



Why are young people having less sex?

Despite disappearing taboos and the increased hook-up culture at universities? We find ourselves in the middle of a sex recession.

What does BrainCandy have to do with sex? Besides the fact that the brain is our most important sexual organ? Well, simply because this is where we get to watch two different factors unfold, both of which I have experienced to be greatly important especially for contemporary marketing. It's how our behavior is affected by contexts and the unconscious efficiency motivation. So please stay with me, I'll clear everything up. Oh and yes - I have decided to express some things in a very direct way. If that's not really your thing, you better look forward to the next BrainCandy.

The Atlantic's December issue featured a very long and very good essay by Kate Julian, discussing the phenomenon of the affluent societies' younger generation's decline in sex drive. I am going to summarize her article here - from the perspective of a brand consultant.

"Millennials killed Toys Are Us," is how a researcher summarized the bankruptcy of what was once the largest toy retailer. Notice how it's millennials and not Amazon! Not because millennials were buying games at Amazon, but certainly because they made 500,000 fewer children in the US alone than the previous generation did. Is that due to a shift in family values of generation Y? That's what one might guess. But if you look at this phenomenon and include the altered contexts that this generation is growing up with, there might be an even more plausible explanation. Let's start.

Sex is everywhere. Fast casual sex seems to be only an hour away with Tinder. Polyamory has become a regular vocabulary. Taboos are disappearing, even the American Teen Vogue (!) featured an how to article on anal sex. BDSM qualifies for bestsellers and the equipment is delivered by Prime. (More than 100,000 hits on Amazon.de). HIV is not on our mind anymore.

And yet young people are having less sex. At high school, sexual intercourse dropped from 54% to 40%. Teen pregnancies are on a third (good), young adults are 2.5 times more abstinent than GenX was at the same age (not good). Xers and Boomers have less sex too now. Still, everyone thinks that others have more sex than they do themselves.

60% of under-35s live in single households. One third still lives at home, in Italy even 50% do so, which likely doesn't make for a great sex life. Yet all that is certainly not the cause, but more the consequence of something else. Julian finds 5 main reasons from studies and discussions with scientists and regular folks.



1. solo sex

European countries experience a decrease in sex frequency and a delay in first intercourse from age 17.1 (2012) to 18.6 in 2017 (Holland). One wonders what might happen if young people miss out on an important stage of development that involves not only flirting and kissing, but also heartache and disappointment. Are they perhaps unprepared for the challenges of adult life? In Japan too, more and more young people think that sexual intercourse is 'stressful' and are interested in services that facilitate masturbation. That's probably more efficient, but somehow bizarre as well. (Google: Herbivore Men or Grass-eating Men)



In the US, the number of men claiming to masturbate on a weekly basis doubled to 54%, and in women the number tripled to 26%. Thanks to easily available online porn and vibrators. The often-voiced reproaches that pornography is addictive and leads to 'stability' in young men (Your Brain on Porn², NoFap³, etc.) are rather doubtful. But Masturbation does reduce libido, which is why Ian Kerner, a sex therapist from New York, claims to have more and more female patients who want more sex than their partners do.

On Pornhub, the leading porn site, 'Lesbian' is the trending keyword for both women and men, followed by 'hentai' / 'anime', which is animated pornography. Both are terms which 50% of the population cannot participate in or are a complete illusion for that matter. This is also congruent with findings that many young people view pornography to simply be another digital activity that relieves stress and makes for pleasant distraction. But it also steals time from the real thing. And that although our hunger for sex should be "primal". Is 'fooling around' being experienced as too stressful nowadays? Yes.

2. Hook-up culture and helicopter parents

In the US, the 78-born had the earliest sex, while the following teens kept having their first intercourse later and later. Nevertheless, there is a public perception that casual sex is omnipresent on campus. In fact, however, even the number of teens going on dates is decreasing. In 2014, only 46% of 17-year-olds said they ever had an appointment, date or otherwise romantic relationship. One barrier certainly being the parents who, out of fear about the prospects of their children, focus on education. That is why many students are inexperienced when it comes to dating. Student: "We hook up because we have no social skills. We have no social skills because we hook up". In her always fully booked course Marriage 101, Psychology Professor Alexandra Solomon asks her students to schedule a date with someone - something many have never done before.



3. The Tinder Fata Morgana

Simon, a 32-year-old student, was in a relationship for seven years. When it ended, he felt like he had fallen out of a time machine. Before his relationship there were neither Tinder nor iPhones. Attempts to meet women in bars failed. Approaching someone in real life had turned from normal behavior to borderline creepy. His friends recommended dating apps like Tinder. He had the same experience as many others: If you're not overly attractive, then online dating is only good for killing time. Simon on average had only one short conversation for 300 swipes. Tinder themselves say that with 1.6 billion swipes a day, they only have 26 million matches. Most of these matches probably do not even lead to a mutual exchange of text, let alone a date or even sex. (which is why Tinder launches many sinful "stories of success" to the press which they love featuring)

One teacher is speaking about a new cultural reality: "Nobody is approaching people in public anymore". The public discussion about rape and sexual harassment is pushing boundaries. 17% of Americans aged 18-29 now believe that asking a woman out for a drink can 'always' or 'normally' be classified as sexual harassment. There are now many lonely, confused people out there who have no idea how to date in real life.

Of course, there are many who find some quick or even long-lasting happiness on Tinder - if they are exceptionally attractive that is.



Others find themselves overwhelmed by the uncertainty and huge amount of offers and don't even bother leaving the couch to actually go on a date. One may call this a paradox of choice, or options paralysis or FOBO (Fear of better option). Even successful app users have insecurities when it comes to classic dating. Using the app, they know what's up. In real life, it's too embarrassing to try and figure that out. Another problem with online dating is that both sexes tend to look for potential partners who are about 25% more attractive than they are themselves - rather not a winning strategy.

4. Bad sex (painfully bad)

Debbie Herbenik, a leading sex researcher, has one piece of advice for her male students: "If you're with somebody for the first time," she said evenly, "do not choke them, do not ejaculate on their face, do not try to have anal sex with them. These are all things that are just unlikely to go over well." Herbenik thinks that the current sex recession is also a healthy reaction to bad sex. "No, thanks".



According to studies by Herbenik, 30% of women experienced pain during their last vaginal intercourse and as much as 72% did so during their last anal intercourse. What's even worse: many women don't even tell their partners. As one researcher suggests, many girls and women have internalized the idea that physical discomfort is part of femininity. Men have good and bad sex. When women experience bad sex, that's very, very bad sex.

Learning to have satisfying sex is particularly difficult in the context of hook-up culture. For most people, casual sex is less satisfying than having sex with a partner. For example, one study showed that only 31% of men and 11% of women have an orgasm when hooking up. In the context of a relationship, however, it 84% and 67%. Of course, there are also enjoyable activities that are not supposed to lead to orgasm. But the difference between these two contexts is striking.

As more and more young people delay serious relationships, more and more of them will not know what good sex really feels like. One interviewee had a Tinder date with a mid-thirtieth last night. "I had such bad sex yesterday - he just penetrated and kept on banging. Could I coach him? But at that age?" She wonders if she should renounce men completely - but actually she likes good sex, or at least pretty good sex.

5. Prudishness

"Millennials don't like to be naked". In American gyms, shared showers are disappearing. An increasing number of studies show a correlation of social media usage and body insecurities for both, men and women. A Dutch study shows that frequent porn consumption causes men to feel insecure about their penis size.



Bild recently reported on a study by German actress Maria Furtwängler, according to which nearly a quarter of young women are having their breasts photoshopped in order to have better cleavage on Instagram. And if you don't want your partner to see you getting out of the shower, how is oral sex supposed to work? The likelihood of having oral sex decreased by 66%, according to a 2017 Millennials study! Body insecurities lead to feelings of anxiety and correlate with increasing rates of depression as well as libido problems. Reinforced by antidepressants. Consequently, being single is considerably more stable than expected. Only half of the hetero-sexual single women in their twenties go on dates. And older women even less so. Just like an economic recession, the sex recession is likely to develop in a way that is unequal and unfair.



Those who are doing well in terms of looks, money, resilience, and strong social networks, will find love and good sex much easier and will become parents too - if they want to. For those less fortunate, intimacy will be harder to get.

Nowadays, sex is difficult. The problem, as shown, does not come from one single factor. The world, the contexts, have changed in many ways, and they have changed quickly. Hopefully we'll be able to rethink a number of things: Our broken sex education, for example. It always used to be a joke, but in times of online porn it's a total shame. Or the unhealthy relationships that many have with their cell phones and social media, affecting our real-life relationships. Efforts to protect our teenagers from almost everything, including romances, leave them unprepared for both the hardship and joy of adulthood. If we don't change anything, it will be much more efficient to pursue satisfaction for ourselves than to embark on the venture of approaching strangers as a relationship-virgin, if one has never been allowed to practice fooling around in a safe space. No good perspectives for a functioning society. But it's amazing how contexts and efficiency really influence our behavior, isn't it?

Sources:

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4. <https://www.bild.de/unterhaltung/leute/leute/instagram-verhalten-was-verraet-die-furtwaengler-studie-ueber-unsere-kinder-59843426.bild.html>



Book recommendations

by Ralph Ohnemus:

Brand experience. A strategy in hyper-competition and information overload

[> order here](#)

Brand wonders. How to win in information overload

[> order here](#)



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