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## We date like we shop

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As much as this is such a tired cliché, there is some truth to the widespread millennial observation that dating in this generation is harder and more complicated than it used to be. It's challenging for me personally to be in the dating scene as a busy 29 years old, single woman living in a city where we've become more self-aware and conscious of things like personal space and safety. Simply meeting potential mates, the 'traditional' way is becoming a dated practice, an exception if you like. More of my friends who are now married or are in serious relationships have met their partners online. And as someone with an anti-social personality, I get uncomfortable when random people stop me in the metaphorical streets to talk to me for whatever reason, my whole life is spent online. It even takes me a moment to warm-up to the idea of new people in general, so being 'hit on' in person completely throws me off. Even on the days when I go out socially with friends, I prefer to stay in my circle then interact with other people in that space.

So online dating has become the most convenient, comfortable, risky (because catfishing) and ironically, 'safe' way to meet a diverse set of people from your couch. Much of our in-between time is spent on apps like Tinder, Her, Grinder and sliding into the DMs of our crushes on Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms. 'Meeting' new people has become a trivial non-activity that involves mindless swiping when we are bored, have time to kill or just looking for validation from strangers. Like online shopping, if you change your mind about someone you swiped on, you inconsequentially have the option to refresh, remove items or clean out your cart before you proceed to purchase or meet face to face in this case. The same way we have the option to send back our shopping items back to the store when or if we are unhappy about the quality of goods, we can just as easily un-match and block someone when a date turns out to be disappointing in person. Online dating somewhat removes the high stakes nature that used to weigh down dating, with apps, people turn to be more honest from the onset when it comes to what they are looking for. But the fact it is widely transactional adds a layer of complexity because alongside social expectations, there are still human beings with emotions involved. The online dating terrain tends to be difficult and confusing to navigate because we are trying to straddle new dating rules that are in contradiction with an old world with traditional rules that pressure us to find the 'one', settle down, get married and have kids. The rules are also blurry because they are constantly changing.

Another reality is that the ease of access that comes with online dating has made us pickier and more critical because not only do we assume there are more people to choose from, we are now also having to negotiate the different types of relationships we can sign up for. Just turning the location on, on your phone serves you with an endless menu of people in your area who could be looking for anything from a situationship, pen pal, one-night stand, polyamorous union, open relationship, polyfidelity, companion, mistress, friends with benefits, validation from married people who are just 'window shopping' and etc. All this choice leads us to have higher and often unrealistic expectations, where we require that people to tick a lot more boxes before we settle with an ideal partner. It drives us to search for perfection in others, when we aren't perfect ourselves.

The grass seems greener because our matches and 'the people in your area' button tells us there are prettier, smarter, fitter, cultured and funnier people out there for us to explore and meet. Options we delude ourselves are open and available for us to choose from, so why settle for one when you can be a casual serial dater? And in reality, most of the people we swipe right on are going to swipe left, so the notion of 'choice' is but an illusion. The same way online clothing stores have an array of items that we could potentially buy, but don't because they don't work with our body shape, might be out of our price range, not in the colour that matches with our skin tone or out of stock, online dating works much the same way. Hence even when we do match with someone based on attributes we thought we liked at face value, they may not turn out to be who we thought they were nor be what we want for ourselves because they either misrepresented themselves, there is no chemistry or we just want different things.

Thus, in the case of online dating culture, you don't even really need a reason to discount, ghost, breadcrumb or bench someone. Fear of Missing out (FOMO) means we never want to settle for one, so we end up alone anyway.