

Interesting article on wives having affairs and the repercussions on the marriage as well as the underlying causes. Might make a good read. FYI

Helping Hearts Heal

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Cheating Wives: Women and Infidelity

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WebMD Feature

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The affair: Maybe you've considered it. Maybe you're in it. Today's women are acting on the urge, more than ever before, a new survey reveals.

One in five married women has had a fling -- the highest numbers ever recorded, according to one group of researchers. In fact, the numbers of cheating wives now equals the statistics on cheating husbands, according to a study by Tom W. Smith with the National Opinion Research Center.

In these Sex and the City days, that's hardly startling. "Society has given women permission to be sexually active, and it's perfectly clear why women do it ... it's for the same reasons men do. They're not getting what they want out of their marriage," says David Kaplan, PhD, a marriage counselor with 15 years under his belt, and now a spokesperson for the American Counseling Association.

The workplace, working out, the Internet -- women have more sexual opportunities than ever before. With better salaries and no children, the stakes seem low if they are caught.

Readers Tell Their Stories

For more insights, we asked WebMD readers about their indiscretions. Here's what some shared:

"My ex-wife cheated and left me for her boss," writes one male. "I took part of the blame myself. To be fair, I didn't pay her enough attention or affection. Though I didn't know why at the time, I was very closed off and introverted. I don't think I knew how to be in a good relationship."

A woman writes: "Yes, I have cheated. I am not proud of it, but I got married young and hubby wasn't paying any attention to me. I worked 12-hour days to come home every night to be by myself. The morning came when he went to work and I left for three days. Can't say I had a miserable time but now that I have kids, I wouldn't do it again. We went to counseling and now are happy with two kids."

Another woman shares her story: "I have been the "other woman" for a married man. We used to meet almost every day while she was at work and we would just walk around the park where no one would know. One day ... he told me he had fallen in love with me. ... It remained sexual for about four months. I finally ended the relationship. I felt guilty lying to his wife ... and I wanted a real relationship."

What Married Women Want

For some cheating wives, the affair is truly all about sex, says Nadine Kaslow, PhD, a family counselor and psychologist at Emory University School of Medicine.

"When they were dating, there was passion, they want that passion back. If they're physically attracted to someone else, they may act on it," she tells WebMD.

Not that every woman is unfaithful, says Kaslow. "Certainly many women have affairs. But many, many don't. When you wait to get married when you're older and more mature, you make a better choice of the appropriate person, and you may be more engaged in the relationship."

Also, not all affairs are flings, she points out. "Sometimes people develop an emotional connection, an emotional affair, rather than something sexual."

For most women, an inattentive husband is indeed the biggest problem. His "affair" with his work or some other passion like sports may turn her into a cheating wife. "She doesn't feel valued, respected, she's not treated nicely, she feels taken for granted. If she finds someone who helps them feel good about themselves, who does those small things, says the right things, it's very seductive, very appealing," Kaslow explains.

A married couple's views of their roles may clash: He wants a "traditional" she-cooks-dinner marriage. She prefers the gym after a stressful workday -- not the kitchen. Both styles of marriage can work. "What makes the difference is whether they're in sync or not. When that's not resolved, it's likely someone will be frustrated," says Kaplan.

Their emotional relationship can also be problematic. If they're joined-at-the-hip constantly, they may be smothering each other's identity. If they are too "distant" and independent, they will likely seek a bond with someone else, he adds.

In fact, all couples have problems, Kaplan says. But couples who have warm, supportive feelings for each other -- and express those feelings -- will stay married.

One large study looked at this issue. "Researchers thought they would find those who wanted divorce had more problems," he says. "But that was not true. All the couples had problems. The difference was the number of positive statements they made about each other."

The happy couples said many more positive statements than negative ones to each other, says Kaplan. "Unhappy couples say more negative statements than positive. There's a very specific ratio -- three positive things for one negative."

Can This Marriage Be Saved?

If your marriage is getting dusty and rusty -- if another guy has caught your eye -- think twice, three times, then think again before you act on it, advises Kaplan. "You need a marriage counselor, not an affair," he says.

Your "need" for an affair has nothing to do with that new guy, he says. "And it's not about sex, even though it may seem that it is. That person represents the needs that you want fulfilled. This is about problems in your marriage, what you're not getting from your marriage."

"Having an affair always has a negative affect on a marriage," says Kaslow. "It erodes trust, people feel betrayed. But it doesn't always mean they have to end the relationship. I have seen affairs become a painful wake-up call. It takes a long time to rebuild trust. I have seen couples get past affairs, but it's hard."

Of course, when children are involved, the priorities shift dramatically to them. "Those couples have a real responsibility to look at their problems, to look at what they're not getting in the marriage. It's a good time to get a marriage counselor involved," advises Kaplan.

Will your marriage weather an affair? "It makes a difference what kind of relationship you have," says Kaslow. "If the marriage is based on friendship, mutual respect, and caring, it can weather many problems. But after an affair, it's really hard to build that kind of foundation."

It may sound un-sexy, but relationships take work. "If couples don't actively work on their relationship, then they drift apart. One will seek attention elsewhere. It's a human need," Kaslow says.

The essence of "working on a relationship" is to talk more often -- and more honestly, says Kaplan. "Unfortunately, couples often get stuck in a pattern ... a certain problem keeps coming up, and they are unable to solve it. Frustrated enough, they may look for someone they don't have that conflict with." That's where a marriage counselor can help, he adds.

While parents often say the kids don't know about the affair, they will know something's wrong, Kaslow tells WebMD. "There may not be a cold war, but there will be tension."

Their parents' bad relationship teaches kids negative patterns -- even if they don't learn about an affair, she adds. "If there is disrespect or no passion or if parents don't communicate effectively, it increases the chances kids drawn to repeat that pattern. They have fewer strategies in working out problems, in getting their needs met."

If your marital problems have been ignored too long, the worse the prognosis for your marriage, says Kaplan. "We try desperately to get to people before they have an affair. An affair complicates things greatly. Then you're dealing with the lack of trust, the emotional repercussions."

Before you cross the line, realize that cheating wives gain nothing, he tells WebMD. If you're trying to send a wake-up call to your husband, an affair is not the way. "I've worked with innumerable couples, and not a single affair offered anything positive."

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SOURCES: Smith, T., National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, April 2003. David Kaplan, PhD, marriage counselor; spokesman, American Counseling Association. Nadine Kaslow, PhD, family counselor and psychologist, Emory University School of Medicine.

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