

The Sex Ed Talk the Midshipmen Will Never Hear

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My particular corner of the military tapestry is the US Naval Academy, where I've just finished twenty-two years as a civilian professor of English. In that capacity I do something that none of the brass does—or has time to do in their brief, three-year tours: I listen to what the midshipmen say. It doesn't hurt that I'm not in their chain of command.

What they say nowadays is concerned to a large degree with the “Sexual Assault” briefs they are constantly subjected to, part of the Navy's attempt to avoid the embarrassing headlines of rape allegations—or, if you ask the brass, to create a respectful and “professional” environment for all sailors. The Naval Academy has weathered two botched rape trials in recent years, in both cases involving football players. In the first case, the Academy's principal charge of rape was found not to be substantiated, and the judge had to tell the JAG to stop referring to the alleged victim as “the victim”—which clearly presupposed an assailant, precisely the issue to be decided. In the second, the Academy's assertion that a “date-rape” drug was involved had to be dropped when a laboratory found no traces of drugs. Underage alcohol use played a role in both cases.

The male students, meanwhile, feel besieged: the alleged victim in the first case was given immunity from prosecution for testifying that she had been raped. All briefs presuppose, they tell me, that men are potential rapists. They don't like this, and as a result do not feel "on board" with the training. In May 2009, in fact, the Annapolis Capital—after a three-year battle with the Naval Academy to get documents through the Freedom of Information Act—concluded in a front-page story that "the Naval Academy created a double standard that punished male midshipmen harsher than females from 2001 to 2006."

Military and civilian faculty members, meanwhile, are still being given mandatory training that continues to refer to the alleged victim as "the victim." If there's a victim, there's an assault: the military seems unable to understand why this creates problems in court.

That's the boy-girl sex. Meanwhile a few years ago Gen Pace, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made headlines with his statements regarding the (im)morality of homosexuality, and his weighing in on the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy. That one hasn't gone away, just because we've been obsessed with male-female rape. People are still being thrown out of the military, indeed in record numbers, because they admit they're gay—even if they're in strategic positions. Now we're poised to repeal DADT. The danger is that we screw this one up too, just the way we mismanaged the integration of women.

The following, in two parts, is the sex ed training that the midshipmen ought to be getting. They won't, of course: the military is too prudish to be frank, and too obsessed with seeming to be on board with protecting women and not protecting gays to actually do something that might work to calm the tension. Still, I can dream. The first part is the part about gays in the military—they're here, in fact; so the question isn't whether to let them in, it's how to deal with the fact that they are. Pretending that it's not a problem because you've declared it immoral,

illegal and fattening isn't an option. Arguably, we've made it a problem by worrying it so long, the way you can make a pimple worse by picking at it: if you don't mess with it, it's tolerable. The second part is about straights in the military. Between the two groups, that pretty much covers the territory. But there's some stuff you can't make disappear by declaring it gone. Sex is one of them.

I: Don't Drop the Soap

First, I should introduce the professor. That's me. I've written a book called *Sexual Ethics* (University Press of America) which I'd like to recommend. No problem if you can't get to it; I'll cover some of the main points here. I've also touched on the issues specific to sexuality in the military in my book *Annapolis Autumn: Life, Death, and Literature at the US Naval Academy*. But this isn't about selling books. It's about talking like adults. So let's get started.

Instead of telling a joke to break the ice (three guys go into a bar, see?), I'll get autobiographical instead. I had a gay brother, Keith, who died 18 years ago of AIDS. (Now he'd be on the cocktail of pills they hadn't yet figured out, and alive.) I'm sure he did all sorts of things Gen Pace wouldn't like to think of. But he *was* my brother. And miserable, at least before he admitted to himself, and others, that he wanted men rather than women. Having to convince yourself you're something you're not is not a situation I'd wish on anybody. During this period he was much less functional than he should have been. And he told vicious anti-gay jokes until the day he told me the truth about himself—which is one reason why I shut these down quick when my students try them. Obviously he was trying them on for size, as well as putting on protective coloration.

So our first point in this adults-only sex brief is, it's hugely "unmotivational" and upsetting to have to lie about your sexual orientation. To get a sense of how unmotivational, straight guys should imagine living in a world of gays where they were never allowed to look at a woman for fear of being found out, and could never come on to them. Reversed, that's the position we're asking of gay men and women under the DADT policy. That might well be a good enough reason for getting rid of it.

Our second point is, there's no justification for presupposing that being gay or straight is a "life-style choice," at least not in the sense that some people mean this when they assert it—which is, to imply that (say) men interested in men could in fact be turned on by women if they wanted to be. If that's true, I can be turned on by sheep if only I want to be. Or guys. Or Asian midgets with one arm. All of us know that's not the way sex works.

To my knowledge my brother was never interested in women. He didn't choose; it chose him. Some gay men go through a stage of thinking they are, or that they ought to be. But why would you conclude they "chose" to be gay? Instead, I think they figured out they were by looking at who turned them on. I know I discovered my "type" in women early. (Pretty standard, for the record: leggy blondes with curves.) Note: I *discovered*. I didn't "choose" it.

Too, we straight guys should admit up front that what we call straight sexuality contains a lot of consciousness of other guys and their bodies, if only to see how we compare. In the military, male consciousness of other men is hugely important. Guys are always checking out other guys "guns" in the weight room, usually while pretending not to. No, it isn't sex, but it sure is interest in other guys' bodies. Those with the good ones like to show them off. Me, I say that needing to come to terms with the competition is just part of what makes us straight. But it's also, admit it, somewhat gay.

Here's another unsettling thought: Sometimes the most virulent anti-gay people seem to believe that everybody is dying to be gay, and has to be held back by force. Why would they go on about it so much if it weren't something we had to be prevented from doing? Bottom line: gay isn't the opposite of straight, it's a different shading in a scale of grays. But wherever you are on the scale, you discover it. You don't "choose" it.

Our third point in this adults-only session is that just because a man is gay doesn't mean he wants you, dude, any more than saying a guy is straight means he's sure to be turned on by any particular woman. Gay or straight isn't a 24/7 colors-everything thing, any more than being, say, a vegetarian determines all your life outside of mealtime. And being a vegetarian doesn't mean you necessarily want to tear into that, say, eggplant on the plate in front of you. Almost everybody has one "type" (or several) he finds hot—which means, nobody finds everyone hot. Even if the person in question is your "type," situational factors play a huge role in whether or not you even think about that someone in sexual terms, and another huge set of situational factors in whether or not you approach that person.

In fact all sex, straight or gay, is defined by what I call "no-fly" zones that are usually so clearly marked or ingrained in our psyches we're not likely even to be aware of them. There are many women who are in the no-fly zone for straight men, so we probably don't even allow ourselves to think of them in sexual terms. We can start the list with female family members (yuk); maybe the female boss; probably too your buddy's girlfriend.

They're so clearly no-fly that we don't even pose them as options—the buddy's girlfriend, perhaps, excepted: there you may be conscious of a struggle, but you're supposed to win it. Problems occur at the edges of the no-fly zones. Everybody has had the experience of having someone go from Category 1 (off limits/non-sexual) into Category 2 (possible): suddenly

there she is, out of uniform and into a little black dress with her hair down. Wow! Where did *that* come from?

Me, I'm married, so I'm not supposed to be coming on to any other women but my wife. So that leaves makes a huge no-fly zone. If I'm always testing the limits, I'm going to be miserable. If I accept it and concentrate on what I have, I'll be fine. Even when I was a bachelor I didn't indiscriminately come on to all women. There's a sort of checklist you go through to see if you're in the no-fly zone: type has to be right (check), situation has to be right (check), I have to see her "as sexual" (check), it has to be off hours and not in the office (check). That's a lot of conditions that have to be met—and collectively, they determine most of life. I think a lot straight guys imagine that we're tomcats coming on to everything that moves. That may be a flattering view of ourselves, but it isn't reality, it's the stuff of porn fantasy.

The elaborate system of "frat," anti-fraternization rules, in the military, is an attempt to codify the no-fly zones within a working environment. They seem imposed from outside, but actually they're not more artificial than any of the other no-fly rules that mark our daily lives.

The corollary to this third point is that even if a gay man *does* think you, dude, are hot, doesn't mean he's going to say anything about it, or act upon it. Or even necessarily think about it much if he knows you're off limits and in the no-fly zone for whatever reason (situational, personal, sexual orientation-wise). Gay men can control themselves, just the way straight men can, and do. All those "don't drop the soap" jokes that nervous straight guys tell are just silly. Stop worrying. I bet the gay guy at the next shower doesn't even think you're hot, and even if he does, who says he's a rapist? Anyway, he's got work to do too, and a shower to take. What, you think you're so irresistible?

But let's say you are—irresistible, that is: attractive to women and also to men (no, you don't have to do anything special for the second). If you make offers to women, you know that they hold the power. You ask them out, they decide whether it's yes or no. You hold the power too, if a guy comes on to you. He makes the offer (a grin, eye contact, a raised eyebrow, a proposition in words). You can always say no (a wry smile, a shake of the head, a bluff handshake). Or use words: say "no." If you're well brought up and secure in your sexuality, you might even go for "no thanks." He's just paid you a compliment, after all. (To repeat: it's simply nonsense to say that having a gay guy think you're attractive is an insult, or a slur on your masculinity. Attractive is attractive, no matter who's looking.)

By this point many of you out there are uncomfortable. That professor, he's just a civilian liberal: he's telling us all just to get over it.

No. And that's what makes me different from the folks who are saying that getting rid of DADT will be a walk in the park. I don't think it should continue, but neither do I think getting rid of it is going to be unproblematic.

But first, let me address the fact that sex of any sort—between men and women, between men, between women—makes what I call "bubbles" in a professional environment. What this means is, sex of any sort is a problem in certain environments: not just gay sex. These "bubbles" are mini-worlds that a machine built out of individuals (such as the military is) doesn't tolerate because they compete with the machine. If two of your buddies are getting it on, whether they're male and female or male and male, that's going to cause problems. If the male LT is getting it on with the female LT, that's going to cause problems. If the guy in the next bunk over is whispering to you at night how hot you are, that's going to cause problems.

Sex causes problems in the military—problems that are the same whatever brand the sex is. That's why the military tries to simply forbid sex. However it's a little late for that. We've opened the barn door by letting women into mixed-gender living situations such as ships. So we're going to have to try and defuse the problem we have rather than pretending we don't have one, or simply saying: I forbid this to be a problem. The question is not, do we let in gay men. There are gay men in now. And it's hypocritical as well as wrong to say the problem is gay sex. It's not: it's sex of any sort.

That's where DADT comes in. It wasn't actually that crazy. Women don't look like straight men. Gay men do look like straight men. So you can't tell what the sexual groups are at a glance. DADT acknowledges that troubling fact. It says to the gay men: whatever you're thinking, you have to act so that you don't constitute another sexual group. In an office, where everybody goes home at 5, we don't have to say that, because presumably people are going to be professional at work anyway (i.e. asexual). But in the military, the living situation isn't so neatly detached from the professional, and frequently people don't go anywhere else at 5. P-ways are narrow on subs, everybody showers together on ships, and bunking together is the norm. So saying: act as if you're not thinking sexual thoughts solves the problem for the straight guys. What we haven't acknowledged is that the price of solving that problem is grotesquely high for the gay people.

The problem is, to repeat, sex. Not gay sex. But any sex. Out gay men would pose the same sort of problem that women do, only we're up in arms about the one, and on the other side of politically correct with the other. I think the time has come for us to acknowledge the problems of both. Actually, experts who have studied this question predict that most gay people in the military will *not* come out of the closet: this acknowledges the problems a gay, say,

Marine platoon leader would have. It would be easier just not to let on. This business of asking an openly gay man or woman to lead predominantly straight soldiers or sailors (especially male, I'd say) is problematic: we should not, may not, pretend that lifting DADT is going to be a walk in the park.

I think the most fundamental issue in making it happen is emphasizing that sex of whatever sort is the issue, not gay sex *per se*. Then we say: when you're on the job, no sex, whether gay or straight. And frat is still out. Sometimes the job will be 24/7 for months at a time: deal with it. That's part of your sacrifice. And make it stick both for same-sex and different-sex sex. From a military POV, there's no difference.

Yet many people insist there is a difference. So that's the last point we have to consider here in Part I. Namely, as we hear, the Bible says sex between men is an "abomination." Gen Pace, after all, said he believed it's immoral. And most of all, say it loud and say it proud: the thought of your buddy having the hots for you creeps out most straight guys. That's not going to go away with top-down legislation.

First, the religious argument. Whatever you believe in your sacred scripture, whether that's the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the Greek Bible (New Testament), the Holy Koran, the Upanishads, The Book of Mormon, or "Science and Health," should be completely irrelevant to the secular military. The military isn't paid to uphold any particular set of religious beliefs. It's paid to defend the country and win her wars.

Besides, the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) also says lots of other things are an "abomination," like eating pork or shellfish, gathering sticks on the Sabbath, or wearing garments consisting of a mixture of fibers—things which virtually all Christians do with no problem, and most Jews nowadays. We cherry-pick the things we choose to take from our Holy

Scriptures. In any case, scholars have a lot to say about this translation of “abomination”—as well as St. Paul’s later disapproval of sex between men (female-female sex is not considered in either part of the Bible). Or is his disapproval with respect to selling sex as a temple prostitute, rather than the sexual act itself? Scholars have argued that it is. As for this “abomination” business, the original word wasn’t “abomination,” an English word. What was the original Hebrew word? And what did it mean in context? (Some scholars have argued it’s closer to “ritual uncleanness,” about on par for the Hebrews with having sex with a menstruating woman, who was also considered unclean.)

In any case, you shouldn’t confuse your sense of being outraged with having a short line to God. Recently I was in Cairo, where many men think it’s immoral for women (those vixens) to show their hair. Some think it’s immoral for women to show their faces, and are outraged when we in the West say we don’t see why. How is their outrage different from ours? Does the fact that they’re outraged mean they’re right?

Now let me acknowledge the problem that still won’t go away. There’s a reason why many straight men do cherry-pick this particular Hebrew (and later Pauline—as in the Apostle Pau;) prohibition. (This is the one that makes me think the people most concerned with forbidding gay sex are the ones most convinced everybody wants to do it, only we’re not allowed to, like stealing or lying. So the Bible says we’d all be gay if we could get away with it?) It’s because many straight men are acutely uncomfortable being physically close to a man who, they know, could have the hots for them. And there are lots of physically close situations in the military.

Of course, straight boys love looking at girls, love fantasizing about what we’re going to do to them. And women put up with this all the time: we just have to control ourselves, in a sort

of DADT, and they can't make us stop imagining anything we want. Guys look at girls, that's just the way it is. Typically guys kind of like girls looking at them, if it's clearly understood that the power still lies with us.

What, typically, we don't like, is the feeling that another guy could have power over us. We like the sense we're in control with the women, and are deeply resistant to the possibility that a guy could be in control of us.

Roger that. No argument there; that's just the way sex works for most people. All the liberals on Earth can't deny away this fact. That's why a lot of straight boys tend to get squeamish when they're naked and vulnerable—that's why there are so many of the "don't drop the soap" jokes.

I'm not denying that's the way we feel; I'm just denying that we're seriously threatened. The other guy has to lay off too in the military, and will, unless he's given encouragement. Okay, if he's twice your size and a rapist, look out. But it's highly unlikely you're going to have somebody like that in your unit. Band of brothers, remember?

Straight boys also bond with each other over a common interest in girls, just the way they bond with each other in comparing their guns. It is absolutely true that a group of scared 18-year-old men are going to relate better to a man they're sure is not trying to bang them, and who moreover is enough like them that he likes sex with women, can tell the same jokes, and whom they can use as a role model. They'll work harder for him, and their morale will be higher. Morale isn't rational; it's based on gut feelings. The contact sport aspect of the military is what makes this following a gay person problematic. It's true that gay and straight men can work together in an office. And a large proportion of the military nowadays is the office. But not all of it is. And that's where lifting DADT is going to pose problems. They may be problems we're

willing to accept (as we accept the problems posed by women). But there's no sense denying that they'll be there.

I've had conversations with advocates of abolishing DADT who argue that allies (such as Canada) have abolished their bans on gays and seen no effect at all. The surprising argument they offer for saying that lifting DADT will make the gays happier and have no effect on the straights is—are you ready for this?—that most gays will not in fact come out for fear of damaging morale. In other words, it won't be a legal rule that keeps them in the closet, but acknowledgment that I'm right in what I say above: they'll lose major command points if they come out as gay. So they won't. And that's why the effect of lifting DADT will be (so we hear) a big fat zero.

My question is, how is this kind of self-policing better than legal policing, if the situation itself hasn't changed?

Perhaps the answer is that it's more in line with the way we do things in America: it lets the gay guys (and gals) decide what to reveal, acknowledging that the world isn't a completely gay-friendly one. If they think they won't lose points, go for it. If they're wrong and they do, they're the ones who pay. It's certainly a system that's more in line with reality. In any case we needn't think that DADT is keeping gay people out of the military: it's just making them miserable while they're in. To reiterate: the issue isn't whether or not we let gay men and women into the military. They're here. The issue is, how do we deal with it? Lifting DADT may not make gay sailors, soldiers, and Marines happier, but at least they won't be able to blame the system.

It does mean straight men will have to learn to say “no thanks,” if that's what they want to say. But that part is easy. Women do it all the time. And that's the subject of Part II.

II: Vive la Différence!

In Part I we considered an adult military world containing gay people. In Part II we consider a no less complex topic: an adult military world containing women. Women, that is, as seen by straight men. Our topic is thus: how straight men can work with women in a military unit without all the problems we currently have.

Right now we have plenty of problems. Many of these have been created by the head-in-sand attitude of the brass. Official doctrine insists there is no problem, insisting—contrary to all intuition and age-old wisdom—that the relationship between the sexes is a non-issue. Women = men = women.

Everybody knows this isn't true. Women talk differently than men (see the work of Deborah Tannen on this subject), to a degree they may think differently (feminist thought coming from French thinkers like Julia Kristeva suggest this at any rate), and have different emotional landscapes (consider "chick flicks"). Women and men may have the ability to contribute equally, if sometimes in different ways, to the military, but they are *not* identical. The pig-headed official insistence that men and women are absolutely interchangeable, coupled with the "if you don't agree with me I'll throw you in the brig" political correctness on this subject that the military is dishing out, is the greatest stumbling block to men and women actually getting along in its ranks.

We could defuse the problems to a great degree if we admitted we have them. But we're not allowed to admit that we've created these problems, and made them worse, by pretending they don't exist.

Here at USNA, the brass screw it up to a degree that's almost unimaginable. They put 4,000 hormone-crazed young people on top of each other in a single huge dormitory, keep the women a minority, encourage the men to be "manly" but don't explain what this means, don't talk about sex with the midshipmen except in a lecturing way, apparently presuppose that men are guilty unless proven innocent, and have no way of even acknowledging, much less dealing with male resentment, which they simply try to deny. It's a poisonous situation.

The official response is to subject everyone to endless punitive "training" that leaves the men feeling they're being attacked. Things aren't made better by the now-documented (no! you didn't just imagine it!) administration's favoritism to women—which of course followed on decades of telling the women they just had to suck it up.

So let's talk about the basics of male-female sexuality; there are some generalizations here, and to every rule there are a hundred exceptions that don't, thereby, invalidate the rule.

The most basic fact about male-female sexuality, from the male perspective, is that we men typically have the power position—and love it. We're usually bigger and stronger, typically we're the ones who offer to the women, and we're typically most turned on when the woman lets us take the initiative. We like the chase. That's a fact, and all the politically correct lectures in the world aren't going to change that. So any rational discussion with straight guys in a predominantly male military has to start off with acknowledging that this kind of initiative in men is good. It's what's kept the human race going for this long, and probably it's going to be necessary to keep it going for however much longer it keeps going. Few women like an indecisive man.

Everybody got that? Being "a guy" is good.

The first problem in discussing straight sexuality with men is that nowadays we fail to start off with this point, this “we love you because you’re guys.” Nowadays it’s all “we suspect you because you’re guys, we think you’re potential rapists.” This is going to make it impossible to get through to any normal group of men, so all the “training” in the world that starts from this point of view is doomed to failure. In fact, such “training” makes things worse, because it makes the men feel bitter and misunderstood, not to mention alienated from the system.

So I’m saying it again: we love you guys. Taking the initiative, being in the power position, being the one who gets to make the proposition: that’s what it means to be a guy. This needs to be celebrated as the biological imperative of being male. But this brings us to point two. At the same time, it also has to be understood as something general that requires flexibility and suppleness in working it out in particular situations. Just because you’re hard-wired to come on to women doesn’t mean you should come on to *this* woman, here and now. Nor does it mean it’s going to get you what you want. Your male imperative is in making the offer; her female imperative is in accepting or rejecting it.

Being a guy means, typically, you make the offer—the fact that you get to make it is what gives you the power position. However part of the almost existential situation of being a guy is that you have to make offers in the dark: you play your hand without knowing what’s in the woman’s. You can’t assume it’s a hand that’s complementary to yours. Men tend to confuse having to make the first offer with winning. But that’s nonsense: all it means is, you have to keep making the offers. That’s what men do. They don’t hit a bull’s eye every time. Nobody, not even a stud, bats 1000. That’s the fact. You can do your best and hope for success, but should never get upset if it doesn’t work out. Being a guy means trying over and over again, not necessarily winning any particular round.

Men who don't realize this do get upset when, inevitably, they lose out more often than win. What they need to do is just shrug good-humoredly and move on. What they do instead is: get angry at the woman, or rail at women in general. That's the logical mistake we can correct, and that's what poisons male-female relationships, causing men to talk trash about women, and causing even worse—the kind of worse that leads to rape. Even if you think the woman is right for you doesn't mean she thinks you're right for her. Or that you *are* right for her. Maybe she sees something you don't. Maybe she isn't even looking. In any case, you've made the offer: she can say yes or no. You can't get furious if she exercises the "no" option. That's how the game is played.

There's a poster I've seen here at USNA that gives a number of frequently offered excuses for date rape. One of the reasons is: "She wearing such a short skirt." As in: of course she wanted it. Otherwise why would she have been dressed the way she was?

One misreading of this poster, which unfortunately is ubiquitous at anti-rape sessions built around it, is that a woman's wearing a short skirt is never a sexual come-on. If they're told this, men will simply tune out the rest of the session, because it isn't true. Sometimes it *is* a signal, and if the man doesn't make sexual advances, the woman concludes he's a wuss, and turns away.

So yes. Under certain circumstances, a short skirt can be a come-on. What men fail to understand is that it isn't always, and of course it never means the woman wants to be raped. Seduced, maybe. But even that's a big maybe. Many times women get dressed up in skin-tight jeans and heels just to go out with girlfriends, or to "look nice." Because the man wants sex, he assumes that's what the short skirt means. It may, sure. But it doesn't have to. You can think it does, but you need a lot more confirmation before you can come to this conclusion. That may not

be what she has in mind at all. And on discovering the woman didn't want that, many men become resentful toward women: why can't they send clear signals? Probably they were, only you assumed what you wanted to assume, and didn't try to confirm your assumptions by paying attention.

So just because you've decided you want her doesn't mean she wants you. She may like you, but even that isn't guaranteed, and in any case it doesn't necessarily mean she wants to happen what you want to happen. You have to play it one step at a time, keeping in mind that the probability is minimal of it ending up where you want it to end.

That's a huge one for most guys to "get." Just because what you see fits with your fantasies doesn't mean that's what the woman has in mind. She could have a steady boyfriend she's happy with. Or getting over a major trauma. Or, yes, into women. Or, more complex, into one woman right now. How do you figure out what she has in mind? You pay attention to what she says, or does. And at some point you can just ask her. Never forget that the chances against success with any particular woman are radically against you. But this shouldn't be upsetting if you consider that you yourself have eliminated 99% of females in order to hit on this one. Why shouldn't you be one of the 99% she too eliminates in her turn?

We men focus on the one case in a hundred (I think those are about the right odds, subtracting the women we can and want to come on to from all the entire pool—you can eliminate most of the grannies right away, presumably) that we want to pursue and forget the ones we eliminated along the way. These include women in the no-fly zone whom we don't think of in sexual terms (she's your sister), those we do think of in sexual terms but aren't allowed to act on our thoughts (she's your buddy's fiancée), those we are allowed to pursue at some point but not now (say it's a work colleague who's never been anything but professional

with you—you have to wait until after hours when she's wearing a little black dress), those you are allowed to approach (she's in the little black dress) but it turns out she's not looking for a man (she's going out with her girlfriends), the cases where she may be looking for a man, but you're not the one.

So even if all systems *for you* are go, chances are way against their all being go for her. Let's say she's an extremely hot woman, but is into women. You're out, buddy. Let's say she's hot and well-dressed but just getting over a bad relationship or a divorce: you're probably out too. Let's say she has a boyfriend she isn't through with (and may never be). You're out there too. What if you're simply not her type? Ever thought of that? Or you're too loud (or drunk) and not even as nice as you can be at your best? She can't make the comparison: what she sees is what she assumes to be true all the time. Of course she's not going to cut you any slack: first impressions count ten-fold.

The reason men get resentful toward women (a resentment that leads to bad situations, including rape) is this failure to see things the way the woman sees them. You've narrowed things down to her. She gets the same chances. And it's stupid to be annoyed at this fact. Men aren't dolts. We can understand, even if we don't like it. But in a military that won't even talk to men like men, who will explain these things?

The male imperative is to come on to women, take the initiative, break the ice. So do it. Sure: once you've decided that the woman is both a possible and an appropriate target to aim at, make an appropriate move. But never ever forget that just because she works for you, at least insofar as you know, doesn't mean you work for her. And take "no" in good humor. You're not always going to land the big one just because you break the ice and drop a line. Men make the offer, then they have to stay tuned to see how it's received. This is something that men who only

focus on their fantasy jackpot fail to do. This thinking is actually encouraged by the black/white world of the Navy or Naval Academy, the list of what's permitted and what isn't. You have to talk about the complex world in the middle for guys to get out of thinking that real women are like a porn movie.

Men can be taught to look for reactions in women. It's actually easy, if you know what you're looking for. No, you won't learn what to look for by hanging out with guys. And "men are rapists" briefs absolutely do not help. Men aren't like women in this way. Men are trained to say outright to other guys what they think: this is the source of the male conviction that men are up-front and women are devious. However it's not because a woman is a woman that she's apparently being devious with you. It's because you're jockeying with her to see if you're sexual partners, and presumably not with your buddies. She's not playing this game with her female friends either. You have to see it from her point of view, see yourself the way she sees you. Yes. It's difficult. But it's necessary to playing the game despite almost certain failure, and avoiding the resentment that leads to problems.

So here's how it works. You walk up to a woman with a pick-up line. Let's say: "Hi, my name is John. I saw you across the room and wondered if I could buy you a drink." (Not great, but this kind of long-distance fishing is always difficult.) Here's where you have to pay attention. If she says, "Thanks, but I'm happy with what I have," and turns away, she's said "no." If she says "Sure, John. My name is Martha. I'd love another of this"—and then gives you a smile, or (even better) taps the glass in a not-completely-businesslike way, then you can go to the next step. Watch her eyes. Watch how close she is to you. Watch whether she's smiling. How hard is that, after all?

But the next step is not bed. The next step is something like, “I’m a Major in the Xth. What do you do around here?” If she says “actually I’m a private in your command,” you say, “Sorry, my mistake,” and walk away. If she says, “I’m LT Jane Doe, and I’ve just got here from Texas. I like it that you-all are so friendly around here” then you get a chance at yet another step, and another, and a hundred others. All this before, perhaps—and whoa, cowboy, it’s probably not going to be tonight—bed. Or marriage, whatever you’re looking for, or something in between. (Hint: she may not be looking for the same thing.) That’s the way it’s played, buddy. If you don’t like it, move to Mars.

Your life as a guy will be full of many offers like this from you, any one of which can be refused. You have to make them all to have a chance. But that means you have to watch the woman for permission and encouragement to proceed. If you get “no” then the game is over. You can probably get out of a mistake, at least the first one. But you have to act fast. If you say “I’m sorry, I think I’m nervous. I didn’t mean to say that” you may survive to the next round. If you don’t say this, you’re dead meat.

Many relationships never get started. Some last an evening. Some a night. Some a month, some a year, and some forever. See how small the chances are of any one particular woman being the one you’ll cross the finish line with? So un lax. Keep playing—if you don’t, you’re not a man. And if you don’t play, you can’t win. But never forget that merely playing doesn’t guarantee winning any particular hand. In fact, chances are against it.

That allows you to mellow out: so this woman said “no” and you thought it would work. That’s the rule, not the exception. What do you really know about what’s in her mind anyway? Close to nothing. It might not have worked out anyway. (I once came on to a woman who, unbeknownst to me, had just had an abortion and had been left by her long-term boyfriend. What

did I know?) Say “thanks anyway,” go back to your buddies, and have another draw on your beer. Don’t bitch and moan about women: they’re just doing what they do. And so are you. It’s called being a guy.