

The Secrets of Happily Married Men

Eight Ways to Win
Your Wife's Heart Forever

Scott Haltzman, M.D.
with Theresa Foy DiGeronimo

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More Praise for *The Secrets of Happily Married Men*

“Once in a generation a book is published that changes the discourse about men and marriage. *The Secrets of Happily Married Men* is that book. Dr. Haltzman weaves a compelling yet humorous argument for a man’s ability to master the skills necessary for understanding his wife and developing a marriage he can be proud of. Haltzman obviously relishes controversy and has several provocative discussions about traditional feminist-based marriage therapy being unfair to men, as well as the brain- and hormone-based differences between women and men.”

—Barry McCarthy, Ph.D., professor of psychology,
American University; author, *Getting
It Right the First Time* and *Rekindling Desire*

“This terrific book is full of stuff you can do (yes, you!). It will guide you in how to connect with your wife in ways that count. She may have bought it, but you need to read it. Get busy. By the way, my wife grabbed this book and read it before I did and she thinks it’s wonderful. Maybe you could read it before your wife does! Big points, fella.”

—Scott Stanley, marital researcher; author,
The Power of Commitment: A Guide to Active, Lifelong Love,
and co-author, *Fighting for Your Marriage*

“Written in the language of men, this brave, take-no-prisoners, highly practical, pro-marriage book is a must-read for men and women alike. I read it from cover to cover.”

—Pat Love, Ed.D., author, *The Truth About Love*

“This book will reach married men (and women) in their minds and hearts. Rather than portraying men as deficient in relationships, Scott Haltzman shows men how to bring their unique strengths to their marriage and how to manage their unique challenges. He blends neuroscience, clinical experience, and everyday stories of men in marriage in a compelling way. A gift to the married men of the world.”

—William J. Doherty, Ph.D., professor of family social science,
University of Minnesota; author, *Take Back Your Marriage:
Sticking Together in a World That Pulls Us Apart*

“In a culture that too often blames men and their alleged ‘lack of relationship skills’ for failing marriages, *Secrets* tells it like it is—men can and often do take successful action to help their marriages. It helps point men in the right direction and tells the truth about how traditional marriage counseling is often an inhospitable environment for men.”

—Glenn Sacks, columnist and host of radio
talk show *His Side with Glenn Sacks*

“We live in a world that has largely given up on the idea that men might be fit for family life and cooperative, communicative equality with women. Psychiatrist and marriage therapist Scott Haltzman now comes to the rescue. Scott spends his life listening to men, to the pain and confusion of guys trying to answer Freud’s immortal question, ‘What does a woman want?’ or, more germane, ‘What does a woman’s therapist or self-help guru want?’ Scott has written an invaluable book, crammed with good advice for men on marriage and with cues for women to understand what it feels like to be a man and how men might be useful if everyone would stop trying to fix the fact that they are men. (Scott is well aware that being a man is no excuse for being a pig.) This book should be on the bedside table of any marriage with a man in it.”

—Frank S. Pittman III, M.D., author, *Man Enough and Grow Up!*

“My wife and I have been married for forty-one years, with never any doubts, and yet, somehow, reading Haltzman’s *Secrets* was rewarding. It revealed new things about me, us, and her.”

—Gary Sutton, business-turnaround expert; author, *Corporate Canaries*

“Finally, the book that every man needs to read and every woman will want her special guy to memorize. This book destroys the myth that men know nothing and care little about how to have a successful relationship. In fact, most men want to be good husbands more than anything else in life. Not only that, but given half a chance we’re actually quite good at it. Dr. Haltzman gives us the tools we need to make marriage work. But I warn you, this book is not for the politically correct or for those who think that men need to be fixed. This book celebrates our differences and recognizes that there is nothing more important in life than learning to have a successful marriage. Get a copy for him and for her and for everyone else you care about.”

—Jed Diamond, author, *Male Menopause* and *The Irritable Male Syndrome*

“Every decade or so, a book about marriage comes along whose perspective is unique, essential, and marriage changing. *The Secrets of Happily Married Men* is that kind of book. Like *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* and *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, this book is hard to put down whether you are a woman or a man. It grips you from the first page and challenges you to tell the kinds of secrets that lead to real happier marriages and human love.”

—Michael Gurian, author, *What Could He Be Thinking?, The Wonder of Boys*, and *The Minds of Boys*

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Published by Jossey-Bass

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989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 www.josseybass.com

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The anecdotes in this book are based on Dr. Haltzman's life experience, clinical work, and research. In cases involving client information, names and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Haltzman, Scott, date.

The secrets of happily married men : eight ways to win your wife's heart forever / Scott Haltzman with Theresa Foy DiGeronimo.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7879-7959-1 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-7879-7959-7 (alk. paper)

1. Husbands—Psychology. 2. Husbands—Conduct of life. 3. Wives—Psychology. 4. Marriage. I. DiGeronimo, Theresa Foy. II. Title.

HQ756.H34 2005

646.7'8—dc22

2005013191

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*In memory of my mother, Dolly,
who always told me that
no goal was beyond my reach
and*

*In honor of my father, Jay,
who taught me more than any textbook could
about what it means to be a great husband*

Acknowledgments

I make marriage my job. In the process, I also have made writing about marriage my job. And, as is true of every worthwhile task, many individuals have participated in my success.

My wife, Susan, has been my principal source of inspiration. I thank her for her edits, large and small, of both my writing and my behavior. She has helped me learn how to be a better husband and a better author.

My family is a web of support and a model for how marriages can work against all odds. Thanks to Dad, Matt, Alena, Jonathan, Mark, Jennifer, Bonnie, Shelly, Cliff, Walter, Jane, Amy and Richie, Andy and Karen, Brian and Patricia.

Alan Rinzler is an editor's editor. Alan never accepted the premise that men don't think much about relationships; he pushed me to answer tough questions about who we are as men, and what to do about it. I am forever appreciative of his foresight and wisdom.

Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, my coauthor, displayed a brilliant capacity for keeping me focused and grounded. I am indebted to her for her patient collaboration.

John Martin—journalist, marketer, and tennis partner—deserves special recognition for his writing help. Early on in this endeavor, John helped me find my voice; his influence can still be found throughout the pages of this book.

My secretary, Jennifer Correia, has supported my passion for saving marriages by fielding calls, arranging travel, and handling all the details that escape my attention. As I tell her at the end of each day, “Thanks for all your help.”

Betty Galligan, of Newberry PR, helped me spread the word that husbands matter. She worked hard for me, and I appreciate that.

I want to extend thanks to Nancy Ellis, literary agent. Nancy made sure that editors saw my work. She never wavered in her belief that the world needed this book.

Many of my friends have offered me opinions along the way, from “Uggh” to “Bingo!” Special thanks to Michael and Jane Mizrahi, Michael Meyerheim and Judy Nathanson, Bill and Sarah Donohue, Marshall and Therese Sonenshine, John and Abigail Carr, Howard and Nancy Feinglass, Scott Triedman and Mary Jo Kaplan, Mark and Sherra Rego.

Therapists Peter Kramer, Andrew Slaby, John Wincze, Diana Lidofsky, and Russell Pet read early versions of my book. I took every word they said seriously. Their help meant a great deal to me.

Others in my community pitched in to support me, including Rabbi James Rosenberg, Christian Stephens, Nancy Paull, and Pat Emsellem. Thank you.

When I began research into husbands, I discovered a phenomenon called “the Men’s Movement.” I wish to acknowledge the brotherly support of Bert Hoff, Steve Inman, Mark Hoover, Jed Diamond, Michael Gurian, Glenn Sacks, Scott Garman, and Warren Farrell.

As the book progressed, there were many experts in the marriage movement who were generous with their time. I want to express special appreciation to Julie Baumgardner, Bill Doherty, John Gottman, John Gray, Roger Harms, Janice Levine, Pat Love, Barry McCarthy, Cheryl McClary, Mike McManus, Frank Pittman, Tom and Beverly Rodgers, Rozario Slack, Scott Stanley, John Van Epp, Peggy Vaughan, Michelle Weiner-Davis, and the late Shirley Glass.

None of this would have been possible if a woman named Diane Sollee, founder and director of Smart Marriages, didn't exist. Diane's passion for marriage education inspires so many. "Thanks" doesn't come close to being the right word to express how much her support has meant to me.

In the end, it was all the married folks out there who helped me write this book. My clients, and the thousands of participants in the SecretsofMarriedMen.com community, have been kind enough to share their marital wisdom. What they have taught me has strengthened my marriage. I thank them for giving me the secrets that I can pass on to others.

And did I mention my wife? She's my first, my last, my everything.

The Secrets of Happily Married Men

Introduction

Slam!

That's the sound that one million American men hear each year as their wives push them out the doors of their homes and into the divorce courts. In three generations, the divorce rate has escalated from 14 percent to nearly half of all marriages. But although this "national epidemic" is widely reported, you rarely hear about the fact that it's *women*, at rates much higher than men, who are the ones telling researchers that they are not happy in their marriages.¹ In fact, wives initiate more than two-thirds of the splits.²

How can this be? Shouldn't women be fixing relationships rather than declaring them dead? Women are supposed to be the relationship experts. They go to therapists, watch relationship gurus on TV, read magazine articles, or seek answers in self-help books. But still their marriages crumble beneath their feet. Why can't women stem the tide of divorce and make their marriages work? It is because in the vast majority of cases, it's the men that the women are complaining about, so the problems in a marriage won't be solved until *men* do something about improving the relationship.

Husbands must accept this challenge. If they don't, the doors to their homes will irreversibly slam shut behind them. And with the closing of these doors come the devastating consequences of divorce:

broken families, financial devastation, spiritual and physical decline, and damaged children.

DEFEAT IS NOT AN OPTION

Prior to the 1960s, religion and culture prevented most marriages from falling apart. Now attitudes are more liberal. Our culture says, “If you’re not happy, get out.” And so for many couples, divorce lurks just around the corner every time an argument tears apart the sense of personal bliss.

But divorce is not pretty. It represents the transformation of love, affection, sharing, patience, understanding, and commitment into frustration, anger, distrust, emotional abuse, trauma, grief, and feelings of failure. No one should have to witness marital joy reduced to bitter abandonment of hope.

You don’t want to go there. So it’s time to reject the idea that marital unhappiness automatically means the relationship is over. When the marriage falters, it’s our job as guys, who innately hate to admit defeat, to revive it. We have no other option. Strengthening, improving, and saving a marriage is not something we can do at our leisure. It must be done right, and it must be attended to on a daily—make that an hourly—basis.

But . . . let’s face it, when it comes to securing a better relationship, many men don’t know where to start. These men may know how to smash a backhand, teach their daughters how to ride a bike or drive a car, pursue advanced educational degrees, and have dynamic careers. Many know how to build their own businesses, navigate a narrow channel through a stormy inlet, negotiate a complicated contract, lead a team of doctors delivering health care in a developing country, or defend a friend from unfounded accusations in a community of peers. However, when they face the biggest challenge of their lives—a collapsing marriage and a complaining wife—the most action many of them can muster is a shrug of their shoulders, which just makes their wives complain more.

Men Can Save Their Marriages

Men don't have to feel so helpless—they can save their marriages. I know. I've worked with hundreds of husbands and surveyed thousands more on the Internet. I've spoken to them in seminars and in support groups. I've interviewed World War I veterans and men just out of college. Each has described times when his marriage was strained. Each has struggled with his place in marriage, questioned his identity as a husband and father, and faced serious challenges to his commitment. Yet through a persistent commitment to fix the problems, these men have saved and improved their marriages.

Unfortunately, far too many men do not have this attitude. They have been conditioned to believe that they can't fix a broken marriage because they lack the necessary skills—and that they lack those skills *simply because they are men*. This book hopes to explode that notion. You possess the means to save your marriage *because you are a man*.

EQUAL BUT VERY DIFFERENT

Men and women are different. In recent years, it's become politically incorrect to utter such a thought out loud. But it's true. Women have tremendous strengths, capacities, skills, and resources that men don't have. And the same is true of men. They are intrinsically, basically, fundamentally different from women in so many ways: their bodies, their hard-wiring, their hormonal and biochemical makeup, their brains—all different. Everyone knows this instinctively, from the gut and the heart. Boys are different to begin with: they develop differently, and they mature with certain strengths and weaknesses that are different from those of women.

Yet, oddly enough, for several decades now, husbands have been encouraged to read books and articles and to listen to “experts” who say that in order to have a good marriage, men have to reason, react, and talk more like women. They tell men they should be

softer, kinder, gentler, less intimidating, more sensitive—and do more laundry. I've read hundreds of these books and articles and have concluded that it's all bunk.

The reason men avoid self-help marriage experts and make no progress toward improving their relationships is that they get the clear but misguided message that they have to reinvent themselves in order to understand their wives. Most men don't want to do that, and I don't blame them.

I take a different approach. Like most marriage counselors, I certainly will ask you to take stock of the instincts, attitudes, behaviors, and especially the words you use that influence your marriage. But I won't ask you to change anything about yourself.

Let me repeat that: I won't ask you to change anything about yourself. You are okay. Men are okay. You do not have to discover your feminine side in order to become a better husband. You do not have to abandon, dampen, or camouflage any aspect of your personality or way of viewing the world that is commonly described as "male thinking" or "male behavior." You can even remain bullheaded, as long as you are bullheaded about making your marriage better and your life happier.

Evolve or Die?

I honestly believe that men innately possess the skills necessary to succeed at marriage. Being a man is an advantage, not an obstacle. I know this goes against what you read in newspapers and magazines, not to mention the images of husbands depicted in popular culture, and it is an opinion that I guarantee will be met with raised eyebrows in mixed company. In some situations, saying that you are fine just the way you are will be thrown in your face as evidence that men are arrogant, insensitive, and uninterested in understanding women. Indeed, there are some who, upon hearing such a statement, will suddenly see you as shorter and hairier, and wearing a loincloth while carrying a club.

Current thinking is that men need to evolve. We are told constantly that it doesn't count anymore if we're strong and silent, because women expect something different. But I don't believe that women's expectations have really shifted all that much. I'll devote more time to this subject early in this book because it's key to understanding why you really don't need to stop being "a typical guy" to have a good marriage. This evolve-or-die mentality presents a trap for men who attempt to change the tenor of their marriage by living up to some politically correct definition of the New Age husband—in other words, trying to be something they are not.

After more than sixteen years in private practice, I have come to believe that men are born with the ability to make their marriages last for the rest of their lives. They don't necessarily need to unlearn anything. They don't have to stop thinking like a man. They don't need feminizing. They are not, by virtue of their gender, incomplete, incompetent, or incapable of satisfying their spouse's emotional needs. In fact, in one way or another, I tell couples I counsel that if we begin the work of repairing a marriage by assuming that the husband needs fixing, the odds of success are greatly diminished, if not doomed.

I start by reminding couples that men who marry usually do so because of an overwhelming desire to be domesticated. They want to be happily ensconced in an exclusive relationship with a person they chose as more special and deserving of their love than anyone else. During courtship, men are inclined to be romantic, thoughtful, and considerate; they enjoy the challenge of pleasing their chosen mate. They say "I love you" with abandon, and take immense pleasure in connecting with their wives in intimate ways. Most married men—even those whose marriages lay in ruins—demonstrated at one time or another that they have these feelings and can do these things. That's why most women want their marriages to be more like their days of courtship.

So why not give your wife what she wants—and at the same time get from your marriage exactly what you had hoped for the day you said “I do”? This book will give you eight ways to make that happen.

MAN TO MAN

Since becoming a psychiatrist, I’ve met with thousands of individuals and encouraged them to tell their stories. As they sit across from me, my clients share their fears, joys, and disappointments, but right from the beginning, I noticed that the men I counsel hold back—they struggle to be honest and forthright when talking about their feelings and fears.

This isn’t surprising. After all, current American culture provides few opportunities for men to talk about relationships with each other. After the frat house days, a code of silence binds men to secrecy about their intimate lives. We might talk about investment portfolios or last night’s game, but marriage-building strategies are almost never shared man to man.

That’s why my search for information about relationships led me to the Internet. When I launched my Web site, SecretsofMarriedMen.com, early in 2001, I expected that there would be dozens of Web sites devoted to married men. In fact, mine was the only noncommercial site dedicated to researching and supporting husbands’ marriage skills. Slowly over time, people found SecretsofMarriedMen.com through surfing the Web, by word of mouth, or on referral from therapists or marriage educators.

The results were amazing. Through this site I was able to tap into a level of intimacy not found even in the privacy of my psychotherapy practice. I took advantage of computer technology to ask specific questions about men’s marriages. I solicited information in the areas of gender roles, sex, infidelity, work, therapy, and gifts. I asked men about their experiences sharing with other men. I inquired about how problems are resolved in the household. I asked

how they would define a successful marriage. I wanted to know if most married men considered themselves to be happy.

BREAKING THE BARRIER OF SILENCE

Men wrote openly about the richness of married life—the intensity, the fury, the deceptions, the connectedness, the separateness, and the ecstasy. I got what I was looking for—the answers to my many questions that men would never tell me in face-to-face therapy sessions.

For months, I sorted through the hundreds of posts to my site. Deciding how to compile the contributions amounted to a tremendous challenge. Is this comment about sex or about infidelity? Is that one a confession about past sins or a pre-wedding warning to others? Pro-marriage or antiwoman? Contented or complacent? Not surprisingly, categorizing each comment eluded any simple formula. In the end, I chose to group the contributions into eight different ways that men have found helpful in building and keeping strong, loving marriages. This collection eventually evolved into this book.

The thousands of men who have contributed to SecretsofMarriedMen.com have broken the silence barrier. I am indebted to all of them for sharing themselves with me and for allowing me to share their lives with you. In loud, clear messages, they have told me that men do have the skills necessary to build strong and loving relationships. And through their discussions and comments, they have revealed to me a remarkable phenomenon: when these men worked hard to improve their marriages by using their inborn manly skills to put their wives' needs above their own, not only did their marriages improve, but they were happier and more fulfilled than at any other point in their lives.

This is the secret of happily married men.

You've Got Male

I jumped into the cab, hoping to catch a quick ride from one side of Rhode Island to the other. During the thirty-minute trip, I fell into an easy conversation with the cabbie and soon learned that he was typical of so many men I know—great at managing and negotiating the complexities of life in general, but insecure and frustrated in his marriage.

At first he told me, with great pride, about his car. He planned to replace the horns because of water buildup. He talked about needing to get the transmission rebuilt and how he was able to strike a good deal. Did you know he paid \$1,500 for the job on a Buick that had almost 300,000 thousand miles on it?!

Soon, the banter shifted to family (probably because I can't help asking people, "So, are you married?"). My cab driver told me that he had two sons and that he had been married for twenty years. Losing the bravado of our earlier conversation, he quietly admitted that he'd been separated from his wife for the last two years.

"My wife and I just can't agree on the right way to raise the kids," he said with a sigh that gave away his frustration and resignation. "I didn't want to separate, because I think it's the coward's way out," he was quick to add. "But I just couldn't figure out how to make things better."

Usually, as a psychiatrist, I'm the one with the meter running. But during this impromptu session, I was paying for *his* time, and

before we arrived on the other side of Rhode Island, I had something important to say to this man. Here's the short version:

You're a creative man who has a marvelous knack for fixing things. If something's not working in your car, you figure out a way to fix it. If you can't, you find someone who can. You've stuck with your car when most owners would have sent it to the trash heap. You have a real sense of commitment and a knack for getting things to work. What makes you think you can't use those same wonderful qualities to save your marriage?

When my trip was over (\$60!) and my little speech done, my driver look startled, but also relieved, as he said, "No one's ever told me that before, Doc. Thanks."

For a long while, I thought about this conversation and about many similar discussions I've had with my patients and colleagues. It's obvious to anyone who studies male behavior that men demonstrate extraordinary skill in sales, mechanics, politics, medicine, finance, construction, and many other areas. So why is it, I have to wonder, that when it comes to problems in relationships, men resign themselves to their fate, act helpless, and give up? After long thought and study, I think I know.

For too long, men have been told that they are relationship-incompetent. Maybe that's what you've heard, and maybe that's what you believe. I'm telling you now, loud and clear, it's not true. *You are competent.* I've got a little more time with you than I did with my driver, so let's talk about *you* for a while.

It's a sure bet that if I were to ask her, your wife would say that you do not contribute as much as she does to the success of your marriage. Find two women talking to each other, and you're likely to hear them joke about how their guys are so useless. You know it's true. Most women are quite vocal about the "fact" that men do not uphold their end of the matrimonial bargain because they simply do not meet the women's standards.

Just one question: Who determined what these standards should be? I have a strong feeling that the finger of blame for unhappy and crumbling marriages most often points to the male because of unrealistic and unattainable expectations. I'm the first to admit that men bear at least an equal share in the blame department, and I've got some ideas about how we men can better contribute to the job of building strong relationships. But first we have to get past the idea that to have a good marriage, men have to be something they are not. Yes, you can have a happy marriage and still be a man.



I think men and women truly see different things in the same experiences. And the more intimate we are, the more important those different ways of interacting become. Unfortunately, I've found that the differences in perception cause the interactions to go so badly so much of the time.

—Ned, age 45, married 11 years

THE MEDIA MAN

Where does the image of a “typical” man come from? Turn on your TV and there he is. On any night of the week, on any channel, you’ll see sitcom husbands who are clueless when it comes to marriage. Generally they are out of shape and uncouth, and can’t match a shirt to a tie, but, hey, they have gorgeous wives! These television caricatures get their comeuppance every episode because they are men—inflexible, selfish, shortsighted, overbearing men who have to be humbled before they can behave appropriately. Most sitcom wives have little role beyond providing a means of measuring a man’s gender-determined marital inadequacies.

It is fashionable in today’s culture to poke fun at the hapless man who is more enamored of his remote control than his spouse. Homer

Simpson, Ray Romano, Jim Belushi, and a host of other sitcom husbands and fathers are consistently redeemed by their more clever and sensitive wives, thus keeping the marriage on track. Even a blowhard tyrant like Ralph Kramden can be easily tamed by Alice, a woman who knows the exact moment to give him his just deserts and still earn the heartfelt declaration that she is the greatest. The message is clear: Ralph never contributes to the good of the relationship on his own because he so totally lacks Alice's relationship skills.

Hollywood movies are equally unrealistic, but from the other extreme viewpoint. They mold their leading men to get the girl by being sensitive, intuitive, romantic, and well . . . more like a woman than a man. (This image was not found in most movies of the mid-twentieth century, when the likes of John Wayne and Clark Gable were allowed to be manly men.)

Now, I happen to like Tom Hanks as an actor and humanitarian. But when I think about the character he plays opposite Meg Ryan in *You've Got Mail*, I'm reminded of the typically skewed image of men and the feminine ideal of marriage that our society embraces. Hanks plays an arrogant businessman whose bookstore chain threatens to put Ryan's quaint shop out of business. Unknown to either, they are already anonymous email pen pals. He is unbearably pompous and obnoxious, until love turns him into a sensitive, attentive, and selfless gentleman—in short, the perfect catch. This film, like many in the chick-flick genre, projects a classic example of how Hollywood perpetuates a standard for men's behavior in a relationship that is drawn wholly from the woman's point of view.

When couples have finished watching that movie, you can almost see the mental bubble captions over their heads. Hers reads, "God, I loved that movie and the way falling in love made Tom Hanks's character become so much more 'human.'" His says, "Hmm. If we hurry, I can catch the fourth quarter of the Knicks-Celtics game."

But somewhere also resonating in the guy's mind is the message, "Gee, if I were just more like Tom Hanks, I would have a happier marriage." But we men aren't all like Tom Hanks. It's a ridiculous standard. I'll bet even Tom Hanks isn't like Tom Hanks.



Men and women do not communicate on the same level. There have been so many times in the past five years that I have tried to talk about important things when my husband is sitting quietly thinking, or drinking coffee, or anything. I get no response. That makes me think he's ignoring me and that I am just talking to a brick wall. I have learned, though, that our brains do not work the same. Our makeups are so different. That's why patience is such an important key in marriage.

—Natalie, age 23, married 5 years

NO WONDER WE FAIL

When we examine Hollywood's portrayal of romance, whose reality are we talking about? Tinsel Town and the media in general convey feminine standards of romance that are tailor-made and marketed to the sensitivities and expectations of women. In other words, they perpetuate expectations that are nearly impossible for men to meet. No wonder we fail.

And when we do, where does the finger of blame point? Common wisdom says that when couples fall apart, men are to blame, as author Jack Kammer confirmed in a survey of his university students. When the class was confronted with the statistic that 75 percent of women precipitate divorce, his students concluded

that the man must be at fault. When given the opposite (false) statistic that 75 percent of divorces are precipitated by men, the class still voted that it must be the man's fault.¹

Obviously, we can't win. When emotions are involved, males rarely get the benefit of the doubt—even as young kids. A classic study tried an interesting experiment to note the way babies were viewed by adults based on their gender alone. In this study, parents watched a videotape of a nine-month-old child reacting to a startling jack-in-the-box. Some were told they were watching "Dana," whereas others were told they were watching "David," although it was the same baby in both cases. The majority interpreted the baby's startled reaction to the jack-in-the-box as "anger" when they thought the child was a boy, and as "fear" when they thought it was a girl. Even when it comes to babies of nine months, people assume that females need to be protected and nurtured and males need to be tamed and lassoed in.²

With so much going against us, it's easy to react the way my taxi driver did: throw our hands in the air and say, "Fine, you win. I just can't be the kind of husband you want." But wait. Maybe if we stop trying to meet impossible expectations, we'd be better able to be true to ourselves and still be good husbands.



Psst!

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Wives shouldn't expect lots of emotive displays from their husbands. Testosterone gets in the way of how a man feels. Unless it's a feeling of aggression (which men can, and do, feel), men usually don't want to talk about feelings even if the marriage is good, alive and thoughtful. That's just the way they're made.

—Christine, married 28 years

MEN AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT

In the 1960s and 1970s, the woman's liberation movement in America opened our eyes to the cultural biases against women. No longer would females be content to be nothing more than adoring eye candy at the side of their husbands. The message was trumpeted throughout the land: men and women are equal.

Although the lasting positive gains of this movement are undeniable in the workplace, in civil rights, in the courts, and in our homes, militant feminists were, and still are, working from a false platform. Women should certainly be considered equals to men, but women are not the same as men. There are biological differences in our mental and physical makeup that cannot be denied or ignored in our quest to understand each other.

To make your marriage great without giving up who you are, it's important to recognize that some of your so-called failings as a husband are very often not failings at all, but simply the result of the fact that you and your wife do not think and feel the same way.

To dissect the ways in which males and females are biologically different, we'll start with the seat of personality, the brain. The brain comprises two sides, the left and right hemispheres. Most folks, even left-handers, are left-brain dominant. The left brain is associated with linear and sequential thought; it's the part of the brain that puts things together piece by piece by piece. The left brain is also the part of the brain that controls the comprehension and expression of speech. When a person dissects speech word for word to determine its meaning, he uses his left brain.

In contrast, the right brain is more intuitive and holistic. It ignores the parts and sees the whole. When you solve problems through hunches or impulse, you are using your right brain. It's also the side of the brain that houses such skills as reading maps and reading expressions.

All brains contain both hemispheres and the connecting fibers between them. But not all brains are alike in all ways; otherwise

we'd all think and act like one another. Recent scientific studies have shown not only that brains differ from one individual to another but also that there are profound differences in the development of the male and female brain.

Here are some of the most interesting findings:

- Before a child is even born, there are noticeable brain differences between the sexes. At six weeks in utero, the male brain gets a large dose of the male hormone testosterone, which changes the brain permanently and determines sexual identity.
- Some scientists believe that our early understanding of male and female gender roles is inborn, caused by the fact that in the womb males are exposed to higher levels of androgens, and females to higher levels of estrogens. The belief that this influences gender roles is based on research done with opposite-sex twins who naturally share both the androgen and estrogen hormones. In these cases, the male tends to have more feminine attributes (lower levels of activity, loudness, confidence, intensity, and selfishness) than his male peers, and the female twin exhibits more masculine attributes (better spatial and mathematical abilities and increased dominance and sensation-seeking behavior) than her female peers. Researchers believe that these results are caused by the transfer of androgen and estrogen hormones from one fetus to another. This finding supports those who believe that at least some male-female differences are the result of hormone exposure in the womb and not the result of social conditioning alone.
- The male brain is 10 percent larger in mass than the female brain. Much of that larger mass is white