

Cheating on your girlfriend? Now there's an online service for you, and for her

By Audrey Dutton

"Don't let his flashy smile get to you!" an anonymous woman writes on DontDateHimGirl.com about her ex-lover Kevin. He's married, she cautions, telling any woman who meets him to "run, run as fast as you can, and don't look back."

But wait. It seems another spurned lover has the same warning. "He had told me that he was separated from his wife, but I found out differently," she writes. "Sometimes when his wife called, he would tell her that he had to work late, so that we could go out or just have sex somewhere."

Heard enough? Well, a third woman delivers the same account, with palpable grief. She writes that the word "hurt" doesn't come close to expressing her feelings.


Then the alleged adulterer responds. "There is an article about me on your Web site that is very untrue," Kevin's rebuttal says, adding his (now defunct) e-mail address. "The woman that wrote this is my very psychotic neighbor who is married and tried 3 years ago to get me into a threesome with her and her husband."

That woman's husband offers his side of the story, too.

It looks like the he-saids and she-saids won't end soon.

The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy estimates that 35 to 45 percent of all American marriages bear the burden of emotional or sexual infidelity. As the online dating market grows, so do the opportunities for cheating on a partner. Enter two services, one for those doing the cheating and another for those who have been cheated on: Alibi Network and DontDateHimGirl.com. While one company goes to great lengths to conceal affairs, the other exposes cheaters to the world.

The Alibi Network is a small Chicago-based company whose sole purpose is to construct alibis. Consultants devise cover-ups for any legal activity, from calling in sick to work--a popular service on the Monday after the Super Bowl--to "virtual employment" for those who are embarrassed to be jobless.

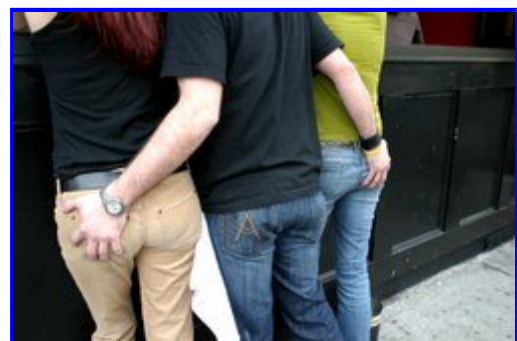
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Wandering-eyed mates can now consult a specialized business that will cover their tracks. But if they get caught, the jilted ex can tell the whole world, using only a computer. (Photo Illustration by Rachel Jones/CNS)



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However, covering up infidelities makes up the bulk of the service. Fifty percent of clients want to hide an affair, with men and women equally likely to seek alibis. The Alibi Network has no moral qualms about its service. "We don't judge," said Mike DeMarco, spokesman for the company. "If we get emotionally involved, we're doing our client a disservice."

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"That's deplorable!" gasped Tasha Jacobs, a public relations specialist from Miami. "Unbelievable."

While the Alibi Network deals in lies, Jacobs' company tries to expose the liars. Her Web site, DontDateHimGirl.com, is intended "to get guys to change their behavior," she said, "or at least think twice before they cheat because they know there are consequences."

DontDateHimGirl.com is a database with a heavy salting of scandalous drama. Angry and brokenhearted lovers can post allegations of betrayal, stamping their exes with a virtual scarlet letter. The exes can try to clear their name with a rebuttal, but the mark is already made. The site gives full names, photographs and identifying information like age and location.

As a result, Jacobs' site draws ample controversy. Earlier this year, one woman asked Jacobs to remove her accusations about a cheating ex-boyfriend after a judge ordered her to stop publicly airing complaints. And the Web site's blog, which highlights "cheaters of the day," is peppered with questions from readers, blaming the women for choosing bad boys and wondering about the proof behind anonymous accusations.

Jacobs says she vets all submissions, often calling or e-mailing women to ask for solid evidence, like telephone records. And before a woman can submit her story, she must agree to the DontDateHimGirl.com terms of user policy, stating that she is telling the truth.

Amid the controversy, the site is growing, with more than 1,100 alleged cheater profiles. Jacobs hopes the database will help women judge whether a potential suitor is bad news.

In mid-March, Jacobs will launch the sister--or brother--site, DontDateHerMan.com. "It was only fair," she said. Plus, "all of my guy friends convinced me to do it."

DontDateHimGirl.com is not the only Web site of its kind. TrueDater.com, UnfaithfulPeople.com and WomanSavers.com also list alleged cheaters by the thousands.

This is where the Alibi Network finds its market: When wandering-eyed mates fear that their rendezvous might be exposed, they turn to the network. After less than a year, the Alibi Network is already turning a profit, and DeMarco says no clients have reported getting caught.

Their alibis are high tech and elaborate, but affordable. A cover-up phone call to an unsuspecting spouse costs \$25 to \$50. Shopping discreetly for a ski trip with the mistress? That costs \$35. And an e-mail alibi starts at \$10.

Ongoing alibis, however, are the most detailed. If a client wants to sneak off for a weekend rendezvous with a lover, the Alibi Network can send him a faux job offer letter, under the guise of its partner company, along with an invitation to a weekend training session. To corroborate the lie, consultants create a Web site for a fake hotel, where the duped significant other can call a fake hotel desk. The fake clerk? That's an Alibi Network operator. The company even patches telephone calls home, to look like they come from Chicago, Manhattan, Los Angeles--anywhere in the United States.

The monetary price for creating this illusion "depends on individual circumstances," the company said.

But the personal price of cheating, says one relationship ethicist, is far deeper.

“A lot of people lead double lives,” said Elaine Englehardt, a Utah Valley State College philosophy professor and relationship ethics expert. “I do think they have a fractured sense of the world, a fractured personality.” She said that self-deception plays a large role in affairs, on the part of both partners. It is common for cheated-on spouses to ignore their suspicions. And when the affair is hidden so well that one partner finds out years later, she said, it’s even worse: “The other spouse feels like such a fool.”

Englehardt does not necessarily agree with outing a cheating partner on DontDateHimGirl.com, either. “I wouldn’t use the service, but I think there are those who will use it and those who will abuse it,” she said, adding that single women often consult the grapevine when trying to figure out a date’s track record. The database, she said, isn’t much different from that.

Does she think the database is ethical? “You’re responsible for making your own judgments about what’s going on around you,” she said, so take the stories with a grain of salt. But, she added, it’s important to learn as much as possible about a prospective partner.

As for using the Alibi Network, Englehardt isn’t so approving. “The better thing is for a person to look at [the affair] and say, ‘Is this the type of person I really want to be?’” Instead of covering up an affair, she wrote in an e-mail, “just confess, save the relationship and try to move on.”

When asked if he thinks his company’s services are unconscionable, DeMarco said, “It’s almost like if we’re brick makers.” The distinction, he said, is whether that brick is used to smash a windshield or build a house. “We’re a service. We’re here for people to use how they please.”

Englehardt offered a different analogy: “Like a brick to a crumbling house is how I’d put it,” she said.

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