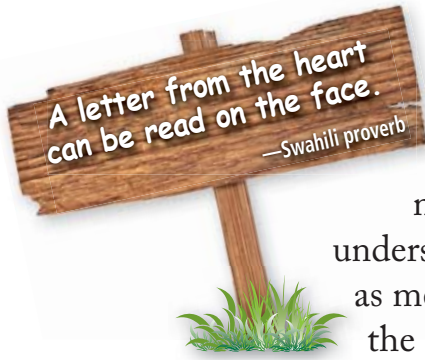
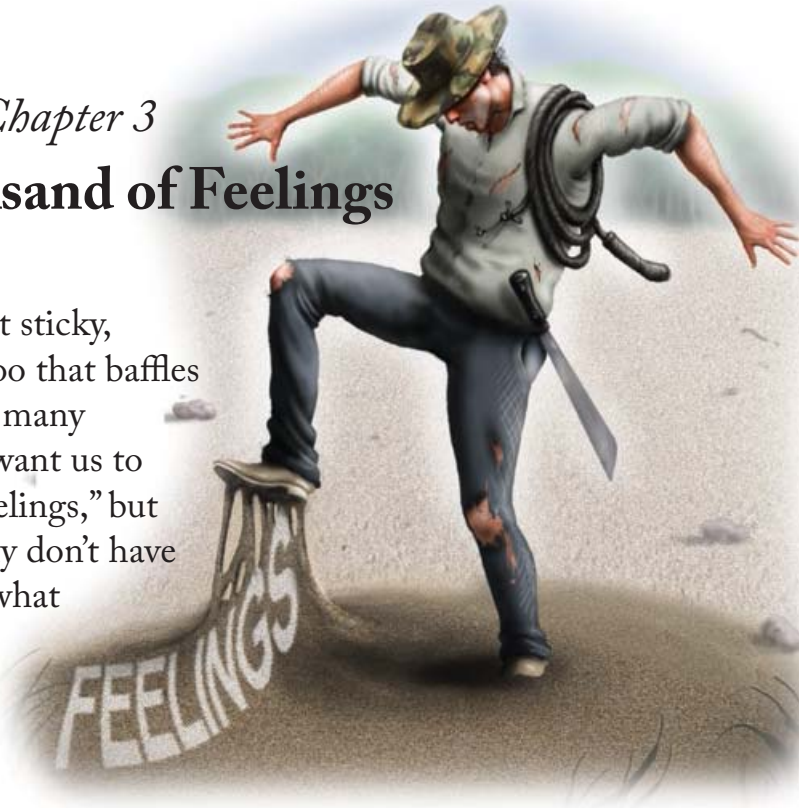


Chapter 3

The Quicksand of Feelings



Feelings—that sticky, primordial goo that baffles and traps so many men. Women want us to understand their “feelings,” but as men we generally don’t have the foggiest idea what that means or what to do with them. This part of the jungle, and especially this quagmire, can be intimidating to say the least.



How do we navigate through this seemingly testosterone-free, estrogen-immersed zone in which women seem to thrive? It’s not that guys have experienced some kind of emotional bypass surgery; it’s just that most guys tend to function quite well in black and white. They have a very simplified emotional world—good or bad, win or lose, hot or cold, sad or happy, hungry or full. It’s a meat-and-potatoes way to live. Life’s pretty simple that way. And it works for guys . . . until we get into a relationship. Then we encounter a woman’s emotional world in living color. Before I show you how to get through the quicksand, let’s look at how differently women are wired.

The Biology of Emotion

Deep inside the brain, there is a tiny organ that is shaped like an almond. It’s called the amygdala (*ahh-MIG-dah-lah*). This is the center of a woman’s emotional limbic system—it’s the mother ship of her emotions. Men have one too, but the amygdala of a woman is *slightly larger* than a man’s.



Right next to the amygdala is the hippocampus which appears to consolidate new information into long-term memories. Together they create “emotional memories.” The hippocampus in women is *slightly larger* than a man’s as well. (Perhaps this is why women don’t forget anything!) So the two major places in the brain dedicated to emotion are larger in women than in men.



Long term emotional memories stored here

I can hear men saying, “Isn’t there anything in *my* brain that’s bigger?” Yes, there is—your hypothalamus. It’s 2.2 times larger than a woman’s! It helps regulate hunger, thirst, and sex.⁵ Connect the dots.

There may be times when the “stereotypical” roles given to men and women in our culture are reversed. Sometimes the man is more emotional, and the woman much less so. For the purpose of illustration, these roles are a broad brush, but there is absolutely nothing wrong when emotional stereotypes are reversed.

Most women, but not all, tend to think in “emotional footprints”—that is, they look at things through an emotional lens.⁶ Let me explain. If I clapped my hands directly in front of your face, you would be startled in 2.5 milliseconds. In 250 milliseconds you would then *think* about what just happened, and then you would refile it under another feeling—“I’m safe.” So we *feel*, *think*, and then *feel* again. That’s why I say women think in emotional footprints. Actually both men and women do. People assume thoughts and feelings are in two separate boxes, but they are really braided and interwoven to the point that it is difficult, many times, to make a decision without emotion.

- How can a man *begin* to understand what a woman is feeling?
- How can a man *help her feel safe* in expressing her feelings?
- What’s a man *supposed to do with her feelings* anyway?

Survival Tip Memorize the Heartbeat of a Woman

You can answer all three of these questions successfully if you understand *The Heartbeat of a Woman*. Open the foldout, and I’ll show you how a woman’s world of feelings works.