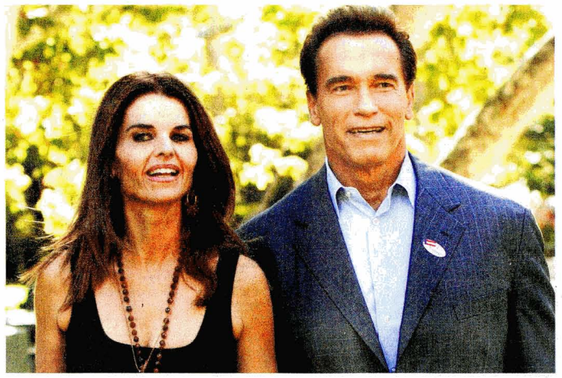
Publication: The Straits Times, p 5
Date: 29 May 2011
Headline: Pretty wife, plain mistress

Pretty wife, plain mistress



"Some people may prefer a plainer or uglier partner to feel more secure about themselves."
ANG THIAM HONG, family life coach

Arnold Schwarzenegger (with wife Maria Shriver, left) had an affair with the plain-looking Mildred Patricia Baena (right).

PHOTOS: REUTERS

That could happen because some men feel more secure being the better-looking one or because they just want variety in bed partners

Yip Wai Yee

He was a body-builder turned movie star, married to a striking career woman from the gilded Kennedy family.

But when the world got its first look at the woman Arnold Schwarzenegger cheated on Maria Shriver with, there were gasps of surprise.

Schwarzenegger, who could have his pick of ambitious, gorgeous starlets, had carried on his affair with a dumpy housekeeper who looks more mom than red hot momma.

Photos of Mildred Patricia Baena – which ran online and in newspapers around the world including The Straits Times – have left readers utterly puzzled over his choice for a lover.

Baena was also discovered to have given birth to an illegitimate son by Schwarzenegger a mere five days after Shriver gave birth to her fourth and youngest child.

Still, Schwarzenegger is not the only famous guy to carry on with plain Janes. A few from a long list include footballer Wayne Rooney and actor Jude Law. And who could forget golfer Tiger Woods, who somehow forgot about his stunning wife Elin Nordegren at home to fool around with trashy call girls?

You may well wonder why men have affairs with women who are plainer-looking than their wives. But counsellors and psychologists say there is a reason for this.

Mr Ang Thiam Hong, a family life coach with private practice Edora Counselling Services, explains: "Some people may prefer a plainer or uglier partner to feel more secure about themselves."

This reasoning is, in fact, something that fits Schwarzenegger's alleged motive exactly.

According to a dossier compiled by Hollywood private detectives and obtained by Britain's News Of The World tabloid, he liked to pick plain-looking women for sex because they "demonstrated more admiration and adoration over his body".

The report said that the actor "sees himself as the dominant, beautiful one", and that "gorgeous women intimidate" him.

Ms Karen McDonald Louis, a marriage and family therapist with charity well-being group Hope Worldwide Singapore, says: "People always say that when people cheat, they go for the prettier or sexier thing, but that is not actually true.

"In fact, what marriage counsellor Dr Gary Neuman found in his study of 100 cheating men in the United States is that only 12 per cent reported that the 'other woman' was better-looking than their wives."

Dr Norman Li, associate professor of psychology at Singapore Management University, shares the rather pessimistic view that men cheat, "not to replace their wives but to obtain sexual variety".

Software engineer Larry Chen, 27, who has a girlfriend, adds: "Not that I condone it, but men sometimes go for the plainer-looking woman for a mistress simply as an alternative. They want something different after being married to a beautiful woman for so long. Men just get bored quicker than women do."

Still, counsellor Louis is quick to add that there must be more to the story than just looking at the physical appearance of the mistress in comparison to the spouse.

She says that most men – and women for that matter – cheat because an "emotional connection" is lacking between the spouses.

She explains: "Some studies have shown that in the average marriage in the United Kingdom, the couple spends only about 10 minutes a day talking to each other. So how is that meant to foster a good marriage?

"Then when the husband or wife goes to work, they may be looked upon by a fellow colleague as fantastic and then constantly showered with praise, and an emotional connection is started there. By then, it doesn't matter whether the colleague is better- or plainer-looking than the spouse, because that colleague is filling the emotional void that had been missing back at home."

The bottom line then, is that married couples need to constantly communicate with each other to make it work.

Corporate communications executive Victor Yen, 31, who has been happily married for four years, says: "There is the urban myth that men are so attracted by physical looks that they are willing to overlook other attributes. But I think men actually need more than that, even if they don't choose to admit it. They need a listening ear and someone who can care for them or be around them when they are troubled.

"People have affairs because they need to fill certain gaps in their lives that maybe their spouses are not filling. They need to have their un-met needs, well, met. What the other person looks like, therefore, does not matter at all anymore."

yipwy@sph.com.sg

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.