



SEX & LOVE

+ EXPERT ADVICE FOR BETTER RELATIONSHIPS AND BOLDER SEX +

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Has DIGITAL DATING *flopped?*

It's the sex-on-app era – a revolving door of no-strings encounters. But is the technosexual revolution leaving single men all swiped out?

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PHOTOGRAPHY MITCH PAYNE

*Coming up
roses?*





The way some friends go at Tinder, I'm surprised their fingers don't burst into flames. If right-swiping were a sport, they'd medal like Jamaican sprinters. And they're in abundant company. Take a look around any city bar on a Friday night and you'll see the pre-mating posture of the modern man; neck craned, face bathed in blue light, thumbs flicking like a broken clock hand...

Beardy creative types sporting at least one item of checked clothing. Slick account managers in Ted Baker suits and slippery loafers. Single. Not-so single... Every type of man Tinders – or Happns or does whatever their dating app of choice may be. Globally, the Tinder scene – still the king of the digital dating world – is 10-million strong. On average users hit the app 11 times daily, resulting in a staggering 15 million matches – and, though the figures are less precise, one assumes a lot of sex.

Hot sex. Swaggering sex. The sort of sex that happens when you are the sort of man who pinballs from conquest to latent conquest, swiping with cut-throat bravado (or indiscriminate urgency, depending how horny you are). Which may be the reality should that ravenous, animalistic appetite

– a potentially false, but arguably prevailing view of male sexuality – go beyond a cheap Tinder icebreaker. But delve further into the hook-up culture, talk to those pinballers, and what comes after the swiping – well, it doesn't quite deliver on the prelude.

Andre*, a 28-year-old producer, talks about his Tinder sex life with resigned exhaustion. "I can't even remember the last time I had really good hook-up sex," he admits. He says he's been 'hammering' the app for two years and lost count of the number of times he's deleted it – only to drunkenly reinstall it when hope or libido gets the better of him. It's the constant merry-go-round of self-promotion and mediocre outcomes that's got to him. "Bagging a hot woman on the first night invariably requires some

not-so-subtle powers of persuasion. So by the time you're in the bedroom, you've already sold yourself as a unique Ryan Gosling-David Beckham crossbreed with a cucumber-sized dick. Basically, you've set the bar so high that anything less than a marathon sex session with multiple orgasms will feel like an overwhelming defeat."

There are two problems here. First, Andre is *not* Ryan Gosling. Nobody is. Probably not even Ryan Gosling. Sure, Tinder has its tandoori-tanned sugar daddies or topless millennial bros weened on a mind-warping diet of hard-core porn. But the biggest chunk is aged 25-34 (45% according to one study). They've got decent jobs, collect Virgin air miles and know where to find good sushi. They are, like me, like Andre, normal guys who eventually want to settle down, have children and go on

holiday to Whitstable. And the pressure's getting to them.

Especially – enter problem number two – given the tricky dance of one-night stands. Which are often a little lacklustre. In fact, US researchers found that only 40% of women orgasm during casual sex – compared to 75% in committed relationships. Bad news for you, but also bad news for us. The stereotype that men don't care as long as they're getting off just isn't true, even in the context of a Tinder hook-up. While we can sometimes act like selfish idiots, our sense of masculinity relies heavily on our ability to please our partners. A 2014 study in the *Journal of Sex Research* backs this up: participants revealed that

bringing a woman to orgasm was one of the "most sexually satisfying experiences men could have", while not getting her over the finish line was "distressing". Trust me, we can't achieve serious gratification without taking you along for the ride. It would sour the strongest of relationships – so imagine how it feels after a string of anticlimactic one-nighters.

A quick aside – that same study found that 80% of men orgasm from casual sex; sounds good on paper until you consider that a fifth of us are throwing our clothes back on unfulfilled and walking home in shame.

Stiff competition

Typically, it necessitates talking to a woman to understand just how much this is messing with the male sexual psyche. Jennifer, 30, a food

consultant and committed swiper, refers to an "epidemic of dying caterpillars". "It happens a lot because of the brutal nature of one-night stands," she sighs. "My first Tinder date of 2015 couldn't get it up – even though I nearly gave myself lock jaw. He started apologising like an embarrassed teenager, saying he was having a hard time at work."

Unsurprisingly, it did not lead to a second date, and Jennifer hasn't spoken to the poor bloke since. (Besides, the same week she moved on to a guy who'd sent her pictures of himself wearing a leather chastity belt. "He wanted me to 'come find the key'.")

"It's not like you can say, 'It's okay, darling, we'll try again tomorrow,'" she points out,

"because with Tinder dates, if it ends badly, you both know there's not going to be a 'tomorrow.'"

There's no denying that poor sexual performance is, er, a growing problem among young men. A recent study revealed that one in four males seeking help for erectile dysfunction were under the age of 40. That's compared to a 2002 study that found it was two in every 100. These guys weren't spangled on drink and drugs, either – they were healthy men with respectable BMIs and fountains of testosterone. The number one culprit? Anxiety –

"It's not like you can say, 'It's okay, darling, we'll try again tomorrow'"

COME TOGETHER

The libido boosters that work best for both of you

FIRE HIM UP



Yohimbe bark

In tea or capsule form, the extract from this African tree is a natural fix for ED. (Cue wood joke here.)



Watermelon

US researchers' found a nutrient contained in watermelons, citrulline, can lead to a Viagra-like effect. Twisting our melon.



Porridge

Oats are rich in the compound L-arginine, which boosts blood flow down below when you really need it.



Apples

Sounds like a punchline, but true: a 2014 Italian study' linked an apple a day to enhanced sexual function in young women.

something that's rarely absent from casual sex with someone you met three martinis ago.

Any man will feel for Jennifer's date – failure to launch is basically our inner teenager's worst nightmare. So taboo is the subject that trying to convince any of my friends to discuss personal run-ins with 'ED' proves, well, harder than I'd imagined. ("I'd rather scoop my own eyeballs out," says one.)

But Duncan*, 35, a graphic designer, is willing to open up (though not be publicly named). "Nobody talks about it, mate, but it's happened to me about five or six times now," he says. "Not limp – just not hard enough. It's definitely an anxiety thing: when you meet a girl online, the chat turns sexual so fast because you're hiding behind a keyboard. Then you meet and it's, like, 'Oh God, now I've got to knock it out the park'"

Aside from being deeply emasculating, absentee erections can become a vicious circle, explains Jerome Hoeksema, a urologist at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. "The more [men] worry about it, the worse it gets," he says.

Here's how it goes down in the male psyche, according to psychologists: performance anxiety is of the same variety experienced before a big presentation at work, but in the bedroom it can lead to feelings of shame and silent self-criticism – not a very arousing

We won't trioja

SOURCES: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, ARCHIVES OF GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS



Can't hold a candle

cocktail. Failure to get it up swiftly follows, topped up by the fear of not being a 'real man'. Suppressing these feelings – as the single man-about-town is inclined to do – only deepens the psychological wound.

Of course, Hoeksema says, all of this can be overcome in the context of a loving relationship, with the security net of honesty and forgiveness to fall back on. But with intimacy cut from the equation, underperformers are left alone with their own thoughts and spiralling sexual stress.

Let's get digital?

If it's all so dispiriting, why don't us men just quit and channel our efforts into finding a meaningful relationship? Because the truth of the matter is, for all the unsatisfying one-off liaisons, it's a remarkably easy way to quickly quench one's carnal desires.

Chris*, 35, an entrepreneur and habitual app enthusiast, sees it this way: "Sex aside, hook-up apps sell this comforting dream that there's

It's a curious reversal of 'pressure sex' when we feel obligation to put out

a seemingly limitless supply of matches out there. We keep telling ourselves, 'I can stop this and settle down anytime I want', but I just don't feel like I'm there yet. It's ridiculous. I sound like a drug addict chasing the dragon."

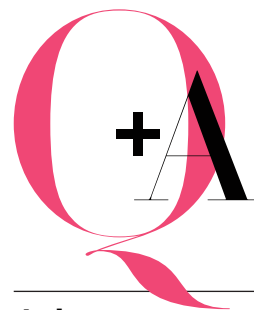
Evolutionary psychologists can explain the impulse. Tinder and apps like it provide men with the comforting illusion that there are millions of potential partners out there, in turn shifting the human mating system towards short-term dalliances. Commitment? That can wait.

Dr Wendy Walsh, a psychologist and author of *The 30-Day Love Detox*, points me towards a shocking study: "It shows that the more sexual partners a man has had, the more he perceives

diminished attractiveness in each new mate," she says. "It's a race to the bottom – as each woman rolls over, he becomes even more disappointed."

All of it contributes to a sort of curious reversal of old-fashioned 'pressure sex', where women are generally assumed to be the ones feeling obligated to 'put out' after a cocktail and a bit of flirty chat. And men just aren't equipped for it – psychologically or biologically. "But what are you going to do," Chris adds, "get up and leave?"

That's one option. But if you ask me, maybe it's time we all let those smouldering fingers cool off. **WB**



Ask our expert

The expert:

Zita West

Who: Sex and fertility expert; director of the Zita West Clinic†



Q Is there a specific sex position that will enhance my chances of conceiving?

A Any position will do! But what I've learnt is that having 'mechanical' sex, making love dispassionately just for the sake of fertilisation, can have a negative effect on your relationship. He might typically want sex first thing in the morning when he has more erections, but you prefer it in the evening – compromise on the timing and do it because you *want* to. As for the theory that sticking your legs in the air can help – it's a myth.

Q What can I ask my partner to do to help us get pregnant?

A There's no real need for him to make any lifestyle changes unless a doctor has officially identified issues with his sperm. If your partner *has* been told there's an issue with sperm quality or count, simple changes can make a big difference. We know alcohol and cigarettes do have an effect on sperm health. And that heat is detrimental to sperm – so no to hot baths. Nutritionally, sperm need protein to function optimally, and vitamin D can help, too – oily fish, tofu and eggs are good sources of both.

*NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED. CANDLE HOLDER PROPS CARE OF HARLEY & LOLA (HARLEYANDLOLA.CO.UK)