

Sex, Infidelity and Stress: The Intimate Relationship Exposed

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You don't have to veer far from the sex organs to understand why a man or woman would be unfaithful to his/her partner. Just look inside of the perpetrator's brain. A short brain-body lesson will help you understand what I mean.

Look at the commonly depicted side view of the brain, and you see the thick, undulating surface called the cortex. This structure allows us to use logic and make rational choices in our lives. Look below the surface and observe a smaller version of the same structure. It contains the stress and emotional centers. They are responsible for the fight/fight reflex, feelings of pleasure, fear, anger and rage. Millions of interconnections between these brain parts allow logical thinking, stress and emotions to work together for a unified, effective strategy of living.

During highly stressful times, logical thinking decreases dramatically. For example, remember that promise you made to yourself during the holidays? "I absolutely refuse to binge on Mom's apple and pumpkin pies. This year I'm going to control my urges."

Well, the pies were eyeing you, and Uncle Harry and his brood were particularly annoying. Forget about that promise! Logic went down the drain like Aunt Mary's lousy green bean casserole. Rational thinking was the victim of stress and those pesky pleasures centers in the impulsive parts of your brain.

Now for the salacious part of this story: A man or woman who has never learned to manage stress effectively – one who spends too much time in the stress zone and little time in the relaxation zone - is prone to a host of strong feelings and bad habits. Emotional eating is one example. Drug, gambling and spending addiction are others. Sexual addiction and infidelity can be added to that list as well.

Don't get me wrong. This is not the entire story behind infidelity. Your family history is critical; that is, what you learned from mom and dad about commitment and fidelity. And some people have psychiatric conditions such as chronic impulsiveness that make them more infidelity-prone than others. But most of us just let the pressure of living and loving spiral out of control.

Don't let stress point a loaded gun at your marriage. Learn to manage life's hassles by doing some self help reading, attending a seminar, and/or consider seeking professional help. Many Psychologists and counselors offer a specific number of therapy sessions just for stress management.

When a friend or family member is unfaithful, people are prone to say: "I just don't understand. He has everything going for him. Why would he get himself in such a stupid jam? Doesn't he realize the consequences of his behavior and the toll on the marriage, children and extended family?"

Perhaps this brief treatise helps provide part of the answer. We have to manage stress or it will take its toll on rational thinking and actions. No one is immune, no matter how talented, rich or famous. You have one brain, and you are responsible for keeping it emotionally serene and healthy.

Dr. John J. Parrino is a Psychologist in Atlanta, Ga. and the author of the e book, *Never Point a Loaded Gun at Your Marriage: Conquer Stress Before It Slays Your Love*. The book and articles on relationship stress are available at his website, <http://www.drparrino.com>.

