

# **Done With the Bullshit**

**Dating by Worth**

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# DONE WITH THE BULLSHIT



DATING FROM WORTH  
SARA RICHARD



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*To my family...who's had to put up with a lot of bullshit.*

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# Introduction

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Let me say this upfront: This is not another fucking dating book promising to help you "catch" someone through manipulation disguised as strategy. I'm not here to tell you how to be more appealing, more accommodating, or more strategic in your approach to relationships.

This book isn't about feeding you the same tired lines that promise a fairy tale romance only to leave you feeling like you're starring in a slow-motion train wreck. It's about dismantling the absurd norms of modern dating by reclaiming your inherent self-worth. We're flipping the script on a world that tells you your value is tied to how many matches you get or how damn quickly you respond to a text. Instead, we're learning to find that worth deep within ourselves - beyond the superficial likes and empty compliments, into a space where authenticity, power, and honesty reign.

This is the story of how I stopped trying to be chosen and started doing the choosing. How I transformed from someone who treated dating like an audition for the role of "girlfriend" to someone who recognized my inherent value regardless of relationship status. My messy, non-linear journey from seeking validation to operating from worth.

If you're looking for "the rules" or "the secret" to making someone love you, I don't have them. What I do have is something more valuable: a roadmap from seeing myself as the product to recognizing myself as the customer in the dating marketplace. That shift changes everything - it's the difference between waiting to be selected and confidently making your own choices based on what truly serves your highest good.

The pages that follow aren't filled with sugar-coated platitudes or quick-fix solutions. They contain raw truths, embarrassing confessions, and hard-won wisdom from someone who's crawled through the trenches of toxic relationships and emerged with a revolutionary perspective. Consider this your wake-up call, your permission slip to walk away from half-hearted connections, and your guide to recognizing your immeasurable value in a world that constantly tries to diminish it.

## Dating By Worth: A Revolution in How We Connect

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Modern dating has become a relentless audition - a performance where you pour out your best lines to impress someone who might just ghost you or turn out to be a

walking red flag. We've been conditioned to chase that fleeting dopamine hit, desperately looking for external validation through likes, messages, and champagne-fueled hook-ups that leave you questioning every goddamn decision you've ever made.

But here's the cold, hard truth: your value isn't determined by whether someone happens to approve of you in a moment of lust or infatuation. Your worth is inherent, deep-rooted, and irrevocable - even if society and dating apps keep trying to convince you otherwise.

When you start dating from a place of self-empowerment, the entire game changes. When you realize that your value is not dependent on someone else's validation but is carved into your very DNA, you begin to see dating for what it is - a series of encounters that can either add to your joy or take away from it.

It's no secret that, as single women navigating modern dating, we've been trolled by the notion that our worth depreciates over time. But here's something more powerful: your value isn't on sale, it isn't a knock-off that loses its shine after a few bad dates - it's the real fucking deal, priceless and immovable. Recognizing this truth is the beginning of reclaiming not only your dating life but your entire sense of self.

## The Four Revelations That Changed Everything

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My journey from dating disaster to self-worth discovery follows what I think of as a relationship revelation roadmap - the path from validation-seeking to worth-based dating. This wasn't a straight journey but a series of crucial insights that fundamentally changed how I approached both relationships and myself.

This roadmap consists of four transformative insights:

*Understanding the difference between chemical reactions and genuine compatibility*

*Recognizing how we actively participate in creating our dating patterns*

*Identifying when we're settling for the absence of bad rather than the presence of good*

*Reclaiming our inherent value separate from external validation*

These revelations form the backbone of dating by worth, an approach that focuses on developing internal clarity rather than external strategy. Throughout this book, I'll share how each revelation emerged through my own messy experiences, showing how they transformed both my understanding and my choices.



## How to Use This Book

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This isn't your typical self-help manual with neat steps and tidy solutions. It's raw, messy, and real - just like actual dating. As you read, you'll encounter several recurring elements designed to help you integrate these concepts into your own journey:

**WORTH WISDOM:** *These contain distilled insights from hard-earned experience. Think of them as the advice I wish someone had tattooed on my forehead before my dating disasters.*

**WORTH REFLECTION prompts:** *Moments to pause and apply these concepts to your own life. These aren't just rhetorical questions - grab a journal and actually explore them.*

**RED FLAG/GREEN FLAG sections:** *Practical guidance to distinguish between concerning patterns and promising indicators in potential partners.*

**POWER PLAYS:** *Concrete practices to transform understanding into behavioral change.*

I recommend reading this book in order, as each chapter builds on insights from previous sections, but feel free to jump to chapters addressing your most immediate concerns. The goal isn't perfect implementation but gradual integration of worth-based thinking into your approach to relationships.

## An Invitation to Laugh, Cry, and Thrive

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If you're reading this, you're probably exhausted from the heartbreaks and the bullshit, hungry for something real, and fiercely determined not to let the chaos of modern dating define your worth. This book is your old friend - the one who calls you out on your bullshit, makes you laugh, and then offers a hard truth with a side of profane honesty.

This is not a step-by-step dating manual filled with shallow tactics, but a memoir-style guide that tells it like it is. A journey through the brutal and ultimately empowering world of dating, where every experience - no matter how exasperating - holds the potential to lead you closer to the most important relationship: the one you have with yourself.

You are the prize, babe. And this isn't just another self-help spiel - it's a declaration of war on the dated and demeaning notions of modern dating. It's time to stop wasting your energy on those who can't appreciate your authentic, unapologetic self. Time to

walk away from the bullshit, embrace your worth, and create a love life that is as vibrant, fierce, and unapologetically you as you are.

Welcome to your journey. Welcome to reclaiming your worth. Welcome to a revolution in modern dating - one ridiculous, honest, and utterly liberating step at a time.

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# Chapter 1: Swipe Left on the Bullshit

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Holy fucking hell, yes, we can talk about the raging dumpster fire that is online dating. Swiping through an endless cesspool of questionable profiles at 2 AM, wine in hand (non-negotiable), until your thumb's begging for mercy and your soul's quietly sobbing? Yeah, I feel you. That grind is real, and it's cruel.

You deserve a goddamn medal for enduring it, or at least a stiff drink stronger than wine. It's like the apps are designed to test how much you can stomach before you snap. But here's the deal: you're not alone in this hellscape. Tons of us are right there with you, cursing the same blurry selfies and half-assed bios.

I realized something that would have saved me years of frustration had I understood it sooner: Dating apps aren't designed to find you lasting love. They're designed to keep you swiping, hoping, and subscribing.

This isn't a cynical take, it's simply acknowledging the business model. Dating apps make money when you stay on them, not when you find someone and delete your profile. Understanding this changed everything about how I engaged with these platforms.

## The Truth Dating Apps Don't Want You to Know

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Here's the unvarnished truth that dating apps don't want you to know:

They're designed like slot machines, not matchmaking services. That little dopamine hit when you get a match? The anticipation when a new message pops up? The brief serotonin surge when someone extends their message window? All of it is engineered by the same brain-hacking psychologists who design addictive social media scrolls, subscription streaming binges, and free-to-play games with paid upgrades.

Think about it, have you ever found yourself still swiping at 1 AM on a Wednesday despite needing to be up at 6? That's not accidental.

Want proof? Notice how dating apps never ask in their exit surveys: "Did you find a fulfilling relationship?" They ask: "Why are you deleting your account?" Because success for them isn't your happiness, it's your continued engagement.

The entire ecosystem runs on the same attention economy as TikTok's 'just one more video' algorithm, except instead of dance trends and cooking hacks, you're consuming an endless buffet of humans reduced to their most marketable attributes. Dating apps aren't selling love any more than Instagram is selling photography, they're selling engagement metrics to investors while keeping you perpetually hopeful but never quite satisfied.

And the most insidious part? We know this, and we keep swiping anyway. Myself included.

**REALITY CHECK:** *The average user spends 90 minutes daily on dating apps, checking them 10+ times per day. That's roughly 10.5 hours per week - more time than most people spend on exercise, reading, or actual in-person socializing.*

Instead of seeing profile after profile as an endless parade of potential soulmates, I began recognizing the ecosystem for what it was: a tool that could be useful if approached with clear boundaries and realistic expectations.

I developed what I think of as conscious swiping, using the tools without being used by them:

I set a 15-minute timer when opening any dating app to prevent the infinite scroll trap

I wrote my actual dating intentions on a sticky note attached to my phone case as a reminder of my purpose

I scheduled specific days for app usage rather than allowing them to become my default boredom activity

I defined success as maintaining my boundaries rather than securing matches

This approach didn't make the apps less manipulative, but it made me less manipulable. The difference was immediately noticeable in both my emotional state and the quality of my connections.

## The Saga of Aron the Almost Perfect

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Let me tell you about Aron. Aron with his sailboat photos and his Stanford MBA and his rescue dog named Hemingway. Aron whose profile said he loved "deep conversations" and "authentic connections." I was fucking SOLD. Our messages were fantastic, witty banter, thoughtful questions, the works. We graduated to texting, then scheduled drinks at this cute wine bar downtown.

I showed up having spent an embarrassing amount of time on my appearance, hair done, wearing the black dress that gives me a gym-sculpted look without the actual gym time, subtle eye makeup that took three separate YouTube tutorials to master. And when he walked in...holy shit. He actually looked BETTER than his photos. This never happens. This is like spotting a fucking unicorn in the wild.

The first glass of wine was amazing. He was charming, attentive, asked great questions. By the second glass, I was already mentally drafting texts to my friends: "GUYS I THINK HE MIGHT BE THE ONE." I was calculating our compatibility with reckless abandon, we both loved travel, hiking, obscure indie films, and had similar political views. His hand occasionally brushed mine across the table, sending little electric currents up my arm. This was what dating apps promised but rarely delivered: genuine chemistry with someone whose online persona accurately represented their offline reality.

By the third glass, Aron leaned in close, his eyes holding mine with what I interpreted as meaningful intensity, and said, "So... I should probably mention that I'm actually still married. Technically. We're separated! Sort of. She doesn't know yet."

I smiled with all the warmth of a January doorknob and said, "That seems like first-message information, not third-glass-of-wine information, don't you think?"

The beautiful thing about delivering this line while maintaining eye contact was watching the exact moment his entitlement collided with reality. His face performed a fascinating journey from confusion to defensiveness to the dawning realization that his penis hadn't, in fact, been granted diplomatic immunity from basic decency.

I paid for my drinks and left while he was still trying to explain how "complicated" his situation was, a word that in dating profiles should automatically translate to "I'm currently in a relationship, but I consider myself remarkable enough to warrant a little deception."

As I walked home that night, heels dangling from my fingers because blisters had formed perfect little mouth-shaped wounds along my Achilles tendons, the cool pavement sending shockwaves through my stockinged feet with each step. The city smelled like it always did after midnight, a cocktail of garbage waiting for morning collection, the lingering exhaust from buses, and that indefinable electricity that hangs in urban air. A distant siren wailed, perfectly matching the alarm bells still clanging in my head as I wondered what kind of mental gymnastics Aron had performed to justify representing himself as single on dating apps.

My \$15 Cabernet still coated my tongue with its bitter tannins, a sensory reminder of how I'd swallowed my rage along with the overpriced wine. A slight drizzle began,

because of course it did, the universe never missing an opportunity for meteorological melodrama, sending that particular smell of rain hitting warm concrete rising up to meet me. I tucked my phone deeper into my pocket as the droplets speckled my dress, the screen still dark. No apologetic text. No explanation. Just the physical weight of another dating disaster settling into my shoulders like a familiar, unwelcome shawl.

The truth is, Aron wasn't malicious, just cowardly and self-deluded. And the dating app ecosystem enabled his delusion by creating a space where people can construct idealized versions of themselves without accountability. I later learned through mutual friends that Aron's wife discovered his dating profile three weeks after our meeting. They're in couples therapy now, apparently working through his "confusion about what he wants." Good luck with that, Mrs. Aron.

**WORTH WISDOM:** *When someone reveals a major lie or omission early in dating, it's not just about that specific deception - it's a preview of how they approach integrity in general. You're not rejecting them for one mistake; you're recognizing a fundamental incompatibility in values.*

## The Dating App Hall of Shame

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The thing is, Aron's not even the worst. There was Finance Bro Frank whose profile said "entrepreneur" but turned out to be a guy selling knockoff phone chargers on Amazon out of his mom's garage. His profile featured photos on yachts and in front of luxury cars, all carefully framed to hide the fact that none of these things belonged to him. Frank had mastered the art of what I call "proximity flexing" posing with expensive stuff that isn't yours to create the illusion of success.

During appetizers, he pitched me on his Bitcoin investment scheme and asked if I'd be interested in becoming a "brand ambassador" for his upcoming energy drink. The drink didn't exist yet, but he had "big plans" and thought I had "just the right look" to help promote it on Instagram. When I pointed out that my Instagram was mostly pictures of my cat and occasionally my houseplants, he seemed genuinely baffled. "But you're hot," he said, as if my physical appearance automatically qualified me for unpaid marketing work. I literally pretended to get an emergency call from my roommate.

The walk of shame back to the restaurant bathroom, fake phone pressed to my ear as I loudly discussed a nonexistent crisis, was excruciating. But not as excruciating as the moment Frank cornered me on my way out and asked if I could cover the appetizers since I was leaving early. "I'm kind of between funding rounds right now," he explained, pulling out a wallet that looked suspiciously empty.



I paid, of course, because confrontation makes me uncomfortable. But I swore that day to stop giving men like Frank the benefit of the doubt. The next time someone's profile screamed "success" but their conversation screamed "scam," I would trust the conversation.

Then there was Catfish Carl. His profile showed this objectively gorgeous man, tall, with perfect stubble and soulful eyes that suggested he probably reads poetry and knows how to make you come multiple times. We had great text chemistry for about a week before arranging to meet at a casual café for Sunday brunch.

The guy who showed up had the same name and job, but apparently the photos were from 2008, before he discovered Cheetos and forgot where the gym was located. I'm not shallow, I wouldn't care if someone gained weight if they were HONEST about it. But starting a potential relationship with that level of visual deception? No fucking thank you.

The worst part wasn't even the physical difference, it was watching him realize that I recognized the deception immediately. His face fell when our eyes met, and I saw a flash of shame quickly replaced by defensiveness. "Those pictures are still me," he insisted before I could even bring it up. "Just from a different time in my life."

We suffered through forty painful minutes of conversation where we both pretended this wasn't incredibly awkward. He told me about his job in IT, his recent trip to visit family in Michigan, his passion for craft beer, all while avoiding the elephant in the room. I nodded and smiled mechanically, wondering if he genuinely thought I wouldn't notice or if he just hoped I'd be too polite to mention it.

When I finally said I needed to go, he asked if I wanted to "do this again sometime." The audacity nearly took my breath away. "I think I'd prefer to date someone who's honest from the start," I said, trying to balance directness with kindness. His response? "Women are so shallow these days. My ex never cared about my weight."

I wanted to explain the difference between caring about someone's weight and caring about someone's honesty, but realized it would be wasted breath. Some people are so committed to their self-deception that they can't recognize the distinction.

## **COMMON DECEPTIONS**

**The Time Traveler:** Photos from a decade ago (or more) presented as current

**The Height Exaggerator:** Adding 2-3 inches to their height (but gets mad if you wear heels)

**The Relationship Status Blurrer:** "Separated," "It's complicated," or "We're just roommates now"

**The Filtered Beyond Recognition:** So heavily edited they look like a different species in person

**The Group Photo Specialist:** Only appears in groups so you can't tell which one they are (hint: never the hot one)

Oh, and we can't forget Boring Ben. Sweet guy, nice enough looking, steady job, but holy shit, talking to him was like watching beige paint dry. Every single question I asked got a one-word answer, followed by uncomfortable silence. At one point I asked him about his hobbies, and he said, "I like to relax." THAT'S NOT A HOBBY, BEN. THAT'S A BIOLOGICAL NECESSITY. I ended up drinking three margaritas just to feel something. The tragic part about Ben is that he probably wasn't actually boring, just terrified. I could see flashes of personality trying to break through his anxious exterior, like when he briefly animated while describing a concert he'd attended recently. But then, as if remembering some internal rule about remaining mysterious or cool, he'd retreat back into monosyllabic responses and nervous throat clearing.

Dating apps create this peculiar pressure to be simultaneously authentic and marketable, vulnerable and bulletproof, unique but universally appealing. For someone like Ben, the performance anxiety of a first date seemed to override his actual personality. I sometimes wonder if, in a different context, maybe working on a project together or hanging out in a group, I might have met a completely different Ben.

## The Good Guys Do Exist

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But here's the part that dating books don't tell you: I've also met some genuinely good men on these apps. Men who showed up looking like their photos, who asked thoughtful questions, who texted to make sure I got home safely. Men who were honest about what they wanted, whether that was something casual or something serious. I even dated one guy for eight months after meeting him on Bumble, and while it didn't work out long-term, I don't regret a minute of it. My friend Sarah literally met her husband on Tinder. It happens.

Take Alex, for example. We matched on Hinge after I was drawn to his unpretentious profile, just honest photos of him hiking, hanging with friends, and one adorable shot with his niece. No shirtless gym selfies, no fish pictures, no obvious attempts to showcase wealth or status. His prompt responses mentioned loving "The Good Place"

(excellent taste), making homemade pasta (useful skill), and being close with his sister (healthy family relationships).

Our first date was at a casual coffee shop that turned into a three-hour conversation so engaging we didn't notice the place was closing until the staff started stacking chairs around us. Alex asked questions and actually listened to the answers, building on what I shared rather than just waiting for his turn to talk. When I mentioned a book I'd recently read, he took out his phone and added it to his reading list, not as a performance, but out of genuine interest.

At the end of the date, he walked me to my car, made sure I got in safely, and then texted when he got home to say he'd had a great time. No games, no strategic wait period, just authentic communication. We dated for several months, and though we ultimately realized we wanted different things long-term (he was determined to move abroad; I was committed to staying near my family), the relationship itself was refreshingly drama-free.

Or take Javier, who I met during what I call my "dating science experiment" phase. After too many disappointing experiences, I decided to date completely against my usual "type." Where I normally went for intellectual, somewhat intense creative types, Javier was a laid-back contractor with a booming laugh who spent weekends volunteering with a youth basketball program. Our worlds couldn't have been more different, and yet we connected over a shared love of spicy food, terrible sci-fi movies, and long urban walks.

Javier taught me that chemistry doesn't follow a formula. It emerges from unexpected combinations of qualities, values, and energy. Though our relationship eventually ended when he reconciled with his ex (with complete transparency to me throughout the process), it opened my eyes to possibilities I'd been filtering out based on arbitrary preferences.

So yes, the gems exist among the rubble. But damn, you've got to sift through a lot of dirt to find them.

## **DATING APP HALL OF FAME: GREEN FLAGS**

**The Thoughtful Responder:** Replies to your specific points rather than generic messages

**The Consistent Communicator:** Messages have a natural rhythm without games or manipulation

**The Photo Truth-Teller:** Looks like their pictures (or better) when you meet

**The Boundary Respector:** Takes "no" gracefully in any context, big or small

**The Genuine Questioner:** Asks about you from actual interest, not as a performative technique

## The Survival Guide: Hard-Won Wisdom

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So how do you separate the Arons from the good guys? After approximately 126 first dates (I kept a spreadsheet during a particularly bleak winter, don't judge me), here's what I've learned:

First, pick your app battlefield wisely. They each have a distinct personality. Tinder is still mainly a hookup app, no matter what their marketing says. Hinge tends to attract people looking for relationships, but it's also full of people who want you to think they're looking for relationships. Bumble puts women in control of messaging first, which weeds out some (but not all) of the aggressive creeps. Match and the paid apps generally have people who are more serious about finding something real, if only because they've literally put money on it.

But beyond the general vibe of each platform, pay attention to how they structure profiles and communication. Apps that require more effort to create a profile, answering specific prompts, filling out actual information beyond photos, tend to attract people willing to invest at least minimal effort. That's a low bar, I know, but you'd be surprised how telling it can be.

I once went on a date with a guy who complained about having to answer Hinge's prompts. "It's so much work," he sighed, as if typing two sentences about his favorite travel destination had been akin to writing a doctoral thesis. Unsurprisingly, he brought that same energy to our date, minimal effort, expectation of maximum returns. When the check came, he looked at it blankly before asking if we should split it, after he'd ordered three expensive whiskeys to my single glass of wine. The correlation between effort in profile creation and effort in actual dating is remarkably consistent.

Second, your profile needs to be honest but strategic. Use recent photos that actually look like you, in various settings, not just perfectly posed selfies. Include at least one full-body shot, because surprising someone with your actual dimensions is never a good way to start. And for fuck's sake, smile in at least one picture. Nothing screams "I might have bodies buried under my floorboards" like five consecutive photos of a man scowling in dim lighting.

But honesty goes beyond photos. Be truthful about your interests, values, and what you're looking for. If casual sex is your goal, own that (tactfully). If you're looking for a life partner to raise children with, don't hide that fact out of fear of scaring people off. The people who are scared off by your authentic desires are doing you a favor by removing themselves from consideration.

The best profile I ever created was after a particularly brutal breakup when I just didn't have the energy to craft some aspirational version of myself. I posted recent, minimally filtered photos, wrote candidly about loving my work but struggling with work-life balance, and mentioned that while I'm generally optimistic, I have my cynical moments about dating. It was the most "matches" and quality conversations I'd ever had, because I was attracting people who were interested in the actual me, not some curated projection.

Write a bio that gives people something to message you about. "Ask me about the time I accidentally crashed a celebrity wedding" will get way more interesting conversations than "Work hard, play hard" (which needs to be permanently banned from the English language). Be specific about what you're into. "I spend weekends hiking with my dog and trying craft breweries" tells me more than "I like going out and staying in," which describes literally every human who has ever lived.

Specificity isn't just about being interesting; it's about creating openings for genuine connection. When someone messages you about that celebrity wedding story, you're already starting the conversation from a place of shared curiosity rather than generic small talk. And you'd be surprised how effective it is at filtering matches. People who have no interest in your passions or experiences are less likely to engage, which saves everyone time.

I once included an intentionally niche reference to my favorite obscure podcast in my profile. Only about one in twenty matches mentioned it, but those who did led to significantly better conversations and dates. Not because loving that specific podcast was so important, but because it indicated a certain overlapping sensibility and actually engaging with what I'd written rather than just responding to my photos.

When it comes to actual messaging, please, for the love of all that is holy, reference something in my profile. "Hey" is not an opener. It's verbal wallpaper. "I see you're into rock climbing, how'd you get started with that?" shows they actually looked at my profile and aren't just mass-messaging everyone with a pulse.

The effort you put into initial messages sets the tone for the entire potential relationship. I once received a thoughtful first message from a match who had noticed a book on my shelf in the background of a photo and asked if I'd enjoyed it. That

attention to detail, that willingness to look beyond the obvious, spoke volumes about how he might approach a relationship. We ended up dating for several months, and he brought that same observant thoughtfulness to our time together.

Conversely, I once made the mistake of responding to a "hey" from an extremely attractive man, reasoning that maybe he was just busy or not great at openers. Our subsequent conversation consisted entirely of me asking questions and him responding with minimal information and zero reciprocal curiosity. The date followed the same pattern, me essentially interviewing him while he offered little in return. Lesson learned: low effort in messaging translates to low effort in person.

Trust your gut, even when your vagina disagrees. If someone says something that makes you uncomfortable, pay attention. I once ignored a guy making "jokes" about how women shouldn't be allowed to vote, because he was hot and I was horny. That ended with him calling me a "typical emotional female" when I disagreed with him about a movie. Your intuition is smarter than your hormones.

This extends to any hint of disrespect or boundary-pushing in early communications. The man who gets aggressively sexual too quickly, who pressures you for photos, who makes "jokes" at your expense, or who gets angry when you don't respond immediately is showing you exactly who he is. Believe him. I remember matching with a guy who seemed perfect on paper, successful doctor, well-traveled, shared my love of obscure films. But when I couldn't meet him the same day we matched because I had previous plans, his response was telling: "Your loss. I don't usually stay on the market long."

As I drove home, I found myself laughing uncontrollably at the sheer bizarreness of the experience. What kind of grown man brings his mother on a first date without warning? What kind of mother accepts this role? And what kind of relationship were they imagining might develop from this inauspicious beginning?

**WORTH REFLECTION:** *Notice your body's reaction when someone crosses a boundary, even a small one. That tension in your shoulders, the slight nausea, the sudden headache - these are your internal warning system activating before your conscious mind has processed the threat. Practice honoring these physical signals as valid data.*

Finally, set your boundaries early and maintain them fiercely. My rule is that I don't meet anyone without at least a phone call first. Too many men are completely different in text than they are in person, and a quick 15-minute call helps me filter out the ones who can't hold a basic conversation. I also don't do first dates at either person's home. Public places only. Safety first, potential orgasms second.



These boundaries aren't just about physical safety (though that's paramount), they're about emotional protection too. When you establish and maintain clear boundaries from the start, you're setting the precedent that your needs and comfort matter. The right people will respect this. The wrong people will reveal themselves by pushing back, which is valuable information.

I once had a match who seemed promising until I suggested a phone call before meeting. His response, "I'm not into playing games or jumping through hoops" told me everything I needed to know about how he'd approach my boundaries in a relationship. Someone who sees basic getting-to-know-you steps as "hoops" is someone who feels entitled to immediate access without earning trust first. Hard pass.

## **The Reality Check: Dating Apps Are Just Tools**

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Dating apps aren't inherently good or bad, they're just tools. Like any tool, they can be used skillfully or they can take off a fucking finger if you're not careful. You wouldn't blame a hammer if you hit your thumb; don't blame the apps when humans behave like humans.

What dating apps do brilliantly is expand your pool of potential connections beyond your immediate social circle or neighborhood bar. They bring possibilities to your fingertips that you'd never encounter otherwise. The doctor who works opposite shifts from you, the artist who runs in completely different social circles, the recently relocated person who hasn't built a local network yet, these connections might never happen without digital intervention.

What dating apps do terribly is foster depth of connection in the initial stages. The gamification of dating, the endless scroll, the dopamine hit of matches, the efficiency of ruling people out based on minimal information, creates a shopping mentality that can be hard to break even when you do meet someone promising. There's always the looming question: what if someone better is just one more swipe away?

I've had to consciously combat this mentality in myself. When I meet someone with potential, I now make a point of pausing my swiping, even if we're not yet exclusive. This gives new connections room to breathe and develop without the constant comparison to an infinite stream of alternatives. It's a small discipline that has improved my experience significantly.

The most successful relationships I've seen come from dating apps, including my own current relationship, happened when both people approached the platform as simply an introduction mechanism, not the relationship itself. We matched, moved to a phone call

quickly, met in person within a week, and then focused on building a connection in the real world, not in the app.

So, the next time you're swiping late at night, remember: it's a numbers game, but you're not just a number. Be authentic, be cautious, be honest about what you want, and don't get so caught up in the hunt that you forget to enjoy your life in the meantime. I've had some of my most carefree, joyful days during periods when I wasn't dating at all.

And maybe, just maybe, update your goddamn photos more than once a decade. We'll all appreciate it.

### **WORTH-BASED DATING POWER PLAYS:**

**Conduct an app audit:** Which dating platforms align with what you're actually looking for? Delete the ones that consistently waste your time or make you feel worse after using them.

**Set conscious usage boundaries:** Create specific time limits for swiping and schedule them rather than mindlessly opening apps whenever you're bored or lonely.

**Craft an authenticity filter:** Include at least one specific interest, value, or question in your profile that matters deeply to you. Use this as a quick assessment tool for whether someone actually read your profile.

**Practice boundary articulation:** Instead of accommodating uncomfortable requests, practice kindly but firmly stating your limits: "I prefer to talk on the phone before meeting" or "I'd like to keep our first date in a public place."

**Define your non-negotiables:** Before your next swiping session, write down 3-5 absolute requirements for potential partners. Not preferences - actual necessities for compatible partnership. Use these as your filter rather than getting distracted by superficial qualities.

## **Chapter Summary**

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Dating apps are designed for engagement, not necessarily successful matching. By understanding their business model and approaching them strategically rather than emotionally, you can use these tools without being used by them. Set clear boundaries around usage time, maintain realistic expectations, and remember that your worth isn't determined by your match rate or anyone's response to your profile. The most valuable

approach is conscious swiping - using dating apps as an introduction tool while maintaining your real-life priorities and authentic self-expression. The gems are out there, but finding them requires discernment, patience, and an unwavering commitment to your own worth.

The swipe culture we've dissected is just the entry point to a much deeper dating journey. While apps might determine who we initially meet, they can't dictate how we connect. As we move from profiles to real-life encounters, we face our first critical challenge: learning to distinguish between the intoxicating rush of chemistry and the quieter signals of genuine compatibility. In our next chapter, we'll explore how first dates aren't just about making good impressions but about developing the discernment to recognize what actually serves us. Because when you're dating from worth rather than for validation, even that initial spark requires closer examination.