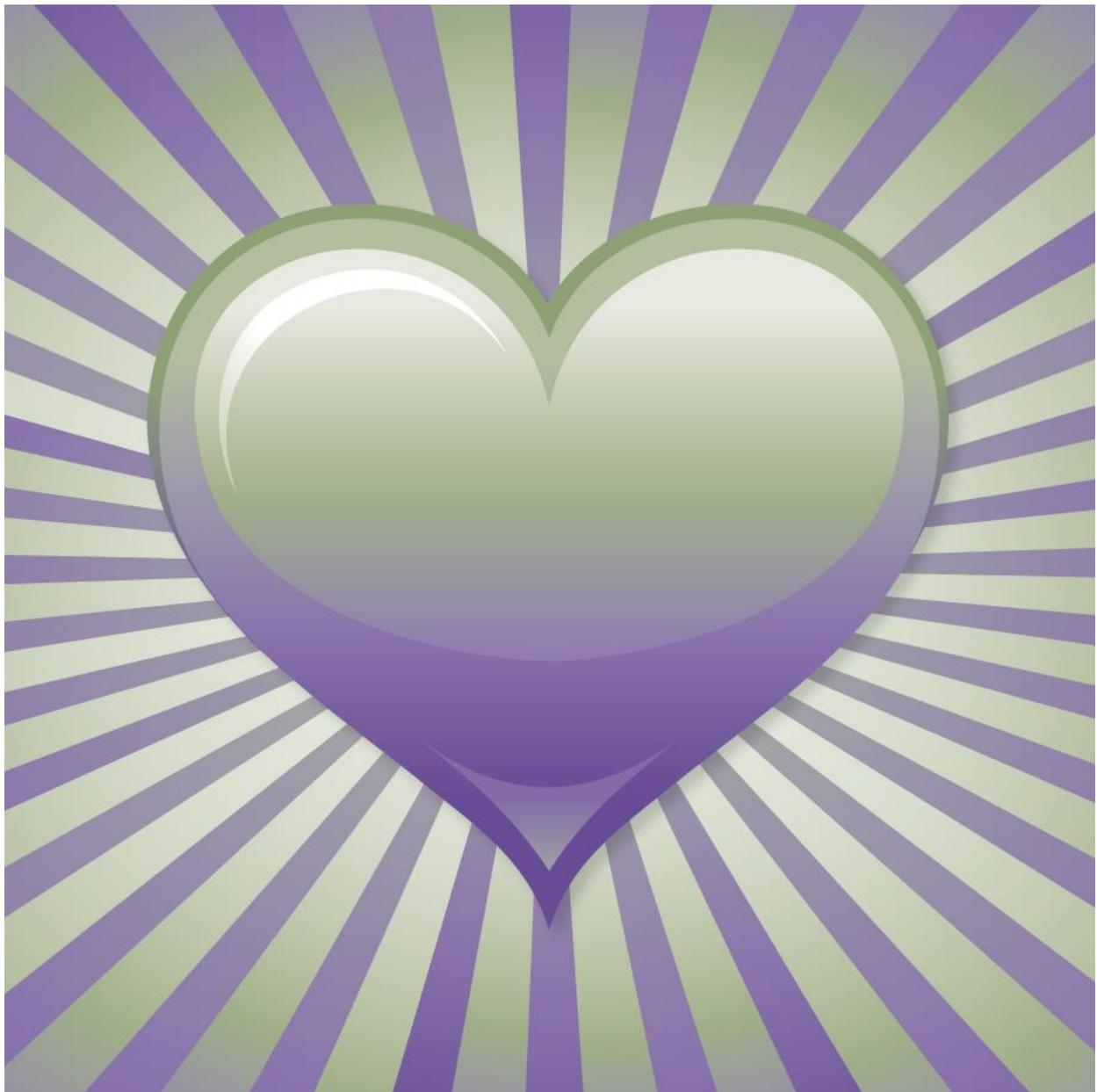


# Dating Difficulties survey results

From the Love Not Anger project, June 2019



# Highlights

Youth and adults, of all genders and orientations, can have difficulty with initiating dating, finding mutually attracted partners, loneliness, and stigma for being single or inexperienced.

An international survey about dating difficulties was conducted online in April 2019, by the independent [Love Not Anger](#) project. There were 713 responses, primarily from North America and Europe. Respondents ranged from adolescence to over 60, with most in their 20s or 30s.

Although this non-random sample does not accurately measure the frequency of dating difficulties, the respondents included 43% heterosexual cis men, 9% heterosexual cis women, 38% homosexual or bisexual cis men and women, and 10% trans and non-binary-gendered people. 5% of respondents identified themselves as asexual, aromantic or demisexual.

50% had been in a relationship at some point. 42% had never been in a relationship, but had limited experience such as flirting, initiating or going on date(s). 8% had no dating experience. Where current status could be determined, 9% were “late bloomers” in a relationship or marriage, 56% were single and trying to date or improve their lives, and 35% were single and not trying.

There are many possible causes of dating difficulties. Respondents report gaps in:

- self-confidence (79%)
- social skills (66%)
- mental health (62%)
- physical appearance (47%)
- social support (45%)
- availability of partners (39%)
- economic issues (28%)
- autism (19%)
- questioning gender or sexuality (16%)
- discrimination (7%)
- physical disability (6%)

Other causes include gender expectations, preferring to be friends first, and negative experiences such as bullying, abuse & assault. 15% are not sure why they have dating difficulties.

Very many respondents report that they are lonely. Many have intense longing for partnership and children, while a few feel positive about being single. Some are coping, such as by keeping busy. Many others wrote that dating difficulties had little or no effect on the rest of their life.

Dating difficulties often lead to depression and reinforce anxiety, making it further difficult to date. Some feel suicidal, and a few struggle with addiction or self-harm. Some felt worthless, hopeless and self-hating. No respondents reported feeling violent, but many felt angry.

Dating and social difficulties lead many people to social isolation. Many respondents feel they are missing out, left behind and alienated from coupled friends. Some respondents associate their un(der)employment or limited education with dating difficulties.



The 9% of partnered respondents either lucked into dating, or they made life changes: improving their confidence, self-awareness, fitness and clothing; mental health treatment; socializing more and getting support from friends; and using dating apps, services or advice. Single people have also been making those changes, as well as dieting, moving, and changing their attitudes.

Many respondents have used dating apps and suggested improvements to them. 33% were not interested in dating apps. Few had used other services to meet singles, but respondents would like to find matchmaking services, singles' events aimed at inexperienced people, and quiet & sober social activities.

Respondents are interested in counselling services, including individual talk therapy (48%), mentorship (43%), an online forum with a counsellor (36%) or peer moderator (29%), group counselling (25%) or sexual surrogacy (25%). Respondents were less interested in electronic services.

Respondents have talked to people about dating difficulties: a friend (80%), family member (54%), therapist (47%), dating partner (38%), online forum (30%), or others. Friends and therapists were most likely to be helpful. Family members were most likely to be harmful. Of the less-common confidantes, sex workers were the most helpful, and religious leaders the most harmful.

Although some thought that dating difficulties were an individual problem, many respondents were able to suggest how society should change to prevent and alleviate dating difficulties:

- Youth education about relationships, and screening for abuse, autism & mental health
- Access to therapy, social skills training and improved self-help advice
- Reduction of bullying, abuse & discrimination
- Acceptance of gender, sexuality and relationship diversity
- A body-positive, sex-positive culture free from gender expectations
- Clear communications about dating, accommodating neurodiversity
- Destigmatizing singlehood and inexperience, and reducing pressure to be partnered
- Valuing friendships and developing family or communal structures for singles
- Fairness to singles in pricing, housing, taxation and employment

There are many people who are unnecessarily stuck in lonely situations. Their isolation and depression has economic consequences (lower productivity and health & social service costs), as well as the risk of violence or suicide.

Based on these survey results, many long-time single people need support to identify the causes of their dating difficulties, make positive changes in their lives, and start dating if they choose to. This report uses data and people's stories to show why and how change needs to happen.



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Alana (2019). *Dating Difficulties survey results*. Retrieved from [www.lovenotanger.org](http://www.lovenotanger.org).



# Introduction

An independent, international survey about dating difficulties was conducted online in April 2019 by the [Love Not Anger](#) project. There were 713 responses, primarily from North America and Europe, from people of all genders and orientations.

## Defining dating difficulties

For purposes of this report, a person has “dating difficulties” if they:

- Want some kind of romantic and/or sexual relationship with another person, and
- Have never had a relationship, or they have been single for multiple years since their previous relationship experience, and
- Are post-adolescent, meaning most of their age peers have started dating.

This definition was not used to screen out respondents. The survey results also include small numbers of people with related situations:

- “Late bloomers”: people who started dating later than their peers did, and are now in a relationship or feel confident they can start one
- Adolescents who are struggling to start dating
- People who prefer to be single but feel pressured to be in a relationship, or had difficulty figuring out that they prefer to be single
- People who can find partners but have some other frustrations with dating or relationships.

## Purposes of the research

This survey was conducted to begin answering the [research questions](#) of the Love Not Anger project, and to give inspiration for further research. The survey results will also give direction to future activities of the Love Not Anger project.

A formal survey was needed to confirm and strengthen the knowledge from anecdotal reports, media coverage and incel community research (which has been limited to men’s experiences).

The survey had many open-ended (free-text) questions to gather unexpected information. This qualitative research was an opportunity to listen to and include people with lived experience, even though they are dispersed world-wide and some have difficulty with social communications.

This survey was concerned with the emotional experiences of dating, relationships, loneliness and isolation. The survey did not ask questions about sexual behaviour.



## What was learned

The survey showed that people of all genders and orientations have dating difficulties, for many different reasons, and they have many different feelings and attitudes. It's not just straight men, it's not just because of physical appearance, and they are not all angry misogynists.

This report explores the causes and consequences for individuals, life improvements that people have made, services that could be supportive, and socio-cultural changes that could prevent and alleviate dating difficulties.

The respondents wrote many personal stories, which provide compelling evidence that action is needed to increase the life-satisfaction of long-time single people.

*WARNING: This report includes discussion and quotations about suicide, abuse, assault, bullying, and other topics that may be upsetting to read.*

The "late bloomer" respondents recounted how they changed their lives, started dating in adulthood, and formed successful relationships.



# Methods

This independent survey of a convenience sample was designed to better understand phenomena, rather than to measure them precisely. The survey succeeded in reaching a variety of people who have or had dating difficulties. It was not intended to study the incel community specifically.

The survey was accessible to Internet users anywhere in the world. The questionnaire (appendix, page 76) was a Google Form in English only, using gender-neutral language. All questions were optional. There were many free-text questions to capture rare situations and insights.

The survey received no funding or academic support. It was done independently by Alana, the founder of LoveNotAnger.org. Alana's university education and career experience include qualitative and quantitative research skills such as designing questionnaires and analyzing statistical data. The questionnaire introduction (page 79) addressed ethical matters such as confidentiality and emotional support.

## Questionnaire distribution (sampling)

The survey was open to responses from April 3 to 30, 2019. During that period the survey was available from the lovenotanger.org website. It was announced on the Love Not Anger mailing list and collaboration forum. The survey link was tweeted multiple times by @lovenotanger and was retweeted by followers. Alana also posted the survey link on Facebook and it was shared by friends. The survey was shared on the Love-Shy forum, one of the incel communities.

This method of survey distribution was not random or unbiased. The results show that the survey reached North Americans and Europeans, and a high percentage of SOGI minorities<sup>1</sup>.

## Ideologies

Based on free-text responses, the survey reached many people with progressive attitudes, including 24 advocating for feminism and 12 with socialist or anti-capitalist politics.

There was a smaller number, 9 respondents, with masculinist attitudes including promotion of traditional masculine strengths, opposition to feminism, critique of women's behaviour, and preference for patriarchy.

There were 18 respondents who identified with the incel community or used its vocabulary.

## Data cleansing, tagging and analysis methods

The survey data was analyzed in Excel spreadsheets.

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the term SOGI to refer to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. SOGI minorities are also known as LGBTQ+ people, and include lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex, two-spirited, asexual and other queer & questioning people.



Eight response records were excluded from the analysis. Two of them had blank responses on almost every field. The remaining six were duplicates of other response records. After removing these records, 713 response records were available for analysis.

The free-text questions and Other-Specify options were read and analyzed by manually applying over 800 tags. The tags were reviewed in multiple ways to correct spelling errors and combine similar tags, then grouped to find themes in the responses.

Responses were used no matter which question they were written under. For example, if a response to Question 15 described a cause of dating difficulties, this information was tagged and analyzed with the causes, question 7.

Throughout the survey, there were only 32 free-text responses that were not clearly written enough to interpret.

To keep this report to a reasonable length, questions were analyzed one at a time, not in combination. Cross-tabulations, such as breaking down responses by a demographic variable, may be requested from the Love Not Anger project. The sample size may or may not be sufficient to draw significant conclusions from a cross-tabulation.

## Quotations

In question 16, 48% of respondents gave permission to be quoted in this report.

*This indented italic format indicates a quotation. Omitted phrases are indicated by "...". Grammar and spelling are left as written unless [clarifications], initial capitals or final punctuation are required.*

Quotations were generally chosen for being eloquent or colourful examples of a group of similar responses. Some situations quoted were unique within the survey but may indicate that more individuals in the world have a similar situation. Quotations are not statistically representative.

This report presents respondents' statements whether or not the researcher agreed with them. Responses about sensitive or taboo topics have been reported here without censorship.

## Biases

The researcher endeavored to phrase the questions neutrally and to avoid biased judgement when analyzing the results. Nevertheless, no researcher can be completely neutral. This survey was conducted by Alana, a white middle-class Canadian woman with progressive feminist views. She was a late bloomer who has spent many years single and many years in relationships. She supports people's freedoms to identify as any gender and orientation, to enjoy consensual sex or forgo it, and to enjoy romantic relationships or remain single.

## Conclusions we can and can't make

Because the survey was not randomly sampled, the quantitative results should be interpreted with caution. Demographics are calculated to show who is included in the results, not to estimate the population frequency of any characteristic.



For example, 64% of the respondents were male. This does not mean that males are more likely than females to have dating difficulties. It just means that more males found the survey (through a biased selection of social media) and chose to respond.

This survey did not require any particular criteria for participation. Some respondents had never dated anyone, while some had limited experience with asking for or going on dates. Other respondents had relationship experience (ongoing dating, live-in or marriage) and were usually either “late bloomers” or still struggling with dating. Preliminary analysis showed that the respondent’s level of dating experience (page 15) was not very significant to the results.

A separate, randomly sampled survey would be needed to determine what percentage of a population has never dated anyone, or meets other criteria for dating difficulties.

Counts of free-text responses are reported for comparison but should not be considered as a percentage of the population. For example, in the free-text responses about seeking dating opportunities on page 41, there were 94 mentions of dating apps/sites and 7 mentions of asking friends for introductions. We can conclude that dating apps are probably more commonly used than asking friends, but there may be many more people who did either one without mentioning it. Even one or two people mentioning something in free-text indicates that others may be having the same experience.

Small differences between free-text counts are not significant. Some mentions of a concept may have been missed or misinterpreted in the manual reading & tagging of responses.



# Demographics

## Age groups

Question 1: What is your age?

Age Group	Count	Percent
Under 18 years	8	1%
18-21	69	10%
21-24	114	16%
25-29	195	27%
30-39	223	31%
40-49	69	10%
50-59	24	3%
60 or over	10	1%
Unspecified	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100%</b>

These results indicate who answered the survey: mostly people in their 20s and 30s. Because the survey is not randomly sampled, these results should not be interpreted as how many people have dating difficulties at various ages.

The age data, cross-tabulated with Experience, page 17, confirms anecdotal reporting that some adolescents feel left out of the dating scene, and that some people remain single long past middle-age.



## World regions

Question 2: *What region of the world do you live in?*

Region	Count	Percent
North America (Canada, USA)	526	73.8%
Europe	132	18.5%
Australia and Oceania	15	2.1%
South America	11	1.5%
Southeast Asia (Myanmar to Indonesia)	7	1.0%
South Asia (India, Pakistan & neighbours)	5	0.7%
East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan)	4	0.6%
Central America & Caribbean	4	0.6%
Middle East & North Africa	3	0.4%
North & Central Asia	3	0.4%
Unspecified	3	0.4%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100%</b>

Respondents were allowed to interpret the region categories. For example, a resident of Russia would decide whether to select Europe or North & Central Asia.

Likely because of who circulated the survey, most responses came from the USA and Canada, with a significant portion from Europe. All other regions submitted less than 8% of the 710 specified responses.

Therefore, the survey's conclusions will largely reflect the "Western" culture of North America and Europe. In these countries, most people are free to select their own dating partners, with limited use of family matchmaking or other traditions. These are mostly liberal democracies where women and men have (theoretically) equal rights, though the tradition of men taking the lead in dating is still common. In these countries, there are varying but relatively high levels of acceptance for diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Data was not collected to identify specific countries nor subcultures within them. Respondents sometimes commented on the cultural variations in dating behaviours and gender expectations.



## Gender identity

*Question 3: What is your gender?*

*Question 4: Are you trans?*

This combination of gender identity and trans status was calculated from questions 3 and 4, according to rules in the Appendix, page 87. “Cis” means “not transgender”, i.e. someone who currently identifies as the same sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender Combo	Count	Percent
Cis Female	194	27.2%
Cis Male	445	62.4%
Non-Binary	51	7.2%
Trans Female	11	1.5%
Trans Male	9	1.3%
Unspecified	3	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Sexual and romantic orientation

*Question 5: Who are you romantically and/or sexually attracted to?*

Orientation was calculated from questions 3 and 5, according to rules in the Appendix, page 88. These categories are statistical simplifications of the variations in romantic & sexual orientation.

Orientation	Count	Percent
Heterosexual	381	53.4%
Bisexual	164	23.0%
Homosexual	116	16.3%
Attracted to nobody	6	0.8%
Unspecified	46	6.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



## Gender and orientation

Gender Combo	Hetero	Bisexual	Homo	Nobody	Unspecified	Total
Cis Female	61	59	72	1	1	194
Cis Male	310	85	41	4	6	446
Non-Binary		14			36	50
Trans Female	4	3	3	1		11
Trans Male	6	2			1	9
Unspecified		1			2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>713</b>

Gender and orientation were summarized into a small set of categories, according to rules in the Appendix, page 89:

Gender & Orientation Summary	Count	Percent
Cis Het Female	61	9%
Cis Het Male	310	43%
Cis Queer (male or female; asexual, bisexual or homosexual)	269	38%
Trans and Non-Binary	71	10%
Unspecified	2	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Asexuals, demisexuals and aromantics

There were 35 respondents who were feeling low levels of sexual or romantic attraction to others, meaning they identified as or questioned whether they were asexual, aromantic, grey-sexual or demisexual. This includes people who responded any of the following:

- Attraction = Nobody (possibly combined with attraction to one or more genders)
- Attraction write-in response mentioning asexual, aromantic, gray-asexual or demisexual
- Free-text responses to any question: 3 aromantics, 15 asexuals and 11 demisexuals

People on the asexual spectrum do struggle with many of the challenges identified in this survey, such as loneliness and self-confidence. They may feel societal pressure to be in an ordinary romantic-sexual relationship or may be stigmatized for singlehood. They may be struggling to find a relationship that meets their needs (without sex, or without romance).



*I am interested in sex in the abstract, but when the opportunity is presented I end up feeling nauseous and anxious. I don't think I've been sexually attracted to anyone before, and I'm not sure if I'm honestly capable of it. I'd like to experience sexual attraction (if only so that people would stop viewing me as stunted or prudish) but I'm not sure how to begin. Dating is stressful because I don't know how to address this issue without losing someone's interest. But I'd like to be in a relationship.*

Demisexual people need an emotional connection before feeling sexual attraction, which may make finding relationships more difficult.

*I have tried online dating multiple times, and gone on several dates. However, I have not really enjoyed it because it's hard for me to feel romantically attracted to people before we are friends (I identify as demisexual). For me, I think I feel most comfortable engaging romantically with someone who is already my friend.*

## Who has dating difficulties?

Respondents to this survey do not reflect the distribution of ages, genders and orientations in the general population. That may be because of who the survey was promoted to, or it may reflect who encounters more dating difficulties, or both.

We cannot use this non-random-sampled survey to conclude how common dating difficulties are. That would require a more specific definition of “dating difficulties” and a large random sample, asked in the widely-spoken languages of various countries.

What we can conclude from this survey is that people of all ages, genders and orientations can and do have difficulty with dating.



# Experience with dating

Question 6: Which of the following have you done at least once?

Done at least once	Count	Percent
Flirted with someone	540	76%
Asked someone for a date	490	69%
Been asked for a date	353	50%
Gone on a date	524	73%
Multiple dates with the same person	413	58%
Ongoing dating relationship	336	47%
Live-in (common-law) relationship	130	18%
Marriage	71	10%
None of the above	59	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100%</b>

This question asked about people's experience with making interpersonal connections, rather than their physical experience of sexuality. It is possible that someone with little or no dating history has some sexual experience, in a context such as sex work, bathhouses, parties, sexual violence or abuse. One other-specify response was "Asked for a hug", which was not recorded because it was about physical touch.

Respondents decided what counted as a relationship. One other-specify response gave details of an online-only relationship, which was not classified above. There were no further other-specify entries to classify.



## Experience level

Question 6 was used to calculate three Experience levels for analyzing other questions:

Experience level	Question 6 selections (done at least once)	Percent
Relationship	At least one of: <i>Ongoing dating relationship, Live-in (common-law) relationship, Marriage</i>	50%
Limited experience	None of the following: <i>Ongoing dating relationship, Live-in (common-law) relationship, Marriage</i> And, at least one of: <i>Flirted with someone, Asked someone for a date, Been asked for a date, Gone on a date, Multiple dates with the same person</i>	42%
No experience	<i>None of the above</i> (Includes two respondents who chose this option plus either Flirted or Asked.)	8%

In this topical survey, half of respondents had Limited or No Experience with dating. This is not a measure of how frequent that situation is in the population at large.

The questionnaire does not distinguish between the following situations for people with Relationship experience:

- A person who had a relationship in the past but has returned to singlehood. They may consider themselves to have ongoing dating difficulties.
- A “late bloomer” who started dating after adolescence and continues to date or be in a relationship. (The survey aims to learn from the experiences of late bloomers.)
- A person who started dating in adolescence and continues to date or be in a relationship. (They may have “dating difficulties” similar to or different from the late bloomers.)

## Dating Status

The free-text responses (especially question 11 about making changes) were analyzed in combination with question 6 (dating experiences) to determine the current dating status of respondents. There were 609 respondents who gave enough information to determine their dating status. Because respondents were not directly asked about their status, this data should be interpreted with caution.

Of the known statuses, 91% (554 respondents) are currently single. Of these, 343 respondents are trying to date (such as by using dating apps) or are making changes to improve their lives (such as socializing more). The remaining 211 respondents (35% of those with known status) are not trying to date or improve their lives; they wrote about being uninterested (perhaps busy or asexual) or having given up (34 respondents) due to age, rejection, ill health or other reasons.



Of the single respondents, 43.5% had relationship experience, but they may still struggle with dating difficulties like inexperienced people.

Only 55 survey respondents were clearly partnered. Some of them (31 respondents) wrote about making life changes that enabled them to start dating successfully as a late bloomer. Another 24 respondents wrote about their luck in finding a relationship, such as by meeting a partner through friends; some people married the first person who asked them out. This lucky group might not feel confident about dating again if their relationship ends.

Dating Status	No experience	Limited experience	Relationship experience	Total
Single – Trying to date or improve self	12	168	163	<b>343</b>
Single – Not trying to date or improve	33	100	78	<b>211</b>
Partnered – after making life changes	n/a	n/a	31	<b>31</b>
Partnered – lucked into a relationship	n/a	n/a	24	<b>24</b>
Unknown	14	30	60	<b>104</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>713</b>

## Age and Experience

The age data (question 1), cross-tabulated with Experience below, confirms anecdotal reporting that some adolescents feel left out of the dating scene, and that some people remain single long past middle-age. However, older respondents were more likely to have relationship experience:

Age Group	No experience	Limited experience	Relationship experience	Total
17 and under	13%	75%	13%	100%
18-21	10%	48%	42%	100%
21-24	11%	54%	34%	100%
25-29	11%	49%	40%	100%
30-39	7%	36%	57%	100%
40-49	0%	25%	75%	100%
50-59	8%	8%	83%	100%
60 or over	0%	20%	80%	100%
Unspecified	0%	0%	100%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>100%</b>



# Causes of dating difficulties

Question 7: *Why do/did you have difficulty with dating?*

Question 8: *Which of the following cause(d) your difficulties with dating?*

Two questions were asked to find out the causes of dating difficulties. The first question was open-ended, and the second presented a multiple choice of known/suspected causes. The free-text answers, the Other-Specify answers, and cause-related statements from other question responses were aligned with the multiple-choice options for discussion beginning on page 19.

The survey relies on self-reports by respondents, which are valuable information but necessarily biased. Many respondents struggle with self-esteem, confidence, depression and/or anxiety, which are known to cause negative self-assessments. We can conclude that either the reported cause, or the respondent's feelings about it, has created a real barrier to dating.

## Causes: Multiple choice responses

Which of the following cause(d) your difficulties with dating?	Count	Percent
Self-confidence, sensitivity to rejection	566	79%
Social skills, body language, non-verbal signals	470	66%
Mental health conditions (anxiety, depression, addiction, etc.)	439	62%
Physical appearance	335	47%
Not enough friends & social support	319	45%
Few suitable people available near me	279	39%
Employment, education, housing or economic issues	198	28%
Autism or Asperger's traits	137	19%
Questioning gender, sexuality or dating preferences	111	16%
Discrimination	50	7%
Physical disability or health condition	43	6%
Not sure	108	15%
Other (Specify)	72	10%



On average, respondents selected 4.3 causes from the above list. They wrote an average of 155 characters in response to question 7 plus the Other-Specify field in question 8. This shows that people have multiple reasons for their dating difficulties. Some of the reasons (such as low self-confidence or lack of social support) are likely to be a barrier to making improvements on other causes.

## Self-confidence, sensitivity to rejection

Question 8 showed that 79% of respondents had difficulty with self-confidence and/or fear of rejection when dating.

Related words are frequently found in the free-text answers to question 7 about causes:

- 59 “confidence” or “confident”
- 58 “shy” or “shyness”
- 40 “fear”
- 36 “rejection” or “rejected”
- 17 “self-esteem”
- 13 “insecure” or “insecurity” or “insecurities”
- 9 “courage”
- 8 “nervous”

The free-text questions garnered over 300 related responses, including:

*Critically low self-esteem and general feelings of inadequacy.*

*On the rare times I was able to get someone to go on a date with me, I felt so nervous and at a loss for words that I would inevitably come off as boring.*

*I was too anxious and afraid of rejection to ask out a crush, and that led to years of unrequited love in some cases.*

*Powerful sense of SHYNESS and INSECURITY.*

*I've always had trust issues and lack of confidence since I was a child, since I got bullied a lot throughout my young and teen years.*

*I had low self-esteem and couldn't really believe anyone would be interested in me. This made it hard to impossible to ask people out, and made me seem shy or standoffish, which made people less likely to ask me out.*

*When I think about asking someone out or flirting or 'makeing a move' I get extremely nervous, I sweat, my heart pounds. In some situations I've actually seen my chest shake due to my heart beating so hard.*

*Massive approach anxiety; never learned about displaying sexual desire appropriately to those I'm attracted to, lots of fear in the process; still lots of rejection fear.*



Rejections can worsen a person's self-confidence, sometimes creating a downward vicious circle:

*It's hard to find somebody I "click" with. Frequent rejection experiences and low self-worth make it painful to keep trying.*

*I don't have the courage or self-confidence to approach a random woman to ask her out, nor would I know how to. I also both expect that I would be rejected by any woman I found attractive (I have a low opinion of myself and thus assume that anyone I am attracted to is out of my league), and fear that if I was rejected, I might "snap", so to speak.*

Some respondents had negative self-assessments, with 37 free-text responses like:

*I have been too shy to initiate contact, and too self-depreciating to imagine someone would want to spend time with me.*

## **Social skills, body language, non-verbal signals**

In the multiple-choice question 8, 66% of respondents stated that their dating difficulties were at least partly due to gaps in social skills and understanding of body language & non-verbal signals.

103 respondents described gaps in their dating skills. Some say they just don't know how to go about dating:

*Don't really know how to meet people. Don't know what to say/when to say it to show interest.*

Some respondents have trouble picking up on social cues or signals from others:

*I have difficulties in determining if someone actually wants to date me or not. I assume they don't.*

*Because I'm shy, never know if it was actually a date or not...*

It can be difficult to express emotions and show romantic or sexual interest in a prospective partner:

*Don't understand how to flirt or express sexual interest, also high social anxiety.*

*... difficulty sharing feelings.*

*Expressing my interest for the other person, expressing what I wanted out of the relationship, expressing my emotional needs in fear of being seen as crazy, being assertive, knowing if i actually like someone, being bored.*

Some respondents have difficulty with both reading and sending signals of interest:

*Expressing my emotional intention with the person and knowing signs that a person wants to be intimate...*



*Being absolute clueless and so inexperienced that I don't know how to make a move and even when all the right signals in the world are being directed towards me, and me being as cautious as possible about it, still being rejected over and over again.*

Dating skills gaps also make it difficult to progress from stage to stage:

*Always had difficulty starting things, wasn't able to transition from flirting.*

*Difficulty in turning digital messaging (Tinder or Bumble) into real dates.*

*Social interactions of establishing the date, determining the level of connection and following up on second dates.*

*Flirting and knowing someone is attracted to me. Asking or accepting dates.  
Negotiating polyamory.*

*I have difficulty making moves, and transitioning from a casual dating scenario to a more serious relationship. I have a hard time asserting myself and what I want.*

127 respondents mentioned the weakness of their social skills. They mentioned feeling awkward, and having trouble with conversation, communication and social cues for everyday interaction and making friends as well as for dating:

*I'm shy and awkward with new people.*

*My personality was really obnoxious when I was young.*

*Not able to talk normally, like with friends.*

*...being ignorant of social cues & signals...*

*Escaped into fantasy so never developed great social skills.*

*...difficulty maintaining conversation, I get embarrassed easily, introversion.*

*...i am kind [of] anti-social and aloof.*

*I have no social skills. I don't have any friends either.*

51 respondents had difficulty with meeting new people for various reasons:

*I have trouble putting myself into new situations and am bad at meeting new people.*

*I have problems finding opportunities to meet new women and flirting with them.*

*I can't find occasions to find meaningful connections with other people, especially of the opposite sex...*

*...I'm not that much of a social animal (only in doses) and tend to be a loner...*

*I don't attend social events, also I am shy.*



A few respondents reported negative feedback about their social or dating skills. More often they described trying to avoid offense.

*...women were scary and thought i was creepy or an asshole...*

*...bad rep with girls.*

*The ability to approach and interact with women I am attracted to and make clear my attraction while not being creepy.*

*...fear of making unwelcome advances; fear of imposing a frightening male presence into an environment...*

Across all of the free text questions, 27 respondents mentioned being an introvert. Introversion is not itself a gap in social skills, but it can inhibit someone from going to large-group activities, meeting new people and opening conversations with them.

Not all respondents with dating difficulties had trouble with other social skills. 26 respondents reported that they were successful with making friends and socializing. A few reported career successes that would have required good people-skills.

*As a child my social skills were bad, and I have gotten them better to the point where I don't have trouble making friends of either gender, and a boss called me an "expert networker", but this type of socializing [for dating] is much more difficult.*

## Mental health conditions

In question 8 (multiple-choice), 62% of respondents stated that some kind of “mental health condition (anxiety, depression, addiction, etc.)” was a cause of their dating difficulties.

Free-text responses to all questions included the following numbers of mentions of specific conditions, whether formally diagnosed or not:

- 66 depression
- 64 anxiety
- 46 social anxiety
- 18 unspecified “mental health”
- 10 addiction or alcohol use
- 6 post-traumatic stress disorder
- 4 attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- 4 eating disorder, e.g. anorexia
- 4 avoidant personality disorder
- 2 bipolar disorder
- 2 borderline personality disorder
- 2 self-harm behaviour
- 2 unspecified “stress”
- 1 body dysmorphic disorder



- 1 schizoid personality disorder
- 1 agoraphobia
- 1 paranoia
- 1 insomnia

Mental health conditions can also be a consequence of dating difficulties, for example, loneliness can worsen depression. This is discussed on page 33. Mental health treatment needs are discussed beginning on page 54.

## Physical appearance

In question 8 (multiple-choice), 47% of respondents specified physical appearance as a cause of dating difficulties. This did not vary significantly by gender or orientation.

There were 98 free-text responses citing physical disadvantages on the dating scene, including being too tall, too short, too hairy, too bald, too skinny, too fat, or otherwise unattractive:

*Poor grooming and fashion choices...*

*...being significantly unattractive (2.5-3/10) with multiple skin conditions and a permanent "messy" look :(*

*People avoid me, i also get insult about my looks a lot.*

*Classic "nerd" physical characteristics, receding hairline even by middle school, large nose, tall but skinny, no real jawline.*

*...extremely poor body image (I'm a very hairy girl) ... I was so afraid of sex because it meant being naked and I hated my body.*

*...repulsive appearance.*

*I have a poor body image resulting from unwillingness for self control with eating, which leads to poor posture and general poor body confidence.*

*Being rejected for things that you can't control (height, age) gets your confidence down.*

*I am old, ugly and poor.*

Some respondents used the concept of “*body image*” to summarize their anxiety and shame about their bodies. Some showed awareness that their self-perception may be unrealistic. Others were very aware of the beauty expectations of their cultural milieu:

*I'm too ugly for people swiping on Tinder/OKC.*

## Not enough friends & social support

In question 8, 45% of respondents chose this multiple-choice option.



In questions 7 and 8, there were 34 free-text responses about loneliness, a lack of friends, social isolation or being a social outcast, as causes of dating difficulties. For example:

*Social life is lacking. My parents had a very empty social life too and Kept their distance from people.*

*...having very little social interaction, rejection by others in a platonic setting, not being part of a group,...*

*I do not go out much. Mostly spend my time at work or playing games.*

*...leading a very sheltered life, lack of socialisation in general, Never actually had any friends...*

*Never chosen for athletics, and never welcomed into any school cliques. Pretty much an outsider.*

*I dont have any friends to talk to. I am completely alone.*

Lack of social support was mentioned another 300 times in response to other questions. Social isolation is strongly related to dating difficulties, but it may be a cause, consequence, or coincidence:

- Cause: A social support network can help a single person meet new people to date. It can boost their self-confidence after rejections. Lack of friends therefore makes dating more difficult.
- Consequence: Some long-time singles withdraw from social activities due to depression caused by loneliness, shame about dating difficulties, or because they have less in common with their coupled friends.
- Coincidence: There may be a common factor, such as gaps in social skills, causing someone difficulties with both friendship and dating.

*I believe my failure to have a romantic relationship, as opposed to a purely sexual one, has also made making friends extremely difficult, but perhaps both from same unknown cause.*

Social isolation is discussed further on page 36.

## Few suitable people available near me

In question 8 (multiple-choice), 39% of respondents stated there were “few suitable people available near me”. Respondents provided a wide variety of free-text comments about their small dating pools:

*I live in a rural area, so there are very few people my age of any gender.*

*Very few single women in this town.*



*People interested in me typically have some deal-breaker for me (non-Christian, non-intellectual, non-progressive). Also have had to move a lot as a scientist.*

*...desire someone with similar interests, personality, religious and political views, and am further attracted nearly exclusively to overweight and obese women.*

*High standards, lack of single people around me.*

People with less-common dating preferences, such as asexuals and polyamorous folks, will have particular difficulty dating in lower-population areas. People who are shy about socializing will have a harder time meeting partners who share their geeky or obscure interests.

*As someone poly and an introvert I found my dating options restrictive. I couldn't date non-poly people so most dating sites were useless...*

## **Employment, education, housing or economic issues**

Question 8 found that 28% of respondents had an employment, education, housing or economic issue contributing to their dating difficulties. There were 36 related causes reported in free-text answers, including:

*I lack confidence, due to frustration w/ poverty.*

*...lack of employment and thus identity...*

*...living with parents, NEET... [not in employment, education or training]*

*...come from a lower class household...*

*Don't own a car and don't drive (my town has poor public transit), so I lack confidence.*

*...low earnings/low prestige job...*

*Lack of money, conflicting work schedules.*

*Post-college, I was unemployed for a long time and didn't feel like I could be a partner in that state.*

10 respondents mentioned living with their parents, either as a contributor to dating difficulties, or as a change (moving out on their own) in question 11.

Dating difficulties may also lead to un(der)employment, as signaled on page 38.



## Autism or Asperger's traits

In the multiple-choice question, 19% of respondents selected “Autism or Asperger's traits” as a cause of their dating difficulties.

Free-text responses to all questions included 41 mentions of being autistic, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger’s syndrome or “the spectrum”, whether the respondent was formally diagnosed or had self-identified these traits.

*I'm autistic and very shy. I see women as some telepathic aliens or myself as a monkey amongst humans.*

*Too autistic to understand social cues. When I try to communicate feelings I am told I am too needy, when I stay quiet I she says I'm not showing interest. Everything I do is wrong and she dates will not communicate what they want.*

*...on the spectrum, ... I'm really worried about being creepy and I'm unsure what the rules are for dating in modern society.*

*I don't know. As a child my social skills were bad, and I have gotten them better to the point where I don't have trouble making friends of either gender, and a boss called me an "expert networker", but this type of socializing is much more difficult. I do believe I am slightly on the autism spectrum, but it would not be noticeable in my daily life.*

This count of free-text responses does not include social-skills or dating-skills difficulties (page 20) that the respondent did not describe as autism traits.

## Questioning gender, sexuality or dating preferences

In question 8 (multiple-choice), 16% of respondents stated that questioning their gender identity, sexual orientation or dating preferences was a contributor to their dating difficulties.

There were 148 respondents (21%) who were questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (SOGI), by indicating any of the following:

- Gender, question 3 = Questioning (based on write-in responses)
- Trans, question 4 = Not sure, and Gender is not Non-binary
- Attraction, question 5 = Not sure (possibly combined with other responses)
- Attraction write-in responses that indicated questioning
- Causes, question 8: selected “Questioning gender, sexuality or dating preferences”

Breaking this down by gender and orientation, we confirm that queer, trans and non-binary respondents are more likely to find that questioning contributes to their dating difficulties. A small portion of cis heterosexuals also have this difficulty:



SOGI	Count Questioning	Percent Questioning	Count of SOGI
Cis Het Female	10	16% of	61
Cis Het Male	24	8% of	310
Cis Queer	90	34% of	268
Trans or Non-Binary	24	33% of	72
Unspecified	0	0% of	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>21% of</b>	<b>713</b>

## Discrimination

Question 8 found that 7% of respondents experienced discrimination as a cause of dating difficulties. Free text responses showed this might include discrimination due to ethnicity, race, disability, gender (sexism and transphobia), sexuality, or other reasons.

*I live in ... a city where race is very important to people when choosing a dating partner.*

*I'd say at least 30% of my Asian friends have never been in a relationship either.*

*African-American with dark skin and coily hair...*

*...a lot of men don't like smart women...*

*I would need to find a gay man who is okay with dating someone in a wheelchair.*

Discrimination (beyond the dating scene) can cause under-employment and exacerbate mental illness, which in turn can contribute to dating difficulties.

## Physical disability or health condition

In the multiple-choice question, 6% of respondents identified physical disability or a health condition as a cause of their dating difficulties. There were 17 free-text responses mentioning disability and illness, including the last quote in the previous section, plus:

*Chronic fatigue issues from chronic illnesses.*

*Cancer diagnosis 2 years ago has sidelined any further efforts to date.*

*I'm 60, unmarried, have no family (in spite of wanting one), have not had a relationship in almost 20 years, and feel that there's a big hole in my life. I lost about 30 years to illness and uninsurability and now feel that my life is effectively over.*



## Uncertain causes

In Question 8, 15% of respondents selected the “Not sure” option. This indicates that many people were uncertain about the cause of their dating difficulties. (Almost all of these respondents did select other causes in the multiple-choice question.)

These are some of at least 22 free-text responses from people who had no identity or diagnosis to label or explain their dating difficulties:

*I feel like there is something about me that makes it impossible for anyone to be attracted to me as a romantic/sexual partner.*

*I'm not really sure why I have difficulty dating. ...A lot of times I feel like it's my appearance - that my face is not attractive enough. I think I am also a pretty sensitive person, so I need to be with someone who is very kind and loving - in other words, I might be pickier than the average person. However, I live in a big city with lots of young people, so I don't think it's a case of not enough people to date. Other than that, I'm not really sure why I have difficulty with dating. I am outgoing, friendly, have good social skills, funny, creative, kind, loving, silly, etc.*

*No idea. I don't know why I unnerve people.*

*I never really figured out why people (men, women, and non-binary people) were not that interested in getting entangled with me. My theory was that I was too intense (emotionally and intellectually), which seems to be off-putting in a woman.*

*As my female friends have been unable to identify any fundamental flaws that I have, I cannot help but conclude I am fundamentally unlikable and unlovable to women. Turns out my lack of self-esteem is based on fact.*

*Obviously, I am not meeting expectations in people I ask out. Am I not attractive enough? Too forward? Too tongue tied? Weird work schedule? I don't know that any ONE thing would fit everyone I asked out, so, I am unsure what kind of help to ask for.*

33 respondents perceived their dating difficulties as a mysterious yet fundamental condition, using language like “abnormality”, “defective”, “stunted”, “diseased”, “damaged”, “sub-human”, and “something’s wrong with me”. 7 respondents felt they were “unloveable”.

## Other causes

The free-text responses to Question 7 and 8 revealed many other factors that contributed to respondents’ dating difficulties. In this list, one respondent may be included multiple times.

### Not matching

60 respondents: Attraction is not mutual.



*The people I'm attracted to don't seem attracted to me.*

25 respondents: Nobody is attracted to the respondent

*People aren't attracted to me.*

*Whatever "chemistry" is, I don't have it.*

10 respondents: Haven't found the right person yet

9 respondents: Straight women and queer people who are not being asked on dates

9 respondents: Having high standards

### **Not interested**

35 respondents: Asexual, aromantic or demisexual (see page 13)

34 respondents: Too busy

27 respondents: Not trying to date

*...lack of desire to put in effort to find others to date / inertia from living a fairly satisfying single life...*

19 respondents: Not sure what they want

*I don't know what type of person I'd be romantically/sexually attracted to...*

15 respondents: Not interested in dating or relationships, but did not mention being asexual or aromantic

6 respondents: Have other priorities, such as career

4 respondents: Don't feel ready for a relationship

### **Inexperience**

45 respondents: Being inexperienced or a virgin

*Rejection, constant rejection. Disclosing my virginity only to be turned down. Being told my virginity is a 'great thing' but then having women deny me for it in the same breath.*

32 respondents: Being too old to start dating, or having spent too many years single

*...feedback loop of feeling like I don't have enough romantic/sexual experience for my age and not knowing how to broach that issue with potential partners.*

### **Survival**

32 respondents: Physical, emotional or sexual abuse

30 respondents: Trust issues, often due to previous abuse, trauma or assault



20 respondents: Trauma history

15 respondents: Being bullied

*Extreme shyness, which I blame in turn mostly on a history of child abuse and bullying.*

7 respondents: Sexual assault survivor, in youth or adulthood

*When I was 17 my first sexual experience involved alcohol and date rape. Ever since then, I've needed alcohol to get sexual with my dates. I recently became sober and find that it's challenging to date and most of the time I would rather not.*

7 respondents: Parenting issues

5 respondents: An isolated or restricted youth

*I grew up in a household with lots of Mental Health issues and emotional abuse. I didn't really start to have a clear idea of who I was until I was 25. During High School I wasn't allowed to have even close friends my age so dating was impossible and scary.*

*I was raised in a very conservative Catholic household where the children were not allowed to mention or discuss crushes, attractions, dating, flirting, or anything romantic pertaining to our own lives.*

## Experiences

32 respondents: Negative experiences in past relationships

*I had no problems getting \*into\* relationships- my problems were that they were with the wrong kinds of people.*

5 respondents: Unwanted patterns in relationship history

3 respondents: Difficulty with dating after divorce

## Relationship style

22 respondents: Preference to be friends first before dating someone (Overlaps with demisexual)

*I don't really feel attracted to people unless I already know them.*

14 respondents: Seeking a serious, not casual, relationship

11 respondents: Preference for traditional relationship styles such as monogamy

3 respondents: Respondent finds it (at least somewhat) easy to find casual sex but struggles to find a serious relationship

## Feelings

21 respondents: Interpersonal emotional issues with attachment, jealousy, empathizing, developing intimacy, distancing, etc.



*I am emotionally distant. Beyond dating, I have difficulty maintaining friendships.*

14 respondents: Fears of intimacy, vulnerability, commitment or abandonment

*Anxiety over being emotionally vulnerable and open, difficulty in connecting with others on an emotional level.*

14 respondents: Issues about sex, such as shame or physical functionality

## **Protection**

24 respondents: Protecting others, or not imposing on them, by not dating

*I know I am not always considerate and can be cruel; I don't believe that I should expose anyone to that.*

*the honest fear that, having my father's temper, I'll become an abuser as well.*

*...fear of accepting unwanted invitations given out of fear, politeness, or a sense of obligation; unwillingness to be involved with a woman when she wasn't sober (eg. at parties)...*

## **Gender & Sexuality**

17 respondents: SOGI issues: closeted, transition, fear of dating the gender of interest, discrimination

*...did not date until I was 28 due to conservative upbringing and late coming out as queer...*

15 respondents: Gender roles and expectations

*I live in the Bible Belt and it's a very sick place. You get pressured to suppress your emotions and are told you need to become an iron pumping alpha male if you ever want a girlfriend.*

*...disconnect between myself and misogynistic expectations of what women should be like...*

## **Focusing**

24 respondents: Unrequited interest, crushes, focusing on unavailable people

*I was too anxious and afraid of rejection to ask out a crush, and that led to years of unrequited love ...*

*... tendency to focus on one potential partner.*

4 respondents: Showing intense interest



*I assume I get to intense early on as I am very excited and women find that off-putting I guess.*

### **Not meeting people**

8 respondents: Straight men in male-dominated environments

*...never actually being around women when I was growing up...*

*I go to a small engineering college so the odds are stacked against me, so to speak.*

5 respondents: Geeky hobbies and/or friends



# Effects of dating difficulties

*Question 10: How do/did your dating difficulties affect the rest of your life?*

55 respondents wrote that dating difficulties had little effect on the rest of their life. Dating difficulties had no effect for 18 respondents. 117 left question 10 blank. Most of the remainder were feeling lonely, depressed, anxious, angry, isolated, alienated and/or worthless, and some experienced economic consequences.

## Single and alone

Not surprisingly, 161 respondents reported feeling lonely.

The most obvious consequence of dating difficulties is being single. Many respondents wrote eloquently about their unfulfilled desires for partnership, including:

- 20 wanting a relationship
- 18 wanting intimacy, sharing, romance and love
- 16 reporting sexual frustration
- 16 wanting to have children
- 12 missing physical touch such as hugs
- 10 wanting marriage, cohabitation, commitment or settling down
- 4 writing that their life is incomplete or on hold
- 2 wishing to be desired

*I can have lots of close friends but without that sort of intimacy - literally, not as an euphemism for sex (though maybe where it's hard to get to without sex) - it's like a sense of pressure, a sort of unscratched itch that leads me to make worse decisions generally.*

3 respondents are anxious about too much time passing before they are in a relationship:

*I worry about it a lot, since I would like to have a child in my late 20s before the risk of chromosome abnormalities and other birth defects rises.*

16 respondents reported feelings of desperation, or intense focus on dating issues.

*Often distracts me from work I need to do. If I let my thoughts spiral out of control, I can lose hours thinking about how I'll always be alone and unloved.*

26 respondents were afraid that they will be single and alone for the rest of their life.



*I'm trying to come to terms with living the rest of my life alone, without ever having sex, or even emotional intimacy, ever again.*

Some respondents are aware of the potential health consequences of being single or lacking physical intimacy:

*I always see these headlines that say 'having sex reduces stress' or 'kissing increases life expectancy'.*

*I will likely die younger than I otherwise would, if statistics are any indication.*

One respondent felt there was a contradiction between advice in the media that sexual touch has health benefits, and media commentary that no-one is entitled to sex. Mutual consent is required for an activity that most people want and need.

21 respondents had a positive attitude about their single status:

*In some ways it was very positive. I formed a series of very close friendships, most of them with women, and most of which I maintain today. I learned to be very content and comfortable on my own.*

*...it's overall been a positive thing because the opportunities to date that I had were not what I'm looking for yet.*

## **Mental health consequences & reinforcement**

Many respondents stated that dating difficulties worsened their mental health, specifically depression (69 mentions) and anxiety (16 mentions). These conditions were also discussed as causes on page 22.

*I'm depressed and hopeless that I'll never find anyone which impacts my studies because I can't focus anymore and my life because I don't care about anything anymore.*

*It's the main reason for my depression, eating disorder, and anxiety.*

There were 23 mentions of suicidal thoughts, attempts, or wishing for death, throughout the free text questions.

*It's not just dating, I have no friends. I'm so lonely i contemplate suicide often.*

*The lethal combination of intense self-hatred, piercing fear and paranoia from trauma, and being on the spectrum have all killed my chances of progressing a successful social life and forming romantic relationships. (The compounding difficulties that I've had with mental health has led to me have four suicide attempts and spending well over a total of two months in the psychiatric hospital for either those attempts or suicidal ideation.)*



Loneliness and isolation tend to worsen depression and addiction, forming a “vicious circle” that reduces confidence. This reinforcing loop was noted by 17 respondents, such as:

*Negative feedback loop of "you're unworthy of being loved, therefore you will never be loved, which is why you're unworthy of being loved" exacerbating depression and anxiety; this lead to social withdrawal, making the possibility of taking action to resolve the issue essentially impossible.*

## Depressed and worthless feelings

Many respondents reported feelings associated with depression:

- 37 felt sad.
- 9 wrote about physical or emotional pain.
- 6 lacked emotion or felt empty.
- 4 were bored.
- 3 lacked joy.
- 3 didn't care about much in life.
- 2 felt unfulfilled or unsatisfied.

Many respondents felt existential despair or low self-worth:

- 21 felt worthless or useless.
- 13 felt hopeless.
- 10 wrote about life being pointless.
- 7 wrote of self-hatred.

*...it has crippled my self-worth in that I view myself solely as a loser and a social reject for lagging so far in life experience to my school peers.*

*I get sad when I think about the things I won't ever have like marriage and kids. It makes me feel like planning for the future is pointless.*

For 41 respondents, dating difficulties have worsened their self-confidence, with effects on their social, dating, academic and career activities:

*They've severely undermined my self-confidence, so much so that many of what would be achievements feel empty without the ability to show it to someone I'm romantically involved with.*

## Anger and frustration

In free-text responses, 18 respondents acknowledged their anger. 15 felt frustration, 11 wrote about jealousy, 8 about resentment, and 6 were feeling bitter. 4 were angry at men or women (whichever gender they prefer to date). 6 were frustrated that dating is easy for other people.



*It's also easy for me to become jealous of my friends who are in relationships. For them, companionship, affection, and sexual intimacy are normal parts of their lives; but for me, those are things I have been dreaming about for almost a decade. This jealousy can be hard to deal with; I find it challenging not to make snarky comments, a struggle not to harbor resentment or bitterness towards my friends, and often I just have a hard time spending time with my friends who are in relationships.*

Respondents expressed frustration throughout the survey, including:

- 32 complaints about dating apps & sites
- 21 complaints about society and culture
- 19 complaints (from cis het men) about women's behaviour in a dating context
- 16 complaints about other people, not necessarily in a dating context.

No respondents reported feeling violent or taking violent actions.

## Social isolation and alienation

11 respondents wrote about a lack of friends and 7 lack social support. 12 reported failure or rejection in social situations other than dating. (See also page 23 for statistics about friends and social support.)

*I have tried to go out with groups of people, meet new people, yet I always find myself sidelined, pushed to the back or ignored.*

*Lately it has been resentment ... towards people who think I'm ugly or awkward or creepy whenever I try to be friendly or kind. My best friend doesn't want to be around me anymore because they said I'm a downer about it ...*

41 respondents were socially isolated, and 18 respondents were withdrawing from social activities, which may have been a cause, effect or coincidence of dating difficulties.

*There were also other times when I would withdraw from friends and family since I thought that nobody would want to be around me.*

*I don't go outside on my own often or interact with strangers because I'm terrified of rejection.*

30 respondents felt they were "left out" or "missing out" on an important part of life by not being in a relationship. 7 felt "left behind" by not keeping up with the pace of life.

8 wrote about feeling immature compared to their peers due to inexperience with dating and relationships. Feelings of alienation may persist even for successful late bloomers:

*Even now, at 44, I still feel like I missed out on a major developmental step and, as a result, often feel "socially retarded" when it comes to flirtation and dating.*



27 were frustrated that many of their friends are coupled up, so they have less in common with the friends. 8 felt excluded from conversations about dating & relationships & sex. 5 felt “*alienated*” from friends or society and 5 felt like a misfit.

See also page 28 about respondents who felt unlovable and abnormal.

*Feelings of being judged and feelings of inadequacy over lack of sexual experience. Negative feedback loop of "you're unworthy of being loved, therefore you will never be loved, which is why you're unworthy of being loved" exacerbating depression and anxiety; this lead to social withdrawal, making the possibility of taking action to resolve the issue essentially impossible.*

## Not meeting expectations

28 were feeling societal pressure or social expectations to be in a relationship, which might be greater than their own desire to be partnered:

*I do always get the awkward questions of why I don't have a girlfriend yet from friends and family though.*

18 felt ashamed of or stigmatized by their singlehood or inexperience.

*We live in a society where virgins are outcasts.*

*It is a constant source of shame -I am dishonored.*

5 reported feeling inadequate:

*I feel "less than" - like I'm not as good as the people in relationships.*

Some respondents felt they will not meet their own expectations in life:

*I feel like a joke of a man and that I'm destined to die alone. I'm unable to form normal human relationships, let alone romantic ones, and am so diseased on the inside that even therapy and the right social interactions would still leave me feeling less than. I'm never enough and never will be.*

*...became 'stuck' as I didn't see the point of anything when I can't get the one thing I most deeply desire.*

## Coping mechanisms

Respondents found both positive and negative ways to cope with their romantic loneliness:

- 34 were keeping busy with other activities (though most of them reported this as a cause of dating difficulties, it can also be a way to cope).
- 12 respondents mentioned alcohol or cannabis use or addiction



*I longed for conversation and connection, so I went to bars (and ended up drinking too much).*

- 10 focused on other aspects of life
- 8 were going out to activities on their own
- 4 mentioned having a pet
- 4 mentioned using pornography, and 1 was reducing their porn use
- 4 went to sex-workers (including 2 who became more comfortable with sexuality as a result)
- 3 avoided thinking about dating
- 2 retreated into fantasy
- 2 reported self-harm behaviours
- 2 were interested in using sex robots
- 1 was using virtual companionship:

*I have tried to gain closure by talking to chatbots with a female avatar and, after a conversation, saying goodbye and then having them say goodbye too. Even though it's all a computer program and "she" is made to say that, just that kind of positive feedback is really heartwarming (even if it's artificial).*

Traditional values may keep a lonely person from employing sex workers:

*Sometimes I struggle with extreme pangs of sexual desire. I have thought about paying for sexual services, or alternatively having my testicles removed. However, I am unlikely to do either because retain hope of losing my virginity with a partner who loves me for who I am.*

## **Economic consequences**

28 respondents wrote that their dating difficulties had spill-over effects on their work, schooling, and other aspects of life. This was often attributed to depression or loss of confidence and self-worth.

*They pretty much devastated all other areas of my life.*

*It was the topmost reason (but not the only one) I decided not to go to college.*

*This decrease in self confidence also shows up in my work, where i'm less liking to pick up or assert myself to give my opinion. Probably allowing me to be passed over for promotions.*

*I think I'm also more cynical and pessemistic than I used to be. These traits have definately worsened my academic performance.*

*I feel sad and lonely and it makes me anxious to the point i cannot study and work as i normally do.*



*I realized I was working to sustain other's families and I would never have one. I stopped working and became an alcoholic instead.*

Another 11 respondents reported feeling demotivated. 2 wrote that being single has negative effects on professional relationships and career progress.

The limitations on academic and career performance are signals that un(der)employment may be a consequence of dating difficulties, as well as a cause (see page 25). The connection to economic outcomes deserves further exploration.

*I would have liked to be tested and treated for a possible diagnosis of ADHD... Getting a university degree may have helped me to obtain gainful employment with a higher salary than just being on welfare.*

The higher cost of living for single people is discussed on page 69.



# Making changes

*Question 11: What changes have you made, to enable yourself to start relationships?*

*Question 15: What else would help you with dating difficulties and related issues? What would have helped you in the past?*

This chapter covers changes that individuals make to their lives, as described in questions 11, 15 and elsewhere. Responses to question 15 that mention desirable services are included in other chapters beginning on page 51.

## Not changing

In question 11, 107 respondents (15%) wrote that they had made no changes to enable themselves to start relationships. Another 127 left this question blank, which could also mean that they had made no changes.

Of the 211 single respondents who have given up on dating or are not trying to find a relationship (see page 16), 59% of them had not made life changes, or left question 11 blank.

*I have not made any changes as I am unsure if it's fair for me to be looking for a relationship when I dislike myself.*

6 respondents thought they shouldn't change, for various reasons.

There were 15 respondents who weren't sure how to change, to enable dating. Some of them were in fact making self-improvement efforts, while others were at a loss:

*None. I don't know how to flirt or express interest or create a relationship and have no idea how I could learn how to do it.*

21 respondents recognized that the causes and effects of dating difficulties reinforce each other, which means changes are difficult to make.

## Changes tried

By contrast, 67% of respondents have made some kind of change to improve their life and dating opportunities. The following are common actions, mentioned in question 11 and other free-text responses:



## Directly seeking dating opportunities

Respondents were much more likely to try dating apps (which provide wide selection, search criteria and some insulation from rejection) than in-person or human-mediated ways to find dates.

94 respondents mentioned using a dating app or site. Of these, 2 mentioned success using a dating app, while 35 respondents mentioned failure with the app, finding it unhelpful, or quitting using dating apps.

*I started to try online dating which was helpful because I had time to think about how to respond to messages carefully and ask others for advice in responding instead of regular face to face talking where it's often going too fast for me. It also let me get to know someone a little better before going on a date so I could be more sure of how to interact.*

24 respondents had asked someone on a date or were finding the courage to ask.

*I decided to ask out someone I already knew a bit (so far my only successful relationship).*

7 respondents have asked their friends to introduce them to potential partners, with results ranging from uncomfortable silence to a happy relationship.

2 respondents used a dating service or agency (presumably where a human agent arranges dates).

2 mentioned flirting.

1 respondent tried speed dating.

1 person went to singles events.

## Increasing social activity and interaction

76 respondents said they were socializing more.

20 were going to meet-up groups and 4 more were volunteering.

20 made some change to their hobbies: *"abandoning solitary hobbies like video games"*

12 said they *"put myself out there"* which might refer to asking for dates or being more socially active.

11 were becoming more outgoing, or making more effort to talk to people.

9 have started talking to or befriending people of the gender they are interested in dating.

7 described their increased social activity as "forcing" themselves. 6 mentioned getting out of their comfort zone.

*I start forcing myself to talk and engage with people who I find physically attractive.*

5 were working to accept people, opportunities and invitations more.



## Friends and support

18 free-text responses mentioned seeking support from friends or others. See also the results of question 13 on page 56: 80% of respondents have talked to friends about dating difficulties.

18 respondents were changing their behaviour to be more friendly, patient, supportive and empathetic, less selfish, and curious about other people.

*I'm also working on developing a less self-centered view of life, not specifically for dating, but I think it could indirectly help.*

8 respondents were focusing on improving their platonic relationships: "Developing a close-knit group of friends."

## Mental health treatment

In free-text responses, 70 respondents mentioned that they undertook therapy or counselling. See also the results of question 13 on page 56: 47% of respondents have talked to a therapist or counsellor about dating difficulties.

14 mentioned using medication for mental health.

*I just have crippling anxiety that stands to more or less (more) ruin my life, I am currently in the process of going over medical and psychiatric records with my new doctor, planning to soon get on anxiety for medication for the first time to see how that goes. Really hope it helps.*

13 stated they had undertaken some mental-health treatment, without specifying whether it was medication, therapy or something else.

9 were considering, seeking or planning therapy.

4 were doing meditation and 3 were doing yoga, both of which are mindfulness techniques that reduce anxiety.

3 were tackling an alcohol addiction.

One respondent proposed a medication that might help with confidence:

*...on the days I took Adderall i felt socially empowered and able to communicate efficiently and easy, and on the other days i felt shy, more withdrawn and less confident...*

See also page 54 about needs for mental health services.

## Availability for dating

Some respondents are making practical changes so that they are more available for dating.

17 mentioned moving to another city.

5 mentioned moving to live alone (instead of with their family or roommates).



3 discussed making time in their schedules to be available for dating and social life.

There were 5 cis het men who were considering “*dating women from non-feminist countries*” or had moved to another country to find more accepting women.

## Desirability

Many respondents were doing something to improve their physical appearance and health, including 63 working on fitness, 32 on weight loss, 25 changing clothing style, 10 changing their hair, 9 improving their diet, 4 getting medical treatment such as for acne, 2 improving their hygiene and 28 making unspecified changes to their appearance.

Respondents were also working to be interesting and desirable for adult life-partnerships. 19 discussed finding a job or building their careers. 7 were boosting their education. 7 discussed independence. 5 were focusing on their passions. 4 were learning various life skills. 4 had done some travelling. 3 were learning by reading books, learning languages and keeping up with current affairs.

*I don't care if I'm single for the next 5-10 years. If i'm being a better, more interesting, more accomplished, and more honest person, it might come one day. Maybe. And if it doesn't, I don't mind. If I improve myself, I win either way.*

## Improving self-worth and confidence

In the free-text questions, respondents reported various self-improvement changes:

40 were improving their self-confidence.

*Self Confidence was an issue for awhile, but when I stopped caring about how attractive I was I guess I started to be more appealing. I didn't stop taking care of myself or wearing less makeup or anything, but my attitude changed. I focused on liking myself and I think the right people were drawn to that.*

17 were working on self-awareness, self-reflection or analysis.

13 were being more authentic or true to themselves.

10 discussed self-love.

7 were focusing more on themselves and their own needs.

7 reported greater courage, resilience, empowerment, determination, persistence or strength.

6 mentioned self-acceptance, and 3 mentioned accepting their own feelings, failures and mistakes.

5 had benefited from increased maturity.

4 had improved their self-image or body image.

3 had left an abusive situation and 1 talked to someone about being abused.

3 had improved their self-care.

3 were developing their dating and social skills.



- 2 had clearer purpose or goals.
- 1 mentioned accepting their sexual orientation.
- 1 was being their best self.
- 21 respondents wrote about unspecified self-improvement.

## Attitude

The Changes question inspired many positive and optimistic statements. Some respondents are changing their attitude towards dating:

- 26 were reducing the pressure on themselves to find a partner.
- 16 wrote about accepting dates and the risks of rejection.

*Even though my success rate is abysmal, being rejected is so much better than never asking and wondering what could be.*

- 14 mentioned being more open or open-minded.
- 10 discussed lowering their expectations or standards, or “settling”.
- 9 were taking a slow approach to dating: “...not think so much and let things take their own time.”
- 6 mentioned risk-taking in general.
- 5 had obtained advice from pick-up artists.
- 4 were trying to “get over” past hurts.
- 4 discussed learning about feminism.
- 2 were working on managing or reducing their anger.
- 2 were trying to relax or accept their anxiety.
- 12 had changed their dating strategy or attitude in unspecified ways.

This respondent changed their approval-seeking behaviour:

*I stopped thinking just about what other people thought of me. I thought more about what I would want in a partner instead of what I thought I should want (i.e. whether the person I wanted to date was conventionally attractive to others). I realized I'm not into men which helped a lot.*

## Acceptance

There were 47 free-text responses throughout the survey in which the respondent was accepting, or trying to accept, that they are single, alone, and perhaps undesirable. Some said they were waiting until the right partner comes along, while 4 others were glad to avoid the downsides of relationships.

*I'm trying to better myself and to be able to be truly happy by myself, as I think it's an important part of a healthy relationship.*



*I am currently trying to come to terms with never finding anyone who can love me like I would love them.*

*Learned to accept being alone and channel energy into creative artistic pursuits.*

*I am happy and successful. I see peers going through divorces, dealing with unwanted children, losing spouses, and I feel relieved to have dodged that bullet.*

This respondent reflects on making changes and accepting loneliness:

*I suppose we have to do our best to not give up and keep trying to improve and become desirable and skilled, as much as is possible, although sometimes there's only so much we can do (you can't exercise yourself into being taller as a guy or think your way out as asperger's for example). Have to try to improve as much as we can and learn to accept a high-degree of romantic and physical loneliness and isolation if that ends up not being enough to become desirable.*

## Ineffective changes

19 respondents wrote about their changes and efforts failing to bring success in dating.

*I use to put in a lot of effort (putting on make-up etc), but considering it didn't change anything, i just stopped trying.*

7 respondents made the point that they have tried everything:

*I've followed all the advice under the sun, from working out to dressing better to approaching more to taking a break to everything else, doing the opposite and everything in between... I've been ghosted and ditched by more women than most people will even meet in their life time.*

The frustration of failed changes can extend from dating into other aspects of social life:

*I went on medication and everyone still hates me. Ive lost weight and tried to get back into art and Ive lost all my work friends, everybody at my job hates me.*

There were 26 respondents who attributed their dating successes to luck. It is difficult to know whether any particular life change will have much influence on dating success.

## What worked for late bloomers

Page 16 describes 31 respondents who made life changes to become partnered. According to free-text responses, these late-bloomers worked to increase their confidence and acceptance of risk. They went to therapy and used medication as needed for their mental health. They put some effort into clothing and fitness. They socialized more (perhaps by volunteering or moving to a bigger city) and got support by talking to friends. Some used dating apps, services, coaches or advice. They also benefited from maturity and getting to know their own selves and desires.



*I got a little older, got a little success and a little more money, and the confidence to risk rejection.*

*...it was my interactions with the workers at strip clubs that helped me in learning to be more comfortable and confident around (beautiful) women. The sex workers were patient, kind, and unashamed to talk about their and my sexuality...*

*I think a big factor of getting used to dating people was trying an 'open relationship'. With my low self-esteem, it felt less like I was forcing them to make a bad choice by being with me, as they could still pursue other relationships, even though that didn't really end up being the case much. Now I feel confident and self-actualized...*

*I started to take more personal risks with my career and my life experiences. I started working harder on my appearance, my physical and mental health, and my skills...*

*Changing my hair and how I dress. Success in other areas of my life gave me more social confidence. Lowering my standards for physical appearance. Professional date coaching.*

*Meeting new people is easy when I get involved with what I'm passionate about and I've had a lot of people be interested in me just for enjoying myself.*

*I went to therapy to treat my social anxiety and moved to an area with much more social opportunity. I made a huge effort to expand my social circle and learn social skills. Then I asked my new friends for advice on my appearance & dating.*

*Meeting people through dating websites where there is no ambiguity about whether there is romantic vs. platonic interest.*

*it was a decade-long process of just ham-handedly getting myself into situations with women, growing self confidence that allowed me to be more comfortable and interact more genuinely with people, and having female friends who talked me into feminist attitudes. PUA [pick-up-artist] stuff helped me a lot with the first part.*

*I tend to date people in similar circumstances (also have a mental illness and are queer) because we have a similar lifestyle.*

*I just threw myself out there and I started to become confident and see my value. Also I needed to find out what I want and not to dwell on the question why someone else did not want me. Maybe we did not fit together anyways.*

*Nothing, really, except gain confidence slowly through some good experiences.*

*I have come to terms with the fact that I am submissive, polyamorous, and bisexual in addition to being agender.*



*I started psychoanalysis and it changed my life. ... I don't believe I would have this relationship right now if I didn't have my therapist to support me through the agony of being myself with another person.*

*A plan to break down the problem into incremental steps that can be tackled one by one, based on Dr. Gilmartin's writing<sup>2</sup>, also the experience that comes with practice and age, and maybe a dose of luck.*

There is no guarantee that these steps would work for any particular single person, who might have additional barriers to overcome before dating.

The 24 people who lucked into a relationship (page 16) did not report making the kind of changes described above. Many of them started dating a friend of a friend, or someone they already knew.

*We met about 8 months before we started dating, and we both liked each other immediately. But we were both kind of socially inept weirdos, so over the next couple months, instead of just exchanging numbers like normal people, we kept trying to engineer ways to hang out through a mutual friend. I was too afraid to ask for her number because I was convinced that she couldn't possibly be attracted to me in the same way, and I didn't want to put her off by being too forward... I get a text from that mutual friend that she thinks I'm totally cute, and that I should ask her out.*

8 respondents who had been in a relationship found that it helped their self-confidence:

*Now that I am in a long-term relationship..., I'm learning more and more that I'm not as repulsive as I once thought I must be. I'm learning how to love, and how to be loved, and those are simply not lessons I had known before.*

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Brian Gilmartin's 1987 book *Shyness and Love: Causes, Consequences, and Treatment* is now [available as a PDF](#). Gilmartin interviewed 500 "love-shy" men for this extensive and sometimes pseudoscientific work.



# Dating apps & services

Question 9: What would make a dating site/app more helpful for you?

Dating site/app feature	Count	Percent
Tools to negotiate your preferred style of relationship	307	43%
Profiles that show more unique characteristics	290	41%
Help with social cues, when interacting with a potential match	285	40%
Features that reduce the risk or pain of rejection	238	33%
I don't want to use dating sites/apps	235	33%

There is an opportunity to develop or modify dating sites & apps to be more friendly for people with dating difficulties. Further research would need to be done to design dating features as suggested in the options above.

The other-specify responses to question 9 mentioned the following issues repeatedly:

- The well-known problems of straight men and women on dating sites (such as a man concerned about *“overabundance of toxic men making women nervous”* or women frustrated with harassing messages from incompatible men)
- Being ignored or rejected by everyone on a dating site
- More options for gender and sexuality, which are complicated spectrums
- New questions, such as screening for comfort with neuro-diverse or low-income people
- Sorting and querying based on multiple criteria for a precise match
- Wanting to find partners for friendship or dating, not immediate sex
- The artificiality of transactional, technological dating; a preference for meeting in person
- Various reasons for not using dating sites currently
- Desire for human match-making – see also page 49.

One or a few respondents also mentioned:

- Profiling people’s values, spirituality, intellectual interests, etc.
- Making apps less superficial, not just about physical appearance
- More ways to begin an interaction on the site *“instead of demanding that one party initiate contact”*
- Wanting a definitive rejection rather than silence: *“Eliminate ghosting, just tell me if she's not interested”*



- Fake profiles & scams
- Privacy violations by dating apps
- Safety features, such as profiles without photos, screening for abuse, or moderation
- Dating sites supported by advertising & donation revenue rather than fees
- Dislike of, but resignation to using, dating sites/apps

## Dating app design ideas

Respondents suggested the following ideas for designing dating apps and sites:

- Use a matching process like speed dating
- Provide a *“progressive script”* of etiquette rules
- An *“easy mode”* feature for those who had never gotten into dating
- Vocal interaction with matches instead of just text messaging
- A game or other guided interaction *“that lets you learn about someone without having problem of coming up with a good opener”*
- Indication of active profiles or *“that a person engages with the site regularly but doesn't receive a whole lot of interest would be helpful. I'd be more interested in contacting them, as opposed to being the 30th person to send someone a message that day.”*
- *“Site for lonely people only, where no one can unmatched with you without a valid reason”*
- *“More incentives for women to take the first step”*
- *“More methods of self characterization that don't rely on self written description”*

## Matchmaking

In free-text responses to various questions, 11 respondents were interested in a matchmaking service. 9 more want their friends to introduce them to potential dates.

*Create an ethos where certain people hook others up, a web of informal matchmakers, for all sexual and gender identities.*

*I was achingly jealous of social groups that have a strong matchmaking system built into the life cycle. Of course, these are often religious groups and my queerness would have made me a misfit in any of them. But a queer, long-term-friendly matchmaker, I would have died for.*

There was one respondent open to *“state-backed marriages”*. Another suggested *“make parents choose people's spouses”*. Arranged marriages were not discussed by other respondents, who were mostly in North America and Europe.



# Support services

Question 14: Support services could be designed for people with dating difficulties. Which would you like to try?

Support service	Count	Percent
One-on-one talk, with a therapist trained in dating difficulties	343	48%
Mentorship from someone who has overcome dating difficulties	304	43%
Advice book, website, videos, etc.	282	40%
List of common issues to discuss with any therapist	269	38%
Online support forum with a professional counsellor	258	36%
Online support forum moderated by other people with dating difficulties	206	29%
Therapy that simulates dating and/or sexual activity	180	25%
In-person group counselling	179	25%
Chatbot app (support by artificial intelligence)	75	11%
Telephone hotline	59	8%
Other (Specify)	51	7%
I don't want any support services	113	16%

These results are discussed along with free-text responses, in the following sections about educational services (page 51), counselling services (page 54) and peer & group support (page 56).



# Educational services

This section discusses the results of questions 12, 14 and 15 that suggest education, training and advice for youth and adults.

27 respondents wrote that they needed some kind of knowledge, about dating, relationships, sexuality, abuse, or other issues discussed throughout this report.

## Youth education

There were 31 free-text responses advocating for educating youth about social skills, dating and relationships, beyond the physical topics of sex education:

*I have had no education ... with how to date, the only information I have received was from pop culture and from much more social family members.*

*By having sex education that includes talking to children about concepts of relationships. By stressing that society reenforces unrealistic standards. Also having education on how to process emotions and conform to social norms and mores.*

*Children should be explicitly taught social skills, especially boys.*

*Society should focus on teaching boys how to cultivate their own sexual and masculine energies as well as their personal qualities.*

*Better relationship education. Not really sure how, but people need to know how to cope with all the weird confusing and conflicting emotions you get surrounding relationships. Having to muddle through and figure out how to ask someone out, or how to reject someone, is really hard and can cause a lot of hurt for all parties involved.*

*Teaching social skills to vulnerable children in school.*

*Better education on dating, relationships, and consent. Dating feels like a secret script or code that you're required to figure out on your own without any official guidance.*

*...teach people social skills and assertiveness in schools.*

*The ability to recognize when someone is leading you on/manipulating you.*

*Education in childhood about autonomy, power dynamics, and self esteem etc.*

Non-judgmental education about gender identity, sexual orientation and asexuality can also help young people figure out their dating preferences, instead of being shamed.

*Early identification of autism and gender issues would've helped me make progress on those issues earlier in life.*



*Knowing that I was demisexual would've helped figure this out sooner. So More education about the sexuality spectrum and help to understand that you're not broken if you don't have love at first sight.*

The school system could also be screening youth for social difficulties and mental health needs, as discussed on page 54.

## Self-help resources for adults

In question 14, advice books, websites and videos were a very popular option (40% of multiple-choice responses).

In the free-text responses, there were 29 mentions of advice used or recommended, including some specific topics and needs:

- Advice aimed at inexperienced people in their mid-20s (and older)
- Resources for men that “aren't misogynist”
- Advice for people with social anxiety
- Resources aimed at parents & family of people with depression or anxiety, who could help their loved ones get help with social needs
- Dating skills for high-functioning autistics (most existing resources are too basic)
- Advice about openly discussing SOGI and other preferences early in a relationship
- Learning to believe someone when they show attraction to you

Respondents recommended various self-help resources for assertiveness, empowerment and self-love, which can help with dating and other personal issues. Existing self-help information could be translated into an app or other tool that provides daily advice:

*What would best help me would be a daily tip by someone who had been in my situation; maybe a skill to practice throughout the day or a few words of encouragement.*

Although there are thousands of dating advice and self-help resources available, new resources could be created that better address the many different causes that underlie dating difficulties. A respondent wished for dating advice that validated the painful feelings and uncertainty of long-time-single people.

Self-help resources have limited power to change a person's situation or behaviour, but they are very affordable, and might be favoured by people who are reticent to interact with other people for support.

### Concerns about dating advice

Some respondents have tried pick-up-artist (PUA) advice, and are aware of its pros and cons:

*I think no one ever effectively rationalized for me why certain approaches were going to work better than others. the PUA guys came closest to just explaining stuff in pure*



*logical terms. but they're still a bit irrational and hearing better arguments (sometimes against them) could've put me on a better path sooner.*

Other respondents disagreed with the simplistic and optimistic dating advice that is often published:

*Honesty ... with long term single people. Platitudes like "there's someone for everyone" and "just be yourself" are some of the worst things people can say.*

*By understanding that some people will be alone. That not everybody is a winner in romance. That such isolation is painful and real and not just something that is of the moment or happens to everyone or that you'll find someone when you stop looking or that you have to learn to be truly happy alone before you can even think of being happy with someone else, or any of a variety of other useless nonsense.*

Another respondent was frustrated that the advice to “be yourself” contradicted the advice to change themselves to be more attractive.

## Training for adults

In free-text answers, 26 respondents expressed a need for training classes or other ways to learn about dating skills, social skills and/or life skills:

*Class to understand basic body language and social interactions.*

*Better explicit education on the norms and etiquette of dating.*

*Learning how to deal with rejection.*

*Adult sex ed and support groups in face to face meetings that are low cost to attend would be great.*

One respondent recounted an experience of respect in a relationship negotiation workshop. Education programmes might be informed by the BDSM community's consent practices:

*I recently did a kink workshop about negotiation and had a kink partner who patiently walked me through a rigorous negotiation. I really wish I had done this AGES ago. Because I always seem to put my needs beneath the other person's and take it for granted that my needs will be treated as less. Seeing what it's like to have a negotiation and have a partner respect my needs [was] mindblowing.*



# Mental health & counselling services

This section discusses the results of questions 12, 14 and 15 that suggest psychotherapy and other professional counselling services.

See also page 42 for the mental health treatments that respondents have done.

## Screening

18 respondents said they, or other people, would have benefited from earlier diagnosis or screening for the many situations that can lead to dating difficulties: autism, social anxiety, other mental health conditions, and abuse. Undiagnosed and untreated conditions lead to years of suffering.

*[What would have helped?] Diagnosing my social anxiety and attending therapy earlier.*

*Help children. Find ways to detect those who are abused, early, and get them out of hell. It's probably the root of all evil.*

*... something to prevent kids who are behind socially from falling any further behind would be a good start.*

## Individual therapy

In question 14, the most-desired support service was “one-on-one talk, with a therapist trained in dating difficulties” (48%), and a “List of common issues to discuss with any therapist” was also very popular (38%).

In response to questions 12, 14 and 15, there were:

- 30 respondents recommending therapy or counselling, including 3 who suggested it be specialized to people with dating difficulties
- 19 respondents recommending mental health treatment (could be therapy, medication or other treatments)

Barriers to accessing therapy, especially the cost, were noted by at least 8 respondents:

*...a therapist. They're expensive, and not covered enough with health insurance.*

See also page 56 for results of question 13, which showed that 47% of respondents had tried therapy, about half of them found it helpful, and very few found it harmful.



## Other counselling

Respondents suggested, wanted or have tried some services that could be delivered by professional counsellors, including 1 to 5 responses for each of:

- Coaching in dating or social skills
- “Intensive rehab facilities”
- Unspecified service specialized to short men
- Needing an observer to explain their difficulty with dating:

*Honest feedback on what is going wrong, if I am doing something in my interactions that is preventing attraction.*

## Group therapy

In question 14, “in-person group counselling” attracted moderate interest (25%). Group therapy would have some cost but less than individual therapy, which was a more popular option.

The free-text responses did not mention group counselling with a therapist, but often recommended in-person groups for support and socialization (see page 58).

## Surrogacy

In question 14, there was moderate interest (25%) in “Therapy that simulates dating and/or sexual activity”. In the free-text responses, 5 respondents wanted sexual surrogacy to be available.

[Surrogate partner therapy](#) is rare but holds promise for inexperienced people who would be comfortable with trying it.

## Counselling chat-bot

Few respondents (11% in question 14) were interested in the development of a chatbot app for dating difficulties. This concept was not mentioned in any free-text responses.

Chatbots such as Woebot currently offer cognitive-behavioural therapy for anxiety and depression. Counselling methods for dating difficulties would need to be better established by human therapists before automating them in an artificial intelligence.

## Telephone hotline

The least popular support option (8% of responses to question 14) was a telephone hotline. This concept was not mentioned in any free-text responses.

Dating difficulties are an ongoing problem, not a one-time emergency. Respondents may prefer continuity of support, in-person counselling, or more modern online services.



# Peer & group support

This section discusses the results of questions 12, 14 and 15 that suggest services and activities where people with dating difficulties could interact with their peers and late bloomers. It also provides the results of question 13, to show who might be a good listener.

In question 15, there were 24 people who needed more self-confidence, which peer support can help to provide.

## Talking to others

*Question 13: Who have you talked to about your dating difficulties? Were they helpful?*

Talked To	Have tried	According to those who tried it:		
		Helpful	Neutral	Harmful
Friend	80%	48%	44%	8%
Family member	54%	18%	54%	27%
Therapist or counsellor	47%	48%	46%	5%
Someone I dated	38%	44%	34%	22%
Online support forum	30%	34%	39%	27%
Teacher, coach, etc.	9%	28%	42%	30%
Religious leader	9%	15%	39%	47%
Sex worker	8%	40%	52%	9%
Live support group	7%	21%	64%	15%

To calculate the “Have tried” numbers above, the “Have not tried” and blanks (non-responses) were subtracted from the total of 713 survey respondents.

Most respondents have talked to a friend. Many respondents have talked to a family member, someone they dated, a therapist, or an online support forum.

Of these commonly used options, friends and therapists were both most likely to be helpful, and very unlikely to be harmful. Therapy is also discussed on page 54, while friends are discussed on page 57.



Family members were most likely to be harmful, and least likely to be helpful. Online support forums and dating partners had mixed results; they were often helpful but also often harmful.

Less-commonly chosen confidantes include teachers, coaches, religious leaders, sex workers, and live (in-person) support groups. The rates of helpfulness should be interpreted with caution due to small numbers. Of these less-common options, sex workers were the most helpful, and religious leaders the most harmful.

Free text responses did not provide many insights about why these listeners were helpful or harmful.

## Friends

Question 13 shows that 80% of respondents have talked to a friend, and almost all of them found it helpful or neutral.

In free-text responses, there were 118 mentions of needing or benefitting from the support of friends and other people.

If someone feels comfortable speaking to a friend with shared values about the vulnerable topic of dating, they may get positive encouragement and learn from the friend's experiences.

*Being able to be more open with friends about sexual wants/dating etc. without it just being super "laddish"... would help people I think.*

The concern is that many respondents indicated a lack of friendship and social support (in question 8 and elsewhere, page 23). People who do not have enough friends may have more difficulty with social skills or have some other disadvantage that also affects dating. Some people, such as SOGI minorities, may not have friends who will fully support their dating preferences. Thus, many people will need to talk to professional counsellors (page 54) or other supporters, below.

## Mentorship

"Mentorship from someone who has overcome dating difficulties" was a very popular option with 43% of responses in question 14.

Mentors or role models (not necessarily with dating difficulties themselves) were mentioned in 8 free-text responses as potentially helpful.

A mentorship service would need to motivate and train mentors to provide peer support, and match mentors and mentees with common interests. Mentorship could be more affordable than therapy. There is some risk that mentors would encourage inappropriate (disrespectful or non-consensual) behaviours.



## Support forums

In question 14, there was moderate interest in online support forums: 36% of respondents favouring a forum with a professional counsellor, and 29% interested if the forum was moderated by other people with dating difficulties.

In the free-text responses, 5 people discussed the need for positive and moderated online forums.

One found that it's near-impossible to discuss dating difficulties on the internet without misogynist extremism emerging.

Another respondent was concerned that they couldn't discuss their dating issues without being accused of misogyny and entitlement. (These are themes of many published opinions about incels.)

Online forums are usually free to join, easy to access, and provide a sense of belonging to lonely and isolated people. There have been many such forums created - some of which became the misogynistic and hateful incel communities. There is little motivation for someone who has had success in dating to stay active in a forum, sharing new knowledge with their peers. Therefore, forums are a higher-risk service unless strong moderation and professional advice is available.

## Groups for support, socializing and singles

The free-text responses included 71 suggestions for groups and activities that could be organized to better meet the respondents' needs. These included support groups, places to meet new platonic friends, and places to meet singles for dating. The activities might be ongoing groups or drop-in events. Some of the needs and ideas suggested:

- Singles events for inexperienced people
- Opportunities to practice dating skills at low risk
- Singles events where dating pressures are lessened
- Singles events where people are seeking to build friendship first
- Activities to meet single people for platonic friendship
- Activities where socially awkwardness is expected and accepted
- Activities that are not in bars or not alcohol-focused
- Activities suited to introverts, such as quieter events
- Activities suited to autistics
- Activities that are free of charge or low cost
- Activities focused on interests & hobbies, to meet similar people
- Non-religious community events
- Support group for dating difficulties (and related issues):

*Support groups made to teach people how to make meaningful relationships in general not just romantic relationships*

The suggestions were brief and did not necessarily distinguish support, social and singles activities. Some respondents were hoping for a combination:



*Support group for those who have dating difficulties to date each other.*

*It would be cool if you signed up for the therapy, and you got to choose a partner who had the troubles you did, or other troubles, and you agreed to some terms that made it safe for both, and then with the person you both mutually chose, you could explore together hopefully feeling less pressure knowing "it's okay, we're both supposed to be bad at this so, let's just get it"*

*Date practice. Get a bunch of singles together, our only hope is to find incel women as hopeless as we are.*

15 respondents wrote about their need to find people similar to themselves, which group activities can enable.

*More safe ways to meet similar people. Singles my age are difficult to find.*

*It's so hard to find people that "tick" the way I do. This, I have learned, is a common experience among neurodivergent people.*



# Socio-cultural change

*Question 12: How should society change, to prevent dating difficulties and support long-time single people?*

*Question 15: What else would help you with dating difficulties and related issues? What would have helped you in the past?*

This section includes suggestions (largely from questions 12 and 15) for socio-cultural changes that are diffuse and not directly controllable. These questions also yielded suggestions for personal improvement (page 40), and implementable services in education (page 51), mental health (page 54) and peer & group support (page 56).

## Should society change?

Question 12 was tough for many respondents to answer, and some disagreed with the premise.

- 60 people wrote some variation on “I don’t know”.
- 42 stated that society shouldn't or doesn't need to change.
- 7 took individual responsibility for their own dating difficulties.
- 9 stated that society can't or won't change, or we can't influence it to change. (This was ignored if they went on to name societal improvements.)
- 2 stated Darwinian ideas such as:

*Perhaps it's good that dating's difficult so that people like me won't be in the pool in the first place.*

## Reducing the causes

Some causes of dating difficulties, described beginning on page 18, could be reduced through societal change.

### Education, support and mental health

The need to increase education, support and mental health services was discussed in the preceding sections.

When asked about societal change, 6 respondents mentioned stigma, awareness and acceptance about mental health conditions and treatment:

*...fighting against stigmas concerning mental health, most people in the Manosphere just want to be loved or have been hurt, they need psychological and even psychiatric*



*assistance most, not cult leaders and snake-oil salesmen who prey on their emotions and end up doing more harm than good.*

## **Discrimination**

Societal change can gradually reduce discrimination, page 27, including racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and other forms of marginalization. This can affect dating directly, when someone is considered undesirable because of their characteristics. Indirect effects on dating include the reduced self-confidence caused by repeated discriminatory statements, and the poverty caused by systemic oppressions.

17 respondents cited discrimination in questions 12 and 15:

*My situation is affected by and large by homophobia and misogyny. I don't know how to fix it, but I would do anything I can to see that another person doesn't experience what I do.*

*It would be nice if society hated Black women less. People should stop gaslighting Black girls to think that they should only date Black boys. It would be nice if more people were willing to befriend us and form reciprocal relationships, and not just see us as a source of free labor.*

## **Abuse and childhood experiences**

In question 15, there were 49 respondents mentioning something that would have helped them in childhood or youth.

In questions 12 and 15, there were 34 mentions of needing to prevent physical & emotional & sexual abuse, bullying, assault, parenting problems, and other causes of trauma in childhood or youth. These issues were also discussed as contributors to dating difficulties (see “Survival” on page 29), and the need for screening is on page 54.

*I think if we had better strategies to combat bullying a lot fewer kids would grow up to become people like me.*

*I think earlier detection of what was going on in my house when I was in High School would have helped.*

*School is where I learned most of my low self-esteem aspects, and habits of social discomfort. I think the school system needs to be entirely rethought ...*

## **Physical appearance**

In questions 14 and 15, there were 14 respondents who focused on physical appearance as the main or only factor in dating difficulties.

There were 6 ideas about medical improvements, serious and otherwise:



*I hear steroids make men more attractive if they're given to you as a child. Makes you taller and gives you better facial features.*

*Genetically engineer everyone to be gorgeous.*

*An intravenous drug that made you more attractive and confident. (I know I'm being sarcastic but looks money and status are harder to come by than you think.)*

## Relationship pressure

83 respondents wanted to reduce the social pressure to be in a relationship.

*We put the nuclear family on a pedestal, and couples too by extension. While we should still value couples and families, we should also understand that if someone chooses to remain single (for any reason), that's not a sad thing.*

*Less pressure on single women to get married from well-meaning family/friends.*

*Absolutely everyone needs to chill the fuck out about moving out, getting married, and having babies as an obvious and expected requirement of an adult life.*

*When everything you see is geared toward couples, or the adverts using sex to sell their products, Everything being a reminder of what you cannot have...*

*Perhaps put less value on having sex or being in a relationship, especially for men.*

*Stop obsessing about love, as if people are incomplete without it.*

6 wanted privacy from people who were making nosy inquiries about their dating life.

The social pressure is particularly inappropriate for asexual and aromantic people who do not want a relationship:

*Aroace people are no less valid than bi or pan people, and should not be pressured into something they neither want nor need.*

Some respondents felt pressured by society's sexual expectations. There were 5 complaints about the culture of casual sex:

*Hookup culture is also intimidating and I don't know how to fit in.*

*As a feminist and someone who hopes to be considered a part of the LGBTQ+ community, it is frustrating to see the concept of sexual liberation leave people like me behind. Throwing off negative expectations of "female purity" shouldn't mean that a woman has to have casual sex. I am not somehow childish for not wanting sex.*



## Stigma of being single

56 responses were about normalizing and destigmatizing being single or unmarried:

*I think we should understand that it's not necessary/compulsory to have a life partner or spouse. There should be no shame in being single. We put the nuclear family on a pedestal, and couples too by extension. While we should still value couples and families, we should also understand that if someone chooses to remain single (for any reason), that's not a sad thing. We should view single people's dating or marriage status as entirely neutral, not something pitiable.*

*...making it socially unacceptable to ask "why aren't you married" ...*

*We need to stop viewing partnerless/childless people as less valuable.*

*Destigmatize being single. Especially for young people in high school. I hate the idea that you have to have a date to go to school functions and the "high-school sweetheart" trope.*

Another 78 responses were about the stigma of being long-time-single, a virgin, inexperienced, late bloomer, incel, alone or lonely:

*I do wish that it could be talked about. Instead the incels have poisoned the well so much that I could never discuss this sort of thing with my friends without being ridiculed at best and actively hated at worst, with the latter more likely.*

*Things like going to the movies by yourself or a concert by yourself not being stigmatized as abnormal or sad.*

*Less ridicule and mocking of virgins and lonely people. I cried typing this.*

26 respondents wished for acceptance or inclusion. 12 wanted more compassion, kindness or empathy for long-time singles and their dating difficulties.

*People need to stop making fun of people who can't find love. Empathy and compassion are needed, not laughter and criticism.*

This response suggests that there is discrimination against single people in the workplace:

*Singles shouldn't automatically have to work unpleasant work shifts, because we need the time to meet people.*

Other things that should be destigmatized, according to 1 to 3 respondents each: being queer or trans, asexuality, polyamory, being an introvert or a geek, "unattractiveness", "women over 40", singles events, dating counselling, being open about feelings, "low self confidence", breakups and rejection.

*Reduce stigma about rejection (both to the people being rejected and the act of turning down somebody).*



*Stop saying that introverted people have no life / their interests are weird.*

*...remove the stigmas relating to talking about emotions for men, and between men and women.*

## **Media portrayals**

33 respondents were concerned about media representation of long-time-singles, and media messages about dating and relationships:

*...eliminating the "sad, loveless, lonely person" comedic trope...*

*...maybe stop commercializing sex so much... Because i didn't date since my breakup and i'm not really into one night stands, I didn't have sex in a year and i feel like a lesser human. I know it's irrational but...*

*Ideally changing perception that late bloomers/ people previously unlucky at romance are inherently suspicious/untrustworthy (better depiction in media?)*

*Media puts so much importance on being in a happy relationship. It portrays long time single people as either being bitter about love or that they're hopelessly socially inept (or both). It's rare to see someone not in any sort of romantic or sexual relationship and still living a happy life. It's possible! I'm proof!*

*More people like me sharing their stories about dating ups and downs and doing exciting things solo ( e.g travel, buying a home, hobbies) in the outlets I read like women's blogs/magazines.*

*Fewer idealized, fantasy relationships in pop culture and media. Fewer super attractive women matched with unattractive men in media, but instead show the reverse sometimes! That match is NEVER shown, while the opposite is shown often.*

*i think if pop culture and social culture didn't present the idea that guys have to date a hot girl and deserve a hot girl for being good people it might be better.*

## **Acceptance of diversity**

There were 39 respondents calling for greater acceptance of diversity in society, particularly acceptance of non-traditional dating styles and family structures.

*Acknowledge that people's interpersonal relationship needs are different, some people can be fulfilled with types of relationships that others wouldn't be fulfilled by. Stop encouraging fairy-tale relationship ideologies like romance (with "the one") being the one and only thing that will make you happy.*

*Teach about a wide variety of relationships to kids.*



*Less normativity of any kind, let people have relationships that differ from stepford stuff*

*Married people need to include singles in their lives. We need families to be part of, to combat loneliness.*

*More emphasis on love, support and mutual respect. Less emphasis on weddings and making babies.*

*By encouraging polyamorous relationships (with some education) to defeat unrequited love!*

*I'm sure there are many other queer folks who bloom late and find it hard to get out there, so the other biggest change that I think needs to happen is an acceptance of difference. Maybe if I was allowed to question and express myself sooner I would have felt safe enough to actually gain some confidence and start dating sooner.*

*Greater awareness of different dating choices and normalization of such would be helpful. It feels like a social secret I have to keep in some circles, and though I never lie or truly go out of my way to do so, it can be isolating.*

*More gatherings where you dont need a partner, let's people define themselves outside of traditional pairings.*

## **Body and sex positivity**

10 respondents wanted acceptance of diverse bodies & appearances by potential dating partners, society and media.

*I think it would make things easier for women if men didn't think of a hot woman as a status symbol. It seems like guys I know reject women they're attracted to, because they wouldn't want be seen dating e.g.: a very overweight woman.*

*We need ... body acceptance. A woman shouldn't feel like she's unloveable because she's hairy or chubby.*

11 respondents called for a more sex-positive society:

*...we need to lose our hang ups about sex. Women should feel empowered (and safe) to engage in sexual activity, without fear or slut-shaming, or worse. Finally, for those people who just never find someone, for whatever reason, we need to have a safe and legal framework for sex work.*

6 called for the legalization (or decriminalization) of sex work. Some respondents felt uncomfortable going to sex workers who might be exploited in an illegal industry.

4 respondents noted the influence of the media, including the pornography industry, on body image:



*Perhaps the media could stop advertising 'too idealistic' body anatomy. Porn sites with unrealistic standards could be banned, but both of those are un-realistic so i don't expect them to occur anytime soon or ever.*

Individuals called for destigmatizing sexuality, promiscuity, sex toys and pornography.

*If people can learn to see that sex is an enjoyable, and natural act, and that there need not be any shame associated with expressing sexual desire, provided it is not of an exploitative or harmful nature, it might go a long way to assisting people who may be facing difficulties in this realm in coming forward and seeking support, instead of turning inward out of shame or anxiety, which can lead to self-destructive thoughts and tendencies.*

## Gender roles

### Who makes the first move

20 respondents of all genders called for more social acceptance of women making the first move in heterosexual dating. Some acknowledged the reason why this is uncommon:

*...encourage women to take more initiative with men without being slut-shamed.*

### Feminism

Feminism-influenced ideas are found throughout the free-text responses.

*Promote less stereotypical gender norms, actively seek to dismantle gender norms, reform masculinity and femininity...*

*First, we have to stop treating certain people, particularly women, as something "other," a different species entirely that men can desire but never possibly understand.*

*I think society brainwashes little girls, particularly with princess culture, into thinking a woman's role is completed when she becomes a bride.*

*Women are challenged by body image and we need to work on that before being successful at dating and sex. Men need to confront their fear of weakness and rejection. I think it's hard for men because of the changing rules around consent and female empowerment but they should not let that make them angry.*

*Like, there's got to be a solution somehow, in terms of how jumbled up the system of how dating works in our society, where we've wisely thrown out the sort of bigoted, sexist stuff, but haven't really come up with a suitable replacement.*

### Toxic masculinity

There were 13 critiques of toxic masculinity.



*It's quite simple imo - end toxic masculinity. That shouldn't be too hard, should it? I really do think that all the social pitfalls that are so hard to navigate for people like me exist either due to women's need to protect themselves, be it from social disgrace or actual physical harm, or due to a (still) patriarchal society's desire to control them. A world where men could just be cool and women could trust them would see a lot more, better sex.*

## **Patriarchy**

There were 4 calls to dismantle, overthrow or abolish patriarchy, and one to increase it:

*...end patriarchy. Sounds weird from an incel? I believe incels are the results of toxic masculinity, and (more controversial point), I also believe women are contributing to it, not only men. Probably why I'm not labeling myself a feminist, even though I share a lot of their values.*

*Abolish female suffrage, make parents choose people's spouses, extreme patriarchy.*

## **Clarity**

### **Clear communications**

There were 32 respondents wanting clear communications in dating situations.

*I feel that flirting needs to be more obvious...*

*Reduce emphasis on obscure social rules for dating, favor plain language.*

*Women should understand that men are not telepathic; needs a two way dialog.*

*More encouragement/support in having early, open conversations in a dating situation.*

*For a person like me, who is likely autistic and is most certainly depressed, anxious, and bad at social skills, open communication would have done wonders.*

10 respondents said it would help to have unambiguous rules or agreed etiquette about how to behave in dating situations.

### **Avoidance of harassing women**

There were 8 male-presenting respondents who avoid approaching women for dating, to avoid offending or harassing them. Their caution and frustration emerged in multiple questions including question 12 about how society should change.

*It makes a lot of sense that people at the gym or the grocery store or in a park aren't necessarily interested in being asked out and being put in an awkward position, but if too many places and situations are ruled out, where other than online can one*



*reasonably expect to meet people potentially interested in forming a relationship, romantic or simply platonic.*

*I actually stopped identifying as feminist because of the #MeToo movement, because of the way that modern feminists treat men as disposable if they make one mistake. ... I do feel scared to express romantic/sexual interest in anyone because of the risk of them feeling harassed.*

*The fear and anxiety of not wanting to be a sexually harassing creep who makes women feel awkward (long before #MeToo was a thing) lead to numerous missed signals and missed opportunities. ... Where that fear kicks in - when they tell me one thing with their body language but another with their words.*

The harassment issue also came up for men who need clearer rules or guidance about dating interactions:

*Clarify what is acceptable in terms of flirting/where it's acceptable/ what counts as harassment, what doesn't etc. etc. no one can agree on this and rules are vastly different between different sets of people and based on how attractive you are to them which is really inconsistent and makes it difficult.*

*Some more structure seems needed, both to help males with bad social skills autism approach ppl, and to provide women with support network to protect them from physical harm & stalking obsessive behavior, which would allow them to take more risks on males that don't have much experience.*

One respondent feels pained that smiling at strangers often meets with rejection:

*working on anxiety with women, by just trying to calmly, respectfully (not creepily or over sexually) say hi to women I feel drawn to while passing by them in public, and a lot of the time I get this reaction where they're smiling, but then their smile goes away as i say hi, and they look at me with disgust ... I know women go through a lot of bullshit, and bad people out there most likely have given them reasons to react that way, but it just such a huge shame...*

## **Contradictions in cultural messages**

There were 9 respondents who pointed out double standards, contradictions and mixed messages in the changing cultural discourse. Some of them were also concerned about approaching and harassment:

*The idea that someone might be doing something "wrong" by approaching someone who is likely to reject them needs to go... If a severely unattractive woman (of appropriate age) were to express interest in me it would be cruel of me to act as if they were so repulsive as to have committed a transgression. I am not oblivious to the problems that people face on the other end, that receive too much attention, but I wish*



*a society that professed to care about every human being was not so eager to discard some of us.*

*Feminism vs mainstream culture (taught to act like a "traditional" macho male; then told simultaneously that that was wrong). ... [It would have helped to have] Consistency on what was and wasn't acceptable behaviour for a male towards a woman; which wasn't going to happen, because social norms were in a historical state of flux.*

Another respondent wrote about traditional and feminist expectations: if women should be treated as equals, why should men pay for dates?

## Economics

### Costs of being single

22 respondents pointed out that the cost of living is higher for single people than for couples & families who can share housing, utilities, telecomm services, hotel rooms, bulk discounts, etc.

*One of the reasons I don't own real estate is that I don't have two incomes in a world that's sort of assuming you do.*

*Stop giving fucking discounts to couples! Or instead, applying those same discounts and privileges to ANY two people (one of my biggest pet peeves).*

*Tax- and housing breaks for people looking to live alone, so there is less pressure to find someone to assist with housing/rent financials.*

Respondents did not mention that some countries provide income tax advantages to couples and employment benefits (such as healthcare) to spouses.

### Economic policies

Some respondents linked long-term singlehood to progressive and socialist economic policies that might alleviate poverty, anxiety and depression. One respondent pointed out that people may be partnering with a good economic provider instead of making a free choice of whether and who to date. Another suggested raising taxes to provide mental & physical health care. Some more ideas:

*Universal basic income to ease the barriers for social support building activities.*

*More employment opportunities. Better access to affordable housing. Welfare allowances above poverty levels, so unemployed, disabled people, etc, can afford to participate in social activities.*

*We need to abolish capitalism and replace it with a socialist system that is more respectful of people's humanity. Frankly though dating difficulties are the least of the*



*issues here. People I think get more depressed being single in a capitalist society than they otherwise would though, for a variety of factors.*

*Give outcast, vagabonds, or low caste people financial freedom and education, so they can travel and find communities that accept them.*

*Welfare allowances above poverty levels, so unemployed, disabled people, etc, can afford to participate in social activities.*

## **Communal support**

*The increased atomization brought on by late stage capitalism and technological advancement needs to be countered by deliberate effort to develop community.*

There were 6 suggestions for communal lifestyles such as home sharing.

One respondent suggested that single people should be able to join with a friend (instead of a spouse) to adopt a child or hold a mortgage.

There were 3 respondents pointing out that single people may not have a family member to support them through illness or aging.

*People in healthy coupled relationships have easier access to various types of support, from the physical, (like someone to take you to the doctor, someone to take care of you when you're sick, someone to help you move a heavy piece of furniture) to the emotional (someone to provide regular physical touch, someone to be sexually intimate with, someone to talk to about your day, someone to comfort you when you're upset). A lot of these things can be obtained from other sources besides a romantic partner, such as family, friends, religious communities, or paid services. But at least right now, the easiest way to get these supports is through being in a couple.*

## **Socio-cultural messages**

Respondents had many more ideas about cultural messages and how society's attitudes should change.

12 respondents wished society put greater value on platonic friendships and family relationships.

7 wished that touch and intimacy were more acceptable in platonic relationships.

*Having a more "intimate" culture, where hugging or cuddling platonically is common, so single people still get affection.*

10 respondents want more in-person interaction, or they objected to online interactions mediated by technology, or the fast pace encouraged by technology:

*We need to have a serious and immediate conversation about the role of technology in our lives. It is so easy to isolate oneself with the internet/smartphones. It should be easier to go to social gatherings where people can meet each other.*



*People are too fast paced these days with short attention spans.*

There were calls for greater honesty (9 respondents), vulnerability (6 respondents), respect (3 respondents), and reduced competition (4 respondents).

*Men should understand that being a man is about compassion and empathy not macho strength. Stop with the penis waving.*

9 respondents wrote about safety needs related to dating and relationships, 6 wrote about the importance of consent, and 2 made anti-violence comments.

*I need to know if I can trust the person I'm dating. Hope that they don't rape me out of a belief that I'm subhuman.*

6 respondents would prefer traditional cultural values such as monogamy, committed relationships and romance before sex.

5 respondents wished for easier, kinder rejections.

There were 4 comments about holidays (such as feeling left out of the emphasis on family gatherings and romantic love) and 2 complaints about Valentine's Day.

This was one of 19 complaints about women's behaviour in a dating context:

*Women have GOT to get over this whole "I Have A Very Sarcastic Sense Of Humor" thing. Sarcasm often feels like humiliation, and it hammers the lonely. It appears in about 80% of the FSeekingM dating ads.*

People of other genders and orientations also have complaints about dating culture:

*The way gay male dating culture works and how men behave. It's hard to get replies that aren't just dick pics, and it's hard to figure out who's going to be shitty about me being trans before I meet them.*



# Conclusions

This survey provides important insight into the causes and effects of dating difficulties. The quotations from respondents provide empathy with long-term single people and with those who have overcome dating difficulties. As a relatively small, non-random survey of an international population, the results should be interpreted with caution.

## What we have learned

The Love Not Anger project laid out some [research questions](#) in 2019, and this survey begins to answer some of them. Other questions not answered by the survey are discussed on page 76.

### What are the demographics of people with dating difficulties?

This survey has shown that long-term dating difficulties can happen to women, men and non-binary people, both cis and trans, whether they are heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual or asexual. The survey found people from adolescence to over 60 years old, on all continents of the world.

Because the survey was not a random sample, we cannot conclude which demographics are more likely to have dating difficulties. We can say that it was easy to find cis heterosexual men, and a wide variety of LGBTQ+ people, with dating difficulties. There were smaller numbers of cis heterosexual women responding.

### What are the more fundamental causes of long-term dating difficulties?

Respondents assessed the causes of their own dating difficulties and gave a wide variety of reasons from the superficial to the fundamental. Some respondents were unsure of the causes of their dating difficulties.

Each person's dating difficulties might fit one or more of the following patterns of causes:

Pattern	Potential causes
<b>Overtures</b>	Low self-confidence, fear of rejection
People who avoid initiating social contact for dating	Anxiety, depression
	Social isolation
	Not knowing how to make an overture (social skills)
	Protecting others or avoiding harassing others
	Not sure what kind of person or relationship they want (e.g. questioning SOGI)
	Demisexual (need to be friends before feeling attracted)



Pattern	Potential causes
<p><b>Desirability</b></p> <p>People who are not attractive to many others (they receive many rejections or few overtures)</p>	<p>Social skills</p> <p>Mental &amp; physical health conditions</p> <p>Physical appearance</p> <p>Discrimination (racism, ableism, transphobia, etc.)</p> <p>Uncommon interests</p> <p>Inexperience</p>
<p><b>Availability</b></p> <p>People who don't have access to many suitable people for dating</p>	<p>Low-population locations</p> <p>Few local people of appropriate age, gender, orientation</p> <p>Uncommon preferences such as asexuality</p> <p>High standards</p> <p>Cultural mismatches (e.g. liberal in a conservative area)</p> <p>Being too busy to date</p>

Negative experiences in childhood or later life, including abuse, assault and bullying, may underlie the difficulties with self-confidence and mental health.

Autism traits are a common reason for difficulty with communication & social skills. Autism is under-diagnosed especially in women.

Some causes can be reinforcing loops, in particular: Rejections reinforce low self-confidence. Loneliness reinforces depression.

### **What self-help, counselling, and other support methods are effective, to overcome dating difficulties?**

Because the causes of dating difficulties are varied, each person will have a different combination of issues to work on. The survey did not test whether any particular life change or support is effective.

There were a few respondents who had made life changes to successfully overcome dating difficulties (page 45). Many other respondents were attempting similar life changes. Some have given up trying to date or improve their life.

Common life changes:

- Improving self-worth, confidence, and self-awareness
- Changing their attitudes about dating and risk
- Increasing social activity and changing social interactions
- Physical fitness, diet, clothing, hair, grooming and medical improvements
- Developing career, education, skills, knowledge and independence
- Moving to own apartment, another city or country



- Accepting being single
- Coping by keeping busy with other activities

Services and supports that respondents commonly use:

- Talking to friends, family or other people
- Mental health treatment (therapy, medication, etc.)
- Dating apps and sites (see feature suggestions on page 48)
- Social activities such as meet-up groups
- Self-help advice
- Sexual services and pornography

Supports that respondents want more of, or easier access to:

- Education, for youth and adults, about social skills, dating and relationships
- Affordable individual counselling with a therapist trained in dating difficulties
- Support groups or group therapy
- Mentorship
- Social activities and singles events aimed at people like themselves
- Matchmaking
- Surrogacy to learn about dating and sex

Respondents were interested in human support rather than electronic services.

Some respondents were unsure why they had dating difficulties, and some were frustrated that their change efforts had not yet brought dating success. We can conclude that people often need an external observer to help assess the reasons for their difficulties and suggest strategies for change. See further discussion on page 77.

### **What are the consequences of long-term dating difficulties for individuals?**

Most respondents are single and many of them felt lonely, lacking emotional intimacy. Some have positive or neutral feelings about being alone while others are deeply frustrated that they lack a partner (and perhaps children) to share life with.

Many respondents are lacking sexual touch or any physical intimacy, and therefore missing out on its benefits for physical and mental health.

Dating difficulties have worsened the anxiety and depression of many respondents. Some were suicidal and a few have addictions.

Loneliness and rejection can reduce self-confidence, which sometimes leads people to social isolation and/or constraining their education and careers. Being single also separates people from friends who couple up or pressure them about dating.

Some respondents felt anger, jealousy and resentment, but none reported being violent.

Long-time single people are economically disadvantaged by extra costs of living, since they cannot share housing, employment benefits or other services. Their income may be lowered due to un(der)employment, as a consequence of depression, low confidence, or discrimination.



## What are the consequences of long-term dating difficulties for society?

When someone is depressed or socially isolated, their community benefits less from the person's abilities, ideas and kindness.

The strong connection of dating difficulties with mental health and self-confidence may have the following economic effects:

- Economic productivity is reduced if people are unemployed, underemployed, or taking time off work because of mental health conditions
- Higher needs for mental and physical health care and social services
- Income support (welfare) costs for unemployed people

There have been a few well-publicized murders by incel men angry about their dating difficulties. Although this seems to be a rare situation, it has tremendous emotional impact on families and communities, as well as monetary costs to society. This survey's respondents did not report any violent feelings or actions.

## What societal changes would prevent these causes of romantic loneliness?

Respondents have identified many ways to reduce the chances of a person having dating difficulties:

- Screening young people for social skills difficulties, autism, abuse and mental health conditions, and providing early supports for these situations
- Youth education about social, dating and relationship skills
- Increased awareness and acceptance of autism, asexuality, LGBTQ
- Freedom from social expectations about gender roles and relationships
- Increased social acceptance of body variation and other diversity
- Parenting and education that gives young people self-confidence
- Exposing young people to social interaction with many people of all genders
- Reduction of bullying, abuse, discrimination and other traumas

## What societal changes could alleviate the consequences?

Respondents suggested many dating, educational, counselling and support services that society could make more available to people with dating difficulties. These were summarized on page 74. Some would require funding from governments, and some would require service development by non-profits, companies, professionals and academics.

Respondents also suggested many socio-cultural changes they would like to see, with awareness that such change is difficult and gradual:

- Destigmatize being single or inexperienced, in society and in media portrayals
- Reduce the social pressure to be in a relationship
- Acceptance of gender diversity and sexual diversity (LGBTQ+)
- A more body-positive and sex-positive culture
- Acceptance of preference for slowly building romance before sex
- Acceptance of diverse relationship structures such as polyamory



- Options to live communally or develop family-like structures for single people
- Greater value of platonic relationships and acceptance of platonic touch
- Reduction of gender expectations, toxic masculinity, patriarchy and sexism
- Clear communications when making, accepting or rejecting an overture to dating
- Consistent cultural expectations for gender roles in dating, and guidance about when and how to approach people
- Fairness to singles in pricing, housing, taxation and employment benefits
- Greater safety, in-person interaction, honesty, vulnerability, compassion, etc.

## Further Research

In question 17, there were 406 respondents who provided their email address, “willing to be interviewed for more insight about dating difficulties”. The Love Not Anger project is open to requests for collaborating on qualitative research that would interview some of these people.

This survey only began to answer the Love Not Anger [research questions](#). Further exploration of the following questions is needed:

### How many people have long-term dating difficulties?

This small survey of a non-random sample cannot determine the percentage of people who have dating difficulties. Now that we have a clear definition of dating difficulties (page 5), random sample surveys could be conducted in various countries and languages to determine the extent of the problem.

There is some data about the age of first sexual experience and the age of marriage. This does not specify how many people have dating and relationship experience at various ages.

A future survey should use a precise definition of dating difficulties, and obtain each respondent’s history of dating, relationship and sexual experience.

### What are the more fundamental causes of long-term dating difficulties?

Academic research could be done to make more objective observations about what causes dating difficulties in a sample of people. This could include in-depth interviews and using psychometric or diagnostic tests. There may be patterns in who is likely to have dating difficulties, or who is more likely to resolve their difficulties and start dating.

Psychological and sociological theory could be applied to map the cause-and-effect relationships and find the more fundamental causes. Resolving superficial issues may not be sufficient for people to start dating.



## **Do the causes differ by demographic group? How do the consequences vary by demographic group?**

This survey data could be analyzed by demographic groups. Preliminary cross-tabulations did not find many significant differences between demographics, so a larger and more evenly-distributed sample may be required.

This survey has plentiful information about single cis het men, while other groups would need more research. For example, there was only one intersex person in the survey, and the various intersex conditions could lead to unusual dating difficulties.

Variations by demographic groups would be useful information for designing support services targeted to specific people.

## **How can long-term singles accurately identify their personal reasons for dating difficulties?**

The survey did not reveal how respondents developed self-awareness.

Some survey respondents were able to assess the causes of their dating difficulties, while others had only limited awareness (see page 28). Given the prevalence of depression and anxiety, it is likely that negative moods coloured many respondents' self-assessments.

An external observer is probably needed to provide a more objective assessment of causes for someone who believes they are unlovable. A self-test quiz could have misleading results.

Further research could develop tests to check for the many known causes of dating difficulties. Existing diagnostic tests, such as for autism, can be expensive. The deeper issues, such as childhood experiences, probably need discussion with a therapist rather than filling in a form. For people with limited funds, perhaps there could be an assessment tool designed for use with friends or other supporters.

## **What self-help, counselling, and other support methods are effective, to overcome dating difficulties?**

Research is needed to test which educational, support and counselling services are more effective at helping single people start dating or improve other aspects of their lives. This survey did not include enough partnered respondents nor enough detail about what was more or less effective for them.

The design-research process could be used to develop the advice and support services below. This process involves research to empathize with people's needs, cooperating with them to design a prototype service, pilot-testing the service, adjusting it based on feedback from participants, and repeatedly testing more versions of the service.

The mental health professions need to develop guidance for recognizing a client's dating difficulties, assessing their causes, and choosing effective treatments (therapy modalities, etc.)



Self-help authors could develop dating advice that reflects the concerns of inexperienced adults and includes & respects people of all genders. Self-help advice about dating skills is also needed for people with high-functioning autism or similar communication difficulties.

Support groups and training courses could be developed for people with dating difficulties.

Group social activities and singles events could be provided to help inexperienced, shy and awkward people meet others in comfortable environments.

### **What supports are effective for lonely youth? For late bloomers who need to “catch up”? For people who have become angry or hateful? For people with autism or other health conditions?**

The support services above could be designed particularly for adolescents, older inexperienced adults, and autistic people.

Reports from the neurodivergence movement indicate that autistic people communicate more easily with each other than with neurotypical people.

Psychological expertise is needed about how to help an angry or hateful person willingly make a genuine adjustment to their attitudes, and how to apply that to dating difficulties.

### **What are the consequences of long-term dating difficulties for society?**

Further statistical research is needed to determine how many people in each country have dating difficulties that lead to un(der)employment and health consequences. Then, known per-person estimates can be used to calculate the financial costs of mental and physical health care, social services and income support (welfare). A similar calculation could be made of economic productivity lost when people are un(der)employed because of low confidence, depression, etc.

## **Carrying this research forward**

This survey has gathered comparable data and eloquent narratives from a large and diverse set of people who share the experience of dating difficulties.

Little previous research has been done on this population. This study shows that the causes and consequences are complex, but changes can be made. It is hoped that these results will inspire others to do more research and develop support services for dating difficulties.

There are many single adults who, with appropriate supports, could become less lonely and isolated, and enjoy more fulfilling lives. There is also a tremendous opportunity to prevent young people from struggling with dating difficulties and their social, health and economic consequences.

The hundreds of people who responded to this survey deserve credit for sharing their life experiences with such vulnerability and passion. Thank you.



# Appendix: Questionnaire

## Dating Difficulties survey

This survey by LoveNotAnger.org is intended to find out: What are the causes and consequences of dating difficulties? The results will be used to recommend supports that would be helpful to people who have never been in a romantic relationship, or who have been single for a long time.

This survey is open to people of all countries, ages, genders and orientations. You might currently have dating difficulties, or you might be a "late bloomer" who struggled to start dating.

This survey includes 10 quick questions and 5 free-text questions, so you choose how much time to spend responding. All questions are optional. If this topic is sensitive for you, please ensure you have some emotional support available after answering the survey. The survey will be open until April 30, 2019.

Your answers will be kept confidential by Alana@LoveNotAnger.org, and aggregated anonymously into a report by June 30, 2019. You will have the choice to provide your email address for an optional follow-up interview. Thank you for contributing to this project.

## Your situation

These questions will help to understand how dating difficulties vary for different people. All questions are optional.

### *Question 1: What is your age?*

(Select one)

- Under 18 years
- 18-21
- 21-24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or over

### *Question 2: What region of the world do you live in?*

(Select one)

- North America (Canada, USA)
- Central America & Caribbean



- South America
- Europe
- Middle East & North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- North & Central Asia
- East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan)
- Southeast Asia (Myanmar to Indonesia)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan & neighbours)
- Australia and Oceania

### Question 3: What is your gender?

(Select one)

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary<sup>3</sup>
- Other (specify)

### Question 4: Are you trans?

(Select one)

- No: Same sex and gender as assigned at birth
- Yes: Transgender<sup>4</sup>, transsexual, or have transitioned sex
- Not sure
- Other (Specify)

### Question 5: Who are you romantically and/or sexually attracted to?

Do not mention any activities that are illegal in your country, because the data may be available to authorities.

(Select all that apply)

- Men
- Women
- Non-binary people
- Nobody
- Not sure
- Other (Specify)

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<sup>3</sup> Option added on April 4. Write-in responses of “nonbinary”, “NB”, etc., were recoded to Non-binary.

<sup>4</sup> Corrected “transgendered” to “transgender” on April 4.



# Dating

## Question 6: Which of the following have you done at least once?

A "date" means any social activity to test mutual interest in romance. "Flirting" is any words or behaviour that indicate romantic or sexual interest in someone, whether you started it or they did.

(Select all that apply)

- Flirted with someone
- Asked someone for a date
- Been asked for a date
- Gone on a date
- Multiple dates with the same person
- Ongoing dating relationship
- Live-in (common-law) relationship
- Marriage
- None of the above
- Other (Specify)

## Question 7: Why do/did you have difficulty with dating?

(Free text response)

## Question 8: Which of the following cause(d) your difficulties with dating?

Select all options that you know or suspect affected your availability, desirability, and/or ability to connect to potential partners.

(Select all that apply)

- Few suitable people available near me
- Self-confidence, sensitivity to rejection
- Social skills, body language, non-verbal signals
- Not enough friends & social support
- Questioning gender, sexuality or dating preferences
- Autism or Asperger's traits
- Mental health conditions (anxiety, depression, addiction, etc.)
- Physical disability or health condition
- Physical appearance
- Employment, education, housing or economic issues
- Discrimination
- Not sure
- Other (Specify)



## Making changes

*Question 9: What would make a dating site/app more helpful for you?*

(Select all that apply)

- Profiles that show more unique characteristics
- Help with social cues, when interacting with a potential match
- Features that reduce the risk or pain of rejection
- Tools to negotiate your preferred style of relationship
- I don't want to use dating sites/apps
- Other (Specify)

*Question 10: How do/did your dating difficulties affect the rest of your life?*

(Free text response)

*Question 11: What changes have you made, to enable yourself to start relationships?*

(Free text response)

*Question 12: How should society change, to prevent dating difficulties and support long-time single people?*

(Free text response)

## Supports

*Question 13: Who have you talked to about your dating difficulties? Were they helpful?*

If you have talked to multiple people in a category, choose your most important experience.

(Select one column per row)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Due to a configuration error, until April 4, only one response was captured per column. Data has been adjusted for non-response.



	Have not tried	Helpful	Neutral	Harmful
Family member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Therapist or counsellor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Online support forum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Live support group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher, coach, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious leader	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone I dated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Question 14: Support services could be designed for people with dating difficulties. Which would you like to try?*

(Select all that apply)

- Advice book, website, videos, etc.
- Mentorship from someone who has overcome dating difficulties
- Telephone hotline
- Online support forum with a professional counsellor
- Online support forum moderated by other people with dating difficulties
- Chatbot app (support by artificial intelligence)
- In-person group counselling
- List of common issues to discuss with any therapist
- One-on-one talk, with a therapist trained in dating difficulties
- Therapy that simulates dating and/or sexual activity
- I don't want any support services
- Other (Specify)

*Question 15: What else would help you with dating difficulties and related issues? What would have helped you in the past?*

(Free text response)



## Follow-up

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will remain confidential.

### *Question 16: May we quote you anonymously?<sup>6</sup>*

If you click Yes, the Love Not Anger project may use short quotations from your survey responses, in any report, post, book or other publication, and attributed to "a survey respondent". If you click No or do not answer this question, your responses will only be aggregated, not quoted word-for-word.

(Select one)

- Yes
- No

### *Question 17: If you are willing to be interviewed for more insight about dating difficulties, please give your email address. This is optional.*

(Box for email address)

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<sup>6</sup> This question was added on April 7. Responses before that date are not quoted.



# Appendix: SOGI coding

SOGI stands for “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity”. This appendix details how responses to questions 3, 4 and 5 were transformed into the classifications beginning on page 12.

These questions were designed to capture the full variety of gender identities and sexuality preferences, without confusing, erasing or offending people. For statistical purposes it was necessary to classify the nuances of human experience into a small number of categories.

## Gender question results

*Question 3: What is your gender?*

Gender	Count
Female	208
Male	451
Non-Binary	51
Questioning	1
Unspecified	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>

The Non-Binary category includes 9 other-specify responses that were variations on non-binary gender (agender, genderqueer, NB, etc.).

Responses to other questions were used to determine the gender of a few people who left question 3 blank or chose a gender category that conflicted with their statements in free-text. Only 2 responses were not possible to classify.



# Trans question results

## Question 4: Are you trans?

Trans question response	Count
No: Same sex and gender as assigned at birth	629
Yes: Transgender, transsexual, or have transitioned sex	38
Not sure	34
Other – Specify responses	10
Unspecified	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>

Currently there is cultural confusion and dissention about whether non-binary-gendered people are included in the definition of “trans”. Thus, non-binary respondents chose or entered many different responses for the Trans question (yes, no, not sure, and various other-specify answers). In later analyses, all Non-Binary respondents were grouped as such, regardless of how they answered the Trans question.

Some people who selected Male or Female for the Gender question 3 answered “Not sure” to the Trans question 4. Based on free-text responses, it was determined that they were cis people who did not understand question 4, rather than people questioning the possibility of being trans.

The survey link was retweeted to some audiences that included many trans and non-binary people, so they may form a larger proportion of the survey respondents than the general population. This was a welcome infusion of data about some small population groups who are likely to have dating difficulties due to identity questioning and discrimination.



## Gender Combo coding

The combined gender identity classification on page 12 was determined as follows:

Gender question 3	Question 4: Are you trans?	Gender Combo	Count
Female	Yes	Trans Female	11
Female	No	Cis Female	190
Female	Intersex, assigned female at birth, presents as female	Cis Female	1
Female	Unspecified (other responses used to classify)	Cis Female	1
Female	Not sure	Cis Female	4
Male	Yes	Trans Male	9
Male	No	Cis Male	434
Male	Not sure	Cis Male	8
Non-Binary	Any response	Non-Binary	51
Questioning	Any response	Unspecified	1
Unspecified	Any response	Unspecified	2
		<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>

## Attraction and Orientation

### *Question 5: Who are you romantically and/or sexually attracted to?*

This question was designed to be combined with the Gender question 3 to determine sexual orientation. The question did not use orientation labels that have many interpretations, such as “bisexual”.

The “Nobody” option was provided, instead of using the word “asexual”. It was anticipated that some people would interpret “asexual” as “not having sex” (a dating difficulty) rather than the asexual community’s meaning, “not desiring sex”.

Using the “Nobody” option and the free-text responses, 35 people identified themselves as aromantic, asexual and/or demisexual (see page 13). It is possible that providing tickboxes for aro/ace identities would have identified more such people.



# Orientation

Respondents were classified with the following Orientation labels. This is a statistical simplification of people's real preferences. After a complicated calculation using questions 3 and 5, all write-in responses were manually classified.

Orientation category	Meaning in this report	Count
Heterosexual	Male attracted to Women but not to Men, Or, Female attracted to Men but not to Women. Includes people who were also attracted to Non-Binary genders, or Nobody, or Not Sure. Includes people stating uncertainty or curiosity about bisexuality.	381
Homosexual	Male attracted to Men but not to Women. Or, Female attracted to Women but not to Men. Includes people who were also attracted to Non-Binary genders, or Nobody, or Not Sure.	116
Bisexual	Any person attracted to both Men and Women. Includes people who were also attracted to Non-Binary genders, or Nobody, or Not Sure. These respondents might identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, or other labels.	164
Attracted to Nobody	Attraction only to "Nobody".	6
Unspecified	A Non-binary gendered person attracted to either Men or Women but not both. (Neither the English language nor this questionnaire had terminology for their orientation.) Or, Gender is Unspecified, and the respondent is attracted to either Men or Women but not both. Or, Attraction is only "Not sure". Or, non-response to the Attraction question.	46

In Question 5, if the respondent ticked "Not sure", they were flagged as questioning SOGI (page 26) in addition to any orientation category above.

In Question 5, if the respondent ticked "Nobody" and also Men and/or Women, they were counted on the asexual spectrum (page 13).



## Summary of gender and orientation

To group the population into large enough segments for analysis, the summary of gender and orientation on page 13 was defined as shown in the cells of this table:

Gender Combo	Orientation:				
	Hetero	Bisexual	Homo	Nobody	Unspecified
<b>Cis Female</b>	Cis Het Female	Cis Queer	Cis Queer	Cis Queer	Cis Queer
<b>Cis Male</b>	Cis Het Male	Cis Queer	Cis Queer	Cis Queer	Cis Queer
<b>Non-Binary</b>	Trans and Non-Binary				
<b>Trans Female</b>	Trans and Non-Binary				
<b>Trans Male</b>	Trans and Non-Binary				
<b>Unspecified</b>	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unspecified

These categories were thought to reflect the largest differences in experiences of culture, expectations and discrimination. For example, people with trans or non-binary gender identities experience a different kind of marginalization than cis lesbians, gays and bisexuals. There are also significant experiential differences within these categories, but analysis may not be meaningful for groups with few respondents.

