



**CAN AN ONLINE COURSE REALLY HELP YOU FIND LOVE?**

After being single for three years, Olivia Foster signed up to Get Ready For Love – a course that promises to help you find lasting relationships. Could it really work?



**BAD RELATIONSHIP HABITS** are easy to get into, right? Whether it's always falling for someone who's just like your dad (awkward) or relentlessly pursuing unavailable men, it's not unusual for single women – consciously or otherwise – to have developed patterns of dating behaviour that sabotage their attempts to develop lasting relationships.

For me, it started in my mid-twenties, when I was dumped for the very first time. Thrown into a world of heartbreak and torment, I was shocked to discover what it really felt like to be rejected. So, adamant to avoid such devastation again, I turned to online dating, always picking the wrong men for brief flings so I wouldn't get hurt. And while I would like to say it was a subconscious thing, deep down, I knew I was just trying to avoid potential heartbreak.

As time went by and I recovered, I came to realise this relationship model couldn't last – it was exhausting. After turning 28 this year, I wanted to find something more meaningful and lasting. But where to begin? Tinder, Happn and Bumble all seem to fall into the transient, disposable-fling model. I already know all my friends-of-friends. And who actually meets their future husband in a bar, ever?

Then I heard about Project Love and a new 30-day online course – Get Ready For Love – that promises to prepare single women for a loving and healthy relationship. I was intrigued and sceptical in equal measure. Could a £69 online course really solve my dating woes? Was this just another example of smug marrieds telling us singletons what we're doing wrong? Could I achieve a life overhaul by staring at my computer for 20 minutes every day for a month?

Project Love is the brainchild of friends Selina Barker, 36, a life design coach, and Vicki Burt, 31, a master NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) practitioner. The girls came up with the idea after they spotted a gap in the market for a course aimed at intelligent single women. Vicki tells me, 'We noticed there just wasn't any love and relationship advice out there that spoke to the smart, self-aware women that we knew, so we decided that we would do something about it. These women don't want to learn "how to catch a guy and keep him" or follow "the rules". A lot of the advice out there plays to people's fears, insecurities and



**ON TINDER, YOU CAN EASILY LOSE YOUR TRUE SELF IN BANTER AND MEANINGLESS INTERACTIONS**

started to flash with a new notification alerting me to posts on the group's wall. I was bombarded with pictures of 'daily acts of love'. For a sarcastic old soul like me it all felt kind of twee and uncomfortable.

But why? Well, for starters, despite the huge stigma around being single, if you admit that you're longing to meet someone you will more than likely be labelled as desperate. Yet here was a group of female strangers openly discussing their desire to find love, and I really didn't know how to handle it. Apparently, admitting that I might like a relationship was going to be one of my biggest hurdles.

I pressed on. To my surprise, day four brought a lesson I could really get on-board with. The podcast, hosted by Selina and Vicki, detailed key traits found in most successful couples, such as being on the same team rather than competing, and having open and frank communication. It was good to hear about positive relationships from someone other than my friends.

Other tasks involved treating yourself to a date night (on your own) or making a collage of My Life Full of Love. I'm afraid, for me, some of these tasks were a struggle. It's not in my nature to revel in visualising my own happy future, probably because I haven't known how to attain it. But there was one enduring message in the project that I simply couldn't argue with or indeed ignore – that in order to love someone else, you need to learn to love yourself. It's a cliché that's been parroted by self-help gurus ranging from Oprah to Jeremy Kyle, but it had never truly resonated with me – until now.

My favourite part of the course, though, came in the final stages, in particular the lessons that dealt with online dating. They

taught me to take a more careful approach and gave practical tips on how to write a profile by laying out what you really want from the start. Anyone with even the briefest experience of Tinder will know that you can easily lose your true self in banter and meaningless interactions, so this advice was helpful and has since made me more open about my desire for more than a casual fling.

Obviously, Project Love isn't going to be the fix-all for more deep-seated problems and some would argue that it's simply playing into the idea that your life would be better with a partner – and thereby adding to that pressure to find The One. For their part, Selina and Vicki concede that they would encourage their clients to seek more professional help, should they need it. But there is no doubt that Get Ready For Love does work for some people. Sasha Johnson, who writes in publishing, joined the course after reading about it online and says, 'I hadn't dated since I left my husband eight years ago. I felt guilty about leaving and terrified of connecting with someone again, including myself. Now I have found love and a real acceptance of myself. I am building a relationship with myself and enjoying learning to flirt and have fun.'

As for me, having completed the course I do find myself taking a more cautious approach to dating. I recognise red flags that suggest a man might not be a suitable long-term partner – such as not respecting my time – and I actively avoid them. And I'm far more open with new people about my intentions. It's cool if they're only looking for a fling, but that's not me any more and I'm not afraid to be honest about it. I'm more confident in my own wants and needs and am learning to stop beating myself up about the mistakes of the past. That's a good place to be. •

*What are your experiences, good or bad, of online dating? And would you go on a course to find love? Email feedback@graziainmagazine.co.uk*

