



Eye on Culture™



www.CultureandMediaInstitute.org

Media Contact: Colleen O'Boyle at 703.683.5004

www.MRC.org

Will Edwards Scandal Teach Media that Lying about Adultery Is Wrong?

By Brian Fitzpatrick and Julia Seward

The liberal media coddled former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards for months, refusing to investigate the tawdry allegations that he pursued an affair and fathered a child out of wedlock even while parading his terminally ill wife as a campaign prop. Don't they realize that adultery, and lying about adultery, is still a big deal?

America's major muckraking newspapers left it to a supermarket tabloid, *The National Enquirer*, to explore the question of Edwards's marital infidelity. The *Enquirer* broke the story last October. Edwards told the Associated Press at the time that "the story is false. It's completely untrue, ridiculous." He continued the strategy of deny, deny, deny, until political pressures forced him to admit in an ABC *Nightline* interview aired August 8 that in 2006, he did in fact cheat on his cancer-stricken wife of 30 years.

The morning after Edwards admitted the affair on national television, CNN anchor Melissa Long was still clinging to the mythical persona created by the Edwards campaign. As reported by Media Research Center Director of Research Rich Noyes, Long described Edwards as "much loved, worked for the poor, a man who was self-made, and all about integrity and honesty."

How could any reasonably intelligent person, much less a cable network news anchor, continue to describe an adulterer like Edwards as "all about integrity and honesty?" How could the media have ignored the story for months?

Apparently many people in the liberal media are operating from the Clintonian premise that private sex lives (and any financial and legal

shenanigans associated with illicit relationships) are nobody's business, and that adultery is of little consequence.

Just weeks before the Edwards admissions stunned the liberal media, CBS's *Early Show* and *TIME* were promoting a relationship expert who advocates lying about affairs, and suggests that infidelity can sometimes improve a marriage.

CBS and *TIME* both gave receptive platforms to controversial relationship therapist Mira Kirshenbaum, author of a new book, *When Good People Have Affairs: Inside the Hearts & Minds of People in Two Relationships*. Contrary to the advice of many leading experts, Kirshenbaum advises cheaters not to admit their adultery to their spouses unless there's a risk of sexually transmitted disease, or if they're about to get caught.

Kirshenbaum also contends that marriages that experience infidelity can "come out the other end in a much better place than they ever were, especially if they don't tell." She argues that "minimizing the hurt" is a greater moral principle than being honest.

Neither CBS nor *TIME* challenged Kirshenbaum about her questionable views.

Maggie Rodriguez, co-anchor of CBS's *Early Show*, interviewed Kirshenbaum on July 28. She asked Kirshenbaum: "And if you cheat, should you tell your spouse automatically?" Kirshenbaum answered with a resolute "No."

Rodriguez seemed surprised, but listened passively as Kirshenbaum amplified her

Most Adultery Experts Advise Honesty

- Dr. Shirley Glass, leading expert on infidelity: "An important stage in recovering from any traumatic event involves telling the story about what occurred. The involved partner must be willing to answer questions about the affair. During an affair, there is a wall of deception and secrecy. The story of the affair must be shared in order for recovery and healing to occur."
- Peggy Vaughan, author of *The Monogamy Myth: A Personal Handbook for Recovering from Affairs*: "Ongoing honesty is essential to both personal recovery and to rebuilding the marriage."
- Stephen M. Judah, Ph.D, author of *Staying Together: When an Affair Pulls You Apart*: "Honesty with the offended spouse about infidelity represents a turning point in respect to intimacy, and so it is a key step in restoring intimacy."
- Willard F. Harley, Jr., Ph.D, author of *Fall in Love, Stay in Love*: "Honesty does not drive a spouse insane—dishonesty does....When you hold something back, your spouse tries to guess what it is. If he or she is right, then you must continually lie to cover your tracks."

answer: “No. There are two exceptions. If there’s a chance of a sexually transmitted disease, then you have to tell. And if your spouse is likely to find out. But why would you hurt someone?” Rodriguez nodded in assent and whispered, “Right.”

Kirshenbaum concluded, “The principle is: do no harm. So don’t hurt anyone, don’t tell them.” Rodriguez never challenged her statement, but only thanked her for being on the show.

TIME magazine writer Andrea Sachs posed a similar question to Kirshenbaum in early July: “Should you confess if you feel guilty about it?”

Kirshenbaum gave a more extended answer than in her interview with Rodriguez, relegating honesty to the backseat and imposing her own moral principle: “Honesty is great, but it’s an abstract moral principle. . . . The higher moral principle, I believe, is not hurting people.” She said that it’s best to spare the other person the “hurt and grief and loss of trust” that comes with revealing an affair. She then argues that “confessing your affair is the kind of honesty that is unnecessarily destructive.”

Sachs didn’t challenge Kirshenbaum’s advice advocating dishonesty, but instead moved on to another question. At the end of the interview, Kirshenbaum said that marriages that experience infidelity may “come out the other end in a much better place than they ever were, especially if they don’t tell. And the problem with telling is that you’re then taking all the time in therapy and in your life where you should be focusing on making the relationship the best it can be.”

Kirshenbaum and her husband, Dr. Charles Foster, are the founders of the Chestnut Hill Institute, which offers “psychotherapy and consulting for individuals, couples, families, and organizations.” Their books offer advice on topics such as marriage, relationships, parenting, decision-making, communication, and emotional health. Kirshenbaum also writes a column for Revolution Health and maintains a blog that disseminates relationship advice.

The couple’s influence is far-reaching. They have appeared on *Oprah*, the *Today Show*, and on John Stossel’s *20/20* special on parenting teens.

On June 20, 2008, Kirshenbaum received a distinctly cooler welcome on Fox News’s *Hannity and Colmes* show. In contrast to CBS and *TIME*, Alan Colmes and guest host Rich Lowry challenged her to answer a few tough questions.

Lowry came out with guns blazing: “Mira, I can tell you right now a lot of people out there in America watching this segment are thinking every adulterer in the country is delighted that you have written this book.” Kirshenbaum replied that she wasn’t advising anyone to go out and have an affair, but that affairs may make a marriage stronger after rebuilding trust.

Colmes challenged Kirshenbaum’s advice about concealing one’s affair: “But you say never ever, even if asked directly, confess that you have had an affair. If you had gone and done that, lie to the person. Don’t tell the truth. Don’t tell your partner that you cheated on them....Aren’t you then living a lie?”

Kirshenbaum explained that “it’s a moral principle...do no harm. It does harm when you tell someone.”

Colmes shot back, “But never tell them if you did it, right? Never, even if asked?” Kirshenbaum replied, “Not if you want to protect the marriage and heal.”

CBS and *TIME* ought to have balanced their interviews with Kirshenbaum by interviewing experts who disagree with her contention that cheaters should lie to their spouses about affairs. For example, Dr. Shirley Glass, one of the world’s leading experts on infidelity, argues that honesty is essential to salvaging a marriage.

Glass, who was described by *The New York Times* as “the godmother of infidelity research,” wrote that “many counselors erroneously advise couples to bury the past and avoid discussing the details of the affair after it’s discovered, despite research evidence that indicates open discussions about the betrayal are essential to recovery.”

Fallen idol Edwards might have been applying Kirshenbaum’s advice about lying about affairs, and he got away with it for a long time because Big Media apparently believed that lying about adultery is no big deal.

Brian Fitzpatrick is senior editor at the Culture and Media Institute, and Julia Seward is an intern. CMI research assistant Colleen Raezler contributed to this report.