

A CONVERSATION WITH SUZANNE VENKER

The Alpha Female's Guide is certainly controversial, but it's also personal. Was it difficult to write?

Very much so. In fact, I came close to abandoning the entire thing on more than one occasion. I might have done so if my mother hadn't died in the middle of my writing it.

I think that was one of the things that was holding me back. I wanted so much to do right in using her marriage to my father as an example of what *not* to do, so obviously I wasn't sure how she'd receive it. After she died, I felt freer to write the book. But it was important to me that I honored both her and my father, for whom I have great respect.

The other reason I struggled to complete the book has to do with what I wrote in the afterword: I was still trying to become a better wife myself through the process, and I didn't feel I had it down until several months before I finished the manuscript. I knew what was happening in my marriage, but I wanted it to be either a done deal or to be at least fully in process before the book was published.

In the book you explain that, like any personality trait, there's a "spectrum" when it comes to being an alpha or a beta—also known as 'Type A' and 'Type B.' Where do you fall on the spectrum?

[According to the alpha/beta online personality quiz](#) I suggest readers take, I'm a High Alpha/Mid-Beta, which means I'm dominant in most relationships but "have the capacity to collaborate and compromise." I do, however, have to "guard against imposing my strong will" and thus overpowering others. My results also say I match up well with a partner who's more laid back than I and can help me take the edge off.

Fortunately, I married someone with that profile. (The second time anyway; my first husband and I were both high alphas.) But here's the thing: most men are alpha by nature. My husband's score landed him the "High Beta/Mid-Alpha" range, which means he's a "good mixture of Alpha and Beta." He is "confident without being overbearing." He is "cooperative" but often prefers to let others lead but he's not a "pushover" because he can "hold his own."

So on paper this looks like an ideal match—and it is—but that doesn't mean life is smooth sailing. Like everyone else, we have to figure out the right balance for us because my alpha-like nature invariably collides with his.

As far as the spectrum goes, I'm probably a 7 or 8 in my professional life. But at home, I've learned to tone it down, so I'm more of a 4 or a 5.

I was never rude or disrespectful toward my husband in the past, nor did I make demands on him (well, I might have tried; but he'd always reject my efforts), but what I did do was just as exasperating: I wouldn't let up. I'd carry on with something until I got my way, and he'd eventually relent because the conflict wasn't worth it.

I was just always in fight mode. I had to have the last word, or I had to correct something if I knew it was wrong, or I had to "direct his traffic," as he would say. And at the end of the day, I didn't want that kind of relationship anymore. I didn't like the way it felt, and I didn't want the arguments that would inevitably go along with it. And I know he didn't.

It sounds like, from what you wrote in the book, that you're an alpha female because the women in your family were alphas and you absorbed that. Can you speak to this?

I do come from a long line of alpha females, that's true. But I actually had a double whammy in that my father was a major micromanager! Micromanaging is something alpha females are prone to anyway, so that influence certainly didn't help my case. While my mother modeled a take-charge attitude, my father was constantly micromanaging everything. Looking back, it was probably his way of asserting control.

Look, all of us are born with certain personality traits; but what we experience growing up has a huge effect as well. My parents were great people who passed on hugely—hugely!—positive traits, for which I'm eternally grateful. But like everyone else, they were human. They also lived at a time when people didn't talk about the whys of human behavior, and neither one of them was self-reflective. As a result, my parents ended up having the same arguments over and over. I don't think this is unusual for couples in a long marriage; I just personally didn't want to live that way. It's exhausting.

What, or who, is an alpha female? And is the message in your book that women shouldn't be alphas anymore?

An alpha female is a leader. As a wife, you may find the alpha female at the office or you may find her at home with the kids. How she spends her days doesn't matter—what matters is how she behaves. An alpha wife takes charge of everything and everyone. She is, in a word, The Boss.

This attitude/personality trait/approach to life—whatever you want to call it—can work well in the marketplace or even as a parent. But as a wife, it's a disaster. No man wants a boss, or even a competitor, at home. That type of relationship may work for a spell, but it will eventually

come crashing down.

So the answer to your second question is: yes and no. It's fine to be an alpha in certain areas of life, but love requires masculinity and femininity if it's going to run smoothly. One leads; the other follows. One makes the first move; the other responds. One drives the car; the other sits in the passenger seat. This means that when an alpha female marries your average guy, she's going to have to channel her inner beta if she wants a peaceful marriage.

Now I know what you're thinking: Why can't the wife lead? You'll have to read the book for that answer. 😊

Do you think marriage, or the relationship between the sexes in general, is more difficult than it used to be? If so, why?

I don't think many people would look at the past and say things were perfect, but there was definitely a time when gender relations weren't fraught with so much tension, anger and resentment. There was a healthy respect for gendered preferences, too, which is so important. To accept human nature, to flow with the tide rather than against it, is just smart. It's one thing to encourage the sexes to think outside the box as far as gender roles go—people have to be flexible—and another thing to suggest biology is bogus and that the goal should be an "equal" marriage.

But playing tit for tat is a recipe for failure. Marriage is a partnership. As long as both partners are thinking "we" instead of "me," they're in good shape.

I also think the Internet, while a boon in so many ways, has had a negative effect on relationships. In addition to pulling couples away from each other, we become privy to what everyone else is doing, or what it *looks* like everyone else is doing. Women are particularly susceptible to this. They make comparisons, which is toxic. Marriage is just so much easier without those negative influences.

What do you see as the future of the marriage?

I'm very concerned. Since 1970, the divorce rate has quadrupled; and it has happened at the exact time women have become the more dominant sex. Is it a coincidence that 70-80% of divorce is now initiated by wives? I don't think so. I think women don't know *how* to be wives. And why would they? That isn't what they were taught to become.

Modern women have been raised to rule the world, not to get married and have kids. They're also products of divorce. How could circumstances like these possibly result in strong marriages?

The good news is that any woman can master the art of wifedom by understanding this one concept: **The skills you need to pursue a career, or even to raise children, are the exact same skills that will destroy your marriage.** If you want to get married and stay married, you need a whole new set of skills.

That's the reason for *The Alpha Female's Guide*.