

Reading 2: Why the New York Times Now Favors Adultery

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Notes

The Gallup polling people have issued a new report on the views Americans hold on what used to be called the moral issues. The results are totally expected and still disappointing.

We love our contraception. A whopping 91 percent find it morally acceptable. Divorce is approved of by 73 percent. Fornication is okay with 69 percent of us. Same-sex relations are approved of by 63 percent. Bastardy is fine with 62 percent. Coming in below 50 percent approval, however, is abortion at 43 percent, teen sex at 36 percent, pornography at 36 percent, and suicide at 18 percent. Polygamy has climbed to 17 percent and cloning gets 14 percent.

And then there's this. Coming in dead last is adultery that gets only 9 percent approval. This has climbed, too. It used to be at 6 percent, then 7, now 9.

Hold onto that thought, that overwhelmingly Americans do not approve of extramarital affairs. And consider a massive New York Times valentine to adultery that appeared in the Sunday Magazine a few weeks ago.

"Is an Open Marriage a Happier Marriage" by Susan Dominus is a 12,000-word wet smooch to several couples who have decided to "open" their marriages to other people, that is, the wife takes boyfriends, the husband takes girlfriends, sometimes everyone jumps into the pool together.

The main protagonists are a couple named Daniel and Elizabeth who find that some years after their wedding, they—mostly Daniel—have grown bored with their sex life. Daniel says Elizabeth's interest had waned. She agreed and blamed her strict—always strict—Catholic upbringing. Daniel cast his desires in the form of rights. He said he had a right to better sex. Increasingly itchy, Daniel wrote about "nonmonogamy" on a blog about sexuality run by a friend of his. Yes, Daniel has friends who blog about sexuality.

Daniel eventually broached the subject of adultery with Elizabeth. He explained to her that having their second child did not detract from the love they felt for their first child because “love is additive. It is not finite.” Oh, yeah, they have two children. These two hapless creatures make at least a cameo appearance in this saga.

Elizabeth was not buying. Dominus writes, “[Elizabeth] was not even sure what, exactly, he wanted from her, or how she could give it.” This does not last long.

They continued with their humdrum lives of mediocre sex until one night in 2015 Elizabeth meets Joseph at a charity fundraiser. She and Joseph “go to tea” a few times.

Dominus says Elizabeth and Joseph barely knew each other and this allowed for a kind of “lightness” between them, “pure fun in the face of everything.” On their third date, he kisses her and she likes “someone else’s mouth on hers for the first time in 24 years.”

And then, get this. Elizabeth’s husband Daniel is upset. This was the guy who brought the idea to her in the first place. Go figure that. Nobody could see that coming.

Where Daniel said outside sex was his civil or human right or whatever, Elizabeth said the affair was important for her “growth” and that she was “taking a stand” for her own pleasure and she was “sticking to it.”

So, off they went to a sex therapist who warned them they were headed for divorce. Concerned, Elizabeth offers to quit boffing Joseph if that is what Daniel wants. And you know what Daniel really wants? It turns out he just wants to give his permission for another man to diddle his wife. He said it’s okay and now he felt better. There is a word for the kind of man Daniel is. It is an old word, a good word. Wuss. Daniel is a wuss. He is also a cuckold. He is a wussified cuckold.

Understand that a lot of this is backed up by the very latest, the most up to the minute therapy and “science.” Daniel and Joseph and Elizabeth want you to know they are not shoving off into rough waters with nothing but a leaky boat. Their sails are full of wisdom from someone named Tammy Nelson, a therapist with an interest in open relationships who wrote a book coining a new term, “The New Monogamy.”

Tammy says, “The new monogamy is, baldly speaking, the recognition that, for an increasing number of couples, marital attachment involves a more fluid idea of connection to the primary partner than is true of the ‘old monogamy.’ Within the new notion of monogamy, each partner assumes that the other is, and will remain, the main attachment, but that outside attachments of one kind or another are allowed—as long as they don’t threaten the primary connection.”

In the New Monogamy, the connection to your spouse is “more fluid.” Anytime the sexual revolutionaries talk about fluidity, you can be sure that some institution is taking it in the chops. Tammy says the New Monogamy could include not only long-lasting relationships outside of marriage but also one night stands.

You notice that the New Monogamy sounds a great deal like the old adultery.

And then, a few paragraphs later, Dan Savage rears his hoary head. You had to expect Dan Savage to make an appearance since he coined the word “monogamish,” what Savage says most gay relationships are built on, that is, a main squeeze and lots of hot man-on-man action on the side. This is what they call being faithful. Seriously they do. Proponents of the New Monogamy greatly admire the way gay men have led the way in this kind of “fidelity.” By the way, if any of you say gays are not generally faithful to their “spouse,” you will get labeled a hater, even though they know, everyone knows, Dan Savage knows they’re not. The only rule in Savage-World is that both partners behave “ethically,” whatever that might mean.

Besides therapists, and sex experts like Savage, in this mammoth New York Times thumb-sucker, Dominus brings in some academics to back these claims. She says there’s “an entire scientific field ... has evolved to understand the near-totally diminishment of lust for their partners that so many women in long-term monogamous relationships feel.” Dominus says, “It took decades for sex researchers to consider the possibility that women’s fabled low libido might be a *symptom of monogamy*.” (Italics mine.) Monogamy now has “symptoms.”

Back to the Daniel & Elizabeth Show. He gets a girlfriend and goes away with her. Later that night Elizabeth playfully texts him, "Are you naked yet?" But when Daniel comes home the next day from his New Monogamy snog, Elizabeth is upset! Why? Because it took weeks for her and Joseph to work up to the sex. They spent weeks growing their relationship before they got naked, and here Daniel jumps into bed almost immediately. She gets over it. Daniel eventually breaks up with his girlfriend. Elizabeth still sees Joseph who, by the way, has a wife who is in the dark about all of this. The children are not mentioned any more. Who cares about them anyway?

If all of this sounds tedious, it is. If it sounds juvenile, it's that, too. One of the things you notice in talking to the New Sexual Revolutionaries is that far from being sophisticated about sex, they are remarkably unsophisticated. It is like expecting anything remotely adult in an adult film, or expecting to find any gentlemen at a gentlemen's club.

And no matter what new phrases they coin or how they dress it up in therapy-talk and academic studies, the fact is they are bored with their husbands and wives and they miss that electricity one feels early on in relationships. Like any teenager, they much prefer to be "in love" than to love. Love is boring; in love is amazing. But the real story is they are run-of-the-mill horndogs and just can't admit it.

If there is any good news it is that, at least according to Gallup, hardly anyone thinks this is a good thing. I wonder what their kids say?