

Seeing Clearly Through The Affair Fog

Quick Tips from AffairHealing.com

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It is not uncommon for spouses, family, and friends to be confused by the changes in thinking and behavior that take place in a man or woman who has an affair. "Affair fog" is a label often used to describe this condition. This Quick Tip provides some insight into its meaning and causes.

What is "affair fog"?

Affair fog is a term used to describe a cheater's altered state of mind while invested in an affair. It typically includes shifts in thinking, sometimes dramatic, in which the unfaithful partner views their marriage relationship in overly negative terms and views the affair relationship with exaggerated euphoria.

What causes the fog?

There are a number of factors that can contribute to this state. Here are the most common causes:

The Brain On A Romantic High

Most of us have experienced the rush of attraction and emotion that accompanies the start of any romantic experience. Part of every budding relationship is the belief: "I've never experienced anything like this before!" No matter how many times I've heard this same claim from people involved in an affair, and no matter how earnestly I can point to the overwhelming evidence that reality will bring a disappointing ending to it all, the unfaithful spouse still wants to cling to their conviction that "this relationship is different... we are like soul mates."

In an unpublished work, Linda MacDonald, author and counselor, writes:

"Scientists have found that romantic highs are fueled by mood-lifting neurotransmitters such as dopamine and norepinephrine. However, the strongest cause of your current euphoria is a hormone called phenylethylamine. This particular hormone is released during fresh infatuation and resembles the chemical make-up of morphine. These neuro-chemicals have distorted your sense of reality. You are, in essence, under the influence of drugs.

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“Right now, you may think your eyes are finally open and you feel more alive than ever before. Yet you do not realize that your eyes are seeing through tainted lenses and your mind is in a hormone driven fog. What seems like mental clarity and finding the love of your life is really an illusion created by the chemicals in your brain. These neurochemicals feel so good, they create a false contrast with your marriage. Only you don’t know it yet.”

Cognitive Dissonance

This term refers to the tension experienced when a person holds two beliefs that are inconsistent with each other. (For example: "I am a good person" and "I am a liar and a cheater.") When this happens, they attempt rearrange their thinking to minimize the tension. (For example, a father who leaves his children to be with his lover will eventually convince himself that his children will actually be better off with a happy father who is following his passions.)

We use self-justification to eliminate the cognitive dissonance. Here are a couple quotes from the book, *Mistakes Were Made**:

"Most people, when directly confronted by evidence that they are wrong, do not change their point of view or course of action but justify it even more tenaciously. Even irrefutable evidence is rarely enough to pierce the mental armor of self-justification."

"Self-justification not only minimizes our mistakes and bad decisions; it is also the reason that everyone can see a hypocrite in action except the hypocrite. It allows us to create a distinction between our moral lapses and someone else’s, and to blur the discrepancy between our actions and our moral convictions."

"People strive to make sense out of contradictory ideas and lead lives that are, at least in their own minds, consistent and meaningful."

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How do fog-walkers respond to arguments for clarity?

Even the most persuasive arguments are not likely to sway someone in the affair fog. Rather than responding with reasonable consideration, they tend to protect their preferred beliefs and behaviors in the following ways:

Confirmation Bias

This term refers to the tendency to give special attention to any information that confirms what we believe, and minimize or ignore any information that contradicts what we believe. For example, once a person has justified their affair, they will actively look for additional evidence (no matter how weak it is) to support their opinions and perspective, while ignoring evidence (no matter how strong it is) that stands against it.

Once our minds are made up, it's hard to change them. Lord Molson, a British politician, once stated, "I will look at any additional evidence to confirm the opinion to which I have already come." That's confirmation bias!

Memory Distortion

One way to make us feel better about our current choices is by changing the story of our past. Many betrayed spouses have experienced this method of truth-shifting when their husbands/wives rewrite their marriage history, making it something worse than it was.

More quotes from *Mistakes Were Made*:

"Self-serving memory distortion [is a way of] 'getting what you want by revising what you had.' On the larger stage of the life cycle, many of us do just that: We misremember our history as being worse than it was, thus distorting our perception of how much we have improved, to feel better about ourselves now."

"False memories allow us to forgive ourselves and justify our mistakes, but sometimes at a high price: an inability to take responsibility for our lives."

Gaslighting

In an attempt to protect their unstable account of events, some cheating spouses will resort to a strategy of manipulation to confuse the betrayed spouse in such a way as to make them question their memory, even their sanity. This form of mental abuse is often referred to as "gaslighting," a term derived from the 1938 play, *Gas Light*, in which a husband attempts to convince his wife that she is insane by manipulating her experience of reality. For more information, visit: marriageadvocates.com/2011/08/06/what-is-gaslighting ■

How should you react to a spouse in the "fog"?

If your spouse is rewriting the story of your marriage to justify their affair choices, you must guard against allowing their new "truth" to alter history. Even if your marriage has no future, you should not allow the past to be stolen as well. Your spouse has changed; not your marriage.

Use the worksheet on the next page to list the strong evidences of the good parts in your marriage story. Start from the beginning of your relationship and consider the hard evidence (things that exist) and soft evidence (memories and impressions).

Choose one of the evidences that stands out as a clear example of real connection and joy in your marriage story. Remind your spouse of it (by talking about it or writing it out). But whether or not they join you in remembering the past in this way, let these evidences give you confidence in the more certain truth of your history rather than their rewriting of it.

Worksheet

Hard Evidence letters, cards, email, pictures, a ring, gifts, videos, etc.	Soft Evidence memories, conversations, testimony of family/friends

*Many of the quotes in this post are from the book [Mistakes Were Made, But Not By Me](#). This is not an affair recovery book, but it provides great information about self-justifying behavior. I especially recommend the following chapters:

- Cognitive Dissonance: The Engine of Self-justification
- Pride and Prejudice... and Other Blind Spots
- Memory, the Self-justifying Historian
- Love's Assassin: Self-justification in Marriage
- Wounds, Rifts, and Wars
- Letting Go and Owning UP