

Why Men Cheat: Steps to Affair-proofing Your Relationship

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

When you think about the topic of infidelity and cheating spouses, you're probably more likely to assume that it is a husband or boyfriend (rather than a wife or a girlfriend) who is more likely to have an affair. And you'd be correct in the assumption.

Surveys show that men are more likely to be unfaithful than women and the goal of this article is to explore some of the dynamics of why men cheat.

There are many reasons why you might be unfaithful and start an affair. The obvious is that you are unhappy and feel that your needs cannot be met by your spouse or partner. When you become aware of the different influences that can lead to an affair, you'll be in a better position to affair-proof your relationship.

(Note: There are many reasons why someone might justify an affair (to themselves and their partner). The explanations that follow are meant to help you build a stronger union with your partner, not act as justification for a decision to be unfaithful. If you learn to become aware of your patterns or tendencies, you can offset any dangers that might exist and shape your behavior so that it benefits your marriage or relationship.)

Relationship Help: 5 reasons why men cheat

1. The Escape Artist

The escape artist has trouble with feelings. If you fit this profile, you feel emotionally shut-down--you're not very good at expressing your feelings and desires. At times you might not even be attuned to your desires. It can feel like you go through life in an emotional straitjacket, stilted and never feeling fully alive or present.

Unfaithfulness creates the illusion that the escape artist has finally broken free of his own self-imposed prison of non-feeling. But the excitement of an affair quickly wanes and waiting in the wings is the escape artist's familiar emotional struggle. Rather than deal with the underlying issue, some escape artists have affair after affair, chasing the temporary high of sneaking around.

The escape artist wants to feel more deeply, yet his inability to do so within his relationship leaves him vulnerable to impulsive, excitement-seeking behaviors (having an affair). He experiences the energy and danger associated with an affair as a way to break through the emotional numbness that he often struggles with. However, that energy is short-lived and very destructive to those who love him.

2. The Avoider

The avoider feels uncomfortable with emotional closeness and with requests for greater intimacy. Avoiders often experience intimacy as a prison and feel "trapped" by the closeness their spouse/partner requires.

Men who struggle with this issue find ways to dodge intimacy. The avoider might rely on the more benign forms of steering clear of intimacy, such as keeping himself constantly busy with household projects or overworking. At the extreme end of the avoiding continuum, he might become involved in an extramarital affair--erroneously believing that he has discovered a way to be in a relationship without the requirements of commitment and the need to be emotionally available.

If an affair continues for any length of time, the avoider begins to feel trapped by requests for deeper emotional closeness and the cycle of having to flee from intimacy starts all over again.

3. The Ostrich (See no evil/Hear no evil)

Men have the tendency to act like everything is fine even when things are falling apart around them.

Unresolved emotional issues (whether from your childhood or your marriage or relationship) have a way of bubbling to the surface and impacting your relationship. Ideally, you will discover healthy ways to deal with emotional issues. But when marital or relationship problems mount and remain unattended, resentments can divide even the closest, most loving couple.

Many men report great discomfort dealing with conflict and negative feelings—which perpetuates the Ostrich phenomenon. Instead of figuring out ways to tolerate distressing emotions (and resolving relationship issues as they arise), some men pretend everything is fine. But ignoring these problems doesn't work and before you know it, the marriage or relationship suffers and this becomes an excuse to go outside the relationship.

4. The Hero

Men are often raised to be heroes. That might sound like a good thing on paper, but in reality it can prove problematic. *Heroes don't feel, they act.* The hero's role models didn't show their vulnerability and seek comfort from others when they needed it. Instead, he took it on the chin and didn't complain. Young boys are inundated with messages about the virtues of being brave and stoic. The hero sacrifices without complaining.

The demands of intimacy can be very confusing to the hero. Rather than feeling celebrated for his ability to get difficult, necessary jobs done (supporting a family), the hero may feel criticized and misunderstood by the requirements to be more emotionally available and communicative (traits that often conflict with the hero's action-oriented, problem-solving modes of operation).

No one likes to feel unappreciated. To compensate, the hero may seek out someone he feels is sympathetic to his struggles—when this occurs outside the marriage/relationship, the seeds of infidelity are planted.

5. The Perpetual Teenager (Stuck in the past)

Do you ever reflect on your life and think, "Is this all life has to offer?"

Maturity definitely has its benefits. You feel more settled and in control of your life, and your relationships are more stable and meaningful. But leaving the self-centered world of childhood and the invincibility of adolescence can also feel like you've lost an important part of yourself--the part of you that is full of dreams and aspirations. Under these conditions, a committed relationship can feel like a prison that holds you back. When your expectations wildly exceed the realities of a committed relationship, it can feel like you're in an emotional crisis.

The excitement of an affair can mistakenly feel like the only opportunity to recapture the vitality of your youth (this dynamic is often unconscious). Rather than discover the real cause for your emotional crisis (and find ways to grow within your current relationship), you seek out the infatuation of a new relationship. Once this infatuation dwindles (which it will), you will again be face-to-face with the need to find the real cause of your despair.

If you see yourself (or your husband or partner) in any of these profiles, don't panic. None of these issues "causes" an affair. But if you believe one or more of these issues are negatively impacting your relationship, the goal is to use this information to open the channels of communication. Information is your ally in working toward an affair-resistant relationship.

To discover ways for you and your partner to effectively communicate with each other and build a more secure, affair-resistant relationship, check out my new e-workbook, *The ABCs of Effective Communication* which can be found at http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/abcs_ebook.html.

If you haven't done it yet, don't forget to sign up for my monthly Relationship Toolbox Newsletter by going to http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/relationship_newsletter.html.

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Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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