

## LL53-What men rarely say but often feel

I'm Alvean Lyons, and I'm Doug Weiss and welcome to Love Life.

So, Douglas, we have an interesting topic today we're going to talk about the thing that we tend to shy away from a little bit in terms of gender specificity. Yes, we're not wholly different one from another, but there are some unique things about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. And the way in which we communicate and how we let go of what we may be feeling on the inside. Are among them. The question today is, what do men rarely say, but often feel? What do you think those things are, the those inner thoughts, that inner world that exists for men that is not very often spoken of, in today's society?

Doug:

Well, I think categorically, they fall into a single dimension. And that's emotion. I think it's the thing that men in general, both by conditioning and predisposition are the least comfortable with talking about, I think, to draw contrast here, that sharing what you were feeling, either at the moment or retrospectively is something which is by observation, a more comfortable experience, more common experience amongst women than men.

There are a number of observations one could make here, so forgive me, but starting perhaps with the most obvious expressing your inner feelings about things may be, at least culturally, a sign of weakness, not manly. I think that's one end of the spectrum. The other end of the spectrum is that men are, in my observation, far more vulnerable creatures than women.

I think we handle criticism less well, generally, I think we are more afraid of rejection, despite the fact that we may put on a good bluff, and I think in our inner life tends to be one where we feel more judged and therefore are more vulnerable to rejection.

Alvean:

Where do you believe that that really comes from, that that sense? Do you think that it is something that is fed from the outside in terms of cultural, societal input? Do you think that some of that is just in the chemistry of who men are internally? Where do you really believe that some of those things originate?

Doug:

I think you have to go to the question of how do men derive their sense of identity? What is it invested in, and much more for men, I think than women, men are invested in externalities; in how the world sees them, and how they are in fact, judged. So often, it tends to revolve around what they do, achievement, work, sports, other areas of accomplishment that are tangible and visible to the world.

Men don't get rewarded in any overt way for being, forgive me, touchy feely, I go to a movie theater if it's a movie that is touching, I will shed a tear. It doesn't particularly bother me. But I don't think that it's a common experience. I don't think that even if they were

so moved, many men would do that, they would find that to be emasculating. If you look at the banter and conversation amongst men in groups, it tends to be very superficial. Hi. Hey, how about those.....insert name of sports team here. It tends to be at a level that avoids too much personal information. You don't really see that intimacy amongst men unless they've had something to drink or they're really close friends . There's a certain line that doesn't get crossed, you don't want to appear to be less capable, and i think that tends to create this kind of neutral to guarded interaction.

Alvean: Do you think that's why men die earlier than women do?

Doug:  
Because we internalize ?

Alvean: Because you internalize everything. Given what you're saying there's a much greater likelihood of implosion than explosion if everything that you feel, everything that you struggle with, everything that you wrestle with is something that you swallow in some way and you have to work it out on the inside because it is not deemed socially appropriate for you to work those things out on the outside . Do you think it impacts the health of men at least emotionally if not physically?

Doug: Well I think the answers is absolutely, it can't help but add to a general stress level and I think that men do internalize a great deal. I want to say here that there are clear societal red flags. Consider the expression man up. Take that apart, parse it out, what's that really say? It's saying, stop showing your feelings, stuff them back down man up, you know, be a man. That starts very early.

Alvean: Big boys don't cry, right?

Doug:  
And, you know, all of these cues are saying to us in one form or another, it's not acceptable to show what you're feeling. In fact, not only is it not acceptable, you shouldn't even be feeling those things.

Alvean:  
How do you believe that impacts relationships, then, because relationships require intimacy, the ability to shed the armor, to lay yourself bare for someone else. When you were trained this way, to stuff down how you feel, how does it impact the way in which you're able to develop real levels of intimacy?

Doug:  
Well, I'm sitting here across from the expert. So, my non-expert response to that is to say, it cannot help but become an impediment if you can't come together and talk about the things that are important to you in your life, if you can't talk about how you feel about one another, how you feel about the things in your life that are important; if you can't talk about things that

may be troubling you whether they're about your partner or not, then you're at the very least eliminating any material in your relationship that's particularly meaningful. You're reduced to transactional stuff. Who's going to take the kids to the soccer game today, should we have the Nelson's over for dinner? If that's the only dialogue between two people there's no investment in a sense of US there's just an investment in the transactions between you.

Alvean:

So, if you would say one thing about all the men that you've known over the years, the most common thing that you think that men feel but don't say, if you could pick one, what would you say that is?

Doug

I think men confess their feelings of love and affection insufficiently, inadequately and not as often as they may feel it, because they don't have the language, because they're embarrassed or afraid to express it, what if it isn't reciprocated? They certainly won't do it in any kind of a setting that would in any way expose or increase their vulnerability? I think men are very good at articulating ideas, very good at articulating positions, even to the point of being little bit argumentative

Alvean:

So, is there a point that you came to, a place in your evolution and maturation as a man where you were able to step across that chasm and were able to speak more sincerely to what you really felt, but perhaps in your earlier years did not often say? When you hit that point, what was the impetus?

Doug:

Well, you know the old saying, even a blind squirrel eventually finds a nut. If you if you live long enough, and you are at all introspective, I think you're going to be you're going to be led to the conclusion that you need to open up. That you need to fess up and speak what's in your heart, whatever that may be, and be a risk taker. And I think the equation for men really has to be one where they finally learn to remap their behaviors because men are relatively good at being risk takers in every area of their lives, except emotionally. Remapping that idea of being a risk taker and applying it to your emotional life leads you to ask what's the worst that can happen here? What could I gain? What would I lose? That is an important and potentially key step to take.

The reverse is also true. If you take that step, however, tentatively and you get shot down, it will be hard to recover. It's like a football team that had its first forward pass intercepted. After that they only have a running game. You have to keep trying, because not everyone's going to accept vulnerability from you. And you may be subject to some good natured or not so good natured chiding from male friends. Worse, perhaps the person that you're expressing your feelings to isn't receptive. If you can get to the place where you can start to talk about what you feel it opens up a path to resolution,

I was just talking to someone, a few minutes before we started. One of the ongoing issues in his marriage is that he and his wife have never learned how to engage in resolving conversations with one another. They wait, till things have been suppressed and bottled up so long that they come out explosively, and nothing is accomplished because it's in a situation which is volatile and not conducive to any kind of rational resolution. Then they walk away to cool down and their issues remain there underneath the surface, waiting for the next trigger,

Alvean:

I was having a conversation with someone about the same question about a week ago, and their responses were interesting. One of them said, one of the things men often feel but never say, is the word no, to their women. Very often, they want to say, no, no, I don't want to go. No, I don't like that on you, no, I don't want to eat that. No, we're not buying this, no, your parents can't come over. They don't say no. But they have substitute language or non languages, signaling their feelings....., you know, kind of grouchy, a kind of passive aggressive behavior that is saying I really don't want to do this, but I but I feel there are consequences for saying no, so I'm not going to say anything, or I'm going to lie about how I really feel.

The second thing that I heard them say very commonly was, men don't say, I'm hurt, or you hurt my feelings, because it's not okay. For some reason, we're women can easily say that, you broke my heart. Not many guys say how much something hurt because it's not supposed to hurt. You're supposed to be made of steel, it's supposed to bounce off of you, as if somehow you are not made up of the same emotional fiber that we are.

Being a mom, a mother of daughters and sons, and watching the depth of my son's emotion, watching the way in which he's experiencing love for the first time in his life and the vulnerability associated with it I swear to you that he feels things deeper than my daughters. But he does not necessarily display those feelings externally. I watch him work through those things internally in his safe space. And as a mother you wonder where the messages came from that say it's not okay for you to feel and to say and do all of those things that girls, my girls can readily do.

Doug:

I want to say to parents, that if you feel this is a failing on your part, that you haven't instilled in your male child this aptitude, don't take it too much to heart. you're just a parent. The input is coming from every source, from entertainment (movies and TV), in everyday life, in every role model that your child is going to be exposed to for better or worse. These are overwhelming influences. Where we get off the rails first is that the process of discovery whereby we could examine these influences is not a natural behavior for men. Man Up. Close your mouth. Don't worry about what things mean. That's where there's ripe opportunity for men to heal and improve their relationships.

Alvean:

Well, I'll tell you, I think that there's so much that men often feel and rarely say that we would be richer for having heard it, felt it and experienced it

Doug:

Words of wisdom and experience. as always,

Thank you for listening to another episode of Love Life. We want to thank Todd Wasburn, our recording engineer, Kamaria Mason, our producer, and you, our audience. If you've got some thoughts about today's episode, or any other topic you think that we should take up please write to us at [doug@lovelife.digital](mailto:doug@lovelife.digital) or [alvean@lovelife.digital](mailto:alvean@lovelife.digital)

We'll be back next week.