

WHY GOOD MEN CHEAT

By Nick Charles

If you think it's only about getting some, think again. Baggage and bad judgment - and even a woman's own behavior - are often at the root of a man's betrayal

Tony knew he and his girlfriend, Ruby, would tie the knot -- someday. They'd been together on and off since college, spending a small fortune on airfare and long-distance calls whenever Ruby returned to her native Barbados. So when her visa expired and they faced another separation, he thought, Why not go all the way? Ruby's need for a green card may have rushed things a bit, but "in my mind, getting married was the honorable thing to do," Tony * recalls.

** Some names and identifying details of individuals have been changed to protect subjects' privacy.*

They said their "I do's" at a lavish island wedding, then relocated to Boston, where Tony was getting his M.B.A. and Ruby had enrolled in medical school. They seemed to be headed for a charmed life. So Tony wasn't fazed when, 18 months later, Ruby confessed to an affair she'd had when they were dating long-distance. It was history, he figured. Ruby also demanded that he tell her if he'd ever cheated. By now he'd heard all about the players in her past. She needed constant reassurances that he was different. And in his mind, he was. Sure, he'd had a dalliance while they had been living apart, but since the woman meant nothing to him, why not 'fess up and put his wife's mind at ease? Big mistake. "She went off," says Tony. "I saw an anger that was scary."

The discovery of a partner's affair can hit a woman with the force of a runaway train. But does it mean that the relationship is permanently derailed? That depends, experts say. It turns out that some brothers who have been unfaithful aren't necessarily players but loving -- if imperfect -- partners. Good men who strayed. Why does it happen? In the marketplace of desire, some men see an affair as an impulse buy. Subconscious needs can temporarily make a sexual opportunity seem too good to pass up. Only in hindsight do many realize the cost. Women may weigh the consequences more carefully.

But taking inventory of male behavior can be tricky. "There is a blanket assumption by women that every man who cheats is a bum," says Peggy Vaughan,

author of *The Monogamy Myth* (Newmarket Press) and a psychological consultant in San Diego. "Women think the infidelity is a reflection on them and a rejection of them." And that perceived disregard is what makes the behavior so devastating and hard to forgive. But, as Vaughan points out, "infidelity isn't always about the wife." This realization helped Vaughan, married for 47 years to her high-school sweetheart, to hang tough during his affairs years ago and work with him to restore intimacy and trust once the drama subsided.

Eros and the Male Ego

Of course, not all marriages survive infidelity. And when a relationship dies, it isn't often that the guy does a postmortem. Men, who don't readily process emotions, are more likely to block off a painful past, notes William July II, author of *The Hidden Lover: What Women Need to Know That Men Can't Tell Them* (Broadway Books). So it's not surprising that some brothers insist that their reason for stepping out was purely sexual.

Take Percy Brown, who at age 26 married an older woman he had known for a year. (They wanted kids and, for medical reasons, having them right away was her only option.) He broke his marriage vows at the five-year mark. "After a while I just wanted to sleep with somebody else just once," he says, feeling that his bachelorhood was far too brief. But he was probably looking to feed a more complex need: Money problems and the stress of being the family's sole provider strained his sense of manhood. He also felt trapped in a role he wasn't completely ready for and unappreciated by a woman he realized he didn't know very well. He later admits that the affair made him feel powerful and desired.

"What a man may be looking for is admiration," says Shirley Glass, Ph.D., author of *Not Just Friends: Protect Your Relationship From Infidelity and Heal the Trauma of Betrayal* (Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group). "If he's feeling needy, an affair can happen, and it's not just about sex." So what are some of the other reasons men stray? We asked a few brothers to speak for themselves. Keep in mind that it's only one side of the story, but it's straight from the (cheating) heart:

Tony: 'My wife expected me to screw up.'

Sometimes a woman's lack of trust in her man may influence him to stray. Let's revisit Tony, whose wife, Ruby, learned of the affair he'd had before they wed. "She said I was a two-timing lowlife just like my uncle, who raised me," Tony says.

He can't help thinking that Ruby's question and his admission put him on the losing end of a destructive game of "gotcha."

Over the next few years the conflict continued. Ruby's distrust deepened. Whenever Tony, a consultant, returned home from a business trip, he says, the inquisition would resume. Although their bitter arguments were typically followed by passionate sex, Tony grew increasingly withdrawn, which fueled Ruby's suspicions. "Her insecurity was stifling," he says. "After a while I can't say I went looking for anyone -- I wasn't hitting the clubs. But I met someone at a client site and we became friends." The woman, Rochelle, looked up to him and sought his advice on professional and personal matters. She was also a good listener when he vented about the situation at home. This was a welcome change from his interactions with Ruby. "A long-term partner sees us warts and all," notes Glass. "But what makes the prospect of a relationship with a new person so attractive is the unblemished image of ourselves we see reflected in their eyes." Eventually Tony and Rochelle became lovers.

"Rochelle knew I was married," Tony continues. "But I was convinced I'd had enough. I just didn't want to end the marriage while Ruby was in medical school."

Ironically, by checking out of his marriage psychologically without actually leaving his wife, Tony created a kind of buffer zone that made his home life tolerable. And when the couple moved to Phoenix for Ruby's pediatric residency, Tony decided there were enough positives in his marriage to give it another shot and broke off his two-year affair. "Our marriage got a second wind," he says.

But the change of scenery didn't help for long. Tony began feeling smaller and smaller with each passing year. "She would bring me down constantly," he says, describing how in public his wife would jokingly discredit compliments given to him. Meanwhile, Tony's business travel left Ruby feeling increasingly abandoned. "She would accuse and complain. I would defend. She was feeling wronged, and I was feeling wronged," he says. Though they'd planned on having kids, Ruby later told Tony that she didn't feel he'd make a suitable father because too much of the child-rearing burden would fall on her. "Ruby wanted a Blockbuster husband, one who would rarely leave home except maybe to pick up a video," Tony says. "I wasn't that guy." He felt devalued, unloved. "In my affair, I felt attractive and wanted. Having gotten a taste of that gave me a sense of what I was missing," he recalls.

Five months before the marriage finally collapsed, Tony met a woman who stoked his libido and stroked his ego. "I got carried away," he says of his relationship with a gorgeous woman who told him he was smart, great in bed, attractive -- all the things he needed to hear.

But he also felt hypocritical and isolated. "I was the man my friends came to on matters of integrity," he says. "I couldn't sleep. I was living a big lie, and it was weighing on me. Eventually, I confessed to my wife."

The admission was the final act in a ten-year drama. Their divorce was swift and uncontested -- with his leaving her everything, including their home, to hasten closure and start anew. Since then he has been living with family and seeing a therapist to figure out what happened. "Once you have an affair, you begin to question if all men are cheats," says Tony. "I behaved like one of the boys, cloaked in a gentleman's persona. But I consider myself a good man. When I think of being good, it's that good men make better choices. When they fall off the wagon, the way I did, they're willing to get back on. Bad men stay off."

A sense of "falling" is described by cheating partners again and again. Glass says that partners who begin to look outside the relationship for nonsexual intimacy are on "a slippery slope" that could easily lead to betrayal. July notes a similar pattern: "When some men have affairs, they're not intending to leave their relationships. It's more a situation of their running away from a problem. They see the other woman as an opportunity to escape from reality."

What's unfortunate is that when a man tries to straighten out, his wife can focus on his failings or faults in a way that trips him up further. And who's there to catch him? You guessed it.

Howard: 'How can she not see that I need her?'

Anita knew that her fiancé, Howard, was a good man. She came home to hugs and a hot meal, and he would run her a bath as he listened to the details of her high-stress day as an executive recruiter. "The two clicked instantly three years ago," says Grace Cornish, Ph.D., a psychologist in Bronxville, New York, who says their story is typical of couples who lose their way.

But when the pair set up house together, Anita's take-charge attitude made Howard, a caseworker at a nonprofit agency, feel not that they were creating a

new life together, but as if he'd been slotted into hers. "She was doing so many things, he felt marginalized," explains Cornish, the author of *You Deserve Healthy Love, Sis!* (to be published next month by Crown). Howard also felt shut out of key financial decisions. For instance, Anita withdrew the down payment for a new Honda from their joint checking account without consulting him.

Meanwhile, budget cuts and layoffs at Howard's agency swelled his caseload, causing him to work longer hours. He seemed to be around less on weekends too, going to games with the guys, Anita noticed. Then Howard was laid off, so Anita offered to pay his share of the rent. "She thought she was being supportive and kind," says Cornish. "But Howard felt he wasn't contributing, like he wasn't needed."

Then a trip to the dry cleaners left Anita feeling like the odd woman out. She found a number in Howard's pants pocket. When she called, a woman named Raquel informed her that Howard was hers. "Give him up," she said. "He doesn't love you anymore."

After the shock wore off and she'd spent some time in therapy, Anita asked Howard if they could work things out. Howard tearfully confided that he had wanted more attention. "Howard's feeling was, How can she not see that I need her?" says Cornish, adding that his affair was fueled both by a desire to get back at his fiancée and by a hunger to feel powerful and adored.

And that's where Raquel fit in. Their friendship started at work. He had helped the pretty single mom of three, who had fallen on hard times, find housing and a job that allowed her to go to school part-time. In her eyes, he was Superman. He kept in touch with his former client, stopping by and doing little favors. "When his comfort level at home was disturbed, he restored it with this younger woman who looked up to him," says Cornish. "It wasn't really about the sex."

But sex became a casualty as Howard and Anita worked to put his affair behind them. They moved into separate bedrooms. They postponed their wedding. Sometimes she'd lash out at him. He'd listen, humble himself and admit -- again -- how sorry he was. But sometimes they would share experiences: How he'd learned growing up that a man should always be in charge. How she'd learned, after an uncle abused her, never to show vulnerability with a man and to depend on no one but herself. And after almost a year of healing, they began also to talk

about the future. Now they're saving to buy a house, deciding where to go for vacation and planning other major expenses together.

"Couples can come back from an affair," says Glass. "The injured party will never look at the transgressor the same way. He or she can't just say, 'Hi, hon, I'm back.' But if the transgressor is willing to take responsibility, a loving relationship can be restored."

Is Betrayal Biological?

"My DNA made me do it." That's a built-in excuse for cheaters everywhere. But sex researcher Vern Bullough, Ph.D., author of *Science in the Bedroom* (Basic Books), doesn't totally subscribe to the theory that cheating is a natural instinct, a biological imperative. Like other experts, the adjunct professor at the University of Southern California says men cheat more to preserve their egos than to preserve their genetic code. "Depending on his temperament, a man may feel that he has to have an affair to show power," says Bullough. "Another way is to buy a motorcycle."

What the choice boils down to is self-control, says Rozario Slack, director of fathering and urban initiatives for First Things First in Chattanooga. "The challenge for someone tempted to cheat is to activate his or her higher self," Slack says. "It's easy to say 'I can't help myself,' but these are the same people who can walk past a radio in the store and not steal it." Choosing monogamy means choosing to integrate our sexuality, our emotions and our spirituality, adds the married father of three. "There are so many bonds during sex -- spiritual, physical, emotional," he says. "A person cannot maintain these with more than one partner and remain whole."

July insists that there's a hidden lover in every man who "longs for a pure open connection, emotionally and spiritually, with his mate." But for a man conditioned from boyhood to wall off feelings, this kind of connection is tricky.

As Tony noted, what separates the "good men" from the boys is the willingness to try. Slack adds that it's also the willingness to stand firm, amid a sex-obsessed culture that he describes as "one big circus," in the belief that monogamy is not only preferable, but also possible.

Senemeh: 'Family keeps me faithful.'

R. Senemeh Burke sets down his beverage, his head nodding in time to the music's beat. Since he became a dad, a night out with his buddies is a rare treat. His boys rib him good-naturedly about that cocoa-skinned hottie who has been eyeing him all evening, but when she makes a move on him, he rebuffs her politely, pushes away from the bar and tells his pals, "Later."

"I've never cheated on my wife," says the 37-year-old, a network administrator in Atlanta. But after ten years and two children, he notes this with neither superiority nor condescension. "I won't say I haven't thought about it," he admits. "We have had some difficult times. But I haven't had to go down that path as a solution."

What keeps Senemeh focused is religion (he's a Yoruba priest), his politics (Black nationalism) and his love for his two sons and his wife, an attorney. "When you're talking about nationalism and nation building, you're dealing with the family unit," he stresses. Watching his closest friends go through horrendous splits has also made him gun-shy about seeking sexual solace elsewhere. "I could not and would not be separated from my children," he explains. "My self-esteem is not defined by my sexual conquests; it's defined by the kind of father I am, the kind of family I maintain."

While Senemeh won't say he will never have an affair, he hopes that he won't. "The most difficult thing is to make time for each other, to keep that spark alive," he says, acknowledging a challenge many parents face. "If I'm happy at home, I won't be inclined to look elsewhere."

Communication helps keep the couple's connection intact. Like any partners, the Burkes sometimes disagree about finances, household chores and the like, but they've learned how to filter out toxic feelings before they pollute their partnership.

And if a husband like Senemeh does feel tempted? Experts say that's the time for him to start talking to his spouse about what may be troubling him -- before he trips up. "Honesty is the only thing that can make a difference," says Glass. "The commitment has to be to honesty, not monogamy."

So, here are 8 reasons why good men never cheat: 1. A real man will never cheat on his woman because he truly appreciates the gift of eternal and genuine love in his life. He knows how hard it is to find a person who would be everything they need and more. So, when he finally finds his person, he'll make sure to keep the fire burning and cherish the love he has, for all eternity. People usually say that men can't control their primal urges, and that's the reason why they actually cheat. But, I like to think that those people don't really have a problem with their self-control, but rather with their value system. Yes, both monogamy and polygamy are choices we need to make. But, a good man will never let his urges define him. Many women wonder why men cheat on their wives and girlfriends even if they still love them. Let's explore the possible reasons for being unfaithful. Nothing feels worse than being cheated and lied to by someone you love very dearly. People who get cheated on feel enraged, frustrated, disappointed, and broken. Both men and women can be unfaithful. However, according to statistics, men are more likely to cheat on their spouses, girlfriends, and partners than women are. Women are extremely sensitive and when being cheated, they suffer enormously. It makes sense why the first question that comes to their minds and that they keep asking themselves is: "Why did he cheat on me? Why does this happen to me?" These are the reasons why men cheat. Explaining why men cheat with one man's unfiltered, honest, explanation behind why men cheat. Against better judgment, against every lesson of hindsight and every shard of wisdom that comes with age, I have no regrets in that moment, because I am naked, or without pants, and I have chosen to be there. I have voted by my presence, declared it, and I feel the blood moving in me again. So it's the blood. That's who I am. That's why men cheat. People always say men cheat because they can. It's easy to cheat, that part is true. There's so little evidence left behind. The checklists are easy—you have to wash here and there, you have to enlist the sympathy of the woman you are fucking, you have to control your time and select your venue. Statistics show that men are more likely to cheat than women. We talked to relationship experts about why men cheat and what causes their infidelity. So you've got a situation where he's ignoring the good parts about his current relationship and ignoring the bad parts—the parts that likely led to the breakup in the first place—of his old relationship. That's a recipe for disaster. 2. He wants out. His partner may think the relationship is all peaches and gravy; he may think otherwise—and not have the guts to confront his other half about it. "One of the reasons people cheat is because it's an impetus for change," says Kristen Mark, PhD, director of the Sexual Health Promotion Lab at the University of Kentucky. Men cheat, women cheat, and according to studies, they have different reasons for doing so. I don't think we can necessarily just say "men cheat for this reason, and women cheat for this reason," though. Each individual person and scenario brings about a reason or reasons of its own. That being said though, I think we need to be careful of blanket statements like all men cheat or all women cheat. As a man, I can only speak on behalf of my own gender. There are plenty of reasons why a good man would never even have the thought cross his mind. A good man appreciates what he has. Obviously, this is a big reason. The more you appreciate your partner, the more valuable they are to you, and the less you are willing risk losing them or hurting them.