

## **“How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About”**

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### **Chapter Five**

#### **The Worst Thing a Man Does to a Woman**

##### Leaving Her Alone but Married

While public records show the majority of divorces are filed by women, most women will tell you that *he* left the relationship long before *she* did. What makes marriage miserable for women is the isolation she feels when her husband seems to leave the marriage emotionally - a defense against shame. One woman said it best: “I have the worst of both worlds. I have the loneliness of being single and the constraints of being married. I can’t go out and date, but I don’t have the support and attention of a partner.” Women who leave commonly report some version of this *alone-but-married syndrome*. Here are some examples of how men drive women away, most of the time without ever meaning to.

##### **Alone At Home**

Even though men have picked up some of the slack in household chores over the past ten years, women still do the lion’s share at home. Although most of the time she has a job just like he does, she still has a larger portion of the responsibility for doing housework; preparing meals; entertaining; maintaining family ties; decorating the home; shopping; organizing seasonal celebrations, birthdays, and cultural and social events; and making dental and medical appointments. And that’s if you don’t add kids or pets to the list, which brings new responsibilities, most of which fall under her job description. But it’s not just the workload that gets a woman down. It is the feeling that she is the *only one responsible for all there is to be done*. Many men still don’t understand how much time and effort it takes to keep a home running smoothly: for example, putting in a new roll of toilet paper when the one on the spool runs out or putting your dirty clothes in the laundry basket instead of tossing them on the chair or floor. All too often when a man does housework it’s a *favor*. When a woman does housework it’s *forgotten*.

Sometimes men fail to appreciate and share household burdens out of sheer obliviousness. But if they are irritable about it or feel entitled, resentful, or angry, shame is almost always at the core. They either feel guilty - in their hearts and they know they *should* do more - or unappreciated for *their* contributions. Once again, the primary way men deal with shame is to *avoid* whatever invokes it, while the primary way women deal with fear is to *talk* about it.

##### **Alone in Her Dreams**

When two people fall in love, they begin to dream of a life together. Sometimes this dream is conscious, sometimes unconscious.

When Amelia met Marcus, part of the dream she began to weave was to have financial stability. Growing up in rural New Mexico in a family that constantly struggled to make ends meet made a lasting impression on her. She looked forward to building financial security with Marcus and was more than willing to do her share to make that happen. When they married, she chose a simple, inexpensive ceremony so they could use the money they saved toward a down payment on a house. After six years of frugal living, they had enough money to buy out her brother-in-law’s share of their small family-owned dry cleaning business. Amelia and Marcus ran the business together for three years, but once she got pregnant, Amelia took time off to be a stay-at-home mom, and because the second baby came along sooner than planned, five years passed with Marcus running the business alone.

One day Marcus came home visibly upset. There was yet another delay in the delivery of cleaning chemicals that were vital to running the family business. “Today was the last straw. For the third time, NuChem didn’t show up. I called Jim Callahan and told him I was buying into a distributorship with him starting in two weeks.”

Amelia would report years later that when Marcus made this pronouncement, it felt like the beginning of the end for her. “I knew my need for financial security didn’t matter to him. He risked everything we had without even talking to me.”

Marcus thought his unilateral decision was only about business. In reality, it had the effect of leaving Amelia alone in her dream for financial security and exposing her to her fear of deprivation and isolation.

This true story illustrates an important fact: Men don't realize that a woman's fear of isolation and deprivation can be triggered by leaving her out of any number of important aspects of his life. Here are some real-life examples of ignored dreams that drove women away from the men in their lives. He left her:

- Alone in her dream to own a home
- Alone in her dream to have a faithful husband
- Alone in her dream for a large, loving family
- Alone in her dream to be active as a couple
- Alone in her dream to have a place in his life where his mother could not interfere
- Alone in her dream for a home without angry outbursts
- Alone in her dream to have a romantic partner
- Alone in her dream to be respected in her work

Just as Marcus left Amelia out of his business decision, men who do any of the above are abandoning their wives in order to manage their own dread of failing as a provider, protector, lover, or parent. A man needs to value the longing of a woman's heart, or he will leave her alone in her dreams and become the failure he dreads.

### **Alone on the Outside of His Life**

Men and women in the United States work longer hours than in any other industrialized nation, including Japan, which gave us the term *karoshi*, meaning "to drop dead from overwork." We actually work longer hours than the serfs did in the Dark Ages. And now with telecommunication, work doesn't stop when you leave the workplace. Evening and weekend hours that used to belong to the individual and family are increasingly considered fair game for getting caught up at work. But of course with most jobs you can never get caught up. Precious few workdays end with getting everything done. Instead, you just have to quit and face the load the next day. The result of this never-ending workday is less and less time for recuperating and relaxing, giving the phrase "I gave at the office" a whole new meaning. It's not just time you donate at work, it's the overwhelming majority of your life energy.

Unprecedented work expectations affect women as well as men; *everyone* is tired at the end of a workday. The question is: How does a man choose to recuperate from the stress of work? Does he go straight from work to happy hour with coworkers or buddies? Does he come home and withdraw into his own world? Does he use silence, TV, the computer, or individual hobbies that exclude her? Does he come home with an attitude that says *I've worked all day and now I deserve to rest and be by myself?* Does he use the weekend to pursue activities that are of no interest to her? If so, he is leaving her on the outside of his world.

Many men feel like they carry an extra burden of work. Despite the fact that their wives work more, it seems that work is harder on them as men. This is due not to any sense of fairness but to their dread of failing as providers. Ashamed to admit it to their wives, they cover it up with a sense of entitlement: "I have the *right* to relax in my own home." This keeps their wives on the outside of their world and jeopardizes the most important thing in their lives-their relationship.

### **Alone in Bed**

Many men don't realize how they take the fun out of sex. In the beginning of a relationship women like sex, they want sex, and they are full of sexual energy. So what happens? Here are six common ways women say men leave them alone in bed.

1. They confuse sex with intimacy. *My husband has the one-stop-shopping approach to sex. He figures he can give me attention, get credit for being intimate, meet my needs for touching, be romantic, spend quality time with me, and make me a happy camper - all by having sex. Once that is over, I'm on my own.*

2. It's all about him. *Sex means one thing - his orgasm. He doesn't ask if I've had an orgasm or if I'm satisfied. There is so little foreplay that I feel like I have to do it all myself. Even though I enjoy sex and want sex, I've become so resentful about his attitude that it has become more and more difficult to even enjoy sex.*

3. Sex is the only time he shows interest. *I always know when my husband wants sex, because that's the only*

*time he's affectionate. If he puts his arm around me or touches me, that's his way of saying it's time for sex. He has no idea how obvious he is. I feel like he's only interested in me when he wants to have sex. Otherwise he's in his own world.*

4. He devalues sex by making it crude. *If sex is going to be a special experience for the two of us, I can't reconcile that with making crude sexual jokes and constant sexual innuendos. To me, sex is a sacred act between a man and a woman; it's such a turnoff to make it into a dirty joke. And, for sure, farting isn't foreplay.*

5. He expects me to be like him. *My husband doesn't understand that for me sex has to have an emotional connection that is built on kindness and respect. Without that base I can't get sexually aroused. Even when I do feel close to him, it takes me a while to get excited sexually. I can't get there in five minutes, the way he can. I've never been able to make him understand that it takes more time and attention for me.*

6. He neglects me sexually. *I'm in the awkward position of being the only woman among my friends who wants sex more than her husband. My girlfriends complain all the time about their husband's insatiable sexual appetite while I am left high and dry. We have a role reversal. I want sex, but he doesn't. What does he expect me to do with my sexual needs? I truly am alone in bed.*

The male problem with sexuality is due almost entirely to his hypersensitivity to shame. Our culture heaps a lot of shame on sex, period. And this has profound effects on both men and women. However, lack of intimacy and emotional sharing in sex tends to be more of a male issue. Women like to think of themselves as being sexually desirable or sexual attractors. Men like to think of themselves as being sexual performers. Of course, women like giving pleasure to men, but they are not likely to think of themselves as less of a woman if it doesn't go perfectly. "Womanhood" is rarely at stake in sexual encounters; whereas "manhood," in the mind of the man at least, is very often at risk. (Any woman who has read at least one romance novel is familiar with the term "throbbing manhood," which doesn't refer to the size of his intellect.) All of the above-described ways that men leave women alone in bed are attempts to reduce his dread of sexual inadequacy. If he pretends you don't have needs, he doesn't have to face the pain of failing you. Until a man changes the way he avoids sexual embarrassment or shame, he runs the risk of leaving a woman alone in bed.

### **Alone on the Edge of His Depression**

Depression affects over fifty million people in the United States, but despite this high incidence, few people have an accurate understanding of this very treatable disease. Nor do many people understand the havoc depression can wreak on a relationship. Men as well as women suffer from depression, but far more women seek help. This leaves many women alone on the edge of his depression. A survey showing public perceptions of the cause of depression explains why it is difficult for men to seek help - most people see it as a shameful thing:

- 71 percent believe depression is due to emotional weakness.
- 65 percent believe depression is caused by bad parenting.
- 45 percent believe depression is a personal choice.
- 43 percent believe depression is incurable.
- 35 percent believe depression is the consequence of sin.

The truth about depression is that it has many causes, including genetic predisposition, lifestyle, stress, and individual coping styles. Fortunately, it is highly treatable, which is good news given how destructive it can be to relationships. When one person in a relationship is depressed, the divorce rate goes up *nine* times! The reasons for this startling fact lie in the symptoms of depression. Imagine living with someone who:

- Has little interest in self or others
- Withdraws
- Has a negative attitude
- Blames others
- Procrastinates
- Overreacts to simple issues
- Cries easily and often
- Has unpredictable mood swings
- Lacks sexual interest

- Hyper-focused on sex
- Doesn't feel the effects of love
- Gets jealous easily and often
- Is paranoid
- Uses passive-aggressive behavior
- Is prone to irritability, anger, aggression, and/or rage
- Takes inordinate risks
- Is insensitive to others
- Does not seem to care
- Is continually dissatisfied
- Is chronically unhappy

Many people erroneously believe depression comes from bad relationships, while it is far more accurate to say that *bad relationships come from untreated depression*. Again, depression is highly treatable, not only with medication but also with diet, supplements, hormones, exercise, outdoor activity, healthy coping strategies, and lifestyle changes. Many men regard help seeking of any kind as a sure sign of inadequacy, but to seek help for mental health problems is particularly shameful, because *their role is to be strong* - physically and *mentally*. This is why he's likely to get angry at his wife for even implying that he might be depressed. What he hears is *You are a failure*. If she dares suggest that he see someone for his depression, he will likely perceive it as an attack and launch his own counterattack. We cannot emphasize this issue enough. Research clearly shows that, unless depression is addressed and alleviated, the woman will not only be left alone on the edge of his depression; sooner or later she will be gone.

### **Alone in Her Fears**

Perhaps the most stressful form of isolation for a woman occurs when the person she would normally turn to for comfort is the source of threat. Men are frightening to women because of their brute strength and the heart-stopping force of their anger. Most men have no idea how frightening, threatening, and terrorizing their anger is to women. Even when the anger is not directed at the woman, it still has a frightening effect. An angry voice can trigger her fear response and dump cortisol into her system. If he has a habit of overreacting and getting angry on a regular basis, she lives in a constant state of fear and alertness. In addition, she cannot feel completely safe or relaxed with him - a prerequisite for love, affection and *connection*.

A man can never completely understand a woman's fear response, just as she can never completely understand his vulnerability to shame. He must take her at her word and regulate his anger, which most often rises from some unconscious and irrational sense that he's failing. Otherwise, he will leave her alone in her fear and eventually destroy their relationship.

### **Alone on the Edge of Her Competence**

While it is true that the average man makes more money than the average women, one-third of U.S. households have a woman who makes more money than her male partner. This can be a source of shame for the man, not because the woman in his life is shaming or critical of his ability to make a living but because the picture in his head - and in the heads of his male peers - is the old, traditional model that says the man is the primary breadwinner and should make more money. This puts them both in a bind: The more she excels, the worse he feels. His resentment, caused not by her success but by his own shame, will drive them irrevocably apart.

### **Alone, Period**

When any of these voids exist in a woman's life, it leaves a hole in her heart - a space waiting to be filled by someone or something to ease the pain of isolation. Sometimes the void can be filled with girlfriends, children, work, or hobbies - but the substitutes will not suffice forever. Of course, all this will increase his sense of failure. The good news is that a man can change this in very simple ways that do not include "talking about the relationship." Here are a few examples:

### **Alone at Home**

- Acknowledge that it is your responsibility, as well as hers, to keep your home life functioning

satisfactorily.

- Appreciate all that she does for the home and family.
- Do your share of household chores, management, and meal preparation - make it less of a division of labor and more of a together activity.
- Do the chores you agreed to in a timely fashion.
- Notice what needs to be done and do it *without* being told, asked, or reminded.
- Willingly pay for help maintaining the residence.
- Notice when she makes home improvements.
- Pick up after yourself, and pick up after others.

### **Alone in Her Dreams**

- If you know her dreams, keep them in mind when you make decisions.
- If you don't know her dreams, pay attention and let her teach you.
- Understand that her dreams change - you need to continually update your information.
- Understand that her dreams are not the same as yours.
- Understand you have the ability to make her extremely happy.
- Understand you have the ability to make her extremely unhappy.
- Become the guardian of her dreams, and make fulfilling and honoring them a priority.
- Take pleasure in fulfilling and honoring her dreams.

### **Alone on the Outside of His Life**

- Suggest and plan activities that include her.
- Make sure that each week includes activities you enjoy together.
- Pay attention to her when you are out in public together.
- Develop rituals for time at home that include her, for example, drinking coffee together in the morning, cooking dinner together, watching birds together.
- Increase contact time with her - affectionate touching or shared activities when work hours get long.

### **Alone in Bed**

- Pay attention to her when sex isn't the motivation.
- Let her know she's beautiful, attractive, sexy, sensual, not as a form of foreplay. If you can't tell her with your smile, send her a note, e-mail, or text message.
- Pay attention to her sexual needs and notice if she's satisfied or not.
- Accept that her sexual needs are different from yours.
- Become an expert in arousing her intimately and sexually.
- Understand that she wants a great sex life.
- Do what you need to do to be a great sex partner.

### **Alone on the Edge of His Depression**

- Understand that depression often shows up as alcoholism, drug addiction, anger, irritability, anxiety, obsessive thoughts, controlling behavior, excessive guilt, insecurity, apathy, withdrawal, lack of motivation, procrastination, low sexual desire, and/or compulsive behaviors such as overeating, watching or reading pornography, having affairs, flirting, shopping, spending, and using the computer constantly. If you have one parent who had any of these behaviors, there is a 50 percent chance you will be depressed. If you have two parents with these behaviors, there is a 75 percent chance you will be depressed.
- Acknowledge any symptoms of depression you might have.
- Utilize the many resources available to offset depression, such as books, tapes, Internet sites, medical advice or professional mental health support. You might be surprised at how many other men suffer like you do. A good buddy can be an outstanding resource.
- Understand that depression is highly treatable and that taking steps to alleviate the symptoms will go a long, long way toward improving your relationship without talking!

### **Alone in Her Fears**

Don't go there - with your anger, that is. The angrier you are, the scarier you are. The best way to get over being a scary person to the woman in your life is to control your anger. Contrary to popular belief, suppressing your anger will not make you depressed. Therapists used to think that depression was anger turned inward, but now we know that more often, *anger is depression turned outward*. You *can* transform your anger. Do it. If you can't do it alone - get help. It can be done.

It should go without saying that chronic resentment, angry outbursts, verbal aggression, emotional abuse, and physical violence have no place in relationships. If any of these behaviors have been a part of your life, run - don't walk - to the bookstore for Steven's book *You Don't Have to Take It Anymore: Turn Your Resentful, Angry, or Emotionally Abusive Relationship into a Compassionate, Loving One*. It is hands-down the very best resource for eliminating destructive behaviors that leave women alone in their fears.

### **Alone on the Edge of her Competence**

A man must see his role as protector and provider as more than just bringing home money. He has to protect and provide the emotional well-being of his loved ones. It's important to keep in mind that the more competent she becomes, the more responsibility she has on her shoulders and the more she needs him to support and protect her. Every man knows what goes with accomplishment: lots of expectations and responsibilities. That burden can only be lightened by love and connection with a partner.

### **Alone, Period**

Women want men in their lives. They don't want to be driven away. They want to be in a relationship and experience the benefits that love offers just as men do, which explains why following any of the guidelines put forth in this book can greatly improve your relationship without talking.

If you are a woman and find yourself eager to get the man in you life to read this chapter STOP! Before you can expect him to make any changes, you have to model the behavior yourself. Let your new, improved behavior speak for the efficacy of this book and only then can you share this chapter with him. Even if he never reads it, you can still improve your relationship without talking about it.

If you're a man reading this chapter, it is intended to make you feel compassionate, not guilty! Most of the negative consequences of the behaviors described in this chapter are unintentional, but they have the effect of hurting your partner and keeping you isolated from the most important person in your life. We will show you how to reverse these behaviors in Part II, after one last warning of what can happen if you do not.