

The New York Times

TECH WE'RE USING (/COLUMN/TECH-WE-ARE-USING)

This Valentine's Day, Considering Tech That Keeps Couples Together



What's particularly misleading about online dating, says Daniel Jones, the Modern Love editor, is how everyone on the site is trying to seduce you. "They're trying to seduce everyone. They're all saying, 'Date me!'" Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

By The New York Times Feb. 14, 2018

How do New York Times journalists use technology in their jobs and in their personal lives? For Valentine's Day, Daniel Jones, who edits the Modern Love column (<https://www.nytimes.com/column/modern-love>) for The Times, discussed the tech he's using.

As the editor of Modern Love, you are constantly reading stories about people's relationships, including submissions that never make it to publication. With that bird's-eye view, how do you think tech has transformed relationships?

In looking for love, tech gives us access, protection and the power of curation. Meaning we can shop for love from the safety of our homes while presenting only the best parts of ourselves to potential mates. So much control! How could anything go wrong?

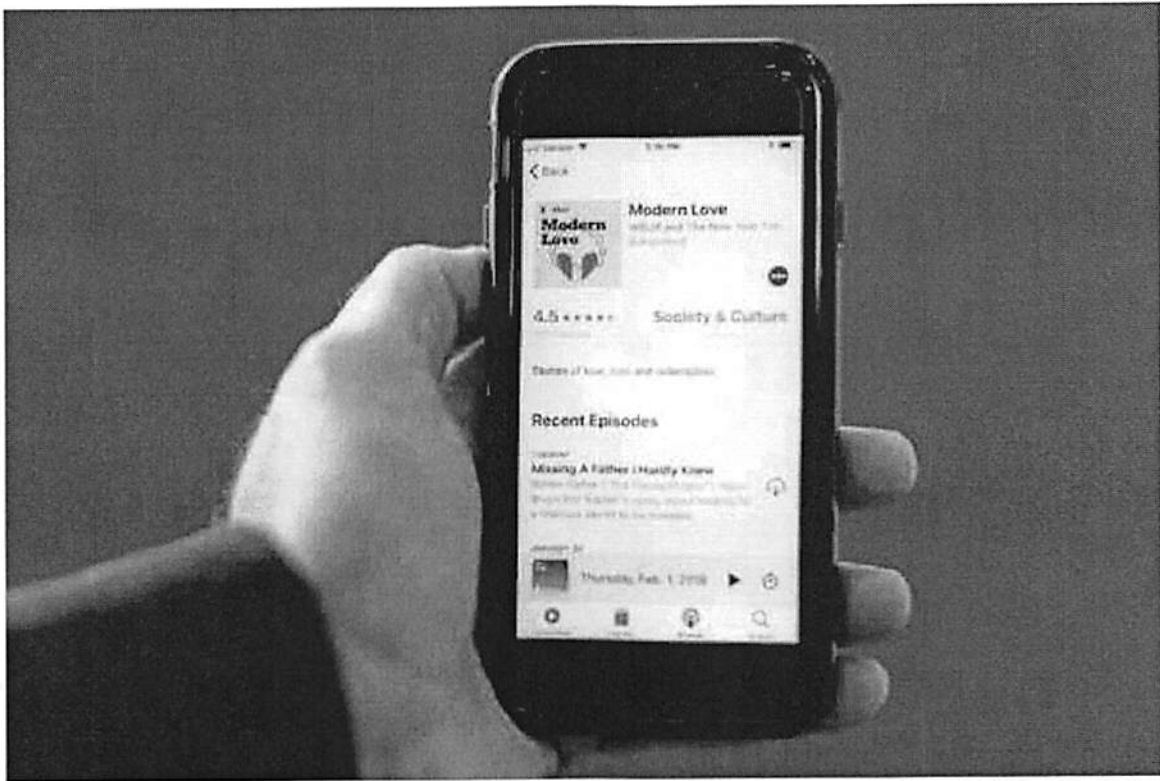
But actually, as with so much of tech, it's mostly the illusion of control. Because we can't really choose anyone even if it seems that we can. We can't protect our hearts with the glass of our phones. And we can't keep a potential mate from discovering who we truly are; we just increase the odds of their ultimately being disappointed by keeping them hooked to our "best" self.

How has tech changed dating

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/well/family/the-love-lives-of-digital-natives.html>)? **Is online dating making romance better or worse?**

I think we view technology in all areas as being a shortcut. We can solve problems faster, maximize time, use less energy while doing more. We can work smarter. And we can love smarter, too, right? With online dating (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/21/style/instagram-thirst-traps-dating-breakups.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FDating%20and%20Courtship&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics®ion=stream&module=st>) we can find the perfect person more efficiently, make contact more easily, rule that person in or out faster.

But that whole approach is fueled by an expectation that our search for love is like finding a needle in a haystack. And from what I've seen, love doesn't often work that way. Having too many choices is in itself inefficient and fantasy inducing.



Modern Love's podcast, shown on Mr. Jones's phone. His metaphor for finding love involves a pod of another sort. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

In my view, love is best found not in a haystack but in a pea pod. Here are your five peas. Or maybe nine peas. The anthropologist Helen Fisher claims that a human brain can reasonably consider only nine or 10 choices; beyond that, they turn to noise. So if you were to limit yourself to nine people and get to know them, give each a chance, you'd probably fall in love with one.

Even so, I'm not one of those people who moan about how dating apps make things worse. It's just different, much the way online shopping differs from brick-and-mortar.

When shopping online, you buy more stuff because it's so easy. Then you probably fantasize a little more about your new shoes or flying drone as you await their arrival, which means you're going to be disappointed more often because the shoes don't fit or the drone is poorly made. So you return them and start over — same as with the average online date. In the store, meanwhile, all of

that trying on and rejecting would have happened in real time, much like getting to know and rejecting people at the bar or a party happens in real time, leaving you little time to fantasize.

What's particularly misleading about online dating is how everyone on the site is trying to seduce you. They're trying to seduce everyone. They're all saying, "Date me!"

When you walk into a bar

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/22/technology/the-new-high-tech-dating-technology-meet-in-a-bar.html>), does everyone rush up to you with a big smile and a glowing résumé? No. Everyone ignores you. But online, a little piece of you believes. Because you're being pitched, you allow yourself to believe in these people's vulnerability and desire. Which is why meeting people online tends to heighten our fantasies and deepen our disappointment.

Our smartphones now include photos, chat transcripts, contacts and more. Is it good for relationships to have so much of our lives public?

What I've noticed about young people who've grown up with social media is the degree to which they bring a sense of audience to nearly everything they do. They see their own life as a performance, one that is constantly "reviewed" by friends, family, aunts, cousins, strangers.

But what's refreshing to me is how goofy a lot of it is. It's curated but not always to show perfection; in fact, imperfection seems to be the goal, something to laugh at, an ugly or embarrassing moment or expression or bad experience. They splash it all out there as a way of saying, "This is me." I think a lot of us who didn't grow up with that are horrified about having unflattering pictures of ourselves out there or embarrassing stories. We see that kind of online vulnerability as risky, and they often don't — they celebrate it.

How has tech affected your job editing Modern Love?

Tech — which for me mostly consists of my laptop and phone — has made me both happier and more stressed out, more engaged with the world and more isolated from my immediate surroundings, more in touch with my friends and family while I see them less and less. In my job, tech allows me incredible

freedom — to do my work at The Times or from the beach, and whether I'm feeling good or am sick in bed. I'm writing this now on a train from New York City to Massachusetts on a brisk, beautiful Saturday in February. It's glorious, and at the same time my work and personal life have almost no boundary.

What tech are you obsessed with in your personal life?

I could not navigate the world without Google Maps, and I could not fully appreciate the world without Google Earth. I still don't get how either works. They are miraculous.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about smartphone addiction (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/technology/apple-tech-children-jana-calstrs.html>). **What's your advice for couples who struggle to put down their phones and want to remain present with each other?**

I'm a bad person to ask about that because I'm on my phone all the time, too. I'm just glad these things didn't exist when I had small children, because I know I'd be like those parents you see at the playground, staring at their phones as their children try to get their attention.

My immediate family is scattered — kids in college, my wife and I frequently in different cities — and these days that texting connection outweighs the negative of being on our phones when we're together. But just barely. With phone addiction, it's all about willpower. These days I'm without my phone only in the shower.

So I guess my parting advice to couples who want to remain present with each other: Spend more time together in the shower.

Follow Daniel Jones on Twitter: @danjonesnyt (<https://twitter.com/danjonesnyt>)