

Men and Intimacy: 5 Damaging Myths about Men and Intimacy

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

When it comes to love, men often get a bad rap.

"I've been married for over twenty years. I know I'm not perfect, but I can honestly say that I do my best to be a good husband...I care about what my wife thinks of me as a husband and father."
~Sal

"It scares me to admit this, but I'd be totally lost without my wife. She's my best friend and she tells me that I'm hers. Making her happy is everything to me..." ~Luis

"You only hear about the guys who are abusive or cheat, but how about the tons of men who are faithful and kind?" ~John

These are some of the messages several men shared with me while discussing their thoughts about intimacy, their partners and spouses. Before long, a theme arose:

What especially bothered these men were the rampant myths that go unchallenged in society about what men really want from marriage or a long-term relationship.

5 myths about Men, love and Intimacy:

Myth 1: Men do not value intimacy and emotional connection.

Myth 2: Men are motivated to control and tell women what to do (and therefore prefer passive women).

Myth 3: Men only want sex (rather than emotional connection).

Myth 4: Men do not care about their partners'/spouses' feelings.

Myth 5: Men would rather spend time with their guy friends than their wives/girlfriends.

Let's take a closer look at the first myth, the one that claims that men do not value emotional closeness. This myth arises out of the difficulty some men have with emotions: in particular, expressing and sharing their feelings. This reality is partly rooted in the way in which many men are socialized. Emotional self-expression is not considered an important and useful trait for many men—therefore young boys aren't given the psychological tools needed to identify and appropriately express their feelings.

Of particular importance is the way in which fathers (and other male mentors) act as role-models for their sons. While many fathers are becoming more comfortable with their sons' emotional lives, some fathers continue to hold the expectation that once their male child hits a certain age, this emotionality will give way to stoic self-control.

All too often these fathers are perpetuating what was handed down to them by their own fathers—a type of intergenerational legacy of difficulty tolerating and expressing emotions.

Why are feelings difficult for men?

Feelings of vulnerability (tenderness, sadness, fear, feeling "less than," embarrassment and shame) conflict with the ideal of masculinity—central to this ideal is the trait of control and

masculine strength. Men value power and in the arena of love, power and strength equate to being able to take care of your loved ones.

As the requirements of marriage and intimate relationships change and men are asked to be more emotionally available, the guiding questions for many men are:

How can masculinity and vulnerability exist side by side?

Do I need to totally abandon the traits of masculinity I value in order to be a good husband and/or father?

Unfortunately, the mentality that emotional vulnerability equates to weakness is alive and well in many cultures and held by too many men. This deep-seated attitude is often triggered in relationships that require and demand greater intimacy. Faced with the challenges of intimacy, men may shut down and withdraw, rather than allow themselves to feel confused and emotionally impotent.

But men still value connection!

Difficulty sharing emotions does not necessarily mean that emotional connection isn't important to men. Think of it this way: You can deeply enjoy music and yet not know how to play a musical instrument.

How men go about creating connection has less to do with emotional sharing and more to do with actions that validate their masculine identity--providing for their loved ones, tangential giving that leads to concrete results.

As Roger recently said:

"My wife didn't like the color of our bedroom and when she was out with her sister, I painted the entire room her favorite color. I couldn't wait to see her reaction. When she got home she gave me this big hug and I felt like a million bucks..."

In other words, Roger felt emotionally connected to his wife. He experienced intimacy through doing for his wife, rather than emotional expression.

For the men who feel most at home in the familiar but constrictive strait-jacket of hyper-masculinity, there are significant hurdles to overcome as they attempt to adjust to the new requirements of love and marriage. But for many other men, self-expression and emotional intimacy are seen as long-overdue and a welcome addition to what relationships can offer. These men have long realized that messages that continue to perpetuate the stoic, need-to-be-in-control, warrior mentality are as detrimental to men as they are to women.

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Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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