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## Why Do Men Resist Change & Why Do Women Bother to Try?

*“Do we have to talk about this right now?  
My nachos are almost ready.”*

—BOB MCLEOD

### **Take a Wife and Call Me in the Morning**

Medical science and country music agree—the love of a good woman does in fact make him a better man.

Science has long proven that married men are healthier, live longer, and make more money. And the “she makes me want to be a better man” theme has been a staple of Nashville gold long before Johnny Cash sang, “Because you’re mine, I walk the line.”

But while a woman may make a man want to be better and while medical science may prove that she actually does, how many men enthusiastically participate in their improvement process?

My own dear husband has been attending the “Lisa McLeod School of Personal Development” for more than twenty years, having won a full scholarship the day we got

married. However, I'm beginning to think that despite the weekly (oh, all right, daily) lectures from the Institute's lead instructor, he's not enjoying this enlightening experience. The diverse curriculum covers everything from diet and exercise to parenting and painting skills, yet he remains a completely uninspired student.

Perhaps he doesn't understand the science behind this educational endeavor.

In the *Parade Magazine* cover story, "Why Marriage Is Good Medicine for Men," author Gail Sheehy suggests that women improve their men's lives, specifically their health and longevity, because "left to their own devices and vices, men are inattentive to physical symptoms." Women typically act as "the health sentries" for men. Any woman who's ever argued with her husband about the merits of convenience store nachos knows that men don't typically troll the vegetable aisle on their own. Although I now feel totally vindicated in my quest to eliminate deep fried pork rinds from my man's diet, the article also states that a wife's loving touch and regular sex are the most essential elements in determining a man's emotional and physical health.

Groan—as if I don't have enough to do.

It turns out that it's not just being married that makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise; it's being *happily* married. And for men, happy means lots of caresses, unconditional support, and plenty of time in the sack.

"When all is said and done," writes Sheehy, "a solid marriage with regular, enthusiastic sex can be the best preventative medicine of all."

In fact, a decade-long study at Queen's University in Belfast about the mortality of middle-aged men revealed that

men who had sex three or more times a week had a fifty percent reduced risk of heart attack or stroke. So technically speaking, whenever your husband says, "I'll die if I don't have more sex," he's actually right. I'm surprised that every man in America doesn't have this study encoded in his e-mail signature.

Like it or not, the science is clear: Men benefit in numerous ways from the loving attention of a wife.

Blogger and gender studies professor Hugo Schwyzer (HugoBoy.typepad.com) goes so far as to say, "Marriage, done right, strips away a man's selfishness and self-absorption like nothing else."

That may be true, but here's where the country music part comes in. A man may love being inspired by a woman, but he doesn't want the rules enforced by one. As country crooner Keith Urban sings, "When you put your arms around me, you let me know there's nothing I can't do," the operative word here being *I*. He didn't say, "There's nothing you can't make me do."

There's a fine line between nudging and nagging. The longer you've been married and the busier you are, the easier it is for a wife to cross it.

But the singers and the scientists concur: Behind every healthy, successful man is a good woman holding him up.

Now, if only I had the energy and patience to become one.

### **Wine, Roses, Mittens: It Must Be Love**

Of all the stupid products designed to henpeck men, I have just discovered the worst: The Smitten, a hideous gift marketed for Valentine's Day.

The Smitten set consists of a left mitten, a right mitten, and a mitten for two. According to the ad, the heart-shaped mitten with two cuffs allows “you and your honey to hold hands tenderly and warmly while braving the outdoors.”

Pass me a barf bag. A fluffy, red mitten for two? I wouldn’t want to be seen in public with the man who would wear this. You might as well put him on a pink, sparkly leash and be done with it.

What I want to know is, what happens if you trip while your hands are stuck inside this thing? I guess the googly-eyed Romeo, who willingly attaches himself to you under a red heart of “warm plush polar fleece,” isn’t too worried about having his hands free in the event of an emergency. Even the guy in the ad (Smitten.com) looks embarrassed to be wearing it.

If ever there is a time when the differing male/female versions of romance collide, it’s on Valentine’s Day. Women think the gift giving is supposed to last all month—or at the very least, consist of multiple, carefully chosen items on the big day.

Men, on the other hand, often don’t remember the holiday until they’re on their way home from work on the fourteenth. The Gas ’N Go may offer a lovely display of chocolates, but we women know that if the guy really loves you, he starts composing his sonnet right after Christmas.

The lengths we’ll go to turn a macho man into simpering sap are just amazing.

We all know the drill: We’re attracted to men, and then after they commit to us, we try to make them act like women. Whether it was his strong, silent demeanor or his slightly unkempt, rugged looks, whatever first drew us in is

the first thing we try to change once our blinding hormones wear off.

Yet if you could actually change a man, a job many women braver than you have tried and failed, I doubt you would be happy with the result.

Relationship expert and TV commentator Lisa Daily, (LisaDaily.com) says, “Men need to be men, and bless them for that. The very same brain cells that prevent him from wearing matching sweatshirts are also the ones that cause him to give you his coat when it gets chilly outside, or kill the really big, nasty bug in your kitchen. These are good brain cells.”

Testosterone may be great for growing back hair, but it's not going to make a man start dotting his *i*'s with little hearts. The reality is that if a guy grew you a room full of roses, called you every hour, and smothered you with cutesy stuffed animals, you probably wouldn't find him very interesting.

Men are programmed to do the wooing, but it works best when they get to choose their tools. Instead of trying to make a man conform to your ideas of romance, give him some room to create his own.

Turned-down pages in a catalog strategically placed on the back of the commode don't make anybody feel dreamy. Smothering a man in *The Smitten* may keep your hands warm. But the guy who insists on choosing his own gloves is the one who can really make your palms sweat.

### **Why Must I Always Be Grateful?**

Don't you just love it when your big, strong man helps you out? Doing special little favors like cooking meals for the

family, cleaning up after the dog, and babysitting HIS OWN CHILDREN! (Insert rolling eyes here.)

Why is it that when a man does something around the house, he sees it as “helping” his wife and believes he needs to be thanked for his efforts? This happens in spite of the fact that on the previous 997 occasions, his wife washed the clothes or fed the kids with nary a peep of gratitude from anyone, let alone him.

I know there are plenty of exceptions. My own dear husband is a true co-parent who does not consider watching his own flesh and blood a charitable action on my behalf. But if the two of us spend the day cleaning out the basement, I’m supposed to thank God on bended knee that my man “helped me out.”

The nice part of my brain knows that praising a man for his efforts makes him feel wonderful and will motivate him to do even more. But sometimes my evil twin wants to scream, “Why should I have to bat my eyes and say ‘Thank you, you big ole hunk o’ man,’ every time you get off the couch?! If anybody should be thanked it’s me, for my uncanny ability to recognize what needs to be done.”

Professor Jay Belsky of the Institute for the Study of Children, Families, and Social Issues at Birbeck University of London has discovered one of the big reasons why men and women have such different attitudes about household work.

Belsky’s research revealed that while men typically measure their contributions around the house against what their fathers did, a woman measures her husband’s efforts against what she is doing.

In his book, *The Transition to Parenthood: How a First Child Changes a Marriage*, Belsky explains that a man doing

thirty percent of the household chores, whose father only did ten percent, feels like he's performing 300 percent, because he's doing three times more than his dad ever did.

But his wife, who takes care of the other seventy percent, thinks he's not even making a half-hearted effort, because his thirty percent is still less than half of what she's doing.

And if she has to nag him to get it done and shower him with flower petals when he's finished, she knocks off even more percentage points.

My husband takes a less scientific approach. In choosing to speak for his entire gender, he explains why men always expect their wife to say thank you, even if the job the man did is something that benefits the entire family, himself included. He says, "The woman is the queen of the house. It's her kingdom. And when I do favors for the queen there should be restitution."

If scrubbing the toilet qualifies a man for knighthood, then cleaning up the cat pee must make him feel like he deserves the crown jewels. If you've been married a while, you probably also know there are a few other little gems most men consider more than adequate compensation for their heroic efforts around the house.

A woman might not make the connection between her man painting the bedroom and then getting to spend more time in it, but a man sure does.

The good news is, it doesn't take much to make a man feel appreciated. The bad news is most women resent the heck out of doing it. If your husband cleans out the pantry while you're getting your nails done, it's easy to be gracious. But when he pitches in and simply matches your efforts, it's hard to understand why you owe him.

Women often feel that our bar is set at 100 percent of the tasks while the male bar rests at zero and that any deviation off those preset marks is something we're supposed to be grateful for.

But I suspect for all the annoyed women, there's a pack of equally frustrated men who are trying their best and are completely baffled about why their wives respond with, "Don't expect any medals from me," instead of, "Thank you." If you're a guy, there's a simple solution to this problem: Do more without being asked, and when you're done, tell her the difficulty of the task really made you appreciate how much work she puts in for your family.

And if you're a woman, your solution is even easier: Say thank you. You've probably faked other stuff in your life before, so faking gratitude shouldn't be too big of a leap for you. And who knows? Sometimes you start off faking it, but after doing it for a while, you actually start to enjoy it.

### **The Secret Angst of Men, Imposters Within**

"Why do you have to question everything I do?"

If there's a non-defensive guy out there who enjoys his wife asking him questions, I'd sure like to meet him. And if there's a woman who successfully has mastered the art of asking her husband a question about something he's done without him interpreting it as nagging or insulting, get yourself to the phone, call Oprah, and start sharing your secret on TV. Right now. Because, aside from the option of spending my entire marriage bound and gagged—something I suspect my better half has secretly wished for a few times—I have yet to figure out this gender dynamic.

I've long known that men interpret the female tendency

to ask lots of questions as demeaning. I've watched plenty of guys, including my own husband, hear an innocent question from their wives or colleagues and mentally attach, "You stupid idiot, can't I trust you with anything?" to the end of it.

Yet despite twenty years of marriage and a lifetime of corporate work, I never fully understood the deep and often painful roots of this bewildering aspect of male behavior—until now.

In an eye-opening book, *For Women Only*, author Shaunti Feldhahn reveals what's really going on in the minds of men. Based on spoken and written interviews with more than 1,000 men, Feldhahn exposes revelations about men that surprised the heck out of me. Many were things I thought I knew, like how much sex matters to a man, how much they want to be respected, and why they feel a need to provide.

But reading the actual words of men helped me see the depth of male feelings—yes, they do have them—behind these surface assumptions. Much like Feldhahn, I was shocked to learn what's really going on in the inner lives of men.

One of the biggest surprises was how many men feel like frauds. Feldhahn writes, "Despite their in-control exteriors, men often feel like imposters and are insecure that their inadequacies will be discovered." Apparently, they're all secretly afraid somebody is going to find them out.

Feldhahn's research (available at [4-womenonly.com](http://4-womenonly.com)) reveals that "a man's vulnerability about his performance (in everything) often stems from his conviction that at all times he is being watched and judged."

You'd probably get defensive too if you thought the world was always waiting for you to make a mistake.

Another startling insight was learning that most men face

a constant battle with ever-present sexual images fighting for attention inside their heads. I've always known men were stimulated by visual images, but according to Feldhahn's surveys, it's not just pimple-faced sixteen-year-olds whose fantasies of Beyonce keep them distracted in algebra. Most grown men are walking around with a huge visual Rolodex of women, she says, and it takes a massive effort to ignore it.

Feldhahn's interviews included large numbers of church-going men whom she personally knew to be nice, normal, loving husbands. Yet she discovered that "even happily married men struggle with being pulled into live and recollected images of other women."

As I read about the secret inner lives of men, my emotions jumped between sympathy, sorrow, and anger. I felt sympathetic because it must be pretty hard to function when you feel like everyone's judging you, and every time you turn around, the image of a naked woman flashes through your brain. I was saddened that men often are so misunderstood. And I was angry that none of the men in my life ever bothered to clue me in about all this inner angst. The biggest shocker of the book was how surprised men were to discover that we women didn't already know those things about them.

I was getting good and annoyed thinking, "Isn't that just like a bunch of men to tell a surveyor something they never bothered to share with their own wives?" But then I came to the last question.

"What is the one thing you wish your wife or significant other knew, but you feel you can't explain or tell her?"

The majority of men said, "How much I love her."