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## Why men can never forgive a wife's affair... even though they'd expect YOU to forgive them

By [Keren Smedley](#)

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Ruth Johnson wonders if she could have put a stop to the chain of events that led her into the arms of another man. Hindsight, of course, is a wonderful thing.

She can now see the errors she made: how having been married for 21 years to the same man, with four children born in quick succession, left little time for romance or intimacy, and how she took so much for granted.

At the time, she wasn't so wise. The 54-year-old further education lecturer from Northampton found herself pouring her heart out to a man she met at a Parent-Teacher Association meeting.



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**Men find it incredibly difficult to forgive and forget if their wife has cheated on them**

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They started meeting for drinks in the pub. One thing led to another.

Before Ruth knew it, the relationship had become sexual and for eight years the married lovers conducted their illicit affair in secret, hiding it from their respective partners.

'The intensity of feeling between us took me by surprise,' she says. But when Nick moved away to Scotland to start a new job, the affair ended. Ruth found it impossible to hide her grief.

When she confessed to her husband, the explosion of his grief and anger was worse than she had imagined.

'He let rip, screamed at me, threw things around the room and sobbed his heart out,' she says. 'He said he wanted me out of the house and said that he couldn't forgive me.'

It is, undoubtedly, a sorry tale, but Ruth's story is far from unique. While infidelity has traditionally been regarded as a masculine trait, statistics suggest an increasing number of women are cheating on their husbands.

Increasing financial equality, more opportunities presented by women working long hours outside the home and even Britain's burgeoning 'ladette culture' are all considered to be factors in this new phenomenon.

And as an accredited coach and counsellor specialising in women over 50, I have noticed the increasing frequency of female infidelity.

It seems to me that while once women would have felt obliged to stick at an ailing marriage, these days they don't feel so compelled to stay.



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#### Maintaining a happy relationship following an affair can be difficult

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And when their children have fled the nest and they're left with an unhappy marriage, a lover can feel like a means of escapism.

But if women are catching up with their cheating husbands when it comes to having an affair, one thing hasn't changed.

While in the past some wives have been prepared to forgive their straying husbands, experts say that men are far less likely to do the same.

Feminism may have given women the inclination - and the power - to be as unfaithful as their husbands, but male attitudes to their wives haven't yet caught up.

'Men can forgive themselves for their indiscretions, but find it much harder to forgive their partners for the same,' says therapist Phillip Hodson, Fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

'For a betrayed woman, an affair is an offence against her dignity. For a betrayed man, it's an offence against his manhood. It goes right to the core of his identity.'

### **'Men can forgive themselves for their indiscretions, but find it much harder to forgive their partners for the same.'**

This was the experience of designer Chris Davies, 47, who divorced his wife, Lucy, after she started a relationship with his best friend.

'Crushed' and 'powerless' are the words he uses to describe his feelings after discovering his wife of 11 years had betrayed him.

'Lucy and I were going through a difficult time,' he says. 'We had three children under ten and Lucy's father had recently died. Although things were not great, I expected the relationship to swing round.'

When Lucy said she wanted to return to work, his friend Ian, the managing director of a marketing agency, offered her a position as his part-time secretary.

Chris happily went along with it, even caring for the children when his wife went away on business trips with his friend.

'I suppose the relationship took off during one of those trips,' he says. When his friend confronted him with the truth, he was stunned. 'I met Ian for a drink shortly after one of these trips,' he says.

'He told me he'd been sleeping with my wife and they were going to set up home together. I ran out of the pub and sat in the car crying. It felt like a double betrayal: my best friend sleeping with my wife.

'I wanted to hit him, but I knew an angry scene would only leave me feeling worse. I wanted to act as a gentleman and not as a hard man.'



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**For men, the sexual component of their wife's affair is very important - they are more concerned about the sexual aspect than if their wife loved the man she slept with**

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Chris didn't return home for three days. He says: 'Finally, when I had the strength to return, Ian answered the door of my home. I was devastated.

'While I'd been away, I'd thought a lot about whether I could forgive Lucy, but it was too dreadful when I saw him in my house. I went to stay with friends.'

In the end, he found it impossible to forgive Lucy. And in addition to losing his wife and family, her unfaithfulness impacted on his feelings of masculinity and self-worth.

He says: 'It took me five years before I started dating again. I'm now in a good second marriage. Sadly, Lucy and I still don't speak.'

According to Paula Hall, a relationship counsellor with Relate, husbands find it much harder to forgive infidelity than their wives do.

'There is definitely more evidence that men are more likely to see their partner having an affair as signalling the end of a relationship,' she says.

She adds: 'For men, the sexual component of their wife's affair is very important. Women are much more likely to ask: "Did you love her?"'

'The feelings and the emotional connection are more likely to be seen as a threat to a woman. Men are more concerned about the sexual aspect.'

This is also backed up by Government statistics.

The 2000 review of the Registrar General on Marriages, Divorces and Adoptions in England and Wales, reveals that 29 pc of men are likely to present 'adultery' as a cause of the irretrievable break down of marriage, compared with 21 pc of women.

As men are more likely to be unfaithful in the first place, this suggests that men are less able to forgive an affair and more likely to see it as the end of their marriage.

UK statistics show that almost a third of divorces cite infidelity as the cause of the breakdown of the relationship.

And a 2006 BBC survey showed that one in seven people had been unfaithful to their partner.

Traditionally, men are viewed as the most unfaithful sex. But there is evidence that female affairs are on the increase.

According to the 2001 Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyle survey, while 14.6 pc of men were unfaithful, women were not far behind - with almost one in ten women admitting they had cheated.

'I don't think women's reasons for having affairs is that different from men's,' says Paula Hall. 'They're looking for attention and affection and that's going to include sex.'

Sheila Williams understands this only too well. The 44-year-old advertising executive cheated on her 48-year-old accountant husband Charles when she returned to work after their third child started school.

## Who knew?

### According to a recent survey, one in ten Brits would cheat on their partner if they thought they could get away with it

Married life, she says, was about juggling the different demands of family members. Weekends were spent ferrying children to activities. But at work, Sheila was required to travel for 12 weeks every year.

'The trips were bliss,' she admits. 'I had stimulating company, meals in great restaurants and lovely hotels to relax in. I felt carefree again.'

Soon, however, she wasn't spending all her nights abroad alone. 'I got to know another advertising executive from Canada and one thing led to another.

'I felt I was being noticed again as a woman and, yes, I liked it. I always saw it as very separate, something from a different world.'

Eventually her lover changed jobs, the affair fizzled out and her husband was none the wiser. But then Sheila met James at a New York conference.

'He was charming and witty and I soon realised I was falling in love. I was torn. I wanted him, but I also wanted Charles, the girls and family life.

In the end, the decision was taken out of her hands. One night at 4am, the phone rang in her hotel room. Her lover leaned over and picked it up. It was Charles calling to tell Sheila that her father had suffered a stroke and was close to death.

Compounding her feelings of guilt, Sheila's husband said nothing about the man who had answered the phone - at least not until a month after her father's funeral.

'One evening he asked me the question I'd been dreading. I confessed to both affairs, as I knew if we were going to find a way through, I couldn't have any more secrets. He spent the first few days either shouting at me or crying.'

And yet Charles was determined not to split up his family. They went for marriage counselling. The first decision taken was that Sheila, who split up with James, would no longer go on business trips.

'I gave in my notice there and then. It was an incredibly difficult decision because I loved my work. But I loved my family more.'

My advice is always that better communication is the key to shoring up a marriage.

Today, having cheated on her husband, Ruth lives alone and can only look back on her mistakes. She married Brian, 54,

straight out of college.

But before she had time to question how happy they were, she was focusing her energies on dealing with the stresses that come with raising four children.

Although her husband insisted on a divorce, he agreed to go to mediation with Ruth so that they could agree joint custody of their children.

It was a painful process, filled - on her part, at least - with regrets and 'what-ifs'.

She says: 'I realised it wasn't that Brian had lost interest in me; he just didn't know how to express it. If we'd gone for help at the point I turned to Nick, I think we'd have been all right, but it was too late.'

*Some names have been changed.*

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Leigh.

The important thing is the kids, not your feelings. That is the priority.

Marriage is a not a romantic LOVE thing, it's an institution for raising the next generation, nothing more nor less.

- joanna, Tunbridge Wells England, 17/12/2009 22:29

Joanna, I would hazard a guess that this is a personal issue for you, reading between the lines. You have a point to a degree, however I have known people who are far more damaged because one or both of their parents lied and cheated yet they stayed together for "the children's sake". I think the "institution" bit is right but when children are being taught bitterness, hatred, lies and deception in that "institution" then surely it is time to make a few changes? People need to be very careful what they teach their children about relationships if they don't wish for them to endure empty and loveless relationships themselves in the future.

- Leigh, Birmingham, UK, 18/12/2009 08:48

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My parents are divorced. Both sets of my grandparents are divorced. 5 out of 6 of my closest friends parents are divorced. I am not going to bother with marriage. Whats the point when the vows mean nothing?

- DiscoHouse, Shrewsbury, England., 18/12/2009 01:42

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I find it all rather depressing. There is little loyalty in modern marriage. You can put everything in to a marriage and then your partner can behave like this and destroy everything for you. Is it worth it? They dont even need to have an affair. My wife of 14 years decided she didn't want me anymore and that was it. I was then made redundant and had to find work all over the world and now have little contact with my kids.

- john, Sydney, Australia, 18/12/2009 01:13

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In previous relationships I've been cheated on. I've also been the 'other woman' although both men told me they were single. Once I found out they were already in a relationship I walked away. I've never done the cheating on any partner.

I agree with Steve Jacks, if you find yourself attracted to someone else then either leave your current partner or talk to them and work it out. Communication is the key. We should just be honest with each other. Most of the time it's not the act

but the lie. I've told my other half that he can sleep with whoever he wants. Just don't lie about it and don't expect to still be with me. If he doesn't respect/ love me enough to remain faithful then I don't want to be with him and he can leave.

- Leigh, Hertfordshire, 18/12/2009 00:27

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Carole from Dorset.

You are a disgrace, how do you look your children in the eye, no wonder this country is in the shape it is, if a comment like yours get so many green arrows.

- Sandeep Singh, Mayfair London, 17/12/2009 23:50

Sandeep - I think you have misread Carole's post. She has quoted Hannah from France and added her own reply a the bottom. Unless of course you feel that Carole should be agreeing with Hannah????

- Leigh, Hertfordshire, 18/12/2009 00:16

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- Leigh, Hertfordshire, 18/12/2009 00:11

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