The honeymoon, that symbol of newlywed bliss, is getting some competition from a new alternative trend: the “solomoon.” And, while that may be good news for travel agents, it's bad news for the rest of us.

Solomooning, according to recent news articles, is a new phenomenon in which just-marrieds take a post-wedding trip separately from each other. While this may be a negligible sociocultural phenomenon, it is symptomatic of a larger shift in people's perceptions and attitudes regarding close relationships.

A few other indicators of this shift in Western culture include declining marriage rates, fewer real-life sexual interactions between two partners (as opposed to solo behavior), increased porn consumption, and widespread attitudes that relationships are not worth investing in. Taken as a whole, they paint a gloomy picture of our relational future.

A significant cause of these trends is people’s tendency to immerse themselves in technology without considering the implications. Technology is not going to stop or go away, so unless we start taking these implications seriously, we may wake up one day in the near future with a broken heart and without the relationships that are so vital to our well-being.

In 2006, married people stopped being the majority in the U.S., and the numbers of married people have kept declining ever since. According to a report by the Census Bureau, in 2017 a record number of adults in the U.S. were unmarried. Thus, over 110 million U.S. residents were divorced, widowed, or long-term singles. This is more than 45 percent of all adult Americans. Is marriage passé? Regardless of the specific reason, the outcome is the same—fewer people are getting and staying married.

Why is that a problem? Ample research shows that close relationships are crucial for mental and physical health. Having close relationships, and specifically being married, is associated with various economic benefits (survivor benefits for Social Security), improved health (lower chance of heart attack), both for the partners and their children, and greater life expectancy. Of course, these are all correlational findings, which limits the ability to infer causality or directionality, but the breadth of the literature increases confidence in the links between marital status and beneficial outcomes.
Not only are people marrying less, but they are also having less sex. Conversely, more people watch pornography (although for a shorter amount of time than they did 10 years ago; 13 minutes then compared to 9 minutes now) than ever before. Thus, according to PornHub’s report, 28.5 billion visitors visited PornHub in 2017 (~80 million people per day, compared to one million in 2007; Perry and Schleifer have conducted important research in this area).

In other words, people are masturbating as much if not more than before, but they engage in less relational sex. Less sex means fewer children. Indeed, research shows that fewer Americans are having children, with fertility rates falling to a record low. Beyond the overall decline in marriages, those who do marry are marrying later—the average age of marriage is 27.4 for women and 29.5 for men—meaning they will likely have fewer, if any, children.

Why is all this happening? According to research done in my laboratory as well as other laboratories, technology and our virtual existence play a central role in these trends. Life in the 21st century involves many technological advancements, which have increased our use of computer-mediated communication, such as emailing, texting, social media and video chats, and interacting more online than offline.

In a series of studies, we showed that our virtual existence (e.g., Facebook use) may have dire consequences for our romantic relationships. Specifically, we showed that whereas offline self-disclosure is positively associated with pro-relational outcomes, online self-disclosure (e.g., posting on Facebook, sharing via Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter) can lead to decreases in relational intimacy and satisfaction for both partners.

In a different set of studies, we showed that another potential outcome of life in the 21st century is Relational Disposability—seeing people and relationships with them as disposable. In the paper, we start by making the claim that people who live in Western industrial developed cultures, high in consumerism and materialism, tend to view objects as disposable. This, in turn, is positively correlated with viewing other humans and relationships as disposable as well.

In the first study, we showed a correlation between the tendency to dispose of objects and the tendency to dispose of social ties. In the second study, we showed that a history of high residential mobility (moving around from one
place of living to the other) increases the willingness to dispose of objects and, and this tendency, in turn, is positively correlated with willingness to dispose of social ties. The two other studies showed that increasing thoughts about residential mobility increases the tendency to dispose of objects and in turn of people and relationships.

The findings about relational disposability are in line with what is called the **Tinder effect**. The use of **online dating** websites and apps, such as the **highly popular** Tinder, has led to a change in the perceptions of, and attitudes toward, romance and committed relationships—replacing **dating** and commitment with **hook-up culture**. Having an abundance of potential **choices** may **overwhelm** people, makes them treat their choices lightly, and pushes them away from dating (or having sex) completely due to **disappointment or dissatisfaction**.

Relationships may seem minor compared to pressing problems like wars, **global warming**, and natural disasters. However, we need to pay more **attention** to them, because they have a huge impact on our individual and societal health and future. Looking at Western **Europe** and **Japan**, we can get an idea of what might happen here at home in the near future—the **upside-down population pyramid problem**—fewer babies are born and more elderly live longer, leading to imbalanced demography and potential socioeconomic collapse. If we don’t pay attention and invest in our relationships, our joint future may look like Europe and Japan’s.

At the individual level, we need people to understand the importance of working on their relationships and being willing to "do the work," meaning establish open communication, compare expectations, respect one’s partners, and work together on problems and issues. Being aware of the tendency to treat people and relationships as if they were disposable objects can help. Trying to take others’ points of view and appreciating what you have can also help. Switching from the virtual to the face-to-face when interacting (spending less time staring at your phone and more time gazing into your loved one's eyes) is another step in the right direction.

At the national level, we need to invest resources in **education**, so that we can teach young people the importance of relationships, how to find a partner, how to maintain relationships, and how to deal with expectations gap and relationship conflicts.
Relationships require hard work; even small changes like having a weekly or monthly date night can help. Relationships also involve compromise, which may mean sacrificing your dream destination for your honeymoon—but the process of compromising could save your relationship and lead to an even more rewarding relationship.