

**An Essay on Relationships Between Men and Women  
in American Society**

(A Second Try)

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“Men!” a woman was heard to say.

“Women!” a man was heard to say.

Neither was expressing hatred for the opposite sex; merely frustration and disillusion. What is happening here? Why is this frustration occurring?

In my previous essay on “The Present Difficulty with the Success of Man-Woman Relationships in our Society” I made many points with respect to sex based upon my experience which I took to be the state of man-woman relationships. I have since had the opportunity to consider such relationships from a woman’s point of view. Specifically, I have been introduced to women who have been in the same situation as I, yet in a reciprocal pattern. They had no control over the relationship, and when the man decided the relationship was finished, that was it!

It is still my belief that one member of the relationship pair will have control over the other member, and over the relationship itself. Control is decided very early in most relationships, and this control frequently develops without either party being aware of its existence — at the start. Perhaps because of my worshipful attitude toward women, combined with the “values of equality” which have been forced upon me through social pressure, I tend to allow women to take control over relationships in which I become involved. I am not alone in this, however, for many men share my feelings of frustration. On the other hand, many women are having similar feelings of frustration, and this is my attempt to explain this difficulty.

We have a situation where men complain about women and women complain about men. But when the complaints are reduced to their basic components, they are essentially the same! Perhaps we are really complaining about “People” in American Society. The reason women complain about men is they typically are involved in an intimate way only with men, and men complain about women because they

typically are involved in an intimate way only with women. Therefore they attribute the bad experience to the entire opposite sex.

What is causing this frustration or disparity between the sexes? What are some possible explanations for the attitudes and behaviors of people in American Society which contribute to the prevalent failures of man-woman relationships?

**Ambiguous Expectations:**

First of all, the roles have been un-defined. I say it this way because they were once clearly defined: the man knowing how he was to behave, and what he could expect from the woman; and the woman likewise. However, because of changes in the last two decades, whether from the values of radical feminism being forced upon us, or simply a realized need to give women a more appropriate and equitable place in our society, the roles have become obliterated! No one knows how to behave toward the opposite sex, and no one really knows how the opposite sex will respond in any given situation to any particular act because of the abundance of ambiguous conflicting behavioral expectations.

When a man and woman meet, the man must decide, without sufficient information, whether to treat the woman chivalrously, or as generic "person". The woman either has expectations of being treated chivalrously, or as a generic "person". The man has an equal chance of offending the woman by behaving one way or the other, and the woman has an equal chance of being offended by the man depending on her chosen value system. And we're just getting started! Believe it or not, this is the ideal case! As if this were not bad enough, each of them is likely to have adopted a subset of each value system: The new "unsexist egalitarianism" and the old "traditional" role behavior.

As a society, we have officially condemned the traditional roles, but we have not defined any roles as replacement! In addition, as a society, we have allowed partial acceptance of the "unsexist egalitarianism," behaving as if complete acceptance had been achieved, while each individual determines from within to what degree this egalitarianism is embraced! Oh, you're a terrible person if you do not "buy in" to this new value system! Why, you're the "scum of the earth," "the dregs of humanity," if you're

identified as SEXIST! The problem is, what one person views as SEXIST, another caring and well intended individual might view as courtesy!

I recently was in a situation where a waiter in a restaurant accused my female companion as having made a SEXIST statement. To which we were both appalled, not only by the waiter's impudence, but also that someone would consider what she had said to be SEXIST. It seems we have allowed the ranting and raving of a few zealots on the edge of society to make us feel guilty for our once appropriate and honorable behavior. We have let them dictate how we should respond toward the opposite sex, whether we agree or not! It is unacceptable that someone should confess themselves to be SEXIST. Why is that? If we are behaving in an acceptable way to our companion, and one that is not demeaning to our companion, yet which is viewed as SEXIST by someone else, why should we feel guilty?

In another situation, in fun, one of my co-workers accused another of my co-workers of being SEXIST, to which she continually and adamantly denied for several days! It was so distressing to her that someone would consider her to be SEXIST, and so important to her that she not be considered SEXIST, she felt it necessary to deny it repeatedly!

So at the onset of a relationship, and continuing throughout, we have the difficulty of trying to decipher the expectations of the other person with respect to "unsexist egalitarianism."

Now consider a couple who have realized this new value system after a relationship has been established. Let us say one of the members in a relationship decides to internalize some of these new values. Suddenly, behaviors that have been practiced for years violate the new values. The rules changed in mid-relationship! No discussion, no option, the other person is at once thrown into turmoil and confusion. Sometimes, the realization of this "new value system" will lead to termination of the relationship; either from a desire for freedom on the one's part to accompany the new value, or an unwillingness on the other's part to accept this new value.

**The Bigger and Better Deal:**

There is perhaps another reason for the frustration and difficulty in relationships between men and women. It is something I once heard referred to as the BBD's — the Bigger and Better Deals.

The concept of the BBD'S is that in any situation, we want the best deal we can get. We want the best car deal, we want the best investments, we want the best house we can afford, and we want guarantees! Many stores offer “lowest price guarantees,” such that if we find the same product for a lower price, we can return our purchase, or in some other way convert our deal to be a better one. This is only natural! We want the best!

It is when we apply the concept of the Bigger and Better Deal to relationships that we have our problem. If you were to ask people if they are out for the Bigger and Better Deal in relationships, they most certainly will deny it. But in my experience, what people say and what people do are not always consistent. Am I suggesting people would lie about this subject? Yes. We are highly resistant to openly admit something so socially detestable. Yet it explains the failure of countless relationships. Although it is self-centered, socially unacceptable (at least openly), and cruel, I fear it is prevalent!

Many times, we want to lock the other individual into the relationship, but have our “best deal guarantee” at the same time. One is hesitant to make a commitment for fear that a better situation might come our way, and we would be unable to take advantage of it. What's worse, often, people in commitment situations will break the commitment in order to take advantage of the better deal. The sad thing is, our society unofficially condones this behavior. We are saturated with it through the entertainment media! Our friends encourage us to take advantage of it if the new potential relationship is significantly better than our current situation.

Where, then, is commitment?

You may say, “I'm not so shallow! I'm not out for the Bigger and Better Deals!” Have you never broken a dating relationship to have a chance to date someone else? You say, “But that relationship never would have worked anyway!” Yes, we use many rationalizing devices to disguise our desire for the Better Deal because it is distasteful to us. None of us openly condones it, and furthermore, it can be used against us!! Someone for whom we care very much may simply go for the BBD!

I once participated in a group discussion on relationships between men and women. A situation was being described where a woman was interested in a man whom she knew was committed, but not yet married, to another woman. The question was posed, "What would you do? Would you pursue him?" The astounding reply from several in the group was, "That depends. How committed is he?" Now think about that for a moment. Isn't that a little like asking, "How pregnant is she?" Either he is committed, or he isn't! Now, if he is willing to break his commitment with another woman, he'll probably be willing to break his commitment with you in the continuing search for the better deal! Now you tell me, "How committed is he?"

Sometimes, the better situation need not even arise for the concept of the BBD's to destroy a relationship. People will often examine their present relationship against an ideal of a relationship that is in their heads. They start to believe it would be possible for them to find that relationship if they were not "trapped" in their commitment. From this point, they sabotage their current relationship by viewing the other partner as being so significantly less than their ideal they become completely disillusioned, and the relationship fails.

Once a member in a relationship feels they are better than the other, that member seeks out to find someone more closely aligned to their current level of self-appraisal. The unfortunate fact is, aside from destroying the current relationship, the new relationship is subject to the same self-appraisal and BBD potential by either party.

In conclusion, I see the failures in relationships falling into two categories: misunderstood or ambiguous expectations for behavior, and the fear of missing-out on the best that is available. What is the solution? I'm open to suggestions . . . .