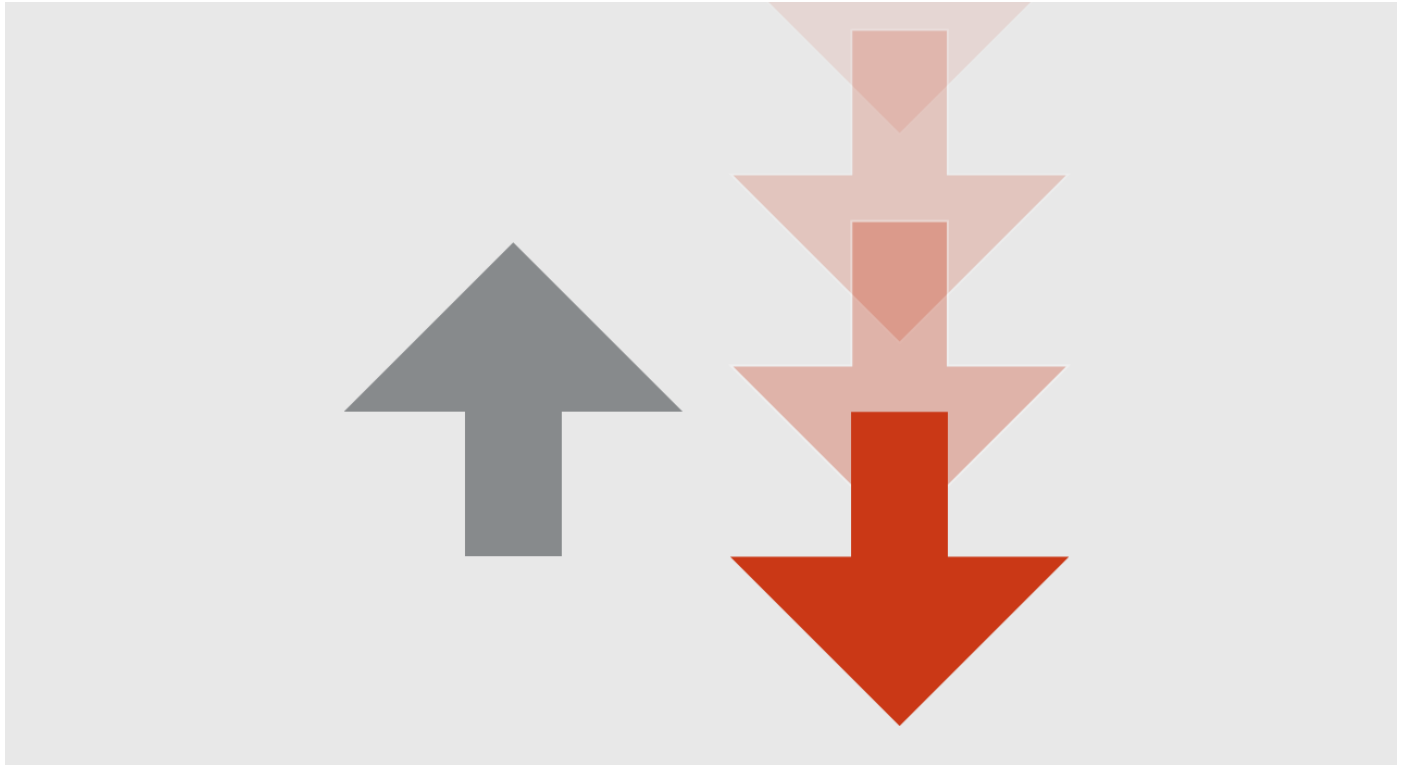


# That Time My Chart Was on the Reddit Front Page and Everyone Hated It (The Process #56)



Hi,

At the Eyeo Festival this year I talked about being the quiet kid on the playground and how that led me to FlowingData. [The talk is online now](#). I might have been nervous and felt like I was going to throw up a couple of times, but I'm glad I did it. Be sure to [check out all of the other talks too](#). There was a ton of good stuff to absorb at the festival.

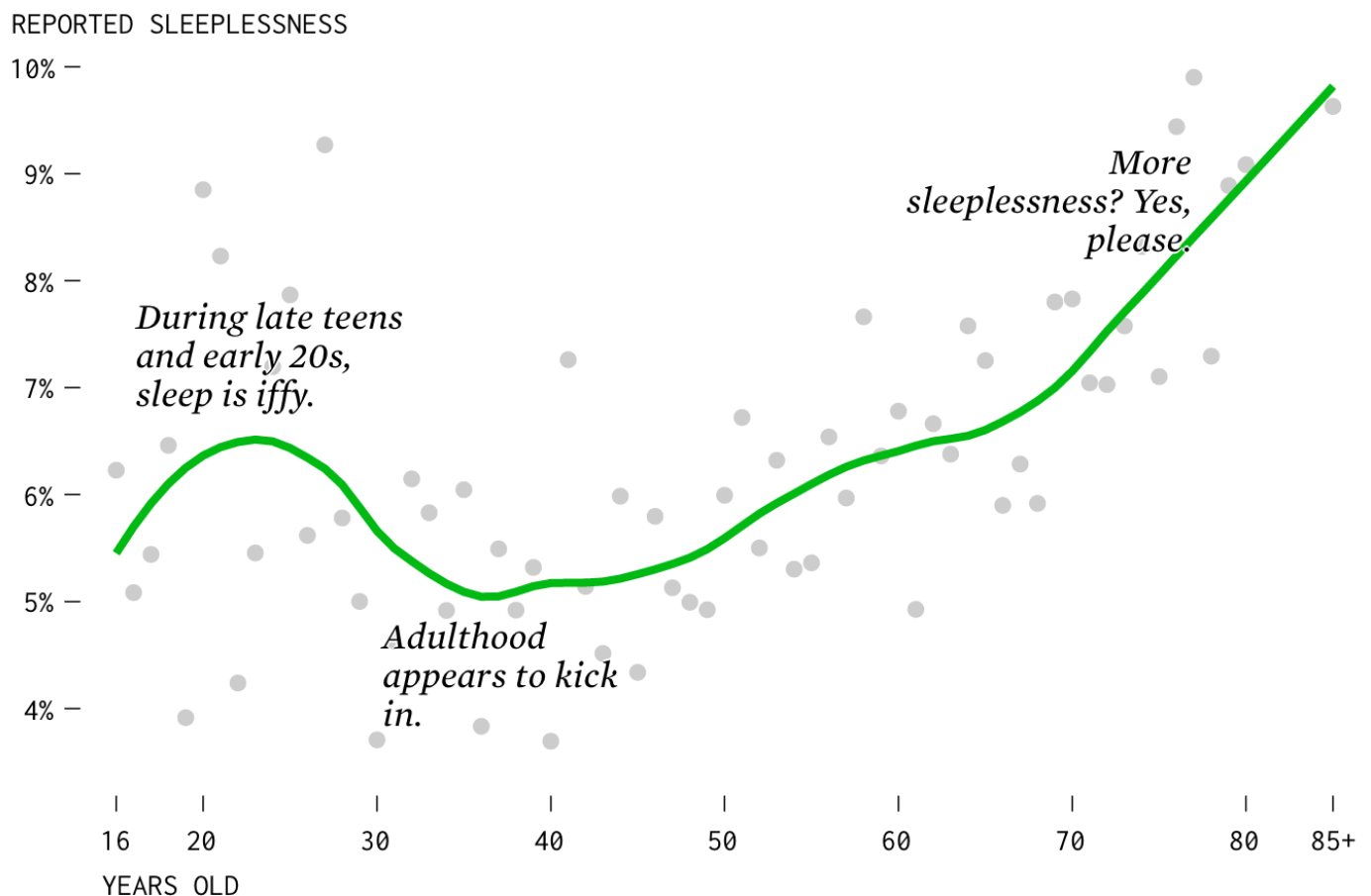
Okay, let's go.

## On Reddit

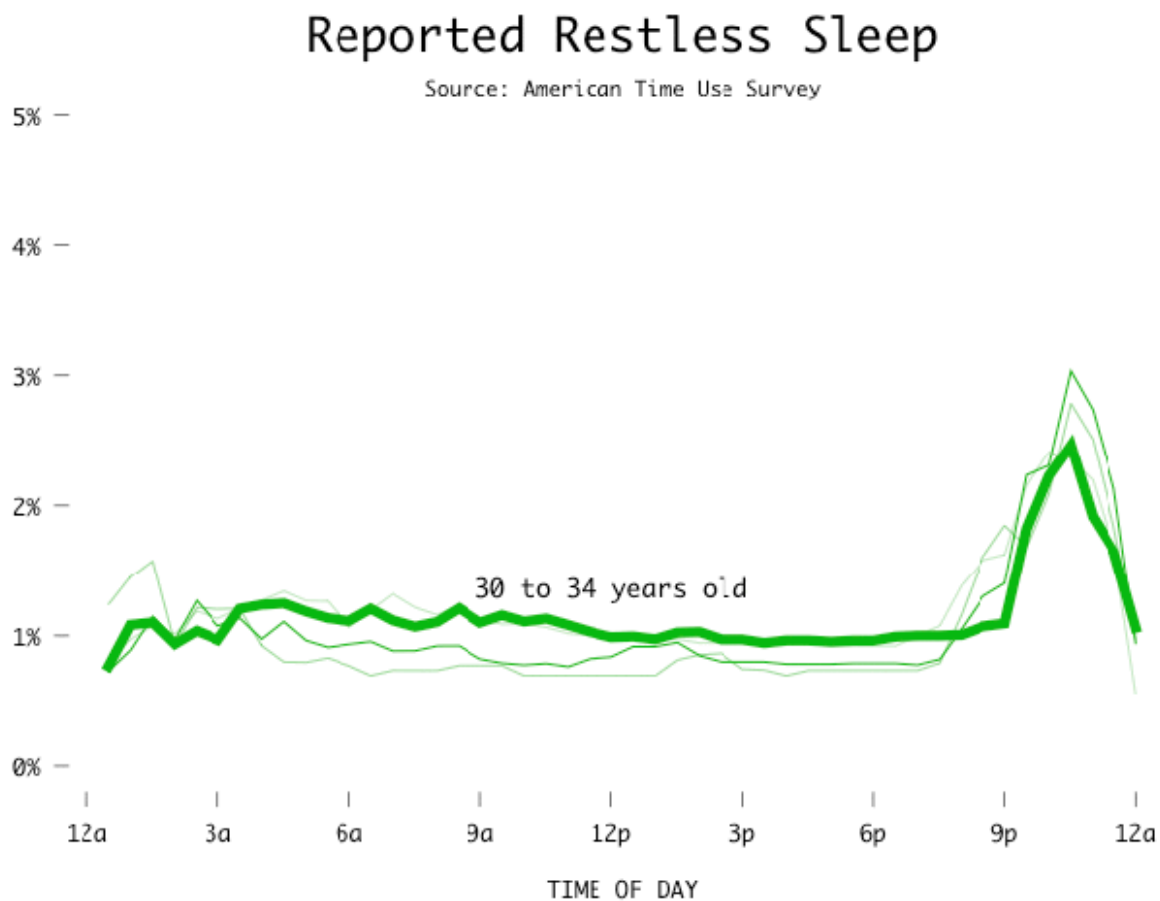
Last week, I posted a quick analysis of [sleeplessness as we age](#). I looked at data from the American Time Use Survey and charted the percentage of people who reported sleeplessness. As you might expect, the percentage increases with age:

## SLEEPLESSNESS INCREASES WITH AGE

*The struggle of staying asleep is real.*



I also included an animated line chart that shows the percentages throughout the day, increasing with age:



After hitting publish, on a whim, I shared the animated chart to [dataisbeautiful on Reddit](#). My thinking was basically, "Hey, they like moving charts over there." Then I forgot about it, because I rarely visit the site, much less post anything. The last time was in 2017.

At some point the next day, I checked back and was surprised to see more than a few upvotes. There were a few thousand. "Huh, that's kind of nice," I thought. Then I went to the comments to let the praise shower over me and realized that the sentiment of most of the top rated comments were that the chart was terrible.

Oh.

Looking at the votes now, the sum of upvoting and downvoting is at about

9,500. About 61 percent of total votes were upvotes. So if my algebra is right, there were about 26,200 upvotes and 16,700 downvotes. That's a lot of people who did not like my chart, especially for one that was on the front page. As a point of reference, the most popular visualization on the dataisbeautiful subreddit right now — a standard state-level choropleth map — is 92 percent upvoted. And in my experience, comments for popular posts are usually positive.

Woo. Hoo.

## What I Learned

What happened? Luckily I've been posting charts on the internet long enough where I don't take criticisms personally. I get to learn from them. These are my lessons learned in no particular order.

## Know the Medium

I suspect a large portion of the downvotes stem from me knowing little about how Reddit works and how people use the platform.

The original animated chart that I posted on FlowingData paused at the end of the age cycle. So it stopped for a few seconds at the 85 years and older group. You could see traces of previous lines and how much sleeplessness appeared to increase with age.

On Reddit, the animated GIF did not pause at the end. It endlessly looped over and over, which made it more difficult to glean anything from the lines. It seemed like animation for the sake of animation and not much else.

When I tried to explain this in the comments, pointing to the original, people seemed to reject that idea too. My comments were downvoted, driven to

negative oblivion.

So that was my fault. I didn't even check after posting to make sure the animation looked right.

## Visualization Reddit is Serious

Someone commented: "wow, that data is f\*\*\*ing ugly, not beautiful. Had to look at it for like 2 minutes to understand it, and then another 5 to read it"

I replied: "I feel slightly accomplished I got you to read a chart for 7 minutes on the internet."

Plus 170 points for the original commenter. Negative 39 points on my comment. Someone replied to me asking, "Why do you enjoy wasting people's time?"

Someone stared at a chart on the internet for 7 minutes. Come on, that's an accomplishment.

But seriously, this is a "know your audience" type of thing. I underestimated (or forgot) how much the dataisbeautiful crowd is on the cleanliness and efficiency type of visualization than they are for the more abstract.

Then again, the flawed chart got over 26k upvotes, so there was something there. Also, a Reddit stranger gave me an Awesome Original Content Award.

Maybe the lesson is that you shouldn't try to please everyone?

I don't know. It concerns me that someone new to visualization, who might be more sensitive to negative commentary, could be turned off from visualization altogether because of one bad experience. Let's be nicer. And if you're new, try not to take criticisms personally.

## **Include the Context**

On FlowingData, the chart is sandwiched between paragraphs of text. On Reddit, the chart stands alone, which means all the context has to come from the chart. I included the link to FD, but out of the people who watched the chart on Reddit, less than a hundred came to FD (which was part of why I didn't even know my post gained traction on Reddit).

I'm conflicted about this, because I like to reward the people who read the stuff around the visualization. If someone doesn't read the words right next to the chart, then that's sort of on them. But again, I posted an image to Reddit, so I should've recognized the medium and adjusted accordingly.

## **There Are More People to Reach**

A large percentage of people who see my projects or read FD have some idea of who I am, because they followed me on Twitter or subscribed to the site. So at the least, they know I make charts for a living.

But on Reddit, many people are not familiar with FD. They have no idea who I am. I might as well be a beginner, and that was actually kind of fun. One person offered words of encouragement: "Keep going!"

It was a good reminder that there are many people interested in data who don't know about FD yet.

## **Visualization Researchers Should Post On and Study Reddit**

Has this been done already? Researchers want to know how people perceive charts and data, and long rant-ish discussion threads on Reddit seem to be a good source of inspiration. I know some of the comments leave more to be

desired and it's not exactly a controlled experiment, but it's a lot of people talking about charts out in the open. There must be something there.

Thanks for your support as a member. See you next week.