

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

That's the real scam. I think if we think that getting what you want, uh, is what it means, uh, to live well or to be happy.

Speaker 2 ([00:24](#)):

Hello and welcome to our fourth episode of a special series. We are calling examples. Often in the study of religion, we find ourselves interested in and exploring topics that on the surface level seem to have no connection to the study of religion. And many people ask us, you're a scholar of religion, why are you studying this? We hope that through examples, the audience will learn some new things along the way and discover that those who are in the academic study of religion contribute to and gain knowledge from other fields of study as well. I'm your host, Sierra Iort, and I am a second year master's student in the Religion and culture program at the University of Alabama. In this episode of examples, Dr. Susanna Vans discusses the topic of online seduction forums with me. She is a post-doctoral research associate at Princeton Center for Culture, society and Religion, and was in the 2022 cohort of American Examples. American Examples is a Henry Luce Foundation funded grant that allows early scholars of religion to investigate larger theoretical questions. The Foundation of American examples is the examples approach, which allows scholars to use examples from America to present analyses about how religion shapes, politics, gender, race, et cetera, without an audience needing extensive background knowledge in American history. This episode contains descriptions of sexual coercion and assault. Please listen with discretion.

([02:06](#)):

Um, can you start by introducing yourself to us?

Speaker 1 ([02:12](#)):

Yes. Yes. Although now I feel immediately shy. Okay. Today? Uh, yes. Uh, my name is Susanna Fas. Uh, I, um, recently, uh, just this last summer, got my PhD from the University of Toronto. Um, and currently I'm a postdoc, uh, at Princeton, uh, where I help run, um, an awesome public scholarship program. Um, and my research focuses on, uh, kind of the, the interplay between, uh, computation and sexual norms. So, uh, that means that I'm interested in how people use, uh, computer language and kind of computer logic, uh, to imagine how they should behave, uh, sexually and romantically. Um, and my current project is a history of seduction forums, uh, which are online places where men, uh, give each other advice for persuading, uh, women to have sex with them. Um, and, uh, in my work, I kind of show how these men use artificial intelligence terminology to describe what seduction, uh, is or should be. So, uh, you know, using an algorithm to get her to text you back, uh, using a feedback loop in a conversation, uh, that kind of thing. Um, and I want to show that computation, uh, becomes a way to imagine, uh, what it means to live well, uh, so computation as a kind of, uh, religious resource in that way.

Speaker 2 ([03:38](#)):

And how did you initially get interested in this type of research?

Speaker 1 ([03:43](#)):

I've been interested in online anti feminism for a really long time. Um, so I started out, uh, studying, um, Christian women who, uh, would blog about, uh, trying to live, uh, as biblical women did. Um, and, uh, that, that required a rejection of feminism. And then I became really interested in, because the way they were talking about the Bible was almost as if the Bible is a kind of code, and they were expecting

themselves to be programmed by the Bible. Um, so then I became interested in this idea of, uh, computers as tools for imagining, um, how, uh, how you should live properly. And then I ended up, uh, looking at an anti-feminist place on the internet where, uh, people do that really directly, uh, you know, by, by saying, I need an algorithm, um, for how to have sex, or I need an, you know, uh, a feedback loop for knowing when to initiate a kiss. So seduction forums are really just a place where people are particularly direct about using computers, uh, to think about, uh, living in the best way, which is, I think the question of how people imagine, uh, a nice life is, uh, a question for religious studies.

Speaker 2 ([04:58](#)):

So like, are they actually using the words algorithm?

Speaker 1 ([05:01](#)):

Oh, yes, absolutely. They're just straightforwardly saying algorithm loop. Um, they're in a later stage in the history of seduction forums. They're saying, uh, you know, you have to think of yourself as data that you, uh, feed into her algorithm. Um, they, they're thinking of, uh, uh, interactions as encounters between two systems. So when two people meet, they're two systems meeting each other. Uh, so the yeah, they really directly use that language.

Speaker 2 ([05:42](#)):

Is the speed seduction method, was that a precursor to this language?

Speaker 1 ([05:47](#)):

Uh, it is the speed seduction method precursor, uh, yes. Uh, I would say, uh, it's just a thing of its time. So the speed seduction method was, uh, an early nineties seduction method. Um, and the kind of computer language it uses is more, uh, language of the fifties, uh, to the eighties. And then after that, we started talking about computers differently. But in a sense, speed seduction is like an early example, uh, of a seduction method, late eighties, early nineties, uh, that totally draws on computer language. It's just computer language that maybe now, uh, sounds a bit outdated to us.

Speaker 2 ([06:26](#)):

And that was from the book, how to Get the Women You Desire Into Bed?

Speaker 1 ([06:32](#)):

Yes. A a greatest hit, a classic, uh, never Not Relevant, how to Get the Women You Desire Into Bed. Yeah. It's, uh, it's written by, uh, Ross Jeffries, uh, who is kind of, uh, the godfather of online seduction. Uh, he, uh, started out just teaching, um, seduction courses in, uh, in, along the Californian coast basically. Um, and then, uh, he met a hacker who took one of his courses, uh, and the hacker helped him set up, uh, and again, this is the early nineties, but helped him set up a Usenet group, which is, uh, what kind of a forum used to be at the time. Uh, and that's how he, uh, kind of started the Internet of Seduction. Uh, he's kind of the, the first figure there. Um, but his method, the Speed Seduction method, uh, uses, um, uh, neurolinguistic programming, which is a little bit older. Uh, basically a self-help movement, uh, that says, you know, you have to think of the mind as something that is programmable, uh, as a system. Uh, and then the speed seduction, uh, method kind of incorporates the insights of neurolinguistic programming, but applies them, you know, to a very specific purpose, which is how to get the women you desire into bed. The, the ti it's right in the title.

Speaker 2 ([07:53](#)):

Was he a neuro linguist?

Speaker 1 ([07:55](#)):

No, I don't think he was a neuro linguist. Uh, I think, uh, that would've made it, uh, now I know I know a bit, uh, uh, about his biography. He was not, uh, somebody who, um, was engaged in serious research about, uh, the brain or about computers, uh, really. Um, but it is important to remember that at this time, uh, when Ross Jeffries, so neurolinguistic programming dates back to the 1970s, uh, and it was developed at Crest College, which is, uh, in San Diego was like really the heart of the counterculture, the hippie, uh, era. Uh, so it was seen as this sort of radical, uh, alternative psychology model, um, but really part of the hippie culture. And then in the 1980s, this is when personal computers happen. Uh, more and more people are feeling, you know, computers are the future, uh, programmers are these incredibly gifted men, et cetera. So it makes sense that Ross Jeffries, uh, comes to neurolinguistic programming with a sense of how powerful computers are. Uh, and then, uh, you know, being a practical guy, he thinks I should apply not only these insights about, uh, the human as a system, uh, I should apply this not only to my general social life, but also very specifically, uh, to getting women into bed. Um, and it made him wealthy. He's made it, it it's his life's career of teaching boot camps and courses, uh, yeah. For his teaching men to apply his method.

Speaker 2 ([09:29](#)):

So for those of us who, um, were born in the late nineties or the early two thousands, can you kind of describe what an online forum looked like when it was first getting started? Because like, I don't imagine that it was like Reddit today where someone would create a post and people would respond to it.

Speaker 1 ([09:51](#)):

I love this question. I really cannot tell you how much I love this question because this is so, uh, important and it's a part that we are often forgetting that the internet has a history mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, so actually in my current role, uh, at Princeton, part of what I'm developing is a way, uh, for young people, uh, now to think about the Internet's past, uh, and to kind of have that sort of literacy in the Internet's past. So basically, I could give you a very long answer to this question. Um, but, uh, I should say that the, especially in the eighties and early nineties, uh, access to computer networks is still pretty limited. So if you think about it, it requires that you have an expensive computer. Um, it requires that you have the time to like tinker with your computer. So it's basically like being a hobbyist, like a car hobby guy.

([10:42](#)):

Um, and it requires that you put this, uh, you know, fragile and expensive computer in a separate space where you can kind of play around with it. So, in effect, this means it's often men, uh, generally, you know, women being at home are, don't quite have the man cave set up, you know, that's the, that's, that's how you should imagine kind of the public that of course there were women there, et cetera. But that's, that's the initial public. Um, and, uh, then they joined computer networks that were very local. Um, so they, they really just, they connected computers through phone lines and long distance calling was very expensive. So they used to join, uh, kind of networks that, that looked like a forum. They look like a forum in the sense that you have a post and then you have a thread. So every response, uh, is like laid out underneath it and sometimes repeats part, uh, parts of the original post.

([11:34](#)):

That's still what Reddit looks like. Um, and that's what forums have looked like traditionally. But at the time, uh, it would've been a forum that really has only, you know, other local folks that are calling in with their phones. Um, it used to be really difficult to, uh, it used to require quite a bit of technical skill to respond to a post. Um, and then gradually, this is just expanded and expanded. Reddit is basically a social media format for the forum. So Reddit is like a collection of different forums, separate Reddit, but before that, there were separate forum websites. So we would have like specialized forums for pretty much any topic that you could think of, you know, from Tropical Fish, uh, to seduction. But, um, yeah, so there's a number of like famous seduction forums in the early two thousands that then end up getting kind of consolidated and combined into, uh, Reddit as a social media platform of forums. Yeah. Sorry, that was probably still longer than you needed. Basically, I think the important part to remember is that forums have always had this structure of like, nested responses. And for me, that's the defining feature of, uh, the forum.

Speaker 2 ([12:48](#)):

So, um, when these forums were just getting started, were they really like for people who had access to the internet, were these forums like fairly easy to access in the sense of, like, nowadays things have kind of gone underground. Like if, like incel communities are like, not necessarily something you just see when you hop on Reddit, it's something you kind of have to like search for. Were they more private or were they like fairly accessible?

Speaker 1 ([13:22](#)):

Uh, that's another great question that has to do with kind of the architecture of the web, cuz uh, the way that inl, uh, websites are inl separated, for example, are banned is only possible if you have a platform, uh, that is capable of banning. Intels are still free to just make their own websites, uh, but they can't gather on Reddit because, you know, the Reddit overlords say that's not allowed. So that's, that's why you get the capacity for banning somebody like Andrew Tate can get banned from TikTok because TikTok is a platform, uh, but he can still, uh, run his own website. And in fact he does, he does exactly that. So really, you, you only get this dynamic of being banned when you have effectively a kind of recentralization of the internet. Uh, and that happens kind of from 2005 onward, but it really picks up after 2010. So it's pretty recent. If you, if you're looking with a historians perspective, it's pretty recent. Um, and before that, absolutely no, uh, banning would go on, you know, users could get banned for not obeying the rules of the forum, but then they could make a new account easily, uh, yeah, was kind of a free for all in that sense.

Speaker 2 ([14:39](#)):

Well, and speaking of accounts, can you talk about the man named mystery?

Speaker 1 ([14:48](#)):

Oh, yes. <laugh>, another famous guy in the history of, uh, modern seduction or online seduction, I should say, uh, is, uh, his real name is Eric ov. Um, and, uh, his kind of, uh, the name he, he gave himself on, uh, the first forum that he joined was Mystery. Uh, and he called himself that because he was, um, working as a magician at the time. Um, and he also strongly believed that, uh, an effective seduction required that the woman be kind of mystified. Uh, so she should, she should be surprised and dazzled. Uh, and, um, you know, a less, uh, kind reading would be that she needs to be kind of bamboozled or conned into, um, going home or giving her phone number, et cetera. Um, and he, a lot of the principles

that even today, um, people on like the, the anti-feminist internet believe in, uh, were started by mystery.

(15:52):

So he really, uh, one of the piece of advice he gives, for example, uh, is to say, you know, you have to really act unimpressed. The more attractive a woman is, the more unimpressed you need to be. Um, which is, uh, that is still something that people believe is really important. He was, uh, very tall and he wore a wizard hat, uh, as he partied because he said like, you need to, uh, you know, show that you're comfortable in your masculinity. You need to show that you're fun, not take yourself too seriously. Uh, you need to be memorable. So he recommended like, kind of extravagant accessories, et cetera. And this is still something, uh, that you see when men are talking to each other about how to impress women that they say you just have a big personality. Uh, Andrew agitate is still saying, you know, wear loud pieces, be, uh, you know, be kind of out there and show that you're daring. Uh, a lot of that just, uh, it really begins with mystery. Um, yeah, now I'm, now I feel like I'm sounding, uh, as though I'm like praising this man for his inventions. That's not quite how I want to come across. But yeah, a very influential figure for sure. Um, and a magician in, uh, more ways than one.

Speaker 2 (17:08):

Suzanne, I had to tell you when I was reading your chapter, I was like so intrigued and simultaneously like, so nauseated.

Speaker 1 (17:19):

Yeah, it is, it is super bleak, I think in the whole arc of the project, cuz the, the book is going to become like a, a history, a 40 year period mm-hmm. <affirmative>, and then you kind of start with, uh, the speed seduction method where it's still, oh, you know, you need to hypnotize her, but do this through feedback loops. Uh, and then you get, uh, mystery who says, you know, she needs to be kind of bewitched, uh, and you need to do that through algorithms. Um, and then that kind of slowly moves toward what we see today, um, which is, uh, the incel internet where there is, uh, enormous anger around the idea that, you know, if I'm doing everything right, then why am I not succeeding? Why am I not having sex even though I want to? And even though I'm taking all the steps.

(18:11):

And if you, if you know the history, you can kind of see it coming in the speed seduction method already. Uh, and then in mystery stuff where says, you know, just give her this input and she will give this output. Um, and then I sells are people who are saying, well, I'm giving the input and I'm not getting the output. Uh, and so they're really, their frustration is, uh, basically, you know, a computer frustration of like, the machine just won't give me what I, uh, what it needs to give me. Just like we were just having, uh, with the recording equipment not working. That's kind of the sentiment on incel, uh, forums. And we see, uh, what that yeah, what, what that gives rise to, you know, the, the violence it gives rise to.

Speaker 2 (18:55):

And can you talk about the, like, dichotomy that exists with this mindset of these men believing that women are like, fixed, like they, there's a specific formula that they will always follow, whereas men have the capability of changing their behavior, but the women will always like, respond and give them what they want.

Speaker 1 ([19:21](#)):

Yeah, yeah. It's basically, um, a, a kind of fundamental tension in, uh, a lot of, uh, seduction thinking is that, uh, it's a, it's a kind of self-help industry, right? So somebody like mystery is selling courses and boot camps and products, uh, and a whole bunch of other, uh, men, you know, they would call themselves pick up artists and you would, uh, pay a pickup artist to give you good advice, uh, for being more, uh, you know, sexually successful. So it really is that, uh, kind of self-help sphere. Um, and if you're selling, um, self-help, then you need to believe that, uh, you're, you know, that men are capable of change, that they might, uh, be at the start of the course, uh, utterly undesirable. And at the end of it, they might be so desirable that women want to sleep with them all the time. Like, that's kind of core to your pro to, to the product that you're selling. At the same time, the product can only work every time. Uh, if women are kind of the same,

Speaker 2 ([20:20](#)):

Right?

Speaker 1 ([20:22](#)):

Only if women are kind of the same, then, uh, only then is it possible to, you know, to take a bootcamp and, uh, rehearse different algorithmic structures and expect, uh, to be suddenly successful. So that's a real kind of inconsistency, and it, uh, it's not, it's not very unique. It's very special. It's like, uh, that's the way sexism works. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> who is, who is seen as capable of change or growth of the, or development. Whereas women are just always their bodies, uh, you know, women's bodies will always respond to dominance. Uh, whenever they see an alpha male, uh, they will just respond in this way. There's no large differences in women's preferences, et cetera. It's just banal sexism. Uh, but in, uh, this sort of seduction system where they're teaching each other algorithms, et cetera, it's particularly, um, stark. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([21:17](#)):

And is this, does this have anything to do with, in your paper you talk about being mind dependent and mine independent?

Speaker 1 ([21:25](#)):

So I take, I take the term from, um, a book called, uh, meta Modernism, which is written by, uh, a scholar called the Joseph and Storm. Um, and he says, uh, that, um, in modernity in the modern era, one of the defining traits is that, uh, we kind of divide up the world, uh, in what is, uh, cultural and what is natural or, uh, the language he uses. And I think that's more precise is like mind independent, the kind of stuff that won't change no matter, uh, how differently you think about it. You know, if I am, if I'm, uh, having a completely different mindset, it doesn't affect, uh, the rain falling on my face, uh, and the mind dependent. Uh, and that's the kind of stuff that changes as you think about it differently. Um, so, uh, your, your sense of your own wellbeing, but it could also be, uh, something cultural, like your idea of what a woman is can actually change, uh, if you think about it differently.

([22:24](#)):

And for, um, the seduction guys, they believe that, uh, women's, uh, sexual preferences are, uh, mind independent. So no matter what a woman says, no matter how differently she thinks about her own desire, she just always, you know, kind of a causes b, if she sees an alpha man, uh, she will respond by finding him desirable or being attracted to him. But then for these men, they believe that their own

capacity, their own abilities, their skill levels, uh, are mind dependent. So they can actually, uh, develop them, uh, through training and thinking differently and, uh, seeing an algorithmic structure in social interactions. Uh, so that's, that's kind of the framing, uh, that I'm using there.

Speaker 2 ([23:12](#)):

And so you mentioned this being like similar to self-help, and that's actually a question that I was thinking about as I was reading, um, because, you know, wanting to date someone is not in and of itself a bad thing. No. And all, I was like, so where is, where's the line? What's the difference between like speed seduction and like you talk about Oprah Winfrey in your chapter, or like, I thought about Dale Carnegie's, how to win friends and influence people. Like how are these different,

Speaker 1 ([23:51](#)):

There's kind of multiple ways to approach that question. So one is, uh, the kind of moral or ethical question, uh, is sex a place where we want, uh, to think about self-improvement in, uh, this particular way? Do we think you can become better at persuading people to have sex with you? That's a particular view of sex as, uh, a success. Uh, you know, as having sex with somebody attractive is a akin to having a high salary or these kinds of, like, should we really think of sex as performance in this way? I think there's good reasons to fight for other ways to think about sex, in part because it creates, creates this view of like, uh, you know, there's different tiers of very attractive people and less attractive people. Um, it is, uh, there's no coincidences in finding someone attractive or having a sexual moment between people.

([24:44](#)):

It can't be a coincidence. It's all your skill that you can level up by grinding, you know, like that kind of, the self-help language there, I think actually really reduces what can be, uh, beautiful human fulfilling, uh, about sex. So I think that's a real loss if we take that to be fully a domain of self-help. And then the other question is, uh, in a way, you know, what's the difference that it makes that, um, these seduction guys are so computational about it? I don't think they're even unique in that there was a, there was a very popular book, uh, called Algorithms to Live by, which also saw to kind of use computational language, uh, for self-help. The thing that, uh, I do think is different is that in seduction, uh, the purpose is not so much to like become your best self, um, which is often, uh, what self-help is about, right?

([25:41](#)):

Like, you, you look inside yourself and you think like, who am I really? What are my strengths? How can I cultivate what is already in me to become even better and stronger and more successful? Um, and, uh, seduction advices. I don't care about, uh, your soul. All I will get you is the women you desire into bed. So it's a very, uh, I in, in my own work, I call this like really a method focus. So they don't really care, um, about, uh, what you self-beliefs or convictions or, uh, they even say, we don't care what women actually are. We only care what they respond to, what method is effective. And I think that kind of minimalism is particularly, uh, it's not unique to seduction, it's not, it exists in a lot of self-help, uh, traditions. Uh, cuz I think Dale Carnegie is a good example where it is not so much focused on like, what is your true self that you're nourishing?

([26:41](#)):

He's very much like, how can I, you know, uh, get people on my side mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But, so I think there's often in self-help this kind of method component, but I think it's especially clear induction because they have such a clear measurement of success, which is heterosexual, intercourse, penis, and vagina. Like that is the measurement of success. And then they say, we don't care about anything else

except, uh, the kind of method that will get you there. Um, and that's usually self-help. Somebody like Oprah is a bit more expansive, right? It's like, how, who are you really? And how can you care for your true self? Uh, seduction is, uses computers to be like, pretty minimal.

Speaker 2 ([27:23](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. No, you put that really well because while I was reading, I was like, I know that there's a difference. I know that this is not solve help, but I don't know how to word this or figure it out. Cuz it, I mean, it really just like the seduction methods just feel like, like you're getting duped. Like they're

Speaker 1 ([27:43](#)):

Getting scam. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([27:44](#)):

Like being coerced. It doesn't feel like, it just feels really icky.

Speaker 1 ([27:50](#)):

Yeah. I think part of the ickiness is that it is, uh, upsetting to think especially about like a romantic or a sexual encounter. Uh, to think of that as a place where the other person is like only oriented toward the goal and like not at all interested in, um, you know, his own, uh, thoughts or feelings. Uh, and not at all interested in the thoughts of feelings of the women that he's talking to. Um, but if you say, you know, I feel, uh, like you're being scammed by seduction methods, then, uh, you're in great company because the install internet, uh, is all about being scammed by seduction methods. So that's really, they believe like, oh, you know, we've been lied to. Uh, the methods actually don't work. And that's the, the source of the anger.

Speaker 2 ([28:38](#)):

Oh, so the scammers think they're getting scammed?

Speaker 1 ([28:41](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I don't think they're, uh, the scammers would be the pick up artists, you know, the mysteries. But you know what's actually sad? They, uh, end up being like, I feel scammed because, uh, the method doesn't work. It doesn't get me what I want. The women I desire are still not in my bed. Uh, but actually I think the real scam is that they robb themselves of a concept of relationships that is not about, uh, success or it's not about like, getting what you want. I think that's actually a very narrow view of what it means to be human. That's the real scam, I think if we think that getting what you want, uh, is what it means, uh, to live well or to be happy.

Speaker 2 ([29:25](#)):

So y through your research you've kind of seen the way that this language has developed, and I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on where you see it going?

Speaker 1 ([29:36](#)):

That's a really interesting question. Where, where do I see it going? I think, um, I think we're still in. So in, uh, in a larger project, I connect the different phases in how, uh, seduction forums are using, um, computer language to different phases in the development, uh, of ai. Uh, and the moment we're in



currently, uh, now when, you know, when we talk about AI in the eighties, we actually mean something quite different computationally than when we talk about AI now. But now we're in a moment where, uh, AI is effectively about statistics. Um, so, uh, you know, when you have chat G p t or something like that, it's, uh, you have algorithms that you feed a ton of data and then they start, uh, making predictions about what sort of answer you want out of them. Um, right? So you feed them a ton of data, they kind of chew through that, and then when you ask a question, it'll produce the, uh, answer that it thinks you're most likely to want.

[\(30:39\)](#):

So it's prediction and statistics and, um, in, uh, the both the kind of domain of male, uh, self-help or seduction advice, uh, men are saying like, you know, women have algorithms in their brain, um, and these algorithms are just ranking and sorting, uh, all men all the time. So what you need to do is to improve yourself as data so that you give her data inputs that are more likely to be processed as a yes. So that is, they're imagining women as the kind of chat G p T that needs to be fed a particular amount of data so that, uh, yes, I want to have sex with you will come out of it. Um, and that's, that's kind of still on the self-help side. They're telling each other like, you need to lift more weights, you need to make more money. Um, you need to have all these markers of success that will, they call this metrics, that will improve your metrics, uh, so that a woman will eventually, uh, agree to have sex with you and then in sales say, uh, we have no way of producing these metrics.

[\(31:49\)](#):

Um, and that's really, I think they are pointing to a kind of disillusionment with the possibility of, uh, this kind of data fight framework, uh, that I, I think they're kind of ahead of the, the rest of us in that I wonder whether we, we will see more broadly, uh, a kind of disillusionment, um, with this style of thinking where you can just split up yourself into all these different particles and improve your numbers and improve your rates. Uh, I think, uh, insults come to a critique. I mean, it's an extremely toxic, hateful place, but I do think, um, uh, they are showing us the limits of, uh, yeah, a certain form of AI thinking. Yeah, I really think that kind of insane. Right? But yeah, they, they really do. Uh, they say it's because for insults actually say it's because, uh, women do not, uh, they care only about looks. So even if you become rich, if you are too ugly, um, you cannot ever succeed with women. Uh, so your, your data will never be good enough. Uh, basically that's, that's the reasoning

Speaker 2 ([33:00](#)):

<laugh>.

Speaker 1 ([33:01](#)):

Yeah. I feel like, should I explain this more, but like, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 ([33:06](#)):

I see how speed seduction is related to psychology and computer science, but where does religion come into this? Like, why would a scholar of religion study and teach this topic?

Speaker 1 ([33:19](#)):

Um, I'm not sure that, uh, all scholars of religion, uh, need to think about, uh, speed seduction, but I do really think that more of us should be thinking about computers. Um, so for me, the, the seduction angle or speed seduction, uh, it helps, uh, show that computers are not just about the internet and that computers are not always about communication and community, uh, which are things that as scholars

of religion we're usually more comfortable with. Um, and I want to show that computers are also part of our imagination, uh, that they help us imagine how we can live or how we should live. So then, you know, if you're a scholar of religion and you care about how people inhabit norms, uh, how people organize their lives, uh, those sorts of things, uh, then you should really be caring about how computers help us do that.

[\(34:13\)](#):

So in the speed seduction method, you see really directly what it means, uh, to imagine a person as a system and how that then fuels, uh, particular ideas about how to behave and how to, how to be a man essentially. Uh, but they're lots of other places where people imagine themselves as systems or, uh, they think they need, uh, a step-by-step plan to where they want to get where they want to be. Um, so that's, that's really why I think, uh, scholars of religions should care. We should care about what computers are doing, uh, to how we think about ourselves and our, our places that we want to go.

Speaker 2 ([34:51](#)):

What did Joseph Campbell contribute to the intersection between the study of religion and therapeutic remedies for feminization?

Speaker 1 ([35:02](#)):

I think he's a bit less well known now, but it used to be the case that if you said, uh, you studied religion at a party, uh, without other people who study religion, uh, then you would get the response like, oh, like Joseph Campbell. Uh, so Joseph Campbell wrote a book in which he, uh, identified basically the same basic story, uh, in all religious myths. So the title, uh, the Hero with a Thousand Faces, uh, kind of gives it away. It's the same hero. He has a thousand faces. Uh, so Campbell believed that modern people, uh, really should, uh, kind of get back in touch with a kind of timeless, unchanging core myth. So in my work, I show that there is this really longstanding concern that men are not doing well, um, and that they're not doing well, specifically because society, uh, is more and more feminized.

[\(35:56\)](#):

Uh, and that's really been, you know, pressing concern since, uh, the late 19th century. Uh, the idea that men are too civilized, uh, they're too sensitive to women's concerns, uh, that kind of thing. And then in the 1980s, uh, there were movements of men who thought that the solution might be, uh, to embrace a kind of inner core, uh, an inner core that's like untouched by modernity, untouched by women, uh, a kind of primal man. Um, I think Jordan Peterson is a recent example of this kind of, uh, this line of thinking where you can counter the dangers of feminization by getting men back in touch with a kind of hero within the kind of eternal hero. So that's, that's what Campbell helps provide, uh, for men, uh, who are reading about this sort of timeless hero figure that appears in every myth in every society.

[\(36:48\)](#):

Uh, it provides a particular vision, uh, of manhood. I, I think that's specifically relevant to the study of religion because Campbell is part of a particular tradition in our field, uh, really from from Yung to Eli, different scholars that are really important to, uh, the study of religion. Uh, Campbell is part of that trajectory. Um, there were a lot of people who, less common now, but a lot of people used to think that the study of religion is really about finding that which is the same in every religion. Uh, and that's, that's also what Campbell, uh, was trying to do. So in this kind of weird way, the intellectual lineage of our field overlaps with the intellectual lineage, uh, of men's movement of, you know, Jordan Peterson and j So Jordan Peterson and our discipline share a kind of common ancestor.

Speaker 2 ([37:42](#)):

Yeah. So is it like the, when Joseph Campbell's talking about this kind of hero complex, does that, would you say that leads into the alpha beta?

Speaker 1 ([37:52](#)):

Not re I think those have different, uh, different backgrounds. Cuz for, um, for Joseph Campbell, the idea was really that there was something like, maybe, maybe they are similar than I say. Yeah, maybe they're similar than, uh, I initially thought. So usually the, the like being an alpha or being a be that's like, um, when, uh, men on the internet use that language, they're kind of drawing on ideas about evolution, um, and, uh, the sense that we are really still animals that our brain, uh, still works, uh, in this kind of animal pack kind of way. Uh, and that the more we under, if you understand that you can, uh, you know, win out and become the alpha, which is itself a really interesting, uh, presupposition. So you can actually change all those years of evolution then. But, uh, that's, that's usually the lineage there. But then, um, for somebody like Joseph Campbell, uh, he believes that there's just some sort of eternal core.

([38:51](#)):

He doesn't really talk about it in the language of evolution in under sense, but he does believe that becoming so civilized, uh, as we are, you know, we are so civilized, we are so far removed from this sort of primitive society, uh, that, that has, uh, kind of alienated us from, from something really important that's within. But generally I would say that Joseph Campbell's not so interested in hierarchies among men. Um, and the Alpha bek idea is really related to that. Um, also, I, I do feel the need to say that this whole idea of going back to primitive, primitive mythology be like having some primal primitive man within, uh, is very steeped in, uh, yeah. Particular forms of racism about who, who is still primitive and untouched by modernity. Um, really, uh, quite outspoken, uh, in these men's movements that kind of came out of Joseph Campbell and, and, uh, kind of formed around him. Uh, there was a lot of like doing indigenous rituals because this was, uh, thought to bring you closer to that primal core within. So it's really like tightly intertwined with that, that kind of racism.

Speaker 2 ([40:10](#)):

It kinda, it reminds me of Essentialism.

Speaker 1 ([40:13](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. But it, because it is essentialism, it's saying like, there is a sacred essence within everyone that is like their masculine core that you can like, get back in touch with, et cetera. So it is hyper essentialist. Yeah. Embraces essentialism, basically. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([40:31](#)):

So I wanna know like what the takeaway is. I know you've kind of touched on it, but why is it important to study for this and what do you hope that people can take away from this episode?

Speaker 1 ([40:42](#)):

I really hope that people take away is that computers are not just our devices. Um, we are thinking and acting like computers. Uh, we are fashioning ourselves in the image of computers. Uh, and even, and, and we do that actually even in places that seem very non computery, uh, like dating or Sex No

Speaker 2 ([41:15](#)):

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Speaker 1 ([41:53](#)):

Uh, name Josephson Storm. Josephson Storm. Oh, I should do start again. Wait. Uh, so I take, uh, that terminology from, uh, meta mor Modernism, meta mor <laugh>. I can't.