

# OFF THE VANIER BOOKSHELF

NATHAN BATTAMS

Society is in a perpetual state of change, subject to social, economic and cultural forces that shape individuals and the relationships formed between them. Romantic relationships are no exception, and how, when and with whom people couple, uncouple and recouple continues to change. In *Modern Romance*, Aziz Ansari combines humour and research to explore how relationships and the pursuit thereof have been affected by a shifting landscape, and the impact that landscape has had on the experiences, expectations and aspirations surrounding romantic endeavours.

The rise of advanced communications technology in North America has had a significant effect on how people come together to form new relationships, with a large and growing population meeting and communicating through new technologies and platforms, including smartphones and online dating websites. Ansari notes that in 2010, one in 10 unmarried Americans met their partner online – a share that jumped to more than three in 10 (35%) by 2013 and continues to increase in both the U.S. and Canada.

Ansari teamed up with sociologist Eric Klinenberg and they compiled academic studies, expert interviews, focus groups and online forums to explore this new realm of relationship-forming. After analyzing survey data and interviewing people from different generations and regions, they find that today's dating experiences are characterized by unparalleled choices and opportunities, but ones that bring a great deal of anxiety, uncertainty and frustration.

Ansari notes that broader cultural shifts have shaped expectations and aspirations surrounding relationships. In previous generations, many typically pursued marriage, home ownership and parenthood after high school and throughout their twenties. In Western countries today, young adults often first pursue other aspirations, such as post-secondary education, travelling and dating, in a period referred to as *emerging adulthood* or *pre-adulthood*. These young adults are typically exposed to a far greater number of potential partners before committing to a long-term relationship, if they decide to take this path at all.

Ansari contrasts these realities with some "dating landscapes" abroad, demonstrating how romance in the digital age plays out in these different cultures. Tokyo,

## Modern Romance

Aziz Ansari  
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for example, has seen a dramatic decline in coupling, marriages and fertility rates among younger generations and a steadily increasing single population, a source of concern for policy-makers. The birth rate in Japan has fallen to such an extent that the government not only provides child allowances, but also subsidizes establishments that host "matchmaking" outings for singles.

Observational and conversational in tone, but grounded in research and data, *Modern Romance* provides the reader with an engaging and humorous portrait of emerging courtship and relationships today. Without placing judgment, Ansari guides the reader on a tour of sorts through the current world of relationship-forming. Primarily focused on younger generations, urban experiences and the intersection between romance and technologies, it is not an exhaustive portrait. Nonetheless, it is a valuable contribution to the discussion about modern relationships. ♥

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