

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.



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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.

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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.

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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

matter—the stuff that surrounds the nerve cells.

In contrast to men, women have a higher percentage of gray matter—the actual source of brain activity.

- The cerebral cortex contains neurons that influence intelligence and memory and that interpret sensory input. This region is thicker in males on one specific part of the right side of the brain: the area associated with spatial skills, such as measuring, mechanical design, perceiving direction, map reading, and working with blocks or other objects. These are skills that males usually excel in throughout life.
- In contrast, women enjoy a broad range of verbal brain processes. Brain scan images that reveal how we use our brains show that women use multiple areas of their brain, on the left and right side, to process speech. Men, on the other hand, are limited to only two areas, both located in the left brain. In tests of verbal ability, study after study shows superiority in women.
- Parts of the connecting band of fibers, the corpus callosum, are larger in women. As we will see in later chapters, better developed pathways between the two hemispheres may enhance the female's ability to integrate information from the logical (left) brain with the intuitive (right) brain and allow women to use both parts of the brain when processing information.³

There certainly are still many who claim that the superior male abilities coming out of the right brain are nurtured by teachers and parents who give males more attention and praise when they practice these skills, but we just can't ignore the strong evidence that the male's advanced spatial skills are inborn. When men work



REMEMBER THIS Not Everyone Agrees

There is biological evidence that women and men are different. There is no debate that men have penises and women don't. Men are generally taller and have deeper voices than women. Men have hair on their chest and face; women do not. Agreed? But dare to suggest that the brains of males and females may be different, and the world will condemn you as a brutish fool. Just ask Lawrence H. Summers, president of Harvard. In January 2005, Summers offended women at an academic conference of the National Bureau of Economic Research by suggesting that innate differences between the sexes may explain why fewer women succeed in science and math careers. He further noted that such differences might stem from biological roots. Female academics were furious—as demonstrated by Nancy Hopkins, a biology professor at MIT who walked out of in the middle of Summer's speech saying, "I felt I was going to be sick."⁴ Front-page news stories threw rocks, and intellectuals around the country wondered aloud why Summers felt women were so inferior. All the man did was note that there is research supporting the idea that the brain of a male is different from that of a female. Many people are not yet ready to accept this idea.

on visual-spatial tasks, their testosterone levels surge—and they get better results, on average, than females. Perhaps that's why men are more inclined to seek work that involves visual-spatial excellence, such as jobs as pilots or carpenters.⁵ And perhaps football coaches . . . Talking about Bill Belichick (the man who led the Patriots to three Super Bowls in four years), a news article notes that his friend Rob Ingraham points directly to his perception and

insight. "Perhaps his most unheralded virtue," says Ingraham, "but one that explains plenty to me, is his innate curiosity. Bill wants to know what makes things tick, and when applied to his passion for football, this extends to every facet of the game: 'What makes this blitz work? How do you counter this blitz? How can you disguise this blitz? How can we vary this blitz? Who can I call tonight to talk blitzes with?' . . . No stone goes unturned because his curiosity drives him to learn everything he can."⁶ This drive to know what makes things tick, common to so many of us men with our strong right brains, says more about our innate abilities than all the research out there.

As Dr. Summers of Harvard pointed out in his controversial comments, the preponderance of the evidence does show that men are endowed with a larger right frontal lobe⁷ and more innate mechanical competence. But this doesn't mean women don't have their own special right-brained skills. Earlier, I spoke about how the ability to express speech was housed in the left brain. In contrast, the ability to interpret emotion and comprehend non-verbal messages is housed in a right-brain area (apart from the visual-spatial centers) where women reign supreme. To study these differences, researchers expose subjects to photographs of the classic expressions of fear, happiness, surprise, anger, and sadness, and monitor their brains as they describe what they see. Males are at their worst when they are in adolescence; study participants were consistently unable to recognize when someone expressed fear. (That's why social scientists think that boys are more inclined to rowdiness; boys don't realize when they have gone too far because they can't read the fear in people's faces.) But even into adulthood, it is harder for men to discern facial expressions. In almost all cases, women dominate interpretation.⁸ I know this myself because my wife will recognize emotions in me long before I even know I am having them.

Some say that we're failing to socialize females to be more right-brain dominant. Maybe, but I don't think that socialization is

responsible for the greater brain mass in the right hemisphere seen in almost all male primates. Anthropologists and social researchers have proposed that some of these differences are the product of prehistoric gender-role differences, still seen in the few remaining hunter-gatherer cultures. Greater spatial ability among males was necessary for long hunting expeditions away from home (talking would just scare away the prey). Women benefited from their better capacity to use words to coordinate their search for edible plants and roots; details of the immediate area that surrounded her living space, including the emotional states of her children, were paramount.

I'm convinced that biology is destiny (Freud said that first, not me), and we have to pay attention to these differences. To me, the right upper cortex of the brain endows me with the perfect way to understand the world through its physical form. The problem is, my less developed verbal centers and my smaller corpus callosum make it tough for me to talk about it!

GUILTY AS CHARGED

Some of the complaints that wives lodge against their husbands are based in truth. We are, indeed, not like them, and these differences can drive some women crazy.

The nature-versus-nurture debate will not be resolved any time soon. But when it comes to how husbands and wives live together, I believe that it doesn't make much difference whether the preference of the man of the house for tinkering with household objects over buying shoes is caused by the way he was raised or by the hormone he was exposed to in utero. Either way, the fact is that there are typical "male" ways of acting.

Of course, not all men have all the characteristics of this stereotype, but what follows is my understanding of what researchers of social behavior have learned about why we men are the way we are. Consider this information not as the gospel truth but as a way of observing human behavior to better understand who we are as men.

And because of who we are, women too often complain that we're not more like them.

Women Say: Men Don't Reach Out and Form Close Social Relationships

Men's social roles do not focus on relationship development as a primary objective; improving a relationship is a means to an end. When two men get together, they establish a hierarchy of interaction based on one-upping the other. Maybe it's the call of the wild. We've all seen on the Animal Channel how the rams fight each other for dominance. Some of that instinct is alive and well in the human male.

Deborah Tannen, author of *You Just Don't Understand*, says, "The essential element of status [among men] is asymmetry: People are not the same; they are differently placed in a hierarchy." She contrasts this with the woman's mind-set, in which "the essential element of connection is symmetry: People are the same, feeling equally close to each other."⁹ This difference in mind-set explains why it's less likely that a man would build a close relationship for the sheer joy of doing so. If a woman doesn't understand this, she's likely to see her man as fatally flawed, rather than as in need of her help to learn how establishing closeness with her would benefit him.

Women Say: Men Just Aren't as Emotional as Women

Up to this point, we've discussed the cerebral cortex—the part of the brain associated with thinking and acting. But much of the human brain runs on autopilot. This inner core of the brain doesn't differ much from mammal to mammal; it contains the centers that control respiration, temperature, balance, and those activities that are thought of as "instinctual." Deep within this core is an almond-size section of the brain called the amygdala. The amygdala is in charge of making emotional connections to life events.

Although the amygdala is larger in men than in women, this is a case where bigger isn't necessarily better. The amygdala scans the signals that enter the brain and stands sentry, ready to light up in recognition of a friendly smile, or send out an alarm if it perceives any threats. When triggered, the amygdala releases a flood of stress hormones into the bloodstream. This flooding shuts down the "thinking" part of the brain, freezes the body to prepare for assault, and prepares the memory centers to retain any necessary information for future reference.

Up to this point in the process, guys and dolls have the same physiological processes, but our brains differ in several important ways. Studies suggest that females are more sensitive and responsive to social cues, including threat signals, than are males. That's why she's more likely to have a visceral response to upsetting signals, especially if they come from your angry face.



REMEMBER THIS **The Brain Is the Largest Sex Organ**

Researchers find that men's amygdalas are much more reactive than women's when exposed to sexual stimuli. Remember that when this brain center gets activated, it shuts down the normal operating procedure of the thinking part of the brain, the cortex!

This difference between men's less responsive reaction to threat signals and a women's more sensitive alarm system may be one reason why women don't think we are as emotional.

Another reason is that even when our emotional reactions are equally strong, men tend to be better able to shut down their amygdala and redirect their brain activity back to the cortex—the place where logical thought takes over. This may seem like emotional coldness to women, but to men it may be a way of

making sure our emotions don't get in the way of getting the job done.

Men may also have internal mechanisms to dampen the seriousness of frightening thoughts. MRI scans have shown that when given two sets of words, one neutral and the other designed to stimulate intense negative emotion, men relied on their left brains and didn't discern a difference between the two sets of words. In contrast, women's right and left brains were involved in recalling both sets of words, and emotional centers were activated when the intense words were recalled. Moreover, women (not men) had an increase in blood flow to the area of the brain that stores memory when negative emotions were triggered. Apparently, women are not only deeply hurt by words, but they implant those slights in their memory for . . . who knows how long?

That's not to say that men can't, or don't, experience negative emotions. In fact, studies show his amygdala is much more responsive to sadness than his wife's. But unlike women, men will shut down the amygdala to keep the cortex in control and thus appear ever confident and emotionally stable.¹⁰

Women Say: Men Are Not Good Housewives

Lots of men are very good at lots of things. Most can competently care for their kids. Many do the family laundry. And many men can maintain strict organization of their CD collection, *and* recite all the songs in order on *Abbey Road*. So why is it that so many of us fall apart when we're left alone to keep house and watch the kids for the day?

If you're one of those guys who burns dinner while the baby is screaming to be changed, and then loses it all when the doorbell rings and your neighbor wants a rundown on the big game, you'll be glad to hear that once again the reason for this chaotic state may lie in the way your brain is structured.

Keep in mind that every brain in every person is different, but as we noted before, women on average have more gray matter in their brain than men. Gray matter is composed of nerve cells that make connections between other cells to move information around in the brain. Scientists have found that besides having more of these important cells, women also have a greater number of connections between these cells than men do. No, there's not a direct correlation between the number of nerve connections and how easily a person can attend to many demands at one time, but scientists do theorize that one reason a woman can manage better is because there are many more areas of her brain that process information at once. A woman's brain is more like a shotgun, a man's more like a rifle. She sends so many nerve messages with each impulse that she's more likely to hit several targets at once.

Another reason some men do not multitask as well as their wives do may have to do with that brain bridge I spoke about earlier: the corpus callosum. When the man's well-endowed right hemisphere—the visual-spatial area—is hard at work, you'll notice he's not talking. That's because the right side of the brain is slow



REMEMBER THIS

We Are Not Slaves to Biology

The function and structure of the brain partly explains why you and your wife think differently about so many things. However, it's important to remember that the biological foundation of human differences accounts for only a portion of who we are and how we act. Women can train themselves to love math; men can learn to be adept at interpreting emotion. We are affected by our biology, yes, but we are not slaves to it.

in moving information over to the left side of the brain, where the verbal centers are nestled. One of the reasons men have to turn off the car radio when they are lost is to cut down on interference between the (right) side of the brain that says, "If I turn left here, will I be able to detour around the construction?" and the (left) side of the brain that is trying to decipher the lyrics to "Bennie and the Jets."

Women Say: All Men Think About Is Sex

Without a doubt, men and women are biologically different in the sex department. These distinctions stem from gender-based differences in hormone levels. Hormones are the chemicals that are produced in one part of the body and race through our blood to other organs, causing changes in the delicate balance of our behavior—and our desire for sex. For men, it's testosterone that fuels the drive.

Testosterone is produced in the testes and flows through the blood to affect the functioning of nearly every other organ system, from cholesterol levels to muscle strength to brain function. This hormone is the reason why your wife is right: you do think about sex far more often than she does—because you have ten to twenty times more testosterone flowing through your system than she does, causing you to have more thoughts of sex and a greater desire for sex (most of the time) than your wife.

Although testosterone also contributes to an increased tendency to be competitive and even aggressive, and affects energy levels, motivation, and drive, evolutionary endocrinologists think that its influence on the sex drive is the most pronounced. They speculate that this has something to do with why married men, and other men in committed relationships, have a 20 percent drop in their testosterone—to help keep them from straying.¹¹

There are a great many ways in which the brain and certain body chemicals influence the way men act and the way they see the world. In later chapters you'll see how higher testosterone

levels make men more aggressive than women and less able to hold eye-to-eye contact. You'll learn that levels of other hormones are responsible for our strong need to bravely protect our homes and our mates (as well as our occasional desire to wander away from home). You'll learn about oxytocin, a bonding hormone that surges when a man has an orgasm (dispelling the myth that men aren't looking for emotional connection in the sex department). You'll come to understand that men are different from women but that this does not make them incompetent husbands or lovers.



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After twelve months of counseling with a psychologist and after reasonably extensive reading, I am coming to suspect that men do think, feel, react and perceive a lot of things very differently than women. Especially related to emotions and sexual interactions! It is probably a particularly accurate partial explanation of some of the “challenges” experienced by my husband and me these last couple years. I believe that females can most assuredly learn a lot about their other half by paying attention to biologic differences. And I also think that husbands (specifically mine) can better deal with the problems in their relationships by recognizing these differences.

—Barbara, age 44, married 20 years

TIME FOR A CHANGE

I've described to you a small portion of the reams of research that make it very clear that we men differ from women and have been unfairly judged in our marriages. Ready to do something about that? Good. Because although this book challenges some of the

unrealistic and unfair standards that I believe can be unattainable, that doesn't mean you can just stand there and do nothing.

No, men are not blameless here. And I'm not simply "making excuses" for bad or wrong behavior. When I say that the definitions of romance and marriage are one-sided, I am not necessarily saying that men have a more reasonable grasp of the subject. The truth is that the average husband, unless pressed for answers, does not actively think much about relationships.

In his *Complete Guide to Guys*, humorist Dave Barry compares men's relationship savvy to an ant's view while standing on top of a big truck tire. The ant knows he is sitting on a tire, but he can't fully comprehend it. "And if the truck starts moving, and the tire starts to roll, the ant will sense that something important is happening, but right up until he rolls around to the bottom and is squashed into a small black dot, the only distinct thought that will form in his tiny brain may be, and I quote, 'Huh?'"¹²

Barry is wildly popular because there is logic behind his humor. He says that men act this way because they have "guy brains." Guy brains, he says, are basically analytical, problem-solving organs. Barry didn't make this up—his ideas could have come out of a neuropsychology text. Men like things that are definite, measurable, and specific. Accordingly, they don't automatically think about romance, relationships, and marriage nearly as much as they think about earned-run averages, gigabytes of memory, mortgage refinancing rates, and the advantages of leasing over buying a car. But just because they don't think about romance doesn't mean they can't be romantic.

What I am offering in this book is permission, if you will, for husbands and wives to consider the advantages of redefining their relationship in new and different ways. I'm suggesting that you identify differences between you and your spouse—some of which I believe are determined by gender—and get past feminized and idealized notions of the "perfect" marriage. Once you do this you can stop feeling inadequate, apply your "guy brain," and begin improve your marriage.

Here are some words of wisdom that I'll impart as I end this chapter about being male, words I didn't get a chance to pass on to my cabbie friend: you don't have to measure up to someone else's standards, especially when they're almost impossible to reach. Hollywood, TV, and women's magazines set the bar for what men ought to be at such an intimidating height, it's no wonder we buy into the notion that men are duds when it comes marriage. But contrary to media images, husbands bring extraordinarily positive qualities to a relationship. Although these manly strengths may not be easy to find in movies at your local Blockbuster Video, I know they exist. I see them all the time in the men who come into my practice looking for ways to improve their marriages, and I hear about them from the thousands of men who have shared their thoughts on my Web site, SecretsofMarriedMen.com.

Unfortunately, one of the most time-honored means of breaking down the barriers that keep men and women from understanding each other—couple's therapy—too often encourages that negative view of men as incompetent bumbler. In the next chapter, we'll take a look at the reasons why couple's therapy can sometimes be the worst thing for a marriage.