



Match Points

FINDING LOVE IS HARD WORK, EVEN WITH HELP FROM EXPERTS

By MEG DONAHUE

MY NAME IS MEG, AND I'M YOUR PERENNIAL SINGLE FRIEND. You know, the one who helped you move, threw an epic bachelorette party for you, and went to a company cookout with your cousin Brad after his date dumped him (you still owe me big for that). But I'm thirty-one now, and my dating history (Brad included) has been a bit pathetic. So I turned to two local dating experts: Julia Jane, a blonde, finely kempt executive matchmaker (i.e., she connects people in Ted Turner's tax bracket) and author of *Secrets to Date By*, and Sarah Kathryn Smith, the chatty brunette founder of the Eight at Eight Dinner Club and One on One Matchmaking.

I joined Jane and Smith for lunch and soon discovered that meeting a dating expert is like having your bikini line waxed: It's painful, embarrassing, and too intimate for strangers. They immediately tried to mine out why I'm still single, grilling me about my life, likes and dislikes, and dating history. Finally, Smith pointed at my cleavage and said, "Well, you're already doing something right." It unnerved me a bit that both Smith's and Jane's relationship advice could be pulled, word-for-word, out of dialogue from *Mad Men*. "Men work harder to have more money, more power . . . to have a wife, a better life, a better family," said Jane, a divorcee now newly engaged. "Same with a woman—we want to be beautiful and the best we can be to attract the best person." It's a little depressing to equate love with a primal need for your genes to live on, but I paid attention to Jane's rules: You must not initiate conversation. Instead, get men's attention by means of a "sexy



MEET YOUR MATCH

EVENTS

Atlanta Pride Festival

Unity puts everyone in the mood to meet new people, and that's the theme of Atlanta Pride. Though its timing and location have recently been in flux due to last year's drought, more than 300,000 bisexuals, gay men, lesbians, and transgender people typically descend on Piedmont Park for the Pride festivities, which include live music, a parade, and general merriment that spills into the surrounding Midtown bars and restaurants. atlantapride.org

Q100 The Bert Show's Bitter Ball

Valentine's Day is for couples—that is, unless you're at Q100's Bitter Ball. This year, more than 2,000 singles converged on the Velvet Room for the annual why-sulk-at-home event, which includes a "Naughty Photo Booth" and screens around the club that display text messages between attendees looking to make a love connection. [Valentine's Day weekend, q100atlanta.com](http://Valentine'sDayweekend.q100atlanta.com)

Corndogorama

This annual festival in the East Atlanta Village especially promotes mingling with partner-based games. So grab a good-looking stranger and enter the watermelon toss at this two-day indie rock festival/block party/"county fair freak show" in the East Atlanta Village. [June, corndogorama.com](http://June.corndogorama.com)

DragonCon

Like the Mos Eisley Cantina in *Star Wars*, Downtown hotel lobbies crawl with all manner of creatures (of the costumed variety) during this annual convention. Many are here simply to share their pop culture obsessions—be it Superman or Joss Whedon—but from the looks of some scantily clad conventioners, a close encounter of the third kind isn't out of the question. [Labor Day weekend, dragoncon.org](http://LaborDayweekend.dragoncon.org)

The Great Decatur Craft Beer Festival

Your unlimited access to liquid courage comes coupled with a built-in pickup line: "So, what's your favorite brew?" The \$35 that attendees shell out for a commemorative drinking glass and tastes of more than 200 craft beers is a small price to pay for this party in downtown Decatur, which usually draws around 4,000 people. [October, decaturbeerfestival.org](http://October.decaturbeerfestival.org)

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MEET YOUR MATCH

CAUSES

Atlanta Community Food Bank's Product Rescue Center

Up to 1,000 volunteers congregate at the ACFB's Product Rescue Center each month to sort and inspect goods from area food drives, grocery stores, and manufacturers. And according to the PRC volunteer coordinator, singles have had success getting to know other available do-gooders during the music-filled sorting sessions, including one known marriage.

732 Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard NW,
678-553-5984, acfb.org

Hands on Atlanta

After a short orientation, Hands on Atlanta hooks up volunteers with service that interests them, whether it's working with animals or making meals for the homeless. Considering more than 32,000 people participate in Hands on Atlanta projects—especially on MLK Day (January) and Hands on Atlanta Day (October)—there's a decent chance that time with this nonprofit might also hook you up with another heart-of-gold single. 600 Means Street, Suite 100, 404-979-2800, handsonatlanta.org

Pets Are Loving Support (P.A.L.S.)

In addition to volunteering with P.A.L.S., which provides care and food to the pets of critically ill, disabled, or senior Atlantans, you can support the nonprofit by attending its themed (say, Disco Diva or *The Golden Girls*) bingo nights on the second Wednesday of each month. Hosted by local drag queen Bubba D. Licious and Alexandria Martin at the Wild Mustang, the spirited sessions are so well attended (usually around 250 to 300, both gay and straight), P.A.L.S. recommends calling ahead to reserve a spot. 404-876-7257, palsatlanta.org

Trees Atlanta

Plant a tree for a better tomorrow—and maybe even a date. Most volunteers (there are more than 4,000 in Trees Atlanta's database) come out on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon to help with the nonprofit's arboreal mission, planting and conserving trees around the city. The thing is, most people show up more than just once, which has led to friendships, relationships, and, yes, a few marriages and “tree babies.” 225 Chester Avenue, 404-522-4097, treesatlanta.org

look” and attitude. (This is worrisome; “sexy” on me could be misinterpreted as “bad heartburn.”) Keep the conversation focused on him. Remain “mysterious.”

The still-single Smith agreed: “You have to play games. You can't be yourself right at the beginning. You have to present yourself in a way that would be attractive to the other person.” Her other edicts: Don't talk about your exes. (Easy, there aren't many!) Don't accept a date at the last second; look your best; let them pay. Smith disagreed with Jane on one point, though: It's okay to approach a guy, as long as it's with a compliment. “Say, ‘That's a lovely watch,’ because I can guarantee they sweated over that \$3,000 purchase,” suggested Smith. Jane then offered to set me up with one of her clients, and Smith offered one of hers as well.

While waiting for my dates to call (because a woman, upon pain of death, is not to call a man first), I decided to practice my “sexy look.” My first attempt garnered me a bowl of butter at the IHOP. I had only asked for an extra few pats, but hey! As I imagined what other food items my smoldering eyes could procure, Jane's client texted me—and I panicked. If he texted me first, does that mean I can call him? Should he text twice before I call? What is the appropriate text-to-phone-call ratio? What would Julia Jane do? Constrained by rules, I was too flustered to respond. The date never happened.

I had high hopes, though, for my date with Smith's client, a computer programmer who needed someone who would embrace his “inner nerd.” That sounded right up my *Battlestar Galactica*-loving alley. I followed Smith's advice and spent

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thirty minutes Googling men's watches, but it turned out I should have researched obscure comic book illustrators instead: After an hour with Doug, I realized we weren't even in the same nerd galaxy. If he were Darth Vader, I would be the *Star Wars* stormtrooper whose only line is, “Look, sir: droids.”

I decided it was time to try out the experts' tips on my own. Smith had suggested meeting men at Turner Field—specifically, the Chop House's busy bar—so that's where I headed. And there *were* plenty of men there. But no matter how much I coquettishly smiled or fidgeted with the straps of my soft-pink sundress, they were more into the game. I did come away with this: Baseball trumps cleavage, and *never* wear Spanx to a sporting event. Ever.

Though my post-expert dating attempts were all strikeouts, I wasn't that upset. All this “mention his watch” and “never call first” advice was worth a shot, but it didn't feel organic. After all, it's just like my mom says: “It's better to be rejected for who you are than accepted for who you aren't.” Maybe I will keep practicing my “sexy look,” though—you never know when you'll need a bit more butter. ■

ONLINE EXTRA Follow Meg at atlantamagazine.com as she experiments with more flirting techniques from Jane's *Secrets to Date By*.