

THE
ROMANTIC
IDEAL



The Highest Standard of
Romance for a Man

Also by Gregory V. Diehl

Brand Identity Breakthrough

Travel as Transformation

The Influential Author

The Heroic and Exceptional Minority

Everyone Is an Entrepreneur

Our Global Lingua Franca

Courage to Live

THE ROMANTIC IDEAL



The Highest Standard of Romance for a Man

*A Hopeless Romantic's Exploration of
Masculine Intimacy, Sex, and Love*

By Gregory V. Diehl
With a Feminine Foreword by Svetlana Sevak, MA, RP



Copyright © 2024 Gregory V. Diehl

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. Any perceived slight against any individual is purely unintentional.

All personal anecdotes included are true. However, with the exception of public figures who have freely disclosed their private details, names and details have been changed and mythologized to protect anonymity while getting the point of each story across.

For permission requests, write to the publisher at contact@identitypublications.com.

Library of Congress Control Number to be assigned.

Orders by U.S. trade bookstores and wholesalers. Please contact Identity Publications: Tel: (805) 259-3724 or visit www.IdentityPublications.com.

ISBN-13: 978-1-945884-93-1 (ebook)

ISBN-13: 978-1-945884-94-8 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-1-945884-95-5 (hardcover)

First Edition, published in Buffalo, Wyoming, by Identity Publications (www.IdentityPublications.com).

Cover by Safa Azar (www.SafaAzar.com).

DEDICATION



When a man reaches the edges of where his perspective will take him on its own, the smartest thing he can do is hand his thoughts over to the right woman to pick apart and play with in her complementary fashion.

Important parts of this book are the direct result of long conversations I had with Svetlana Sevak—a beautiful and self-expressed woman who, due to our uncanny psychological chemistry, forced or allowed me to go deeper into what I was trying to explain about things nearly unexplainable. Her incessant questioning and uncommon ability to articulate her feminine perspective on things I thought I understood forced me to improve the scope and depth of what I had to say about being a man and loving a woman or being a woman and loving a man.

She was the only person appropriate to write the foreword you're about to read. In a way, she co-created this book with me, acting in part as a mother to the ideological offspring I was father to in what eventually grew up to be this book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Foreword	ix
Introduction	xix
Chapter 1: The Highest Standard of Romance	1
Chapter 2: Woman's Signature Influence on Man	13
Chapter 3: Attraction, Meaningful and Superficial	39
Chapter 4: The Sexual Burden	69
Chapter 5: Love and the End of Sexual Curiosity	109
Chapter 6: Watching the Women You Love Die.....	127
Chapter 7: Returning to the Void	155

FOREWORD



In my practice as a trauma therapist, I have noticed an interesting trend with every patient I've worked with. There have always been prominent relationship issues present in their personal lives. No one has ever come into my office to address other issues who didn't also have serious relationship issues. People who came to me with self-esteem and body image issues turned out to have communication problems with their partners, for instance. Some people came to me suffering from anxiety after traumatic accidents, only to eventually reveal that the hardest thing they were dealing with was that their partner was not caring enough during their rehabilitation, which was more hurtful to them than the actual injuries they dealt with.

It is very unfortunate that knowledge about gender differences and relationship dynamics between men and women is not widespread because it results in a range of personal problems and disorders (or exacerbates unrelated ones). It seems to me that the majority of people nowadays are so concerned with seeing equality in everything that they have forgotten about seeing equity, which is where we all meet each other's needs and feel valued, respected, and accepted for who we are as individuals in the highest possible way.

Compared to men, who are more single-tasked, women have a stronger ability to quickly switch between their right and left lobes in the brain or even have them activated simultaneously. Consequently, they are better able to perceive and process emotion and logic, coming to conclusions quickly and calling it a gut feeling

(a.k.a. “women’s intuition”), which can feel alien to men, who feel that women can be poor at rationally assessing how they decided something so quickly or explaining their conclusions in explicit terms men will understand. I consider myself hypersensitive to this facet of feminine nature. My professional training in classical singing, particularly in the art of opera, has polished my mastery of simultaneously activating logic and emotion and elevated it into a complex system of self-awareness. My unique engagement in operatic art and psychotherapy has resulted in a highly personal journey of observing, analyzing, and understanding myself as a woman, and I have placed a high priority on assessing my feminine experience of life rationally and coherently for men and women alike.

The author of this book is a highly intellectual man who, for as long as I have known him, has been in a state of constant self-development. I can say with a high degree of confidence that his number one goal in life is to help people understand important things, in his signature style, that they cannot easily learn about from any other source. It requires a huge amount of self-awareness and self-study to notice every mistake, every imperfect facet of the past, as the author has attempted to do for himself, and make a public statement and choice about how he wants to grow from it and the man he aspires to be.

Though this book is written from a very personalized masculine perspective, bravely provided by Gregory V. Diehl, I believe it is a huge step forward for people to learn healthy relationship dynamics, understand fundamental differences between men and women, and accept that gender dynamics are a vitally important and inseparable part of our lives that cannot be avoided. In that regard, it is similar to learning about health, finances, or the environment. We can sit in ignorance and pretend it does not



personally affect us or matter much in the grand scheme, but we will pay the price for our ignorance of the principles at play in our lives. The author has undertaken a monumental task by self-analyzing and reflecting on his own experiences and comparing them with permanent fixtures in global human mythology. He has a preternatural talent for educating and expressing the complex and incomprehensible as comprehensibly as possible to the public.

This book shows that there are certain qualities that highly masculine men desperately need from highly feminine women (and vice versa). These qualities and the need for them reveal the essence of true masculinity and femininity. In the 21st century, virtually everything is available to everyone. Anyone can do almost anything on their own. A single man can have his single life happily with access to basically everything they could ever want. Likewise, a single woman can live a fully functional life without a man. Each can even conceive and raise children without the support of the other. So why do we still crave each other?

Men have always sought (and, I believe, always will seek) certain feminine characteristics that exist most prominently in women, and women seek certain masculine characteristics that exist most prominently in men. And it's okay to need each other. Eventually, we *should* need each other. If we want to reach a divine level of human connection, if we want to reach something very sacred, we have to like and love needing each other. Celebrating the differences between them is the best way that men and women can achieve harmony together. As such, this book will make women feel good about being needed by men, and the same with men being needed by women for the respective duties and responsibilities they seek to offer in a romantic partnership.

Nowadays, it's often misinterpreted as a bad thing, as a great insult, when you tell a woman she needs a man (or even that a man needs her). It's a very damaged mentality to be offended at the idea of needing your complementary influence or being needed to provide complementary influence to someone else. I can understand the author's lamentation that people have misinterpreted and been offended by some of the ideas contained in this book, even ones that were clearly meant as empowering and complimentary. Our respective roles go much deeper than how most people interpret them in the most superficial sense.

From this book, men will learn that women are not just beautiful objects (as the author calls them) or innocent creatures that exist to entertain, serve, and arouse them without volition of their own. Women will learn that men can be irresponsible and disregard vital things in relationships in a way that is alien to them. They will also learn that, despite how it might seem, there are good, highly masculine men oriented toward romance who are ready to commit and sacrifice everything for the right feminine influence from a good woman. Masculine dedication and love should not be underestimated or taken for granted by women. Indeed, wise and smart women will never be indifferent to that magical masculine magnetic force that attracts and is attracted to its much-needed femininity.

As women, we need to understand that men are very easy to deal with once we can look at them from a detached and realistic angle and try to understand who they truly are and what they truly need from us. Typical masculine men have certain systems and identifiable logic behind every single action, thought, and behavior. These stay quite stable throughout their lives and will not be changed unless something malfunctions. Men like to speak to already tested scientific methods, things they know work. In

contrast, typical feminine women make ongoing changes and decisions, derived from their highly intuitive nature to better things and fully experience every emotion possible. To men, this often looks like unpredictable chaos.

The burden faced by feminine women is our way of constant questioning and self-criticism, which contributes to our more erratic nature. A woman faces a lifelong social burden of constantly being at the center of attention as an attractive human being. With that comes expectations for who she is supposed to be, how she is supposed to look, and how she is supposed to act. We always feel like we are under surveillance. Everybody's looking at us under the world's largest magnifying glass. We also have a more fearful nature than men. It comes from insecurity and the constant need for protection, which are qualities that are also socially reinforced in most societies. We attempt to fix this by surrounding ourselves with supportive people who give us a sense of security and protection from outside ourselves. If we cannot build that sense of security internally, we start overdeveloping our masculine side instead of feeling free to express our femininity.

When a woman brings chaos into a romantic relationship, a state of being the author refers to as "the feminine minefield," it's because of how insecure she feels in her relationship or life. She does not know who she is for her partner. A woman needs to feel comfortable and know who she is in this man's life with high security. Otherwise, she can become chaotic. She's looking for her protector. When she doesn't have someone who can protect her emotionally, give direction, or just confirm what's happening, she becomes like a tornado.

Women thrive in rest and beauty compared to men, who thrive in action and achievement. Men work to become someone attractive to women because they are not born the type of gentleman every

feminine woman dreams about at least once in her life. Men learn to be gentlemen either from observing male mentors or by being motivated by feminine women holding them to such a standard. There should be some type of grand motivation for a man to act and grow into the man he should be. A man being a gentleman means choosing to become full of thoughtfulness, desire, and consideration toward the woman he is most attracted to, in a way he never cared to pay attention to before, by channeling such core masculine qualities as ambition, protection, and leadership. I believe this is what the author refers to as the type of feminine qualities masculine men allow themselves to develop that are attractive to women.

In our very complex and chaotic world, being gentlemanly is often mistaken for spending an unreasonable amount of materialistic fortune in a performative way, which you will see the author criticize several times as an indicator of a performative relationship or pseudo-romance. However, I see it as a man being confident enough to showcase this very sexy and subtle masculine behavior, which can be materialistic but is not necessarily so. It demonstrates his creativity, intelligence, commitment, and bravery. This is undeniably attractive and heroic to feminine and self-satisfied women. Two people become more emotionally sensitive and attentive as a result of gentlemanly behavior and, consequently, connected. Since women observe, notice, and feel everything at a more sensitive level, these thoughtful moments initiated by a man cannot go unnoticed. Consistency of gentlemanly behavior will make a woman become more trustful toward a particular man and react favorably to his behavior.

Men are very lazy beings in general, which makes them oriented toward efficiency of action. They need justification for putting effort into things. “Why should I do that? Why? What’s the

purpose?” The women they desire set the standard for coming out of that comfort zone, for setting higher standards and maturing. The author expresses this principle under the heading *Men Can't Live Up to Their Masculine Potential Without Women* in chapter two as part of what he considers to be a woman's signature influence on a man. The way I see it, every man is a Lego® set that needs to be assembled, rather than the already assembled model that most women expect to meet. A wise woman should learn how to identify the quality of the blocks and whether the set has all the parts needed. This is true feminine happiness. The author claims these women “want to skip ahead to the finish line” instead of playing their important feminine role in a man's masculine development. Indeed, the courtship process is the path to a strong relationship because it allows men and women to build a strong influence on each other and develop together into their potential, meaning men and women need to know how to provide positive emotions outside of the sexual context before feeling comfortable with the physical act of sex.

Men seldom realize that sex for a woman happens in the brain before the body. It's a moment of rapid dopamine and oxytocin release, which women can get even without physical stimulation. Events such as shopping, having a “beauty day,” taking care of a child, enjoying a dinner or dessert, or simply being complimented by strangers can initiate this dopamine stimulation. Talking with someone they feel they can trust can be like sex to women because of the intimate connection they feel. They can talk, feel heard, and feel safe with a gentleman. Thus, they can share all their thoughts without being judged. As the author details in chapter four, *The Sexual Burden*, “Feminine comfort comes from knowing what to expect. Knowing what to expect makes her less hesitant to express herself in a sexually dynamic way.” Women

can start talking to a man and then become detached from this world because of how safe they feel. They don't have to edit their thoughts or words. This is the whole essence of masculine protection on a very profound but non-evident level.

Therefore, to get what she wants from a man, a woman needs to be very skilled at communicating her sexual and other needs. Sexual communication comes after being able to communicate all types of wants and wishes in life and after having established all ways of communicating with a man. Plenty of relationships collapse because there is no established method of sexual communication. There is no openness. There is no trust because people are afraid of each other's reactions. Women and men need to learn how to give and receive positive emotions to and from each other outside of the sexual context. A woman seeks someone who can listen and understand her, which she perceives as protecting her emotionally. She will do everything to find such a soul in a man. And if she cannot find that in her partner, she will replace him with a psychologist or by having an emotional affair with another man who is open to listening to her.

Very often, romantic love is mistaken for that heightened hormonal state of being physically attracted to someone from first sight, which usually sacrifices the opportunity to learn about the person the way they are. It happens in opposite sequences for men and women. Men get attracted by female looks, and they decide to approach her. Later, they realize that she is more than a beautiful object. She has a brain in her head, and maybe they have romantic chemistry beyond the physical. Meanwhile, a woman is initially attracted to the brain of a man, and later, she realizes that they also have a physical connection and lets herself feel sexual lust for him once she is comfortable.

Understanding a man is the main mission for a woman considering marrying and spending her life with him. Marriage is the highest emotional institution for highly feminine women, requiring absolute levels of commitment, responsibility, and attraction. If she feels that she understands this man and that this man matches her ideals, she can fall in love with him. In fact, it's a lot more work for a woman to find someone she can trust and express herself completely with than men can imagine. That's the goal for a woman: to find someone she can build trust with intellectually, physically, and emotionally in all possible ways. That's where security comes from.

I hope my contribution of a more feminine interpretation to the author's highly masculine one provides some balance and validation to the idea that there is a great deal for men to learn about women, women to learn about men, and everyone to learn more about themselves in the pages that follow. Gregory has taken great trouble to detail the masculine experience of intimacy, sex, and love in a way that will speak quite deeply to a certain type of reader, regardless of their gender. It is my ambition to undertake a similar feat in a forthcoming book of my own that explores the essential feminine side of these important topics and more, providing the complementary perspective that his idiosyncratic take is missing.

Written by Svetlana Sevak, MA, RP
Registered Psychotherapist
Toronto, Canada

INTRODUCTION



There has probably never been a major civilization in history that did not have a strong conception of the gendered differences between men and women and how they applied in a cosmic way. It goes much deeper than, for instance, the domestic rules imposed on women and career freedoms allotted to men in 1950s America. Cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and religious associations of men, women, masculinity, and femininity can be found at virtually any time and in any place that one is willing to look.

Archetypal contrasts demonstrate the universal human tendency to understand the world through the lens of complementary opposites such as up and down, light and dark, hot and cold, active and passive, and (drum roll please...) *masculine and feminine*. The obvious example is the ancient Chinese concept of yin and yang, represented by the iconic symbol of a circle divided into two swirling halves of black and white. In Hinduism, Shakti represents the feminine, dynamic, and ever-changing aspect of existence, and Shiva is the masculine, conscious, and unchanging one. Ideas about the “divine masculine” and “divine feminine” appear throughout various iterations of New Age spirituality. Psychologist Carl Jung developed the concepts of anima and animus to describe his ideas about the opposite-gendered influence subconsciously present in men and women, emphasizing that integration between the two was necessary for self-realization.



Of course, the fact that an idea has had a history of being popular does not constitute a logical argument or offer proof of its validity. It does, however, mean we cannot be quick to dismiss the differences between men and women as some recent, superficial blip on the radar of humanity's understanding of itself. If homo sapiens was not a sexually dimorphic species, we would not need complementary categories to understand and classify ourselves by gender besides the physical differences in our downstairs plumbing. Because males and females are different in many notable ways, our minds have come up with distinct methods of associating them. Beyond the sex organs, there are several important distinctions between males and females of most species on this planet. Naturally, our minds start categorizing those traits found more prominently in men as belonging to a "manly" category and those found more prominently in women as belonging to its complementary opposite.

Beyond the social reinforcement of gender roles and limitations, there exists a natural biological and psychological division of traits¹ between the sexes—and it's a good thing so long as we can arrange things so that our respective strengths work in each other's favor. Instead, the male/female dichotomy has often been embodied as a fight for control, each side employing strategies suited to their strengths. Problems arise when we stereotype and prescribe these traits, shaming men for not embodying the furthest possible extreme of masculinity and women the same for femininity. Because most men naturally grow more body

¹ Many will recognize "division of labor" as an economics term that refers to how any process is most efficient if you separate types of value according to who is best suited to provide each. Sexually dimorphic organisms, like people, have unevenly distributed traits between their sexes, from the functions their bodies perform to how they think and feel. Each approach provides some natural advantage the other lacks.



and facial hair after puberty than women, we might too quickly conclude that women having any body hair makes them masculine or that men not growing enough body hair makes them feminine. The same applies to various personality differences that might be more likely to show up in men or women and that we, therefore, come to associate as masculine or feminine ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Though this book primarily addresses the masculine experience, it is intended for everyone. It's for men, of course, to understand themselves better—to find healthy ways to deal with what they are experiencing or likely to experience throughout life as a masculine entity. Many unhealthy habits we've stereotyped and socially accepted (and even disastrously encouraged) about men are things we can learn to deal with more responsibly. For women, this book aims to shed light on what the men in their lives endure so that they can better empathize with and support them. Feminine women frequently underestimate how the masculine experience of life can be so different than what they experience. It will also help them know what qualities to look for in good men and be confident about how men should treat them.

As I can't claim to know what it's like to be a woman directly, everything I write about women and femininity comes from informed guesses and an external masculine perspective, not personal experience. I can only infer certain principles about the feminine experience and compare them to my lived experience of the masculine one. When the woman who wrote the foreword to this book, Svetlana Sevak, finishes her similarly themed book from the feminine perspective, I'll be the first to read it. I suggest every man and woman reading this book does so, too.

The behaviors and experiences I describe in this book are, so far as I can discern, part of the quintessential masculine experience.



If you are actively embodying your masculinity (even if you are female), you should recognize the principle in yourself and see how it applies across your lifestyle, including how the failure to apply it leads to struggle and unfulfillment. Your life will be harder than it needs to be if you fail to embody who you are at your core, and you will not feel at home in yourself. Not every man is going to be horny all the time. Not every man is going to view sex and women the same way. Not every man is going to deal with his anger by punching holes in drywall, which would be a clear sign of immature masculinity and the inability to manage masculine frustration. It doesn't make me any less of a man if I don't watch sports, drink beer with the boys every weekend, get into bar fights, or go out hunting for pussy. I experience the same impulses that other men do. The difference is what I do with them. Being a man does not have to mean glorifying the worst things about men just because they set them apart from women. I hope to offer a superior, positive alternative to addressing the masculine burdens of existence.

For whatever reason, masculine traits are naturally overrepresented in men and feminine traits in women. If they are the product of our evolution, experts more qualified than me can only speculate about the advantages they've provided that have led to their proliferation in our species. Though the potential for endless diversity and individuation exists and should be respected, there are still broad categories of personality, values, and experience that most people will primarily identify with. Most masculine men are attracted primarily to feminine women, and most feminine women are attracted primarily to masculine men, for instance. Both natural genetic/hormonal expression and social conditioning likely play significant roles in this—though that's not a can of worms I'm ready to open here. Still, neither

masculinity nor femininity is exclusive to men or women. If you don't feel like you belong squarely in the categories I describe, apply your own judgment and self-analysis to see how what I am talking about could still broadly apply outside of you.

Most people probably wouldn't think me to be particularly masculine from afar. I'm average height with a slim build (though I can put on muscle when I try to). I'm not excessively hairy, I don't have a square jawline, and I can't even grow a decent beard. But my personality, the mind that sees the world and makes sense of all its workings, my default emotional responses to sensory experience, my orientation to reality, and the types of goals that bring meaning to my life are almost entirely masculine. My weaknesses and failings are masculine, too. My experience of the world is alien to most women, especially those who are inversely skewed toward the feminine, just as their experience is alien to me. The further we stray in either direction from the neutral androgynous center, the more important it is that we understand and empathize with each other to reap the benefits of our respective strengths and specializations.

I've written this book at age 35—a nice, level station from which to assess my own experience of masculine development thus far. I've been an adult man long enough to have settled into it, past the chaotic sensitivity and hyperactivity of my teenage and early adulthood years. I've seen how my sexual interest and masculine demeanor have stabilized over time. I haven't yet experienced the decline I anticipate will come in my twilight years as I descend into being what I imagine as a helpless curmudgeon, when my hair goes gray, and I lose much of the virility that presently defines my experience as a man.

Throughout this book, I'll address pertinent examples from my own detailed romantic experience in cultures worldwide that

primarily influenced how I formed my present worldview in this domain. All personal anecdotes included really happened. However, except for public figures who have freely disclosed their private details, names and details have been changed and mythologized to protect anonymity while getting the point of each story across. The lesson contained in each matters more than the specifics of what occurred. I will also draw on many examples from ancient and modern mythology and philosophy, usually in the form of parables, movies, books, and music, that illustrate timeless archetypes and truths about gendered romantic experience better than could ever be captured by something that just so happened to happen to me or someone I know. Though these examples do not offer scientific truth, they demonstrate that these ideas have been floating around in human culture and mythology throughout history. That's the point of mythology: to showcase a concentration of the most important aspects of the truth that are normally hidden from view.

APPEARANCES OF SEXISM

While writing this book, I'd occasionally come across someone who seemed offended by its very premise. Some people took issue with me not only *acknowledging* the differences between men and women but actually *promoting* them as qualities worth celebrating in pursuit of total self-expression and social harmony,² likely because they saw them only as sources of historical conflict and strife. Male readers would often praise me for the passages denouncing toxic feminine behavior but take offense at the

² “Social harmony,” as I use the term, means individuals getting along with one another once they are self-expressed. We can ignore historical examples of totalitarians and social engineers using “social harmony” as justification for forcing people into roles to fit their particular vision for civilization.

passages denouncing toxic masculine behavior. Female readers frequently did the opposite: They thanked me for shedding light on how men mistreat them and became volatile when reading about how their own sex is often responsible for mistreating men. It would be easy to take certain portions of this book out of context to make the person who wrote them look like a diehard misandrist or misogynist. This is a book that has to be interpreted holistically to receive it as intended. If you find yourself getting offended when I generalize and criticize aspects of your gender and not just as much when I do so with the opposite gender, ask yourself why.

Men and women alike have the capacity to be despicable creatures, though typically in different ways that are manifestations of their immature masculinity and femininity, respectively. Which gender we're allowed to criticize more harshly seems to change with the times. Personally, I am an equal-opportunity hater. I am quick to criticize all things worth criticizing and call all spades spades, disregarding momentary cultural narratives around these things. At my core, I'm a timeless humanist³—a universal champion for conscious self-expression in whatever form consciousness is to be found: male, female, big, small, round, square, and any color of the light spectrum. I know that everyone who does not radically assess their capacity for acting irresponsibly threatens everyone they interact with. And everyone who harms another when such harm was reasonably

3 *I would argue, though, that even the term "humanist" is an oversimplification of my position. I value humanity because it contains the highest concentration of certain virtues in the known universe, such as emotional depth, intelligence, morality, consciousness, and volition. My bias toward humans would naturally extend toward any other beings, now or in the future, who display such human-affiliated qualities, which we might broadly refer to as their capacity for humanity. Perhaps a more appropriate term for me than "humanist" would be "humanityist."*

preventable should be held accountable. If you feel called out by condemnations of certain negative gendered behaviors, ask why you identified yourself in them.

Any advice presented in this book is only valid if following it would be an authentic expression of the self in each reader's particular case. This is a disclaimer that, realistically, should be included in any book written in the genre of personal or sociological development. Any book that appears to tell you who you should be or how you should act only makes sense if those instructions are in line with who you really are. No one has the authority to try to change someone into something they are not.

THE SEMANTICS OF GENERALIZATION

The English language is pretty bad at distinguishing generalizations and absolutisms.⁴ It is the difference between when something happens *often* and when something happens *always* by definition. When Isaac Newton said that an object in motion remains in motion until an outside force acts on that object, he meant that it was true for *all* physical objects and *all* forces. It's part of what defines them. But if I say that men are physically stronger than women, I clearly don't intend to apply the claim on an absolute scale to *all* men and *all* women as a facet of their definition. I mean that it is generally true, even if I don't explicitly say so. We have enough data about men and women to broadly describe the scientifically informed sexually dimorphic differences between them. Beyond what we can directly confirm as laws and hard statistics with experimentation via the scientific method, we must venture into the weeds of philosophy, personal experience, and interpretation. That men and women are demonstrably different in

⁴ *In fact, as far as I am aware, no world languages contain a clear grammatical distinction between statements meant to be interpreted generally and absolutely. They all require additional semantic distinctions that can muddle meaning when such distinctions are left out.*

a variety of biological and psychological aspects is a scientifically informed conclusion—one that goes well beyond the scope of this book. However, what it *means* to be masculine or feminine and how men and women can best express themselves and get along together is a matter of personal values and interpretation.

Imagine the chore of reading a book semantically required to include the qualifier “generally speaking” in every sentence. My solution is to apply generalization as a disclaimer unless statements are clearly emphasized as absolutisms. Every claim I make about men and women in this book is intended as broad generalization, and most generalizations are descriptive, not prescriptive. I am not usually saying that things *should* be the way I portray them here. I am describing what I observe, the truth as I understand it. My wording should make it clear when I am projecting a preference or ideal instead of describing a fact. Perhaps your observations and understanding differ. Perhaps you can read mine and still gain something from them.

Generalizations are not stereotypes by necessity. A generalization is a pattern you identify that broadly categorizes your experiences. A stereotype is a generalization you apply *before* experience because someone passed it on to you. They, too, most likely had it passed to them via reports from others, biasing their interpretations of their experience. Sometimes, the patterns we identify from our experiences can align with existing stereotypes. Ironically, we might deny what we observe as true because we are extra cautious against being influenced by stereotypes. We stop trusting the evidence of our senses and our own ability to reason, which is the best we have in the absence of hard scientific data. Just because people think something is true doesn't mean it *is* true. It doesn't mean it *isn't* true, either.

CHAPTER 1



The Highest Standard of Romance

“Perhaps the feelings that we experience when we are in love represent a normal state. Being in love shows a person who he should be.”

— Anton Chekhov



The subject of this book is idealism in a particular domain of life: romance and everything connected to it—namely, intimacy, sex, and love. Idealism consciously upholds a standard of the highest possible good. If you’re a romantically oriented individual, you will, by default, be seeking out a certain type of influence in another person that you can’t get anywhere else. It’s a form of inherent passion. Romantic love is love defined by passion more than any other kind of love. Some people are born passionate about animals. Some people are born passionate about music. They naturally gravitate toward it, or anything related. You can love your friends and family, but that’s not a love typically defined by passion. Passion is something that burns inside. It has an intrinsic fuel supply that never runs out so long as you are alive because it is a consequence of your design. It would be very harmful to tell someone to ignore any kind of



authentic passion, to try to pretend it doesn't exist because it's risky or inconvenient or because it seems incompatible with their environment.

A romantic idealist (or, in my case, a romantic idealist) faces a difficult time finding someone who lives up to their romantic ideals. And even if, by some miracle, you meet someone who has the potential to fit the bill, there's still a whole heroic journey you have to go on together to make that relationship work at a level beyond basic compatibility. It's not enough to win the lottery by finding the right person. You have to invest your winnings well and manage your wealth for life.

Romantics are brought into this world feeling a certain undeniable burden at their core. They carry it their whole lives and have likely always been aware of it. For many, society told them they would outgrow it and lower their idealistic standards to match the conditions of "the real world" everyone else lives in. I'm an idealist in many ways besides my orientation toward romance. I want world peace—a complete and permanent end to all war. Does that sound idealistic? Utterly impractical? Like something that would never ever happen, dooming me to disappointment? World peace is my ideal. If we can get even a little closer to that, I will be a little bit happier. But until we reach that ideal, I will still be disappointed with the state of the world. And such idealists are virtually guaranteed to see their ideals fail to actualize. "Disappointed idealist" is a cliché for a reason.

Every great artist who's ever lived and every person who's ever championed an important cause has known the pain of idealism. They were tortured by an idea, a standard that burned in their head. They had to paint some incredible vision or fight some great injustice in their time. They had to change the world because reality was inadequate for them. Even the ones who died before

the work was done may still have made a meaningful impact across generations. They made progress easier for those who came after. We have all benefited from the suffering of idealists who did not sacrifice their principles. Their reward came from the work itself, knowing that there was a chance all their effort might make a difference one day. It could, eventually, change some lives. It could go on to create something that didn't exist before, something that once seemed impossible.

Love does not have to hurt, but for the romantic idealist, it is likely to. Unmet expectations hurt, and love in its ideal form requires the setting of extremely high expectations. The test of idealism is if enduring all the pain and disappointment is worth it in the end. If you're the kind of person who would willingly jump back into hell for a chance at making it work and finally getting what you know you want and need to be fulfilled, you're an idealist. I'm a romantic idealist who has repeatedly failed at enacting his romantic ideals—yet, against all odds, I have resisted the descent into romantic cynicism. I remain hopeful about and dedicated to the fulfillment of the standard I have set for myself about how romantic love will define my life.

“Scratch any cynic and you will find a disappointed idealist.”

— George Carlin



People typically love the idea of love, the performance around love, more than the real thing. They cherish the gestures and symbols associated with it. If you really feel it, the symbols become superfluous. It's like a painting of a sunset compared to

the real thing. It's just a visual reminder of something incredible. And there's no harm in having that unless you start to mistake it for the real thing. If you love someone, there's nothing wrong with buying them flowers. But the love and the feelings associated with those flowers are not dependent upon the act itself. And you don't have to default to flowers as the symbol of your love just because it's common. You should do it because you know your lover actually appreciates flowers. Does the emotion of romantic connection exist independently of the gestures? Would it persist without them as a product of two romantic individuals' unique chemistry?

Love songs, love stories, love letters, bouquets of flowers, and expensive diamond rings⁵ are the sort of things non-romantics fill their conscious experience with to feel like they are participating in the illuminating dance of genuine intimacy. They need a constant resupply of these symbols for fear that the "magic" in their romantic relationships will run out. They feel only just enough of the hunger that they seek out a mere representation of what would actually satiate them. Such performative romantics will often be disappointed by real romance. It can never live up to all the pomp and hyperbole of the imagery derived from it, imagery that no longer accurately captures it. So, on they go, living in an invented world that has less and less to do with true romantic bonding. They are children playing dress-up compared to real adults who embrace the responsibilities of the real world.

5 *Actually, the wedding ring might be the only romantic symbol that makes any kind of non-arbitrary sense to me. It's a social signal to let potential suitors know not to get their hopes up about romancing someone already pair-bonded. However, the elaborate and expensive form they have come to take, such as the arbitrary insistence of spending three months' salary on one, is more about indulging in a status symbol established by a manipulative marketing campaign.*

They are geeks cosplaying as their favorite comic book characters. LARPer⁶ who have lost sight of what they are supposed to be role-playing—illusion without any connection to the real.

All types of love are shared identification with another being. Parents love their children to the point that their survival instincts extend to them. Friends and comrades bond over shared support, pastimes, and values. But romantics seek to merge both body and identity with the one they love. It is like a natural chemical reaction that automatically occurs when they are near the person they are most romantically compatible with. The extreme end of natural romantic compatibility is the ever-elusive, much-fabled “soulmate,” which does not have to mean the one-and-only great love that two people are predestined for from birth. A naturalistic explanation works fine, too. Soulmates are people who have the rarest and highest capacity for romantic bonding due to their complementary nature.⁷ They fill each other’s needs so strongly that it nullifies their tendency to seek out alternatives. However, it is not a foregone conclusion that they will find one another and put the work and growth into making their ideal relationship work. Both must embrace their nature as romantics and seek the highest form of their self-expression, which they know is found in one another.

6 *“LARPERs” is short for “Live Action Role-Players,” actors who participate in interactive storytelling by pretending to be characters in a fictional or historical scenario.*

7 *The concept of a soulmate, if interpreted liberally, can extend beyond the romantic and even human domain. My cat soulmate was a sweet, petite, blind, dilute calico named Matit. She became the standard through which I evaluated my relationship with all other felines because of how, by pure accident, our natures were so utterly, magically, miraculously complementary. She needed exactly me, and I needed exactly her for us to become the most expressed versions of ourselves.*

Romantics are more sensitive to the bonding mechanisms between compatible lovers. It becomes an overlay for their experience of the world, related to an intuitive sense that your life, your ability to live out your identity to the fullest, is incomplete so long as it is missing the influence of the feminine (if you are masculine) or the masculine (if you are feminine). While non-romantics can casually ignore the half they are missing, romantics cannot. Hungry creatures are impelled to find food. Those in the cold and dark await the coming sun or huddle around the fire for vital warmth. Romantic people recognize that there is a better, upgraded version of themselves, their fundamental potential, waiting for them when they bond with the right person—and that the same divine luxury awaits the person they bond with. A romantic man is chronically burdened, and he cannot remove the burden on his own, no matter how smart or capable he pushes himself to become. He needs *her*. He needs the influence he finds only in *her*.

Romanticism results from acknowledging the natural imbalance in one's soul and all the limitations that come with it. Two people imbalanced in complementary ways create romantic polarity—the eternal, exciting, sacred dance between a man embodying his masculinity and a woman embodying her femininity. If everyone were eternally balanced, androgynous, and neutral, there would be no drive to bond with one's reciprocal. People who fall under this description may have never really understood why romance is so important to some people. Regardless, they have much to gain from learning what the experience is like for diehard romantics.

The ideal outcome of romantic love is a specific, elaborate, sophisticated state of being that's incredibly rare in the universe. It only occurs under just the right conditions for it. And maybe

you can sustain it if you're very smart, very determined, and very emotionally mature. Most people have to search their whole lives to figure out what is capable of making them truly happy. Romantics are lucky in that regard. They already know what they need. They just face the mountainous task of making it happen without falling into the trap of mistaking a false or unhealthy bond for the real thing.

The love story most associated with the NBC sitcom *Friends* is, undoubtedly, that of unconfident nerd Ross Geller and preppy "girl next door" Rachel Green. Their on-screen will-they-won't-they romance spanned from 1994 to 2004 and inspired many shallow romantic tropes that still show up across television genres. The show ends on what it frames as the climax and culmination of their chronically on-and-off relationship, with Rachel famously getting off the plane that would have taken her out of Ross' life to pursue her dream job in Paris. Instead, she decides that *this time*, things will finally work out for them, despite them having tried and failed so many times before, to the point of already having broken up and gotten back together several times, been married and divorced, had a baby they raise separately, and ruined each other's attempts at relationships with new people. Has there ever been a more toxic on-screen relationship that refused to end?

On the same show, the understated friendship-gradually-turned-romance of sarcastic Chandler Bing and high-strung Monica Geller stands in direct contrast as a heroic and healthy partnership. Each member of the partnership is deeply flawed but compensates for the other's weaknesses with their strengths. Because they have spent years developing affection for one another as close friends, once they allow themselves to recognize their great physical chemistry, their romantic feelings quickly propagate into love that results in enduring marriage. As



complementary opposites, could they *be* any more perfect for one another? If *Friends* had been a more mythological show, Chandler and Monica would have been its romantic focus. Ross and Rachel would have been framed as a failed, codependent⁸ romance that nobody should aspire to, and their story would have ended with the two of them growing mature enough to wish each other well as they went their separate ways.

“If I’m the best, it’s only because you’ve made me the best.”

— Chandler Bing to Monica Geller, *Friends*

Someone unsatisfied with themselves does not have a whole and sustainable identity. They should not pair-bond⁹ with anyone, or they will forever be trying to compensate for what they have not developed within themselves. People can spend their lives chasing after satisfaction in infinite, invalid ways if they don’t take the time to critically assess what kind of person they would have to be to feel like they are embodying who they truly are. People have to work very hard to develop their character, to approve of, at the deepest level, the people they are. Even after all that important

8 *Codependence is a psychological and behavioral condition wherein one person enables another’s dysfunctional behaviors to the detriment of both people, characterized by reliance on others for approval, validation, and a sense of identity.*

9 *“Pair-bonding” is a term from evolutionary and social biology that refers to a strong and sustained connection between two individuals of a species, instigated and maintained by recurring hormonal reactions in each other’s presence. In the context of human romantic relationships, it usually means sexual monogamy and lifelong commitment to aid in our prolonged period of child-rearing, which is one of the bases for our traditional conception of marriage.*

work, they could remain far from *fulfilled* as romantically oriented individuals if they cannot yet partake in the actions, the external accomplishments that would give them the sense of meaning they require. There is no further work they can do on themselves to create fulfillment. They have to venture out into the universe and apply themselves out there.

Conscious unfulfillment drives people to do incredible things. A man who is happy alone has no reason to seek out his soulmate and build his relationship with her. But for the romantically oriented man, his relationship is his life's great work of art. His Sistine Chapel. His Statue of David. His Mona Lisa. Life-changing romance, the kind people write love songs about and recreate in cultural mythology, is vital to the pursuit of his conception of fulfillment. It would be paradoxical to insist such a man achieve this before entering into a romantic relationship because building that relationship *is* what brings him fulfillment. It would require him to consciously deny the truth of who he is.

However, even for the most romantic man in the world, his romantic life cannot be the *only* thing that brings him fulfillment. There has to be something else he considers all-important, something worth pursuing throughout his life. The right woman embodies his love and acts as a mechanism through which he pursues everything else important to him (and what she respects and loves him for). He does the best he can in those areas, even while single and alone, operating at a fraction of his potential before he finds the love of his life. A man whose whole life revolves around *only* his woman becomes a needy, codependent puppy in her eyes. No woman wants that in a man unless she's a narcissistic manipulator.

Why should it be so difficult for a compatible man and woman to come together and fulfill their mutual wants in the domain

of romance? Why is falling in love with and marrying the right person seen as one of modern life's most difficult (but most essential) tasks? Most people are not clear on who they are and what they want. Romance of the right caliber is one aspect of full self-expression, and most people fail at expressing who they really are. Various fears and insecurities keep them from ascending to everything they are capable of, especially when doing so would go against the social order they are part of. Romantic bonding requires the conquering of all fears and insecurities that would prevent it. It requires two independent people to become the masters of their own lives and willfully choose each other as the expansion of their self-expression.

Still, it often seems that a codependent relationship built on personal weakness and undeveloped identity has almost everything in common, on the surface, with a healthy, self-actualized one. Our timeless love songs frequently boast about needing someone, belonging to someone, feeling lost or helpless without someone, living for someone, and so on. Are these healthy or unhealthy sentiments to express about another person? These words could be seen as cries of desperation, obsession, and unhealthy connection. When Daniel Cleaver told Bridget Jones, "If I can't make it with you, then I can't make it with anyone,"¹⁰ he could have meant, "I love you so much that I could never be with anyone after you. No one else would ever compare to you." But it could also be: "I'm so incapable of being in a healthy relationship that it's hopeless for me unless you continue giving me a chance."

The healthy version of romantic love, the one we celebrate the world over, is the consequence of a complementary man and woman's mutual self-actualization. It's what both truly want,

¹⁰ From Sharon Maquire's movie adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding (Penguin Books, 1999).

and it's heroic to put forth the effort to make it happen in spite of everything working against it. The unhealthy codependent version is the consequence of failure to fully integrate oneself. You desperately seek something inauthentic to you because it distracts you from the awareness of your inadequacies. That's how love turns into manipulation for one or both parties. Ideally, our loving expressions would display our willing interdependence upon one another. I trust you, and you trust me like no other, even though we are each vulnerable enough to be destroyed by the other. We are one because we are both better that way—the best we could ever be in these bodies, with these identities, here in this time on this Earth.

To deny the natural drives, passions, and values within us would be to deny and defeat ourselves. To be true to ourselves is to acknowledge the principle of who we are, even (perhaps especially) when those fundamental truths about the self distress us because we cannot fully embody and express them. Bonding with the right woman is how the romantic man fully expresses himself because of the signature influence she has on him, that magical quality he can never find anywhere else in the universe, no matter the depth of his other accomplishments.

