

# Dating is Pain and Labor for All

English translation of the interview in Die Welt newspaper by Nicola Erdmann

*Blogger Indrani Ashe was brave and perhaps reckless: In one year she went on 50 Tinder Dates. While engaging with and then being forced to lose contact with so many men she learned important information about the patterns and power dynamics at work in the world of potential partnership.*

***Caption: A swipe to the left, and a swipe to the right, Tinder is so easy. The difficulty comes when the app interfaces with real life.***

Every terrible date brings us one step closer to a really good date, so we have often been comforted. Does this not mean a woman has to date an average of 100 men to find one partner in the end? The art student Indrani Ashe was 30, and having wasted 3 years of singledom with half-baked romantic rendezvous she made a plan: tackle dating in a way organized to expose the patterns that led to consistent failure.

She would arrange 50 dates in a year via [dating](#) app, documenting her progress, analysis, and emotional turmoil via video diary in her blog "[Fifty Dates of Grey](#)". During 50 appointments with 37 different men, she estimates that she spent 150 hours with her now absent suitors. She tried her luck both in London, where she completed her art studies, and in Berlin, where she lives now. 50 times she dressed up and went to dinner, exhibitions, clubs, and concerts. Before and after each date she create a video, and almost always a "Mid-Date-Video", filmed quickly outside the bar or in the privacy of a toilet stall. Meanwhile, Indrani, now 31, is still single, still dating, but enriched by significant experience.

**ICON:** What were you looking for and hoping to find?

**Indrani Ashe:** I'm looking for a partner. Someone with whom I can develop emotional, intellectual and physical intimacy over a longer period of time.. because he'll remain in

my life longer than 30 seconds. I find it very difficult to find those deeper connections in conventional ways.

**ICON:** What kind men have you met?

**Ashe:** All kinds of men. [From a vegan who likes wearing women's clothes](#), to passionate Italians. A cross-section of the entire society uses dating apps like [Tinder, if you look around there a year, then you will encounter everything you meet in society as well.](#) I learned that there are two different types of awkward people: Those who do not dare to say what they think, and those who are too honest and regret it afterward. I am the second type, but I tend to have an attraction for the first...this is when the drama starts!

*[Indrani Ashe](#) has given the men who had the most "emotional impact" on her nicknames. When she talks about them, she does not call them by their real name, but remains in the characterization with which she describes them in her blog: "The Media-Man", she says, the "Red-Headed Cupid" or "Prince Charming ". "The Tall Irish Vegan" discovered her blog and seemed okay with it, but disappeared after a work holiday. The "Young Architect" was kind and intellectual but tended to wash without soap and always had sweaty hands, after a few weeks Indrani gently ended their meetings.*

**ICON:** How many times have you been stood up?

**Ashe:** One time I went to the toilet, and my date was gone when I returned. The worst incident happened when I was dating” The "[Greenwich Punk](#)", we had been meeting for over a month and had slept together twice. He said he would be busy with a move over the holiday, but we kept in touch with Whatsapp, and finally arranged a date at the Tate on the weekend. When I arrived there I called him and he said he had made a mistake, thinking we were supposed to meet later in the afternoon. Like an idiot, I agreed to meet him the next day and was stood up a second time.

**ICON:** How stressful was it, when you made videos in the middle of your dates?

**Ashe:** This did not always work, often there were too many people waiting for the toilet, or the place we were in was too quiet and compact. I was always afraid my date would catch me! I still tried to pull through as often as possible, because the mid-date vlogs

carried a very differently psychological quality than the videos made before or after. Because they were made in a rush they exude an unfiltered gut response to the date, whether I am glowing with the enjoyment of meeting someone new or angry and annoyed.

**ICON:** What were the biggest differences between the dates in London and those in Berlin?

**Ashe:** In London it was usually clear: Either men would lose interest after the first date, or they would strive to convince me of their interest long enough sleep with me, and then suddenly realize that they did not want anything to do with me. It's usually all over in eight weeks. In Germany I met guys who arranged to meet with me on and off every few weeks without any clear idea of what the direction of our relationship might be. They are submerged for weeks without communication and I assume they are gone, then they ask me out again. What is that?

*One of these men treated her to lavish dinners every few weeks while only making the most flimsy attempts at physical intimacy. She recently wrote an email asking whether they might go on dating each other or remain friends? She would like to know in order to behave accordingly. Then she asked for the name of the restaurant, about which they had spoken. His answer: "Hi Indrani, The restaurant was xyz Regards."*

**ICON:** What was the worst experience you had during the 50 dates?

**Ashe:** I was often wounded emotionally. Although I was always direct about what I was looking for, men often behave as if they want a relationship when they don't. I wrote about how people obtaining sex by playacting and pretending is extremely painful. It obliterates your sense of agency while draining you of energy. You have no choice, you have to trust people in order to hope to have love in your life, but you are perfectly aware your trust will often be betrayed. [Date Number 14](#) was the worst example of someone betraying my trust and doing something quite blatantly non-consensual. There was a warning sign: he asked me repeatedly if we should go to a bar near his apartment. I thought it was suspicious. I said no the first few times, but the bar we were at was closing early and I was really enjoying the date. So finally I let him take me there, and there was no bar, just his apartment. That shows you should always listen to the alarm bells ringing in your head even though you have no proof of someone's intent.

**ICON:** What does the blog give readers?

**Ashe:** Dating and connecting with people is hard and necessary work, especially for people coming from outside a community or system. The project should make it clear over this period: It is painful and stressful, it is not a game.

*Ashe's blog is named ["Fifty Dates of Grey"](#) - because she started the project when she lived in the grey London and because she wanted to deliberately refer to "Fifty Shades of Grey". "I wanted to reorient my choices with men as having a strong relationship to my thoughts and feelings instead of making choices based on what I imagined to be desirable. The history of feelings in the blog gave me space focus on that." She saw herself as the opposite of the protagonist Anastasia Steele - whose love for Christian Grey consisted of total submission and offering a blank slate for him to etch his sexual desires upon. Instead she wanted to retain control over her fate and find a partnership in which she would have equal agency.*

*Indrani did not tell many of her dates about the blog. Date #14 [threatened to sue](#) her after she pointed him to the description online of how he had forced anal sex on her. After a month of her ignoring his texts and calls he finally disappeared. Her final blog post was recently presented as part of an Artists' Identity Symposium at Birkbeck, University of London.*

**ICON:** What was your most important finding after 50 Dates?

**Ashe:** Most people see dating as a game of power. People invest so much energy in the performance of attraction; They do everything to make sure that the other person is chasing after them so they can maintain control of the situation. Opening up to someone and expressing feelings counts as vulnerability and an undesirable loss of control. It seems like in this environment people see sex as a conquest rather than a way of expressing affection or connecting to someone. Women can either treat their body as a commodity that they sell to the highest bidder or forgo any desires for emotional and intellectual connection. I do not think that dating should proceed like this. I often say this on the first date.

**ICON:** How should [dating](#) work instead?

**Ashe:** One should try to connect with the other person. This requires honesty and also courage, and vulnerability.

**ICON:** And now - Are you still [on](#) Tinder?

**Ashe:** I liked Tinder because you meet people from all sorts of places and backgrounds. That's extremely interesting. At the moment I'm trying to stay away from the app. Even with men who I meet otherwise, I have these typical experiences: First, they behave as if they were completely fascinated me, a short time later they're in love with another woman. After all these dates, that makes it difficult for me to believe that I'm ever going to experience love.