

Know Your Husband

When Rosa and Lucas stepped into my office for our last session, it was obvious that this was one happy couple. There's something in the way that happily married people look at each other and treat each other. They don't wear signs announcing their state of bliss, but still, everyone knows.

But it hadn't started out that way for Rosa and Lucas. At our first meeting, after routine hellos, Rosa began to explain why they had come.

She told me that she had met Lucas during a code blue at a New York City hospital. At the time, she had been a nurse there for three years, and he was a new surgical intern. She had recently ended a previous marriage, so was wary when this mild-mannered doctor struck up a conversation with her and eventually asked her out.

In the early days of their romantic relationship, Lucas was sensitive, warm, and very attentive and loving. This was the kind of man Rosa had been looking for.

"I wanted to know everything about him," she said, "what made him tick, what made him afraid, what made him happy."

Rosa thought she had all the answers by the time they celebrated their wedding day. But, a few months later, she began to get frustrated that Lucas seemed to be more devoted to the hospital than to her. Finally, they ended up having a heated argument over what Rosa called his obsessive dedication to his work, his self-absorption, and his cruel negligence of his wife.

When she finished berating him, she was shocked at the words he threw back at her: “You knew who I was when you married me. Now you want me to change. This is who I am. Why can’t you accept that?” How could he make such a hurtful comment and still claim to love her?

“If he really loves me,” she said looking at him rather than me, “he’d stop working so much and spend more time with me. Right?”

From Rosa’s point of view, the answer was an obvious yes. Either Lucas signs on to work fewer hours or the marriage is over. Rosa was hanging on to an either-or view of how husbands should behave; at that point, she was not a good example of a happily married woman.

So when she came to my office hoping I could save her marriage by making Lucas change, my first step was to introduce her to Secret 1: Know Your Husband. Understand his true nature—and then use that information to your advantage.

THE CORE NATURE OF MEN

By getting to know a man’s inborn traits, a woman can enjoy his strengths as well as better understand his weaknesses. At the same time, this knowledge puts her in a position where she can use her mysterious yet wonderful feminine nature to bring out the best in this man she loves.

Of course, in some cases there are things that a man has to agree to change or the marriage may not be able to be saved. If he's shooting heroin, blowing money on scratch tickets, going to strip clubs, or using violence in the household, then the Popeye motto, "I yam who I yam," just doesn't cut it. But in most other cases, any marriage will be a happier one if the husband and wife capitalize on the things that make them "who I am" and make them both feel whole and proud (and focus less on the things that do not!).

In this chapter, we'll take a close look at the nature of a typical male, a nature honed through millennia of biological and societal conditioning, and explore ways that you can both enjoy who he is and gently persuade him to be even better.

Who Is This Guy?

With that goal in mind, you can (as Rosa did) begin to ask yourself, "Who is this guy?" "What makes him tick?" "Why does he act the way he does?" In the answers, you may find that your husband has some funny, weird, annoying, and idiosyncratic ways of doing things that are quite different from the way you do things—not necessarily "wrong," just uniquely his.

As soon as Rosa learned to better read Lucas's male nature, she was able to give *less* time and emotional energy to the impossible task of making her man change because *she* wanted him to, and to put more emphasis on getting *him* to want to change. It wasn't long before Lucas chose to drop those excessive overtime hours and run home to his new wife, now a very happily married woman. How did she get him to do that? Well, that's the secret I'm ready to share.

Secret 1 will explore seven of the many reasons why men see the world differently than women, and how knowing those

differences gives women the remarkable opportunity to get exactly what they want and need out of their marriages:

1. Men need to feel cared for.
2. Men need acknowledgment of their efforts.
3. Men have trouble verbalizing love and regret.
4. Men need to protect their families.
5. Men need to be right and in control.
6. Men need action.
7. Men have an undeniably strong attraction to females.

When I think about the uncanny ability of a good woman to change a man's tendency to have a self-centered, ego-driven nature, I'm reminded of that scene in the movie *As Good as It Gets* when Jack Nicholson's character says to Helen Hunt's character, "You make me want to be a better man." It is her reply that explains why it's worth the effort to teach men how to be more than they think they can be. She says simply, "That's maybe the best compliment of my life."

There. That is the magic power women have: to touch a man so deeply by caring for him that he wants to be more and better. At their core, men are hardwired to want to please their mate and make them happy. Understanding your man's nature will help you touch the core of who he is and get back from him all that you need to be happily married.

Consider the following, not as rules, but as guidelines that might differentiate you from your husband and give you insight into the many ways you can use a man's nature to strengthen your marriage.

Of course, many women have these same drives. And, naturally, all these needs are not equally strong in all men. But the



REMEMBER THIS

It Starts in the Brain

Any discussion of human behavior has to include the main engine behind all thoughts and actions: the brain.

So when I talk about the brain, please remember that I am talking in broad generalizations; just as every person is different, every brain is different. To begin: There are two lobes of the brain. In most individuals, even left-handers, the left brain controls the understanding and speaking of words, the fine details of images and words, logic, mathematical sequencing, and orderliness.

The right side of the brain has a different area of specialization. Rather than appreciate the exact semantics of speech, or see the fine details of items, the right side of the brain is more big picture and holistic. The brain's centers for creativity and emotional interpretation are found in the cortex of the right brain. Music and creative movement are generated from the right side of the brain.

As a fetus's brain develops in a mother's uterus, it will begin to shape itself based on whether the growing child is a boy or a girl. Although the expression of gender traits varies from one person to the next, the hormones androgen and estrogen act on the brain to produce "typical male" or "typical female" brain types. These differences include the following:

- The male brain is 10 percent larger in mass than the female brain. (Men's heads and bodies are also larger.) Much of this larger brain consists of white matter, which shields the brain cells from trauma and keeps information running quickly along the whole cell.
- The female brain contains more gray matter than the male brain, and these gray-matter cells tend to have more connections between them. Due to these additional connectors, the cells in the female brain are more likely to interact with many other cells simultaneously.
- The visual-spatial region of the right cerebral cortex is thicker in males in the area associated with interpreting sensory data, such as measuring, doing mechanical design, perceiving direction, map reading, and working with blocks or other objects (like the car engine). In females, there are more nerve cells in the left half of the brain where language is processed.
- The brain's two distinct hemispheres are connected by a group of fibers called the corpus callosum. In women, parts of the corpus callosum are larger than they are in men. These more fully developed pathways between the two brain hemispheres may help women to better integrate information from the logical (left) brain with the intuitive (right) brain.

As you read the rest of this book, keep these differences in mind. Differences in brain structure are microscopic, but they can sometimes result in monumental differences in behavior.

goal is to avoid marital disappointment, frustration, tension, and even divorce by accepting the fact that men and women have different physical and psychological strengths and weaknesses. This understanding can be used to support the two opposing pillars needed to give a marriage a strong structure on which to build.

So read on, and get a snapshot of who your man really is. With that understanding, you too will soon be doing less work and getting more love.

MEN NEED TO FEEL CARED FOR

Men need to feel cared for? Oh no, you and your man may say. A man wants to be the one who cares for his family. He is not the weak partner who needs someone to care for him! Well, yes and no. Yes, men do want to pamper their wives and be in charge of things (as I'll explain later in this chapter), but there's no denying that many of them also have a strong need to be cared for by their wives. If men didn't want to be taken care of, we would not be so accustomed to hearing women say, "He's such a baby when he gets sick" and "He acts like he thinks I'm his mother and will indulge all his needs" and "Sometimes I feel like my husband is my third (or fourth, or fifth) child." Sound familiar? Most men do have distinct moments when they express dependency on a mother figure and a desire to be taken care of. This is common and natural among men.

I confess to having this need myself at times. On Tuesday nights I work late, usually until after 8:00 P.M. Because I don't get a chance to eat dinner until I come home, I hold on to the secret hope that when I arrive at the end of that long day, my

wife will have some leftovers heated up for me. More often than not, Tuesday is pizza-delivery night in my house. When Susan thinks to warm up the oven and put a few slices in before I get home, it makes me feel taken care of. I'm not talking about an intellectualized process; it's an instinctual thing.

If a man has the need to be taken care of and his wife doesn't understand it, avoids or denies it, or refuses to respond in any way, he's likely to feel a sense of loss or unhappiness—even though he may be unaware of exactly why. Somewhere inside his psyche he wants to know that his wife is willing to do things to make his life more comfortable.

Nurture or Nature?

I know; I know. You're absolutely right to be wondering at this point, "What about me?" I'm sure you'd too feel happy to have clean socks without having to do the laundry, so you might well be asking why your husband doesn't do that for you to nurture your needs.

He definitely should nurture your needs too, but there are reasons that a man, more than a woman, needs to be shown how to do that through his mate's example—and those reasons are rooted in both nature and nurture philosophies.

Most men are raised by women who take care of their domestic needs. They grow to expect this kind of caring from the women who love them. Most guys I work with identify their mothers as their main nurturer in their childhood; few of those guys had been encouraged in their upbringing to be caregivers.

"Hold on a minute," you say. "Girls are raised by women too, and they too get their socks washed by their mothers. So why don't they grow up looking for that same kind of care and attention from their mates?" Good question, and one good

answer points to estrogen. There's evidence that females are wired to be the ones who have more to give emotionally. In one study, one-day-old females responded more strongly than males to the sound of a human in distress. One-week-old baby girls, but not baby boys, can distinguish an infant's cry from other noise, and four-month-old girls, but not boys, can distinguish photographs of those they know from those they don't know.¹ I just don't believe that these infants "learned" how to play gender roles as early as the first day of life. I think the difference is hardwired.

As they grow, girls are five times more likely to play with dolls, and much of their imagination is tied into tending to their "baby." Compare this to how boys play with their action figures, and I'm sure you'll agree that caregiving is much more natural to girls.

These findings and others quite similar indicate to me that right from birth, females have a more highly developed intuitive sense—they are gifted at reading the feelings and thoughts of others, detecting emotional clues, and responding in appropriate ways. Until the last two generations, most career women were in teaching or nursing—two very giving professions. Some say women gravitate to these types of careers that are extensions of the maternal role; others say that women have been relegated to them. Either way, there is a strong cultural and social history behind women's role as the caregiver.

For the happily married woman, whether the who-takes-care-of-the-home conflict is due to biology or upbringing doesn't really matter. What matters is whether her husband has a strong need to be taken care of by his wife. Is it part of his nature to need a wife who is willing to wash his socks, take his temperature when he's sick, soothe his hurts, and, yes,

baby him when he needs extra attention? If it is, his wife will need to meet that need without feeling resentful if she is to remain one of the happily marrieds.

The Kindness That Goes Around Comes Around

If your gut reaction to the idea that your man needs you to take care of him is a negative one because you feel it puts an unequal burden on you, I concede that on some days, “You’ve got two hands, wash your own dirty socks” is a perfectly legitimate comeback. But at the same time, I’d have to ask you to take a careful look at what you’re calling an “unequal burden.” Do you really split all work equally? Do you do the typically “men’s work” around your home—yard work, car repairs, plumbing and electrical repairs, and the like? What about the ultimate responsibility to provide enough money for food on the table and a roof over the head? Although there are households in which the wife tackles this responsibility, most men still take on this duty to provide as their own. Happily married women know that pulling out the who-does-what-when mental scorecards does nothing to improve the quality of marriage. Instead, they focus on how man and wife can balance out each other.

In my clinical practice, I find this manly need to feel cared for usually centers on domestic things. Men aren’t saying, “Gee, I feel really annoyed that my wife never changes the oil in my car” or “How come my wife never mows the lawn?” or “Why can’t my wife earn more money than me and take primary responsibility for supporting the family financially?” But they may very well be feeling, “It’s so nice to have clean socks without having to do the laundry myself,” or “Wow, I’m glad you thought of picking up my favorite ice cream at the store.” This isn’t simply an issue of the division of labor; these are the



REMEMBER THIS

You Are No Doormat

If you find that you're doing all the domestic work *and* all the men's work (or your husband has been hiring someone else to do his share), then it is time to sit down with him and sort through how domestic tasks are accomplished. Any man who wants a wife who will do *all* the work required to make a household run is bound to have to deal with any unhappiness that comes with that expectation. Or a husband who works at home in his art studio while his wife works a fifty-hour week in corporate America, who expects his wife to come home, make a great meal, and wash those socks, may need to adjust his expectations. In cases like these, it's time to rethink the division of household chores in a way that can meet his desire to be cared for but also meet the wife's need to feel like more than a household servant. If, for example, your husband pays a landscaper to mow the lawn, it's time for you to begin paying someone to do the laundry and ironing. Restore some equilibrium, without going on strike. The goal is happiness, not war.

kinds of things that nurture a man and make him feel happy and content in his marriage.

That's why women tend to be happier in their marriages when they understand that (1) men are not intentionally using them to do the dirty work, (2) men's expectations have grown out of their upbringing as well as social, cultural, and evolutionary processes, and (3) men can learn how to be more giving through their wife's example.

That's the bonus: Your actions can show your husband how to care for *you*. As you cater to your guy, he's watching and learning what marriage means. He's enjoying the love and care of his wife and will soon feel, if he doesn't already, the desire to do the same for you. It's human nature. We all tend to be kind and giving—in our own way—to those who are kind and giving to us. Your husband will return the kindness in ways that fit his nature, and, unfortunately for some women, that will never involve doing the laundry.

MEN NEED ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR THEIR EFFORTS

Soon after the publication of my first book about happily married men, a book club group in rural Rhode Island invited me to attend a discussion of my work. To begin, the hostess of the group, Louise, shared a story about her husband that perplexed her. It seemed that Jim would help carry the groceries in from the car *if* she asked him, but he did it in a dramatic way. "He'll pile bag upon bag in his arms and place them on the kitchen counter with a loud grunt," said Louise. "And then he stands proudly in front of the grocery bags as if he had actually just gone out and hunted the food, slaughtered it, and dragged it across the jungle to place it on the table!"

All the women laughed because they recognized the same need in their own men to be thanked for doing routine household chores. “My Bill,” added Julie, “expects me to pin a medal on his chest every time he watches the kids on a Saturday afternoon.” Again, all the women laughed and nodded in agreement.

The actions of these men made perfect sense to me—probably because I’m a man. The many magnificent statues of great men that dot all the major cities of the world attest to the fact that men don’t strive only to achieve: They want to be acknowledged for their achievements. They like people to connect with them on the basis of what they’ve done to make the world (or at least their home) a better place. This is a need that we still see in men in their marriages today—which in this age of gender equality is often misunderstood and criticized.

Of course, all of us, male and female, want to be recognized for what we do, but for most men, the need is greater. The real reason Louise’s husband stands proudly in front of the grocery bags is that he wants Louise to say, in one form or another, “Thank you so, so much. I could *never* have brought in those groceries without you.”

Okay. Okay. Yes, this kind of seemingly childish need is bound to give you a good laugh—probably good enough to knock you off your chair. After all, you too work hard day in and day out, and you don’t expect anyone to pin a medal on you. Well, dust yourself off and settle back down in your seat, because I’m going to share with you something that may seem plain silly, but that will help you better know and love your man: It’s quite possible that your husband is one of many men who need to feel like a hero.

The bottom line: Your husband may think he’s Superman and you’re Lois Lane. He’s Spiderman; you’re Mary Jane. You

get the idea. You can laugh about it if you want, or you can outright ignore it, but if you treat your husband like someone who has helped save your life, he'll be motivated day in and day out to swoop in and do it over and over again.

When your husband performs an act of service, don't just say "Thanks." Say "THANKS!" Give him a hug (men tend to communicate with action). It would not take much time or effort for Louise to say, "I really appreciate your help; it makes my life so much easier." In this nanosecond, she will have motivated him to offer help again in the future, and he will more than likely do it without being asked.

You may be doubtful that such a strategy will work to get a guy to see things your way. Or perhaps you just don't want to play this game. But consider a situation that I see quite commonly: a married man leaving his wife for his secretary. A common reason men fall for their secretaries is that these women look up to them and satisfy their unmet need for acknowledgment. They see their boss as fighting a battle against stupid managers, incompetent workers, or irate clients. In other words, they worship their hero, and this is amazingly appealing to the men who are the objects of their awe. Ultimately, the once lowly clerical assistant now steps up and volunteers for the role of Lois Lane.

Some women have told me that they think this is a silly way to treat a man. But it's not just me—a man—who says that playing to the male's need for acknowledgment is a quick route to happiness. Amy Sutherland, an intelligent and insightful reporter for the *New York Times*, wrote an article titled "What Shamu Taught Me About a Happy Marriage" that says the same thing. In her engaging and witty style, she explains that while writing a story about how animal behaviorists get wild

Psst!

Sharing a Secret

Get More Attention by Giving More Attention

I've learned that when my husband makes even the slightest gesture of affection (even if it is as simple as "you look cute today") I need to go overboard showing my appreciation of his attention. I went for a year and a half of telling my husband I needed more affection from him (I even told him flat out that I wanted him to tell me I was beautiful). He did not respond to those demands and expectations. But one day, when he paid me an unexpected compliment, I stopped what I was doing and hugged him and kissed him and told him how much that meant to me. I began to do that every time he did something nice for me and guess what? He pays a lot more attention to me now. I hear that I am beautiful almost every day along with plenty of "I love you" and "You are the best thing that has ever happened to me." Men are not always thoughtful in the ways women want them to be. If you want him to make an effort to do things for you that don't come naturally for him, then you need to make it rewarding for both of you.

—Jaclyn, married 5 years

animals to do exactly what they want them to do, she realized that the same techniques would work on “that stubborn but lovable species, the American husband.” “The central lesson I learned from exotic animal trainers,” she concluded, “is that I should reward behavior I like and ignore behavior I don’t. After all, you don’t get a sea lion to balance a ball on the end of its nose by nagging. The same goes for the American husband.”²

Reward behavior I like and ignore behavior I don’t. Sounds like a model for happiness to me. I’ve seen the results over and over again. In fact, freely giving praise and thanks while refraining from nagging and complaining is one of the strategies that helped Rosa to get Lucas to *want* to change. It had never occurred to her to praise the very thing that was coming between them—his overtime work hours. Yet that’s exactly what Lucas, like many men, wanted. Hearing a woman say, “I appreciate how hard you work” can make a man weak at the knees; it makes it much easier for him to hear her requests that he join her for dinner the following night. This is a far better tactic to make a man want to change than Rosa’s either-or strategy that was forcing her husband to choose overtime work or his marriage. A man who feels that his efforts are appreciated is far more likely to get out of work on time so he can race home to his wife’s smiles and words of affirmation. Ultimately, that’s exactly what happened.

MEN HAVE TROUBLE VERBALIZING LOVE AND REGRET

Men are raised on such life lessons as “Talk is cheap. Action is key.” This kind of training, combined with the male’s brain circuitry, sets up the male of the species to be a creature of action rather than words.

Certainly, men can learn to verbalize their feelings and to respond better to the feelings of others, but such behavior doesn't come naturally. Part of the brain bridge that connects the right (emotional interpretation) and left (verbal exactitude) sides of the brain is less developed in men than in women. This doesn't mean that a man's right brain is weak. He can still apply intuitive and emotional thinking skills that help him solve problems through hunches. His left brain is also working fine, so his linear, logical, and sequential skills are in full gear.

The problem is that this structural difference may make it harder for him to use both lobes of the brain at the same time. When pressured to speak, men default to their dominant left lobe—the side controlling literal, not emotional content. Researchers in the area of gender communication express it this way: Men talk to *report*, whereas women talk to build *rapport*.³

Knowing this puts you in a better position to understand that the way your man expresses love and regret will be different from the way that you do. Then you can lovingly help him to appreciate what *you* are looking for from him; why you need to hear those words and how he can say them without giving up his manhood. (Those how-tos will also be explored in the next chapter and in Chapter Four's discussion of how to communicate with your man.)

A Woman's Way: With Words

You may be surprised to hear that any human being needs lessons on how to say "I love you" or "I'm sorry." You, with your more highly developed ability to put your emotions into words, probably feel very comfortable and confident with both of these expressions. But if your husband is like so many of the

men who come to my office and who write to me on my Web site, he is going to be far less able than you to express these emotions verbally.

Let's start with expressions of love. It is very likely that you tell your husband how much you love him with words that sound like this: "I love you."

That's easy for you to say. Remember, you have more nerve cells in the left half of the brain where language is processed. And with your more fully developed pathways between the two brain hemispheres, you are better able integrate information from the logical (left) brain with the intuitive (right) brain.

For a lot of men I know, however, it's really difficult for those words to pass from their lips in a manner that does not seem to them forced or phony. It's often a response that they feel has been demanded and extracted from them like a sore tooth, and the words are difficult to enunciate. No kidding. Some men get hot and flushed, tongue-tied, and clumsy with their lips when they feel coerced to say these words: "OK, I looove you. I love yooo. Sure, I luv ya." All kinds of weird sounds come out in a rush. Some husbands will tell you that—if they are honest.

Meanwhile, you, far more than your guy, are both biologically and culturally reared to seek intimate connection. You, with your need to feel connected in a relationship, may talk with him about the events of the day. You, with your desire for connection, may sit staring into his eyes as you linger over a cup of coffee. You, with your romantic spirit, may arrange for a starry-eyed dinner with wine and dim lighting.

Unfortunately, he may not think to do any of those things to express his love for you.

In the same way, when it comes to saying “I’m sorry,” you will usually do this the easy way by simply saying so. But many men will not. Communication expert Deborah Tannen points to a primary reason why these words are sometimes freely given by women but withheld by men. She has found that women often use the phrase “I’m sorry” in a complementary fashion. If a woman wishes an apology from a female friend, then she knows that sometimes she has to extend an olive branch first. Her friend recognizes the wish for reconciliation and responds in kind. Recognizing that women talk to build rapport, Tannen sees mutual apology between women as totally natural.⁴

So when a woman turns to a man and expects an apology, particularly if she offers one herself, she’s often shocked, disappointed, and confused about why her man is too stubborn to offer the same in return. But spend a few moments in a man’s frame of mind, and you may understand why this is so.

A Man’s Way: With Action

Besides the general difficulty that many males have making the right brain talk with the left brain so that they can access both emotion and language at the same time, there is another reason that they tend to avoid such phrases as “I love you” and “I’m sorry.” It is because of a heartfelt belief that talk is cheap.

“What good does it do to say these things?” they reason. “It doesn’t change a thing.”

“Anyone who feels that way should show it, not talk about it.” Spoken like a man. Saying “I’m sorry” “or “I love you” just seems like an easy way out for men, and they won’t insult you by even trying.

But don't lose hope. Your husband may be expressing his emotions in ways that you haven't been hearing. They won't come from his mouth. They will come from his actions.

He may not often say the word "love," but look for romantic expressions in the things he does for you. When he fills up your car's gas tank or picks up your clothes at the cleaners or cooks you a meal, he may be doing these things to show his love for you. Instead of sitting down and talking with you about feelings, he may see his hard work as a source of support and a gift to you. Romantic? Not by a woman's standards, but to many men, doing things for their wives is what love is all about.

"I'm sorry" is often expressed in similar ways. After you have an argument with your husband over something that is obviously his fault, instead of waiting for the words "I'm sorry," watch for the message in his actions. You may see him quietly

Psst!

Sharing a Secret

"A Man of Few Words"

My husband is a man of few words and sometimes that drives me crazy. But I have found that I deal with that part of his personality much better when I remember that even though he says few words, they are usually carefully chosen and therefore hold more intent and substance than I initially realize.

—Susan, second marriage of 10 years

polishing your car or emptying the dishwasher. *Doing* something for you may be his way of expressing regret.

In fact, saying “I’m sorry” can be a much harder challenge for some men than saying “I love you.” For men, talk (like so many interactions) is about hierarchy and one-upmanship. So when a man apologizes, he doesn’t look at it as a way of bonding (as a female does); he looks at it as losing stature.

Take it from me: for a guy, that’s major. You may be tempted at this point to say, “Grow up!” But I’m not here to reform men. I’m just here to explain them. Suffice it to say that one reason some men won’t apologize is that they don’t want to feel like less of a man—even though they are sorry.

One couple who was recently talking to me about infertility issues illustrated this method of apology. George didn’t want to see a specialist; Loretta did. After a heated discussion, it became abundantly clear how hurt Loretta was by George’s stone-cold refusal and how important this life step was to her. He never said he was sorry, but the next morning, when she went off to work, he called the fertility doctor and scheduled an appointment.

Loretta was touched by George’s actions and told him so: “I’m sorry for the cruel things I said to you last night,” she said as soon as he told her what he had done. “Thank you for understanding.” And then to herself she added, “and because you made that phone call today, I know that you’re sorry too.”

If Loretta continues to notice when George speaks his heart through his actions, without insisting that he say the words “I’m sorry,” it won’t be long before he realizes that apologizing is not a painful or shameful thing. And when that happens, he’ll start to open up and begin to verbalize those words of love and regret.

Before you can get your guy to speak his heart to melt your own, try to *see* his feelings of love and regret, accept this method of expressing emotions, and let him know that you understand the message.

MEN NEED TO PROTECT THEIR FAMILIES

Throughout the history of humankind, males have been assigned the role of protector. Men are generally bigger and stronger than their wives (not always, but usually). They have put their lives on the line to keep their family members safe. Modern-day men still feel the primal pull to be the brave defender, but without a grizzly bear threatening at the door, they must find other ways to “save” the family; at the very least, they need to have some control in the family dynamic.

In generations past, the man’s role as head of the family was unchallenged. One of the benefits of this unquestioned status was the respect it accorded the man. But in modern marriages, this role is less pronounced. Women have stepped up and found that they are generally quite capable of running the house and making important family decisions too—resulting in an equal partnership. But in this equal partnership, what happens to the man’s ingrained need to protect and defend? Sometimes it gets in the way of marital harmony—*unless* you can understand where all that male stubbornness and obstinacy is coming from.

This confusion over the difference between protecting and getting in the way is especially common in the home, which the female often views as her domain. If you put the vase of fresh flowers on the kitchen counter and your husband moves it to the dining room table, would you be annoyed? If you want

to use freshly grated parmesan cheese for your dinner party and your husband suggests the ready-made cheap stuff instead, would you overrule him? Most women would because they tend to control domestic issues. So how then can a woman keep the peace in her home by letting her man have some control in the family dynamic? In many homes this need simply goes unmet, and the men find themselves staying longer and longer at work, where they have that sense of power and control. But in homes where the insightful wife is willing to occasionally grin and bear it, happiness is her reward.

Let's consider the family dynamic of Larry and Diana, for example. Larry would often throw in a load of laundry to help his wife. But he soon learned that he did not do it the way Diana would do it (by choosing the correct water temperature, pretreating soils, and separating permanent press from cottons). So he started staying away from the laundry room.

"Why bother going to the effort if it's not going to make her happy anyway?" he asked me.

My wife tells me that there certainly is a right and a wrong way to do the laundry. And although Diana was right, she's also a smart woman who knows how to get what she wants. When she saw Larry backing away from the laundry pile, she realized that her criticism had worked against her and made him feel incompetent. She remembered the lesson about men needing acknowledgment and began to praise Larry's efforts and give him hugs of thanks. *Then* she eased into laundry lessons to help him help her. That way she didn't extinguish Larry's need to help his family and (even worse for her) lose the possibility of getting the help around the house that she would like.

And what about Juan and Anna? Juan calls his wife every night before leaving the office and asks if there is anything she

needs from the store that he might pick up for her on the way home. Some days it's a loaf of bread or half gallon of milk; other days it might be an onion or a tomato. When he first started picking up a few things, he often arrived home with items that Anna wouldn't have purchased: white bread instead of wheat, whole milk instead of skim, red onion instead of white, and perhaps a hard, unripe tomato. But Anna quickly learned that when Juan asked what she wanted from the store, she could get it by being very specific. Being a straightforward kind of guy, Juan was happy to know exactly what his wife wanted—allowing him the joy of providing for her needs.

And then there's Evan and Natasha. Evan wants to be a good father to his newborn son, but sometimes he's worried that he's an inept parent. Natasha noticed that he felt this way most often when his own mother came to visit. In her need to make sure that the baby was properly cared for, the new grandma would hover over Evan as he held the infant, saying

Guyness Quotient Quiz

How Would Your Guy Answer?

What, in your opinion, is the most reasonable explanation for the fact that Moses led the Israelites all over the place for forty years before they finally got to the Promised Land?

- a. He was being tested.
 - b. He wanted them to really appreciate the Promised Land when they finally got there.
 - c. He refused to ask directions.
-

such things as, “Be careful. That’s not how you hold a baby. You’re going to hurt him. Hold his head more firmly and a bit higher up.” This tore at Natasha’s heart. Her mother-in-law was right, but the look on Evan’s face when he thought that his incompetence might hurt his own son—the child he needed to protect more than anything else in life—was something she couldn’t just ignore.

Natasha told me that on the day her mother-in-law commented about the proper way to hold the baby, Natasha stepped in and gently repositioned the baby in Evan’s arms and then smiled at him, praising him for loving his son so much that she could see it in his eyes.

“I don’t want Evan ever to feel that he isn’t a good dad and provider, and I certainly don’t want him to stop helping me because he thinks he does it wrong. We’re both new at this, and although I do think I have better natural instincts as a parent, I know that I can’t push Evan away without hurting him deeply. He needs to be a part of our son’s life, and I’m going to patiently show him how.”

With wives like Diana, Anna, and Natasha, these men are given opportunities to protect their families and keep them safe. I have no doubt that this is why they describe themselves as happily married men, why they speak so kindly about their wives, and why they will not disconnect from their families and wives by pulling away emotionally and absorbing themselves in their work, hobbies, or computer games as so many unhappily married men do.

It’s in a man’s nature to look for ways to protect his family. In these modern and less dangerous times, happily married women recognize and acknowledge the many, often inconsequential and even unhelpful attempts their men make to be involved, important, and manly.

MEN NEED TO BE RIGHT AND IN CONTROL

The competitive drive ingrained in males over millennia has pushed them to achieve and triumph. It also is the reason they will fight to win an argument and won't easily back down if they think they are right (and sometimes even when they know they're not!).

Part of this is hormone related. We know that it's testosterone that makes men aggressive, and men have a lot of it, more than women. In addition, the hormone vasopressin (the male version of oxytocin, which is associated with feelings of attachment) promotes territoriality. It's one of the reasons men are more inclined to "stake a claim" about arguments of fact.

This aspect of the male's nature seemed to be causing turmoil in the household of a couple I had been seeing for several months. These middle-aged parents of a teenage boy arrived at my office one day barely talking to each other. As the story unfolded I learned that it was time for their son to choose a sport at school, and, as fate would have it, he just wasn't a natural athlete. Dad thought that his son should join the golf team because golf would combine definable goals with a feeling of teamwork. Mom, however, sided with her son, who preferred weightlifting. This wasn't just a disagreement; this was a *disagreement*! What made this particular discussion so intense was that in the past, Tim had rarely ever vetoed his wife's parenting decisions. But now, according to Debra, he wouldn't listen to reason.

So which sport did their son sign up for? I'll get to that. But first let's talk about why it was so important for Tim to make



REMEMBER THIS

It's All About Knowing Your Man

Writer Jonathan Alter crafted a very moving story for *Newsweek* about his experience with cancer. Describing the days after his diagnosis of lymphoma, he said:

By this time I was in mental free fall. Friends later said I handled it courageously, but they were wrong. American culture rewards cheerful stoicism, a quality that cancer patients usually display in public but find difficult to sustain in private, especially at the beginning. I collapsed in tears only briefly, but retreated into a fog of unshakable misery. My detachment alarmed Emily, who wisely resisted many well-intentioned efforts by family and friends to coddle me. She understood that their instinct to be protective was making me into a weaker person than I needed to be. So she lovingly but firmly pushed me back into some semblance of normal life. “Get off the Internet and get back to your real work!” she insisted on more than one occasion.⁵

Isn't it beautiful how his wife knows him well enough to figure out how to get through to him and how to improve their lives through her actions and words? That's what marital happiness is all about.

a stand this time. Most men I talk to say that they don't really care all that much about many of the things their wives do. Their wives will show them color samples for the living room wall, and they'll shrug and barely respond. Men tell me that they'll be asked about what teacher their child should pick for kindergarten, and they'll . . . well . . . shrug and barely respond. You get the idea. There are many things that guys simply don't care about. But there are many things they do care about, and when a man has a strong attachment to an idea, he becomes possessive about it and is willing to fight to have his position accepted.

Men tend to separate out the emotional from the logical and sequential aspects of an issue. So when they register a

Psst!

Sharing a Secret

“Accept Your Husband as He Is”

Either wives have unrealistically high expectations or husbands are just lug nuts. Maybe it's a little of both. :-) But the bottom line is: If you want to be happy in your marriage, accept your husband as he is because he is not going to change fundamentally nor should he. Do not make him feel like a failure because he cannot live up to your expectations. Decide from the start that not only will you not be disappointed, but you will be happy and celebrate who he is and the way he is different from you.

—Mara, 47, married 28 years

“fact,” they are not as likely as women to see that information as open to discussion. With less gray matter and more white fibers channeling brain cells to each other, men see things very clearly from *one* point of view—theirs.

So how did Tim and Debra settle things? Well, in this particular case, this dad was not going to concede his choice. When Debra realized how important it was to her husband to steer their son toward a more social sport and how determined he was to have his way, she was willing to concede, for the sake of marital unity, that there was value in her husband’s point of view.

“My husband knows sports; he knows our son; and he needs me to trust him on this. So that’s what I’m going to do,” she told me, and then added, with that knowing smile that I’ve seen on so many wise women, “I guess I owe him this one.”

MEN NEED ACTION

Caitlin is married to a guy who can’t sit still—but this isn’t a problem for her.

“Gosh no,” she says with a wonderfully hearty laugh. “When Derek can’t get rid of his pent-up energy, I can feel the tension in the house. I’d much rather have him get out and blow off some steam with his friends. When he comes home, he’s so much more relaxed. That’s good for both of us.”

Some men do have an inborn need to be active. In general, men have greater muscle mass than women and are more likely to use physical activity to express their inner world *and* to relieve anxiety. For instance, we know that boys are ten times more likely than girls to be hyperactive. We recognize that boys have lower attention spans than girls in the school

yard, and are more prone to play with action-oriented toys.⁶ Now that he's grown from boy to man, your husband's need to move hasn't disappeared. That's probably why men, more often than women, are involved in such physical activities as playing on baseball, softball, or basketball leagues, coaching Little League teams, or working out at the gym. (Yes, women do these things too, but not as many of them and not as often as men.)

Wives can easily misinterpret this need to get out of the house as a need to get away from *them*, which leads to marital friction. But wives like Caitlin, who have men who are driven to get up and get going, don't try to tame that inner Tasmanian Devil, but rather support that aspect of their husbands' nature and reap the benefits—of which there are many. When a man has an opportunity to be physically active,

He's focused. When your husband can be physically involved in something, he is able to better exercise those powers of concentration that males are known for, and thereby to reduce his level of inner tension. That's why men particularly like physical activities that are goal oriented, structured, and linear—think of baseball and golf, or even household jobs like building a new fence, chopping firewood, or doing any constructive project that requires both physical movement and single-minded focus.

He's creative. When a man can move in space, he opens his body *and* his mind to the world in ways that are unpredictable and new. By experiencing changes in his bodily sensation and, especially where outside activity is concerned, by exposing himself to sights and sounds of the



REMEMBER THIS

His Marriage May Save His Life

Guys do love action—sometimes to the extreme. The male-only Y chromosome causes the brain of the fetal male to grow extra dopamine neurons. These nerve cells, involved in reward and motivation, propel boys toward thrill-seeking behaviors, and their extra dose of testosterone feeds their sense of fearlessness and adventure.⁷ A study of preschoolers at a zoo found that the boys were about twice as likely as the girls to pet a burro, ride an elephant, climb a steep hill, or walk on the narrow ledge.⁸ Any mother raising a young boy knows all about this “fearless gene.”

Unfortunately for harried wives, this recklessness in males continues through every stage of development. Males, far more than females, participate in such extreme sports as deep-sea diving, ice climbing, parachuting, and downhill mountain bike racing.⁹ Men are far less likely than women to fasten their seat belts when driving, and are more often the ones who will speed, tailgate, and refuse to yield.¹⁰ And (not surprisingly) men are far more likely to die from accidental injury.¹¹ But again, you have the ability to make your guy a better man. Studies show that men who are married have much lower incidents of reckless driving, DUIs, speeding, and accidents.¹²

environment, your husband is more open to new ideas, less rigid, and more creative.

He's learning. Most men are more apt to learn about things by getting physically involved with them. That's one reason they aren't inclined to reach for an instruction booklet when they get a new power tool. First, a guy will test it out, try it on a few things, and, when he begins to run into a roadblock, then (and only then) he'll unfold the directions. Being physically active is how men learn about the world and their place in it.

If being active is an important part of your man's nature, you can see why making small changes to accommodate his passion for movement would be a good idea—and you can work it so that you get more of what you want at the same time. In fact, you can actually build emotional connection by joining in.

Let's say you've planned this coming weekend so that you and your husband can clean out the hall closet and then research used-car prices for your teenage daughter. There's nothing there that would nurture your hubby's need to get out and do something physical. So in the interest of improving the happiness quotient in your marriage, you might figure out a way to encourage your husband to get to work on that closet so that the two of you will have time to exercise, fish, hike, bike, play tennis, explore museums, or whatever you can think of that requires physical movement and not too much talk. Routinely spending time together outside the house is fun (with or without kids in tow) and provides good soil for emotional roots to grow. It's worth rushing through those "must-

do” tasks on your weekend agenda in order to put the drudgery of domestic life behind you both for a little while.

On other occasions, you might even want to send him out to get his fill of activity without you. Although spending time in the great outdoors (or on the tennis court or at rock climbing in the gym) with your husband is good for your marriage, there are some times when you don’t have to join in—in fact, your husband might even prefer that you don’t.

Men need to play. And, despite the non-PC nature of it, sometimes it’s just more fun when women aren’t around. I like to go to tournaments for a card game called “Magic, the Gathering.” I enjoy cross-country skiing. I don’t think I’d mind if Susan chose to join me in my playtime, but, truth be known, I’m extremely self-absorbed and competitive, so I know that doing these things as a couple would not be that much fun for either of us. When my wife gives me space to ski or play Magic alone, I feel better, perform better, and am more relaxed and physically fit. And happier.

MEN HAVE AN UNDENIABLY STRONG ATTRACTION TO WOMEN

When I began my research into gender issues, I talked to many men who are deeply involved in the men’s movement. For the most part, the participants of the discussion groups are great guys, and they have given lots of intelligent thought to some very deep issues. It occurred to me as I learned more about these men that in one very special way, they are different from their mirror image, feminists.

One of the most famous quotations attributed to Gloria Steinem and still seen today on T-shirts is “A woman needs

a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” Now, not all feminists see men as useless, but for many years the women’s movement was not kind to our gender. What I noticed about the men’s movement, in contrast, is that men *love* women. They genuinely, deeply, passionately think women are wonderful creatures. Okay, of course some of the guys don’t like one particular woman (like an ex-wife), but generally they are intrigued by women and relish the role that women play in their lives.

Maybe men like women because they never really detach from their mothers; maybe they like women because pheromones unconsciously stimulate attraction. Probably, men have a biological imperative to reproduce, and seeking out women may be nature’s way of perpetuating the species. I’ve heard it argued that individuals sense the parts of another’s DNA chain that complements what is missing in their own. I’ve read texts that say we seek that which we were unable to obtain from our parents during our formative years. I give up trying to figure it out. But take it from a man who has made a career of listening to what men say about women: Women have a mesmerizing effect on men. That’s why you may worry when your husband goes away on a business trip and why you sometimes watch to see if his eyes follow a beautiful woman as she walks past. He can’t help being attracted to women—women are magnets to a man’s nature. So why not use this undeniable allure to your advantage! Don’t forget that especially as a married woman, you still have power over him—if you choose to use it. You can still charm your husband into supporting your interests by appealing to his own need to feel connected to you, his beloved wife whom he wants to please and to have as his happy partner forever.

This is one strategy that Michelle uses all the time with her husband, Rod. Michelle knows she can get things that matter to her by making Rod feel important and valued and, yes, sexy. For example, let's say Michelle wants to spend the evening with her girlfriend, but worries that Rod might not like being left behind. She doesn't see Rod's needs as signs of any deep character flaw. She's smart enough to know that the only reason he would feel that way would be if he thought she cared more about her girlfriends than she cares about him. That's what makes a guy feel slighted, she rightly assumes, not the evening out with a friend.

So to meet his need to know he's important to her, she'll use something she knows will ease his mind—her femininity. Before she goes out, she'll spend some undistracted time with

Psst!

◦◦ *Sharing a Secret*

“Something . . . Causes Our Eyes to Be Drawn to Women”

I was having an argument with my wife over why guys look at other women even when they are happy with the person they are with. My wife believes we as people have full control over whom and what we look at. It's my belief that men don't. We as guys have something inside, either chemically or instinctively, that causes our eyes to be drawn to women even if we are in love with someone else.

—Harry, 25, married 3 years

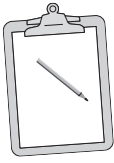
Rod. She'll sit by his side and tell him something positive: "I loved the way you looked in that new suit today—very handsome." Or perhaps say something sexy that will give him a reason to look forward to her return later in the evening—not in a manipulative way, but in a sincere and loving way.

A woman can soften the rough exterior of her husband's persona—and ultimately get exactly what she is looking for in her marriage—simply by being a woman. There is no shame in paying attention to what your man needs and wants to get happy! Using your feminine side is one more way you can nurture his nature.

A happily married woman is one who loves her man for who he is—not for who she wants him to be. Most will tell you that doing this is not always easy—but still worth the effort.

"There are times when my husband's view of life is different from mine," admits forty-three-year-old Marsha, "but when that happens, I have to remind myself that he's probably thinking the same thing about the way I view life, and that helps me put things in perspective. It's taken me time, but I've finally come to accept that the way he does things is not necessarily *wrong*, just *different*."

In the next chapter, we'll continue this discussion. Now that you know what a man's nature is all about, you can more easily nurture his needs—and make sure that he understands yours as well!



The Do Less Lesson

When you better understand the male and female mind and heart, you can do less pleading, yelling, and arguing; less complaining, worrying, and banging your head against the wall. When you stop trying to do it all, pick up his slack, make things even in all ways, and get him to do things the “right” way, you can spend more time laughing, hugging, and raising kids who see that Mom and Dad sure are different, but balance each other such that they can both thrive and be happy. In fact, you may come to the point where you don’t see your husband’s actions as shortcomings at all, but rather as expressions of otherness that attracted you to your guy in the first place.

To do less today, consider that lots of husbands tell me that they back off of parenting and household work because their wives criticize the way they do things. The critical approach doesn’t seem to be working out for either wives or husbands, so I have a different proposal: give your guy another chance to let you do less today. Ask him to watch the kids for an hour or pick up groceries from the store or throw in a load of laundry. Then sit back and let him do it his own male way—no matter how wrong it may look to you, say nothing except “Thanks.” In the end, he may not perform the task as well as you would, but hey—at least it’s done. He’s doing more; you’re doing less. And that’s bound to make you happy.

