

Streaming leads to 'binge cheating'



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CONSUMER WATCH

Recently, I came across an interesting article about a survey that claimed nearly half of Netflix viewers have secretly binge-watched a show without their partner, after they had been watching together.

For the uninitiated, "binge-watching" is when you watch multiple episodes at one sitting on Netflix or some other streaming service. The serial nature of many TV shows, as well as the ease with which you can move from one episode to the next, has contributed to the rise of this phenome-

non in just a few years. The term has recently been added to dictionaries.

Many couples find it to be something they can share. So, sitting down together, they'll watch four straight episodes of "The Walking Dead" (for example), one after the other. But, alas, sometimes we still want to watch something after our partner has gone to bed early or is out of town, and the lure of "The Crown" or "House of Cards" is nearly inescapable.

This phenomenon has tripled since Netflix rolled out the results of its first such survey in 2013. Slightly disturbingly, most viewers who admitted to it say they'd plan to keep doing it if

they could "get away with it". As to which shows are inspiring this behavior, Entertainment Weekly reports that "The Walking Dead," "Breaking Bad," "Orange is the New Black," "House of Cards" and "Marvel's Daredevil" are most often cited.

To be clear, there are far more serious offenses that can jeopardize a relationship, and this behavior is unlikely to cause significant issues on its own. Still, these statistics indicate just how far TV has infiltrated our lives. While the explosion in streaming services has cut significantly into "traditional" TV watching, the average American watches about five hours of TV a day (across all device types),

according to a 2016 Nielsen report.

When it comes to how much binge-cheating is going on, Americans are strictly amateurs. The real action is in Latin America and Europe. In Brazil and Mexico, about six in 10 viewers reported that they regularly "binge-cheated" on their significant others. And in the U.K., the problem has gotten so out of hand that a British ice-cream company created what they call "commitment rings," wearable gadgets that are linked to each other by radio signals (near-field communication). Clever marketers have sold the product with the tagline, "Love should last more than one season." A couple buys the rings, then registers through an

online app, choosing which shows they plan to watch together. If both rings aren't in close proximity to each other, the app will prevent the show from streaming.

So — other than buying expensive wearable tech — what's a committed couple to do to avoid conflict from binge-watching? I'm no marriage counselor (nor do I play one on TV), but after 26 years of wedded bliss, I believe it starts with honesty. My wife and I have a policy of telling each other when we want to keep on watching after the other has left the room. (In the interest of full disclosure, I promptly self-report even unintentional incidents: "Sweetie, I continued to watch 'Longmire' after

you fell asleep in your chair. Please forgive me." One can't be too careful in a marriage.) We have a specific set of shows we like to watch together, and if one of us wants to move on to the next episode alone, we'll ask. But we'll generally switch to something else until the next time we can watch together; we've found that time we spend together is too valuable.

Having honest dialogue could possibly prevent the conflict altogether. Hmm, sounds like it could solve much more serious problems than that of trying to hide the fact you watched "Breaking Bad" by yourself.

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