



PUBLICATION
Jul 1, 2020

CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

“TETHERED” BY NATHALIE NEUBERT

CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.



There once was a girl talking to two guys on Tinder; they were both named Max. She liked one more than the other and when he sent her a message: “Drink this Thursday?” In her nonchalant, playing-it-cool reply, she agreed, ending up on a date with the wrong Max.

This was my life when I used Tinder on a near-daily basis. I met my current boyfriend on the app; I had an interesting evening with a famous French actor; I went on countless awkward dates and learned all the French slang an American expat is required to learn. When I was eighteen, I moved to Paris from my small hometown in California listening to stories about girls being swept away by Frenchmen found in dating applications. I wanted to fit in seamlessly with French culture, and saw said dating apps as an opportunity to become a proper Parisienne. I wanted to be tethered to this country.

In her 2011 book, "Alone Together," Sherry Turkle says that the modern person is never alone. That metaphorically we are always tethered: connected to others, all types of others, reaching wide and far. We cast our lines out there through the smartphones in our back pockets and the smart watches swinging on our wrists.

Options were endless and in 2015, Tinder revealed its new feature: the "Super Like" which allowed users to swipe up on their favorite profiles. **The other person saw your super interest, and that's when you also let them know that you are yourself a "Super Liked" candidate.**

In 2016, I received my first Super Like. With Amélie, my friend and interpreter of all things French, we glued our noses to my phone and discussed potentials. I thought about dates and how whenever I would go for a casual drink at a Parisian brasserie with a potential romantic prospect; **I noticed that our phones were always present. We would be enjoying a drink and conversation, with our phone on the table seemingly sending notifications with every breath we took. The tiny bright lights and high-pitched sounds acted as a constant reminder that never mind the current date, a plethora of romantic opportunities would be awaiting us at the end of our rendezvous.**

I "Super Liked" him solely based on his profile photos, that's the norm. Christian Rudder, one of the founding members of the dating app OkCupid, **said that profile pictures factor 90 percent into decision-making in the online dating world.**

I didn't understand half of his profile, but Amélie told me that he went to an important Parisian university, had a great job, and that I should just marry the guy. As I stood ready to engage his imminent proposal, I saw his location: 1831 kilometers away from me. He sent a charming message, complimenting my photos and my profile. Then came the caveat: he was from Paris but lived in Morocco. He had been in town the day before.

While initially disappointed, I welcomed the conversation. Morocco boy and I started chatting every day, harmless talks at first, anecdotes about ourselves, about what we do and where we're from, easy flowing conversations. He was clever and funny, and I loved how our rapports challenged me to outwit him. I woke up every morning looking forward to his messages. **Gradually our exchanges became deeper; we talked about our families, our beliefs, our goals and dreams. I put so much of myself into our chats that I began obsessing over a boy I had never met.** He took up my headspace and distracted me from my university classes, my work, my friends. My daydreaming about Super-Liked-turned-Morocco-Boy took over my life.

The distance started to feel unbearable. After three months of chatting, we decided we absolutely had to meet each other. He invited me to come to Morocco and stay with him in his apartment. I invited him to come to Paris and stay with me. Finally, after three months of obsessive texting, he booked his ticket to Paris for a weekend with me. I was on cloud nine. I dieted the whole week, had my hair done, bought a new outfit for the dinner. I had to match my own profile; I had to be the woman he had in mind. Or more accurately, I needed to look the way I believed he saw me.

On Friday, dressed up and ready for our dream date, he tells me he has to cancel because of a problem with his family, something about his mom. I felt shattered. I needed to meet him. I pleaded and begged for him to come and see me the following morning, even just for a moment. He agreed. I went to bed with a heavy heart but with some hope for the next day.

In the morning, he came to my apartment. We were quiet, and we didn't know what to say. Do we kiss? Do we hug? There was no protocol for this kind of situation. **You feel that you know someone so intimately, and yet you have no idea who he is. We kissed. We made out. It didn't feel like us.** The easy, witty, fun conversation was gone. He was shrouded in a heaviness that came from his familial drama the night before. Everything felt forced and awkward. And, clearly I also had formed an image of what I wanted him to be. He was a daydream, and daydreams don't fit well with reality.

He messaged me the following day, said our meeting was "weird" and that he wished circumstances could have been different. **I said the same, and we agreed to end our non-relationship. I had moved to Paris wanting to be tethered to the city, its culture, and its people. I became tethered indeed, but disconnected from myself.**

But what is there to love if we are not true to ourselves?

