

The Man Rules

The title 'The Man Rules' is displayed in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The word 'The' is positioned above 'Man', and 'Rules' is below it. A light blue male symbol (a circle with an arrow) is superimposed over the letter 'n' in 'Man'.

**New Rules for Men
in the 21st Century**

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The Water

Has it ever felt to you like you were following some set of unwritten rules on how to be a man? Men can do *this* but can't do *that*. *Real* men only act a certain way. These are the Man Rules™. These are the rules that we have learned since we were little boys from our parents, caregivers, teachers, friends, the media, and on the schoolyard. These are the Rules that we follow to let others – and ourselves – know that we are men. These are the Rules that we so often follow without realizing that we are doing it. These are the Rules that we follow that we have falsely come to believe are *just the way men are*. And even more importantly to you – these are the Rules we follow that have led us to falsely believe that it is *just the way you are*.

These are very big statements for an opening paragraph! But take a moment to look inside and ask yourself about the pressure you have felt all of your life to be or not be a certain kind of man. How much permission have you really felt to be yourself? Just be who you are? Our society gives lip-service to the value of “being true to ourselves” but there are ideas, beliefs, and expectations that we have taken on since we were first born that are not easily overcome, even when they are negatively impacting our lives. These are the forces that create the Man Rules. And no man living in this country is exempt. Every man's life has been touched –in positive and negative ways – by the Man Rules.

Some of the most common Man Rules I hear about from men *and* women are:

- Don't cry.
- Don't be weak.
- Don't show emotion, other than anger.
- Don't ask for help.

Do these sound familiar?

Remember, you learned these Rules. You learned to follow them at a very young age.

Why do I call them the Man Rules? Well, how much choice did we have in the matter? Nobody sat us down when we were kids reviewing each of the Rules with us. “What do you think of this one, ‘*Real* men don’t cry.’ Dan?” Ummm... “Well, Dad, how well is that working for you?” Can you imagine if the men in our lives had the ability to honestly answer that question? What would you answer if you were completely honest? I will tell you that this one rule – and there are many Man Rules - has caused me so many problems in my most important relationships. Over and over again.

What happens when we don’t follow Rules? There are consequences. Especially from the Rule followers themselves. Shame is one of the greatest tools we human beings have to make sure each other follows the Rule. Frequently, we shame others out of our own shame. It can be vicious at times. Other times, more insidious and less caustic, but incredibly damaging nonetheless. You will hear me talk about shame throughout this book because I do not think there is a greater enforcer of the Rules.

In order to better see this, you must first begin to see *The Water*.

What the Hell is Water?

I start almost every talk I do with this little parable: Two fish are hanging out at the bottom of the ocean when another fish swims up to them. This third fish looks at the two others and says, “Hey guys, how’s the water?” and then swims off. The two fish look at each other and say, “What the hell is water?”

That little story talks about one of the greatest – and perhaps elusive - experiences of our lives: reality. We have the opportunity to see the world we actually live in rather than the one we have been told we live in or the one that we wish we lived in. The greatest tool for being able to see Reality, The Water I will constantly be referring to throughout this book, is awareness. And Awareness can hurt. Awareness can shake you. And the foundation you thought you had. Yet, without awareness it is not much of a life because until we have true awareness, as Sigmund Freud said, we are being lived by forces inside us.

And that, my friends, is how the Man Rules show up in our lives. The same is true with the Woman Rules. The Rules, are the Water! We are constantly in them and have been for so long that we are often not even aware of them. If we are aware of them, we may not be fully aware of how deep The Water is. We think we're in a small pond while the truth is that we're swimming in the Pacific Ocean! It is said that ignorance is bliss, but ignorance distorts our perceptions and limits our range of choice. It is my objective and my hope that by the time you have finished reading this book you will no longer be able to claim ignorance.

The profound significance and ramifications of this story about The Water will become more evident as you reflect upon these ideas and look honestly at how these Rules show up in your life and in all of your relationships.

Gender 101: What's Your Gender?

Before we get too deep into this conversation I want to make sure that we are on the same page when it comes to talking about men and masculinity because that means we are talking about gender and sex. Let me start with a quick example of how confused our society is about

what is one's sex and what is one's gender. The majority of the forms that we fill out during the course of our daily lives start by asking the question; "What is your gender?" Then, what are the options they give you? Male or Female. That is gender not sex! This may not seem like a very big deal to you but it is significant because it reflects our general confusion on these two topics.

Sex is the categorization based upon biological distinctions such as genitalia and other characteristics (breasts, adam's apple, deep voice, facial hair, etc.) Understandably we have lived for a very long time – at least in our "enlightened" Western society – in the binary of male and female with that designation being based upon the most obvious physiological distinctions – namely, genitalia. What we are learning about the biological determination of one's sex is showing us that even the presumed obvious dichotomy of male/female is not nearly as clear cut as once thought.

Gender is a social construction – though many do not view it that way – of feminine and masculine. What that means is the determination of gender has a lot to do with the society itself, its values and beliefs, and the traditions associated with gender. How we view masculinity in our culture is not necessarily the same in another culture. For instance, in our culture there is almost no situation where a man could wear a dress and have it be considered masculine. While in other cultures not only do some men wear dresses but the ability to wear a dress is reserved for men of only the highest station. Gender not only varies in cultures, it varies in every single one of us.

As we will discuss throughout this book, gender is expressed along a continuum. The rigid dichotomy of masculine and feminine has never really existed. In fact, every single man reading this book has been more masculine at certain times than others. You may have even found yourself being more "feminine" when in fact all you were really doing was feeling safe

enough to actually be yourself. Or perhaps the situation called for it – like spending time with your daughter or son when they were younger or perhaps a certain part of your job on a certain day. The point is that any given point of our lives and on any given day we might find ourselves on different places of the continuum. Then, when you look at different cultures and the way they express masculinity and femininity you see how different that can look from American culture and begin to see that it is a socially created reality.

The challenge is that, because we believe these constructs of masculine and feminine are not just true but the Truth, we have very strong attachment to it needing to be real and “the way things are.” In fact, we believe in these ideas so strongly they have become rules that we follow, that we enforce with others, and that we then teach our children to follow (even if they are making us miserable)! Some of us will even hurt others in any number of ways if they challenge the Rules or do not follow them. These are the Man Rules and The Woman Rules. And they are a huge part of The Water.

This is how our baptism in The Water begins:

What is one of the first questions we ask a woman when she is pregnant? Answer: Is it a boy or a girl? And what do so many couples do once they have that information? They start creating the fantasy of who that baby is. They start planning out so much of *that child's* life! They start painting the room, buying clothes and toys, even imagining the sports they will play, passing on the wedding dress, or any other number of fantasies that are significantly based upon knowing the baby's sex. And this is not just the women - men do it too!

Now, let's take that same couple that knows they are having a baby girl. They have already painted the room, had the baby shower and gotten all of the nice little girly gifts and they

go in to see the doctor. The doctor says, “I have good news and well, not bad news but some *new* news.” The couple look at each other with some fear wondering what the doctor is going to say. The doctor continues, “First, let me assure you your baby is very healthy. However, there is one small thing that we missed.” He smiles and almost, as if adding an element of dramatic pause, lets that statement hang in the air. “You’re actually having a baby boy!” There is a mixture of emotions that runs through the couple as they process this new information, looking at one another. In a split second they even search the other’s non-verbal responses for any hints of excitement and/or disappointment. Much of their reactions are due to how attached they had already become to having a baby girl and the fantasy they had created and been living in for the past five months.

Whoa! At the very least it is a shock. At the most the young couple changes the paint in the room, returns the clothes, and comes up with new names for the child. The narrative changes. The fantasy the couple was playing out in their minds changes. It has to!

Doesn’t it?

The baby isn’t even born yet look at how much of who that baby is has already been created – if only in the minds of its parents.

But it doesn’t stop there. That is just the very beginning.

Are you starting to see The Water?

When that baby is born we place them in a metaphorical dixie cup and begin pouring the water into this tiny receptacle. We put them in blue blankets and pink blankets and often treat them very differently based upon that arbitrary and insignificant symbolism. Research shows that baby boys are held less, given less opportunity to cry, talked to in different tones, and handled

differently, often rougher. Research even shows that if you put a baby boy into a pink blanket or onesie, the baby will be treated differently than if he was dressed in blue clothing. We treat the baby according to the color – comfort him more, speak softer, allow more opportunity for the “softer” emotions, and held longer and more gently. Are we aware that we are doing this? Rarely. We just do it with the best of intentions. It is The Water. We do it with little to no idea that we are doing it, and that is how we end up perpetuating the expectations and limits we place on each other – and ultimately ourselves - based solely on gender.

All you have to do is listen to parents and grand-parents talk about their boys. “Oh, look at those hands. They are so strong. He is going to be a big strong boy.” “Oh, look at her hands and how cute they are. How soft. She is just precious.” Chances are they are essentially the same damned hand!

And it continues. We continue to immerse that child in The Water.

By the time children are three years old they have already made up so much about their world and how gender fits into it. This is based mostly upon what they have seen and heard, even if they are only just beginning to learn how to speak. You would be amazed what three and four year olds will tell you about boys and girls and what they can and cannot do based upon the worlds they have been observing. You cannot ever overestimate the power of all of the information that children are passively taking in as they move throughout the day. They observe a world deeply organized by gender and start making up their own reality. That is how gender becomes invisible to so many of us and how we come to accept it as part of the natural order.

By the time we become adults we are in the Ocean and most of us have no idea. We are just swimming. We wake up every morning, put on a figurative and literal gender outfit and

move out into the world. Let's be honest, how conscious were you when you put on your gender outfit this morning? Did you think to yourself, "I am about to put on my man clothes!" Probably not. Now, look down or look at yourself in the mirror. Do you see your man suit? Can you look at your clothes and see what messages you were wanting to send about how you see yourself – and want to be seen – as a man?

What's my point?

The precise goal of this book is to help you to see The Water and to help facilitate your own journey of awareness toward becoming the man you truly want to be. I want YOU to make the decision of who you are. And who are shouldn't be the result of some blind allegiance to a set of rules about which you weren't even given a choice – and can't even see!

Let me be clear: I do not care, nor do I have the right to judge, what kind of man you are so long as you do not intentionally hurt anyone. In fact, every man has his own idea of who he is and how he is supposed to show up in the world. That truth lives deep inside of him. It may even be that truth was born with us and it is our deep connection to God or whatever you want to call that wisdom of the Universe that is so much greater than any of us.

*What I hope to give you with this book is one of the greatest gifts anyone can give another human being: **Awareness**. Awareness is the fundamental – and necessary – source of all change. With that awareness comes true choice. The freedom to choose the man you want to be. With that freedom comes a great amount of responsibility. You become 100% responsible for how you show up in your life as a man. No more excuses. No more being able to slough off certain behaviors or comments by simply saying, "That's just how guys are." No more accepting unacceptable situations or relationships because you think that a man is just supposed to take it.*

No more crashing into everyone else's lives and pretending that you get to do that because you are a man. Sorry.

I cannot say how much you have or not have chosen the man you want to be. I can say that it is a long journey to truly being ourselves and my sole intention is to provide information that might offer some new perspective for you and with that give you a greater sense of choice around who you want to be.

*Let me repeat: That choice means you are now **100% responsible** for the way you live your life as a man. I am not looking to nor encouraging you to create new rules. I want us to get rid of the rules! No more rules! Only choices. Freedom. However, I am also not suggesting that the Man Rules are bad. Far from it. There is so much that is absolutely wonderful about being a man that we seem to have lost in our society of late. Keep what you want and lose the rest! And if you change your mind, that works too. That is what freedom is – the right to make your own choices, find out how well they work for you, learn from them, and make new choices if you want!*

As I said earlier, how often do we hear people throw out that maxim: To thine own self be true? I hear it a lot yet it is one of the hardest journeys you will ever take in this life. Some of the smartest people in the world have absolutely no idea who they are. They are incredibly intelligent lacking wisdom. It is very easy to talk about, watch a TV show, listen to podcast after podcast, read as many books as you would like. But this journey requires action. Action borne out of awareness. And awareness, well, that doesn't always come easy and when it does it doesn't always feel good.

My Water

Let me try to unpack this idea of The Water a little bit more for you. Said another way, it is the filters we have that impact our consciousness. The way we see reality, ourselves and in turn how we see others and the world around us. The Water is much bigger than gender. And we all have our own water.

As a trained critical sociologist I have learned to see how much the lenses I wear affect how I see the world. When I say I am a critical sociologist it means I have studied society from the perspective of power and the coercive forces that have helped to shape us, our communities, and our world. It means I have paid very close attention to some of the most salient and impactful forces in the socialization process: race, cultural background, class, sexual identity, and, of course, gender. It means that we often see ourselves as such free thinkers and profess our beliefs and even disparage others' beliefs with little understanding that so much of that is not even *ours*. Or vice-versa we do study after study and conclude from the results that we are “wired” to engage in certain behaviors or relationships.

It took me a long time to see my water and I know I don't see all of it. You will learn much more about my Water when you read my story later in this book detailing my own struggle with the Man Rules and the journey to becoming the man I am today. Here is a short piece of it:

I am a white male who identifies as heterosexual and primarily as masculine. I am well-educated with a master's degree in sociology. I did my masters research on the social construction of masculinity in the culture of Alcoholics Anonymous, the first qualitative study of its kind published under a pseudonym. I was raised Catholic and went to Catholic school in the

Washington D.C. metropolitan area from grades 3 to 12. I grew up in an upper-middle class suburb of Maryland where a private golf course was my backyard. I am from Irish and German/Polish descent and identify more with the Irish part of my ancestry. Every part of my education included children from other cultures especially African-American and Filipino. My all-boys high school was probably about sixty percent Caucasian and forty percent African-American. In other words, I have a fair amount of privilege in this society.

Another part of My Water is that I am also a man in long-term recovery from alcohol and marijuana addiction which means I have chosen not to drink alcohol or take any other drugs since May 21, 1994. I come from a family with severe alcoholism and numerous episodes of violence. I am a survivor of early childhood trauma including multiple medical traumas. In 1995 at the age of 54, my father died due to complications *solely* from chronic alcoholism. I have been married for twelve years now to a wonderful woman whom I consider my soulmate; one of the greatest gifts I have been given during this lifetime. I am a father to a beautifully spirited girl named Grace though we had quite a journey of five years just to be able to have her enter our lives.

Why is all of this information important? Because it has shaped who I am, how I see the world, and how I see myself as a man. It has deeply affected My Water.

You have your own Water. In fact, we are going to do a little exercise now so that you can begin to see some of your Water. This exercise alone might surprise you. ***Go to the end of this chapter and you will see 20 questions that will help you better locate your place in the Water.***

It Runs Deep

One day I returned home from a long week of trainings having very emotional and provocative conversations about men in our society. I was feeling particularly sensitive to all of the ways that gender messages get reinforced by men and women and I was exhausted. I thought about my relationship with my wife and how we were raising our daughter. I felt frustrated because it felt out of integrity – it certainly did not seem to be congruent with what I teach and train others on throughout the country. I pointed this out to Nancy with some judgment and a hint of anger. She simply looked at me, with a loving yet somewhat dismissive smile, and said: “It runs deep, Dan.”

And, indeed it runs deep. Very deep.

My guess is, and this is not meant as an insult - You *may have no idea how deep it runs*. I am not even sure I do. Let me explain a little more:

Let’s explore for instance the Man Rule: Men Don’t Cry,

On the surface of the water: Men don’t cry. *The vast majority of us are familiar with this Rule and can name it quite easily. In fact, when I query audiences about the Man Rules this is almost always the first one that comes up.*

A little deeper: “Yeah, I can’t remember the last time I cried.”

Deeper: “I don’t have a problem with guys who cry. I remember when my father died – I cried a lot that day and even at the funeral.”

Even deeper: “I sometimes wonder why it is so hard for me to cry.”

Deeper: “I realize I have never really been given or given myself permission to feel sadness

since I was a young child and I do not think I really got it then.”

The Depths: “I know that the contempt I often feel for people who cry or express sadness is because I am afraid to acknowledge and express those emotions that are perceived as weak and unmanly, and I am projecting my fear and shame onto them. And yet at the same time, I envy them the ability to experience and communicate the full range of human emotion.”

I promise if you immerse yourself in this awareness every time you think you see it clearly you will realize it goes deeper. I can say this with such confidence because despite having been on this journey for twenty years now I am constantly humbled by realizing how deep it runs for me and all of the subtle and hidden nuances I keep missing. Or simply realizing how tenacious these ideas are and how often, despite the amount of time I have put into cultivating different levels of awareness, I have to learn the lesson again and gain the same awareness I had previously.

It’s All Made Up

If it hasn’t been challenging enough for you, let’s take it to another level. I often ask my audiences: “What is the inherent meaning of a dress?” The response is often: woman’s clothing, feminine, part of the Woman Rules, or other answers referring in some way to the dress being feminine. I repeat the question: “What is the *inherent* meaning of a dress?” This time I stress the word “inherent”. They look at me a bit quizzically their faces clearly implying, “We just told you.” “Is this a trick question?” No, not at all but an incredibly important question. I continue, “What is the inherent meaning in lipstick? A pink blanket? A tonka toy? A blue blanket?”

The answer: NONE! There is NO inherent meaning in any of them.

The looks on their faces, men and women, say it all: “Huh? What do you mean, of course there is!”

There is NO inherent meaning in any of those items but we have most certainly filled those objects with an incredible amount of meaning. We have made it up. We have imposed meaning on these objects. We have imposed our own meaning that is often unique to our culture. As I mentioned previously, go to another culture and you will see men who wear dresses, sometimes where it is only those who are held in the highest regard. In other cultures men wear lipstick. Watch children play with toys, especially today, and many of them will pick up any toy and play with it, at least until they get a disapproving look from some adult or another child. If you identify as a man and find yourself stranded in some remote location and the only clothing you happened to have was a pair of women’s underwear, a flowery blouse, and a skirt that just happened to fit you? Would you wear them?

Yes, of course, you would!

If it was between having to walk around naked and being somewhat clothed you would wear those clothes. Why? Because a more basic need would transcend any of the meaning we have imposed on the clothing. Yet, simply imagine yourself wearing that outfit. Just take a brief moment to imagine yourself in that situation wearing those clothes.

Even as I write this I imagine the embarrassment and even shame – the resistance to wearing the different items of clothing – that *I would* feel about wearing those clothes. Even though the only person within miles would be me! I’ll come back to that point shortly as it is a very important one. The gist of the point is this: We internalize the Rules and often become the most brutal overseer of them.

Nonetheless, when the search party found me as emotionally and physically exhausted as I was what embarrassment might I feel when they saw me? How would they respond to this “cross-dressing” man they found deep in the forest? What might they make up about me?

Now, take a man who has no idea what a dress or bra is because he is part of a tribal culture. When he comes across them and picks them up does he see a dress? A bra? No he sees pieces of cloth that look a certain way. He surely has no idea that they are “only” for women. We know because it is the meaning we have made up for these particular pieces of cloth. This example is beautifully and humorously expressed in the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. There is nothing in our consciousness as human beings that has not been made up by us to some degree, even when it has been divinely inspired we are still an imperfect channel.

So, if it is all made up why do we even care?

We care because it is so powerful. We care because it runs deep. We care because, despite what we may say to ourselves and others, at some level almost every single human being desires acceptance from others. And gender, and following the Rules of gender and being accepted for following those rules, is connected to one of the deepest desires of acceptance.

Touchy Subject

Even if there is no inherent meaning in any of those objects I listed above you better believe that we get incredibly emotionally attached to that meaning. Just notice the emotions that came up for you when you imagined yourself wearing that “women’s” clothing. Imagine how people respond any time a man breaks one of the Man Rules? The more important we make the Rule the stronger reaction. Men and women. Adults and children. Teachers. Priests. Politicians.

All cultures. We have such strong emotional reactions to these ideas. Young boys are ridiculed for not following the Rules. Young men are still killing themselves by the thousands because they believe there is something wrong with them because *who they are* is against the Rules. Many men are still struggling to respond to their kids without the Rules controlling their response; without them reacting out of shame from their own experience as kids. On a daily basis, many boys all around the world are having the Man Rules figuratively and quite literally beaten into them.

Think about how men and women respond to someone who *really* breaks the Rules? The man who dresses up in women's clothing. The person who refuses specific pronouns. The woman who tapes her breasts. The man who is very openly emotional in his relationships. The women who compete in arenas previously reserved for men. The little boys who hold hands. The two young men who hold hands and are very physically affectionate with one another. The list could go on.

Warning! Caution! Before Proceeding.

This book is not for the faint of heart. Not at all. The journey you are about to take by going swimming in The Water *with me* will be profound. In fact, it could be one of the most profound experiences of your life. That is a bold statement to make but I say it with the utmost sincerity and humility because it is based upon almost a decade of experience of taking men *and* women into the Water.

This Water runs very deep. You can look at it another way: the Man Rules are so deep inside of us they represent one of the tectonic plates of our consciousness. What happens when

tectonic plates move against one another? They cause incredible disruptions. Prepare yourself for some incredible disruptions.

Just when you think you have resolved their effect on your life it goes deeper. You see another element you hadn't seen before or hadn't been ready to look at. There is no end to this Awareness. There is no end to Waking Up. And, as a good friend of mine says, there is no end to better! The benefits you will reap from this process will be amazing.

If you read this book to get through it and cross it off of your list to get your spouse or friend off of your back, that is exactly what you will get out of the book. If you treat this as an inquiry that you are moving through slowly with great intention then your experience will be completely different. If you do the exercises I suggest in this book, when I suggest to do them, you will get new awareness about yourself from a much more personal perspective. Speaking of that, did you do the first exercise yet? Go do it! Now. Please.

If you share your work and insights with others in your lives your life will forever change. Each chapter and each group of questions will help you see more of The Water.

You will find yourself inexplicably feeling more and more like the man you had always hoped to be. You will see all the ways that you had arranged your life to not be that man and the subsequent impact this has had on you and your relationships. You will notice some relationships slipping away as you move more toward those who really honor the man you want to be. You will find some of your relationships deepening. More than anything, you will feel permission to create the vision of the man you want to be. You will be able to hear that quiet but emerging voice inside of you steering you toward the man you have always known yourself to be, but perhaps did not have the courage or clarity to move toward.

This is real courage.

You imagine yourself to be your own man? A man who is willing to stand against the crowd?

Let's see!

This journey will test that resolve more than anything you have done before. You will see how much what other men and women think about you means to you. You will see the ways that you constantly go against your own values. You will see what you sacrifice to gain the acceptance of other men and women. You will begin to see some of the ugliness that men engage in when we are with each other and "bonding." You will feel lonely at times. You will wonder if your partner is going to love you *for you* or laugh at you if you really share what you are feeling or thinking.

And then it will happen again.

And again.

And again.

Oh, and if you think you are going to do any of this perfectly forget it. There is no perfection. You will make plenty of mistakes. You will constantly slide back into the man you don't want to be. You will often find yourself, for no obvious reason, acting in ways that completely contradict the path you are now walking. You will not be behaving as the man you truly want to be. That is okay. The difference is that you will be Aware. You will have a vision you can go back to. You will know that behavior is off the mark, can clean it up, learn from it, and move on.

Throughout this process any time you think or say or do anything I would ask you to question: *How does that [behavior/thinking/idea/relationship] fit with the man I want to be?* Without judgment or persecution simply reflect on how whatever you are doing in that moment reflects *the man you want to be*. I will be asking that question of you throughout the rest of the book just to help you remember. It is really the only question you need to ask.

This journey is not about doing it perfectly but doing it consciously.

Your Water: 20 Questions to Begin to See the Water

General Questions

- 1. In what year were you born?*
- 2. How do you identify sexually?*
- 3. What is your gender?*
- 4. What is your highest level of education achieved?*
- 5. What was the socioeconomic status of your family while you were growing up? You can have multiple answers to this question.*
- 6. With what culture do you most identify?*
- 7. With what, if any, religious affiliation were you raised?*
- 8. What percentage of time did you spend with other people just like you (up until age 17)?*
- 9. How many immediate family members have struggled with addiction? How many are in recovery?*
- 10. How many immediate family members were involved in the criminal justice system and for what?*

Questions about Being a Man

- 11. What makes a good man?*
- 12. Who taught you to be a man?*
- 13. What did your father or father figure teach you about being a man?*
- 14. What did your mother or mother figure teach you about being a man?*
- 15. What was the most painful experience you had as a boy?*

- 16. What was the most painful experience you had as a teenager?*
- 17. What are five qualities you admire about yourself as a man?*
- 18. What are five qualities you know you could improve upon to be the best man you could be?*
- 19. What was your relationship with your father like?*
- 20. What was your relationship with your mother like?*
- 21. In a short paragraph talk about the men you would like to be.*

The Man Rules™

Are you beginning to see how the Man Rules show up in your life? Do you see the pressure you feel at times to be a certain kind of man? Think about your day-to-day experiences and look at how many Man Rules you follow. Think about how you may judge yourself as less than manly if you don't follow them. For instance, there is the Rule that real men do not ask for help. This rule contributes to many men remaining lost – in numerous ways - for much longer than necessary, among other problems. You may be pretty good at asking for help, but how do you feel when you do it? It's still hard for me to ask for help, and when I do it is frequently accompanied by some sort of self-criticism. If you are anything like me, every time you ask for help it is a struggle just to get to that point, and once there you probably have at least a twinge of shame around feeling or appearing weak or incompetent or stupid. But with time and practice, it gets better.

Let's start with a very simple exercise. I would like you to take some time to write, in this book, every Man Rule you can think of. Before you do the exercise I want to reiterate this one point: I am not suggesting that the Man Rules are good or bad. They simply are. *You* especially are not good or bad despite what others have said, what you tell yourself, or even some of your worst behavior. You are much more than the sum of your worst behavior. You certainly are *not* your behavior. Men are not good or bad either. Even though we can exhibit some pretty terrible behaviors the vast majority of us are not bad men. Some of us have been deeply wounded and out of those wounds can do some pretty terrible things to other human beings. Yet, some of the greatest gifts we have to give this world come out of our deepest wounds. That is why some people refer to them as “sacred wounds”.

Let's do the list. This is the beginning of truly seeing The Water. I will put the four big ones down and you fill in the rest. However, if any of the four I have listed do not fit for you don't hesitate to cross them out. You also don't have to fill in every space but I encourage you to come back and add to the list as you read throughout the book and do the other exercises. You will be amazed at how much clearer you will see The Water as you think more and more about this.

Testing the Water

- Take some time right now to write down as many Rules about being a man as you can think of in the space provided at the end of this chapter.

What does your list of Man Rules look like? My guess, if your experience is anything like the majority of the men and women I work with, is that you have not previously spent a lot of time consciously thinking about and attempting to identify these Rules. The more I travel the country talking about these issues, the clearer it is that the biggest problem with the Man Rules is how oblivious to them so many of us are.

How aware of your own internal conversations are you? What do the voices from your past tell you about being a man? I encourage you to listen closely without preconceptions. Think back to the questions I had you answer at the end of the first chapter. Only in this way can you come to truly see the Water in which you swim every day.

If we do not consciously call them out, the Man Rules tend to operate in the shadows, driving a lot of our behavior, with little awareness on our part. We treat them as reality, and as inevitable. How often have you heard the dismissive phrase, "Well, that's just how men are"? I

have heard it all of my life, and a lot of the time it did not apply to me. So I thought the only thing that made sense to me at the time which was, *I must not be much of a man*. That sentiment haunted me for a long time, and I didn't think I could tell anyone about it. After all, it is such an unmanly act to whine about not feeling like a man. Just man the fuck up and grow a pair! Once I had the courage to begin talking about the insecurity of feeling like I wasn't a real man and share about the negative judgments I hurled at myself, I heard from man after man that I was not alone; many men have these feelings in common. For many of us, though, those feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt are buried deep within us. After all, being a man means never letting on to anyone that you have such thoughts or feelings! Masculinity is built on the façade that we have it all together.

Let me restate: the Rules are not necessarily bad. How the Rules are taught to us (sometimes literally beaten into us) and how we respond to them can be problematic. Rigidly following the Rules is unhealthy because there is no freedom; there is no choice. The Rules at their extremes are toxic. They lead to disconnection, violence, homophobia, objectification of women, and extreme competition, as well as isolation, loneliness, self-hatred, and misery. Discover who you are despite the Rules, and you cannot help but become the man you were meant to be. With self-aware practice, the Rules become more relaxed and flexible. They feel less like tight, constricting clothes and more like loose-fitting, comfortable garments.

Of course, the Rules are not always specific and concrete; they can be a set of ideas that we react to or resist. For instance, all of my life I have felt more emotional and sensitive than most men (and even women). The Rules, however, dictate that men are not to show emotions other than anger, and that certain emotions, such as fear, sadness, and hurt, are signs of weakness. These emotions are associated with being feminine, which in the context of the Man

Rules has negative connotations. Maybe we feel “less than.” We may even spend a fair amount of time trying not to engage in certain Rules that we consider unhealthy and even destructive, but doing so may affect how we feel about ourselves as men. However, if we’re self-aware and allow ourselves to experience how becoming emotionally vulnerable can enhance the quality of our connections with others, through practice we begin to have a better understanding of the man we want to be rather than one whose relationships are being suffocated by the Rules.

Implicit in many of the Rules are a lot of “don’ts.” For example, if the Rule is “Men have to be strong,” an underlying message is “Don’t be weak.” Which is the greater Rule—that men have to be strong or that men cannot be weak or show weakness of any kind? In other words, the negatives associated with many of the Rules tend to be the stronger part of the message. These “don’ts” are important because, at the heart of it, they are telling us as men what and who *not to be*. How much of your identity is built around what and who you *are not*? How much time do you spend *not being* somebody as opposed to *being someone*, or more importantly, being *who you are* and *who you want to become*?

Interestingly, if you look at the “don’ts” and get rid of the word “don’t,” you get a list of Rules that tend to be associated with a particular group of people. Let’s look at some of them.

- ~~Don’t~~ be weak.
- ~~Don’t~~ show emotion.
- ~~Don’t~~ ask for help.
- ~~Don’t~~ cry.
- ~~Don’t~~ care about relationships.

What group do we tend to identify these statements with? Women. Practically from the moment we are born, men are raised with messages that conflict with those given to girls and women. We

receive messages—explicitly and implicitly—that not only are certain behaviors against the Rules, they are to be avoided because they are associated with the “weaker” sex. Now, consider that some of the same behaviors are exactly what we are expected to practice in our most intimate relationships. This is one of the phenomena that creates serious internal tension for men and conflict between men and women in relationships.

You may be saying, “But, Dan, I don’t live by a lot of these Rules.” Fair enough. But as a man you are still frequently judged consistent with them. Chances are there is still a voice inside you, a model of a “manly” man that you have internalized, with a tendency to judge you more harshly than you realize when you don’t follow the Rules. I know that is the case for me, and I have been living an examined life with respect to my masculinity for a very long time.

The Man Rules have also changed a lot in the past two decades. Every time I present this information to an audience at least one person will say, “Yeah, I get it Dan but you are talking about how things *were* forty years ago not how things *are* today.” I have come to expect this comment. It actually makes a lot of sense because it is what we are seeing with young men today. Sort of.

Is it really that much different? Yes and no.

There is no question that how young boys are being raised is very different from how I was raised and definitely very different from how my father was raised. I consider that a very good thing. Even adult men are showing up differently as men than they ever have before. It is that “relaxed masculinity” from my master’s research again – where men wear the armor of masculinity more loosely and feel permission to do so. The biggest area where we have seen this change is how men are allowed to be fathers which I discuss much more in depth in the chapter on *The Man Rule and Fathers*.

Interestingly, when I do the main exercise of having the audience list out all of the Man Rules they can come up with young men give me the same exact Man Rules as any other group of people. That is The Water. Despite the fact that they will even say: “Yeah, but these are not Rules that I really follow.” It doesn’t take a very long conversation for them to see how much they do live by those same Rules but with little awareness about it. It seems that it has only been surface of the Water that has changed in the past two decades.

If I had to name the dominant feeling for all men – but especially young men – these days it would be one of confusion. Fifty years ago the message and the role of men was clear. Thirty years ago the message was still pretty clear. Today? Not so much. Now there is no clear time when a man – young or old – can express himself in a way that is not strictly by the Man Rules and know that he is safe from ridicule or violence from another man *or* woman. While it may not surprise you to know that men can be quite vicious; women can be as well. The main point is this: while the traditional role may have been stifling and limiting it was clear. Today we are in such a state of flux in our concepts of masculinity that it is simply not clear what is safe and when it is safest.

They have loosened up, allowing for what I referred to in my master’s research as a “relaxed masculinity.” The armor I talked about earlier is less rigid. We have more flexibility and more room in which to move. I am convinced we are on the right path as we evolve as individual human beings and as a society. Unfortunately, I have also found that this relaxed masculinity can cause a great deal of confusion. In the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s the Rules were pretty clear. Men and women knew exactly how to act and how to be in relationship with each other. Half a century later there is much less clarity and certainty. Under what circumstances is it okay to show weakness? When is it acceptable and preferable to be

vulnerable with our authentic emotions? Some men have learned the hard way that when they do not follow the Rules they are made fun of or rejected for not being manly enough, not only by men in their lives, but by women as well. Understandably, women can buy into the Man Rules as much as men do. They don't see the Water either.

The Man Rules provide one very important experience for all men: safety. I get it. We don't talk about safety. Until we get into very safe places and someone cares enough about us to simply ask us and to help us find the words. When we hear our truth about how safe we or do not feel at any given time it may surprise us. Many men actually struggle with feeling safe, especially around other men. So many of us are constantly on guard with other men. *I will say a lot more about this in the chapter where we talk about trauma.*

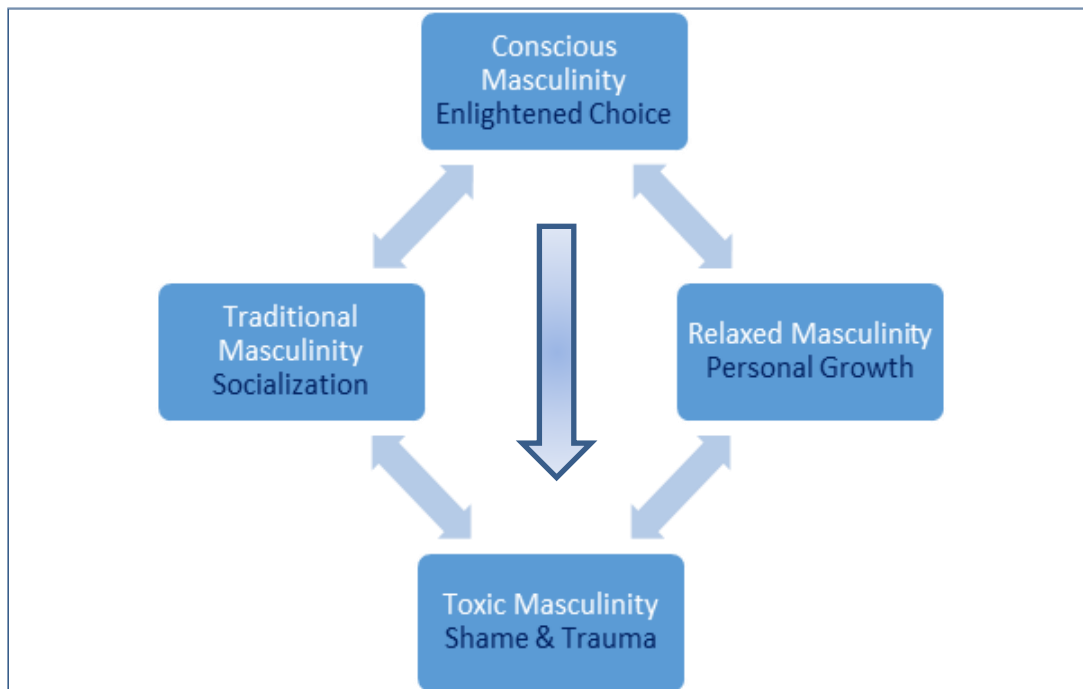
When I ask audiences what following the Man Rules offers men, they often say "acceptance" or "sense of belonging." I will push them to look further underneath that. What does acceptance, a sense of belonging, or being liked give us? Safety.

At the heart of the Man Rules is an attempt for us to feel safe in the world; to not only be validated as men but to truly feel safe and fit in. Every young boy learns that when he follows the Man Rules he is safer in that he is less likely to be made fun of, criticized, beaten up, attacked, marginalized, and so on. The majority of us did not learn the Rules in peaceful conditions. Maybe your home had a more enlightened approach to gender, but no boy escapes the brutality of the schoolyard.

Given how much the process of socialization cuts us off from core parts of our humanity, there is a degree of psychological trauma experienced by every man. For some of us the trauma is severe. To make matters worse, at the heart of any attempts we make to be intimate and truly known to others is a level of vulnerability that we may not be prepared for or have the ability to

navigate. This experience can touch our trauma, triggering it constantly in our most intimate relationships, and when it happens we have no idea what to do and end up sabotaging our relationships as a result.

What I have found helpful has been to distinguish between the four different types of masculinity: toxic, traditional, relaxed, and conscious. If you look at the graphic below you will see how experiences of shame and trauma may influence the development of certain types of masculinity. At the core of toxic masculinity is shame and trauma. This is important because it reinforces the idea that very few men are evil or inherently just assholes – life experiences have helped to create a toxic shell that protects the man as much as it hurts others. Hopefully this also helps to engender some compassion for men who have been deeply hurt while at the same time not condoning any of their aggressive, abusive, or violent behavior.



Ultimately, it is conscious masculinity that I advocate. What does that look like? Well, that is a very personal experience for each man. It is using enlightened choice to be, moment to moment, the man that is most authentic to me for that moment. Conscious masculinity may be a

more traditional type of masculinity or a more relaxed masculinity at any given moment. However, you may also notice that even when one is living in a space of more conscious masculinity if they have a severe shame attack or have a previous experience of trauma triggered he can quickly revert to a more toxic masculinity. A specific example would be in my relationship with my wife. We can be having a wonderful time but if she says or does something that accidentally triggers a shame response in me, if I am not paying attention and taking good care of myself emotionally, I can easily snap into a more toxic response and act like an asshole toward her. It is a defensive reaction that is not okay or appropriate but it is not reflective of whether or not I love her or my status as an inveterate asshole! The more my emotional awareness has increased the more I have been able to increase my reaction time before slipping into more toxic behaviors.

Finally, there is another nuance of the Rules that affects some men differently than others that must not be ignored. The people I have had the honor to train and share this conversation with have helped me to see more of the Water. When we think of criminals or drug dealers, whose face do we tend to see? When we think of illegal immigrants or people doing menial work, if they are even men, whose faces do we see? The point is that the Man Rules are not color-blind or classless. I will never know what it is like to walk down the street and have people fearing me simply because of the color of my skin. Or make judgments about me and my intelligence, moral character, or basic humanity simply because of the color of my skin or who I am drawn to love. The intensity and expression of the Man Rules also seem to be different in the suburbs where I grew up than they are in the inner city, the child protection system, or the juvenile and criminal justice systems. All men are not socialized equally.

Half a Man

Men and women are essentially raised to be half human beings: Women are given one part and men the other. The breakdown could look like this:

<u>Socialization Process</u> ©		
<u>Feminine</u>		<u>Masculine</u>
Emotional Intelligence (EQ)	Intellect	Logical Intelligence (IQ)
Retreat/Isolation/Internalization	Response to Trauma	Aggression/Externalization
Collaboration/Decentralized	Power	Control/Hierarchy
Process/Intuition	Information	Analytical/Rational
Relational	Self-Development	Individuation
Surrender/Intimacy	Sex/Love	Conquest/Performance
Codependence	Relationships	Independence

We hear from an early age that “boys don’t do *that*” and “girls don’t do *that*.” Case in point: My daughter was at her preschool when a very tall man with long hair walked into the building. “That is a very tall woman!” she said with complete seriousness. “That is a man, honey.” “No it’s not. She’s got long hair. Only girls have long hair!” She doesn’t hear it from me, but she still “knows” that boys don’t paint their fingernails or wear long hair. It is not at all uncommon for her to make comments like “Boys don’t do . . .” and “Girls don’t do” I still struggle allowing myself to cry when I am sad and so my daughter thinks I do not cry and therefore thinks men do not cry. She has seen her mother cry numerous times. These are observations she is making about the world in which she lives, and if I do not challenge those comments they become fact for her, stored in the processor of her brain. It becomes part of her Water, with no

awareness on her part that it is happening. It happened to me, and it happened to you.

There Is No Gender Neutral

Without breaking into a treatise on oppression and marginalization, as a sociologist it is important for me to recognize that we cannot ignore the reality that some people receive benefits and advantages in this society simply because they belong to a certain category. And others get just the opposite—deficits and disadvantages—because they belong to another category or, said another way, do not belong to the dominant group. In terms of gender, men are the dominant group in our society (as in many others). Our society is patriarchal and “maleness” is the norm, the expectation, and even the subconscious default for many men and women. Unless both men and women are aware of this, it infiltrates all of our relationships in insidious ways. Once we are aware of it, we can choose to transcend it.

The issue of gender becomes even more complicated when you consider gay men or men of color who are part of a dominant group (men) and also members of a minority or marginalized group. As Gary put it in my first book, *A Man's Way through the Twelve Steps*, “Even though I am a man, I am a gay man, and being a gay man is the worst of both worlds. I am seen as a predator, weak, dangerous, sick, and as the ‘other’ all at once by the same people.” Psychologically, this can have seriously damaging effects on how these men express their masculinity and how they are able to engage in their relationships.

As we adhere to the old adage “To thine own self be true,” we begin to move toward wholeness as individuals. We round out the rough edges of our character and discover our true selves. The more we engage in the process of personal growth, the more likely we are to move toward authentically expressing who we are. One aspect of this process is learning to love parts

of ourselves that we were taught or told were not okay. Another aspect is coming to embrace parts of ourselves that we rejected. A third aspect is expanding what we see as possible, including ways of being that we never considered or had rejected without ever exploring, often because “boys (or girls) don’t act that way.” As I stated earlier, as a young boy I was always sensitive. I learned very early growing up in my home that being sensitive was not okay (or emotionally safe). I learned to fear and hate that part of myself because I thought it was not manly. I have come to realize that it is a central part of who I am and I do not care if others think it is manly or not. In fact, it is a wonderful quality when I choose to express it in a healthy way.

Chances are you have your own examples of similar experiences. What is important is to be able to verbalize those experiences in a safe environment. This requires doing the work of self-examination and self-discovery. Equally important, however, is that you look at your experiences through the lens of gender to help the unseen become seen.

On a spiritual and moral plane, we don’t ever prosper by treating others as inferior or second class, or by engaging in any of the other ways human beings disparage one another. Nor do we ever prosper by accepting such statements. Such actions affect our spirit deeply. We are aware, are living an examined life, and are challenged to see that other people are not responsible for our behavior. And we become aware that the differences between individuals do not automatically confer a status of one person as “better than” another. In fact, the differences enrich our lives. Ultimately, the two primary questions for men that I pose are: How are your behaviors consistent with the man the people in your life truly want you to be? More importantly, how are your behaviors and the beliefs you maintain reflective of the man you want to be?

If you want to have loving and fulfilling relationships, I cannot stress this enough: Screw the Rules! Be who you are, and you cannot help but show up, authentically and as the best man you could ever be.

Your Man Rules

In the spaces provided below write down all of the Man Rules you can think of. If you get stuck remember these tips:

- Think about the Rules you learned from your parents/caregivers, school, neighborhood/community, the media, and workplace. If you are having trouble, think of them in the following areas: Self, Relationships, Activities, Power, Sexuality, and Spirituality.
- Think of Rules that reinforce a healthier idea of masculinity. While the majority of the Rules are neither inherently bad nor good, how they tend to be enforced can be rigid and restricting. However, there are Man Rules like integrity and self-discipline that seem to be inherently healthy traits.

1. **Don't cry**
2. **Don't be weak**
3. **Don't show feelings other than anger**
4. **Don't ask for help**
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