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## Hip, sassy books hit on love, dating

By Kathleen Grant Geib, STAFF WRITER  
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VALENTINE'S DAY is right around the corner, the day we officially gorge on chocolate, spend too much on diamond jewelry and present Hallmark cards. Or is that too cynical?

At any rate, it's a day to celebrate love and a day we hope for romance and candy hearts, even if a mate is only a mirage.

These books on love and dating are by turns positive, questioning, hopeful, honest, wise and practical. They reflect a basic human desire to be loved unconditionally and to love in return.

### Sexy mama

Rachel Sarah is hip, sexy and optimistic. The Berkeley author handles single motherhood with aplomb, and her book "Single Mom Seeking: Playdates, Blind Dates and Other Dispatches from the Dating World" (Seal Press, \$14.95) is a delight.

With Sarah it's all about balance. Her devotion to daughter Mae is exemplary, yet she's aware of her own needs — professional and personal. A columnist for J., a San Francisco Jewish weekly and online magazine, literary mama Sarah has her hands full describing dating and single-mom life.

There are moments she'd probably like to forget, such as the Thanksgiving her lover abandons her and Mae, as well as some early dating experiences. Life improves dramatically, however, when Sarah moves back to California and reconnects with her dad and sister. Soon, the author meets other moms and her support system grows. She puts feelers out to the Jewish community and finds comfort there, too.

Sarah isn't just

searching for sex, she's looking for a man with whom to build a future. This healthy outlook makes her book valuable reading for those struggling to balance their dating and parenting lives.

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When forced into an impossible situation, Sarah makes intelligent choices such as moving closer to family and surrounding herself with good friends and a warm community. In doing so, she creates stability and continuity for her child and herself and perhaps unknowingly, sets the stage for Mr. Right.

### All kinds of love

Trust the New York Times to turn out quality fodder such as its weekly "Modern Love" column, edited by Daniel Jones. Following the time-honored tradition of collecting worthy columns and calling them a book, Mr. Jones does just that in "Modern Love: 50

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HELP FOR THE SINGLE MOM: Rachel Sarah of Berkeley is the author of "Single Mom Seeking: Playdates, Blind Dates and Other Dispatches from the Dating World."



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True and Extraordinary Tales of Desire, Deceit, and Devotion" (Three Rivers Press, \$14.95).

It's the kind of writing you'd expect from a great newspaper — pithy, current, worldly, honest, tender and well-constructed.

Check out "Hear That Wedding March Often Enough, You Fall in Step" by Larry Smith. This is the essay every woman who gives her boyfriend an ultimatum needs to read.

It's a heartfelt love letter to the girl of Smith's dreams and the story of how they both realize (as in, no pressure) that they yearn to marry. Told by a man in an understated, romantic way, it's even more appealing.

### Midlife dating

When she's whining about not having a boyfriend, she sounds like a 2-year-old. When she's talking about her grown-up daughter, mother-love radiates from the page. She is a curious combination of writer: feminist, horny adolescent, philosopher and single mom. She is Jane Ganahl of Half Moon Bay, former "Single-Minded" columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and a literary version of a "Sex and the City" gal.

"Naked on the Page: The Misadventures of My Unmarried Midlife" (Viking, \$24.95) is brand new and, in spite of the author's perpetual moaning, is as addictive as a box of Valentine chocolates.

Ganahl sets a brisk pace, describing her first year with the column and the avalanche of responses she reads compulsively, answering some, deleting many. Old boyfriends write to her, recognizing themselves. Friends alternately sympathize and beg her to get it together. Ganahl's daughter is her touchstone, the friend she calls most dear and a remarkable young woman.

Throughout the book, Ganahl is consumed with the idea of having a date for her 50th and finally makes plans with her unreliable, rock star paramour. They meet, but once again he is absorbed in his own life and barely remembers it's her birthday. But this time something clicks. The knight has fallen off his horse one too many times.

In an ironic twist, Ganahl leaves him to sleep off his satiated state (of course they have sex first) and goes to the ball by herself. Well, not really by herself. She's surrounded by the people who really love her.

### Fix me up

Susan Shapiro is a little bossy in her new book, "Secrets of a Fix-Up Fanatic: How to Meet & Marry Your Match" (Delta Trade Paperbacks, \$12), but it's for your own good.

She's an amateur matchmaker with an impressive track record and a whole lot of practical dating advice. Learn why it's important to improve yourself first, then date; ask someone you know and trust to fix you up; recognize good qualities when you see them; know the 12 rules of blind dating; and get rid of old ideas about love.

Shapiro makes a strong case for using a matchmaker rather than trying to meet someone online or at a bar or mixer. Basically, she says family, friends and co-workers already know and care about you, so they're going to have a good idea of whom to pair you with. It's your job to trust their judgment and be open-minded.

If you take Shapiro's advice you'll definitely improve your life and will probably end up getting married. At the very least, you'll go on some promising dates.

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