

HAVE WE FALLEN OUT OF LOVE WITH DATING?

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Due to the nature of this story, we have changed the names of some interviewees to protect their privacy upon their request. To avoid speculation, we have also chosen to omit certain identifying information, including graduating class.

Millie thought she knew what she was getting into.

On the same day a cute guy added her on Snapchat, she discovered that they shared a favorite musical artist. Snaps progressed into phone calls within a few days.

Just a couple weeks later, Millie spent a Sunday visiting a family friend and did not check her phone for several hours. When she finally did, she found at least 40 angry texts and 10 missed calls. The messages grew increasingly frantic and culminated in accusations that she had been hanging out with another guy.

The next week, Millie sent him a Snap of her sitting beside her female best friend. He accused her of prioritizing "less relevant people."

More conflicts unfolded in hours-long text chains where her boyfriend would routinely "play the victim." A month in, Millie ended the relationship exactly how she started it – over Snap.

Millie's story reflects the volatility of modern high school dating. As relationships become faster-paced and more fragile, fewer teenagers want to engage in them at all.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2014 and 2015, only 35% of those under 17 had been in some form of a romantic relationship, a drastic decrease from Baby Boomers (78%) or Gen X-ers (76%) at the same age.

This is the "romantic recession."

FLYING SOLO

Susanna, an underclassman, wants to find "the one" – which is exactly why she is currently not in a relationship.

"I'm dating to be with someone forever," Susanna said. "When you go into a relationship in high school, you have to have the mindset that, unless you are the one percent [of relationships that lead to marriage], it's not going to last."

While Susanna is not completely opposed to being in a high school relationship, she remains wary of potential repercussions. Back in middle school, she and some of her friends had a crush on the same person, but when one of them made a move, the fallout broke up the entire group. Friendships were irrevocably ruined – all for a relationship that didn't last.

"High school romantic interests don't last forever – but your friends should," Susanna said. "It's stupid to sacrifice your friends for a guy."

Kelli, who has never even had a crush, considers friends more important than relationships, especially when it comes to

balancing her academic responsibilities and social life. Last year, Kelli was a self-described workaholic who did not spend as much time with her friends as she wanted.

"If I'm struggling to have enough time with friends, then what's to say I have enough time for a romantic relationship?" Kelli said. "If I were to start dating somebody, then that would just strain my relationships with other people."

A lot of Susanna's male friends share a common phobia: girls. Susanna attributes the current decline in dating to a fear of rejection, especially since dating standards expect boys to reach out.

"It's come to the point where nobody's making the first move. These days, it's a lot more frequent for people to just be talking," she said.

Gen Z uses the term "talking" in reference to the step between friendship and official dating – interactions mainly occur via text and social media. While those in the talking stage are not off the dating market, the possibility of them eventually becoming a couple remains open.

Susanna only talks to one person at a time. Yet she has observed others who talk to several people at once, which she considers a convenient way to remain uncommitted.

Keith, a senior, does not see an issue with talking to several people at once, as long as both parties understand they remain uncommitted. He adds that talking stages are not necessarily harmful.

"I think talking stages are integral to find the person you're looking for," Keith said. "But when one party isn't committed enough and the other party doesn't have, no offense, the self-respect to call it – that's damaging."

After his own official relationship came to an end, Keith wants to work more on himself.

"By getting into a relationship, you inherently share a lot of emotional burdens," he said. "A lot of your mental energy is being put towards keeping the other person happy and keeping the relationship stable."

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While some view the end of a relationship as dramatic, Keith found that being single was freeing.

"You see a different aspect of yourself you don't usually see in a relationship," Keith said. "You get to focus on yourself."

LOSING CONNECTION

That was a great campout."

Magda Rajszewski, a senior at Lamar High School, read the text from SJS senior patrol leaders of their respective Scout troops.

Rajszewski was initially hesitant to date before college but reconsidered after meeting Silsby.

"I was in the car with my mom, and I was telling her, 'Hey, I actually met a pretty good boy,'" Rajszewski said.

A few weeks later, Silsby and Rajszewski visited the Houston Museum of Natural Science for their first official date. The rest is history.

Though Silsby and Rajszewski met in person, such an experience is becoming increasingly uncommon. As traditional third spaces – community hangouts including cafes and parks – continue to disappear, many teens turn to online outreach to form connections.

According to the Pew Research Center, 50% of all teens have expressed romantic interest by following or adding someone on a social media platform, while 47% have done so by liking, commenting or engaging with that person's posts. A quarter of teens with dating experience have dated or hooked up with someone they first met online.

A relationship is an agreement in which you both give it your all, and some people might just be afraid of giving 100%.

– ISMAEL SULTAN

For Rajszewski, chatting online is no substitute for face-to-face connection. "If people aren't leaving their houses and doing new things, they're missing the chance to truly meet new people," she said.

Social media can also create problems for those already in relationships.

Millie found that relying on digital communication with her partner eliminated common conversational cues such as tone and body language. When they were mad at each other, they would intentionally take longer responding to texts, send fewer Instagram reels and merely like TikTok videos instead of commenting on them.

"These are small things, but we thought they made a major difference, and we wanted each other to notice them," she said. "It was a way to send not-so-subtle cues."

Knowing her boyfriend could track her location through Snapchat and see her active status online, Millie felt constant pressure to stay available. Her experience reflects a growing trend – about 20% of teens in serious relationships have been pressured by partners into immediately responding to calls and texts, and 27% admit to using social media to keep tabs on their significant other's whereabouts, according to the Pew Research Center.

"I felt like I needed to tell my boyfriend who I was with and where I was at all times and to update him every hour of the day, or else I wasn't doing it right," Millie said.

Silsby and Rajszewski fault social media for perpetuating unrealistic expectations. According to survey results from Match, 41% of single people believe

romantic media has set unrealistic expectations for love, and 43% think they will end up in a "picture-perfect romantic relationship."

"People see what a perfect guy or girl should be like online, and they just keep raising their standards until nobody feels good enough," Rajszewski said.

This culture of comparison can shift the focus of relationships toward public validation.

"I don't want to associate a good relationship with likes or comments," Silsby said. "I want it to be just between us, not whatever social media labels us."

Although their first contact was over Snapchat, senior Ismael Sultan and junior Sonia Ambani cite social media as a major factor in the decline of dating. They say the fast-paced, casual nature of Snap culture has paved the way for situationships – an umbrella term for relationships that lack clear definition and differ between couples in terms of exclusivity and seriousness. As Ambani describes, situationships are "basically everything about dating, but without the label and commitment."

According to YouGov, half of 18-34 year olds in the U.S. have experienced a situationship, compared to 30% of those over 55.

While the no-strings-attached mentality may seem appealing, Sultan points out that many enter situationships assuming they will not last, contributing to anxiety and preventing emotional investment.

"A relationship is an agreement in which you both give it your all," Sultan said. "And some people might just be afraid of giving 100%"

PERFECT MATCH

Even as relationships shift online, physical proximity still plays a role in whether a relationship will last.

Seniors Jake Hunt and Erin Bray, who have been friends since middle school, skipped the "traditional talking stage" and began dating sophomore year. Bray, who prioritizes quality time, prefers an in-school relationship.

"A big thing for me is just being able to see each other in the hallway or say good morning at the beginning of the day," Bray said.

Bruno's in-school relationship was not as comforting. The St. John's student felt like his frequent interactions with his former partner exacerbated other tensions in their relationship.

"I feel like at school you should remain friends. Outside of school, that's where you can be more of a romantic couple," Bruno said. "It led to a lot of problems. I didn't want to see them."

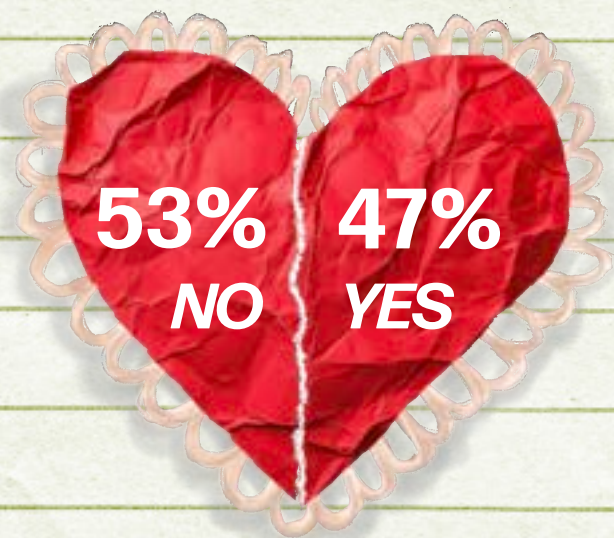
Bruno started an out-of-school relationship at the end of his freshman year with his current girlfriend. They messaged each other online for a month before meeting in person. Most of their current communication occurs through Instagram and texting. They see each other about twice a month.

"Having social media makes it okay to not see each other as much in person," Bruno said. "It's not like we

DATING DATA

BASED ON A SURVEY OF 100 STUDENTS

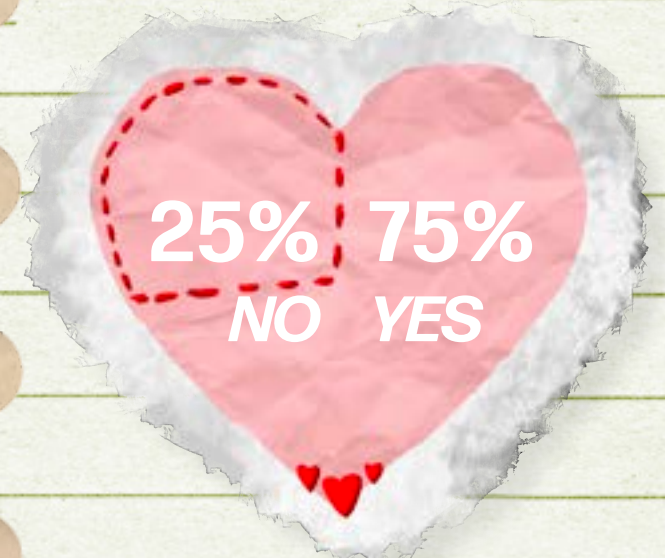
Have you been in a high school relationship?



Have you gone on a date in high school?



Is a high school relationship "worth it"?



LOVE DEMANDS

According to an Add Health survey, men and women involved in a romantic relationship during their last two years of high school are at least 50% more likely to marry or cohabit by age 25.

The correlation, however, is not completely straightforward. The Society for Research in Child Development recently found that non-romantic relationships had the greatest influence on adult romantic relationships, even if the teens were concurrently involved with romantic partners.

Keith says that while his romantic relationship was "formative" to his development, his platonic ones have been even more influential. He adds that it can be difficult to be emotionally mature enough for a relationship in high school.

You have to be content with who you are before you can be content with someone else.

"You're both super young. You don't really know what you want yet in life," Keith said. "If you have really strong friendships that can support you through the thick and thin, that's way more emotionally valuable than having a good relationship in high school."

Rajszewski stresses that healthy romantic relationships should be worth the effort.

"Only date if they're actually adding to your life," Rajszewski said. "If you're crying all the time, worrying all the time, and you can't trust them, then it's built on insecurity instead of respect and care."

Millie agrees.

"You have to be content with who you are before you can be content with someone else."

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