

# SET TALK

By *Don McCann, MA, LMT, LMHC, CSETT*

*MM3717*

*(Massage Message, May/June, 2018)*

## WE ARE BETTER THAN THIS

The news today is pretty upsetting: sexual harassment is rampant with top government officials, top executives, top entertainers, and a major massage chain. There was even a sexual joke about massage made at the Oscars. This behavior, in addition to being illegal and immoral, is also indicative of a deep rooted problem within our culture. We learn these values at home, which are reinforced in the media and have been passed on for generations.

We would like to think that anyone in the massage profession would have updated their thinking and values so that inappropriate sexual values and harassment would not be a problem in our profession. However, if you follow the news you find this is not so. In fact, massage therapists and massage establishments have made headlines for inappropriate sexual behavior. When this happens I ask myself how many tens of thousands of massage clients no longer feel safe or feel inclined to promote the benefits of massage to others due to the stigma that becomes attached to massage therapy. It is time for us to raise our consciousness and values so that we will become part of a solution, not the problem.

Most of the massage laws require draping and strictly forbid inappropriate touching of any sexual nature. Thus, we have laws designed to protect the public. We also have a responsibility to report anyone who may be breaking the laws to the appropriate authorities. This is not a “don’t-get-involved” situation because your lack of reporting makes you part of the problem, and you are in essence culpable (responsible and liable) for the damage that is done. In fact, in some states you could also be prosecuted for not reporting.

**So one of the first things we can do to raise the level in our profession is to be aware and challenge anyone who we feel is inappropriate, and report them if we find they truly are inappropriate. The second thing we can do is if we find someone who has been sexually harassed or abused during a massage we can support them in reporting to the appropriate authorities.** This is not being a tattler and small minded – this is taking the high road and holding it for the entire massage profession. The laws are clear. They are to protect the public, but they are also to protect the profession, and it is our responsibility to not only uphold the laws, but to protect our chosen profession that we love.

Even when the laws are upheld, many deep seated values need to be updated. This is going to take both men and women taking a step forward to reach the higher level. We want our clients to feel comfortable and safe. This is especially true as they are not fully clothed when they are on our tables which puts them in a vulnerable position.

## STRONG BOUNDARIES

When working in a massage establishment massage therapists need strong boundaries with their clients, other therapists, office staff and anyone else who visits our establishments. Sexual innuendos or language that sexualizes appearance, communication, or behavior is not only creating an unsafe atmosphere for massage but also objectifying the person about whom the comments were made. This is the very dehumanizing behavior that perpetuates the sexual harassment taking place throughout our culture. It can be stopped if we control our language and behavior even though it seems harmless or acceptable because we have used it all our lives. It is time we update and rise to a higher consciousness. It is also time that we challenge this behavior when we see it in others, especially around the massage establishment, but also whenever we encounter it. This will be a challenge because often it is an unconscious behavior that we have been engaging in without the awareness of the damage it does.

In the massage room, especially if you are doing structural body reading, it is very important not to give compliments or use any behavior that could be misconstrued as a sexual come-on.

One of the biggest areas where boundaries are broken is when therapists move clients’ draping or clothing aside to work in an area of the body that is close to a sexual area without first explaining why it is beneficial for the client to have the area treated and then get their permission. This even applies when uncovering the client’s back by moving the draping or unhooking a bra while the client is lying on the stomach so you can do back strokes. It is also important to not just assume you have permission when working with regular clients who you have seen many times. If they say you don’t have to ask, my response is “yes I do. It’s good boundaries and there will never be a misunderstanding if I ask”.

## RAISING THE BAR IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

**For women:** For your entire life you have heard sexually objectifying and belittling comments from men. **Stop believing them!** Spend time assessing your own value without the consumer media standards. They are

unrealistic and they keep you striving to meet an artificial standard where you will not be good enough and, consequently, do not stand up and value yourself.

**Women need to not settle for less than who they truly are. They need to honor, respect and value themselves.** The more you respect and value yourself the easier it will be for men to see, respect and value you. Believe it or not, men need to see your value in order to recognize the goddess within you – for this they need your help. As soon as you become aware of being disrespected and devalued in your interactions with men it would be beneficial to stop the conversation or change the situation and communicate to the man what he is doing and especially how it makes you feel. Keep in mind that many men will act like stereotyped cavemen when originally confronted on their old unconscious belittling and sexualizing behaviors and conversations. They need your help, and rather than resent them your willingness to communicate how their comments and behaviors come across can help them to raise their awareness - the first step to change.

Additionally, women don't need to use their sexuality or flirtatiousness to gain the approval of men. Save it for your special relationships. It's not necessary to use it especially around the massage establishment. Men have been conditioned to be aggressive and pursue it. Therefore, only enjoy it in cases where you truly want that sort of relationship, but not around the massage establishment.

**For men:** It is time that we upgrade the values that came from our early family and culture. **Women are not physical objects that exist purely for our pleasure.** We need to stop looking at them and evaluating them with the standards that are portrayed by the consumer media which is “women are judged by their sexual attractiveness based on physical appearance.” This does not portray who women really are. As men we need to be conscious of when we use these judgments. Letting ourselves be aware of when we are evaluating women based on the consumer media standards does not make us wrong, but instead gives us a chance to consciously choose in that moment to let go of the judgments and view women without them.

It is also very important that in our conversations with women we become aware of when they allude to their physical appearance based on the consumer media, and not reinforce it by our own comments or actions. The more aware you become of this the more aware you will be of how prevalent it really is, and it needs to be taken out of our interactions with women. In our conversations with women we need to remove sexual innuendos, physical judgments and flirtation, especially from the

massage room. Again, awareness only comes when you **observe yourself** in conversations and interactions with women. The needed change here is to stop the line of the conversation, not to make yourself wrong. It is important for everyone to feel safe in the massage establishment.

On a higher level, as you rid yourself of sexual judgments and innuendos with women, you will find that women are much more than you might have ever imagined. A step that takes place at this time is that you can also recognize your feminine side. Carl Jung says that we each have a male (animus) and female (anima) side. Unconsciously males have been afraid of their female side as they see it as weak and vulnerable, when in reality accepting and honoring it makes you stronger and more balanced. It also sets the stage to relate to women as human beings with value, honor and respect. It is discovering the female goddess who is a joy to behold.

Once we can all get past narrow vision and judgment, there is much more room for positive interaction as well as self and mutual growth.

*Please visit our website for more information – [www.StructuralEnergeticTherapy.com](http://www.StructuralEnergeticTherapy.com). You may also contact me through that site with any questions you may have.*