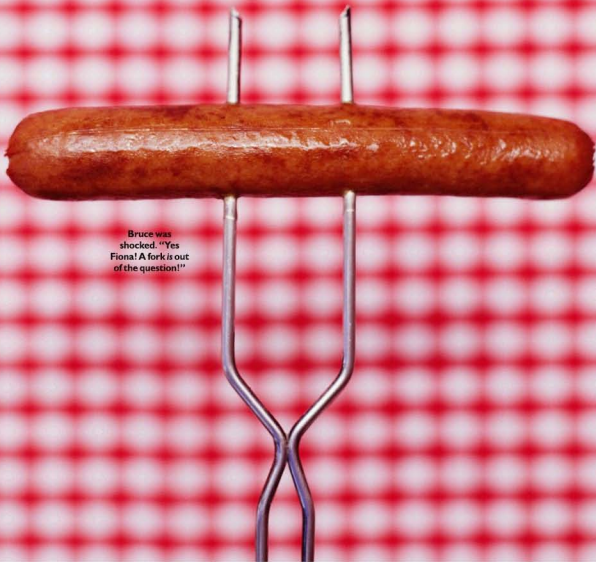


Is it time for the
SNAG
to **MAN UP?**



Bruce was shocked. "Yes Fiona! A fork is out of the question!"

Cosmo's Caelia Corse considers the Sensitive New Age Guy...

In the '90s and early Noughties, women put it out there. We were sick to death of misogynists raised to enslave us to both children and the home. Feminism had come of age and women were well over strong, silent types – we wanted an emotional equal, as well as an equal in everything else. And so the era of the Sensitive New Age Guy (SNAG) was born.

At its peak, Hugh Grant was the movement's poster boy: the adorable, bumbling *SNAG du jour* – or at least the foppish rom-com characters he portrayed were. In real life, everyone knew Hugh was a bastard who cheated on Liz Hurley (in his car) with that prostitute Divine Brown. However, reality aside, Hugh Grant was wonderful – just lovely – and every woman wanted a SNAG like him to call her own.

THE WRONG CHANGE

And when weren't fantasising over *Four Weddings and a Funeral*? Women were busy breaking the glass ceiling and still (without the benefit of hindsight, mistakenly) believed we could have it all. Why shouldn't the boys be liberated, too, we mused? After all, feminism was supposed to be about equity, equality. A man could be a man and still be in touch with his feminine side, women told them. It would be sooooo sexy, we promised. And men believed it, a little too wholeheartedly, the poor fools...

Or were they? "According to some, the idea of the SNAG was a big furphy – what it really was, was men playing a role to get women into bed," says pop culture expert Dr Karen Brooks. Could it be men used the SNAG image against us as the biggest sexual marketing tool of all time?

FAKING IT TO MAKE IT

Men and industry, apparently. But it wasn't all predatory. In the absence of any clear criteria of what it meant to be "sensitive", confusion reigned and men took the easiest option – buying into the metrosexual look. Lack of education about what it meant to be a SNAG coincided with an explosion of male grooming products on the market, says relationships psychologist Gary Rubin. "Commercialism and consumerism got to a point where it could potentially make a lot of money from this trend," Rubin explains. "Before you knew it you had David Beckham and his aftershaves, then there were male moisturisers and hair gels..."

But there's a difference between sensitivity and using hair gel. "A lot of men were trying to play the role of the SNAG, as opposed to *actually becoming* SNAGs. That was the appeal – to get attention from a female you need to play this role – and the best way it was portrayed was through physical description," says Rubin. But once women scratched the surface, we saw through the well-groomed facade and demanded that men open up. The problem? Women have experience dealing with our emotions – hashing out our feelings about everything with our mums, sisters and friends since the day we could talk. Men, on the other hand, have zero practice, bar a beer on a bad day or the odd consolatory slap on the back. How are they expected to know how to deal with their emotions without the lifetime of education we've

had? "What happens naturally, when men do finally start opening up, is they may have a lot of repressed emotions which they've carried for many years. Without the correct education in how to work through that – before you knew it females were going, 'Holy cow, what's happened to my man, he's turned into this person who's crying at the drop of a hat,'" says Rubin.

So, here we find ourselves today. We've got boyfriends who borrow our hair straighteners, partners who've lost the ability to take the initiative in the relationship – and guys we have just met who are drinking skim lattes at their desks and emailing us things like, "I just want to know where this is going. I think we need to talk..." Oh, please! "Man up already" is our new demand, but is that too much to ask?

Kind of, says Brooks. "Not only are we confusing men – but we're also confusing ourselves." While it's a bitter pill to swallow, we need to face the fact that, yes, we wanted men to be more sensitive, but now that they're overwhelmed with their own emotions we've realised that we meant "be more sensitive to us". "Communication tends to be the biggest problem in relationships," says Rubin. Indeed, we certainly sent our message arse up... but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. We've become selfish and narcissistic with our Mr Right checklists and our impossibly high standards, says Brooks – at least now that the shoe is on the other foot and our men are talking, we can hopefully find out what *they* want.

The good news is that the next generation will have it easier, says Rubin. Boys are no longer being raised to be brave and to swallow their emotions. We, and the poor, confused men we love, will aim to teach our sons to feel comfortable expressing their sensitivity and masculinity in harmony; to be men who can bake a really good pie, and wash it down with a beer while watching the footy, too. □

“He's turned into this person who cries at the drop of a hat...”