

The myth of the successful couples affair

Your relationship affair may not be all it's cracked up to be.

1. Most sexual affairs become emotional, and most emotional affairs become sexual, but both have a history of poor outcomes. Getting a little bit of feeling good usually leads to wanting more of the same. This slippery slope is tempting and many have found it difficult to negotiate. Relationship affairs - better known as cheating, can be very hard work.
2. When someone leaves their relationship for another person, their chances of having a successful relationship are slim. Only about 30% of second marriages are successful, and when step-children are factored into the odds, they lessen.
3. The smartest use of an affair is to determine which of your needs have not been getting met, but such self-awareness is seldom present. It is not up to any partner to meet your needs, but rather it's your responsibility to use a solid relationship to ask for support to get these met. An affair is usually too emotionally hot for the awareness of such subtle needs to be voiced.
4. Most affairs are an unconscious attempt to get unmet and unseen needs met. Although the affair may get different needs met, it will not meet needs that are unconscious to their owner.
5. An affair is not proof that one's former partner back home was not enough. Rather, it shows the inability of the original couple to know how they could have supported each other to meet needs, wants and desires, and also to meet the needs that the relationship itself required in order to remain healthy.
6. Affairs are not real and fully fledged relationships because of the following, meaning that the enjoyment of something different and the enthusiastic meeting of some needs soon wanes.

Problems soon arise because of the following:

- a. During the honeymoon period, partners are more excited, more tolerant, less discriminating, more engaging, more talkative, better at meeting the other's needs and more sensitive to the other than they will be when this period comes to a close.
- b. After the honeymoon period, participants return to their original behaviours, no matter how determined they are to avoid repeating history. Each brings their problems with them, although these may not show up for a while. As Freud observed, our compulsion to repeat our past is inevitable.
- c. The affair masks stressors of ordinary life such as howling children, unpaid bills, the humdrum of everyday domestic chores and the stresses that get in the way of harmony in the original partnership or marriage. These will soon impact on the affair relationship.
- d. During the affair, the stresses of what a marriage breakup would entail are rarely considered, and easily played down if they are considered. The impacts of separation are difficult to fully imagine.
- e. The consequences of 'divorce' of the existing marriage partner is also rarely fully considered, including the emotional and social impact on children, the compromising of the child-parent relationship, the impact on mutual friendships, the impact and attitude of relatives, the financial cost of splitting assets including chattels, the legal implications of separating, the time and emotional demands of transporting children, the difficulty of bonding with the new partner's children, the difficulty of each set of children getting on together, and the impact on the new relationship when these stressors have to be managed.

While some people do make this transition successfully, it is not for the fainthearted. Careful consideration of the consequences is vital.