

Planning My Geeky-Queer Wedding: The Proposal and the Rings



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Deciding to get married is a big step. There are many things both individuals need to consider and discuss before agreeing to enter a marriage contract. Add extra “complications” such as children from previous relationships, lupus, and one individual being a gay trans man, there are many extra things that must be discussed long before any agreement can be reached.

In my introduction to this series, I wrote that I found it fascinating when friends have asked, “So... how did he propose?” I can understand strangers asking this question, but only to a degree. I live in a society where more and more women are asking the man for his hand in marriage. However, the norm still seems to be the male asking the female. As I present as female, I don’t think too much of this question when strangers ask, even though I would have asked, “Who proposed to whom, and how?” I have a very different expectation from my friends, as they know I am a trans man. Right or wrong, I expect them to not assume it was my partner who did the proposing.

So, who did the proposing and how? The answer is no-one. In fact, had he proposed, automatically my answer would have been, “No.” You now may be wondering, “Wait, so how are you engaged?” You may also be curious as to why I would have said no, had he asked. The answer to these questions, and more, is very long and complicated.

The answer to the first question is our engagement was the result of many long discussions and negotiations.

The very first of these discussions and negotiations happened when I came to the realization that I cared deeply for Andrew, and I strongly suspected the feeling was mutual. At this point in our relationship, we were what I label “close pals.” Before I could consider him a friend and should we both agree to the terms of the new relationship label, I had to discuss with him what friendship meant to me, and what our mutual responsibilities are. Yes, I have relationship contracts. Yes, I make people sign them. In some situations, the contract comes into effect after many short conversations about expectations and responsibilities, or one long conversation. With Andrew, the friendship agreement was entered into after a very long conversation. The conversation was every bit as awkward as when [Sheldon asked Amy to be his girlfriend](#), followed by the discussion on roles and responsibilities, before he was allowed to give me an answer.

As an aside, that episode had not yet aired when we went through this phase in our relationship. When Andrew and I were watching it, we *howled* because it was pretty much exactly how it went down when I asked Andrew to be my friend, including word choice.

Part of this talk included talking, once again, about “romantic” relationships. The reason for this is that I first need to be friends with a person before I am able to enter into a “romantic” relationship. I am incapable of doing the, “Let’s go on social outings to get to know each other, and find out if we actually like each other” thing, also known as “dating.” Because friendships with me can be quite intimate — not in a sexual way, but mentally intimate — there was the chance, or risk, depending on one’s point of view, that the relationship could develop into more. I even used the words, “Even though I haven’t thought about it beyond this discussion, the idea of us being in a “romantic” relationship does not repulse me. Do with that information what you will before making your decision regarding whether or not you want to be my friend.” When I told him this, as we had already discussed “romantic” relationships, but only to a degree, he already had some idea of exactly what that meant to me.

The next discussion happened when we both realized that not only did we care deeply about each other, but we were in-love with each other. This was a difficult realization for us both. One of the reasons this was difficult for us is because we were done with “romantic” relationships. Not because we were jaded, but because we were both very happy with our lives as they were. Our mental and emotional needs were already being met with the relationships we had. Also, my idea of a “romantic” relationship just does not work for most people.

Until Andrew, people did not appreciate the very logical way I approach relationships. They found it difficult that no “romance” was inserted into the relationship with the inclusion of sex. Living with me is like living with a [Spock](#)/[Data](#)/[Dr Spencer Reid](#)/[Dr Sheldon Cooper](#) hybrid. I do not come to emotion until I’ve had a considerable amount of time to “do the math” and figure out how something affects my life. While this can make for a wonderful friend, even if that relationship can be frustrating at times, it doesn’t satisfy most people’s romantic needs. On the opposite end, Andrew is driven by emotion first, even if he is a very logical person.

The other thing that was difficult for me was acknowledging this idea of being in-love; a state of being that I don’t necessary agree is actually a thing. With the exception of one other person, the degree to which I loved someone with whom I was romantically involved was no different than how I love my friends.

So, the first thing we needed to discuss was whether or not we wanted to again change the relationship label and enter into a new contract, or leave things as they were, while acknowledging that we were in-love with each other.

This conversation took place over the course of many days, for hours each day. Because we were finished with “romantic” relationships, we both were in agreement that *if* we were going to do this, we were going to plan for a lifetime; it wasn’t going to be, “Let’s see how it goes.”

Another thing we had to discuss was the fact that if I was going to agree to this, I needed a guarantee that he would first be my best-friend, before he was anything else. I needed to know that I could still talk with him about anything and everything, and he’d be able to not allow his emotions to interfere with any conversation we were having. I also needed to know that when the situations arise when he does become butt-hurt by something I’ve said, that he approaches that conversation in the same way he approached it when the relationship label was friend. The reason for this is because, in my mind, nothing has changed between us outside of the inclusion of sex, and sex doesn’t complicate things for me. If he can’t be my friend first, before anything else, then I can’t enter into a “romantic” relationship. This point was one of many contributing factors to my past failed relationships. They were “in-love” with the idea of me, but not actually me. I was a great best-friend, but suddenly, who I am was no longer enough when the label changed.

Next on the list of things to discuss: his role in the lives of my children; how is he going to be able to cope with the unexpected things [lupus](#) throws at me, like a hysterectomy at 29 and a [stroke](#) at 30, plus multiple hospital stays; and the fact that [I am transgender](#), and what would happen should I change my mind and decide I needed [sex reassignment surgery](#), even though I’ve already stated I’m pretty sure I will not do the surgery. But this does not mean I do not consider reassignment surgery. It enters my brain about once or twice a month. So, even if the chances are low, they are still there. Each of these things have also been contributing factors to past failed relationships.

The talk about my boys was relatively easy. My youngest is now 13-years-old. My oldest will be 17-years-old at the beginning of September. They already have a dad. They do not need another one. What they need is someone who will be their friend and someone with whom to talk. Oddly enough, it is because I didn’t want past partners to take on a parental role that caused issues. Andrew is very happy to not have that responsibility, and instead be a friend.

The talk about my lupus was mildly difficult. Having [read both my books](#) on my experiences with lupus, Andrew already knew what he was getting himself into. But knowing, and actually having to endure it, are different. Judging by how people have reacted to this in the past, it is also different when you are a friend supporting someone who has lupus than if you are romantically involved with someone who has lupus. I had to discuss things that are a little uncomfortable for me, like preparing him for the periods where one day I’ll be fine, and the next day I’m literally fighting for my life. I had to make sure he fully realized the implications of this choice. Because I’ve had many people leave my life as a result of my lupus, it felt like I was risking another person leaving simply by having this conversation. Even though Andrew didn’t like having this conversation, because he doesn’t like to have to think about me dying, he still managed to put aside his feeling and discomfort, and honestly discuss it. He received bonus points for my relationship equation during this conversation.

This brought us to the fact that I’m a gay trans man. I had to discuss how this has been an issue in past relationships. I also had to tell him that he needs to be 100% sure that he is okay with my mental penis. Without going into more detail than I already wrote in my [“coming out” to the world post](#) — which I would have never written without Andrew’s support — this aspect of my personality can be quite difficult for many. Because we were discussing a lifetime commitment, and not “we’ll see how it goes,” we also had to discuss what would happen should I change my mind, and decide I need to go through sex reassignment surgery. If one day I decided that I must have a penis, would we still be in a sexual relationship? We also

discussed the situation in reverse, even though it doesn't apply with him. We also had to discuss what our roles, as two men, would be within the relationship.

The discussions about my gender identity, how it would affect a sexual relationship, our roles within that relationship, how it reflects on his sexual orientation, and what would happen if I needed the surgery were made easier by two *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes: [The Host](#) and [The Outcast](#).

Without getting too personal or too explicit, Andrew's sexual preference is female. However, there are some who would put him in the category of [pansexual](#) as, even though he is sexually attracted to the female form, the fact mentally I'm androgynous-to-masculine doesn't matter. In fact, when it comes to gender, his preference is people who fall in the androgynous area to somewhat masculine. Andrew would argue that he is only pansexual under the right circumstances, because he isn't automatically attracted to the male form, even if he is attracted to masculine qualities.

However, had we met post-sex reassignment surgery, it is unlikely we would be in a relationship. But now that we are, he'd like to think that if I changed my mind about reassignment surgery, he'd still be sexually attracted to me, as it is mostly my brain he loves. My genitals are just a fun bonus as, from a sexual standpoint, they are his preferences. That is more than I can say. I don't think I would still be able to have a sexual relationship with him if he decided he needed to be female. I'm just not sexually attracted to the female body. Even though he is unable to guarantee that we'd still have a sexual relationship if I were to do the surgery, the fact he would like to think it doesn't matter is good enough for me. His openness to the idea is all I need, especially as I don't think I'd be as open in return.

As for our roles within the relationship, Andrew is very happy to have me take the lead. I am very exact on how things need to go and need to be done. Andrew is pretty laid back in that area. The biggest adjustment for Andrew is fully realizing that a lot of things that are expected within romantic relationships, I neither expect, nor appreciate. Even though he doesn't do "romance" either, his past relationships, regardless of the fact they were tomboys, still expected some degree of "typical" romantic gestures. It is also a bit of an adjustment to be in a relationship with someone who, like him, is a cave dweller and isn't one to talk about emotions unless the "fix" cannot be found, and help is needed to find a solution. At times, he still feels he needs to ask me, "What's wrong?" and to continue asking until I actually talk about it, instead of trusting that I actually mean it when I say, "Nothing that I want to discuss. When I'm ready and have had time to think, I'll let you know." Another thing he finds difficult at times is the odd time I do have emotion regarding something, because he is accustomed to me being overly logical. The only thing that helps in those situations is the fact that I can tell him how I reached that state of emotions; there is an equation and process behind it.

Andrew also had to be reassured that I'd be okay with his quirks; the biggest being his panic and anxiety issues, plus being prone to depression. As I'm no stranger to any of these things, even if the source is different, in my mind, they were non-issues. Another thing we had to discuss was Andrew's inability to properly express certain things, especially when he is being emotional, which is often. Unlike me, he doesn't know how he got to that state, he's just in it. At times, this is difficult for me to cope with because I would be able to articulate cause and effect. Often, I have to say, "I don't get it. I accept that you feel this way, but I just don't get it."

Now that the difficult conversations were over, we discussed the normal things, such as finances.

After the many days of discussions, we did the math and decided that we were both in agreement on the many different points, and we both felt the benefits of changing the relationship label outweighed the risk. How could we possibly say no to a lifetime of sex with our best-friend who, for the first time in our lives, completely accepted exactly who the other person is as an individual?

Despite us agreeing to pursue a lifetime partnership with each other, we decided that we did not want to get married. We had both been there, and it just wasn't for us. For me, especially, marriage was just not something I wanted to do as, in Canada, there is no benefit to marriage. The exception being, in most provinces, the division of assets upon dissolution of the relationship. Last year, in British Columbia, our common-law relationship laws changed to include the division of property and assets. Because of this, a marriage-type relationship was all we needed. The only logical reason for us to get married is because we wanted to immediately enjoy the benefits of marriage, instead of benefits relying on varying periods of cohabitation in a marriage-like relationship. At this point, Andrew started to wear a wedding band on his left ring-finger. We also decided that, at some point, we would purchase a ring for me to wear.

Then, sometime during December of 2011, during a discussion about our relationship and checking in with each other to make sure our needs and expectations were being met, we discovered that both our views on getting married had changed. We were independently thinking about having a wedding.

We had a few long discussions on why it matters to us that we have a wedding, especially as neither of us are fond of them, and a marriage wouldn't change our relationship or our legal obligations to each other. For the both of us, a wedding is just another social convention, and we do not do social conventions. We came to the conclusion that not only are we in-love with each other, but we are in-love with our relationship. We are very proud of each other and the relationship we have created. Every day, we privately celebrate our relationship and the things we have to navigate around that most people never have to think about. We decided that we want to celebrate this with our close friends and his family, because we think it is worth celebrating. We also really like the idea of being spouses, and not only partners, even though partnership is the best way to describe our relationship.

With a level of enthusiasm that we both found surprising, we decided that we were going to get married. But only under the condition that it be a small, private affair, and that it be exactly the wedding that we both want, as the first time around, neither one of us was happy with the wedding part of it. The wedding was a necessary evil in order to get to the important part: marriage.

This brings us to our engagement rings. We decided that as he still has his wedding band, and neither one of us attaches any sort of significance to the fact it is from his previous marriage, he would wear that during this phase of our relationship. My ring required much more thought.



Our engagement rings. Photo: Jules Sherred

Because of my frame and the fact I have miniscule hands, a female engagement ring is the only thing I'd feel comfortable wearing. Men's rings are just too clunky for my small hands. But I find most female engagement rings to be too feminine, and I wouldn't be comfortable wearing them. I also do not like what is fashionable these days in regards to engagement ring settings.

Another reason I wanted a female engagement is so that I can pass it on to one of my, hopefully, future male grandchildren for when they become engaged. Despite the fact I am a trans man, that is a tradition that is very important to me.

After nearly five months of searching, we found the ring. The setting is non-traditional and looks very antique. Often, I say that I was born in the wrong period; that I should have been born in the 1700s when men dressed just as flamboyantly and lavishly as women. The ring has a period design. The only thing I wish was different is the stone. I would have preferred a garnet. Diamonds are just not my thing. However, as soon as I saw the ring, despite it having diamonds, I knew I would be happy with it and wouldn't be uncomfortable wearing it.

The TL;DR version of this story: our engagement is the result of a many long, and necessary, conversations. Had he gone the traditional proposal route, I would have said, "No," because there are just way too many things that need to be discussed long before marriage can be thought about. Also, if he had to ask, then obviously he doesn't know me well enough; if I wanted to marry him, he'd already know without asking. When I've discussed this with Andrew, he was a bit surprised. According to him, the social

convention is that a traditional proposal still needs to be done, even if both parties are aware that marriage is something wanted from the relationship. Though this romantic gesture is appreciated by many, if it was done to me, it would turn me off, for many reasons.

My personal opinion is that these conversations need to happen in all relationships, long before it gets to the engagement stage. I am often surprised when I hear of friends who are engaged, and they have yet to discuss even the simplest things like finances and household responsibilities. When you are in a relationship where both partners are female, or male, or with a transgender individual, these conversations are even more important.

For those of us who are not [heteronormative](#), we do not have movies, parents, television shows, books, etc., to guide us — even if some of these guides are, at times, sexist and dated. We have to make up the rules as we go along. Relationships do not happen in a vacuum. If you want them to last, they need to have a solid foundation, built on communication, trust, and respect. Talk with your partner. Talk with them often. Be sure to celebrate the difficult conversations, and celebrate them often. Managing to get through those is what will get you through the rest of your relationship, not the easy and fun times.

Still to come in my geeky-queer wedding planning series:

- The outfits and wedding attire
- The wedding party, and how family members will be involved
- The guests
- The ceremony and reception, including vows and legalities, and the process of going through a legal name change and the reasons behind that need
 - Last names and culture
 - The location
 - Gifts

Once again, there may be a number of aspects of the planning process that may interest you, but I have not included them above, because I have not thought of them. Or, this post has created a lot of questions in your mind. If that is the case, I want to know. Tell me, what has you curious? About what would you like to see me write? If you let me know, I will endeavor to do my best to include it in a post.