

Why Does Our Society Still Despise Affairs?

Yesterday evening, [we learned](#) that those who hacked the Ashley Madison site [revealed](#) the stolen information online.

For those who don't know, AshleyMadison.com is a website that facilitates affairs. It proudly describes itself as "the most famous name in infidelity and married dating," and encourages would-be users to "have an affair today on Ashley Madison."

Predictably, the release of the stolen information has been met with jeers similar to those you see on cheating reveals on Jerry Springer. Though Ashley Madison has (or had) 37 million members, most Americans still see affairs as taboo, and as a result, believe cheaters should be vilified and punished.

But why? Why are affairs still frowned upon in our society?

Deeming an affair "wrong" seems to depend upon affirming some form of marriage as "right." But the more traditional understanding of marriage no longer possesses the consensus that it once had in modern Western society. Many of its prohibitions have been chipped away over the past century, such as sex before marriage, divorce and remarriage, and that marriage is reserved for a man and a woman.

Many now view these prohibitions as archaisms, and their taboo status has been trumped in favor of protecting freedom and love.

But affairs can be regarded as an act of freedom, and there are many who defend their affairs as choosing love rather than remaining trapped in loveless relationships. So why does society still look negatively on affairs? Why not celebrate them as acts of freedom and love?

It can't simply be because affairs hurt people. After all, there are scores of children and divorcees who have testified about the damaging effects that divorce has had on them. Yet, our society has become very sympathetic to those who feel divorce is necessary.

So if you've rejected the traditional foundations of marriage, why would you still opt to uphold one of its old taboos by condemning those who have affairs? Has this taboo been deemed compatible with our society's new foundations of marriage? If so, where is the description of these new foundations so that people can gain clarity about why despising adultery is one of its tenets?

I'm by no means claiming that we should celebrate affairs. I'm just looking for some intellectual consistency.