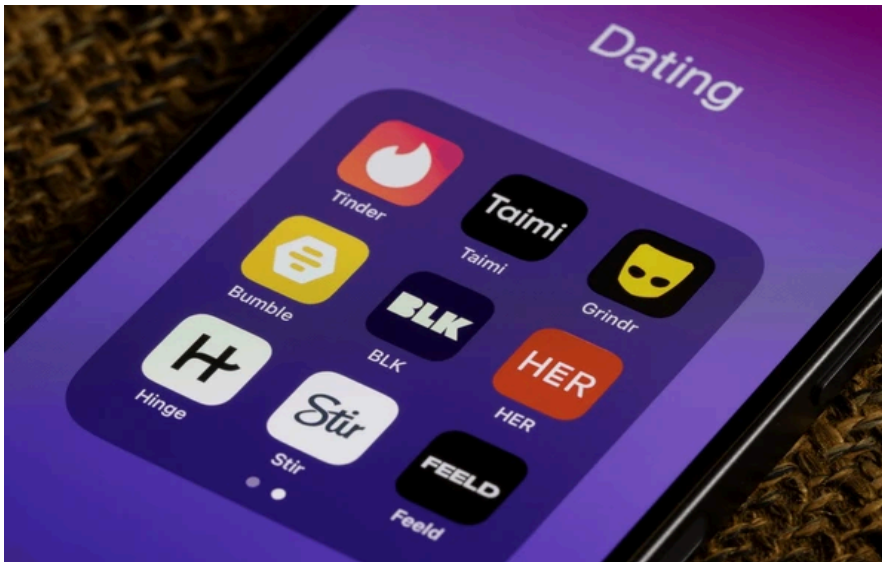


What is wrong with Melbourne's Dating Scene?



Credit: Shutterstock.

“Should you message a ghoster”, I smashed into the keyboard scrolling for answers. Another hopeless search for guidance in random columns that seems to repeat the same ideas.

It's a story that is not unique to myself, but certainly helps to paint a broader picture of the current modern dating landscape. Naturally, dating apps like Hinge, Tinder and Bumble have been blamed for perpetuating a culture of non-committal, casual relationships.

Often one party strings the other along until they decide to move on to bigger and better things while the other has “caught feelings” often resulting in catastrophic heartbreak for someone whom you were never even official with in the first place.

This is what is now known as a “Situationship”. It sounds like a made up term, because it is. The word is a blend of Situation and relationship and is defined by a lack of definition and labels of said relationship. Confusing? That is the whole point.

It feels as though the majority of modern dating has come to this, wrapped up with playing games through text whilst analysing a person's “reply time” to work out if they are really into us or not.

In 2022, Tinder reported a 49 per cent increase in its users usage of the term “Situationship” in their bios.

If you have ever had the pleasure of dating in Melbourne you would know it is particularly difficult. From the Fitzroy artist, to Eastern Suburb Footy Boys that frequent the Espy (Hotel Esplanade) and Hotel Sorrento in the summer.

I could go on with the niche Melbournian references but the Melbourne Dating scene has developed quite the reputation.

The issue may not be a Melbournian problem but rather Australia-wide. Kate, a 20 year old Sydney-Sider can attest to the same kind of struggles dating in Sydney.

“I was once ghosted right before a date, we met on hinge and agreed on a time and place and the day of he just disappeared” She said.

“I have of Course been on my fair share of Awkward first Hinge dates that have not gone anywhere” She said.

Nothing happens in a vacuum. There must be broader socio-cultural factors at play here, in the way that young men in Australia have been brought up.

Psychologist Helene Brenner refers to an “Invisible emotional straitjacket that I like to call the Male Code” She said.

Brenner defines the Male code as “An unspoken agreement that you should do everything in your power to not feel pain, fear, weakness or vulnerability”.

Over the years much advocacy has been done to attempt to break down this stigma. The culture shows progress being made, with a shift in celebrity culture celebrating less hyper masculine men.

The popularity of actors and performers such as Harry Styles and Timothy Chalamet as heart-throbs reflects this shift away from hyper- masculine and emotionless men being the ideal.

However, The culture hasn't quite shifted that far in Australia. There is still an underlying “Boys Culture” and fear of over sharing still lingering within Male friendships and relationships.

Social and developmental Psychologist Angelica Puzio Ferrara conducted a study earlier this year speaking to a range of men from different backgrounds on their experiences with their friendships and intimate connections.

One Respondent to the study said that they “Didn't know how to have intimacy with anyone they were not sexually attracted to”. Another respondent, a 28 year old Canadian, said “Women offer me actual relationships, whereas men offer me experiences”.

Here lies the disparity, socio-cultural conditioning of men does not allow for vulnerable, close intimate friendships that go beyond Saturday night beers or attending Music festivals. Instead women provide this closeness but in a romantic context.

Tall Poppy Syndrome is ingrained into Australian Egalitarian culture and it isn't just an issue Men face. So what is it and how has it in intangled itself deep into our personal relationships?

Tall Poppy Syndrome refers to people being attacked and resented for their achievements and success. Essentially cutting down the tallest poppy. This can manifest in a multitude of ways from career success, personal milestones and relationships.

A culture of humility sounds like a good thing but it ultimately stifles any opportunity to celebrate success which In terms of relationships, translates to a lack of effort and care placed in the pursuit of romantic partners.

In a Study conducted in 2018 by Dr Rumeet Billian found that 70.1 percent of respondents found that they had their achievement devalued or downplayed.

Tik Tok User Jordan Stacy discusses Tall poppy syndrome and “insecure culture” in Australia in a recent Tik Tok post. “There is a lack of trying or fear of being seen trying” she said.

Dating apps have given users the luxury of choice and the over abundance of options, leading to higher instances of ghosting.

Psychology Today Australia reports that according to a 2018 study, 25 percent of Men and Women have been ghosted in a romantic relationship. As I alluded to before, i'm part of that statistic.

The study also reported that 22 percent of people surveyed admitted to ghosting someone.

I'll reluctantly admit that I am also part of that statistic. Ghosting Karma coming back to bite me I suppose.

Looking at this issue from a gendered and Feminist perspective, dating apps have given Men the tools to uphold patriarchy and treat women like disposable objects once they have gotten what they wanted from them. Even if that means emotional manipulation along the way. The vicious cycle that is situationships.

Chloe 20, Who is now in a committed long term relationship with her partner she met at uni, has experienced the dreaded Hinge Situationship.

“Through dating apps, I have been on multiple dates where the topic of relationships hasn't actually come up. There's no labels and it did keep me confused and it was hard to figure out what I actually wanted” she said.

"It's not as organic compared to meeting someone in person," she said.

"It's hard to connect with someone when there's a lack of communication of what you're looking for in a relationship," she told me.

"Even on your profile you have information of what you're looking for but it kind of just gets disregarded" she said.

Any Hinge user would be all too familiar with the "Short term relationship, open to long" in someone's profile. Spoiler Alert, they almost are never actually open to that long term relationship.

Chloe's experiences ring true to that.

"There felt like there was this expectation that we were only there in a casual dating sense and after about three dates the communication was sparse" She said.

Chloe can attest to this culture of insecure and "nonchalant-ness" in the dating scene.

"Men wanting to be nonchalant and not wanting to look like they care is ruining a lot of romantic ideals we grew up with, I do think that's why a lot of people tend to be in situationships nowadays" she said.

From personal experience she feels that a "Lack of communication is huge and it's also what leads to situationships".

When asked about the most frustrating aspect of the current dating landscape when she was single, chloe shared a poignant experience;

"Why are you not communicating your feelings if something happened between us, possibly its a lack of maturity and being scared to hurt someone and not wanting to be the bad guy. If a guy is honest and says i'm not interested in being with you but i'm just interested in having a very casual dating experience. They don't want to say that because they think you are going to be upset, but a lot of women also want that too" she told me.

Although, It would be unfair to place all blame on men, Casual relationships and "Rosters" which is a term that has also been popularised on social media refers to the speaking to and seeing multiple people at the one time. Women engage in this behaviour as much as men. Further perpetuating this vicious cycle.

It's easy to blame dating apps and technology and it certainly has altered our romantic relationships, but Australia's insecure yet egalitarian culture has perpetuated this dating

landscape and of course that pesky thing called patriarchy that doesn't just impact women but also men.