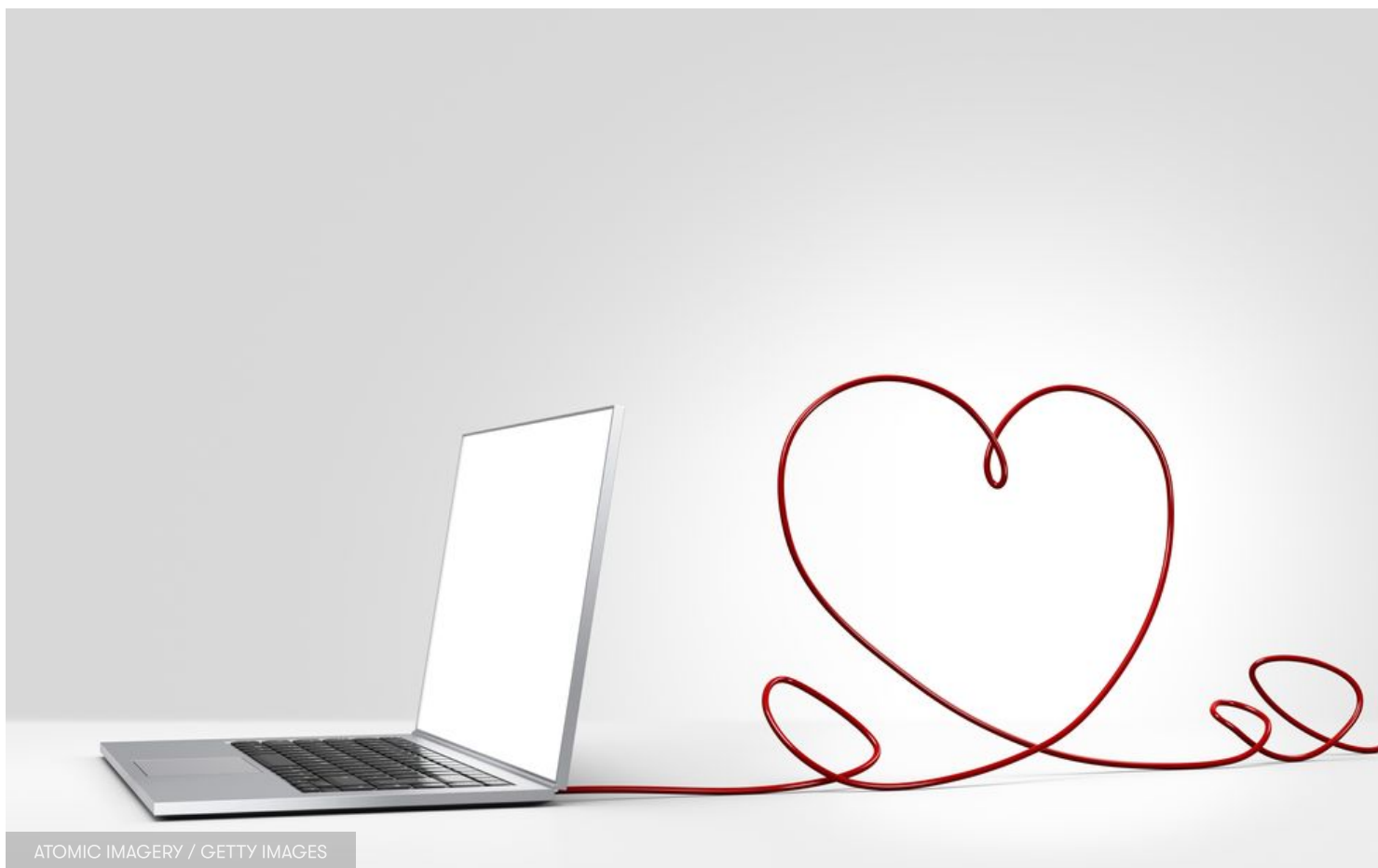


# When Online Dating Becomes the Antidote to Social Distancing

Amid the Covid-19 crisis, technology is bridging the gap for many singles.

By Alesandra Dubin MAR 27, 2020



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For all its sporadic thrills, online dating can sometimes feel like a harrowing feat with dubious potential for romantic payoff. Add to that equation a historic global pandemic and nationwide social distancing, and the pursuit can only feel more futile, right? Actually, it turns out, even when you can't meet a match in person, going online can prove to be a fruitful or at least a great distraction.

Tiffany Yu is based in San Francisco, now under a shelter-in-place order through at least April 7, and she's found the surreal circumstance can be an icebreaker on dating

platforms like Hinge and The League. "If anything, the move to staying connected virtually has gotten me more comfortable with video calls," Yu says. "So I participated in my first League Live [two-minute video chats with matches] which I actually thought was really fun and was a great launching-off point for conversations."

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Yu is the founder and CEO of Diversability, a group that connects people living with disabilities. Before city residents were asked to stay home, Yu didn't always love investing in her own connection with matches before meeting face to face. Now, she's thinking differently. "I have since had a FaceTime date with one of my matches, and I was not even the type of person to hop on a phone call before a date," she says. "I'm not sure if I'll be able to keep up the momentum with these matches digitally to see if we can meet in person next month, but I'm trying to stay hopeful and open minded."

Yu lives alone and admits "social distancing has felt isolating." And certainly that extra level of isolation — already a factor in single life, even (or especially) in population-packed metros — has led others to ramp up their online-dating efforts. It's something you can do when you're lonely, bored, and not supposed to get within six feet of other humans.

"At the beginning of the year, I deleted all my dating apps in an effort to put a focus on meeting people IRL — in real life. In fact, I told my New York girlfriends that we needed to start going out in groups of two and not a pack of five in order to have better luck," says Baylie Robinson, an author who blogs at The Baysics. But now under mandated distancing, she decided to download Bumble again since "there is no other way to meet people right now."

"While it's still fresh for me to be back on the dating apps, the response rate and time seem to be a lot better," says Robinson. "I believe quarantine life has given strangers,

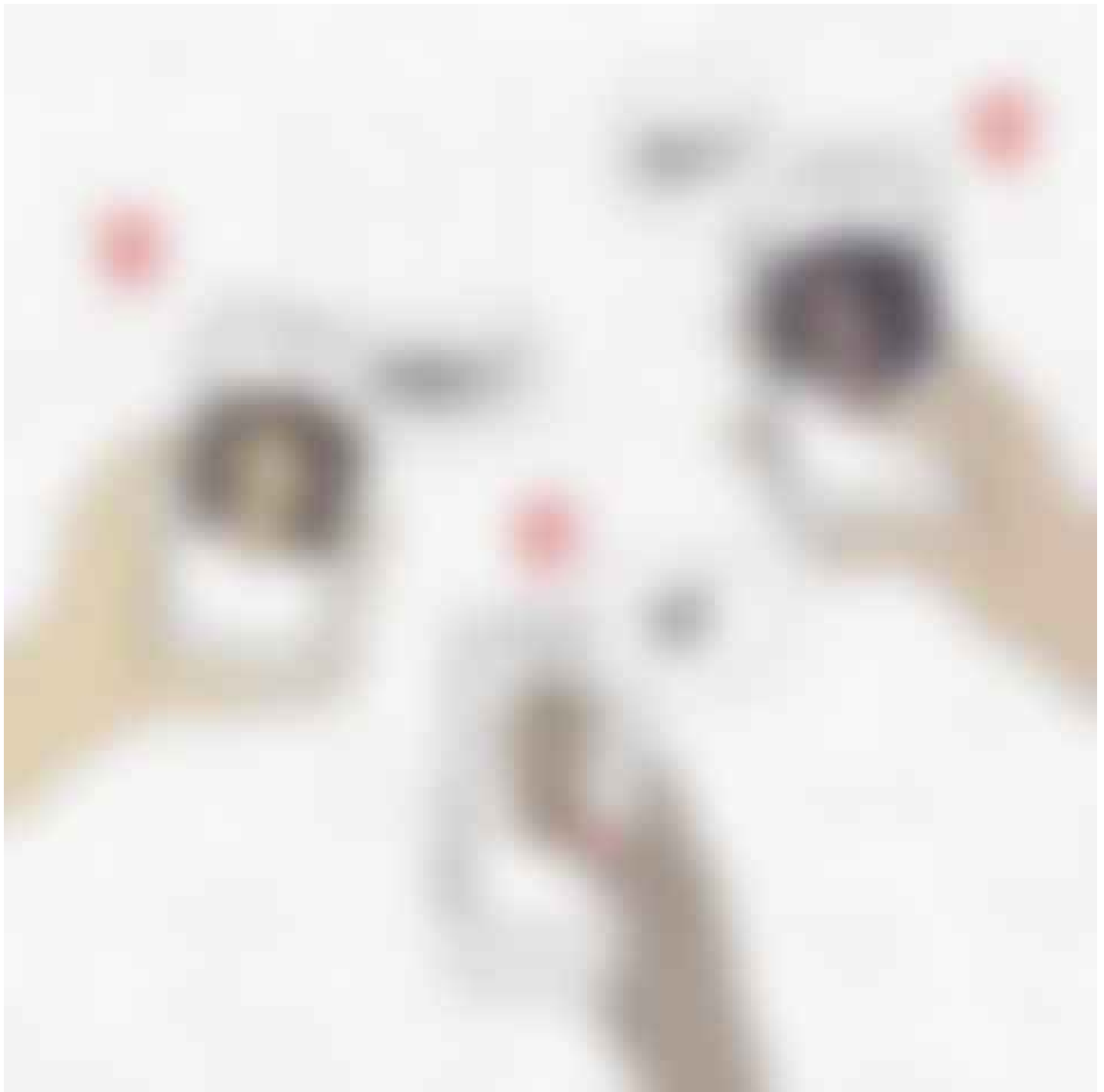
aka matches, a plethora of relevant and noncontroversial topics to talk about — like tips for working from home and how work is actually going right now."

Beyond that, the destruction wrought by the global pandemic has a few silver linings. And this, Robinson says, is among them: "It's giving people a few new pick-up line ideas."

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Nobody would have wished the coronavirus crisis and its subsequent social distancing mandate into existence — but it's here. Online dating can be a fruitful coping mechanism for some singles.

Recently, Tinder announced it was giving users free access to its Passport feature until April 30, which allows users to search for matches anywhere in the world.

"In this challenging time, we see Tinder members finding new ways to connect," a spokesperson for Tinder tells Shondaland. "As an area becomes more affected by physically isolating measures, we see new [online] conversations happening there and those conversations last longer."

In the hardest hit geographic areas, the epidemic is also changing the tenor of the connection. "More people are using Tinder bios to show their concern for others — 'how is everyone?' — instead of their life motto. Many of our current subscribers are even reaching out across the world, using the Passport feature, to find solidarity with matches thousands of miles away."

Bumble has instructed its users not to meet up in person and has encouraged each of them to connect virtually, urging virtual dating and offering tips from experts on how to have a great online dating experience. "We wanted to make sure our users knew where we stood on dating IRL," a Bumble spokesperson tells Shondaland. "Bumble can provide a great outlet — it's one way to stay connected to real people without having to meet in the physical world."

Bumble stats show a 21 percent increase in both messages sent, and Bumble Video Call usage over the past week. "This only further validates that when physical connection is limited, humans will seek out other means to interact and engage," the Bumble spokesperson says.

OkCupid also notes growth during this time of quarantine: There were nearly 36 million intro messages sent on OkCupid in March between singles connecting for the first time, up almost 4 million from this time last year.

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Another place the platform is seeing a lot of activity is with its in-app questions. "We have thousands of questions on everything from first-date ideas to politics, and our questions have been answered over 30 million times this month," explains OkCupid global communications manager Michael Kaye. "And if you're single, now's a great time to be on OkCupid while you're staying safe at home because 93 percent of respondents on OkCupid are now dating digitally [meaning they are not meeting in person], 51 percent are relying on messaging and texting, 26 percent are video chatting, and 17 percent are sticking with good, old-fashioned phone calls. Only 7 percent are not dating right now, but they're still clearly active on our app."

Marcus Anwar, co-founder of the classified site [OhMy.ca](#), is among the group of people preferring not to date online at all right now because he's fully committed to safely social distancing. And with no plans for an in-person meetup, he just doesn't see this as the time to connect digitally. "This horrible reality is making us realize the seriousness and devastating effects of this dangerous virus if we don't take extreme measures. Using online dating platforms to meet strangers in person can put you at risk with a life-changing impact," he says. "I am not using online dating because I don't plan on meeting up in person until the shelter-at-home order lifts."

But Robinson says she actually finds a reduced pressure at a time when no in-person meetup is expected as an underlying tension.

"While coronavirus is far from ideal, quarantine life has made people more open to conversation with someone new without the pressures of having to meet in IRL," Robinson says. "It's also eliminated the many distractions and excuses we use for not calling, responding, or texting back."

"Online dating can become your best friend in this temporary new world, a way to socialize and not feel so isolated," says Destin Pfaff of Love & Matchmaking, a date-coaching and matchmaking service.

And of course, social distancing is changing the rules of the game.

"As love experts, we would normally suggest you message someone online no more than three times before you take it to a short phone call, then physical date," Pfaff says, noting that the escalation levels have now changed format. "Extend your chatting time online, move it to a longer phone call or video chat, and then plan an amazing virtual first date."

Rachel Federoff, Pfaff's wife and partner in *Love & Matchmaking*, suggests you "get creative" at this level. "Have each other make the same meal, break out the wine, and then, via FaceTime or Skype, enjoy your first-date meal together," she says. According to Federoff, "In our world of amazing technology, chemistry can be transmitted electronically."

The *Love & Matchmaking* duo notes that while this unprecedented time might be trying for marriages, it may be an opportunity for singles. "For singles forming bonds online, this could be advantageous as the courting process is forcibly extended," Federoff says. "You'll have a shared experience that connects you, and you can really get to know someone — as the typical rush to the physical can't be permitted."

Relationship expert and LGBTQ matchmaker Tammy Shaklee of [H4M Matchmaking](#), who is seeing an uptick in volume of singles looking to be matched during the crisis, also suggests now is a time to be choosier and to "curate your potential partners more carefully."

After initially matching online, use those phone calls and video chats as a way to "truly vet to see if this person will be one you'll want to meet face-to-face when the time is right," she says. "If someone won't want to FaceTime, Zoom, or Skype video a date, then they may not be worth an extended wait to meet in person."

And of course, if you do find a promising match and spend extended time courting virtually in quarantine, that can ramp up the electricity for that first meeting

whenever we're all free to move freely about the world again.

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It's worth noting, too, that while businesses suffer across so many sectors — notably live events, travel, and restaurants — online dating operations are seeing self-quarantine as a growth opportunity, and are ramping up marketing accordingly.

WooPlus, which is geared toward plus-sized singles, has sent reminders and tips to its users on ways to keep the conversation going while waiting out the virus.

WooPlus rep Penny Chen says, "We have recently updated our app to allow users to show their personalities more vividly," explaining the platform has also updated features to allow "people to stay connected with the community and help beat the isolation some may be facing."

The New York City-based executive matchmaking firm Agape Match also sent an email to its clients offering a free webinar about dating, and assuring clients that meetings were continuing in pursuit of recruiting and vetting potential matches for them (all held by video chat).

While there are certainly more serious issues in play right now (like flattening the Covid-19 transmission curve), when people are finally allowed to leave their homes again, maybe they'll have a new partner to enjoy the fresh air with, too.

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*Alesandra Dubin is a veteran news and lifestyle writer. Her work has appeared in Business Insider, TODAY, BuzzFeed, Cosmopolitan, Parents, Good Housekeeping, Best Life, Esquire, and more. Follow her on Twitter [@AliceDubin](#).*



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