



## Are You a Righteous Dude?

Doing good is good for your health. But what happens when a moral code becomes too complicated to decipher? It's time to rethink your notion of right and wrong. **BY MATT McCUE**



**MUCH CAN CHANGE IN A DECADE. CONSIDER: IN 2004, NOT** one state allowed same-sex marriage. Now 26 have laws supporting it. Ten years ago, only 11 states had legalized medical marijuana. Now it's 23—and nearly six in 10 Americans favor legalized recreational use, a Gallup poll reveals.

These issues were once moral dilemmas for many, with both sides claiming the high ground. But seismic shifts in attitude reveal that virtuous behavior can be hard to define. For some, the line between right and wrong seems blurrier these days. Signposts can be ambiguous—is that shortcut over there the smart way to go, or does it skip past essential steps? We decided to ask American men what they think.

**E**

**BACK IN 2004, MEN'S HEALTH** ran a poll to check the moral pulse of the average guy. This year we did it again. The responses, from nearly 1,500 men, were not encouraging.

Compared with 10 years ago, the number of guys today who've allowed a drunk friend to drive increased one and a half times. Twice as many men have revealed a close friend's secret, and three and a half times as many have lied to get a woman into bed. But cheating on your significant other is still unethical—right? Probably not, according to the 28 million users of Ashley Madison, the online dating service for married people. The site's slogan: "Life is short. Have an affair." And our survey found that cheating is indeed up: In 2004, 28 percent had done it. In 2014, it's 36 percent.

Today, moral dilemmas fill our news feeds—like your recent quandary, perhaps, over whether to accept the ALS ice bucket challenge. Overall the campaign was a success; it raised more than \$100 million. Yet it's likely that most of the people in the videos were projecting a do-good image without actually doing good. When the analytics firm RJMetrics scrutinized 1,500 of the videos, it found that only 20 percent mentioned a donation. The point was to raise money—but 80 percent probably failed to crack their wallets. (Want to see what extreme altruism looks like? Turn to page 148.)

In 2004 we cited research linking generosity with longer life. More recently, researchers at UCLA noted that people whose happiness came from a deep sense of purpose—the kind you get from helping others, as opposed to the more superficial pleasures provided by self-gratifying behavior—had lower levels of inflammation and greater antiviral and antibody activity, indicating stronger immunity.



**FLAME OUT**  
Only 16 percent of men say they always act morally.

On some level, you probably sensed that doing good is good for you. But since "doing good" usually means doing something for someone else, maybe it wasn't a priority. In our new survey, 93 percent of respondents claimed to be moral. Yet 84 percent said they sometimes acted immorally. So do you wipe up your sweat at the gym, or leave it for the next guy? Accept the boss's praise, or deflect it to the colleague who really deserves it? You know what's right, but it's easier to act in your own self-interest. And the payoff comes faster.

Perhaps that helps explain the success of the Facebook "Like" button. In a 2014 study, Kurt Gray, Ph.D., director of the Mind Perception

and Morality Lab at UNC Chapel Hill, and his colleagues analyzed the 1.17 million members of the Save Darfur page on Facebook. As with the ice bucket challenge, most participants were more invested in the idea than they were in action. Among the nearly 100,000 original members, 99.8 percent didn't donate and 72 percent never recruited another member.

"They raised almost nothing compared with what a similar campaign would have raised offline," says Gray. "The reason is that you got to look great without having to pay."

The Internet makes it easy to score a quick hit of feel-good emotion without actually doing anything. But if morality is considered

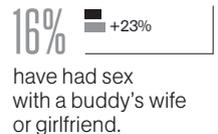
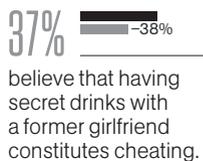
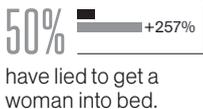
**VIRTUE: BY THE NUMBERS**

WE POLLED MEN IN 2004, AND AGAIN IN 2014. GUYS, IT LOOKS LIKE OUR MORALS MIGHT BE FAILING US.

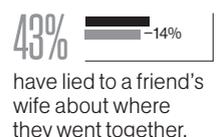
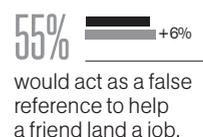
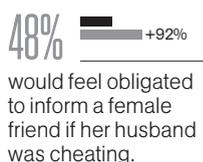
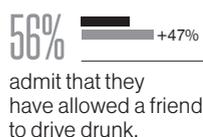
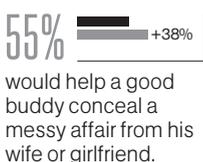
- 2004
- 2014



**THE LOVE GAME**



**BEST-BUD PRACTICES**





**HELLO, HALO**  
 Science says good  
 behavior can help  
 keep you healthy.

a nutrient, then the cheapest forms of online activism are just doughnuts. “It’s the equivalent of refined foods,” says Gray. “It’s engineered to make us like it, but it’s ultimately empty.”

None of this is to say that we’ve all become selfish pigs. In one surprising shift in our poll, today’s guys are *more* virtuous at work. We’re now less likely to steal office supplies, share company secrets while interviewing for a new job, or carry out a boss’s unethical orders.

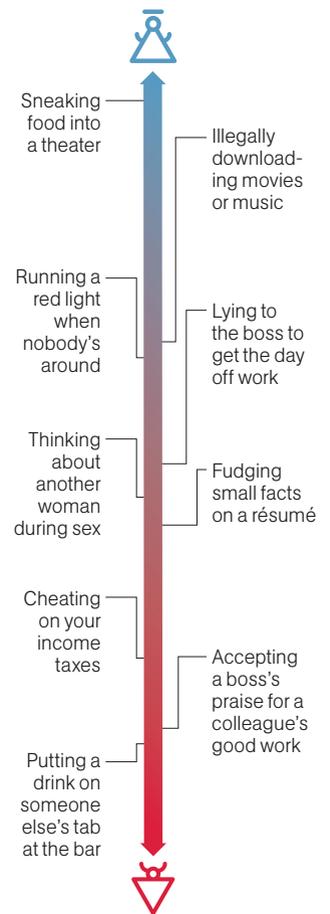
So how can you be a better man? No need to spend every weekend in a soup kitchen. It’s more important to simply consider your impact on the world and aspire to make it slightly better. “Morality is about what kind of

person you are,” says Christian Smith, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at Notre Dame and the author of *Lost in Transition*. “People who exercise virtue know that when they get in a certain situation, they hardly have to think about it because they know how they will act.”

Gut check time: Evaluate your moral code right now, and ask yourself how well you’re following it. Be honest, because if you’re slipping up and turning into the kind of jerk even you can’t respect, you’re undermining your health and happiness. But if you feel good about yourself, you’re probably well nourished with virtue. And please—when this story goes online, don’t forget to “Like” it on Facebook. ■

## SPECTRUM OF SIN

WE ASKED: ON A 1-TO-10 SCALE, HOW IMMORAL ARE THESE EVERYDAY INDISCRETIONS?



Source: Men's Health poll of 1,430 men

### FAMILY LIFE

47% say lying to their kids about their past drug use is morally okay.

42% have no problem with lying to their family about whether they've been drinking.

60% say it's fine to lust after their daughter's hot college friends.

27% say it's totally fine to lust after their daughter's hot high school friends.

12% would lie about military service to teach their kids about sacrifice and patriotism.

31% would help their daughter obtain birth control—and keep it a secret from the wife.

### OFFICE CULTURE

20% have padded a company expense report.

5% would misrepresent corporate finances to shareholders.

20% would follow an order from a superior to do something unethical.

8% would share a current employer's business secrets while interviewing at a new firm.

34% have cheated to improve a golf score.

62% consider it immoral to read confidential documents left by an office printer or fax.