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Which kind women do men
cheat with? Is she always younger?
Thinner? More submissive?
SABINA-LEAH FERNANDEZ
gets cheating men – and
mistresses to open up about
The Other Woman.

Party unfaithful

*Affairs are
contagious.
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It's

easy to spot a potential threat to your marriage. Just look out for silver-tongued foreign girls, right? Wrong. Despite the high-profile cases of foreigners duping local men (and their women), the reality is that the other woman is not always what you imagine. Don't assume that the only threats to your marriage are younger, sexier versions of you, or modelesque trollops after his money, because mistresses come in many forms.

Take Michelle*, a 30-year-old events manager.

"I have a career and I am independent. I don't want his money. I don't let him buy me things and I certainly don't want him to leave his wife for me. But this is one of the best relationships I've ever had." Says Michelle. She has been seeing James*, 59, a married man with two grandchildren for six months now.

Shocked? So were we. We spoke to adulterers, mistresses and counsellors to unearth the five things you need to know about The Other Woman.

She's everything you're not

Cheaters tend to look for something they don't already have, ergo, most men describe their mistresses as the exact opposite of their wives. James tells Michelle as much. His wife (who's the same age as him) is world-weary and a little jaded. He says he likes Michelle's youthful spirit and go-getter attitude.

"He thinks I'm energetic and ambitious. She and I don't even look the same. She's spunky and one of the boys, but I'm more feminine," says Michelle.

Experts say that cheaters want variety. To them, having two women who are identical would be tantamount to having two wives – not quite their ideal situation. They also find that difference exhilarating.

Mark*, 35, strayed from his sweet, conservative wife Angel*, for his colleague, Cindy*.

"Cindy was outgoing, and overtly sexy. Very different from Angela," he says. It was thrilling for me to have a relationship with someone so different from what I'm used to."

Psychologist Dr. Kit S. Ng from The Center for Psychology has been helping married couples work through infidelity for over 20 years. He says what he hears most often about the other woman is that she doesn't nag or complain the wife does.

"What these men don't realise, of course, is that when you don't live with someone, you never complain. A mistress doesn't know a man's flaws the way a wife does, so obviously she has nothing to nag about," he says.

She is also willing to do everything in the bedroom that you don't. Marriage therapists have heard many male patients cite a cold partner or chronically boring sex with their wives as an excuse for their philandering ways. But a dead-end sex life is no licence for a man to fool around.

"Looking for sex outside your marriage is a choice you make consciously, no one forces you into it. If there are problems in a marriage, you have to deal with them, not have an affair," says Dr John Van Epp, a relationship guru and author of *How To Avoid Marrying a Jerk*.

She is not just a conquest

In fact, many times, the affair is much more than just physical. While there are serial two-times who have one-night-stands, Dr Ng observes that it's not uncommon for illicit affairs to turn into genuine emotional attachments.

That's exactly what happened to Edward*, a married shipping executive in his 40's. Five years into his marriage, he met Joanna* at a ballroom dance class. His wife doesn't share his love for dance, so he went alone. Joanna's spouse felt the same way. As the only two "singles" in the class, they became dance partners and soon fell in love.

"It's like being in school again. Everything just fits. Her hand in mine, how my arm feels around her waist, all of it. What we have wasn't love at first sight, it developed over time and now she makes me feel alive," Edward says.

So sweet, it almost makes you empathise with him. But what Edward is doing doesn't make the fact that he's married go away.

Dr Van Epp says a cheater escapes from fixing the problems in his marriage by creating another world to live in – a world where he and his mistress are sublimely happy, and nothing else exists.

"People having an affair go into a bubble, and they don't like life outside of that bubble. They become addicted to the love drug, that intense euphoric feeling that everyone has at the beginning of any relationship. It's even more powerful in an affair because there's nothing about a secret liaison that intensifies feelings of arousal and attraction," he explains.

Counsellors also believe that this "but-we're-so-in-love" mindset also helps cheaters justify the infidelity. By convincing themselves that it's a meaningful, whirlwind romance, they feel less guilty about betraying their partner. A flawed logic by any means, but then again adulterers are good at deceiving everyone, including themselves. →

The things cheaters say

...BEFORE THEY GET CAUGHT

"Honey, I'm working late tonight"

Work is the all-encompassing excuse for any perfidious love. If you are suspicious, get a friend to call the office and ask his whereabouts.

"All men cheat, so it's okay"

Unfaithful husbands are rife, and disloyalty is often swept under the carpet and dismissed as "men being men". No matter what anyone says, it's perfectly legitimate for you to expect fidelity in a loving relationship.

"It wasn't me"

Cheaters will do anything to avoid being caught, including denying the affair until their last gasp. Often the betrayal is as much in their deceit as it is in their unfaithfulness.

...AFTER THEY GET CAUGHT

"I didn't plan it. It just happened"

This excuse might apply to a drunken kiss, but not a two-year affair. As Dr Ng says, "Nothing just happens. There is always an unconscious drive or some sort of pre-meditation."

"I can talk to her about anything"

This is the most common phrase Dr Ng hears from his patients. They also say their mistress can speak intelligently about any subject.

"It's like magic"

"All relationships begin with a sense of euphoria and fantasy, a feeling that no one understands his problem like she does and they are crazy about one another," Dr Ng says. "With an illicit affair, the parties have to find a good motivating reason, and 'magic' is as good as any."

She doesn't need his money

While there are women who end up with men so they can drape themselves with diamonds, many extramarital affairs involve women who are very comfortable financially.

Take Michelle and Joanna, for example. Both of them are successful career women making a comfortable living. Michelle, 30, is an events manager and Joanna, 38, works at a well-known multinational corporation.

So what happened to the myth of the money-hungry study mama who wants a sugar daddy to support her son?

"There are certainly infidelities where the motivation isn't financially security, but emotional security. There can be adulterous relationships that are genuinely loving," says Dr Ng, who has counselled hundreds of couples in unhappy marriages.

So how do independent, self-sufficient women turn into man-stealers? The two common reasons are insecurity and growing up in a climate of adultery, according to the counsellors we spoke to. Quite simply, affairs are contagious. Hang around people who think cheating is okay, and eventually you will too. Women who have relationships with married men also tend to have low self-worth. A part of them doesn't think that they deserve to be happy, so they don't set boundaries to protect themselves from getting into destructive relationships.

"A woman who decides that she will never date a man who's attached and is determined not to cross that line will probably never commit adultery. People who have affairs tend to be narcissistic. They only live for the pleasure of the moment and for instant gratification. They rationalise away the consequences and focus on their excitement and satisfaction," Dr Van Epp asserts.

She's not Pamela Anderson

Jack*, 26, a bar manager, had it all going for him. He was doing well in his job, and he had a beautiful intelligent wife, Claire*. Claire's hour-glass figure and exotic features made her one of those women that turned heads wherever she went. But that didn't stop Jack from falling into the arms of his employee, Liz, 20, a simple, T-shirt-and-jeans kind of girl.

Describing Liz only as "cute", Jack explains that it wasn't looks that he eventually left Claire to be by Liz's side.

"I'm sure it would make my ex-wife feel better if Liz was a drop-dead gorgeous model who threw herself at me. But that wasn't it all. I've always been a guy who needs to be needed, and with Liz I still feel that. After a while, Claire didn't need me anymore," he says, echoing the sentiments of many of the men we spoke to.

It boils down to this: Rarely does a man cheat because a woman is heart-stoppingly beautiful. Most times, he cheats because he wants to fill a void in his existing relationship and that void isn't always a physical one.

She works with him

A staggering 80 per cent of extramarital affairs in the United States are between co-workers. Apart from the sheer convenience of having an affair with someone you see every day, the office also becomes an easy cover-up for the romance. Having lunch and working late are par for the course for colleagues so while he's in a workplace rendezvous, a man doesn't need to look far to explain his whereabouts to his wife. When he's not home for dinner, he's working late, and when he goes away from the weekend, he's on a business trip.

It becomes a safe, effortless cover-up for the cheater and when confronted with a suspicious wife, the façade is topped off with: "We're just colleagues, we were working. You're over-reacting." Hurtful words, especially when a woman has no way of knowing the truth.

But before you insist your husband hires a Mrs Doubtfire lookalike to man the reception, consider this: counsellors say that apart from the workplace, other hotbeds of extramarital affairs are sporting groups, book clubs or (as in the case of Joanna and Mark) dance classes. With sports and dance groups, the barrier of personal space is done away with, allowing more opportunities for intimacy. Cheaters are more comfortable working in groups, and any activity that their wife is not involved in is a safe haven where they feel comfortable enough to be unfaithful. **HW**

**Names and situations have been changed*

Is he or isn't he?

If you think your partner is cheating, experts advise that you talk to him openly and honestly. Tell him that he needs to be honest with you and that you will be able to handle the truth. Let him know that you want to hear his side of the story rather than point an accusing finger.

Dr Ng also suggests making sure that you have evidence or a good reason to confront him before you begin. Remember that if the suspicion is unfounded, you may feel very silly, so be as non-judgemental as possible.

If you know for sure that he has been unfaithful, there are only two options: stay with him and forgive him, or leave him and move on. Seeking counselling from a trained professional may help you decide whether you should stay or go.

Ultimately, it's about love, Dr Van Epp says. If the relationship has a good history, you still feel love for him and he's willing to end the affair, then it's possible to make it work. However, if you feel very betrayed and you are not able to forgive, or if your partner continues to defy your trust and breaks his own promises, then you need to think twice.

He says: "Some people cheat because they are lousy characters – cheaters through and through. Others are good people who made bad choices and put themselves on the slippery slope of adultery." Once you figure out which one your man is, the decision – on whether to leave him or not – is an easier one to make.