

people



SECRETS & Wives

What happens when infidelity isn't only in the tabloids, but in our own homes?

By Danielle Wallace

The world is no stranger to infidelity, mostly due to its undeniable habit of following celebrities and politicians as they move from relationship to relationship. This past year alone, the country learned the sordid details of the “transgressions” of golf superstar and married father of two Tiger Woods, whose wife, Elin, is standing by him as he seeks treatment for sex addiction. We saw Mark Stanford, the governor of South Carolina, disappear to Argentina with another woman. His wife, Jenny, ultimately filed for divorce and moved out with their four sons. Then there was John Edwards, David Letterman, Jon Gosselin, Jude Law, Eliot Spitzer. The nightly news is rarely without extramarital scandal.

But what happens when we turn the finger away from Hollywood and Washington and point it toward the suburbs that we live in? After all, if 50 percent of marriages fail, and celebrities make up less than 2 percent of the population, then one can assume the cheating epidemic is much closer to home than most of us would care to admit.

Divorce lawyer of 30 years Kate Vetrano, of Vetrano & Vetrano in King of Prussia, says that unfaithfulness cuts across spectrums of race, income and family situation, stating that “no one seems to be exempt.”

However, she believes that in most divorce cases, infidelity is merely a symptom of a marriage that has already broken down.

“Happy people don’t cheat,” she says.

Vetrano also noted that 100 percent of the blame does not always belong to the cheater.

“Many husbands and wives who have been deceived are unwilling to examine what part they may have played,” she says. “Spouses should be willing to ask themselves why their partner might have wanted to stray. If someone can admit that they might have been un-supportive, unloving or withholding sex, that could go a long way in working through issues to prevent divorce.”

Jennifer*, a 32-year-old Doylestown mother of three and married for nine years to her college sweetheart, reflects on her decision to work on her marriage following her husband’s admission of a four-month affair.

“I know they say you shouldn’t stay in it for the kids, but I have seen what divorce can do to young children,” she says, “and I want to avoid it at all costs.”

Before moving forward, Jennifer made some demands: counseling sessions twice a week, access to his e-mail and Facebook accounts, and cutting down on the number of his business trips per year. But even with those requirements met, she says it is still a daily struggle.

“My biggest obstacle was that he had real feelings for her,” she says. “I think it would have been easier had it been just a fling.”

Not so, according to Stanley*, 43, a small-business owner from

Perkasie, whose wife of 18 years recently admitted to a one-time indiscretion with a coworker.

"I could never trust her again, plain and simple," he says.

Deborah McKnight, PhD, a psychologist at CM Counsel in Exton and Plymouth Meeting, acknowledges that a loss of trust can be the most devastating to a marriage.

"Most people share that reaction initially—if you make a commitment to be monogamous and infidelity occurs, then trust is broken," she says. However, she also feels that there is no hard and fast rule for determining whether a couple can survive a marital misstep. In this case, Stanley's wife says his depression about work and finances caused her to look for a distraction in someone more upbeat. The couple, who have no children, are getting divorced.

Office trysts aren't the only form of cheating prevalent in the suburbs—and it's all thanks to technology. The ease with which we can privately contact someone has made it more common—and more convenient—for a woman to slyly reach out to an old flame via MySpace, or for a man to send a flirty text to another woman.

McKnight says she has noticed a rise in couples who seek out her services, not necessarily for physical cheating, but rather emotional deceit initiated or facilitated by the Internet.

"Social networking sites, secret e-mail accounts and instant messaging are all ways for people to flirt with the boundaries of commitment," McKnight says. "They aren't sleeping with someone else, so they don't see how wrong and hurtful it really is."

Even without the tabloid headlines and press conferences, infidelity is the greatest test of a marriage or committed relationship. Whether the couple chooses to stay together and work on the relationship or to go their separate ways, it's a difficult decision and harsh reality regardless if someone is world famous or lives on a quiet street in your town.

**Names have been changed.* ▼

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