



# MAN TALK

what every guy  
oughta/gotta know about  
**good relationships**

by **Michael Kaufman**





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**2016 edition**

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# man talk

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I don't care whether you're hooking up for the night or searching for someone to be with for the rest of your life. I don't care whether you're a man who believes in waiting until he's married before he has sex or believes he should wait until he's known someone for at least ten minutes. I don't care whether you're the captain of the football team or a guy who gets excited by a new version of Linux. I don't care about the color of your skin, what your religion is, or your sexual orientation (or even if you have one).

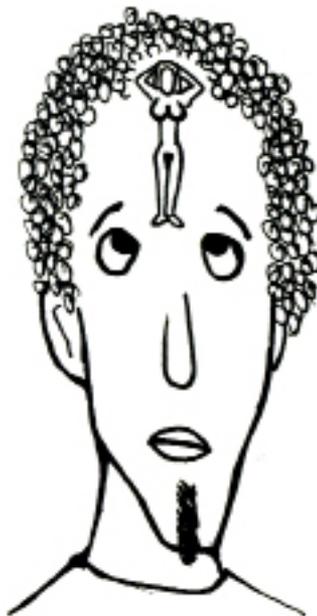
I only care about four things:





# 4

1. As a man, when it comes to anyone you're dating, hooking up with, kissing, flirting madly at, or sleeping with, I care that you treat them with respect, and that you get treated with respect, too.
2. As a man, I care that you never, ever, physically hurt that person or do something that you know will cause deep emotional harm, that will bring shame to you and your family, that will get you kicked out of school, or that will land you in jail.
3. As a man, I care that you get a chance to be the good man that you are and that you feel truly good about the choices you make.
4. As a man, I want you to know how important it is for you to speak out against abusive language and abusive relationships, and let the guys around you know that neither has a place in school, on your campus or in your community.





# 5

I hope this booklet will help you keep out of trouble. Even better, this booklet is going to help you be much happier. It's going to help you create better relationships. It may even help you get...well, you decide what you want to see happen in your life and maybe this booklet is going to help with that too.

I don't think you're guilty of anything you haven't done. I don't think men are bad. I do think it's okay if, like most human beings, you've got sex on your brain. I don't think I have to censor my thoughts or pretend one thing when we all know I mean another. This booklet isn't for your parents; this booklet is for you.

A lot of what I'm going to say applies to any dating relationship, but a lot of what I say is about men's relationships with women because this is where most dating violence occurs.

Best of all, unlike just about everything else you'll read this year, there's no exam. No essay. Just your life.





# 6 what guys tell each other about dating violence...

A friend and I did a simple experiment with some guys. Some were good students and some...well, let's just say they were better at other things. Some were student leaders; some were potheads; some were brainiacs who built their first computer out of chewing-gum wrappers in second grade; some were football players and others were long-distance runners; some were sexually active, some weren't but figured it would happen eventually, and some were so horny even dogs and cats were staying out of their way. You get the picture.

So, here was the experiment: We asked them about sex, relationships, violence, and school.

There was a trick to how we did it. First, we asked if other guys would agree with some statements. Second, we asked what they thought. Here are some examples:

‘It’s okay to have sex with a girl you meet at a party who’s totally plastered.’

“A guy can spread stories or pictures online about a woman he’s dating if she cheats on him.”

“If a woman wears revealing clothing, she’s sending out a signal that she wants it.”

The research was totally confidential: no one could see anyone else’s answers. We compared the two sets of answers to discover if we tell the truth to each other.





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And just in case we had a particularly lame group, this experiment has been repeated over and over with different ages, in different schools and different countries.

The envelope please.

The exact numbers varied, but here's the type of response we got. When we asked what they thought was the opinion of the other guys, 60-80% said other guys would "agree a lot" or "agree somewhat" with those statements.

But when asked what they personally thought, only 10-30% actually agreed a lot or somewhat.

In other words, the vast majority of men disagreed about those statements and yet they falsely believed other guys agreed with them.





That's a big disconnect. Most of us think other guys have some really nasty attitudes.

It seems that when we're with our buddies, we don't always tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We pretend stuff that is different from what we actually feel and think. It turns out what guys often tell each other is a puffed-up version of manhood. Because of that:



- ▶ we think other guys are getting laid much more than they are.



- ▶ some of us feel it's okay to use violence against a partner in some circumstances or to get it whatever way we can when, in fact, the majority of us think that's definitely not cool.

This is amazing. We've built a whole culture full of stereotypes about what guys are supposedly like. It's in movies, music, and on the Internet; it's what a lot of men and women believe make men tick.



And just about all of it is a lie.

So why don't we tell each other the truth?

I've put that question to a lot of guys and here's what one group told me: "You don't want to appear weak... soft...a wimp." One student said, "You gotta act fearless even if you're crappin' in your pants." Another thumped his chest and bellowed, "No fear, no pain."

Yep, you got it: we guys act tough, we act in control, we act like "one of the boys". Too often we keep quiet in the face of homophobia, racism, and other forms of bigotry. Why? Because deep down we're scared of not being a "real man."

This leads many of us to keep quiet when we see women around us getting hurt, getting humiliated, and getting talked about like sexual meat.

This contributes to what some people call a "rape culture."



what is  
rape culture?

Stay calm! No one is accusing you of doing something you would never do, and no one is saying that men are collectively guilty for what some men do. But this interesting phrase is useful because it helps men understand what's going on around us.

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# 10

Rape culture is a complex concept, but at its heart it means this: we've created a culture where we trivialize and even excuse sexual violence. When this violence becomes the subject of jokes and everyday speech ("I raped that exam"), we trivialize sexual assault.

In a rape culture, violence is portrayed as powerful and sexy. Violent degrading sex gets celebrated, like in a lot of porn.

This also means that our judicial system still doesn't take the crime seriously enough. Only a tiny percentage of men who commit rape are ever charged, and only a small percentage of those men are convicted.

One of the worst things that occurs in rape culture is victim blaming: "She drank too much." "Look what she was wearing." Can you imagine if you got drunk and a group of men beat the crap out of you or raped you? My guess is you would probably *not* say: "Yeah, it was my fault; I was drunk and those jeans were pretty revealing."

Think about other crimes. Let's say I've been drinking and I stagger home alone. Someone sees that I'm out of it and robs me. Or maybe I've done an all-nighter at the library, fall asleep on the bus, and my wallet gets stolen. In either case, am I to blame? Of course not! The robber is 100% responsible.

Sure, we all need to do things to protect ourselves from crime, but no one should ever be blamed for being the victim of one. That's absolutely true for rape.





dating violence:  
very **bad news**  
and (some) very  
**good news**

||

**First, the good news:** Most guys would never, ever commit sexual assault. Most of us would never drug a woman and then rape her. Most of us would never hit or threaten a woman just to show who's boss. Most of us wouldn't want to see the girls we know—our friends, our classmates, or our sisters—humiliated online. Most of us think that these are disgusting things done by cowards.

It's about time we stop being silent and start letting other guys know what we really think.

Once we stand up for what we believe and ignore the initial teasing, we discover that a lot of other guys think the same as we do. And they admire our courage and strength when we speak out.

**Now the bad news:** There's a significant minority of guys who do those very things.

About 1 in every 5 women experiences an attempted or completed rape sometime in her life.





# 12

We know that about 1 in 4 guys grew up in a household where his dad or his mother's boyfriend used violence or the threat of violence against his mom. (It can sometimes happen the other way around, but it doesn't lead to nearly as many serious injuries or as much terror.) We also know that a lot of guys experienced physical or sexual abuse as kids. All this means that they had pretty lousy models of what it means to be a man.

We know that college women have to watch over their drinks at bars or parties, that they often have a buddy system to look out for each other, and that they often don't feel safe walking from the library to their dorm at night—a basic right of freedom of movement we guys take for granted.

These are terrible realities. They not only create fear in the lives of many women, they really screw up all new relationships between girls and guys. Because of dating violence, many women don't trust a guy they're starting to go out with or misinterpret things you do or say, even if you're the nicest guy on the planet. That's because all men catch the fallout for the crap some guys think is okay to do.

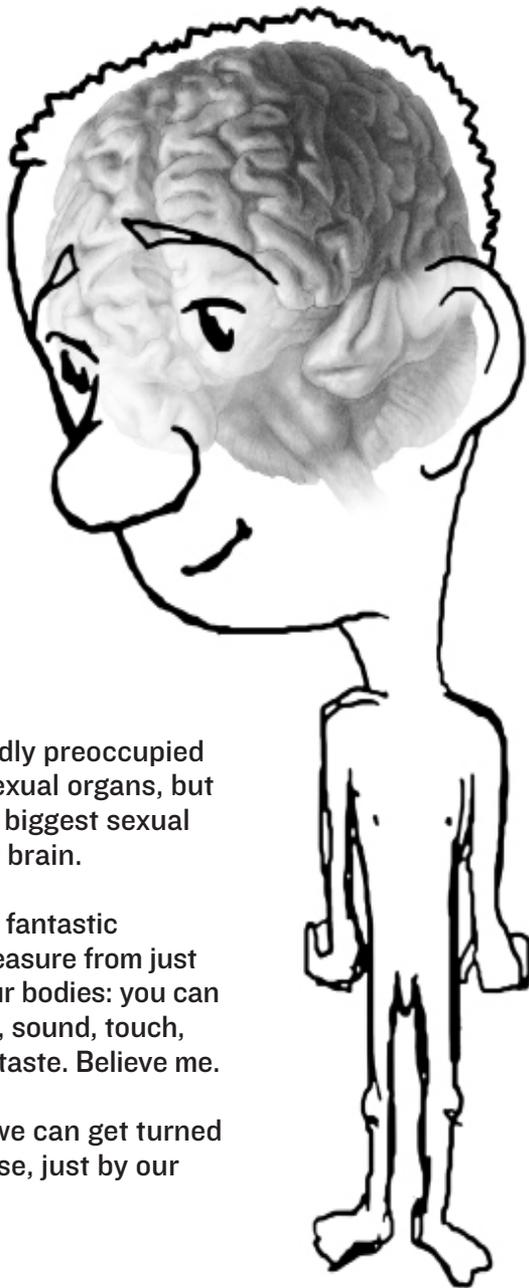
**One more bit of bad news:** While the majority of guys would never sexually or physically abuse a girl, the majority of us don't usually speak out against it. And in some horrible cases, we see it happening and don't say a word—especially if it's “only” emotional abuse and hasn't yet gotten physical.

**One final bit of good news:** More and more guys are pissed off at men who do these things and are stepping forward, showing they have the strength to be good men.





your  
great  
**big**  
sexual  
organ



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We guys are supposedly preoccupied with the size of our sexual organs, but don't forget that your biggest sexual organ is actually your brain.

Our brains give us the fantastic capacity to receive pleasure from just about every inch of our bodies: you can get turned on by sight, sound, touch, vibration, smells, and taste. Believe me.

Even more amazing, we can get turned on without any of these, just by our imagination.





All that is why sex isn't just about sticking a part of your body into a part of theirs. Sex is the amazing ability of our bodies to get and receive pleasure from our own body and that of another. Kissing someone may not be as big a deal as banging your brains out, but it's a sexual act that carries sensations and emotions.

Thank you, brain.

Luckily for us, we have these great big organs because, as we're about to see, we're really going to need them.

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# rules of consent

to make sure you both want to do it!



We have a phrase for any type of sexual act when one person doesn't want to do what the other person is doing to them: it's sexual assault, or, simply, rape.

Consent is when both people agree to do the same thing and let the other person know. There are four rules of consent:





**Rule 1:** When it comes to sex, only yes means yes. “Maybe,” doesn’t mean yes. “I guess so,” doesn’t mean yes. “Let’s see what happens,” doesn’t mean yes. And “no” never, ever means yes.

Unless you want to commit rape, you’ve got to hear “yes” to have consent. (And don’t forget: the other person needs to hear “yes” from you, too.)

Sample: “Do you want to tear off our clothes and have sex until we’re zombified?” “Yeah, sounds cool.” That’s consent.

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**Rule 2:** It’s your responsibility to know if you have consent. If a cop pulls you over when you’re speeding, it doesn’t help to say, “Officer, I didn’t know there was a speed limit here.”



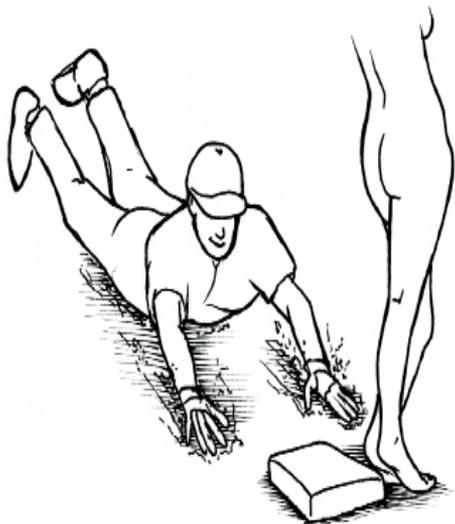


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Ditto with sex. It's your responsibility to learn the other person's limit and it's their responsibility to learn yours. And remember, it's not their responsibility to say "no"; it's your responsibility to know they say "yes."

Some people say, "Well, how can you know for sure?" My friend Harry responds, "Man, how could you *not* want to know? Can you imagine waking up some morning and wondering if you're a date rapist?"

Or, to put it differently, how could you not want to have good (consensual) sex?



THOU SHALT NOT TRY  
TO STEAL BASES

### Rule 3:

Nothing you've already done gives you permission to do the next thing. You're kissing like mad; she's totally into it; that must mean it's okay to get your hand under her shirt. Wrong. You've got your clothes off and you're all over each other; that must mean it's okay to have intercourse. Wrong.

The truth is that, unless you're involved in a regular relationship and have already worked out a set of rules (although "no" still means no), every time you go to a new "level" you've got to get consent.





Some people say, “That sucks. That totally breaks the flow.”

I’d be lying if I didn’t say there’s a bit of truth in that. But by both knowing you’re doing what you want, there’ll be a thousand times more sexual energy than if one person is getting off and the other would rather be at the dentist

Even better, because you’ll know for sure and because you’ll both be talking about what you want, we guys become much better in bed.

**Rule 4:** **If you’re intoxicated, you can’t give or get consent.** If either of you is too drunk or high to completely know what you’re doing, then it’s impossible to have informed consent. You can’t give it and you don’t know if you’ve truly got it. Afterwards, neither of you know if one of you is a rapist.

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Even if you think you’ve received or given consent before getting wasted, you have to make sure it’s still there when you’re hooking up. At any point, “no” means no and “stop” means stop. If one of you doesn’t have full control over your faculties, there can’t be consent. It’s the law.





your biggest sexual  
organ: **giving it**  
a **good** workout

18

If your massive, bulging, throbbing, manly brain is what makes you a sexual animal, then you better figure out good ways to use it right.

We hear endless talk about good communication. But no one really tells us how to do it.

So let me give you the three keys to good communication in relationships. And like I said at the beginning, I don't care whether that relationship lasts an hour or is meant to last a hundred years, or whether it's with a man or a woman or with someone who doesn't identify with either.

**Key 1: Good communication begins with respect.** Everyone deserves respect. If you don't respect the person you're with (or trying to hook up with), then you're not only demeaning them, but you're demeaning yourself. Respect for someone in sexual situations means respecting what they want to do, respecting their preferences, and respecting their limits. And you deserve the exact same respect in return.

**Key 2: Good communication is based on listening.** But real listening isn't easy. You've got to listen to what someone says and even what they



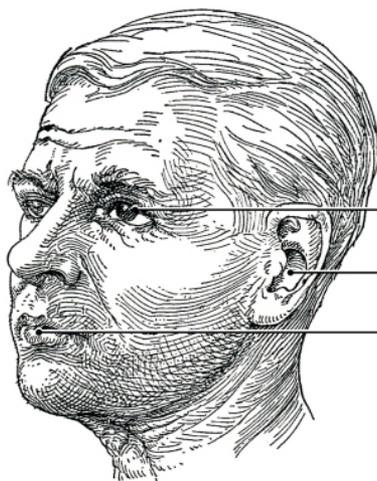


may not be telling you. To do that, you've got to read their body language. You're more likely to hear what they're really saying if you listen with respect.

The best way to hear what isn't being said is by trying to imagine what the other person may actually be feeling (but may have a hard time expressing).

At the same time, we guys have got to work hard to figure out our own feelings.

Sometimes, for example, we may be feeling angry, but when we go deeper, we're actually feeling hurt or confused.



Organ of respectful perception

Organ of effective listening

Organ of honest speaking

**Key 3: Good communication means speaking honestly.** Your ability to hear each other and prevent misunderstandings, hurt, anger, or frustration is helped if you're both doing your best to be honest. Honest about your feelings, about what you want and don't want, honest about embarrassments and insecurities, honest about uncertainty or confusion. Good relationships always involve taking some risks.





equality =  
**good** sex

20

There are some people who want to turn back the clock to the old days when men called the shots and women went along for the ride. At first glance, you'd think it was paradise for men.

But it wasn't. Relationships built on inequality are simply not good relationships. Relationships suck when one person is the boss and the other has to obey. Think about jobs where you get bossed around. It doesn't exactly bring out the best in you and you probably don't want to stick around for long.



I lied. There is an exam:

POP QUIZ!

1. "NO" MEANS

a) no

b) no

c) no





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 **this means that  
a man's got to ...**





# make a difference

Think about what it means to be a member of a team: when you're on the field or on the court, you look out for each other.

That's what we guys have got to do. We don't want to see one of our friends doing something dumb just because he believes other guys think it's okay. We've got to let each other know where we stand.

## 22

Think about what it means to be a leader: it means you stand up for what's right, not what everyone else is saying. What makes you proud. What makes you strong. What makes you a man.

Think what it means to be a man who cares about women: it means you don't want to see any of them treated like dirt. You don't want to see any of them living in fear of violence.

### **Be the best man you can be!**

Make sure you always have consent. Keep abuse and disrespect out of your life.

### **Speak out!**

Speak out when other guys don't respect women and other men, or are doing something that is going to cause hurt.

It's true, you may not always feel safe challenging abusive talk, but at least you can change the subject. That will send a message that you're not interested in sexist, racist, or homophobic language, or any form of abuse. I can guarantee that other guys will be glad you did.





But do your best to directly challenge guys around you who act in abusive or disrespectful ways.

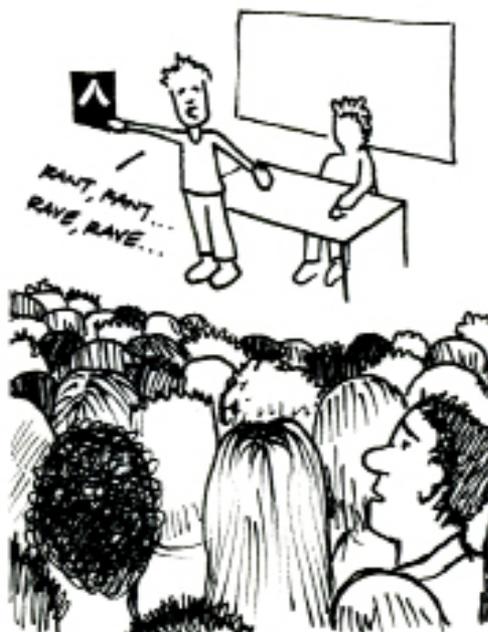
**Don't go it alone!**

Take part in campus activities (like a White Ribbon Campaign) to promote awareness about these issues.

In whatever ways you can, find the strength and power you have to be a good man.

In the end, that's the only real score.

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**SPEAK OUT ON YOUR CAMPUS**





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Thanks for advice and help from: Manisha Aggarwal-Schifellite, Holly Blake, Harry Brod, Tracy Davis, Josh Edward, Liam Kaufman Simpkins, Jason Laker, Melanie Miller, Karen Mitchell, and Tad Peretz. As always, thanks to Michael Kimmel. Special thanks to Betty Chee.

Dr. Harry Brod's lecture, now captured in his DVD "Asking For It: The Ethics and Erotics of Sexual Consent" (Media Education Foundation), was the inspiration for my four rules of consent ([www.harrybrod.com](http://www.harrybrod.com)). The questionnaire on student opinions was by Alan Berkowitz ([www.alanberkowitz.com](http://www.alanberkowitz.com)) and came from the work we did together on the White Ribbon Campaign's "Education and Action Kit."

Cover and inside artist Julian Kirk-Elleker is a medical illustrator. His fine work can be seen at: <http://brodel.med.utoronto.ca/~julian/>

Designer Kathryn Moore's elegant work can be seen at [www.moorecreative.ca/](http://www.moorecreative.ca/)





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