

ASHLEY MADISON®

# **Love Beyond Lockdown**

A Report on Navigating Marriage and Infidelity  
Through a Pandemic and the New Normal

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# Background

The COVID-19 pandemic is altering the way we live, and its impact will continue to be felt in the years to come. There has been much speculation about how marriages and relationships will be affected by the 24/7 lockdown, and Ashley Madison, the world's leading married dating site<sup>1</sup>, sought to discover how married individuals are faring during this unique situation.

Through a series of anonymous member surveys, Ashley Madison set out to learn more about married life during lockdown and why many married people are choosing to carry out new and existing extramarital affairs while at home with their spouse. The study as a whole addresses several topics, including sex, increased stress, divorce, dating during a pandemic, and the future of marriage and monogamy. The research reveals five key findings about navigating marriage and infidelity during a global pandemic.

## Summary of Findings

***Finding #1: Lack of sexual initiation is the primary complaint of married individuals during lockdown, thus many aren't having sex and have become less attracted to their spouse***

It's easy to think being stuck at home with little to do would mean married people are having a lot of sex. However, 58% of married daters say their spouse has not initiated any sort of sexual intimacy during lockdown. Fifty-nine percent have addressed this, but to no avail. Unsurprisingly then, 75% of cheaters are having less sex than usual or no sex at all with their spouse, and 25% say that that, specifically, is the hardest part of lockdown – harder than not seeing friends or family (23%).

When sex is so important yet so unattainable within a marriage, individuals will inevitably find a workaround – be it alone or with someone other than their spouse. Sixty-eight percent of married daters are taking matters into their own hands and masturbating just as much or more often than before the stay-at-home order, while most members (64%) have been having affairs during the pandemic as a direct result of the lack of sexual satisfaction at home.

Fifty-three percent of married daters say lockdown has been the most time they've ever spent with their spouse. It's clear their needs aren't being met and 76% have essentially given up on reviving their dead bedroom, so it's no wonder 74% are unlikely to stop having physical affairs even once the pandemic has passed.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the number of signups to Ashley Madison since 2002

***Finding #2: People don't look to their partner in times of uncertainty and stress, they look outside their partner.***

Even with the world slowly coming back to life, there is still that feeling of unease and uncertainty brought on by the initial declaration of a pandemic and stay-at-home order. With so much bad news on a constant loop, it's hard to stay positive. During lockdown, married people report feelings of boredom (49%), isolation and loneliness (30%), frustration and anger (29%), worry and fear (24%), and anxiety and overwhelm (24%). They also report, however, a mood boost as a direct result of their infidelity.

A whopping 95% of members were still interested in finding and maintaining outside relationships near the beginning of lockdown, and cheaters have come to learn that having an affair during a pandemic is something to look forward to (34%), a great distraction (23%), and means they have someone in a similar situation they can talk to (14%). In fact, 84% believe infidelity is a reliable form of self-care. Of those who have experienced negative emotions during lockdown, 66% find their affairs have improved their overall mood.

There are also those who remained positive from the very beginning and saw lockdown as a way to work on themselves. Thirty-four percent of cheaters say learning how to prioritize their own needs has been the most valuable lesson, and 40% vow to continue slowing down and putting themselves first even after the pandemic has passed. With infidelity deemed a form of self-care, it's not unreasonable to assume cheaters will continue down that path.

***Finding #3: The pandemic has not decreased the desire or ability to cheat; in fact, it has fueled it.***

Thanks to modern technology, being on lockdown doesn't mean those we live with are those we devote all our attention to. Texting, phone calls, and video chats have replaced most in-person communication with loved ones outside of our home, including secret lovers. Lockdown has not put an end to affairs, cheaters are merely adapting their current methods while also preparing for future affairs when less restrictions are in place.

Where the old lines such as, "I'm working late tonight," "I'm grabbing drinks with friends," and "I have a business trip this weekend" once sufficed as ways to cover up an affair, cheaters are now using excuses like, "I'm doing work" (38%), "I'm going to the store" (13%), "I'm going on a walk/bike ride" (10%), and even "I need some personal time" (9%). Though most cheating has gone virtual, many married daters are still meeting their affair partner in person. However, they have introduced new precautions.

From now until there is a cure or vaccine for the novel Coronavirus, 65% of cheaters are likely to be more selective with who they go on in-person dates with, and 56% are likely to get creative with socially-distanced date ideas. During these dates, 41% of cheaters regularly use hand sanitizer, 36% avoid crowds, and 11% stick to outdoor dates only. Where there's a will, there's a way!

Some married daters are even comfortable with having sex – or with the idea of having sex – with their affair partner, and they've introduced new rules there as well. Fifty-five percent are likely to limit

themselves to one physical affair partner from now until there is a vaccine and 43% are likely to wait longer to have sex with anyone at all. In terms of location, 46% of cheaters are making good use of hotels and motels, 37% are sticking to either their own house or their partner's, and 6% are fogging up the windows of their car.

***Finding #4: With the bulk of time now spent at home, married people having affairs deem their infidelity an integral form of self-care and a way for them to stay married.***

The increased time at home as a result of social distancing is the most time many married couples have ever spent together. Despite the promise of “for better or for worse,” there was no mention of a 24/7 lockdown in anyone's vows. Understandably, marital tension has been high and reports of heightened divorce filings [began in March](#). For married daters, however, divorce is the last thing on their mind. In fact, only 1% of Ashley Madison members see themselves leaving their spouse, and their infidelity is to thank for that.

Cheating, though vilified, is a way for those in sexless, orgasmless, or even sexually active marriages to explore a different side of themselves and get the confidence boost and fulfilment they lack at home. Cheating during lockdown has made 47% of members feel sexual, 45% excited, and 44% desired – but the benefits run deeper than just feeling sexy. Thirty-two percent of members feel appreciated, 30% feel relaxed, 28% feel confident, and 19% feel acknowledged. While many Ashley Madison members cheat primarily for sex, they reap the additional personally therapeutic benefits, which are especially helpful in this unique lockdown situation.

***Finding #5: Decreased socialization is calling into question the role of the primary partner as the sole confidant, friend, lover, and source of peace.***

The pandemic has changed the way we interact with others and has made us diligent about who we socialize with. The safest way to avoid COVID-19 is to stay home and away from people, but a social [bubble](#) is a safe alternative for those seeking socialization and fulfilment away from home. For married people who have come to realize they can't depend on their spouse for everything, it's a way to have their various needs met.

This practice of selective socialization forces us to think about what we need and who can give it to us. When you're lonely, who do you call? When you need spontaneous fun, who do you call? When you need passion, who do you call? The answers are likely a different person for each scenario. There is not one single person who can offer fulfilment in every aspect of life – not even a spouse. Sometimes spouse, confidant, friend, and lover are not synonymous. More often, marriage equates mainly to co-parenting and financial stability.

The pandemic and new practice of selective socialization may pave the way for new conversations about monogamy and which desires cannot be completely fulfilled by the spouse. Dr. Tammy Nelson, author of *When You're the One Who Cheats*, says, “Creating monogamy agreements that are not as traditional or conservative as they have been in the past could work for many couples who consider themselves

primary to one another but crave something more. A more open monogamy might include other sexual partners, or even more help with parenting or household responsibilities.”

The future of marriage may be more fluid after a 24/7 lockdown. More married individuals are realizing what most married daters have already come to learn – your “one and only” isn’t always the one or the only when it comes to your needs, and the structure of marriage may evolve to become more emotionally and physically fulfilling in the future.

## Approach

This data was extrapolated from six member surveys:

Survey 1: “*Affairs in Isolation*” comprised of 1,470 Ashley Madison member respondents from March 17-20, 2020

Survey 2: “*Pet Peeves*” comprised of 2,047 Ashley Madison member respondents from April 7-9, 2020

Survey 3: “*Habits*” comprised of 2,085 Ashley Madison member respondents from April 22-24, 2020

Survey 4: “*Post-Isolation*” comprised of 1,861 Ashley Madison member respondents From May 28-June 5, 2020

Survey 5: “*Specifics of Cheating During Lockdown*” comprised of 2,258 Ashley Madison member respondents from July 24-28, 2020

Survey 6: “*Self-Care*” comprised of 2,249 Ashley Madison member respondents from August 10-12, 2020