

**NO MEANS NO**

STOP TRIVIALISING HARASSMENT

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After seeing way too many women being sexually harassed by people from my close peer groups, I was appalled by how many men actually didn't know how their toxic culture actually propagated and trivialised this.

When I was a teenager, we boys devoted ourselves to the art of wooing girls. We equated our self-worth with how many girls we could impress and be in a relationship with. It became a competition. Girls were not treated as human beings but rather, as collectibles which would, figuratively, be put on display for us to boast about. If you didn't have an impressive scoreboard, you would be regarded as one of the inferior few and shunned. Thus, to be respected amongst the "Bros" you needed to have a tally.

This "need" made a lot of boys desperate. I recall a time where a friend kept obsessing over this one girl. He would always bore us to death about how he thought she was perfect and whatnot. Mind you, he never interacted with this girl at all. So it should've occurred to him that she would say no when he asked her out in front of everyone at a coaching centre one fine morning. Naturally, he was devastated and by the time he overcame his grief, the girl started dating someone else. The friend then started spreading nasty rumours about the girl being of ill-repute because she didn't say yes to him. The girl had to leave the coaching centre and go somewhere else because everyone started behaving badly with her. A lot of boys like him have no understanding of what consent is and how to ask for it. They think they can hound a girl and pressurise her into giving in, which is very similar to the predatory behaviour that sexual harassers exhibit.

Sometimes, guys even turn friends against a girl who declined their advances. I've seen way too many cases where people blamed a girl saying "Don't you see that he

loves you so much?" and "Why are you so stone-hearted? Don't you know what he's going through for you?"

I'm sorry, but a "nice guy" who expects reciprocation because he exhibited common human decency is probably not a very nice guy at all.

Whenever someone speaks out against this behaviour, we are told to vehemently hate that person because going against your bro is "not cool". This stems from our deeply-ingrained insecurity.

Speaking of insecurity, when a woman

actually speaks out against harassment, you'll find a crowd of guys shaking their fists angrily at her because they are afraid of the so-called "false" allegation. This is a major reason why so many sexual harassment cases go unreported by the victims. The culture of blaming and shaming the victims is so widespread, that it sometimes even serves as a deterrent when the victim wants to take official action.

Remember how certain masculine role models on TV and media say they always get a "yes" out of a woman no matter

what? Yeah, no, that is coercion. This Bro culture of glorifying "getting" women by overpowering them mentally and emotionally needs to stop.

So, should we just stop interacting with women altogether? If we're that bad, we should probably lock ourselves up in our rooms and never go outside, right?

My answer is, of course not. It is not a crime to court a woman. A healthy consensual relationship is a great thing to strive for. But there are multiple things that guys need to keep in mind here.

If you like someone, you can always express that. But keep in mind that you must ensure that they are comfortable with your advances. Respect her decisions and her wishes. If she says no, it is not the end of the world for you and no, it does not shatter your value as a man.

If you make someone uncomfortable, they will tell you or they will show signs that they do not welcome your advances. Recognise that you are at fault, apologise, and promise to never do this again. They will forgive based on the extent of what was done. If someone doesn't stop even after the other person has expressed their refusal explicitly or implicitly, it is sexual harassment. Remember, sexual predators make increasingly bold advances even when told to stop.

Intent is a big factor here, and the woman in our society can easily distinguish the difference between an accidental touch and an intentional grab.

All in all, we men should strive to create a healthy environment in our society where we stand united with women against sexual harassment and help them live without fear. Empathy doesn't make us lesser men. The lack of it does.

Shahrukh Ikhtear roams the mystical plains of adulthood in search of the fabled work-life balance. Help him out with good music or just say wholesome things at fb.com/sr.ikhhtear

