

The Evolution of Courting

By Kiera Toffelmire

It is early afternoon on a school day; the best time for Michael Saxton to roam the aisles of on-campus grocery stores. There is one thing on his shopping list - a new lover.

Female university students fill the grocery store. They are crouched in the frozen food aisle, they are strutting through produce, they are waiting in check-out lines. He spots a slender, wavy-haired woman and approaches her. Saxton slips a hand through his mane of blonde curls before dishing out compliments. "You have a beautiful neck," he says, "such high cheek bones." Before dashing away Saxton hands the woman a piece of paper and instructs her to call him when she is ready to see him for a second time. Then he disappears, leaving social work student Shauna Kewin both confused and intrigued. She pays for her lunch and heads back to class, her hand clenched around the small piece of paper stored in her pocket. The paper contains Saxton's name and number. What Kewin is unaware of, is that Saxton is part of a growing community of men who help other men seduce women. He is a self-proclaimed pick-up artist; a master of seduction. And Saxton is one, among a plethora of men with varying strategies of how to successfully pick up women. Whether they classify themselves as pick-up artists, dating wizards, relationship counsellors or seduction gurus, these men all have one thing in common – they are profiting from other people's inability to entice women.

Today, more than 38% of Canadian marriages will end in divorce, according to statistics Canada. Our attention spans are shorter, our ability to sustain relationships with clear-cut gender roles is succumbing to societal pressures for female equality within these relationships. Our courting structure has evolved from that of the male providing the female with her basic needs, to a power struggle between the genders. As female equal rights are pushed to an international forefront, we are entering a time when gender roles are progressively being blurred, creating tension that ultimately affects success rates of long-term relationships.

In 2005, famous pick-up artist Neil Strauss released *The Game* – a book that offers men a step-by-step approach of how to seduce women. It was featured on the New York Times Bestseller's list and sold more than

two million copies. After its release, the number of for-profit seduction coaches in Toronto has more than doubled.

According to Michael Marks, founder of seduction business – The Dating Wizard, the number of legitimate dating gurus in Toronto has jumped from next to none in 2000, to more than a dozen today. “A lot of men want to be spoon-fed techniques on how to seduce women,” says Marks. “Unfortunately a lot of seduction stuff out there is about negating a woman’s self-esteem.” Obsessed with finding a girlfriend, at the age of 17, Marks attempted to hit on every attractive girl he met. He was a nice guy, whose idealistic theories on love were based off of romance films he watched while growing up. However, after being hurt by his first serious girlfriend, he realized that it was only when he stopped catering to her every need, did she start paying attention to him. Frustrated with this pattern, Marks decided to start his own business – The Dating Wizard – that helped nice guys learn how to alter their mentalities in order to intrigue women. “I realized not to put anyone on a pedestal just because you’re attracted to them,” said Marks, who is currently single.

Frank B. Kermit, the founder FrankTalks.com, focuses on teaching men how to address a woman’s emotional needs by altering their words and actions. He believes a man’s job in a relationship is to relieve stress, whereas a woman can play one of two roles. “She is either your mother, or your lover,” says Kermit., who helps men interpret what women want within relationships. After Kermit was rejected by his ex-fiancé as well as a long-term friend, he felt both hopeless and angry and eventually contemplated suicide. He had a choice: figure out the key to relationships, or end his life. Thankfully, he opted for the former. He started helping men, realize their ability to begin relationships with women without using pick up lines, without changing the entirety of who they are, and instead by being confident and demanding respect. “Nice guys mistake gratitude for love,” says Kermit, who attempts to help men change their behaviour and respect their gender roles as men in around a six-month time frame.

After reading an article about a man who shot and killed multiple women because he felt rejected by them, Kermit made an effort to reach out to anyone who may be feeling similar to the man who went on a shooting rampage - hopeless and dejected. Kermit posted a note on his website asking any man who may be experiencing these feelings to call him for help. Years later, he discovered that one of his clients had been

planning on getting a weapon and killing women because he was feeling so alone and rejected. After seeking Kermit's help, this particular client is in a successful relationship and now understands his role as a confident, relational man. "I'm helping stop the violence before it happens," says Kermit. While Kermit has experimented with the swinger lifestyle, taking part in polyamorous relationships, he tries to stay away from teaching men how to pick up women and focuses more on how to sustain long-term relationships with women. "The things that make a man a great pick-up artist are the same things that would make him a bad boyfriend, an absent father, a derelict employee and a lousy husband," said Kermit, who has one son with his wife Jade. Kermit uses the example of famous pick-up artist Neil Strauss. "Every time that guy has wanted to get married, he has not been able to make it work," says Kermit, "there are too many tactics, too many pre-determined rules."

"Anything that's formulaic disregards the uniqueness of us as individuals," says Rebecca Rosenblat, a relationship and sexuality expert who hosts her own talk show on Rogers TV. Rosenblat believes the spike in men seeking help from the seduction community coincides with the decrease of successful long-term relationship. "We've gone from focusing on romance, with clear cut gender roles, to fast-tracking to sex, with undefined roles." "My grandpa and all his friends are way more romantic than the guys I date," says 21-year-old Kewin, chomping on a carrot stick. "I guess it's just a generational thing. Guys my age just expect more of girls."

With the evolution of feminism, and the progressive movements that accompany it, has there been a backlash against masculinity? Kermit says in theory equality is a good idea. Though the blurring of lines between genders seems like great progress, in reality it has been regressive to the success of courting; of relationships.

"As women's gender roles have changed, men feel the pressure to change their gender roles as well. Men are becoming more feminine. On paper it makes perfect sense. In the real world, when a man behaves more feminine it's less attractive. When a woman behaves more masculine she ends up turning off a lot of the men she's attracted to," says Kermit.