



## Modern Dating: A Field Guide

By Chiara Atik

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*From the creators of the popular online dating site howaboutwe.com comes the definitive guide for navigating the modern dating world.*

The single woman is having a moment. In the worlds of work, personal finances, and education, women are more successful than ever before. When it comes to dating, they're happy to take their time exploring lots of different relationships before deciding if they want to settle down. Women today, like the generations of women before them, want to fall in love. But they want it to happen organically, at its own pace, and with the right person.

Rather than listing a set of "rules," *Modern Dating* offers advice on modern challenges, like how to send a relatively unembarrassing sext, how to create a failproof first date idea, and how to make sure you're getting into a relationship for the right reasons. Instead of telling you *How to Win a Husband in Just 3 Easy Steps!*, it will gently guide you through all the triumphs and pitfalls of what dating is actually like, from one-night stands, to confusing texts and emails, to your first online date.

Frank, funny, and totally relatable, this is a book that really gets at how women are dating today—the ideal travel companion for your dating life. The only rule is that there are no rules, but this book will be there for guidance, or just for laughs, every step of the way.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Atik's smart, youthful appraisal of today's social landscape makes her seem like an expert that's just one step ahead of you. Informed by research and delivered with style, this is big-sister advice at its best." -Publisher's Weekly Starred Review

"Packed with tips and tests you can use to squeeze the maximum fun out of singledom." -Glamour

"Using an appealing format full of sketches and bulleted lists, the authors impart tidbits such as the six worst things to say on a date, what makes a profile picture successful, how to be more attractive in five easy steps, and much more." -Library Journal Starred Review

### About the Author

Chiara Atik is a writer and blogger recently described by Gawker as "The Girl You Wish You Knew When You Moved to New York." Her writing has been featured on Elle.com, Glamour.com, The Hairpin, Today.com, and Yahoo Shine. She was New York editor of GuestofaGuest.com and has been writing about dating for HowAboutWe since 2010.

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## YOU SAY "SINGLE" LIKE IT'S A BAD THING

There are a billion and one reasons why you might be single. Maybe you just got out of a serious relationship. Maybe you've decided to take a break from men for a while. Maybe taking a break from men is the *last* thing you want, and you can't imagine committing to just one. And of course, maybe you *do* want a relationship, but you just aren't in one right now.

Whatever the reason, the point is, you're single right now, and whether it's by circumstance or design, you might as well enjoy it as best you can. Because being single, at least in the way women get to be single today, is a luxury our mothers and grandmothers didn't have.

For centuries and centuries, a woman's lot in life was based on the supposition that she would get married, and the sooner the better. In the Middle Ages, a girl would live in her parents' house until the ripe old age of seventeen or so, at which point her father would march her down the aisle and hand her off to a husband. The next twenty-five years would be spent getting pregnant, narrowly escaping death during childbirth, and picking out new tapestries for the castle great room, or whatever it was that women did back then. (Peasant women basically did the same thing, minus the tapestries and plus a good ten hours a day of toiling away in the fields with a baby strapped to their backs.) The only exceptions to the rule? Nuns and prostitutes, aka celibacy and syphilis. So, yes, the Middle Ages were pretty bleak.

As the centuries went on, things for women got better, but not by much. Women in colonial America were finally able to inherit their husband's property, thus providing some of the first examples of American female autonomy. And never-married women who could scrape together enough money could often manage to buy

cottages, where they would lead relatively quiet lives and do their best to avoid anyone suspecting them of being a witch.

With the industrialization of the nineteenth century, single young girls were given the opportunity to leave home and earn a living in mill towns, the very first example of the single life in America. Sure, they lived in all-girl boarding houses, worked an ungodly number of hours, and made very little money. But they were also allowed to sneak into town for the occasional evening's entertainment, one of the *very* few opportunities for young women to meet men unchaperoned. (Unfortunately, birth control at this point was still ages away, so this single life was pretty finite.)

To be a happy single woman, you needed to be rich, and if you weren't born rich, it was very hard to make your own money.

So the single woman continued to unhappily exist until the twentieth century, which is when things suddenly, miraculously took a turn for the better. First, the car was invented, and what's more, women were allowed to drive. Instantly, women had more autonomy: the ability to leave the house, to get to a job, and, best of all, *to meet men unchaperoned*. Is it any wonder that the sexually promiscuous flapper of the 1920s coincided perfectly with the sudden mass popularization of the automobile? Women have *always* been sexual creatures; it was just a matter of getting a moment alone with a guy outside of the damn parlor. Suddenly, women were smoking, drinking, dancing, and having sex: the germination of single life as we know it. But birth control was still dicey, and women hadn't entered the workforce quite yet, so they still got married ASAP. If a girl was dating a guy she mostly got along with, and they were both of a certain age (say, twenty-four or so), they would probably get married, because that's just what you did. No "I like you, but I need to see what else is out there . . ." exit clause allowed. (If, five years down the road, the two discovered they weren't so compatible after all, well, tough cookies.)

And then, boom! The Sixties happened, and everything exploded. The most important development, of course, was the birth-control pill: that miraculous little thing that you swallow painlessly in the morning to have worry-free sex all month. (Well, relatively.) The other important development was the rise of the "career girl," a woman who entered the workforce not because she had to support her family or help with the war effort, but simply *because she wanted to*. And when a woman got a job, she often got money, and her own apartment, with no one to look after but herself. So naturally women started to realize, *Wait a minute, if I can have sex outside of marriage, and support myself outside of marriage, WHAT is the big rush?* And for the first time in history, there really wasn't a rush, biological or financial, to get married. Was the Sixties single woman free of stigma? Of course not, but it was a start.

Which brings us to today. Women today get to enjoy all the perks of the sexual revolution and feminism, with the added advantage of the fifty or so years over which they've sunk in. Society is *used* to a single woman now. However *you* may feel about your singleness, no one is going to give you a dirty look for buying condoms, or signing a lease on your own, or booking a vacation for one.

All the things that you enjoy or appreciate about being single—absolute control over the DVR, coming and going whenever you please, making decisions based on your desires alone, the excitement of going out and meeting new people, the lack of responsibility for just a *little* while longer—these are all things that your grandmother probably didn't have the opportunity to choose for herself.

And as you no doubt know, being single doesn't mean being lonely. You may joke about becoming a cat lady, but you're probably not spending your Saturday nights knitting. You've got friends, you've got interests, you've got hobbies, and you have every opportunity to pursue them. Is being single amazing *all* the time?

Definitely not. But then again, as your coupled-up friends can tell you, neither is being in a relationship.

This is not to say that it's bad to want to *not* be single. It's okay to want a boyfriend, to want to get married, and to want it to happen sooner rather than later. And maybe every once in a while, you do get a little lonely. That's normal. You don't have to want to be single forever. But as long as you are, you might as well enjoy it while you can. Someday you might stop being single, and if all goes well, who knows? You might never have the opportunity to be on your own again.

So, seriously: Live it up! Your great-grandmothers would want you to.

## FIFTEEN THINGS TO ENJOY WHILE YOU'RE SINGLE

### **1. Sleeping Diagonally on the Bed**

Can we momentarily let go of the illusion that sharing a bed with someone is actually comfortable? It's tolerable at best. But having an entire bed to yourself is *great*.

### **2. Wild Nights!**

It's pretty nice to be able to go out and stay out as long as you want without having to worry about whether your significant other is tired, or his feet hurt, or that you said you'd call, or that he's just ready to go home and have sex now.

And if, at midnight, a friend calls and invites you to come out, you can just go.

And if, at 2 a.m., you meet someone you like, you can just kiss him, or go home with him, or just get his number.

And if, at 4 a.m., you feel like getting a slice of pizza, or a whole pizza, or a whole pizza with extra-garlicky garlic knots, you can, no problem. Who's going to care?

### **3. Quiet Weekends!**

Conversely, if you want to spend an entire weekend ensconced in your room and watch seasons one to four of *The West Wing*, and order delivery, and sleep all afternoon, and wear your rattiest sweatpants, and stalk people on Facebook 'cause you're just in that kind of mood, you can. You can ignore all phone calls and basically disappear from the world without feeling too neglectful or guilty.

### **4. The Opportunity to Check Out All Those "What-Ifs"**

A random person you meet at a party, an acquaintance you've had a crush on forever, maybe even a co-worker: When you're single, you can pursue these "what-ifs" and see where they lead. More often than not, these little sparks of romance turn out to be nothing, but at least when you're single, the not knowing won't drive you crazy.

### **5. Spending Your Money on What You Want**

No need to justify that \$300 dress; no need to put money aside for *his* friend's wedding or Christmas presents for *his* family.

## **6. Not Having to Hang Out with Anyone Else's Friends**

You have your own friends, and it's hard enough to find time to hang out with them. So it's pretty nice not to have to waste a perfectly good Friday night at a bar with his buddies (who aren't half as cool as yours).

## **7. Guiltless Flirting**

Flirting is one of life's simplest pleasures and easiest confidence-boosters. Maintaining eye contact just a beat longer than normal, engaging in a little repartee, touching someone's arm, sending a few playful texts that may or may not lead anywhere. It all puts an extra spring in your step, doesn't it?

## **8. You Have the Best Stories**

Your crazy, roller-coaster dating stories make you the most popular person at brunch. Dating and hookup stories may not end in "happily ever after," but they're almost always entertaining.

## **9. Big Decisions Are Yours and Yours Alone to Make . . .**

If something happens in your life—a job opportunity, a lifestyle change, a sudden trip, a need for something new—you don't have to consult anyone else. You don't have to consider anyone else. Your decisions affect you and you alone, so you never have to compromise or turn down an opportunity for someone else.

## **10. . . . And So Is the Remote Control**

You're going to watch that *Toddlers & Tiaras* marathon in its entirety, and ain't nobody going to stop you.

## **11. Eat Whatever, Whenever You Want**

Something about being in a relationship seems to put a lot of pressure on meals. Whereas a single person can just pour herself a bowl of cereal for dinner, a couple will more often than not feel the need to "go get food" or put together an entire meal. You can enjoy eating without feeling the pressure of making dinner a big production.

## **12. You Can Have Sex with Anyone If You Want To**

People in relationships can't.

## **13. Privacy**

People always say that one of the pleasures of being in a relationship is finding someone with whom you can always be yourself, and do anything in front of. But just for the moment, enjoy the fact that you don't ever have to see or hear anyone clipping their toenails, and vice versa.

## **14. Spontaneity**

Couples have to be spontaneous *together*. Single people can decide on last-minute trips, after-work plans, or

impromptu weekend activities without checking with anyone first.

## 15. First Dates

First dates are scary, and they don't always turn out well, but they're always, always laced with possibility. Every first date you go on could be your last for a while, really, so enjoy the excitement, the butterflies, the hope, and the *unknown*. It's something you'll miss once you're happily settled.

### I'VE NEVER HAD A BOYFRIEND

*"I'm turning twenty-six pretty soon, and I've never had a boyfriend, nor have I ever dated short-term or casually. I've liked guys, and a couple have even liked me, but they haven't really matched up. The ones that have liked me are both longer-term guy friends who became interested only after several months of knowing me. Is that bad/weird?"*

— *Larissa, 25, Minneapolis*

"Bad/weird?" Maybe just unusual/not great. But don't worry about the past too much, and start looking ahead: Do you want to get more experience under your belt in the romance department? If you've liked guys and guys have liked you, then there's literally nothing keeping you from going out and finding someone to date short-term or casually *tomorrow*.

That's the danger about being single for a really long time: not that it's weird or bad per se, but that it can create sort of a mental roadblock in your own mind. We become so used to being alone that we can't even imagine a scenario where we're not. We have no idea how to take those simple steps from platonic to romantic—single is normal, single is status quo, and romantic is not.

If you want a boyfriend, you can get one, but it's definitely going to mean pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. (Being single is comfortable, if nothing else.) Go up and talk to people at parties. Sign up for an online dating site and force yourself to go on at least four dates—don't just go on one mediocre date and then give up. If the guys who have liked you in the past did so after several months of knowing you, it suggests that you are slow to open up to people. Force yourself to be friendlier and flirtier to guys when you meet them. What to you might feel overly forward is probably pretty tame.

You might be telling yourself that you're waiting for the right guy to come along. But what you're risking is not knowing how to get his attention when he does come along. Don't lock yourself up in an ivory tower—kiss a guy, have a fling, date someone for a while, and get comfortable with the idea of romance.

And then, if after all that you find you prefer being single to the effort of dating, then by all means become a confirmed bachelorette. But at least at that point, you'll know you're making an informed decision rather than just settling.

### NOT THAT IT'S ANYONE'S BUSINESS, BUT...

Everyone knows it's not polite to ask a woman her age or her weight. Unfortunately, asking someone why

she doesn't have a boyfriend still seems to be allowed. (Personally, I'd way rather tell someone my age and/or weight than have to explain to someone why I happen to be single at that particular moment.) The worst is when people ask by way of paying you a compliment ("Why doesn't a pretty/nice girl like you have a boyfriend?"), as if all your fabulous traits are wasted on you and you alone.

The thing is, it is absolutely no one's *business* why you're single. Not your great aunt's, not your ex-boyfriend's, not the nosy cab driver's or the inappropriate co-worker's. As we've said, there are myriad reasons why you could be single at any given moment, and they're all personal. So the next time someone asks you why you don't have a boyfriend, you are perfectly within your rights to say, "That couldn't *possibly* be less of your business." Except with more expletives.

Of course, it's hard to actually tell people to eff off when you're face-to-face, and they probably are just "politely" inquiring. So what are some things you can actually say when someone asks you why you're (still) single?

If you're really uncomfortable with the question, the best thing you can do is keep your answer short, succinct, and conclusive. Then *immediately* follow it up with a question that swiftly changes the topic.

At a loss as to what to say? Try one of these strategies:

**Deflect the question with a joke.**

- *I was born this way.*
- *I didn't realize there was a cutoff age!*
- *I have yet to meet my match in wit, brains, and beauty.*
- *Why are you still married?*

**Keep your response honest and simple.**

- *Because I want to be.*
- *Because I have too much going on right now to have a relationship.*
- *I haven't met the right person.*
- *I just don't think I'm ready to settle down yet.*

**And remember, you can always add:**

- *Why, do you know someone?*



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