

the Eyeopener



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Photo Marta Iwanek

October 12, 2010

The business of getting lucky

Rebecca Burton enters the world of seduction to explore how courting has evolved from a mating ritual to a game of strategy

Andrew Laforges stands alone in a crowded bar fumbling with his keys, glancing up periodically to check out the tall, dark-haired woman sitting across the room. After half an hour of debating whether to approach her, the second-year Ryerson student trudges over to the woman and introduces himself. He spews out a list of memorized questions: What's your name? Do you live in Toronto? Do you come here often? But the woman seems uninterested.

In a last attempt to save face he asks for her number, which she refuses to provide. A dejected Laforges makes an exit, his hopes of finding romance dwindling.

In attempts to find potential relationships or hookups, many university students have experienced rejection at least once — and rejection sucks. It can break our hearts and kill our confidence. Or it can turn us into stalking psychos and inconsolable fools. But to combat these feelings, a number of businesses across Toronto have emerged to help people dodge rejection in the dating world by offering foolproof seduction techniques.

Toronto is now home to one of the largest seduction communities in Canada, and the act of courtship is transforming into a business that people are quite literally buying into.

Walk by advertising poles on campus and it's not unlikely to see signs that read: spread your sperm, posted by one of the most notorious seduction groups in the city — Toronto Real Men. For men that suffer from below par talents at picking up women, these groups claim to turn members into 'guru's of seduction,' tackling the challenge of meeting women with systematic techniques and pick up lines. It's no surprise that some of these groups have caused an uproar among Toronto feminist groups because of degrading tactics they use in attempts to charm women.

However not all groups are focused on landing one-night stands. Exceptions like Toronto's Paradigm Shift Institute are out to create long lasting relationships that benefit both men and women.

Steven, a fourth-year aerospace engineering student was looking for a long-term relationship when he came to Ryerson. Though he lacked confidence he convinced himself to approach his dream girl and without thought, blurted out that he really liked her and thought they should be together. The girl rejected him, a huge ego blow for the head-over-heels first year.

Devastated, Steven decided he'd crack the code of how to successfully meet and date his ideal woman. He turned to the seduction community for help and began researching theories and techniques that some of these businesses teach.

“In today’s society men have become more feminized. They don’t know their role as a man. They have a fear of getting rejected,” Steven says. “Whenever you see someone that is attractive, force yourself to talk to them, and over time you develop the confidence you need to talk to anyone you’re into,” says Steven, who has spent time researching and exploring the seduction community.

Today, Steven says he is comfortable approaching women in any setting — be it the Ryerson quad, a coffee shop, or even at the bank. Steven met his last girlfriend while walking down the street. After a series of dates she proposed to him. He declined the offer claiming that he’s not ready to settle down.

“You have to be smooth, you can’t be hesitant and awkward,” said Steven of his newfound success. While he would not reveal many of his seduction secrets, Steven says he often gives his friends tips on how to approach women. After he graduates,

Steven plans to start a coaching business to help male university students who are struggling to pick up women.

“I’m sure I’d make way more money with this business than the field I’m in,” says Steven — a bold statement considering the average salary for an aerospace engineer is \$68,000 per year according to PayScale Canada. If Steven’s business succeeds he will become one of many who have turned the art of seduction into a paycheck. The 2005 release of Neil Strauss’ book *The Game*, which sold more than two million copies, was one of the first sources to provide men with a directory of seduction secrets, using catchy code words like IOI’s (indicators of interest) and AMOG (Alpha male of the group). For struggling men it became a bible. What originally existed as online-only content and message board posts became socially accepted business, preaching beliefs that millions of people now subscribe to.

“The seduction community has a seedy reputation but it also gives innocent and shy guys the proper tools to meet women,” says Kimberly Moffit, a Toronto based relationship expert and psychotherapist.

Groups like Toronto Real Men have contributed to this ‘seedy reputation’ by lashing out against feminists and homosexuals, encouraging men to use their manhood to get laid.

Seduction coach Frank Kermit was based out of Toronto for more than a decade but has since cut his ties with the community because of unethical approaches some groups were taking.

“You’ve got a virgin who’s never had a girlfriend teaching people how to approach a girl,” he says, discussing his fears of what the Toronto seduction community is becoming.

“A lot of people in the Toronto seduction community are very damaged people and men are coming to them looking for seduction tips.”

After his own experiences with heartbreak and dating, Kermit’s work focuses on creating and maintaining positive relationships.

The majority of Kermit’s clientele, many of whom are university students in their early 20s, are looking for girlfriends.

“It’s about the way people approach you,” says Kirthan Aujlay, events coordinator at the Women’s Centre.

She uses the common example of a woman being approached at a club. If a woman is out dancing with her friends she doesn’t normally want a mystery man grinding behind her.

“When the guys don’t get the message that you’re saying no, it’s creepy,” she says.

While both Kermit and Steven vowed against using clubs as a meeting place for potential mates, Moffit disagrees.

“At the end of the day it doesn’t really matter where you meet someone. If your going to a club and you’re a nice student, a good person, there will be other students like that at clubs. You can’t rule everyone out just because they’re at a club,” she says.

While seduction coaches and relationship experts differ in their opinions of where to meet potential lovers, they all agree that finding a creative way to approach someone, with a funny comment or remark about a shared interest, is the best way to meet a stranger.

According to Moffit, less than a decade ago bars and clubs were the hot spots to meet potential partners, but today many women won't set foot in a bar. Now relationship partners can text, e-mail or Facebook each other.

As technology diversifies, romance signals are becoming unclear and courting is packed with mixed messages says Moffit. When one partner just stops texting the other it becomes code for 'it's over,' and assumes the other person should forget about them.

While seduction groups attempt to diffuse confusion that technology causes by spoonfeeding men techniques, Grace Hawkins, a fourth-year radio and television arts student says that relationships differ on a case-by-case basis and that there is no fail-proof method. What may work for some isn't the right answer for another. While books like *The Game* offer a singular equation for romance, it makes people put on an act rather than showcasing who they really are, says Hawkins.

"There's something to be said about confidence — playing with what you have and not being someone else," she says, "This tends to work better than any cheesy pick up line."