

RECENT GLOBAL STATS SHOW MORE WOMEN THAN EVER ARE CHEATING ON THEIR PARTNERS – AND SHOCKINGLY, IT'S NOT ALWAYS EMOTIONALLY MOTIVATED, SOME STRAY SIMPLY FOR PHYSICAL KICKS

THE RISE OF FEMALE CHEATERS

HOLLYWOOD WAS ROCKED WHEN IT EMERGED THAT KRISTEN STEWART WAS CHEATING ON HER LONG-TERM PARTNER ROBERT PATTINSON WITH MARRIED DIRECTOR RUPERT SANDERS.

Two years on, it's believed that Sanders is still struggling to get over the brief relationship, with insiders claiming he still feels a "deep emotional connection" to the *Twilight* actress, while she, conversely, has put the whole uncomfortable mess behind her, calling the fling a "lapse in judgement".

Showbiz cheating scandals are nothing new (hello, Jude Law, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Tiger Woods...) but the incident stood apart for two very notable reasons: One, the cheating star in question was a female, and, two, she was apparently sexually, rather than emotionally, motivated (unlike, it would seem, her heartbroken lover).

While these facts incited a nasty backlash against the 24-year-old starlet (even earning her the nickname Trampire), Kristen is not alone.

Even playing (around) field

The number of women having affairs has shot up by 40 per cent in the past two decades, according to recent statistics from the National Opinion Research

Center's General Social Survey, meaning that almost as many women as men now admit to cheating. In fact, the Kinsey Institute in the US reports that a whopping two thirds of women have thought about hooking up with someone else, while figures from the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* say that 19 per cent of women compared to 23 per cent of men have acted on this impulse.

And the leap from fantasising about that cute co-worker to embarking on a full-blown affair is not as huge as you might think, says Nina Atwood, relationship expert and author of *Temptations of the Single Girl* (Dh39, www.amazon.com) and *Date Like a CEO* (Dh11, www.amazon.com).

80%
BELIEVE THAT HAVING AN EMOTIONAL AFFAIR IS MORE DAMAGING TO A RELATIONSHIP THAN A SEXUAL ONE

70%
OF AQUARIUS READERS POLLED HAVE A FEMALE FRIEND WHO HAS CHEATED ON THEIR PARTNER

"Often it's fantasising about someone in your orbit – the cute guy in the next cubicle at work, an old flame you found on Facebook... A little fantasy is OK, but when you start obsessing about someone, you're heading down the wrong path.

"The general rule of thumb is: if you're doing something that you wouldn't want your spouse to know about, it's outside the marital boundary and therefore wrong."

Researchers at Auburn University at Montgomery in the US believe that women have more opportunities for affairs these days: the explosion of social media and greater female financial independence have given rise to the perfect storm for married women cheaters.

And while the number of women cheating on their partners is rising, it would seem their motivation for doing so is also shifting. Staggeringly, sex is now a bigger motivator than emotions for women, with research from the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* suggesting that women who didn't feel sexually compatible with their partner were three times more likely to have an affair than those who did. Those who were emotionally unsatisfied were deemed to be 2.6 times more likely to cheat.

Sexual healing

While infidelity and sex outside marriage is illegal in the UAE, global surveys show that the number of women who are cheating for sexual rather than emotional reasons is on the up – something that Maureen* 34, can identify with.

She cheated on her husband of six years after becoming dissatisfied with her love life. "When I married David*, there were never exactly explosions in the bedroom," says Maureen. "But I told myself I could live without the fireworks – after all, David was kind, funny, thoughtful and perfect in every other way. So what if our love life wasn't exactly

a thrill-a-minute? I was spending my life with my best friend and that's all I cared about."

But when Maureen met Russ*, through work, all that changed. "Sparks flew immediately," she says. "We flirted for months before starting an affair on a business trip. We could barely keep our hands off each other. It was so different than anything I'd had with David. It was extremely passionate, fiery and electrifying. Just looking at him turned me on. I felt like a light had been turned on inside me."

Inevitably, a few months on, the relationship burnt out almost as quickly as it had started, and, wracked by guilt, Maureen confessed all to David. To her shock and relief, he forgave her, and the couple are now in counselling trying to rebuild their relationship.

While David's magnanimous act may seem unusual, cheating is not necessarily the relationship deal-breaker it once was, and it is now fairly commonplace for a relationship to survive an affair. In fact, according to Lisa Penn, from www.cheatingstatistics.com, as many as 78 per cent of couples attempt to rebuild their relationship after an affair.

"The damage that happens to the relationship »

“A relationship may be headed towards infidelity when a couple stops maintaining the relationship”

after infidelity is that trust is completely broken,” says Laurel Wiers, a therapist who specialises in infidelity (www.therapydiva.com). “Whether or not that relationship can regain trust is different for each couple.

“How quickly the relationship can be restored often depends on how willing the cheated person is to rebuild the trust.

“The majority of relationships do survive infidelity, and are better in the end, so it is not necessarily a death sentence for the relationship.”

Desperate housewives?

So are we becoming more blasé about extramarital affairs? Social trends would certainly suggest so – after all, there are even dedicated cheating websites that offer dating services for married people.

“With the advent of websites like Ashley Madison, it seems like having an affair is more acceptable,” says Laurel. “It’s not that we’ve become more tolerant, it’s just that it’s now out in the open. Something that used to be a shameful subject has now become something that’s actually monetised.”

But just because affairs are coming out of hiding doesn’t mean that we’re OK with it. A recent survey by CNN found that 90 per cent of people still disapprove of having an affair.

“More women are cheating than ever, which

may make it seem like it’s more acceptable,” says Laurel. “It’s not that it’s become more acceptable to have affairs, it’s just that more people are doing it.”

It’s not always about sex, either. Tellingly, user data from Ashley Madison reports that record numbers of married women take to the site the week after Mother’s Day – when they feel most unappreciated and taken for granted at home.

“A relationship may be headed towards infidelity when a couple stops maintaining it,” says Laurel. “Maintaining a relationship means that the couple is spending time with each other; going on dates; communicating with each other in a positive way; having sex with each other; agreeing upon what a healthy sex life looks like; understanding each other’s expectations for the relationship... These are just a few of the things that may have an impact on whether or not the relationship will experience infidelity.”

Men behaving badly

You might also ask yourself who these women are having affairs with. After all, mistresses have always had to lurk in the shadows for fear of being met with scorn. However, it seems there are plenty of single men looking for a no-strings fling with an unsatisfied married woman, and they see no shame in it. James* 29, recently began an

affair with a married woman he met online.

“I’d had a few long-term girlfriends in the past, but we always seemed to break up for the same reason: she gets demanding on my time and I want my freedom back. When I met Lydia*, 34, a married mother of two, through an online chat room, I knew it would be different,” says James.

“Between her family life and work, she only has time to see me for a few hours a week. She has no expectations from me and makes no demands. We both know what it is: no-strings fun and an escape from our ordinary lives for a few stolen hours each week.

“I know there is no future in it and we’ll probably break up when I settle down and find a serious girlfriend, or the guilt about her husband finally gets to her, but we’re both having fun while it lasts.”

It’s about to get emotional

So far, so simple, right? But things can get seriously tricky when one or both parties become emotionally, as well as physically, invested in an affair, warns Nina.

“Often affairs happen in order to tolerate and stay in a bad marriage, not in an effort to leave the marriage with a new person,” says Nina. “But since sex leads to bonding and intimacy, relationships do get created out of affairs. That leads to a break-up of the marriage and sometimes a remarriage to the new person.”

Take singer and actress, LeAnn Rimes, who started an affair with her then-married co-star, Eddie Cibrian, while she was still married to her

first husband, Dean Sheremet. When news of the affair broke, two marriages imploded.

“I did one of the most selfish things that I possibly could do, in hurting someone else,” said LeAnne, who is now married to Cibrian. “I take responsibility for everything I’ve done. I hate that people got hurt. But I don’t regret the outcome.”

Though both Rimes and Cibrian were married when their relationship began, it’s worth noting that she has carried the burden of blame, with the singer consistently blasted as a home wrecker. “It is still seen as more acceptable for a man to have an affair,” says Laurel.

“In general, men encourage other men to have affairs. This differs from how women approach and respond to cheating. In my experience as a therapist, overall, men are not shunned as much as women for having affairs.”

Regardless of whether you are the cheater or the one being cheated on, the bottom line is, it’s impossible not to get caught in the crossfire where infidelity is concerned.

“On a personal level, people are still very hurt by affairs, and the person having the affair can also become very confused and upset by the situation,” warns life coach Cate MacKenzie (www.catemackenzie.com). But she adds, it is possible for a stronger relationship to emerge from the ashes of an affair.

“If a couple is willing to work and become honest, then the result of an affair could be a renewal of the relationship. It could be that the couple was stuck in a way that was not working for them and were not spending any meaningful time together and the space opened up for another to come in. I have seen relationships bloom into much deeper experiences once they can deal with why the affair came about and what they need to do as a couple to come to a sense of radical commitment.” **AQ**

52%
OF AQUARIUS READERS
POLLED WOULD
ATTEMPT TO REBUILD
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FOLLOWING AN AFFAIR

90%
BELIEVE THAT WOMEN
WHO HAVE AFFAIRS
ARE MORE LIKELY TO
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MEN WHO HAVE
AFFAIRS

Have Your Say

We asked *Aquarius* readers to tell us what they think about infidelity

“It affects my opinion of a person”

Catherine, Dubai
“I pride myself on not being judgmental, but if I hear that someone (man or woman) has had an affair, it changes my opinion of them, for the worse.”

“Women get a bad rap”

Claire, Dubai
“My husband and I were both involved with other people when we met and fell in love. When he tells people about how we met he gets a pat on the back, whereas I get raised eyebrows.”

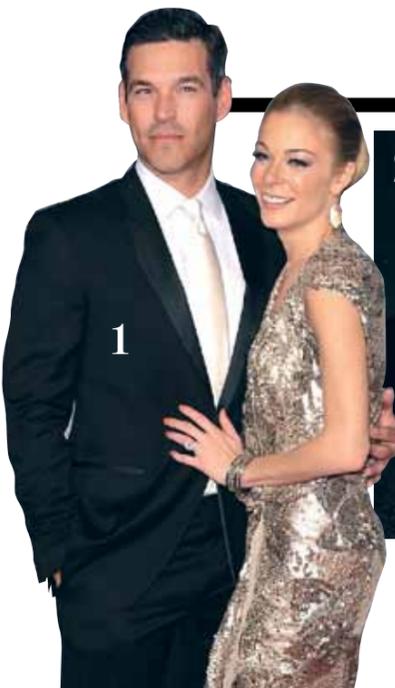
“Affairs destroy trust”

Amina, Sharjah
“Once someone has had an affair it’s impossible to get back the intimacy you once shared. People say relationships can be repaired but I don’t think that’s true.”

“I forgave my husband”

Jacqueline*, Dubai
“My husband cheated on me while he was away on a business trip. He was wracked with guilt so confessed everything. I was devastated but we decided to work through it as I understood it was just a fling, rather than an ongoing affair. Six years on, we are stronger than ever.”

THE OTHER MEN



1 LEANN RIMES AND EDDIE CIBRIAN got together while shooting TV movie, *Northern Lights*. Eddie left his wife, Brandi Glanville, while LeAnn split from husband Dean Sheremet.

2 TORI SPELLING AND DEAN MCDERMOTT married following their affair. She has since said she doesn’t regret it and would do it all over again. Unfortunately Dean beat her to it as he was caught cheating late last year.

3 KRISTEN STEWART AND RUPERT SANDERS had a fling during the making of *Snow White and the Huntsman*. It didn’t go anywhere, but cost him his marriage and ended her relationship with Robert Pattinson.

TEXT BY AODIFE STUART-MADGE. PHOTOS BY GETTY/SHUTTERSTOCK. *NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED