

*Also by Shan Boodram*

*Laid: Young People's Experiences with Sex in an Easy-Access Culture*

The  
GAME  
of  
DESIRE



*5 Surprising Secrets to Dating with  
Dominance—and Getting What You Want*

SHAN BOODRAM



*An Imprint of WILLIAM MORROW*

*For my husband, Jared Brady, who served valiantly as my cheerleader,  
therapist, confidante, booty call, and relentless inspiration  
during the emotional process of living—then writing—this book.*

This is a work of nonfiction. Some names and other identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

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## ← PROLOGUE →

Courtney seemed stuck—caught between two thoughts, two versions of herself, but mostly between two colors.

“Should I make the smiley face red or black?” she asked with her marker hovering over a stack of notecards.

I glanced around her office, a place that I knew she spent far too much time, then replied, “The next action card in the routine is the physical challenge, so why not make that one black? Then you can make the smiley face red.”

The colors did not matter in the least, and we actually didn’t even need to make cue cards, since Courtney had rehearsed the routine until she knew it by heart; but I invited her to use her marker collection because I knew it would calm her nerves. I suspected that she knew this too.

Courtney had gone on at least a dozen dates since we began working together months ago, but this meetup with Derek was special. Derek was her target to a *T*: a conscious thinker, a health nut and a hot firefighter who looked like his nickname was Mr. October. She had been crushing on him from afar but had only mustered the courage and skill set to ask him out a few days ago. The *Derek-type* was exactly what we’d been working toward, and the best part of all was that he wasn’t the only high-interest play-

mate Courtney had lined up. Another man named River, whom she'd described as a potential soul mate, was flying in from Dallas in a couple of weeks to see her as well.

"Don't stress out too much about getting this date in the can, okay? Derek is the one who should be scared of you with ya dangerously seductive self!"

Courtney exhaled into a half smile and emphatically pressed the cap on her marker as if to say, *Amen*. She handed me the cue cards, grabbed her purse then looked back up at me. "Okay, we should probably head out, he'll be there soon."

I stood in agreement and looked her over one more time. "Do you need to wear a bra?"

We left her office in separate cars and by the time I got to the restaurant, Courtney (and her freed nipples) were already outside on her faux good-news phone call, which was the first technique of the routine. After working with me to fix her struggling love life, Courtney was inspired to begin her own workshop for women, who, like her, had been bullied in high school. The "caller" was a web designer who had agreed to take on her new passion project, pro bono. All of this was true but of course, it didn't *just* happen . . . but it did happen to be something we could use to her advantage because positive first impressions are well worth their weight in gold.

Courtney pointed through the window at a man sitting with his back to us. I nodded then flashed three cards at her for a final reminder: a red smile (make sure this is the first thing he sees), blue connected arrows (touch consensually ASAP) and a newspaper (share good news). I slid into the table behind Derek and a beat later Courtney walked in with a tsunami of positive vibes. She finished up her call, loudly, then approached Derek, who had now gotten to his feet.

"It's so good that we're finally doing this," she said as she hugged him tightly. "I just got some awesome news that I have to share! Maybe you're my new good-luck charm."

I did a fist pump under my table and waved the fourth cue card with the drawing of a keg, a symbol to remind her to be the life of the party. A few minutes later the waiter sauntered over to their table and Courtney cradled her chin in her hands then struck up some small talk.

The waiter took the bait, shifted his body toward her and stood taller. "You've been here before, right? We have some new things on the menu, do you want some recommendations?"

In response to this, Courtney switched her attention back to Derek. "What do you think I should get?" She appraised him and smiled with approval. "I trust you know what you're doing."

When the waiter left, Courtney proceeded to tell Derek about the phone call. He asked a series of rapid-fire follow-ups then surprisingly revealed he too had been severely picked on growing up. They shared a moment, exchanging their high school pitfalls and triumphs that I'm sure would have gone on longer if I weren't there. I held up the fifth card, a squiggly face, and waited for Courtney to find something to disagree with him about. After all, fire isn't created with sunlight alone; to create sparks you must also have friction.

Derek started talking about football and how it helped him gain the confidence he lacked in high school. With this Courtney sat up straighter to investigate. "You're a football guy eh? Who's your team?"

"Oh, you're a football gal?" said Derek excitedly. He leaned so far over the table, you'd truly think he was holding that damn thing up. "I'm a Rams fan."

Up to that point, Courtney had mirrored his body position, plus she had been giving him the full flirtatious treatment: her speech was slow, her body was in a perfect S formation and she had been picturing him naked to keep her pupils dilated. But the Rams comment changed everything. She sat back to put distance between them, then closed her body by crossing her arms and pointing her feet toward the door. "The Rams, seriously? Just when I thought we could be friends."

For the next few minutes, Courtney barraged him about his bad taste in football. He defended himself and his team, but she was unrelentingly displeased with him. I held the red-smiley-face card up, indicating it was time to turn the disagreement into an opportunity to tease and create their first inside joke. I couldn't hear what she said but I noticed her uncross her arms and poke out that hip again. *You're welcome, Derek*, I thought.

The waiter stopped by, took my order and then stared down at my bright yellow cards as he picked up the menu. In moments like this I was so glad to live in L.A., a place where too many weird things happen for anyone to really give a damn. He walked away and I flashed the seventh card, which was a picture of a dumbbell that signified it was time to get physical. Courtney glanced down at her Fitbit then back up at Derek.

"Shoot," she murmured.

"What?"

"It's stupid, but me and my friends are doing this twenty-one-day physical challenge that's kind of turned into a competition. This is awkward, but I have to squat now. Will you do it with me?"

"Here? No," he said flatly.

Like the professional that she was, she didn't back down. "Please, just thirty seconds so I don't look like a dork in here alone? We don't even have to get up, we can just hover over our seat."

He shook his head, but this time with a smile that said, *You win*. The two of them scooted back their chairs, then squatted. This technique may sound crazy but let's analyze the genius behind it.

1. Exercise increases the heart rate, which is also the same physiological response you get when you like someone new.
2. "Misbehaving" in a civilized place brings you back to the joys of childhood.
3. Doing something physically exerting while you're inches away from the face of someone you have chemistry with is the closest you're gonna get to sex in public without drawing stares or sirens.

Courtney wavered on her heels then placed her hand on Derek's for balance as they kept their eyes locked on one another. "Okay, done!" she declared.

They both collapsed back and laughed until their breathing returned to normal.

"What other alerts do you have on there?" quizzed Derek.

Courtney took this as an opportunity to cross the physical barrier again to show him her watch and to examine his. Most women are afraid to introduce touch on their first few dates, which is precisely why I taught Courtney not to be. Everything she had done, from the moment she asked *him* out, was designed to make it abundantly clear she was far from average.

Courtney inspected his watch and turned his wrist over in her hand until it naturally fell into her palm. She held it there for a second then gestured for him to take it back. As he retracted, she let her fingers brush against his. I later learned that our good sport Derek had brushed back.

I held up the card with three Xs on it, a prompt for Courtney to begin mind-fucking Derek. She nodded subtly in a way that looked like she was agreeing with him, even though I was certain the gesture was for me. As they chatted some more, she casually lifted her hand and gripped then stroked her glass up and down then down and back up. She also took every opportunity to expose her neck and draw attention to her mouth. The goal of mind-fucking is to activate someone's sexual responses, without them overtly understanding why they are becoming aroused.

I pulled out the card with the bathroom symbol drawn on it and a few beats later, Courtney excused herself being mindful to touch Derek's shoulders reassuringly as she left. If you have a hard time introducing touch on dates, the bathroom technique should solve that dilemma by giving you a natural excuse to touch a neutral place. This break also provides a crucial opportunity to freshen up, not just physically, but mentally. Professional sports teams take a halftime break to regroup, so why shouldn't you? I encouraged

Courtney and the other women in our group (who you will meet later on) to use this time to recenter themselves by rapping their favorite pump-up verse, reapplying their vaginal fluids (again, more on that later) and most important, to stare at themselves ravenously in the mirror until *they* couldn't resist the woman gazing back.

The waiter approached with my soup and salad, which I had totally forgotten I'd even ordered. I looked up at him apologetically and asked, "Can I get this to go and grab the bill, please?"

I wanted to be gone before she got back to communicate that I had total confidence in her ability to close without prompts. This was the moment the training wheels came off. Before I left, I threw the remaining cue cards in the trash. They were:

- Ask a bold question (*Why are you still single?*).
- Ask a weird and sexy question (*If you were a sexual superhero, what would your special power be?*).
- Leave him with an anecdote or story to think about.
- Get the fuck out of there!

With that last note in mind, I sent Courtney a reminder text once I got back to my car:

Don't let him extend the date beyond dinner, no matter how good things are going

About an hour later, she called and practically yelled, "Girl, that date went so damn smooth. I got a second date *on* the date. Literally while we were eating, he said, I want to see you again!"

"You're officially and indisputably a pro now."

She laughed and clapped her hands joyfully. "All thanks to you, Shan. This shit really works."

## INTRODUCTION

Hello luvas!

Be honest: How many of you know an awesome person with a romantic life that could be summed up with these six words: *the short end of the stick*? Perhaps that friend might even be you. I'm not here to judge, but I am here to wake your butt up by letting you know that despising your experiences as a single person is not normal. When people say relationships take work, they are talking about the inevitable misalignments that occur when two (or more) people try to share one life. What they're not talking about is all the unnecessary drama, unreturned texts and lackluster sex that result from picking up floor scraps because you don't feel worthy of joining the dating feast. And believe me, despite the fact that we are statistically in a dating famine—or as *Vanity Fair* dubbed it, a Dating Apocalypse—there is a feast out there of explosive chemistry, conversations until dawn, fairy-tale firsts and finger-licking-good seconds.<sup>1</sup>

In short, I wrote this book to teach each of you how to boldly play the game of desire, and win.

Thankfully, though, as long as you play, there really aren't any losers. First of all, the goal here is not to trick or one-up potential mates, but instead to get the best out of everyone involved in each budding connection. Second, while it's fun to walk into a room

feeling like you own it, cool to know how to make people feel excited in your presence, and exciting to be the one deciding if you wanna call someone back, there's also a ton of value in coming up short because that's how you get better and find better matches. With this in mind, the choice to play isn't a question of morality but one of personal endurance: How much longer can you stand to wait for luck to notice you and fix your broken, lonely heart?

In David Brooks's book *The Social Animal*, he states that the recipe for happiness has three parts; two of those three have to do with the quality and quantity of a person's close relationships.<sup>2</sup> I became a sexologist because I couldn't understand why we, as a society, were leaving such a critical component of our well-being up to chance. In other important areas like our career, finances and health, we are taught that if we want to excel we must study, seek out expert guides and practice proven behaviors. As an intimacy educator, I've made it my duty to help people understand that this formula works wonders on the interpersonal side of life too. From my private counseling service, to my YouTube channel, to features on major networks and publications, I've reached millions of people on a topic they've unfortunately barely spoken about in school. I'm a certified sex education counselor in Canada, a certified sexologist in America, Facebook Watch's couples counselor on *Make Up or Break Up*, and MTV's millennial intimacy expert on their "Guide To" series. I've written for *Cosmopolitan*, the TV show *The Bold Type* and *Teen Vogue*. My first book, *Laid: Young People's Experiences with Sex in an Easy-Access Culture*, is still on shelves. I'm a member of the National Coalition of Sexual Health where I've led the execution of a sex education video for new military members and I'm apart of Trojan's Sexual Health Advisory Council. In total, I've worked in the intimacy space for over ten years, and wanna know the one conclusion I've come to?

Most people have no clue what they're doing, no idea what they're doing wrong and thus, absolutely no concept of how to change the direction of their romantic fate.

Yes, women have a ton of advice columns. And yes, we have libraries of self-help books that encourage us to be a bitch, a prude or a vixen; but in my experience of listening to singles, they don't need any more arbitrary tips. They need a clear system to follow that's inclusive, multifaceted and proven.

Before we get into the details of the system I've created, let's first analyze the current conditions of the dating landscape, because once you know where you want to go, it's important to know what you must get through.

According to the 2014 U.S. Census poll, there are 107 million unmarried Americans over 18, and more than half are women.<sup>3</sup> Jon Birger, author of *Date-onomics*, believes these numbers alone can tell us all we need to know about the current conditions: "Sociologists, psychologists and economists have done a ton of research on sex ratios, and the consensus is clear. When men are in oversupply, the dating culture is more traditional and more monogamous, but when women are in oversupply—as they are today . . . the dating culture is less monogamous and more libertine; women are more likely to be treated as sex objects rather than as romantic love interests."<sup>4</sup>

Birger's assessment is consistent with what I've heard firsthand from the vast majority of singles I've met through my work. In preparation for this project, I asked a pool of three hundred women to describe dating in one sentence and here are some of the most common responses I received:

"Dating is a chore. . . . most people I meet are disrespectful and just want sex."

"Dating is draining, men are extremely immature and misogynistic."

"Dating is annoying because it feels like I'm starting something that won't finish the way I want it too."

"Dating is confusing because people want all the benefits of a relationship but don't actually want to commit."

In further support of the gender ratio theory, popular dating apps like Bumble, Match and Coffee Meets Bagel have more users

that identify as women than men. But somewhat unsurprisingly, according to a study conducted by Hinge, looking to your phone to find a real connection, regardless of your gender, is statistically not the most fruitful route. In fact, only one in five hundred Hinge swipes led to a phone number exchange, and 81 percent of Hinge users have reported they've never found a long-term relationship through a swiping app.<sup>5</sup>

In 2018, HBO put out a documentary called *Swiped: Hooking up in the Digital Age* by Nancy Jo Sales that painted a grim picture of mating for millennials and Gen Z's. Sales, the creator of the documentary, said that one of the most disturbing findings of her deep dive was the rampant racism that swipe-right culture seems to normalize by ranking attractiveness solely based on race.<sup>6</sup>

Even more disturbing were the statistics it pointed to. According to the U.K.'s National Crime Agency, reports of online-dating-related rape have risen by more than 450 percent in six years.<sup>7</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2017, a record-breaking 2.2 million cases of syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia were diagnosed in the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the culture of dating in a famine has left a massive impact on our general feelings about connection. A Harris Poll conducted in 2016 found that more than 70 percent of those who participated identified themselves as lonely.<sup>9</sup>

LET'S RECAP. A SINGLE WOMAN TODAY IS IN A MARKET WHERE WOMEN ARE IN oversupply, sex is at the forefront, real connections are statistically improbable, reports of sexual assault are rising, sexually transmitted infections are spiking and people think it's okay to talk about race as though they're ordering a pizza.

If reading all of this makes you feel like closing up shop and heading for a life of shoe-crafting solitude in the depths of a forest, I can't say I blame you. But I do dare to challenge you because

while, yes, many people are currently struggling, there are the few who've mastered the art of connection, who are thriving. And if in your mind you need to have one million followers or a face sculpted by the gods to be a part of that few, you need this book more than you could possibly know. I say all this as someone who has been through the merciless fires of dating hell, gotten my shit together and then come out not just alive, but ablaze with purpose and gratitude *because* I found (and married) the love of my life.

Some people refer to their life partner as their better half, and in my case, I would boldface, underline and add exclamation marks to that statement. My partner, Jared Brady, is the kind of sweet, empathetic and gentle person I will probably never be. Which is fine, because I'm the smart-ass, analytical and worry-free woman he needs to balance him out. It works in a way that has made every love song literal, every sunset vibrant and every aspect of my life richer. In the most obnoxiously cliché way possible, finding and being in a good relationship is the best thing that's ever happened to me. But, Jared wasn't a fluke or one-off. He was simply the better of a lot of bests and the result of years of good decisions and calculated moves. Please believe, before I got to the altar, your girl found and fully enjoyed her time at the feast (\*Will Smith voice\* *You know what I'm shaying?!*).

That is why this game is worth playing and why I led this journey with Courtney and five others. Through their experience, I hope to empower single women everywhere to have more fun than they can imagine while using tangible tools and strategy to fulfill their wildest romantic aspirations.

Although we will be moving through this process as a group, everyone's outcome might look very different. For sure, a successful long-term monogamous marriage is a beautiful example of love that we can all admire. On the other side of the coin, an incredible, reciprocal one-night stand, where both parties leave feeling better and just as healthy, is also something worth applauding,



even if it's not something we would personally do. The goal here is the feelings of confidence, acceptance and mutuality that accompany desire; the conditions in which this result occurs are far less important.

All right—before I sound any more like a drawn-out infomercial, let's get to why we're all here! Below are the five phases that will serve as our guide as I attempt to lead six short-end-of-the-stick daters to the land of abundant desire:

This book is a detailed account of how I tested this five-phase program on six down-on-love daters—and how you, dear reader, can implement these tools for yourself. Our journey is radical, raw,



**Phase One. KNOW** who you've become by identifying the core traits of your intimate self. This includes being fully aware of your strengths, weaknesses, blind spots and patterns. This knowledge also needs to be supplemented with advanced feedback from others who know them intimately—be they close friends or exes.

**Phase Two. CHANGE** the habits and perceptions that are holding you back. This includes changing your appearance, your mind about your limits, faults and even your traumas. Learn the art of seduction, anti-seduction and the habits that may be preventing you from making powerful connections where it matters most. You are who you've become, which means you can become whoever you consistently choose to be. If a component of your reality does not serve your vision of your highest self, it is no longer you.

**Phase Three. LEARN** from a series of experts (don't worry, I've done a lot of the work here for you!) to fine-tune your external and internal

ridiculous, turbulent—and absolutely true. I hope in the upcoming pages you will vicariously learn through these women (whom you will come to know very well) how to overcome any fears, faults, limiting beliefs and insecurities that have been preventing you from discovering your own feast.

All right, let's get started. Now would be an ideal time to tuck away your preconceived notions on the *do's* of dating, and your good-girls-don't guidelines. Because the story of how these women became everything they should be is driven by doing almost everything you've been told you should not!

presentation. Become a master at approaching, attracting, flirting and influencing. Decide who you want to attract and learn how to find and entice them.

**Phase Four. PRACTICE** what you've learned thus far in low-risk environments, including at work, among friends and on casual dates. In addition, test out new hypotheses so you can create your own unique toolbox for making connections at will. Flirting, seducing and influencing should not be reserved for "the one" but are skills that will transform all your relationships, including the one you have with yourself.

**Phase Five. BE** the person you've always wanted to be. Enjoy the company of people who better you and bring you joy. Join the feast and empower others, through your exceptional transformation, to do the same. Finally, revisit the other four phases periodically because this work is never truly done. And once you get into the swing of things where it starts getting *really* fun, you'll realize how great that news is!

