

Why women lose out in the dating game

Where are all the good men? That's all the women's magazines seem to talk about these days. The number of wonderful single women in their 30s who can't find any men. Women astonished that men don't seem to be around when they decide it is time to settle down. Women telling men to "man up" and stop shying away from commitment.

But there is another conversation going on — a fascinating exchange about what is happening from the male point of view. Much of it thrives on the Internet, in YouTube vlogs or in the so-called "manosphere". Here you will find men cheerfully, even triumphantly, blogging about their experience. They have cause for celebration, you see. They've discovered a profound change has taken place in the mating game and, to their surprise, they are the winners.

Dalrock (dalrock.wordpress.com) is typical: "Today's unmarried 20-something women have given men an ultimatum: I'll marry when I'm ready, take it or leave it. This is of course their right. But ultimatums are a risky thing, because there is always a possibility the other side will decide to leave it. In the next decade we will witness the end result of this game of marriage chicken."

The end game Dalrock warns about is already in play for hordes of unmarried professional women — the well-coiffed lawyers, bankers and other success stories. Many thought they could put off marriage and families until their 30s, having devoted their 20s to education, establishing careers and playing the field. But was their decade of dating a strategic mistake?

The crisis for single women in this age group seeking a mate is very real. About a quarter of women in their 30s don't have a partner, according to the latest 2016 census statistics. The challenge is greatest for high-achieving women in their 30s looking for equally successful men. Some years back sociologist Genevieve Heard, then working at Monash University, revealed that almost one in four of all degree-educated women aged in their 30s will miss out on same age well-educated men.

And the gap keeps widening. Over 40 per cent of females aged 25-34 now have degrees, compared to 29 per cent of males — up 11 per cent for women and seven per cent for men since 2006.

So there aren't enough men with degrees to go around and many of the other available men fall far short of what these well-educated women have come to expect. Although there are similar numbers of single 30s males and females — many of the available men have only high school education, earn low incomes or are unemployed.

The high expectations of these professional women are a big part of the story. Many high-achieving women simply are not interested in Mr Average. They've swallowed the L'Oreal line: "Because you're worth it!" These women want Alpha males, men who are just as successful as they are and ideally tall and handsome as well.

The problem, according to the male commentators, is many of these women are used to sharing the attention of the most highly desirable men. During their 20s women compete for Mr Big, many readily sharing a bed with the sporty, attractive, confident men while ordinary men miss out. As "Whiskey" puts it at whiskeys-place.blogspot.com.au: "Joe Average Beta Male is about as desirable to women as a cold bowl of oatmeal."

There's some research from American college campuses showing 20 per cent of males — the most attractive ones — get 80 per cent of the sex, according to an analysis by Susan Walsh — a former

management consultant who wrote about the issue on her dating website (www.hookingupsmart.com).

That leaves a lot of Beta men spending their 20s out in the cold. Greg, a 38-year-old writer from Melbourne, started adult life shy and lonely. "In my 20s, the women had the total upper hand. They could make or break you with one look in a club or bar. They had the choice of men, sex was on tap and guys like me went home alone, red-faced, defeated and embarrassed. The girls only wanted to go for the cool guys, good looks, outgoing personalities, money, sporty types, the kind of guys who owned the room, while us quiet ones got ignored."

He barely had a date through much of his 20s and gave up on women. But then he spent time overseas, gained more confidence, learnt how to dress well and hit his early 30s. "I suddenly started to get asked out by women, aged 19 through to 40. The floodgates burst open for me. I actually dated five women at once, amazing my flatmates by often bedding three to four of my casual dates each week. It is a great time as a male in your 30s, when you start getting more female attention and sex than you could ever have dreamt of in your 20s."

It's not surprising that men in this situation will take advantage of the bounty on offer. Here's a comment on one of the online chat sites from Take Greenlander, an apparently extremely successful engineer in his late 30s. In his early adult life, he was unable to "get the time of day from women". Now he's only interested in women under 27.

"The women I know in their early 30s are just delusional," he says. "I sometimes seduce them and sleep with them just because I know how to play them so well. It's just too easy. They're tired of the cock carousel, and they see a guy like me as the perfect Beta to settle down with before their eggs dry out ... when I get tired of them I just delete their numbers from my cell phone and stop taking their calls ... It doesn't really hurt them that much: at this point they're used to pump and dump!"

Greenlander's analysis is echoed by Australian singles, both male and female, who report many of the unattached males are simply interested in playing the field. "It's wall-to-wall arseholes out there," reports Penny, a 31-year-old lawyer. She is stunned by how hard it is to meet suitable men willing to commit. "I'm horrified by the number of gorgeous, independent and successful women my age who can't meet a decent man."

Penny acknowledges part of the problem is her own expectations — her generation of women was brought up wanting too much. "We were told we were special, we could do anything and the world was our oyster." And having spent her 20s dating Alpha males, she expected them to be still around when she finally decided to get serious.

But these men go fast, with many fishing outside their pond, some choosing younger women and others partners who offer something other than career success. Some doctors still marry nurses, and lawyers their secretaries. The most attractive, successful men can take their pick from women their own age or younger women who are happy to settle early. Almost one in three degree-educated 35-year-old men marry or live with women aged 30 or under, according to ABS statistics.

"I can't believe how many men my age are only interested in younger women," wailed Gail, a 34-year-old advertising executive reporting on her first search through men's profiles on the RSVP Internet dating site. She was shocked to find many mid-30s men have even set-up their profiles to refuse mail from women their own age. The choice makes sense for a man who doesn't want to be

pressured into immediately starting a family — a likely scenario if he pairs up with a woman of his own age — or is rightly nervously of getting involved in IVF with all the stress that brings to a relationship. Younger women offer him more breathing space to make sure it is the right relationship before starting a family.

But talking to women like Gail, it's intriguing how many look back on past relationships where they let good men get away because at the time they weren't ready. The American journalist Kate Bolick wrote in *The Atlantic* about breaking off her three-year relationship with a man she described as "intelligent, good-looking, loyal and kind". She acknowledged that "there was no good reason to end things" yet at the time she was convinced something was missing. That was 11 years before she wrote her article by which time she was 39 and facing grim choices.

"We arrived at the top of the staircase," she wrote, "finally ready to start our lives, only to discover a cavernous room at the tail end of a party, most of the men gone already, some having never shown up — and those who remain are leering by the cheese table, or are, you know, the ones you don't want to go out with."

Many women are missing out on their fairy tale ending, their assumption that when the time was right the dream man would be waiting. The 30s are worrying years for high-achieving women who long for marriage and children — of course, not all do — as they face their rapidly closing reproductive window surrounded by men who see no rush to settle down. Of course many women eventually find a mate, often ending up with divorced men. The complications of that second marriage market, where men come complete with ex-wives and sometimes stepchildren, was not what they expected. That was never part of the plan.

Many really struggle with the fact that they aren't in a position to be too choosy. American author Lori Gottlieb gave a painfully honest account of that process in her book *Marry Him — The Case for Settling for Mr Good Enough*.

"Maybe we need to get over ourselves," she writes. The 40-year-old single mother enlisted a team of advisers who helped her see that while she was conducting her long search for the perfect man — Prince Charming or nobody — her market value had dropped through the floor.

"Our generation of women is constantly told to have high self-esteem, but it seems that the women themselves are at risk of ego-tripping themselves out of romantic connection," she wrote. She acknowledged she made a mistake not looking for a spouse in her 20s, when she was most desirable. She advised 30-something women to look for Mr Good Enough before they have even less choice. "They are with an 8 but they want a 10. But then suddenly they're 40 and can only get a five!"

That's a five judged by her own unrealistic expectations about the type of man she hoped to attract.

Her point hits home, highlighting the problem when women delay too long their search for a serious relationship. That delay has set up a very different dating and marriage market, with delighted men very much the beneficiaries. Many single men in their 30s can't believe their good luck.

Jamie, 30, a Sydney barrister, finds himself spoilt for choice. Like many of his friends he's finding women actively pursuing him, asking him out, cooking him elaborate meals, buying him presents. "Oh, you're a barrister," they say with eyes sparkling.

While many of his mates are playing the field, determined to enjoy this unexpected attention, Jamie is ready to settle down. He's very wary of the Sex and the City-type girls convinced that they are so special but he's confident he will soon find someone with her feet on the ground. "I'm lucky to be in a buyer's market," he says smugly.