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Introduction.

The article below contains a few sweeping generalisations within it that hold true in most cases. I wouldn't for a moment claim that all men or women act out a particular gender role, I would however say that some assumptions can be very useful. This article has already changed lives, my editors understanding of men improved and she quickly eliminated one of the biggest mistakes she was making around the men in her life. I hope you enjoy it, let me know.

For those of you that wonder, we will be getting to the mistakes that men make around women in the near future.

Men for Beginners

One of the roles I seem to find myself in is translator. I often end up in conversations with my female coaching clients about what does it mean when my partner....disappears into the garage for the evening?....watches three movies back to back?....drinks all night with his friends?

It means he's unhappy.

Men are different from women; I've resisted this truth for so many years I can't tell you. We do things differently, particularly around the area of feelings. Men are trained to be ashamed of their feelings from a very early age. We learn quickly that tears are not something we shed if we have any other option. We know that big boys don't cry, and that message started very early for us. We are often shamed publicly for crying and shame is something we resist feeling at any cost.

Have you ever noticed that there isn't a clearly defined male character in society? In some way, we invest most of our energy in NOT acting like a woman. Men have no idea how to get along with each other and our male intimacy often comes about by punching each other in the arm and other types of play fighting.

Take the example of holding hands. We don't stop holding hands because we don't like our friends. We stop holding hands because someone made it unsafe to do so. Just like the tears in public, male friends holding hands is subject to

ridicule, harassment, and more of the dreaded public shaming.

One theory suggests men are not allowed to have feelings because if they did they might become sensitive to the fact that killing other men is unacceptable. We've been trained from the moment we could observe that if a war happens, we must be willing to get out there and defend our women and children. That's a heavy load to bear and it does interfere with our ability to be sensitive.

We even process feelings differently, as overt feelings make us vulnerable. Sometimes men get so numb they don't even know they are having a feeling. If you've ever read any books about the actuality of war, you'll realize this is an essential skill for men to master. Many of us process feelings outside ourselves because it is safer that way. Watching a movie, where the emotion is at a distance, is one way of processing feelings externally. Another is to tinker around in the garage...because it's also safe.

My understanding is that we only disappear into our cave when we feel unsafe. The problem is that generally when a man lets his defenses down, the first thing he feels is anger or frustration because these are the safest emotions for us. At this point, the woman stops listening or fights back and once again man learns feelings are not a good idea.

If a woman really wants a man that can feel and communicate his feelings, she needs to be his guide. Women have the luxury of being allowed intimate female friends and the upper edge when it comes to empathy and compassion. When women re-entered the workforce, some men were only too happy to mentor them into management positions. I'd encourage you to mentor your man through the process of emotions. The easiest way to do this is through a process that Taylor and McGee refer to as Deep Listening in their book "The New Couple". It's very easy and surprisingly powerful.

Set aside 20 minutes and agree that you are each going to take ten minutes to talk about your lives. When it's your turn to talk, you can discuss anything and everything on your mind. When it's your turn to listen, you must actively listen. This means no grunts, no head nods, and no interruptions. Ideally, you just look at the speaker with 'soft eyes'. It is important that both parties take ten minutes because you are building a safe space. There is no set agenda and it's not a place to air grievances between the two of you. It's a space to open up to each other.

You will discover new things about your partner during deep listening sessions. Don't expect anything too dramatic. Just remember after 15 years of therapy, I still rarely cry 'like a girl' and it's my sincere belief that our kidneys just process liquid differently.

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