

Stop Telling Singles to Try Online Dating

The wedding industry [is booming in the post-COVID world](#). Yet the fuss over wedding flowers, gowns, and photographers can't cover up an ever-growing reality: A large portion of the American adult population is single.

Nearly half of Americans over the age of 18 land in this category, [according to the Census Bureau](#), and 62 percent of that group have never been married at all. That means there's a high chance every one of us has a friend or two still in the dating market. And, of course, being the helpful friends that we are, we've probably asked them some form of the following question: "Have you tried online dating?"

Online dating—which 15 to 20 years ago was viewed as the last resort for those who couldn't find a mate in the real world—has now become a standard way to meet a significant other. But while the acceptability of online dating has soared, interest in it may be souring. Indeed, it seems possible that "the days of online matchmaking are numbered," [according to Lucy Cavendish at *The Guardian*](#).

Cavendish, herself a middle-aged divorcee, decided to dip her toe into the online dating world, but found to her surprise that many singles view the apps with skepticism.

"People are jaded and fed up," she wrote. "No one seems to know what they want and trying to meet anyone has proved nigh impossible." Part of the problem is that, as Cavendish put it, "no one really knows how to date—what to say, where to meet or recognize if there's chemistry—so we give up, leaving us baffled and frustrated."

Why such confusion and frustration? One answer lies in Neil Postman's book, [Amusing Ourselves to Death](#).

Writing in 1985, Postman couldn't foresee the huge role the internet and smartphones would play in our everyday lives and relationships. But he did see the problems that television caused in those same areas, and therein lie some important revelations for our time.

"Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself," Postman wrote. "Therefore—and this is the critical point—how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged."

Put another way, what we see through our phones and screens today becomes our model for how to stage ourselves in dating or other social media profiles. Instagram influencer X poses with duck lips and is constantly jumping from boyfriend to boyfriend? We do the same. Public figure Y wears a man-bun and tight jeans and waxes eloquent on how it's important to recognize his white male privilege? We follow suit.

Postman continues:

It is not merely that on the television screen entertainment is the metaphor for all discourse. It is that off the screen the same metaphor prevails. ... In courtrooms, classrooms, operating rooms, board rooms, churches and even airplanes, Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas; they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials. For the message of television as metaphor is not only that all the world is a stage but that the stage is located in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The reality is, when we live in the world of the screen—when everyone tries to portray themselves like Kim Kardashian or Justin Bieber or some other public figure—everything is a sham. Real life is not like what's portrayed on the screen. And sham is the last thing that must happen in a dating relationship.

In dating, it's not a matter so much of whether the other person is pretty or handsome, smart, and checks every box on your list of must-haves for a spouse. Rather, it's a matter of whether you can do life with that person, pulling in the same direction, helping the other when he or she struggles, or humbly admitting when you yourself fail. And you can't know if you can do life with that person unless you move away from the screen and spend time with each other, face to face and side by side in the everyday matters of life.

In that sense, it's encouraging to hear Cavendish report that more singles are ditching the dating apps and choosing in-person meetups instead. And hearing that those singles want to meet face to face should give us one more idea regarding what we can do to help rebuild the culture.

Instead of simply suggesting that singles should "try online dating," why not help them out in other ways? Hold backyard BBQs and invite singles you know to participate, mixing in married couples with children at the event as well, both to smooth the awkwardness and provide a model for the singles to follow. Or if you don't have the bandwidth to host singles in your home, invite them to church or concerts or sporting events.

Get to know them yourself, asking them what they are looking for in a mate and then keeping an eye out for those qualities in other singles of the opposite sex.

Strong, intact families make up the core of culture. But those families will never start unless our young people can get over the hurdle of figuring out how to meet each other and bond over something other than a screen. Why not start smoothing the way for that to happen?

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