

Twelve Things Men Should Avoid in Women

Gerry's Story

Gerry's marriage ended on a battle-fatigued field of frustration. He spent 26 years trying to extinguish his wife's smoldering resentment. These feelings rarely flared into a combative inferno but appeared in day-to-day interactions that should have been simple. She was never content. When it was his turn to make a choice, he again was getting his way. When it was her turn, the selection was tainted with a feeling that it was too little to late. When he attempted to express his concern for her happiness, she stubbornly held on to her dissatisfaction as if it was a life raft floating on a boiling sea. For years, Gerry lived with a feeling that he was responsible for her discontent. It ended when she walked out—certain of her reason and taking one half of their assets.

A couple years passed before Gerry ventured out to date. Decades had ticked by since he was single or had sought the companionship of a woman. Now, these initial tentative steps grew into a steady stream of dinners after reviewing profiles of women at various cyber-dating sites that connect people today.

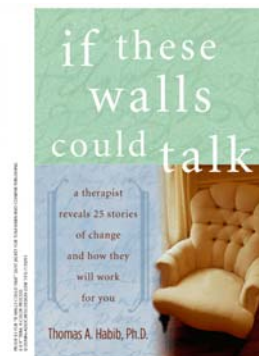
In our discussion about the ladies he was meeting, we began to identify a pattern in the behavior of the women Gerry found attractive. They all tended to become unnecessarily angry in response to minor problems. Furthermore, he was turned off by a woman who wanted more from him than his initial desire for her. The warm, generous sweetheart wasn't attractive; the clingy, excessively dependent woman didn't stand a chance. If any of the women were prone to anger and demanding, Gerry seemed to find them, although he swore he wasn't looking for this type of companion.

Similar to Ryan in the preceding chapter, Gerry had to consciously give the woman who was generous and warm an honest chance. He had to push by his initial negative, or more accurately, a subtle feeling of indifference toward this more loving type of woman. He had to move beyond this Purgatory of Hope that Gina struggled with in an abusive relationship.

Our talks about his family relations in which neither his critical dad nor mom had much to give helped us understand the unconscious underpinnings of Gerry's attraction. These angry and discontent women offered him a chance to receive love in the style he was raised on. They would provide him with an opportunity to finally gain approval from someone—a person as critical and withdrawn as his parents—where it would really mean something and not someone who gave it freely. Receiving this person's love just didn't mean as much because it didn't finish his unconscious need to be loved by his parents. Gerry wasn't picking a partner to marry as much as he was seeking someone to heal childhood wounds. Of course, this unconscious process never brought about these results; it just created more turmoil and pain.

A list of things Gerry was assigned to look for and avoid in women was created shortly after the list in the previous chapter, "The Twelve Things Women Should Avoid in Men." I've

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created a second list, The Twelve Things Men Should Avoid in Women, which has been expanded from Gerry's initial items by stories and lessons from other men.

1. Women Who Rely Too Much on Physical Beauty
2. Women Without Power
3. Women Who Will Not Stand Up to Her Parents
4. Women Who Engage in Duty Sex
5. Women Who Are Too Materialistic
6. Women Whose Desire for Sex Does Not Match Yours
7. Women Whose Wish for Children Does Not Match Yours
8. Women Who Share Few Interests of Yours
9. Women You Never Feel Accepted or OK With
10. Women Who Are All Too Willing to Mother You
11. Women Who Cannot Be Vulnerable
12. Women Without Dreams

1. Women Who Rely Too Much on Physical Beauty

Most men are practically helpless when they have the chance to date a woman with a pretty face. Her beautiful body and/or face suspends the average man's ability to look beyond the packaging and discern for himself if this person is someone to build a relationship with. The powerful physical experience men have during sexual attraction must be controlled if they are to objectively evaluate the person they're getting involved with. The question they need to ask themselves is: "This is nice, but who are you?" If they have the courage to ask themselves this tough question often early in the relationship, the answer becomes clear.

To get this clarity, it could mean fighting off feelings of doubt and insecurity. These insecurities could include thoughts like I won't find another woman to love. This may be my last chance. Maybe I am being too critical. These feelings would have a man ignore and settle with someone who isn't

just right for them. This question needs serious consideration before the obligation builds and the relationship takes on a momentum of its own. The goal is to peer into the future knowing that in a down the road, you'll know much more about the person you are with. If you don't realize that the physical beauty will mean a whole lot less then it does now, you're not ready for a long-term commitment.

Don't underestimate the power of physical beauty. This relationship will not be your last opportunity to become attracted to it. Be careful of women who are gorgeous and especially those who excessively rely on this strength to attract men. Repeatedly ask yourself, "Who is she?"

2. Women Without Power

Interpersonal power is the ability to influence. That includes being able to alter her relationship with her parents from being a child to that of an adult; to earn the respect of her friends; to be seen as competent and valuable by her coworkers; or to do all of this with the man she loves; interpersonal power requires the courage to verbalize assertion when needed and appropriate.

Many men are attracted to the softness of passive women. Let's admit it, traditional women don't challenge the notion of being a man and are initially very easy to be with. It's very comfortable to slide into accustomed roles handed down through the eons of time and resilient mores of our culture. As if this wasn't enough, there's something about this softness that arouses the role of protector within men—a familiarity that readily allows men to feel like men. This is much more comfortable than to remain open to examining the roles we unconsciously

adopt. We aren't questioning fairness in behavior or stifling a need for recognition and mutuality. In short, men relax with these women.

The problem with these women is that you'll become bored as the years pass and your responsibilities grow. As your burden builds, your respect for them slides. At some level, you look at her with a vague feeling of needing help and conclude that she's not strong enough to lend you credible assistance. This realization will come out in a variety of critical remarks that will further deteriorate her confidence and her scant ability to help you. Meanwhile, your vulnerability to an affair will grow at a time when children and a mortgage weigh in as part of the equation. If you recognize yourself already in this relationship, you need professional help. If you are unmarried but recognize your attraction to these women without power, deal with your discomfort of being with women who can fully be your partner. In the long run, you have much more to gain by marrying your peer rather than your dependent.

3. Women Who Will Not Stand Up to Their Parents

As you would expect, women without power and women who will not stand up to their parents tend to go hand-and-hand. These women prove to be too weak to support you when you most need it. The fact that they haven't learned to set limits with their parents signals major unresolved issues that will be a source of irritation throughout any marriage.

These women are caught between roles. On the one hand, they're fighting for their independence and trying to establish their personal meaning for life. On the other hand, they're playing the role of the obedient and subservient child while partially enjoying their protected child role. If you marry this woman, you will feel like a parent coping with an adolescent in years of teenage rebellion.

Why? Because she hasn't fully separated from her parents and hasn't declared her independence either to them or herself. Consequently, an opportunity for cooperation will feel to her like acquiescence. Let me say that again. Any opportunity you might provide for cooperation she will accept and interpret as acquiescence.

These women come with an ever-present need to rebel. Imagine how this will affect your relationship. They will repeatedly raise the contrarian view—you might say the sky is blue and they will point out its white clouds. A thousand times they will bounce off of anything you say, driven by a fear that they're being swallowed up and losing their identity. You'll lose countless opportunities and precious moments to affirm your point of view and join together on obvious areas of agreement. In time, this pattern becomes a predictable source of irritation and frustration. The more you press your point of view hoping to find some validation, the more her anxiety will rise up to set the stage for more of the same.

The powerful guy with a need to take care of emotionally immature women frequently finds himself locked into these relationships. Like anyone involved with women without power, you need to look at your discomfort with powerful women. You also need to ask yourself how do you really feel in the presence of a woman who is her own person, who has fully separated from her family of origin.

If you struggle with her for every morsel of consensus, then look to see if she has done the necessary work to wrestle her identity from her parents and claim her adulthood.

4. Women Who Engage in Duty Sex

The vast majority of women consent to sex out of a sense of obligation to some degree. Often they don't want to have sex but do anyway, knowing that as they warm up, it becomes an intimate and enjoyable experience. This is OK to some degree and men need to accept this, especially in light of what we will discuss in *Women Whose Desire for Sex Doesn't Match Yours*. They're being generous at these times because they care about you and want to meet you

needs. It's OK to accept the slow start; listen to their suggestions about foreplay and kindness to gently ease into sex.

However, you do want to avoid the woman who engages in too much duty sex. If you get involved, you'll feel rejected by this woman for years in an important area, as Gerry did. What do you look for? Look for the woman who initiates sex, at least occasionally. This indicates she has her own well-developed libido and will bring something to your sexual relationship greater than compliance and duty.

5. Women Who Are Too Materialistic

Most women have high on their "criteria" list a partner who can help them build home and hearth. They want a good provider, which is consistent with their desire to raise a family. Obviously, this is a constructive use of a couple's resources and benefits society as a whole. Women sometimes help to remind us of this priority. However, some women put too much emphasis on loving a rich man and living a lifestyle they deem essential and foremost. This lifestyle is a world of the finest things that can only be bought.

I've heard of a private night class in San Diego that purports to teach how to marry a millionaire. Instructors will tell you where these "successful" (notice how we automatically assume success means money) men congregate, the interests they have, the behaviors of a woman who would attract them and more. The assumption is that having money correlates with contentment when in reality it offers nothing of the sort. Lots of money can contribute to financial security, provided you live within your means. It can free you to pursue more worthwhile opportunities, assuming you'd recognize them and had the self-discipline not to let your life slip into the abyss of profane consumption and social-class isolation.

Men already experience an inordinate amount of pressure to succeed financially. Becoming involved with a woman with excessive desires for materialism will exacerbate this pressure and prevent the couple from focusing on what's fulfilling in their lives. Financial security is fine, providing you know the costs it exacts on you to achieve it. Most men never evaluate this cost. The fortunate ones make a midlife correction as their financial security builds and they sense the limits of the tool we call money. The unfortunate men continue to hone their ability to acquire more stuff that they'll never use to build a life worth living. If they're not extremely careful, this financial resource will saddle their children's ability to develop self-discipline and purpose. We live in a consumer-oriented society that does not fully appreciate the limits of money. We're still dazzled by it beyond what it can really help you do. Its value is still way over the top as evidenced by the fascination with the rich and famous. Be careful of the woman who is fascinated with glamour and success.

6. Women Whose Desire For Sex Doesn't Match Yours

On average, women are unlikely to ever want as much sexual contact as men. Of course there are exceptions; a woman can be more sexual than her male partner. But by and large, men frequently feel there isn't enough sexual activity in their relationships. This fact was poignantly revealed in a Dear Ann Landers column¹ several years ago when a disturbingly large number, 70% of women, admitted they could go without sexual intercourse providing they had enough hugging, cuddling, and communication! This doesn't bode well for marriage in general and becomes the bed upon which seeds of discontent are sowed, where men drift away with vague notions of the rejection they feel.

We're not that far from a time and place when Puritan and Victorian ethics suppressed women and any expression of their sexuality. Although significant progress was made during

c.f. Farrell, Warren, 1988, pg. 195

the twentieth century, thousands of years of cultural indoctrination have not been fully undone. However, some women are further along in nurturing their sexuality than others. Given how important sexual intimacy is to most men, it's wise to pick one of these more developed women.

A confident thirty-year-old single male said to me in session, I want to meet a woman who wants to go to Mardi Gras and yank up her shirt. This was a guy unafraid of a woman who understood the power of her sexuality and had the courage to use it. To him, this woman would be adventuresome, creative, and playful. She'd make the commitment of fidelity not seem so dreary or burdensome. This woman could feel her own lust and required her desire to be satisfied. This woman would be open to new ideas and experiences that keep the intimacy alive. Although public displays of nudity are not the criteria for an adventuresome mate, look for signs of playfulness and sexual comfort.

Nice girls are often very safe girls, but don't choose them at the exclusion of a woman with a strong sexual identity. It's a troubling sign if she only wants to undress in the dark, is reluctant or embarrassed to be seen naked, or has feelings of guilt associated with her sexual behaviors. Make sure the woman you choose has a strong and secure sense of her sexual identity that won't atrophy into duty sex performed by too many married women as another chore.

7. Women Whose Wish for Children Doesn't Match Yours

If you do want children and the woman you love doesn't, you're in trouble. It's more likely you don't want children and she does. The formula still amounts to trouble. As her biological clock ticks its relentless countdown toward infertility, she'll begin to press for children or become resentful that you refuse. It's imperative that you raise the issue of children with the woman you have just begun to love and listen carefully. Many women camouflage this issue, not wanting to scare off a man who just might turn out to be a great provider, companion, and father. That's why you have to listen carefully. If you're sure you don't want children and she does, then you have problems. Or perhaps you want two children and she wants five and she wants to stay home as a full-time mother. That's a problem, too.

A word to those convinced they don't want children. Although I wasn't totally closed to the idea of having children, I was perfectly content to live my life with my wife, family, friends, and career without children. I was apprehensive about the changes entailed with bringing another life into my world. I wasn't sure if I'd feel that it was worthwhile and if I could sustain the effort needed to raise a child for two decades. In discussing this agonizing decision with friends, I'd joke about how it's the one decision in life that you can't get out of. My wife would seek to reassure me with . . . "don't you think you're underestimating the love you'll get out of the relationship with your child?"

Her words meant very little until the day my first daughter was born. The love I felt for her was instantaneous at birth—and overwhelming. I repeatedly marveled at how I underestimated the joys of parenting and just how much it changes one's house into a home. I could have missed one of the most important roles in my life had it not been for the gentle persistence of my wife wanting children.

Nevertheless, if you're completely sure you don't want children, don't marry a woman who wants to be a mother.

8. Women Who Share Few Interests of Yours

If playing and watching sports, building your career, tackling home improvement projects and hanging out with your friends is what you enjoy before marriage, it's likely you'll continue to enjoy them after you get married. Think of the conflict that will be generated for any couple whose interests are not shared. Contrast this with a couple who have shared interests in tennis or golf or other sports. These can be very positive points of connection as the years pass.

Similarly, determine if your prospective partner will share your patterns involving finances, home decoration, interests in current events, politics, reading, movies, music, and friends. A prospective married couple doesn't have to be a perfect match in all these categories. However, I'd advise that the woman you pick to be your lifelong mate share a minimal of one out of every three of your interests to ensure a viable relationship for the long term. This may be a modest number but the third that she does share has to be real. That is, if she's just tolerating attending the baseball games you love, this doesn't count toward the necessary one third. If she reads the sports page after you, then her interest is legitimate and you have something to genuinely share.

9. Women You Never Feel Accepted or OK With

Some people are attracted to and are driven by negative reinforcement. These men (or women) are not attracted to partners who are generous with their love and acceptance. I have found that when they examine how they feel, they are actually turned off by warm, positive overtures. They tend to experience them as insincere or even pathetic! To them, approval and acceptance feels the sweetest when (rarely) given by a person who primarily is critical, cool, and nonaccepting.

The result is a tendency to connect with women who fuel your feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. You'll spend years trying to please this partner who will only occasionally support you with a morsel of approval. As the years pass, this partner will respect you less and less while your exhaustion builds and your ability to please her becomes less and less. This was Gerry's experience.

If your dating or marital history suggests a pattern of attraction to this type of partner, invest in professional consultation. If you are already married to her, you need individual and marital therapy in that order. You and your counselor will need to understand why you can't accept love that's freely given. There is a reason...one you're probably not going to like, but will find valuable over time. A word of caution. If you are quick to anger and you discover that your spouse is withholding and unavailable, resist the impulse to blame her. The cause is fear, not malicious intent. Give your spouse a chance to grow with you. If she refuses, then move on without her.

10. Women Who Are All Too Willing to Mother You

Some men looking to marry women who will mother them. This is frequently confused with a woman's ability to nurture them. They won't be disappointed in their search for these women, for many will eagerly volunteer to fulfill this desire. In the long run, however, these men become depressed and their future wives are often angry. How could this quid-pro-quo possibly turn so negative as time goes on? One only needs to look at the reasons this couple came together. It is here we find the sources of attraction for this couple who so adroitly do the steps in a dance others readily recognize.

The woman who volunteers to mother you looks for two primary things. The first is a high need for control. These women can be identified by a demeanor that is overtly strong, who have very definite ideas and taste, and who tend to get their own way. It is their tendency to get their own way that negates the value of the previous two attributes. Nevertheless, they can't imagine depending on others. The idea of sharing decision making seems foolhardy and an unlikely proposition. And in time, they help create men who are truly inept.

The second reason why these women volunteer to mother their men has to do with their fear of becoming involved in any relationship that would open normal levels of vulnerability. Their discomfort with their own vulnerability can even include a feeling of dislike for this part of themselves. Long before your relationship began, they decided that they were unlovable when vulnerable—if it was momentary or otherwise appropriate. They select men who are unlikely to

reach this part of themselves. In time, however, they resent these men who fuel their anger and disparagement. This often gives rise to her husband's depression.

If you're single and your pattern of dating shows a tendency to get involved with women who want to mother you, you're not ready to get married. Find a psychologist to work with and find why you look at women with an eye toward what they can do for you and why you're so afraid to form adult attachments. This isn't rocket science but missing this call can explode in your face.

11. Women Who Cannot Be Vulnerable

As mentioned above, this woman may appear as someone who wants to mother you but not necessarily. She may be feminine in dress and in many aspects of behavior in the roles that she plays. However, this woman rarely cries or is willing to engage with you in a heartfelt conversation. Like the mothering woman above, they have an underlying fear of becoming involved in any relationship that would open up even normal levels of vulnerability. Because they're afraid to get close, they'll show up with a diminished capacity to participate emotionally and sexually in the relationship.

12. Women Without A Dream

If a woman's primary purpose in life is to marry, stay home, and have babies, be careful. This goal in life needs to be distinguished from the woman who has completed her college education, has begun a career, has lived on her own, and then decides—in conjunction with her husband—to stay home and raise their children. The sequence doesn't have to be career first and then family; it can be family first and career later. But she does need to be her own person. The distinction is between a woman who has not risked being independent versus one who has emerged from this developmental challenge of adulthood. The woman without a dream has not fully grown up; she isn't her own person and doesn't really make choices. Rather, she's playing a culturally prescribed role. In time, she will find you controlling and will perhaps resent the function she allowed herself to drift into. If you're attracted to these women, you're likely also attracted to Women Without Power. The risk is you'll feel bored and burdened.

Gerry's Story

Gerry is still in therapy and dating. He's yet to find anyone to settle down with although he may have prematurely let go of a couple of relationships that had real promise. The time he's invested in dating has been worthwhile. Gerry has become conscious of his tendencies and I believe he'll avoid marrying a woman who is angry and unsupportive.

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