



The Ashley Madison Hack Shows We're Too Dumb to Cheat



Jennifer Weiner AUG. 20, 2015



America. We used to bestride the world like a colossus, a leader among nations, smarter, faster, braver, more forward-thinking than our rivals. Once, we were great, inventive and nimble, always pressing fearlessly ahead in the name of progress. Eradicating polio, inventing the airplane, the chicken nugget, the music video. Going to the moon.

But now? We're a nation of losers, mouth-breathing, couch-potato, hands-down-our-pants dolts. We're an embarrassment, and in the wake of Tuesday's revelation, we should all be sent to our rooms with no electronics.

I speak, of course, of the Ashley Madison scandal, a hack that revealed the names of a jaw-dropping, knee-weakening 32 million would-be philanderers, many of whom were stupid enough to use work emails for the purposes of philandering. (The site, brought to us by some clever Canadians, allows married people to find dates who know from the beginning that nothing serious is intended.)

The revelations have the nation in a lather, and not the sexy, let's-do-it-in-the-shower kind. (If you want a laugh, Google "Ashley Madison hack." Note that the news stories about the hack itself are followed by links for "how to check if you were exposed.")

The hackers who released the names said they did it, in part, to highlight the site's failure to keep its promise of privacy. But what it's really revealed isn't Ashley Madison's shortcomings so much as those of our friends, our neighbors and our government officials — who, unlike our friends and neighbors, are paid by you and me. How, I ask you, can a country be great when its government workers aren't smart enough to scurry over to the anonymous embrace of Hotmail and Yahoo when they want to cheat?

America's on the downward slope. I've suspected this for a while, and it wasn't just the professional football players who blew off their own fingers with fireworks, or the looming spectacle of Donald J. Trump, Legitimate Presidential Contender, or the approval of a lady libido enhancing drug with the unpronounceable name Addyi instead of the infinitely better She-Zam!

For the last week I've been on a book tour, which, admittedly, can leave you with a dim view of your fellow man. You're visiting a city per day, exposed to humanity at its most raw, undefended, and coughing-without-covering-its-mouth: people in airports, people in taxi lines and train stations, people in transit, people with their masks off, their guard down, and their manners and good sense evidently checked for the duration of their trip.

I have seen the best minds of my generation fumble with their belts in security lines and forget to take their bottled water out of their purses before sending them through the scanner in spite of T.S.A. employees whose job it is to stand in front of the conveyor belts and drone "No bottled liquids."

I have stared in shock and heartbreak as my sister, who really should have known better, surrendered a small jar of crunchy peanut butter that she'd attempted to carry on to the plane (they did let her keep the Nutella).

I have seen mothers slap children, and watched grown men in Hooters caps and flip-flops curse while attempting to shove overstuffed wheelie bags into inadequate overhead storage bins. I have bitten my tongue as people pushed strollers onto the escalators, right past the NO STROLLER signs that also have drawings of a stroller with a slash through it.

Idiots. Dummies. Dodo birds. Our once-great nation is full of them. On Sunday, I was sitting in the Quiet Car on a train from Boston to New York when a couple came down the aisle, blinking and peering around like owlets who'd been roused from their nests.

They didn't notice that there was, at the entrance to the car, a storage rack for luggage. Each one of them was hauling a gigantic suitcase they were unable to lift, a fact I learned after they announced it, loudly and repeatedly. Nor did they care that, as they stood in the aisle, wondering out loud how they were going to store their bags, they were blocking several dozen travelers behind them.

Once seated, the man peered up at one of a dozen QUIET CAR signs, then leaned toward what appeared to be a long-suffering spouse. "OH," he yelled. "THIS IS THE QUIET CAR. WE'RE IN THE QUIET CAR."

"SHH!" went the quiet car.

The man gave an imperious wave of his hand. "I GUESS WE BETTER NOT TALK. WE'RE IN THE QUIET CAR."

"SHHH!" went the quiet car. At which point, the man's phone rang.

"HELLO, FRED!" he shouted. "I'M ON THE TRAIN! ON THE QUIET CAR!"

The writer Fran Lebowitz once created useful categories for people she believed were committing crimes against the rest of us ("You write poetry and you are not dead").

After that train ride, I wanted to add a new category — "You are on the Quiet Car and you are not Quiet."

In the wake of Tuesday's revelation that up to 15,000 of Ashley Madison's would-be philanderers might work for the United States government or military, I want to add yet another: "You are a government employee and you were too stupid to create a new email account when you registered on a website for cheaters."

I know, I know, a number of the government accounts are probably fakes. Many nongovernment people also reportedly used their work emails and actual names on the site, including, evidently, a number of folks who toil at the Vatican, where I am pretty sure there are rules against this sort of thing. I'll let the pope handle those sinners. I'll let others debate the morality of infidelity and enjoy the spectacle of profit-mongering divorce lawyers gleefully capitalizing on the debacle.

Right now, I don't care about cheaters in general. I care about the ones whose lifestyles I'm funding. According to The Washington Post, the capital has the [highest rate](#) of membership for the site of any American city. A number of those caught up in the hack work at the Department of Justice and — #irony — the National Security Agency.

Maybe it shouldn't come as a surprise that D.C. is full of cheaters, but why, oh why, did it have to be full of stupid cheaters, cheaters too lazy and incurious to go to [Gmail.com](#) before they cheated? We're talking minimal effort here, people. Five minutes, a couple of security questions, a password that isn't PASSWORD and you're [mywifehasnoidea@comcast.net](#), or [phil@wehaveanarrangement.com](#), and France isn't laughing at us anymore.

So let's make America great again. Let's not be a nation of Quiet Car flouters, failed peanut butter smugglers and idiot nonmonogamists.

If you're going to cheat, cheat smart.