

## Relationships and Communication Styles

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What is your type of relationship with partner? Find out!

### **The Great Male Hierarchy**

Women don't think that all men were created equal. In most species, females prefer to mate with certain males. Females' preferences created the Great Male Hierarchy.

Hierarchies have many advantages. Leaders provide for the welfare of men below them. Subordinate men support the leaders. Every man has a job to do. Leaders make and execute decisions quickly.

New men can join the hierarchy at any time-at the bottom. No time is wasted deciding who likes or dislikes whom.

"Ego boosts"-praise and appreciation that boosts a man up the hierarchy-can be more important than anything else.

It is with baubles that battles are won.<sup>[1]</sup>

— Napoleon Bonaparte, creating the Legion d'Honneur medal

Conversely, fear of embarrassment-a fall down the hierarchy -makes soldiers risk their lives. An insult-a shove down the hierarchy-"drives a man to distraction" or makes him ignore more important goals.

The hierarchical model works with a dozen men, or a million men.

Men in a hierarchy have no need to put down any other man. They establish rules. The rule of law supplants force and violence. The organization runs smoothly. Courts and justice systems are hierarchies.

The downside of hierarchies is that high-status individuals can abuse low-status individuals.<sup>[2]</sup> A male hierarchy with thirty million members-e.g., Nazi Germany-has far more potential for abuse than a thirty-member women's circle.

### **Women's Support Circles**

Women form egalitarian support circles. When a woman has a problem, the other women in her circle help her. This structure promotes sharing of resources. Support circles take care of each member.

Women compliment each other and put themselves down to say, "You're in my circle."

Instead of having set jobs, at different times individuals have different roles. A woman with resources or skills needed today helps her sisters. They'll care for her at another time.

Women play games to socialize. In contrast, men play to win.

The downside of women's support circles is that they're effective only up to about thirty members. Decisions require consensus. Women's circles can talk and talk and talk instead of making a decision.

Women in a circle exclude other women. Women gossip to say, "You're in my circle." Women make "catty" remarks to exclude individuals from their circle.

Only five women head Fortune 500 companies.<sup>[3]</sup> But few women are homeless. The top and bottom of the Great Male Hierarchy are far apart. Women's egalitarian instincts keep them from society's depths as well as its heights.

### **Women's Culture, Men's Culture**

In most societies, women spend most of their time with other women, and men spend most of their time with other men. North American society is unusual in that we have few rules enforcing this, but men and women still

generally follow this pattern.

Women's culture isn't monolithic. Some groups of women read fashion magazines, others look to Oprah Winfrey as their role model, while other women are devoted to their horses. But, in general, women like to be with other women.

Men like to engage in activities with other men. Watching sports, drinking beer, going hunting and fishing, etc. The difference between men's and women's cultures is that men welcome women into their cultures, when women want men to stay out of their cultures (although there are exceptions to both these assertions).

For example, a woman who likes to watch football and drink beer will be welcomed at any sports bar. She'll receive plenty of attention from the men (e.g., they'll buy her beer). (However, this may not be the case at a small-town gambling establishment.)

But a (straight) man who shows up at an aerobics class wearing a leotard will be ignored by the women in the class. They won't buy him a sports drink at the juice bar afterwards.

The obvious problem is that the women will think that he's there just to pick up women. The women won't think he's there because he likes aerobics. In contrast, at the sports bar the men will assume that a woman is there to see the big game (the same reason the men are there).

A subtler problem is that women may assume that any man who tries to join their culture is a loser. For example, a friend invited me to the aerobics class she taught at a health club. (She warned me not to try to pick up any of the women.) Through 95% of the class I was having mishaps. All the brightly colored gym equipment was beyond my abilities to control. E.g., my big bouncy ball kept bouncing around the room, instead of staying between my feet. I was hopelessly off the beat in any exercise that required rhythm. I excelled at the few exercises that required upper body strength, but the women ignored that. I laughed and had fun, but my friend (the instructor) pretended not to know me, and none of the women in the class talked to me. No one offered to show me how to use the brightly colored springy thingies, for example. In contrast, if a woman shows up at a bowling club, men will be happy to show her how to hold the ball, etc.

In contrast, when a woman joins a men's culture, she quickly figures out who are the alpha males, and is happy to meet them.

If a man tries to join a women's culture, the women might form "buddy circles" to talk and exclude him. A woman who doesn't have a buddy circle will get out her cellphone to avoid him trying to talk to her. The man trying to join a women's buddy circle conversation is a major faux pas.

The result is that women have power and opportunities that men lack. This power is balanced in several ways. Young, attractive women are welcomed into men's cultures, but less attractive women are ignored. And women who are too engrossed in their women's groups can find themselves without a man in their lives. For example, when my running club goes out to dinner the handful of women sit at one end of a long table, while the ten or fifteen men sit around the rest of the table. One night I put a Kleenex pack on the table in front of me, while I talked to the men on my side of the table. Our conversation was interrupted by two women asking for Kleenexes. Both were crying, and when I listened to their conversation I heard them commiserating about being thirty-something and not having boyfriends. One was saying that she'd now decided to accept that she could be happy on her own, without a man in her life. I felt like telling them to stop sitting together at one end of the table and go sit among the men, and they'd soon have boyfriends. Instead, she'd decided to stay with her girlfriends and try to be happy without a man.

### **Men: "Report Talk"**

Men communicate to establish social hierarchies, examples being when:

- They put each other down, showing off, or boasting.
- They talk about things they did, a.k.a. "report talk."
- They issue orders or commands-"Bring me a beer!"
- "Anger as a greeting." A man makes a verbal challenge. If the other man stands up to him, they respect each other.

- Men disagree to show superiority. E.g., a man admires a Honda motorcycle. His buddy replies that Harley-Davidson motorcycles are better.
- Men refuse offers of help. This shows that a man is independent. Dependence indicates low status.
- Men tend to find something positive in negative situations. "No, I didn't catch any fish, but I tried my new outboard motor." Expressing unhappiness admits failure.
- Men offer advice. Advice taken shows that the advisor is smarter. In contrast, fixing another person's problem communicates subservient status.
- Men talk more in public. High status men talk the most. Men interrupt each other, to increase their talk time.
- Equal men prefer to talk sitting side-by-side, not looking at each other.<sup>[4]</sup> Driving is ideal for a conversation with a man. Men talk to each other face-to-face only within a hierarchy (e.g., a boss sitting at his desk), or in a confrontation.
- "Playful insults and teasing put-downs are a common way that men and boys show affection and intimacy."<sup>[5]</sup>

## **Women: "Rapport" Talk**

Women communicate to establish egalitarian support circles:

- Supporting each other-"You're doing great!"
- Complimenting each other.
- Agreeing or saying "we're the same."
- Putting themselves down-"I'm not smart like you!"
- Making suggestions, especially to do things together- "Let's clean the house today"-instead of issuing orders.
- Asking for help, and offering help, to show rapport and equality.
- Instead of offering advice, women do the work themselves.
- Preferring intimacy to independence.
- Talking more in private.
- Gossiping or telling each other secrets, to demonstrate equality and intimacy.
- Women prefer to talk sitting face-to-face.<sup>[6]</sup> Women feel threatened when approached from behind.

## **Men Should Learn to Speak "Woman-ese"**

Men have to learn two languages: "man-ese" to get to the top of the Great Male Hierarchy (and so attract women), and "woman-ese" to make a woman feel the equality, kindness, and support she's used to receiving from other women. Speaking "woman-ese" is the most important dating skill a man can learn.

The men at the top of the Great Male Hierarchy often have the worst relationships with women. Smart men devote years of higher education to learn "lawyer-ese" or "computer-ese." Then they spend one weekend in a John Gray seminar learning "woman-ese."

Instead, practice your "woman-ese" with every woman you meet. Make every woman feel good about herself. This includes old ladies, cleaning staff, and your sister-in-law.

Men with overdeveloped cerebral cortexes look down from their corner offices and wonder why women go for losers. The leader of a three-punk motorcycle gang, who plays guitar and knows the words women want to hear, scores all the women he wants. An MBA managing sixty employees can't get a date, if he only knows how to talk about business.

## **Men's Mistakes**

- Interrupting--women's #1 complaint. When your date is talking, repeat silently to yourself: Let her talk.
- When women talk about their problems, men often give advice for "fixing" the problem. Women instead are asking for emotional connection.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Put-downs. Never tell a woman that she's ugly, stupid, short, or fat. Not even when you're joking.
- Don't argue, disagree, or correct facts. Listen for things a woman says that you can agree with, instead of listening for points to disagree about.
- Lecturing. Nothing is more boring to a woman than a man endlessly talking about his work or hobbies. Women smile, nod, and act interested, because this is how women listen. Men interpret this as encouragement to

continue talking.<sup>[8]</sup> To improve your conversation skills, imagine that your date is silently asking "How is this conversation relevant to me?"

- Lack of eye contact. Don't stare at a woman's breasts. Don't look at other women.
- Not listening. At least half of "good communication skills" is listening. (However, researchers have found that the commonly taught marital counseling technique of "active listening" doesn't improve relationships.)
- Sometimes, if you ask a woman a question, her reply will not necessarily be the one she wants to give. Females tend to expect males to read their mind and say either 'yes dear' or 'no, we're doing this'. Picking the wrong one at the wrong time is disastrous, but use that hunter's risk assessing ability that has been precisely sculpted over eons of time.

### **Women's Mistakes**

- Don't say "no" when you mean "yes," or "yes" when you mean "no.". Also avoid saying "maybe" or relying on the male to pick up subtle signals. If you pull that kind of crud, you will watch 'Planet of The Apes' and be eating \$8 curry and home-brewed lager.
- Most women aren't adept at "man-ese" and shouldn't speak it, e.g., "trash talk" after a game (unless you desire a hearty dead-arm or a wedgie).
- While interrupting a woman will cause her to pause and maybe listen but silently harbour a scathing grudge, more often than not a man will simply continue to talk over the top of you.
- If a man talks about a problem, he is probably subconsciously asking you to help him fix the problem. Women manage to realise the first half of this and overtly offer a solution. This will often be rejected because the solution wasn't provided by the male. That mistake causes perfectly good solutions to go unused.
- Don't argue or overtly disagree. Listen for things a man says that you can agree with, instead of listening for points to disagree about.
- Lack of eye contact, especially don't look at other men. Also too much eye contact may enrage the male.
- Nagging. With reference to the above, men give orders and rarely enjoy taking them from subordinates. However, men are often looking for some kind of 'damsel in distress' situation and if you reconstruct the order into a request they will most likely oblige (unless it is rinsing the dishes before putting them in the dishwasher, this is a feat yet to be accomplished independently of nagging).
- Trying to stop a fight that has already begun. Big mistake, about a hundred reasons not to do it. Just don't.

Don't try to compete with the guys; it won't impress anyone. Remember, one of the reasons they like you is because you don't offer yet more competition to the already existing male egos.<sup>[9]</sup>

— Chrissie Hynde's advice to aspiring female rock stars

### **Emotional Communication**

Emotional messages hide in factual communications.<sup>[10]</sup> For example, Morrow Mayo's essay "To See It Fall" is composed only of scientific facts and objective narration, yet it gives a sense of strong disapproval to the settlers' cutting down of the Brobdingnagian sequoia.

Emotional messages can be verbal, e.g., inviting a woman to a party. Or emotional messages can be nonverbal, e.g., offering a man a place to sit.

Emotional messages can be positive (e.g., "I like you") or negative (e.g., "I don't like you"). Responses can be positive, negative, or ambiguous.

Good communicators respond to the emotional message as well as to the factual message. Good communicators respond positively to negative and ambiguous emotional messages.

### **Dating: Ambiguous Responses to Positive Emotions**

In dating, the most common communication problem is ambiguous responses to positive emotional messages.

E.g., a man asks a woman out to a movie Friday night. His factual message is about the movie. His emotional

message is, "I feel romantic attraction to you. Do you feel attraction to me?"

The woman responds, "No, I have other things to do Friday night." She's responding negatively to the factual message, and ambiguously to the emotional message. She's thinking, "You're probably a loser, but I'm not 100% sure, and the other men I'm dating are losers too, so keep asking me out. Maybe some night I'll be so desperate that I'll go out with you. God, I hope not."

The man responds, "What about seeing a hockey game Saturday night?" The woman again responds, "No, I have other plans Saturday night." They can go on for weeks without asking or answering the deeper message. Miscommunication wastes their time.

The woman could directly answer the emotional message. She could say, "I think you're attractive. Let's get together another time." Or, "I don't find you attractive and don't want to do anything else with you." It's hard to imagine that a woman would speak directly. You can see why we hide emotional messages in factual statements.

Or the man could clearly communicate his deeper message: "Do you feel attracted to me?" Again, it's hard to imagine a man directly asking an emotional question.

But clearly communicating emotional messages will improve your relationships. Try it. At first you'll say embarrassing things. With practice you'll master emotional communication.

### **Relationships: Respond Positively to Negative Emotions**

In relationships, the most common communication problem is negative responses to emotional messages.

E.g., a couple agrees to meet at a restaurant. He's twenty minutes late. She points this out (a factual message) and her body language and vocal tone communicate that she's angry (an emotional message).

He responds negatively, "Only twenty minutes. What's the big deal? Last week you were thirty minutes late."

Negative, ignored, and ambiguous responses don't change your partner's negative emotions.

Successful couples respond positively to negative messages. E.g., he responds, "I'm late because my boss gave me a lot of work, but all day I was counting the minutes until we'd be together."

### **Playful Partnering**

Relationship masters use humor to respond to negative emotions. The key word in that sentence was masters. Humor used badly will get you into deeper trouble.

Play a game (see page 16). E.g., you're twenty minutes late. Ask your partner to pretend to be angry. She looks at her watch, paces, and says, "He's one minute late. He doesn't love me. Now he's two minutes late. I should have married Fred the accountant. He was boring but punctual..."

You pretend to be somewhere else. You dreamily think aloud, "I love her cute little nose, I love her kissable lips....Oh no, look at the time, I'm late! She hates it when I'm late! I'd better stop and buy her flowers. No, that'll make me more late!"

Then you meet. She expresses anger, impersonating Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. You express drippy, romance novel love. If she doesn't laugh, you get drippier, until she's laughing.

Now repeat the game, switching roles.

You acknowledge that you understand her emotional message, and switch your partner from negative to positive emotions.

### **Emotions Are Contagious**

Consciously or unconsciously, people mimic each other's emotions. We infect each other with our emotions.<sup>[11]</sup> Your emotional state results primarily from the people around you, not from what you do or think.

If you can't get dates, maybe you're infecting people with negative emotions. No one wants to be infected with anger, distrust, anxiety, or low self-esteem. Instead, infect people with positive emotions.

## Women's Dating Lies

I felt a kind of pleasure in accepting at face value all the counterfeit currency she had passed off on me.<sup>[12]</sup>

— Giacomo Casanova, 18th-century Italian lover

## When "No" Means "Yes"

40% of college women admitted that they'd said "no" when they meant "yes" to male sexual advances.<sup>[13]</sup>

Female rodents, ungulates (e.g., deer, elk, water buffalo), canines, and primates solicit mating by alternately approaching and withdrawing from their selected male.<sup>[14]</sup>

Females may use "approach-withdrawal" behavior to attract higher-status males. An "alpha" male gets many mating offers from females. Plus, he has to defend his territory against other males. He has to plan the next hunt or protect his harem from predators. A female has to make the male ignore the other preoccupations, and instead focus on her.

A high-status male will ignore a low-status female's approach, unless she looks easy. But if she appears to be too easy, her status drops even further, and he'll reject her. She has to play "hard to get" to increase her status. But this makes him drop the chase because she's no longer easy. She approaches again, repeating the cycle. If she skillfully plays the game, she increases his judgment of her status, and makes him focus on her, while paying less attention to other females.

"Approach-withdrawal" behavior also avoids aggression from higher-ranking females.<sup>[15]</sup>

"Approach-withdrawal" behavior alternates masculine and feminine sexuality. A woman uses masculine sexuality to aggressively get a man's attention. She then switches gender roles to feminine sexuality and lets him chase her.

People endlessly debate whether treating a person badly makes him or her do what you want. Women tell their girlfriends to treat men badly. Men tell their buddies to treat women badly. Alternating interest and disinterest is "approach-withdrawal" behavior. It works, if played skillfully. But if you don't have the skills to play well, don't play that game.

## When "Yes" Means "No"

"Toxic niceness" is something most women are trained in from early childhood, and the most common manifestation of this malady is saying "yes" when you don't necessarily mean it. Which leads to doing things you don't really want to do. Which in turn leads to resentment, which tends to leak out in all manner of bizarre ways: snappish behavior, smashed dinnerware, prolonged periods of pouting...Being in touch with your inner [expletive deleted] eliminates resentment because it frees you to say "no"...Being in touch with your inner [expletive deleted] does not mean that you indulge in poor behavior, such as hissy fits and manipulation...[rather, it means] using the handy catch-phrase "I don't think so."<sup>[16]</sup>

— Elizabeth Hilts,  
*The Inner Bitch Guide to Men, Relationships, Dating, Etc.* (1999)

When women talk to each other, they use inflection and body language to communicate, "I don't agree with you, but I'll accept your view because I value our relationship."

This communication style often doesn't work when women talk to men. In the Great Male Hierarchy, passing a message down a chain of a command eliminates the emotional content. Organizations train men to hear literal messages, and ignore emotional subtext.

Men shouldn't "play games." E.g., a man may chase a woman while pretending to be "friends" (especially if he fears rejection). Women, in general, are better at dating and can lead men in circles if they try to "play games." Stay with clear, direct communication.

## **Jealousy**

My guy and I have a loving relationship, but...I crave attention from other men. I flirt with every guy in the bar, including men my friends are after. I never take it any further than that, but I get off on making men swoon. Is there something wrong with me?<sup>[17]</sup>

— letter to Cosmopolitan

Women are twice as likely as men to intentionally cause jealousy.

Women cause jealousy to test the strength of the relationship, and to increase their partners' commitment. Jealousy increases sexual passion.<sup>[18]</sup> Jealous couples are more likely to marry. Revenge, bolstering self-esteem, and punishment aren't typical reasons for women to use jealousy.

## **Boyfriend Lies**

25% of women living with men say they don't intend to marry their partners. Most explained that their partner's income or education was too low.<sup>[19]</sup>

These women wanted monogamous relationships, so they "hooked up" with a boyfriend. But they're not satisfied with their boyfriend, so they're keeping their eyes open for better prospects. If the boyfriend realizes this, he might cheat or end the relationship. Navigating through this dilemma sometimes requires lying:

- A man asks a woman's friend whether she has a boyfriend. "Yes," the friend replies, "but she wants to break up." He asks her out. She rejects him, saying that she has a boyfriend.
- A woman flirts with a man. When he asks her out, she says that she has a boyfriend.
- A woman accepts a lunch date with a man. After he pays the bill, she starts talking about her boyfriend.
- A woman refuses a date, saying that she recently broke up with a boyfriend and needs time to recover. Two weeks later she has a new boyfriend.

The message in all these examples is "I'm not 100% satisfied with my boyfriend so I checked you out, but you're not worth leaving my boyfriend for." He refuses to hear that he's inferior to another man. He instead accuses her of lying. (She may also be trying to make her boyfriend jealous.)

## **Men's Dating Lies**

We have different rules for interactions between friends and strangers (see "Adult Friendship," page 86). Men's dating lies cross the boundary between friends and strangers.

A man may feel that he knows his object of desire, and so believe that they're friends. He may have watched her and overheard her conversations with her friends. Or, in this electronic age, he may have seen her on television or listened to her music and feels that he knows her. But as long as he's a stranger to her, he should interact with her according to the rules of strangers.

Or a man may think that acting like a friend will make a woman like and trust him. That works with equal partners. E.g., two men meet while fishing. If they're friendly to each other, they become friends (see "Equality," page 84). In contrast, imagine going into a bank to ask for a loan. There's nothing wrong with being friendly, but friendliness won't affect whether you get the loan. Dating is like applying for a loan. If a woman decides not to go out on a date with you, being friendly isn't going to change her mind.

## **Unsolicited Gifts**

Friends give each other unsolicited gifts. Friends don't expect anything in return.

If you receive an unsolicited gift (e.g., a man finishes People magazine while eating lunch at a restaurant, and then

gives it to the waitress), say that you don't want it but you know someone (e.g., a co-worker) who'd like it. If the giver backpedals and insists that the gift is only for you, don't accept it.

### **Solving a Problem**

Friends help each other solve problems. But friends don't overplay minor problems into major problems. And friends don't cause problems, and then offer to fix them.

E.g., a man and woman arrive at a hardware store after it closes. He asks what she needs to buy, and she replies that she has a leaky faucet. It's OK for him to say that another store across town is open late. It's not OK for him to insist that she accompany him to the other store, and insist that she let him fix her leaky faucet.

### **Refusing to Hear "No"**

Your best friend says that she doesn't want a birthday party this year. You ignore her "no," reserve the back room of her favorite restaurant, invite all of her friends, and decorate the room with banners and balloons. Your friend has a great time.

It's not OK for a stranger to refuse to hear "no." If a woman gives in to a minor allowance, e.g., carrying her groceries up to her apartment, she'll give in to bigger advances.

For more about recognizing predatory men's lies, read *The Gift of Fear*, by Gavin De Becker (1997).

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