we're lonely, Broody and desperate to settle down what single men really think about hook-up culture; It's never been easier to have casual sex, but where does that leave lasting relationships? Martin Daubney talks to the millennials who are tired of playing the game

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Full Text:

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Fancy-free, in control of his own destiny and in his sexual prime: a single man's twenties and thirties are meant to be the happiest time of his life. After that, it's a soul-crushing cocktail of mortgages, kids, middleaged spread and midlife crises, right?

Not according to the results of the biggest British survey into men's wellbeing, core values and priorities, conducted by University College London and Harry's. According to respondents, single men are significantly less likely to be positive about their lives than their married or cohabiting peers. Furthermore, it's the youngest men who are the hardest hit. Remarkably, young single men are less positive about life than divorces, or even widowers.

The survey will be the subject of a parliamentary launch, debated by MPs and a think tank of the UK's leading experts on men's mental-health issues. There will be a call for a cross-party action group that focuses on male suicide, boys' educational underattainment, fathers' rights and men's mental health across the board. So, if being single is challenging for men's mental health, what's really going on inside the minds and lives of the male Tinder generation? It turns out, it isn't always what you might think.

GARY BARNETT, 34

Social media manager from Brighton. He's been single for three months.

"Three years ago, I was in a serious relationship with a woman ten years younger than me, and I got broody out of nowhere.

"Over two years I'd lost my mum, then my dad and brother in one seven-month period. I decided, 'I want more family.' I started putting pressure on my ex, saying, 'Life is short. We need to start a family.' It freaked her out and helped to end our relationship.

"So I took to Tinder in a big way, looking for 'the one'. I've been single now for three months, and hope to meet somebody who wants to have children reasonably quickly. The problem is, the gender roles in dating are being completely flipped.

"Nowadays, it's more commonplace for women to be the players. I struggle with it. It's alien. Women hold the power and it can be difficult, weird and bizarre. I'm not into it. I now get why girls hate players as well.

"Sex is on tap. Nine times out of ten, you don't even have to go out on a date. If a girl likes your photos, they just come round.

"We live in a vanity-based society. If you're half attractive, you're bombarded with offers. The women aren't even subtle. Instagram is the new Tinder. As soon as you post photos, your inbox lights up with offers. You can go on Tinder dates every single night of the week. The social interaction is totally lacking. You can have sex and never talk again.
"They always say the same three things: 'Hi, how are you?' 'How's your week been?' 'I love your beard/tattoos.' That's literally code for, 'Do you want to f***?' That was really good for a while. But after 50 dates, including 20 in the past 2 months, with no sign of any 'keepers', I'm a bit over it. You get to the point where you can't be bothered to do it any more.

"People don't care if they have partners, or if you do. Having sex with someone you meet online almost doesn't count, as you have no emotional connection with them.

"In relationships, nobody works through their problems any more. If they hit turbulence, they go on Tinder. As a result, there are trust issues from the beginning in every relationship. You're constantly trying to decode if your partner or date is talking to 600 other guys on Tinder. It's painful and monotonous.

"Women can be brutal. I overhear girls I know saying, 'He was crap in bed. I'm not meeting him again.' "It's an empty, hollow pursuit. Girls go on hundreds of dates. You're left thinking, 'Where do I fit into this?' "All of this means it's never been harder to fall in love. It's becoming borderline impossible to find that connection. There's so much competition.

"People are burning out when it comes to dating. It's so intense, so soon. You're pitching yourself every date. You say, like a robot, 'I'm financially secure. I have two cars' - you're making yourself a one-dimensional object. All of my mates have ridiculous cars they often can't afford. They live with their parents in a house they hate, yet they pay PS500 a month to lease a Range Rover. You need all this stuff to project success.

"I often think previous generations had it easier. I want what my parents have. I want to grow old with a woman. More than anything, I want to be a dad. I genuinely think I will have children by accident. I've resigned myself to that, but I think I'd still be happy. Even if I didn't live with the woman, I'd have a child, so it'd be worth it.

"It's not how I expected to be at 34. I didn't think it would be a struggle like this."

PIM VAN DER BERG, 29

Company owner from Notting Hill, London. He's been single for two years.

"Apps are a useful additional tool for meeting women, but it can be addictive. I call it my 'toilet app' because I always seem to use it while sitting on the loo. If you're trying to find romance while sitting on the toilet, it's hardly the recipe for everlasting love, is it?

"In my job, I use a lot of big data - I analyse how people connect with each other - and I see that, in dating, humans are just becoming data. It's dehumanising. A person becomes a single picture; they're just digital information. We are moving more and more towards a digital world where we use GIFs as tools to communicate. People don't respond to two-page emails. Everything is perfunctory.

"The number of conversations we have is being eroded. It's robotic and removes the emotion from any connection. It is just information. How are we meant to connect in short, sharp sentences?

"On Tinder, there is also too much choice. It means we're always unsatisfied with our choice. It's the same as a restaurant menu. If there are five things, it's easy to make a choice. But if there are 40 things, it becomes much more difficult. Dating apps are like a menu of human meat.

"People also lie. A lot. I once met a woman who pretended to be under 30. I immediately realised she was much older. I confronted her, saying, 'Did you lie about your age?' She said, 'Yes, but I feel 28 years old in my head.' I tried to be as polite as possible, but she was easily ten years older.
"Last year, I took drastic action. I wasn't meeting anybody and I couldn't think straight. So I decided to give up all the things that were bad for me - meat, alcohol and Tinder - for a 50-day fast.

"Now I'm ready to move on. I want something more stable. A lot of money goes on all these dates, and a lot of time, and I don't have the time. It consumes lots of energy. That's fun, for a while. But in the end I'd like to devote all that energy to one person.

"I've started using an app called the Inner Circle. It's a network of successful people who meet up at events, usually in private members' clubs in Mayfair. If I take a date and we don't get on, I can leave her and we can both meet other people. You meet people from other walks of life who are better educated; you can be more certain they aren't gold-diggers.

"Dating apps are not good for us. They are making us lonelier. We all want love, kindness and an arm around us, but we are not going to find that swiping on a smartphone."

SIMONE IPPOLITO, 25
A salesman and part-time model from Bournemouth, but born in Italy. He's been a Tinder "player" for two years.

"When I first got on Tinder, it was heaven. It was so easy. In 4 months I got 300 matches. They arrived so fast I couldn't keep up. When I was up to 500 matches, I didn't even notice the messages. In the end, I just sent the fire emoji and 100 per cent of the time, I got a result. You quickly realise that, if you're on Tinder, you're not there for a relationship. It's for one thing only: sex. If you want more than that, you're in the wrong place.

"I'm a salesperson - I listen, analyse and close deals. That's all Tinder is: deals. I've been on 200 dates and I get a result 99 per cent of the time. Getting sex is too easy. You get bored. It takes all the pleasure out of playing and flirting; it is literally two glasses of wine, then back home for sex. There is no emotion. It is lonely. You can't have a nice conversation after mechanical sex. It's just sex and go.

"I haven't got time to waste any more. I want to feel comfortable every day. But settling down in England could be a problem, because, from what I've seen, people only want easy things.

"Girls in Britain seem to want 'geezers'. They like cut bodies, steroids, tattoos, bad boys, money, show-offs. It's shallow. English girls are used to men who lie, so they increasingly play the same game. Everybody is lying and cheating.

"It makes me afraid to commit to a girl. It makes me think, 'Would I want to be with somebody like this?' It's not really worth it. When you've been doing what I've been doing, you see the worst of deception. When you've seen what I've seen, the lying affects you. Tinder has made it natural for us to lie.

"I want to be in a relationship with a girl who makes my life better. I don't think you get that on Tinder, because relationships are based on trust. It would be very difficult to trust anybody I met on Tinder.

"It gets to a point where you want something stable. You want respite from a life of 24/7 messaging. It's exhausting. It's too much stress.

"Of course, I realise I'm a part of the problem. My reputation goes before me. Being a player was great, but in a small town like Bournemouth, everybody knows who you are and what you've been up to. Privacy is a huge issue when we've all spent so long putting our digital presences out there for all to see.

"Now I want to settle down. I've done my playing. I am a romantic at heart. I'm oldfashioned like that, but it doesn't seem to work in England. My brother married at 18 and now he's 30, they have a
daughter. He has found the person of his life. I'm not jealous, but I want to be like that. Will my generation look back and think, 'Tinder made it easy to get sex, but made it impossible to fall in love'?

TAKUU CHIWALA, 21

Trader from Manchester. He's been single for three years.

"Like many of my mates, I could spend all my money on dating - the image, the restaurants, the champagne - and live with my parents. But I've got my own place to live, and the price to pay is that I'm single. It's as simple as that for a young man these days.

"Everyone's dating differently now. Everything has gone digital. Dating - and maintaining your image, so you can portray yourself online as desirable - is an expensive, full-time business.

"I have got Tinder, but I've had to stop using it. It's like you're constantly on a stage. I prefer to do it the old-fashioned way, to meet girls at work. Having said that, it's not really working out. For now, I've decided to focus on my career. I can't compete with the guys who spend all they've got on dating.

"These men, their whole life is about going out and building a glamorous lifestyle to show off online, via Tinder, Instagram and Facebook. It's 100 per cent fake. They're not living like that. They're working 6am-6pm all week just to buy one bottle of champagne for a selfie. They're slaves to self-image.

"Blokes today PR themselves, as if they were brands. It's tiring, having to constantly project that you're on-trend. It's depressing if you're not very good-looking or fashionable.

"If I've not been going to the gym, or eating at the right places, then the pool of girls I might appeal to just dries up.

"I've got mates who splurge their whole salaries on this facade, and it works for them. Last summer, one of my friends took out a loan of PS2,500 to go to Ibiza to take loads of selfies, but when he came back he had no means to repay the debt. He did it for the immediate fix of getting dates. It's mad.

"You've got to really put yourself out there.

There are so many guys who act loud, get their expensive watches out, even pouring bottles of champagne over their watches just for a selfie to show off with. This method is getting girls, but not girlfriends. I look at it and think, 'What's the point?' "In Manchester, there are a lot of semifamous lads, and everybody follows them on Instagram.

If one of these lads says he's going to a club, then everybody descends on the place - and not just girls. You'll get 300 men turning up, hoping to get a selfie with the famous lads. Those selfies will increase their dating currency - plus, they're hoping for a piece of the action from the girls who turn up.

"Women are changing. We've seen a lot of women become empowered. I find it attractive, but some men are scared. Lots of women want to do better for themselves, so they get picky. But some women can be shallow. They want the money, the meals - they need to see you've got money.

"Tinder is selling yourself for the product.

Men are now like objects of success. If you have the trappings of success, you are a success at dating. It comes naturally to men now, to think of themselves as objects.

"It's getting tiring to maintain this lifestyle.

You can get left behind immediately. That's not healthy for men.
"This whole world is controlled by social influencers: the rich, successful, cool guys. You see 21-year-old guys in music videos with PS800 shoes, and men think they need to be copying them to get the same attention."

ALISTAIR SEED, 25

Headhunter/recruitment consultant from Surrey. He's been single for two years.

"Sex has become a digital asset, and apps feed into this perfectly. The physical side of life is just another flick of a switch; we acquire sex via Tinder just as we might order clothes via Asos. Older people might think that's weird or lazy, but it's completely normal to us.

"But with age and maturity, things change.

For me, there's a sense of shame. Being single for so long, I get loads of 'lad pressure' from my mates. I'm in 10 to 12 WhatsApp groups and you get mercilessly ribbed. When they find out you've been on a date, it's always, 'Did you kiss? Did you go back to hers?' "A lot of these lads sleep with girls they've never met before, so it's become almost like a new norm. To them, a shag is the barometer of a successful date. It's a sign of the times: everything is more sexualised.

"It's like you have to justify yourself to the lads. You feel like a failure for not getting a date - and then a failure again with the lads.

"Whenever I meet my mates, they ask, 'What's wrong with your love life? You're good-looking, successful. What's wrong?' That's a further pressure. Close female friends are always trying to set me up, but it feels too forced.

"It affects me. It constantly niggles. I feel like I'm having a midlife crisis at 25, because there is no significant other in my life. I also worry I'm not going to be able to buy a property in London on my own. I need a partner to do that, and that's another pressure.

"I've even thought about buying a house with a male mate and think, 'Do we need women to do it?' "My worst moment was two years ago, on New Year's Eve. I went to a pub with 20 of my mates and I was the only person not in a couple. At midnight I saw everybody kissing their partners. I felt sad and detached.

"I do wonder, 'What's wrong with me?' Girls say I'm 'nice', but they don't seem to go for 'nice'. I have thought, 'Maybe if I treat them badly or flirt with their friends, I'll get the girl.' But I just can't do that. It's not the way I've been brought up.

"I also think a big reason many millennial men remain single for longer is because of the rise of the 'bromance'. These days, men have a more fluid idea of masculinity. Modern men are much more in touch with their feminine side, and talking about feelings and emotions with other men doesn't seem so weird.

"We get emotional satisfaction from guys, too, which means we need women less. Often I'd rather spend my hard-earned time with men. It's risk-averse.

"The vast majority of things I like to do, I prefer to do with men: shopping, endlessly talking about cricket and rugby, eating ribs and drinking ten beers without being judged.

"Last weekend I spent a perfect day with a male friend: we played golf in the morning, went to dinner, then a gig in the evening. It was like a gay date.

"I hope to find that special woman who also wants stability and maturity. I still have faith in romance. I hope it works out before it's too late."
The Harry's Masculinity Report, in conjunction with University College London, will be published on October 30

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