**Are Affairs Easier than Ever for UK Women?**

Kristen Stewart and Edwina Curry did it. Gwyneth Paltrow vehemently denied she did it when a recent Vanity Fair article claimed she might have. People cheat. All the time. Yet infidelity is still a hugely contentious issue which is often a relationship ender when it emerges.

A recent report conducted by [married affair dating site MaritalAffair.co.uk](http://www.maritalaffair.co.uk) estimate that anywhere from 40 to 80% of men and 25 to 70% of women will cheat on their other half at some point in their lifetime and thanks in part to the ease with which one can find an illicit encounter on the internet, the popularity of finding a bit on the side is on the rise, especially for women.

As such we’ve created a whole set of rules around infidelity that the media, celebrities, TV shows, films and books live by in order to make having an affair acceptable.

1. Meeting ‘the one’ supersedes all other things, so if you meet Mr Right and you’re already married, you’re within your rights to play away.

2. It’s ok to cheat on an abusive, mean or simply unappreciative partner, because you’re being ‘rescued’, this one only applies to women though.

3. If your partner is holed up in an attic or a lunatic asylum and has no chance of recovery then cheating is acceptable (see Jane Eyre, Downton Abbey).

4. If both parties are gorgeous and French or famous and French if they’re a man and meet on a train, or when simultaneously trapped in a doorway during a Parisian downpour, then by all means go for it!

But, this leeway doesn’t extend to poor people, ugly people, women over the age of 40 or ‘ordinary’ women, i.e. Brenda from reception. When a woman is caught cheating the world lets out a gasp of horror, whilst women’s magazines hysterically warn us not to do anything that could lead to him straying, after all, what could be worse than being alone? ‘How to Stop Him Cheating’ features are in every woman’s mag, yet the male magazine market seems decidedly uninterested in the subject.

Writer and sociologist Catherine Hakim attests that the British attitude to infidelity is ‘positively puritanical’ when compared to our continental cousins. She began researching internet dating but quickly switched focus when it became clear just how many people were using the net to conduct extramarital affairs. She found that whilst infidelity was part and parcel of most French marriages, in the UK a cheating partner was more often than not automatically kicked to the curb.

According to Hakim female subscribers to affair sites in the UK are growing at a far faster rate than their male counterparts, but they are on average much younger than French subscribers, which she believes reflects the UK attitude towards female sexuality, whereby women are not expected to have sexual appetites once they hit a certain age bracket.

The prevalence of internet sites offering an easy route to an affair demonstrates that the number of female cheaters will continue to grow at breakneck speed but it’s unlikely that our attitude to women who have affairs will evolve at such a fast a pace.