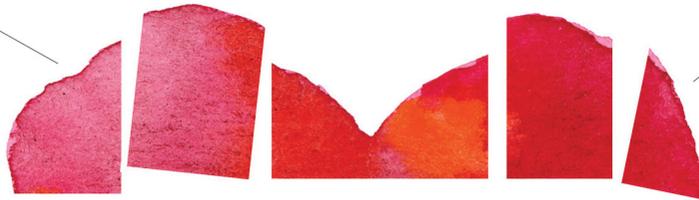


ANATOMY OF AN AFFAIR

RISKY HISTORY

DANGEROUS PARTNER



How affairs, attractions & addictions develop,
and how to guard your marriage against them

CLOSE CALLS

MARITAL STYLE

DIGITAL
FRIENDSHIPS

SUSTAINED
STRESS

EMOTIONAL
AFFAIR

DAVE CARDER



THE SEASONS YOU PASS THROUGH

WE'VE TALKED ABOUT the risks of certain family history and also high-risk personal factors. But it isn't just the personal factors that can be risky. While a close call can often be the result of personal factors (and those are certainly a major part of the equation), there is usually a little more to it than that. Often there are situational factors that weigh heavily into the initiation of a close call. Let's move our discussion to two of these areas: *high-risk times* and *high-risk behaviors*.

High-Risk Times

Times of Loss

If you recall what I said earlier—that sex is comforting, especially to males—then a season of significant loss is a high-risk time for close calls or even infidelity. Unfortunately, this loss can affect both spouses to the degree that they cannot adequately care for or listen to or help the other in view of their own need. Each spouse can be too overwhelmed to even think of the other. Each is often just trying to survive and has very little left to give to their spouse.

Unfaithfulness or even flirtation, though certainly wrong, is understandable when you recall that sex can be a source of comfort. Research has identified that the frequency of sexual relations between husbands and wives tends to increase after the death of a significant family member. I suspect that this risk factor could be expanded to cover other severe reversals in areas such as health, occupation, finances, and social setting (though I am unaware of any research to substantiate that claim).

Life Transitions

Though life is basically one transition after another, I am talking about the big ones—retirement, major promotions, cross-country moves, caring for a chronically ill parent or child or spouse, threatening lawsuits, and so forth. These kinds of experiences, both negative and positive, can have a significant impact on how we view ourselves and the level of support we have available. Some of these experiences can come with a sense of entitlement, exhaustion, or the need to feel young and attractive. And any of them can make us vulnerable to another's attention. All of these transitions have a tendency to erode an individual's normal support systems.

Ron and Lori had lived all their lives in a midsized town in the northwest. They met in high school and both attended a local state university not far from home. The city's main employer hired Ron after graduation and, after a very successful career start, decided to transfer him to their corporate headquarters in a large city in the southeastern United States.

Leaving the familiar family, church, schools, friends, and culture behind, they started a new life. Both felt they needed the change, and both were quite excited about the opportunity. However, Lori decided to stay behind to finalize selling the house and finish the school year for the kids, so Ron went on ahead. In the months before Lori and the family joined him, he began to do things, go places, and engage in activities that he had to keep secret from his wife. The office atmosphere and values were nothing like his conservative, small workplace had been back home. When he was no longer able to keep the secrets, he confessed everything, and they both recognized that if they were going to save their marriage, they had to go back to what was familiar.

It doesn't have to be as extreme as Ron and Lori's story. It can be a simple dullness that sets into a marriage when the focus is upon rearing the children. When the couple

makes the parenting project the primary task of their marriage, they have a tendency to ignore the spousal relationship. Then, as the children prepare to leave the home, there is a great risk for close calls, infidelity, or divorce. The parenting job is done, and there is very little reason for these two “strangers” to stay together.

Pregnancy

Though popular literature has often talked about midlife crises and the resulting close calls and infidelities, I have long suspected that there are other high-stress seasons of life. One that has surfaced often in my clinical experience is the season of pregnancy. Some of you might be surprised, but it is not all that unusual as you think about it:

- The emotional focus of the wife changes at the confirmation of pregnancy. The husband is no longer the primary person in her life. She has a new baby coming.
- Her hormones began to change, and many wives report a lowered libido during pregnancy.
- Her shape also begins to change, and many husbands find their wives less visually appealing.
- Sometimes there is nausea, tiredness, and even required bed rest, all of which can make her less interested in being close to anyone.
- Various levels of discomfort usually occur in the latter stages of pregnancy.
- Then factor in the sleep deprivation, the different hormonal changes after delivery, the restrictions on sexual activity, the pressure of caring for a newborn, the excess weight of the pregnancy, and it is no wonder that the time during and after pregnancy can place very difficult stress on marital relationships. And many a mom of young children will tell you that her need to be touched is more than satisfied by having babies and toddlers crawling over her—something a husband doesn’t always understand!

High-Risk Behavior

We have looked at high-risk family of origin history, high-risk factors, high-risk times, and now we will take a look at high-risk personal behavior. Behavior we may feel is harmless can easily lead to a close call—or worse.

Opposite-Sex Friendships

Though our culture talks a lot about platonic heterosexual friendships, I have become convinced that this is a dangerous experiment. One survey shows that 50 percent of the pastors polled who acknowledged inappropriate sexual behavior while in ministry and married did so with a “close friend.” When you have a close opposite-sex friendship, you only manage one half of the experience. You have no control over what the other party brings to each engagement. It doesn’t take much for the conversation to drift to personal issues, such as complaints about one’s marriage. After all, that’s what friends are for, right?

Now you might be thinking, “You mean, that once married, one cannot have a close opposite-sex friendship?” I am not restricting these kinds of friendships to only singles, but just reminding you that there is an inherent risk in this kind of relationship. With opposite-sex friends, each must be self-aware and honest enough to acknowledge whatever mood elevation is occurring within the friendship and promise themselves to not engage in that second level of personal discussions that belongs only within marriage. To do otherwise is to starve the marriage and feed the friendship.

Workplace Affairs

About a third of men who admit to infidelity report they are dissatisfied in their marriage, while almost two-thirds of women report high levels of marital dissatisfaction prior to their affair.¹

Don and Trish had remarried after many years of being single. Both of their initial spouses had left the marriages because of affairs. Both did a great job of raising their children as single parents, and now they were almost done. When they met at a trade show, there was an immediate connection due to having so much in common. After a whirlwind courtship and marriage, with the blessing of all their children, they settled back down into their respective careers. Now, after seven years, things were not going so well. Though no children were living in the home, many of Don and Trish’s differences were causing distance between the two of them. Trish felt too tired to be fun anymore. The new grandchildren, the adult children’s schedules (six children in total!), and their own work schedules were taking their toll. On a business trip and after drinking too much at a dinner with clients, Don had a one-night stand with a coworker. Initially, he tried to pass it off as a common, sex-only affair in a sex-starved

marriage, but, given both of their histories, Trish would not accept it. He had no interest in leaving the marriage; she had no interest in him staying.

Volunteer Opportunities

The Christian counterpart to the workplace affair occurs when two people have similar passions for volunteer service that they might not share with their individual spouses. The volunteer opportunity brings them together on a repeated basis, and they both begin to not only enjoy what they are doing but who they are doing it with. Over time, this mutual admiration, this shared passion and understanding, and the sense of achievement that comes with success, all coalesce into a relationship that invites inappropriate close calls.

It often starts innocently enough with the idea of planning how to do a better job in the volunteer opportunity. From there, it can quickly escalate to withholding conversational topics from the spouse in order to share them with the volunteer partner who “seems to understand me better.” At this point an individual is robbing the marriage of the emotional intimacy it so desperately needs. When criticism of the marriage enters the conversation, even under the guise of “Help me understand my spouse better, will you?” then you are on a slippery slope to a full-blown affair.

“Soloing” in Public Places

One of the concepts that intrigued me early on in my counseling, while listening to men and women who had been unfaithful in marriage, was that very few of them were overtly looking for an illicit relationship. With my curiosity piqued, I listened with the purpose of trying to find out how these folks eventually “found” their affair partner. I discovered the answer to this question by asking one of these “other women” who was sitting in my office.

She said, “It’s easy. When I see someone sitting in a public place by themselves, I can immediately tell if they’re happy or unhappy in their marriage.”

Incredulous, I asked her, “You mean you can tell if someone’s happy or unhappy in their marriage just by looking at them?”

She answered, “Yes, those people who are unhappy in their marriage send out signals that I pick up on!” She continued, “I would never strike up a friendship with someone

I think might hurt me by rejecting my advances. I always make sure that they are dissatisfied at home early on in our conversations.”

I did not believe this woman at first. But when I have shared this material with couples in which the unfaithful spouse was unhappy in the marriage, both of them agree strongly that this is exactly what happened. Over the years since that conversation, I have become convinced that this woman is right—people who are unhappy in their marriage send out signals of being in that frame of mind.

And there are people out there, in your world, who are looking for unhappy spouses. They will settle for someone they can make happy and someone who can make them happy for even a short period of time.

I have also come to believe the corollary to the above formula; namely, that those who are happy in their marriages have fewer temptations. The “other woman” or “other man” will not bother with them. It has very little to do with the attractiveness of an individual. It has everything to do with your mental state of mind about your marriage and the kind of signals you are sending to those in the world in which you live.

Newly married, and for the most part happy with his new bride, Trevor was still adjusting to his expectations of married life. For the past year and a half, he had eaten lunch out at the neighborhood diner close to work. He had become friends with all the waitresses, and they all knew the details of his impending marriage. Of course, when Trevor revisited the restaurant after the honeymoon, they wanted to know all about the marriage itself. He counted them as his friends. Some of them were even old enough to be his mother, and he had known all of them longer than he had known Jennifer. He began sitting in the same section and continued to talk openly about his new marriage to one of the younger waitresses who expressed a lot of interest. Today though, when she brought the check, she also dropped a hotel key beside his plate, said, “I’ll see you at 3:00,” and walked away. And he went.

Fantasizing

When you find your mind wandering into daydreams about someone who is not your spouse, you’re in a dangerous spot. This can start innocently enough just by thinking about the other person: “I wonder what she’s doing right now?” or “I hope I see him this morning at church.” It can progress to comparisons that have you inserting

this person in the place that should be reserved for your spouse: “If only my husband treated me the way Bobby treats Carla . . .” or “I wish my wife dressed more like Kathy—she understands how important appearance is to a man.” From there it’s not a big leap to move to daydreams or fantasies about a special friendship, connection, or even an intimate relationship.

The Internet

In these days of Web mobility, you don’t have to be in physical proximity to get involved with someone to the point of a close call. With chat rooms, Facebook, Twitter, and other avenues of communication, it’s too easy to meet someone online who can draw you into a close call.

But these “add on” relationships can also be short lived and appear quite innocent in this digital age. Yet with digital messaging and the immediate connection it creates, can come the same mood-altering elevation that is present in long-term relationships.

* * *

Michelle called the answering service and left an urgent request for an immediate appointment. They would be available anytime, day or night. When I called back, Michelle told me her husband had just been fired that day from his “dream” job, and though there was a young administrative assistant involved in some way, she wanted to hear the rest of the story in the presence of a third party. She felt she just couldn’t go through much more; she had a month-old baby, a two-year-old, and her parents were getting divorced.

When they arrived, her husband told me this story: he had just started with this particular company a month prior and the opportunity came only after months of submitting applications with repeated rejections. His first day in the office, he met his new administrative assistant, Sheri. She was cute, single, vivacious, high energy, and had experience in this division with his predecessor. Everything was so overwhelming that her reassurance meant a lot. She had read his resume and was confident that he would pick it all up in no time.

Part of his preparation required a new company phone, one that he was unfamiliar with, but Sheri knew it well and promised to help him. It used special company en-

ryption, so they started with simple messages about where each was and what was happening in the office. Over the next thirty days, the two of them logged over three thousand texts, and when the messages were decoded, not one of them was found to be inappropriate or suggestive. Nevertheless, the company fired him, finding that the frequency and intensity of their communication was interfering with their productivity and endangering him while driving the company car. It was easy to tell that they were having “fun” communicating this way. It had become a mood-altering experience.

Identifying Your Risk

Let’s put the information you learned in the last chapter together with what we’ve discussed in this chapter and see if and how you might be at risk for an affair. Remember, my purpose here is to tell you what adulterers have been telling me for forty years—there *are* risk factors that those who have affairs wish they had known so they could have been on guard against having a close call that led to the heartache of an affair. Not one person who came to my office has not had deep regret for the devastation caused by an affair.

Two clusters of these risk factors are part of your story: the personal history and the family history factors shown on the chart on the next page. You can’t change these, so just be aware of them, and move on.

However, you do have a lot of influence on the other two clusters: high-risk seasons and personal behavior. The following chart is an opportunity for you and your spouse to privately identify what each of you think are the high-risk factors for yourself as well as for your spouse. Remember, it’s not a matter of who is right or who is wrong. It’s really a matter of understanding what each of you brings to the table, so read closely and learn.

After identifying the risk factors for both you and your spouse, note your findings on the chart titled “High-Risk Factors.” Make notes and comments as they come to mind, and then sit down and talk about these issues. Again, a risk factor does not mean that a close call or an affair inevitably lies in your future. In fact, the opposite is true if each of you will acknowledge what you bring to the marriage! Don’t be defensive. I know this might be hard to hear, but the person talking with you is not the enemy—they are on your side!

HIGH-RISK FACTORS

This checklist contains a cluster of experiences that help identify individuals at risk for infidelity. Simply mark each item YES or NO according to your personal history. In the right-hand column are brief definitions of the risk factors.

YES	NO	HIGH-RISK FAMILY HISTORY	DEFINITION/POTENTIAL RISK
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Family history of infidelity	Up to two generations back
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Single parent/blended family	A more vulnerable family history
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical abuse/chronic conflict	Creates high need for nurturance and reassurance
YES	NO	HIGH-RISK PERSONAL FACTORS	DEFINITION/POTENTIAL RISK
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual molestation	Childhood seduction, abuse, molestation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adolescent promiscuity	Sexually active at fifteen or earlier, more than six partners in the teen years
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning disabilities/ADHD	High need for reassurance and nurturance due to emotional pain
YES	NO	HIGH-RISK TIMES	DEFINITION/POTENTIAL RISK
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss—death, health, career, finances	Look to sex for healing and comfort
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Life changes—pregnancy, school years, teens launching	Affair provides reassurance of youth, virility, attractiveness
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Life transitions—moves, promotions	Loss of usual supports/controls
YES	NO	HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS	DEFINITION/POTENTIAL RISK
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Opposite-sex friendship with private conversations	Always begins to mean more/comforting
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Volunteer opportunity with opposite sex	A shared heart/passion that doesn't exist in the marriage
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Soloing" in public places	Needy individuals are more aggressive
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fantasizing about another	Erodes satisfaction with spouse

As the two of you talk about this, identify which item within each cluster is the primary risk to your relationship within that cluster. Give some thought as to why you've responded the way you have, and listen to your significant other's reasoning carefully.

Given their history, some people probably wonder how they managed to remain faithful in marriage as long as they have. Keep in mind that the greater number of risk factors, without the same degree of awareness and protection, the more likely an individual will have a close call with a dangerous partner. However, the more aware you are of your own risk factors, the more likely you'll be able to resist a close-call situation, or pull back if it occurs.

And don't discount the power of your moral compass or your religious convictions. Commitment to marriage has kept many husbands and wives faithful to each other despite family history, personal history, and high-risk seasons of life. However, research has shown that a close call and/or affair can sneak up almost before you're aware of what's happening. That's why it's essential for all of us to be aware of these matters.

Now the next part can be tough stuff to talk about—sharing old history that most couples shove under the rug and never discuss. Many people don't talk about the vulnerabilities that come from family history or personal history because they're not sure how their spouse will respond. If you will take time to talk through these things, though, you and your significant other will know each other better, and you'll have an even stronger tie to the person with whom you've made a lifelong commitment. In our culture these attractions occur regularly, and to discount or to deny their existence makes both spouses more vulnerable.

Deep inside most of us is a yearning to be better known and still deeply loved for who we are; it is a place where no secrets are kept hidden and where your secrets have brought the two of you closer. Remember this as you talk over these things:

- How do you feel about the information you've uncovered in these last two chapters?
- Had you ever thought about these things contributing to your risk of looking outside your marriage to have any needs met, or even having an affair?
- Now that you're aware of your own risk factors, what are you going to do about it?

- What have you learned about your spouse that will help both of you be more protective of your relationship?

COULD THIS BE YOU?

It happened two years ago when we lived on the East Coast. I was in a really weird place in my life. My husband and I had been trying at that point for a year and a half to have a baby. I had weathered the sorrows of infertility fairly well up until that point, but something happened. I believe I slipped into a mode of bitterness and then soon into discontentment. I wanted nothing more than to be where all my friends were: home with their little ones. If I couldn't have that, then I decided that I'd try to enjoy other realms of the world. It is hard to describe or put into words, but I became fascinated by earthly things. I started studying Jung and his philosophies. I became really into recording my dreams and trying to understand their meanings. I wanted to start traveling; I'd bug my husband about taking me to Italy or Spain (knowing the timing wasn't right but not caring).

I became completely wrapped up in one person—me. All my pursuits were to make myself feel good. I soon started feeling like my husband just couldn't understand me.

During this time I met a much older man at work. He had attended an Ivy League school, majored in philosophy, and was Buddhist. He was raised Christian but as an adult he rejected it, so we would debate a lot. I'd tell myself that it was good for me to talk to him about this because he might come back to Christ. One day while on the phone with him, I happened to stop for a light at the intersection where I attended church. I looked up, saw the church, and heard an audible voice say to me, "What are you doing?" It shocked me so much that I asked him if he had heard anything. He said he didn't, so I checked the radio, which wasn't even turned on. If I could go back in time I'd take a shovel and smack myself across the head.

I won't go into details because frankly I don't want to relive it, but slowly, friendly debates at work became friendly debates at lunch or coffee. The final friendly debate was at his home where he physically came on to me. Soon,

what I saw as fun became pretty scary, and I was in a situation that I didn't know how to get out of. I can honestly say I did not want anything to happen, and I fought him as well as I could, although some things did happen that make me really sad. I hate to think about that day. But I hate to think about the next day even more.

The next day reality hit, and my world was shattered because for the first time in months, I saw clearly. Everything came crashing down. I reached out to my church and was able to meet right away with one of our pastors. She was such a minister to me. I told her everything; she prayed for me and in her wise counsel told me to tell my husband. That was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I don't like remembering that day because the pain still burns when I remember my husband's face. He was devastated. But because my husband is such a wonderful man, we were able to work through it and, to fast-forward for the sake of length, four months later I got pregnant. The joy God has given us in our son and our restored (and better) marriage is a testimony to His love and grace.

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