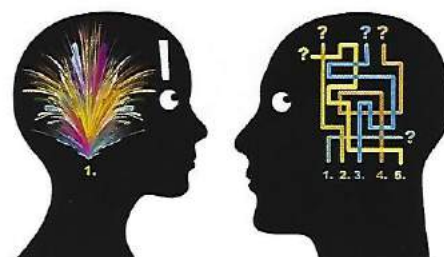
Activity 2: Think of a friend of the opposite sex. Write down some benefits of having this friend. Would you agree they offer something 'complementary' that might be different to your friends of the same sex? Are there things you would not be prepared to do with, or share with them, because they are of the opposite sex? If yes, why is this?

"A woman wants to be loved so that she can show love. A man wants to love so that he can be loved".

John Paul II, On the Dignity of Women.



Rigid stereotypes aren't helpful.



Male and female he made them.

Step 3

This is where we come to the crux. The Church's vision is that, within a romantic relationship between male and female, masculinity is more about initiating: loving so that I can be loved, and femininity is more about receiving and responding: being loved so that I can love. We are all receivers and responders in relation to God.

Step 4

Man's role of initiating in his marital relationship with woman is complemented by woman's initiating in us all an understanding of our relationship with God. We all have to learn to be receivers and responders to God and women often have a crucial role in helping men understand what that means.

Pope John Paul II gave some very thoughtful meditations, over many years, on the idea that the complementarity of man and woman is most clearly seen in the sexual act which, as an icon or ideal expression of marriage, reveals the complementarity that exists at the physical, biological, emotional, psychological and, especially, spiritual level.

Step 5

A particularly sensitive situation is if any of us discovers a strong, continuous attraction for persons of the same sex, instead of the complementary sex. This calls for sensitivity, perhaps even more so in our culture, when so many things seem to be polarised around this. We cannot deny the objective reality of sex being directed towards procreation and family, nor the link between this and marriage, commitment and parenthood. Nor can we deny if our subjective dimension moves us another way. It's important that this is made clear: that Christ and his Church do not ask us to dismiss either of these dimensions, and that we grow when the objective truth shapes our subjective experience. We have to have the courage and patience to hold on to truth and our experience, and cooperate in integrating them. This isn't easy!

Activity 3. Watch the following clip (Jason Evert: Homosexuality)(11:50) which explains further the issues in the previous paragraph. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLrRfwpvERU>. If time permits discuss as a class or watch with parents at home and share your findings with the class at the start of the next lesson.

John Paul II offered his vision as a way for us to see that each person is 'holy ground' and is someone who can help me understand myself better too. It encourages sensitivity between males and females. And it also helps us value motherhood and fatherhood. A world focused on power and control naturally demeans these and says that what you do, and how much you earn, counts most.

Summary

The differences between the sexes can be confusing sometimes. This can be made worse by stereotypes and ideologies being forced upon us. The Church speaks of complementarity, reciprocal giving and receiving, and mutual enrichment. John Paul II spoke of truly understanding the sexual act as the way to unlocking the understanding of the complementarity of the sexes. The differences of each, in union, strengthen both.

Suggested Activities

1. Watch and discuss. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lCbtmdrpcl> (Christopher West: Why Gender Differences Matter)(8:50).
2. Go around the room and interview 6 persons of the opposite sex and ask them what do they believe is the advantage of being that sex...collate your findings and discuss as a class.
3. "Are men and women equal and the same or equal but different?" Debate this question.
4. Play 'devil's advocate'. With a partner: one of you plays the devil's advocate and argues against all the points in this lesson. How do you counter the arguments?
5. The French have a saying 'Vive la difference!' which means we should celebrate and enjoy the differences between men and women and not try and eradicate them. Do you agree? Write an evaluation that considers both points of view then explain and justify your conclusion.



God given differences, when worked out, become enriching.

10g The Joy of Fertility

Learning Objective

To realise that discovering one's fertility, understanding and owning it, and offering it appropriately is one of the greatest joys of life.

Step 1

What do you want to be when you grow up? Perhaps, a substantial percentage of teenagers answer, 'I don't know'. But what is important to realise is that the question you might hear - 'what job/career will you have when you grow up?' - might not be the most important question to answer. What about wanting to be a husband and father, or a wife and mother? It is surely good that females no longer grow up only thinking about being a wife and mother, but it is no improvement if you are not encouraged to think about these vocations at all. An important part of growing up is thinking through the calling to marriage and parenthood.

Step 2

Similarly, we have a deep need to make a difference, to be fertile; but our discovery of our biological fertility, our understanding it, owning it and appropriately offering it, gives shape to all our fertility. We are not all called to marriage, but marriage is so written into the human heart that we should only say no to it for the sake of a better calling. This might be priesthood, religious life or a single life of virtue and service.

This is true of both sexes, but as it is the female that initiates in procreation and, on a practical level, is more affected by it through her cycle, it is perhaps even more important for the female to discover, understand and own her fertility. This is one reason why the contraceptive pill poses such a moral danger - because it drives a bus through female fertility.

It takes time for a teenage girl to begin to understand her fertility, and very much connected with that, her cycle of fertility. To start with it can be frightening, very painful and draining, and so it's no wonder that, at first, a teenage girl may not see the beauty and joy behind all that is happening to her. On a biological level, there could be many imbalances in the woman's body that can lead to menstruation being very debilitating, but with medical help and advice, adjustments that focus on the holistic health of the female, not just her cycle, can be made... The alternative of simply taking the Pill lacks any sensitivity and can often mask chemical imbalances that could be better dealt with in another way. It is a cheap and quick response that denies the woman a personal and holistic treatment and brings with it dangers and side-effects that are glossed over. Since the discovery of the Pill, many more women have imbalances in their cycle and the problem of infertility has significantly increased.

Not only that, the Pill bulldozes through and prevents the young woman understanding her fertility and her femininity. Again, this takes sensitivity and time - and daily doses of hormones work against that. Instead, the teenage girl is interrupted from getting attuned to her biology and its rhythm. This then stifles the integration of her spiritual and physical fertility - her growth as a person with the capacity to give herself, and her fertility, in love, to another person. It also makes it harder for male and female to choose the spiritual over the physical, by removing the physically fertile dimension of sex.

"Shared joy is the second name of love."

Sabino Palumbieri.



The joy of fertility.

■ Step 3

In marriage, the pill and its consequences deprives the sexual act of its given and giving nature, because what fundamentally gives it its meaning is the mutual gift of one's fertility in love. (All artificial contraception does this.) One can only give what one has. In marriage, a woman (or a man) may be physically infertile at the moment of sex, but they still give themselves completely when they offer their love and the physical fertility they have, within this intimate communication of persons.

Once the woman understands and owns her cycle of fertility, she can educate her husband to understand it too, as part of her person, and together they can cooperate with that cycle in seeking either to conceive a child, or not. This is stewardship: cooperation with God in nature. Human intellect can discern whether it seems more appropriate to conceive at this time, or not, but it has not the capacity to know what is ultimately best. Therefore, it is used well when it guides the timing of the sexual act; it oversteps its capacity when it controls fertility through contraception.

On the previous page is a diagram of a natural fertility awareness chart which can now be supported by a phone app to provide fertility awareness.

■ Step 4

The Church is clear that all artificial contraception, that separates the unitive and procreative aspects of the sexual act, is wrong. (All Christian Churches throughout 2000 years taught this until 1930.) The pill being 'artificial' is not the problem. Reading glasses are artificial. But medicine's purpose is to aid the body in its normal function. The Pill does the opposite and fights against the body's normal function. Maybe this is one reason why the female body struggles against the Pill! We can understand that, while taking the Pill for health reasons isn't wrong and can be right, we have to be very aware of the danger it presents in stifling the whole journey of the female discovering, understanding and owning her biological fertility, helping her understand her spiritual fertility, and then teaching her spouse about it, which both helps him treat her as a person and strengthens the bond between them. Making a difference is one of the deepest joys of human life - making a difference together, even more so. And at the heart of this joy is the process of owning one's physical fertility - whether one ends up having no children, two or ten!

Summary

Understanding one's physical or biological fertility is important in itself, and central to understanding one's spiritual fertility. It should lead to a deeper personal ability to own oneself and give oneself appropriately. This takes time and sensitivity. The Pill can interrupt this process, and should only be used wisely for medical reasons. It is always wrong to use it in marriage to prevent the gift of one's fertility, and using it in this way stifles growth in communication and co-operation between the spouses themselves, and between them and God.

Suggested Activities

1. Write a job description for being a parent. Identify the duties involved, the qualities required, the qualifications needed and the benefits received.
2. "Being a parent is the most important job of them all." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
3. As you may know some people may use artificial contraception to stop their fertility from doing what it's meant to do. So here is a question to ponder "Is my fertility a blessing or a curse?" Discuss and write a response. If it is a blessing then what responsibility comes with this?
4. How do hormones affect our sexuality? How do we grow in understanding what it is to be masculine or feminine? How might a daily intake of hormone - such as the Pill - affect this process?
5. Catholic teaching on contraception can often be misunderstood. Create a poster, leaflet or write a letter to a friend explaining why the Church believes artificial contraception is not good for a relationship.
6. Watch and then discuss and create a mind map to bring out key lesson points.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIad4KiPnxU>

Learning Objective

To understand something of the hormones that are connected with sexual activity and how they affect persons.

Key Words

Oxytocin and Vasopressin: hormones that increase emotional bonding between sexual partners, and between parent and child, especially in the female.

Step 1

Human procreation is unlike animal mating because it doesn't stop with the conception of the baby, for either father or mother. It is specifically designed also to include the joint rearing and education of the child. It's a lifelong team effort:

(a) Because the father and the mother bring different qualities into the family,

(b) Because there are two distinct jobs to be done which are complementary, and which therefore cannot easily be achieved by one person: the role of nurturing and caring for the family and of home building; and the role of directing the family as a whole and providing for their external needs. These are **initiated** by mother and father respectively - not done separately by them, but initiated by them. Especially in pregnancy, and the child's early months and years, the mother surrenders much of her own autonomy in order to nurture their child. This calls upon the father likewise to surrender his independence, to support and protect both of them.



Care of children is a lifelong vocation.

Step 2

The feminist Camille Paglia once said that: "It is not male society but Mother Nature which lays the heaviest burden on woman." To shed light on this let's look deeper. When sex is indulged inside a committed marriage, it is the woman who bears the greatest burden because it is she who risks pregnancy and bringing up a child on her own. This isn't a punishment. It is just that a child is so important and vulnerable that God has given ultimate responsibility for it to one person to make sure it is not abandoned.

"What made the traditional family remarkable, a work of high religious art, is what it brought together: sexual drive, physical desire, friendship, companionship, emotional kinship and love, the begetting of children and their care, their early education and induction into an identity and a history."

Jonathan, Lord Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom.



However, there are other ways in which a woman bears the brunt of non-marital relations:

- She also often takes the indirect consequences of using contraception, with its side-effects and possible damage to future health and fertility.
- She is more prone to STIs than the male, and is especially vulnerable to them as a teenager before her body is fully formed.
- Oxytocin bonds her more securely to her sexual partner than happens with a boy or a man. This is a chemical thing: nothing to do with her strength of character or her liking for the man. A woman tends to find it more difficult to enter uncommitted sexual relationships and is prone to suffer mentally and emotionally if sexual relationships fail.

True masculinity should acknowledge this biological vulnerability and seek to be appropriately sensitive to it and protective of it, rather than abuse it. Indeed, vasopressin seems to encourage this sensitivity as will be mentioned below.

When a woman engages in a sexual relationship, her brain is flooded with a hormone called oxytocin, which is designed to bond her permanently to her sexual partner. The neurochemical fills her with desire, leaning her towards trusting her man. She 'falls in love' with him: making love really does increase a sense of love. Oxytocin release doesn't even require full sexual relations but is also prompted by other sexual behaviour - so we even have to be discerning in entering into these. This bonding hormone is also released in large quantities at childbirth and in breastfeeding, helping the mother to 'fall in love' with her baby and give them new priority in her life.

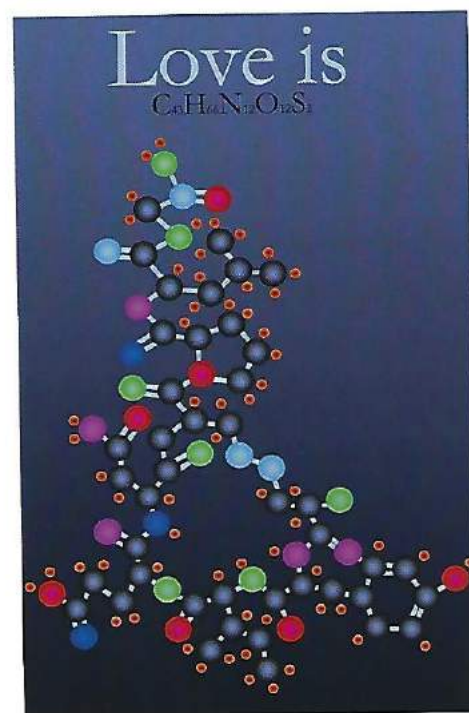
Oxytocin release weakens with new sexual partners and so does the ability to bond in a permanent exclusive relationship. Patrick Fagan, a Senior Fellow at the Heritage Foundation ...in the US, in one survey, found a link between the amount of sexual partners a woman had chosen to have and their marriage lasting - starting from 80% of married couples staying together for those who had only had one partner.

Men also release oxytocin, with similar effects which are important to acknowledge, even though they are lessened by high testosterone and low oestrogen levels. Vasopressin affects males more. It promotes sexual arousal, pair bonding and mate guarding, but also the sense of separateness and dampened emotions that a man can feel after sexual intercourse. It seems to be present in the male visual system, which might explain why male human bonding tends to be more visual. As with the woman, the man's ability to bond into a permanent relationship lessens with multiple partners. Instead, the dopamine rush of sexual excitement becomes the dominant chemical affect, which can become addictive. This means that sexual experimentation can easily weaken the ability to settle into a permanent marriage.

None of this means that if a person has sex before marriage, their marriage is doomed. There are a lot of other factors in a life-giving marriage. No-one is a statistic. However, the biology does show that our sexual behaviour has more consequences than we perhaps realise. There is no such thing as 'safe sex', as every sexual act affects the person chemically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

Summary

Looking at things biologically, it does appear that man has been created to be the initiator in sexual relationships, and woman the receiver-responder - in a communion of love. In complementarity, it is the woman who initiates in childbearing and rearing, and the man who needs to receive and respond to this. All our hormones seem to direct us this way. However, just as we need to understand our emotions and master them to truly grow, so we need to understand our hormones and master them too. We are called to respect our own and each other's gift of fertility, using it wisely. In particular, the male should never manipulate the woman's consent. When we act wisely and justly, oxytocin and vasopressin strengthen family bonds.



Oxytocin love hormone molecule.

Suggested Activities

1. In groups identify a list of roles a father may have within the family. Now do the same for mothers and compare.
2. Have a discussion about 'faithfulness'. Does faithfulness happen automatically or is it something that has to be practiced?
3. Make a 'faithfulness' acrostic really appreciating the value of such an important quality in any relationship.
4. In your own words, explain with examples what is to be understood from the quote from Camille Paglia.
5. "Women use sex to get love, and men use love to get sex." This is a familiar saying but is it true? Discuss.
6. "The hormones released during sex are nature's way of seeking faithfulness." Discuss and write a response showing that you have considered more than one point of view. Write your own concluding thoughts.

11h The Gift of Human Life

Learning Objective

To understand more the integration of love, life and joy, particularly in reference to cooperating in the gift of human life. It is this integration that enables us to grow as persons, not simply as individuals.

Key Words

Unitive: join together, unite. Regarding the sexual act as uniting a couple in love, the two becoming one flesh.

Procreative: The transmission of human life, reproduction of the species, how babies are made!

Contraception: 'Contra' = against. Contraception is against human life forming from the sexual act. Artificial Contraception using the 'hormonal Pill', patch, condoms, etc.

Natural Family Planning: Using a woman's natural fertility cycle to plan the conception of children.

Step 1

Watch as an introduction: 'Humanae Vitae' (2:35)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnFo9t7YNUI>

On 25th July, 1968 Pope Paul VI publishes the encyclical (letter) *Humanae Vitae* on the transmission of human life. It reaffirmed the Church's unchanging teaching that the sexual act should be between spouses (husband and wife) and always be open to new life (the couple should not do anything to deliberately prevent conception). For many people, even in the Church, this seemed disastrous. Life was getting busier and busier. Since the invention of the "Pill", contraception seemed easy and trouble free. Taking control of fertility seemed to empower people, especially women; to protect them from unwanted pregnancies; to protect their lives from being overwhelmed by large families; perhaps even from their life being affected by family size and expectations which they did not share with their husband. For men, too, the prospect of being able to separate sex from fatherhood looked like a positive thing. On the face of it, what was wrong with married couples sometimes using contraception?

Step 2

"People who look for sex without love are lying, because the closeness of their bodies does not correspond to the closeness of their hearts." YouCat 403

How can you have the taste of food separated from the nutrition of food? They need to go together.

Step 3

The main thrust of the argument from Pope Paul VI was that it was wrong to separate the 'unitive' and 'procreative' sexual dimensions of love. They are two dimensions of the same fertility. He showed that it is the mutual gift of fertility that makes sex loving and unitive, so deliberately removing that gift removes the meaning of the act.

"The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships."

Paul VI, Humanae Vitae n.1.



Life-giving love.

He also showed that the perceived benefits wouldn't be borne out in reality. Instead, more than 50 yrs ago in 1968, he talked about 4 main areas:

1. There would be a general lowering of sexual standards in society, especially in the young who are more vulnerable.
2. There would be a general increase in the disregard for the physical and psychological well-being of women by men.
3. Governments would use family planning programmes for coercive purposes once contraception became widely available.
4. We would begin to treat our bodies as though they were objects or commodities.

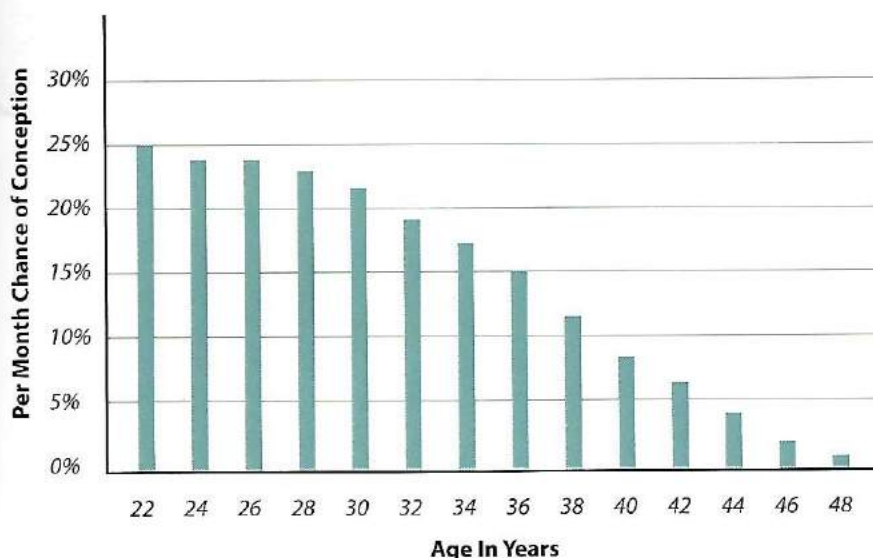
■ Step 4

When a couple fails to conceive, artificially replacing the sexual act with IVF can seem appealing and right to them. We are called, though, to be stewards of God's creation, not replace him. There are many ways in which technology can help the sexual act lead to conception (such as getting in touch with and cooperating with the woman's natural fertility cycle; ruling out other fertility issues). These methods are more natural, less traumatic, much less expensive and more successful than IVF. IVF also raises real moral concerns with the discarding of unwanted or unused embryos. Because no-one knows when a human is entrusted with the soul, then from the moment of conception all human life is sacred. It is not to be frozen, experimented on or destroyed.

If you were conceived by IVF, you were still created by God out of love, and known by him from all eternity.

The Age Factor

As you can see by the graph below, by the age of 35 a woman's chances of conceiving per month is decreased by half. The downward slope continues until age 45, when the natural fertility rate per month is approximately 1%.



Suggested Activities

1. When we talk about desensitisation we sometimes refer to "The frog in the water effect". What is this?

2. *"Everything that makes a sexual encounter easy hastens at the same time its plunge into irrelevance."* Paul Ricoeur.

Write an evaluation of this comment showing that you have considered more than one point of view. You should come to a conclusion.

3. Discuss whether contraception has truly liberated women, or actually made them more "available" and vulnerable to being used.

4. **Research:** What percentage of abortions are as a result of failed contraception?

5. Look at the fertility graph. What pressures are there on couples to delay having children. Why is this more problematic for women.

Summary

Our culture is so dominant, it is often hard to see the Church's vision as a coherent whole, rather than receiving it as sound bites that are made to sound negative, old fashioned and too difficult. If I allow my mind and heart to step back and not jump into automatic mode with "but I want to do what I want", then the more I will see the teaching as coming from a Father and Mother who just want me to be happy and truly free and fulfilled. No deep joy comes without hard work - whether it be practicing at a sport, a musical instrument, any other talent, or a relationship. The excitement of passion is readily seen, but if I don't sell myself short or under-estimate how precious I am, then I will realise how joyful goodness is, and what an amazing privilege we all have when God invites us to share in his infinite creativity.