

# Can men and women be “just friends?”

It's only natural for opposites to attract—so don't try and fight it

Keep it in your pants: you don't have to screw everything in sight



AMANDA TERMEER

point

Face it, Paul: any friendship between men and women has undertones of sexuality. Biology makes men desperate to spread their seed and makes women want to bare children. This animalistic condition is unavoidable. Any connection made between men and women is based on this simple evolutionary process, whether the couple in question is conscious of the desire to procreate or not. Strictly platonic friendships are biologically impossible.

However, many men and women have attempted to defy biology through the formation of alleged non-sexual relationships. Although these friendships begin innocently enough, one member of the twosome inevitably develops a lust for the other. Unfortunately, after this carnal desire is revealed, the counterpart often immediately loses interest. This twisted version of cat and mouse then causes the friendship to fall apart.

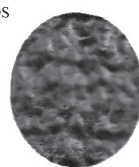
People love to be chased and desired; friendships can gain a lot through sexual tension. The initial chemistry between two members of the opposite sex creates a fulfilling and exciting relationship. After a while, however, the sexual chemistry boils over, leading either to a hookup—or a breakup. After a hookup, the couple is forced to consider the possibility of a lasting relationship, in which case the original friendship is destroyed.

Even if the couple decides to ignore the inevitable hookup, the friendship is suddenly forced to evolve. Quite often the sexual tension leads to more hookups, and

the platonic friendship is forced into the domain of “friends with benefits.” Regardless, the friendship loses its innocence and enters the world of sexuality.

Ernest Hemingway wrote of male bonding being based on misogyny and homophobia, and that when women enter this realm, male friendships tend to fall apart. Moreover, men are suddenly put in an uncomfortable arena of sexual tension and are unable to function as “just” men; instead, they're forced to put on a sort of act for women.

Females also put on an act around men, whether by flaunting their physical prowess through makeup and revealing clothes, or by variously fawning or masking interest in their potential partners.



Dance clubs are excellent for observing the bleak interactions between men and women because they put humans in the position to be blatantly sexual. In this case, men and women put on acts for each other, preventing a true and honest friendship from forming.

The only friendships men and women can have are with outcasts of the gender arena. For example, masculine females, or tomboys, are quite comfortable hanging out with the guys. Effeminate males, on the other hand, fit in better with a gaggle of female counterparts. However, the typical heterosexual members of each sex are unlikely to form friendships with each other.

Essentially, friendships between males and females are impossible. Biology prohibits platonic friendships because sexual tension clouds rational thinking, thus making hookups appear almost inevitable. In the words of Oscar Wilde: “Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship.”



PAUL KNOECHEL

counterpoint

Despite how it may seem, sex isn't the only desire men are built with. For example, I would love to rob a bank or bitch-slap certain individuals who shall go unnamed. But just because I have these desires occasionally doesn't mean I can't use banks regularly and without difficulty, nor that I can't hold calm, violence-free conversations with the aforementioned individuals. Much the same way, men and women can hold back on this supposedly all-consuming biological drive and not only be “just friends,” but great friends at that.

Of course, there are unique challenges to the male-female relationship, but I would suggest that there are even more challenges in male-male and female-female relationships. Sure, there might be a little bit of sexual tension in some instances of heterosexual male-female interaction, but for most people that's pretty standard. On the other hand, experiencing sexual tension with members of your own gender can, depending on your preferred sexual orientation, tear a relationship to shreds with its awkwardness.

Tensions can also arise between same-gender friends over competition for that special girl or guy, as well as over asking those friends advice about the relationship once they have that special person—and anger over the terrible results of said advice.

I believe it was Aristotle—or was it Paula Abdul?—who so wisely said “opposites attract.” And when you're talking about opposites, it's difficult to beat the polar

opposites of men and women. Biologically, we're built rather differently and are governed by different sets hormones; socially, the roles we're subjected to shape us in some way or another as well.

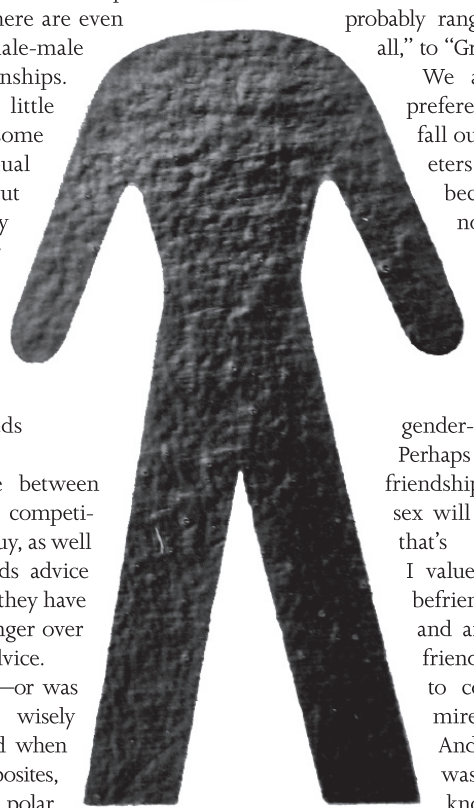
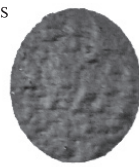
I say thank God for that, since it's because of these differences that friendships can be built around the exchange of advice between the sexes. Both parties benefit from this exchange, and though I personally like to think I'm just a wonderful boyfriend, I must admit that my own relationships have often gained from some female insight. In exchange, I've been able to share my own knowledge with my female friends—especially in bars.

It's also a fact that a lot of male-female relationships simply have zero sexual chemistry. Now I don't know about you over there, Amanda, oozing sexuality and having all the boys fall for you, but it's quite different for the rest of us. For instance, if you were to take a little informal poll of my female friends, asking if there's been sexual tension between us, your responses would probably range from, “No, not at all,” to “Gross.”

We all have our sexual preferences, and when you fall outside of those parameters, there's no tension because there's simply no attraction.

Without this attraction, the only reason the friendship will fail in this case (if it does at all) is going to be something non-gender-specific.

Perhaps for some people, friendships with the opposite sex will never work out, and that's simply unfortunate. I value all the women I've befriended over the years, and am confident that our friendships aren't doomed to collapse into a quagmire of sexual tension. And besides, Oscar Wilde was gay—what would he know about this?



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