

Sociologist: Tiger Woods' Example Neither Reflects Nor Threatens the Image of Marriage

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(PhysOrg.com) -- University at Buffalo sociologist Sampson Blair says Tiger Woods' alleged rampant infidelities don't affect the status of marriage and the family because his lifestyle and wealth are regarded by most Americans as an exception to the rule, and his behavior is seen as attached to the lifestyle.

"The situation with Tiger Woods, while it certainly has garnered a great deal of attention due to his [celebrity](#) status as a professional athlete, does not necessarily 'harm' the cultural image of [marriage](#) and the family," says Blair, an associate professor of sociology who studies marriage and the family.

"Most Americans tend to regard the marriages and subsequent divorces of celebrities as not representative of the 'typical' American marriage in the first place," he says, "as F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, 'the very rich...are different from you and me,' an opinion most Americans seem to share," he says.

"What goes on within marriages of the very wealthy -- whether it's [divorce](#), domestic violence, or even a simple marital spat -- is always fodder for gossip magazines, which present it as more dramatic than the experiences of most of us. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that the average American husband worries about his angry wife chasing him down the street with a golf club in her hand," says Blair.

As far as marriage itself goes, Blair says we are in "a very interesting time" in the history of marriage in United States.

"Given the length of the economic recession, marriage rates have dropped slightly over the past year," he says, "but divorce rates have dropped as well." He says this means fewer young adults believe that they can afford to get married, and fewer married adults believe they can afford to go through a divorce.

"Quite simply, more and more people are beginning to realize the economic dimensions of marriage and family life," he says.

On another note, Blair says he is troubled by the selective nature of the Tiger Woods story.

"Granted, he is, arguably, the most famous athlete in the world and, as such, garners a considerable amount of media attention," Blair says, "but marital infidelity is hardly something new among wealthy athletes.

"Over just the past decade, there have been many incidents of married athletes from football, baseball, and a variety of other sports 'straying' while playing away from home.

"It is difficult to imagine that all other professional golfers whom, like other athletes, travel constantly in their sport, have been completely faithful to their spouses," he says.

"The combination of wealth, travel, and money frequently leads to the dilemma in which [Tiger Woods](#) currently finds himself," Blair says.

"That he is not alone in this sort of infidelity does not excuse his lack of responsible behavior, but we should perhaps back up and realize that Woods simply is the one who was most recently 'caught.'"

Provided by University at Buffalo

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