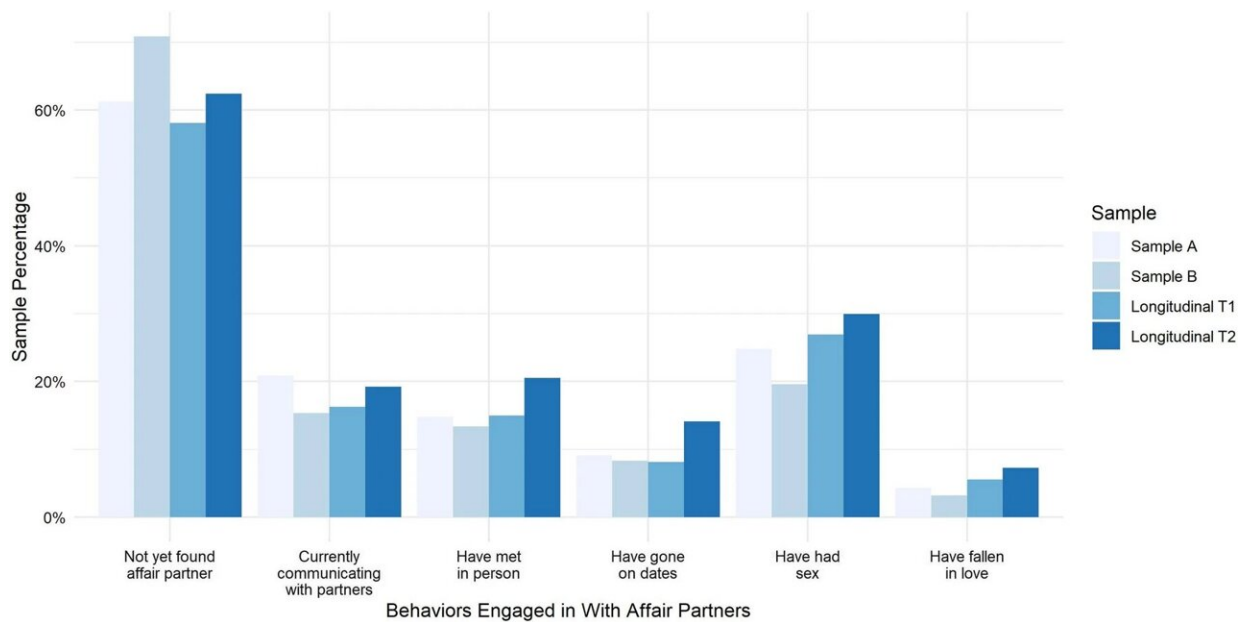


# Married people who cheat don't regret it, finds study

May 22 2023



Behaviors engaged in with potential affair partners for each sample. Note Participants were able to select multiple behaviors. Credit: *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s10508-023-02608-4

Married people who have affairs find them highly satisfying, express little remorse and believe the cheating didn't hurt their otherwise healthy marriages, finds a new report on the psychology of infidelity.

The extensive survey of people using Ashley Madison, a website for

facilitating extramarital affairs, challenges widely held notions about infidelity, particularly about cheaters' motivations and experiences. The work is newly published in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

"In [popular media](#), [television shows](#) and movies and books, people who have affairs have this intense moral guilt and we don't see that in this sample of participants," said lead author Dylan Selterman, an associate teaching professor in Johns Hopkins University's Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences who studies relationships and attraction.

"Ratings for satisfaction with affairs was high—sexual satisfaction and emotional satisfaction. And feelings of regret were low. These findings paint a more complicated picture of infidelity compared to what we thought we knew."

Researchers conducted this study to better understand the psychological experiences of those who seek and engage in extramarital affairs. Working with researchers at the University of Western Ontario, Selterman surveyed nearly 2,000 active users of Ashley Madison, before and after they had affairs.

Participants were asked about the state of their marriage, about why they wanted to have an affair, and about their general well-being. Respondents, generally middle aged and male, reported high levels of love for their partners, yet low levels of sexual satisfaction.

Participants reported high levels of love for their spouses, yet about half of the participants said that they were not sexually active with their partners. Sexual dissatisfaction was the top-cited motivation to have an affair, with other motivations including the desire for independence and for sexual variety. Fundamental problems with the [relationship](#), like lack of love or anger toward a spouse were among the least-cited reasons for wanting to cheat.

Having great marriages didn't make cheaters any more likely to regret affairs, the survey found. Participants generally reported that their affair was highly satisfying both sexually and emotionally, and that they did not regret having it.

The results suggest that infidelity isn't necessarily the result of a deeper problem in the relationship, Selterman said. Participants sought affairs because they wanted novel, exciting sexual experiences, or sometimes because they didn't feel a strong commitment to their partners, rather than because of a need for emotional fulfillment, the report found.

"People have a diversity of motivations to cheat," Selterman said. "Sometimes they'll cheat even if their relationships are pretty good. We don't see solid evidence here that people's affairs are associated with lower relationship quality or lower life satisfaction."

Selterman hopes to advance this work by looking closer at how other populations of cheaters compare to the Ashley Madison population.

"The take-home point for me is that maintaining monogamy or sexual exclusivity especially across people's lifespans is really, really hard and I think people take monogamy for granted when they're committed to someone in a marriage. People just assume that their partners are going to be totally satisfied having sex with one person for the next 50 years of their lives but a lot of people fail at it. It doesn't mean everyone's relationship is doomed, it means that cheating might be a common part of people's relationships."

**More information:** Dylan Selterman et al, No Remorse: Sexual Infidelity Is Not Clearly Linked with Relationship Satisfaction or Well-Being in Ashley Madison Users, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2023).  
[DOI: 10.1007/s10508-023-02573-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02573-y)

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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