

Great expectations

By Ruth Ostrow

I WAS listening to a woman complain about her partner the other day and it was a real insight into how our unrealistic expectations make us unhappy.

Her partner is a proverbial dreamer, the kind we girls jokingly call New Age Sensitive – the type who was characterised in the '90s as a man who eats quiche. The advantage of this delightful male is that he is incredibly attentive to his lover's every emotional whim.

It's said that men have only one good massage in them and they give it to you at the start of the relationship. But this is the sort of partner who will walk over and give you a shoulder rub for no reason, bring home flowers on a Friday night and, God bless him, he can really cook.

However, it would be an understatement to say he ain't great in the ambition department, preferring to amble about in nature while other silverback apes are swinging off vines and beating their breasts.

"Well, what do you expect? There are two sides to every coin," I hear myself chastise as she laments their impending poverty. But then again, aren't we all guilty of the same crime? We all like the shiny side of the coin, preferring to pretend that the underbelly doesn't exist.

It's one of life's truisms. We have stoic friends who are pillars of strength for us, who take our hand and bulldoze their way through our crises and lead us out the other end, but we later complain they are "too bossy".

We have "fun-loving" friends we later whinge are "self-absorbed". Here's the news. Fun people are often self-absorbed, lurching from one hedonistic pursuit to another. Highly creative people are often fluff heads. Alpha males or females are too busy sniffing their own adrenalin to come out of the tree.

Why are we so unrealistic? I think it's a function of conditioning. Somehow we're not brought up with the concept of duality. We favour simple concepts: good and bad, right and wrong. Yet the only difference between a partner being "sensitive" or "too wimpy", "articulate" or "verbose", "strong" or "bossy", "honest" or "tactless", "powerful" or "controlling", is in who's doing the looking, or what side the coin landed on that day.

Buddhists have a saying: "And that, too!" If we stopped having unrealistic expectations, and accepted up front that quiche eaters don't like the taste of blood, it would make life a lot easier.

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