

I Love You, Man

reviewed by [Jason Byassee](#) in the [May 5, 2009](#) issue

I got this problem. There's this guy I want to be better friends with. We've been out with other people for drinks, talked at professional events and had a few laughs. But when I ask him out on a man-date (strictly defined: lunch or drinks after work) he's always busy. Should I take a hint or try some other approach?

If you recognize the awkwardness of this question, you will appreciate the cringe-inducing theme of *I Love You, Man*, the new bromance featuring two veterans of warm-hearted gross-out lad flicks (*Knocked Up* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*), Paul Rudd and Jason Segel. Rudd plays Peter Klaven, who is the professional woman's dream—he's handsome, thoughtful, sensitive and ambitious, but not obsessed with work. He even makes root beer floats for his fiancée, Zooey (Rashida Jones), and her friends on girls' night. But then he hears them dishing: Why doesn't he have guy friends? Isn't that a formula for a disastrously clingy husband?

So Peter decides to make male friends. But it's hard. The guy with the peroxide hair at work sends him sex videos of senior citizens and wants to worm into his sales territory. An Internet friend-making service leads him to a candlelit dinner with a guy interested in another sort of intimacy. The usual male bonding is impossible for Peter—he's just not interested in locker-room talk of sex and sports. The film raises an interesting question for a generation of men not known for deep friendships: are their lives impoverished in this area?

Then Peter meets Sydney Fife (Segel), an investment banker with a shocking capacity for honesty. Syd wants to know intimate details, like how Peter and Zooey's sex life is going. Their conversation provokes a necessary talk between Peter and Zooey—and a painful (but hilarious) public revelation of their secrets. Now that Peter has a friend, he has someone poking around in his life, able to enhance his life but also to destroy it.

Sydney shows Peter his "man cave," a detached garage in which no women are allowed. There the pair watch mindless TV shows (on multiple screens at once), jam on Sydney's arsenal of guitars and discuss the finer points of masturbation. They

recognize a common love of the band Rush and attend a concert together, singing along and dancing to every song as Zooey stands by, a third wheel. The sequence suggests that male bonding is a threat to relationships with wives or girlfriends, since there is only so much time and energy for intimacy. How can different forms of intimacy enhance rather than compete with one another?

The film is as hilarious as Rudd and Segal's other films, and it raises a genuine issue amid the jokes about oral sex and riffs on the giving and receiving of nicknames ("See you later, Joben." "Did you just call me 'Joben'? What's that even mean?" "Dunno. Sorry"). But somehow this film seems hollower than the previous lad films, perhaps because the topic of friendship is so central to a well-lived life.

Ancient philosophers knew the importance of friendship. For Aristotle, friendship required the parties to share equal status (one could not be friends with one's slave, for example) and a common pursuit of the things that make for a good life—perhaps even a common pursuit of God. The way Peter and Syd bond over Rush and fish tacos rings true, but the viewer senses the absence of any moral or religious horizon to their friendship. The film tries to portray the two as going deeper than surface-level talk of farts and fun, but they don't have any place to go.

The movie ends with a series of predictable hilarities on the way to the now-standard Hollywood wedding on the beach, where the two male friends profess "I love you, man" like newlyweds themselves. But without a devotion to matters beyond the flatulent and the awkward, they don't have much else to say.