

Why some men will always have affairs regardless

Robert Crampton



An academic in America has made a study of the effect of income differentials on the likelihood of one partner cheating on the other. She has come up with some very interesting results — while also, to my mind, arriving at the wrong explanation for those results.

Essentially, argues Professor Christin Munsch of the University of Connecticut, the greater the percentage of a couple's income earned by the woman, the greater the chance of her less well-remunerated other half doing the dirty. By contrast, when the chap is the chief breadwinner, that tends to indicate his spouse will remain faithful. Up to a certain point anyway: once the big guy's contribution exceeds a given proportion (about 70 per cent) of a couple's aggregated wedge, he will then become more prey to temptation.

Clear? The data may be a bit complicated, but hey, you're not daft, it's not that complicated. Bottom line: economically dependent men are statistically way more prone to shagging around than similarly economically dependent women.

What to make of this discovery? Admittedly, that's a bit tricky — but, again, it ain't that tricky. Munsch's analysis is that the relevantly adulterous man behaves as he does because he is responding to the perceived threat of emasculation posed by his partner raking in more than he does. Such an account,

The cat who cost too much

Which brings me to the news that some people are spending thousands

of pounds — close on five grand for a hip replacement, more than that for cat chemotherapy — on medical procedures for their pets. Not that I know for definite such people reside in southern England, but we can all assume they

probably do, right? While such spending is obviously bonkers — not to mention peculiar and borderline immoral — I totally understand how it happens. We had a cat a while back, Tips. Ailing from the off was Tips, poor little blighter. One thing after another,

couple of hundred here, couple more hundred there, chunky sums, but never quite enough to pull the plug. He set us back by a fearful amount in the end, did Tips, then he went and snuffed it regardless. And I didn't even like him much.



Ruth Wilson as Alison and Dominic West as Noah in *The Affair*

Munsch suggests, is the correct feminist argument.

Maybe so. Allow me, however, to make, on the basis of the very same research, a different interpretation. My case is, I would maintain, every bit as feminist as hers — while carrying a great deal more intellectual potency.

To be blunt, some men — not most by any means, not anything approaching a majority, nor even a large minority, but quite a few — are just no good. They transgress. They don't play by the rules. They lie, cheat, steal and deceive. They don't observe prevailing social and moral norms. These men will think nothing of sponging off one woman while doing whatever they fancy with any other woman who comes along. I don't deny that some women behave in the same selfish way. Such women are well-documented. Such men less so.

I'm not having a go at house-husbands or stay-at-home dads. Far from it — some of my best friends fall into those categories and my admiration knows no bounds. I've spent my share of time looking after small children and, blimey, it wasn't easy. Anyone, man or woman, who opts for that lifestyle commands my utmost respect.

Yet the fact remains that there exists a subset of my gender — we've all met them — who for whatever reason are sniffing about for a free ride. An opportunity to doss around pretending to be ill — or resting, or studying, or writing, or in some way too delicate to punch the clock in the usual manner. Guys who, in some mystical not easily explicable fashion, consider themselves exempt from a conventional requirement to earn their keep.

Guys who believe someone or something else (state, parent, wife) should provide the necessary. While they do whatever they damn well want. Cads, bounders, dirty rotten scoundrels — wrong 'uns, my grandma used to call them, so in her memory I'll go with that. And wrong 'uns are always with us. All Munsch has done is identify their contemporary incarnation.

My tight Yorkshire relatives

Sticking with the same cash-conditioned theme, another survey reveals — to the mildest surprise of absolutely nobody — that the British region most canny with its coin is ... Yorkshire! Yup, in wallet-related matters, folk in God's Own County are the most sensible — "tight" might be another useful word in this context — with their hard-earned. Who knew?

Well, I did, actually. Not so much because I grew up there, but because my two brothers-in-law did too.

Eeh bah gum, if I'd had a monkey, as we say down here in the capital, for every time those two adorable tykes have said, in suitably scandalised flat-vowelled tones, "You paid HOW much ferri? I could have got that off a mate/for a fiver/out of a skip for nowt, etc", I'd be a rich man.

Or if not properly rich, at least much better placed to stand a criminally expensive round whenever they visit us here in that bloody rip-off London.

We don't want to be married — not ever

In a new book, *Spinster*, the US author, Kate Bolick, argues that not all women want to wed. Here two writers agree

Earlier this year I accepted a fellowship to an artists' colony in New England, holing up in a snowbound cabin. Only dinners were communal and a few evenings in I found myself seated between two women in their late thirties, like me. As soon as they began talking about their husbands, I knew what was coming. "So how about you? Are you married?" they asked.

The consoling "aahs" that met my answer — a perfectly smiley "no" — oozed kindness. They were also presumptuous, patronising and devoid of self-awareness. After all, both these women had sought out the colony's solitude precisely because they had struggled to find that vital creative space within their marriages. Surely it was I who should have been commiserating with them?

You get used to such moments when you're single. Even as our ranks grow, we're still considered peculiar, still defined in terms of what we supposedly lack. And, yes, that hoary old double standard lingers: while single men tend to be envied, single women are pitied, our lives portrayed as a marathon of microwave suppers broken up by bouts of bacchic excess.

That may be about to change thanks in part to a memoir by the American writer, Kate Bolick, in which she rhapsodises the single life. Bolick took a while to appreciate how much she yearned to be single, no matter how stifled a succession of fellows made her feel. As a student, you see, she decided she would be married by 30.

Instead she moved to New York, where she managed to wean herself off serial monogamy and begin chasing what she dubs her "spinster wish" — "shorthand for the extravagant pleasures of simply being by myself". There's a lush sensuality to the way she details these delights, be they a small but lofty apartment in which she might realise her longing for "an independent self" or tipsily munching a Big Mac, "prolonging the delectable realisation that waiting for me at home was nothing but an empty bed into which I'd crawl naked and drunk".

Yet still she's uncertain of her path as a single woman. "Whom to marry and when it will happen — these two questions define every woman's existence, regardless of where she was raised or what religion she does or doesn't practice," she writes. The title of her book? *Spinster*.

Well before this memoir came into view, I could have

let you in on a secret: a "spinster" 's life can be great. As a single woman I can come and go as I please. My free time and spare cash are my own. I don't have to share dessert, my duvet or someone else's moods. I can eat whatever I want, wherever I want (a bowl of cornflakes in the bathtub for supper? Heck yes!).

I needn't edit my friends or please anyone's extended family. If I want silence, it's all mine; if I'd rather cavort naked around my flat belting out rock ballads, no one's going to judge me. Then, at the day's end, I get to go to bed when I like and with whom. And if that turns out to be nobody, I can look forward to the joy of being able to wake to my own thoughts.

I know what you're thinking. How selfish. A bit, perhaps, but at least we solitaires aren't inflicting that selfishness on anyone else or resenting our spouses for cajoling us into compromise. Besides, single women, I've noticed, often make better friends, daughters and siblings, if only because we have the time and energy to give ourselves over wholly to relationships outside of the idealised couple. In fact if ever I worry about certain friends becoming isolated, it's invariably those who are married with kids. As anyone who's ever found themselves in the wrong relationship knows, living alone and being alone are hardly the same.

I'm not denying occasional pangs of loneliness, but they tend to occur while I'm surrounded by others, like when a couple asks me to switch seats. The sheer expense of single life is another drawback and as for dating — let's just say it can drain your reserves of charm and optimism.

Yet there's a thrill to be had from independence, and the improvised life — which the single woman's is, once she passes that age at which she's expected to have yielded to marriage and motherhood — is rarely anything less than an adventure.

A couple of weekend news stories seemed to be geared towards panicking young women into settling down. The Economic and Social Research Council released a study that found that more than a fifth (22 per cent) of women graduates who were born between 1960 and 1968 are childless. The presumption is that all these women wanted children to begin with.

Then came the warning from Geeta Nargund, a fertility expert at London's St George's Hospital. Fertility lessons, she said, must become part of the national curriculum. Only then would girls realise that the smart thing to do would be to pop out a baby before they are 30, thereby



MIKE MCGREGOR/THE GUARDIAN; CHRIS MCANDREW FOR THE TIMES

Kate Bolick, the author of *Spinster*. Below: Serena Kutichinsky. Left: Hephzibah Anderson

alleviating the "costly burden" that women place on the NHS through their IVF demands.

However, these women surely cannot rival the burden that smokers, alcoholics and junk-food guzzlers place on our healthcare system. A badly wanted child born to a mother with means of supporting herself is likely to mature into an adult who will put more into the system than a round or two of IVF ever took out.

My own one regret is that it took me so long to realise how much I relish being single. It would have saved some heartache along the way. If I look back on the romantic choices of my twenties and early thirties, they certainly don't seem the decisions of one in a hurry to get married; I just didn't see it at the time. In spite of overwhelming real-world evidence that matrimony is not the elixir of happiness, the pull of the marriage plot remains hard to resist.

There's another factor too. No one uses the word spinster any more, yet its spidery, desiccated connotations haunt us all the same. Rather than waiting for it to claim us, let's be the ones to do the claiming; let's reclaim and redefine the word and in so doing enable the spinster to finally be seen as the pioneering figure she's become.

So am I married? No, I am a spinster. And while I may yet want to change that, there is an abundance to savour in the meantime. Hephzibah Anderson

I sabotaged my wedding — I want to be a spinster

This time last year I was waking up in a luxury tepee in Glastonbury, in the arms of the man I loved, listening as the rain poured down outside. Suddenly our morning bliss was shattered by the sound of my phone vibrating. Rolling over, I felt a sense of dread creep over me. The name on the display confirmed my fears. The call was from my fiancé. I turned the phone off and buried it in the depths of my handbag.

Yes, shortly after becoming engaged to my boyfriend of almost three years, with the wedding venue chosen, the guest list assembled and the social media announcement made, I embarked on an affair. We sneaked off to an array of summer festivals, me lying to my fiancé about where I was going and with whom. I even stored his messages to read before I fell asleep, despite the constant fear that my fiancé would pick up my iPhone by mistake.

I knew that at some point I would have to do the hardest thing of my life: break off my engagement, destroy my seemingly perfect life (trendy flat in Hackney in London, shared record collection and friends) and step off the trajectory towards happily ever after. And when I eventually plucked up the courage to do so the fall-out was ugly.

My fiancé was broken-hearted and I was so bruised and guilt-stricken that carrying on with my exciting affair-man was rendered impossible too. I had two men who loved me and I have ended up with neither, but looking back I believe there was an underlying impetus for my infidelity. I had never cheated on a partner before. I sabotaged my own wedding for a reason.

I have never been the marrying kind. Why has this statement until now been reserved for men? Perhaps my aversion to signing away my independence stems partly from attending

an intensely academic all-girls school where the now rather archaic-sounding aim was to educate us as men.

These days the career-woman stereotype has become tied up with the caricature of the crazy cat lady who missed her chance to have children and is condemned to die alone. When I was growing up, career-woman was the new superhero. As the child of divorced parents I also witnessed first hand the pain of a marriage breakdown and had always



wondered if there might be another way to live. If women can survive financially and emotionally on their own, why do so many of us still insist on staking our personal happiness on someone else?

Yet the pressure on women to get married remains. The new book by Kate Bolick highlights the need for society to rethink its attitude to unmarried women. And she's right: despite all my tough talk I too felt the pressure to settle down — that perhaps independence was worth sacrificing for the chance to chip in when the conversation turned to such scintillating subjects as breastfeeding and house prices.

Thus in my mid-thirties I allowed myself to be swept along on a wave of romance and grand gestures. I mean, who wouldn't melt if they were proposed to on a rooftop in Vietnam on Christmas Eve? I still look back on that as a truly happy moment, marred only by the awkward telephone call to my mother who had predicted doom from the start. "You'll get bored," she used to say to me. "No I won't," I would say stubbornly. "It's sweet, he adores me." But as usual she was right.

Nevertheless I threw myself into wedding plans, desperate to convince myself I was doing the right thing. The location was chosen — a crumbling castle in Wales near my fiancé's family home — the party planned. My low point came the day of our first appointment at a bridal boutique. I stared at my lace-clad self in the mirror and asked myself what on earth I was doing.

A braver woman might have simply broken off her engagement, but I chose a more destructive path. I'm not proud of what I did, but I am proud of being unafraid to be single.

Bolick argues that single life should be defined more than as the absence of coupledom. It should be a lifestyle choice of its own. So why shouldn't we ladies reclaim the much-maligned word "spinster"?

The past year has been liberating and heart-breaking in equal measure. It's given me the chance to fashion a future of my own choosing. This is what Bolick identifies as the "spinster wish", shorthand for holding on to that in you that is independent and self-sufficient.

I also know that coupledom is no panacea. When I now recount my dating tales to married friends they sigh longingly. All around me I see couples in various states of shock that the fairytale family life they bought into has turned into a grimmer reality of sleepless nights and financial woes. All too often, one party — and yes it is still usually the woman — has had to sacrifice or compromise on her hopes and dreams, not to mention her social life.

Bolick's spinster is a free agent — not wife, nor mother, nor mistress, she is a radical figure. I for one am happy to live by her rules. Serena Kutichinsky

The lowdown Holacracy



Hey man, say *hola* to Holacracy. I've seen the future of management and it's circles, baby, circles. Can I remind you that I am not your baby, I am your boss.

Oh, yeah, sorry, just getting into the new business vibe. This is so cool. What is?

Holacracy! Loads of companies are doing it in America. "Holacracy" comes from the Greek word for "whole" and basically it's a managerless management system which makes companies more resilient and innovative. And how do they do that?

Brian Robertson, who came up with the idea, has written a book about it. *Holacracy: The Revolutionary Management System That Abolishes Hierarchy*. He says that organisations should switch from the traditional pyramid hierarchy to a flatter structure of "nested circles", each with their own responsibility. Robertson describes the system as being like a self-organising city or a human body. It's the end for autocracies. Sounds like a hell-ocracy.

No! People in a holacracy don't have jobs, they have "energising roles". The online shoe retailer Zappos, which is owned by Amazon, is a leading company that has embraced the philosophy.

Oh yes, I heard about that. And what happened there? More than 200 of their 1500 employees took redundancy rather than give up their job titles and migrate (as I am sure you would put it) into circles.

Perhaps they were afraid to "embrace and drive change". That's the second of Zappos's ten core values. Number one is: "Deliver WOW through service."

Wow. Just wow.

I know. Smart huh? Hahaha. You're fired.

Damian Whitworth

