

Would Your Guy Cheat? Would You Know?



Few of us believe our guy would ever fool around. Yet we all know of married guys who do. So we rounded up a raucous group of sinners, plied them with beer and let the tape recorder roll. Man at his worst? Yes, but important words for even the happiest married woman to hear.

Meet the Sinners

James,* 37, health-care executive. Divorced; daughter, age 8. Tall, handsome, hilarious, James is the most introspective and romantic man at the table. Genuinely sad about the dissolution of his marriage.

Nathan, 39, marketing director. Married. Chain-smoking native New Englander; aloof and calculating. Never had any desire to be unfaithful until his wife cheated on him.

Mark, 31, graphic designer. Separated. Young, attractive and relaxed. Has sincerely tried to unearth the roots of his behavior.

Sal, 41, building contractor. Married; two daughters, ages 1 and 3. Charming but misogynistic loudmouth.

**Some names have been changed.*

The Cheaters' Wives

Redbook: Let's talk about your wives.

James: Let's not. [*Laughs*] Okay, I'm freshly divorced after five years of marriage. At the beginning, before we got married, it was a crazy, passionate whirlwind, and we got caught up in that groundswell and got right into marriage. We met one April, got married the following April, and we were married for five and a half years. Regrettably, we had a child almost immediately — not that I regret my child, but her arrival hardly gave us a chance to really be husband and wife for very long before becoming Mom and Dad. It got really serious really quickly.

Nathan: I've been married four years and met my wife through business — she's a PR director — so we were professional colleagues at first, then dated for four years before getting married.

Mark: My wife and I dated for about seven years before we actually tied the knot. We lived together for four years before getting married, but she was constantly pushing me to get married. We've been married for about three years, but we're on a hiatus. It doesn't look good.

Sal: I've been married for four years. I dated my wife for two years, and we have two kids. I wouldn't call our relationship passionate, though. [*Laughs nervously*] It's like I gave up on the passion because I wanted something long-term. Once I saw 40 coming I decided it was time to, like, get it together and have the kids.

Redbook: How are your sex lives?

Sal: Mine's pleasant. When I first got married, my wife's friends' husbands said to me, "So, you're still getting laid regularly?" I'm like, "Yeah, why?" They said, "Well, the first year you get laid regularly. The second year she says,

'How about I just jerk you off tonight?' [*Laughs*] The next year she watches while you jerk off. And thereafter you're on the couch by yourself in private."

[*Everyone laughs*]

James: I can't be as eloquent as Sal, but I agree with him. For the first eight months the sex was never under two hours; it was constant new things and exploration. And then it started getting less regular, especially when she got pregnant. After our daughter came, it just dropped off totally. Initially I thought it was a phase that all relationships go through. I just assumed, "Okay, well, we won't have it right now because she feels ugly and fat." I figured it would come back around. It never really did.

Mark: I had the same thing. My wife said, "I need space; we have to work through some problems; I'm going to sleep in the guest room." She was having an identity crisis, and I kept thinking she would eventually come back and our sex life would start up again, but that hasn't happened. It's been like this for a year now, and there have been no "conjugal visits."

Redbook: Do you think she knows you've cheated?

Mark: I'm sure she didn't — and doesn't — know. She's never confronted me.

Nathan: Well, my wife and I used to have sex every single day for like three years, except when we traveled for work. Then she cheated on me, and everything turned upside down for a while.

Redbook: We'll get back to that. What I want to know is, what specifically are your wives doing — or not doing — that causes you to go astray?

James: It was just a total lack of interest on my part in her interests. And I get an unequaled thrill from pursuing a new woman and having her want me. Perhaps it's ego gratification, or the fact that I may not have been hugged enough. I just want to be held and loved.

Redbook: Are you being sarcastic?

James: Not at all. I mean every word of that.

Sal: Communication and adventure are what keep our marriage together. But when she shuts down because of depression, or won't fulfill my fantasies, or seems too conservative sexually, I start to go crazy and start looking.

Mark: My wife started complaining about her appearance and how she wasn't comfortable with her body. And then she wouldn't let me touch her or see her naked. [*The three other men nod; a lot of "uh-huhs"*] Her weight wasn't an issue for me, and I assured her that I still loved her. But she was a prisoner in her own body, and I was locked out. I'd leave home some nights with a proverbial loaded gun in my pants — and that was her fault.

Sal: Keep that weapon off the table! [*Laughs*]

Nathan: I cheated to level the playing field. Simple as that. She cheated first.

Cheating to Get Even

Redbook: So you cheated to get even?

Nathan: Yes. My wife cheated on me first, so I cheated for revenge. It was weird, because she started telling me she was out with her girlfriends, and then the girlfriends would of course call while she was out with her lover. I never actually figured out who the guy was, but I cornered her, and she admitted it without much remorse. She was really steadfast, saying, "It was a mistake; let's just get over it." And then I left for a little while and came back, and we kind of worked it out. But after a few months I felt like I needed to make it even for me to get over it. So I made up my mind and found a willing participant.

Redbook: Because you couldn't forgive her?

Nathan: Yeah — I knew that her cheating would always be there. So I seduced a girl I'd known and liked for years, and she accepted willingly. Afterward I felt like I had cashed in my "Get Out of Jail Free" card: The slate was clean. Then, a couple of weeks later, I told my wife what I did. It took a while for her to get over it, but it's fine now.

Mark: I would have held that "Get Out of Jail" card over her head to keep her in line.

Nathan: Yeah, but the card started burning a hole in my pocket. I guess I committed a crime of passion. [*Heads*]

around the table nod in empathy]

James: I wish my story was that complex, but it isn't. My ex-wife and I had made an ill-conceived move to Florida, then decided to move back to New York. I had a job waiting for me there, but I had to give one month's notice in Florida. So my wife moved back without me while I tied up all the loose ends. Well, within four nights all the loose ends were essentially tied up, and I was just bored. So being in Miami Beach, with a nonstop bar scene, I just met some girl and went home with her. And I probably spent about four days with her before I left, and then I moved back to New York like nothing happened. Why did I do it? Lust. I'm just a horny guy, I guess.

Redbook: You wouldn't blame this on any animosity toward your wife?

James: At that time, no. I still loved her, even though she was a nag and a ruthless, militant homemaker. [*Laughs*] I just wanted to get laid.

Redbook: So have you always been unfaithful in your relationships?

James: Yes. There hasn't been one woman in my life whom I've remained faithful to — until now. I am totally weakened by the female sex and feel a sort of conquest impulse swell up in my chest when I am around someone whom I desire — even if I'm involved with someone else.

Redbook: Then why are you faithful now?

James: Essentially, I may be truly in love for the first time and would not want her to ever cheat on me. Does that sound hypocritical?

Sal: We're all hypocrites! [*Laughs*] The only relationships that I was faithful in were the ones with outrageously fantastic sex. [*Hoots from the group*]

Nathan: I had never been unfaithful in any of my relationships until my wife cheated on me.

Mark: Staying faithful always revolved around having enough sex.

Rx: More Sex, More Often

Sal: For me it all comes down to wanting to get laid more.

Mark: For me it's variety. If I'm always ordering filet mignon, once in a while I want a nice cheeseburger with bacon. It's not necessarily about quality. It's a change of pace.

James: Quality has to be there.

Mark: Even if you're getting laid at home, if someone else is saying yes elsewhere, that becomes very appealing, because now someone out there is saying, "I find you attractive, I find you stimulating." My wife stopped saying that.

James: My wife stopped saying, "I want to see you naked."

Sal: I don't think cheating has anything to do with how your relationship's going. It's just a matter of who shows up at the wrong time.

Redbook: For instance?

Sal: Nice breasts, thin shirt. [*Laughs around table*] You know, a hot girl is available, and she just exudes sex. It's irresistible.

James: I agree. Cheating has more to do with our genetic makeup than with a specific situation at home. For me, I wanted something different. I wanted to conquer something new. And suddenly there she was, looking at me across the bar. To me, sex is 80 percent cerebral. I think the charge comes from conquest and chasing, establishing "This woman wants me."

Mark: Sex is 80 percent in your head.

James: What I'm trying to say is that it's more than the actual physical act of sex; it's processing all the information: the fact that I'm seducing or being seduced by someone, that someone finds me attractive, wants me to touch them. That's what fuels desire.

Mark: Yeah, I enjoy the hunt. Finding a woman who wants me. Taking her back to her place. Her letting me into her house and me sleeping beside her in her house. It gives me such a rush.

Sal: Rule number one: Never sleep over. Are you crazy?

Mark: Well, I only stay if I get drunk and can't drive home.

Sal: You're a mess. [*Laughs*]

Nathan: For me it was totally physical. I chose a girl I always wanted to sleep with because she was so hot and so off-limits. I never thought I'd get to play the revenge card on my wife. It all worked out pretty well.

James: Wait! What I'm saying is that it's not just the act of ejaculation. I'd rather have foreplay for five hours with someone totally excited to be with me than five minutes of rabbit f---ing. Otherwise, if it were just physical, I'd have stayed home and f---ed my wife.

Mark: I've been in affairs where I'd be home with my wife and I could get it, but instead I'd go out to find the girl who I'm seeing on the side. It was more exciting to do what I wasn't supposed to do.

Redbook: And you really loved your wife at this time?

Mark: I really loved her and was very happy. But there are always urges. And I always take advantage of them.

James: The male mind's like a computer server: You can partition it. You'll say, "Yeah, I was in love, but I still needed it."

Nathan: Who doesn't crave excitement, the thrill of the chase, the power of getting it? Any man who says that he doesn't is a liar.

Sins of the Fathers

Redbook: Are you your fathers' sons?

James: My father was a rather voracious womanizer, from what I understand. In fact, my mother was actually one of his affairs gone awry. He was previously married, cheated on his first wife with my mom and ended up leaving her for my mom. Of course, he then proceeded to cheat on my mom. He ended up leaving my mom and remarrying his first wife. Strangely, I cannot explain this. I do feel a certain hereditary responsibility to be like Dad, though I never really knew the cad.

Sal: My father was unfaithful; so were a number of my male relatives — perhaps it's my Mediterranean blood. I also spent a lot of time in Europe, where the attitude on cheating is much more relaxed, more along the lines of "Don't ask, don't tell."

Mark: I have no solid proof that my dad cheated, but as a teenager I was old enough to figure out what was going on when my father would drop me off at one of my ball games but could never stay and watch because he had to "drop some paperwork off at the office." There's a long history of this in my family. All of the men in my family, back to my great-grandfather, have been divorced. They all remarried younger women. Growing up with this made me think I wouldn't get married, because it would be doomed to fail. I guess I was destined to fail at this.

Nathan: I have to say that my parents had an amazing relationship. My dad adored my mom, and she worshiped the ground he walked on. [*Applause*] I won't blame either of them for my warped actions.

A Question of Ego

Redbook: Do you worry that your wives don't think you're sexy anymore? Is that why you cheat — to validate that you've still "got it"?

James: I think I'm decent-looking, but I also possess other qualities that women find alluring. [*Winks*] I actually listen, take an interest in their lives. And I don't hide the fact that I am utterly fascinated by their species. But it is definitely all about validation. My wife always sang my praises — my looks, sexual prowess, intellect — but I already had her. I needed others to feel the same or stronger, have others commit their virtue and values to me.

Sal: I'm good-looking, she knows it, and I still got it — even with a gut! [*Everyone raises a beer mug*]

Mark: Before we separated I was verbally berated and belittled to levels that are off the charts. I would go with her to our marriage counselor and spend the hour listening to everything I've ever done wrong. Between the counseling and our "talks" at home, I learned every imperfection, flaw, wrong and horrible thing I've ever done. After all of that, the best therapy has been going out and meeting women who find me attractive. To have other women find me interesting, attractive, smart and funny is like being born again.

Nathan: I think I'm pretty good-looking, and I was happy that someone wanted to have sex with me; it reminded me that I'm attractive to other women. I think my wife thinks I'm at worst okay and at best pretty hot. As long as she doesn't cheat on me again, I'm happy with that.

No Guilt

James: We can all think of excuses to rationalize why we do what we do. And the truth is, we could all be very happy at home, but if it's the right moment at the right time, we're all done in by lust.

Sal: Speak for yourself. You need to learn how to separate love from lust. It's really not that difficult, and the guilt eventually disappears.

James: Yeah, there was an iota of guilt when I cheated, but not enough to stop me from doing it again.

Redbook: How can you say you felt guilty when you stayed with her for four days?

James: Because you pump yourself up for the challenge, get caught up in it. But then there's the aftermath, when you feel that what you're doing isn't right.

Mark: Yeah, the moment after you've finished! [*Laughs*]

James: Exactly. It was very small guilt, but I just felt it was part of my idiom, who I am. No one gets married thinking they're going to cheat. I thought I was with the love of my life but learned within 13 months that I wasn't. I would have ended the marriage sooner if it hadn't been for our daughter.

Sal: You know what it is? You're married to a tall blonde, you want a short-dark woman. You're married to a model-thin woman, you want big breasts. [*Laughs*]

James: That's a fact. We always want what we can't have.

Mark: I got over the guilt when I realized that part of being a guy is, you never do anything right in your wife's eyes anyway. I am totally underappreciated by my wife.

Redbook: Are you all saying that cheating is a biological inevitability for men?

Sal: No more than for women. Men are such idiots, because they think they are the only cheaters. Quite a number of the women whom I cheated with were married.

James: To say it's biological is too easy.

Mark: I agree. I know guys who don't cheat, but I know more men who do.

Nathan: Infidelity is not inevitable, but I think fidelity is a gift you give to somebody that you have to work hard at continuing to give. [*Shouts of "Hear, hear!" and toasts*]

Getting Caught

Redbook: Do any of you ever worry about getting caught?

James: When I was married? Of course. I was worried all the time.

Mark: No, but I do live in fear, and that's the thrill. Doing what you're not supposed to be doing — and the threat of getting caught — make it very exciting.

Sal: I almost got bagged once, and my stomach dropped. But I kept my voice steady and lied. You'd have to be an idiot to admit anything.

Mark: What is the advantage of admitting it? What do you possibly have to gain by admitting it?

Sal: You might as well just wait until you get caught, because let me tell you something: Getting caught lying is not as bad as getting caught cheating. You might as well lie.

Redbook: In all cases?

James: Yup. Deny it all. Deny it all.

Mark: It's the American way. One of the great things about Clinton is that he denied right up until the point he was basically in front of the impeachment committee. You've got to give the guy credit for having Herculean balls.

James: Absolutely. That's a good point. About a year after we got divorced, I brought my daughter home one day, and my ex-wife and I actually sat around bullshitting, and she said, "You know, you did cheat on me, didn't you?" I said, "Absolutely not." I will never admit it to her face.

Redbook: So let's turn the tables: How would you feel if your wife cheated on you? Do you think you'd know if she had?

James: If she had — and I'm positive she didn't — I'd probably have felt worse about the perception it would have created about me: that I don't satisfy her. I would have perceived it as more of an ego blow than a commentary on the state of our relationship. I don't believe she ever cheated on me; that's not her style. I think I would have known. Her movements were utterly predictable. Then again, we all think we're getting away with it. [*Laughs*]

Sal: If my wife slept with someone because they were drunk, and it was only once, I would deal with it.

Mark: You're full of crap! [*Catcalls ensue*]

Redbook: Now, now. Let's keep it clean.

Sal: Doesn't matter. I know she hasn't.

Nathan: You hope you'd know.

Sal: It's a total crapshoot if you know someone is cheating. Sometimes you can tell by their eyes or the way they put the coffee down.

Mark: My wife is incapable of dealing with the guilt I live with every day. I would hate for her to ever feel as terrible as I do most of the time.

Nathan: Well, I evened the score, and I feel like I gained a level playing field with her, for us to equally decide if we will stay together. So far it seems to have worked.

Redbook: We've talked a lot about how you feel about the chase, and how you feel about yourselves and your needs. But how do you feel about your marriages? Do you all still love your wives?

Nathan: Yes, very much so. Despite all that has happened, I love her very much.

James: When I first started cheating, I knew I didn't truly love her anymore. I realized I had made a mistake getting married and having her believe I was the one for her. We all deserve more.

Sal: Absolutely 100 percent, I love her. I love her, but I'm a dog.

Mark: I don't. The woman I fell in love with and married no longer exists.

Their Take on Monogamy

Redbook: How do you feel about monogamy?

Mark: I think it's overrated.

Sal: No, fidelity is overrated. I think it's an idealistic way to be, a way I wish I could be. But I'm not.

Nathan: I believe theoretically it's a nice thing to give to someone, but I don't think we are monogamists by nature. But it would be a really nice gift to give someone. I tried to give that to my wife. She f—-ed it all up.

Redbook: But is it something that's a goal, that's an ideal?

James: I would like nothing better than just to be monogamous with someone. I think I've found that person, but it's very difficult to be monogamous. Can I have a group hug? [*Laughs*]

Mark: By nature I don't think we are meant to be monogamous. I think the people we find and get into relationships with possess things we seek in a long-term relationship, like personality and warmth, but often what fades quickly in a long-term relationship is the physical part. So we go looking for something else to amuse us sexually.

James: I think monogamy exists. I want to believe it does. Whether it's part of human nature to not be monogamous, I don't know. I don't think I'm qualified to make that call. I think Nathan said it beautifully: It's a great thing to give somebody. That's poetic and true. And I'm convinced that I will be able to give that to someone. Someday.

The 5 Warning Signs He's Cheating...

As the president of Blackhawk Investigative Services in Charlotte, NC, former police officer David Sigmon, 32, has been retained by hundreds of suspicious wives to get the goods on their no-good, two-timing hubbies. "Most of the wives have been right," he says, "and I catch the husbands red-handed." So how do you know if that new bowling league he joined is really in some tarty motel room on the interstate? Here are the five red alerts Sigmon says to look for:

- **He's suddenly fixated on his looks.** Watch out if he exhibits a newfound concern for style and fashion, gets a mod new haircut or dyes his beard and starts heading to the gym for major crunches every morning before work. While it could be a midlife crisis, Sigmon says it's more likely he's trying to attract or impress a babe.
- **Your sex life goes from zero to 60 (or the reverse).** The key here is some radical change. If your sex life gets a burst of energy — he's trying new things, being more spontaneous, experimenting with some kinky dominance — he could be using you for batting practice to prepare for her, while also keeping you "happy" to assuage his growing guilt. The other extreme is complete withdrawal: The torment about his affair makes him come to bed ashamed, causing him to shut down on intimacy.
- **The "three C's" rear their ugly heads.** And they are Confrontation, Criticism and Complaints. Seemingly overnight he's carping about everything from no milk in the fridge to your hairdo. He's picking fights with you to justify the affair.
- **He "works" all the time.** It's a cliché but true: Husbands use the office to mask indiscretion. His work schedule is most likely to change gradually as his other life unfolds. He's working late and out of town more, without much notice; he's coming home after you've gone to bed. Also, his "business" memory becomes foggy ("I don't remember who I had dinner with that night").
- **He suddenly loves doing laundry.** Is he dropping his garments directly into the washing machine before coming to bed? Or have you noticed that pieces are missing, like that favorite tie he packed for the last business trip? Be wary of that old gag, "Oh, I spilled red wine on it, so I just tossed it." Chances are it's at her place.

...and the 5 Ways to Intervene

Whether you definitely know or only suspect that your husband is having an affair, how you deal with it is critical — not only for your marriage, but for your own sanity. Jennifer Knopf, Ph.D., a sex and marriage therapist in Chicago, offers these tips for navigating the explosive emotional landscape of cheating:

- **Don't attack.** "Your instinct may be to come out swinging, but this will only make matters worse. As soon

as one partner starts using accusing language, the other becomes more defensive and less truthful and will distance himself even further." Sure, you need to vent, but do so to a therapist or a trusted girlfriend.

- **Don't blame yourself.** Knopf often sees wives who react to their husbands' infidelity by heading out for liposuction or marathon sessions at the gym. All of this stems from the woman's belief that she's not sexy enough, or that whatever went wrong with the marriage is simply her fault. "While you may be a part of the problem, you are also only part of the solution," she says. "You alone cannot fix your marriage. Your husband must contribute."
- **Get counseling together.** An independent third party has the obligation to explore your husband's point of view, which will keep him from feeling backed into a corner. According to Knopf, the biggest mistake you can make is insisting that you're right, he's wrong, and that's it. Taking a hard line encourages you both to dig in instead of dealing with your anger and hurt feelings.
- **Consider his childhood.** "If you have a partner who comes from a tumultuous background — where his father or mother strayed, or they had six divorces between them — there's going to be a lot more going on than the issue of your marriage," Knopf says. In this case, individual therapy for the husband, allowing him to explore the personal connection between how he was raised and why he cannot remain faithful to you, may work best.
- **Don't let his behavior kill your self-worth.** Any affair will damage your ego, so remind yourself of areas where you shine. While you may not feel successful as a wife right now, remember what you do well: whether it's at work or as a mother, a daughter, a friend. Nurture yourself and treat yourself to things that make you feel good. "You need to allot some downtime just for you," Knopf says.

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