

# SUMMARY

## IT'S NOT YOU

SARA ECKEL



# **Summary of It's Not You by Sara Eckel**

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Dating expert Sara Eckel dives into the misguided advice we often receive about love, and the pressures women face to find, and to be, the perfect romantic partner.

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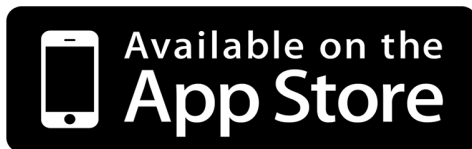


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# Introduction

It's innate human nature to seek out companionship. We are genetically predisposed to need affection and love. It has been demonstrated in research with other primates that when given the choice between food and cuddling they'll choose the latter every time.

So it should come as no surprise that many women over the age of thirty are experiencing a deep emotional crisis when they have trouble finding the partner they always dreamed they would settle down with.

But it doesn't need to be that way, a romantic partner is not the be-all-end-all to find that love we all need. Your own goals for yourself, your career, your ideal life, don't need to be dictated by society's expectations of what happiness looks like.

Author Sara Eckel goes in depth to explain how to overcome external pressures, as well as your own internal voice, and find happiness because you're single, not in spite of it. As well as how to deal with the prejudices many around you have towards single women, the low self-esteem this can often cause, and how to succeed at dating by having no expectations.

# It's Not Wrong To Feel Lonely

One of the fundamental mistakes people often make is that you're the one to blame for you being single. If you can't find a relationship it's because of some issue you need to work on.

It's also an extremely common view that you can't have a good or happy relationship if you're unhappy being alone. "You have to love yourself before others can love you". But both of these claims are pure nonsense, unbacked by any evidence.

Research shows that the best indicator of a happy and healthy relationship is compatibility between the couple. People who've "fixed" their personal issues are not more likely to be in a happy relationship than people who haven't. What matters above all is that the couple are on the same page, their personalities click, and that they are supportive and accepting of one another.

You also don't have to feel bad if you're unhappy by yourself. The author makes references to the HBO series *Sex and The City*, making the point that his image of single women constantly toying with and jumping from one man to another, only alone by choice and constantly receiving male attention, isn't the real world. It's ok to feel lonely and it's ok to feel sad about that loneliness.

Your loneliness doesn't make you undesirable, nor does low self-esteem or other personal insecurities. Almost nobody is genuinely comfortable with loneliness, it is instinctual to us to pursue companionship and there isn't some idealized point at which you've worked on yourself enough that you're now allowed to pursue a relationship.

# Sadness Is Part Of The Human Experience

People often say the best way to display confidence on a date is to go into it with no expectations. But what does that actually mean? It simply means not to go into a date with your hopes up that it will result in a relationship, or even a second date. Instead go into it with the goal of having fun, no more and no less. Then if it leads to something more, great! If not, at least you had a good time.

But this is easier said than done when you're feeling lonely. It's a hard and unhappy feeling, perhaps the hardest feeling there is. But the best way to deal with that feeling isn't to run from it. That doesn't mean embrace sadness and wallow, but to accept that sadness is a fundamental element of human existence. That without moments of sadness in our lives, we would be fully human. To accept negative feelings like sadness, loneliness, fear, and so on, we become liberated from them.

They will happen, they will be hard, and you will survive them. Happiness can only be defined by contrast, life without the possibility of sadness is like an artificial flower. It will never wither and die, but it will never bloom or smell sweet.

So, if you're single and feeling sad, don't blame your lack of a partner; rather, accept the feeling as part of being alive.

The author says that this is the mindset you should go into dating with. Whether in person or online, don't let your sadness or loneliness be your motivator. Go in with a clear head.

## Confidence Is Intimidating, and Attractive

People often say that confidence is the most attractive trait, but women who are outwardly confident, highly educated, or have a high income often report that men feel intimidated by them. A high income may make a man feel emasculated if he's been brought up to believe the male in a relationship is meant to be the breadwinner. Post-graduate may make men feel inferior or fear that you will find them dull or stupid. And confidence may just outright scare them.

An issue both women and men with high amounts of confidence report is that potential partners often worry about if there was room for them in a confident professional's busy life, or if they'd be needed at all. People want to feel needed. In fact, ironically, they need to feel needed. If a man sees you and thinks "she can do it all, what would she ever need me for?" he might fear that you won't want him as much as he wants you.

In spite of this though Eckel cites research showing that women with higher levels of income and degrees from universities and post-grad programs are actually more likely to marry. So while confidence can be intimidating it certainly doesn't mean acting unconfident is going to make you more successful in the dating world.

Be confident, just also work hard to make sure you aren't giving off a vibe of being unapproachable or uninterested. Show that the successes you have in life are things you desperately want to share, and that what you're looking for in a partner has nothing to do with their college diploma or their income. That you have needs that only they can fulfill, and vice versa.



## Common Relationship Advice Is Often Misguided

Eckel explains her own experience of listening to common dating advice:

“I also talked to a lot of self-help authors. There was the Tough-Love Married Lady who declared the key to finding a soulmate was to grow up, quit whining and do something about your hair. There was the Magical Soul-Mate Finder who prescribed keeping a journal, long hikes, candle-lighted bubble baths and other hocus-pocus. And there was The Man — i.e., a moderately cute guy who wrote a book — who gave insider tips on how to hook up with him, which involved not being critical and having long hair.

So I grew my hair out. I took bubble baths. And, of course, I started examining my issues. Was my failure a result of my latent commitment-phobia (cleverly masked as really wanting commitment), as one helmet-haired expert implied? Did I feel inherently unworthy and broadcast that low self-assessment to every man I met? (Another gentle suggestion.) Did my failure to “love myself” mean I was unable to love another?”

The key here is that the underlying assumption that you’re single because something is wrong with you, and that showing a need for love makes you seem desperate, is misguided. What eventually worked for Eckel was that she accepted her vulnerabilities and insecurities, she accepted her flaws. And she finally found a partner because she met someone who meshed with her and also accepted those flaws.

# You Don't Need To Share Everything With Your Friends

Going to friends for advice is a common and often helpful thing. They know you well, know your past, and many times can see your life and actions more objectively than you can. However that's only if you've been honest with them. If you went out with a guy a few times only to have him ghost you, you might be embarrassed to admit it or to show how much it hurt you. And so in turn you might pretend to your friends that you liked him less than you did, or that he was a worse guy than you actually think he is.

From your friends' perspective it may seem like you have a habit of being attracted to cruel and selfish men, even though you don't, and they'll give you advice based on that misconception.

Maybe in your last relationship you only talked to your friends about your partner when you needed to vent. The issue isn't venting to your friends, but that because they only hear the negative they might misconstrue that this is an awful guy who treats you horribly, and then don't properly understand or sympathize when you're sad about breaking up.

And more than any of that, a reason to not share every bad date story, every relationship issue, is that it conditions you to trust your friends' judgement over your own. The goal is to be able to be confident and independent right? You can't do that by always relying on others.

## Don't Feel Rushed

Women often feel judged for being single, as though they need to have a good reason not to be in a relationship. It's often said that society's perception is that men are single by choice, while women are single because nobody wants them.

Because of this many women end up in relationships they never felt sure of, just because they thought they were supposed to be in one. When those relationships end they're left with a feeling of not being able to do anything right.

And in turn they start seeing relationships almost as job experience, if I want the long term career I need to first have adequate experience right?

Thinking this way isn't conducive to finding and building a great relationship, nor to one's own mental health. You need not feel rushed, like you are running out of time or like you're not up to par with your peers, you don't need to be constantly going on dates because you feel such pressure to find The One.

For one, it puts too much pressure on you and the date and leads to a correspondingly powerful crash if the dates don't turn out right. It's also not fair to the men you're seeing for you to secretly have so much hope built up, or for you to think "I have to find someone" and end up with someone you don't truly want.

More and more people are meeting the person they spend the rest of their lives with in their 30s and even their 40s. It's ok! It might even be preferable, as you'll both be more mature and stable as you build the foundations of a long term commitment.

Don't treat getting married as the finish line. Far too many people are much more focused on getting married than being married.

The inverse of this is that it's ok to want to be single. Many women over the age of 30 report feeling a need to look for a relationship even if they don't really desire one.

A point the author often repeats is to stop trying to improve yourself, and start taking care of yourself. Don't go to yoga or the gym because you're trying to look better, go because it feels good. Don't try to make yourself flawless, try to see how your flaws make you worth loving.

# Don't Let Negative Emotions Rule You

Why do relationships end? An oft popular trope is that it's because you weren't working at it hard enough. A happy relationship is a reward for hardwork, therefore an unhappy relationship must be the result of a lack of work. An issue we often have in our culture is the portrayal of happiness as a virtue. We admire when people who are terminally ill put on a happy face and try to enjoy their remaining time. We see smiling in spite of bad circumstances as a sign of maturity and character.

And that's a great way to make you feel that you must be a bad person, an un-virtuous person, if you aren't feeling that way. But that's the natural way to feel in bad circumstances! Judging yourself for having negative emotions is a feedback loop that leads to more and greater negative emotions.

Don't obsess over the fact that you feel sad, or lonely, or frustrated. Accept that you feel that way instead of criticizing yourself for it. It's easy for everything to seem dark if you're always sitting with the lights turned off.

This negative feedback loop that so often prevents us from proper motivation or wellbeing has many components to it. When we feel bad, and feel bad about feeling bad, we often find ourselves going through a circular train of thought to bad memories and bad past experiences. Obsessing over what we did to end up alone and why we can't change.

Those thoughts become self-fulfilling prophecies. You end up thinking less of yourself, assuming others also think less of you, and avoid doing things that make you happy or put you in a position to actually change.

It certainly doesn't help that single women, especially over a certain age, are culturally depicted as being universally pathetic. The "lonely cat lady" stereotype for instance. Or as being immature girls who never grew out of their college partying phase.

You internalize all these messages, and repeat them to yourself when you're asking for the thousandth time why you're single. Instead of just accepting that you are, and considering that maybe it's not actually your fault.

# Be Open To The Many Types Of Love Out There

Despite being one of the most universal topics depicted in art, poetry, theater, and prose, the way we talk about love is surprisingly one dimensional. Love, at least in the early 21st century western world, nearly always means romantic love. When we have a girlfriend or boyfriend we refer to them as our “significant other”, when we say “I love you” it holds immense gravitas because it’s only supposed to be said in the context of a serious romantic relationship.

But that forgets that there can be many significant people in our lives, that we can love many people in different and unique ways. This wasn’t so true in the past, expressions of love and affection for friends prior to the 20th century were much more common and seen as a great sign of character.

People in past centuries often considered close lifelong friendships more serious and deeply loving than even a marriage. We like to think we’re so much more progressive today but the truth is in many ways we are much more limited.

The Victorians even had a term; “romantic friendship”, referring to a friendship so deep that it fulfills the emotional needs we often seek out in romantic relationships.

Obviously there are elements of romantic love that fulfill unique needs that other types of relationships simply cannot. But not having romantic love does not mean you’re unloved. If you feel it does then maybe you’re not opening your mind to all the other forms of love you have in your life, and how fulfilling those might become if you choose to embrace and cultivate them.

Don’t define what love and happiness mean to you based only on what you’ve been taught and what you see. You are the only one who gets to choose what it means to love and be loved in your life.

## Final Summary

The most foundational and underlying point Eckel wants to get across is the importance of self-compassion. Wishing things were different, running from or denying negative emotions, criticizing yourself for not having the kind of life others do, blaming yourself for being single, these are all things Eckel wants you to work against. And things she believes modern dating advice encourage rather than help avoid.

She wants you to realize that you are the best expert on your own life. There's nothing wrong with seeking advice, but understand that no one is experiencing your life except you. So remember they can't truly give you the type of knowledge about how best move forward in your life, as you can learn yourself.

Don't go into the world of dating with expectations about how it should turn out, and don't beat yourself up for things not turning out the way you wanted. As she puts it, don't ask yourself "what's wrong with me?", instead ask yourself "what's right with me?". Desperation is settling for an unhappy relationship. Choosing to instead embrace being single, to focus on the love you can give and receive in other areas of your life, and focusing on loving yourself, are acts of strength. Not desperation.





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