WANT TO CONCEIVE?
NI? M4W
M4MW
M4WW

I am a white, professional, educated, healthy, normal easy going guy. I’ve
been in a relationship and its time to start a family. More
than anything I want to start a family with a lovely woman.

I am a 'people person' so get on well with most and am
happy with kids too. I am 40 years old but
look younger. I am
very much a human being but
I am not a fraud! I

can change a nappy.

If we click then

happy to start a

family with you. I

am happy to play as

big or small a role in

the child as you wish.
Could Craigslist get this woman pregnant?

Samantha Rea is 37 and, like many women, would one day like to start a family. The issue? She’s single. Fortunately, thousands of willing men on Craigslist say they can help. But at what cost?
My work, as a freelance journalist, comes with a good, but precarious income. I haven’t had a serious relationship in two years and, judging from the calibre of the last dates I have been on, do not envisage that changing any time soon.

When my mum was my age (37), she was married. She had a house, five kids and a loving husband to help with all the nappies and jammy hands.

But a lot has changed since her day. In fact, should I want to have a child any time soon, there are options. Lots of hugely progressive and inventive options, as it happens. I could pop my eggs on ice (£5,500). Or have a couple of rounds of IVF (one cycle: £5,000). Or, if I leave things really late, I could find a friend and a willing surrogate (£12,000–£15,000). Then there’s artificial insemination (£800 per cycle). Or I could do none of these things and instead hop onto the classifieds website Craigslist and put an ad up asking for a man, any man, to be the co-parent of my child (£0).

The latter is the new, unconventional way women in my position are looking to raise children on their own. Me? It’s not an option I would want to take – I’m still hoping to meet a man and raise a family the good old-fashioned way, should I have children at all. But it did intrigue me. Who were these men, and women, using the controversial site as a makeshift sperm clinic? I decided to post an advert of my own one Friday evening: Looking for a co-parent to be involved in my child’s life. If you’re intelligent, healthy and – ideally – can contribute financially, let’s meet up and have a chat.

The responses begin immediately. There is the guy who boasts about his ‘fertile sperm’. And another who tells me about his ‘robust immune system’. Within two days, I have 14 promising leads. One of them is Steve.*

We meet on a sunny Saturday afternoon in a dingy coffee chain not far from where he lives. He’s already there when I arrive, dressed in a bobbly fleece emblazoned with the logo of the council he works for. Every time he speaks, spit flies out of his mouth and lands on my cheek.

“I got the idea after watching an American documentary,” he tells me, slurping his coffee in big, greedy gulps. “Loads of women are having babies this way over there.”

He then proceeds to tell me that the easiest way I can get pregnant is by having sex, unprotected, with him. As many times as is necessary. “But what about STDs?” I ask.

“You don’t have to worry about that with me, love. I’ve not had sex with anyone since my wife – and we’ve been married since 2002.”

His wife, unsurprisingly, does not know about Steve’s benevolent side hustle. “I suppose it might bother her,” he says, shrugging, “But if it’s helping bring a new life into the world, that’s alright.”

Later that evening, I receive a text message from him: Hi Samantha. If you’re going to go ahead with
this, can you let me know three days before? I have to abstain from sex with my wife, to keep my sperm healthy... then you’ll have a higher chance of pregnancy.

The following week, I meet Greg*. Same coffee chain, same ice-cold coffee that sends shivers all the way through me. A 40-year-old divorcee, he’s dressed in an open-necked shirt, his chest hair poking out wildly, with an anorak flung on top. We start with small talk – but within five minutes he’s directing the entire conversation towards my breasts.

“I’d never have done this while I was married!” he jokes with my nipples.

Like Steve, he’s more than happy to have sex as many times as needed, at his house, condom-free. After that? He wants nothing to do with the child’s life.

When I suggest that he simply offers me his sperm, to be used in a clinical setting, he refuses. It has to be natural insemination only.

“Why?” I ask. “I just love sex!” he replies grinning, before showing me pictures of his children, adding that he’s also “helped” two other women to get pregnant.

There was only one other man who seemed worth another cup of coffee: that was Carl*. He was 22. He sat opposite me explaining how his mother had taught him to cook, describing her as his “best friend”. His ambitions consisted of...
of buying a house with a garden, and starting a family. He explained how shy and clammed up he became around the opposite sex. It was clear Carl didn’t want to be a sperm donor or a co-parent. He simply wanted a girlfriend.

**GETTING PERSONAL**

The ‘personal’ section of Craigslist is littered with adverts from ‘well-meaning’ men who have your fertility in mind. ‘Over 30 and want to get pregnant? If you want to avoid the sperm bank, let’s talk.’ There are less from women, but Becky’s advert stands out from the rest: *I don’t use turkey basters when cooking and I’m not using one at conception. Message me if you’re interested.* In her mid-thirties, she tells me she posted this after a particularly brutal break-up. “I was with that guy for two years,” she says. “I didn’t have time to meet someone and wait around until he decided whether kids were an option.” This way, she felt, gave her some control back.

Shelley*, 36, whose advert finished with *Hopefully you can tell I’m “normal”*, felt the same. Articulate and educated, she has a successful career as a lawyer and owns her London home. “But I’ve not yet found the right person to settle down with,” she says. “And I’d like to have one, or maybe two, children before time runs away with me.” Shelley, who was having no luck on dating websites – finding that most men her age were married, already had children or weren’t interested in them – has advertised on a couple of co-parenting sites as well as Craigslist and Facebook, but is yet to find a match.

Co-parenting websites have exploded in the past couple of years, with tech moguls recognising that as more of us are staying single for longer**, there’s a gap in the market for an online hub to meet people who want children – whether they’re single women looking for a man who can provide sperm, in a co-parent or donor capacity, or lesbian and gay couples searching for donors or surrogates. PollenTree was set up seven years ago by a married couple who realised their single friends were attempting to get pregnant through casual sex. They currently have 30,000 accounts registered within the UK, and estimate that 400 to 500 babies have been born with their ‘help’. Modamily, meanwhile, works similarly to upmarket dating sites, ‘matchmaking’ you with others who also want to start a family, while app Just A Baby has now been launched – it purports to work like Tinder, but you’re swiping on the potential father of your child.

But, like most dating sites, they’re simply a place to meet those in a similar situation to you. And apart from validating accounts through email addresses and providing guidelines and codes of conduct (most recommend knowing your co-parent for over a year before attempting to conceive), there’s little they can do to ensure the safety of those on there. PollenTree try – they have a team of human moderators carefully vetting each member, with 8% of new members being thrown off the site within the first 24 hours for not using it correctly. But largely what they offer is the guarantee that serious members, who pay £19 a month (handing over their credit-card details), do so
because they want children. None of these sites, so far, have been approved or licensed by the HFEA, which works on behalf of the government to monitor and inspect fertility clinics.

Becky did try a co-parenting site before posting her Craigslist advert. “I met this guy who had such bad skin I couldn’t even shake his hand,” she says, adding the experience not only put her off the site, but also off the sperm bank. “It terrified me; what if I paid out for the sperm and it came from someone like him?”

Information about UK sperm donors is scant: you get their ethnicity, nationality, height, weight, education, job and hobbies. Pictures aren’t included. Meeting men privately meant she felt in control of who the father of her child would be. As for Shelley, she’s more worried about the timing, and how long it would take through other routes. She’s trying everything that she can.

But, the thing is, Craigslist doesn’t have the best track record. In 2009, Philip Markoff became known as ‘The Craigslist Killer’ after he murdered three women whose adverts he’d responded to on the American version of the site. Angela Diaz is currently serving five years in prison after posting an advert for sperm on the site. Michelle Hadley. In it, she listed Hadley’s address, saying she wanted men to come and fulfil violent rape fantasies. And 21-year-old James Jones was shot after posting an advert on the site.

Women like Becky and Shelley are well aware that this method isn’t ideal – that they’re relying on just their intuition, at first, as to whether to carry on a conversation with whoever they meet. It would be the same situation meeting someone on a co-parenting website. For both, how that child is then conceived is left up to them. Artificial insemination in a clinic is the safest (but priciest) option – there, they carry out blood tests, looking for both STIs and genetic defects, but at around £1,000 per go, it’s not an option for many. Then there’s home insemination, with websites like Co-parentmatch.com that offer step-by-step instructions on how to do this (advising that you ask your donor to produce up-to-date health tests). Or, of course, there’s the natural way.

Because while, on paper, there appears to be plenty of options for single women wanting children, in reality, they’re all very expensive – and with little guarantee that they’ll actually work. There’s just a 10% chance of artificial insemination resulting in conception first time around. The likelihood of it working does increase with time, but the truth is, when Steve said the best chance I’d have at getting pregnant was intercourse with him, he was sadly right.

And these men all know it – they’ve cottoned on to the fact that when women are vulnerable they’re far easier to manipulate. When I look back at my replies, apart from Carl, there wasn’t one man willing to work with me, donating his sperm to be used in an artificial setting. Nobody wanted to be named on the birth certificate. And nobody was willing to contribute financially. And most of them hadn’t even wanted to meet up for an initial coffee first, they simply wanted sex. Straight away.

Becky and Shelley’s experiences echoed mine. “I just got a lot of good-for-nothing guys wanting to jump into bed with me,” Becky says of the 50 replies to her advert she received. “None of the men seemed to have an interest in the child long-term.”

The astronomical cost of fertility options for these women, as well as the time it could take to meet the right donor from a co-parenting site, and conceive in a safer, clinical setting, is driving them to Craigslist.

Against all odds, Becky’s gamble paid off. She only met one of the men who contacted her, a guy in his thirties called Ben. They hit it off, and she ended up conceiving during her first cycle. Now seven months pregnant, she’s in a relationship with Ben, and they are about to move in together. She’d given up on relationships when she posted her advert, but Lucked out, meeting a man in the same place in his life as her. “My friends say he’s exactly the sort of guy I should have met years ago,” she tells me, circling her swelling stomach. A happy ending for Becky maybe. But for others? Time to go back to the drawing board.

**ACCORDING TO PEW RESEARCH CENTER ANALYSIS OF CENSUS DATA IN THE US.**

HAIR AND MAKE-UP EMILY-JANE WILLIAMS, USING TARTE. STYLING CHLOE BEENEY. SHIRT, RESERVED. JEANS, JIGSAW. SHOES, SAMANTHA’S OWN.