

HOW MATCH.COM, OK CUPID AND THE CORPORATE DATING SITES KILLED THEMSELVES

By [Antonia Lenon](#)

In *Sex And The City*, the sitcom that defined the Noughties dating scene, Carrie and her girlfriends meet up to discuss the men causing havoc in their lives.

It makes me feel faintly envious; when I hang out with my single friends we swap stories about the miseries of dating apps, instead.

At 26, I'm a member of Gen Z (now aged 12 to 27, although you have to be 18 to use a dating app). We have the dubious privilege of being the first cohort to come of age in a time when dating apps are ubiquitous.

Once you're out of the booze-fuelled uni years, no one just chats up a potential partner at a pub or bar any more. And while I can only speak for my own social circle, none of us has struck up relationships with mutual friends, either. Apps are seen as the only way to meet someone new.

But far from making dating easier, it's turned our love lives into a brutal, exhausting slog. No wonder a recent Forbes survey found that 79 per cent of Generation Z describe themselves as experiencing 'burnout' thanks to online dating.



Antonia Lenon says that far from making dating easier, apps have turned young people's love lives 'into a brutal, exhausting slog'

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On [TikTok](#), young women beg their audiences to ditch dating apps, with their manipulative algorithms, for the good of their mental health. One typical critic rages: '[Dating apps] do not care about you finding your soulmate... they just care about taking your money and keeping the attractive people locked away.'

There are even signs that we're switching off altogether: shares in dating app Bumble crashed 30 per cent this month after it slashed its projected revenue, while Match Group, behind Tinder and Hinge, has reported a decline in paying users. Dating app downloads have been on the wane since 2019.

So what exactly are we complaining about? The truth is, the apps have changed since they were launched a little over ten years ago — and not for the better.

Back then, they made dating feel like a fun (and deliberately addictive) game. They were also a genuinely useful tool for finding love: a survey of 2,000 British couples who married in 2017 to 2021 found 28 per cent had met online.

Now, though, as the app makers struggle to boost profits, the terms of the game have changed — and it feels like my generation can only lose.

On Hinge, for example, your 'best' matches are pooled into a separate category called 'Standouts'. You see 70 options a week, but can only contact one for free. To reach the rest, you must buy a virtual 'rose' to send them, at a cost of £10 for three 'roses'.



Antonia suspects the apps' algorithms are deliberately serving up duds in the hope

you'll cave in and pay for premium services

There are pricier options, too: a top-level 'Hinge X' subscription is £89.99 for three months, while Bumble's top subscription costs £149.99 for three months and Tinder's 'platinum' service is £116.99 for six months.

Your suggested matches are often bizarre; it's hard not to suspect the algorithm is deliberately serving up duds in the hope you'll cave in and pay for premium service.

Actual dates are often comically awful. Take my friend who recently went to the pub with a guy who turned up in a three-piece suit. He told her he spent his weekends at football matches being aggressive towards the opposing fans. 'I am a football hooligan,' were the words he used.

There's a relentless focus on appearance — forget a few fun snaps, these days self-promoting video and voice recordings on your profile are increasingly the norm.

Even when you do find someone you fancy, the rules of engagement can be breathtakingly cut-throat.

My friend Hannah* started seeing someone from Hinge last year; they were together for three months and even met each other's parents.

He asked her in person to be his girlfriend — and then a few days later sent a WhatsApp message informing her he was back together with his ex.



Dr Luke Brunning, a lecturer in Applied Ethics at Leeds University, says the private nature of communication on dating apps enables users to engage in cruel behaviour

He clearly had no qualms about his actions, wishing her the best of luck in her career and signing off with two hearts and a smiling emoji. She never heard from him again.

Dr Luke Brunning, a lecturer in Applied Ethics at Leeds University, says the private nature of communication on apps enables this sort of cruelty.

'There are fewer social consequences for poor behaviour,' he explains. 'Many dating app users report feeling aware that they behave in ways that they would regret in person, but struggle to stop.'

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Another friend, Chloe*, matched with a guy and went on a date which ended up lasting 13 hours. They rode bikes in the sunshine, went for lunch and then dinner. Two other similarly whirlwind dates followed and, on the fourth date, he stayed over at her flat and they slept together.

A few days later, he messaged her saying she was clearly looking for something serious, and he wasn't interested. He then unmatched her on the dating app and deleted her as a friend on social media.

His parting gift, she later discovered, was an STI.

Even my rare friends who have managed to date someone from an app long-term often end up feeling lukewarm towards them, some seeming reluctant to introduce them to

our friendship group.

Perhaps it's because a relationship that begins on an app feels devoid of serendipity.

In spite of all this, I haven't taken the TikTok influencers' advice and deleted my dating profile, and neither have most of my friends.

We feel trapped in our toxic relationship with the apps — because, well, everyone has them, and there's still a tiny part of us that hopes they might work.

I have no doubt there are plenty of decent boys on Hinge or Bumble.

But are we ever going to find each other amid the cringeworthy profiles, the cumbersome algorithm and the horrors of dating etiquette in 2024? Probably not.

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