

The relationship crisis for men

Guest: Shana James

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Meagen Gibson - [00:00:09]

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Relationship Super Conference.

Today I'm speaking with Shana James. For 15 years, Shana has coached people to find love, rekindle spark, step into their leadership, create legacy, increase their impact, and become more personally inspired and fulfilled.

Shana is a certified coach with a Masters in Psychology and 15 years facilitating workshops on authenticity and communication. Her deep spiritual practice adds support for stuck spots in your career, love and life and sole purpose. She loves working with people who are sensitive and seek a deeper understanding of life and love.

Shana, thank you so much for being with us today.

Shana James

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Meagen Gibson

So as I understand it, your current work is mostly with men. And what is one of the things that you see as being the biggest breakdown between men and women?

Shana James

Yeah. It feels to me like, I would call it a relationship crisis these days. And it may not be limited just to genders or to heterosexual relationships, but I do see that there's a particular thing happening with men and women right now. And one of the pieces of it is that men tend to feel like they need to shoulder the burden of many things. I mean, women do, too, right. So let's not like...

Meagen Gibson

But we will do it but the way it looks on the outside...

Shana James

It's different. And so as an ally for men, what I often see is that they can feel like they're dying inside, or they can feel like they're drowning or underwater or they're supposed to not ask for help, they're supposed to just barrel through it, world on their shoulders, and that does not create intimacy or connection.

And then we as women, in a way it's kind of awesome for a man to be strong and powerful and to be the rock. And yet, at the same time, if there's nowhere that he's actually able to express the fears and the struggles and the hopes and the dreams that we, as all human beings, have, not just women, men have them too, then he can start to shut down and pull away and be emotionally unavailable and distant or grumpy, or all kinds of things can happen.

And overall, he might be a super nice guy and may not feel cherished or loved or seen or really heard or understood or pleased or any of those things, because he's off in his little internal world not knowing what to do and full of all of this stuff, because the older we get, the more there is. When we're parenting and working and the financial responsibilities, and there's tons of stuff happening.

So I think one of the parts of the crisis is that men aren't supported to come out with that, and then it keeps them stopped up and internal in a way.

Meagen Gibson - [00:03:12]

So if I hear you right, it's that men are not given permission to be fully human outside of their internal world, right?

Shana James

Totally. And, I did a TEDx talk, and it was called *What A Thousand Men's Tears Reveal About The Crisis Between Men and Women* and some of it is that we, as women, haven't really been taught, like when a man expresses emotion, if he gets sad or he feels hopeless, or he feels devastated or he feels hurt, it's okay, let him express that, let him feel that. We have to do our own work as women to know I'm not a bad person. There's nothing wrong with me. I'm not unlovable. We have to depersonalize it and then also remember that just because he's expressing these things doesn't mean that's who he is now and forever.

He will come back to his strength, his power, his compassion, all of that, actually even more so if he has space to be able to share some of that.

Now, it's different when someone becomes chronically depressed or when they're constantly complaining. There are subtleties here. And I think that's why people end up working with you or me or someone like that, because it's like, wait a minute now I'm inviting this but now that's all he talks about. It can get tricky in there. But ultimately, if you two aren't actually having discussions or connecting about those deeper layers, then there's not going to be, passion is not going to last, and the intimacy is not going to build.

Meagen Gibson

And I'm so glad that you mentioned that, because that's exactly what I was thinking while you were speaking is that the person, the man in this situation, will figure out a way and a space in which they can express those feelings, regardless, what's going to suffer in there, a woman in this situation, in this relationship, hasn't done their own work, can't allow for that kind of expression in their partner.

And the only thing that's going to suffer is the intimacy of that relationship, the relational ability of that relationship, and who they turn to when they are feeling weak or unsupported or were scared or the burden of too much has been put on them.

And I can relate to that as a partner. There have been a couple of times where my husband has had these sorts of feelings, and it definitely activates me. Even though I know all of this, even though I know I need to allow space for, yeah, I need to allow space for him to be a fully expressed human being and have bad days or have weaknesses or have fears. But I have noticed that activation in me of what it does and all the fear response and all of, what does this mean? And where's the ground of my being in this relationship and in our stability, if you're feeling weak?

Shana James - [00:06:15]

Exactly right. And then that points to where we, as women, need to do our own work, to not be so thrown, to not be depending, oh, you're my ground. No, I have to be my ground. We can be the ground together. We can co-create together, collaborate together, but if I'm counting on you to be the ground it's a recipe for, I was going to say disaster, maybe not disaster, but it's not a recipe for thriving.

Meagen Gibson

For nurturing, closeness and intimacy and walking the same path of life together, right?

Shana James

Yeah. Exactly.

Meagen Gibson

So what does it look like to make space for men's feelings, validate them? And how can people communicate those feelings? What kind of intimacy can we create in the right way?

Shana James

Yeah. I was just thinking, I had a couple images flash in my mind, the difference between being bitter or like, you never talk to me. Or why don't you? With some kind of attacking or shaming, right? Versus, hey, I love you. I care about you. It seems like something's going on. I want this relationship to be a safe place for you to share. I can get that it would probably be scary, because the closer we are, the less scarier it gets. And there might be some commitment in there or some agreement together.

I find couples don't often make agreements about their relationship or their communication but if you take a step back, might be like, well, maybe we want to agree to loving each other through some of these challenging times or challenging emotions, or we're going to open up this part of our relationship. And if either one of us needs help, or if either one of us starts to feel like, hey, you're not who I thought you were, we're going to get some help. We're going to get a therapist. We're going to get a coach. We're going to talk to our friends. We're going to do something.

Because, I was just thinking of my current relationship, it's about 3 and a half years. And when we started, we were like, maybe we should just show all the shit first. And shit is actually a bad way to say it because it's not bad, right. But maybe we should show the darker side and the shadows. And maybe we should just not try to hide them from each other like people do.

Meagen Gibson

Don't show the shiny surface first. Show the dents and scratches.

Shana James

Exactly. And there were a couple of moments where I was like, this might be a bad idea. We might not actually make it. But there's something really freeing at this point to know, all right, you don't love me because I'm trying to put on some façade right? There's love here because we respect each other. We're holding space for each other.

And I just had a couple of different things that I think a couple of the keys are, being an invitation, committing to and even saying this out loud, I love you and I know that all human beings, including men, have deep feelings and fears, and it doesn't make you less than, and if I start to think that it might, then I'm actually going to do my own work to recognize that. Just because you express something doesn't mean you're a different person.

Meagen Gibson - [00:09:25]

Right. And I found, and I'm going to over generalize here, but women, we tend to do a lot of psychological Sherlock Holmes-ing. And we invent a lot of stories. We create a lot of narratives to fill in the gaps of what we don't know, what we might suspect. And I don't even mean anything nefarious, it's not, is he having an affair? Is there infidelity? It's really just maybe he's worried about getting old, or maybe he doesn't like his job anymore.

Shana James

Maybe he doesn't like my body anymore. We do that thing too where we make it bad about ourselves.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely, right.

What have I done? So instead of creating these narratives, and there's so much relationship dynamic and history that's involved in the way that these patterns develop and evolve. So you might be going on, on cruise control for 10 years and there's not a problem until something happens in your partner's life that triggers something in them and then all of a sudden you know that they're having an emotional experience that you're not tuned into, you haven't created that space, and so they're hesitant.

And I can just imagine, how do we, how does that, I mean you spoke a little bit about the invitation, but I'd also love to hear from the accountability of the partner's perspective of, hey, I know that I haven't necessarily been the sounding board or the safe space for you in this, in the past. And I don't know what's going on for you, and I can't guarantee you I won't react. I can't guarantee you I won't have big feelings, but I'm going to try not to let them get in the way of what's going on. I'm going to try to do my own work.

Shana James

That was brilliantly said. Because I think when we start to acknowledge I haven't been this person in the past. I haven't done this, but I want to, I'm committed to it.

After my TEDx talk came out, one of my old college friends texted me and said, oh my gosh, this is what my husband has been saying and asking for and I couldn't quite wrap my mind around it but now I really get that I can be there with him when he's vulnerable.

She was kind of taking on, sometimes people see it as the masculine role of fixing. She was like, I was doing that. Trying to fix him for having feelings, and he didn't want to be fixed. And so I said to him, I acknowledge, oh, I can see that I was doing this. And this is what I want to do and how I want to be. And like you said, there are relationship dynamics that kind of turn into baggage. And, well, you always do this and you always do that.

And so a beautiful thing for couples, too, and I was super guilty of this in my marriage, I would do that, he would say something that he was upset with and I would be like, well you. Anytime you find yourself saying well you it's like, nope, I'm not actually hearing what my partner is saying. And if I need to say something later, if there's something happening that still I'm upset with I can circle back to that in the conversation, but first can we actually listen?

And one of my favorite books is called *Undefended Love*. Do you know that one?

Meagen Gibson

No, but I love the title already.

Shana James - [00:12:32]

It's so powerful and really looking at how we think we need to defend ourselves. We think there's something we need to prove. And when we can let that go, then we can actually hear our partners. I don't know, I don't think I answered your question.

Meagen Gibson

You did. You did.

And it brings up such a great point, because I actually started a practice a couple of years ago when if my partner was saying something that I wanted to do, one of the, well, what about or when you, I would just write it down even on my phone, jot it down really quick so that I had, whatever I thought was super important to counter with, I would write it down and then note to myself, this is something that if this is really actually that important to you, you can bring it up at a different time, now is not the time.

Shana James

It seems like we're going to die. It seems like if I don't bring it up now, I can never bring it up. And yet that's where we have to see their own nervous systems and be like, there's time. This is okay.

Meagen Gibson

Right. Right. This is not the appropriate time in which to approach that problem that you're having. Now is the time. And so I'll just, I write it down and then I'm like, all right so I don't quite understand what you're saying, but I want to. Can you say more?

Shana James

I love that. That's so sweet. I don't quite understand but I really want to.

And thinking back to, my partner and I don't often fight, I think because we really practice communication. And if there's something going on, we have a specific practice for how we share about it.

We had one a couple of years ago and we both were like stewing and then finally, we both had the same idea. We were like, alright, let's go sit on the couch and why don't we each share what's most vulnerable about this for each of us?

And so there's a willing to go first, and there's an invitation for the other person. And so you can actually, okay, even just one layer deeper. Why does that scare you? Or what did it remind you of? Or who do I seem like to you right now? I mean, that question can be a little confusing, but sometimes it's like, oh, you seem like my mom. Or you seem like my dad. Or sometimes when my partner is complaining about something, I'm like, I can hear my family's voices of complaints.

And so then I'm like, I have a big reaction. It's not as much about him as it is to recognize we have all of this loaded up baggage.

Meagen Gibson

The history.

Shana James

A history in our own psyches.

Meagen Gibson - [00:15:02]

Absolutely. It's so often when we're having a big reaction to somebody else's emotions, that is history coming into playing. Right?

Shana James

Totally.

Meagen Gibson

I know how this is, and it's a protective mechanism. It's completely understandable. We're collecting data our entire lives to protect us. And so when something pulls up that file of data and says, this sounds a lot like this, completely understandable, but not really useful in that moment unless you're actually in a dangerous situation.

Shana James

And it reminds me of this big fight I had with my ex husband, where we were about to go to Burning Man in my younger days, when I was actually adventurous, and we had a fight about a water bottle. He wanted a plastic water bottle that closed. I was like, we already have water bottles. He was like, yeah, but they don't seal. This is like life and, for him, it was life and death. For me, it was like, we're impacting the environment and we're spending money that I don't want to spend.

And if we had both been able to say at that point, hey, here's what I'm concerned about. Here's what really matters to me. Can you try to understand that. If we could have slowed down and soothed our nervous systems enough to have that kind of conversation. And if I had the humility to be like, okay, I don't like it, but I see that you're a different person looking for different things. This is something you need. I'm going to go along with it. Then we can start to respect each other's needs and preferences.

Meagen Gibson

Right. I understand why it's important to you.

And it's so interesting because we often feel like in order to, if we understand the other person, it means we have to compromise in some way. And a lot of times no compromise happens at all. It's literally just the intimacy that you're protecting through that understanding. It's, I understand. I might not agree with you at all, more than I did before we started talking.

Shana James

And I respect you. I respect you enough to give you that understanding and to recognize that whether I'm pinch or contracted, that's mine.

Meagen Gibson

And I imagine if somebody that's watching this hasn't yet, they will at some point in a long-term relationship have an experience where their partner has a lot of big emotions they've never seen before.

I remember this happened to me early in my relationship with my husband. We watched a movie, and the credits started, and he burst into tears. And it was out of left field. I was like, whoa. I couldn't believe it was happening. It literally hasn't happened since. But that was such a moment to lean in and say, I'm incredibly confused about what's going on. Please open up to me. And it took time. The lights went up, they had come through and swept the theater. We were there for a long time, just waiting and holding space for it.

And so I would just love to talk to you about that kind of experience. If somebody's having a really big emotional reaction. And those can be a lot of things. They can be anger, they can be sadness, grief and tears. They can look like a lot of things. And how to hold space for that, if that might be your first experience with your partner?

Shana James - [00:18:18]

Yeah. Well, you so beautifully spoke to it also, to give it space and give it time and not rush.

And oftentimes, I think it's Alison Armstrong who talks about asking a question and giving a man, even maybe a full minute to respond, because we, as women, often have it loaded up and this and that we're so used to being in community and chatty and connected.

Meagen Gibson

We want to fill the silence if nothing's coming.

Shana James

Exactly. So that's one of the things she says, is not to fill the silence and really just to be caring and loving as much as possible. And, it's okay if you notice, well, this is a little bit uncomfortable for me or something like, you can say something like, you know what? I don't totally know what to say here. Or I've never really done this before. And I know that I love you and I care about you.

So you could ask a question, like, what do you need? Or how could I love you best right now? How can I be here for you? And he may not know either. So maybe let's co-discover or co-figure this out, because I've never expressed this much before either. And part of me just really wants to curl into a ball or run away. And I don't want you to see this.

I found myself saying that too many times to partners when I'm expressing, this is the last thing I really want you to see but okay, if we're going to be closer this is a part of me also.

So I think there's the invitation, like you said, slowing down and then also remembering, I'm not all my feelings. He's not all of his feelings, like all these things. And we have all these different parts and they're going to move around and we're going to express and they're going to be messy. And there's more to us than all of that. We have our thoughts, we have our emotions, we have our body. We also have, like, for people who feel that this deeper soul place in us and more of an essential being. And we are all those things.

And so just to remember if the fear shows up, okay, he's not just this. I'm not just my fear. He's not just his fear. And it can help to get support too. Maybe it's something, I mean, I would not suggest as soon as the emotions come up, like, do you think you need to see a therapist? But it might be like, I'm here with you and also, I don't have experience with this, so maybe it would be good to find someone to talk to. Maybe it would be good to find some support or a men's group or whatever it may be. So you don't have to be alone in this. I don't want you to be alone.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Shana James

I don't think it's healthy for couples to just only have each other to bring your emotional depths and whatevers to because we need other people in other places so that we can also have the playfulness and the passion and the family time and all the other things that need to happen.

Meagen Gibson - [00:21:21]

And I found this happens in all my relationships, even with my kids, when somebody's expressing a huge emotion that you can't relate to or that you think is disproportionate to the thing that has upset them, or you don't understand it because it's not your experience is that when I'm completely caught off guard and really don't know how to support, I just say thank you for being this way with me. Thank you for showing me this.

Shana James

Thank you for trusting me.

Meagen Gibson

Thank you for trusting this.

Shana James

I don't exactly, I don't totally understand it yet, like you said, I want to. I don't quite know. And in parenting I often have that question of is this a time for helping my kids self soothe? For me coming in, is this a time for me saying, listen, that's not how we talk to each other?

I want to say that even having done this work for 20 years with people and 25 years probably on my own, it still can be confusing and that we can even make that part right. Like, wow, this is a little confusing. Okay, I'm going to give myself a moment or I'm going to give myself some time, or we could take a walk. Or sometimes my partner and I will meditate for 5 minutes or just sit silently if meditation isn't your thing. Let's just sit and close our eyes and just let our nervous system settle and then see what's there.

And that actually is, my partner and I have a practice where we inquire into ourselves without using you language, you did this. I'm feeling this. I'm feeling nervous. I'm feeling scared. I'm feeling whatever. And we share that with each other and sometimes even set a timer. I'm going to talk for 5 minutes. You're going to talk for 5 minutes. Then we're going to come together and we're going to have a dialogue back and forth. But first, we're just going to listen to each other and really check in with ourselves and see what's going on here.

Meagen Gibson

And I know that we've described a lot of ideal situations. So I also want to talk about the opposite of that, which is when we can't think with our better brain and don't properly support people or reject their emotions.

For generations people have been telling boys that grow into men to disregard their feelings or to toughen up or to act like a man, etc, and all these messages that aren't necessarily helpful.

And so if you're a man, your full expression is rejected by your partner or the person you're in an intimate relationship with. What do you do with that?

Shana James

Yeah. Okay. So if you're someone who's being rejected? Oftentimes, if I'm working, whether it's whatever gender, I would say there's a way that I help people stand up for themselves and first recognize, oh, there's nothing wrong with this in me.

First, we have to know that there's nothing wrong with it, because otherwise if someone else rejects us, we'll just be like, oh, yeah, I am bad and wrong. Oh, there is something wrong with me. So first, it's oh yeah, I have fears, I have feelings, I want things, I don't like things, all of that is okay.

And then there's a standing up for oneself with love. I know you're telling me that there's something wrong with this and over here, what I believe is, I'm a good person. I have feelings. This is a part of me. And so what I really want from you or need from you is would you be willing to allow me to have these feelings? Would you be willing to actually listen to me instead of trying to fix me? And then would you be willing versus I need you to do something different.

So that's the strong standing up for oneself and as much as possible with an open heart, with compassion for the other person. Because if we really get into it, nobody wants to hurt each other. If you look at the other person and they're attacking you, it's like they're in some kind of, Eckhart Tolle calls it the pain body or other teachers have different ways of saying it. They're not in their highest self. They're not in their heart either. And it's usually because of fear or some kind of childhood experience they haven't learned.

And so wow. I mean, it's masterful, but can you have compassion for someone else who's actually blaming you or shaming you or making you wrong? That's the mountain we're all climbing, and it's not easy to get there.

Meagen Gibson - [00:25:58]

Absolutely. Because that requires a lot of people. You've expressed something that's scary or surprising to you, that's a big emotion, and you're being rejected and it's being thrown back at you. And to be able to say, like, wow, the person that I just shared with is not currently capable of receiving this and I'm going to also have compassion for that.

Shana James

Yeah. And going back to what we were saying before, how can I be my own ground? How can I know, woah that feels like I just got stabbed with a knife. Okay. I am okay. I don't like it. It doesn't feel good. I would rather not be this way. And I'm okay. And then from there, we could say something like, wow, that did not feel good. Wow, I really wish that had gone differently. Can we try that again? Would you be willing to try that again?

Meagen Gibson

Right. And I'm sure there's so much contextual, not specificity, but context here that just so many situations in which, I know that I've had this before where sometimes I just tell my husband I'm like, I love all of you, I just need you to work on the when and the how you approach. I would love to talk about this but while I'm bouncing a baby on my hip and cooking dinner is just not the right time.

Shana James

And that's masterful, right. You are expressing incredible mastery.

Meagen Gibson

This is my retelling. I'm sure if we pulled him in here, he would be like, oh, that's how you said it went.

Shana James

That's how you said it. Actually, you told me to fuck off.

Meagen Gibson

Exactly. Right. I'm sure that's happened.

Okay. So I would love, for the women watching, to just give specific examples of the ways that women communicate that push men away and how they can repair.

Shana James - [00:27:49]

Yeah. So the biggest one I would say, is complaining versus sharing desires.

And so I spoke to it a little bit before, but imagine that if there's something that you are not liking, the opposite side of the coin is that there's something that you're wanting. If you want it to stop, then you want something else to start. If you don't want this, you want something different.

And so it seems like, and I know I've done this many, many times myself where it seems like, but if I don't share the complaint, I'm not going to feel heard. And you're going to seem like the better one. I'm going to seem like, you know, but it just doesn't work, really. It doesn't create trust or intimacy. It doesn't inspire a man to say, oh, I want to do that for you. Speaking to the desires rather than the complaint is really helpful, and then we'll bring connection back when you are pushed away.

Meagen Gibson

I love that example because, and I can think of something immediately in my own life just to give people frames of reference, I spent years, probably a decade where at the end of a school break, at the end of summer, at the end of a long holiday week or something like that, the house would just be an absolute disaster. There's just toys and stuff everywhere. And my kids take the term, throw pillow, super literally so pillows are all over the floor. And it would amp up my anxiety.

And so I would spend a full Friday and Saturday just complaining about the mess, complaining about the mess, wanting people to clean it up. When is it gonna get cleaned up? Who's cleaning up with me? And no one wants to clean up. Everybody wants to make a mess. No one wants to clean up the mess.

And then I finally started talking about it in different terms, saying at the end of the weekend, it's really hard for me to relax and have fun during family night, movie night, if the house isn't back in order. It's hard for me to get back into my focus and do my work while you guys are at school if things aren't put away and organized in a fashion that will allow us to have a really smooth Monday morning. And they started changing.

Shana James

Here's where I wanted to go. Then people don't feel attacked or blamed or shamed or there's something wrong with them. They're like, oh, that's going to make mom happy, or that's going to make her happy. Wow. I feel more inspired to do that.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. I was like, it's hard for me to have a dance party with the disco ball going and the music blaring when there's stuff all over the floor, I'm worried about my feet. They totally got it, they were like, oh, okay. If you'll stop yelling at us during movie night because we cleaned up a little, I can get on board with that.

Shana James

I love it. So good.

Meagen Gibson

They don't know how to translate complaints, do they? They don't know, there's no action out of a complaint.

Shana James - [00:30:34]

No. Exactly. There's no action item. They're just like, okay, well, and it seems obvious to us, well, of course I want you to do this other thing, but it's not necessarily obvious to other people.

The other one that we already talked about, I would say, is expecting a role rather than welcoming humanity. So this role of the rock or the man who's strong and has no needs, and then that way, we can relax and we can surrender, but most of us don't anyway, most of us as women, and I hope this isn't offensive because it's me too, but it's like, we like to be in control, and we don't have an easy time letting go of control.

And so, if we're expecting that he's going to fill this role, then that does push him away, like everything that we've said. It has him feel like it's not safe here, I'm going to be more distant, I'm going to go into my man cave, I'm going to go handle this by myself. And then either, if he doesn't know how to handle it by himself, he's so full of all of that stuff that's basically all he can see. He can't really even see you anymore. Or like you said, he might go somewhere else to try to get that intimacy or connection, whether it's emotional or sexual or whatever it may be.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, exactly. And it doesn't even have to be that big. It's just like, I don't understand why you go hunting with the guys every other weekend instead of spending time with us and family. Or I don't understand why you spend all this extra time at work. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's some big emotional thing behind it, but it means that we're turning elsewhere for our intimate connections and our relationships, other than where we should be, we should be turning into here.

Shana James

And then that goes back to speaking a desire. I noticed that you're spending this time over there, and I want you to have the time you need. And I'm also missing you. It's so much more vulnerable to say that than it is to be like, why are you doing that? What's wrong with us or what's wrong with our relationship? It's so much harder to say, I miss you and I really want to spend more time for you because we could be rejected. But at the same time, that's where that intimacy and the heart gets connected.

Meagen Gibson

Right. And you might find some tough stuff out. It's like, I really want you to spend more time here. I've noticed you're gone a lot, I miss you. And your partner might say, well, I find every weekend that I spend at home is filled with a huge list of to do's.

Shana James

Or fighting or yelling, whatever it might be.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. It's hard for me to relax around here because of these reasons and I work hard all week and how can we, there's opportunities.

Shana James

You should not take that personally and really be like, okay, can I self reflect on that? Can we collaborate on this instead of it's just my way? I need to get this done.

Meagen Gibson - [00:33:16]

And things don't always come to a conclusion and get fixed in those conversations. A lot of the time there's an invitation, somebody reveals something, and then you're like, okay, thank you for sharing. And now I'm going to have to think about how we can both get what we want moving forward. I don't have the answer right now but I'm really glad that you told me.

Shana James

I'm going to sit with it and I'm glad you told me.

And then the other one I often find is taking for granted versus appreciating.

And the way that we push away is like, and I remember my family saying this to me once. They were like, why are you thanking, this is with my ex husband, why are you thanking him for emptying the dishwasher? Why are you thanking him for doing the things that he should just be doing? And I was like, really? Are you serious? Because you see what happens when people don't appreciate each other, even for the little shit that we could be, should be, whatever, would be doing.

I want to feel appreciated for what I'm doing, I want to feel seen for wiping up the kitchen counter. It's not like it has to be everything, but if we're really expecting and demanding as opposed to really getting oh, my gosh, these are the ways that my partner takes care of me, or these are the ways that I wouldn't have even really brought to my consciousness, they're kind of in the background, but actually, wow, we don't have the financial struggles that some other people have, or we don't have the problems with our kids, really starting to look and appreciate and have gratitude for what is going well. And what are our partners doing to make our lives better?

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. And it speaks so much to, I know I've had this dynamic in my relationship where you want help with something, you want assistance with something so you're going to make a request and your impression is that your partner is living their dream. In their perspective, you're like, this dude's living his dream. He's golfing 3 days a week, he gets to go away on the weekend, so I need more.

And their perspective, and I'm speaking for all male humanity, no, I'm not. But my experience is that the partner in this situation often feels like everything that they're doing is also for the good of the household. And it looks different and it acts different. There like, everything I do is for you and for our kids or for our family. What do you mean, you need more?

And so then there's a real opportunity there, we can get into that some other time, but like, nitpick gender roles and responsibilities and invisible labor and all of those things that go into happy functioning couples.

But the impression of just making sure you check your narrative about what your partner's experience is.

Shana James

Story isn't all men are, all women are, or all people are and really get into, okay, who are we being to each other? How are we treating each other? What is happening here?

Maybe it is unequal. Maybe it's because I haven't asked for it. Or maybe it's because we haven't had a collective conversation of like, okay, what do you need? And what do I need? How can we best support each other to both be happy?

Meagen Gibson - [00:36:26]

Absolutely. Is there anything else that you want people to know? I know that you've done a TEDx talk and several of the things that have to do with this particular subject. Is there anything we haven't touched on that you want people to know?

Shana James

I think we've touched on a lot. I mean, it's been powerful. I do have a podcast called *Man Alive*, and it's almost 200 episodes at this point, which is wild that that happened.

If you, as a woman, are struggling with certain things, you can always go to that podcast and look at the different topics and be like, hey, I'd like to listen to this together. Or I actually have a book of those podcasts, it's called *Power and Pleasure*, and you could read or read it together.

When I did a summit years ago for men, it was a sexual satisfaction summit, and I remember a woman emailing me and saying, oh, my God, this is so amazing. A, I'm now understanding what men are learning and what men are taught and what men struggle with. And B, we started listening to these together, and now we have a common language where we can talk about things.

Meagen Gibson

Conversation starter.

Shana James

Yeah. Right. And if your partner is a male, and husband, whatever, if they are resistant, then I would suggest getting vulnerable too.

And instead of, I need to do this with you, or why aren't we doing this? I did that in my marriage. Why aren't we having more spiritual sex? It's more like here's something I really want. You know, one of the things I would love to do is listen to this 20 minutes podcast with you, and then I want to hear what you think about it. I want to say what I think about it.

And start bringing those desires and bringing them in a way that when you imagine receiving, you would be like, oh, yeah. I would be inspired by that. Instead of, I would be shut down or feel kicked by that.

Meagen Gibson

Right. Shana, you have a guide on your website as well about the ways that women communicate? Where can people find that?

Shana James

You can go to shanajamescoaching.com/tedx

And that's where my Ted talk is. And then also, there's a guide for men and there's a guide for women.

And so if you go there with, again, with a partner, if you're a heterosexual couple, you can actually find things for both of you. And then I would suggest, watch the talk, talk about it together, be like, oh, what did you get in your guide? What did I get in my guide? And starting to have some of those conversations.

And if you're really struggling and there seems to be no doorway in, reach out to Meagen, reach out to me or someone else here and just know that it's not hopeless and things can turn around in ways that you would never even imagine.

Meagen Gibson - [00:39:26]

Absolutely. Shana James, thank you for joining us today.

Shana James

Thank you so much for having me.