



Technosexuals: Alarming Rise Of Dysfunctional Behavior

This story shows the unfortunate outcome of the unbridled use of personal technology in society, namely, the inability to create or maintain normal, intimate relationships with members of the opposite sex. It is an upward trend that has no end in sight. □ TN Editor

If the pandemic wasn't a surreal enough experience, a recent study suggests that lockdown has amplified a disturbing trend. Research by sex toy company WeVibe revealed that 14 per cent of men admit to being aroused by their smart-speaker Alexa, which confirms my view that we have been sleepwalking into a different kind of epidemic - one of loneliness and fear of intimacy.

I've been a practising psychotherapist for 20 years, and never have I worked with so many men and women who are unhappy and scared because their deepest attachments and primary source of arousal are through interacting with their tech. I call these people 'technosexuals'.

Technosexuals are joined - as though surgically - to their favourite gadgets. Whether it's the 'ping' of a message, swiping right, or the

seductive, authoritative tones of a cloud-based voice service, their tech fulfils them by mobilising the reward system in the brain and releasing dopamine - the 'happiness hormone'.

The instant activity of using their tech - likes and comments - is like a sexual turn on. This 'dopamine hit' happens in all of us but, in technosexuals, something else is at play.

For them, the modern digital world influences all their libidinous activity. It dictates who they fancy, and how they present and value themselves.

You could be dating a techosexual without even realising it. They are great at screen chat, yet not so great at the face-to-face authenticity required to begin or sustain a relationship. The tech they carry around has become such a handy dopamine stimulator, it's like having a sex toy in their pocket - human intercourse no longer cuts it.

The reason why some of us can sustain a healthy relationship with tech, while others can't, comes down to a deep-seated fear of intimacy - the main trait of the technosexual, which being at home, often alone, has only intensified.

Take Jess*, 36. She runs her own recruitment agency, has a wide circle of friends and appears to enjoy life. Yet behind the image of a contented, successful woman lies someone totally disconnected from her sexual desires. Before the pandemic, Jess would rarely see the same person twice and hadn't had sex in three years. Instead, the activities that arouse her include maintaining her social media feeds, chatting online, and scrolling Instagram for date outfits or locations - activities that have ramped up during lockdown.

In all my years of practising, technosexuals are perhaps the most troubling cohort of mental health sufferers I have seen, because the source of their distress appears, on the face of it, to be so innocuous. Where most of us just use tech when we need it - and, as Zoom-fatigue has shown, can get quickly turned off by it - the technosexual is hit by the double whammy of intensified use, which arises from (and is subsequently inflamed by) an existing fear of closeness to other human

beings.

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