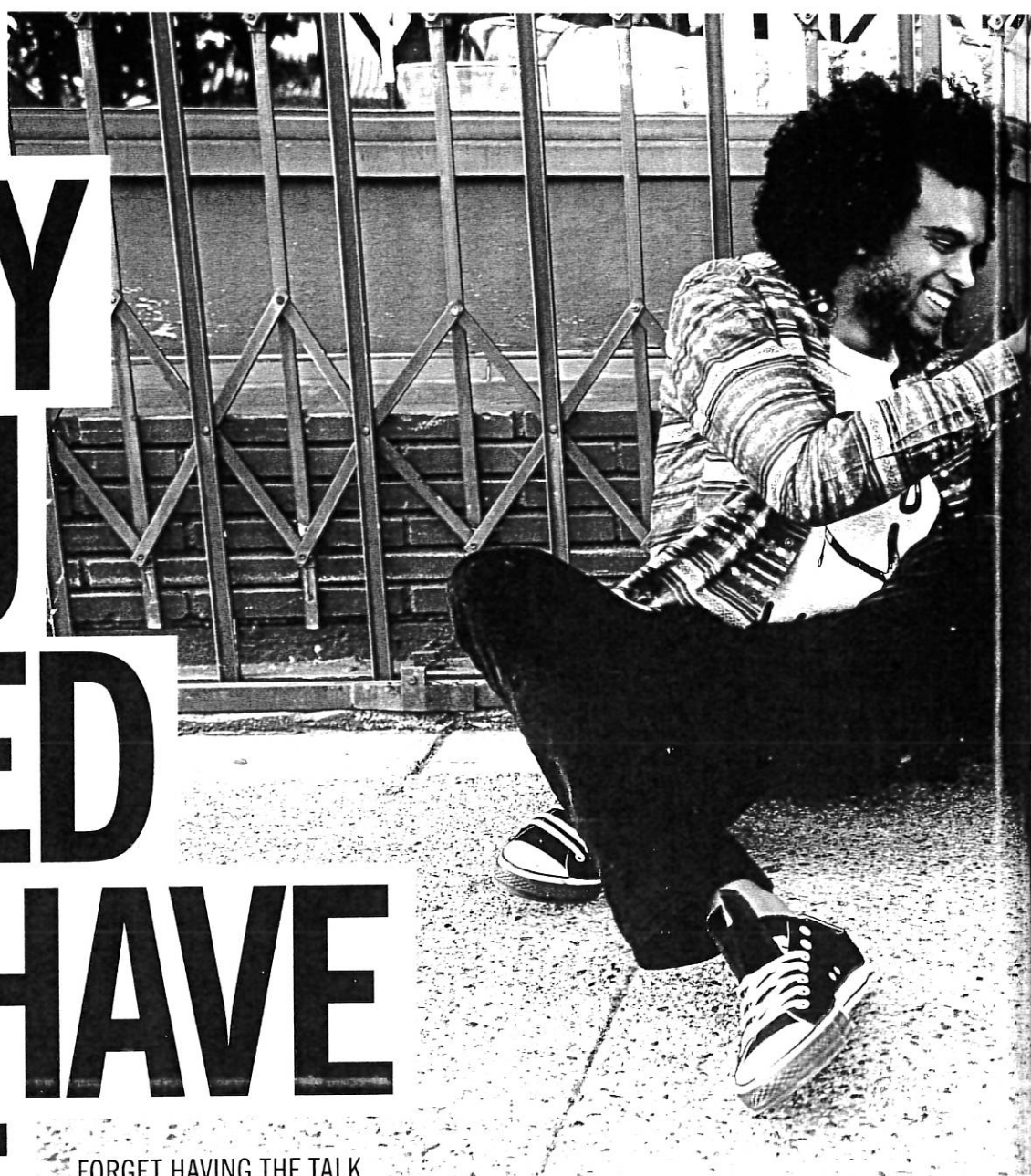


WHY YOU NEED TO HAVE THE MINI TALK

FORGET HAVING THE TALK. HERE'S WHY LOWER-PRESSURE CONVOS ARE THE NEW ROAD TO COMMITTED.

BY EMILY C. JOHNSON

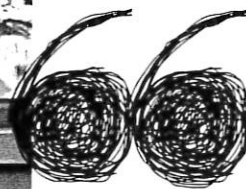


YOU MEET UP, and you keep hooking up, until one day, after months of text deciphering and friend consults, you have the big Define the Relationship Talk. Then you've passed Go—you have an Official Boyfriend.

That may be how relationships traditionally go, but lately, more women are forgoing one DTR talk and instead having several mini talks about relationship status on the way to coupledom. "I've had mini talks going into my last

six relationships," says Chelsea, a 27-year-old public-health scientist from New York City. "I don't rush straight to boyfriend and girlfriend. I've had smaller talks about whether we want to keep seeing each other, if we're sleeping with anyone else, and if we should deactivate our online-dating accounts, all before we made it official. Breaking it down into smaller steps means that final convo isn't so scary."

"There's this push among millennials to



LOVE LUST

Smaller steps make that final boyfriend/girlfriend convo less scary.”

ing OkCupid accounts or ask if he's hooked up with anyone else, you can figure out a middle ground even when your answers don't match up. "You probably don't want to say, 'I want you to be my boyfriend' if he hasn't even deleted Tinder. But by talking only about where he's at with his Tinder, you better protect yourself," points out Emma Tessler, cofounder of The Dating Ring, an online matchmaking service. Happily, mini talks let you do all that without the awkward confrontation of The Talk.

into a DTR talk until you're positive a dude is worth it.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, casual dating is actually an indicator that you care a lot about a relationship's quality and stability. When you're the slow-to-decide one stressing over whether a fling has a future, mini talks give you time to evaluate your feelings. It's not about sitting around while he figures his shit out—it's about having clarity on where the relationship is going for you. "Having any kind of conversation about your status, instead of waiting for what he's thinking, is empowering," Lamont says, adding, "There's a narrative that men drive relationship progression, but in my research, it's often the women. They're very proactive."

And if you're dealing with a garden-variety commitmentphobe, mini talks help you manage him. After all, if you ask a guy to be your BF and he gets scared and ghosts you, well, that's that. But if you casually suggest deactivat-

Checking in with a guy about where you stand is also...kind of sexy. "When I have mini talks, I'm elongating that excitement when you first get into a relationship. It means we have even more firsts, and I get an extra flutter when, say, I find out he doesn't want to sleep with anyone else either," Chelsea says. Given how much we love validation, that's a plus. "It's nice to have repeated conversations that confirm your feelings," Tessler says.

Lauren, a 22-year-old student from Miami, credits mini talks with giving her current relationship a great foundation. Unlike her previous BF, who asked to get serious after the first date, Lauren loved how this relationship built gradually and how she had a voice in it. "All those mini talks made it so much easier to dive in once we were ready." ■

be a bit more casual about relationships. In my field research, I find people have all kinds of smaller talks with their partners, about whether they're exclusive or what their label is," confirms Ellen Lamont, PhD, an assistant professor of sociology at Appalachian State University, who studies gender norms in relationships. "These mini talks allow people to negotiate some type of commitment without being official right away." For a generation

that craves novelty and validation (think of the buzzy high we get from Insta Likes and Tinder matches) and often side-eyes the notion of real commitment, there are compelling reasons to opt for the slow roll. "Having mini talks keeps things lower-stakes—it's easier for you to get out if you want," Lamont says. "Millennials seem to prefer exploring their options when they start seeing each other—not because they only want to hook up but

because they reject the idea of putting constraints on dating."

Women are often painted as indiscriminately pining for commitment (recall the recent *Saturday Night Live* skit about Settl, a dating app for women willing to put up with mediocre guys just so they have someone to marry). But in reality, plenty of women would never give up their options right away. When you have zillions of guys at your fingertips, it can seem nuts to jump

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