Association of Sex Drive, Gender, and Infidelity in Romantic Relationships

Mari Eik

LIU Post

Abstract

This study examined the association between sex drive and infidelity based on gender differences. All participants had either been in a serious relationship in the past, or were currently in one. The sample was compromised of students from a Northeastern university in America (N=60). Those who reported having a high sex drive were more likely to engage in infidelity. However, there were only partial statistically significant results for men being more unfaithful than women. Infidelity was examined using two measures, Perception of Dating Infidelity Scale (Wilson, Mattingly, Clark, Weidler & Bequette, 2011) with no statistically significant gender difference, and a single item measure (Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollmann & Stapel, 2011) with statistically significant gender difference. An ANCOVA analysis in this study indicated that sex drive is the determining factor of infidelity, meaning that once sex drive is taken into account, gender is no longer a significant predictor of infidelity. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for the role of gender and sex drive in romantic relationships.

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Infidelity might be a sensitive topic for many, and therefore difficult to accurately assess. Not only is it a sensitive topic, but it is also difficult to define. People have diverse ways of defining infidelity in relationships, either it is emotional or physical, or none of the above (Mathes, 2003). For this reason, in the current study we decided to describe infidelity in a more traditional way by explaining it as engaging in sexual behavior with someone other than one's partner.

The lack of consensus on how infidelity is defined might contribute to disagreements in romantic relationships, especially when women are more likely than men to define both ambiguous and explicit behaviors as indicators of infidelity (Wilson et al., 2011). In Wilson and colleagues study (2011), ambiguous behaviors are explained as "eating or drinking, dancing or going somewhere with someone other than your partner", whereas explicit behaviors include sexual intercourse, oral sex and dating. Moreover, this current study focuses on explicit behaviors in regards to infidelity.

Similar to our study, Whisman and Snyder (2007) measured infidelity based on the explicit behavior of sexual intercourse. They examined whether or not participants had engaged in sexual intercourse with someone other than their partner over the past twelve months. Participants took part in two formats, a face-to-face interview and an audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (A-CASI). The A-CASI method (6.13%) showed greater prevalence than the face-to-face interview (1.08%) when measuring infidelity, most likely due to infidelity being a sensitive topic to address. Their findings explained that behavior of infidelity decreased as age and education increased. Interestingly, Atkins, Baucom and Jacobson (2001) found the opposite; participants with a graduate degree were 1.75 times more likely to engage in extramarital sex than those with less than a high school degree. Similarly, men 55-65 years of age and women 40-45 years old at the time of the study were more likely to have been unfaithful. Comparison of these two studies indicates that it may be difficult to draw conclusions based on limited research when examining infidelity. In addition, there are several factors that indicate unfaithfulness in relationships.

Some research indicates gender differences in the behavior of engaging in infidelity. Seal, Agostinelli and Hannet (1994) assessed the impact of individual differences in sociosexuality and gender on their willingness to engage in extradyadic romantic involvement when being "exclusive" with a partner or not. Their findings show that men were more likely to violate their exclusive commitment on all three segments examining sociosexuality and willingness to cheat. In other words, men showed a greater likelihood of being unfaithful to their partner in a romantic relationship compared to women. Comparably to Seal and colleagues' (1994) findings, Atkins, Baucom and Jacobson (2001) also found that a greater percentage of men report engaging in infidelity. However, one important aspect of this finding is that men in the age group of 55-65 at the time of the survey reported more unfaithfulness than those below or above this age group.

Relevant to this current study, multiple theories may explain possible gender differences in infidelity, but also provide other factors that distinguish gender from being a determining factor in infidelity. Previous research suggests that gender does not always play a significant role in research when other variables, such as power, age and education are present (Atkins et al., 2001; Lammers et al., 2011; Whisman & Snyder, 2007). Due to little attention devoted to issues of assessment of infidelity, the goal of our study is to examine what predicts whether people engage in infidelity. However, due to several findings supporting men as being more susceptible to infidelity than women (e.g., Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman 2006; Seal, Agostinelli & Hannet, 1994), we predict that there is an association between gender and infidelity.

Pervious research has looked at several factors that might explain why some people engage in infidelity. However, due to lack of research on sex drive and infidelity, we decided to examine if there is an association between the two. We operationalized the definition of sex drive by stating it as the need, passion or desire to engage in a sexual behavior. This sex drive varies from person to person. Burchell and Ward (2011) found that higher sex drive predicted greater distress at partner's sexual infidelity in both genders. Mathes (2003) supports these findings to some extent in his research study by stating that men are more likely to experience distress over partner infidelity involving sexual intercourse than emotional attachment. On the contrary, women rated themselves opposite: more distressed by emotional attachment than sexual intercourse. Adding on to these findings, Mathes (2003) also found that higher sex drive or urge caused more men than women to choose sexual gratification over emotional warmth.

Buss and Schmitt (1993) addressed the aspect of evolutionary psychology looking at men and women's mating preferences. Interestingly, the Sexual Strategies Theory suggests that the evolutionary traits of a man are built up by wanting to have as many mating partners as possible. For this reason, men have a tendency to seek women who are higher in sexual accessibility such as "promiscuity, sexual experience, high sex drive, and lack of prudishness" to minimize the risk of having to commit to a mate (Buss & Schmitt, 1993, p.226). Women who lack these qualities are more likely to require more resources and commitment from men, which makes them less desirable. Furthermore, their findings indicate that men have a higher sexual urge than women, and that this urge is a part of their short-term sexual strategies (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Similarly, Mathes (2003) findings of men choosing sexual intercourse rather than emotional attachment might be explained by evolution of wanting to mate with as many as possible (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Also supporting these findings, Ostovich (2004) reported that men had a statistically significant higher sex drive than women. With this said, evolutionary psychology predicts that men have in general a higher sex drive than women due to biology.

Overview of current study

The purpose of this study is to find out who, with respect to gender, is more likely to engage in infidelity and whether any potential gender difference might be

due to sexual drive. In order to test this, we collected information from undergraduate students from a Northeastern university to measure infidelity and sex drive, as well as including demographics. The reason for including these different aspects is to see if there is a positive correlation between sex drive and infidelity, mainly in regards to previous findings in which indicate that men are more likely to engage in infidelity (e.g., Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman 2006; Seal, Agostinelli & Hannet, 1994). Previous research indicates several variables as contributing factors to infidelity, such as relationship satisfaction, age and education (e.g., Atkins et al., 2001; Renshaw, McKnight, Caska & Blais, 2011; Whisman and Snyder, 2007). However, past research has not looked at sex drive as being a predictor of infidelity, whilst relate it to gender.

Hypotheses:

1. We predict that men are more likely to engage in infidelity in romantic relationships than women, due to a higher sex drive.
2. We predict that there is an association between gender and infidelity
3. We predict that higher sex drive is associated with infidelity

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were 61 undergraduate students enrolled at a university in Northeastern America: however, due to missing data from one participant, we used data from a total of 60 participants. Thirty-one females and 29 males participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30, mean age was 22.36 (*SD* = 2.91). Data were collected from: (a) students currently in a relationship, and (b) students who had been in a relationship. Thirty-five of the participants were currently in a relationship, on the contrary, 25 participants had been in a serious relationship in the past ranging from 1 month ago to 65 months ago (5 years and 4 months, *M*= 19.28, *SD*=19.44). Participants were recruited from the university by approaching them and asking if they were willing to take part in a study assessing relationship satisfaction and sex drive.

Measures

Sexual infidelity. Infidelity was measured using two different measures from previous studies. The first measure, called the Perceptions of Dating Infidelity Scale (PDIS), was modified in our study by only asking the so-called "explicit behaviors," (Wilson et al., 2011). These behaviors included sexual intercourse, oral sex, and dating. Participants were asked to answer 5-item questions based on the infidelity scale looking at engaging in "sexual intercourse, oral sex, heavy petting/fondling, dating and kissing", with someone other than their partner. The measure was a 5-point scale with the possible range of scale scores indicated 5 as the lowest score of infidelity and 25 as the highest score of infidelity. The scale had strong internal reliability in the current study (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

The second measure used asked participants one question based on a previous study done by Lammers et al., (2011). We were only interested in knowing whether the participants had engaged in infidelity, and not their possible intentions of

infidelity. For this reason, we chose to only present them with one item, "How often have you secretly had sex with another person?" to examine "actual" infidelity. Participants were asked to respond to the question using a 5-point scale (1=never; 5=very often). The possible range of scale scores was 1 through 5. Hence, higher scale scores mean more infidelity. Due to our topic being sensitive to some participants, they were given the option to skip this section. Fifty-one of 60 participants chose to answer this item, more females (N=28) than males (N=23).

Sex drive. Sex drive was measured using the Sexual Desire Inventory-2 (Ostovich, 2004). Participants were presented with fourteen questions where they were asked to rate their agreement with each on either a 7-pont Likert type scale, or an 8-point Likert type scale. Due to the different scaling systems, we changed the responses into z-scores before combining them to create a scale score. The 7-point Likert scale ranged from 0 "not at all" to 7 "more than once a day" or "many times a day", whereas the 8-point Likert scale ranged from 0 "not at all important" to 7 "extremely important". An example of an item participants were asked to answer with the first type of scale was, "During the last month, how often have you had sexual thoughts involving a partner?" The second type of scaling asked questions like, "When you first see an attractive person, how strong is your sexual desire?" and "How important is it for you to fulfill your sexual desire through activity with a partner?" Higher scores indicate higher levels of sexual drive. We computed all scores as Z scores. In order to do so, 0 indicate the mean of the score and 1 equals one standard deviation over the mean. Internal reliability for this scale was strong (Cronbach's alpha = .89).

Relationship satisfaction. We measured participants' relationship satisfaction to enhance the likelihood of them answering questions regarding infidelity and sex drive. We predicted that individuals would be more likely to answer sensitive questions when we added questions about their relationship in general. Participants were presented with seven questions from the Relationship Assessment Scale (Renshaw et al., 2011). They were asked to mark the letter that fits the question best for them (A=poorly, C=Average and E=extremely well). Examples from the scale are, "how well does your partner meet your needs?" and "how often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?" Question number four and seven had to be reverse coded, as the greater indicator of the letter means less relationship satisfaction. In order to get the mean score we added all the items and divided by 7.

Procedure

Participants were given an informed consent form where they chose to either participate or not participate in the study. The consent page provided contact information of the researchers should participants have any questions regarding the study. Individuals who decided to participate completed a survey that was distributed in person. They were asked to place their answers in a sealed envelope without names to keep their answers confidential. Demographic questions were asked on the last page of the study.

Results

Infidelity and gender

In our hypothesis, we predicted that there would be an association between gender and infidelity. To test the relationship between these two variables we conducted separate analyses for each measure of infidelity. The first measure was a 5-item scale from the Perception of Dating Infidelity Scale (PDIS: Wilson et al., 2011) and the second one was a single item measure (Lammers et al., 2011). Both measures were examined by an independent samples t test. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant gender difference for the Perception of Dating Infidelity Scale (PDIS), $t(57)=-1.52$, $p= 0.13$. In other words, infidelity in romantic relationships is not associated with whether the person is a male ($M=8.20$, $SD=3.32$) or a female ($M=6.93$, $SD=3.11$). These results do not support our hypothesis.

However, our second measure of infidelity and gender (Lammers et al., 2011) did show statistical significance. This one item assessment, "how often have you secretly had sex with another person?" showed a statistically significant difference in infidelity between males and females, $t(49)=-2.42$, $p=.03$. Men ($M=1.61$, $SD= .89$) were more likely to engage in infidelity than women ($M=1.14$, $SD= .45$). For this reason, our hypothesis is partly supported due to the first measure not being significant, while the second measure did support our hypothesis.

Sex drive and gender

For the second part of our study, we wanted to see if there was an association between sex drive and gender. We predicted that men would have a higher sex drive than women. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in scores on the Sexual Desire Inventory-2 (Ostovich, 2004) between males and females, $t(58)=-2.66$, $p=.01$. In other words, our hypothesis was supported due to findings of men ($M= 65.26$, $SD= 19.36$) having a higher sex drive than women ($M=52.51$, $SD= 17.49$).

Correlation sex drive and infidelity

We predicted that higher sex drive would be associated with infidelity. In order to measure this, we conducted a correlation between sex drive and infidelity (PDIS). The results indicate that there is a statistically significant positive association between sex drive and infidelity, meaning that higher sex drive is correlated with infidelity, $r(57) = .34$, $p=.01$.

The second correlation looked at sex drive and the one item measure of infidelity (Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollman & Stapel, 2011). This correlation was also statistically significant and supported our hypothesis, $r(49) = .42$, $p=.002$.

ANCOVA – gender, sex drive and infidelity

Our overall hypothesis was that men would be more likely than women to engage in infidelity due to a higher sex drive. We found some support that there is a gender difference in infidelity, leading us to want to find out what the role of sex drive in this association. To test this idea, we conducted an ANCOVA analysis of gender, sex drive and infidelity. We looked to see if there was a gender difference in infidelity once sex drive was controlled for. Our findings indicate that sex drive is the determining factor of infidelity, meaning that once sex drive is taken into account,

gender is no longer a significant predictor of infidelity. For this reason, sex drive explained the gender differences in infidelity, $F(1, 48) = 2.00$, $p = .164$. This finding supports our hypothesis of men being more likely to engage in infidelity than women due to a higher sex drive.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine which gender was more likely to engage in infidelity and whether this gender difference was due to a difference in sex drive. In keeping with past research, (e.g., Atkins et al., 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006; Seal, Agostinelli & Hannet, 1994) men were more likely to engage in infidelity than women. However, this gender difference was found with only one of our measures of infidelity. In fact, like most other studies (e.g., Lammers et al., 2011; Whisman & Snyder, 2007; Wilson et al., 2011) other predictors than gender play a role in determining whether men or women cheat. In fact, Whisman and Snyder (2007) and Atkins and colleagues (2001) examined education and age, among other factors as having an association with infidelity. Moreover, high income (<$300,00 annually) and power are both related to greater likelihood of engaging in infidelity than people with less income and power (Lammers et al., 2011).

Infidelity was examined using two different measures, the Perception of Dating Infidelity Scale (Wilson et al., 2011) and one item addressing "actual" infidelity (Lammers et al., 2011). The PDIS scale did not show any statistically significant difference between men and women in level of infidelity. This finding is not consistent with previous research that has found women to be less likely to be unfaithful; however, our results are similar to Lammers and colleagues (2011), who found that gender does not moderate the effects they found, but rather that infidelity was dependent on other factors such as income and power. We wanted to see if sex drive could be a predictor of why men possibly engage in more infidelity than women.

The results from the Sexual Desire Inventory- 2 indicate that men have a higher sex drive than women. These findings are consistent with those of previous research (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Mathes, 2003; Ostovich, 2004). Evolutionary psychology suggests that men have a higher sex drive due to the urge of finding as many mating partners as possible throughout the lifespan (Mathes, 2003). Moreover, these findings may therefore explain why men often choose sexual intercourse over emotional attachment (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Previous research has not examined sex drive and infidelity. We found a positive correlation between sex drive and infidelity, meaning that the higher sex drive a person has, the more likely is this person to engage in infidelity. However, these findings do not indicate cause and effect, but solely explain that there is an association between the two variables. These findings support our hypothesis of predicting that higher sex drive is associated with infidelity.

Gender and infidelity have been examined in several studies, (e.g., Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006; Seal, Agostinelli & Hannet, 1994), possibly due to interest in finding out which gender is more likely to engage in the behavior of infidelity. We predicted that men would be more likely than

women to be unfaithful due to higher sex drive. In other words, we did not necessarily predict that men would be more likely to cheat, but because they possibly had a higher sex drive they might be more likely to do so. Our results indicate that this is the case; namely that sex drive is the predominant factor in or study for explaining the behavior of infidelity.

While evolutionary theory provides explanations of why men have a higher sex drive (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Mathes, 2003; Ostovich, 2004), it does not provide us with information of infidelity. For this reason, we did an ANCOVA test to make sure that gender was not a determining factor of infidelity as long as sex drive was present. In fact, our results show that when sex drive is measured, infidelity is not dependent on gender. In other words, it does not matter whether an individual is a male or a female when examining infidelity as long as this person has a high sex drive.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study had a great number of strengths that made it possible to study associations between predictors of infidelity. For instance, we predicted that there was a gender difference between men and women in engaging in infidelity. For this reason, we measured infidelity using two measures, Perception of Dating Infidelity Scale (Wilson et al., 2011) with no statistically significant gender difference, and a single item measure (Lammers et al., 2011) with statistically significant gender difference. These findings indicate the strength of using two different scales measuring the same variable, as one scale might give different results than another scale. In other words, partial statistically significant result for gender difference is a strength in this study.

Another strength of our study was internal reliability for every scale used to assess predicted behavior of infidelity. Preexisting measures were used to enhance the validity of the current study. The Perception of Dating Infidelity Scale (PDIS) was found to demonstrate predictive validity in future research based on the previous research done by Wilson and colleagues (2011) addressing specific attitudes toward infidelity behavior. Similar to the PDIS, Ostovich (2004) examined the test-retest reliability and internal reliability of the Sexual Desire Inventory-2, which supported our findings of a Cronbach's Alpha of .89.

The current study examined personal matters, and thus ethical practice was key. All participants were assured confidentiality by placing their questionnaires in sealed envelopes. Analogous with Egan and Angus (2004) we also waited to open the sealed envelopes until the study had been completed. This increased the likelihood of not connecting answers to specific participants. In fact, research indicates that anonymous participants score lower on measures of social anxiety and social desirability than participants that are not anonymous when responding to a questionnaire (Joinson, 1999).

Infidelity might be a sensitive topic for many. For this reason, the current study included a section of items regarding relationship satisfaction to persuade participants that we were not looking to see if they had been unfaithful to their partner, but more importantly to enhance their comfort in participating in the study. In keeping with

past research (e.g., Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006), relationship satisfaction indicates a statistically significant association with infidelity. However, we did not include these findings in our study, as results from this section was not relevant in our prediction of sex drive being associated with infidelity.

There were also limitations in the current study. Firstly, participants might have felt uncomfortable answering personal questions related to the behavior of infidelity, and for this reason not be as honest as we might expect. Secondly, those participants who reported having been in a relationship in the past might not accurately remember how they felt about their partner when in that relationship.

Moreover, the sample size (N=60) may not correctly represent the population of undergraduates at universities. Additionally, due to only sampling students at the age of 18 to 30, our study is limited to this population. In other words, our findings might not be applicable to the rest of the population that are not in this age group or students at a university. In fact, Regan and Dreyer (2008) found that 61.9 percent of the college students participating in the study had engaged in one-night stands. Their findings indicate that sexual desire was the most frequently reported reason for men to engage in one-night stands, and third for women. In other words, young adults engage in casual sex.

Directions for Future Research

The results of the current study indicate that people with a higher sex drive are more likely to engage in infidelity than people with low sex drive. In addition, our study sample indicates that men have a higher sex drive, and for this reason more likely to be unfaithful. Additionally, due to no statistically significant findings for gender and infidelity, future research can address personality traits such as narcissism, and sex drive to see if there is a correlation between certain personality traits and low or high sex drive.

Another possible direction for future research can be to examine infidelity among professional male athletes, as power and income seem to be predictors of infidelity (Lammers et al., 2011). Furthermore, the motive of choosing male athletes over female athletes is due to support for gender differences in infidelity with men being more likely to be unfaithful (e.g., Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006; Seal, Agostinelli & Hannet, 1994). For this reason, a possible prediction for future research within this topic can be that male athletes would engage in more infidelity than female athletes. Yet, another possible prediction might be that the more successful the athlete, the greater likelihood to engage in infidelity due to more power.

Conclusion

Does gender play a role in engaging in infidelity, and, if so, are there other factors that might be more prominent in effecting this behavior? To answer this question one has to examine gender behavior, but also take into consideration other variables such as for example sex drive. In this current study, gender appears to not

influence infidelity as long as sex drive is present. For this reason, sex drive is the determining factor in deciding which gender is more likely to be unfaithful.

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