

The Essence of Infidelity

by: Susan Sheppard Infidelity affects 8 out of 10 marriages in this country. This is a shocking statistic! What happens between the time the marriage vows are spoken and that first episode of cheating? It's an assumption, of course, but I don't think that 80% of the people who get married intend to cheat or be part of a love triangle. I decided to tackle unearthing the real truth about how and why this happens. On one very popular web site there were 260 posts from both sexes commenting about forgiving and forgetting infidelities. I read every one of them. With one exception, the perception conveyed was that one party was an innocent victim of the other's philandering. It seemed to me that everyone was looking at adultery as a cause of marital discord. From my perspective, there are only rare exceptions to the fact that adultery, cheating, or affairs are SYMPTOMS of long standing marital problems. The cause occurred possibly even before the marriage vows were uttered. Let's go back to the beginning of a relationship. What really happens before two people decide to get married? They have been dating and checking each other out. You all know that women do the choosing. Men respond to a woman's signals and a relationship moves forward at a pace governed by the woman's appetite. So how does a couple who is totally in love and committed to each other end up in the predicament dictated by an affair? I think the predicament results from the general consensus of opinions and expectations generated by a marriage. In all of the posts that I read it seemed that "being married" automatically presupposed that fidelity is the most precious aspect of the marriage. It appears that everything that could go wrong would be tolerated, everything except infidelity. I do not support tolerating infidelity. What I'm wondering is what are the reasons that people actually get married? Do they get married because they are in love? Want to have sex? Want exclusivity? Want emotional, financial, sexual security? Want to have children? It seems like the thing to do? Or do they get married because they have found someone with whom they are career compatible, financially balanced, sexually attracted, intellectually well-matched, culturally congenial, religiously aligned, madly in love, with whom they want to procreate and raise children according to mutually agreeable standards? Do all people get married for the same reasons? I don't think so. I believe that some people get married for love, some for lust, some for status, some for money, some for security, some for convenience, some to have children, some looking for parental guidance, some for business reasons etc. etc. And if that is true, why is it that everyone who gets married expects adherence to the same standards as far as fidelity is concerned? The expectation seems to be that everyone gets married for passionate, romantic love and fidelity is the highest value of marriage. I don't presume to have all the answers, but possibly some suggestions as to the seeds of infidelity. Let's start with a couple who declare that they are in love and want to commit to each other. They are starry eyed and the state of "in love" creates a certain blindness and denial especially when this person seems to be almost perfectly aligned with the important values you have designated to be essential in the person you are going to marry. So this person lies to you about something or breaks a promise to you, or does something that totally violates your ethics, but you love him/her and he/she is so perfect otherwise. It's just a small thing and you can certainly tolerate a little thing like that. After all, you are getting married and that means you can work it out. Love conquers all. Here is the problem. Love doesn't solve anything. People come to agreement or negotiate boundaries and decide to be together because they want to be together. They choose marriage. I think the rules of marriage and the boundaries that each couple wants to live by must be negotiated. Obviously each and every scenario cannot be discussed ahead of time, but the individual standards of each partner in each marriage must be decided prior to the vows. When a woman/man settles (that includes compromises, tolerates, sells out) on a value that is significant to her/him, the bond is compromised. It makes it okay to do it again, whatever "it" is. According to the Man/Woman Strategy that I subscribe to, women have the power in relationship and their job is to provide appetite, which challenges the man who loves her to produce results. The man who wants to please his woman will produce those results as long as she believes in him and respects him as the producer. The other component in this neat little package is the sex. Men will do anything for sex. Women love sex as much as men do; it's just not socially acceptable for them to say so. Men get their pleasure from a woman's pleasure and "most women lie to men about their satisfaction" which leads to the giant gap in the presumption that marriage presumes passionate, romantic love and fidelity are the highest values. Women on the whole are not able to maintain the level of energy and self esteem necessary to always validate for a man what sexually satisfies her. Thus the communication regarding sex gets distorted. Men, unless someone instructs them, can not be expected to know what areas of a woman's body are responsive to erotic touch. It's different for every woman (man too). So here's what happens. Women get pregnant. Pregnancy creates enormous changes in a woman's body and physiology, which at times do not make sex appealing. Women become mothers. Parenting, especially mothering is a 24-hour job, which includes massive sleep deprivation, and instincts, which consume even the most, prepared. Generally, both men and women have jobs, which consume time and energy. Women also feel responsible for the upkeep of the home. Not that men do not, but somehow for a woman five million years of homemaking has become instinctual. So what does this entire story mean? It means life gets in the way of relationship and unless some time and energy is devoted to the relationship as an entity, that state of "in love" that everyone marries into will disintegrate. There are exceptions, but generally speaking most people do not intend to cheat on their spouse after the wedding nor do they intentionally pursue an affair. So here is how an affair begins. One or the other partner is not getting his/her needs met for whatever reasons. That person encounters someone at work, or at a party, or in the neighborhood, who notices him/her and sees something that attracts. There is nothing like a flirtation to restore a sense of self-esteem. Initially, the married person resists but enjoys the attention. That person then goes home to his/her spouse and hints that he/she needs more attention. The spouse at home who assumes that because they are married, everything is great and there is always time for taking care of the spouse later, ignores the hint That, my friends, is the beginning of the affair. When one partner seeks emotional or physical or intellectual support from someone of the opposite sex outside of the marriage, the seeds have been sown. The marriage is taken for granted. The almighty wedding ring is supposed to be able to bind people to their vows automatically. This is the false presumption that leads us to the incorrigible statistic that 80% of marriages are affected by infidelity. Marriage doesn't work by itself. It takes two people who pay attention to each other's needs. It takes two people who believe in each other

and validate each other. It takes two people who want to love each other and who continually approve of each other which allows the vulnerability necessary to be honest about their personal needs. What should be done about reversing this destructive trend? Marriage encounters? Premarital counseling? Relationship coaching? Pre-marital coaching would be best. Determine if the person you are marrying meets your standards and that you are not just settling because he/she is almost what you want and you might not find anyone better. Second best would be to stop an affair before it happens. This could be accomplished by paying attention to your relationship and not taking anything for granted. Decreasing the number of affairs would probably make a difference in the divorce rate. Preventative would seem to be preferable, but some people need to get hit by a board before they wake up and realize they are in jeopardy. Ideas are welcome. What do you think are the cause and effect of infidelity?

About the Author

Susan Sheppard is the founder of Getting What You Want, a life and relationship coaching organization created for the purpose of promoting sacred intimacy in all personal relationships : romantic, parental, sibling, friendship and business. She is the author of the book "How to Get What You Want From Your Man Anytime", a relationship book that tells everyone in romantic relationships how to be content and have more fun, more sex and less bickering. Susan is a speaker, writer, trainer and coach who is passionate about sacred intimacy and her crusade against indifferent relationships. With an intense, straight-talking, compassionate manner, she targets the core issues and quickly moves you in the direction of getting what you want. She enrolls you in her passionate movement towards meaningful love. I help people seeking sacred intimacy in a hot relationship, get what they want from each other so that they can experience more fun, more sex and less bickering. Contact Susan for a free consultation

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