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The Changing Roles of Men in America

— Jeffrey L. Santee, Ph.D.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN today is more diverse and confusing than any other time in recent history. The traditional role of being the provider and protector who works outside of the home is changing. Historically, men haven't been very involved in the household and the emotional development of their children, except as disciplinarians. Today, male roles are changing and not so easily defined, which results in frustration for some men and opportunities for others. The modern man may be employed at home while shouldering many of the domestic and childcare responsibilities while his wife (partner) is the primary breadwinner.

I have worked with many males who are challenged with straddling both the traditional and modern roles of men. Meet Joe, a 35 year-old man who was raised in a blue-collar family. To Joe and multiple generations of men in his family, being a man means being a strong, self-reliant breadwinner.

Joe was never encouraged

to go beyond high school where he focused on football, fast cars, and girls. He thought that he wouldn't have any problem finding well-paying jobs after high school, and at first he didn't. But now he struggles to find jobs that pay enough to support his family.

You see, Joe's notion of masculinity was to be tough and academically disengaged. But with society shifting to a knowledge- and word-based economy, and away from an action-based economy, Joe is struggling to keep up. Currently, many young men like Joe are growing up with an attitude of anti-intellectualism in which they don't think it is masculine to be smart and engaged. There is a widening achievement gap between young men and women. So few young men have been enrolling in college over the last four decades that at this point, only 40 percent of college degrees are earned by men. In addition, more young women than young men are valuing high-paying

careers, even though women still make 82 cents for every dollar a man earns.

Now let's meet Matt, a 35 year-old high school teacher. His wife works in a high-paying career as a financial analyst. They share the household and child-rearing responsibilities. Matt is among a growing number of men who either have wives who out earn them or who are staying home to raise the children. In fact, the number of stay-at-home dads has more than doubled to over 2 million since 1994.

So we can see that the diversity and fluctuation of men's roles present both confusion and opportunity. Some men remain angry and resist the growing trend toward gender equality, while others are going back to school and retooling. Many men like Matt are embracing the flexibility and opportunities that gender equality provides. Men no longer have to go into careers they don't enjoy just to support their families, and they no longer are judged strictly on the ability to generate an income. Gender equality—where men and women share evenly in the responsibilities of work and home—is good for everyone in the family. ■

...diversity and fluctuation of men's roles present both confusion and opportunity

Jeffrey L. Santee, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist with advanced training in cognitive psychology and behavioral medicine. In addition to his work in men's and marital issues, he specializes in the treatment of depression, anxiety disorders, and stress-related health problems.



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Q&A

Q My wife thinks I am stressed and shutting down. She says a men's therapy group might help. What could I expect if I join?

A Men face numerous pressures to be successful, resulting in emotional, relational and health issues. Men's therapy groups offer an opportunity to learn from other men. Members discover that they are not alone, and they help each other become their best selves.

Current group members offer these comments:

"Group therapy is a great opportunity for personal and relational growth."

"Veteran members model honesty in addressing the challenges we all face at work and home."

"The men in group offer me unconditional empathy and support."

"The men accepted me as is: quiet. I realized that by sharing my concerns, hearing other men's perspectives could help me deal with them."

"Group is about guys shattering their 'feelings ceiling.'"

"Group is a reality check; the other guys challenge my irrational thinking."

"The growth and accomplishments of other members inspire me to reach my goals."

"Group has helped me to adjust my priorities."

"Having a female facilitator gives insight that helps our relationships, especially with our families."

A final comment sums it up: *"I joined because my wife wanted me to, but I stayed because I want to."*

Learn to live your best life! For more information, contact Joyce Babb at (630) 260-0606 x128. ■

Joyce Babb, L.C.S.W., offers individual, marital, family, and group therapy to help people become their best selves.

Becoming a Great Dad

ONE DAY I WAS TALKING TO a 9-year-old boy in my office. Let's call him Tony. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. Why? Tony missed his dad (we'll call him Frank). It wasn't death or divorce that had taken Frank away from Tony. It was something much more ordinary: the increasing time demands of Frank's work. Thankfully, when Frank learned of the impact his absence was having on Tony, he quickly made some adjustments to his schedule that showed Tony that he loved him and wanted to spend time with him.

Tony needed his dad. Frank loved his son, but had gotten off course.

We all get off course sometimes.

If you want to be a great dad, and I believe you do, here are five areas in which you can use to give yourself a "check-up" of sorts. Just as even the best sports car needs

some maintenance now and then, good dads do, too.

■ **Your eyes.** How do you look at your kids? Do you see them as precious gifts that you have for only a short time? Are you looking for the unique abilities, interests, and traits that God has given them, like prizes in a cereal box?

■ **Your mouth.** How do you talk to your kids? Do your words, tone, and volume draw them closer to you or push them away?

■ **Your heart.** How do you connect with your kids? Do you show interest in their interests and engage with them in activities they enjoy? Do you have regular family times and family discussions?

■ **Your hands.** Do you spend time teaching your kids? Do you help them find good ways of handling tough situations? Do you practice positive behaviors with them?

■ **Your feet.** How do you lead your kids? Do tell them to be respectful, friendly, and caring or do you show them what being



respectful, friendly, and caring looks like through your own example?

Use this little inventory to give yourself a "great dad check-up" from time to time. You can take a more comprehensive parenting survey at www.8simpletools.com/assessment. ■

Todd Cartmell, Psy.D. is a child psychologist and author of *8 Simple Tools for Raising Great Kids and Project Dad*.

How Men Experience Depression

IT CAN COME AS A SURPRISE that a man can be depressed without knowing it. Often men's symptoms of depression are different from those of women. When women are depressed, typically they are sad, cry, and are aware on a feeling level that something is wrong. On average, they come to treatment for emotional problems much sooner than men.

Depressed men are frequently unaware of their feelings. Many have been taught by male role models that it is weak and unmanly to express soft, "womanly" feelings such as sadness and pain. Terence Real, a well-known men's therapist, calls this "covert depression."

A covertly depressed man may unconsciously block his painful feelings by abusing alcohol, working too much, gambling, binge eating, or using other addictive behaviors to manage

negative feelings. He may express his unhappiness by becoming irritable and angry rather than tearful and sad. Sometimes men who are depressed are "touchy" and blame people around them for their unhappiness. Sometimes they become abusive and rage, or become extremely controlling, to avoid their troubling emotions.

How can a man with covert depression be helped? Initially, the addictive coping style must fail. Often this happens when a spouse, a boss, or—in extreme cases, the court—is clear that he/she is no longer willing to tolerate inappropriate behavior.

In therapy, a man can be helped to feel and express the painful emotions that underlie his defenses. He can begin to understand how he learned to "not feel." Often at the root of covert depression is some form of trauma that the man has been struggling for years to

defend against and ignore. As men learn to identify and let go of maladaptive coping, they have the opportunity to understand and change their behavior in relationships. The outgrowth of dealing with addiction and depression can be deeper levels of intimacy with partners as well as families, and more positive relations in the workplace.

In addition to therapy, antidepressants can be useful in managing the painful feelings that can come when addictive behavior is stopped. Many men report that once the initial work in psychotherapy is completed, they are significantly happier in all areas of life, and are able to feel more positive and "freer" than they had ever imagined. ■

Dr. Sharon Beck is a therapist and nurse practitioner who has worked with many depressed clients, both men and women, over the years.