

## **Affairs: Why Men and Women Cheat**

By Ann Klein, LCSW-C

Dora said, "I thought we had a good marriage. I don't understand why he had an affair."

Jacky said, "I know we haven't been spending much time together recently because of work and the kids, but I'm shocked that he went outside of the marriage."

While many of us know that difficult marriages can lead to affairs, they happen even in happy marriages. How can this be? After all, most people say they believe in monogamy. An affair occurs when one spouse shifts the intimate emotional energy in the marital relationship to another partner. Intimacy is the emotional bond we share with our mate, a feeling of connection, safety and attachment.

According to Dr. Shirley Glass, a prominent researcher, she says that people who never intended to be unfaithful form deep, passionate relationships before they realize they have crossed the line into romantic love. This has been increasing in the workplace where coworkers are spending more time with each other. Many affairs start when one worker confides in the other about an unhappy relationship and closeness forms or when both are working on a creative project together. She says, secret, emotional attachments outside of the marriage can be just as great a betrayal as extramarital sex. When it is combined with sex, the threat to the marriage is catastrophic.

She goes on to say that men still have sexual affairs, but more are having emotional affairs than ever before; while woman more often have affairs as a result of long-term marital dissatisfaction.

Peggy Vaughn, an expert on affairs, adds the following reasons leading to infidelity: seeking novelty, excitement, curiosity, enhanced self-image, boredom, desire to fill gaps in existing relationship, desire to punish one's partner, glamorizing affairs in the media, and the privacy of the chat rooms.

### **Affairs: What We Know From Research**

- Affairs are becoming more common in the workplace.
- It can take a couple of years to get over-with reminders from time to time, such as, a song on the radio, going over yearly calendar, etc.
- The one betrayed may have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress-feeling the rug has been pulled out from under them, intrusive distressing recollections and dreams, reliving the experience, intense stress, difficulty falling and staying asleep, hyper-vigilance (searching for emails or cell phone bills), becoming obsessive and distrustful, feeling badly about themselves ("I'm not good enough, desirable or attractive").
- Women tend to be more concerned with 'emotional affairs'; while men with 'sexual affairs.' (This may be changing as we get more information.)
- Affairs are usually stuck in the first stage of a relationship which is the Romantic Phase where there are chemical changes in the body to enhance the feelings-it is a fantasy. In a committed relationship, the Romantic Phase can last up to about 3 years.
- 80% of affairs don't work out to successful committed relationships.

- To begin healing from an affair, it needs to end. There can be no contact. If there is contact accidentally, the partner must be told at once or trust will be further eroded.
- One of the key ingredients to help partner to heal from an affair is continued compassion and patience (be willing to answer questions over again). There is a 'lag' time for the partner. They have had the information for a much shorter time than the one who had the affair. They need time to 'catch up.'
- If both partners are committed to get through the affair with treatment, usually their relationship is more satisfying than before the affair.

### **Continued Reading**

It is highly recommended that couples read about affairs and how to heal from them. Some books and website suggestions:

- Emily Brown, *Affairs: A Guide to Working Through the Repercussions of Infidelity*.
- Helen Fisher, *Why We Love, the Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*.
- Shirley Glass, *Not Just Friends*.
- Janis Abrams Spring, *After The Affair*.
- Website of Peggy Vaughn, [DearPeggy.com](http://DearPeggy.com).