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Adulterers are driven by power, needs unfulfilled, experts say

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Franklin Delano Roosevelt was assistant secretary of the Navy. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower was leading the Allies against Hitler. John F. Kennedy was a young officer in the Office of Naval Intelligence. They were military men. Each became commander in chief of the United States.

Each was an adulterer.

"If we were to go into Congress and disqualify members on the basis of adultery, there would be a very empty chamber," said Bernard Murstein, professor of psychology at Connecticut College.

It's hard to come up with a long list of White House residents who haven't participated in an extramarital dalliance.

Adultery is at least as old as, well,



AP FILE 1953

JOHN AND JACQUELINE KENNEDY at their wedding. He had an affair with a married woman suspected of being a Nazi spy.

the Bible.

"Nobody's keeping quiet about it anymore," said Pepper Schwartz, a University of Washington sociologist who studies marital indiscretion. "That's the big difference. The public shield has been lifted. It's like a car crash. You don't want to see it. But it's so riveting you kind of peek."

Men of power and prestige are more likely to engage in affairs than others, specialists say. However, it is also a regular occurrence among the

commoners.

In a USA Today poll last week, 52 percent of those surveyed said they have a close friend or relative who has had an extramarital affair.

In 1992, a survey that was dubbed the Kinsey report of the '90s reported 25 percent of married American men had had affairs, 15 percent of married women.

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Adultery

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Specialists say a complex mix of psychological factors cause people to stray. Those in power often cannot achieve intimacy with spouses. Others seek love elsewhere because of unmet emotional needs.

"Sometimes we meet someone who makes our heart sing," Schwartz said. "Sometimes marriages are alive in name only."

"Sex is an appetite wired into us," she said. "We are keyed to notice things like breasts, shoulders, hair. These are meant to allure us, and they do."

Affairs, observed therapist Dan Beaver, are usually unplanned. People often don't realize where their feelings are leading them.

"They're starving for intimacy," said Beaver, of the Relationship Counseling Center, which has offices in Walnut Creek and San Ramon. Their spouse is friend, sex partner and security, but not someone who touches them on a deep, emotional level. An affair meets that desire.

"It's an incredible rush of passion," he said. "They are experiencing intimacy in a way they haven't in 15 years. I call it escape from the Big House. They are experiencing something so powerful it overwhelms them. Then they get caught between the marriage and the affair. They are strung out like a junkie."

Lure of affair in military

In the military, the lure of an affair can be heightened during long deployments away from loved ones, said Orli Peter, director of the marriage, family and child counseling program at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles. She has been a consultant for Rand, a Santa Mon-

ica-based think tank that does military research.

"You have a situation where the employer is setting up an environment where you'll have an increase in that behavior," she said. "Then they call it a crime."

The armed forces attract people who might have more of a propensity for affairs, Peter said. Those who are drawn to power in careers such as the military, politics and police are more apt to break the standards of relationships. Men in these situations can be more prone to use their power for sex, which sometimes results in harassment, Peter said.

"Power and intimacy are polar opposites," she said. "The more you are into power, the less adept you are at intimacy and the more likely you are to violate the rules of intimacy and have affairs. The military and politics are careers of power."

Studies suggest that men are more likely to use power to obtain sex. However, specialists said, married women commit their fair share of adultery as well.

"Men don't have a monopoly on affairs," Beaver said.

Nonetheless, a higher percentage of men will probably always engage in adultery, said Edward Laumann, a sociologist with the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. He co-authored the 1992 study of U.S. sexual activity, considered by many to be a definitive survey.

"Women are more likely to embrace more conservative religious ideology," he said.

What has changed, Laumann said, is that people today are less likely to take back a wandering spouse. Women are much more financially independent than they were a few decades ago. Divorce, now an everyday occurrence, doesn't carry the stigma it once did.

"People are not prepared to put up with this," he said. "It makes the marital band more fragile."

Adultery remains taboo. Laumann found that 90 percent of those polled said affairs are "almost always or always" wrong.

However, the USA Today poll found that 58 percent said the military goes overboard in enforcing its adultery ban.

The survey followed the controversy swirling around Air Force Gen. Joseph Ralston, who pulled out of the running for chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because he had an affair 13 years ago while separated from his wife. His sexual history became an issue after the discharge of Air Force 1st Lt. Kelly Flinn, who lied about and disobeyed orders to end an affair with a married man.

Civilians don't understand

Civilians do not understand rigid military regulations, explained Lt. Col. Christopher Shepherd, national security affairs fellow at the Hoover Institute at Stanford. A superior issuing life-and-death orders needs the utmost respect of soldiers, who won't call into question the officer's integrity, he said.

"It's not like telling someone to work in the mail room until 5 o'clock. You're telling them to defend this hill, which means even if they are overrun, they still have to defend the hill."

However, in the USA Today poll, most said a double standard exists for men and women in the military, and for high-ranking officers. It's one thing to say adultery is morally wrong but another to force someone to quit a job, especially if the affair has nothing to do with work.

The late presidents' affairs did, but few at the time learned about the indiscretions.

Roosevelt had a long-standing af-

fair with Lucy Mercer, Eleanor Roosevelt's secretary, starting when he was in his naval post. Eleanor Roosevelt discovered the affair while unpacking a trunk after FDR returned from a trip abroad. Mercer was at his side when he died in 1945. The affair broke Eleanor Roosevelt's heart.

Eisenhower had a fling in the field of battle with a young personal aide, Kay Summersby.

And Kennedy, while an ensign in Navy intelligence, carried on a torrid romance with a married Danish bombshell who was suspected of being a Nazi spy. The affair was extensively recorded by the FBI. It ended after Kennedy was transferred to a remote PT boat squadron in an attempt to break them up.

The military at the time seemed to have a different "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Americans today are less tolerant of adultery when children are involved, Laumann said. Relatives and friends — those who might suddenly have new responsibilities thrust upon them — are apt to react negatively to an offending spouse. However, people tend to forgive if the new lovers marry. That's not to say those who disapprove don't fantasize about a roll in the hay now and then. Fifty percent of men think about sex at least once a day, and 25 percent of women do, he said.

"Sex is very much on people's minds," Laumann said. "But they aren't doing it with multiple partners. The reason is everyone has a stake in seeing you don't wander off the reservation. Nobody cares about the sex you are having. But if you are stepping out on somebody, that really mobilizes the troops."

"That's why there isn't as much of this as you'd think. There is an enormous amount of pressure on people to stay on the straight and narrow road."