Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Sociologist Dr. Alicia Walker likes to explore behaviors that deviate from cultural norms such as infidelity. After reading several articles that challenged common sense understanding about infidelity especially among women, Walker set out to research the topic of women and affairs for her doctoral dissertation.

 The project took several years and involved in-depth interviews with women across the country who sought or participated in affairs through a dating site. The result of that research is her first book published last month, titled The Secret Life of the Cheating Wife: Power, Pragmatism, and Pleasure in Women's Infidelity.

 I'm Emily Yeap. Walker, who is assistant professor of sociology at Missouri State University, joins me today to talk about her work and book.

Alicia Walker: The book is an opportunity to give voice to women's experiences. I talked to 46 women who were using Ashley Madison to find affair partners, and this book goes through their perceptions of what's going on, what their experiences are, how they navigate those relationships alongside their marriages, what are the benefits, what are the costs, and it really looks at what can we learn from these women's experiences.

Emily Yeap: For her research to work, Walker had to find a good sample of women willing to share their experiences.

Alicia Walker: I tried to figure out where am I going to find people to talk to, how am I going to find people who've cheated. It's a super closeted behavior. It's very secretive.

 I remembered that I had read an article about Ashley Madison, the website, so I thought, "Well, I'm just going to contact them. They're probably not going to get back with me," but, to my total delight, they responded very enthusiastically. They were more than happy to help with the study, which was great, and they sent out email invitations to their members with a link to a survey and contact information for me for anybody that wanted to be interviewed, and then people contacted me, which was fantastic. I interviewed everyone over email, which made sense for them in their situation.

Emily Yeap: She explains what her interviews revealed.

Alicia Walker: The bulk of the sample reported that they were cheating to get satisfying sex, which is not at all what we think women's cheating is about. We think that women cheat because they fall in love or because they want revenge or because their husband isn't giving them enough emotional support or whatever, but that's not what I found. Women were really cheating with the primary goal of sexual satisfaction.

 Another one was most of these women have multiple partners, and they talked about that very pragmatically, very matter-of-factly. They used a lot of like market language. They talked about having a herd of men or a team of men or keeping the bench filled, keeping the candy jar full.

 I mean, it's kind of funny and amusing, but, at the same time, it's very revealing that there was not this sentimentality. It wasn't like, "Oh, I'm in love with this guy." There was none of that. Matter of fact, they purposely vetted partners to avoid having emotional attachment.

Emily Yeap: Walker believes there are key lessons couples can learn about marriage and relationships from the women's insights.

Alicia Walker: The first piece would be, if you find out someone's cheating on you, it may not mean what you think that it means.

 I feel like we've all been socialized, I know, I've been guilty of this as well, to think that if someone cheats on you, they don't love you or they don't care about you or they're planning to leave you, but that wasn't the situation at all with these women. Matter of fact, they were not cheating with a plan to leave. They were cheating to stay, so that's a big thing as women talked about, "I've spent years in a sexual desert and, now, I've went out to solve this problem, but my whole point in solving this problem is I want to stay in this marriage."

 Then I think the second piece is we have to really look at our relationships objectively and without emotion and sentimentality about our sexual needs and, specifically, is there a disparity between what I need sexually and what my partner needs sexually. If one of us wants to have sex way more often than the other one does, we’re either going to have to compromise or it's probably just a matter of time before that person decides to go get those needs met somewhere else, and so I need to have some realistic, honest conversations with myself and with my partner about, "Am I willing to meet these sexual needs or am I willing to accept that at some point they may go have them met by someone else?"

 Those are tough things to think about and consider, but from all the data that I've looked at, it seems very obvious that that is really a primary driving force in terms of infidelity.

Emily Yeap: For more information or to contact Walker, visit alicia-walker.com. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the office of university communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.

How did we do?



If you rate this transcript 3 or below, this agent will not work on your future orders