

4. *The LATE Men*

To overstate the obvious, men and women do relationship differently. Women generally learn more relationship skills than men. Men tend to be more disconnected emotionally. Many years ago, I was walking down the beach with my sister and we were talking about these differences. She told me that “All men are emotionally crippled.” This may be a bit of an overstatement, but tragically, it’s mostly true.

Why do so many men sabotage their most important relationships? I’ve specialized in working with men in individual therapy, couples therapy, and personal growth workshops for over thirty years. A majority of these men struggle with relationships and other adult responsibilities. They have shame issues and anger management problems.

The role of men historically has been to protect and provide for their families and community. Men have primarily been defined by their work roles, not by their relationships. But the male role has changed dramatically in recent history, as a result of revolutionary economic and social changes. In the past, there was no need or expectation for men to communicate in an intimate manner. No need to talk about their feelings, to be emotionally sensitive to others, to “validate” their female partner, or to be emotionally supportive in marriage. The LATE Men are relationally behind the times, and their parents didn’t have the knowledge or skills to help them evolve.

The new, more empowered role of women in our society presents a great challenge to The LATE Men. Today, women compete with men in the same workforce, and these enlightened, empowered women expect, often demand that men carry an equal load at home with meals, child care, and other traditionally “female” tasks. Those same women also require emotional connection, support, and open communication. But LATE Men haven’t been trained or socialized to meet these new expectations and demands.

In fact, most men are quite limited because, while growing up, *they weren’t taught how to feel or to communicate relationally*—rather, they were taught to stuff their feelings and to disconnect emotionally and relationally. Terry Real says that men have been deprived of their hearts, and women have been deprived of their voice. Men are taught not to feel (historically, only anger was acceptable in men—“big boys don’t cry”). And until very recently women were taught compliance in a patriarchal model of the family, so they had no voice. Women were dependent on emotionally unavailable men, and now, as men continue to be emotionally unavailable, women are justifiably angry and seeking more emotional connection. The world of relationship has been thrown into a crisis state.

Connections

“Women are unhappy in their marriages because they want men to be more related than most men know how to be. And men are unhappy in their marriages because their women seem so unhappy with them.” (Real)

The sad truth is that men want and need connection—even the LATE Men. In fact, they need emotional connection and support just as much as women. But men are afraid of closeness and intimacy because they’re taught to be strong (“be a man”), to be powerful and in control, and to protect against vulnerability at all costs. Psychologist Stephen Bergman describes the “relational paradox” today’s men struggle with:

“The boy is placed in a terrible bind: on the one hand, he feels the pressure to disconnect for self-achievement (to be especially good at *doing* things or *fixing* things, to be competent in the world); on the other hand, he still has a strong yearning for connection.”

Intimacy is threatening because LATE Men don’t have the knowledge or skills to manage the feelings and relationship demands necessary in marriage and deeply committed relationships. That’s an important reason why men tend to sexualize relationships—they are far more capable of sex than they are of emotional intimacy. Marvin Allen, therapist and expert on male psychology, writes:

“Men are obliged to channel their emotions through one narrow conduit—their sexuality—which makes the feelings they experience during lovemaking all the more intense . . . Most of the time they feel cut off from people. Sex can create an instant connection. For a few passionate moments they feel united with another person body and soul.”