



Once upon a time, having an affair took some effort. Whether it meant hanging out at bars while waiting for opportunity to strike, or hooking up with a friend with similar interests, maintaining contact with your lover required careful planning and coordination.

With so much effort and risk required, it just wasn't worth the trouble for some. That was until modern technology made it almost easy peasy.

The numbers speak for themselves. Media Research Asia's September 2013 numbers



revealed an 87 per cent smartphone penetration in Singapore. And figures released by Norton last year state that 55 per cent of Singaporeans consider themselves addicted to their mobile devices. With smartphones becoming the norm, affordable data plans have also made it fairly common for people to own more than one mobile phone – this makes it even easier for cheating partners to hide their infidelity.

## Cheap and easy thrills

Take Tinder for example. Launched only in October 2012, it reported a total of one billion matches in March last year. The social networking app allows you to check out photos of potential dates who are physically near your vicinity. Swipe right if you like what you see, swipe left if you don't. And if there is a match, voila! Simply strike up a conversation with your potential date using the instant chat mode. Many other dating and social apps, such as Stepout and OKCupid, also use a similar model of "swiping". Paktor (a dating app that some refer to as "Southeast Asia's Tinder") has also reported having more than 1.5 million registered users since its launch in 2013.

Even applications made for supposedly straightforward communication purposes have since incorporated features that allow you to make new acquaintances anywhere, anytime – like WeChat. Released in January 2011, it boasted 396 million monthly active users in the first quarter of last year – with a simple shake of your smartphone, this instant communication app reveals users who are in your physical

## The Emotional Fallout

**The idea of a no-strings-attached fling may be exciting and tempting, but experts say the consequences are no less detrimental than a full blown affair.**

"It can be just as painful and traumatising for the betrayed spouse," says Elvira Tan, a marriage specialist from

Focus on the Family Singapore. "Some fall into depression, or develop addictions like drinking."

And when kids are involved, they are not spared from the pain either. "Children are terribly affected, especially when they witness arguing or emotional withdrawal between their parents," shares Eugenia Gajardo, a psychologist and counsellor at Alliance

Professional Counselling. But while infidelity strikes at the very foundation of a marriage, there is hope in getting the marriage back on track. "If the fundamentals are in place – love and respect for each other – it is perfectly possible to heal, with the right guidance, and come out of the situation stronger, and closer," Eugenia assures.

vicinity, and gives you the option of chatting with anyone whose profile photo you fancy.

## Are apps to blame for infidelity?

Could the ease and convenience of hooking up with someone who is virtually a stranger, have led to an increase of infidelity cases here in Singapore? Private investigator and Managing Director of International Investigators Pte Ltd, James Loh, thinks so. "Over the past two years, there has definitely been an increase of matrimonial cases due to the usage of social networking phone apps," he says. Experts like Geraldine Tan, Director and Principal Psychologist of The Therapy Room, and Gloria James-Civetta, Head Lawyer at Glora James-Civetta & Co, agree.

"My first such case was in July 2013," shares Gloria. "I now handle about five such cases every month."

Geraldine adds, "I started to hear more about these apps in the last couple of years – many of those who cheat do travel a fair bit," she reveals. "Some of them also switch to 'localised' versions of social networking apps from the countries that they travel to, for instance, when they are in Cambodia or Thailand."

## No longer just the men who are at it

"There are possibly equal numbers of men and women who cheat on their spouses now," says Gloria. "Although they may have different reasons for cheating – for men, it tends to be for the sex, but for women, it's usually about



## Bring the sparkle back into your marriage

"Too many people put their marriage on auto-pilot and leave things to chance," says Elvira Tan, a marriage specialist from Focus on the Family Singapore. "Spend time and effort to strengthen your marriage - do not wait till something happens to threaten it."

### **SPEAK HIS LOVE LANGUAGE**

"Everyone has a primary love language - a preferred way of being shown love. Know what your spouse's is," advises Elvira, who recommends *The 5 Love Languages* by Gary Chapman as a resource.

### **UNDERSTAND HIS SEXUAL NEEDS**

"Get to know your spouse's sexual needs and preferences," says Elvira. "Ask open-ended questions like, 'What is your favourite thing about sex?' or 'What do I do that really turns you on?'"

### **BE BOLD AND CREATIVE**

Explore, discover, and have some fun. "Allow yourself to be a free child - amongst two consenting adults, there are no rules," says Eugenia Gajardo, a psychologist and counsellor at Alliance Professional Counselling.

### **DATE EACH OTHER**

Plan staycations, or have a dinner date at home. "The thrill of chasing and dating fades with the routine of married life, and we forget how good it feels until we are reminded of it - by someone else," cautions Geraldine Tan, Director and Principal Psychologist of The Therapy Room. "Do not forget to date and chase each other - especially after children come into the picture!"

unfulfilled emotional needs."

The thrill of no-strings-attached sex or having travel flings with virtual strangers, is just too irresistible for some. "Some men have sex addictions, and enjoy 'conquering' different women around the world," Geraldine explains. "Sleeping with so many women makes them feel 'powerful,'" she adds. "Yet others are addicted to the world of fantasy. These men may not even carry out the the actual act of physical sex - instead they seek instant gratification from the thrill of sexting different people, or engaging in phone sex."

Social media smart phone apps are so convenient, they allow people to engage in affairs at anytime, and in any place - you could be travelling in the MRT on your way to work, or even having lunch with your colleagues - and no one would suspect a thing. "It is like an escape from reality," explains Gloria. "The false sense of security that these apps provide, adds to the thrill, as the offending partner believes that he or she is acting in secret."

### **Invisible evidence**

The ability of disabling auto-notification features for these apps, and the existence of phone apps like BlackSMS or Vaulty Stocks (that hide discriminating messages and pictures), all make it extremely easy and tempting to cheat.

But nothing is fool proof. "I've heard of clients using apps like BlackSMS, but their spouses still found out about the affair," says Gloria.

Often, the betrayed spouse may also spot the red flags through other subtle ways such as

suspicious behaviour or non-verbal signals that a cheating partner subconsciously sends out.

"Placing the phone face down is passe, since settings can be managed," says Geraldine. "A cheating spouse may change his mobile phone password, lock apps that contain chats, or quite simply, spend an unusual amount of time on their phone."

### **Should these apps be banned?**

While they do make it easier to cheat, the truth is that apps like Tinder, Okcupid, and WeChat were never meant to be developed for that purpose. Says Eugene Lu, founder of FinalSip, the latest social networking app in town, "We developed FinalSip to encourage people to take online socialising offline, through incentivising our users - but everyone has his own agenda."

"We live in an environment filled with distractions," says Eugenia Gajardo, a psychologist and counsellor at Alliance Professional Counselling. "A couple must carve time out to develop and strengthen their relationship, so that their marriage foundation is strong."

Elvira Tan, a marriage specialist from Focus on the Family Singapore, agrees. "The reasons behind extramarital affairs are varied and complex, but insufficient communication, poor conflict resolution skills, and a general lack of effort in maintaining emotional and sexual intimacy, are some of the more common factors," she says. "So look for ways to strengthen your marriage through resources or marriage enrichment classes." **W**