

On Extremes: A 2011 Dating Retrospective

A month ago, my friend went on a diet. This wasn't a run-of-the-mill eating modification plan, this was balls-out life change guaranteeing drastic changes in metabolism. My friend visited a nutritionist, who subjected him to long evaluations and dictated an elaborate new eating plan. In addition to the big eating shift, my friend had to, each morning, inject himself in the stomach with some fancy herbal concoction his nutritionist cooked up. He couldn't consume alcohol, he couldn't veer even a moment from his new eating schedule; he couldn't do much of anything.

Although I was sad to temporarily lose my partner in crime, I was fascinated. Would his dramatic about-face afford him immediate gratification? This wasn't mere *sacrifice*; my friend abandoned most comforts in the pursuit of a tangible, new body. (He gave himself *injections*.) A few weeks in, frustrated by a stagnant, unforgiving bathroom scale, my friend gave up, declaring the entire process a sham. The night of the big break, we sauntered up 21st and treated ourselves to a late night pizza party. If he was falling off the wagon, by God, he'd fall off right.

Like my dieting friend, we all sometimes operate in extremes. This past year, during my first real foray into dating after a long-



lady about town

BY DANIEL BORGEN

term, live-in apocalypse, I decided to upend my romantic approach. For as long as I can remember, I've always been unapologetic about my shortcomings—perceived and otherwise, favoring a blunt love-it-or-leave-it mantra. *I speak my mind; deal with it.* This time, I'd be wide open to criticism; I'd listen to it and fix the bad stuff. I'd mind my tongue and overcompensate for friends' behavior. I'd dutifully tend to perception.

My about-face, not surprisingly, failed. I spent so much time apologizing for—let's face it—being myself that I was convinced there were irreparable, fatal flaws in my dating psyche. There's no person to blame here, *per se*; there's no need for a laundry list of transgressions. The choice in approach was mine, as were the consequences. I chose to suspend a certain amount of disbelief, embrace a dash of self-delusion, and tell myself little white lies, determined to fill a niche I was never meant to occupy.

Shortly after that relationship added itself to the large, growing pile of also-rans, Grindr announced its migration to Android phones. Until then, I railed against it pub-

licly and privately, protesting a bit too much. Like how Larry Craig and Ted Haggard rail against gay sex. I was uncomfortable with what it represented, with how it and similar mediums contributed to the slow death of the gay bar. I thought it killed courting. I cringed at the make-a-man notion; pick the body, face and sexual position you're craving without being bothered by social settings.

But once I had it—in a flash, I moved from hate to love. I embraced courtship from the comfort of my living room couch. Maybe there is something to be said for knowing beforehand whether the gentleman courier who's buzzing your front door is going to pound you silly, demand you be the jackhammer or engage in a long night of switch-hitting. Now, I not only acquiesce to the power of Grindr, I advocate for it. It's convenient and fruitful. Even when I'm blocked immediately post-coitus. *Hey, why can't I message him anymore? I wanted to tell him I had a good time.*

To balance get-sex-quick schemes, I dabbled with Match.com. I've heard myriad stories—with varying levels of success. From

the moment you sign up, though, you know *this* will be different; you're hit with a barrage of questions and probing queries aimed at pulling the real you out of you. *No distorted observations about self here, I'm sure.* Profiles are pages-long descriptions, detailing every bit of neuroses and off-putting observations. Things you'd never dream of bringing up in initial conversations. But there it is, all before your eyes. Every bit. Then, the emails come; it's like getting 10 mates in 10 minutes. I found it all overwhelming.

During a party on Mississippi a few weeks back, a friend told me word on the street is I'm ready to wife it down after a date. While I'd argue my experience speaks to the contrary, that alarming perception gave me pause. But if I've learned anything this past year, I think it's this: I'd rather make mistakes—even extreme ones—than avoid effort and chance. I'd rather look silly—occasionally—than perpetually too cool to be bothered. And I'd certainly rather be romance's fool than lament not ever exerting effort, no matter how far outside comfort zones that sometimes drags me. And above all else, I think I've finally dumped pretense for good. ☐

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