

I Was Addicted to Sex With Married Women

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I was addicted to sex with married women

As a young man, Akhil Sharma revelled in the most dangerous of liaisons, having sex with other men's wives – until the thrill began to pall

Dangerous liason: Anne Bancroft and Dustin Hoffman in The Graduate (1967) Photo: United Artists

By Akhil Sharma

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For about a decade I mostly slept with married women. Even now, nearly 20 years since the last time I did so, when I think of these affairs my mouth goes dry with excitement.

The affairs began when I was 15. A married woman who was a friend of my family started to take a great deal of interest in me. In retrospect, it is obvious that the woman was mentally ill. Back then, because I had very difficult parents who did not pay me much attention, her interest brought enormous relief. I used to wait for her visits. I would write down lists of things I wanted to tell her.

The woman was 40 and she began picking me up at the local library and taking me to her house. As soon as we drove into her garage and she lowered the door, we would start kissing. Even now the musty smell of a garage gets my heart racing. Like all **affairs**, this relationship existed outside time, outside responsibilities. The affair also had the power of secrets. There is something astonishing about how secrets make you feel like you live in a world of your own.

This first affair stamped my sense of what a relationship should be. Afterwards, when I went out with girls my own age, it seemed pointless. For me a relationship needed to contain certain excitements and problems to count. I needed the woman to risk herself for me, the way that the married woman was risking her marriage. I also needed secrets and the feeling of existing in a sort of private world.

After this woman, I tried to go out with other married women. One was a professor of mine. This relationship was strange because, as soon as we had sex, she told her husband. He laughed and said he hoped she was having a good time. I was 18 and the fact that this was his response made me feel my youth and feel how strange the world is. Almost as soon as the woman had told her husband I lost my interest in her. The fact that it was in the open made the relationship real and so, to me, feel leaden with responsibility. Another affair was with the wife of a friend. This is the relationship that I feel saddest about, because I hurt somebody who was important to me.

When I could not find a married woman to sleep with I tried to create drama for myself by going out with women who had boyfriends or with whom I worked. The discretion these situations required felt very much like an affair. Sometimes when none of these conditions prevailed, I would tell the woman I was seeing not to let anyone know we were dating. I would tell her I preferred people not knowing my business, while in reality I just liked secrets. I am not sure when I decided that the loneliness of going out with married women, the sense of being invisible that I experienced when I met their husbands and the sense of not being able to plan my schedule because I was always waiting for small windows of availability all became too much.

I do know that by the time I was in my mid-twenties I could not bear it. At some point I started having the sorts of relationships all my peers did, being introduced by friends to someone with shared interests, going out to dinners, to concerts, to parties at friends' homes. A part of me found the gradualness of all of this irritating, like sipping wine when you are used to a swig of hard liquor. A part of me also found that these ordinary relationships made me more vulnerable. When I was sleeping with a married woman I knew absolutely that the woman was risking herself for me and so I was important. With a woman who was my peer there was always a sense of uncertainty because the fact that she valued me seemed beyond belief.

I have been married now for 13 years. There are good days and bad days. There are even good years and bad years. The one thing that I have gained from being in a committed relationship, though, has been a sense that I have nothing to hide, that when someone asks me a question I don't have to think about what lie I might have last told. Usually this is worth it.

“Family Life” (Faber & Faber), by Akhil Sharma, is available from Telegraph Books

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