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The Danger in Demonizing Male Sexuality

May 28, 2013 by [Alyssa Royse](#) 1,093 Comments

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Alyssa Royse explains how our current predator/prey model of sexual relationships is harmful to both men and women.

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Jamie Peck over at The Gloss, wrote a great little piece asking a great big question: [Can Men Write About Sex Without Sounding Like Douchebags?](#) In asking, however, she wasn't pointing at men and suggesting they are douchebags so much as she was pointing at all of us and suggesting that we have a tendency to demonize male sexuality. She rightly points out that most of the men who achieve any sort of status and acceptability in writing about sex are somewhere on the gender queer spectrum.

Puzzling.

I was trying to wrap my head around why that was, and unable to come up with anything really to contradict it, when the incredibly brilliant Sabrina Morgan left the following comment on Facebook:

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Cis men are also in the position of the cultural desirer, never the desired; many genuinely believe that since "no one" finds them sexy/since their sexuality is considered threatening, no one wants to hear what they have to say about sex.

God, that woman is brilliant. And she's right. It is at least possible that women love the likes of Dan Savage because he is in no way threatening to us. I could be drunk, dirty-dancing on his lap and he'd be all like, "bitch, please, put that shit away." I like to think he'd also give me warm milk and tuck me in, but who knows. The point is, he is no threat to me.

But more than that, he is an ally. He has, time and time again, stood up for the rights of women to have full agency and autonomy over our bodies, spoken out against rape culture, and generally paved the way for an open dialog about human sexuality and our right to it. Charlie Glickman can write about sex and sexuality without being called a douchebag, but he is also widely considered queer, and not a threat to anyone.

But to Sabrina's point, what of the [cisgender](#) men? Specifically, heterosexual cis men? How we read their words has so much to do with what we, as a society, *assume* about their sexuality and how it manifests. Society seems to have set heterosexuality up as a thing that involves men pursuing, and women either accepting or rejecting—mostly rejecting.

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This starts young. I live in Seattle, which is, by any standard, a very progressive city. Many of us do a mommy / daughter sex-ed class at Seattle Children's Hospital as our daughters get close to starting menstruation. In the session of the class that is less about biology and more about navigating sexuality, the presenter offered the idea that girls would have to start learning how to say "no" to boys who were ~~going to want to touch them sexually~~

I looked at my daughter, who sort of rolled her eyes at me. And the woman went on, listing the many ways that girls could rebuff boys. I looked at my daughter again, and she said, "go ahead mom." And I did. I raised my hand and said, "Can we also talk about how to teach girls to say 'yes' to sexuality. Can we teach them that sex is about pleasure for all parties involved, and that learning how to identify and say 'yes' to things that give them pleasure is how they learn to draw their boundaries and say 'no' to things that don't."

She replied that surely I could understand that protecting girls from boys was more important. I told her that I surely did *not* see it that way.

But it starts that young. Yes, girls are told that boys are predatory and somehow out of control. The corollary there is that boys are told they are predators, and out of control. Therefore, not a desirable thing, but a thing to defend against. From the get-go, we are teaching our kids to fear male sexuality, and to repress female sexuality.

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As they age, and their media exposure extends beyond the protective (and crappy) bubble of children's programming, we see example after example of men having to pull huge gestures to lure women into sex, or catch them, or trick them. Just off the top of my head: In *Superbad* when one of the guys talks about getting girls drunk enough that they can be "that mistake;" in *Spiderman* when he shoots a web to catch the girl who said "no" half a dozen times, pulling her in for an epic kiss that leaves them both breathless; in *Anchorman* when the guy uses a cologne made with "bits of real panther" that "60% of the time works every time" to get the girl. I could go on and on, but that point is that popular culture sets up this idea that men are sexual predators who need to resort to trickery and cologne to fulfill their one and only mission, which is sticking their penis in a girl.

It's sad. It's insulting. And it's damaging.



This way of looking at male sexuality conflates sexuality with predation. It means that he who possesses sexuality is assumed a predator.

That is obviously damaging to the vast majority of men who simply are not. They want and like sex just as much as the rest of us. However, it's downright dangerous when you extrapolate that out to situations like the horror of Stubenville. It is this line of thinking that allows people to say, "boys will be boys." As if this kind of predation is just natural for guys, when in fact it is *not* normal for guys to be predators. Most men are not predators.

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Steubenville, and the way-too-many incidents like it, are not examples of natural male sexuality. There are examples of a violent rape culture than perpetuates the idea that predation is the natural manifestation of sex.

So with this in our mind's eye, no, it is not possible for us to believe that heterosexual cis men can write about sex without being douchebags. And that breaks my heart. It breaks my heart as someone who loves men, in a whole lot of ways.

You do not need to trick us into sex, in fact, you shouldn't. And you don't need a cologne with bits of real panther to attract us. In fact, lay off the stuff, seriously. A little dab'll do ya.



So, how can we all work together to change our collective impression of male sexuality as something that is dangerous and disgusting? Besides the obvious—understanding male privilege, dismantling of patriarchal mythology and ending rape culture? Those issues are far too big for me to take on here, but without accomplishing those three, nothing changes. So while we work toward those goals, here are some steps to take along that path:

1. Be an ally. Help us stop the violence against women. I am assuming that none of you would do what happened in Steubenville, but would you have helped stop it? Have you been vocal about how wrong it was? About how that should not represent you or your sexuality? From a societal perspective, we need your help. From a personal perspective, when we feel safe, we let our guards down, and that's the first step to an intimate connection.

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2. Ask women what they want, and listen to what they tell you. We are all different; we all want different things from the men in our life. Rather than getting lost in a frustrated guessing game, ask us. Listen to our answers. Tell us what you want, with words, and listen to our responses. Whether it's sex or any other relationship, the best way to not be seen as predatory is to not act like a predator. And that means communication, not acquisition. Which, by the way, is also called consent. "Yes" is the safest word of all.

3. Let us in, don't lure us in. Lay off the cologne, the pick-up lines, and the games. Please. Trust that you do not need to trick people into wanting you. Trust that you are worthy, just as you are. And that you deserve someone who wants you for who you actually are, how you actually are.

1. Don't take it personally. Your self-worth is in no way connected to whether or not someone likes you.

Some people love cilantro. Some people think that cilantro tastes like tinfoil soaked in dish soap. That in no way reflects on the worthiness of cilantro. And cilantro never takes it personally. If you can, don't even think of it as rejection, you are just cilantro sometimes. After all, you're not attracted to every person you meet, why would every person you meet be attracted to you?

5. And lastly, know that your body is beautiful. I, like most females, was warned that penises and balls and anuses were gross. I was told to hold my nose, close my eyes, get it over with. Imagine my disappointment when I saw my first penis and there were no festering boils hissing my name, no sulfurous clouds wafting up from a menacing member. I thought it was kind of cute. As I learned more about them, I grew to love them, in and out. Hell, there are times when I was sure I heard angels giving hummers on high when I've seen one. Most of us straight chicks really like your bodies. You don't need to trick us into liking them. That is what makes us straight, after all.

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However, they are not lures, and we are not fish. Do not, ever, show them to us unless we ask for it. The bonus for you is that when we ask for it, it's because we want it, so you aren't really risking rejection at that point, Mr. Cilantro.



I am sorry that generations of lazy storytelling and bad media have perpetuated the myths of men as predators and women as victims. Or the idea that women's purity is what can redeem the nastiness of male sexuality. It is wrong for both men and women alike.

But the only way we're going to change it is together, and it's gonna take time. We need to all be better. Oh, hey, I know, we need to come together—if we want to, that is. You can also come alone. Or with someone else. Aint' no skin off my back, as long as it's all consensual. And, hopefully, pleasurable.



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