

Act Like a Lady

In a previous article I shared about the training to act like a man and the Act-Like-a-Man Box. It is a box we need to avoid. Similarly, there is an Act-Like-a-Lady Box, and we do all we can to keep females in this box. We are taught that women are to take care of men emotionally, physically and sexually. Paul Kevil writes: "Many men expect women to be available whenever they want. Today, there are still some men who when they think that women are not available, are encouraged to assert control—to teach, train, or punish them. The basic message is that women are less important than men.

Yes, we do have many outstanding women as national, corporate, and church leaders in our society. However, there are still far too many families, parents, leaders, and men, who are keeping females in a box, just like what we are doing with our males in society. There is still an underlining belief that women are less important than men. Also, we are trained to pass on anger towards women by abusing them. Far too many in society are trained to see women as inferior and expect women to serve them. Believe it or not, the Act-Like-a-Lady Box provides the presupposition that married women cannot be raped by their husbands.

If we ask women to share one word, phrase or demand, they never want to hear from a man again, what will it be? Here are a few of them as presented by Paul Kivel in his book "The Men's Work Workbook."

- It must be that time of the month.
- You are not submissive enough.
- What's for dinner?
- Where's my socks, shirt . . ?
- You're too emotional.
- I'm not angry.
- That's your problem.
- You're always nagging.
- Let me take care of that for you.
- You did that like a man.
- Why is this place a mess?
- That must be a woman driver.
- The baby needs changing.
- Can't you keep those children quiet?
- Shut up!
- Trust me.
- You'd better not make me angry.
- I could help you go places in this company.
- Lots of other women would love to have this job.

Additionally, women also dislike it when men (if not their partners) use words and phrases like "girl," "honey," "little lady," etc.; talk to women's breast or make lewd noises on the street. This set the backdrop to what most men often expect from women. This expectation keeps women in the Act-Like-a-Lady Box. Here's what in the box: Ladies should be polite, nurturing, emotional submissive, dependent, pretty, sexy, take care of the house, take care of the children, be superwomen, put their needs aside, be clean, be available to men.

When men do not get what they want they can use a set of excuses to immediately blame women. These words can fuel anger and resentment. Here are a few examples: "She's frigid." "She's too emotional." "She knew that would make me angry." "She asked for it." "She said no but she really meant yes." "I told her to stop and she didn't stop so she deserved it." "What did she expect?"

If a man is in the Act-Like-a-Man Box, he will certainly want his female partner to be in the Act-Like-a-Lady box. That's a terrible combination. Men, we can do something to remove women from this box. It is time we give up control and start sharing power. Women are to be our equal partners. They are to have equal voice, vote, authority, access, opportunity, and privileges.

Men, we can make a difference. I like how Paul Keil puts it: "By changing your expectations and behavior you can stop being abusive, which will help women you know get out of the Act-Like-a-Lady Box. Here is what Paul Kivel says men can do.

- When talking to a woman, concentrate on what she is saying. Notice if you get distracted by your own thoughts or by her body, or when you feel impatient. Practice a lot.
- Notice how often during the day you are distracted by thoughts of women's bodies.
- Say to yourself, if a woman says no to sex, she means no. Notice any old learning that keeps you from accepting this statement.
- Next time you hear a comment about "women drivers" or some other putdown for women, interrupt it. Notice how scary it is to challenge this kind of male bonding. Notice if it scares you to do this. Imagine how dangerous it can be for a woman.
- If you live with a woman, make a list of who does the cooking, shopping, laundry, diapers, cleaning, and other household chores. Then ask her to make a similar list. Compare your lists and talk about the expectations. What do you expect her to do because she is a woman?

It is important to note that research shows us that the happiest couples are those where roles are determined by talent, skill and not gender. To facilitate this no one is to be in a box. There is to be no requirement to do a chore just because you are a male or female.

I encourage females not to keep yourself in a box. Take charge of your life. Believe in yourself as independent, vibrant, intelligent women. Here are a few things you can do.

- Become an independent, self-actualized woman before you seriously date. You need not have completed college or have a big savings to accomplish this. But you must be in charge of your life. If you are still depending on mom or dad to make decisions for you, then you are keeping yourself in a box and will most likely find a man who is also in the box. You will be in trouble.
- When you go on your first, second or third date with a man, be an independent adult on the date. Do not give him power to be in charge of the moment by paying for the date, picking you up or taking you home. If you do not have a car, let a friend, aunt or parent take you there and pick you up and you must have your own money. You must always be in a position to comfortably say "no" and to leave at your choosing and be safe. Do not give up your power to a man.
- Do not go on a romantic date with a man alone until you are confident that he has a respectful view of women. Date in groups and listen to his choice of words, watch body movements and attitudes. If he is insisting that you do something you are not ready for or uncomfortable doing, then he will only be using you like a piece of meat—It tastes good now, but if he finds a better tasting one, he will leave you.

Do you put yourself in a box.

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