

# NARCISSISM OFTEN PRODS A CHEATING HEART

What motivates cheaters? What are they thinking? How can smart people do such stupid things? With John



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INTIMACY, SEX &  
RELATIONSHIPS

Edward's recent confession of infidelity, these questions are all over the news. Oprah is even doing a show on why men cheat.

Most people believe that when partners cheat, it's a symptom of a bad relationship. They ask, "What was he or she not getting at home?" You can even find experts urging scorned women to snap men out of their doldrums by surprising them with something sexy . . . to be more "kittenish" so their tomcats are less likely to prowl. What a bunch of sexist hooley!

I'm not saying that adding some spice to your usual routine isn't a reasonable antidote for sexual boredom. But it won't keep a cheater from being unfaithful if the motivation for the infidelity is a fundamentally flawed self-esteem accompanied by an insatiable thirst for attention, novelty or excitement.

Narcissistic entitlement, devoid of empathy, is often at the heart of infidelity. The narcissist seductively idealizes the new love interest while denigrating what they have at home.

Dr. Smith, 62, is a highly regarded practitioner and a narcissist. Whenever he travels to the Caribbean "on business" he hires a \$2,000-a-day call girl for some hot beach-bungalow booty. His reason for cheating . . . "You only live once. These women make me feel like the center of the universe." His reason for contacting a therapist — "I guess I'm afraid I might get caught someday and that would ruin my practice. I know this is a pretty stupid thing that I'm doing," he says with a sly smile.

As the therapy sessions evolve, it's evident that Dr. Smith's motivation to "change" is minimal, at best. He spends most of his time giving vivid accounts of his sexual escapades and clever obfuscations. When I asked how he thinks his wife would feel if she found out, he chuckles, "I haven't given that any thought. I'll cross that bridge if I come to it." I searched unsuccessfully for evidence of guilt or remorse. The only person he seemed to worry about was himself.

Because of his interest in staying

anonymous, Dr. Smith paid for his therapy sessions with cash. This is not unusual, but there was something different about our interaction — a lack of human connection that left me feeling like a commodity. It suddenly struck me that psychotherapy might be another kind of paid entertainment for him. As soon as I offered him this hypothesis, he predictably ended his treatment.

Mary is also having an affair: Married to Mario, 56, she reluctantly accompanies him to one promised couple's session.

Mario is an affable slightly pudgy guy neatly dressed in a blue pin-striped suit. Mary is tan, lean, and long-legged. Her striking platinum hair is stylishly cut in a shoulder length bob. She struts into the office wearing a tight black skirt that barely hits mid thigh and fire-red stiletto heels. Not an outfit for the attention-averse, I thought.

Sure enough, that's her complaint. Mario has been consumed by his business for 15 years, and never gives her any attention. Mario immediately protests that he adores his wife . . . buys her flowers, massages her feet, and approaches her sexually only to be rebuffed. "I

just can't make her happy." He says. "Please don't give up on us, Mary," he begs as his eyes start to fill. But he may as well be talking to a sphinx. Without missing a beat, Mary coldly pronounces, "I want a divorce."

The back story (Mary reveals in confidence) is that she's been cheating with her married realtor-boss for two years and having the "best sex of her life." Richard is a handsome "bad boy" that plays her body like a maestro. He makes her feel alive and wanted. She confesses she's never had such mind-blowing orgasms. Mario is clueless. She no longer loves him — but needs his six-figure income. The conclusion — she refuses to give up Richard and undercuts attempts to improve their marital intimacy. P.S. After the divorce is finalized, Mr. Realtor decides to go back to his wife and kids. Mary is left alone . . . searching match.com and Mario is dating Mary's best friend.

The biological and psychological motivations of infidelity have filled volumes. People have affairs to experiment with a new lover; to re-experience the thrill of early infatuation, to tempt fate, or to escape an unfulfilling or abusive marriage.

Some people cheat because real intimacy is frightening to them or to deny the passage of the years by proving they are still sexually competitive in the market place.

So what are cheaters thinking? The answer is — they're probably not. The truth is that we don't usually cheat because of something missing in our partner; we cheat because of something missing within ourselves.

But regardless of the motivation, there is no justification for an affair.

If you're cheating, ask yourself, "What am I receiving?" Is it worth the damage to family, friends, and reputation? If you cheat, you will regret it. I promise you.

As Warren Buffet says, "It takes twenty years to build your reputation and five minutes to ruin it."

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