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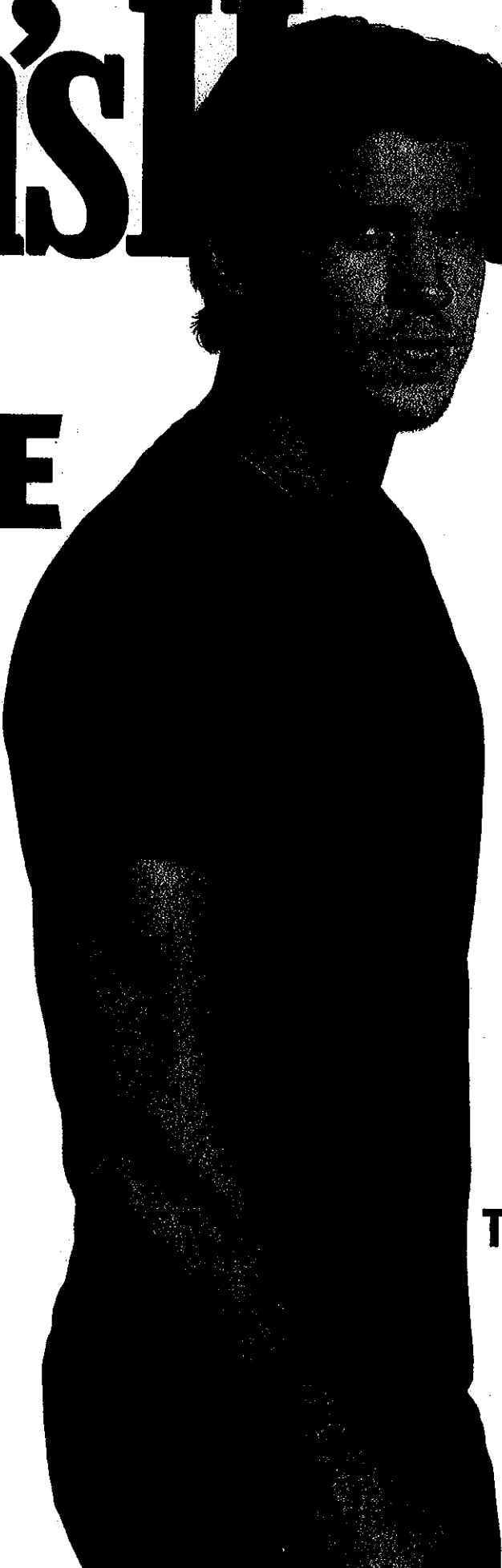
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(STEP ONE: DO IT IN THE OFFICE. PAGE 106)

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Couples

You may not see your dating flaws clearly, but she does.

Save the Date!

If your love life feels like a string of sitcom clichés, it's time to amp up the excitement

BY JULIE STEWART

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARLEY KATE

IN SPORTS, IT'S A LOSING streak. At sea, it's the doldrums. At work, it's the same old, same old. Day in, day out. Sound like your dating life lately? If it does, then maybe it's time for you to take a step back and evaluate your strategy. Dating should be a roller coaster of excitement, not a depressing slog. But you can't fix it alone. You need feedback, a bit of expertise. We've gathered a ton of great insight from experts who will

show you how to climb out of your romance rut. "You need to find out what you really want and what's holding you back," says psychologist Paulette Sherman, Ph.D., the author of *Dating from the Inside Out*. "Otherwise, if you keep floating in these clouds of uncertainty, women won't be able to see what you have to offer." So read on to shake up your routine, put the wind back in your sails, and start winning some hearts.

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO'VE HAD FIRST-DATE DEALBREAKERS*

3

NUMBER OF DATES WOMEN SAY THEY NEED TO TRULY ASSESS A POTENTIAL MATE'S MERITS

SECRET

Eliminate loser moves

A bit of sleuthing can unlock the secrets behind your struggles. "When a man falls into a rut, he either has no idea why it happened, or he has a strong theory about it that may not actually be true," says Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at the University of Washington. Perhaps you have dating fatigue, and as a result you've developed an aura of self-doubt or shyness when you talk to women, she suggests. This might lead you to overcompensate by being phony or less than genuine. Or maybe you're picking the same types of women over and over. Enlist the help of your closest male friend who's in a committed relationship, Schwartz says. Ask him to play detective, observing your methods and pointing out any patterns with the women you date. While you're at it, ask his wife or girlfriend to do the same.

TAKE ACTION Once you've heard an honest evaluation, start with your biggest quirk, Schwartz suggests. If it's just an annoying habit or trait, like a tendency to exaggerate, start cracking jokes about it and give your dates permission to point out your slipups. "Whenever you invoke help, you're much better off than if you pretend it's not going on," Schwartz says. If you realize you really are dating the same types of women, write down key personality traits of the last five you dated and circle the overlap—then be on high alert for women with these traits.

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ve heard an rt with wartz sug- oying habit y to exag- jokes about permission ps. "When- you're much pretend it's tz says. If are dating nen, write traits of the d circle the igh alert for aits.

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO SAY THEY MET THE LOVE OF THEIR LIFE THROUGH FRIENDS

1

RANK THAT A BAR HOLDS AMONG PLACES WOMEN SAY THEY'RE LEAST LIKELY TO FIND WORTH-WHILE GUYS

STEP 2

Get off your butt

You can find the woman of your dreams anywhere, as long as you're willing to become a man of action. In other words, don't focus only on online dating. The advantage of face-to-face encounters is that people are more genuine; they can't hide behind cleverly cropped photos or portray themselves as some artificial ideal. Try a local sporting event or street festival: "It takes some of the pressure off when you meet someone in a place where she's doing something fun and being herself," Sherman says.

TAKE ACTION Scan the crowd and select multiple potential candidates. In your mind, you're taking the pressure off by giving yourself plenty of alternatives in case you bomb on your first try. If you do strike out, keep your momentum. "Men have this misguided romantic fantasy that if Ms. Right is out there, he's fated to meet her somehow, so he can be lazy and aimless about how that happens," says Geoffrey Miller, Ph.D., an evolutionary psychologist at the University of New Mexico. Talk to as many women as you can. Rejection may sting, but that's a primal feeling you can overcome. "We evolved in small groups where you knew everybody and rarely met strangers," Miller says. "Rejection could be costly because you might not meet anyone else for a year or two." Tell yourself: *This rejection doesn't matter. I can meet someone else in 5 minutes, or tomorrow.*

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO HAVE DATED A MAN WHO DIDN'T INITIALLY IMPRESS THEM BUT WHO LATER HOOKED THEM IN

69

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO SAY OPPOSITES DON'T ATTRACT

STEP 3

Be open to surprises

Clinging to what you *think* you want can blind you to the perfect woman—especially since you may not actually know what you want. In a 2011 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, people expressed more romantic interest in potential dates whose written descriptions included personality traits they considered ideal. But once the study participants got to know their potential dates face to face, their feelings changed. "Men form an idea of what they want in a woman and narrow their criteria too much," says Christie Hartman, Ph.D., the author of *Changing Your Game*. Instant chemistry can happen, but it won't always be that way, she says.

TAKE ACTION Hartman's advice: If you're on the fence about a woman, have at least one more date before moving on. For an even more concrete compatibility gauge, compare your vocabularies. A study published last year in *Psychological Science* suggests that people who have similar language styles are more likely to become romantically interested in each other and to stay together if they pair up. Luckily, you don't need a linguistics degree to figure this out, says study author James Pennebaker, Ph.D. Just enter a text or instant-message conversation into Pennebaker's online calculator (secretlifeofpronouns.com/exercise/synch) to see if the two of you truly sync up.

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO SAY HUMOR IS YOUR FRIEND WHEN TRYING TO PICK THEM UP

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO WANT A MAN WHO'S CONFIDENT AND FORWARD, NOT SHEEPISH AND SHY

STEP 4

Can the canned lines

When you set your sights on that 10 across the room, what's your opening line? Wait, you actually *have* an opening line? That's bad. (Sorry: trick question.) "Having a repertoire of material is not impressive," Miller says. "Women are good at seeing through that." And science proves it: In a study in the *Journal of Social Psychology*, women expressed more interest in dating men who used a direct approach ("I saw you across the room and knew I had to meet you. What's your name?") than in men who resorted to cheesy pickup lines or asked about something banal, like the time or the band playing in the background. The researchers say that's because cheesy lines make you sound unintelligent, a signal that you're not a good long-term mate.

TAKE ACTION Be direct and real. "When you use hyperbole—like telling a woman she has the most beautiful eyes in the world—it feels like something on a script," Schwartz says. A simple compliment will do the trick, and the more genuine you sound, the better. An example that works well: "I feel a little embarrassed about this... but I'd really like to meet you." She'll appreciate that you're not trying too hard to be smooth—that you actually might be the real deal. "Somebody who's incapable of delivering phony lines can be seen as incredibly sweet and attractive," Schwartz says.

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO SAY MEN WAIT TOO LONG TO INITIATE THE "WHERE ARE WE" CONVERSATION

38

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO BRING IT UP THEMSELVES INSTEAD

STEP 5

Recalibrate your radar

You may think you're a master at reading the she's-so-into-me vibe from women, but you're probably way off. "Research shows that men are more likely than women to see sexual interest that's not there," says Glenn Geher, Ph.D., an evolutionary psychologist at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Figuring out where things are going even after you start hooking up can be tough, since only about half of women involved in hookups see long-term potential, Geher says.

TAKE ACTION First you'll have to figure out if she wants to date you. The tricky part is that even if she does, she might reject you if you two haven't built enough rapport, says Hartman. "Women don't move as fast in that way—they want to feel comfortable and safe first." Look for physical clues that she's ready. If her shoulders are squared with yours when you're talking, her pupils are dilated, or she's twirling her hair or playing with the buttons on her blouse, for example, your chances are pretty good, Hartman says. Then, when do you know it's time to start thinking "relationship"? Do it when she starts bringing up future plans—even light stuff, like bands she wants to see. "If she didn't like you, she wouldn't do that because she knows you'll want to go with her," Hartman says. So if she mentions that Maroon 5 is swinging through town, your rut's over, baby. ■

*All stats are from an MH survey of 439 women.