



Candice O'Grady, 32

Living the single life.

WITH drastic shifts in how people think about marriage and sex in societies around the world, and ever-evolving technologies that constantly impact the nature of courtship – the number of people living alone is on the rise.

An article published in *The Guardian* in March 2012, cited data produced by market research firm Euromonitor International, claiming “the number of people living alone globally is skyrocketing, rising from about 153 million in 1996 to 277 million in 2011 – an increase of around 80 percent in 15 years.”

In mainstream media, being single is often portrayed as the result of some inherent physical or mental defect. And the depiction of that solitary existence is usually characterized differently depending on gender.

Unmarried men are cast as commitment-phobic Don Juans, as in the classic film *Alfie*, remade in 2004. Jude Law plays the near-pathological bachelor on the road to ruin, after breaking the hearts of countless women, from the patient and loving single mom, to the blonde with movie-star looks, considered the zenith of the heterosexual dating pool.

In the novel-turned-film, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Renée Zellweger is the affectionate, though ultimately neurotic spinster. Complete with wine-soaked renditions of *All by Myself*, and unruly pounds brought on by self-pitying ice cream binges, Bridget Jones solidified and possibly revived the desperate 30-something female archetype.

The movie's problematic stereotyping has not escaped widespread criticism, but its cultural resonance cannot be denied. The film, along with its 2004 sequel, grossed over \$500 million at the box office. Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie in her 2009 Ted Talk said, “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.”

According to Statistics Canada, 13,788,492 Canadians identified as single in 2012. Yet many uncoupled people feel misunderstood.

“Nobody talks about single people. There are no stories written about them,” said Ross Henwood, a 38-year-old single man living in Hull, Québec.

“If you watch any movie, a single person is like a lone wolf or an anti-hero. Like, ‘What’s wrong with them? Why wouldn’t they want to find somebody and settle down?’ ... I think the last two marginalized groups are fat people and single people.”

The perception of singles is often polarized. Friends and family offer pity or envy, implying the lifestyle is either pathetic or glamorous. According to Ross “being alone is a bit of a paradox. It’s both really good, but it’s also a bit of a drag at the same time.”

Candice O’Grady, 32, of Toronto, says her feelings about her status are always changing. “I go through phases; sometimes it bothers me and sometimes it doesn’t.”

Like many, Candice finds it impossible to meet people, and says it only grows

more difficult with age. “I find it so hard to picture meeting someone. That’s what’s changed for me. I never worried about that when I was younger, because obviously it’ll just happen.”

Many say being unattached also impacts their social life, and how they interact in groups. Ottawa resident Kate McInturf, 45, identifies an uncomfortable dynamic in her experience as a single woman.

“I have a couple of close friends who are couples, and I’m aware of trying not ever to be alone with the husband... not because anything has ever happened... I just don’t want the [woman] in the couple to ever feel awkward about it.”

McInturf debunks the stigma of the desperate, middle-aged divorcee, explaining that she isn’t on the hunt for just any man.

“I’m pretty comfortable being alone and being independent. And so I don’t feel like I have to rush out and find someone. Or put up with someone just because I want to be with someone. I’m way more confident now than I was in my 20s. Way more confident. Much more likely to think about do I like him, than I am to think about does he likes me.”

Alanna Makinson, 25, says she has had a passive attitude towards dating.

“I’ve actively gone after everything that I wanted with regards to education, career, hobbies, traveling. If I wanted it, I would just make it happen. ... And I just never did that with relationships. ... The thing that I find challenging about relationships is they can be so up and down. ... So I think that I chose in the rapid instability of my familial life - I think I just chose stable things to focus on.”

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But single people, as resilient as they may be, don’t wish to be regarded as invulnerable either.

Celia Posner, 33, is an ASL instructor in Ottawa. She says she’s becoming increasingly set in her ways, and finds it difficult to make concessions in relationships. But at the same time she admits that finding a partner is all-consuming.

“It’s really all I think about. It’s everywhere. I drive to work, and I check out other cars to see if there’s a hot guy in it. And so what if there is? He’s not going to be my boyfriend: “Pull over. We’re getting married.” What am I thinking? Who cares? But that’s all I think about.”

While modern-day singletons would like the stories told about them to reflect their diverse realities and ways of thinking, there does seem to be agreement across this demographic, for an eternal ban on unsolicited romantic advice – and in particular: “It will happen when you least expect it.”

More to the Story

by Natalie McMullen

“I suddenly felt very old. I never cared about my age until this year. I turned 35 and I felt like I didn’t have a whole lot to celebrate. I was off work with depression... and my marriage was falling apart... I felt pretty humbled, pretty small... I was terrified at first. I thought I was too old for the game. I was worried and I’m still worried about being an old father.”

Ryan Mill, 35



“When I came here, I don’t know what’s wrong with him. Every time I went out, he get pissed off. He wants me to stay in my room or whatever. He doesn’t want me to mingle with other people. He doesn’t want me to grow. I feel tight. I can’t breathe. So I asked him, ‘I want my freedom. I want my life before...’ I like it better now. Free-spirited, care-free, no commitment. No other things to think about except for myself.”

Haydee Flores, 32

“I used to take jam and peanut butter packets from restaurants – not for me, but for her grandmother, who was in a retirement home and didn’t have access to those things. So we used to store those and bring her a big shopping bag full of them. And I would do that for a little while after [we broke up], and then I was like ‘ah shit’, and throw them out walking halfway home.”

Benjamin Fox Dickerson, 36



“Sometimes it’s just frustrating ‘cus it’s hard. It would be nice when my car breaks down that I could call my husband to come and get me. Or just when - because I’m human - when the little girl is being too much to handle I can just step away and say, ‘can you take over for me?’ Or in the middle of the night I’ve got nobody to tag team. She’s throwing up and I’m trying to clean up the bed and comfort her at the same time. Those times I feel really alone. It just would have been nice to have that. I’ve never really had that.”

“Jackie”, 39



“Even if I hear any hundreds of people idea, I have to make sure that I have something strong idea... Even if something really ugly or not agree for them. But I have to have something idea very strong. ‘Cus otherwise it’s going to be easy to lose myself...’ “I’m not judging or anything. But I think you have something that I answer for yourself already. It’s just that you want to hear that more idea and then satisfy yourself. That’s only you’re doing right now. Which is very interesting, I think.”

Hiko Komatsu, 34