

LUST - PLUS LIAISONS

THE HIT TV SERIES THE AFFAIR
HIGHLIGHTS THE EMOTIONAL FALLOUT
FROM INFIDELITY, BUT FOR MANY WOMEN
SUCH FLINGS ARE EMPOWERING PASSION
PICK-ME-UPS. NICOLA GILL REPORTS

When Caroline, 43, returned to London from her annual Easter trip to the Maldives, she couldn't wait to get back to her job as a high-powered advertising-industry exec. She'd had a lovely time with her husband, Jake, some decent après-beach sex, too, and if he hadn't noticed how great she looked in her new Odabash bikini, well, it had been 12 years.

All in all, it had been a solidly successful trip and she was already looking forward to next year's holiday — and the many that would surely follow. But the first thing she did when she arrived at her Soho office the next morning was to log on to her favourite website and start browsing the latest crop of hot, hopeful men filling her inbox. Jake is handsome and solvent, and she never dreams of leaving him or their thoroughly enjoyable life, but like most of her successful friends, she has discovered that nothing gives her the get-up-and-glow of a “lust plus” affair.

Caroline is surfing a trend that's big in more ways than one. The Affair, the latest must-watch American TV series, hit our shores earlier this month, charting the emotional fallout of a passionate extramarital relationship between the happily married writer and father of four Noah Solloway (played by Dominic West) and the waitress Alison Bailey (Ruth Wilson), who is piecing her life together after the death of her son.

Figures from the extramarital dating site Ashley Madison (tagline “Life is short. Have an affair”), confirm that finding a lover is top of our to-do lists. According to the site, 41% of British women stray because of a lack of intimacy, with 48% saying they have sex with their spouse only once a month. In a worldwide survey of its customers, it found that most affairs start three to five years into a marriage. About 70% of its female members are seeking longer-term affairs rather than one-night stands, with 84% of women saying they definitely do not want to leave their husbands. Typically, these serial affair-seekers have mini-relationships lasting about three months — and a significant 12% are on their fourth or fifth fling. A similar site, Illicit Encounters, has taken on extra staff to deal with the 4,900 female members who have signed up so far this year.

Claire Page from the website says the trend is decisively for “life-altering affairs”. Women are coming to the site with more awareness of their needs than ever before. “They aren't looking for a quick fumble or seeking solace from an empty marriage. They want something more. They want a curated



Ruth Wilson
and Dominic
West in *The
Affair*

connection and fulfilment on several levels, with earth-shattering sex being just one part of it.”

They're looking for what Caroline's friend Sasha, 36, calls “lust plus” trysts; the “plus” being a meeting of minds and emotions as well as bodies. “I want a series of blissful honeymoons,” says the former party girl-turned-PR director. “I want a man to adore my every gesture, book surprise tickets to my favourite band, read me passages from his favourite author after sex and send me Agent Provocateur underwear at work — everything my husband did before married life set in. I don't want an affair that leads to messy, broken hearts or the other wife turning up on our doorstep. I want short, sweet affairs where I know I'll end it at the right moment, so I get that intense falling-in-love fix, with all its confidence-boosting benefits and glorious romance, over and over, but the solidity of a good-enough marriage, too.”

Caroline and her friends are mostly right to think their partners won't suspect they are serial strayers. A survey of male members on the extramarital matchmaking site Victoria Milan found that 52% thought their wife was



“not the type” to seek an affair, and 81% said they would be “shocked” to find she was surfing the web for an entirely different kind of new season's delivery. Last year, a study by Relate revealed that a quarter of adults in the UK admit to having cheated on a partner. A 2013 NatSal (National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles) survey also suggested that the higher the educational qualifications and professional standing an individual held, the more accepting they were of affairs. Indeed, a recent survey by Illicit Encounters found that 72% of its female members in Britain have degrees and above.

The CEO of Ashley Madison, Noel Biderman, says that high-aspiring individuals are drawn to power affairs because, consciously or unconsciously, “they take whatever is lacking in their marriage from the other, secret, relationship, removing any distracting blocks of dissatisfaction that might otherwise prevent them from peaking professionally”. He suggests that Tiger Woods, Bill Clinton and François Hollande were all at their peak when their infidelities were uncovered — and never fully recovered their form once cut off from their energy-giving extracurricular activities. No doubt what's long

been sauce for the goose is now also for the gander, the difference being, perhaps, the female of the human species is better at covering her tracks.

Some fiercely successful, time-poor women are even combining their extracurricular passion with self-improvement. Harriet, 35, whose role as trend-hunter for an international luxury brand takes her around the world, chooses successive lovers based around what languages they speak. “So far, I've picked up working Finnish, Portuguese and Dutch — all very useful — though, obviously, I don't break out the saltier phrases in the boardroom. My boss thinks I've taken evening classes, which in a way I have.”

“For me,” says Sasha, “the extra bounce and bonhomie I feel from being adored and worshipped elsewhere translates into a happier, homelier me when I'm with my husband and children. I'm like a caged tiger when I go too long without my indulgences, and everyone benefits from this arrangement. My first illicit lover, Andre, studied classics. He summed it up on our first date when he whispered in my ear, in beautifully accented English, ‘Aristotle may have said love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies, but he didn't say it had to be the same two bodies all your life.’” ♦