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Silent and Strong: The American Myth

BY:
Doug
Blocksm

Even though the calendar currently tells us that it is June, think about the last football game you noticed on television. As prime time material for guys aged 18-49, most of the 30 second advertisements are aimed directly at us guys. (For the sake of full disclosure, I am one of those Sunday afternoon, fantasy football playing gridiron junkies myself). The commercials are often for a range of 'manly' commodities, large trucks, beer, home-improvement stores, even prostate meds and Viagra get in on the act. There is a theme among most of these ads: men looking confident, secure and strong – and those men that are acting 'un-manly' are only around to be the butt of the joke as our tough guy hero wins the day with the girl/beer/truck by his side.

Let us be honest about this development in our culture – even if this is admittedly an unscientific observation about trends in mass media. There is a certain accepted code among men in this country: an overwhelming desire to not be seen as 'un-manly' and therefore become more stoic, silent and reserved. This theme is part of the reason that women outnumber men in therapy on a scale of two to one, though this is not because women are in such a larger need of help. Michael Addis writes about this trend in his book *Invisible Men* (2011), in which he recounts the following exchange:

"How's it going?" He asks.

"I'm fine, how are you?"

"Can't complain." He says. "Work is work. You know?"

Then he grinned with that familiar mixture of 70 percent suppressed anger, 20 percent irony, and 10 percent real visible pain." (p. 9)

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IN NEXT ISSUE:

From Family Feud to Family Ties



"Here's all you have to know about men and women: women are crazy, men are stupid. And the main reason women are crazy is that men are stupid." – George Carlin



Importance of Father-Son Relationships

BY: Sheri Fluellen

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The relationship between father and sons is extremely important, even as the son lives out his adult life. Here are two significant findings from a research study examining this exact issue:

1. Men who reported having a good relationship with their father during childhood were more likely to be less emotional when reacting to stressful events in their current daily life.
2. Men who had a poor childhood relationship with either parent reported more stressful incidents in their current daily life.

The researcher said it is difficult to come up with a concrete theory as to why men's relationship with their father had such an influence on their emotional reaction to stress. She states, though, we know that fathers have a unique style of interacting with their children, especially their sons. (1)

Men's Sexuality & Identity



Research: Can men and women ever be “just friends”? A research study found that that we may think we’re capable of being “just friends” with members of the opposite sex, but the opportunity (or perceived opportunity) for “romance” is often lurking around the corner, waiting to pounce at the most inopportune moment. In the study, men had consistently over-estimated the level of attraction felt by their female friends and women consistently underestimated the level of attraction felt by their male friends. (2)

BY: Mark Russelll

Sexuality is often a sensitive issue for men (especially among Christian circles). There is the constant struggle between the concept of being a perfect gentlemen who respects women regarding the intimacy of sexual relationships and the almost instinctual desire to achieve sexual conquest. These are perhaps better understood as opposite ends of a spectrum of the male attitude toward sexuality and sexual relationships. Most men

find themselves somewhere in between these two mindsets. Sexuality is, in itself, a core aspect of our humanity and therefore our identity. Sexuality speaks to a man's sense of power, competence, and significance. While these qualities are addressed by other aspects of our being, sexuality is one of, if not the most, influential sources of identity for these three areas. Additionally, when one of these three qualities is called into ques-

tion by a relationship, emotional state, or event, a man is likely to act out sexually to reestablish security in the area in which he feels the deficit. Too often, those that are struggling with sexual addiction or behaviors get stuck on the behaviors themselves. A more effective way for a man to address his sexuality is to look at his identity and learn that he can be confident in who he is.

Research on the role of fathers suggests that the influence of father love on children's development is as great as the influence of a mother's love. Fatherly love helps children develop a sense of their place in the world, which helps their social, emotional and cognitive development and functioning. Moreover, children who receive more love from their fathers are less likely to struggle with behavioral or substance abuse problems in adolescents and adulthood. (3)



An Unspoken Issue

By: Dr. Sheri Fluellen

Because American society highly values men who have it all together, are hard chargers, exude confidence, and don't show any “cracks” in their armor, there are a lot of experiences that men endure that end up going unaddressed. One such experience is sexual victimization. Sexual victimization can happen at any age and can happen in myriad ways. Whether the victimization happened as a 5 year old with an older neighbor, or it happened yesterday in an office setting, it is a very difficult, emotional, and vulnerable experience.

Getting help for this trauma will typically mean having to talk about it, but likely feels too embarrassing and shameful to do. So all too often, the trauma gets pushed down and ignored. The problem with this strategy is that parts of our mind and our body don't forget. Guys continue to react to people, places, noises, smells, events, based on their horrible experience(s). The negative impact of trying to “stuff it” may be significant relationship problems, increased alcohol use, drug use, over-sexed behaviors, chronic anger, depression, body tension and physical ailments such as ulcers

and headaches, suicide attempts, and avoidant behaviors. On occasion, a victimized man can

actually become over-competent in an area of his life (for example, excels at work with promotions and income raises), but this is often at the expense of other areas of his life that are too painful to deal with, such as his family.

As with any trauma, the longer that the ordeal is ignored and stuffed, the more time it has to damage confidence, self-worth, and views of others and the world. It is like knowing you need to get your brake pads replaced on your car but putting it off because you don't have time. Eight months later, you now have to replace the rotors because the brake pads completely wore out and now the rotors are grooved. Or seeing your oil light come on, choosing to ignore that for 3 weeks, and then having your engine seize up due to lack of oil. What started as a normal procedure now has unnecessarily become a more costly one.

There is no good time to deal with trauma, other than the sooner the better. Take the risk. Reach out to someone in your life that you trust and reach out to trusted professionals.



CONTROL it before it CONTROLS you

Anger is an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage. Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. Memories of traumatic or enraging events can also trigger angry feelings. The instinctive, natural way to express anger is to respond aggressively; yet we can't physically lash out at every person or object that irritates or annoys us; laws, social norms, and common sense place limits on how far our anger can take us. (continued on page 3)

How To Improve Your Marriage Without Talking By: Linda Malm



We often hear that the way to improve marriage is

through verbal communication. The problem is that while talking comes naturally to women, men usually don't have the same verbal skills as women and actually dread the words, "Honey we need to talk".

In their book, *How to improve your marriage without talking about it*,

authors Patricia Love and Steven Stosny present a new approach to improving your marriage using "connection". Women learn to connect to their husbands in a way that frees him to talk more. Men can also learn to connect with their wives emotions in a way that is more natural for them. Men don't have to become like a woman (a.k.a. talking) to connect with one. In general, the authors purport that

developing the ability to experience the world through your partners eyes while holding on to your own perspective may be the single most import skill in intimate relationships. The theory is that a man connects through touch, activity, sex, or routine. When a wife connects in these ways to her husband, he becomes more free to talk, which is what she needs to feel connected to him.

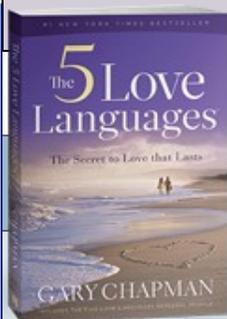
If you are intrigued by this approach, get the book and start working on making changes in your relationship.



Control it before it controls you (continued)

The three main approaches to dealing with anger are **expressing, suppressing, and calming**. Expressing your angry feelings in an assertive—not aggressive—manner is the healthiest way to express anger. To do this, you have to learn how to make clear what your needs are, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others. Anger can be suppressed, and then converted or redirected. This happens when you hold in your anger, stop thinking about it, and focus on something positive. The aim is to inhibit or suppress your anger and convert it into more constructive behavior. The danger in this type of response is that if it isn't allowed outward expression, your anger can turn inward—on yourself. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure, or depression. Finally, you can calm down inside. This means not just controlling your outward behavior, but also controlling your internal responses, taking steps to lower your heart rate, calm yourself down, and let the feelings subside. (4)

ANGER MYTH: "letting it rip" with anger actually escalates anger and aggression and does nothing to help you (or the person you're angry with) resolve the situation.



YOUR MAN'S LOVE LANGUAGES By: Dr. Sheri Fluellen

Gary Chapman is the creator of the "Five Love Languages" series of books. The idea of love languages has revolutionized how couples express their feelings to their significant other.

What are the 5 love languages?

1. Words of affirmation
2. Acts of service
3. Receiving gifts
4. Quality time
5. Physical touch

Women, how can you understand what will mean the most to your man? To put it simply, what should

you "do" to get the most bang for your buck?

Two of the best ways to identify what your significant other's primary love language is, is to pay attention to what he does and what he complains about.

Did your parents drill into your head "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"? This applies to love languages too. A key to recognizing what is important to your man is what he naturally does for you. Is he handsy and want to touch and hug all the time?

Then he might "speak" physical touch. Is he constantly praising your cooking or telling you how much he loves you?

Then he might "speak" words of affirmation.

The other way to try and identify what floats his boat is what he complains about the most. If he makes little side comments about your iPhone being more important than him, he may "speak" quality time and is feeling neglected. If he is constantly dropping hints about all the tech devices that he would love to have, then he may "speak" receiving gifts.

Figuring out what love languages matter most to your significant other maximizes your efforts in helping him really feel your love. I am confident that you will find it worth your efforts.

Silent and Strong (continued from pg 1)

This whole exchange is mostly notable for how common and easily it happens. 'Can't complain' is the polite way of saying that having an honest conversation is off limits, and nobody would want to hear it anyway. Taking this stance in our relationships with our family, spouses, children and friends is virtually expected but completely unhelpful. Men feel just as complex of emotions and reactions as the fairer gender, but it often takes a dramatic amount of time and hand wringing before any of it is allowed to see the light of day. How is this healthy? How is this an example of a full and realized life? This is not to say that I (or any therapist) desires for all men to be constantly sharing their deepest feelings to anyone willing to give them five minutes in line at the grocery. I desire more to illuminate the lie that in order to carry around your 'man card' it means that you keep

things to yourself – and not just the bad things, but the good things too. Indulging that small spark of desire to open oneself is not something to be snuffed out without hesitation. It is the beginning of something better, of freedom, of something more real. Let the spark breathe into something that the beer advertisers won't know what to do with.

Further Reading/Watching:

- * *Invisible Men*, Michael Addis, 2011, Times Books
- * *I Don't Want to Talk About It*, Terrence Real, 1997, Scribner
- * *The Saga of Carl*, The Simpsons, Season 24, Episode 22 – where Homer, Lenny, Moe and Carl realize what the depth of male friendship actually *should* mean



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"If a man wants to truly communicate with a woman, he must enter her world of emotions." ~ Gary Smalley

References

- (1) Fathers and Sons: Importance of Paternal Affection for Adult Well-Being (2010) Melanie H. Mallery, PhD
- (2) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/23/platonic-friends-men-women_n_2005709.html
- (3) <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/changing-father.aspx>
- (4) <http://www.apa.org/topics/anger/control.aspx?item=1>