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Gender and Feminism

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### Addressing the Male Binary and Sexual Assault

A man is allotted two emotions, happy or angry, two sexualities, gay or straight, and two interests, nerds or jocks. Then, most young men spend an inordinate amount of time consumed by a singular thought: women. Male existence can feel like endless worrying about asking a girl on a date. The binary nature of men coupled with the heightened anxiety surrounding females ensures that there is nothing more embarrassing than addressing your feelings for someone and getting friend zoned. Rejection for men follows this path of binary interpretation, rejection is total, all-consuming, emasculating. On the other hand, when a woman agrees to a date or allows a man to make a move a psychological confirmation can flow down an unsupported path of logic. She will go on a date with me, she finds me cute, she wants to have sex with me. A problem with consent is that for someone to want to have sex they would likely want to go on a date with the other party and probably find the other person cute, but those two conditions don't necessitate consent, a square is a rectangle but a rectangle is not a square. We must explore the middle ground between friends and lovers to break this logic loop that leads to date rape.

The classic 80's romcom when Harry Met Sally poses the question, can men and women be just friends? Presenting yet another binary, friends or lovers, that males are forced to choose between. The answer, of course, is not so two dimensional. Many people would argue that men and women (men in particular) are not able to be just friends, that intimacy demands a sexual component. They argue that therein lies the root of the problem, if a man and woman engage in

intimate interaction, sexual expectations arise that lead to problems such as date rape. However, I want to argue that the problem is not that men and women can't be just friends but rather that there is no middle ground between friends and lovers. For every interaction with the opposite sex, men have been conditioned to determine if the relationship is friendly or sexual. I believe a spectrum can exist that oscillates from platonic relationships to intercourse. Deciding that a relationship is one or the other forces men to think in extremes rather than feel out a relationship carefully.

In reading Georgetown students' recountings of sexual assault and rape I found one girl's narrative particularly simple yet insightful. The anonymous author recalls, "I went back to an upperclassmen's room; he was a friend of mine, someone whom I wanted to spend time with. I did not have any intentions of sleeping with him". Ominous because you know what the expectations are of the male involved in the situation. This woman has no expectations for the night, she is enjoying seeing where the evening takes her. Traversing from the party to the man's house is a change in circumstance that likely caused the man to define the relationship with the girl as sexual. The man hops in the logic stream that ends with him and her having sex, even though consent has not been granted. There is a middle ground for the women that the man has never considered. In this scenario, the man didn't pick up the many signs and literal pleading that voiced the women's displeasure. His jump from friends to fully intimate partners disregarded any variation of friends and lovers that lies in between. If we introduce men to a middle ground they might not jump to extremes. Hopefully, consent would be a journey rather than an answer, a progression into intimacy rather than an instance of awarded consent.

My mind wonders how flirtation and consent intermingle appropriately. Sexual tension is after all developed because you don't know what the other person is thinking. I think that is why

the middle ground needs to be explored so much more. Placing your hand on someone's leg can be unwanted but the emotional toll is much more forgivable than penetrating another's genitals. By moving slowly through the middle ground of sexual comfort we can run up against one another's comfort levels gracefully, and with control. The hope is not only to prevent sexual assault and rape but to come nowhere close to it, and hopefully enjoy the process a bit too.