

20. Masculinity is a Master of Intimacy

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the definition of Intimacy is

1. Marked by close acquaintance, association, or familiarity. 2. Relating to or indicative of one's deepest nature: *Intimate prayers*. 3. Essential; innermost: *the intimate structure of matter*. 4. Marked by informality and privacy: *an intimate nightclub*. 5. Very personal; private: *an intimate letter*.

When we are getting to know a romantic interest, it is natural to want to control them, so that we continue to receive their attention and good feelings. Deep inside we know that we are not doing or saying certain things that we fear might jeopardize the harmony, so we naturally expect that they are not telling us everything as well. This suspicion makes us uneasy and further justifies why we might want to agree to some set of rules. But this leads to policing and a power-tug-of-war, not to trust and open communication free of the fear of punishment. It certainly does not lead to intimacy.

Intimacy is the solution for the problems posed by infatuation and the relationship script. Not *sexual* intimacy (which is lust), but using the dictionary as a good starting point, the type of intimacy marked by familiarity with one's essential private thoughts and feelings.

Men typically are less able to recognize and identify their feelings than are woman, so to ask them in addition to express these feelings can be a monumental task, which requires a strong dedication to introspection. Nevertheless, in order to achieve intimacy we must be *completely* open and honest, and we must prove that we will not let shame, nor embarrassment, nor fear, prevent us from saying exactly what we think. If there is *any topic whatsoever* that I will not discuss due to embarrassment, shame, fear, etc., then it will be impossible to prove that nothing will get in the way of saying what's on my mind, because there is indeed something that will prevent me from doing so (i.e., shame, embarrassment, fear, etc.), and to assert otherwise then cannot be true. And what would be an alternate way of proving this? Saying over and over "Honey, I love you very much, you can trust me, I will never do anything to hurt you, I will always be truthful...." is very nice, but it proves nothing, and it only creates *expectations*, not *intimacy*.

Proving to her that I feel free to tell her anything will send her the message loud and clear: "this is someone who knows who he is and is not afraid of emotions and of the consequences of telling the truth, and who will tell me the truth NO MATTER WHAT.....this man is in control of his life, and deserves my respect". She will know beyond a doubt that if I have something on my mind that she may not want to hear right now, I can nonetheless discuss it with her in an open and loving manner, before it has a chance to take root and grow into a real threat.

If I fall short of doing this, then she will always suspect that I may be having feelings and thoughts that are threatening to our relationship...and who can blame her? In absence of having proven to her that I have the courage to communicate with her regardless of what it is, she will be justified in her suspicion. Small disagreements will get blown way out of

proportion. Feelings that are not perfectly consistent with the promises I've made, but are otherwise no big deal, will be amplified into major flaws, and I will be spending a lot of energy trying to explain inconsistencies, desperately trying to prove that I love her despite my flaws. This is totally unnecessary, but common.

The fact is, we fear the unknown. The more we make known the less we have to fear. Whatever it is, get it out in the open, on the table in plain sight where it can be seen for what it really is. Maybe we'll get in an argument; maybe there will be hurt feelings, maybe not. More than likely what we thought was something worth hiding will turn out to be no big deal, and you both may end up laughing at it. So what if a person has doubts, or conflicting emotions, or any kind of "bad" thoughts? We are human. We are not angels, but we are not devils either. By virtue of choosing to not talk about something, fearing that it will have some kind of negative effect on the relationship, or that it is not representative of the pristine moral self-image that you cultivate, you are giving it more power than it would otherwise have. By not talking about something you give it more power than it deserves, and then you are thus giving it a chance to actually grow into a genuine threat. The best way to strip an uncomfortable topic of its power is to *make it known* through discussion. Just get it out in the light and deal with it.

An Example

Consider a man who has always done his very best, suppressing bad behavior, thoughts, and speech, ultimately to his own detriment. In school he was a model student, got married in his mid-twenties, and achieved a very successful career. He is a devoted husband and father, and an expert rule-follower. He did what was expected of him, and he did what was right. What he did *not* do was learn the differences between infatuation and intimacy, and like the rest of us, had no formal education on relationships, and little insight into his own emotions. After being married for over 15 years, he feels an attraction for a woman at the office, but has no intention of acting on it. He does not tell his wife about the woman, because he does not want to needlessly alarm her. After spending more time with the woman at work, he grows to know her and like her, kind of like a friend or buddy, nothing sexual, although he can't help but find her attractive, and she has dropped some hints that she finds him attractive as well. He talks to her like he does the other guys at work, so he can relax and be himself. He feels very comfortable with her, and she with him. And unlike with his wife, he doesn't have to watch what he does or says, or answer to her, or feel responsible to make her feel special. Still nothing overtly sexual, but he wonders and fantasizes about her. If he is *really* self-moralizing, he *would not admit to himself*, let alone his wife, that he is having such thoughts. The chemistry with this woman grows the way it does in the movies, so he thinks it might be love. He "knows" he still loves his wife, so he's confused: after all, he is unaware that infatuation is not really love, and that it is destined to fade. Also, as such morally upright person he does not want to admit to himself the large role that *lust* could be playing. Given the fact that he is such a good person and has never considered cheating on his wife before, he reasons that if he is feeling strongly for this other woman, there must be something to it. It has now become a real threat, because intimacy is growing with the other woman, not with his wife.

Alternately, if he had a full understanding of himself and of the temporariness of infatuation and that it's natural and normal to feel lust for women other than his wife, then he could have told his wife everything from the beginning. Share everything. Let her get mad, jealous, whatever. Show some courage and deal with it! As long as he shares nothing with this other woman that he does not share with his wife, any intimacy with the other woman will pale in comparison to that which he has with his wife. Infatuation and lust might grow, but these are temporary feelings that can be discussed with no real threat because they *are* temporary. With his wife he can have a far deeper intimacy than with someone he has not known for long: but he must know himself, and be in the habit of communicating with his wife absolutely everything. Otherwise he may become more *intimate* with this other woman, and that's the real threat.

A Quote

Love is possible only if two persons communicate with each other from the center of their existence, hence if each one of them experiences himself from the center of his existence. Only in this "central experience is human reality, only here is aliveness, only here is the basis for love. Love, experienced thus, is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together; even whether there is harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, is secondary to the fundamental fact that two people experience themselves from the essence of their existence, that they are one with each other by being one with themselves, rather than by fleeing from themselves, There is only one proof for the presence of love: the depth of the relationship, and the aliveness and strength in each person concerned; this is the fruit by which love is recognized.

-Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving

"...if each one experiences himself from the center of his existence" In other words, before we can have love we must know ourselves. We need to know what we are capable of thinking and feeling. Moralizing or suppressing thoughts we think we *shouldn't* have does us no good.

".....even whether there is harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, is secondary..." Harmony and joy are the *REWARDS* of a healthy relationship founded on intimacy, *NOT THE GOAL*. Satisfaction, appreciation, passion, and lasting romance are the *REWARDS*, *NOT THE GOAL*. The sure route to failure is to make joy and happiness the goal. When we dedicate ourselves to making the other person happy, we will do all sorts of things to preserve short term harmony; for example, protecting each other from the truth, and not allowing ourselves to admit when we have doubts or bad feelings. The true meaning of commitment, despite what our haphazard socialization and shallow Hollywood culture has taught us, is not "following through on promises to behave according to some agreed upon set of rules." The real commitment, the one that works, is the resolve and courage to deal with whatever happens (whether it be harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, or even rejection,) when we pursue intimacy by divulging our innermost essential thoughts and feelings: and to do so over the entire duration of the relationship.

“..... There is only one proof for the presence of love: the depth of the relationship.....”

It's the depth of the relationship, not whether your partner is doing what you expect them to do, not whether they following a particular set of rules, not whether they are satisfactorily dedicated to the task of making you happy: none of these can prove love. Only the depth of the relationship can do this. If you have a deep intimate relationship with your partner, one that respects their freedom to do *whatever they want to do*, then they will naturally be drawn to you, and you will be a pleasure to be around and a joy to please. You are being more like an best buddy in this regard, because you are letting your partner be themselves without any demands on their independence, and letting them continue to experiment, to grow, to change, to live their lives by their own accord, not yours. Consequently, they will end up doing the things you believe they should do anyway, not out of fear of letting you down, and not out of fear of punishment, but because they *really want to* out of the desire to please you, out of love! There will be giving without the attachment to receive. No power tug-of-war. But this has to be the reward, not the goal. You can't demand this of your partner. The goal is simply to communicate everything, and then let the chips fall where they may. Detach from the outcome, be fun, and let love grow on its own, if it's meant to grow at all. This may seem to require faith (in love, or nature, or God, etc.), and maybe it does; but I think it's more important first to recognize how our fear prevents love from growing.

To a lot of people this “best buddy stuff”, especially to women, is a big red flag. Don't worry, you're not being *just* his buddy. The point is that you need to drop all the expectations and additional requirements so that you're more fun easy to be around, and not such a pain in the ass. More importantly, he needs to feel as comfortable with you as he is with his best buddy, so that he will not let shame, embarrassment, or fear of hurting you prevent him from sharing. (Men have enough trouble understanding and sharing their feelings even when they are not feeling watched, evaluated, and pressured.) Again, if your fall short of doing this, then you will get suspicion and distrust - not intimacy.

Our Innermost Thoughts and Feelings

These can be easy to express or they can be things from our past that cause shame or anything at all that we feel reluctant to tell the other person that may be true. A common objection to this is, “Why go there?” Why should I tell my girlfriend about something I did long ago that has nothing at all to do with her?

Suspicion is natural, but that doesn't mean it's good. Again, the only way to prove that nothing (not shame, embarrassment, or fear) will prevent me from communicating is to openly express to her things of which I actually *am* embarrassed or ashamed, or for which I fear her reaction. I call this process “ruining the romance”. It derails infatuation by interrupting the game of connect-the-dots by giving each other data points (dots) which do not fit the ideal image. To

deter the destructive consequences of infatuation and of the dating script, and to enable intimacy; ruining the romance serves to build trust by making no topic off limits.

This can be scary and people will come up with all kinds of elaborate theories to explain why this can't possibly be necessary, which serves to further support the fact that it takes a lot of courage. Some objections include, "but I'm an introvert", and "some people just don't know how to articulate their feelings", and "I think it's important to maintain some mystery about myself", and, "no one would want to be with me if they knew all the stuff that I've done in my life." Yes, if you want real love, there's some work to do. But it's really not that much work after all. Once you understand infatuation, and reject it for what it is (which may be difficult for those of us who are romance addicts), then you're really done with the work. Next, you just develop friendships, and detach from where they might be going. This means no more dating, no more high pressure job-interview style dinner-and-a-movie routine with someone you don't know. Just friendships. And eventually, for when a friendship reveals some strong compatibility and attraction, you may want to practice saying something like this:

"I can guarantee that I will always do my best to be completely open and honest with you. I believe that this will lead to total trust and true and deep intimacy, which is the foundation of love, and this is to what I am committed. I will not make any promises about my specific thoughts and behavior, and therefore you will have no need to police my actions and words. I will not let anything prevent me from telling you what I think and do. If love grows from this, great. If not, that's okay too."

and,

If the "essence from your existence part" is what you're afraid of, for what ever reason, then try something a little more manageable. For example, the following rule of thumb might work: If you cannot share a particular thought with your spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend, but you can share it with *anyone else* (like a best friend or buddy), then you know you have an obstacle to intimacy. The good news is that you are indeed capable of sharing this particular thought, so now you just need the courage to tell a different person. If you can't do this, then whether you intend it or not, you are actually more intimate with your best friend or buddy. This is so common in our society today, we call it normal. Watch most episodes of *Sex and the City* and you will see the four women complaining about men being poor communicators; then they share all their fears, suspicions, doubts, and insights with each other, but not with the men. With the men, they play the dating game by the rules, but they certainly do not encourage intimacy. Sex yes, intimacy no.