"I love you" is an interesting phrase because it is one I think way more than I say. I rarely say it to my parents even though I love them to death. Our relationship is one where love is implied in everything we do, so none of us ever really say it. Sometimes I wish we did, but I like how "I love you" is just an undercurrent of our relationship rather than a thing we always say whenever one of us leaves the house. The only real time I've heard my parents say a version of the phrase to me or to each other is when, say, my mom is going out of her way to get us take out and she'll quip "Don't say I never loved you." So maybe that's why I've hardly ever said it in relationships I've been in.

I've only said "I love you" to one girlfriend I've ever had. Even with her the phrase felt kind of alien and awkward coming out of my mouth--she said it to me far more often than I said it to her. But I was in love with her months before she ever said it to me. My emotions for girls are often very, very high; often to my detriment at a college where the hook up culture is so founded in aloofness, I get heavily invested in a person very quickly. I don't necessarily have the impulse to blurt "I love you" to every girl I see or am involved with, but my friends do often mock me when I tell them about somebody I'm seeing by saying I've "fallen in love with a girl again." So I often don't confess the level of feeling I have for the people I'm involved with for fear of them recoiling from the strength of the word (or the commitment it implies).

I feel that love has almost become a taboo in millennial culture. In Elizabethan times, when teenagers wanted to sleep with each other they would write love poems with beautiful turns of phrase, promising fidelity like it were nothing. But now to tell someone that you "like" them is a major step in a relationship. I often get scared when telling a girl I "like" her, almost as if it's a synonym of "I love you." Maybe it speaks to my own fear of commitment, but I do often see the phrase "I love you" as being something I will say in relationships outside of college. It's a thing married people say. But when you are surrounded by so much casual hooking up, the simple phrase "I like you" (which is hopefully the basis of every relationship you have, platonic or not) seems powerful enough to demonstrate my emotions that are, perhaps, closer to love than I would like to admit.