

50 years of pickup artists: why is the toxic skill still so in demand

In an **upmarket** bar near Oxford Circus in London, I am watching two men hit on women with all the desperation of a **doomed cavalry** charge. But without the **heroism**.

upmarket 高档的

doomed 注定的

cavalry 骑兵

heroism 英雄气概

Mike and Raj (not their real names) circle the bar, scanning for women, drinks held at an awkward right angle to their chests. When they identify a target, they approach. The women stiffen, their smiles tightening. They swirl drinks with **straws** and **chit-chat** politely before mentioning boyfriends — real or imagined.

straw 吸管

chit-chat 闲谈

I'm standing with the man coordinating this operation, the British pickup artist Johnny Cassell, as he watches Mike and Raj — his students — run drills.

For the uninitiated, pickup artists (PUAs) are typically men — who attempt to **coax** women into having sex with them through a mixture of **flattery**, psychological manipulation and **coercion**. The movement has a surprisingly long pedigree, dating back to Eric Weber's now almost 50-year-old manual *How to Pick Up Girls*. The community really exploded into the public consciousness with the publication of Neil Strauss's bestseller *The Game*.

coax 哄骗；劝诱

flattery 奉承；谄媚

coercion 强迫；强制

For the next three hours, Cassell identifies groups of women. Mike and Raj **trot** over **obediently**. "Try that blonde at the bar," he tells Raj. "You'd only be adding to her night. She looks bored." Cassell suggests going up to a woman, saying "Trick or Treat?", and then holding her wrist. At one point, Cassell sends Mike to sit with two women. "What should I say?" Mike pleads.

trot 慢跑

obediently 顺从地

In that moment, I feel sorry for Mike. It is easy to judge these men, but they are painfully *introverted* and shy. I don't think they are bad people. But they are denying women the chance to exist in public spaces without being treated as objects of desire.

introverted 内向的