

# The Truth About Limerence Affairs

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In my work with marriages in crisis since 1994, 67% of those marriages have been affected by infidelity. Some on the part of the husband, some the wife, some both. If the affair was short-lived – primarily about sex – the crisis is real but not as difficult to repair as when one of them is “madly in love” with another person. I understand that many who work with marriages in trouble refuse to enroll couples if one spouse is still in this emotional state with the paramour. Over the years, I’ve welcomed them to our workshops even in the midst of these emotionally powerful affairs and have had great success in helping to salvage those marriages and make them good again.

## What Is Limerence?

We use the term limerence for this strong emotion. It was coined in 1979 by Dorothy Tennov. In her book *Love and Limerence* she listed a number of characteristics of limerence including:

- intrusive thinking about the person one is madly in love with (*referred to as the Limerent Object or LO*)
- strong, pervasive longing for the LO to reciprocate the emotion
- feelings of euphoria or ecstasy when any action by the LO is interpreted as demonstrating reciprocal emotions
- obsessive thinking about the LO to the point that many other things, even important things, are ignored or neglected
- a powerful perception that the LO is nearly flawless (good qualities are magnified; bad qualities strongly minimized)
- sexual desire for the LO

Because we work with many couples each year in which one spouse is in limerence with a paramour, we understand a great deal about it, as well as how to help people move beyond it.

Limerence usually exists between two people. If only one person feels it and the other person does not, limerence eventually extinguishes itself because of the lack of response from the other.

## Limerence Affairs

Our work with marriages affected by limerent affairs has given us insight into the ways that limerence affects people. Typically, one person enters limerence faster than the other. That “faster” person usually pulls the “slower” deeper into limerence. Our experience indicates that the one who enters limerence more slowly often tries to end the illicit relationship a few times, but the one who has gone in deeper and faster pulls the hesitant person back into the relationship. They do things such as feigning illness, pointing out what they’ve given up for their lover, becoming visibly distraught, or in some cases threatening to destroy the lover’s marriage or life.

Interestingly, the one who enters limerence faster is usually the one who comes out of limerence first. For example, if the woman went in faster, she probably will be the one who ends the relationship at some point. If she does, typically just as she pulled the man back in at the beginning if he tried to stop, he'll likely try to pull her back when she tries to end the relationship, doing all the things mentioned above on even a stronger scale. Occasionally, they resort to violence or, in extraordinary cases, murder to prevent the LO from leaving the relationship.

Nearly all limerent relationships end within 36 months; some much quicker. I've witnessed them last only a few weeks. The range tends to be between 3 months and 36 months. It has to end as a biological necessity. If people who entered limerence remained in it for years, productivity would grind to a halt and the human race could no longer exist. As noted above, people in the depths of limerence obsessively think about the LO. That obsession strongly hinders a productive life. If limerence lasted forever, people in it would lose jobs, forgo the crops, and civilization would eventually crumble. If you think I exaggerate, ask a person in limerence how much his/her life has been altered by the emotions felt. Being with the LO becomes the goal overriding everything else. No matter how much a person may believe that what s/he feels while in limerence will last a lifetime, that won't happen. It always ends. Always.

When two people have no impediment to being with each other (both are single, for example) the relationship continues after limerence fades if it is replaced by a deeper, different kind of love.

Seldom does that happen when limerence brings together two people who do not have an unimpeded path to each other. When limerence fades people see the flaws in the other. That usually is not a major problem if the relationship hasn't cost either of them anything important, but it's often the death knell to the relationship of people who have given up marriage, children, or anything else that they once considered important so that they could be with the LO.

For example, if a married couple went through limerence during dating (not every couple does), over time that limerence morphed into a different kind of love. It's a deeper love, but it's not an ecstatic love like limerence. As the limerence wore off, their relationship remained stable because of their commitment to each other and the evolution of their lives. However, if a spouse leaves marriage and/or children for another person because of limerence, when that limerence eventually fades, s/he often blames the LO for being the cause of losing those things. Whatever flaws the LO has – we are all flawed – becomes exacerbated in the person's mind. In short, people who violate their beliefs and values by leaving a marriage and/or children for an LO will at some point regret that decision. In most cases they do not have long-term relationship with the LO. It ends. Badly.

Do we ever witness exceptions to that? Yes. But they are rare. Very rare.

### **They Can't See Reality**

Neither a straying spouse nor a paramour in limerence sees the future as it likely will be. They exist in the throes of ecstasy that come with limerence, as well as the pits of fear when anything occurs that has any possibility of preventing them from being together. That fear leads each of them not only to experience exuberance when the LO demonstrates positive emotion, but also worry and despair if they interpret any word or action from the LO as negative. Those of us who have been through limerence testify that it is a strange, overwhelming sensation that vacillates wildly between love and fear, joy and misery. That's why logic doesn't work with people in limerence. It's such a powerful emotion that it denies the logic that confronts it.

We often hear, “Oh, but we’re different. No one has ever felt this way. This will last forever.” Everyone in limerence thinks that. I did years ago. I learned the hard way that it ends. Badly. Since then I’ve worked with hundreds and hundreds who have learned the same lesson the hard way. The love that would never end did. Badly.

That is one reason we work so hard to get people into our workshops. Limerence won’t be remedied by logic. There are ways to reach people in limerence but it is much more likely to occur in the particular setting we create than in counseling or most marriage seminars. Please don’t hear that as a critique of counselors or others trying to help marriages. Thank God for all who work to help marriages. It’s that for some reason God gave me an understanding of this (actually, in many ways He let Satan train me through my own sinfulness, then taught me from that experience). We don’t have 100% success (however, 3 out of 4 is pretty good, don’t you think?), but when it comes to helping people get past limerence, the team God blessed me to work with is the best there is. Nearly everyone on my team has been through or affected by limerence doing terrible things to their marriages. While I’m glad that most people in other ministries/counselors/etc haven’t had to live through our histories, I thank God that He uses our pasts to so effectively help others.

If you are in limerence, call us. We can help. 615-472-1161 or email [Johnny.Cardwell@MarriageHelper.com](mailto:Johnny.Cardwell@MarriageHelper.com).

If your spouse is in limerence, call us. Again, we can help. 615-472-1161 or email [Johnny.Cardwell@MarriageHelper.com](mailto:Johnny.Cardwell@MarriageHelper.com).