


will he cheat? (and will you know?)

YOUR GUY'S BEHAVIOR TODAY CAN TELL YOU IF HE'LL STRAY LATER, SAY THE AUTHORS OF AN EYE-OPENING NEW BOOK. HERE'S HOW TO SPOT THE SUBTLE WARNING SIGNS—AND WHAT TO DO NOW TO KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE STRONG FOR GOOD.

You've heard all the time-honored cheating-man clichés— he starts to take more interest in his appearance, he suddenly seems to know a few new sexual tricks—and they're clichés for a reason: Men often do follow these fairly obvious patterns when they're unfaithful. But there are also more-subtle early signs, specific things all men say and do *before* they stray, according to Elizabeth Landers and Vicky Mainzer, authors of the new book *The Script: The 100% Absolutely Predictable Things Men Do When They Cheat*.

A *script* for philanderers? That *all* men follow? Sure, it seems like an oversimplified notion about a complex subject. But Landers and Mainzer only



by Jennifer Graham Kizer

» developed their theory after listening to a string of friends vent about their unfaithful guys. In each woman's story, the men delivered the same lines, in the same order. Intrigued, the pair started talking to jilted wives nationwide. And in hundreds of interviews, they continued to hear...the same lines, same order.

Landers says that for most men, following the script is a subconscious thing, not some kind of vast masculine conspiracy. "By the time a husband starts down the road to adultery," she says, "he's already heard the explanations and rationalizations that other husbands have used. So he picks up the lines from them." Sure, some evil cads might knowingly quote from the script, but most men are unaware that they're defaulting to it.

Anywhere from 22 percent to 60 percent of husbands are likely to stray, depending on which study you read or which expert you ask. But here's what the majority of experts agree on: Most affairs happen in marriages that are already in trouble—whether or not the spouses realize that's the case. So do listen for these lines from *The Script* in your own life; they may or may not be hard evidence that your man's going to cheat—but they are sure signs that your marriage could be headed for tough times. Here's how to recognize them so you can interrupt the script (no matter who starts it, it takes *two* to act it out) and challenge your husband to work with you to get through your relationship's rough spots together.

the preemptive denial

He says: "I would never do that to you."

Michael Stern,* a 39-year-old record executive, still recalls the day he said these words to his wife. "We were talking about President Clinton's affair," he says. "I laughed at the idea that I'd ever be unfaithful." But a year and a half later, he strayed.

A man who says this line probably believes his own comforting words, Landers notes. But on some level he's following the script, which teaches him to establish his "character"—the loving, supportive spouse—early on in his marriage. This comment, says Landers, "throws their wives off track, so they're less likely to believe it when an affair does happen."

■ **How to interrupt the script:** Even this seemingly harmless line provides a good opening to generate a dialogue about fidelity and closeness. If he says, "I would never do that," you might reply, "Me neither. But if one of us ever feels tempted, can we talk about it?" Or: "That's great to hear, but it happens to so many couples. Would you let me know if you ever do feel restless in our marriage?"

the concern for your well-being

He says: "You need to see a psychiatrist."

Jim Cannon didn't cheat on his wife, but three years ago, the 32-year-old came close. He was attracted to a coworker who was always full of energy. "My wife can get really tired and frazzled," he says. "I know she has a very busy schedule, but I decided that her stress was starting to have an impact on me and our two kids. In my view, she wasn't putting enough effort into our relationship. So can you blame me for my office flirtation?" He suggested that his wife talk to a doctor about going on antidepressants. (She refused.)

In their interviews, Landers and Mainzer found that nearly all of the husbands told their wives that they were troubled or depressed; in many cases, the man would suggest that his wife seek professional counseling. "He may not even realize he's doing it, but he's starting to build a case," says Landers. "He's painted you as the one who drove him away." Of course, some of these women might have actually needed medical attention. "But the you-need-help comment was so pervasive that it couldn't *always* be true," says Landers.

Luckily, Jim Cannon's office attraction didn't evolve any further. "The more I got to know the woman at work," he says, "I just wasn't interested enough to risk my marriage for her." Meanwhile, when his wife's own office workload lightened, her demeanor did, too. Jim realized that his wife's "depression" wasn't chemical, but a natural reaction to a hectic life situation. And he had reacted by pulling away—and falling into the script. "I was quick to jump to conclusions about my wife's mental state," he says. "And my judgment was obviously clouded by my interest in the woman at work," he says.

■ **How to interrupt the script:** If you get a comment like this, don't simply dismiss it or let it roll off your back—or worse, get angry. You might say, "I do feel tired and stressed, but what makes you think I'm seriously depressed?" If he suggests that you go to counseling, ask him to come with you for couples therapy—then use the sessions to help both of you to really communicate about how tough it's been to manage your busy lives, and what you can do together to improve the situation. ▶

What most experts agree on: Affairs typically happen in marriages that are already in trouble—whether or not the spouses realize that's the case.

the blame game

He says: "I keep telling you to..."

Kelly Hanson's husband said these words so many times that she blamed *herself* when he ended up having an affair. The 28-year-old had opted to take time off from her career as a home-furnishings designer in order to care for their 1-year-old son. "Ken kept telling me I should go back to work," she says. "I actually wanted to—I was going stir-crazy in our tiny apartment. But I also wanted to stick to my decision, and give my baby another year with me full time."

Landers recognizes the scenario. "He's telling you to improve yourself in some way. Go back to school, join a gym, take time off, whatever," she says. It may look like tough love, say Landers and Mainzer—your guy is urging you to pursue a goal that will fulfill you. But often his motivation for doing this (whether or not he's conscious of it) isn't so altruistic. One: He's sticking with the script's premise that *he's* the positive, high-minded spouse—after all, he's only trying to help. Two: He's positioning *you* as the one who needs help. But you won't listen. And if only you would, you'd be happier and better off—which in turn would make *him* happier.

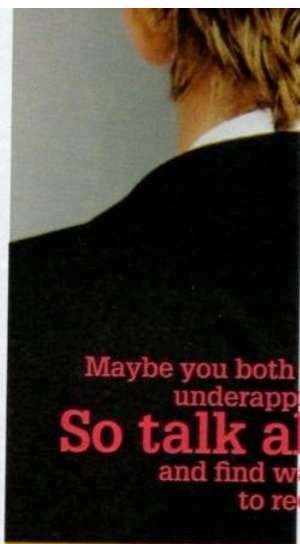
Kelly, who's now divorced, says she missed this early warning sign. "Ken acted like he was concerned about my feelings about staying home," she says. "But what he was really getting at was that *he* wanted me to be more than just a boring housewife. And I'd better do something about it, or else."

■ **How to interrupt the script:** "Challenge him to explain himself," says Landers. Is he saying that he wishes you were more career-driven? That he feels you don't listen to his advice? Asking him questions will help you both figure out what's really on his mind. Ideally, this will start an ongoing conversation that plugs you into each other's point of view.

the plea for attention

He says: "What about me?"

Most men won't say this exact line, but it's what they're thinking. The sentiment—that he's being undervalued by you—is expressed in other forms, such as, "Can I get a thank-you once in a while?" or "I never get to do what *I* want to do." Or he might silently sulk, which is what Jim Cannon did. "I didn't feel like my wife appreciated me," he says. "The house was always messy, and on weeknights she spent more time in the



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So talk about it,
and find ways to reconnect.

kids' beds—getting them to sleep—than in ours. Meanwhile, I felt like I was keeping my end of the bargain, making the lion's share of our income and driving the kids around on weekends."

No doubt Jim's wife had a very different perspective, but for a man who's following the script, that's beside the point. "He's feeling like nobody cares, and that his contributions to family life aren't valued," says Landers. But it's hard to know how deeply these feelings run if he doesn't tell you.

■ **How to interrupt the script:** Turn his muttered comments into a real conversation. If he's the silent type, you'll have to work a little harder to break through his sulking. "Bring up topics that involve feelings," says Landers. Your time may have been stretched thin lately—could he think you're rejecting him? Set him straight. Or you might ask if there's anything he misses about your pre-kids life, like your special date nights. Let him know you miss them too. Fact is, maybe you *both* feel underappreciated. So talk about it, and find ways and make time to reconnect.

the big drift

He says: "I've grown and you haven't. You don't understand me."

This is a pivotal scene in the script. He's no longer just hinting at a disconnection between you; he's *telling* you that you two are drifting apart. The plot hasn't changed much—he's continuing to frame himself as the stronger one, while you've failed to evolve in some way—but the tension is higher.

The accusatory nature of this line also ends up reinforcing his argument, since a wife often responds with anger. When Kelly heard these words, she says, "I felt like I was being attacked, and then, of course, we started arguing. I came off like the defensive one, the whiner who just wasn't 'getting' what he was saying."▶

REAL-LIFE LOVE

In fact, "I've grown and you haven't" is one of many comments that a man might use to spark a disagreement. "He's forcing you into acting unpleasant or irrational, which further drives a wedge between you," Landers says. "It makes him feel less guilty about spending time away from home."

■ **How to interrupt the script:** Yes, it's a rotten comment, but at least he's giving you a chance to take part in the dialogue. As Landers and Mainzer write, "Eureka! He's speaking! To you! And the words are...about how he feels!" The tricky part is to listen to him without being short-tempered in response. "Instead, encourage him to talk more," says Landers. "This could lead to more talks that might let him know that you *do* understand him."

the dramatic pause

He says: Nothing.

At a certain point, there seems to be a break in the script. He's not talking to you—maybe not even *looking* at you—as much as he used to. "Even before I was officially seeing the other woman, I was sharing more with her than I was with my wife," says Michael. "It was just easier to talk to her." Basically, he'd found a new confidante—a more supportive one.

The husbands of the women Landers and Mainzer interviewed all began to look elsewhere for the appreciation they felt they were missing at home. In their book, the authors call this "talking to A BMW (Anyone But My Wife)." The only information that A BMW has to go on is what *he* tells and shows her about himself—so she sees, say, his quick wit, not his hair-trigger temper. As for his wife, "She knows too much about him," says Landers. "So, from his perspective, *any* other woman is more likely to be supportive."

■ **How to interrupt the script:** You might be lulled by this period of calm, but don't be. "Take the first step to

bridge the chasm," says Landers. You might say, "I feel like there's been distance between us lately. You know that you can talk to me about anything, right?" If you suspect he might be attracted to someone else, ask about it without anger. Sure, this is tough and *painful* to do, but it might lead him to acknowledge the truth. And talking about an attraction may lessen some of the illicit thrill he's getting from bonding with another woman on the sly.

the vanishing act

He says: "I'm going to need more time to..."

He needs to put in extra hours on a work project. He has to spend more time training for a big race. In Jim's case, it was simply: Work is crazy. I have to put in long hours. "My wife didn't know that I was staying late to hang out with a female coworker," he says. The "I need time" announcement comes late in the story, but sometimes before the affair actually begins. His decision to cheat might not be 100 percent certain, but he's preparing just in case. "He's diverting his wife's attention and buying himself some time," says Landers. "This way, he can put off having to answer questions about his whereabouts later."

■ **How to interrupt the script:** "Ask questions now!" says Landers. "Especially if your gut is telling you something's going on." You might say, "I know you have a lot of work to do, but is that all it is? Is something else happening here—something we could talk about?" Push the issue.

Remember, any script can be rewritten. This may be one of your last chances to prevent a damaging crisis in your marriage. Don't let denial or resentment keep you from seizing it; overcoming the hard stuff together is what builds meaningful bonds that are truly unbreakable—no matter what comes your way. □