

Ask your interviewee to describe the attitudes that governed female sexual behavior — or female identity — in his or her day. How were “good girls” supposed to act? What counted as *bad* behavior — and what were the subtle or overt social punishments for that behavior? Write a brief report of your findings, comparing the older person’s description of attitudes at an earlier time with those you hold today.

6. Try rewriting one of Kingston’s versions of No Name Woman’s story from the point of view of the man. How might he see things differently? After you have written this man’s version, jot down a few things about him. What does he value? What does he think of women? What is his relationship to women? Finally, bring your version to class to compare with those of two classmates. After studying each version, work together to make a list of what the three versions have in common and a list of how they differ.

DAVE BARRY

Guys vs. Men

ONE OF THE FIRST WORDS I ever spoke was truck, and about forty-five years later I finally bought one, a fully skid-plated 4 × 4 Yukon tall enough to scrape the garage roof and designed to roll me safely over the treacherous ravines and gullies between . . . home and work. Well, I’m man enough to admit that gas-guzzling Big Blue made as much sense as a drawbridge, and I eventually traded it in for a smaller, more environmentally friendly SUV. But the guy in me still yearns for tow hooks, a robust V-8, and a subwoofer that will pop rivets.

If you don’t understand what makes grown men covet “neat stuff” or ruin their knees to conquer at touch football, reading Dave Barry’s “Guys vs. Men” may help a little. Barry (b. 1947) is, of course, a guy, and that fact helps him at least diagnose the problem of guyness — if it is one. Suffice to say that a lot of men will recognize themselves in the categories he describes. And some women may identify with the “stupid behavioral patterns” that mark men as guys. In fact, when I discussed Barry’s essay in a writing class recently, the women insisted on a “guy” term of their own and came up with chick.

“Guys vs. Men” is the preface to Dave Barry’s Complete Guide to Guys: A Fairly Short Book (1995). Barry is a Pulitzer Prize-winning humorist who, early in his career, lectured to business audiences on effective writing. He has published more than a dozen books and collections of humor, including *Stay Fit and Healthy until You’re Dead* (1985) and *Dave Barry Hits below the Beltway* (2001). Barry’s syndicated column appears in more than 500 newspapers.

—J.R.

This is a book about guys. It’s not a book about men. There are already way too many books about men, and most of them are way too serious.

Men itself is a serious word, not to mention *manhood* and *manly*. Such words make being male sound like a very important activity, as opposed to what it primarily consists of, namely, possessing a set of minor and frequently unreliable organs.

But men tend to attach great significance to *Manhood*. This results in certain characteristically masculine, by which I mean stupid, behavioral patterns that can produce unfortunate results such as violent crime, war, spitting, and ice hockey. These

Who might write
“Chicks vs.
Women”? Whoopi
Goldberg? Queen
Latifah? Hillary
Rodham Clinton?
—A.L.

Could a woman get
away with such a
trivialization of
womanhood? The
fact that a man can
(and so successfully
at that) is evidence
in itself for Barry’s
argument.
—J.G.R.

follows:

Henry Kissinger looks like a big fat wart.

Then I stare at that for another ten minutes, pondering whether I should try to work in the concept of "hairy."

This is absurdly simple work for my computer. It sits there, humming impatiently, bored to death, passing the time between keystrokes via brain-teaser activities such as developing a Unified Field Theory of the universe and translating the complete works of Shakespeare into rap.²

In other words, this computer is absurdly overqualified to work for me, and yet soon, I guarantee, I will buy an *even more powerful* one. I won't be able to stop myself. I'm a guy.

Probably the ultimate example of the fundamental guy drive to have neat stuff is the Space Shuttle. Granted, the guys in charge of this program *claim* it has a Higher Scientific Purpose, namely to see how humans function in space. But of course we have known for years how humans function in space: They float around and say things like: "Looks real good, Houston!"

No, the real reason for the existence of the Space Shuttle is that it is one humongous and spectacularly gizmo-intensive item of hardware. Guys can tinker with it practically forever, and occasionally even get it to work, and use it to place *other* complex mechanical items into orbit, where they almost immediately break, which provides a great excuse to send the Space Shuttle up *again*. It's Guy Heaven.

Other results of the guy need to have stuff are Star Wars, the recreational boating industry, monorails, nuclear weapons, and wristwatches that indicate the phase of the moon. I am not saying that women haven't been involved in the development or use of this stuff. I'm saying that, without guys, this stuff probably would not exist; just as, without women, virtually every piece of furniture in the world would still be in its original position. Guys do not have a

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How about dividing Shakespeare's characters into guys or men? Fdstaff — now, there was a guy. —A.L.

Less than amusing — especially in light of the space shuttle disasters. Is he implying that guys aren't interested in basic ethical questions like what results their gizmos have on people's lives? —A.L.

Probably the most telltale line of this piece. —J.G.R.

Little boys don't have to be taught to want toy cars or video games. —J.R.

things have given males a bad name.¹ And the "Men's Movement," which is supposed to bring out the more positive aspects of Manliness, seems to be densely populated with loons and goobers.

So I'm saying that there's another way to look at males: not as aggressive macho dominators; not as sensitive, liberated, hugging drummers; but as *guys*.

And what, exactly, do I mean by "guys"? I don't know. I haven't thought that much about it. One of the major characteristics of guyhood is that we guys don't spend a lot of time pondering our deep innermost feelings. There is a serious question in my mind about whether guys actually *have* deep innermost feelings, unless you count, for example, loyalty to the Detroit Tigers, or fear of bridal showers.

But although I can't define exactly what it means to be a guy, I can describe certain guy characteristics, such as:

GUYS LIKE NEAT STUFF

By "neat," I mean "mechanical and unnecessarily complex." I'll give you an example. Right now I'm typing these words on an *extremely* powerful computer. It's the latest in a line of maybe ten computers I've owned, each one more powerful than the last. My computer is chock full of RAM and ROM and bytes and megahertz and various other items that enable a computer to kick data-processing butt. It is probably capable of supervising the entire U.S. air-defense apparatus while simultaneously processing the tax return of every resident of Ohio. I use it mainly to write a newspaper column. This is an activity wherein I sit and stare at the screen for maybe ten minutes, then, using only my forefingers, slowly type something like:

Henry Kissinger looks like a big wart.*

I stare at this for another ten minutes, have an inspiration, then amplify the original thought as

Alas! Barry's first slip — completely neglecting the computer's all-important functions of Solitaire and Hearts. How would we play these without a computer? —J.G.R.

¹Specifically, "ashole."

²Henry Kissinger (b. 1923): foreign policy advisor to President Nixon and U.S. Secretary of State, 1973-77

²To be or not? I got to *know*.

Might kill myself by the end of the *show*.

basic need to rearrange furniture. Whereas a woman who could cheerfully use the same computer for fifty-three years will rearrange her furniture on almost a weekly basis, sometimes in the dead of night. She'll be sound asleep in bed, and suddenly, at 2 a.m., she'll be awakened by the urgent thought: *The blue-green sofa needs to go perpendicular to the wall instead of parallel, and it needs to go there RIGHT NOW*. So she'll get up and move it, which of course necessitates moving other furniture, and soon she has rearranged her entire living room, shifting great big heavy pieces that ordinarily would require several burly men to lift, because there are few forces in Nature more powerful than a woman who needs to rearrange furniture. Every so often a guy will wake up to discover that, because of his wife's overnight efforts, he now lives in an entirely different house.

(I realize that I'm making gender-based generalizations here, but my feeling is that if God did not want us to make gender-based generalizations, She would not have given us genders.)

GUYS LIKE A REALLY POINTLESS CHALLENGE

Not long ago I was sitting in my office at the *Miami Herald's* Sunday magazine, *Tropic*, reading my fan mail,³ when I heard several of my guy coworkers in the hallway talking about how fast they could run the forty-yard dash. These are guys in their thirties and forties who work in journalism, where the most demanding physical requirement is the ability to digest vending-machine food. In other words, these guys have absolutely no need to run the forty-yard dash.

But one of them, Mike Wilson, was writing a story about a star high-school football player who could run it in 4.38 seconds. Now if Mike had written a story about, say, a star high-school poet, none of my guy coworkers would have suddenly decided to find out how well they could write sonnets. But when Mike turned in his story, they became

³ *A tongue-in-cheek nod at the politically correct. Nice.*
—J.G.R.

Another stereotype neatly deployed
And he counts on our not minding that he lumps all women into one category — it's part of what he has to do to make such portraits "funny."
—A.L.

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deeply concerned about how fast they could run the forty-yard dash. They were so concerned that the magazine editor, Tom Shroder, decided that they should get a stopwatch and go out to a nearby park and find out. Which they did, a bunch of guys taking off their shoes and running around barefoot in a public park on company time.

This is what I heard them talking about, out in the hall. I heard Tom, who was thirty-eight years old, saying that his time in the forty had been 5.75 seconds. And I thought to myself: This is ridiculous. These are middle-aged guys, supposedly adults, and they're out there *bragging* about their performance in this stupid juvenile footrace. Finally I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Hey!" I shouted. "I could beat 5.75 seconds."

So we went out to the park and measured off forty yards, and the guys told me that I had three chances to make my best time. On the first try my time was 5.78 seconds, just three-hundredths of a second slower than Tom's, even though, at forty-five, I was seven years older than he. So I just *knew* I'd beat him on the second attempt if I ran really, really hard, which I did for a solid ten yards, at which point my left hamstring muscle, which had not yet shifted into Spring Mode from Mail-Reading Mode, went, and I quote, "pop."

I had to be helped off the field. I was in considerable pain, and I was obviously not going to be able to walk right for weeks. The other guys were very sympathetic, especially Tom, who took the time to call me at home, where I was sitting with an ice pack on my leg and twenty-three Advil in my bloodstream, so he could express his concern.

"Just remember," he said, "*you didn't beat my time.*"

There are countless other examples of guys rising to meet pointless challenges. Virtually all sports fall into this category, as well as a large part of U.S. foreign policy. ("I'll bet you can't capture Manuel Noriega!"* "Oh YEAH??")

OK. Now I know I am not and never can be a "guy."
This is the last thing I would do in response to a story about 40-yard dash times.
—A.L.

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Any guy who has ever competed in an "cat-fil-you-PUKE" contest with 49-cent tacos can relate to this.
—J.G.R.

Who is it that proposed cutting out all militaries the world over and resolving all foreign policy crises by sending out squads to play some game? I can just imagine Barry describing such scenes.
—A.L.

I may expire on the football court some day. But I'll go happy — so long as I'm winning.
—J.R.

Oh "Last one to the moon has to eat the Berlin Wall."
(It took them over 20 years to pay up for this one.)
—J.G.R.

³Typical fan letter: "Who cuts your hair? Beavers?"

GUYS DO NOT HAVE A RIGID AND WELL-DEFINED MORAL CODE

This is not the same as saying that guys are bad. Guys *are* capable of doing bad things, but this generally happens when they try to be Men and start becoming manly and aggressive and stupid. When they're being just plain guys, they aren't so much actively *evil* as they are *lost*. Because guys have never really grasped the Basic Human Moral Code, which I believe was invented by women millions of years ago when all the guys were out engaging in some other activity, such as seeing who could burp the loudest. When they came back, there were certain rules that they were expected to follow unless they wanted to get into Big Trouble, and they have been trying to follow these rules ever since, with extremely irregular results. Because guys have never *internalized* these rules. Guys are similar to my small auxiliary backup dog, Zippy, a guy dog⁴ who has been told numerous times that he is *not* supposed to (1) get into the kitchen garbage or (2) poop on the floor. He knows that these are the rules, but he has never really understood *why*, and sometimes he gets to thinking: Sure, I am *ordinarily* not supposed to get into the garbage, but obviously this rule is not meant to apply when there are certain extenuating⁵ circumstances, such as (1) somebody just threw away some perfectly good seven-week-old Kung Pao Chicken, and (2) I am home alone.

And so when the humans come home, the kitchen floor has been transformed into GarbageFest USA, and Zippy, who usually comes rushing up, is off in a corner disguised in a wig and sunglasses, hoping to get into the Federal Bad Dog Relocation Program before the humans discover the scene of the crime.

When I yell at him, he frequently becomes so upset that he poops on the floor.

⁴I also have a female dog, Earnest, who *never* breaks the rules.

⁵I am taking some liberties here with Zippy's vocabulary. More likely, in his mind, he uses the term *mitigating*.

Guys do care about rules when it comes to their machines or cars — the more sophisticated the better. Only guys could have invented cars or the infield fly rule. —J.R.

Wonder if his wife read this? —J.G.R.

Morally, most guys are just like Zippy, only taller and usually less hairy. Guys are *aware* of the rules of moral behavior, but they have trouble keeping these rules in the forefronts of their minds at certain times, especially the present. This is especially true in the area of faithfulness to one's mate. I realize, of course, that there are countless examples of guys being faithful to their mates until they die, usually as a result of being eaten by their mates immediately following copulation. Guys outside of the spider community, however, do not have a terrific record of faithfulness. I'm not saying guys are scum. I'm saying that many guys who consider themselves to be committed to their marriages will stray if they are confronted with overwhelming temptation, defined as "virtually any temptation."

Okay, so maybe I *am* saying guys are scum. But they're not *mean-spirited* scum. And few of them — even when they are out of town on business trips, far from their wives, and have a clear-cut opportunity — will poop on the floor.

GUYS ARE NOT GREAT AT COMMUNICATING THEIR INTIMATE FEELINGS, ASSUMING THEY HAVE ANY

This is an aspect of guyhood that is very frustrating to women. A guy will be reading the newspaper, and the phone will ring; he'll answer it, listen for ten minutes, hang up, and resume reading. Finally his wife will say: "Who was that?"

And he'll say: "Phil Wonkerman's mom."

(Phil is an old friend they haven't heard from in seventeen years.)

And the wife will say, "Well?"

And the guy will say, "Well what?"

And the wife will say, "What did she say?"

And the guy will say, "She said Phil is fine," making it clear by his tone of voice that, although he does not wish to be rude, he is trying to read the newspaper, and he happens to be right in the middle of an important panel of "Calvin and Hobbes."

But the wife, ignoring this, will say, "That's *all* she said?"

Well, that's a relief — considering that they will readily foul up their marriages. —A.L.

And she will not let up. She will continue to ask district-attorney-style questions, forcing the guy to recount the conversation until she's satisfied that she has the entire story, which is that Phil just got out of prison after serving a sentence for a murder he committed when he became a drug addict because of the guilt he felt when his wife died in a freak submarine accident while Phil was having an affair with a nun, but now he's all straightened out and has a good job as a trapeze artist and is almost through with the surgical part of his sex change and recently became happily engaged to marry a prominent member of the Grateful Dead, so in other words he is fine, which is *exactly* what the guy told her in the first place, but is that enough? No. She wants to hear *every single detail*.

Or let's say two couples get together after a long separation. The two women will have a conversation, lasting several days, during which they discuss virtually every significant event that has occurred in their lives and the lives of those they care about, sharing their innermost thoughts, analyzing and probing, inevitably coming to a deeper understanding of each other, and a strengthening of a cherished friendship. Whereas the guys will watch the play-offs.

This is not to say the guys won't share their feelings. Sometimes they'll get quite emotional.

"That's not a FOUL??" they'll say.

Or: "YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT'S NOT A FOUL??"

I have a good friend, Gene, and one time, when he was going through a major medical development in his life, we spent a weekend together. During this time Gene and I talked a lot and enjoyed each other's company immensely, but — this is true — the most intimate personal statement he made to me is that he has reached Level 24 of a video game called "Arkanoiid." He had even seen the Evil Presence, although he refused to tell me what it looks like. We're very close, but there is a limit.

You may think that my friends and I are Neanderthals, and that a lot of guys are different. This is true. A lot of guys don't use words at *all*. They communicate entirely by nonverbal methods, such as sharing bait.

This section on "communication" especially this communication between men and women, is the subject of several books by Deborah Tannen, whose studies might suggest that Barry is not far off the mark here. —A.L.

I am glad to say I know some men who really are different, especially in the way they communicate their feelings. —A.L.

Example Chart

Men	Guys
Vince Lombardi	Joe Namath
Oliver North	Gilligan
Hemingway	Gary Larson
Columbus	Whoever astronaut hit the first golf ball on the Moon
Superman	Bart Simpson
Doberman pinschers	Labrador retrievers
Abbott	Costello
Captain Ahab	Captain Kangaroo
Satan	Snidely Whiplash
The pope	Willard Scott
Germany	Italy
Geraldo	Katie Couric

Are you starting to see what I mean by "guyness"? I'm basically talking about the part of the male psyche that is less serious and/or aggressive than the Manly Manhood part, but still essentially very male. My feeling is that the world would be a much better⁶ place if more males would stop trying so hard to be Men and instead settle for being Guys. Think of the historical problems that could have been avoided if more males had been able to keep their genderhood in its proper perspective, both in themselves and in others. ("Hey, Adolf, just because you happen to possess a set of minor and frequently unreliable organs, that is no reason to invade Poland.") And think how much happier women would be if, instead of endlessly fretting about what the males in their lives are thinking, they could relax, secure in the knowledge that the correct answer is: *very little*.

All kidding aside, I do think women need a better understanding of the way guys think, if that's the right verb for the process. —J.R.

C'mon, Dave . . . even you had to do some thinking to come up with this book. —A.L.

⁶As measured by total sales of [my] book.

Yes, what we need, on the part of both genders, is more understanding of guyness. And that is why I wrote this book. I intend to explore in detail every major facet of guyhood, including the historical facet, the sociological facet, the physiological facet, the psychosexual facet, and the facet of how come guys spit so much. Every statement of fact you will read in this book is either based on actual laboratory tests, or else I made it up. But you can trust me. I'm a guy.

Stimulus-Response Comparison Chart:
Women vs. Men vs. Guys

Stimulus	Typical Woman Response	Typical Man Response	Typical Guy Response
An untamed river in the wilderness.	Contemplate its beauty.	Build a dam.	See who can pee the farthest off the dam.
A child who is sent home from school for being disruptive in class.	Talk to the child in an effort to determine the cause.	Threaten to send the child to a military academy.	Teach the child how to make armpit farts.
Human mortality	Religious faith	The pyramids	Bungee-jumping

QUESTIONING THE TEXT

1. Barry's humor obviously plays off of gross stereotypes about men. Under score or annotate all the stereotypes you can find in the essay.
2. Barry employs a lengthy analogy featuring his dog Zippy to explore the moral behavior of guys (p. 410). In a group, discuss this analogy, focusing on the observations that seem especially apt.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Pick any essay from this collection and give it the Dave Barry treatment. That is, try your hand at making readers see the subject from a comic perspective. You might, for example, write a short article portraying the issues in James Q. Wilson's "Cars and Their Enemies" (p. 320) as a battle between car nuts and tree-huggers, or think up some opportunities for humor after reading Kay S. Hymowitz's "Scenes from the Exhibitionists" (p. 233). Be certain your comic piece makes a point, and think carefully about audience: you will probably want to be careful not to offend.
2. Barry suggests that men love complicated gizmos that they can tinker with forever. Examine Barry's observations side by side with any of the readings on science and technology in Chapter 5. Write a serious response to Barry's humorous observations. Is science a male obsession with how things work? What evidence can you find in Chapter 5 to support your answer?

IMPROVING THE CONVERSATION

1. "Guys vs. Men" is almost a textbook exercise in writing an extended definition. Annotate the different techniques Barry uses to craft his definition (definition by contrast; class/characteristics; definition by example; negative definition). Then write a similar definitional piece — humorous if you like — contrasting two terms that might at first glance seem similar, such as chicks vs. women, cops vs. police officers, freshmen vs. first-year students.
2. Barry illustrates the competitiveness of men with a short anecdote about the forty-yard dash. Choose another stereotypical trait of either men or women (insensitivity, bad driving, excessive concern with appearance), and write an anecdote from your own experience that illustrates the trait. Try some of the techniques Barry uses to make his story funny: understatement, exaggeration, irony, self-deprecation, dialogue.