



# If Men Give Love to Get Sex

*by Micah J. Murray*

I've always wanted to get it right the first time. I don't like to make mistakes. I don't like to learn from experience; I'd rather learn from books. So when I was getting ready to propose to the girl who would become my wife, I read everything I could about how to have a good marriage.

One phrase emerged as a consistent theme, a thread of folk wisdom running across a spectrum of dating and marriage advice:

"Women give sex to get love. Men give love to get sex."

It seemed reasonable enough. And it fit neatly with the gender stereotypes I'd heard all my life: Men think about sex every seven seconds. Women aren't visual. Men are like microwaves; women are like crockpots.

But, as a newly married man, I soon discovered that these ideas were both inaccurate and damaging in our

relationship. Beneath the glib cliché was an economic model of sex-bartering that undermines the very essence of love.

If it's true that men give love to get sex, then our shared sexuality is simply a business arrangement, a deal brokered in flowers and kisses. My wife is a deluxe call girl with a long-term contract, marriage is sheer capitalism, and love is a filthy currency.

This sort of thinking drives a wedge between my wife and me, as if we're more different than the same. As if her "emotional needs" are beyond my understanding and experience. As if my thirst for sex overshadows my thirst for a relationship. As if love is something that I'd simply cash in for sexual fulfillment.

This is every sort of false. Before we were lovers, we were friends. I can live without sex, but I deeply need my relationship with my wife.

The gender roles perpetuated in this sex/love arrangement distort our humanity. The man who "gives love to get sex" is assumed to be the paragon of "masculinity"—cool, dangerous, unaffected by soft, "girly" emotions and romance. In control of his world. Stooping to the realm of flowers and chocolates and poetry only to drive a smart deal with a big return in bed.

But in reality, this man—and the version of masculinity he embodies—is not a role model to be emulated or a hero to be cheered. Rather, this false stereotype of masculinity reduces men to base creatures—driven to manipulate women for their own satisfaction, unable to contain their own desires.

This cartoon of a man isn't in control of his own destiny at all, despite all the faux-manly posturing. He is at the mercy of his desires, a slave to his own sexuality.

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But I think we're better than this.

If we can move beyond easy stereotypes and cheap clichés, we can abandon a sex/love marketplace for genuine, fulfilling relationships.

I'm convinced now that those marriage books I read when we were dating were wrong. For whatever wisdom they may have had, they focused so much on the differences between men and women that it seemed we were more different than the same.

I am a man. I like sex. These two statements are both true, but this is not a uniquely male condition. Neither sex nor love is the sole domain of men or women. I don't believe men give love to get sex, nor do I believe that women simply endure sex to get love. I believe that we all crave meaningful relationship and connection in every aspect of our lives—our spirituality, our families, our sexuality, our community.

But when we reinforce our differences rather than our shared humanity, we shame both men and women for the very real needs and desires that we experience—for sex and for love.

Rather than giving love to get sex, let's give love because we are created to do so. Because giving and receiving love transcends shallow gender stereotypes and gets to the heart of what it means to be truly human.

Rather than perpetuating stereotypes that create walls of isolation and shame between us, let's find common space and meet each other there.



Micah J. Murray loves words, people, coffee, and Jesus. He writes about church and culture at *Redemption Pictures*, *A Deeper Story*, and the *Huffington Post*. Micah lives in Charlotte, NC, with his wife and two small boys. You can follow Micah on Twitter @micahjmurray.

### Join the Conversation

What are the most helpful things you've learned about relationships, sex, and masculinity (or femininity)?

How has the stereotyping of men and women impacted the relationships in your life?

What advice do you have for young couples preparing for marriage?

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