

No Digital Affairs This Christmas

By Barrington H. Brennen, December 19, 2012

While most of us will be having lots of wholesome fun during the Christmas season, there will be some who will be causing damage to relationships and creating great emotional pain to others with the use of digital equipment—cell phones. One of the fastest growing methods of causing strife in relationships is texting or text messaging. That is the use of cell phones or online messengers to transmit secret, sexual, romantic messages to someone you are not married to or not in a relationship with. When the Blackberry was first introduced, there was a surge in the number of couples who accessed marital therapy in the Bahamas and in many other countries. Why? Because a spouse would have discovered, after probing his or her partner's cell phone, intimate messages to or from a stranger. These messages often caused heated debates between spouses whether or not the partner was cheating or chatting. A question often asked was: "Why are you saying those things to that person and you have never said them to me?"

Too many of today's relationships are on a fast track to destruction. Relationship specialist, Dr. Sheri Meyers, in her book *"Chatting or Cheating: How to detect infidelity, rebuild love, and affair proof your marriage"* states that "It used to take a long time for affairs to develop. Not anymore. With the advent of social media and technology at our fingertips 24/7, the pathway to cheating is fast and practically unobstructed. It is easier than ever to meet others, stay constantly (and secretly) in contact, get intimate and cheat on our partners." It is my observation that this phenomenon is occurring in the Bahamas and the Caribbean.

As I have stated in many of my previous articles, most affairs do not start with deliberate, intentional acts. They move progressively slowly down to a precipice of pain and misery. The difference today is the "slow" journey has gotten faster—very fast. Traditionally affairs started face to face with "innocent friendship" until it mushroomed into a heated, passionate encounter. However, many individuals today, with the use of cell phones, online messaging, and emails are secretly diving quickly into intimate sharing. The practice of openness and honesty has lost its meaning in many relationships. Some individuals try to keep their secret love affair hidden as long as possible thinking no one would ever find out. It seems to be a real fantasy world that offers some form of satisfaction, although unreal, to the participants. The defense phrase by many is "we are only friends."

AVOID THE TRAP

When an emotional need goes unmet, the marriage is vulnerable to an affair. Sadly, too many people are not even aware that their needs are not being met. Yes, that is true. Others are aware and have been complaining for years, but the other partner would not listen. Therefore the romantically starved partner may innocently seek a listening ear or someone who seems caring and understanding. Unknowingly, the affair begins. Here is my definition of an affair. "Whenever you say or do something to someone other than your spouse that you should **first say or do** to your spouse or **only say or do** to your spouse, you are either having an affair or you are at risk of having one." It is a slippery slope and cyber technology has made it easier and faster. Avoid this trap.

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE ABOUT TO CHEAT ON YOUR SPOUSE

The following tips are shared by Dr. Sheri Meyers and I thought would be beneficial to share. She indicates that the key to tell if you or your spouse is "chatting or cheating" is whether

the three points are present: shared intimacy, secrecy and exclusion, or sexual chemistry. Read carefully the following quiz by Dr. Sheri Meyers and see if you are cheating or chatting.

Shared Intimacy

- Are you exchanging personal, intimate, and confidential information (and/or had offline contact) with an online "friend" that your partner doesn't know about?
- Are you giving more and more time, attention and emotional support to your "friend" and less to your partner at home?
- Are you beginning to emotionally or physically withdraw from your partner, preferring to spend time away, online, talking or texting with your "friend" vs. connecting with your partner?
- Are you constantly checking to see if your "friend" has made contact and/or are continually trying to come up with ways to connect and have contact?
- Are you feeling high and happy when connected with your "friend" and low and lonely when you've been disconnected for too long?

Secrecy & Exclusion

- Are you hiding your correspondence with your "friend" from your partner?
- Are you becoming secretive or evasive about your activities, changing your passwords, getting new anonymous email addresses, setting up fake profiles, joining a dating or cheating hook-up site?
- Are you avoiding getting into serious conversations with your partner?
- Are you pretending you're single when you're not?
- Are you spending a large amount of time (in person or online) talking, sharing, confiding with your friend and not telling your partner about it? Or worse, lying about who you are with?

Sexual Chemistry

- Are you finding yourself sexually and/or emotionally aroused when you think about or have contact with your "friend"?
- Are you sending or receiving flirtatious or sexy emails, texts, photos or videos?
- Are you doing anything sexual using your webcam (or your imagination)? Having sexy chats? Sharing your sexual fantasies? Masturbating and/or mutually masturbating?
- Are you imagining you are in bed with your "friend," while making love with your partner?
- Are you feeling cold when it comes to having sex with your partner? More interested in reading a book, Facebooking, watching TV, or talking to your "friend" than making love with your partner?

If you answered yes to any of these statements, you should be aware that you are cheating and you need to quickly make a change in your behaviour. I encourage you to purchase the book mentioned in this article by Dr. Sheri Meyers. It will change your life. Have a very merry Christmas.

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