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Picking Up and Acting Out: Politics of Masculinity in the Seduction Community

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ABSTRACT

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The “Seduction Community” broadly defines a subculture of men who follow varying philosophies and methods to achieve success with women. Their goal is to transform themselves from what they term “average frustrated chumps” into skilled “pickup artists.” The majority of my research into the Seduction Community has been observational field study; incorporated into this research is historical analysis. By acquainting myself with a number of pickup artists, I have been able to observe as well as informally interview these men in order to ascertain the motivations, goals, and behavioral patterns of members of the Seduction Community. While my study will contribute to the continuing discourse of men’s studies, it is unique in that it is the first academic study of the Seduction Community. The purpose of this project is to determine

the social context that has given rise to such a vibrant subculture, and to speculate on its broader gender and social significance. In attempting to deconstruct the American cultural climate that has produced the Seduction Community, I examine a few concrete factors: the continuously shifting aspects of men's culture, the collapse of elaborate courtship rituals, the impact of feminist ideals on popular thought, and the proliferation of the Internet. Although these distinct elements can be identified as causes for the community's existence, they are also intertwined in a complicated web. By recognizing these distinct aspects, however, I distinguish the motivations behind the formation and explosion of the Seduction Community. I determine that the community is composed of many elements that are borrowed from America's cultural past, making it more reflective than revolutionary. I propose that what is unique, however, is the distinct manner in which these various elements have coalesced to form a community of men, bonding through shared experiences and acting together to accomplish similar goals.

For my brother, who taught me how to tie my shoes, read, drive a car, and so much more.

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INTRODUCTION

Pickup or Shut Up

Sitting at the family dinner table, I watched as my older brother, a senior in high school at the time, pushed his food around on his plate and sulked. My mother, always intuitive and attentive to our problems, asked him what was wrong. He sighed as he admitted that there was a girl at school whom he liked. “What should I do? I don’t know if she likes me!” My father piped up to offer, as he always did, a simple and practical solution, “Well, why don’t you ask her out on a date?” With an exasperated tone my brother said, “Dad! People don’t do that!” At that moment, my mother and I gave the famously useless advice “Just be yourself and she’ll like you!” He responded only with a sigh. My mother began to name all of my brother’s good qualities, as if listing these would give him the sudden self-esteem boost he needed to pursue the current girl of his dreams. As she continued citing all that he had to offer the opposite sex, I could see him holding back tears; he was not listening to a word she said. He was unaffected by our attempts to help him. Neither my mother, father, nor I was surprised by this particular conversation, it was a common one at our house and it always ended the same way. Our parents would attempt to give him guidance, and my brother would listen and nod, all the while knowing that neither of them had the advice he needed to get what he so desperately wanted: a girlfriend.

By the age of twenty-four, the advice “Just be yourself” had proved the extent of its uselessness, he had still never had a girlfriend. He came to the startling realization that just being himself was not enough. At the advice of a college friend, he began to investigate the Seduction Community, a society of men who focus on bettering their skills at attracting women. On message boards and websites he discovered literally thousands of other men with similar histories to his own. It was within this community that he finally found what our parents had never been able to give him well enough, the guidance and support he needed to finally become comfortable with the opposite sex.

The “Seduction Community” broadly defines a subculture of men who follow varying philosophies and methods to achieve success with women. Despite differing strategies, members of the community are typically all connected by two constants: a feeling of frustration and powerlessness with their inability to attract the women they desire, and a belief that conventional dating methods are flawed. Their goal is to transform themselves from what they term “average frustrated chumps” (AFCs) into skilled “pickup artists” (PUAs). Aspiring pickup artists seek to take control over their lives by gaining an understanding of the female mind, improving their ability to function within a social context, and by achieving self-confidence. So-called seduction schools have emerged in order to provide men with both concrete skills that they can apply to their romantic lives and also the inner confidence that they believe is gained by overcoming social helplessness. Although the schools of seduction are both numerous and varying, each methodology encourages men to achieve personal improvement by accepting their flaws and conquering them. While these

schools of thought may share common goals, the tactics employed in order to achieve these objectives differ greatly.

In the more than fifteen years of its existence, countless members of the Seduction Community have produced literature describing their methods for attracting the opposite sex. There is no comprehensive published source, however, explaining the nature or history of the community itself. Currently, the Wikipedia articles describing the community and its teachers remain the only written resources. While the accuracy of such a source may be disputed, the fact that members actively edit the content of these articles means that Wikipedia is a good source for understanding the Seduction Community from the perspective of the participants themselves. Similarly, personal reports from members on Internet discussion boards and even a published account such as Neil Strauss's tell-all story of his experience in the community, *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*, may not contain complete truths; but for the purposes of this project, what is *true* is not necessarily as important as what these men perceive and report to be their own real experiences. Each member has his own motivations and goals for becoming a part of the Seduction Community, and consequently, every man's experience differs. For this reason, there is much dispute within the community about what methods are best and even about what is necessarily right or true about the community itself. But despite internal disagreements, there are many overarching similarities that can be drawn out. By exploring the most fundamental aspects of the community and by examining the self-reported

interpretations and motivations of these men, I seek to illuminate the impetus behind such an expanding subculture.

In order to understand the current nature of the Seduction Community, it is important first to place it within the context of its own history. While not directly connected to the formation of the Seduction Community, members credit Eric Weber's book *How to Pick Up Girls* (1970) as the predecessor for the type of how-to self-help literature that now flourishes within the community. In the late 1980s, failed comedy writer Ross Jeffries harnessed the persuasive elements of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), "a school of hypnosis holding that one can communicate with the subconscious through seemingly normal conversation," in order to formulate his method of pickup, called Speed Seduction. The 1988 publication of his book *How to Get the Women You Desire Into Bed* helped to spawn interest in both the book and the general seductive arts within fledgling online communities. A student of Jeffries, Lewis De Payne, established the Internet newsgroup alt.seduction.fast (ASF) in 1994; it quickly gave rise to forums, blogs, and related websites, all dedicated to the exchange and discussion of seduction techniques. As the popularity of ASF surged, the Learn the Skills Corporation created a moderated version known as Moderated ASF (mASF). Steadily growing since 1994 to a current membership of 20,000 (according to their own data), mASF is a common online destination for members of the Seduction Community, but it is by no means the only method of interaction for these PUAs.¹

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Seduction community," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Seduction_community&oldid=76063636 (accessed September 17, 2006); Neil Strauss, "He Aims! He Shoots! Yes!!" *New York Times*, January 25, 2004, final edition; Wikipedia contributors, "Ross Jeffries," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,

Although Ross Jeffries is a critical figure in understanding the origins of the Seduction Community, Mystery, a self-taught PUA, revolutionized the pickup arts by taking seduction methods out of seminar classrooms and Internet discussion boards; he became the first to hold in-the-field training sessions. Hands-on teacher/student experience is now not only a key feature of most seduction schools, but it represents a distinct rite of passage for aspiring PUAs. While equally well known “pickup gurus” (PUGs) exist, Ross Jeffries and Mystery represent key players (no pun intended) in the evolution of the Seduction Community. In addition to their status as central founders, they are both main characters in Neil Strauss’s *The Game*, the book that has brought the Seduction Community further into the mainstream than it has ever been before.²

The Game is the self-reported supposedly true story of Neil Strauss’s ascension from romantically challenged sexually starved AFC to “the most powerful of the Jedi.” According to Strauss’s own account, in two years time he had assumed an alter ego named Style, become the best pickup artist in the world, and eventually was the most sought after guru of the Seduction Community. But before donning the alter ego Style, Strauss spent years as a rock-and-roll critic and connoisseur for *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, and *The Village Voice*. He also co-wrote and ghost wrote for celebrities such as Jenna Jameson, Marilyn Manson, Dave Navarro, and the band Mötley Crüe. Although such work offered him a chance to dabble in the glamorous celebrity lifestyle, the sexual appeal of these high-profile

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ross_Jeffries&oldid=74536035 (accessed September 17, 2006); Wikipedia, “Seduction community.” (September 17, 2006).

² Wikipedia contributors, “Mystery (seduction guru),” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mystery_%28seduction_guru%29&oldid=73963164 (accessed September 17, 2006).

provocative icons was not contagious. Strauss explains, “In all that time, with all those backstage passes, I didn’t get so much as a single kiss.” He felt that, despite his proximity to fame, he had always remained invisible to the opposite sex. Even before witnessing the sexual exploits of rockers, Strauss bemoaned his lack of contact with women. Hopelessly uncomfortable and intimidated, he had not slept with a single woman in four years of college. At a time when he was experiencing significant professional accomplishment, Strauss felt that his romantic life was destined to stagnate.³

This experience of frustration, confusion, desperation, and lack of control is paralleled by the thousands of men who have found the Seduction Community as their solution. Like so many men of the community, Strauss felt that there was no solution to his life-long romantic despair until discovering the existence of an underground society of pickup artists. Despite its proliferation on the Internet, the Seduction Community mainly gains new followers by word of mouth, and for Strauss it was no different. A book editor who discovered the community noticed that no comprehensive guide for members existed. He presented Strauss with this project and soon what started as research for a pickup how-to book became a lifestyle for Strauss. In joining the ranks of pickup artists across the globe, he transformed into Style and, according to his own report, began to experience success almost immediately. He rose to fame within the community and became “the king of the unnaturals,” the supposed best of the self-taught Casanovas. While Strauss’s rise to fame

³ Neil Strauss, *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* (New York: ReganBooks, 2005), 213, 10. While *The Game* chronicles what Strauss claims to be the true story of his experience within the Seduction Community, some dispute its accuracy due to the seemingly unbelievable way in which Strauss rose to fame so quickly within the community. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the book is wholly or even partly fabricated.

within the community may be anomalous (as most members will not become as famous or publicly successful as Strauss has), his reason for joining the community and his experience of romantic success is common. It is not surprising, then, that the recent mainstreaming of the Seduction Community has brought more men to the brotherhood.⁴

As members of an organized society, the men of the Seduction Community have developed their own jargon that they use to refer to different methods or concepts relating to the pickup arts. Much of this terminology is abbreviated to acronyms, often making it difficult for outsiders to understand a conversation between pickup artists. In an interview with *The Hollywood Podcast*, Strauss explains, “I’ll get phone calls from guys, and they’ll be like ‘I was sarging a two-set. I was getting IOIs from the obstacle when I DHVed. Do you think it’s still possible to #close the target, or is she just gonna give me ASD... and she was like an SHB 10.’ And anyone who’s listening to this from the community will know exactly what that means, otherwise you’re just not gonna know.” Employing what amounts to their own language allows members to develop a sense of belonging; it also means that PUAs can discuss their methods openly in bars and clubs without being found out. Some of these men shun the constant usage of such terminology, as they believe it is only an attempt by some to prove their technical prowess to others. Most PUAs, however, do utilize at least some of the community’s lingo. For this reason, I will employ the expressions and acronyms that PUAs

⁴ Ibid., 214. Members of the Seduction Community categorize men into “naturals” and “unnaturals.” Naturals are those who seem to instinctively know the skills and methods of the game, without having been taught. Unnaturals are those who require instruction in order to do what naturals claim to inherently possess. While most members of the Seduction Community are unnaturals, some claim to be naturals who wish to enhance their instinctive skills. Among the community gurus, most are unnaturals, but others are naturals who attempt to deconstruct their methods in order to teach others.

use so prominently. Although some of these terms will be explained in context, I also include a glossary of these terms for the convenience of the reader.⁵

Just as members have developed their own language for interaction, each man also assumes an alternate name. In some cases the name may be chosen by other members, but most often men choose the name for themselves. Some even call each other by this title in person, but most simply create a name for use on Internet discussion boards. Although most are not referred to by their Internet handles in person, the creation of a kind of alternate personality gives new members the opportunity to step outside themselves and start the path towards self-improvement. The need for privacy is another reason for the use of a pseudonym. Because members post on discussion boards their “field reports” and “lay reports,” which describe in detail specific interactions with women, many PUAs fear being found out by these women. Similarly, many PUAs keep their “alternative lifestyle” hidden from friends, family, and colleagues. For the purposes of this project, I will refer to these men by their assumed titles.

Because the Seduction Community is essentially a loose society of men who follow similar philosophies, there is no set initiation or requirement for membership. In fact, to use the term membership is a bit misleading, as a member is simply someone who considers himself to be associated with the community. While some PUAs may choose to improve their game without the help of others, most choose to go out in groups and accept the advice of other members. In most large cities in America (and in countless other countries) there exist what PUAs call “lairs.” In essence, a lair is simply the group of PUAs in a particular

⁵ Neil Strauss, interview by Timothy Coyne, *The Hollywood Podcast*, September 13, 2005.

city. In November of 2006, BristolLair.com reported over 150 active lairs all over the world in over forty different countries. Lairs provide these men with a kind of local support group as they learn and change. In contrast to business franchises, no two lairs are the same. Some lairs may be more organized than others, electing a president, having certain requirements for membership, and holding regular meetings. Just as the activity level of different lairs varies, some PUAs are more involved than others. While a few only learn one method and choose to follow it, most will explore various methods in order to broaden their understanding of the pickup arts.⁶

After remaining entrenched in the community for a year and a half, Strauss felt that the line between journalist, Neil Strauss, and pickup guru, Style, had become blurred. In *The Game* he writes, “It was time to remind myself that I wasn’t just a PUA; I was a writer.” On January 25, 2004, in an attempt to subvert his alter ego and stake a claim as the first journalist to uncover a fascinating secret subculture, Strauss exposed himself and thousands of other men as members of the Seduction Community. Published by *The New York Times*, his article “He Aims! He Shoots! Yes!!” became the first truly mainstream moment for the Seduction Community. A year later, *The Game* was published and quickly climbed to the top of multiple bestseller lists; no longer a well-hidden secret, the book revealed the existence of a methodical and calculated process of seducing women. Although some members have expressed fear that this mainstream success will interfere with their ability to successfully execute the known methods of pickup, PUAs have adapted quickly, and the Seduction Community has steadily gained membership. Since the publication of *The Game*, numerous

⁶ Bristol Lair, “Lair List,” <http://www.bristollair.com/lairlist> (accessed November 5, 2006).

articles have been written about the Seduction Community, thus bringing the pickup arts closer to the mainstream. But mainstream media have latched onto the community's more eccentric and superficial aspects, ignoring the deeper purpose to the Seduction Community. At its heart, the Seduction Community can be understood as a self-help movement. Reformed average frustrated chumps coach hapless men to improve their "game" and in turn, themselves.⁷

The president of The Austin Society of Pickup Artists (TAS) invited me to a party hosted by a fellow PUA, Dr Gonzo; there would be men from the society as well as others unconnected to the Seduction Community. Never having met any of them (including the president himself), I wondered how I would be able to identify the PUAs from the AFCs. It turned out to be much easier than I thought. The PUAs stood out in their designer jeans and brightly colored fitted dress-shirts like a meticulously groomed clean-cut army. While circulating the party I spoke to many of them, revealing only to some my true reason for attending. Many had only recently joined the community and therefore were able to offer me little more information apart from their personal experiences. As I stood talking to Merchant (the president of TAS), another man stood near us listening to our conversation. He finally spoke, shaking his head and saying, "You're gonna get it wrong!" I looked at him, stunned,

⁷ Strauss, *The Game*, 240, 241. Increasingly, mainstream media have focused on aspects of "outer game." The term outer game is used to describe the skills, techniques, appearance, and routines that PUAs use while in the field. Conversely, there is "inner game," which refers to the mindset, beliefs, and values that make up one's identity. Members of the community attempt to improve both. Most of the press that the community has received, however, sensationalizes the methods of outer game, ignoring the community's interest in self-improvement through inner game. For a more detailed explanation and examples of inner and outer game, see the glossary.

“Wrong?” I said back. “Yes, you’re just gonna get it all wrong.” I pressed him for what he meant, and he suggested we go into the foyer down the hall from the apartment.

Standing in the foyer of the hip, upscale, distinctly Yuppie-esque downtown loft-apartment building I spoke to Compass, a twenty-seven year old PUA with curly blonde hair. Expecting to meet someone manipulative and wily (as I had wrongly assumed of all PUAs), I was surprised to find that he was reserved and seemed far more genuine than the contrived industrial quality of the cement floor and metal stair rail that surrounded us. Anxiously, I asked him again what he had meant when he said I would “Get it wrong.” He sighed as he told me that he had been familiar with the community for over five years, long enough to watch the progression of many men. He lamented the media’s mounting portrayal of PUAs as oversexed fraternity boys and feared that I, too, would incorrectly depict the community and its purpose. Considering the complicated task of studying a community of individuals each with different approaches and goals, I understood why he worried that I would have a false impression of PUAs. He qualified his statement by conceding that increasingly the community has attracted “frat boys,” but that these men are not what is “real.” When asked what *was* real, he simply said, “Your brother is what’s real.”

What Compass meant when he said this was that my brother (whose community pseudonym is Passion) came to the community out of a longing for self-improvement. Passion genuinely sought to better himself and his relationships with women, and his reasons for joining the community are common to many PUAs. The media often depicts PUAs as unscrupulous and misogynist playboys who learn pickup tactics in order to control women,

and sadly, this is increasingly true. Lamenting this trend, Strauss explains, “As self-esteem defense mechanisms, some PUAs developed misogynist tendencies in the process of learning.” But while a great many of these men exist within the community, these men by no means constitute the majority or even the intended nature of the community itself.⁸

While talking to Compass, I noted that he was well spoken, intelligent, and thoughtful. Recognizing his analytical nature, and the fact that he had been a longtime member, I thought he might have some insight into the answer to the one big question that had been on my mind since beginning my research: Why at this particular historical moment had the Seduction Community become so popular? I was shocked by the simplicity of his answer, “The Internet, of course. Also, I guess guys are a little confused on exactly *how* to date.” While both these ideas are worth considering, I find them insufficient; the existence of such a distinctive subculture is due to a multitude of additional factors.

In attempting to deconstruct the American cultural climate that has given rise to the Seduction Community, I should pinpoint a few concrete factors. Among these influences are: the continuously shifting aspects of men’s culture, the collapse of elaborate courtship rituals, the impact of feminist ideals on popular thought, and the proliferation of the Internet. In the first chapter, I identify and analyze several facets of the Seduction Community through a historical lens. My argument rests on three key aspects of men’s culture: I juxtapose the Seduction Community against the fraternal organizations of the late-nineteenth century, compare the philosophy of sports from the same time period, and place the Seduction Community within the context of men’s literature of the mid-twentieth century. The second

⁸ Ibid., 350.

chapter charts the progression of courtship since the colonial era and examines the Seduction Community's relationship with certain elements of this history. In the third chapter, I analyze the overlapping elements of the men's movement and Seduction Community, viewing both within the context of the feminist movement. The fourth and final chapter investigates how the popularity of the Internet has contributed to the community's vast expansion in recent years. Although these distinct elements can be identified as causes for the community's existence, they are also intertwined in a complicated web. By recognizing these unique aspects, however, we can distinguish the motivations behind the formation and explosion of the Seduction Community.

In recent years, knowledge of the existence of the Seduction Community has begun to seep into popular consciousness. Many are familiar with the 1999 film *Magnolia* in which Tom Cruise portrays T.J Mackey, a self-help instructor whose book *Seduce and Destroy* is meant to teach men how to bed women. In an interview with Creative Screenwriting magazine, director and screenwriter Paul Thomas Anderson admitted that the character was based on Seduction Community godfather Ross Jeffries. In January of 2006, the popular television series *CSI: Miami* aired an episode called "The Score" in which a pickup guru and his students are accused of murdering a fellow PUA. As of February of 2006, Columbia Pictures plans to film a movie based on *The Game*. The major television network, VH1, is currently in the process of filming a reality television show in which Mystery coaches men to become pickup artists. And the list goes on. At the same time that the media treat the Seduction Community like a bizarre new fad, members hail it as a revolutionary innovation;

each regard the community as though it were wholly original. While the community's increasing mainstream appearance signifies that many find it a fascinating novelty of popular culture, in reality the Seduction Community is not at all novel. The community is composed of many elements that are borrowed from America's cultural past, making it more reflective than revolutionary. What is unique, however, is the distinct manner in which these various elements have coalesced to form a community of men, bonding through shared experiences and acting together to accomplish similar goals.⁹

⁹ David Konow, "Paul Thomas Anderson," *Creative Screenwriting* 7, no. 1 (2000): 46; Wikipedia contributors, "Seduction community," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Seduction_community&oldid=122380299 (accessed April 15, 2007).

CHAPTER ONE

Contextualizing the Culture of Modern Casanovas

Within the past two years, my brother has moved within Austin a number of times. During each move, one or more of his friends from the Seduction Community have aided him in the heavy lifting. In this way, to call the Seduction Community a *community* is accurate, as it is truly a fellowship of men. Members not only meet in self-described “lairs” to discuss the skills of pickup, they meet to socialize. During the course of my research, various members of The Austin Society invited me to watch Ultimate Fighting Championship matches or the Super Bowl. Upon my arrival at these events I found that, in the company of other PUAs, they sat watching television and rarely discussing anything related to picking up women. Much to my surprise, in the guise of a community of pickup artists, I had stumbled upon a group of friends and a brotherhood. This aspect of brotherhood is historically significant, as it reveals the Seduction Community’s connection to a broader culture of men. By placing the community within a historical context of fraternal organizations, sports culture, and men’s literature, this chapter demonstrates that the Seduction Community reflects a number of elements present within the lineage of men’s culture.

Secret Societies

One of the most striking features of the Seduction Community is its similarity to fraternities, fraternal lodges, and men's social associations of the nineteenth century. In many ways, the Seduction Community functions as a modern-day version of nineteenth-century men's clubs. Despite the fact that it centers on discussions of women, the Seduction Community is, at its heart, an organization by and for men. Thus, I argue the Seduction Community is a descendent of men's organizations of the past. Among the most significant similarities are the benefits of mutual living arrangements, the sharing of knowledge among men, the value of competition, bonding through discourse, and the vitality of male friendship.

In order to understand the rise and proliferation of fraternal organizations, it is important to examine first the social context surrounding these institutions of bachelor interaction. A number of historical factors led to the founding of men's social clubs during the nineteenth century: the perceived value of personal independence, the migration to urban areas that resulted from expanding economic opportunity, and finally, the growing number of bachelors. In his book *The Age of the Bachelor*, historian Howard P. Chudacoff argues that an emphasis on independence marked nineteenth-century American society, motivating "young, unmarried men, who after the Revolution found new labor markets open to them in an expanding country," to migrate into urban areas. The result of this desire for independence and subsequent urban migration, however, was

that many bachelors found themselves without the emotional support of their families. And so, these young single men sought social outlets to help them avoid isolation. Fraternal clubs became a primary source of socialization, and, according to Chudacoff, bachelors made “their public, non-familial peer group and other associations into quasi families...by carrying on their personal affairs in mostly public or semipublic places.”¹

The sheer number of bachelors in urban areas also added to the demand for a male space. Fraternal organizations of the nineteenth century emerged at a moment of urban expansion during which time the number of unattached men increased drastically. Although statistical data for the exact percentages of unmarried men remains relatively incomplete, most historians agree that the proportion of bachelors was rising during the late-nineteenth century. In 1890, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded the highest proportion of unmarried men that had been documented up until that time; nearly 67 percent of fifteen-to thirty-four-year-old men were unmarried. The surge in the population of bachelors had much to do with the settlement of the frontier, as many men waited until they were settled in the West to get married. The growing number of unattached men led to the increased establishment of fraternal associations, thus signifying an expansion of bachelor society.²

The late-nineteenth century became the so-called Golden Age of Fraternity, as over three hundred fraternal associations existed at this time. With a membership of approximately 5.5 million men nationally, fraternal orders served one-fourth of all adult

¹ Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 27, 147, 184.

² *Ibid.*, 48, 60.

American men. While these organizations did not cater solely to unmarried men, bachelors heavily populated these fraternities. All-male associations served both practical and personal purposes for bachelors; in particular, during the mid-nineteenth century, urban middle-class single men often lived together in “‘clubs en famille,’ cooperative group residences in which members shared the expenses of rent, meals, and a cook-housekeeper.” The choice to live in such an arrangement was an economical one for these white-collar workers who suffered from the high cost of urban living. While the high living expenses of the city meant that these clubs were usually formed out of financial necessity, these associations were often centered on a specific mutual interest or theme. For example, the San Francisco Olympic Club, founded in 1855, held activities including “gymnastic exercises, track and field events, boxing, baseball, wrestling, cycling and dances.”³

Even more common than middle-class social clubs were the exclusive private upper-class societies. Although their privileged financial situation meant that these men did not need to live together, many often did so by choice. Clubs offered men an alternative to living with family members while still providing a familial atmosphere. In his book *American Manhood*, historian E. Anthony Rotundo describes how “like families, male youth groups provided a setting for common nurture.” Chudacoff echoes this same idea: “For bachelors away from their family of origin... fraternal orders offered

³ Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 171-172; Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 41. A few of the major fraternal orders of the late-nineteenth century included the Odd Fellows (membership of 810,000), Freemasons (750,000), Knights of Pythias (475,000), and the Red Men (165,000). Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 171-172.

a structured source of fellowship and camaraderie, a substitute for, rather than an alternative to, the family.” Although the need for a physical location for male bonding was not unique to unmarried men, fraternal organizations proved to be particularly essential to the formation of a more unified bachelor society.⁴

All-male organizations continue to provide social stability to unattached men, as my brother’s recent experience in the Seduction Community indicates. Like the nineteenth-century bachelors in fraternal clubs, my twenty-first-century brother sought an alternative to the lonely musician’s life that he had led for so long; he found the friendship and brotherhood he was searching for in the Seduction Community. Since youth, Passion’s main interest has been music; he loves listening to it, playing it, and analyzing its every element. In high school, he would spend hours alone sitting in front of his CD player, dissecting the works of Alice in Chains, Soundgarden, Pink Floyd, and Dream Theater. With equal interest he learned the viola, guitar, piano, and voice. In college, he changed his major from international relations to music, and soon thereafter proclaimed that his career goal was to become a composer. After graduating from college he spent three years perfecting a portfolio of compositions with the intention of attending graduate school. For those three years, he devoted his attention and focus almost completely to music; but in the summer of 2005, a college friend introduced him to the

⁴ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 64; Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 153. Although living together offered bachelors the semblance of domesticity that they strongly desired, married club members sought fraternal orders as an alternative to family life. For these married men, a club offered the benefits of domesticity without the same responsibility. While clubs and associations provided different specific benefits for married and unmarried men, the sense of camaraderie and bonding created within fraternal societies was ubiquitous despite marital status.

Seduction Community and his energies shifted. Although he still spent hours alone composing, he also committed himself to improving himself socially, and, as he soon found out, these two interests were in opposition.

In the fall of 2006 he matriculated into a graduate program at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Upon his arrival in San Francisco, he had little worry of finding new friends since he had an immediate connection to over six hundred PUAs in the San Francisco Seduction Community lair. It seemed to be exactly what he had been striving for, an opportunity to begin a new life and a chance to spend his time learning and composing at a prestigious music conservatory. And so, I was shocked when in early December, only a few months after his arrival in San Francisco, he called to tell me of his decision to quit school and move back to Austin with the intention of pursuing an entirely new career direction. In explaining his choice, he told me that his experience in the Seduction Community had fundamentally changed him: the community taught him how to be social, not just with women but with men as well, and after a year of learning how to interact with people, it became something that he deeply craved in every aspect of his life. He no longer felt the need to escape into the self-imposed isolation of composing. Passion proclaimed that he now wanted a career in which he could employ the social skills that he had spent the last year perfecting.

Still reeling from what seemed to be a sudden decision, I asked what career he now had in mind. He explained that his own experience of personal growth in the Seduction Community, as well as his experience watching other men make positive

changes, inspired him to want to become a therapist in order to help men improve as he had. Billionaire, my brother's former pickup coach, and others helped him to become a more confident man, and now he wanted to do the same for others. But before he could begin his new path, he needed to move back to Austin and find a place to live.

In college Passion reluctantly lived with a roommate his first two years and chose to live alone his junior and senior years, and, after his time in college, Passion lived by himself. But upon moving back to Austin, he decided to move into a house of men he knew from the Seduction Community. Strauss's experience in *The Game* confirms that Passion's choice to live in a house with other PUAs is not necessarily uncommon for men in the community. Strauss and several other PUAs move into the former home of the famed Rat Pack member Dean Martin. They name their new residence "Project Hollywood" and shortly afterwards various PUAs around the world begin Project San Francisco, Project Austin, and even Project Sydney. While most members of the Seduction Community do not live together, the experience of brotherhood remains a constant for most PUAs. For Strauss, "the Seduction Community became more than just a bunch of anonymous screen names. It became a flesh and blood family." The familial nature of the Seduction Community provides aspiring PUAs with an encouraging brotherhood, making the experience of male bonding a vital ingredient for each individual's personal change.⁵

The experiences of both Strauss and Passion demonstrate a parallel between the modern Seduction Community and nineteenth-century fraternal organizations. For young

⁵ Strauss, *The Game*, 149.

single men in the nineteenth century, fraternal organizations provided not only the advantages of a family, but also social acceptance at a time in their lives when other attachments and assurances were unstable. Many young men found the transitional period between boyhood and manhood difficult, and turned to all-male clubs for support. The transition into the work world was particularly stressful for these young men, as “their attempts to enter the men’s world of work and achievement reminded them daily of ways in which they needed to change their behavior and reshape their character” in order to function as men. Fraternal organizations offered young men aid in obtaining mind-sets and skills that were required for later success. Among these skills were speaking, writing, and logical thinking. In this way, fraternal societies offered members a substitute for a college education. For example, societies often housed their own libraries, exposing young men to knowledge that they often had not sufficiently received in their youth. Furthermore, fraternal organizations gave members ample opportunities for public speaking such as debate, the presentation of political speeches, and reading poetry aloud. In addition to these concrete skills, men’s associations provided valuable resources for life to men by offering “an education in the social graces” which included social skills and manners. Rather than through formal instruction, members taught each other both concrete and personal skills. In this way, men’s associations functioned like self-help support groups, as young men shared knowledge while at the same time acting as a temporary family.⁶

⁶ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 68.

Likewise, the Seduction Community imparts valuable life skills to its members at the same time that it encourages members to make positive personal changes. In this way, the Seduction Community is more than a specific set of methods blindly followed by hundreds of frustrated men; it is a support group for the socially challenged. In a self-deprecating tone, Strauss recognizes that many members of the community are in desperate need of help from others: “Those who ask for help are often those who have failed to do something for themselves... social retards go to pickup school.” Like those of nineteenth-century organizations, members of the Seduction Community turn to each other for help and advice; most seek the knowledge of the more experienced “gurus” of the community.⁷

While in essence the community remains a cooperative brotherhood for the purpose of self-improvement, in recent years many members have become more organized and entrepreneurial; it is now common for experienced PUAs to coach individual students for pay. Additionally, a plethora of gurus now teach pickup workshops, as Strauss explains, the gurus “each with his own methods and disciples, each operating under the belief that his way is *the* way. And the giants do battle constantly—threatening, name-calling, debunking, competing.” Although for most members the Seduction Community remains cooperative, there is an element of competition that is frequently evident. Competition is seen as a positive way to improve one’s game, as Strauss proved with his recent challenge to new members of the community. In May of 2006, Strauss launched the Stylelife Challenge, a thirty-day

⁷ Strauss, *The Game*, 16.

program in which aspiring PUAs received one pickup assignment on each day of July. While the primary goal of the project was for these men to "Get-a-Date in 30 days," these men also competed with each other to become the most improved. The winner received a weekend in San Diego with famed guru Hypnotica. By encouraging competition between men, Strauss prompted previously dateless men to improve personally. Similarly, fraternal organizations encouraged healthful competition among club members.⁸

The precedent for the usefulness of competition was set more than a century ago when men's fraternal organizations and "self-help societies made debating an integral part of their activities, setting friend against friend in verbal combat." Engagement in debate became a way for young members to prepare for manhood by synthesizing the competitive habits of boyhood into forms that would be more functional in the middle-class working world. Debating societies taught men to fight with words rather than fists, thus cultivating analytical skills useful in the public arena of men's work. In this way, debating societies redirected the competitive impulse of boyhood into verbal aggression, which was regarded as a valuable skill for manhood. Additionally, men's debate clubs trained members to evaluate their peers on the basis of intellectual standards rather than physical ones. The ability to measure the scholastic competence of one's peers also proved to be a useful skill in the world of middle-class work. Debating within fraternal

⁸ Ibid., 109; "About Stylelife Academy," Stylelife Academy, The Online Academy For Attraction, <http://www.stylelife.com/phase2xl/about/> (accessed April 5, 2007); Wikipedia contributors, "Neil Strauss," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Neil_Strauss&oldid=123496684 (accessed April 24, 2007). In the next section on sports I will go into greater detail about the significance of competition both historically and in the Seduction Community.

associations became one method through which young men could incorporate the competitive elements of boy culture into their preparation for the world of manly work. And so, with the encouragement of fraternal organizations, young men acquired the type of intellectual skills required to function as men.⁹

Although men's clubs historically provided opportunities for personal change, they primarily existed for the purpose of socialization. According to sociologist Leonard Ellis, four basic types of conversation took place within fraternal organizations: "ribaldry, competitive ribbing, gossip, and serious discussion." Ribald conversation usually involved the discussion of men's personal shortcomings with women. "Competitive ribbing" most often took the form of "good-natured teasing" as a way for members to connect "and often involved use of first names and nicknames, a practice generally uncommon in polite society." The absence of women within clubs gave men the opportunity to gossip amongst themselves, an act that strengthened their fraternal bond. All types of discourse provided men the chance to form compassionate social relationships within a "bounded and emotionally-grounded all male peer group."¹⁰

Just as the private discourse within fraternal organizations served to connect club members as men, the dialogue between PUAs is an invaluable part of most men's experiences within the Seduction Community. Strauss reflects on the importance of

⁹ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 69-71.

¹⁰ Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 43; Leonard Ellis, "Men Among Men: An Exploration of All-Male Relationships In Victorian America" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1982), 371.

verbal communication between men: “Nobody had understood the potential of this whole pickup community, the bonding power of dudes talking about chicks.”¹¹

Passion never had difficulty articulating his feelings to our family or his very close friends, in large part due to our mother’s emphasis on open expression of emotion; however, he had never had the chance to communicate this way with most men. Since boyhood my brother had mostly been a loner; he had very few close friends. While this detachment from peers helped us to form a very close sibling relationship, despite our age difference, and a positive relationship for him with our parents, it was obvious that he longed for a bond with others. In high school and then in college he formed small groups of friends and rarely socialized outside of these safe circles. In the years after graduating from college it seemed that Passion had fewer friends than ever and he spent most of his time alone composing music. And so I was understandably surprised when, as he delved into the Seduction Community, I began hearing the names of several new friends with whom he was associating. The most shocking moment occurred when our family attended Passion’s improv class’ performance and after the show Passion was swarmed with friends congratulating him. We were further taken aback when he declined to go out with our family for a celebration dessert, since he had already made plans to spend time with his PUA buddies.

A defining feature of the Seduction Community is the formation of male friendships that result from sharing experiences. From sarging in groups to choosing a trusted wingman, not to mention the hours spent on seduction discussion boards

¹¹ Strauss, *The Game*, 269.

exchanging stories and advice, PUAs may originally seek to improve their relationships with women, but often succeed more in connecting with other men. In *The Game*, Strauss emphasizes this point saying, “There is nothing more bonding than successfully picking up girls together. It is the basis for a great friendship.” Most PUAs join the community initially intending to improve their social relationships with women and ultimately form a stronger sense of brotherhood with each other. Strauss articulates this idea precisely: “The point was women; the result was men.” He expands on this notion of brotherhood stating, “I had accidentally found the sense of camaraderie and belonging that had eluded me my whole life.” For Passion, the Seduction Community offered him a community of men to aid him on his journey to self-improvement, and the existence of this support group was integral in his transformation.¹²

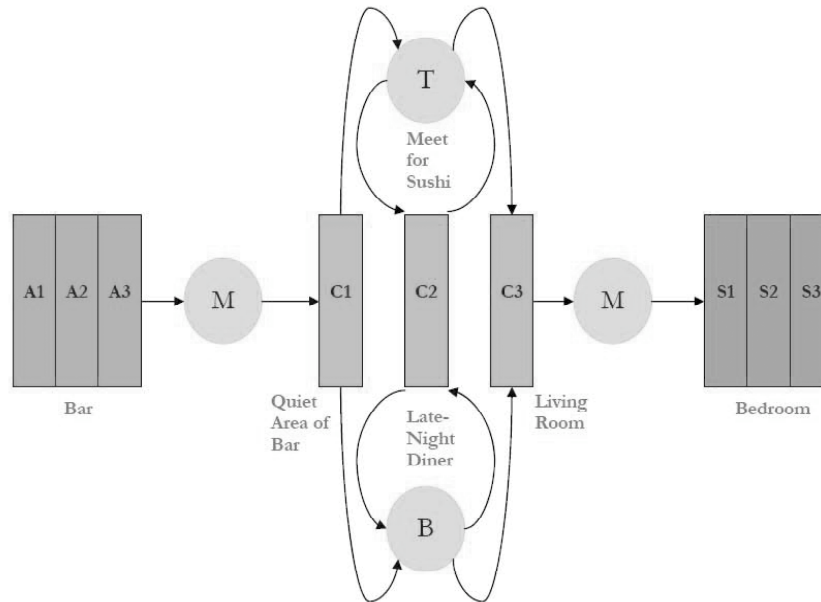
In much the same way, nineteenth-century men often frequented locations such as fraternal clubs, pool halls, and saloons, seeking the company of other men. At the same time, both married and unmarried men engaged in and watched sports as another outlet for socialization. But in the same way that bachelors latched onto all-male associations as a substitute for family life, the sociability of sporting culture made athletic pursuits especially popular for single men.

¹² Ibid., 180, 287, 241.

Playing the Field

In the late-nineteenth century, men often sought male fellowship in participant and spectator sports; Chudacoff explains, “Males of all social classes often tried to display their prowess in acts such as picking up unattached women and prostitutes.” While it may seem odd for a historian to list picking up women as a type of sport, “sporting” was a common part of the courtship lexicon in the late-nineteenth century. Sporting, both in its athletic sense and its association with romantic pursuit, is useful in regards to the Seduction Community. Dating has been popularly referred to as a game since long before the existence of the Seduction Community; the discussion of its rules and strategies have been a topic for discourse among both men and women for as long as we have been able to engage in such a conversation. In her book *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, Beth L. Bailey explains how the competitive game of dating expanded between the World wars. The men of the Seduction Community, however, have taken the game of dating much further than the far less strategic competitive courtship of the past. PUAs institute rules for seduction and spend time reflecting on past pickups and strategizing for their future outings. Sometimes referring to themselves as “players,” the parallels between the pickup community and a game of football are eerily plentiful. In talking to my brother once about the usefulness of strategy in dating, he said, “It’s like with football, the rules haven’t changed, but the game has evolved.” PUAs often use comparisons between sports and pickup; for example, in order to lessen the anxiety of

approaching a woman, Strauss was told to “think of tonight as a video game. It is not real. Every time you do an approach, you are playing this game.” Mystery, current mega-guru and main character of *The Game*, even uses various game-plan diagrams to demonstrate strategies and concepts to students. See diagram below.



While many direct superficial comparisons can be drawn between pickup and sports, the most compelling parallel is in the way that both the Seduction Community and the sports crazed culture of the nineteenth century were spawned from a need to reenergize manhood. Through competition and spectatorship, nineteenth-century men were able to redefine their masculinity and construct a more cohesive brotherhood. In much the same way, men of the Seduction Community establish their masculinity through personal development, camaraderie, and mutual validation.¹³

¹³ Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 154-155; Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 26.; Passion, personal

In the late-nineteenth century, Theodore Roosevelt's emphasis on pursuing a "strenuous life" of manly physical virtue reflected the common anxiety felt among middle-class American men in regard to their own masculinity. The popular fear of cultural feminization arose from a number of social changes during this time including immigration, urbanization, and the increased influence of women on young boys. The influx of immigrants in the late-nineteenth century fueled concerns about cultural degeneration, as many Americans regarded these outsiders as weak and lacking masculine virility. At the same time, many believed that the city itself was to blame for men's feminization, "with its conformist masses scurrying to work in large bureaucratic offices, which sapped innate masculine vitality and harnessed it to the service of the corporation." Worries about the feminizing influence of cities at the turn of the century were further compounded by the vastly expanding gay male subculture within urban areas. Viewed as "gender inverts," homosexual men symbolized the ultimate feminization of men. It is unsurprising, then, that women also became scapegoats for the perceived waning of masculine virtue. Believing that the feminization of men began during boyhood, women were blamed for their dominance in the lives of boys. In 1910, women constituted four-fifths of elementary-school teachers, an increase from two-thirds in 1870. For boys and men alike, sports became the primary method through which they

communication with the author; Strauss, *The Game*, 19; Mystery, *The Venusian Arts Handbook*, 2nd ed. (Mystery Method, 2005), PDF e-book, 67. While some PUAs have come to embrace the term player, many more bemoan its connotation and view its usage as derogatory; See Appendix A for details regarding the above diagram.

sought to subvert the feminizing influences of American culture and reclaim masculinity.¹⁴

As historian Elliot Gorn asks in his book *The Manly Art*, “Where would a sense of maleness come from for the worker who sat at a desk all day?... Where was virility to be found in increasingly faceless bureaucracies?” For turn-of-the-century men, the answer was sports; sports were popularly perceived as a way for men to revitalize masculinity through the acquisition of physical strength. In his book *Manhood In America*, sociologist Michael S. Kimmel argues that, rather than work, sports were responsible for creating so-called self-made men. The bureaucratic nature of work at the time led many men to no longer see the workplace as “the central arena in which self-making men had made themselves,” thus causing many to turn to athletic pursuits in order to reclaim their manly virtue. Nineteenth-century men established their masculinity through both active participation in competitive sports and the vicarious identification of spectatorship.¹⁵

Prior to the Civil War, men engaged in sports solely for their physical benefits, as they “strengthened the body, refreshed the soul, and increased a man’s resistance to luxury and vice.” During the mid-to late-nineteenth century, however, due in part to the increased popularity of baseball, athletics came to represent competition in addition to exercise. Competitive sports were seen as a way to develop “team spirit” as well as the aggressiveness needed for success in business. For example, Edward Hitchcock, the first physical education professor in the United States, believed that football taught players “to

¹⁴ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 121-122.

¹⁵ Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 192; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 118.

protect themselves but also to be aggressive while controlling their tempers,” therefore becoming better prepared for the world of work that lay ahead.¹⁶

Athletic games also became a way for men to express “rivalry between towns, neighborhoods, and businesses,” thus helping to redefine masculinity around the turn of the century in terms of competition rather than just physical prowess. Toward the late-nineteenth century, students at Phillips Exeter Academy requested that the school provide competitive sports in addition to physical training, imploring “the boy to drop his chest weights, and don boxing gloves; to stop jogging on the track, and race.” By the end of the nineteenth century, athletics had come to signify more than masculine physicality; the competitive nature of sports was now entwined with morality and the very essence of manliness. In his book *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, John F. Kasson argues that sports competitions were attractive to working-and middle-class men because these challenges were “occasions to participate vicariously in dramas of strength, courage, and honor.” In this way, men were able to define themselves by witnessing the performance of masculine virtues through competitive play.¹⁷

As in the previous story of the Stylelife challenge, a certain element of competition does exist within the Seduction Community; however, the greatest degree of competition for PUAs is with oneself. PUAs seek to redefine themselves by establishing goals and pursuing them. Modern athletes attempt to challenge their “personal record,”

¹⁶ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 239; Harvey Green, *Fit For America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 233.

¹⁷ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 239 ; “Life at Phillips Exeter,” *Bulletin of the Phillips Exeter Academy* 14 (1918): 33; John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and The Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 35.

and PUAs strive to do the same. It is common for men of the Seduction Community to set personal goals as a part of their self-improvement. Strauss links this need for achievement with masculinity, explaining, “If you sit the average male down in front of anything halfway intriguing and explain to him that it has a system of rankings that he can get better at over time, he’ll become obsessed. Hence the popularity of video games, martial arts, Dungeons and Dragons, and the seduction community.” With this, Strauss implies that men do not necessarily require an opponent in order to feel the need to compete, as each of the activities he lists can be done and improved upon alone. In February of 2007, on The Austin Society’s message board, Dr Gonzo and others exchanged posts proclaiming their personal goals for an upcoming weekend sarge. Dr Gonzo stated, “My goals are the same as last time: 1.) open five sets or one SOLID number close (qualification, SOI, and rapport) with HB8-10 target and 2.) move or bounce one set (seed and use false takeaways).” Goal lists such as this help PUAs to improve their game through personal competition. At the same time, men of the Seduction Community take their interest in personal improvement one step further by sharing it with other men of the community. The tightly knit lairs serve as support groups for self-improvement in which men can encourage each other and seek mutual validation.¹⁸

¹⁸ Strauss, *The Game*, 295; Dr Gonzo, comment on “bi-weekly sarge - this friday 2/9,” *The Austin Society Message Board*, comment posted on February 9, 2007, <http://www.theaustinsociety.com/viewtopic.php?id=179> (accessed on February 9, 2007). Essentially this means that he plans to approach five groups of people in which a highly attractive woman is a part of each. If not, he wants to get one woman’s number and be sure of her interest in him. Also, he intends to facilitate the relocation of one of these groups. Refer to the glossary for a more detailed explanation of these terms.

A few months into my research I was invited to a party hosted by two prominent Austin Society members: Deuce, my brother's former wingman, and Dyce, a millionaire Internet marketer. The party was located at Dyce's 6,000 square foot house, of which Deuce and Dyce are both residents. Hailed as the new Project Austin, I expected a massive party crawling with dozens of PUAs and even more beautiful women. I brought my roommate Caitlin and what we found when we arrived was my brother and half a dozen PUAs playing Nintendo Wii on a giant flat screen television. Slowly more people began to arrive, but Caitlin and I remained the only females present until finally one PUA showed up with a female friend. An hour and a dozen more PUAs later, Dr Gonzo arrived with three women. Passion admitted that this was not an isolated occurrence, and that most often these parties consisted almost solely of PUAs. What struck me as odd, though, was that these men did not seem to mind the lack of women; they were simply satisfied to socialize with each other. Chudacoff brings attention to the prior occurrence of such behavior noting, "Men more frequently sought confirmation of their maleness in the exclusive company of other men." Strauss reiterates this same idea in *The Game*: "There were no girls, and we didn't need any to validate us. Tonight, it was just the boys."¹⁹

In much the same way, during the late-nineteenth century, the cultural explosion of spectator sports gave men an avenue for socialization and brotherhood. During this time, "the competitive physical nature of sports encouraged and glorified the so-called manly activities of drinking and betting that distinguished the bachelor subculture." These "manly activities of drinking and betting" encouraged socialization among

¹⁹ Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 155; Strauss, *The Game*, 267.

bachelors, as spectator sports such as baseball and boxing gained popularity. The shared experience of watching sports inspired discussions that took place outside the ball fields and boxing rings and became a method by which men could engage socially. Chudacoff asserts that the discussion of sports allowed men “to show off their expertise to male companions as well as to identify vicariously with the physical contest that they were watching.” Boxing became one such sport through which men were able to indirectly identify themselves and mutually redefine their masculinity. Gorn describes the way in which working-class bachelors idolized bare-knuckle prizefighter John L. Sullivan for his artisan-like athleticism. For turn-of-the-century men, Sullivan “represented a remasculinization of America.”²⁰

The *National Police Gazette* covered Sullivan’s professional and private life in equal measure and, as his career soared, Sullivan became one of the most recognized and idolized men in the country. Bachelors, who personally identified with the publicized stories of his drinking and womanizing, particularly adored him. Sullivan “achieved and displayed his persona in an all-male and largely bachelor environment” where the various facets of bachelor culture “all blended together to create and reinforce the male peer group.” The newly popularized spectator sports of the late-nineteenth century formed a masculine culture in which men were connected through a shared assertion of manhood as well as social life. In this way, sports gave men a common ground upon which to forge a brotherhood. In the same way that fraternal associations offered bachelors a chance to

²⁰ Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 155-156; Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 247.

lessen the loneliness of their single lives away from family, the spectatorship of sports offered men an occasion for social unity that may not have existed otherwise.²¹

Playboys and Pickup Artists

In 1877, Richard Kyle Fox bought *The National Police Gazette* from its owner, former New York City police chief George Washington Matsell, and began to overhaul the newspaper in order to increase the *Gazette's* declining readership. Fox printed numerous illustrations of voluptuous burlesque dancers in revealing positions as well as detailed coverage of prize fighting contests. By the late-nineteenth century, the *Gazette* had become a centerpiece of the emerging bachelor subculture. Part of its immense popularity was due to its perceived vulgarity and illicitness that “matched the bachelor’s position at the edge of acceptability but not quite beyond the pale and not too iniquitous.” Like fraternal organizations and sports, men’s literature represents another male space for forging a shared sense of male community and solidarity. Men’s publications, particularly those of the twentieth century such as *Playboy*, have proved their importance in establishing a social mentality conducive to the formation of the Seduction Community.²²

Since its first publication in December of 1953, *Playboy* has become one of the most popular published forums for men. The magazine has both echoed and influenced

²¹ Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 244, 155-156.

²² *Ibid.*, 189-192. At the end of the Civil War, a number of similar publications existed, thus lessening the *Gazette's* overall readership.

cultural trends of male identity. *Playboy* and other men's magazines serve to create and promote fraternal bonding by producing a male-centric environment, while at the same time encouraging a consumerist impulse in men. *Playboy* is often considered a rebellious product of the sexually repressive time in which it was first produced; its continuing cultural influence proves, however, that it represents much more than a historical snapshot. The magazine's values and purpose have expanded since its first publication and have impacted subsequent men's publications. *Playboy's* unique cultural perspective has become fully realized with the recent barrage of article-driven "skin magazines" such as *Maxim*, *Stuff*, and *FHM* (For Him Magazine). The recent popularity of these clearly derivative magazines proves that *Playboy's* influence remains today. *Playboy*, therefore, represents an important and influential point in the continuum of men's culture. As a more recent point on this continuum, the Seduction Community is a product of the cultural climate that *Playboy* has helped to create.

The fear and dislike of unmarried men has long played a role in American society dating back to the colonial era. Before the nineteenth century, many communities went so far as to legally punish those who remained single by creating statutes that discriminated against unmarried men in regards to land holding and prosecuted against sexual behavior outside of marriage. According to Chudacoff, such abhorrence of bachelors stemmed from the fact that "Americans have always revered and depended on the family as the chief institution for promoting citizenship and social order." During the mid-to late-nineteenth century, swift social and economic changes, such as urbanization, revived

worries about loose morality, leading to an increased fear of the breakdown of the ideal republican family and the ostracism of individuals living outside of the traditional family setting.²³

While the existence of fraternal societies helped to bolster the emerging bachelor culture of the late-nineteenth century, a palpable stigma still surrounded men's single status. But beginning in the mid-twentieth century, men's magazines made strides in further removing some of the negative attitude towards single men by exalting bachelorhood. Chudacoff describes how *Playboy* "consciously fashioned its appeal to the man who, by condition or by desire, was a fulltime bachelor." The magazine acknowledged the outcast status of these men, and, by appealing to and celebrating single manhood, *Playboy* effectively constructed an even more unified bachelor subculture. The massive popularity of *Playboy* among single men (and also married men who were able to live vicariously a bachelor life through the pages of the magazine) would not have been possible if not for the stigmatized nature of bachelors. Chudacoff notes how "a stigma can prompt those who share it... to unite into a conscious social group and to utilize their deviance for their own advantage." *Playboy* capitalized on the outcast status of bachelors and offered a type of new masculinity that was wrapped in the guise of traditional manhood.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 176, 4. Among the legal punishments for a man's single status was the Oregon land law of the late 1850s, which stated that a bachelor could only purchase half the amount of land that a married couple could buy. Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 176.

²⁴ Ibid., 261-262, 18.

In its formative years (particularly during the 1950s and 1960s), *Playboy* developed a new and expanded notion of masculinity by ignoring typical male pastimes such as the outdoors or sports, and instead encouraging men to engage in consumerist and domestic pursuits such as entertaining, art, and fashion. But at the same time that the magazine presented a broader conception of the male gender, its text and imagery depicted a less than progressive image of women.

The bachelor subgroup addressed by *Playboy* was not simply defined by the unmarried status of the readers, but rather, *Playboy* promoted an entire lifestyle to accompany bachelordom. This lifestyle was marked by distinct references to traditional masculinity in its imagery of nude women, while at the same time encouraging what James K. Beggan and Scott T. Allison term “alternative masculinity,” in their article “‘What sort of man reads *Playboy*?’ The Self-Reported Influence of *Playboy* on the Construction of Masculinity.” They propose that, rather than reinforce cultural stereotypes about masculinity, through textual analysis *Playboy* puts “forward an expanded and alternative definition of masculinity.” In her book *The Hearts of Men*, Barbara Ehrenreich alludes to this alternative masculinity in her description of how “the new male-centered ensemble of commodities presented in *Playboy*” meant that a man did not need elements of traditional masculinity, such as a house or wife, in order to “display his status or simply flaunt his earnings.” This departure from traditional manhood can be seen in the magazine’s embrace of subjects that are considered typically feminine such as

style, fashion, grooming, and party hosting. These ideas are continuously emphasized through advertisements and articles.²⁵

In *Playboy's* first issue, Hugh Hefner explains how playboys “spend most of our time inside.... We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an *hors d'oeuvre* or two, putting on a little mood music on the phonograph, and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.” Kimmel refers to this “new model for manliness” as a “domesticated bachelor.” An example of the seemingly feminized masculinity of the domesticated bachelor is the September 1956 issue’s feature entitled “Playboy’s Penthouse Apartment.” The article reads as though it were an advertisement; pictures of furniture are captioned with prices and stores where the “urban bachelor” can purchase these items. The article explains that such an apartment is meant to appeal to “a man who enjoys good living, a sophisticated connoisseur of the lively arts, of food and drink.” In her article, “The Man in the Mirror (What Esquire, GQ, Men's Journal, and Details tell us about the American male),” Judith Levine asserts that “coded into the text” of men’s magazines “are messages about social transformation... They are responding to, and doing their part to reshape, masculinity.”²⁶

While *Playboy* does offer an alternative masculinity within the realm of personal identity, this new kind of manhood is juxtaposed against a steadfast traditional one. The

²⁵ James K. Beggan and Scott T. Allison, “‘What sort of man reads *Playboy*?’ The self-reported influence of *Playboy* on the construction of masculinity,” *Journal of Men's Studies* 11, no. 2 (2003): 191; Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 47.

²⁶ *Playboy* (December 1953), quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 255; “Playboy's Penthouse Apartment,” *Playboy* 3, no. 9 (September 1956): 54; Judith Levine, “The Man in the Mirror (What Esquire, GQ, Men's Journal, and Details tell us about the American male),” *Columbia Journalism Review* 32, no. 6 (March-April 1994), <http://archives.cjr.org/year/94/2/men.asp>.

objectified images of women serve to reassert conventional masculinity at the same time that the magazine itself challenges it. According to Beggan and Allison, “*Playboy’s* nudes serve as justification for buying what can actually be viewed as a lifestyle magazine with an emphasis on creating a more broadly defined conceptualization of masculinity.” Noting the relationship between *Playboy’s* female imagery and its encouragement of materialism, Chudacoff writes, “Seductive and available young women constituted the reward for sophisticated consumerism.” According to Chudacoff, the impetus towards materialism surrounding bachelorhood began between 1880 and 1930 when the modern bachelor subculture emerged; as a result, bachelors wielded a new power to influence the direction of consumer culture. *Playboy*, a product of the 1950s, was not the first men’s magazine to promote the image of the consumer bachelor; *Esquire* had done so since the 1930s. *Playboy*, however, was far more successful than *Esquire* in popularizing this new image of bachelorhood. *Playboy* had a larger circulation and a wider demographic, appealing to both college-educated young men as well as the sophisticated elite bachelor.²⁷

In the same way that men’s magazines have allowed an alternative conception of masculinity to flourish behind the guise of traditional manhood, the men of the Seduction Community also embrace subjects that contain what Levine refers to as a “whiff of femininity.” And thus, they have created a new understanding of masculinity while still asserting conventional heterosexual manhood. Many PUAs describe themselves as “metrosexuals,” a term coined by British journalist Mark Simpson in his article "Here

²⁷ Beggan and Allison, ““What sort of man reads *Playboy*?”” 193; Chudacoff, *Bachelor*, 262.

Come the Mirror Men," published on November 15, 1994 in *The Independent*. The term is often used to refer to a heterosexual man who embraces elements of style that are stereotypically associated with homosexual men. Rather than reject this feminized masculinity, the men of the Seduction Community welcome this broader concept of manhood. On the mASF online forum, a message board entitled "Lifestyle" contains various threads dedicated to the discussion of issues that seemingly have little to do with picking up women; among these threads are "Grooming Tips & Tricks," "Event Throwing Guidelines," "Art + Apartment Decorations," and "The Ultimate Living Space Tips Thread." The ease with which PUAs discuss such typically feminine topics signals the influence of *Playboy's* alternative masculinity on men's current conceptions of manhood. For PUAs, lifestyle is just as much a concern as improving with women, and the two seemingly disparate subjects are viewed as being intertwined. In their book *How To Succeed With Women*, Ron Louis and David Copeland devote an entire chapter, titled "The Elements of Style: Dress and Confidence," to the game/lifestyle connection. For the men of the Seduction Community, enhancing one's lifestyle or "changing one's style of dress is about personal power." Witnessing my brother's physical transformation helped me to understand how many PUAs view the relationship between lifestyle and success with women.²⁸

²⁸ Levine, "The Man in the Mirror;" Wikipedia contributors, "Metrosexual," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Metrosexual&oldid=99929782> (accessed January 11, 2006); mASF Discussion Forum, <http://www.fastseduction.com/discussion/fs?action=10&boardid=2&fid=136> (accessed December 28, 2006); David Copeland and Ron Louis, *How To Succeed With Women* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1998), 55; Passion, interview with the author, January 2, 2007.

One of my brother's first steps to achieving success with women was to alter his appearance. Passion has always been naturally handsome; he stands 6 foot 5 but seems even taller due to his excellent posture and thin build. His wavy chestnut-colored hair is dotted with a few natural blonde highlights; he has a strong jaw that is accented by a proportionally large nose. His subtle grayish-green eyes soften his whole face and are offset by the light olive tone of this skin. Unfortunately Passion's complete lack of style always disguised his natural attractiveness. In elementary school my brother wore whatever our mother bought for him, which often included neon-colored wind shorts and other regrettable remnants of the 1980s. Once he entered middle school, he adopted the fashion of his favorite music genre, grunge; he began wearing t-shirts that advertised his favorite bands, over them he sported flannel shirts whose sleeves were always a little too short. He chose his jeans for practicality rather than style, and as a result he wore pants that accentuated his huge feet and gangly frame. He continued to dress this way for over ten years, until the influence of the Seduction Community altered his personal sense of style.

Passion had always been well-groomed and clean cut, but he had never shown much concern for style or popular fashion, which is why I was shocked when one day Passion asked if I would take him shopping. He wanted my help in picking out stylish jeans and shirts. We agreed to meet at the mall since Passion said he wanted to hit the maximum amount of stores in the shortest period of time. After sifting through every piece of clothing in three different stores, I, an experienced shopper, was exhausted, but

Passion's resolve was unshaken. He was determined to find, as he put it, jeans that would deemphasize his skinny legs and shirts that would accentuate his broad chest. As we stood in the Banana Republic and he asked the advice of the salesperson, I was struck by his genuine interest in altering his outward appearance. It didn't seem that he was doing it in order to fit into any specific mold or portray himself as something he wasn't. It was apparent that this change was a part of a conscious effort to improve. In addition to his rapidly changing fashion sense, he became more concerned with the décor of his apartment, and what his belongings said about him as a person. A year after this lifestyle metamorphosis I asked him to explain what it had meant to him to undergo such change. In his own words he explained,

I was always concerned with my appearance and decoration scheme, but I didn't realize how I was coming across to others until I became involved in the Seduction Community. I realized that the clothing I was wearing was not presenting me in the best light. I realized that dressing stylishly is not about trying to impress others or trying to fit in with the cool kid crowd. Rather, it's all about expressing your natural attractiveness and power.

He wanted to finally put outward a sense of confidence that his old style of dress did not seem to reflect. In this way, the Seduction Community's embrace of metrosexuality is often for the purpose of asserting what they believe to be masculine confidence.²⁹

While Passion's newfound attention to appearance was a significant alteration to his lifestyle, it was not the most drastic change he experienced on his journey: "The

²⁹ Passion, interview with the author, January 2, 2007.

biggest change in my lifestyle was spending more time with groups of men and less time alone.” Although a sense of shared purpose is an obvious bonding factor for PUAs, the deep friendships formed by these men are not simply due to a common interest in improving with women; the formation of these powerful relationships is based on mutual feelings and values, shared weakness, and, perhaps most importantly, a feeling of rebellion against what many PUAs believe to be feminized masculinity. The literature of the Seduction Community often describes men’s need to reclaim their manhood. In his book *Attraction Isn’t A Choice*, popular community guru David DeAngelo states, “REMEMBER... It’s OK to Be a Man!” PUAs see the establishment of a strong fraternal bond as a way of reasserting their manliness.³⁰

PUAs and seduction gurus alike frequently speak of the importance of male companionship to improving one’s relationships with women. In July of 2006, Decker, an active member in the pickup community and a seminar leader and personal coach for the Authentic Man Program, wrote a blog entry entitled “Men’s Culture and ‘Pick-Up’” in which he emphasized how women are drawn to “men who carry that vibe of masculinity that comes with having healthy and supportive relationships with other men.” It was not surprising that my brother, a student of the Authentic Man Program, expressed this same

³⁰ Passion, interview with the author, January 2, 2007; David DeAngelo, *Attraction Isn’t A Choice: How To Use “Secret” Communication And Sexual Body Language To Attract Women* (David DeAngelo Marketing Inc, 2004), PDF e-book, 45. While David DeAngelo is not considered the absolute best pickup artist in the world, he consistently ranks within the top ten each year on Thundercat’s Seduction Lair. And although many styles and methods exist within the community, most PUAs draw at least some of their skills from DeAngelo’s works. Furthermore, DeAngelo is one of the most well read authors of Seduction Community literature. Many of the topics and methods discussed in DeAngelo’s works are reflected in the works of other pickup gurus, making DeAngelo an excellent reference for this project. For this reason, I will be referencing him often in my discussion of the community.

idea of the connectedness of male-male friendship and strong romantic relationships with women: “I realized that the quality of my relationships with women was going to be directly affected by the quality of my relationships with men.”³¹

While many PUAs view the male camaraderie of the Seduction Community as a means to healthy dating relationships, others see this brotherhood as an opportunity to engage in a unified rebellion against perceived female power. In the introduction to his book *How to Get the Women You Desire Into Bed*, Ross Jeffries (one of the founders of the community) writes with the fury of an army general: “FOR GUYS, GETTING LAID IS A CHORE. FOR WOMEN, GETTING LAID IS A CHOICE. Never forget this difference in the balance of power between the sexes.” He ends his introduction with a rallying cry to downtrodden men: “Enough chit chat. Let’s go to battle men.” Decades before the formation of the Seduction Community, Hugh Hefner wrote on a wholly different subject, but utilized the same martyred tone in his first editorial for *Playboy*: “We want to make clear from the very start, we aren’t a ‘family magazine.’ If you’re somebody’s sister, wife or mother-in-law and picked us up by mistake, please pass us along to the man in your life and get back to your *Ladies’ Home Companion*.” Hefner sought to market *Playboy* as the literature of cultural dissenters; reading *Playboy* meant establishing “membership in a fraternity of male rebels.”³²

³¹ Decker, “Men's Culture & ‘Pick-Up,’” Authentic Man Program Blog, July 5, 2006, <http://www.authenticmanprogram.com/2006/07/mens-culture-pick-up.html> (accessed January 5, 2006); Passion, interview with the author, January 2, 2007.

³² Ross Jeffries, *How To Get The Women You Desire Into Bed* (Jeffries Publishing, 1992), 2, 4; *Playboy* (December 1953), quoted in Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men In Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 120; Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, 43.

In her book *The Male Body*, Susan Bordo argues that the text of *Playboy* encouraged readers to envision the magazine's centerfold as a "symbol of disobedience;" for many boys and men, the pornography within the magazine offered a strong fraternal bond based on this shared rebellion. Before the invention of the Internet or videocassettes, the availability of pornography was mainly limited to magazines. Boys were unable to purchase these magazines and instead the illicit material was often procured from a father's hiding place. Beggan and Allison examine men's accounts of the feelings associated with their first viewing of *Playboy*. They identify three main elements of this "*Playboy* moment" that link this common experience to a coming-of-age and a sense of male camaraderie. They simplify these three elements to "discovering *Playboy* in the company of a same-sexed friend, i.e., the experience of the fraternal bond; recognizing the transgressive nature of *Playboy*; and experiencing sexual interest and arousal." Many men have reported discovering *Playboy* through a friend, thus experiencing a sense of overall male kinship and a distinct link to the larger masculine society. It seems that the fraternal bond established during the *Playboy* moment has less to do with the magazine's content and more with a rebellious camaraderie. In this way, the *Playboy* moment itself generates masculine solidarity.³³

Because the magazine alone cannot recreate the same kind of male unity, the text subtly (and often obviously) demeans women for the purpose of bonding its male readers. Simply portraying nude women in a manner meant to objectify them is not enough to produce a cohesive fraternal bond; and so, the text itself contains multiple female

³³ Bordo, *Male Body*, 120; Beggan and Allison, "What sort of man reads *Playboy*?" 195.

stereotypes that, while asserting the superiority of men, encourage a kind of “us vs. them” mentality. A blatant example of this stereotyping exists in the comics of Jack Cole. For the first five years of *Playboy’s* publication, at least one of his cartoons appeared in each issue. His series called “Females By Cole” portrayed a different female stereotype in each comic. The September 1957 issue features number 39, a naked woman sitting on top of a block of ice, the caption underneath reads “Frigid.” See image below.

FEMALES BY COLE: 39



Frigid

By categorizing women into known character types, the cartoon instructs male readers to mock the opposite gender and as a result feel empowerment and solidarity for their own.

Furthermore, Cole's cartoon series of female stereotypes relegates women into categories, thus instructing male readers to view the opposite gender in a one-dimensional manner. Cole's dehumanizing oversimplification of women resonates today in the words and actions of men in the Seduction Community.³⁴

By my own account, I have observed that the most common concern reported by aspiring pickup artists is the anxiety of approaching a woman due in part to the fear of rejection. For this reason, the philosophies of the Seduction Community have developed in such a way as to alleviate these trepidations; as a result, various community texts as well as the commonly adopted ideologies of the community encourage PUAs to view women as dispensable and replaceable. Renowned pickup guru Mystery is one of the leading promoters of this mentality; in his e-book entitled *The Venusian Arts Handbook*, he explains, "It's easier to attract a new woman than it is to fix things when they go wrong with your existing target." Additionally, he instructs students:

Go out gaming four nights per week for four hours each night. Make three approaches per hour. This schedule allows for twenty minutes per approach. That adds up to twelve approaches per night—which is forty-eight per week and two hundred per month.... Within a year you will have approached over two thousand women.

Mystery's lesson implies that men can stave off the fear of approach and rejection by lessening the importance placed on the pursuit of an individual woman and instead

³⁴ "Fantastic Dad of Plastic Man," <http://www.jackcole.org> (accessed November 26); "Females By Cole: 39," *Playboy* 4, no. 9 (September 1957): 70.

emphasizing the overall pursuit of women. In this way, PUAs are taught to view women not as unique individuals, but as identical and expendable. Such mentality contributes to a broader sense of polarity between the sexes, as this model maintains the complexity of men and implies the simplicity of women. While perhaps the primary intention of such ideology may not be to promote a sense of cohesive male unity, the result is that this perspective unifies men by transforming women into disposable “its.” In much the same way, the outcome of Cole’s dehumanizing illustrations within *Playboy* is the creation of male solidarity, although the initial purpose of the “Females by Cole” comic series is not necessarily to do so.³⁵

Building on Brotherhood

Fraternal societies, sports, and men’s magazines are but three of the many elements of men’s culture that create an overall sense of unity and fellowship among men. Historically, these various aspects of men’s culture served particular purposes during their respective eras. These aspects transcend their historical roles, however, by contributing to the broader cultural milieu of male fellowship that has led to the development of the Seduction Community. In this way, the Seduction Community is not a direct descendent of any one specific aspect of men’s cultural past, and is instead a cooptation and coalescence of these elements. The very fact that the Seduction Community incorporates not one but many of these cultural elements of brotherhood

³⁵ Mystery, *The Venusian Arts Handbook*, 37-38.

proves, however, that each of these elements alone are insufficient to satisfy a need that is specific to the current era. The community is, therefore, reflective of the historical lineage of men's culture at the same time that it is a unique contribution to the future of this same culture. The following chapter examines further the way in which the Seduction Community is both a reflection of and elaboration on America's cultural past by examining the community's relationship to previous systems of courtship.

CHAPTER TWO

Pickup and Then What? From Calling Cards to Closing the Deal

The Seduction Community books *Double Your Dating*, *How to Succeed With Women*, and *Dating Breakthrough*, and schools of pickup Speed Seduction, Real Dating Results, and Enlightened Seduction, all contain the terms “seduction,” “success,” or “dating.” But these terms are left undefined, thus leaving the meanings ambiguous. The ambiguity of these terms parallels the confusion felt by many men and women in our current era of courtship. The most confusing of these seems to be the term “date.” When I asked a few PUAs what their definition of a date was, I received varying answers. Some claimed that any planned interaction with a woman constituted a date. Others explained that it was only a date if they went out to dinner and he was the one to pay. In her book *Unhooked Generation: The Truth About Why We’re Still Single*, author Jillian Straus (no relation to Neil Strauss) attributes part of current dating confusion to the existence of differing, and often conflicting, personal “scripts” that are held by both men and women. Straus describes these scripts in terms of one’s own expectations about certain behaviors leading up to, during, and after dates. Even historians have been imprecise in defining dating. In his book *Dating and Sexuality in America*, Jeffrey Scott Turner avoids discretely defining the term, but does explain, “Dating, at least in part, represents an extension and reflection of cultural beliefs and practices.” Turner shares this view with

historian Beth L. Bailey who, in her book *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, refers to dating and courtship in terms of “convention,” the “public codes of behavior and systems of meaning that are both culturally constructed and historically specific.” It seems to many, however, that currently there are no culturally constructed codes for dating, leaving a great number of men and women awash in a sea of bewilderment.¹

The lack of a common, socially defined dating philosophy is one of the most distinct elements of the post-Baby Boom generations. Although popular publications from the early-to mid-twentieth century were littered with advice on courtship, thus signaling a common feeling of confusion about proper dating etiquette, the rules and social conventions of courting were still more well-defined than today. Bailey defines “America’s ‘traditional’ system of courtship” as “the dating system that flourished between about 1920 and 1965.” Bailey argues that the proliferation of advice literature in the twentieth century was partially responsible for making courtship “more and more a private act conducted in the public world” where “people compared their experience to public norms.” While this wildly popular prescriptive literature created a more specific national convention for courtship, it often contained contradictory messages due to the rapidity with which society was changing. With hindsight it is apparent that it was at this time of social change that the seeds were planted for the later collapse of traditional courtship.²

¹ Jillian Straus, *Unhooked Generation: The Truth About Why We’re Still Single* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 24; Jeffrey Scott Turner, *Dating and Sexuality in America: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 2; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 6.

² Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 3-4.

As a part of the generation that is subject to this dating mystification, the Seduction Community represents a reaction to this problem. Although advice literature of the past has contributed to confusion rather than detracted from it, the Seduction Community produces a wide array of its own prescriptive dating literature that functions as a solution for many men. The Seduction Community attempts to simplify dating by establishing its own sets of rules and methods that, supposedly, can be applied in any real-world situation. In this way, the Seduction Community is clearly a response to the current lack of dating structure, and therefore points to a larger concern among men and women in this time about dating norms and expectations.

The term dating is used in the Seduction Community, but it is defined differently by PUAs than it has been by the mainstream or how it has been defined historically. In fact, the common vernacular of the community steers away from using the term date at all. Many PUAs favor the term “day2” to describe the first interaction with a female that occurs after the initial meeting. While PUAs use both the terms date and day2, for the purposes of this project I will simplify the matter by just using the term date. It is important to note that each PUA has his own dating script and therefore any description of the community’s definition of dating is a composite of these varying opinions. While some PUAs are highly inexperienced with any form of dating prior to their entry into the Seduction Community, most PUAs report having dated women and many report having had at least a few girlfriends in their lives prior to the community. Despite this experience, men who find help in the Seduction Community often seek something more

or different from their dating relationships. The most common report is that these men want to learn how to attract the women whom they are attracted to, rather than passively pursuing only the women whom they feel are in their “league.” Another common report is that many wish to learn how to bed women quickly and without a relationship.

Months into my research I met Ghost, an energetic red-haired PUA. When I told him about my project he asked if I planned to write about how dating was no longer simple and easy to understand. What struck me about his question was the implication that dating was *ever* easy. Ghost’s conception of the supposedly simplistic dating system of the past, however, was one I had heard many times before. Among members of the Seduction Community there is a common perception of the former simplicity of dating. The legend goes something like this: “Things were so much easier for our parents! A man could just call up a woman and ask her out on a date, it was simple! There were understood rules about the roles of men and women. But things don’t make sense anymore, that’s why we need pickup.”

While it may be true that there exists a great amount of confusion about courtship in our current times, this is by no means a wholly new phenomenon. In fact, the second-third of the twentieth century saw some of the greatest change in the system of courtship due to the shift from “calling” to “dating.” The history of courtship in America is a complicated one, changing rapidly over short periods of time; by briefly outlining the history of dating prior to the twentieth century, I will dispel the notion that courtship ever existed without complexity. Furthermore, this chapter will detail the twentieth-century

history of courtship in order to establish a foundation to understand the existence of the Seduction Community. As I examine the dating system from the 1920s through the sexual revolution, I will pinpoint particular aspects of the Seduction Community that reflect this history.

The Colonial Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Despite current nostalgia for an uncomplicated past, inconsistent notions of love, sex, and gender roles marked the courtship system during the years from the late-colonial era and the early republic to the mid-nineteenth century, making this time period far more complex than is commonly perceived.

Conceptions of love and its place within courtship and marriage changed dramatically from the colonial era to the mid-nineteenth century. During the colonial era, marriage was not based on love, but instead on reason; in order to marry, a man had to be able to support a wife and family. In their book *Courtship*, historians Rodney M. Cate and Sally A. Lloyd explain the role of love in marriage: “Love was the natural expression of the spouse role (something that was to develop after marriage rather than before).” But by the beginning of the nineteenth century, love no longer solely depended on reason. According to historian Ellen K. Rothman, in her book *Hands and Hearts*, love was thought to be “more compelling than friendship, more lasting than passion, more serious than romance,” but this kind of love was not referring to “romantic love,” as that was

seen as immature or unreliable. This changed when, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, an increasing separation between men and women led to an idealization of the opposite sex that subsequently caused young men and women to romanticize love. Cate and Lloyd explain, “Romantic love contained elements of passion as well as mutuality, communion, sympathy, and candor.” While previously considered immature, romantic love was now an acceptable reason for young couples to marry. Many women felt that romantic love gave them a guarantee of an enduring commitment, which they considered particularly important since wives were both economically reliant on their husbands and increasingly isolated within the home. Mutual love and understanding thus became vital requirements for marriage during the mid-nineteenth century.³

Just as cultural perceptions of love fluctuated between the late-colonial era and the mid-nineteenth century, the predominating values about sex were equally inconsistent and changeable. Colonial-era Americans valued personal independence, as many of those who settled America were single individuals or nuclear families. For this reason, parent-dominated marriages became far less common and young men and women were given more autonomy in their choice of a mate. Parents remained relatively distant in the arena of courtship, offering privacy to young couples by taking a walk or going to bed early when a suitor came calling. The practice of bundling in colonial times exemplifies the freedom given to young lovers. In their book *Intimate Matters*, authors John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman describe bundling as a practice that “allowed a couple to spend

³ Rodney M. Cate and Sally A. Lloyd, *Courtship* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 14; Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 36, 40; Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 18; Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 107.

the night together in bed as long as they remained fully clothed or, in some cases, kept a ‘bundling board’ between them.” Despite the possible presence of a bundling board between the two lovers, the practice did give couples the freedom to engage in a certain degree of physical intimacy. Physical intimacy, however, was expected to remain within certain boundaries and while “parents and youth shared the expectation that sexual intercourse would not take place,” couples did not always abide by this social convention. Rothman refers to the high rate of premarital conception in the 1780s: thirty percent. At this time, though, “premarital pregnancy was a sign of weakness rather than immorality.” The beginning of the nineteenth century, however, marked a shift in attitudes towards the sexuality of women. Repressive notions of sex replaced the relative sexual autonomy and openness of the colonial era. In her book *America’s Women*, Gail Collins notes the ideological shift during this time: “Men were lustful, so it stood to reason that women—contrary to the theories of the colonial era—were chaste and possibly passionless.” The notion of women as passionless became prevalent and thus premarital sexual relations were interpreted as a sign of a woman’s impurity. Young couples coped with this restraint of sexuality by inventing the act of “petting” which involved all actions but sexual intercourse.⁴

While a relative equality between the sexes (although still within a patriarchal structure) marked colonial times, a strict separation of men and women and a clear

⁴ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 25; John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 22; Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 15; D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 22; Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 45; Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 16; Gail Collins, *America’s Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 87; Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 16.

understanding of these gender-defined roles characterized the mid-nineteenth century. During the colonial era as well as the years of the early republic, there was not a discrete separation between the home and the commercial spheres. Therefore, at this time, men and women experienced interdependence in their roles, and “even when going about their separate tasks, men and women moved within the same small world.” Shifting views of both sexes during the mid-nineteenth century, however, established a rigid ideology of “separate spheres,” subsequently changing the American system of courtship. Cate and Lloyd describe separate spheres as an ideology that “emphasized the immutable differences between the sexes—from the mundane to the spiritual.” Unlike the inter-sexed socialization among adolescents in the colonial era, the separation of spheres in the nineteenth century “served to limit the ability of adolescent boys and girls to get to know one another.” Post-pubescent girls were expected to enter the domestic world of their mothers in preparation for their future roles as wives and mothers, thus limiting the daily interactions between boys and girls. The roles of men and women were distinct. Common perception valued domesticity and viewed women as virtuous and morally superior to men; at the same time, a man’s primary role was to support his family through work outside the home. The shift in gender expectations that began towards the middle of the nineteenth century continued into the later part of the century, subsequently affecting young men and women’s expectations during courtship.⁵

⁵ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 23; Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 17-18.

The Late-Nineteenth Century to The 1920s

As the nineteenth century progressed, the notion of separate spheres continued and expanded, thus widening the gulf between the sexes. While popular rhetoric of the era regarded women as moral beings, men were increasingly viewed as inherently depraved. For this reason, young men and women were to remain distant even while together in order to protect the female's purity. At the same time, the value placed on romantic love increased; however, women were thought to love with less passion than men. During courtship, men emphasized their own feelings while women did not do so with equal intensity. This was most likely due to the greater control that men had over their own futures than did women. Rothman notes this power imbalance and attributes the difference in emotional openness to the fact that men were responsible for being "the initiators of intimate relationships. Women were expected to *receive* offers of marriage."⁶

Just as gender roles became more rigidly defined, courtship customs increased in formality. According to Bailey, the middle class "was actively creating, controlling, and consuming a national system of culture" and thus this was the group that disseminated middle-class standards among the greater public. Women's magazines played a major role in the propagation of these conventions; the act of "calling" in particular was firmly established by these prescriptive literatures. Calling described a variety of activities including a man and woman sitting on her front porch or a man leaving his card at a woman's front door. Although calling could involve many activities, social conventions

⁶ Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 20; Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 105.

surrounding the act itself were quite rigid. Set rules determined “the proper amount of time between invitation and visit...; whether or not refreshments should be served...; chaperonage...; appropriate topics of conversation...; how leave should be taken,” and more.⁷

As the calling system became increasingly rigid, a new system of courtship emerged. The middle class adopted this new system, called “dating,” from the working class. Cate and Lloyd define dating as a system that “involved informal, unchaperoned, male-female interaction with no specific commitment... The rules of dating were established by the peer group rather than the community at large.” Young working-class women were often unable to receive callers in their homes due to cramped urban living quarters; and so, young men and women courted in public instead. Additionally, Bailey notes that as more women began to seek work outside of their homes, they “began to demand fuller access to the public world in general.” This need to exist in the public world was remedied in part by the invention of the automobile. The automobile provided young couples with both mobility and privacy, thus taking courtship out of the home and into the public sphere. Other major influences in the emergence of dating were the proliferation of mass culture and the creation of adolescence as a separate group. These changes that took place in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries meant that by the 1920s, the institution of dating was firmly entrenched in middle-class American culture.⁸

⁷ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 14-16.

⁸ Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 22; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 19.

The 1920s to The 1960s: Commodifying Courtship

Bailey cites “the emergence of national systems of communication, transportation, and economy” with the “development of cultural media...that provided a common experience for most Americans.” This common experience, found in advice books, magazine columns, and more, served to create a system of rules and regulations for dating. At the same time, a redefinition of youth created a separate category and culture for adolescents. Bailey explains the new interpretation of adolescence as a result of “a changing economic structure, a reform impulse, and new scientific and social-scientific definitions of youth.” No matter the reasons for this new categorization, the result was the formation of a distinct youth culture and a lessening of adult responsibilities for those within this separate category. Because young people were not subject to the same responsibilities as adults, youth found the act of mate selection far less immediately important. For this reason, courtship became focused on the act of going out on dates rather than on the former system of calling, a system aimed at the selection of a lifelong partner.⁹

In much the same way, by obtaining the personal accounts as well as observing the behavioral patterns of members of the Seduction Community, it appears that the community favors a system of dating that does not result in long-term monogamous relationships. Although many men in the Seduction Community do not seek a lifelong mate or even a long-term relationship (LTR), in my research I found that most PUAs join

⁹ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 7, 9.

the community hoping to improve their confidence with women and to ultimately find a girlfriend. Despite this, I also discovered that few have achieved this goal in full. Just as the youth-centered dating system that formed during the 1920s resulted in a greater focus on dating rather than marriage, the men of the Seduction Community often seem unconcerned or unable to achieve monogamy due to the methods and ideas that are promoted by the community itself.

Primarily, the community is more focused on perfecting approach than on relationship maintenance. Many PUAs get so absorbed in improving their skills that they ultimately favor the game itself over the women they pursue. For example, in a March 2007 thread on the Austin Society message boards, Dr Gonzo exchanged messages with other Austin PUAs discussing an upcoming planned sarge: “I'm planning on attending. I'm rusty as all HELL because of my LTR situation but I'm gonna be out and have a great f*ing time.” To this post, Liquidstock77 responded, “Leave the LTR this weekend! It's what I tell all my guys - LTR on the weekdays, new blood on the weekends.” This exchange exemplifies the attitude of many PUAs who find themselves in an LTR: they fear that time spent in a relationship will impede their improvement as a PUA. This is due in part to the fact that PUAs often believe that the skills required to maintain a relationship are minimal compared to those needed to attract a woman initially. And so, many enter the community in order to obtain the skills needed to approach women, giving little attention to the subsequent stages of dating or relationships. In David DeAngelo's *Attraction Isn't A Choice*, he implies that the first stages of dating are far

more difficult than maintaining an LTR: “I’m not a relationship expert... I prefer to focus on first meeting to the first several dates. I feel that’s an area that most guys find the toughest to figure out.” The kind of behavior that pickup artists find effective for attracting women during the initial part of dating, however, is fundamentally at odds with the behavior needed to sustain a relationship. Neil Strauss echoes this idea in *The Game* explaining, “The problem with being a pickup artist is that there are concepts like sincerity, genuineness, trust, and connection that are important to women. And all the techniques that are so effective in beginning a relationship violate every principle necessary to maintain one.” As a result, PUAs (even those whose goal is monogamy) are caught in an endless loop of dating and short-term girlfriends. It is therefore evident that the act of picking up women is fundamentally detached from the notion of seeking a mate in much the same way that dating among youth during the mid-nineteenth century was disconnected from marriage.¹⁰

In addition to delaying mate selection, the new system of dating that took hold during the 1920s and 1930s shifted courtship from the private to public sphere, and as a result fundamentally altered issues of control. Going out and frequenting public places made money a requirement for dating; the centrality of money in the dating system shifted the balance of power from women to men. In the calling system, a man was invited into a woman’s home; in the dating system, a woman was invited into the “man’s

¹⁰ Dr Gonzo and Liquidstock77, comment on “****bi-weekly sarge- this friday March 23rd!!****,” *The Austin Society Message Board*, comment posted on March 19, 2007, <http://www.theaustinsociety.com/viewtopic.php?id=237> (accessed on March 20, 2007); DeAngelo, *Attraction Isn’t A Choice*, 12; Strauss, *The Game*, 242.

world” of the public sphere. Although this shift in control meant that women now had less overt power, a man’s power was restricted within the dating system by how much money he could immediately provide. According to Cate and Lloyd, this made “a man’s access to a woman contingent on money in a very direct way.” As a result, women often determined a man’s worth by the amount of money he spent on a date. Men were not the only ones commodified in the dating equation, Bailey explains, “Men and women often defined themselves and each other as commodities, the woman valued by the level of consumption she could demand... and the man by the level of consumption he could provide.” Although many men may have disliked being evaluated solely in economic terms, their control of money imbued them with a kind of power in the dating system that women were not afforded.¹¹

Despite the control that monetary power may provide them, PUAs implicitly reject their own commodification by encouraging each other not to pay during the initial stages of dating. The men of the Seduction Community insist that the expectation that a man should pay is a socially constructed and harmful gender role. In an interview with *The Hollywood Podcast*, Strauss explains, “The whole point of this community is to be able to do it [pickup women] without fame, looks, or wealth, and it’s totally possible.” In this way, PUAs demand that they should be evaluated based on their character and the strength of their pickup skills.¹²

¹¹ Cate and Lloyd, *Courtship*, 23; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 58, 66-67. While a man’s worth was also determined by money in the calling system, his financial worth was based more on social status than on readily disposable income.

¹² Strauss interview, *The Hollywood Podcast*.

Although each PUA has his own personal rules about pay-etiquette, much of the Seduction Community literature explicitly states that a man should not pay for his date, especially on a first date. One such example can be found in David DeAngelo's enormously popular book *Double Your Dating*. In the first chapter, DeAngelo writes, "When a man takes a woman out to nice dinners and buys her gifts too early in the relationship, the woman will begin to think the man is trying to 'buy' HER. Women see this as manipulation... and a LACK OF CONFIDENCE." In this way, DeAngelo puts the issue into a perspective of how this kind of behavior may be interpreted by a woman. For this reason, DeAngelo and many other teachers within the Seduction Community have taken money out of the dating equation altogether by encouraging PUAs to take women on creative and cheap dates. In a March 2006 entry on the Attraction Chronicles blog, DeAngelo suggests ten different date ideas. At the end of the blog entry he explains, "So there you have it; 10 fun and frugal date ideas. You can then save your money for the future dates you'll book after she has so much fun on the first."¹³

Boomdude, a burly forty-year-old PUA who wears black platform combat boots, explained that he enjoys creative dates. He described a date he had gone on recently; he took a woman to the grocery store where they bought the ingredients for rice krispie treats that they subsequently made together. Although Boomdude claimed to prefer non-traditional dates because he believed they were more fun, I could not help but think that

¹³ David DeAngelo, *Double Your Dating: What Every Man Should Know About How To Be Successful With Women*, 2nd ed. (David DeAngelo Marketing Inc, 2005), PDF e-book, 24; David DeAngelo, "Where Should I Take Her On A Date? (Day2's)" The Attraction Chronicles Blog, <http://attraction-chronicles.blogspot.com/2006/03/where-should-i-take-her-on-date-day2s.html> (accessed on March 27, 2006).

perhaps the real reason for his fondness for such informality was that it eliminated the expectation of him paying when on a more conventional dinner date. My suspicion was confirmed when Deuce readily admitted that he rarely went on dates where money was required. When I asked why he chose expense-free dates, he matter-of-factly said, “Well, I don’t have any money right now.” While currently in the process of starting his own business he is unable to afford the cost of conventional dating. Although lack of funds is a factor in Deuce’s disinterest in traditional dates, he explained that another reason is that he feels that paying for a woman will lower his value in her eyes. In Deuce’s own words: “It will actually lower my value and show the girl she can walk all over me. I’m not really into that and knowing girls, she isn’t either.”¹⁴

Most of the PUAs with whom I spoke agreed that when first getting to know a woman, he should not pay (because they believe it will lower their value), but that on subsequent dates, it was within reason for him to pay. In fact, a few of the PUAs who I interviewed felt that it was their duty to pay for subsequent dates. Harmless, a 23-year-old computer programmer with glasses and wavy hair, explained that he was raised with what he described as traditional sex roles, and that he enjoys treating a woman when on later dates. My father will be overjoyed to hear that my brother expressed a similar sentiment when he said, “On the first date, go dutch. On subsequent dates, I believe the man should pay.” Having read numerous statements by pickup teachers about how a man

¹⁴ Deuce, e-mail message to author, March 26, 2007. PUAs use the term value to refer to a man’s personal worth or appeal to a woman. During the course of a pickup as well as subsequent interactions with a woman, a PUA will attempt to demonstrate higher value (DHV) in order to prove that he is different from other men. See the glossary for a more detailed explanation.

should not pay, I was surprised by Harmless and my brother's ideas on the subject. Ghost, who recently began teaching pickup seminars with Deuce, explained why the community's literature seems to promote one idea, while in practice there seems to be another: "It's only taught to not pay for anything because the newbies won't understand the subtle nuances that go into when its actually ok to do so." Ghost's statement, as well as DeAngelo's writings, clarified the issue; PUAs do not want to feel that it is a requirement for them to pay in order to be considered a person of worth. At the same time, they also do not want the woman they are dating to feel that she is being bought or that he expects something simply because he has paid. For this reason, pickup literature often simplifies the issue by indiscriminately discouraging a man from paying. In this way, pickup literature can be viewed as a departure from the traditional dating system of the past, while the actual practices of many PUAs are in fact a parallel of this system. Ghost humorously and succinctly summed it up when he said, "It's all so silly actually. Too many guys are textbook black and white, trying to follow a protocol set by other PUA fuckups. If she's a cool girl and you can still pay your rent, buy the girl a damn drink and tell your friends to shut the hell up."¹⁵

By refusing to pay during the initial stages of dating, pickup artists demand to be evaluated on personal factors rather than on monetary status, and thus they implicitly reject their own commodification. Despite their refusal to be reduced to a wallet, they have not refrained from considering women as objects. On the community's message boards, in pickup literature, and among PUAs themselves, women are referred to

¹⁵ Passion, e-mail message to author, March 18, 2007; Ghost, e-mail message to author, March 17, 2007.

namelessly; instead they are called “HB” (Hot Babe/Hot Bitch) or “SHB” (Super Hot Babe/Hot Bitch), which is followed by a numerical rating of her physical attractiveness: HB8. In reference to a specific woman she will often be assigned a nickname such as “HBNiceLegs” or “HBRedhead.” Reducing women to body parts or hair colors is not unique to the Seduction Community. The same devaluation of women’s personalities or other qualities in favor of physical factors arguably has always existed; however, specific examples of such behavior were especially prevalent during the post-calling era. An early 1960s issue of *Playboy* included a coloring book consisting of outlined drawings of three shapely women. The instructions explained, “Make one of the girls a blonde. Make one of the girls a brunette. Make one of the girls a redhead. It does not matter which is which. The girls’ haircolors are interchangeable. So are the girls.” Just as their supposed interchangeability dehumanized women, women were further objectified by the fact that men considered them symbols of status and popularity.¹⁶

Bailey argues that as dating emerged from the calling era and money became central to courtship, men began to see the amount of money they spent on a date (event) and the attractiveness of his date (person) as directly proportional. Women too “gauged their own value in dating by how much money men spent on them.” As the era of dating continued and the relationship between economy and sex intensified, breast size, according to Bailey, became a determinant of a woman’s value due to the fact that it could be easily quantified as an objective measurement of a woman’s worth. Objectivity

¹⁶ Marie Torre, “A Woman Looks at the Girly-Girly Magazines,” *Cosmopolitan* (May 1963), 46, quoted in Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 69.

was a key factor in the underlying relationship between money and sex, since dating an attractive woman (and in this case a large-breasted one) reflected a man's monetary worth. As Bailey succinctly explains, "By dating women with big bosoms, men showed that they could afford the expense, could command such abundance." The connection between a woman's attractiveness and a man's status remains linked even today; PUAs often evaluate another's skills based on the beauty of the women they are able to "close." An example of this can be found in *The Game*; Neil Strauss signs up for a workshop instructed by Mystery, who is arguably the most famous PUA in the world. Before the workshop begins, Mystery produces a folder of photographs for the students to peruse. Strauss recounts,

In the folder was a spectacular array of beautiful women: a headshot of a sultry Japanese actress; an autographed publicity still of a brunette who bore an uncanny resemblance to Liv Tyler; a glossy picture of a *Penthouse* Pet of the Year; a snapshot of a tan, curvy stripper in a negligee who Mystery said was his girlfriend, Patricia; and a photo of a brunette with large silicone breasts, which were being suckled by Mystery in the middle of a nightclub. These were his credentials.

With this story, Strauss makes obvious the fact that Mystery's status is fundamentally tied to the beauty of the women whom he has had sex with. This demonstrates that the previous link between personal popularity and dating continues even today.¹⁷

¹⁷ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 65, 74; Strauss, *The Game*, 18. PUAs use the term close to refer to the acquisition of a phone number (number-close, #close) or email address (@close) as well as in

Besides the beauty of the women one is able to close, another symbol of one's status or prowess within the Seduction Community is "score," a term commonly used as a verb for having sex (e.g., "he scored last night"). PUAs use the term in this way but also use it as a noun to refer to the number of sexual partners one has had (e.g., "what's your score?"). Here, emphasis is on the number of women one has had sex with rather than the number of sexual encounters (although number of sexual encounters is also important to PUAs). On Internet message boards, PUAs post Field Reports (FRs) and Lay Reports (LRs) that detail their encounters with women. Although both kinds of reports usually include questions to other PUAs on how to eliminate sticking points, the reports more often serve as documented bragging. In *The Game*, Strauss refers to these message boards as an "online locker room." By documenting their encounters with the opposite sex, PUAs seek to gain popularity or prestige among members.¹⁸

While pursuing women in a competitive sense may seem to represent an appalling development in our current society, such behavior is actually an extension of the kind of competitiveness of dating that proliferated in American society from the 1920s through the second World War. In his 1937 sociological study of American dating practices, entitled "The Rating and Dating Complex," Willard Waller examined the dating habits of college-aged youth. His article was responsible for naming the competitive system of courtship that had been well underway since the system of calling disintegrated.

reference to either kissing or having sex with a woman for the first time (kiss-close, *close, f-close, full-close, fuck-close). See the glossary for a more detailed explanation.

¹⁸ Strauss, *The Game*, 12. A sticking point is a particular difficulty a PUA may be having with his game. See the glossary for a more detailed explanation.

According to Waller, in the rating and dating system, a man “must belong to one of the better fraternities, be prominent in activities, have a copious supply of spending money,” and more. In this way, the popularity of men was based on tangible characteristics; for women, however, popularity was determined by how many dates she could obtain. Waller explains, “The girl’s prestige depends upon dating more than anything else.” Bailey notes that Waller failed to recognize that men too were concerned with “the technique of image building,” and therefore they also determined success by the amount of dates they could command. In this way, for both sexes, the act of dating was fundamentally separated from the experience of spending time with a member of the opposite sex. Rather, the purpose of a date was to gain popularity; Bailey explains, “Dates had to be highly visible, and with many different people, or they didn’t count.” From this idea a clear parallel can be drawn to the Seduction Community’s Lay and Field Reports, which exist primarily for the purpose of gaining popularity.¹⁹

If the changes in the courtship system in the post-calling era were due in part to the increasing visibility of youth as a specific group, then it can be argued that youth were therefore responsible for the shifting actions and mentality that took place during this time. Bailey notes how the expanding youth culture’s attitudes about sex began to change during the 1920s: “Youth’s attitudes about sex and their sexual practices seemed to directly oppose conventional morality and the values of (older) authority—and youth

¹⁹ Willard Waller, “The Rating and Dating Complex,” *American Sociological Review* 2, no. 5 (October 1937): 730; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 28-29.

meant them to.” Such a purposeful departure from previous attitudes signaled the beginnings of what decades later became the full-fledged sexual revolution.²⁰

The Sexual Revolution: Dating Derailed

In his book *Make Love, Not War*, historian David Allyn attempts to answer the question: “What was the sexual revolution?” By posing such a question, Allyn implies that there is confusion about how to define the events and ideologies included in this term. He explains, “In the highly politicized climate of the late sixties and early seventies, the ‘sexual revolution’ was given a range of meanings.” Jeffrey Scott Turner defines the sexual revolution more concretely in terms of “changes in thinking about human sexuality that focused on gender roles as well as specifically on sexual behavior.” Helen Gurley Brown’s controversial 1962 publication *Sex and the Single Girl* encompassed the changes of which Turner writes. Additionally, the book is representative of the swift and irreversible shifts taking place in American culture during the early 1960s.²¹

A number of revolutionary events in the first half of the 1960s contributed to the increase in personal and sexual freedom for women. Among these were Betty Friedan’s 1963 publication *The Feminine Mystique*, John F. Kennedy’s 1960 Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964; these events and others helped to ignite the contemporary feminist movement. The single

²⁰ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 79.

²¹ David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 5; Turner, *Dating and Sexuality in America*, 14; Allyn, *Make Love*, 10.

most important event in the advancement of sexual freedom, however, was the advent of the birth control pill—popularly referred to as “the pill”—in 1957. In 1960, the pill received FDA approval and by the time of Helen Gurley Brown’s publication two years later, over one million women were using it as their primary form of contraception. Although many celebrated the freedom that the pill supplied women, others opposed it on moral grounds, claiming that contraception of this type would encourage pre-marital sex. At the same time that debates raged about the pill’s effect on America’s supposedly declining morals, the pill’s invention also prompted significant legal wrangling. In the early 1960s, birth control was still illegal in many states; but in 1965, in the case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Supreme Court struck down Connecticut’s ban on contraception, effectively determining the unconstitutionality of laws against contraception in any state. Despite the Supreme Court’s ruling in favor of personal sexual freedom, many Americans remained opposed to the “revolution” that was afoot. Allyn notes, “By 1965, conflict over sexual morality was leading the nation to the brink of cultural crisis.”²²

In addition to fears that the pill would lead to widespread sexual impropriety, more worried about how oral contraception would influence gender roles. Allyn explains, “The only real reservation anyone expressed about the pill in the midsixties was that it might make women more independent and consequently make men feel more insecure.” While the increased independence of women was assuredly a positive effect of the sexual

²² Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 4, 64, 72; Allyn, *Make Love*, 33-34, 38, 36. In the following chapter, I will discuss the events of women’s liberation in greater detail.

and social changes of the 1960s, a perhaps less favorable result was the altered system of courtship. Bailey argues that for nearly the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, the courtship system was framed in economic terms. She goes on to argue that in our current times, sex “has replaced courtship’s metaphor of economy... Sex appears to be the normal, if not unproblematic, medium of contemporary courtship.” Bailey reasons that “we can trace the shift in courtship to the sexual revolution,” since “metaphors of revolution (granted *sexual* revolution) emerged in the 1960s to replace economy.” She argues that it is this metaphor of revolution that is partially responsible for the current confusion in dating. Interpreting courtship in terms of economy is a simple cause and effect relationship; revolution, however, implies freedom and a lack of convention, and is therefore an unreliable system. PUAs attempt to impose order onto this system by inventing methodology that, they claim, is based on biological and evolutionary truths rather than socially defined codes, which they believe are far less reliable.²³

PUAs often study evolutionary theory in order to understand what drives men and women, and ostensibly to manipulate what they see as the biological impulses of women. In *The Game*, Strauss explains, “Among the required reading for all PUAs were books on evolutionary theory: *The Red Queen* by Matt Ridley, *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins, *Sperm Wars* by Robin Baker. You read them, and you understand why women tend to like jerks, why men want so many sexual partners, and why so many people cheat on their spouses.” Additionally, pickup literature is riddled with references to evolution and evolutionary psychology. Mystery, who subscribes to evolutionary science with a

²³ Allyn, *Make Love*, 34; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 141-143.

nearly religious kind of belief, bases many of his theories on a pop-science interpretation of evolution. Before enlightening aspiring PUAs on how to eliminate what he terms Last Minute Resistance (LMR), he explains why women are reluctant to jump into bed right away: “The woman places her survival itself in great danger by having sex.

Evolutionarily speaking, if a man impregnates her, she is dependent upon her pair bond with him to protect her and provide for her during this vulnerable time.” Similarly, David DeAngelo bases and explains his theories in terms of evolution: “There are millions of years of evolution driving us to reproduce by having sex. Since attraction is what leads us to have sex, attraction is firmly tied to biology resulting from that evolutionary history.” After setting up the evolutionary purpose for attraction, he goes on to explain how to create this attraction: “The ‘alpha-male’ is the kind of man women are instinctively attracted to because he embodies the traits they look for in a man.” Much of the pickup theory within the Seduction Community is based on evolutionary theory rather than socially prescribed norms of behavior. By doing so, PUAs find a solution to the current lack of dating structure.²⁴

Like the popular prescriptive dating literature of the past, a plethora of recent dating publications have attempted to reinstate some sort of coherence into a system that has little semblance of order. Many dating manuals instruct women to demand a return to

²⁴ Strauss, *The Game*, 294; Mystery, *The Venusian Arts Handbook*, 12; DeAngelo, *Attraction Isn't a Choice*, 68, 106. Last Minute Resistance (LMR) is a term PUAs use to refer to what happens when a woman rejects a man's advances towards sex. Refer to the glossary for a more detailed explanation; In her book *The Male Body*, Susan Bordo debunks the “standard issue popular science” of evolutionary theory to which the Seduction Community subscribes. She argues that our society is extremely selective in its understanding of evolutionary biology, and interprets certain theories in order to fit culturally prescribed notions of gender. Bordo, *Male Body*, 230.

a dating system that is seemingly unaffected by the sexual revolution. One such example is the famously controversial 1995 publication *The Rules*, written by Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider. Rules such as “don’t talk to a man first (and don’t ask him to dance),” “don’t meet him halfway or go dutch on a date,” “don’t rush into sex” and the especially antiquated, “let him take the lead” all seem to ignore any kind of shift in courtship practices since the 1960s. Prescriptive literature of this type is nostalgic for an imagined past, while the literature of the Seduction Community incorporates much of the rhetoric of the sexual revolution into its methodology. For example, Seduction Community literature frequently references the freedom of sexual choice. This phrase is most often used in reference to the freedom of choice that PUAs seek both in the type of woman one is with as well as in the freedom to bed women at will. In his book *How To Be A Pick Up Artist*, seduction guru Juggler (recently voted the best pickup coach of 2006) writes, “Acquiring the skills to meet and connect with women anywhere, anytime is about exercising more options and freedom of choice.” The rest of his book, as well as most Seduction Community literature, intends to teach men how to obtain that freedom of choice. In this way, the Seduction Community is clearly a product of the sexual revolution by indulging in the freedom it provided.²⁵

²⁵ Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, *The Rules* (New York: Warner Books, 1995), 26, 36, 80, 88; Wayne Elise, *How To Be A Pick Up Artist: A Practical Guide*, 3rd ed. (Charisma Sciences, 2005), PDF e-book, 2. The title of “best pickup coach” was determined by the Attraction Chronicles blog. I will discuss this further in the last chapter.

Wooring and What Lies Ahead

The Seduction Community has its own rules for dating that are in some ways based on previous models, and while the community's methods may be based in part on these former systems (such as rating and dating), the Seduction Community has modified these systems in order to cope with the changing times. In this way, the Seduction Community recalls certain distinct points in the historical lineage of dating, but at the same time it is also representative of the culmination of this history. And while the Seduction Community symbolizes a coalescence of dating history, its existence and popularity also speak to a more mainstream feeling of confusion among men and women. Is the Seduction Community the answer for all? Ostensibly, the pickup arts could evolve as dating does, leading one to wonder if the Seduction Community and its gurus have the answer to both current and future dating difficulties. They certainly seem to think so, and perhaps that alone will be enough to sustain the community as it evolves into the next era of courtship.

While the first chapter depicted the Seduction Community in terms of its place within the historical lineage of men's culture since the late-nineteenth century, and this chapter has examined the community's relationship to changes in dating during the twentieth century, the following chapter will outline the history of the men's movement in order to create a broader understanding of what men's communities imply about our current era.

CHAPTER THREE

Roots of Reaction and Forming Attraction

How dare a woman ask another human being to do what she's not willing to do herself! I've heard more adult, 'successful' women act like two-year-olds when you suggest that they go out and actually call a man for a date than I can shake an E.R.A. [Equal Rights Amendment] petition at! My God, it's as if you're asking them to act equal or something.¹

During my first encounter with Merchant, a handsome twenty-something with dark hair and light skin, and Billionaire, a lanky and quiet professional hypnotist, I watched as they approached woman after woman, engaging the target in conversation and working to keep her interest. While both men made their interactions seem effortless, I noticed that on this particular occasion Billionaire did not seem especially excited to be picking up women. He only approached a handful of women that night, while Merchant spoke to many. Walking from one bar to the next, I asked if they were ever frustrated by always having to initiate contact with women. Merchant quickly answered with a confident "Definitely not," while Billionaire took a moment before saying, "Well, yes." I was intrigued by their disagreement; I asked why they each felt differently. Merchant

¹ Robert A. Sides, "On Women Having It Both Ways," in *Men Freeing Men: Exploding the Myth of the Traditional Male*, ed. Francis Baumli (Jersey City: New Atlantis Press, 1985), 68.

explained that he felt it was his responsibility as a man to be a leader and a pursuer, and so he did not lament his role. Although Billionaire agreed that this was his role and that he had accepted that fact, he explained that truly he was a shy person and approaching women sometimes felt laborious. He revealed that he often wished that women would take the lead. Although Seduction Community members are trained to be experts in initiating contact with the opposite sex, many feel frustrated that women routinely expect men to be the pursuers. For this reason, one might assume that the above epigraph would come directly from the mouth of a pickup guru or from the plethora of Seduction Community literature. The reader might be surprised, however, to find that this aggravated declaration comes instead from the 1985 men's liberation anthology *Men Freeing Men* and has no direct connection to the Seduction Community. At the time of the collection's publication, author Robert A. Sides was the national secretary and Boston area director for the men's rights group called the National Coalition of Free Men (NCFM). Although there may be no purposeful link between Sides's angered writing and the numerous similar writings by Seduction Community members, this men's liberationist document demonstrates the intrinsic ideological connection between the Seduction Community and the men's movement.²

Many members seem to be under the impression that the Seduction Community is both unique and revolutionary; by tracing the history of the men's movement over the past forty years, however, it becomes apparent that the Seduction Community owes much

² Francis Baumli, ed., *Men Freeing Men: Exploding the Myth of the Traditional Male* (Jersey City: New Atlantis Press, 1985), 328.

of its philosophy to the diverse set of ideas within the men's movement. In turn, the men's movement owes much of its ideas to the women's movement. In order to understand the current nature of the men's movement and its origins, it is important to place it within a historical context of both the sexual revolution (examined in the last chapter) and the women's movement. I will begin by examining the emergence of the women's movement and then outlining the main focuses and activities of the various strands within the men's movement. After establishing this historical outline I will then draw ideological parallels to the Seduction Community.

Many argue that the birth of the women's movement in the United States took place in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York when the first women's rights convention met to produce the "Declaration of Sentiments." The document, modeled on the Declaration of Independence, outlined numerous grievances while at the same time demanding political rights for women, notably the right to vote. The Declaration was signed by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men and set the agenda for women's rights at the time. Now called "First Wave Feminism," the main goal of these women's rights advocates was to achieve political equality, which included suffrage, marital property rights, and protective labor legislation. This goal was accomplished (at least in part) in 1920 with the passage of the Susan B. Anthony amendment, which established suffrage for all women. Nearly fifty years later in March 1968, Martha Lear published the article "The Second Feminist Wave" in the *New York Times Magazine*. Although this served to christen the newly forming women's movement with its now well-known title, the Second Wave was

already in full force by the time of the article's publication. An abundance of cultural events initiated the Second Wave in the early 1960s including John F. Kennedy's election in 1960 and his Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, the publication of Betty Friedan's groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, the passage of both the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and the formation of the feminist civil rights organization called the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. While a multitude of positive changes were taking place, the efforts of Second Wave feminists proved to be far less unified than their First Wave counterparts due to differing agendas among a multitude of feminist groups including The Redstockings, WITCH, NOW, and others. While the methods and beliefs of Second Wave feminists varied, the larger movement remained committed to women's equality.³

Having already achieved voting rights during the First Wave, Second Wave feminists became less concerned with absolute rights and as a result concentrated more on social equality. This is not to say that feminists did not seek legislative solutions to discrimination, as many feminist agendas sought to end female oppression through political ends; however, "consciousness-raising," a term coined in 1968 by Kathie Sarachild of New York Radical Women, became the chosen organizational tool for feminists at this time. In her book *The World Split Open*, Ruth Rosen explains consciousness-raising as "the process by which women in small groups could explore the political aspects of personal life... By sharing life stories and questioning the 'natural

³ Collins, *America's Women*, 113-114; Rosen, *Split Open*, 27, 4, 64, 72, 74, 85. WITCH is an abbreviation for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell.

order of things,' women could begin to see their condition through their own eyes.” Feminist groups engaged in consciousness-raising on both a local and national scale in order to awaken the public to women’s oppression. In this way, consciousness-raising demanded that the personal was in fact political. Also in 1968, Carol Hanisch, a member of Gainesville Women’s Liberation and later New York Radical Women, introduced the legendary slogan “The Personal is Political.” Rosen describes how this then-revolutionary idea insisted “that there were political dimensions to private life, that power relations shaped life in marriage, in the kitchen, the bedroom, the nursery, and at work. Politics existed beyond Congress, beyond global affairs.”⁴

As the idea that one’s personal struggles included political dimensions gained visibility, men began to question their role within and outside of women’s liberation. In this way, the feminist movement not only gave women permission to scrutinize perceived gender roles, it also legitimized men’s need to do the same. It was at this time that the men’s movement began to gain direction. In response to the rapidly expanding women’s movement, many men joined the fight against patriarchy and in so doing gained a new perspective on being male. Books such as NOW board member Warren Farrell’s *The Liberated Man* (1974) and Marc Feigen Fasteau’s *The Male Machine* (1974) quickly became men’s liberation classics. Despite their support for and involvement in feminist causes, some men’s liberationists began to feel criticized by feminist women, thus leading to a division within the newly formed men’s movement. In his article “The History of the Men’s Movement,” Tom Williamson (a co-founder of NCFM) notes how

⁴ Rosen, *Split Open*, 196-197.

feminism influenced the development of the men's movement: "The anger directed toward men by the women's movement helped solidify the men's movement as men reacted to women's anger toward men." He goes on to explain that men's reactions to this anger were divided: "One accepts the feminist condemnation of men as oppressors, while the other rejects it." This fundamental difference in ideology caused the men's movement to mature in a somewhat disjointed manner.⁵

While certain elements and ideologies of the men's movement have existed since long before the 1970s, the chronology of the modern men's movement can be traced to this time. Since then, the men's movement has expanded and diversified in both philosophy and membership. Referring to the "men's movement" or using the term "membership" is misleading, as the movement itself is not a cohesive organization with a specific set of beliefs. Many groups and individuals are considered to be a part of this men's movement, but they each have specific goals and approaches that often oppose one another. Australian sociologist and men's movement expert Michael Flood outlines the movement's four main strands in his article "Men's Movements." He identifies these four basic overlapping groups as anti-sexist and pro-feminist, men's liberation, spiritual or mythopoetic, and lastly men's rights and father's rights. It is important to take note of the

⁵ Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1997), 37; Baumli, *Men Freeing Men*, 328; Tom Williamson, "The History of the Men's Movement," in *Men Freeing Men*, 308. While *The Liberated Man* remains an important piece of literature for understanding men's liberation ideology of the 1970s, it should be noted that in the mid-1980s Farrell recanted his previous pro-feminist stance. In his 1986 publication *Why Men Are the Way They Are*, Farrell declares his frustration with feminism and claims that in the wake of the women's movement, success-driven women have enslaved men. For further discussion of this subject, refer to Susan Faludi's book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*.

differing beliefs and goals of each of these main facets in order to understand the Seduction Community's relationship to the broader men's movement.⁶

The first main strand of the men's movement, known as pro-feminist or anti-sexist, can be understood as a direct outgrowth of Second Wave feminism. Men who don't the label pro-feminist or anti-sexist may or may not consider themselves to be a part of the broader men's movement, but do agree with the feminist notion "that women as a group suffer inequalities and injustices in society, while men as a group receive various forms of power and institutional privilege." While the idea of feminist men may seem odd to some, men have in fact long been supporters of women's rights. During the Victorian era, the fight for women's suffrage was closely linked to abolition. After attending the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, Frederick Douglass wrote "The Rights of Women," a document supporting women's right to political equality. Originally published in his abolitionist newspaper *The North Star*, his essay presents the hypocrisy of women's lack of equality while slaves gain rights: "Many who have at last made the discovery that the Negroes have some rights as well as other members of the human family, have yet to be convinced that women are entitled to any." As a prominent abolitionist figure of the time, his endorsement of women's political rights was well respected. Other abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison and James Mott, also supported suffrage at the same time that they opposed slavery.⁷

⁶ Michael Flood, "Men's Movements," *Community Quarterly* 46 (June 1998): 66.

⁷ Ibid; Frederick Douglass, "The Rights of Women" 1848, in *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776-1990 A Documentary History*, eds., Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller

Men's support of women's rights did not cease with the end of slavery. In the early-twentieth century, Max Eastman, a Columbia University professor and the editor of socialist magazine *The Masses*, aided in the organization of the Men's League for Woman Suffrage. The League was the first pro-feminist men's organization and among its participants were many prominent names: John Dewey, Rabbi Steven Wise, *New York Evening Post* editor Oswald Garrison Villard, and others. These men supported suffrage not only in rhetoric but in action as well: "League activities included organizing men's contingents to march in suffrage parades, mass meetings for suffrage speakers, and rallies and suffrage dinners for up to six hundred guests." While these men did not assume the title "pro-feminist men," as even the title "feminist" had yet to be embraced, their commitment to women's rights clearly influenced the later actions of men who did assume this title.⁸

Strengthened by the historical precedent for men's place within the struggle for women's rights, the pro-feminist men of the Second Wave originally fought alongside women to end patriarchy and discrimination against women. The role of feminist-supporting men, however, was limited due to the popular feminist rhetoric that could at times demonize men as enemies and oppressors. For this reason, many pro-feminist men felt restricted in their support for feminist causes. But in 1970, with the establishment of the Men's Center in Berkeley, pro-feminist men were united for the first time. These men "saw the primary political function of a men's movement to be supporting women in their

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 211-212; Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller, eds., *Against The Tide*, 198.

⁸ Kimmel and Mosmiller, *Against the Tide*, 207-208.

quest for equality with men.” All other activities were focused on consciousness-raising and achieving personal change for men. This quest for introspection is exemplified in the “Berkeley Men’s Center Manifesto.” Published in February of 1973, the document describes the center as “a collective of men struggling to free themselves from sex-role stereotypes and to define themselves in positive, nonchauvinistic ways.” In this way, pro-feminist men emphasize inner work as one way to achieve gender equality. Active social change, however, still remains the main focus of pro-feminist men.⁹

Since the 1970s, the pro-feminist and anti-sexist arm of the men’s movement has been involved in various efforts for social action including, in Flood’s words, “academic study on masculinity, men’s health policy, the development of gender equity curricula in schools, the counseling of male perpetrators of violence, and more.” Additionally, anti-sexist men have often worked cooperatively with feminists for women’s causes (including domestic violence and crisis centers for women). This has been primarily concentrated on men’s violence against women. According to men’s liberation activist Tom Williamson, “Issues involving men battered by wives, women who assist men in rape of another woman, and false accusations of rape by women” have been largely ignored. Many members of the pro-feminist men’s movement take issue with this inequality, claiming that such disparate treatment is evidence of the fact that, like women, men are oppressed by gender stereotypes. In his book *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity*, Kenneth Clatterbaugh defines these men as “liberal pro-feminists.” He

⁹ Williamson, “History of the Men’s Movement,” 311; “Berkeley Men’s Center Manifesto,” in *Men and Masculinity*, eds. Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 173.

juxtaposes liberal pro-feminism against what he terms “radical pro-feminism.” According to Clatterbaugh, radical pro-feminist men believe that men’s lives are privileged over women’s, thus leading to the oppression of women. Alternatively, liberal pro-feminists emphasize the ways that both genders have been harmed by constrictive gender roles. In this way, the philosophy of liberal pro-feminism is more closely related to the ideals of the second strand of the men’s movement: men’s liberation.¹⁰

Flood outlines the men’s liberation perspective: “The men’s liberation strand argues that men are hurt by the male ‘sex role’ and that men’s lives are alienating, unhealthy and impoverished.” Most men within the men’s movement share at least some of the philosophies of men’s liberation; in this way, men’s liberation often encompasses many of the beliefs of the other three strands. The degree to which each strand agrees with the men’s liberation perspective as well as the methods by which this perspective is implemented by each group, however, have differed. While the primary focus of pro-feminist men has been social action, with a secondary emphasis on personal growth, men’s liberation has first and foremost encouraged men to seek individual improvement. This has been a point of contention between pro-feminists and men’s liberationists. In 1980, the California Anti-Sexist Men’s Political Caucus (CAMP), a self-proclaimed pro-feminist and anti-sexist political organization, published the article “Male Pride and Anti-Sexism.” Within a section of the article entitled “The Difference Between Men’s Liberation and Male Anti-Sexist Activities,” the authors explain that “it is tempting to try

¹⁰ Flood, “Men’s Movements,” 67; Williamson, “History of the Men’s Movement,” 312; Flood, “Men’s Movements,” 67; Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 10.

to solve our problems on an individual basis.” The authors expand on this: “Choosing to work out a personal solution is an option taken by some men within the men’s movement.” The authors then make their pro-feminist perspective apparent by frowning upon this choice: “Some of us can *afford* to keep our solutions on this personal level, because we are not oppressed... We in the CAMP Caucus believe that it is not enough to work only for men’s liberation.” Despite pro-feminists’ disapproval of a predominantly personal approach to social action, the men’s movement has evolved since the 1980s to focus mostly on individual change.¹¹

The effort for personal male improvement has taken two forms: the men’s support group and individual therapy. The third strand of the men’s movement, known as mythopoetic, is centered almost entirely on men’s inner work, which they believe is achieved in cooperation with other men. Men’s movement activist Shepherd Bliss is credited with coining the term mythopoetic. In an interview with *M.E.N. Magazine*, however, Bliss admits that he did not create the term itself, as it is originally a literary term. He simply applied the term to the men’s movement. Bliss explains the meaning of the word: “It does not mean myth and poetry. It means to re-mythologize.” Since this strand’s title originates in the literary tradition, it is not surprising that the key influences of the mythopoetic perspective are the works of psychologist Carl Jung and poet Robert Bly. Bly’s best-selling book *Iron John*, published in 1990, encouraged countless men to travel into the wilderness together for the purpose of “enacting an ancient hunt and

¹¹ Flood, “Men’s Movements,” 67-68; Alan Acacia, Craig Scherfenberg, and Tim Wernette, “Male Pride and Anti-Sexism,” in *Against the Tide*, 426.

reading poetry by the fire and beating a drum” in order to get in touch with their instinctual masculinity. Followers of the mythopoetic perspective believe that masculinity is “based on deep unconscious patterns and archetypes that are revealed through myths, stories and rituals... It is more symbolic than literal, more therapeutic than theoretical.” Clatterbaugh further explains that these men believe that in their journey through life, men may lose sight of what it means to truly be a man and “eventually, if men probe the archetypes buried in their unconscious, they will be able to heal these wounds and restore themselves to a state of wholeness and psychospiritual health.” This inner work, however, requires the aid of other men. In his article “The Struggle for Men’s Souls,” sociologist Michael S. Kimmel explains how “mythopoetic men’s retreats... allow men to retrieve their masculine essence, celebrate their inner warrior, and heal their wounds.” For this reason, the main activity of the mythopoetic followers is the establishment of both men’s and boys’ retreats rather than the push for men’s legal rights like many other members of the men’s movement.¹²

Because personal growth is emphasized within this strand, the mythopoetics, for the most part, have had no direct political agenda. In his book *Warriors and Wildmen*, Stephen Wicks credits this lack of direct social action to the mythopoetic belief that “any of the social problems typically attributed to men—violence, sexism, anger, or personal unhappiness—are the result of men losing touch with their bonds to nature, or an inner

¹² Bert H. Hoff, “Interview with Shepherd Bliss,” interview with Shepherd Bliss, *Men’s Voices Magazine*, May 1995, <http://www.menweb.org/blissiv.htm> (accessed February 20, 2007); Stephen Wicks, *Warriors and Wildmen: Men, Masculinity, and Gender* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), 64; Flood, “Men’s Movements,” 68; Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives*, 86; Michael S. Kimmel, “The Struggle for Men’s Souls,” *Tikkun Magazine* 11, no. 2, 16.

self that reflects a kind of male gender heritage or archetype.” Thus, mythopoetics believe that many social ills can be remedied through men’s inner change. In his 1991 *New York Times* article entitled “The Male Manifesto,” environmentalist Andrew Kimbrell echoes this notion of a positive relationship between men’s personal improvement and society’s betterment: “As men recover a healthy sense of inner ‘wildness,’ they are calling for more environmental protection... As men realize that modern techno-war mocks the inner warrior aspect of men, they reject modern warfare.” Robert Bly also expresses this idea in the preface of *Iron John*: “The dark side of men is clear. Their mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and humiliation of women, and obsession with tribal warfare are undeniable.” In this way, mythopoetics believe that men’s personal work is necessary for affecting the larger community.¹³

For much of the American public, the image of the stereotypical mythopoetic man, chanting and drumming in the woods, is comical rather than compelling; at the same time, the notion of a men’s rights advocate, often imagined as irrationally angry and dangerous, is feared and ridiculed. Like men’s liberationists, men’s rights advocates believe that men’s roles are often detrimental to the male gender. Those who favor a men’s rights perspective, however, take this idea one step further and argue that male power and patriarchy are myths propagated primarily by feminists. Furthermore, they claim that men have been forced to remain in traditional masculine roles, while women have more flexibility since, according to these men, the goals of the feminist movement

¹³ Wicks, *Warriors*, 63-64; Andrew Kimbrell, “The Male Manifesto,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1991, Op-Ed Section, A27; Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1990), x.

have essentially been achieved. Flood explains the men's rights perspective in relation to their own gender discrimination: "Men are 'success objects' (like women are 'sex objects') and burdened as providers, violence against men... is endemic and socially tolerated, and men are discriminated against in divorce and child custody proceedings." Men's rights advocates' perception of male victimization at the hands of women and feminists has recently expanded to include men's victimization by the state in relation to court cases. Thus, the most visible political issue for men's rights organizations recently has been father's rights. While other men's movement perspectives also emphasize the importance of fatherhood, advocates of a men's rights perspective seek legislation for their cause. In ways such as this, the breadth of issues and ideologies within the men's movement is apparent.¹⁴

The varying perspectives within the men's movement allow each man to concentrate on the issues that he finds personally relevant. In much the same way, members of the Seduction Community each follow different methods in order to pursue their individual goals. At the same time, just as every strand of the men's movement does not necessarily represent the views of each member who considers himself a part of the movement, individual members of the Seduction Community differ in their identification with the varying beliefs within the men's movement. For this reason, the comparisons of the Seduction Community to that of the men's movement are not wholly representative of

¹⁴ Flood, "Men's Movements," 69; Michael Flood, "Backlash: Angry Men's Movements" in *The Battle and Backlash Rage On: Why Feminism Cannot be Obsolete*, ed. Stacey Elin Rossi (Xlibris Press, 2004), 262. As men's movement ideologies formed during the mid-to late-1970s, the terms men's liberation and men's rights were often used interchangeably. Men's rights emerged in tandem with men's liberation and later developed a more distinct set of beliefs and goals.

each person's beliefs, and are instead individual examples. While the men of the Seduction Community might not explicitly identify with the men's movement, their similarities are striking. In this way, it is obvious that the men's movement has contributed to the cultural milieu that has given rise to the Seduction Community.

The most noticeable similarity between the current men's movement and the Seduction Community is in their relationship with therapy and self-help. While men's movement activists suggest individual therapy for overcoming personal issues, support groups are also encouraged as a way to heal men's inner wounds. Flood notes the connection between men's liberation and group therapy: "One of the most important movement activities to embody men's liberation is the men's support group." Early in my research my brother mentioned that members of The Austin Society met each month to discuss their progress, welcome new members, and socialize. Upon discovering this, I was ecstatic at the notion of being able to attend a meeting and observe multiple PUAs all at one time. When I asked my brother where and at what time the meetings transpired, he declined to tell me. He explained that the presence of a female outsider would inhibit the goings-on of the group. While essentially each PUA must ultimately learn to function on his own, the community itself is an integral part of each man's journey to possible success. In their utilization of groups of male support, both the Seduction Community and the men's movement have chosen nearly identical means to achieve what can be viewed as similar ends: personal betterment. A quote by Kimmel in reference to the

mythopoetics could also apply to the Seduction Community: “These men seek the solace of other men to express their needs for lives of coherence and meaning.”¹⁵

While the group therapy aspect of the Seduction Community may aid these men in their quest for the skills of attraction by helping to mend their inner wounds, the community also serves as a collective knowledge base from which aspiring PUAs may draw. Men of the Seduction Community are avid students of “the seductive arts” (as they sometimes phrase it) and in addition to learning from each other, PUAs often read numerous books while on the path to becoming a competent pickup artist. The seductive arts syllabus includes hundreds of books from a variety of pickup gurus, sales strategists, psychologists, hypnotists, and more. FastSeduction.com, the Internet go-to location for PUAs, includes an entire page of books and movies aspiring PUAs are advised to examine. Similarly, the various strands of the men’s movement have produced a plethora of literature. For this reason, a comparison of each group’s respective writings is an appropriate method for understanding their similarities.

Still an underground phenomenon, the Seduction Community’s literature is difficult, if not impossible, to come by in a typical bookstore. A select few publications, however, have made it onto mainstream shelves. Among these is Robert Greene’s *The Art of Seduction*. In this book, Greene outlines nine different “seducer types” that he modeled on famous seducers such as Casanova, Don Juan, Cleopatra, John F. Kennedy, and others. Greene claims that everyone exhibits traits of one of the nine types, Sirens, Rakes, Ideal Lovers, Dandies, Naturals, Coquettes, Charmers, Charismatics, and Stars,

¹⁵ Flood, “Men’s Movements,” 69; Kimmel, “Men’s Souls,” 16.

and that by acknowledging one's own type one can learn to harness these skills in order to seduce anyone. Greene explains the relationship between these model lovers and the attainment of power: "Only by stepping into one of them and letting it grow inside you can you begin to develop the seductive character that will bring you limitless power." Although many men of the Seduction Community endorse Greene's book, it reads less like a how-to guide and more like a narrative of seduction mythology. He begins his explanation of each of the seducer types by relaying a well-known legend of a famous seducer. These stories involve a mixture of truth and myth, and urge the reader to identify with the men of these famed romantic encounters. Greene's discussion of archetypal seducers, and the mythology surrounding them, encourages men to emulate these types in order to gain power over women in the same way that the mythopoetics examine archetypes and myth for the purpose of understanding their deeper feelings and drives.¹⁶

In much the same way that Greene encourages readers to identify with mythical seducers, the mythopoetics exalt and seek to model various archetypes. Psychologist Carl Jung's (1875-1961) theories on archetypes and the collective unconscious are the basis for much of mythopoetic belief. The mythopoetic perspective contends that men can regain their masculinity by acknowledging archetypes that exist within the collective unconscious. Wicks explains the mythopoetic movement's relationship with Jung's philosophy: "Jung argued that men begin their lives as whole, unified entities and that the soul becomes fragmented by Oedipal conflict and pressures of socialization." The mythopoetics claim that these "psychic stressors relegate the male archetypes, or ideal

¹⁶ Robert Greene, *The Art of Seduction* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 4.

images of mature masculinity, to the distant corners of the brain.” By repressing these archetypes, the mythopoeists deduce, men have lost their primitive masculinity. Only by “discovering and reintegrating the masculine archetypes into consciousness” can man “restore the missing wholeness of his psyche.” Among others, these archetypes include the Warrior, King, Wildman, Trickster, Magician, and Lover. Mythopoeists find these archetypes within the abundance of myths that pervade culture and are passed down over centuries.¹⁷

In his now legendary book *Iron John*, Robert Bly explains how myths can be of personal importance centuries after their creation: “Stories, then—fairy stories, legends, myths, hearth stories—amount to a reservoir where we keep new ways of responding that we can adopt when the conventional and current ways wear out.” The “conventional and current ways” of which Bly writes are found in “defective mythologies that ignore masculine depth of feeling” and limit men to being “the right man, the tough man, the true man.” Bly contends that this limited man is a product of the Industrial Age. Mythopoeists utilize myths, and the archetypes found in them, to tap into the depths of their own psyches in order to overcome their social programming. In much the same way, Greene implies that men are unable to harness their seductive potential and that by identifying oneself with one of the nine seducer types, and by studying the tendencies of that type, one can obtain the power of attraction. He explains, “We all have the power of attraction... Far from all of us, though, are aware of this inner potential... Yet all we need to do to realize our potential is understand what it is in a person’s character that naturally

¹⁷ Wicks, *Warriors*, 71.

excites people and develop these latent qualities within us.” It is through identifying with myths of seduction and archetypal lovers that men will be able to realize their own potential. In this way, the mythopoetic perspective intersects with that of the Seduction Community, thus exposing a common link between seemingly disparate men’s groups.¹⁸

An essay by men’s rights activist Robert A. Sides, whose other work formed the epigraph to this chapter, exposes another ideological similarity between the two groups. In his essay entitled “The Sensitive Man: Why Is He So Undesirable?” he explains the frustration that men often experience in trying to be the “sensitive” man that women claim they want. With what can only be described as an angered tone, he explains,

Women say that they want ‘sensitive’ men, but it’s not often clear just what they mean by that. Usually it means they want men to ‘sense’ what women want and give it to them without complaint. Men’s own needs are to remain in limbo, their lives in hell. Well, if sensitive, feeling men are really so desired by women, why aren’t they being pursued?

While the inequality of dating is not among the most common of men’s rights causes, this essay demonstrates that it is still a subject on the minds of at least some members of the men’s movement. Although this essay’s only purpose is to express an aggravated complaint about “women having it both ways” in dating, seduction guru David DeAngelo conveys this same frustration and at the same time forms a solution to it.¹⁹

¹⁸ Bly, *Iron John*, xi, ix-x; Greene, *Seduction*, 3.

¹⁹ Robert A. Sides, “The Sensitive Man: Why Is He So Undesirable?” in *Men Freeing Men*, 75; Sides, “Both Ways,” 68.

In his book *Attraction Isn't A Choice*, DeAngelo explains why he believes women are repulsed by “nice” and sensitive men; he then outlines his widely-praised theory of “cocky funny” as a solution to this problem. Just as Sides states in his essay, DeAngelo declares the paradox of women’s stated want for, but apparent lack of interest in, sensitive men: “The most attractive and interesting women seem to be attracted to men who don’t treat them very well.” DeAngelo follows the next logical step in this assessment and encourages men to use “teasing, humor, unpredictable behavior, and that magical combination of cocky and funny” in order to attract women. In the rest of his book, DeAngelo describes specific methods of how to implement his “cocky funny” solution to the “nice guy” problem. While both Sides and DeAngelo express the same frustration in their respective writings, DeAngelo suggests a solution to the problem while Sides simply complains. Despite their differing ways of coping with such a problem, it is important to note that the same idea is expressed in both writings.²⁰

Sides’s and DeAngelo’s similar frustration demonstrates but one example of the overlapping opinions between the men of the Seduction Community and the men’s movement. There are numerous other instances of similar if not identical ideology of both groups. The ultimate intersection between the ideology of the men’s movement and that of the Seduction Community can be found in spiritual teacher David Deida’s book *The Way of the Superior Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire*. Although the author does not openly associate himself with either group, both have adopted his book as a key piece of literature. The online

²⁰ DeAngelo, *Attraction Isn't A Choice*, 26, 25.

magazine for “men’s voices,” MenWeb.org, lists Deida’s book among their recommended reading. The book is also endorsed and discussed at length by many of the contributors to the Seduction Community’s mASF online forum. In Deida’s book there are broad concepts and smaller details that the men of the Seduction Community and the followers of the men’s movement both accept, yet implement in different manners. For example, in the chapter entitled “Enjoy Your Friends’ Criticism,” Deida writes, “About once a week, you should sit down with your closest men friends and discuss what you are doing in your life and what you are afraid of doing.” As examined previously, the all-male support group is an element shared by the Seduction Community and the men’s movement; however, each group views the message of this passage differently. The men’s movement interprets this concept as encouragement for male group therapy, while Seduction Community members understand the same passage to imply that they ought to seek the advice of fellow pickup artists in order to improve their own skills.²¹

Seduction Community members also use details within Deida’s book as confirmation of some of the pre-existing concepts that are accepted by the community. Conversely, members of the men’s movement may not place such importance on these details. Evidence of this is in the community’s interpretation of Deida’s idea about the “tests” women give. Deida explains, “A woman often seems to test her man’s capacity to remain unperturbed in his truth and purpose. She tests him to feel his freedom and depth of love, to know that he is trustable.” Pickup artists relate this passage to the

²¹ *Men’s Voices Magazine*, <http://www.menweb.org> (accessed March 12); David Deida, *The Way of the Superior Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire* (Boulder: Sounds True, 2004), 35.

community's concept of "shit tests." Strauss explains in *The Game*, a shit test is "a question, demand, or seemingly hostile comment made by a woman intended to gauge whether a man is strong enough to be a worthy boyfriend or sexual partner." In his book *Double Your Dating*, David DeAngelo notes, "Women are constantly testing men. They do it by acting bratty, making demands, complaining, commanding, being emotional, etc... Some women actually have standard tests that they give to new guys to see if the guy will do what they tell him to do." Pickup artists acknowledge the existence of these tests and choose not to indulge a woman's demands. While Deida's idea could be read in other ways, the Seduction Community sees a direct correlation to their own vernacular. At the same time, followers of the men's movement would perhaps not place any undue importance on such a concept, and they would instead take the passage at face value. Nonetheless, both groups share the ideas expressed within Deida's book.²²

While on the surface, the Seduction Community and the men's movement may appear quite different from one another, on a different level they are quite similar. In short, the Seduction Community can be understood as an extension of the men's movement. There are continuities inherent within the ideology of both groups and these enduring connections speak to larger issues in the lives of American men. Among these issues are an interest in men's inner selves, a concern with how men and boys are socialized in our society, and a new importance on men finding other men with whom they can explore a deeper connection. In essence these issues all deal with spirituality and

²² Deida, *Way of the Superior Man*, 51; Strauss, *The Game*, 446; DeAngelo, *Double Your Dating*, 89-90.

brotherhood. In his article “The Struggle for Men’s Souls,” Michael S. Kimmel describes how in recent years the men’s movement has focused on “saving men’s souls” and that the men’s movement seems to imply that a loss of spirituality is essentially a loss of masculinity. Some men have turned to the Seduction Community in an attempt to redefine their masculinity and thus regain spiritual consciousness. Those who feel a spiritual void have latched onto the Seduction Community with religious fervency; it seems that members often turn to the community as the solution to their problems with women and with themselves. Kimmel bemoans these spiritually centered men’s organizations, such as the Promise Keepers (an evangelical Christian men’s organization) and the mythopoetics, because “each group... explicitly ministers to *men’s* souls,” and excludes women. But it is precisely this exclusion that allows members of both the men’s movement and the Seduction Community to reclaim their masculinity, because brotherhood is an integral component of both organizations. The next chapter will examine how brotherhood is expressed in the Seduction Community through a non-traditional outlet, the Internet.²³

²³ Kimmel, “Men’s Souls,” 15 (emphasis mine).

CHAPTER FOUR

Cyber Seduction: Internet Newsgroups to International Pickup Conventions

While attending a party at Project Austin, I met Big Daddy, a fifty-one-year-old environmental engineer, who had discovered the community less than a year before. He explained that he was married for twenty years before divorcing his wife with whom he has two teenage daughters. Up until that moment, most of the PUAs I knew were younger and had never been married, thus I was intrigued as to how Big Daddy discovered a community that is seemingly outside the traditional life that he had led. He explained how he was alone at home one night, reflecting on the difficulties he was experiencing with women since his divorce. On a whim, he searched the Internet for “how to meet women” and found nothing useful. He changed his search to “how to *pick up* women” and discovered Maniac High’s PickupGuide.com, a non-commercial website associated with FastSeduction.com, the most popular go-to location for pickup information on the Web. At that time, Big Daddy’s story was unique to me, as most others I met had been introduced to the community through a friend. A few months later I met Harmless, one of my brother’s new roommates. Harmless discovered the community at the age of eighteen in much the same way as Big Daddy had when searching the Internet for advice on women. Harmless explained to me that he was having no difficulty bedding women, but that he was unable to maintain their interest longer than a few days or a week. In

frustration he searched the Internet for tips on attracting women. Reading the information on various websites and message boards gave him a new perspective. For both Big Daddy and Harmless, the accessibility of the Internet provided the anonymity necessary in order for them to feel comfortable finding the solution to their problems with women.

While both Big Daddy and Harmless began their journeys within the virtual dimension, they both subsequently stepped outside of cyberspace and into the real world of the Seduction Community. Many men, however, remain online, never implementing the knowledge they acquire from chat rooms and message boards. The community developed a term for those who accumulate knowledge but do not go out and practice the pickup arts, these men are called “keyboard jockeys.” Although a great deal of discussion between active PUAs occurs through Internet communication, it is an established rule within the community that simply reading and discussing pickup theory is not enough to become a competent PUA. The community encourages men to meet in lairs and go sarging together in order to hone their skills, but many men start out learning and discussing pickup tactics solely online. These men find it less intimidating to remain behind their computers, learning but not doing; this is not surprising, as the prospect of going out and experiencing rejection from women is essentially what has kept a great number of them from ever acquiring the skills to pickup women. While some men are destined to remain keyboard jockeys, others realize that by lingering online they will never internalize the skills of the game. One might assume that Passion’s previous tendency towards solitude and his intense fear of female rejection would seemingly cause

him to forever linger in the virtual world of the Seduction Community. My brother, however, spent only three months as a keyboard jockey before deciding to move outside the scope of the Internet to learn the skills of pickup. On FastSeduction.com, he met Deuce, a newly aspiring PUA also from Austin; they met in person and began to truly learn the skills of the game.

From my own observations, I found that the men who tend to remain keyboard jockeys are those who have previously had *some* success with women. These men do not feel the same sense of urgency that pushed my brother out of cyberspace and into the real world of seduction. Those who attach themselves solely to the virtual world of the Seduction Community, as well as men like my brother, find the accessibility of the Internet alluring, while at the same time enjoying the anonymity it provides. Without its strong Internet base, the Seduction Community would not exist, nor would it continue to expand. For this reason, the existence of the Seduction Community is fundamentally tied to the advent of the Internet. While my previous chapters prove that the development of the Seduction Community connects to multiple historical factors, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the Internet in establishing a forum for the community to proliferate. It is no coincidence that the mainstreaming of the Internet in the late 1980s and early 1990s coincided with the increasing popularity of the Seduction Community, as the establishment of the Internet newsgroup alt.seduction.fast (ASF) in 1994 represents the birth of the community. Therefore, the advent of the Internet fundamentally influenced the establishment of the Seduction Community and continues to be a forceful component

of the community's recent explosion. By providing anonymity, accessibility to information, and an opportunity for communication with a vast array of people, message boards and websites supply imaginary locations for these men to come together in an alternate reality in which keyboard-wielding nerds can be seduction gods.

Anonymous Interactions

Clinical psychologist John Suler argues that the anonymity of the Internet creates what he terms "the online disinhibition effect," a phenomenon in which people "loosen up, feel less restrained, and express themselves more openly" when communicating via technology. He explains that the disinhibition effect leads many to explore "territory they would never explore in the real world." For men of the Seduction Community the disinhibition effect is especially strong, as the shame a man may feel by admitting openly to his friends that he is unable to attract women is more than most can bear. The anonymity of the Internet provides men the opportunity to discuss embarrassing details of their personal lives while assuring privacy. This privacy is maintained by the adoption of an online pseudonym, thus guaranteeing that one's real and Internet lives can be kept separate. The creation of a pseudonym, however, does not simply function as a tool for maintaining personal anonymity. For men of the Seduction Community, assuming an alternate name often coincides with the development of a nearly alternate personality—one unaffected by a life of female rejection. In *The Game*, Strauss explains

that although he first assumed the persona of Style online, he soon emerged as Style in his real life. Through the transformative power of the Internet, Strauss felt able to eliminate years of painful rejection and start anew; he explains, “I needed to shed Neil Strauss and rewire myself to become Style.” In this way, the online disinhibition effect is present in the Seduction Community, as these men feel less restrained by their real identities and are therefore able to project a chosen, more confident self-image.¹

In his essay “Cyberspace and the World We Live In,” Kevin Robins explains that in the online world, self-identity is “a matter of freedom and choice... The exhilaration of virtual existence and experience comes from the sense of transcendence and liberation from the material and embodied world.” The anonymous virtual world of the Seduction Community allows men to engage in selective self-disclosure online; this modified self-image, however, often expands beyond this cyber-reality and into the real world interactions of many PUAs. Suler contends that the online disinhibition effect can cause people to perceive the characters they have formed as existing in an alternate space; the online identity one has formed and “the online others live in a make-believe dimension, separate and apart from the demands and responsibilities of the real world.” While it is often true that the online world of the Seduction Community can feel wholly separate from one’s daily interactions with friends or family, for men of the Seduction Community their online identity exists outside of the Internet. In *The Game*, Mystery christens Strauss with the nickname Style for use on a private Internet discussion board; he says, “You are

¹ John Suler, “The Online Disinhibition Effect,” *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 7, no. 3 (2004): 321; Strauss, *The Game*, 57.

no longer Neil Strauss. When I see you in there [the discussion board], I want you to be someone else.” Strauss’s experience of assuming a new personality at the expense of his former exemplifies Robins’s point that online “identities can be selected or discarded almost at will, as in a game or a fiction.” In his book *The Virtual Community*, Howard Rheingold expands this idea, arguing that the assumption of an online fantasy persona has its roots “deep in that part of human nature that delights in storytelling and playing.” PUAs, however, take this one step further, merging this fantasy with reality, beyond cyberspace.²

Accessibility, Autonomy

The anonymity of the Internet also plays an integral role in the consumption of knowledge obtained through online outlets. For men of the Seduction Community, cyber-anonymity allows them to freely access information about how to overcome rejection from women, without exposing themselves to the social ridicule that might accompany the admission of such a personal flaw. In his article “Western Heterosexual Masculinity, Anxiety, and Web Porn,” Ian Cook refers to pornography as a primary example of a form of information that has had recent widespread success due to the accessibility of the Internet. Cook argues, “The Web provides unparalleled access to an enormous amount of

² Kevin Robins, “Cyberspace and the World We Live In,” in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), 79; Suler, “Online Disinhibition Effect,” 323; Strauss, *The Game*, 56; Robins, “Cyberspace and the World We Live In,” 80; Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), 155.

pornography while allowing consumers to access that pornography without opening themselves to social condemnation that might attend being seen as consumers of pornography.” At the same time that the Internet provides anonymity, it also supplies a vast availability of information. For this reason, the accessibility of the Internet allows many men, who may not have otherwise done so, to obtain information regarding how to pickup women. Strauss’s experience reflects this point, as the online world of the Seduction Community opened his eyes to a possibility other than failure with women; he explains, “In the guise of... the Internet, God had given me a second chance. It wasn’t too late.”³

After discovering the cyber Seduction Community, Strauss desperately sought the advice of the men who posted advice in newsgroups and message boards; he recounts, “Whenever I returned home from meeting or going out with a woman, I sat down at my computer and posted my questions of the night on the newsgroups... And online characters like Candor, Gunwitch, and Formhandle began replying to my questions.” Strauss’s experience exemplifies how the accessibility and equalizing force of the Internet has led to the formation of “informal experts.” Informal experts are particularly prolific within the Seduction Community, as every pickup guru began with no more formal expertise than the recovering AFCs who now seek his advice. A PUA may prove his status through frequent postings on the message boards as well as through the postings of other PUAs who endorse his skills. One such example is Thundercat’s

³ Ian Cook, “Western Heterosexual Masculinity, Anxiety, and Web Porn,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 49; Strauss, *The Game*, 12.

Seduction Lair, an online blog that ranks the top ten PUAs each year. The ranking is arbitrary, considering that it is determined by Thundercat himself and is not based on any real data. The blog, however, is fairly well known within the community, meaning that Thundercat's access to the Internet and ability to publicize his blog is authority enough for him to determine the top ten PUAs for the entire community. A similar example is the Attraction Chronicles blog, which in 2007 polled its readers to determine who were the top five pickup coaches of the past year. Over 1,100 readers voted for their personal favorite based on "performance, innovation, and content of advice." In this way, the accessibility of the Internet allows individuals to become authorities, therefore giving these men the opportunity to straddle the line between teacher and student, producer and consumer.⁴

In his book *Cyberspace*, cultural geographer Rob Kitchin explains that while traditional media, such as television and newspaper, are "based on a one-to-many model where an editor, publisher or producer decides upon what should be seen and when," the Internet has allowed "the 'consumers' of cyberspace" to become "the 'producers'" as well. This is particularly true in the Seduction Community, since much of the written information on pickup is only available online. E-books, DVDs, and audio recordings are all sold through websites of self-proclaimed experts. None of these require the approval

⁴ Strauss, *The Game*, 12; Joseph Matthews, "ANNOUNCING THE TOP 10 PICK UP ARTISTS OF 2006!" How to Meet Women Blog, posted on December 29, 2006, <http://www.artofapproaching.com/blog/2006/12/29/announcing-the-top-10-pick-up-artists-of-2007> (accessed March 10, 2007); Donovan, "Top 5 Dating Coaches of 2006," The Attraction Chronicles, posted on January 7, 2007, <http://attraction-chronicles.blogspot.com/2006/12/top-dating-coach-of-2006.html> (accessed March 10, 2007).

of publishers or other outside sources, making it an option for any PUA to become an author and subsequently a community expert. While many PUAs become informal experts by producing e-books, blogs, or newsletters of pickup information, many proclaim their expert status simply by offering to teach lessons, workshops, and seminars. Juggler, voted the best pickup coach of 2006, acquired his expert status years ago through well-written discussion board posts and by offering in-field training for aspiring PUAs. David DeAngelo, a marketing genius, has had unparalleled success with his e-books, even though his only qualification for giving advice is that he is a former student of Seduction Community godfather Ross Jeffries. Within the Austin Society alone, Merchant has already produced an e-book entitled *Natural Attraction Secrets* and Ghost, an active member of the community for approximately one year, is currently writing his own e-book of seduction advice. He and Deuce, who has been a practicing PUA for less than one year, began teaching pickup workshops in the spring of 2007, calling their company Real Dating Results. In the past, Billionaire has offered private tutoring to students for 200 to 300 dollars a session. As the community has gained popularity it has gained experts, proving their mastery through attractive websites and e-books. This element of democracy is an intrinsic and highly important part of the community's personality, as the Seduction Community has been built on men's informal sharing of advice. In this way, the Internet is democratizing, as it has been the primary force for the community's highly autonomous evolution.⁵

⁵ Rob Kitchin, *Cyberspace: The World in the Wires* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 13; Donovan, "Top 5 Dating Coaches;" Strauss, *The Game*, 115; Wikipedia contributors, "David DeAngelo," *Wikipedia*,

Communication and Connection

At the same time that the Internet increases accessibility to information, it increases accessibility to others. The Internet provides PUAs with the ability to communicate on a global scale with other members of the community, thus contributing to the community's increasing vitality. At the same time, the virtual world of the community impacts the individual experiences of these men. In her book *Life Online*, Annette N. Markham presents three main ways of understanding online experiences; the first understanding is that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is "a tool that facilitates communication," the second is that cyberspace is "a place to go to be with others," and the third is "a way of being that is inseparably woven into lived experiences." For members of the Seduction Community, Markham's three understandings of online experience are accurate and intertwined. Internet message boards satisfy the first, given that these online forums provide for PUAs the opportunity to share stories and advice in the form of field reports and lay reports. Applied to the Seduction Community, the second and the third themes coincide due to the fact that, while the Internet provides an imaginary location for these men to be together, their real lives are enriched by and connected to their online experiences.⁶

The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_DeAngelo&oldid=120435982 (accessed April 6, 2007). While I do not have time here to discuss extensively the democratizing effect of the Internet, Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community* provides an ample analysis of this subject.

⁶ Denise M. Carter, "Living in Virtual Communities: Making Friends Online," *Journal of Urban Technology* 11, no. 3 (2004): 109.

Rheingold argues that the Internet allows the emergence of a type of utopian community in which people come together based on mutual interests rather than “coincidence of location.” In Rheingold’s opinion, these “virtual communities” appear when people engage in computer-mediated discussions, “with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.” The Seduction Community, while not solely an online phenomenon, is one such example of the kind of virtual community of which Rheingold writes. Throughout *The Game*, Strauss’s real world experiences in the community are punctuated by online discussions with other PUAs. Before entrenching himself fully in the community, Strauss explains, “I realized this was not just an Internet phenomenon but a way of life. Such interconnectedness is not uncommon for many PUAs and exemplifies what Denise M. Carter discusses in her article “Living in Virtual Communities: Making Friends Online.” She argues that “rather than transforming methods of sociability such as friendship, it [cyberspace] has enhanced or added to those mechanisms that were already in place in everyday lives.” In her argument, Carter estimates that the Internet enhances real world communication; for PUAs, whose online and real world experiences are often interdependent, this is certainly true. The culmination of the merging of the Seduction Community’s real and virtual worlds took place in 2005, when the first annual pickup artist convention met in Montreal. The event was put together and hosted by Cliff’s List, “one of the most established online seduction newsletters.” Cliff, a Canadian businessman in his forties, began the Cliff’s List newsletter in 1999 but has been a member of the community since its inception. Both the

2005 and 2006 conventions were attended by hundreds of PUAs and dozens of pickup gurus who came from all over of the world to meet and discuss their craft. After attending the 2006 convention, my brother explained to me that it was the first time met all of the gurus face-to-face whom he had followed for so long. For Passion, the convention brought the online world of pickup to life, enriching his experience within the community.⁷

The Seduction Community's proliferation on the Internet may possibly be its least novel aspect, as countless underground subcultures have surfaced online as the Internet has gained popularity. Yet the Seduction Community's relationship with cyber culture is somewhat unique in that it is limited. While the Internet remains a vital component of the community's original advent as well as its continuing popularity, the Internet has not replaced the value of face-to-face interaction for men of the Seduction Community. For PUAs, the Internet provides a way to reach out to others, and is therefore simply a tool to facilitate contact rather than the primary essence of the community. Strauss succinctly explains the community's tenuous relationship with the Internet: "Talking to guys online was not going to be enough to change a lifetime of failure. I had to meet the faces behind the screen names, watch them in the field, find out who they were and what made them tick."⁸

⁷ Kitchin, *Cyberspace*, 86; Rheingold, *Virtual Community*, 5; Strauss, *The Game*, 12; Carter, "Living in Virtual Communities," 110; Strauss, *The Game*, 131, 145.

⁸ Strauss, *The Game*, 12.

CONCLUSION

My Life as a Pivot: Concluding Thoughts on a Controversial Subculture

Pivot. *noun:* A woman, usually a friend, used in social situations to help one meet other women. A pivot serves many functions: she provides social proof, she can create jealousy in the target, she can make it easier to open difficult sets, and she can brag about the pickup artist to his target.¹

Five months into my research, Deuce approached me and asked if I would play a relatively minor role in his new pickup coaching company Real Dating Results. My first response was to agree to help, as I felt it was a research opportunity that could not be missed. Yet something disturbed me about the idea of participating in Deuce's business. If I were to accept the job of assisting aspiring PUAs, I would be actively proclaiming my role as a supporter of the Seduction Community; to do so felt uncomfortable, but I was uncertain as to why. I began to wonder if I could actively participate in an organization that I felt morally unsure about. In trying to answer this question, I realized that delving into the world of the Seduction Community brought me further from a definite understanding of my personal opinion of the community than where I began nearly a year before.

¹ Strauss, *The Game*, 445.

My introduction to the Seduction Community began almost exactly a year prior to the completion of this project when my brother spoke to me about his new personal direction. I was studying in England when I received a rare but welcome phone call from Passion. He spoke to me excitedly about the help he was finding in a group of men who teach each other how to meet women. As he gushed, I breathed a sigh of relief; I had often worried that Passion would never overcome his romantic disabilities. Passion described the Seduction Community (without ever using its name) as a self-help group; he spoke of how he was learning to improve his social skills; he told me about a book called *The Game* that was a part of this movement of men. Yet in all his excitement, he remained ambiguous with any details. He never uttered the term *pickup artist*. Only later did I discover what felt like a disturbing truth.

Weeks after my phone conversation with Passion, I traveled to London to visit my friend Jordan. Sitting in the large Soho flat that he shared with three other American students, I spotted something that caught my eye. On the coffee table sat a leather-bound book with a red ribbon bookmark. At first I thought it was a copy of the Bible, but quickly I saw the gold engraved title: *The Game*. I picked up the book and began flipping through the pages as I said, “This is the book my brother was talking about! He said it’s helping him with girls.” Jordan began laughing, “Are you kidding? Do know what that is?” I gave him a puzzled look. He explained that one of his roommates was a pickup artist and that *The Game* was like their instruction manual for how to seduce unsuspecting women. I sat in complete disbelief. There was no way my brother was

involved in such a thing. Passion was kind and sincere with an utmost respect for women, and I envisioned these men to be manipulative and evil misogynists. I was appalled—I had to find out the truth about these so-called pickup artists.

My initial impression of the Seduction Community was that of outrage and disgust. Despite these feelings, I trusted that my brother would not involve himself in something inherently reprehensible. And so, I began a personal quest to discover what value there could be in the Seduction Community. I was surprised to find that the more I researched, the less shocking the community seemed. As I delved into the world of the Seduction Community, each pickup artist whom I met confounded my expectations. With each man's story, my conception of a "pickup artist," as well as of the community itself, shifted and expanded. For this reason, this project has attempted to go beyond the label of pickup artist in order to see these men as not only a part of a larger male community, but as a reflection of broader social trends.

In chapter one, I examined men's culture, paying particular attention to fraternal societies, sports, and *Playboy*. In chapter three, I dissected the men's movement and its relationship to sexual politics. These chapters demonstrated how the strong brotherhood of the Seduction Community reflects men's cultural and gender-political history. In chapters two and four I drew parallels between the Seduction Community and American cultural history. In chapter two, I proved how the Seduction Community is influenced by a number of key moments in the history of dating, including the connection between economics and dating, rating and dating, and the freedom of sexual choice spawned from

the sexual revolution. Within the same chapter I also demonstrated how the Seduction Community is a reaction to current American courtship trends. Chapter four analyzed the Seduction Community's position as a part of a vastly expanding Internet culture and revealed how the community goes beyond the mass-mediated world of the Internet to create human bonds. By dissecting the various elements of the Seduction Community through a historical lens, I have illustrated the key factors behind the development of the community, as well as a deeper understanding of the motivations and influences of the men involved.

But what of my original objections to the community? While my research gave me an intellectual understanding of the Seduction Community, it had not yet quashed many of my feelings of disapproval. My research brought me to the point where I began to understand the impulses of these men, and I sympathized with their difficulties. I began to applaud many facets of the community, in particular its encouragement of both brotherhood and expression of shortcomings. Yet, I still felt uneasy about supporting the community due to certain elements that I still found extremely bothersome. In particular, I took issue with the way in which women were often simplified, regarded as interchangeable, and objectified. Additionally, I could not ignore the fact that so few pickup artists seemed able to simply be friends with women and instead they viewed women primarily as sexual objects. As a woman who regards herself as a feminist, I deplore the system of privileges afforded to men. But at the same time, my numerous interactions with the men of the Seduction Community opened my eyes to the problems

that these men experienced. Still, how could I support a community with such a gendered social outlook? I felt unable to reconcile my strong criticisms with my praises of the community. Thus, I considered myself not as a part of the community, but as an outsider.

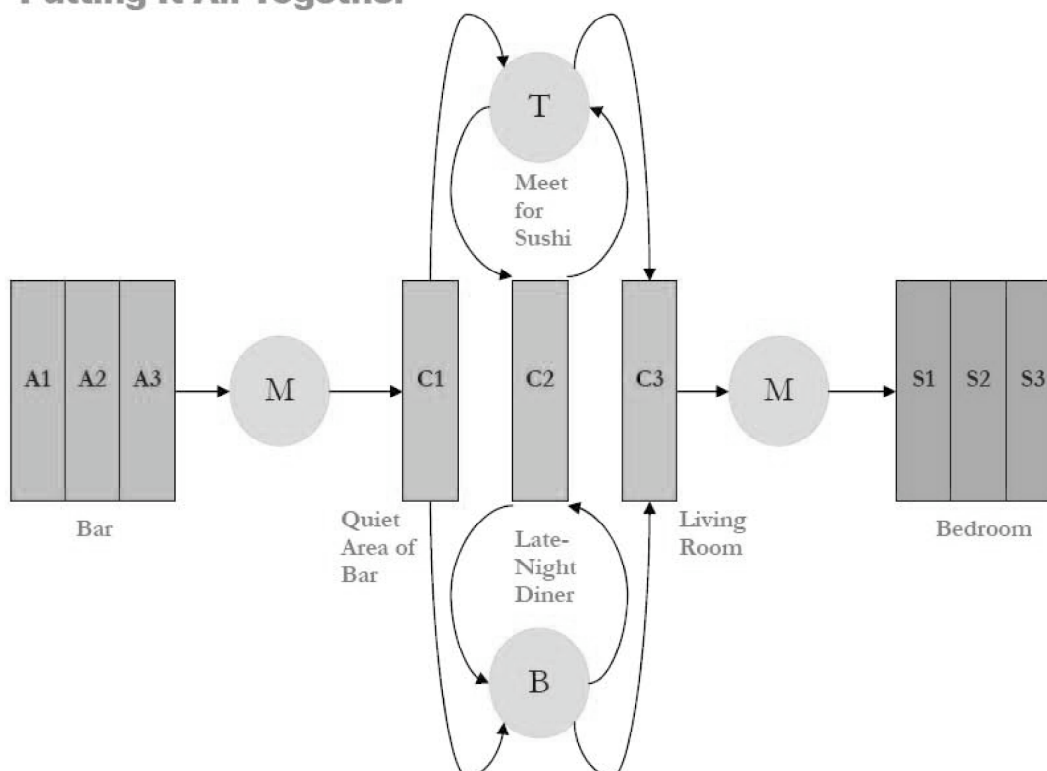
As I became closer to the men of The Austin Society, I began to notice something that, at the time, seemed peculiar. The pickup artists too had criticisms of the community, and much to my surprise they even vocalized their dissenting viewpoints. My brother had always taken issue with the outwardly chauvinistic aspects of the community, and towards the end of this project he even began to distance myself from the Seduction Community. Ghost, frustrated with many of the same issues as I, once emphatically proclaimed, “You know, 90% of this pickup stuff is complete bullshit!” Billionaire once described the act of joining the Seduction Community as “dangerous.” Similarly, Strauss’s account in *The Game* is littered with criticisms of the pickup arts, making the book at times seem more like a cautionary tale to aspiring PUAs than an encouragement. Yet, these men have continued to practice the pickup arts and consider themselves members of the community. The Seduction Community does not speak with a unitary voice, but rather with the voices of thousands of men who each contribute their differing views about gender relations. Such dissention is an intrinsic part of the community itself, meaning that my mixed feelings made me more a part of the community than an outsider.

Upon sharing with my brother the revelation that I too was a member of the Seduction Community, he said, “But Elana, the fact that you are a woman means that you have a certain role in it, but it’s not designed for you.” I was shocked. I spent months

engulfed in the Seduction Community befriending and trying to understand these men, but I was still an outsider. I am a woman, which inherently separated me from the brotherhood. But more than my gender, the fact that I had not practiced the pickup arts put me apart from the fellowship of the Seduction Community. I had only acquired knowledge, and never acted. As the community expands into the mainstream, with multiple television shows, a movie, and professionally published books, there will be many who, like me, will simply acquire knowledge and never develop the skills of the game. While the knowledge of the pickup arts will be yet another element of pop and consumer culture, a true feeling of brotherhood cannot be bought.

APPENDIX A

Putting It All Together



A1. A venusian artist with tight game approaches a set of people in a bar, using an indirect opener. He doesn't seem needy or interested in the target, and in fact comes across as though he's just leaving. He then demonstrates higher value to the set and crosses the Social Hook Point.

A2. He continues to convey his personality using stories, humor, patterns, games, routines, palm reading, poetry, etc. This, combined with his apparent disinterest in the target, raises his social value relative to hers and intensifies her emotional state. She begins to give him indicators of interest.

A3, C1. He uses this to bait her into chasing after him to earn his affections. As she becomes more invested in the interaction, he rewards her with indicators of interest. Then he moves her to a quiet area of the bar to begin building comfort.

C2, C3. With a bounce to Mel's Diner and a time bridge for sushi the next day, he builds comfort, connection, and trust over a cumulative seven hour period. At some point early during this phase they will begin kissing. They eventually bounce to his apartment.

S1, S2, S3. Finally, he moves her into his bedroom, begins foreplay, overcomes any last-minute resistance, and has sex with her.

Mystery, *The Venusian Arts Handbook*, 67.

GLOSSARY

@close. E-mail close.

AFC (Average Frustrated Chump). A stereotypical nice guy who has no pickup skills or understanding of what attracts women; a man who tends to engage in supplicative or wimpy patterns of behavior around women he has not yet slept with.*

ASD (Anti-Slut Defense). The maneuvers some women make to avoid taking responsibility for initiating or agreeing to sex; or in order to avoid appearing slutty to the man she is with, to her friends, to society, or to herself. This can occur before or after sex, or it can prevent sex from occurring.*

Bounce. Extracting a girl/set from environment and taking to another. *Also, Venue Change or Move.***

Day2. A first date.*

DHV (Demonstration of Higher Value). A routine in which the pickup artist displays a skill or attribute that raises his worth or appeal in the estimation of a woman or group; it is intended to make him stand out from the other, less interesting men in the club.*

FB (Fuck Buddy). A woman with whom a man engages in casual, consensual sex without an emotional attachment or relationship expectations.*

Field. Any public place where a pickup artist can meet women.*

FR (Field Report). A written account of a pickup or a night out picking up women, usually posted online. Other types of reports include an OR (outing report), LR (lay report), FU (fuckup report), and TR (threesome report).*

Freeze Out. To ignore a woman to make her seek validation; usually used as a technique to counter last-minute resistance.*

Full-Close. 1. *verb*: to have sexual intercourse. 2. *noun*: sexual intercourse. *Also, fuck close, f-close, or !close.**

HB (Hot Babe/Hot Bitch). A term used by members of the seduction community to refer to attractive women. When discussing a specific woman, it is often followed by either a numerical ranking of her beauty—such as HB10—or by nickname, such as HBRedhead.*

Inner Game. The mindset, beliefs, and values that make up one's identity. Pickup artists attempt to improve their inner game in order to become more naturally adept at picking up women.

IOI (Indicator of Interest). A sign a woman gives a man that indirectly reveals she is attracted to or interested in him. These clues, generally unintentional and subtle, include leaning toward a man when he speaks, asking mundane questions to keep a conversation going, or squeezing his hand when he takes her hand in his.*

Keyboard Jockey. Someone who spends all his time behind a computer or shares info that has not been field-tested.**

Kiss-Close. 1. *verb*: to kiss or make out, with passion. 2. *noun*: a passionate kiss or makeout. *Also, k-close or close.*

LJBF (Let's Just Be Friends). A statement a woman makes to a man to indicate that she is not sexually or romantically interested in him. One can hear an LJBF speech or get LJBF'ed.*

LMR (Last Minute Resistance). An occurrence, often after kissing, in which a woman who desires a man prevents him, through words or actions, from progressing toward more intimate sexual contact, such as removing her bra, putting his hands down her pants, or penetration.*

LR (Lay Report). See Field Report.

LTR (Long Term Relationship). A girlfriend.*

mASF (Moderated ASF). The moderated Internet newsgroup alt.seduction.fast.

MLTR (Multiple Long-term Relationship). A woman who is part of a harem, one of many girlfriends a pickup artist is currently seeing and sleeping with. Ideally, the pickup artist is honest with his MLTRs and informs them that he is seeing other women.*

Move. See bounce.

Neg. 1. *noun*: An ambiguous statement or seemingly accidental insult delivered to a beautiful woman a pickup artist has just met, with the intent of actively demonstrating to her (or her friends) a lack of interest in her. For example: "Those are nice nails; are they real?" 2. *verb*: To actively demonstrate a lack of interest in a beautiful woman by making an ambiguous statement, insulting her in a way that appears accidental, or offering constructive criticism. *Also, Neg Hit.**

NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming). A school of hypnosis developed in the 1970s based largely on the techniques of Milton Erickson. Unlike traditional hypnosis, in which subjects are put to sleep, it is a form of waking hypnosis in which subtle conversational cues and physical gestures are used to influence a person on a subconscious level.*

Number-Close. 1. *verb*: to obtain a correct phone number from a woman. Note that giving a woman one's own number does not constitute a number close. 2. *noun*: a woman's phone number, obtained during the course of a pickup. *Also, #close.**

Obstacle. The person or people in a group whom the pickup artist does not desire, but whom he must win over in order to run game on the woman in the group he does desire.*

Opener. A statement, question, or story used to initiate a conversation with a stranger or group of strangers. Openers may be environmental (spontaneous) or canned (pre-scripted); and direct (showing romantic or sexual interest in a woman) or indirect (not showing interest).

Outer Game. The skills, techniques, appearance, and routines that pickup artists use while in the field. Examples of outer game include peacocking and canned openers.

Peacock. To dress in loud clothing or with flashy accoutrements in order to get attention from women. Peacocking items include bright shiny shirts, light-up jewelry, feather boas, colorful cowboy hats, or anything else that makes one stand out in a crowd.*

Pivot. A woman, usually a friend, used in social situations to help one meet other women. A pivot serves many functions: she provides social proof, she can create jealousy

in the target, she can make it easier to open difficult sets, and she can brag about the pickup artist to his target.*

RAFC (Reformed Average Frustrated Chump). A seduction student who has not yet become a pickup artist or mastered the skills offered by the community.*

Routine. A story, scripted conversation, demonstration of skill, or other piece of prepared material intended to initiate, maintain, or advance an interaction with a woman or her group.*

Sarge. 1. *verb*: To pick up women, or to go out and try and meet women. 2. *noun*: A woman who has been picked up.*

Set. A group of people in a social setting. A two-set is a group of two people; a three-set is three people, and so on. Sets may contain women, men, or both (in which case they may be referred to as mixed sets).*

SHB (Super Hot Babe/Bitch). An extremely attractive woman.*

Shit Test. A question, demand, or seemingly hostile comment made by a woman intended to gauge whether a man is strong enough to be a worthy boyfriend or sexual partner. If he takes the question, demand, or comment at face value, he fails and generally loses the opportunity to move forward in his interaction with her. Examples include telling him he is too young or old for her, or asking him to perform an unnecessary favor.*

SOI (Statement of Intent or Show of Interest). A direct comment intended to let a woman know that one is attracted to or impressed with her.*

Sticking Point (SP). A mental limitation that may affect any aspect of a pickup artist's effectiveness but usually impedes his overall improvement. Most often the term is used in reference to the primary aspect of a pickup artist's game with which he is having difficulty. Pickup artists identify sticking points in field or lay reports in order to gain advice for how to fix such a problem.

Takeaway. A pickup technique in which a man who has approached a woman and is getting along with her leaves—for as little as a few seconds or as long as a couple hours—in order to demonstrate a lack of neediness and increase her attraction to him.

*Also, False Takeaway.**

Target. The woman in a group whom the pickup artist desires and is running game on.*

TAS. The Austin Society

Three-Second Rule. A guideline stating that a woman should be approached within three seconds of seeing her. It is intended to prevent the man from thinking about the approach too much and getting nervous, as well as to keep him from creeping the woman out by staring at her for too long. *Also, 3sr.**

WBAFC (Way-Below Average Frustrated Chump). A man who is extremely unsuccessful with women, usually due to awkwardness, nervousness, and lack of experience.*

Wingman. A male friend, generally with some pickup knowledge, who assists one in meeting, attracting, or taking home a woman. A wing can help by keeping a woman's

friends occupied while the pickup artist talks to her, or by talking to the woman directly about the pickup artist's positive traits. *Also, Wing.**

* All terms marked with one asterisk are quoted directly from the glossary of *The Game*.

** All terms marked with two asterisks are quoted directly from the list of terms available at FastSeduction.com.

All terms without an asterisk are the author's own definition.

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