

Twitter Thread by Kate Julian



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1/ Something strange is happening with people's sex lives. 20-somethings are having sex later and less frequently than previous generations. I spent several months digging into this for @theatlantic. <https://t.co/5ehzmWY9wi>

The Atlantic

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The Sex Recession

Young people are retreating from
intimacy—and what this means for society

BY KATE JULIAN



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2/ This phenomenon—I'm calling it a Sex Recession—really surprised me. It seemed improbable in the age of Tinder, digital porn, and attitudes that are generally permissive and sex-positive.

3/ What's happening isn't exclusively American: Similar trends are being observed in other countries, including Japan, Australia, the U.K., Finland, and the Netherlands.

This brings us to fertility-challenged Japan, which is in the midst of a demographic crisis and has become something of a case study in the dangers of sexlessness. In 2005, a third of Japanese single people ages 18 to 34 were virgins; by 2015, 43 percent of people in this age group were, and the share who said they did not intend to get married had risen too. (Not that marriage was any guarantee of sexual frequency: A related survey found that 47 percent of married people hadn't had sex in at least a month.)

4/ One cause is obvious: Adults under 35 are less likely to be living with a partner than in recent decades, and more likely to be living with their parents—which, it's safe to say, isn't great for one's sex life.

5/ But I also found other explanations, each with profound implications. The first, unsurprisingly, has to do with internet enticements. Netflix and other online entertainment may be substituting for sex.

Even people in relationships told me that their digital life seemed to be vying with their sex life. "We'd probably have a lot more sex," one woman noted, "if we didn't get home and turn on the TV and start scrolling through our phones." This seems to defy logic; our hunger for sex is supposed to be primal. Who would pick messing around online over actual messing around?

6/ (If this seems implausible, one study linked the arrival of broadband internet access at the county-by-county level to a significant drop in the teen birth rate). <https://t.co/PNMqmi6Zt7>

7/ Since the '90s, the share of men who masturbate in a given week has doubled to 54 percent, and the share of women has tripled to 26 percent. Porn is part of this; so are vibrators. Amazon has thousands of varieties, and more than half of American women have used one.

8/ Another factor: People may be entering their 20s w/ less romantic experience. Among 17-year-olds in 1995, 66% of men and 74% of women had been in a romantic relationship. By 2014, another survey found, just 46% of 17-year-olds had dated, hooked up, or had a relationship.

9/ Then there are dating apps, which can be insanely inefficient and demoralizing. "It's like howling into the void for most guys," said one man I spoke with, "and like searching for a diamond in a sea of dick pics for most girls."

10/ Relatedly, the more people rely on swiping, the more awkward it can become to approach someone in public. Remember how Grindr supposedly killed the gay bar? <https://t.co/rZMG3lzea5>

11/ Other people are retreating from sex that's unwanted, unpleasurable, or worse. The economist [@MarinaAdshade](#) thinks this may be especially true for young women: "Men have bad sex and good sex. But when sex is bad for women, it's really, really bad."

12/ And because learning about sex from porn seems to have given some people troubling ideas about what a partner might like (think nonconsensual choking), it's possible that their partners are being scared off of sex.

13/ Other experts talked with me about how depression, anxiety, poor self-image, sleep-deprivation, and distraction—which unprecedented numbers of us seem to be struggling with—throw on our sexual brakes.

14/ So where does this leave us? Some are panicked about a falling birth rate. The sex recession is related to that, of course—most sex doesn't cause babies, yet most babies still come from sex. <https://t.co/x3cWheZIBS>

15/ Honestly, I'm more worried about the people who are already here. An overwhelming body of research shows that for adults, a happy sex life predicts overall health and happiness. Unfortunately, the reverse also seems to be true.

16/ Swedish leaders have said if the conditions for a good sex life have deteriorated, it is a political problem. We should think about the sex recession similarly—if both physical and emotional intimacy are becoming more elusive and fraught, that should be a wake-up call.

17/17 Hopefully in time we'll rethink some things. The way we teach sex ed, for example, and our relationships with our devices. In the meantime, if you're finding sex and dating tough, you're not alone. <https://t.co/5ehzmWY9wi>