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## Why Do Women Cheat?

Find out the most common reasons why wives or girlfriends become unfaithful

by **Denise Schipani**

Lisa,\* a mom of three who lives in the Midwest, calls her extramarital affair mostly a matter of closeness, connection and communication. “Ninety-nine percent of it was about talking, and only 1% about sex.” Why did Lisa stray from her marriage? “After three kids, I was feeling unappreciated and unattractive,” she says. “I didn’t feel like a sexual person anymore.” On top of that, Lisa’s spouse wasn’t, in her eyes, fully participating in parenting. “I felt like he was my fourth child, not my husband.” Eventually, Lisa’s husband found out about the affair and the two of them still remain married. But is her reason for cheating the same for most women?

Turns out, there’s no simple answer to the question “Why do women cheat?” But there are generalities. “Lots of women are in relationships with pieces missing: sex, affection, romance, companionship, communication—you name it,” says Mira Kirshenbaum, author of *When Good People Have Affairs*. “At some point, the pain and yearning explode into an affair, if the woman meets a man who can offer her what she’s been missing.” Here, some of the main reasons women step outside their marriages:



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**1. She’s feeling ignored or stonewalled.** “Her husband is emotionally unavailable, dismissive of her needs,” says **Elizabeth Sloan, a couples therapist in McLean, Virginia**. She tries to talk, and he doesn’t want to hear it. “I call it the ‘yadda, yadda’ factor.” She tries for a long time to get through to him, but eventually, she gives up. Until she finds someone else who, like Lisa’s lover, seems to “understand” her.

**2. She’s sexually unfulfilled.** Even if the couple is having sex regularly, she may not feel as though they are making love, says **Sloan**. She may try to tell him what she needs, and is met with resistance (for example, “You’re trying to teach me how to be a man” or “You don’t appreciate me as a lover”). But don’t presume that women don’t sometimes stray from marriage solely for sex. Diana,\* who has cheated on her boyfriend of several years on more than one occasion, admits that she did so out of loneliness. “Given our living situation, there are extended periods of time when I don’t see him,” she says. It was during times like this that Diana had sex with men she’d met while out drinking. “I was looking for comfort,” she says, and calls her affairs purely “physical, not emotional.”

**3. She's angry about unresolved past hurts.** This can take several forms. Sloan describes a common scenario: "Maybe *he* stepped out on her in the past, when they were dating, or after they had a child, and she lost interest in sex for a while." Perhaps they repaired the rift and stayed together, "but if she's never dealt with the anger and hurt, and the opportunity to have an affair presents itself, she may feel justified in doing the same." Some women are suffering in marriages that are sad, loveless, even abusive, as was the case with Gina,\* who is now divorced from the husband she cheated on. "I was unhappy in our marriage. There was physical and mental abuse in small degrees, and at the time, I felt I was cheating out of rebellion. But I also realized that I just didn't like my husband for the majority of our marriage."

**4. She's lost respect for her husband.** This is a tough one, because we all like to believe that we married purely for love, not money or status. But when a man who seemed like a star (not rich, necessarily, but hard-working, ambitious, smart and upwardly mobile) appears, after a while, to give up and hit the couch, he can lose his wife's respect—which leaves her ripe for an affair, says Sloan. "A woman likes to know that her husband shines. She wants to look up to him." You know the end of that story: She meets someone at work who has his act together—and her couch-potato husband suffers by comparison.

*\*Names have been changed to protect privacy*

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