

Twelve Things Women Should Avoid in Men

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" We're lost but we are making good time."

Yogi Bera

Alicia began therapy a month ago. She was 28 years old. She had been married at 21 for a brief two years when her husband declared that they married too young. Alicia felt enormous pain and embarrassment when he ended a marriage that barely got started. She thought she knew him, she use to trust her feelings and judgment; she began questioning everything about herself and marriage. During this period she noted what had become a familiar pattern in her relationships with men including her ex-husband. This is what she wanted to work on in therapy.

Alicia was attracted to men who were sensitive, easy going, warm, and cooperative. So far, it sounds good. However, the common pattern was their lives were going nowhere. These were men who were chronic underachievers. They rarely took a stand on anything in life whether it was a statement about themselves or a determination to go after something like a career or passionate interest in life. Although they were non confrontational and relatively easy to live with, Lisa always felt she carried a greater part of the load, both emotionally and financially, than they did. She began to feel like she was a magnet for little boys who wanted to be mothered.

We began to explore how she felt about more traditional men, who were more assertive, powerful, and knew what they wanted. Initially she said that these men would be great but as we continued to talk she realized that she didn't feel safe with them. Assertive unconsciously meant controlling to Alicia. Powerful felt dominating. And a clear, determined direction meant that she would be left behind.

Discussions about her family revealed a mother she felt was dominated by her father. This wasn't going to happen to Alicia she was sure she told herself prior to puberty. The path was set. However, Alicia went too far in the safe direction.

Alicia was given an assignment to meet men she normally wouldn't initially be attracted to. These men might be a little more outspoken, less ingratiating toward women, and significantly more forward around what they wanted. These were men whose lives were going somewhere. She was encouraged to tolerate her initial reaction to them until she gained a deeper understanding of who they were. In preparation, we listed several things that she was to observe and we planned to jointly assessed them during her therapy.

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Below is a summary and commentary on what grew out of Alicia's initial list. They are written from the perspective of The Twelve Things Women Should Avoid in Men.

1. Men Who Have Not Spent Enough Time Being Single
2. Men Who Are Little Boys Looking For Mommy
3. Men Who Are Rigid and Controlling
4. Men Who Have a Poor Work Ethic
5. Men Whose Mothers Still Dominate Their Lives
6. Men Who Do Not Want Children (*And You Do*)
7. Men Who Can't Co-parent
8. Men Who Can't Ask for What They Want Without Melting Down
9. Men to Whom You Are Not Physically Attracted
10. Men Whom You Cannot Successfully Engage in Problem Solving
11. Men Who Tell You Feeling is Something You Do With Your Hands
12. Men with Whom You Never Feel Accepted or OK

1. Men who have not spent enough time being single

It is imperative that the man you select for your life long mate has invested enough time being single. There are a number of reasons why this is true for both men and women. But at this time I want to focus upon a man's capacity to commit. What does being single have to do with their ability to commit, you may be asking? A lot, especially in their ability to give-up the fantasy of a bachelor's life style.

A man's fantasy of the bachelor's life style involves an unending supply of physically gorgeous women that he can date casually while having a sexual relationship. It's not that men are animals. It's a little more complicated than that.

Two factors predispose men to the fantasy of the bachelor's life style. Foremost, on average, men experience their sexual drive at a higher intensity than women. There is a study that shows that men think about sex, depending upon age, anywhere from every four to eleven minutes! Of course there are exceptions to this trend where a women's libido matches any man's. Secondly, men are not socialized to express as wide a range of feelings as women. This renders them more dependent upon sexualized forms of intimacy.

After a series of relationships men begin to understand and appreciate the much more comprehensive agenda of women. He discovers, to his continued astonishment, that having sex with multiple partners is not even on her agenda. The reality that the bachelor's fantasy is never going to happen can only be fully accepted by dating and experiencing a good number of relationships. When he's able to conclude that he's been there and done that, and has some sense of a woman as a person with her own set of hopes and dreams, then he's ready in this area for commitment and marriage.

Be careful of the man who hasn't been single long enough. He's more prone to have a mid life crisis if he hasn't fully reality tested his bachelor's fantasy. This was an early sign overlooked by Alicia that exacted a toll long before mid life.

2. Men who are little boys looking for Mommy

There are a certain number of powerful, accomplished women who have this tendency to pick men who are little boys looking for mommy. From the outside looking in, these women are admired by many for their education, their careers, the strength of their personhood, vision, energy, and purpose. However, inside they still doubt themselves. To ensure the power and control they have fought so hard to attain, they fall in love with the gentle teddy bear. A teddy bear that will never challenge or threaten them.

These men are often times created by their mothers. They were the prince raised in an environment where they wanted for nothing and were indulged at every turn. His mother likely had a marriage only in name with his father, who was absent or distant throughout his life. This teddy bear never got to see any man relate to a woman other than as a mother, and expects the same treatment for the rest of his life. Look out if he continues to have excessive involvement with his mother. Although you may be the recipient of his generosity you'll find that he often allows others to use him. Rather than operating on a principal of give and take, he indulges everyone's expectations in a series of appeasements. We will discuss this more in *Men whose mothers still dominate their lives*.

The problems with these men is almost identical to what I will express to men in *Women Without Power*. That is, you will become bored with them as the years pass and your responsibilities grow. As your burden builds, your respect for him will slide. Repeatedly you will look at him with a clear feeling of needing help and conclude that he's not nearly strong enough to lend you any credible assistance. This realization will seep out in a variety of critical remarks that will further deteriorate his confidence and his scant ability to muster strength at the most crucial junctures. Meanwhile, your frustration will grow at a time when there are children and mortgages weighing 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 men who want to relate to you as mommy, deal with your discomfort of being with a stronger man who can fully be your partner. In the long run, you have much more to gain by marrying your peer rather than your dependent. This lesson was already beginning to be understood by Alicia prior to entering therapy.

3. Men who are rigid and controlling

Marriage and parenting will constantly challenge anyone with the need to make changes. Growth is the euphemism we use to describe this painful process. These challenges can ultimately be personally rewarding but they are difficult. One of the surest ways to make this process nearly impossible is to marry a rigid and controlling man.

The rigid and controlling man is anxious and afraid and he *doesn't know it*. This is what makes him especially difficult.

He's too afraid to construct a partnership where the natural strengths of each partner, by virtue of their merit, has a chance of making the best contribution to the marriage. In an authoritative style, driven by his anxiousness, he controls the marital and family process to the detriment of everyone.

Often times (but not necessarily) the rigid and controlling man cloaks himself in tradition. As part of his dedication to tradition he expects his wife and children to practice obedience and to fulfill predefined roles. He does this because he's looking for a life path without risk. And you've probably guessed it by now...the more trying times become, the more rigid and difficult he becomes at the worse possible times. This rigid and controlling man is also likely to evidence an inability to ask for what he wants without melting down, described later in this chapter.

If your dating history suggests that you are attracted to the rigid and controlling man, you need to find out why. It can be anything from too strong of a need to feel protected, insufficient time spent developing your own life goals, or a history of childhood abuse. Time spent in therapy with a psychologist would be well spent before you marry this man.

4. Men who have a poor work ethic

Men who have a poor work ethic and men who are little boys looking for mommy can go hand and hand. In either instance, you need to be careful before you sign up for a life of heavy responsibility with little support. If he also rings the bell for men whose mother still dominate their life (see below) you have what I like to call the *teddy bear triad*.

The man who fits the teddy bear triad initially presents as soft and cuddly. He's not a threat to you. He can be warm and ingratiating, a skill he honed with his mother who rewarded compliance with her agenda and otherwise controlled him.

Most women are not attracted to this man without real power and thus successfully avoid his charms. If you are attracted to this guy and you marry him, he is guaranteed to frustrate you before the fifth year of marriage. Alicia's ex-husband fit the teddy bear triad.

5. Men whose mother still dominate their life

The final leg of the *teddy bear triad* is unique and easily identifiable. It will rear its tell tale sign around holidays, birthdays, family gatherings or even in his apartment. His mother will continue to expect involvement in his life. If he should decline or modify her wishes she will react with anger and invoking guilt. He will do everything possible to avoid feelings of guilt and will juggle your wishes alongside his mother's in an ongoing attempt to appease the two most important women in his life. What's missing in this ongoing dance (where the music never stops) is what *he* wants. Without this vital source of connection, nothing he agrees to is sustainable or consistent. He will drift into any number of commitments that will ultimately polarize you as the evil witch. This role will be assigned to you by his mother and ratified by other family members.

6. Men who do not want children (*and you do*)

It's frightening how often women marry a man who is expressing doubt about whether or not he wants children. But what's a woman to do? A very large proportion of men are very doubtful around wanting children and only discover after the fact that it's worth it. Thus, many women's strategy to take *one step at a time* appears to work more often than not. It is indeed wise not to scare away a guy they love by introducing this blockbuster issue too early.

This said, I am still cautious about this strategy. If a guy is adamant around not wanting children, and you marry him with the hope that you can change his mind, you are taking a big risk. Moreover, I have found that these men's commitment to parenting isn't all that strong which means you will have the opportunity to be superwoman, by taking on tasks you will have to accomplish mostly alone. Early on in the relationship, casually ask him how he feels about children. Be careful of men whose childhood was troubled or chaotic. They seem to be the most hesitant about having children.

7. Men who can't coparent

There is a difference between men who *won't* coparent and men who *can't* coparent. If they won't coparent, they either didn't want children in the first place or they are stuck in a time warp five decades old. If they can't coparent and agreed to have children, you and your unborn are in major trouble.

Men (or women) who can't coparent should never have children. Their capacity to love children is limited, they frequently lack tolerance, and they do not want to make the necessary investment and sacrifice. At best they will be an absent parent and model for your children how not to build a marriage. The worst has almost no limit...let it be said that they will be hostile and angry.

To screen out the man who can't coparent try the following. Volunteer to baby sit a child with your significant other to see how he reacts. If possible, take them for a ride in his car or better yet, take them to his condo. If he stresses out over a child acting like a child, and seems to miss the joy of caring for a little one, you may have a man who can't coparent.

8. Men who can't ask for what they want without melting down

The vulnerability we all feel in intimate relationships causes us all to feel hypersensitive. It's why we can fight over the most inane issues. A sample of these issues could include failure to pick up one's socks, neglecting to put the cap on the tooth paste tube, forgetting something at the grocery store, arriving later than planned, omitting a phone call, not providing the right look, the right response, the right touch. Anyone who has been in a relationship greater than one year could add to this list of seeming atrocities. How is it that we are so sensitive to disappointment in the intimate relationship? How is it that we tolerate much better the slights and indignities and sometimes outright abuse in almost every other relationship?

There is an unspoken expectation of perfect responsiveness in every intimate relationship

A man who can't ask for what he wants without melting down has not accepted that love isn't perfect. Many issues that could be resolved and perhaps satisfied through communication and cooperation will unnecessarily ignite quarrels and chaos. These men frequently cannot problem solve with you (see number 10). If they are also rigid and controlling (see number 3) and have little or no ability to express feelings (see number 11) then you are voluntarily signing up for decades of problems with an angry and verbally abusive guy.

9. Men whom you are not physically attracted to

This is rarely a problem for men, but sometimes a problem for women. It's important to be physically attracted to the man you're thinking of marrying. It's not enough that he's taller than you and that he is a good provider. You're going to have to sexualize this relationship throughout the years and physical attraction plays an important role. It may not seem as important to you in the beginning but it helps sustain the necessary passion and connection. In time it will prove more important to you and especially to your future husband. If he becomes conscious of your lukewarm connection than trouble will lie ahead. Either way, both of you will lose the chance to relate in a way only a married man and woman can.

10. Men whom you cannot successfully engage in problem solving

It's hard to find a more important couple skill than the ability to problem solve. On the surface, it seems like it should be relatively easy, but it isn't. Too many people don't even know what they want when they enter a problem solving discussion. They begin with angry feelings and expect their mate to comb through it and help them figure out what they want. This expectation that the issue is self-evident is usually lost in the all too frequent blizzard of anger and put-downs.

The initial rule in problem solving is, if you can't answer the question '*what do I want*' in your head, then you are not ready to begin a discussion. It's time to bite your tongue and say nothing until you know what you want. Other important rules for problem solving are:

** He can ask for what he wants but is able to accept 'no'.*

** He attempts to find consensus but realizes it isn't always possible. Sometimes plain old horse trading is necessary (e.g. O.K., I'll go to your nephew's birthday party if you'll trade me a baseball game.)*

** He raises only one issue at a time.*

** He's appreciative and content when given something.*

** He accepts that every problem is not immediately solvable and at time you agree to disagree..*

Of course, these rules apply to you as well. In my experience, a couple who can produce an agreement in one out of every four problem solving attempts, is going to be O.K.! What destroys a relationship is the hopelessness of traversing the same old ground again and again with no solution in sight. Avoid the guy who cannot problem solve.

11. Men who tell you “feeling” is something you do with your hands

How much do I need to say about this? If you're actually attracted to this guy, and there is plenty of women who are, get into therapy. Look past any semblance of strength or accomplishment and try to see how immature and under developed these men are. Typically these men have an authoritarian style and dismiss sentimentality. However, they could evidence the *Teddy Bear Triad*. These concrete thinking men seem to enter, to a greater degree than others, occupations that heavily rely upon logic such as engineering and computer programming.

12. Men with whom you never feel accepted or O.K.

Ask yourself this simple question. How do I feel about myself when I am around him? If you don't feel occasionally loved, almost always accepted and affirmed, appreciated, occasionally admired, comfortable and relaxed, there's a problem. For the sake of this discussion, I am assuming that you like who you are and the problem is with him. Sometimes it's both. If you think you are in a situation where you never feel loved and accepted, ask a girlfriend who has seen you with him to comment. It's usually fairly easy for other to see. One needs to feel accepted and O.K. with the man they love.

Prologue

Alicia eventually fell in love with a guy who was both sensitive and powerful. She married a business executive a year after she finished her therapy. He was career focused, he could tell her no when he didn't want to do something, he enjoyed sports, cars, and water rafting with a few of his friends. She felt safe with him even though he was more powerful than what she previously had been accustomed to. Alicia finally had the true partner she always wanted. Someone who could give as much as she could. I knew Alicia would be fine when she began to see the little boy still existing behind the facade of accomplishments and power. Alicia found a better way of being safe than marrying a man who hadn't matured.

Extracted from the book *"If These Walls Could Talk"* by Thomas A Habib.

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