

The best of *Bon Journal*

Monday 7 October 2002 <http://www.bonjournal.com>
Volume 1 Issue 2: Love like you've never been hurt

To be single or to couple? That is the question. Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer, the slings and arrows of Cupid.

Fear of commitment

Fear of commitment is really about fear of rejection.

If you don't commit, you don't feel committed.

If you don't feel committed, then you can't get rejected.

Even if you get rejected, you won't feel rejected.

Is that why it's so easy to say yes until it really matters?

Is that why it's easier to have many superficial relationships than one serious, committed relationship? It's like putting all your eggs in one basket, or worse, having just one egg.

If it doesn't hatch, then you feel truly rejected.

Or is fear of commitment actually about fear of regret?

The song "It's sad to belong to someone else when the right one comes along" says it perfectly. What if someone better comes along? How will you really know?

The answer is faith. You believe it, and you trust your own judgement.

Those of us who are still afraid to commit, we just have to learn to commit to ourselves first. Until we do that, we will never truly commit to others.

Singleton

It is unreasonable that the word "bachelorhood" conjures up a happy sought-after lifestyle, while the word "spinster" conjures up an anal-retentive, homely person.

Monday's METRO free newspaper had an article headlined "Single and over 35? It's a sad, lonely life." The Mintel survey dispelled the myth of singles continuing to enjoy a fun-

filled existence. More than half of mid-life singles (age > 35) were sadder than 5 years ago. Single people put priority on having close friends, a good job, and financial security.

Somebody should write a book about the joys of being single.

Happy to be single

Liz Hodgkinson's book begins with "being single is wonderful - once you get used to it!" and it ends with "You're not missing out, you're gaining."

"Happy to be single" is totally opposite of "Women Living Single" which depressed me thoroughly. In contrast, "Happy to be single" almost convinced me that being single was the optimal state to be, had it not gone over the top.

The author simply overdid it. As a journalist, she wrote well. She repeated her main messages in 100 different ways. But she went too far by blaspheming people who are in relationships.

Having followed Classic FM Radio's Classic romance programme for about ten years, I am convinced that long, happily married couples do exist. Otherwise, they wouldn't bother writing letters about their love stories and requesting love songs of significance to the public. I have come to the conclusion, from listening to such stories, that the secret to everlasting happiness is to feel like committing to the other person when you find him and then follow through by committing to that relationship. That's all it takes.

But in this age of uncertainty, everyone wants flexibility. And one way to be flexible is not to commit yourself. So staying single is an option. But it's not necessarily an everlasting happy option.

Some of the messages in the book I like are -

1- "if you can be alone by yourself, enjoy your own company, even live

by yourself, then you have grown up."

2- "being single is not lonely, boring, or frightening."

3- "behind every successful work of art ... is the inspiration of a single individual - those who wish to create need time alone to think."

4- "those who can learn to enjoy being alone are the happiest and most fulfilled people."

The messages that I don't like are -

1- "women with very low self-esteem, who have little sense of their own worth, may attach themselves to alcoholics, bullies, or violent men, believing they don't deserve anything better while women with slightly more self-esteem, slightly more self-confidence, may go for the alpha male - somebody tall, good-looking, aristocratic, maybe, and with plenty of money in the bank." This implies that women with high self-esteem don't get attached at all. But surely, the desire to couple is also present in women with high self-esteem!

2- "many men feel that unless the relationship is going to lead somewhere - i.e. in bed - there is not a lot of point in them taking single women out to lunch, dinner, the theatre." Okay, the author used "many" instead of "all" men. If this is true, it's very sad indeed!

3- "the more you devote yourself to another person and deny your own needs, the further away you get from knowing and understanding your true self.... the monogamous heterosexual couple, by and large, is the most dysfunctional unit on earth." Well, well, well, ... that's a bold statement. It throws out all the Barbara Cartland novels.

4- "the fact is that almost everybody who tries to bond exclusively with one person of the opposite sex for life, excluding all others, will eventually have relationship problems and will almost certainly also have sexual problems, when the

sex has become boring or routine - as it inevitably will as time goes by." If this is true, then we'll have to rewrite all the fairytales that we tell our children!

Wild as blackberries

Every time I cycle past the blackberry bushes in the fields near my home, I make a mental note of coming back in the late summer to pick them. Having recently tasted a few berries along the road, I knew that it was time.

I came ill-equipped to pick the berries, I learned. The ones closest to my reach were either dried up or gone. The ripe and pungent ones lay beyond my reach, protected by nettle, thistle, and other ghastly climbers. Only with careful manoeuvring did I manage to get positioned optimally.

The blackberries gave in easily. They simply slipped off the stem and into my warm hands. So engrossed was I that I didn't notice the spider webs, the tiny mosquitoes, and other bugs that bit me. So focussed was I that I didn't mind the thistles brushing against my legs and arms. So obsessed was I that I didn't feel the discomfort under the heat of the afternoon sun.

Why are the juiciest fruit protected by cobwebs, bugs, and thorns? Since the low hanging fruit has already been picked, I have to reach high for those hard-to-get. Does it work like this with people, too? The low hanging fruit are married. Only the difficult and high-maintenance Rapunzels remain. And the really ripe and sweet sleeping beauties are protected by a maze of complexity. But which prince charming will be desperate enough (these days) to go through all the trouble of waking up, let alone, finding that sleeping beauty, however juicy she may be?

Consciously single

I pointed out that my friend's use of the words "we" and "us" in reference to events in his past showed that he was not single. He wasn't even conscious of using these plurals.

When I talk to strangers, I notice if they have rings on their fingers or tan marks on the ring fingers if they are absent.

Unlike my friend, I use the royal "I" and "me" whenever I talk about my past. Whether the experience was with an ex-boyfriend or classmate, I still talk as if I were alone in that experience.

Some men are so unconsciously not single that they bring up their significant others in the second sentence of our conversation. The unhappily married ones don't wear rings and don't talk about their partners. The consciously single seem to zoom in on each other in a crowded room. Their antennas are sharp and raised above all others.

It is not difficult at all to spot the consciously single who are consciously seeking.

Singlehood

Someone sent me an article today about how bachelors are no longer outnumbered by younger single women. This is an interesting turn of events, or rather, a turn of statistics. In one of my operations research courses, I recall working out the mathematics of why it's an uphill battle for a single woman to find a suitable male partner the older she gets. It goes like this:

The best men are already taken - like the low hanging fruit. The ones that are left can be categorised as workaholic and hidden away, divorced and disenchanted, playboy and fickle, and losers and hopeless. The age preference also goes against the tide, leaving more women to hunt for the fewer available older men.

But times change. Nowadays I meet many workaholics who don't have time to play. I'm tempted by the divorced but disenchanted. I can spot a fickle playboy a mile away. And hopeless losers don't have the courage to ask me out.

Equally I should say that I belong to the first category - a workaholic hiding in cyberspace.

Emotional hangover

Some years ago, I caught up with a good friend who told me his reasons for wanting to settle down.

As a bachelor, he enjoyed dating as well as getting involved in relationships. However, each relationship came at a cost.

The cost of emotional hangover.

It takes awhile to sober up, you see.

One way to deal with hangovers is to get drunk before you are totally sober.

So he rebounded into another relationship without being totally aware of his feelings. He used the next relationship to recover from the previous.

The more relationships he had, the more confusing it became. The leftover feelings got mixed up in the new relationship. This went on - until he saw a pattern - and became tired of it.

Another bachelor friend told me at the age of 34 that he had to decide whether to get married or not. I asked, have you found someone? He said no. "But if I decide to get married, then I will look for the person."

How long do you have to sober up before you are "ready"? How do you know if you're ready? What if the right person comes along when you're waiting to sober up?



Anne Ku

Editor's note:

Next: love stories and poems.

Feedback from readers:

Malaysia: We write about what we care about most and what impacts our life the most. Your talents, energy, and devotion aside, what I admire most about you is your honesty and courage to express. Keep up the wonderful work, It's truly therapeutic for the readers too!

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