

Getting it together

The affair: Old, old story

If you believe that extra-marital affairs are signs of weakened moral discipline, you're quite wrong. But I can understand how you could think that way, because I used to believe the same thing. In fact, I thought that an affair was a victory of passion and emotions over decency.

When I first was exposed to strongly moral, rigidly decent people who were having love affairs, I was sure that I had simply met the exception to the rule.

Now, after working with scores of decent men and women who are in the midst of infidelities, I can see that the paradoxical exception is actually the rule. Almost all affairs, at least those based on love rather than just sexual adventuring, occur in a context of strong moral feelings about marriage. Almost all individuals who have affairs hold severe prohibitions against destroying a marriage.

In contrast to what you would probably expect, extra-marital lovers feel almost intolerable responsibility for their spouse and children. They are inclined to do the decent thing in all of their living even at great personal sacrifice. And their lives are governed rigidly by one dogmatic rule: Thou shalt not hurt people who depend upon you.

HOW CAN SUCH ethical individuals enter into such an unethical activity as infidelity? Because it appears to be the only decent solution to an excruciating dilemma: Staying with an empty marriage because it is the responsible and humane thing to do, even though it means a life sentence of loneliness and emotional starvation.

When you think about it, there's nothing new about this dilemma. It's as ancient as history. And so is the "solution." Romantic infidelities have been the historic partners of pre-arranged marriages and rigid prohibitions against divorce.

In some modern societies the paramour solution has even become an informal institution. Affluent Mexicans, for example, are surprisingly public about their "casa chica," their "little house," where they keep their lover, while they keep their wife in their big house.

To me, these are not just signs of moral weakness. They are what happens when blind morality and cynicism gang up on honest relating and idealism. When marriage partners refuse to challenge realistic-

cally the weaknesses of their love relationship, no matter how decent their reason, they are stepping onto the path that leads compellingly to affairs and probable divorce.

By
BOB TRENZ,

Ph.D.



YET, UNAWARE of the consequences of their acts, thousands of new couples are right now taking those first steps toward the end of their relationships.

If you could watch them, you would see incredible similarities in the way these early seeds are sown.

Having vowed to stay married no matter what, newlyweds settle quickly into communication patterns which are geared toward apparent harmony. Interpreting the sacredness of marriage to mean that you're not supposed to challenge or threaten it, young couples learn to bury "petty" disappointments.

Relying on their moral commitments and sense of decency to protect the marriage contract, they are oblivious to the single most important truth about marriage: People enter marriages in hopes of getting their emotional needs met.

As long as these hopes are fulfilled, the marriage stays alive and is resistant to even the worst crises. As long as a love relationship is a precious source of love, both partners will protect it from all possible threats. Only when it fails to provide for the love needs of its members is a marriage vulnerable to affairs and divorce.

BUT, BLIND to this truth, one couple after another places their faith in the power of moral decency and responsibility to keep their marriage together. Instead of doing the honest work necessary to keep the love relationship functioning

well, decent couples develop patterns which reinforce moral obligations.

By sacrificing himself to traditional roles, a husband becomes the devoted breadwinner and father while his wife throws herself into the task of keeping the nest comfortable. The more intensively and exclusively a wife devotes herself to wifing, the more pressure is felt by her husband to respond with devotion.

Likewise, the pressure to be decent is increased when you see your partner as desperately dependent on you. So spouses of obligatory marriages make themselves seem totally incapable of surviving a divorce. In the extreme, this dependency can become so profound that talk of divorce is followed by threats of suicide or insanity.

Along with the fact that they are avoiding the confrontation and work needed to make the love relationship work, these manipulatory devices eat away at the mutual respect and spontaneity that are essential to a successful marriage. Instead of feeling loved, the responsible partner feels trapped. And frustration turns into hunger.

PESSIMISTIC about ever being able to find love in his obligatory marriage, the future looks empty and hopeless. He can't hurt his kids and his extremely vulnerable wife by leaving them for the sake of his selfish needs for love. Yet, he can't feel loved if he stays in his marriage. A painful dilemma.

So how can we be surprised when this love-starved man, who could never do anything as indecent as deserting his dependent wife and children, meets a love-starved woman, who could never be so irresponsible as to leave her family, and they discover the one possible escape from their dilemmas?

For them, it must seem that their problem and their solution are unique. But, in fact, they have simply taken their place in one of the oldest ruts of human history.

Bob Trenz is a psychologist and marriage counselor in Rochester. Comments for Dr. Trenz may be sent to P.O. Box 61, Rochester 48603.

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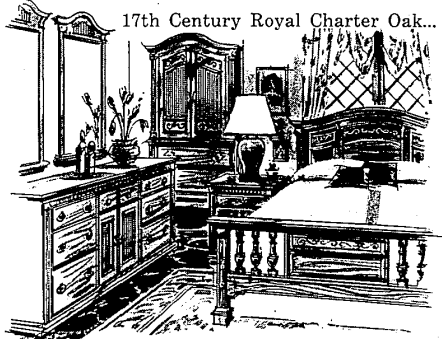
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Managing money topic

"Managing Your Money" will be the topic of a Women of Wayne conference beginning at 9 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 23 at Fairlane Manor in Dearborn.

Dr. Barbara Murray, business consultant, will outline "An Economic Survival Kit for Women," and workshops will follow on "How to Decide What Investments are for You," "Understanding Insurance and Its Place in Your Financial Plan," "Budgeting and Credit," "Investments that Save on Taxes," "Questions about Estate Planning," and "How to Figure Out Your Retirement Income Needs."

An 11 a.m. punch party in the consultants' roundtable area will encourage table-bogging so individual questions can be answered. Topics will be "How to Save Money on Legal Services," "How to Get the Most for Your Travel Dollar," consumer cooperatives, banking services, "Auto Economics for Car Owners," and Social Security.

Following lunch, J. Jordan Hummerstone, senior vice-president of the Heritage Antique and Appraisal Society, will have tips on "Investing in Antiques and Collectibles of the Future."

The final afternoon session will be a lecture demonstration on "How to Stretch Your Clothing Dollar" by Phyllis Ashinger, of the Department of Family and Consumer Resources at Wayne State University.

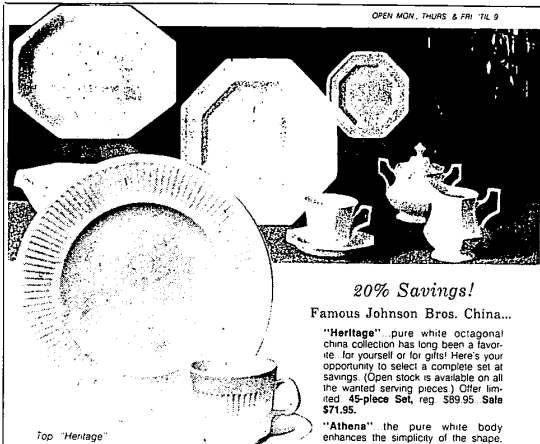
For reservations call 577-2167.

Council plans travel night

Husbands and friends will be invited to join members of the Greater Detroit section National Council of Jewish Women in a travel night at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 2.

The program will be at the NCJW office, 16400 W. Twelve Mile, Suite 106, Southfield. Sam Tappis, Unitours director, will describe council tours to Israel, Europe, the Orient, Mexico and Africa.

Call the council office, 567-9604 for reservations.



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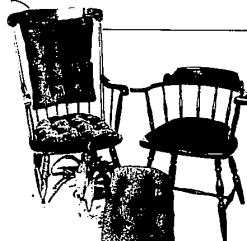
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