

## 4. Dangerous Liasons - The Impending Discourse of "THE FRIEND ZONE"

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**Abstract:**

*The present paper examines the concept of "the friend zone" and its overwhelming impact on life and consciousness. Some crucial questions are raised in this context as to its new found origin, cause and its relative uniqueness. Critics' views along with that of psychologists and social scientists are taken into account so as to approach the problem tactfully and effectively. The contribution of electronic media in its growth and propagation is studied so as to trace its propensity in overriding philosophies and social structures. Endeavour has been made to examine the pros and cons of abiding by this juvenile trend and a viable solution has been proposed.*

**Keywords:**

*Friend zone, newfound, psychologists, electronic media, propensity, philosophies, abiding, trend*

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“The Friend Zone”, which is a newborn phenomenon, is based on the idea that a person who ushers in acts of kindness to his friend should indeed be recompensed for his favours. The problems of nurturing such a delusion are manifold, as it overrules any logical sense and exploits sensibility. The idea is arbitrary and masochistic. It demands copious significance and attention over trivial details. The friend zoned person gratifies oneself upon pity, pain and suffering, and often relinquishes in scorn and ridicule of the other sex. It is largely male-centric and presumptuous. The friend zoned person is passive and riddled with compunctions. The current paper explores the potential dangers of romanticizing such a notion and proposes a viable solution. Altogether, the paper purports to raise such potent questions as may spur future researchers to speculate upon different angles pertaining to the issue that may open new vistas for research.p

“And would it have been worth it, after all,  
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,  
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,  
Would it have been worthwhile,  
To have bitten of the matter with a smile,  
To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,  
To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all-  
If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
Should say: “That is not what I meant at all;  
That is not it, at all.”

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)

“The Friend Zone” is popularly defined as a situation in which one person has unreciprocated romantic or sexual feeling towards another person, when the other person is in total denial of it. “The Friend Zone” concept is argued by social psychologists as a totally unique and new phenomenon, which cropped up only recently. The lack of historical and ethnological records to consistently support the origin of this phenomenon lays

credence to the fact (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012). These psychologists assert that over millions of years ago, our ancestors and forefathers ideally cohabited and mated for reproduction and not “friend-zoned”, in the Platonic sense of the term.

So what is so unique and different about “the friend zone” that has led a horde of researchers and scientists on a furry? What is so exceptional about “the friend zone” that separates it from the love zone or even the parent zone? Although, all these zones have their distinct characteristic properties, “the friend zone” distinguishes itself for the sexual tension and emotional frustration it creates in the mind of the person, supposedly victimized by it. In contrast, “the love zone” and “parent zone” are relatively secure and furnished with mutual give and take. Psychologists concur that cross-gender friendships are not blood relations or conjugal alliances, but are voluntary and cooperative personal alliances formed outside the societal stereotype. These companionships can be of various types and can range from being non-romantic to affectionate and even intimate. They are different from same-sex friendships and more complex in nature. Meara observed in one of her papers, that cross-sex friendship is confronted with four prime challenges, which were “determining the type of emotional bond shared, facing sexuality in the relationship, presenting the relationship as an authentic friendship to outsiders, and addressing equality in the context of gender inequality”. (Qtd. in Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012)

Coming back to the question of “the friend zone”, *what are the factors that facilitate its origin?* Nicholson claims that it depends on a number of reasons such as lacking the quality to be sufficiently attractive to one’s friend. He says that often the friend zoned person wastes time in building up comfort and not sexual attraction in the person, so as to make his friend long for him. For this, the friend zoned person needs to be physically attractive, confident and competent. The friend zone also occurs due to a deficiency in finding an ideal match. He says that in order to work up a relationship, two people need to be compatible to each other. He affirms in the friend zone, either the person does not sufficiently attract or charm the other person, they long for or often times, the two people are intimate, as in “friends with benefits” (Nicholson, 2013) with only one person being committed to the relationship while the other person is not. Hence, there is a “commitment mismatch”. For a relationship to work, all the rough ends need to be smoothed. The friend zoned person is also believed to be a wimp, as he hesitates to put the question in front of his beloved friend, in fear of refusal, and stays in his own comfort zone of being near his friend. Kipp affirms

that he was too scared to open up earlier in his own relationships, and hence had only friends and not “girlfriends”. That kind of attachment with a person would be “emotionally risky” and inviting “rejection”, and it was only when he could overcome these fears, that he found a perspective in life (Kipp, 2011). At last, the friend zoned person is believed to be an out and out “nice guy”, who does not let his partner run after him. He performs all the favours, makes all the “sacrifices and concessions”, thus, making himself unworthy, undesirable and easily forgettable to his partner. Nicholson contends, for a healthy relationship, both the partners need to work equally and invest in achieving the desired results. It is only when a person works hard to obtain and invests in something, does he truly credit and respect it (Nicholson, 2013).

Feminists, hugely condemn “the friend zone” on grounds that it is the product of male narcissism. Its theory is based on the idea that a woman essentially owes a man romantic or sexual favours in return for the generous acts towards her. Rivu Dasgupta calls “the friend zone” and “nice guy” concepts as essentially “sexist”. He affirms: “Kindness shouldn’t demand reward, especially in the friend zone” (Dasgupta, 2014). Marcott frowns at the notion that women are some sort of creatures to be experimented on by the narrow idealisms of male narcissists. She asserts that women are not treated as “full human beings” but rather as “sex dispensers”. Men look upon them as the weaker sex, who constantly needs the guidance and reassurance from their “users” and “abusers”. The PUA (Pick-Up Artist) industry doles out the idea that men are absolutely perfect, however they are and it is the woman who is incapable of seeing anything good in them. Marcott clearly sees through the machinations and manipulations of the “nice guy”, who guilt-trips a woman whom they can’t possess. Dr. Hugo Schwyzer, a sociologist, confirms that the niceness is often a pretext to carry out one’s hidden agendas: “They rage about being “friend zoned” and complain about the hours spent listening to women without being given so much as a hand job in return for their investment... Their anger, in other words, is that their own deception didn’t work as they had hoped.”(Broadblogs, 2013). Marcott asserts: “The possibility that a woman might actually enjoy your company and assume you enjoy it, too, is discounted. The possibility that she may have given you a soft rejection and you’re just lingering around, exploiting her polite unwillingness to tell you to buzz off, is pointedly ignored “ (Marcott, 2014). Marcott especially points out towards the “misleading” memes frequently portrayed in the electronic media, where women are ridiculed and misogynist faiths overrule.

Psychologists are of the view that the male in a cross-gender relationship is more likely to get attracted to his female partner than vice-versa and often more likely to overvalue his friend's sexual interest in him (Fogg, 2013). Cognitive neuroscientist Ogi Ogas, on the other hand, describes the process of female interest and arousal as a careful and systematic analysis done by women from all angles- social, physical and emotional. It is only when all these criterions are justifiably met, does it spur favourability and genuine likelihood towards that person (Broadblogs, 2013).

Other critics, like Ally Fogg are less assertive and vehement in their protests against the "nice guy" or "the friend zone". Fogg notes that "using the phrase 'friend zone' doesn't make you a misogynist, but the nice guy of OK Cupid often stray into that territory". Fogg primarily affirms that "the friend zone" doesn't exist neither do "nice guys". It is a myth based on "confirmation bias". She explains that sometimes friendships can be seen to evolve into marriages, while sometimes they don't. It's a question of allegiance to one faith while discarding or rubbishing all others. Fogg says that this is a flawed vision. As per customs and age-old conventions, men are always expected to make the first move. She says that, "men, like women, are victims of our tediously stubborn gender roles". It is probably due to this that men and not women complain of being in "the friend zone". Although Fogg denies the existence of "the friend zone", she affirms the validity of the "emotional experience" that is there. In fear of risking emotions and rejection, Fogg says that the man voluntarily prepares himself for rejection, and expects it too. Fogg is swift to understand the hypocrisy underneath, as she observes: "Those who deviate from an assertive, even aggressive masculinity are shamed as wimps or with homophobic slurs. The shaming of the sexually reserved man is the converse of the shaming of the sexually assertive woman, both are defying the same norm." (Fogg, 2013a)

Fogg, in one of her protests against the NBOOKC (Nice Guys Of OK Cupid) blog, which has now been removed, further writes that sometimes these guys are cruelly mocked and bullied for no reason whatsoever, which is unjust and should not be entertained. She is not in favour of the callousness depicted by some men, who ought legitimately to be named and shamed. She only prays to allow some reason to be intervened in favour of some genuinely "nice" guys (Fogg, 2013b), who are wronged. Joana Shroader, too, is of the same opinion as that of Fogg. Though she acknowledges the pent-up frustration, fear and anger of average

women concerning these matters, she too believes that the “bullying” has gotten “out of line” (Shroader, 2013).

### **Conclusion:**

Scientists confirm the role of electronic media in attracting the undivided attention of the people towards “the friend zone” and “friend zoning”. A lot of T.V. soaps and commercial cinema have popularised this concept and seems to have blown it out of measure. ‘Just Friends’, ‘Scrubs’, ‘No Strings Attached’, ‘When Harry Met Sally’, or the phenomenally popular ‘Friends’, etc. apparently show the impact of electronic media in spearheading this phenomenon. So, what is the plausible solution to such a problem? Scientists agree that the person concerned should primarily approach for potential lovers and not friends. To cite an example, Bender (a real life person), portrayed as Brander in the movie ‘Just Friends’, complained of being “the third wheel” in his relationship. It was only when he got out of “the friend zone” and into the love zone that he could realize true happiness and comfort (King, 2005). Again, one should also see the reverse side of the coin. Spurned love is often the root cause of growing crime and injustice against women. Marcott observes that being a “nice guy” does not necessarily reduce the risk of domestic and emotional abuse, rather it increases the chances. Closeted ambition is a dangerous thing and marks the genesis of a storm in a nutshell. Since, this is self-motivated and self-governed; efforts should be made to stem the sapling from evolving into an unfavourable weed. Friendship is a wonderful thing as long as it respects the rights and freedoms of the other, and should be free from any hidden agendas.

### **To memorably quote the French philosopher, Albert Camus:**

*“Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead. Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow.  
Just walk beside me and be my friend.” (Rudd, 2012)*

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