

of major newspapers, diagnosing modern society with counterproductive hypersexualization, entitlement, individualism, excessive feminism, porn poisoning, angst, disinterest in procreating, too many apps, and so on. The future generation is doing sex wrong, we learned—and not enough! If this is what sex positivity is, I thought perusing these takes, I'd prefer sex negativity. It was a sorry spectacle. To quote i-D magazine, "People today are obsessed with the idea that young people aren't having sex anymore."

It is distasteful to insist that others should have sex, even more so that they have to fulfill a certain quota of erotic encounters per year. What would be the point if „we“ stopped having sex? To me, it's eye-opening that the scolding is only directed at non-black, non-Muslim, non-Hispanic people of reproductive age. And as evidence of how skewed the view of sex is, I look to the headlines surrounding the issue of sex in old age. During the pandemic, rising numbers of sexually transmitted diseases indicated that older people in homes and retirement communities were experiencing a great deal of promiscuous intimacy. But anyone who now thinks that the media, which bemoans the sex slump among younger people, is cheering the lust among older people is mistaken. Sounding at best funny and at worst a little bit disgusting, this is the title under which researchers from Pittsburgh published their finding in the summer of 2021: „Older men with erectile dysfunction are having more sex than ever before in the Covid- 19 pandemic.“

Despite advances in awareness about the evils of ageism, society by and large would manifestly still prefer older people to be "asexual"—or "graysexual." The latter, which has nothing to do with gray hair (even if young people do also dye their hair gray), refers to a sexual identity pioneered by Generation Z, situated in the figurative gray zone between asexuality and its opposite. To be an accomplished graysexual is to be virtuosic at identifying and pursuing one's comfort: to revel in the pleasures of preferring not to as well as of saying "yes"; to shamelessly engage in sex that one enjoys, while refusing to feel shame about not enjoying sex and indeed excluding sex from one's life.

I confess I only encountered the term graysexuality recently, while spending time on TikTok in an effort to better understand the sophisticated sexual culture of the younger people in my queer community. I had initially dismissed Gen Z's emphasis on the "ace," or asexuality, spectrum—which includes demisexuals, graysexuals, aromantics, and more—as simple sex-negativity, but I have come to understand that what the Washington Post might see as a youth "sex recession" actually constitutes a trauma-informed and care-oriented new tradition. "Ace" culture is easily pathologized as excessively consent-oriented and overly risk-averse. However, I am sure that it is precisely the attentive cultivation of boundaries that is necessary when it comes to feeling comfortable in a world in which, for example, the boundaries between work and leisure are visibly dissolving.

We can learn to think about a radically care-ori-

ented society on Netflix TV show Sex Education, with its strange mix of fashions and technologies from the 1970s and 2020. Sex Education's plot is a kaleidoscope of different sexual practices, mishaps, health issues, orientations and predilections explored (sometimes enjoyably, sometimes not) by rural English townspeople of all generations—from teenagers to the elderly. For instance, one character consciously embarks on a period of abjuring sex, instead hanging out with a goat on a leash and baking vulva-shaped cupcakes, as an open-ended exploration of an "ace" mode of self-care. Sure, there is a huge amount of diverse erotic intimacy on display, but the show's title is a bit of a misnomer: the crux of the action is actually care, with multiple character arcs revolving around comfort-seeking and healing from trauma. Rather than focus exclusively on sex acts, Sex Education proposes (somewhat like the lesbian feminists of the Seventies!) that everybody develop norms around taking time off from sex and

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expanding non-genital vistas of intimacy. A dose of sex-negativity may be a sine qua in a society in which the neoliberal injunction has increasingly become to self-optimize and enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.

To truly respect "ace" culture and practice would mean adopting a more nuanced lens vis-à-vis any "scientific" reports that partnered sexual behavior was on the decrease in our societies. It might mean asking, rather, whether the quality of people's sex lives is improving—a different matter, which people tend to define in myriad highly personal ways. Social scientists, when they perform surveys, rarely achieve much insight into how good the sex people are having feels (be it one-player or two-player or three-, four-player sex...) let alone asking whether conscious abstinence from sex also feels good. Researchers often opt to look at sales of lube, lingerie, sildenafil and tadalafil (drugs that help to maintain erection) in order to reach conclusions about how people have spent their lockdowns. In order to find out qualitative things about our collective sex lives, however, we might need to drop such quantitative approaches altogether.

When it comes to the frequency of sex per capita, it is also worth taking a look at the circumstances: What environment, what private and public spaces, what structural conditions are needed to make sex possible? The Kinsey Institute at the University of Indiana, which studies sex, gender and reproduction, considers the idea of a „sex recession“ to be nonsensical and instead sees us on the threshold of a new era of „sexual intelligence.“

Does that include making the best of the circumstances of the pandemic? At least that's how Irish cultural anthropologist Thomas Strong sees it. In his native Dublin, he perceives the pandemic as a phase that creates more opportunities for sex, not less. He says, „The long period of social disruption-no work (for a minority), no public events, a dissonant sense of time which blurs the days of the week and times of day - creates the opportunity to have more sex than ever.“ And women's magazine Cosmo doesn't see a sex drought either, but people „rejecting potentially bad sex with more confidence.“ And that's in response to #MeToo - the hashtag under which those affected made producer Harvey Weinstein's sexual assaults public and which has since come to be seen as a term for dealing more openly with sexual assault and harassment.

Even the obligation to wear a mask in public can be seen as something positive in terms of living out one's sexual identity: Transsexuals feel less attacked by transphobia in public thanks to the face masks. According to my wife Victoria, „Trans women who were housebound during the pandemic, either because they became unemployed or worked from there, had time like never before to explore their gender identity without public pressure, without expensive rituals for depilation, makeup, and clothing.“ Victoria also said she noticed a remarkable amount of „eggs“ - a term for people who first discovered they were transgender and were able to „hatch“ in the pandemic. And they did so under

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favorable circumstances because they can much better control who can see them doing so. „There's a fleeting sense of freedom here and there for trans girls,“ Victoria says. „the joy of not being unwelcomely perceived.“

As well as being beautiful, Vicky is fat. Under the Covid 19 pandemic, the fat-phobia rampant in America has continued to intensify, perhaps in response to the „Covid pounds“ many have gained. The medical establishment's attitude toward obesity has also sharpened. Scientific studies have diagnosed „obesity“ as an important factor in severe covid cases, despite decades of research also showing that „obesity,“ BMI, and other measures of a „healthy“ body tend to be arbitrary interpretations of data when considered separately from social conditions such as poverty, poor health care, or race. Indeed, it is the least predictive factor of disease progression. But because data on body weight is commonly recorded and collected, being fat easily becomes a scapegoat for actual social determinants.

I put on a significant amount of weight quite fast during the first lockdown, to the extent that, one day last Fall, I suddenly noticed stretch marks in the mirror, below my belly button. When I aired my ambivalence about this new discovery to some younger friends—whose lives seem heavily concerned with queer TikTok—they responded with a firm and serious correction of my perspective: “So, your body has grown fuller. Your thighs and belly have expanded. Perhaps that means