

The Myth of Cybersexual Losers

By [Regina Lynn](#) From Wired News on May, 12, 2006

I estimate that I've been online at least 40,150 hours since 1996. That's a conservative estimate but I don't want to over-share. Ahem.

I've known a lot of people who spend more time online than they expected to. I've met people who have fallen into robust online lives at the expense of their (former) offline relationships.

But among the thousands I've interacted with online, in professional venues and in sexual communities, I have yet to meet more than a handful who have lost interest in offline romance, love or sex. And even they admit that their disinterest probably won't last forever.

Yet almost every interviewer asks me something like, "Aren't there millions of people spending their entire sexual/social lives online? Isn't there a danger that all this technological whiz-bang sex stuff will replace real sex, and worse, real relationships?"

The tone is usually part incredulous, part pity and part ... glee? Titillation? *Schadenfreude*? It's like they have this vision of a geek utopia where we all log into an internet underground and have wild international orgies.

I don't know if they think through the details of whether we do this through text, audio, video, avatars or maybe a holodeck we're bogarting from the rest of the world, but if this place exists, I've never found it.

And where does the question come from? What makes anyone think that "millions" of people would, as one Sex Drive forum member put it, "give up sex for something that is predominantly tapping their fingers on little squares of plastic"?

Temporarily, perhaps. Cyber as an adjunct, definitely. But very few people decide to have online-only sexual relationships for the rest of their lives. And those few people aren't "failures" or "losers" or whatever the stereotype suggests.

If that's where you're happy, why is your choice "less than" the sexual choices other people make? You're not hurting anyone, like you would be if you pretended to be present in an offline relationship you'd rather not have. And you might as well take yourself out of the dating pool if you truly prefer online sex to physical sex 100 percent of the time.

Interviewers seem to assume these "millions" of cybersexuals are straight males, and so socially inept they don't even know the "women" they're having sex with online are also men. (Hey, if he's that good at impersonating your dream woman, keep him!)

But still, I've never found anyone who says that for the rest of his life, he plans to eschew physical sex for paraphysical sex in a virtual environment. I have heard

women talk about how they wish their sex lives were as intellectually engaging offline as they are on the internet, but even they don't want to give up the corporeal.

The negative judgment evident in asking the question echoes the hazing women get for not wanting to marry or have children. It's not the norm or the majority, therefore it's weird and deviant, and we must feel sorry for them because they don't know what they're missing.

At the same time, those making that judgment might feel a pang of envy from time to time, as the single, childless woman jaunts off to Micronesia for a diving expedition while her friend attempts to balance a full-time job, two school kids, a baby and a husband.

One Sex Drive forum member suggests, "If teledildonics ever really becomes widespread, I would say that many people (in the thousands anyway) will eschew the trouble and danger of major efforts at 'meat sex.' You'll have the interaction with no solid ties, and no chance at disease or pregnancy."

That's true, and I think he might be underestimating how many people will make that choice. But I don't think adult internet appliances are proof that "the internet will replace sex." They will become part of our sexual lexicon, and something we indulge in as part of a "normal" sex life (whatever that is), but it's not the next wave of human evolution.

Our consensus in the forum is that most people will continue to want what one member describes as "skin on skin, warmth and flesh, something to hold on to, in person, sex." We have yet to find studies proving (or even suggesting) a large-scale abdication of the human responsibility to reproduce, to touch, to entwine physically in various ways.

"It seems to me that technology -- not just the internet -- has changed the way everyone I know has relationships," writes one regular Sex Drive correspondent. "Instant communication -- cell phones, e-mail, IM, VOIP -- has fundamentally changed the way we view society.... And, because we are no longer limited to relationships with people we meet face to face, relationships have fundamentally changed."

Meanwhile, billions of people continue to pair up in various ways, have sex in various ways, and use technology in various ways -- without giving up sex. And most of the folks having sex online have no intention of living in chastity when they're away from their keyboards.

One Sex Drive forum member pointed out that virtual spaces provide social and sexual opportunities for people with conditions like Asperger's syndrome who might otherwise not have romance in their lives at all. (Asperger's is similar to autism, and is characterized by difficulty interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues, social norms and emotional expression.)

"I actually have several Asperger's friends who prefer to interact through online media because they find social cues that are typed out easier to interpret," she writes.

Online sex is not a replacement for sex, although it can be a replacement for no sex.

Sex, in all its forms, will always be a primary human interest. I don't think anyone needs to worry about those "millions" who might be having more fun than you are. Sexual relationships take work regardless of the form they take, online or off.

Now where is that utopia again?

See you next Friday,

Regina Lynn
