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Exclusive: Case Study: He gave me the creeps (Spotting boundary pushers early)

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It's hot. Why is it this hot? It's almost October. So hello, happy Sunday, I hope that you're having a beautiful day, I hope that you're having a beautiful weekend. Thank you as always for being here. This Patreon is the only reason that I'm able to do polyamory education work full time. I do have other jobs. But this is now my main one, and pays my bills. And that is thanks to you.

Okay, so it has been a minute since I've given an anecdote as a resource, an example, a case study of a larger trend or phenomenon. Every now and then, a situation will arise where I'm like, "this is a perfect microcosm of a thing that I see happening all the time". So let me tell it from start to finish: what I saw, what I think it means, what I did about it.

There can be subtle boundary pushers, microscopically coercive people who have never done anything so egregious. Sometimes our friends, our friends of friends, our partners or their partners, they might not pick up on these tiny clues that we are picking up on. When is it something we listen to? When is it something that we examine ourselves? What is and is not appropriate to tell or ask of our mutuals, if we get bad vibes from somebody? If you relate to any of it, or if you've experienced similar situations, maybe this will be helpful. If not now, then maybe in the future, if you encounter something similar down the road.

So at an event about a month ago, I met a person who I've known of and mostly heard good things. He came over and sat down, and did not say, "Hi, I'm so and so" like, he just sat and looked at me. And I'm a pretty friendly, open, warm, smiley person. so I started the conversation.

In hindsight – I thought nothing of it at the time, but in hindsight – I was like, "why would he just sit down and stare at me?" that feels kind of like a tiny power move, right? Like a 2% power move. And the reason I did not clock it at the time is because, why would I assume bad intent of somebody that is friendly with people I'm friendly with? Also, sometimes people can be awkward and not know how to start a conversation. I don't want to, again, assume bad intent.

So I got my drink. And then I was like, "Oh, I think I'm gonna go walk over and talk to my partner". And he's coming with me... Okay... And then he started kind of butting heads with my partner. This partner was also a man. And it was specifically about the party scene, the Berlin party scene. My partner was saying what he likes about it. This

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dude has had bad experiences. And it was like, you know, "you're wrong" basically. It got weird. And my partner is the type of person to pause, "Hmm, am I being rightfully called in? I'd love to know more, tell me more". But after we left the party, my partner said, "that was kind of weird, the way he was coming at me. It didn't feel like it was in good faith. It felt like he was trying to like win." And I was like, it's so weird that you say that, because I kind of feel that way too. But I was also thinking "well, you know, if he's had bad experiences at parties, I wonder if he was just feeling defensive? I wonder if he took that as an attack?" Again, I was trying to think of plausible deniability. And so my partner's like, "yeah, it could have been that..."

This guy messaged me on Instagram afterwards, "so good to meet you". I was like, "good to meet you too, glad to finally meet ya". And then he was like, "Well, I'm in town for another week or two. Do you want to hang out again? Do you want to get a lunch or coffee?"

Because of those couple of things, I didn't super wanna go out of my way to try and have a one on one hang with the person. "No, I'm busy". And he was like, "okay, yeah, I mean, in general, on these dates, will you be in town?" and I didn't respond right away. So the next day, he sent me a message again and said, "Here's my number for WhatsApp". This is the point where I'm starting to be like, "this person's gotta cool it." Right? There's some sort of urgency. There's some sort of, you know, forcefulness behind his agenda here that is feeling not relaxed at all to me, and that's not my favorite. So I finally get back to him and say, "I've got plans with this mutual friend. I've got plans with that mutual friend". He was like, "let's all four of us hang out".

Now, a side note is, everybody in my extended friends knows that I get antsy in group chats. That I don't really – because of the cult that I experienced – I just get very paranoid, hyper vigilant, struggling breathing sometimes when I'm on a group thread. And I know for a fact that this guy knows this about me, because we actually did mention it at the party. He was like, "Oh, are you not on this discord with everybody?" And I was like, "Oh, I have this thing with being on group chats..." So this was in recent memory, an explicit conversation talking point. And then he just goes ahead and creates a group chat with me.

That felt like first kind of egregious overstep. And by the time I realized that the group chat was created, a few of our friends had already been back and forth. "How about this? And how about that? And Morgan, do you have dietary restrictions?" And so I was already in the conversation. I felt like, "okay, we're talking about a restaurant, you know, let me reply, let me just engage with this. And then if it gets bad, I can remove myself, but it's just a dinner plan", I kept responding to my own discomfort by saying, "chill out". And I never have to do this. Not with other plans that I make, or with other people that I casually meet, or with other straight men that I interact with.

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Then he private messages me, “hey, the partner that I want to bring to the dinner, she actually hired you for a peer support a year ago, and I wanted to check with you if that would be awkward for you, or what you think about it?” [I replied] “Well, if it's not somebody that I have an ongoing client relationship with, and we just chatted once a year ago, I think that would be fine for me to show up and she's there. And I can talk about it with her, what is or is not weird, if anything.” I did appreciate that he asked that. But what he did next was really fucking uncool.

We were already on this group chat that I did not want to be on. And he said, “hey, here, I've made this Whatsapp group chat instead”. My understanding was the four of us would migrate to WhatsApp. But every single person, including this girl who had hired me for peer support, was in that group. Which means she now has my phone number.

I thought, Look, this is all feeling really weird to me. So said “I'm just gonna remove myself and I will reach out to one of you to find out where the dinner is, ahead of time”. Before I even have the chance to confront him about this whole showing-his-girlfriend-my-phone-number thing, he immediately responds, “hey, I'm so sorry about the group chats, I will contact you the day before and I will keep you posted about where we're going”. I had just clearly said I will reach out to one of you...

So I sent him a voice message back, “Look, when it comes to the group chats. Yes, I appreciate you for apologizing because we did just talk about that, man. And also, I'm grown, that's on me to take care of myself. What I did not like was, you asked for consent about showing up to an event where your partner is, but why did you not extend that same courtesy showing up to a digital space where she can see my phone number?” and finally I said “I will reach out to this mutual friend or that mutual friend leading up to the event. Please do not reach out to me between now and then”. I have now put up a very unmistakable boundary. I do not want to continue interacting with you.

He responded basically saying “I didn't give her your phone number, you did. You did not have to join WhatsApp”. Nope, nope, I call bullshit. I call bullshit on that. Right? You did not say that all these other people would be there. Now it's all making sense. Now I see you, man... Maybe I'm burying the lead on this, but this dude is a therapist. And I tend to have higher expectations from people who are licensed in that kind of thing.

I said, “it will be better for me to not go.” Within a minute and a half of me saying I'm not gonna go, he was like, “okay, so do you want to have a one on one hang then?” What the fuck? You're making me feel nuts! What part of me removing myself from everything, and telling you not to contact me for a month, what is the thought

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process that says 'Okay, so I'm gonna ask her on a date'? I just... I don't, I don't... I I was genuinely speechless. And I responded just with "I'm not interested."

I think it is very important to notice those tiny little tingling things, of "this doesn't feel right", because it can protect us from getting closer or being in sustained contact with people who make us feel that way. We can remove ourselves earlier. We don't have to let it get worse. And if I have spent enough time doubting myself, explaining it away, maybe after this dude wears me down for a while, maybe then something really unacceptable I might tolerate. I've already done it! I've already joined a group chat. Why was I flexible? Why did I soften on that boundary in this case? What is it about interacting with this dude, that I thought it would be easier to go along with what he wants than say no to him? Because that's a fucking red flag to me, no matter how small the circumstance, right?

So I'm feeling better. But there's still the matter of mutual friends. What do we do when they still know and hang out with the guy?

I have been on the receiving end of being told how to feel about a person, being told how to relate to a person, and I have not received that well. Maybe that goes back to anarchistic relating. So I don't want to do that to other people, and prescribe how they need to now act. I don't get along with some people, I don't trust some people, and I won't lie about that. I will say to other people exactly what I would say to this person's face.

And so I reached out to each of them and I was like, "Hey, I'm not trying to talk shit. He has not done something that has made me feel foundationally unsafe, you know, but I've gotten weird vibes from him. He's been pushy. I think I've decided to not go to this dinner. I also won't be mad if you still hang out with the guy". I'm not going to expect exile and shunning and all of that. I really think that that's a break-glass-in-case-of-emergency kind of thing. it's probably coming from just being a cult survivor and having been shunned and exiled by 200 people, and going from having a community to having nothing. I really think that it's punitive and carceral, to say "this person did any minor infraction and so they get banished". Obviously, if anyone is a danger, if anyone is really unsafe, we don't welcome them to our space. Right? Again, everything's context dependent, always depends on what we're talking about, who's involved, what are the stakes what literally happened? And I might adjust my response accordingly.

But I hope that a story like this can be helpful if you relate to any of it, because it's that subtle shit. Can we catch it while it's still small? Can we draw a line in the sand early? To add distance if we need to, if we don't feel like it's sitting right, and be self protective if that's what needs to happen?

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Anyway, I'd love to know your thoughts, your feelings, if there are similar kinds of things that you would love an anecdote to illustrate. I can probably dig through the archives. This one is fresh, it just happened over the last few weeks. But I usually have an example for some kind of thing. Feel free to request it. This space is for my patrons. But otherwise, I hope you have a beautiful rest of your week. And I will see you next Sunday. Bye

xxx