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My mother once told me, "If you ever figure women out, write a book!"

How about a column, Mom?

Now I'm not saying that I know everything about the female species. I probably know more about Bulgarian rules for yak hunting than I do about women, but I have figured out everything a guy really needs to know.

I may not be able to answer all of our questions about what women want and need, but hopefully I can keep you off of Ricki Lake. I'll even subtitle it — just like Cosmo.

Trust

First of all, let's throw out this notion that we are living in some peculiar day and age. As far as good relationships go, 1997 is little

different from 1957.

One thing has always been universal — trust. For a while I thought I could get around this one. I was thinking "I don't really trust her, but if I watch her really close ..." Although this theory sounds good, it doesn't work.

Can we say DYS-FUNCTIONAL?

To solve the trust problem I have come up with one simple rule: If you can't trust a prospective girlfriend in a closed room with Fabio, Tom Cruise, Patrick Swayze and Patrick MacDonal modeling briefs — get rid of her.

Attraction and Respect

At one time this combination had me befuddled. "Do I really need to respect her if she looks like THAT?"

This may seem like an impossible situation, and I'm sorry guys, but you need them both. You know the guy with that "drop-dead gorgeous" girlfriend — the one who is worthless in a conversation.

Everybody at the table is talking about fraternity rituals and she's talking about fraternity parties. You're talking about mathematics, she's talking about cosmetics. You may envy her boyfriend now, but wait 10 years; he'll be dating his secretary and she'll be dating her tennis coach.

To avoid this situation — and

save your kids a lot of heartache — find a woman who at least meets a minimum attractiveness standard — a woman who you can also respect.

Good news guys, this is the one time in your life when the less intelligent you are, the more choices you have. If football and fast food are the most important things on your mind, if you have ever heard a Jeff Foxworthy joke and stopped to think that it hit a little too close to home — feel free to date the Kelly Bundys and Jenny McCarthys of the world.

Commitment

Now comes the scary part. Commitment. This not only scares the average male, it terrifies them. I went to my brother's wedding last week. I thought I was going to have an allergic reaction. It was like a horror film. It couldn't have been scarier if Freddy Kruger had been the minister, with Jason Voorhees and Lorena Bobbitt as the best man and bride's maid. I was very happy for my brother but I wanted to run far, far away.

Seriously, we all have to pick one woman — love, honor and cherish her, until death do we part. There is one other option — you can act like you are committed, but go around cheating on your girlfriend and hitting on all of her friends.

But if you do, don't blame me in



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20 years, when your daughters are timid little wall flowers. Don't call me up when your precious, little girls are all dating guys you hate, guys that treat them like you know what.

Then you'll say, "My girl deserves better than that!" (whine, whine, wimper, cry).

I guess every woman is somebody's little girl, huh? Show some backbone. Try one woman at a time. If it doesn't work out — try again.

Personally, I have 10 more years of higher learning to find that perfect woman (and it may take me that long!)

The ~~Other~~ Sex

Men are lying, cheating, unfaithful slugs.

At least that's the message the mass media is pounding out these days. It seems every which way you look, men are cheating on their wives or leaving lovers for the next beautiful young thing that comes their way.

Is there any greater fear than a lover leaving you for someone else? The betrayal and self-doubt can be crippling.

After seeing all these stories and all these movies filled with characters suffering from sexual wanderlust, I'm worried. If men have such a difficult time keeping their pants on, how am I ever going to find a faithful lover?

Keeping in mind that movies aren't real and that Hollywood has its own code of morality, I decided to go the source. In a mass e-mail to my guy friends, I asked them what commitment and monogamy means

to them. I was pleasantly surprised with what they had to say.

Generation X marches to the beat of its own drummer, picking up and casting off social mores at will. Yet, I'm excited to report that from my small, unscientific sampling, the men of Gen. X have a strong sense of commitment and duty.

It may also be that I just have a really swell group of guy friends who have really got it together. And because they're such great guys who don't want to be besieged by commitment-hungry women, some of the names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Men and commitment. What's there to say really? Aren't they all commitment shy? Not so, said my friend James.

"I think that whole thing about men being afraid of commitment is a crock. Typically, I have been the one wanting commitment and she doesn't. When you find the right

person, don't be afraid to commit; that is what makes it all worthwhile."

Echoing James, Eric said, "I think in the '90s that men are more commitment-based and women are looking to just have a fling. I'm not saying that this is always the case; however, between me and my friends, it seems to be the trend."

An impromptu survey of my women friends reveals that every single one of them is afraid of commitment. By no stretch of the imagination are we representative of the entire female population.

We all know being in a relationship can be tough at this stage in our lives; the unknown looming so near.

"Because I'm so close to graduation and am so involved in my career, I can't devote the time or energy to another person, no matter how much I may care about them. I don't want to have to worry about where it would be convenient to go once I graduate," Josh said.

So when the time is right and everything comes together, what do men think about commitment?

My friend Matt said it best, "I think commitment is the ultimate form of expression of your love to one person. I think commitment is sacred and should be taken incredibly seriously. If one cannot take commitment seriously, it shows a serious lack of moral integrity, and it shows weakness. Make a decision and stick to it. If it doesn't work, make the decision to end it and go on."

Matt went on to make a very good point: "Don't f**k around, hurting one to pleasure another. That's robbing Peter to pay Paul."

However, Jeff has an interesting side note. Even though he's all for monogamy and has never cheated, he feels that "monogamy may not be for everybody. But if you get into a monogamous relationship at the right time in your life, the issue of faithfulness isn't a big concern."

Cheating is not without its consequences, as Eric points out.

"... I have seen what cheating can do to a family and a person and would never want to cause a family or person that much pain, so that is why I would never cheat on someone, especially if I was married."

Everyone flirts, and friends frequently hug and occasionally kiss. And it's hard not to notice the hottie in your poli sci class.

Therefore, what constitutes cheating?

Jason defines cheating as "physical contact other than the friendship hug."

By far the worst form of cheating is not the physical betrayal. "The mental aspect (of cheating) is what I think hurts the most," Jason said.

Is flirting cheating, even though everyone seems to do it — and accept it?

According to James, no. "I'm not usually aware that I am flirting. Either because a) I'm no good at it, b) I don't do it or c) she doesn't respond. Flirting takes two people."

Jason goes a little deeper.

"Flirting can have two goals. One, just for fun. Two, it's the initiation of a relationship or sexual act. This is like a crime, which has two parts. The first is the actus rea, or act. The second is the mens rea, which basically is the intent ... so flirting is based on the intent of the person flirting."

Steve's definition of cheating is much simpler: "I know it when I see it."

Is thinking about another person cheating? How about while you're in bed?

Steve doesn't care. "It might get her to act out more and that's good for me. Besides, someone else may be in her mind, but I'm there in the flesh."

"Absolutely not. I have to concentrate like a ninja warrior to keep the train a rollin', so other women do not figure in — ever,"



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Matt said.

Jason said, "Just because you're with another in a relationship doesn't mean you're dead; others are still attractive, and we always covet what we cannot have."

As for forgiveness, it's a split ticket.

Steve said that he's forgiven a cheater in the past. "Being young and dumb, I believed them just because I was whipped. If that were to happen now, I would hope that I would have the balls to send her ass packing then and there. I'm tired of being shit on!"

Whereas Eric plans on showing a little more mercy if the situation were to arise.

"I would forgive a woman that cheated on me one time in a moment of weakness or passion, but if I felt it was going to be a continuous occurrence then I would leave."

All hope is not lost! The men of Generation X show the signs of being dedicated, loving partners. They believe in trust and monogamy. My small sampling seems ready to give their absolute all to the women they love. Matt said it best:

"And, if I am to trust someone completely with my heart and soul, they must pledge themselves to me and I to them."



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