

What Do Men Want?

By John R. Morella, Ph.D.

Over the last couple of decades, at least in this country, the question famously explored was, “What do women want?” I don’t believe it has been satisfactorily answered by women, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists or other “oligies.” I guess we can expect the same outcome to the question, “What do men want?” I do know if you watch any amount of television, both in programming and in commercials, men are often portrayed as the dumb, bumbling, and inadequate gender, with women as the smart ones, tolerating the male’s immaturity, laziness, and insatiable lust for sex. I haven’t been on Oprah, I’m not a famous author, or member of a “think tank,” and really no one has asked me to answer this question, but it’s one that I’ve explored with hundreds of men in my role as a licensed psychologist, now retired. I’ve treated them in individual, couple, marital counseling and in group therapies. These were serious-minded men, of all socioeconomic statuses, who wanted to explore their potentials as males, husbands and fathers. The vast majority were not clinically dysfunctional, but wanted to cope with their culturally defined roles, their biology, and their spirituality. Confused, yes; neurotic, no. I have asked myself the same question, at each stage of my manhood, as I have shared my life with my wife for forty-five years. What has our culture done to us men? We mostly fight the wars, which we usually incite, we build bridges, skyscrapers, go to the moon, write poetry, and paint the renowned works of art, and our gods are depicted as men. Yet, men fill our prisons, are quick to physically aggress at others, especially women, and we are the gender that is most likely to sexually abuse children. Sigmund Freud, the creator of psychoanalysis wrote, “Biology is destiny.” Is it our biology, our predominant testosterone make-up, our early imprinting and skewed learning that grants us our destiny?

I remember one mother telling me that she cried upon learning her child was born male. I asked, “Why?” She responded, “Life is so much harder for a male. They have fewer choices. They must be tough, aggressive, a provider; have so much more potential for failure, in education, career, and they must pursue women, whereas, women, have more choices of whether they work, marry or have children. Men are destined to feel fear, compete, and pursue sex. Women can choose to be sexual; men can’t, as they must have sex. It must be a burden to think about sex so much.”

As Jerry told Elaine on one of the Seinfeld episodes, “Until you walk around with all the testosterone in us men, don’t judge us.”

So what do men want, or perhaps better stated, need. This is what hundreds of men told me. They want an abundance of praise and recognition from their mate, the kind that comes from a woman’s words, and a softness that comes from her touch. They need to feel their life is more than the work they do, the money they make; they need a “why” to their existence. Some find it in their children, their love for others, and in their spiritual beliefs. However, most men confess that the daily fatigue is so heavy, they don’t have the energy to pursue much more than what society demands from them and getting their primal needs met. It is the older men, those nearing retirement, who come to the recognition that their lives have been spent in shallow pursuits, that much of what they chased after, are no more than illusions. They never took the time to stare long in the mirror of their lives. Men need to take the time for retreats away from

their jobs, their families, their sports and their libidos, not in planned vacations to the beach, Las Vegas, or in the woods on a hunting trip. They need to be alone with themselves, if not for a few days, then for a few hours. Men are in many ways needier than women, but they haven't learned to appropriately express their needs, so they remain silent and their needs go unmet. As a result of these unmet needs, they act-out. They grow up believing the damaging adage, "men offer love to get sex and women offer sex to get love." How sad for both genders. Men, in the confidentiality of a psychotherapy session, relate they want a love that comes from a gentle, warm, supportive woman that affords softness to their own perceived callus existence. These men want women to experience their liberation, but not at the expense of them emasculating men. When women confuse aggression for assertiveness, then the perception by men is accorded the b-word that rhymes with witch. And—yes, men require a lot of sexual intimacy, not just before marriage but during marriage. After twenty-plus years of counseling men, there is no doubt in my male brain; men are emotionally the more fragile gender. Women, are you listening? Forget Mars and Venus, you live on Earth!