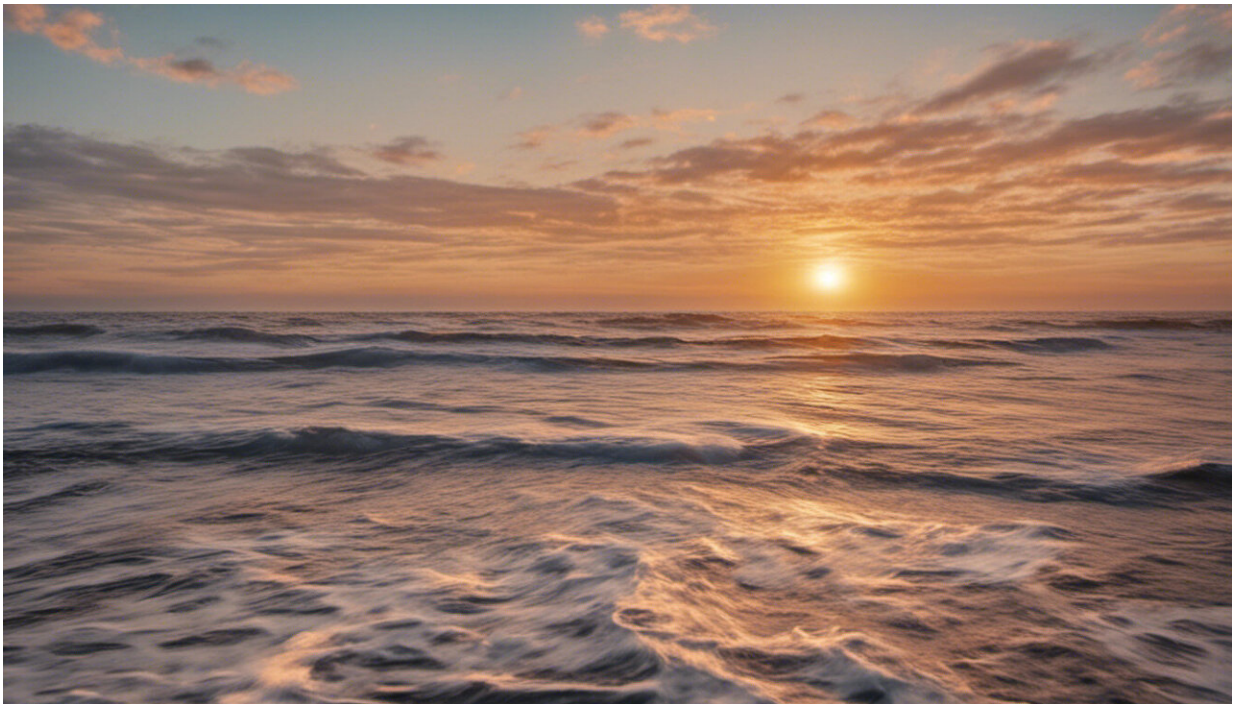


Dating after lockdown: why you shouldn't expect a summer of love

May 18 2021, by Viren Swami



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Over the past year, many single people have patiently waited through what might have seemed like the long, slow death of their romantic lives. Social distancing has meant fewer dates, while strict physical distancing measures designed to limit the spread of COVID-19 were quickly branded a "[sex ban](#)" when they came into force in the UK in 2020.

But with [strict physical distancing rules](#) eased in the parts of the UK as of Monday May 17, some [social scientists](#) are now predicting a [summer of love](#), flush with the same abandon that accompanied the "roaring twenties".

Anticipating a [sudden flurry of sexual activity](#) isn't unrealistic—some singletons will rush back into the dating scene headfirst to enjoy their newfound freedoms. But much has changed since March 2020, not least the way we date. And, with many people reporting rusty social skills and higher levels of [social anxiety](#), I'd expect it to take some time before single people can comfortably date once more.

A new dating scene

It's too simple to say that single people have abandoned intimate relationships completely during periods of lockdown. Instead, there has been a flourishing of creative [new forms of dating](#) and intimacy-building online.

Young people in particular have been using various platforms to maintain some intimate links with others, including [flirting, often as a form of game](#). Some dating apps, meanwhile, have enabled users to match with anyone in their [country](#) or even anyone across the [world](#)—with many using this opportunity to get to know people hundreds or thousands of miles away, in the knowledge that a casual hook-up cannot happen.

More generally, [video calls](#) have become much more commonplace in dating, emerging as an important step prior to meeting face-to-face. They can help to manage [anxieties](#) about meeting up with strangers and may help minimise the tendency to [idealise potential partners](#), which can lead to disappointment and conflict. Given these benefits, we can expect the video date to continue into the summer.

Roaring or slow?

Testing the waters with a video call before a face-to-face date also points to a growing appreciation of "[slow dating](#)"—taking the time to get to know a partner instead of jumping in at the deep end. One [recent survey](#) found that online daters are more likely to value developing a deeper emotional connection with a potential partner before a physical one.

Slow dating would seem to make sense post-lockdown, with many of us still experiencing a heightened [awareness](#) of physical safety and the risks of illness. One [report](#) found that one third of daters who were surveyed were apprehensive about kissing and hugging others, while a quarter were worried about catching coronavirus from potential dates.

It appears that many single people are aware of these barriers to intimacy, which won't simply be magicked away as restrictions ease. Online dating profiles mentioning the word "[vaccinated](#)" have increased in the past year, with the syringe emoji now commonplace on dating profiles.

But there may also be a desire among daters to deal with an uncertain future by minimising what researchers sometimes refer to as "[relational turbulence](#)"—the intense emotions at the start of a relationship, such as jealousy, which can sometimes lead to conflict. Taking things slow and forming deeper bonds with others might be one way of navigating the uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Fear of dating again

There's another reason why we shouldn't expect a sudden flurry of sexual activity. Many single people report feeling ambivalent about "going back to normal", with fears of [crowds](#) and [socialising](#) having increased

recently. Such anxieties have coalesced into what is being called a "[fear of dating again](#)"—a phenomenon that has even been given its own acronym, FODA.

This apprehensiveness about meeting others and having to be social again means the wild summer of hedonism and hook-ups is likely out of reach for many people, who are still recovering from a difficult year. This may be especially true for individuals who are socially anxious, shy, or introverted, for whom lockdown may even have felt like a respite.

All of this isn't to mention the fact that many single people are emerging from lockdown having undergone seismic [life changes](#). During periods of lockdown, many singletons found new opportunities to introspect and learn about themselves, which can [positively shape](#) relationship formation. Outlooks and priorities have shifted, and the things we value most in others are also likely to have changed.

If you're feeling anxious about dating again, remember it's okay if you want to take things slow and it's understandable to feel apprehensive about meeting others after a long period in social isolation. There's really no reason to rush into things. And whatever you decide, you can take comfort from the fact that you are not alone in facing this strange new world.

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