

Dating is an industry that has been inextricably linked to time pressure ever since. According to Moira Wiegel, author of *Labor of Love: the Invention of Dating*, our mating habits still reflect the labour market. As she explains, whereas in the era of old fashioned 9-to-5s it made sense to ask, 'So, I'll pick you up at six?', now, in an era of flexitime, we're more likely to text a lover simply 'u up?'

Tinder is the very embodiment of the free market when it comes to sex. As *Vanity Fair's* Nancy Jo Sales put it, 'online, the act of choosing consumer brands and sex partners has become interchangeable.' It is easier for a man to get laid than at any point in history – but the quality of sex is suffering for us women. According to the Kinsey Institute, women are twice as likely to have orgasms in the context of a relationship. But since 'relationships' have been replaced by a never-ending regimen of dates, young women kept asking Sales 'what's a real orgasm like? I wouldn't know.'

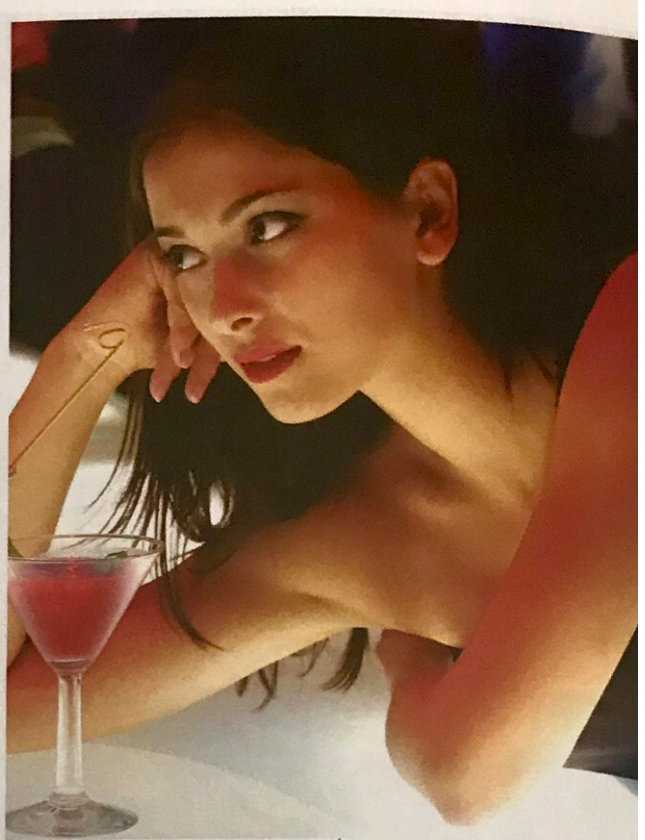
Some new phone apps – such as Bumble – claim to liberate women from all this Tinder bullshit. But in effect it just deludes us into thinking we have some control over the product, when we don't. On Bumble, a woman has to message a man first and within 24 hours, after which he'll disappear forever (like a bargain resisted in the sales). But it's the men who benefit. My best male friend has used it to juggle eight different women simultaneously.

Using apps to find love doesn't even make sense. Tinder has a vested interest in keeping us single. Otherwise, it'll disappear like MySpace, Bebo and Friends Reunited. Even those with positive experiences of the app see it as an extension of their working life – just one more thing to achieve. 'Dating' they say, is 'a numbers game.' You 'only get out what you put in.' What most scares me is the prospect that, even if I do, against all odds, couple up, I'll still have to go on 'date nights'. A fitting British response to the whole concept is, as Nicholas Lezard puts it, 'Let's split up. It's more dignified.'

For as Ruth E. Valentine eventually concluded, there's nothing more dismal and depressing than dating. 'Every time I thought I had met a nice guy they were all either married, liars, cheats, psychos, mentally deranged, abusers, transvestites, criminals, druggies, alcoholics or mummy's boys.'

Ultimately, dates are about one thing: sex. So it's time to say, 'Down with dates!' Leave them to the Americans. Somehow, we have to bring back old fashioned British confusion and abashment. For even in the 21st century, there's still no more beautiful way to fall in love.

● *Emily Hill is the author of Bad Romance, which will be published on Valentine's Day, 2018*



New Yorker *Janet Mercel* finds the men she wants in bars, cafes and stores – not on an app

I've never been much of a dater. I have been a girlfriend, a wife, a lover. These roles are interspersed with sprees of serial fucking, sometimes simultaneously, because monogamy is not, historically speaking, my strong suit. But they are not the kind of interactions preceded by carefully laid dinner plans. I've never used an app or a website to meet people because I disagree with the basic premise for my own purposes. I want the frisson of interaction in person, no set-ups, no preconceived notions. I don't want my work done for me with an algorithm of compatibility that can't possibly transfer into real life. It would also be somewhat akin to throwing a diabetic headlong into a candy store. I don't need that kind of exposure at my fingertips.

I went immediately from my divorce, still relatively young, into the arms of a man I'd already known more than half my life and have stayed there ever since. Our relationship is either very simple, or very complicated, depending on your perspective. But while on a recent much-needed break, I vented my frustrations with my go-to method of coping since my pre-married days, a physical bender of sorts. Unless you're thoroughly self-deluded, it's not what anyone would consider dating.

During this period of two-ish weeks, I took a

different man home every other day, in every possible circumstance. The first night I went out with calculated intent, sat at the bar and wondered, briefly, if the game was still the same. The default setting for the interaction of so many people is now an app-generated introduction. Can you still pick someone up in the flesh like we all used to? Turns out, you can.

‘For two weeks I took a different man home every other day, in every possible circumstance’

One man I met while trying on a pair of jeans in a changing room. Another, when I wandered into his restaurant late one night in search of dessert and he gave me the most exquisite apricot tartine I’ve ever eaten. That was enough of a reason for me to invite him home, but he was entirely too French and too much and now I can never go back to his lovely cafe.

There are some things you will never, ever learn for yourself if you rely on technologically manufactured chemistry. I spent the night with a 23-year-old, and then a 55-year-old, and was struck by the differences in their generational approach. I realised, for instance, that pure, blind youth is not necessarily a prerogative. Twenty-three sounds super-hot and completely awesome, I know. But I was so distracted by the lack of age in that dude that it was almost more novelty value than lust. I wanted to bounce coins off his tight chest more than I wanted to have sex with him. Two nights later, with a man who could have been his father, (or mine), I realised there is an element of leathery strength that only comes with age, and to me, is far preferable. That man sat me on my bathroom sink, took my face in one hand and wiped away my eye makeup with a linen towel in the other, and when morning came I wanted him to stay so badly I had to tell him it was time to leave.

The concept of compatibility has changed so much with the filling-out of profile data and these things have precious little to do with reality. Too young, too old, but he doesn’t like Thai food . . . At the end of the day you still must fall asleep next to that person. (At least I think that’s the goal.) You must love their smell and their voice.

I am well aware that online dating makes the concept of relationships more palatable for some people; makes the whole process, in a way, more civil. But the next time the mood strikes for a couple of weeks, I guarantee I will find the right pair of eyes looking at me from across the avocados in the grocery faster than I will staring up at me from a cold, blue screen.

● *Janet Mercel is a copywriter based in New York. Her first book will be published by Bauer & Dean*

John J Barley went on a multiple dating binge after a break-up, before embracing monogamy

I plunged into online dating the day a long-term relationship ended. I’m tempted to justify the way I went about dating many women at once as indicative of my addictive personality, but I’ll be straight with you. I was just looking to get laid, and to me it was a numbers game.

I knew I was rebounding, serving the selfish part (or the horny part) of me, and I made my dates aware before we met up that I was looking for sex. I’d arranged a couple of dates during the first week, but first dates quickly turned into second and third dates and, as fresh dates and booty calls kept coming, I found myself, in the fourth week, bedding someone different every night. That week was so thrilling that even now I can remember the shape and roundness of the breasts and buttocks I embraced, the feel of the many hands that caressed me. Some of their fingers left traces.

I felt alive. Having been with the same woman for more than a decade, and having got together very young, I took great pleasure in the variety of personalities, physiques, and sexual kinks that presented themselves. So many different sounds and scents. So many apartments. So many freaks. I had fun sampling. Like ice cream. Something sweet or something bitter? Rich or fruity? Chocolate or caramel? I tried women,

