

A Mixed Methods Analysis of Review Posts Discussing “Love and Respect” Published on To Love, Honor, and Vacuum in January 2019

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Rationale for Analyses

Many of the comments left on the series of posts on *Love and Respect* raised concerns. Some excerpts of these comments are included below:

- *A healthy marriage could read the book and understand the point is to be unselfish, but in our case it just affirmed his selfishness.*
- *Following this bad advice to be even more submissive almost cost me my life.*
- *This is how I felt when given this book to read during my abusive marriage. It simply reaffirm what my abuser preached from sunup to sundown... I was the problem and the one walking in sin.*
- *I was worried that if Christ/Church was the model of my crummy marriage, maybe I shouldn't love Christ.*
- *You know how this makes women feel? As though our husbands will only love us if we give them what they want.*
- *You cannot submit your way out of a violent situation.*
- *I felt the yoke of oppression being put back on me and I fought it tooth and nail. But everyone lauded the book and talked about how great it was. So I tried my best to endure the rest, thinking there must be something wrong with me.*
- *This "husbands need physical release or they'll stray--and that's really all there is to sex." has led us to marital rape and abuse. It's toxic at it[s] best. I've been in that marriage.*
- *Overall the gender stereotypes and views of sex are deeply problematic. I'm sure it's great for those who fit into the stereotypes. But the problem is that it is deeply hurtful and even damaging to any that do not.*

Upon reading these comments, we felt it important to conduct thorough analyses on the hundreds of comments received in response to these posts on the book *Love and Respect* to ascertain if these comments were part of an outlier group or more representative of how the book affects those in vulnerable situations.

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Selected Comments for Themes included in Finding 5

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Theme: Both women and men need love and respect

Theme: Love and Respect is too focused on men and their needs

Appendix A: Selected Additional Comments, By Theme

Additional Comments for Finding 2

Theme: I dislike Love and Respect

Additional Comments for Finding 3

Theme: Love and Respect is dangerous and could facilitate abuse

Theme: Love and Respect made my relationship worse

Theme: The ideas in Love and Respect were used by my partner to be negligent, cheat on me, and/or abuse me

Additional Comments for Finding 4

Theme: Putting the vast majority of the blame on women for marital problems is wrong; it is not a woman's fault if her husband cheats

Theme: Love and Respect puts undue pressure on women

Theme: Love and Respect made me feel belittled

Theme: Women also have sexual needs, they may even be higher than her husband's

Theme: Women being made to feel they cannot say no to sex is wrong; being pressured into sex in order to keep your husband from straying is unbiblical

Additional Comments for Finding 5

Theme: Both women and men need love and respect

Theme: Love and Respect is too focused on men and their needs

Methods

Comments from seven Facebook Posts written by Sheila Gregoire or in which she was tagged and five blog posts at tolovehonorandvacuum.com given were included in the analyses. Replies to comments from the blog post were included invariably, though replies to Facebook posts that simply agreed with the previous poster, were not applicable to the topic at hand, or which were a part of a redundant back and forth were excluded from the database. If the Facebook post was one in which Sheila Gregoire was tagged, the main body of the post was included in the analyses. Comments sent to Sheila Gregoire as private messages on any of her social media platforms were also included if they were relevant. Replies to the weekly newsletter sent via email were also included. Comments, messages, and replies sent after March 1, 2019 at 12:00 AM were excluded from the database. Any comment made by Sheila Gregoire, her employees, or her immediate family were excluded from the database.

To facilitate analysis, comments were coded with an ID number and the commented post, the comment content, date and time of commenting, and commenter name. Blog post comments also were coded with the email and IP addresses of the commenter. Comments which were not topical or which were otherwise not applicable to the discussion were included in the spreadsheet but were excluded from the analyses by being coded “0”. Comments emblematic of important themes are included in the report with proper names removed, important sections marked in bold, and grammatical mistakes corrected and marked with brackets.

A list of codes for comment content was inductively created after reviewing the comments but before coding began and additional codes were added during coding when encountered. When applicable, comments were coded for more than one theme. A quality control check was conducted in which all codes were reviewed for accuracy. Related themes in the research were clustered together into larger findings.

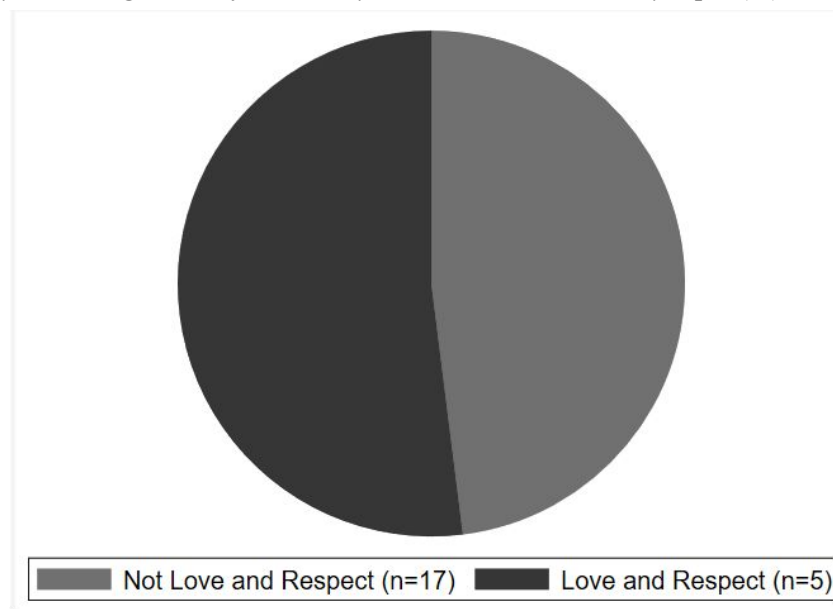
In order to investigate reader engagement, the seventeen To Love, Honor, and Vacuum posts published in 2019 which did not cover Love and Respect were compared with the five posts that did. Google Analytics data was retrieved for each post and their landing page sessions and all page view sessions were recorded. All comments given on To Love, Honor, and Vacuum posts published in January, 2019 written before March 9, 2019 at 11:59 EST were similarly compared.

STATA 15 (MP) was utilized for data analysis (code and raw data in .tsv file format are attached in the Supplementary Information folder). One sample tests of proportion and the two sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for equality of populations were utilized for statistical inference.

Finding 1: The To Love, Honor, and Vacuum posts written regarding Love and Respect have generated a large amount of reader interest

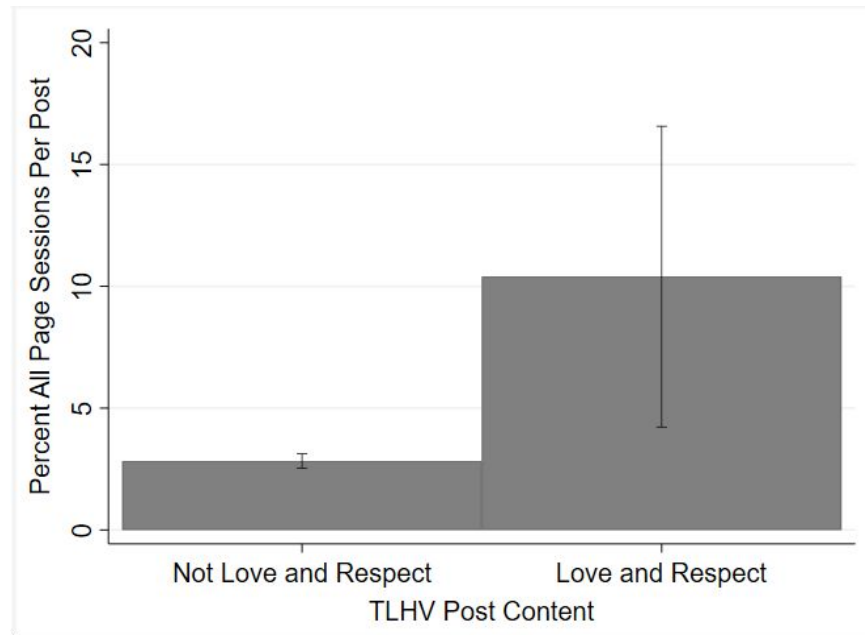
The posts written on www.tolovehonorandvacuum.com regarding Love and Respect were extremely successful and have been a major source of traffic for the site ever since their publication. As of March 12, 2019, the first post written on the subject ranks 4th in Google for the search “Love and Respect Review.” It is also notable that the 5th result is a negative review of the book written by a licensed counsellor in 2016.

Figure 1: January 2019 Page Views for January 2019 Posts on TLHV, by topic (%)



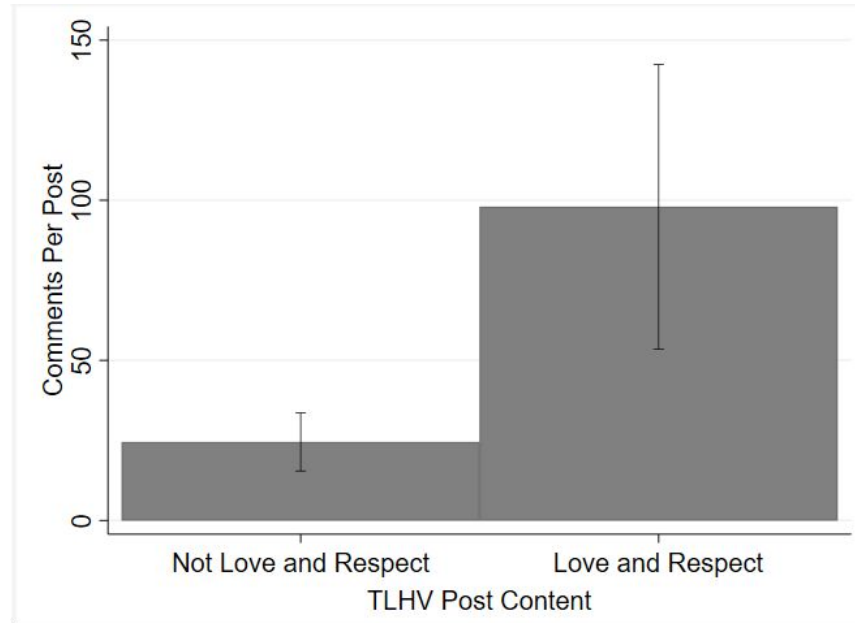
While only five of the twenty two posts written for To Love, Honor, and Vacuum in January 2019 addressed Love and Respect, those five posts comprised 52.0% (80% CI: 25.4%, 78.6%) of all page views for January 2019 posts in the week following each post’s publication. Posts published in January 2019 not regarding Love and Respect made up 48.0% (80% CI 43.0%, 53.1%) of all pageviews over the same period.

Figure 2: Average January 2019 Page Sessions for January 2019 Posts in the Week Following their Publication on TLHV, per post (%) with 80% Confidence Interval Error Bars



The average percent of total monthly page views for posts written in January, 2019, with each Love and Respect post making up, on average, 10.4% of the total page views for January 2019 posts in the week following each post's publication (range: 2.5% to 25.5%) while non-Love and Respect posts received, on average, 2.8% of page views in the week following each post's publication (range: 1.0% to 4.3%). This result was statistically significant using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov two sample test for equality of populations ($p=0.01$). For all of January 2019, love and respect related posts had, on average, 4.26 times the page views that other January 2019 posts received.

Figure 3: Average Comments for January Posts on TLHV, by topic (count)



The average comments per post, as of February 20, 2019, was 98 comments for posts regarding Love and Respect (range 27 to 167), but was 24.5 comments for posts not related to Love and Respect (range 1 to 126). This result was found to be statistically significant using Kolmogorov-Smirnov two sample test for equality of populations ($p=0.01$). That Love and Respect related posts generated significantly more reader engagement than posts not relating to the book indicates increased interest and emotional response by readers to the topic. Additionally, thankfulness for the posts was the most frequent theme in the comments: it was included in 101 (32.9%) comments and by 95 (42.6%) separate commenters.

Finding 2: Comments expressed dislike for Love and Respect more often than they said it had been helpful in their relationship

A total of 463 comments made by 223 unique commenters were included in the database, of which 307 (66.3%) met the inclusion criteria. Of these, only 43 comments (14.0%) and 33 commenters (14.8%) indicated that the book was helpful to them in their relationship. However, seven of these commenters noted that they desired to reread the book after hearing Sheila's critique. A further thirteen comments (12 commenters) said that while the book was helpful in some way for them, it could be misapplied and dangerous if one spouse had ill intent or that they did not enjoy the book, despite finding a few good points. Only 26 commenters (11.7%) and 31 comments (10.1%) stated that the book is a favorite, well-liked, and/or biblically accurate. Additionally, 88 comments (28.7%) and 79 commenters (35.4%) noted that they actively disliked the book and had been familiar with it before reading Sheila's piece. An additional 4 comments (1.3%) and 4 commenters (1.8%) noted that their spouse disliked the book. That more comments noted active dislike of the book than those who found the book in any way helpful was found to be statistically significant (one sample test of proportion, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, there were more comments noting dislike of Love and Respect than comments describing it as a favorite, well liked, and/or biblical (one sample test of proportion, $p < 0.01$).

Comments exemplary of Finding 2

Theme: Love and Respect was helpful for me in my relationship, but I can see how it could be misapplied

My husband and I definitely jumped on the Love and Respect bandwagon when the book was at the height of its popularity. Over time, we discovered that while some of it worked for us, some of it didn't.

It's definitely a book for marriages where both people are good-intentioned, not something I'd recommend to couples going through various difficult situations. And ultimately, we are all unique individuals who give and receive love and respect in our own ways. Too many blanket statements diminish the beauty of how intricately God designed each and every one of us.

Yeah, that's definitely problematic. That's why I said the book is definitely most helpful for couples who are already generally well-meaning toward each other, and not experiencing major problems like abusive behavior. Obviously we're all sinners and we can all improve our marriage! But some people need a LOT more help than others and that's where this book could be misapplied or downright dangerous, instead of just being unhelpful. I was just saying that I PERSONALLY found it really convicting, encouraging, and inspiring, but my marriage is of two people who typically are pretty loving AND respectful in both directions (all glory to God!!).

Theme: I dislike Love and Respect

I completely agree with your analysis of this book. **I was very disappointed in the book as it really did nothing for our marriage or sex life.** Making love to me as a man is extremely emotional. We are not

just looking for a release but a deep emotional connection to the one we love and we want our wives to feel the same. I would much rather please my wife than receive my own pleasure. Thank you!

Theme: My spouse dislikes Love and Respect

Sheila, I have silently benefited from several of your post through the past few years. However, when I came across this post I wanted to comment with my personal experience. Love and Respect was gifted to us at our wedding. **Being a anxious to make a good and God-honoring start to our marriage, I started reading it shortly after we got back from the honeymoon. I was so disheartened by Eggerichs' depiction of a marriage relationship. As I was reading I kept thinking if I had read this before I got married, I would have stayed single!** I wish I had our first year of marriage to do over again. I resented my husband for letting me pick up the slack in multiple areas of our life. I sent mixed signals to my poor husband while I was trying to pretend everything was okay because a godly wife should always be positive toward her husband. Being the “neat freak” in our relationship, his story about wet towels on the bed hit so close to home that it made me want to cry. I was overwhelmed and disillusioned by my marriage. To be fair much of my struggle should be blamed on my own immaturity and not directly on the book. But, at a time I could really have benefitted from solid encouragement to start healthy conversations and open up to my new husband about my concerns in our relationship, Eggerichs' book pushed for the opposite under the guise of biblical authority. Nearly everything you wrote in this review was exactly how this book effected me and there were several other issues you didn't even have time to cover. **(Thankfully my husband doesn't hold to this definition of respect. He has since read sections of the book and groaned.** I now tell my newlywed friends your communication can get better and don't follow this book. ;))

Finding 3: Love and Respect has the potential to harm and its ideas can be easily weaponized by a spouse with ill intent to facilitate abuse

A major theme in the comments was that Love and Respect is dangerous and could be used to facilitate abuse (81 comments [26.4%], 69 commenters [30.9%]). Forty one commenters (18.4%) said that ideas in the book made their relationship worse (44 comments [14.3%]). Furthermore, 21 commenters (9.4%) claimed that the ideas in Love and Respect was used to facilitate abuse in their own life (21 comments [6.8%]). Three women described how the anguish caused by their experience being abused via the ideas in Love and Respect caused damage to their relationship with Jesus.

The answers given in Love and Respect state overtly that women and men should bear up under difficult marriages and stay in them to serve Jesus and be rewarded in heaven. “When you make a decision to love or respect your spouse, the dividends are without end. Jesus is offering you a bargain. Do a few things on earth in this life and get many things forever in heaven” (p. 272). The only caveat made in the chapter is a statement regarding abuse, “which I absolutely condemn as wicked and urge a wife to seek protection and help for” (p. 278). Nowhere does the book state that there are times in which it is justified to leave an abusive spouse; instead, the rewards promised to those who stay in unsafe situations are focused upon.

That the concepts included in Love and Respect can be twisted by a spouse with intent to harm was evident before the book was published. From page 282-283, a woman’s comment is included,

Now whenever he senses anything that smacks of disrespect, even when it isn’t, it reminds him of our pasts and he gets infuriated. I haven’t seen such rage in awhile... Actually, I regret letting him know what I had learned from you because he used it against me each time... I can take on the criticism - I feel I deserve it - but his rage is withering and makes me want to get away and hide.

Eggerichs offers solidarity and sympathy in response, but then goes on to describe at length the importance of avoiding the term “victim.” In fact, he claims that spouses will be rewarded if they remain with an continue loving and respecting an unloving and/or disrespectful spouse. No caveats are given for abusive situations. Furthermore, he claims that if a person lays blame for marital problems at the feet of a spouse, “if you go the blame route, you wind up only a victim and you miss out on God’s rewards” (p. 286). Again, there are no exceptions given here for spouses who are negligent, adulterous, or abusive.

Selected Comments for Themes included in Finding 4

Theme: Love and Respect is dangerous and could facilitate abuse

I bought this book several months ago after it was recommended to my husband and I as a great tool for couples. **I was so confused after reading the first couple of chapters, wondering why I felt like the**

book was written as an instruction only to the wife. It's so sad that someone can use spiritually as a coverup for emotional abuse, and turn it into a best-seller.

Theme: Love and Respect made my relationship worse

I'm sorry to say that I read this book and followed the advice given for men. Wholeheartedly throwing myself into showing my wife "unconditional love" with the hopes of restoring our marriage.

Unfortunately for me this meant turning a blind eye to increasingly destructive behavior, immorality, and even abuse. All with idea that if I just showed her more love, she would all of a sudden wake up and realize that she really wanted me. Of course this didn't happen and I turned to tough love instead. This didn't bring her back either, we are now separated and divorcing. But at least i'm not living in the barren wasteland of sacrificing everything for someone that has no intention of ever sacrificing self for me. Not what I wanted, but better than the alternative.

I literally just sent this to a friend of mine who has watched my marriage fall apart due, in part, to these exact statements! The exact words I used in my message to her were "Yes! Yes! Yes! Someone finally wrote exactly how I feel about this damn book!" Thank you for writing this. Thank you for putting this out there so clearly. I wished the church would teach the aspects of sex that you brought up here. Thank you!

10 years ago I attended a L&R conference in an attempt to help restore my marriage with a negligent husband. We had been married 2 years, I was early in our first pregnancy, and he was staying out until 4am four nights a week. What he got out of their conference was "Men and women are made differently and have different needs, therefore I am just fine the way I am. It's wrong to tell me that my behaviour is wrong for a married man, because as a man I don't need to conform to what women think is appropriate behaviour. If we are going to stay married, we don't have to fit our marriage into a box, it can be whatever works for us." So I had to leave, 5 months pregnant, and we were never able to reconcile. I had totally forgotten until now what role that L&R teaching played in our marriage deterioration. **Like you said, a healthy marriage could read the book and understand the point is to be unselfish, but in our case it just affirmed his selfishness.**

My husband and I started listening to his podcast series and I'll be honest in the beginning I didn't think anything negative and the concept of my husband giving me unconditional love really appealed to me and sounded great and I thought 'yeah I can do this respect thing'. Then last week I brought up something that ultimately made my husband annoyed and quite defensive and he doesn't behave too nicely when he's like that and he knows it. After it was all done and dusted and we were good he made a comment that just set alarms bells off in my head he said "well the whole Love & Respect cycle just went out the window didn't it" it just dawned on me that wait a minute if in his head I was coming across as being disrespectful by bringing up a particular topic and telling him how I feeling about it he then saw it as 'well now the gloves are off and I don't have to show her love because I think she disrespected me' I didn't say anything in that moment I just wanted to pick the right moment and it was literally 2 days later I started reading all the commentary and your blog & posts on L & R. I was flabbergasted and horrified at what I was reading. I sent my husband some of your posts and comments and we talked about it that night and he too was shocked. Needles to say when I explained to hubby how I had felt the other day about his comment he

apologised profusely and said he didn't want to make me feel like his love was conditional and that he would pick and choose when to withdraw it. **I realised then that really deep down my husband wasn't really like that male chauvinist guy who has the power of 'I give love and I take it away' and somehow even those 7 podcasts of L & R had planted a terrible filter in his head.** I am so glad now we never continued them and so appreciative that people like you are willing to go against the tide (being his and his book's popularity) to speak up for what's RIGHT!!

Theme: The ideas in Love and Respect were used by my partner to be negligent, cheat on me, and/or abuse me

I can attest firsthand that following this theology with my abusive husband almost left me dead by his hand. When we first dated/married, I would stand up to him when he was in one of his rages, and when our marriage was fractured I turned to biblical advice to learn how to “fix” what was obviously my issue if he was constantly so unhappy. When I lost my fight, so to speak, he turned even more dangerous, trying to provoke me into a fight. I left the day he genuinely tried to choke me to death, and I refused to stand up to him. I now know I did everything I could to save our marriage, but **following this bad advice to be even more submissive almost cost me my life.**

I stayed in a very emotionally abusive relationship because I was taught so wrongly. He would always throw respect in my face. Anytime I didn't agree with him I was being disrespectful. I read books telling me to pray for him and be respectful. Meanwhile I was dying inside, constantly criticized, love was used as a tool to punish or reward me. **I know that there are a lot of good marriage books, but they did me a disservice because they didn't address abuse. Now that I'm in a relationship where we have mutual love and mutual respect, I can't believe I lived so oppressed for 15 years of my life. It's so sad.** And you know what opened my eyes one day? I read a blog post about getting cheated on (That also happened a few times in my marriage) - and the author wrote "God cares more about you than your marriage." I had to read it again and again as I felt a burden lift. It's so simple but so profound. I honestly had worked so hard on saving my marriage because that's what I thought mattered most. Not once had I thought God might care more about me than if I stayed married. Anyways that was kind of all over the place, but I feel strongly about marriage advice in the Christian community because of my experience. I even had a Christian counselor diagnose him as narcissistic but never told me anything else. It's crazy.

Thank you for this Sheila!!! I 100% agree, this is very dangerous teaching. It belittles women and can break their spirits especially in abusive situations. **This is how I felt when given this book to read during my abusive marriage. It simply reaffirm what my abuser preached from sun up to sundown... I was the problem and the one walking in sin.** Thankfully, a dear friend walked with me through leaving and healing. She helped understand that I mattered, that my feelings, thoughts and voice mattered. Sadly, I still hear this faulty teaching in churches. Someone close to me recently encouraged me to keep quiet about my concerns with my (new) husband because I was blocking what God was trying to do in his life. She told me that even though I had valid points and hurts I needed to put those aside for the “bigger picture” (that my husband is supposed to be the head and lead, so that my family will be blessed). I'm sure this person meant well. But I could not reconcile the notion that speaking up about hurtful things (being out down, having my feelings being dismissed as not important, etc) could be out of the will of

God. After reading this post I see what bothered me so much. The advice given was very much what comes from Love and Respect– keep quiet and show respect. *Sigh*

Thank you for this. I'm so sick of seeing this book recommended. These teachings were toxic to our marriage (my husband was a very, very broken man – “basically well meaning” doesn't even enter into the discussion. He's slowly healing, though). I haven't read the comments, so I may be repeating, but my take on this book was basically: if Emmerson wants it but doesn't get it from his wife, it's lack of respect or overt disrespect. If Emmerson doesn't want it (like the issue of picking up wet towels) but does get it from his wife, he chalks it up to lack of respect or overt disrespect. **He writes over and over, “I didn't feel respected.” He paints himself a great, big carte blanche. It's largely about him, and the wife and the unit is distant second or third. My husband began using this tactic w/ me.** We were taught this in church by the elders. “This is the best teaching on the man/wife relationship I've ever encountered” they told us. So, thank you for speaking out. We desperately need this.

Thank you for writing and sharing this one, too! What a horrible book!!! Years ago, when in the throws of my husband's sexual addiction, which had starting progressing beyond porn, a marriage mentor at our former church made it all about respecting him. She told me I was fully responsible for making him feel 100% respected and like a man. Over the next year, our marriage mentor asked at every meeting if he felt more respected and if I felt more loved than the previous week. He happily reported each week that he was feeling more and more respected, while I was becoming severely depressed each week as I was feeling less and less loved. **He was reaping the benefits of “unconditional respect,” while still fulfilling his sexual needs outside of our marriage, ignoring and neglecting my sexual needs, emotional needs, etc., and being verbally and emotionally abusive to me. Practicing unconditional respect, especially while my husband blatantly showed no desire to behave respectably, nearly killed me. I became near suicidal from depression.** Fortunately we've gotten away from that person, and that church, we have found good counselors and recovery groups, and he and I are both much better today. But I agree with absolutely everything you wrote here. The idea of unconditional respect is SO harmful!

I appreciate you sharing this week about the love and respect book. I could never finish it. Too depressing and off. I really thought both wanted both. And I hate it how a lot of books treat women as a man[']s slave and have no voice. Sure they are not that direct but that is what it often condenses down to. I thought there was something wrong with me. Bad girl! I am glad you broached this topic as I now know there are a heap of other people who have issues with it too now. Such a relief. Sometimes I feel like I have the weirdest ungodly ideas when all I want to do really is to honor God. I also realise part of the issue is my husbands long term hidden porn use and all the lies that left me confused. His guilt over his sin meant he was always on the hunt to ‘bring me down’ to make himself feel better but those mixed messages were so confusing. **I always thought I must be a really bad person and my family and friends were just being nice to me. But no my husband was abusive to me because of his sin.** Now we are trying to work it out and build a better future, it[']s a rough journey. Your blog helped me to deal with this. I will ever be grateful for you. I also think you did the right thing talking about it on the blog. It gave lots of people a voice it also shows clearly the book is a problem and maybe the author will listen though I don't hold out much hope. And as Brene Brown would say unless you are in the arena you have

no right to critique. Well you are an author who deals with similar issues so in my view you are the right person to say something. THANK YOU!!

Theme: The ideas in Love and Respect drove me away from Christ and/or the Church

Thank God I found this! **I was worried that if Christ/Church was the model of my crummy marriage, maybe I shouldn't love Christ.** I love this inspection of the word "submit." I miss loving my Lord with freedom and abandon.

Thank you so much Sheila. I cannot explain to you how healing it has been to read your posts. I have stopped going to church mainly due to the issues you talk about. And I refuse to date Christian men because of this reason alone. I have had multiple male pastors and men in church treat me the way you speak about and teach these types of things. **After I left a marriage where I was being treated this way, and was finally standing up for myself, I was actually accused by the male pastor of "leaving my faith" and that god had told him I needed to return to my husband.** To which I replied "when I hear the same thing, I'll be sure to listen". Thank god I didn't listen to him and go back or I'd still be in an abusive marriage. Thank you so much for shedding light on these topics that absolutely MUST be discussed. You are so brave. And I'm so grateful to be able to read your blog and see that I wasn't crazy. That these problems are rampant in church and that they MUST be dealt with. It has been truly healing to read your posts and I cry, out of sheer happiness when I read it knowing I am not alone and knowing that other women who are in similar situations also get to read these posts and hope that one day it might save them too

I'm so glad you are talking about this Sheila. I really respect you. If you had asked me at the time of reading Love and Respect what I thought of it, I'm sure I would have said positive things. Those were the days-excuse me, YEARS of trying to fix my rotten marriage by myself. My husband and I are still together after 21 years of marriage but only after he filed for divorce, I moved out and finally understood and then faced the hard truths of what a mess our marriage was. My part being that I could/should hang in there and keep trying selflessly no matter what. I stopped going to church because of not wanting to be around that type of teaching anymore. Still love Jesus of course. I had read every marriage book that I could get my hands on. I'm free from that now, thank God. It's terrible to live through emotionally abusive crap for 19 years and with every turn and all advice being to fix myself. Ugh. Much better since I learned to be me without the brainwashing. No longer do I believe so many unhealthy teachings. Never will I go back to works based sacrificing my life only to promote more selfishness in my husband. I'm finally free and back with my husband and he has become better since I changed my wrong beliefs and ways of handling marriage. Thanks for all you do.

Finding 4: Love and Respect puts an undue burden on women and ignores their sexual needs

A large number of comments (66, 21.5%) and commenters (56, 25.1%) felt that the ideas described in Love and Respect put undue pressure on women in order to fix marital problems. Many women shared their own stories of feeling belittled or condemned after reading the book or participating in small groups going over Love and Respect material (20 comments [6.5%], 18 commenters [8.1%]).

While Love and Respect claims it does not suggest women be “doormats,” it often asserts that a woman should respond to her husband’s sinful behavior, such as anger, with respectful silence. One example of many (p. 221) “Your quiet and respectful behavior will win him. This is the key to empowerment: *you get what you want by giving him what he wants.*”

According to surveys for the Girl’s Guide to Great Sex, in approximately 25% of marriages the wife has the higher sex drive. Asserting the importance of considering women’s sexual needs and desires was an important theme and was shared by 27 (8.8%) comments and 26 (11.7%) commenters. Additionally, many noted that it is destructive to say that women must have sex with their husbands in order to prevent them from straying (31 comments [10.1%], 29 commenters [13%]). Reasons for this included that it creates a damaging sense of shame and, in extreme cases, may facilitate coercive sex or even marital rape.

Selected Comments for Themes included in Finding 4

Theme: Putting the vast majority of the blame on women for marital problems is wrong; it is not a woman’s fault if her husband cheats

I had a similar experience in my marriage. My husband is a wonderful man, but like so many he has a selfish streak and struggles with anger. I read L&R early in our marriage. I am by nature a compliant person and I had never been rude to him or belittled him, but any time I brought up an issue in our marriage it would just upset him and he would end up blaming me. According to L&R this must be my fault because I wasn’t being respectful enough. We have always had a fulfilling sex life, so I thought according to L&R that my husband could never struggle with porn. Well 11 years in I discovered that he did occasionally view porn. Of course I was devastated, but **I also realized something hugely important – my husband’s sin was not only not my fault, but I couldn’t control the outcome of my marriage by being the perfect wife. I had to leave that up to the Holy Spirit to change my husband, and put our future in God’s hands, not my own.** Things improved quite a bit from there, but something was still missing. Fast forward to this year, when we moved with 4 kids and remodeled our new house. Everyone was stressed, and hubby was increasingly angry. And I found myself feeling fearful of him and incredibly guilty. It finally reached the point that I knew something was seriously wrong in our marriage and I went to counseling. He wouldn’t go with me but I did it anyway. At our first session she recommended I read Boundaries. I sobbed through the first chapter. Everything I thought about what it means to be a godly, submissive wife was so backwards. I decided I wasn’t going to fear my husbands anger anymore. That

was HIS issue, not mine! And like I said, he is a good man and I knew he would never hurt me. What was I so afraid of anyway? **It was such a huge turning point the first time I stood up to him.** He was ranting about something I did, and I just told him he wasn't going to make me cry, not this time. He kept blustering and I held my ground, fighting back tears. Finally he said, "you probably feel like I'm trying to break you, don't you." And he calmed down and apologized. The next time he got upset with the kids for some mess, I didn't step in and fix it for him. I just calmly said, "If this is really important to you, you can come talk to me about it when you've calmed down" and I walked away. You know what he did? Cleaned it up himself, came back in and apologized! **Once I set up boundaries, stopped shielding him from the consequences of his actions, and started speaking my heart, our marriage has been completely transformed.** I no longer feel afraid to share my heart with him, or get nervous about upsetting him. We are able to talk about things we couldn't before. And you know what the difference is? HE is respecting ME!! He is enjoying me more because I am the woman he fell in love with, not some sad doormat version. It has been a bit bumpy with more conflict than we are used to as he is adjusting to the new "rules," but I am feeling more hopeful than ever about our future. I think I am going to be writing Mr. Eggerichs a letter soon. His advice was the opposite of what a woman married to a husband like mine should do. He is a strong man, and he needs someone strong enough to call him out (lovingly, of course) when he needs it.

Theme: Love and Respect puts undue pressure on women

Thank you so, so much for writing this series! My husband and I went through the the love and respect series early in our marriage and, after years of following this advice, it nearly destroyed me and our marriage. I was tired, resentful, and feeling unloved. This book taught me that, as the wife, I always needed to be the one to sacrifice, to "break the cycle". **You know how this makes women feel? As though our husbands will only love us if we give them what they want,** which is exactly what Emerson endorses.

I wish our faiths as a whole had more reliable advisors on the topic of violence... I turned to everything I could get my hands on to try to learn how to be what I needed to be to fix our problem, and it was faulty. In reality, **you cannot submit your way out of a violent situation.**

Theme: Love and Respect made me feel belittled

My church regularly offers marriage classes based on Love & Respect because, "husband's really enjoy the course." I left with some insight on how I can be unintentionally disrespectful, but mostly feeling an inch tall. Shortly after the last class, in the middle of an argument my husband said (kindly), "I feel like you don't respect me." I had been working hard to use a nice tone and focus on the issue at hand, so **I asked back, "Do you really feel disrespected, or are you just upset you're not getting your own way?" He thought about this for a few days and decided it was the latter.** I grew up with my mother being a doormat in the name of respect and my father walking all over her in return, and so my husband knew before we married I would not tolerate being in a marriage like that.

My husband is the good-hearted type Emerson says is needed for his book to work. But mixed into my man's good heart was a LOT of toxic crap from his family of origin, including the belief that respect equals silence and no questions and obedience. I had just enough crap from MY upbringing to believe this is what I was supposed to aspire too, but I was continually failing and being berated for it. Seven years into our marriage, I was dying. I found a counselor & she taught me I had options and choices other than "sit down and shut up." I slowly started coming back to life -- Setting boundaries, speaking my opinions, learning my own worth, standing on my own two feet, making healthy choices and coming free of the co-dependance that had been created in our marriage. But then a year later we went to the church L&R study and I felt myself dying again with every video session. **I felt the yoke of oppression being put back on me and I fought it tooth and nail.** It was implied I was fighting it because I knew it was right, and my sinful nature was fighting against how God created us to be. I came home every night from those video sessions desperately discouraged. I wept so many tears. I felt I was being crammed back in the "sit down and shut up" box, though nobody said those actual words. It was applauded as a way to get the love I needed, but to sit down and shut up and slowly die again was not worth it to me! To lose my personhood again, to be devalued constantly - - I couldn't go back to that. **But everyone lauded the book and talked about how great it was. So I tried my best to endure the rest, thinking there must be something wrong with me.** Now you write these posts. WOW. So. Much. Validation! To know I'm not crazy. There WAS something wrong with the book and Emerson's advice. I was right to fight it. That niggling feeling that something was wrong (you know, the one he says we're not supposed to trust) was right. Whoa. Thank you for being brave enough to put yourself out there and tackle this popular book. Thank you for speaking truth to desperate drowning women. Thank you for speaking truth to women who are slowly discovering that we are worth taking care of as well. That we're worth being loved, we also are allowed to want sex, and that God created us BOTH to need intimacy, sex, love, and respect. Thank you for always urging that a marriage be focused on Christ, not people.

Theme: Women also have sexual needs, they may even be higher than her husband's

Yes, please write more about the dangers of books like this. Women like me often read these and feel odd or bad for having a higher drive, for being visually stimulated, etc. **I hated this book but felt I had to accept it because it was part of a sermon series my pastor at the time did. Also, my husbands porn use and affairs were NOT linked to lack of sex from me. I was very lucky that he didn't give me an STD.** We were having sex often and seemed to have a good sex life. Then we went through fertility treatments and the medicine he had to take made sex difficult for us which was tough for me with a higher drive already. That's why I despise these books and wish the authors would do more research and look at varied perspectives before they lump us and God all in a box. So much to say.

Theme: Women being made to feel they cannot say no to sex is wrong; being pressured into sex in order to keep your husband from straying is unbiblical

I can't thank you enough for this article. I was introduced to this book while going through a separation with my now ex-husband, and it felt so demeaning at the time even though I did try to read it with an open mind and heart because I wanted help for our situation. I kept questioning my reaction, wondering if I was just being defensive, but it just felt like I was being told that I had an obligation to have sex with him, in spite of the horrible way he was treating me and our children. He certainly used it in an attempt to pressure me into having sex with him, in order to "fix" our problems. Please forgive the graphic

description, but having sex during this point of our relationship made me feel almost like a prostitute, except I wasn't trading sex for money—I was trading it for momentary peace in our home. And then, because of this book, I was told that I was required to fulfill this marital "duty" because if I failed to do so, then I bore the blame not only for any sexual sin that was caused by his deprivation, but also for his treatment of me because he was only reacting to me withholding something I was required to give. **I fully believe that this book is well-intended, but it caused great harm to me. At a time when I was vulnerable and wanted desperately to be obedient to God's Word, yet felt that I had to do something to protect myself and my children, this book, and the discussion of sex it contains, were used in an attempt to guilt and manipulate me.** I am so grateful to see someone trying to explain the fallacies in its approach, because at the time I was introduced to it, I couldn't think clearly enough to articulate precisely why it troubled me. Please keep addressing this issue—I know I'm not the only one who has been in that situation.

I immediately sent this over to my husband as soon as I had read this article, not because I have complaints but because I wanted to get his thoughts on if this was an accurate portrayal of how Christmas men view sex. Our conversation that followed was so good and he agreed that yes, this view is prevalent of it being just about "release" and that if they're not getting it from their wives they are tempted to look elsewhere (yuck). But we talked about how that is so missing the mark because it's not even actually the "release" they long for, it's the emotional connections that comes from mutually-fulfilling intimacy. NO WONDER so many women hate sex and so many men think it's just about release, if couples have no idea what a healthy sex life looks like and can't get good solid teaching from the church. I asked him why he doesn't think that way, as we have both grown up in the church, and he said it's because of me. Possibly if I had a different/more passive approach to sex, we might have been in the same boat, but my enthusiasm and enjoyment has benefitted us both. I feel that your ministry, Sheila, has contributed to that in my life as I have been reading your articles for years and I know that my fulfillment matters and makes for a healthy, happier marriage. I wish that healthy sex was talked about more in the church, but I appreciate your writing. You are doing important work and making an impact, keep it up!

In my most humble opinion, **this "husbands need "physical release" or they'll stray--and that's really all there is to sex." has led us to marital rape and abuse.** It's what caused generations of women to tell their daughters "just do whatever he says." **It's toxic at it[s] best. I've been in that marriage.** I was held captive by that belief when the 35-year-old him needed release and the 12-year-old me was available. (I get that's not within marriage, but the same thought prevailed.) I agree that women need to respect their men. That shouldn't be a one-sided balance. I have never felt so loved as the moment my husband said, "I believe in you and what you're doing, let's redo your office so you will have a great space to operate from." His respect for me and my venture FAR outweighs our hand-holding, movie-going, dinner-eating, love-making love.

Finding 5: While Love and Respect claims that both spouses require both love and respect, in practice the wife's need for respect is often overlooked while the husband's need for respect is overstated

While Love and Respect asserts that both spouses need both love and respect, but that women naturally give love, men naturally give respect, and each spouse must learn to use the inverse, this is not what the book teaches in practice. A number of readers complained that the book overstates its case by relying too heavily on gender stereotypes (14 comments [4.6%], 13 commenters [5.8%]). Furthermore, 47 comments (15.3%) and 43 commenters (19.3%) noted that both men and women require both love and respect. Many comments (30, 9.8%) and commenters (27, 12.6%) complained that the book was overly focused on men and their needs.

Because the concept of “unconditional respect” is meant in the book to mean that a wife must be submissive and avoid voicing concerns about her husband's behavior, the fact that the premise of the book states that men *naturally give respect unconditionally to women* is untenable. Otherwise, the husband would equally have to be submissive and avoid voicing concerns, a view which is not held in the book. The fallacious nature of this line of reasoning is shown by the author's own avoidance of the statement that husbands naturally respect their wives in a recent blog post (available here: <https://loveandrespect.com/blog/the-two-edged-sword-of-love-and-respect-virtue-and-vice/>). Speaking about women, he states “A wife's virtue is that she has love in her heart for her husband already.” However, he does not claim the inverse (that a husband has respect in his heart for his wife already). Instead, he only says, “A husband's virtue is that he has honor in his heart as a man.”

Selected Comments for Themes included in Finding 5

Theme: Love and Respect is overly reliant upon gender stereotypes

It sounds like the classes were more helpful than the book. However, I have never even heard that there are classes on this, and I don't know a single person who has taken one. The vast, vast, vast majority of people are ONLY reading the book. And the vast majority of buyers of marriage books are women—I work in Christian publishing—so it's mostly only women receiving the message of this book since husbands do not read it. I think there are some helpful things in this book, such as his explanation of the crazy cycle, but **overall the gender stereotypes and views of sex are deeply problematic. I'm sure it's great for those who fit into the stereotypes. But the problem is that it is deeply hurtful and even damaging to any that do not**, and I'm not even talking abusive relationships here; I'm just talking personality types. A truly good marriage book would cover basic principles that can be applied to ALL marriages, not specific applications that help some but harm others.

Theme: Both women and men need love and respect

I'm saddened by the harm done with a book so hopefully named! To me, marriage is a man and a woman on equal footing and looking eye-to-eye. I struggle with many of the Christian marriage books that create a hierarchy, with the woman looking up to the man on some sort of dais. **It's obviously unfair to the woman, but I think it is also unfair to the man. In a perfect world, where the husband knows God's wishes infallibly, this idea makes sense. But, we can't. We're just men.** I'd rather have an equal partner working to create the marriage and the life we want, than to have all the power and responsibility. Love and Respect are the right answers, but they apply equally to husband and wife.

Emmerson: Women want love, men need respect. Bible: "Be devoted to *one another* in brotherly love. Outdo yourselves in honoring *one another.*" Romans 12:10 (emphasis mine) Emmerson: Kind of recommends men to love their wives, but actually teaches women to respect their husbands (and not argue, even if he is intemperate). Bible: "Teach the older men to be temperate, *worthy of respect*..." (Titus 2:2, emphasis mine) and "teach younger women to love their husbands..." (Titus 2:4) (my point is that E.E. has things reversed in his book)

The oft-given explanation of the underlying verse for this book always cracked me up. "Women need to be commanded to give respect because they LOVE naturally, but don't show respect naturally." And conversely, "Men need to be told to love, because it doesn't come naturally but showing respect does." Ha! Talk about reading your own biases into that. **Where, in the history of the world, are all these men who have "naturally " shown respect to women?**

So far as I can see, the dumbest thing about this is saying men respect naturally and need to be taught to love. Really? Never noticed that while caring for children. No matter the gender, children love naturally, but need to be taught what respect is and how to earn it. Age does not change this. Education and observation does. If a boy watches or hears his dad or other men treat women like plastic dolls, they'll pick it up because they think these authority figures know how things work. Girls will do the same. And so it goes on for generations. Then those who know somehow that something is wrong but not what, get advice from books like this and the authority figures of the church, and the poisonous rot goes on.

Theme: Love and Respect is too focused on men and their needs

Thank you!! I have heard so many raving reviews about this book, but when I read it, it made me raving mad! Haha! **He actually says it's a sin for a woman to not meet all of her husband's respect needs because God commands her to, and then says a man can never give his wife the love she craves because only God can fulfill that desire.** Totally lopsided view of all marriage intimacy. His book was very obviously "for the man". So glad someone else felt the same way I did!

Appendix A: Selected Additional Comments, By Theme

Additional Comments for Finding 2

Theme: I dislike Love and Respect

I have to add my 2 cents here. I too did some research online and purchased this book. I even shared some of the “principles” with my hubby and in total I was absolutely sickened and angry with the messages in this book. Per the comments of many here, both genders need Love and Respect equally. How you ratio this out in your relationships is between the 2 of you. I told my husband that I was so sick to death of the arrogance spewing from this book and that women are inferior and men should rule. I hope that women have more sense and confidence in themselves to disregard these teachings, and for those who are disgusted by the book, to write a review for other women to read prior to purchasing.

Same. I read the book before I got married and really disliked it but couldn't quite put my finger on why at the time. I knew the whole framing was off but this article was like, whoa, no wonder I didn't like it when I read it.

Additional Comments for Finding 3

Theme: Love and Respect is dangerous and could facilitate abuse

I totally agree. this is why I do not recommend this to marriages on the rocks. many of them already have a perverted view of being a Christian wife and to me this makes it worse. they never get healed.

Keep up the good work Shelia! I'm so glad you took the time to address the problems with this book. There are so many. No matter who you're interacting with, the relationship will benefit if you treat them respectfully. But there is so much in this book that has the potential to harm.

For everyone defending this book, I think you are missing what makes it so dangerous. It SOUNDS right. I grew up with the idea that the man was the head, the spiritual leader, the provider. It SOUNDS good on the surface. Just give what he needs, and you'll get what you need. MAYBE it will work IF you are both HEALTHY. But if there is one iota of dysfunction it will tear you apart. It's insidious. Even from the MALE side it's defective. ANY TIME you are GIVING in order to GET SOMETHING, it will backfire! You cannot, CANNOT get a HEALTHY relationship by doing something for or to the other person EXPECTING it to be repaid in kind! You can give because you are called to give, and that giving can be in the form of love, respect, whatever. But to expect to be treated in kind in return is believing in a lie. You should expect your spouse to give BECAUSE they are your spouse, NOT because you act a certain way. And you should give to your spouse BECAUSE they are your spouse, not because they act a certain way. Anyway, giving to get is manipulative in and of itself. If your spouse is loving you because he's expecting it to garner him respect, what is the logical outcome? He gets angry. Then it's all your fault?

Um, no. If you are giving respect expecting love, the outcome is similar. It's purely manipulation, and it's exceedingly unhealthy. It is what narcissists do. This book is about giving to get. But we should be giving to give. And if one or the other spouse refuses to give, then the one who is giving and giving and giving hoping for getting is wasting away on the inside! The ONLY way a relationship can be healthy is if it is MUTUAL in ALL things. This book does not present that. It SOUNDS like it on the surface, but it just doesn't, and those insidious hidden things are the most dangerous! Sorry. I'll get off my soapbox now. Love and hugs. ♥♥♥

Theme: Love and Respect made my relationship worse

I'm blown away. I read this book early in my marriage and took it all in, along with "Created to be His Helpmeet". I can see now that it was only by the grace of God I didn't end up in an abusive marriage. But I can also see why I enabled my husband in some very bad sin habits for years. These books weren't taught from the front of church, but they were sure touted amongst the congregation- a church that ended up being spiritually abusive. How easily we are deceived! Lord forgive us!

This book's thinking hurt me.

This book has ruined my family, my husband started demanding respect from me and our children caused my children to hate the word respect

I agree with you on that. I think the book took it too far though, in that a wife should basically accept any and all behavior from her husband and not speak up. It was incredibly damaging to our marriage. After counseling I have finally found the freedom to confront my husband, and guess what? He is finally starting to mature in some areas that I let slide for far too long because of advice like this. But when I confront him I am still careful to be kind and respectful in how I speak to him. I do agree that it is important to let him know I still think he's a great guy, even if there's something he needs to work on.

Brad and I spent 3 hours reading and talking about this yesterday, and we didn't even finish the article. But can I just say YEESSS to *all* of this?!?!?!? 🙌🏻🙌🏻 So thankful for Sheila and her voice on this sensitive topic. Brad and I (mostly me but it affects him) are still recovering from this toxic way of thinking and teaching. I would be happy to talk to any of you in a PM more about how this affected us if you want to know. Suffice it to say: she hits the nail on the head. And I spent so many years defeated, feeling responsible for things I shouldn't have felt responsible for, and carrying a burden that was too great to bear, and having nowhere to go for help because the advice was the same and the books all said the same thing; but the advice wasn't working and really was a moot point at that time. So, so, SO thankful for God's working in our lives and marriage, and for growth! 🙌🏻🙌🏻

Oh. My. Goodness. I am so angry! Thank you, Sheila, for fighting this good fight for healthy sexuality. I was a new Christian as a young woman and fed this misogynistic teaching in my young marrieds groups. It's taken me years to grow out of those lies. As an incest survivor on top of that, I've lost decades of fulfilling intimacy with my dear (patient, loving) husband. I'm praying for your continued strength and joy in the path that the Lord has set you upon.

Theme: The ideas in Love and Respect were used by my partner to be negligent, cheat on me, and/or abuse me

Yes! I have read so many Christian books on marriage because I was desperately trying to figure out how I could be more respectful so that my husband would stop being so angry with me all the time. I tried to be so proper, and kind, and loving, and prayerful ... but it was never good enough. Abusive men thrive on women who strive to be the "good, Christian, respectful wife". When we actually stand up for ourselves and find our voice, we are called a bitch and a fake. So sad. A book title just came to mind that I'd like to go back and read with a new eye ... Sheet Music by Lehman. Have you read that?

I first read Love and Respect back in 2011 after a pastor provided the book and DVD to me and my then-boyfriend while we sought counseling for our troubled relationship. He was emotionally demeaning and physically abusive toward me, and often used Love and Respect as a weapon against me when he felt I was being disrespectful. He claimed since he was the man (and the spiritual leader of the relationship should we marry) and I was the woman (and therefore easily deceived), that I should respect him and his desires even if that meant I lost something of myself in the process. He had rules for everything, and if I broke them, he would claim I was being disrespectful and withhold his love and affection as punishment (and even report to his family and friends that I was causing problems in the relationship). It was a highly abusive situation, and I'm so glad that God gave me the discernment and strength not to marry him!

I often feel like a lot of marriage books are fine if they are read by a "normal couple", two good intentioned, unselfish people who look out for each other. They get a totally different meaning out of it, because the husband wouldn't dream of treating his wife inappropriately, so the wife thinks that these books are ok. I was in an emotionally abusive marriage, I read ALL THE MARRIAGE books, including love and respect. (My husband and I took the course together as well). Nothing helped. I tried to be quiet, submissive and respectful and yet I KNEW how awful he was treating me, so then we would often have big arguments where I would try to explain how I felt. And it never ended well. Blogs like this and eventually Leslie Vernick's "emotionally destructive marriage" is what finally changed our marriage. I needed to work on myself, but that was only to become stronger in my faith, to spend more time in the word and to not treat my husband like he was going to fulfill/complete me. I had to separate from him emotionally to be able to see what needed to be done. I started SPEAKING UP! I started kindly saying my own opinion, what I wanted, stopped letting him taking advantage of me, and more importantly STOPPED FEELING GUILTY ABOUT IT. I stopped engaging / arguing but I also stopped being a doormat. In our marriage, all the typical Christian marriage advice damaged us greatly, because there was never any incentive for my husband to change, it was always me trying to fix everything. Anyways, after counselling etc, we are doing very well, we are in love again, we are experiencing a marriage like God intended. I feel hopeful, and I wish more people in the church could understand and encourage couples to mutually love/respect each other.

Thank you for this! I have never read the book but I did listen to Eggerich's podcast 3 years ago which covered topic and from his book. At the time, I got the sense that something was wrong in my marriage but I didn't know exactly what. I would try to talk to my husband about it but he thought I was just too sensitive or not seeing things clearly (turned out this was gas lightings). So I wholeheartedly threw myself

into Eggerich's "The Rewarded Cycle" (basically doing your part in the marriage knowing that God will reward you regardless your spouse's response). In spite of my efforts my husband grew more emotionally AND sexually distant and I fell deeper into desperate attempts to follow "Christian" marriage advice which really just led me into idolatry with my husband happily enthroned as the god of our home. I came to find out that he has a porn addiction which was beginning to escalate as I caught him surfing Tinder for girls. And this was after years of trying everything in my power to get his attention, sexually or otherwise. It turns out the problem was never me, it was an addiction that he had struggles with since before we were married. He was all too happy to keep his addiction and be waited on and doted on as god of the Home while never being held accountable for his actions as a husband or father. And sadly it was "Christian" advice like this that kept me locked in a "This must've be my fault" mindset for years. I'm so grateful that God has brought clarity to the real issue and that he has provided experts in the area of sexual addiction to help get our marriage back on track. Thanks again for speaking out!

Wow Sheila thank you thank you thank you for this post today!! I wish I could've read this post years ago when the message of the book caused so much pain and damage to me in my emotionally abusive marriage. God did show me over time how so much in this book was false. He used things like your blog or your book Nine Thoughts That Can Change Your Marriage etc. He strengthened me with truth over the years so I could eventually leave a marriage filled with alcoholism, emotional abuse, and adultery. But you know what's amazing? Someone is going to read this blog post and your links, and they are going to have the truth all upfront! Books like this, and the lies throughout it, won't be able to hurt them and their families. Thank you Sheila for shining the light of God's truth in the world. This is SO needed.

Thank you so much for writing this. I must have read the book back in like 2005 or 2006 while I was dating/engaged. I believe we both read the book. He definitely took it as an excuse for all sorts of awful behavior, including justifying cheating. Thankfully I ended that relationship before it got way worse and before we got married! But the book never set right with me. I think I attempted to read it again once I was happily married (not same guy! My husband is amazing!!) and it didn't sit right with me still. You expressed everything that didn't sit right about it with me in these articles you have written. You can bet I make my 6 yr old SON pick up his towel and hang it up!! Haha! The towel thing is over the top!

I have hated this book for years and I'm the one who bought it way back when it was first published. But my now ex-husband LOVED the book and even bought it as an additional wedding gift for one of his best friends from high school. Long story short, I was married to a pathological liar and serial cheater/adulterer; for sure a narcissist. I finally caught him out on a date with a newly divorced woman that he'd been grooming behind my back for nine years. She was finally "free" and he took their behind-my-back coffee dates to the next level — a late night drinks date, so he could be a good "friend" to her after her divorce. Yeah, right. So like I said, it's a long story. In the end he said to me and I quote, "not trusting him is not respecting him." Any single time (and it wasn't very often because I had been ground down to not speak up for myself or keep my needs very, very small) I'd bring up his women "friends", he'd turn it around that I was being disrespectful to him. So if you are married to a very selfish person, this book will be used as a weapon against you. Every single time I see a picture of this book, I'm like, "grrrrrrr".

Additional Comments for Finding 4

Theme: Putting the vast majority of the blame on women for marital problems is wrong; it is not a woman's fault if her husband cheats

It's used by many abusive husbands, and Christian counselors who do not recognize abuse. It's the #1 book I would never recommend for troubled marriages. It follows the same concept that many Christians erroneously do--that it's the wife's responsibility to fix what's broken, regardless of what her husband is doing. It's WRONG and destructive, and completely unbiblical. She shouldn't have to act first to get love from her husband.....

Yes! I hate all these excuses for men (or anyone) making the decisions they make. Men don't rape because they're not satisfied at home. They rape because they believe they can have what they want from whomever they want and at that particular moment. It's not an innate thing. It's a sin thing.

Aside from the fact that it's kind of hard to love a woman or meet her need for love if you show her no respect and treat her as a sexual object, making her responsible for your sin.

Theme: Love and Respect puts undue pressure on women

Hi, Sheila! I have been finding this series fascinating because I've been exposed to the faulty teaching for SO LONG. Interestingly enough, it hasn't [a]ffected my husband- his response continues to be primarily Godly and unselfish. However, hearing continued teaching about "love" and "respect" did change MY view for the worse. I put expectations on myself for "keeping" my husband, rather than my seeking God. This has caused so many problems in our marriage, including my thought that sex had to occur so often (and it was up to ME to seek it) in order to keep my husband faithful. I remember having a conversation with a friend about the book where we discussed how men didn't have any power over an urge to ogle a beautiful woman and how we needed to be available and try to look better (read: perfect) in order to keep them from looking. Wow. What pressure on ourselves when we try to constantly keep someone else from sinning. I love your straightforward approach in this piece to point us to the Lord and not to idolatry.

This book promotes "human behavior" ... please the man and make him happy and then he will love you. It really should be that he loves you for the person you are. What is marriage about anyway? God's design for marriage is not all about pleasing the man and making him happy. I personally believe I am to honor and please the Lord and follow the Lord's leading and looking out for my husband's spiritual well-being is important. If my husband is continuing in sinful behavior and leading me in a life that is sinful, then I should instead be obeying the Lord and not worry about pleasing my husband. If someone is looking to please their husband to get love, that is sad. I, and every other woman deserves to be respected, valued and loved for the special person they are and not just because she makes her husband happy.

Theme: Love and Respect made me feel belittled

Oh my goodness I'm so glad I'm not the only one! I tried to read that during an extremely difficult time and had to put it away. I already was feeling like a failure trying to carry a heavy burden, and the book

made it feel heavier with every page. Matthew 11:28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

I think if you're working from the foundation about already decent marriage this book may be helpful for some marriages. But if there's faulty thinking or any patriarchal tendencies already in the marriage, then this book can be gas on top of fire. I've read the book and we sat through the seminar sessions together. I cried every night I came home from them. The burden it placed on me, as a wife, so was heavy. The options it gave me were limited: basically sit down and shut up.

This has been very interesting for me. The first time I read the book it was with a ladies bible study group. I thought the book was great. The second time was with a couples bible study group, led by our pastor. We were supposed to read the book together with our spouse. I remember my husband being so frustrated because he couldn't relate to the book. This made me upset because it was presented as the answer to all our problems. Then, in the group, I remember wanting to either run out and scream or shrink down and cry. I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. Yet, somehow, I never equated those negative emotions with the book itself. I have some thinking to do. Thank you for pointing this out. The book may just be leaving my bookshelf.

I too was given this book because they felt it really helped them understand their husband's needs....but I never could finish it all the way, and was left feeling guilty and completely hopeless. I can not tell you what a relief it is to read these posts you've done on it. I know some people might feel like its nitpicking, but I so badly wish I had seen this back when I was feeling so hopeless, so full of guilt and sadness! I do want to say my husband has never been abusive and has always been loving and supportive, willing to try anything I thought would help...I think though, marriage retreats, and books I read fed me so many lies and I consumed them all, and allowed them ALL to be placed on me. I remember going to a marriage retreat once...and just crying and crying because I was filled with so much guilt and pressure to be “perfect “. We haven't been to another one since. The thing that is so sad to me...is it is the women who WANT to be great wives who pick up those books, who take the advice to heart...and I feel in my case anyway..it does exactly opposite. I gave up on ALL books and advice for a long while before I accidentally stumbled on your FB page. They have been so helpful, and healing(along with other authors) and so totally mind blowing for both me and my husband. So thank you so much for being willing to take on the hard stuff!

Theme: Women also have sexual needs, they may even be higher than her husband's

Yes, yes, yes! Thank you! I had spent 8 of my 9 year marriage feeling embarrassed and ashamed for wanting sex, and feeling like there was something wrong with me. I'm not supposed to crave sex or have any temptation in that area- that's a guy problem, right? I grew up in the church and had never once heard about a girl wanting sex, or about sex from the wife's perspective in a way that wasn't an obligation to her husband. It was always, “this is what your husband wants from you”. You have been a God-send, Sheila. I'm still recovering and trying to learn to allow myself to like sex- rather, allow myself to ADMIT I want it, but your blog has helped tremendously.

I cried when I read the quote from his book about men's lust being normal and like every man is like that. You're right, it isn't normal! And every man isn't like that. There is freedom from lust available in Jesus. Thank you so much for helping me understand (through your book and articles) what it is, as a woman, that I've been longing for in marriage and sex. I feel like you stick up for the women's hearts and I really appreciate all of your godly wisdom and insight. I used to do it all for my husband and had no interest in sex. But now I know that God wants me to feel connected, cherished and loved through sex. And that it's okay for me to want it too. I used to be afraid of sex and ashamed of owning sexuality but I'm changing and learning that this gift is for me too.

Theme: Women being made to feel they cannot say no to sex is wrong; being pressured into sex in order to keep your husband from straying is unbiblical

Thank you for your review, Sheila! I have read this book and was raised in a church and family where this was the thinking on sex. My husband and I are still working hard (and successfully!) after nearly 24 years of marriage to undo the mess left by these unbiblical ideas.

Hi Sheila! Thank you so much for your heart for women (and men) in this area! I'm so sorry that you came under fire with your concerns about the damage some of that can be done by that book. I just want to say that my husband and I have been married for 24 years (we are Christians) and we followed the line of thinking promoted in that book. I have never enjoyed sex one time, but I have never denied my husband once, (sex 3-4 times per week-more in the beginning), even though I can't stand it. Guess what? He still turned to pornography. It didn't protect my marriage. And because of the teaching promoting that men will always struggle with lust and women have to accept it, my [husband] thinks there is absolutely nothing he can do about his sin and so he said we both have to live with it. I cannot respond to him sexually due to many ways he has hurt me over the years with words and actions. I still tried to show him respect even though he has called me stupid, fat, etc. (By the way, he called me fat at 105 pounds, wearing a size 1- because I didn't have a hard, super toned body like super models -and presumably porn models-have). I am not here to vent or get sympathy. I just wanted to back you up in your concerns about how the well meaning teaching of the author of that book might not be accomplishing what he is hoping. Thank you so much for your heart and passion for women to have fruit in this area. I will be praying for you!

What you're talking about is hugely important. I've been in therapy 4 yrs and im still struggling with guilt over whether or not I can say no to my husband re:sex. There's an underlying lie that I've believed that tells me I don't own my own body. Intellectually I know it's garbage but a lifetime of messages teaching me how to be a "good wife" are difficult to disentangle. I keep telling myself I'm dishonoring God, myself, and my husband by having sex when I don't want to (nearly daily). Maybe one day I'll believe it

Thank you, Sheila. It was through reading a different (negative) review of this book that I realized that I had been raped several times within my marriage. No wonder it's so hard to trust or feel safe!

"you are his release" This is just so gross and would make me feel deeply uninterested in sex! It's like they are getting their ideas from porn, and considering how many men in church seem to have issues in

that area it might be true. I wouldn't trust relationship advice that refers to a woman as a 'release' not a person.

This was a great review, Sheila! I haven't read it since my old church did a weekend conference on it several years ago, while my husband and I were still engaged. I don't recall thinking this was an odd way of looking at sex at the time, but then, I'd never had it and didn't know what to expect. In retrospect, I can see how damaging it's been to be told that the best way to respect my husband is to have sex with him. In my struggles to just overcome the physical pain that it's caused, during the times when I've been constantly nauseous for months straight due to pregnancy, and while wondering if there's ever going to be anything in it for me just than a happy husband, the guilt of thinking that I'm not doing enough to respect him on top of all that is just too much. I'm so thankful that my husband is more understanding of these things than the author.

Additional Comments for Finding 5

Theme: Both women and men need love and respect

Thank you....I always wondered why I had the need to feel respected too! I have a varied background including growing up in a legalistic church and Christian school. I married a man who entered the ministry and was abusive to the point that I left with my children. Now that I remarried to a godly guy, this "Love and Respect" thing has been a mystery...actually a war inside of me. Because of my first marriage, I smell abusive behavior a mile away. Though I feel my marriage is healthy in that department, I have wanted something beyond love. I have a brain and love to use it...I love being respected for being a partner, not just a cheerleader on the sidelines. Thanks for putting into words my struggle with the "Love and Respect" book!

And even for those who don't understand what Jesus meant regarding sexes, many christian men know that the word of God, taken as a whole is about humility and love and not about bossing supposed underlings around nor is it about handling the little women like a fragile piece of china. But some men, especially evil ones, take these ideas, spin them as biblical truth and use them maliciously to direct and control. When Adam saw Eve for the first time he didnt say, "oh great.. sex and sandwiches for life!" But instead, "This is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh!!". He was excited to have a like companion.

At the time I thought it was my rebellious spirit pushing back. now I realize that it was my spiritual discernment. the book isn't sound. both genders need respect. mutual respect. mutual adoration. we both crave thoughtfulness and mindful and purposeful action based love. 10 years together. I absolutely respect him. I adore him. but he does have to continue to walk with Jesus and lead our path in a way that earns that trust and respect from me. I'm not afraid to tell him when I'm discerning a wrong path and we communicate and compromise on major life issues. it's just a mutual trust, respect, love.

This helped our marriage a little but I ended up throwing [the] book out. I want respect too. Love = Respect.

There are many things I don't like about this book, the premise that men need respect and women need love is not biblical from the starting gate, as we see that men are commanded to honor (respect) their wives, and that wives are advised to love their husbands. But, in his world, a man gets to say "I don't feel respected when you won't give me sex" but a woman doesn't get to say "I don't feel loved when you pressure me into sex". Also, check out his advice to men on how to "lovingly" tell your wife she's gotten too fat for you ("I don't feel attracted to you") instead of loving her and accepting her for what she is, for better or for worse. This whole "I won't give you what you need until you give me what I want (an orgasm)" is emotional blackmail. It's no way for a marriage to thrive.

I have good friends that loved this curriculum and teaching. My gut response when they shared it with me was this: You know what men need? Love AND respect (and sometimes a good kick in the ass with solid boundaries). You know what women need? Love AND RESPECT (and sometimes the same reminder and boundaries). In other words, it's not either/or, it's both/and. We are brothers and sisters (and "one another") before we are husband and wife. Let's not ignore the totality of scripture that teaches us how to love God and one another in order to focus on one or two verses to develop a modern marriage curriculum.

I wonder how much of the "women just need love" stems from a deep-set, overarching, narrative in our churches and society at large that women are just not worthy of respect. When a woman gets overt and subtle messages that women aren't respected for her entire life, then it's not unexpected that she will reach adulthood and marriage just having given up on that as an expectation. So we tell women that they don't get to be respected, and then we turn around and look at them and say "See? Respect isn't important to women." I think that's what bothered me most when I read the book (many years ago), coming away with the idea that the author really believed a woman had zero need to be show respect as a person. That some warm fuzzies and emotional connection were the totality of her desire in relationships. I knew I wanted a man who would respect me (and I had one, he's a great catch still!), but according to this book it meant I wasn't in the category of "women." I also have a higher sex drive, and that was apparently not in the needs I was allowed to have either. So I chunked the whole concept, which, it seems, was the far better choice.

The idea that love can be separated from respect is utterly ridiculous to me.

Yes! I don't know any men who give respect unconditionally, not to women, not to other men. And historically, men have a terrible track record on treating women with dignity and respect. That whole premise just boggles my mind every time someone brings it up!

Ok, so I admit nagging can sometimes be out of hand, but I just have to wonder... if in the story about the wet towels, the husband were the one asking the wife to clean up after herself, not leave shoes on the floor, etc. (which is 100% plausible because some women aren't naturally neat and some men are neat freaks!) I'm pretty sure the consensus would have been that OF COURSE the wife should learn to clean up after herself because she should *respect* the husband's wishes. I have an inkling that in the story we were supposed to go, "Oh wow, isn't she just so unreasonable?" Yet if it were reversed, it

wouldn't be seen as unreasonable at all, and if so then Oh Well because she should still respect his wishes. Strange that loving her wouldn't include respecting her wishes.

So dangerous. We've read part of it. I'm not okay with with the tolerance of allowing your husband to lust. Yes, we should be gracious and merciful, but should not accept his sin as normal or okay. Maybe, since I'm a woman, I'm prone to nagging (im being facetious). It's natural! It's kind of how most women are, so just accept it, men. Ugh!!!! No. Andddd! A woman not putting out causes affairs? PLEASE. I could go on....

Theme: Love and Respect is too focused on men and their needs

Thank you for these posts this week. I've been married for a year and a half and have been exposed to a lot of harmful teaching in the past few years, basically saying that my voice and my contributions as a woman don't matter in my marriage or the church as men's contributions. Fortunately my husband and I believe in being partners who both seek after God, but it's really demoralizing to hear these harmful teachings all the time in the Christian community. I'm deeply saddened by the stories that have been shared. Those who are criticizing what you have written don't understand how dehumanizing and exhausting it is to constantly be told in subtle ways by the church that women are lesser than men and don't have anything to offer in the church and home except to follow all their husbands decisions and keep quiet. Thank you so, so much for reaffirming that God loves women, that women are not second class citizens in the church, and that marriage is supposed to be a partnership that both contribute to. This message doesn't get said enough.