

The Art of the Subtle Flex

How to Date With Intention in the
Age of DMs, Swipes, and Situationships



Mark Faider

LUMERY BOOKS

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Part I: Know Yourself Before You Swipe

Self-Awareness

Introduction: Welcome to the Game Nobody Taught You

Welcome to the Game Nobody Taught You How to Play

It's 11:47 PM on a Tuesday. You're lying in bed, phone six inches from your face, blue light slowly cooking your retinas. You've typed the message four times. Deleted it four times. The first version was too eager. The second was too cold. The third had an emoji that felt unhinged in context. The fourth was perfect, but then you second-guessed the word "haha" versus "lol" versus just letting the joke land without a laugh track. You lock your phone. You unlock it. You go to their profile. You zoom in on their latest post — not to admire, but to investigate. Who's that person in the second slide? You screenshot it. You send it to the group chat with the caption: "Am I overthinking this or..."

Three friends respond in under ninety seconds. One says send it. One says absolutely do not send it. One asks if you've eaten dinner. The group chat devolves into a debate about whether the "typing" bubble means anything. Someone references a TikTok they saw about attachment

theory. Someone else sends a meme. Nobody has an answer. It is now 12:14 AM and you have not sent the message.

Welcome to modern dating.

More Tools, More Confusion

Here's the part that would be genuinely hilarious if it weren't happening to you: we have more ways to connect with other humans than at any point in the history of civilization, and we are more confused than ever. We have apps that show us thousands of faces. We have DMs that let us slide into anyone's world at any hour. We have stories, reels, posts, likes, comments, super likes, roses, and whatever new feature some product manager in San Francisco dreamed up last quarter. We have read receipts. We have "Active Now" indicators. We have the entire architecture of human connection reduced to a swipe of the thumb.

And yet.

According to Forbes Health, 78% of dating app users report dating app fatigue. Not mild annoyance — fatigue. The kind of tired that makes you delete the app on Sunday night and redownload it by Wednesday because your

coworker just got engaged and the loneliness hit different during your lunch break. Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge have all reported declining user engagement among Gen Z. People aren't just bored with the apps — they're exhausted by them. The Pew Research Center found that 30% of adults under 30 have used a dating app, but among those who have, nearly half describe the experience as mostly negative.

But here's what makes this interesting instead of just depressing: 73% of young adults still believe in lasting, committed love. That number hasn't budged. The dream isn't dead. The delivery system is just broken. People want connection — real, actual, makes-you-feel-something connection — they just don't know how to build it when every interaction is filtered through a screen, an algorithm, and seventeen layers of irony.

The Software Update

This book operates on a single thesis, and it's this: the fundamental things that make humans attracted to each other have not changed. Mystery still works. Humor still works. Vulnerability — real vulnerability, not the kind you perform for a story — still works. The tension between "I'm interested" and "I have a life" still works. Emotional intelligence, the ability to read a room (or a chat), the

confidence to be direct without being desperate — all of it still works.

What's changed is the medium. The signals are different. The timing is different. The platforms are different. The unspoken rules that govern a DM are not the same rules that governed passing a note in class, but the underlying psychology is identical. Dopamine doesn't care whether it was triggered by a handwritten letter or a fire emoji on a story. Your nervous system doesn't distinguish between someone walking toward you at a bar and someone following you back at 1 AM. The hardware is the same. It just needs a software update.

That's what this book is. A software update for how you show up, connect, and build something real in a world that has made all of it simultaneously easier and harder than it's ever been.

What This Book Is Not

Let's get a few things out of the way before we go any further.

This is not a pickup artist manual. If you're looking for "negging" techniques or scripts to manipulate someone into liking you, you bought the wrong book. Close it, return it, and maybe sit with a therapist for a few sessions to explore why that approach appealed to you.

This is not a manipulation guide. Everything in here is built on the premise that you are a fundamentally decent person who wants to connect with another fundamentally decent person. The strategies you'll find are about presenting yourself authentically, communicating effectively, and understanding the psychology behind attraction — not exploiting it.

This is not gender-specific. The principles here apply whether you're a man pursuing a woman, a woman pursuing a man, a man pursuing a man, a woman pursuing a woman, or a nonbinary person pursuing anyone. Attraction is attraction. Good communication is good communication. The examples will reflect a range of

dynamics because love, thankfully, does not require a specific configuration.

This is not a guarantee. No book can promise you a relationship. What this book can do is dramatically improve your odds by helping you understand what's actually happening in digital courtship, why you keep hitting the same walls, and what the people who seem to "get it" are doing differently. Spoiler: it's rarely about being hotter. It's almost always about being more intentional.

How to Read This Book

You can read this front to back. That's the intended experience — each section builds on the last, moving from self-knowledge to digital presence to active courtship to real-world connection. But if you're the type who flips to the chapter that speaks to your current crisis, that works too. Every chapter is designed to stand on its own.

Here's what you'll find in each one:

Every chapter opens with a scene. Not a hypothetical — a situation so specific that you'll either recognize it from your own life or from your best friend's. The kind of moment that makes you go "oh no, they're describing me." Good. That means we're in the right territory.

Every chapter includes a section called "**The Science Says.**" This is where we bring in the research. Not to be academic, but because the science of attraction is genuinely fascinating and surprisingly practical. You'll see data from Hinge, Bumble, Tinder, Pew Research, the Kinsey Institute, and peer-reviewed psychology journals. The goal isn't to make you feel like you're reading a textbook — it's to give you the confidence that the advice isn't just vibes. It's backed by something.

Every chapter includes "**Don't Be That Person**" — two or three cautionary examples delivered with love and humor. These are the mistakes everyone makes, described in enough detail that you'll either laugh or wince. Ideally both. The point isn't to shame anyone. The point is to hold up a mirror and say, "Hey, we've all been here, and here's why it doesn't work."

Every chapter includes "**Try This**" — a concrete, actionable exercise you can do today. Not "manifest your soulmate" — actual, practical things. Rewrite your bio. Send a specific kind of message. Track your emotional reactions for a week. Small moves that compound over time.

And every chapter ends with a line designed to stick with you. Because if you're going to remember one thing from each chapter, it should hit.

The Map

The book is organized into sections that mirror the actual arc of modern dating:

Part I: Know Yourself Before You Swipe. Before you open an app or craft a DM, you need to understand your own patterns. Your attachment style, your actual desires (versus the ones social media sold you), and the energy you're projecting whether you realize it or not. This is the foundation. Skip it at your own risk.

Part II: Build Your Presence. Your digital presence is your first impression, your opening line, and your reputation all rolled into one. We'll cover everything from photos and bios to stories and reels — how to be interesting without trying, how to show up without showing off, and how to build the kind of online presence that makes someone think, "I want to know more about this person."

Part III: The Digital Courtship. The actual mechanics of connection. The strategic like. The DM that doesn't make them cringe. How to build tension through text. How to move from the app to real life without the weird transition energy. This is where strategy meets execution.

Part IV: Real Life. Because eventually — and this is the part people forget — you have to actually be in the same

room as another human being. First dates, reading signals, what to do when the vibe is there, what to do when it isn't, and how to handle the murky in-between.

Part V: Define It or Lose It. The conversation nobody wants to have. How to navigate the "what are we?" moment, how to handle situationships, when to walk away, and how to build something that actually lasts past the three-month mark.

One More Thing

The title of this book includes the word "flex," and I want to be clear about what that means here. A flex, in its worst form, is about showing off — performing status, attractiveness, or desirability for an audience. That's not what we're talking about.

A *subtle* flex is different. It's the quiet confidence of someone who knows who they are and doesn't need to announce it. It's the person whose profile makes you curious, not because it's trying to impress you, but because it feels real. It's the DM that lands because it's specific and genuine, not because it follows a formula. It's the date where someone is fully present, asks good questions, and makes you laugh without performing.

The subtle flex is about signal over noise. In a world that is extraordinarily loud — where everyone is broadcasting, performing, curating, and competing for attention — the most attractive thing you can do is be intentional. Know what you want. Communicate it clearly. Show up as yourself, not as a character you think someone else wants to see.

That's the game. And no, nobody taught you how to play it. The rules were never written down because they keep changing — new apps, new norms, new slang, new unspoken expectations every six months. But the principles underneath? Those are old. Those are human. And once you see them clearly, the whole thing gets a lot less confusing and a lot more fun.

So put the phone down for a second. Not forever — we're going to need it. But just for a moment, take a breath. You're about to learn how to do this differently.

And that message you've been drafting since 11:47 PM? By the time you finish this book, you won't need the group chat to tell you whether to send it.

You'll already know.

Chapter 1: Your Attachment Style Is Running Your DMs

Chapter 1: Your Attachment Style Is Running Your DMs

They haven't texted back in forty-seven minutes. You know it's been forty-seven minutes because you checked. Twice. The first time, you told yourself you were just opening the app to check something else. The second time, you didn't even bother with the excuse. You just stared at the chat, at the little "Delivered" sitting underneath your message like a tiny gravestone for your dignity. You started composing a follow-up. Something casual. Something that says "I'm not bothered" while being the most bothered you've been since your Spotify Wrapped revealed you listened to the same sad song 347 times.

Then you catch yourself. You put the phone down. You pick it up. You put it down again. You open Instagram to distract yourself, but they just posted a story and now you're spiraling about why they have time to post a story but not respond to your text. You screenshot the story. You send it to your best friend with "???" and nothing else. Your friend responds with "breathe" and a glass of wine emoji. You do not breathe.

If this sounds like a personal attack, good. It means we're starting in the right place.

The Operating System You Didn't Choose

Here's something that will either blow your mind or confirm what you already suspected from your third glass of wine and a deep scroll through psychology TikTok: the way you act in relationships — the texting anxiety, the pulling away, the hot-and-cold energy, the overthinking — most of it was programmed into you before you were old enough to hold a phone.

Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in the mid-twentieth century, long before anyone had to decode the emotional subtext of a thumbs-up reaction. The basic idea is this: the way your caregivers responded to your needs as an infant created a blueprint for how you relate to people for the rest of your life. If your needs were consistently met, you learned that closeness is safe. If they were met inconsistently, you learned to be hypervigilant. If they were rarely met, you learned to not need anyone. If the person meeting your needs was also the source of your fear — well, that creates its own special kind of chaos.

This isn't therapy-speak for the sake of being trendy. This is the underlying code that runs every time you decide whether to double-text, how long to wait before responding, whether to bring up your feelings or pretend you don't have any, and what you do at 2 AM when someone you like goes quiet.

The Science Says: According to research cited in *Attached* by Amir Levine and Rachel Heller, roughly 50% of the population is secure, 20% is anxious, 25% is avoidant, and the remaining percentage falls into the disorganized category. But here's what's wild — on dating apps, the distribution skews heavily. Secure people tend to find relationships and leave the apps. What remains is a disproportionate concentration of anxious and avoidant people, bouncing off each other like emotional pinballs. Hinge's own internal data suggests that Gen Z men in particular report a fear of being "too much" — texting too often, showing too much interest, coming on too strong — which is textbook anxious-avoidant behavior wrapped in a hoodie.

The Four Players

Let's meet them. And yes, you're going to recognize yourself. That's the point.

The Anxious Attachment

You double-text in three minutes. Not because you have something new to say, but because the silence is physically uncomfortable. You check "Active Now" like it's a stock ticker. If they were active six minutes ago but haven't responded, you've already constructed three theories, two of which involve another person. A period at the end of a sentence — not an exclamation point, not an emoji, just a period — reads as hostility. "Sounds good." means something is deeply wrong. "Sounds good!" means everything is fine. The exclamation point is doing the work of an entire emotional support system.

You over-give early. You're planning the third date during the first. You've already imagined introducing them to your mom, not because you're delusional, but because when you feel something, you feel it at full volume and you don't have a dimmer switch. The idea that someone might not match your intensity isn't just disappointing — it feels like rejection, even when it's just someone being a normal human with a job and a life and a phone that sometimes dies.

Your superpower: you're emotionally available and you know what you want. Your kryptonite: you interpret

everything through a lens of "are they leaving?" and that energy is palpable, even through a screen.

The Avoidant Attachment

You leave people on read and genuinely don't understand why they're upset about it. You were busy. Or you saw the message and meant to respond and then forgot. Or — and this is the one you won't say out loud — responding felt like a commitment, and commitment felt like a wall closing in, and so you just... didn't.

You're incredible at the talking phase. Charming, witty, just flirtatious enough to keep someone interested. But the moment it starts to feel real — the moment someone asks what you're looking for, or suggests meeting your friends, or texts you "good morning" three days in a row — something in your chest tightens and you need space. You don't call it running. You call it needing space. From the outside, it looks identical.

You've turned off read receipts. You post stories but don't respond to replies for hours. You like the idea of being desired but the reality of being known feels dangerous, and you couldn't tell someone why if they asked, because the whole point is that you don't examine it that closely.

Your superpower: independence, self-sufficiency, not losing yourself in relationships. Your kryptonite: you confuse emotional unavailability with strength, and by the time you realize you actually liked someone, they've already stopped trying.

The Disorganized Attachment

Monday: "Text me when you get home, I want to know you're safe." Wednesday: "Why are you texting me so much, I need space." Friday: "You didn't text me all day, do you even care?"

If this sounds exhausting, imagine living inside it. Disorganized attachment — sometimes called fearful-avoidant — is what happens when closeness was both desired and dangerous in your formative years. You want intimacy desperately and you're terrified of it simultaneously. You pull people in and then push them away and then wonder why they look confused. You crave consistency from others while being wildly inconsistent yourself, and the worst part is you can see the pattern but you can't seem to stop it.

On apps, this shows up as intense initial connection followed by sudden withdrawal. You match, you vibe, you text for hours, you feel a spark, and then you ghost — not

because you don't like them but because liking them triggered something you don't have language for yet. Or you go the other way: you test them. You create small conflicts to see if they'll stay. They usually don't, which confirms the thing you were afraid of, which perpetuates the cycle.

Your superpower: emotional depth and intensity that, when channeled, creates profound connection. Your kryptonite: the channeling part.

The Secure Attachment

You respond to texts when you see them, or when you're free, and you don't agonize about the timing in either direction. If someone takes a few hours to reply, you assume they're busy — because that's usually why people take a few hours to reply. Revolutionary concept.

You say what you mean. If you like someone, you tell them. If you're not feeling it, you communicate that too, kindly and directly. You don't play games because games feel like a waste of time, and you don't keep score because keeping score feels exhausting. You have a life — friends, hobbies, ambitions — and a relationship is something you want to add to that life, not something you need to complete it.

Secure attachment is, frankly, the new sexy. It doesn't make for dramatic TikTok content. Nobody's going viral for "I communicated my needs clearly and my partner listened and we had a calm, productive conversation." But in a dating landscape full of mixed signals, breadcrumbing, and three-month situationships that end with a slow fade, the person who is emotionally consistent and genuinely available is the most attractive person in the room.

The Science Says: Research from the Kinsey Institute suggests that secure individuals report higher relationship satisfaction across all metrics — emotional, physical, and communicative. They're not more attractive in a conventional sense. They're just easier to love, and they make the people around them feel safe. In a dating market defined by uncertainty, safety is a flex.

The Test

Here's a quick one. No scoring, no categories, just honesty.

When someone you're interested in doesn't text back for several hours, your first instinct is to:

A) Check when they were last active. Reread the conversation. Wonder what you said wrong. Consider sending a follow-up.

B) Barely notice. You were doing other things. You'll respond to their response eventually.

C) Feel a flash of anxiety followed immediately by a desire to pull back. If they're going to be distant, you'll be more distant.

D) Assume they're busy. Check back later. Carry on with your day.

If you answered A, lean anxious. B, lean avoidant. C, lean disorganized. D, secure. And if you answered some combination depending on who the person is and how much you like them — congratulations, you're human. Attachment styles aren't fixed boxes. They're tendencies that shift based on context, history, and how much wine you've had.

How Each Style Self-Sabotages on Apps

Anxious on apps: You over-invest in matches before meeting. You craft the perfect opening message, spend twenty minutes on it, and then check every three minutes to see if they responded. You swipe right on people who seem emotionally unavailable because the uncertainty feels familiar, even though it makes you miserable. You unmatched

- **Frank Ocean** — "Pink + White" (everything feels heightened and fragile)
- **Sabrina Carpenter** — "Feather" (deciding you're worth more, choosing with intention)
- **Dominic Fike** — "Why" (the vulnerability of letting someone in)
- **SZA** — "The Weekend" (complicated feelings, honest about all of them)
- **Chappell Roan** — "Good Luck, Babe!" (the ache of wanting something to work out)
- **Claire** — "Bags" (standing at the door, hoping they ask you to stay)
- **Steve Lacy** — "Playground" (realizing this isn't casual anymore)
- **Billie Eilish** — "Wildflower" (sitting with uncertainty, choosing to stay anyway)

* * *

Phase 4: The Real Thing

The "okay, I'm in" phase.

- **Frank Ocean** — "Self Control" (love that's bigger than your ability to contain it)
- **SZA** — "Snooze" (choosing someone, fully and fearlessly)
- **Tyler, the Creator** — "GONE, GONE / THANK YOU" (the whole emotional arc in one track)
- **Sabrina Carpenter** — "Skin" (intimacy, trust, no more walls)
- **Billie Eilish** — "everything i wanted" (the relief of being understood)
- **Chappell Roan** — "After Midnight" (when the night feels infinite and so does the feeling)
- **Dominic Fike** — "Vampire" (love that changes you, willingly)
- **Claire** — "I Wouldn't Ask You" (quiet devotion, no performance needed)

* * *

How to Use This

Put it on while you're getting ready for a date. While you're walking home after one. While you're lying on your floor at

midnight thinking about someone who might be thinking about you.

Music doesn't give you answers. But it gives you company while you're figuring them out.

* * *

The right song at the right moment doesn't change the story. It just reminds you that you're in one.

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