

# A User Manual for Mike Mantell

## Tips for how to connect with this strange creature

### The Purpose of This Manual

I want to create a meaningful, mutually fulfilling connection with you :-) And I trust we could do that without this document. But my hope is that this manual will help us get to that place faster and more easefully.

### Ask Culture > Guess Culture

I learned this fun concept recently, and I prefer Ask Culture over Guess Culture.

Here's what both of those terms mean:

**Ask Culture:** People openly ask for what they want or need and try not to take offense to a straightforward yes or no. Social norms aren't implicit; they are overtly and collaboratively created.

**Guess Culture:** People rely on context, hints, and cultural norms to communicate. Each person expects the other to intuit their needs and desires without asking openly.

Here's an example: You come over for dinner and don't bring wine. In Guess Culture I might be upset because you neglected the obvious norm of bringing a gift 😞. In Ask Culture, there isn't a norm that guests bring gifts—instead, you bring wine if you want to, and if I feel upset, I'll voice that.

### Preferred Communication Norms

Within the frame of "Ask Culture," here are some norms I appreciate.

Though bear in mind that these are all just preferences; if you don't like any of these norms, then we can ship them off to Uranus! 😊

1. **Check-ins.** I like starting connections with a check-in, where we both share how we're doing. Feelings, desires, etc. And if we're on a longer adventure, perhaps checking in throughout.
2. **Withholds.** This is when you share something you've been holding onto that is impacting our connection. For example: "I felt frustrated when you showed up late, and I've been bottling that up."

Withholds are often scary. But they are super helpful! I'm a big believer that the "rupture → repair" process leads to stronger connections.

3. **Naming desires.** I think that the easiest way for us both to get what we want out of connecting is to continually look for our desires and then share them. I want to know what you want!
4. **Naming attraction.** If one of us feels attraction to the other person (sexual or otherwise), it can be helpful to name. Doing so is vulnerable, and that creates intimacy in itself. But also, attraction is such a strong force, that keeping it hidden is blurring out a large part of what's going on in the "shared field."
5. **Safeporting.** This is when you announce a thing before you do it. I find it especially useful to safeport escalations in vulnerability or vibe shifts, so that the other person can prepare themselves.

EG: "Hey, can I give you a withhold?" or "Do you mind if I yell real quick to release some tension?" or even "I'm about to turn on the blender which is super loud."

6. **Speed of trust.** Sometimes vulnerability happens really fast. And sometimes it is slow and gradual. I don't want either of us to "push" our connection into vulnerability faster than it's ready to happen.

## Some of My Triggers and Challenges

I'm hoping that by sharing these with you, you might be able to help me in moments when I'm struggling to advocate for myself.

### My svelt verbal capacity

I love conversations. Love 'em! But I can usually only hang out in verbal land for 60-75 minutes straight before I start to feel disembodied.

When that happens, I'll try to bring it up. But sometimes, it can feel hard! 😞

**What you can do to help (though no pressure!):** If you notice the two of us have been talking for over an hour straight, I'd probably find it helpful if you ask how I'm doing.

### Conversational balance

I find conversations most fulfilling when each person takes up 40-60% of the space. But sometimes I create the opposite dynamic without meaning to 😞.

Here's what happens: I ask the other person a lot of questions from a place of genuine curiosity. But each time they respond, I just ask another question. Next thing you know, I start shrinking. Taking up less and less space, until I've become a full-blown conversational pipsqueak.

And often, once I notice this has happened, I feel too small to share what's happening.

**What you can do to help (though no pressure!):** If it feels like I'm interviewing you and not sharing much, I'd love a gentle nudge. Maybe ask how I'm doing, or get curious about me. Sometimes just feeling an expression of interest in my world is all the permission I need to open back up.

### How in-connection do we feel?

If we're hanging out, at some point one of us might feel disconnected, or unfulfilled in our connection.

It's only natural that this'll happen!

To address this, ideally, every so often, one of us would pose the question: "On a scale of 1-10, how connected does each of us feel to the other? And what can we do to up that number?"

This is admittedly edgy to ask!

But it's a question I quite enjoy.

## Identity

I identify as non-binary, pansexual-ish, kinky, and non-monogamous.

Most people probably (and understandably) assume I'm a straight, monogamous man.

And it's not the end of the world to get misperceived. Though all else equal, I'd rather you see me the way I see myself :-)

## Gender ideology

Gender! It's a pretty culturally charged topic these days.

I've thought about and explored gender a fair amount, and have come to my own views on it. And there's a reasonable chance that these views are different than yours.

So let it be known: **I don't at all expect you to see things the way I see things (and vice versa).**

I genuinely welcome differences in how we think about and experience gender (or any other topic).

I just ask that you try to be open-minded and understanding of my views and experience. And to strive to hold the complexity of differences in ideology. And I will try to do the same 😊

## The Ways I Like to Connect

Conversations are great fun. And necessary! And I find that my most fulfilling connections involve more than just talking. So I'd like to empower both of us to propose activities at any time.

Here are a few activities I enjoy. But please propose things not on this list too!

- Connection games
- Board games
- Co-exercise, sports, physical play
- Eye gazing
- Listening to music together
- Singing together
- Pushing social edges by talking with strangers together
- Cuddling, massage, dance, platonic touch

## Space for silence

I tend to have more conversational "stamina" when the discussions leave space for silence. I also just like the intimacy of shared silence.

Of course, comfort with silence isn't inherent in all relationships, and sometimes it develops over time.

## Touch

I really like connecting through touch.

Though I'm aware that not everyone does. And boundaries can be hard to speak up.

So, I probably won't initiate a lot of touch in our connection until I hear how you relate to touch and boundaries.

But know that you are welcome to initiate touch with me!

# Relationship Philosophies

Here are a few core orientations that I hold in relationships.

## Needs-based relationships

I'm a big fan of honoring needs and capacity. If we're hanging out, I don't want either of us to ever feel like we're "forcing it."

I view each relationship as a team. And I love to be a good teammate. So the more you can share your needs, the more I can help you meet them (and vice versa).

For example: let's say we meet up planning to play laser tag. But you're feeling wiped. I'd much rather we connect restfully instead of you pushing it to go with our plans.

## Relationship paradigm

I'm non-monogamous and I live with my life partner Angela.

I don't want to slot my connection with you onto a predetermined path. I want our relationship-organism to evolve how it *wants* to.

That means it might include collaboration, and it might not. It might include platonic touch, and it might not. It might include sexuality, and it might not.

Whatever is the intersection between both our desires and boundaries.

(You may have come across [Relationship Smorgasbord](#), which to me has been a super helpful framework.)

## Fin!

I hope this Manual ends up supporting our connection.

I'm also aware that there's now an unbalance: you've read a manual about me, though I haven't read one about you! So when we meet up, I'd love to know anything you want to share 😊