



18 years
ago she wrote
The Rules
of dating

But are they
relevant now?

Alexei Sayle, the original Mr Angry, is back

‘Men can’t be chased. It’s biology’

In 1995, a book laid down the rules to find Mr Right. Now updated for the digital era, Tim Teeman asks if they still work

Every diet book could be reduced to “eat less rubbish and exercise”, then the feverish pages of infamous dating book *The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets of Capturing The Heart of Mr Right* could be condensed to its intended straight female audience thus: “Never pursue, be pursued”.

Its thirtysomething authors, Sherrie Schneider and Ellen Fein, taught a generation of women to lie in the bath before a date intoning “I am a beautiful creature unlike any other”, then not to return the man’s calls. Some two million women in 27 countries bought their advice.

But that was 1995, and this is now, the era of Facebook, texting and naked photo messages that dissolve in seconds. What could Schneider and Fein possibly have to say to this generation? The answers are detailed in *The New Rules: The Dating Do’s and Don’ts for the Digital Generation*. The new rules contain such advice as not to put it all “out there” on social media (“like walking around naked”), with videos of you having sex ending up online, and not to respond to late night calls, texts or “booty calls” (“We don’t answer the phone after 10.30pm,” Schneider says). Do place an online dating ad — but then wait for it to be answered. Never answer ads. “Women can chase apartments and jobs, but not men. It’s biology,” says Fein, now 55. Every chapter comes with a plethora of capital letters: Don’t Sext or Send a Guy Anything You Wouldn’t Want Him To Have If You Broke Up; Stay Away From His Facebook Profile.

After four e-mails if he hasn’t asked you out, forget it. Don’t text first. Age governs how quickly you reply to texts: a 20-year-old should leave it an hour, a 50-year-old four hours. Never see him more than three times a week. “Rules girls always have things to do. It’s not anti-feminist, or tricky, you’re just in control,” says Schneider, who at 53 still has long, glossy brown hair, tight jeans and is a UK size 8. She works out every day and hasn’t had surgery or Botox: “I drink lots of water.”

Schneider and I meet at a Bloomingdale’s store in New Jersey where she meets clients, “high-powered women” who spend \$350 (£220) an hour, or \$1,500 for a package makeover of hair, wardrobe and advice: “They’re upset, they haven’t had a boyfriend for years or haven’t been proposed to. We tell them they should look like they have a fabulous life.” Schneider and Fein have seen about 1,000 clients and claim a 100 per cent success rate. “Work can only make you so happy,” Schneider claims. “Women want to be fulfilled by a partner and children. Take that away and they’re devastated.”

While she and Fein “believe in equality in the workplace, men and women are different romantically”. Their advice was old-fashioned even in the Nineties — the germ of *The Rules* came to Fein and Schneider via a friend’s grandmother, and they followed it themselves. “Ellen played hard to get with her husband and so did I,” says Schneider, who dated “around 50 men, five seriously”, sleeping with “a handful”, before she married her husband 18 years ago. A week before her husband proposed he asked about the book she was writing and “almost fell off his chair” when she told him about *The Rules*, but “totally agrees with it”, she adds. He was a “player” and she walked away when they first met. He went after her, then “it went like clockwork”. He calls her “ten times a day”, which apparently isn’t tiresome.

“I would like women to be able to ask men out, but the reality is very different,” Schneider says. “We never thought feminism meant being able to chase a guy. We thought it was equal pay. Our strength is quiet and powerful: it doesn’t come from being aggressive, but from managing relationships.”

It hasn’t been as smooth for Fein. She divorced her first husband Paul Feingertz, citing abandonment, in 2000 after 16 years of marriage; she has a daughter aged 21 (“She grew up naturally doing *The Rules*”) and a 25-year-old son. In 2008 she remarried. “We grew apart, it doesn’t disprove *The Rules*,” Fein says of her divorce. “I moved on pretty quickly. My second husband (Lance) knew about *The Rules*. I did them on him. He thought it was cute and funny.”

“We have a lot of clients who are divorced and we help them to remarry,” says Schneider brightly. “You can be married, then want a different kind of husband. You may want a mover and shaker at 25 and a soulmate at 40.”

But whatever age their client, she will be advised to have long, straight hair. This rule is immune to fashion. Quite simply, men like straight hair. They don’t like curly. “And if a man doesn’t like your look, he’ll leave you for a girl whose look he does like,” Fein says.

FRONT COVER:TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER CHRISTOPHER LANE, BELOW: TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER CHRISTOPHER LANE AND CHRIS BOTT, COURTESY OF BLOOMINGDALE’S SHORT HILLS



Authors Sherrie Schneider, left, and Ellen Fein



What if a woman likes her short or curly hair? “If a woman does what she wants — whether talking to a guy or eating a piece of cake — it is the antithesis of discipline,” Schneider says. “Many women are doing what they want and failing miserably, having one-night stands and so on. That’s fine if you want short-term gratification ...” Her frown ends the sentence.

She and Fein must hate Lena Dunham’s drama *Girls*, featuring a group of twenty-something Brooklyn women in vintage dresses having rubbish sex. “They think they have all the time in the world,” says Schneider. “You’ll sleep with guys, get hurt, but you won’t lose fertility years. In your thirties it’s suicide to do that.” “They break every Rule,” Fein roared. “I saw one character chasing — no! no! — and then having sex with a guy who didn’t respect her. It was like watching a funeral.” Schneider’s 16-year-old daughter knows *The Rules* “instinctively”, she says.

Fein says that if *The Rules* became a TV show “it would be very boring: go to school, work, see friends, have dinner, don’t drink too much or jump into bed with someone. This isn’t *Girls* or *Sex and The City*: respect yourself, respect your body.” She has pinpointed *The Rules*’ best resonance. “You can sleep with a guy on a first date, but afterwards don’t ask ‘Am I gonna hear from you?’ Leave him alone,” advises Schneider. “Clinginess does damage.” Ideally, when should you sleep with him? “After three months. If you’re 17, wait a year. You want him to fall in love with your soul.” Never accept business cards, says Fein, you might be tempted to call him: “They must take your number.” Men call when they are ready, Schneider says.

“If a woman does what she wants it is the antithesis of discipline

Do’s & don’ts

Do not respond to late night calls, texts or “booty calls” (don’t answer the phone after 10.30pm)

Do place an online dating ad but never answer a man’s ad

Don’t “sext” or send a guy anything you wouldn’t want him to have if you broke up

After four e-mails, if he hasn’t asked you out, forget it

Don’t text first

If you are 20, leave it an hour to reply to a text. If you’re 50, leave it four hours

Do not put it all “out there” on social media

Never see him more than three times a week

Never accept a business card. They must take your number

Never go Dutch. He should take you out

You can’t get a guy by chasing him

It doesn’t seem Rules-woman exercises much agency. “Ellen and I are feminists,” Schneider insists. “We started our own company. The problem is women think they can do in the romantic arena what they do in a corporate arena. Women go on dates and ask men their astrological sign, his five-year plan, ‘here’s my phone number and e-mail’, tell him about past relationships, losing a job: the date becomes therapy. We’re not saying, ‘Be brainless’, just talk less. Men will marry the girl who doesn’t give them the time of day.”

What’s feminist about insisting on short skirts and busty tops? “We know what works with men,” says Schneider, with a shrug. “Oh, never go Dutch. Even if he has no money and you have a mansion he should take you out for pizza.” If you’re suppressing the real you, that’s not good. “By the time the guy proposes or says ‘I love you, we’re exclusive’, you can share more,” Schneider says. Can’t a woman be sexually assertive? “No,” Schneider says. “These women are like Samantha in *Sex and the City*. *Sex and the City* girls aren’t Rules girls. You can’t get a guy by chasing him. We tell women a man is not your friend. Until he proposes he has the power to hurt you by never calling, by sleeping with you and never calling. Men can be cruel, not because they want to be — they just don’t love you.”

Gay and lesbian readers are advised in the *Rules* books to do the same as straight women. But as that is so gender- and hetero-specific it doesn’t follow. “In every gay relationship, like Ellen DeGeneres’s, there’s a more masculine one, the mover-shaker,” says Schneider. But Portia de Rossi, DeGeneres’s wife, is a full-time actress. “Yes, but Ellen was the pursuer.” How does she know? “It’s just what we read. . . . In every relationship Ellen has been the one to get hurt, like by that partner (Anne Heche) who decided she wasn’t gay.” How does Schneider know? “From all I read Ellen is the one who needs to do *The Rules*. Portia’s gorgeous, Ellen’s the more masculine one.” Because she likes to wear shirts and trousers? After this, Schneider says: “We believe women are usually more devastated in relationships, so they need to read *The Rules*.”

Don’t men feel hoodwinked if their partners turn out to be different to who they’ve been dating? “We’re not being manipulative, we’re being our best selves,” Schneider trills. “My husband could see I was a nice Jewish girl, not an axe murderer on the side.”

How soon should you date after a break-up? “What are you doing tonight? The best way to get over a guy is to get another,” Schneider says. If you’re widowed? “Maybe a year.” Divorced? “You should be out there. He’s probably marrying the woman he cheated on you with.” Go to singles nights, not museums: “You won’t find marriage-minded guys there.” We pass some paisley trousers. “No,” cautions Schneider. “Not good. Women shouldn’t dress for other women. Men want sexy stuff, action and lights. Every guy wants the ‘It Girl!’”

“You can trash us,” Schneider concludes, “but this works.” What if *The Rules* don’t feel like “you”? “Fake it,” Schneider says. And that, in a blur of tight dresses, long hair and kittenish game-playing, is *The Rules* all over.

The New Rules: The Dating Do’s and Don’ts for the Digital Generation (Piatkus, £9.99, or £9.49, free P&P, from Times Bookshop, 0845 2712134)

Musicals are utterly idiotic, every last one of them Sarah Vine



Having triumphed at the American box office, the new big-screen adaptation of *Les Misérables* opened last Friday in the UK to a record-breaking weekend. It pulled in more than £8.1 million (trouncing *Mamma Mia!*’s £6.6 million opening), and accounted for the lion’s share of cinema attendances, nearly 40 per cent. It is, by any standards, an astonishing success.

Directed by Tom Hooper, it stars Hugh Jackman (above with Isabelle Allen as young Cosette) as the convict Jean Valjean, Anne Hathaway as tragic heroine Fantine and Russell Crowe as super-baddy Javert.

Audiences don’t just love it, they are going crazy for it. Literally. The reaction in cinemas countrywide has been hysterical: people sobbing and clutching each other, giving standing ovations and applauding riotously. On YouTube, a hilarious video is doing the rounds showing an American cinemagoer gabbling incoherently with tears streaming down her cheeks, while hashtag Les Mis is positively trend-tastic on Twitter.

Myself, I haven’t seen it and I don’t have any intention of doing so. The online leakages of Hathaway having her hair cut off are quite enough, as is Samantha Barks warbling *On My Own* in a gigantic puddle while Crowe looks stern in a hat and Jackman pulls a boat through the sea.

Like the stage version, the film clearly has about as much dramatic depth and nuance as Graham Norton in a birthing pool. Besides, it’s a musical and there are few things I hate more than musicals. I know what you’re going to say: what about *Guys and Dolls*, what about *The Sound of Music*, what about *West Side Story*? Sorry, folks, utterly idiotic, every single last one of them. Nothing more than a bunch of



stage-school brats doing jazz hands and affecting stupid accents. I’d rather spend an evening listening to my son’s One Direction CD.

Over the years, friends have tried to persuade me of the error of my ways. And I have tried, really I have. I went to see the *Lion King* (that *Hakuna-sodding-Matata* number made me want to gnaw the armrest from my seat). *Cats* was just a sea of Spandex. *Chess*, *Chicago*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Mamma Mia!*: I’ve tried them all and loathed every last one.

Why this should be, I don’t know. After all, I’ve married a man who cannot listen to *Edelweiss* without springing a leak, and my children appear to have inherited similar tendencies. I’ve spent many an evening mystified at one end of the sofa, feeling like some kind of emotional alien because the sight of a singing novice fails to move me to tears. Perhaps I’m just missing that crucial chromosome (you know, the one in the Lycra top). I’m like the king of Swamp Castle in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, with the drippy son who “just wants to SING!”: I refuse to believe there’s ever a point in a drama where strings need to swell and a person has to express the plot through song.

But perhaps the most significant factor is an incident ten years ago that even now sends a shiver down my spine. I was on a train with friends, returning from a skiing holiday. There had been some drinking. One of them began to sing: “It won’t be easy / You’ll think it strange / When I try to explain how I feel / That I still need your love / After all that I’ve done. . . .” Drunkenly, tunelessly, the rest of the carriage began to join in and the torture continued all the way across France. The pain, let me tell you, was indescribable. So when I say musicals don’t move me to tears, I’m not being honest. They do, but just not for the same reasons as everyone else.

“I’m an emotional alien because the sight of a singing novice fails to move me to tears

Puppy love: not just for Christmas

A funny thing happened to me the other day. In the morning I almost died choking on a sausage (it would have been a most undignified way to go). That evening I acquired a puppy. I suspect the two are related: I’d been planning on getting another dog for ages, just hadn’t made the move. Near-asphyxiation has a way of focusing the mind.

It’s a thoroughly silly animal, a ten-week-old bichon frisé. Looks like a small sheep and smells a bit like one too (poo balls: not something I’ve previously encountered, since my existing dog is a very short-haired Jack Russell). I was alerted to him by a friend who told me that a family in her street wanted to re-home their puppy. A classic tale: he was a Christmas present but they had never owned a dog before. They had no idea “how much work it would be”. Clearly they had never seen the bumper sticker.

When I got him home and had a good look at him through my reading glasses (yes, I have become the sort of person who examines dogs through a lorgnette), I realised he was filthy and teeming with fleas. At the vet’s it became clear he hadn’t had a single jab or been wormed. If you put him on the floor he would immediately run and hide behind the nearest piece of furniture, his little legs scrabbling to get himself out of sight. I don’t think his previous owners were cruel to him, just completely out of their depth and, I’m sorry to say, very stupid.

No matter: he’s settling in nicely. The house is covered in puppy paraphernalia and the children are over the moon. They’ve named him Snowy after the Tintin dog, having overruled my suggestion that we call him Boris on account of his unruly blond hair. Mars (the Jack Russell) has been cautiously welcoming, although when the ooohing and ahhing starts he looks at me as if to say, “You humans are so damn gullible.”

Mostly, though, this new dog’s presence has convinced me more than ever of the need for some sort of regulation on dog ownership. Responsible owners won’t mind having to buy a licence and, with luck, any bad ones will be discouraged enough to bother in the first place.

For luxury, it’s got to be Llandudno

Forget the Four Seasons or the Ritz: next time I fancy a luxury hotel holiday I’ll be off to Llandudno. For the seaside town in north Wales is home to the Lauriston Court Hotel, which has just been voted the best hotel in the world for service by users of TripAdvisor.

Owned and run by Carol-Lynn and Ian Robins, examples of this establishment’s excellent hospitality include bacon sandwich packed lunches, giving guests a lift to the theatre when it’s raining — and even helping guests to get dressed. All that from £35 a night. You’d barely get a cup of tea and a boiled egg for that in some hotels.