

Richard Hayley, a young 20-something in Eugene, frequents the Bijou for some quality alone time. Unlike its more crowded sister theater in the downtown area, this artsy cinema is a quiet retreat. “That’s one of the draws, because I have a low capacity for human interaction,” he says. Hayley’s experience of choice at the Bijou is attending a rainy day *matinée* and sipping beer using Red Vines for a straw.

On my first self-date to the Bijou, I sat in the dark, fidgeting with insecurity. A conversation sparked in my head. I rambled on about how interestingly the silhouettes of people bobbed in front of me and giggled over jokes I made, amazed by my own sense of humor. I realized something: This is me enjoying my own company.

And damn, it felt empowering.

After venturing further outside my comfort zone of sitting alone in a dark theater, I found that once you go to a place by yourself — whether you’ve been there before with friends or a partner — the whole scene can change. You may notice new details or spark up a debate in your head. You may even realize you don’t actually like a place as much as you did when you were smashed and flirting with that questionably cute bartender downtown while your friends belted out karaoke songs.

As I went more and more places by myself, a checklist slowly started compiling itself. Yes to that bar, yes to that park, and stay the hell away from that one club.

Scattered around Eugene are plenty of havens for the single crowd. Poppi’s Anatolia is a quaint, Indian and Greek restaurant downtown with plenty of tables for two — for you and your favorite book (or glass of wine).

They pause, give me a smile and ask sweetly, “So, are you dating anyone new lately? I know it’s been a while.”

By this point, I’m internally screeching; on the outside, however, I reply with a patient smile and a “no,” explaining how this year I’m focusing on myself and my career.

I don’t have time to be somebody’s somebody, honestly.

Pressure to date comes in multiple forms and can affect people young, old and all across the broad spectrum of identities. But one particular audience is given quite a bit more attention than others: women.

If you identify or were socialized as a woman, being in some form of a romantic relationship is usually held as a milestone of worth and validation. To top it off, you have the largest realm of media portrayals directed at your love and sex life.

There is a growing number of media promoting the idea of women being single, although most of them wind up alluding to getting married, getting laid or eventually being in a relationship.

But there are plenty of women who are choosing to throw themselves into passions, careers and friendships instead of indulging another round of serial dating.

According to a survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, 150 million people 18 and older identified as single in 2013 (the majority of which had never been married, widowed or divorced), and 53 percent of those folks were women.

It can be isolating and overwhelming for some women who decide to be — and stay — single. During moments of weakness, I desperately turn to Google to help me find a sense of camaraderie.

really not seeing any body at all and the other is you’re not seeing any one particular person, but you might be dating multiple people or you might just be hanging out with a couple people on a casual basis.”

At times, we need some extra lovin’ in our lives, while at other points we may need to focus on ourselves. When you choose the latter, pressure can reach beyond the media hype of finding your soul mate; it can come from your family.

Orenstein giggles about her own experiences with her grandmother who relentlessly tries to play matchmaker. “How to Deal with the Pressure to Date from Family & Friends,” published on Her Campus, is an article she wrote in response to her own experience with insistent family members, as well as the prodding that comes from friends.

Women have their own priorities, and dating or hooking up may not make the cut. “I think for that person the best thing they can do is to just take time for themselves and reconnect with what they love to do,” Orenstein says. “Maybe they’ll want to date somebody later on, maybe they don’t, and either way that’s totally fine.”

Those who identify as men are also smashed into a mold of what their love and sex lives should look like. The idea of “getting some” or feeling the need to play the role of someone’s romantic savior are often projected as achievements worthy of a reward by friends, family and media.

But maybe instead of “tapping that,” men should be more focused on getting to know themselves — who they are, how they act and how this plays into the world around them.

Non-binary folks and people of color have more neglectful or misrepresenting media attention



'Self-dating' is a term for those flying solo with a self-oriented goal. It is a commitment to oneself and it builds an intimate relationship with yourself instead of hooking up with another person (or persons) in the stereotypical romantic way.

Apart from the busy downtown crowd, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art on the University of Oregon’s campus has a fairytale-esque courtyard where you can have an existential chat with yourself after strolling through exhibits.

Bike rides and strolls through your part of town are a given and are easygoing ways to catch up with yourself.

When you go places alone — phone off and all — you’re sharing opinions, ideas and experiences with someone who plays an irreplaceable role in your life. You’re getting to know yourself.

SO, ARE YOU SEEING ANYONE?

Nope.

This question gets eased into catch-up chats with a handful of my family members and old friends. I can always tell when it’s coming: after a discussion about how I’m doing and right before diving into a career-choice talk.

Although articles that intersect across multiple identities are still largely outweighed by the generic headlines of “How to Succeed in Life: Be in a Relationship or Get Laid, A Guide for White Heterosexuals,” a shift is happening. Resources are popping up with themes of being single and how it’s a damn good thing.

Ah, oasis.

Hannah Orenstein, a 22-year-old freelance writer currently living in New York, has written for *Cosmo*, *xoJane*, *Thought Catalog* and other popular on-and-offline publications. She reminds me of a more modern Rory Gilmore who took the *Cosmopolitan* path as opposed to presidential campaign reporting. Orenstein is sweet, fashionable and determined as fuck.

A handful of her articles reflect what it’s like to be a woman in her 20s who is fulfilled, adventurous and doing it without a relationship.

Orenstein explains how being single can look like different things to different people. “I think in general there are two different phases of being single. One is

plastered all over their experiences — most of them often inaccurate and tokenizing.

Whoever you are, it can be a blessing to step back and examine what the hell your life actually looks like. Finding your own identity and what that entails, how it needs to be taken care of in order for your relationship with yourself to be strong and sustainable, is all a part of quality time with your own damn self.

LONELY, I’M SO LONELY

Once I committed to myself and moved past the exhilaration of those first couple of self-dates, things got a little bumpy.

To be honest, after a year and a half of dating myself, I’ve spent countless nights snuggling up to a pillow wishing it had a pulse and daydreaming about my vibrator having a “human companion” setting.

Self-dating is more an obstacle course to fulfillment than a solo stroll at sunset. Most of us are taught from a young age that romance and a sex life are fully