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The Incredible Shrinking Man

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If television reflects the state of the sexes, men are in trouble.

I've watched two episodes now of ABC's *Cashmere Mafia* and I see a gaggle of males who are insecure, dependent, jealous and damaged. I caught a few episodes of *Big Shots*, and I see stooges with money - self involved twits who endlessly discuss their sorry lives over Scotch and cigars. And on the first episode of HBO's *In Treatment*, a patient tells her therapist about her boyfriend crying because their relationship wasn't going anywhere and he wants to start a family. "Haven't you heard," she said, "men are the new women."

OK, I'm not talking heavyweight social commentary here. But collectively, these shows say something different is going on in the world of men. There is a new man out there. But is he the man we're seeing on television? Partly, yes. Mostly - and thankfully - no.

In the *Cashmere Mafia* there is no doubt about the women: smart, tough, poised, stylish, on top and in command. But the men are hazy - split among babies and bastards, not terrible as much weak. Granted, this is a show written for women. But it at least raises a question about experience and expectations.

Conversely, and interestingly, there is also a new woman on television. Pick a cop show, and the female partner is *Dirty Harry* - only nicely accessorized. On *Law and Order SVU*, Olivia even beats up an occasional perp.

It's confusing out there in the world of XY chromosomes. We need to sort a few things out.

I'm all for the newly-expressive male. But there is a fine line between a man who is in touch with his feelings and one that clutches them to his chest in a weepy embrace. At what point does a man unburdening his emotions make you wonder: "Did Steve McQueen ever do this?"

Now the good news. Studies show that men are, in fact, changing.

And one of the changes will have a lot to say about the next generation of kids: families have moved to the center of their lives. Maybe it's working wives; maybe it's the distance they felt from their own fathers whose sole responsibility was to sole provider; maybe it's another evolutionary click of the wheel away from the days when men went out in the morning to kill for food.

Whatever the combination of reasons, there is a new dad in the house. According to Dr. Warren Farrell, the author of the book *Father and Child Reunion*, the desire of dads to be involved with their children "is to the twenty-first century what women's desire to be in the workplace was to the twentieth century."

A 2007 survey by the employment Web site Monster.Com found that 70 percent of fathers would consider being a stay at home parent if money were no object. Almost 50 percent of dads of school aged children took paternity leave when their employer offered it.

It's also obvious in small moments. Men hug more, they help with homework, they listen more, they even leave early for soccer practice. Men have not become mothers; but they have come far from the distant, silent providers of the past.

I say welcome, new man. You have never been more important. And I know you're not the one I see on television.

Get a pedicure if it makes you feel good. Have your back waxed if you want to. And by all means continue your evolution into a, breathing, loving, contributing member of the family.

But, if possible, please:

Don't chatter about your feelings, tell us what you don't like about your bodies, botox your eye wrinkles, or order Appletinis. And outside of family tragedy, the end of *Brian's Song* or when they put down Barbaro, keep the tears to a minimum.