SEX DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL INFIDELITY

Beth Babin
Arizona State University

Kathryn Dindia
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Sex differences and similarities in emotional and sexual infidelity
Abstract

This study addresses inconsistencies in the literature about sex differences and similarities in sexual and emotional infidelity. Sex differences in the behaviors that constitute infidelity, commission of infidelity, justifications for committing infidelity and approval of infidelity were examined in a study involving 732 college students at a large Midwestern university. Men did not commit infidelity more than women, and no sex differences were found regarding the type of infidelity (sexual, emotional, or sexual and emotional) that men and women report committing. More women than men reported kissing another person, while more men than women reported receiving oral sex from an extradyadic partner. No sex differences were observed for sexual touching, giving oral sex, sexual intercourse, flirting, datingseeing someone, spending time with another, sharing intimate information, falling in love, and phone/cybersex. More women than men reported that kissing, sexual touching, oral sex, sexual intercourse, dating, falling in love, and phone/cybersex constitute infidelity. There were no sex differences for spending time with another and sharing intimate information. Women were more likely than men to cite emotional dissatisfaction as the reason they cheat. Differences did not emerge regarding the other three justifications for infidelity tested (sexual dissatisfaction, sexual and emotional dissatisfaction, and other). Participants overwhelmingly disapproved of infidelity (men rated infidelity as more acceptable than women), despite the fact that a large percentage of both men and women reported engaging in infidelity, and both sexes reported that it was more acceptable for their own sex to commit infidelity than the opposite sex.
Sex Differences and Similarities in Emotional and Sexual Infidelity

Infidelity research has revealed that significant numbers of individuals are going outside the primary relationship and becoming involved with other relational partners (Boekhout, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1999; Feldman & Cauffman, 2000; Hansen, 1987; Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Greeley (1994) found that 11% of women and 21% of men engaged in sex with someone other than a spouse during marriage. Additionally, Hansen (1987) found that 71% of men and 57% of women were unfaithful to a dating partner. Past studies focused on different types of infidelity (sexual, emotional, or both sexual and emotional) and attempted to understand why individuals become extradyadically involved.

The majority of infidelity research has focused on sex differences in jealousy responses based on evolutionary predictions; less research has focused on sex differences regarding other issues surrounding infidelity, such as perceptions of the behaviors that constitute infidelity, commission of infidelity, justifications for infidelity, and approval of infidelity. These issues are important to study because many stereotypes exist regarding sex differences in infidelity, in particular is the stereotype that men commit infidelity more than women. Research that has addressed these issues has produced contradictory results with some studies finding sex differences, whereas other studies find no differences. Because contradictory results exist, we do not have a clear understanding of sex differences in infidelity in dating and marital relationships. The purpose of this study is to gain a clearer understanding of sex differences in beliefs about what constitutes infidelity, the commission of infidelity, justifications for infidelity, and approval of infidelity.

Definition of Infidelity

Infidelity is defined as a severe relational transgression in which one or both partners perform extradyadic behaviors that violate relational rules of monogamy and exclusivity without their partner’s prior consent (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). The existence of extradyadic behaviors do not always constitute acts of infidelity because some relationships do not have an expectation of exclusivity or monogamy. Infidelity research addresses two types of betrayal that occur in committed romantic relationships (Feldman & Cauffman, 2000): sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. Sexual infidelity, as its name suggests, refers to engaging in sexual activities with someone other than one’s partner. Behaviors that constitute sexual infidelity range from kissing to sexual intercourse, including behaviors such as sexual
touching and oral sex (Feldman & Cauffman, 2000; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988). Emotional infidelity refers to becoming emotionally involved with someone other than one’s partner (Roscoe et al., 1988). Behaviors such as flirting, dating, spending time together, and falling in love with someone outside the primary relationship are identified as acts of emotional infidelity.

Relational infidelity may consist of sexual involvement in the absence of an emotional attachment, an emotional attachment in the absence of sexual involvement, or a combination of sexual involvement and emotional attachment. Although both sexual and emotional infidelity can inflict stress on a relationship (Cann, Mangum, & Wells, 2001), research indicates that sexual infidelity in the absence of an emotional attachment is considered to be one of the most severe and unacceptable types of infidelity that occur within dating and marital relationships (Sheppard, Nelson, & Andreoli-Mathie, 1995).

Sex Differences in Infidelity

Sex differences in infidelity are one of the main foci of infidelity research. Scholars have studied a number of dependent variables to gain a better understanding of sex differences in infidelity. These dependent variables fall into one of five categories: (a) perceptions of what constitutes infidelity, (b) commission of infidelity, (c) justifications for infidelity, (d) approval of infidelity.

Behaviors that Constitute Infidelity

Various studies have examined men’s and women’s attitudes and behaviors regarding both sexual and emotional extradyadic involvement; however only one study (Roscoe et al., 1988) has asked participants to identify what behaviors constitute infidelity. In a study of 258 unmarried undergraduates, Roscoe et al. found that 57% of the sample believed that dating/spending time with another was an unfaithful behavior, 42% mentioned sexual intercourse, and 40% reported sexual interactions including flirting, kissing, petting, and necking as constituting infidelity behaviors. These findings are noteworthy because acts constituting emotional infidelity were more strongly identified as infidelity than sexual acts. This is strong evidence that infidelity is not just sexual, but emotional as well.

Three sex differences emerged indicating that men and women may identify different behaviors as acts of infidelity. Women identified dating and spending time with another partner and keeping secrets from one’s partner as unfaithful acts significantly more than men, while men reported engaging in sexual interactions with another partner as acts of infidelity significantly more than women (Roscoe et al., 1988). These findings suggest that women more than men identify acts of emotional betrayal as acts of infidelity.
and more men than women identify sexual interactions as acts of infidelity. These sex differences in what constitutes infidelity are noteworthy in that sex differences in the commission of infidelity may result because men and women have different definitions of infidelity. Based on the results of the study by Roscoe et al., the following research question was posed.

RQ1: Do men and women differ in the emotional and sexual behaviors they identify as acts of infidelity?

Commission of Infidelity

Findings on whether sex differences exist in committing infidelity are clearer than the findings on beliefs about behaviors that constitute infidelity, suggesting that sex differences do not exist in the commission of infidelity contrary to stereotypical beliefs that men cheat more than women. Seal, Agostinelli, and Hannett (1994) assessed participants’ willingness to become romantically involved with an extradyadic partner and found that when presented with a hypothetical opportunity, men reported a greater willingness to engage in extradyadic behaviors violating rules of exclusivity than did women. However, this is a report of hypothetical infidelity and may not generalize to actual infidelity.

Several studies have examined the actual commission of infidelity. That is, instead of asking whether they would be willing to engage in infidelity, participants were asked whether they had actually committed infidelity. No sex differences emerged in a study measuring the proportion of men and women in a serious dating relationship who reported actually engaging in extradyadic dating, indicating they had dated at least one other person while in a serious committed relationship (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Overall 42% of the participants reported being involved in extradyadic dating. Moderate sex differences surfaced, however, when respondents were asked whether they had multiple extradyadic dating partners (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). More men than women claimed to have multiple extradyadic dating partners ($d = .53$) while in a serious dating relationship. Similarly, Spanier and Margolis (1983) found that men reported having multiple extramarital sexual partners more than women did.

Other studies have found that women were just as likely as men to report being a perpetrator of emotional and/or sexual extradyadic involvement (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999) and marital infidelity (Prins, Buunk, & Van Yperen, 1993; Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Thompson, 1984). Many studies (Boekhout et al., 1999; Glass & Wright, 1992; Sheppard et al., 1995) have reported the percentages of men and women that have committed infidelity but do not indicate whether they differ
significantly, thus it is unknown whether the results of these studies confirm those reported on finding no sex differences. The following research question is asked to provide further evidence that sex differences do not exist.

RQ2: Are there sex differences in the actual commission of infidelity?

Extant research suggests that the type of infidelity (sexual versus emotional) that men and women commit differs. Many studies have found sex differences in the type of actual extradyadic behaviors that men and women commit in dating and martial relationships. Boekhout et al. (1999) found that of the participants who reported having been unfaithful (38% women, 49% men) women reported being emotionally, but not sexually, involved at a higher frequency than did men (33% versus 13%), whereas men reported being sexually, but not emotionally, involved at a higher frequency than did women (62% versus 25%). In addition, 42% of the women reported being both sexually and emotionally involved, while only 26% of the men reported being both sexually and emotionally involved. Glass and Wright (1985) found that significantly more men than women reported having engaged in extramarital sexual intercourse, and men were more likely to classify their affairs as more sexual than emotional than women.

In a study of extramarital infidelity, Thompson (1984) found that men were sexually, but not emotionally involved more than women, confirming the stereotypical viewpoint that men have more sexually driven extrarelational involvements than women. Similar results were reported by Sheppard et al. (1995), revealing that a higher percentage of men than women had engaged in sexual infidelity, while a higher percentage of women reported engaging in emotional infidelity.

To determine whether men and women commit different types of infidelity (sexual or emotional), Dreznick (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that differentiated between sexual and emotional infidelity. Results revealed an effect of \( d = .68 \) indicating that men were more likely than women to rate their infidelity as sexual versus emotional. Although these results are interesting, they are problematic for two reasons. First, the effect size, although moderate, is based on a sample size of three studies (Boekhout et al., 1999; Glass & Wright, 1985; & Spanier & Margolis, 1983) with a combined total of 645 participants. Secondly, the results do not take into account the fact that infidelity may be both sexual and emotional. Of the three studies included in the meta-analysis, two of them (Boekhout, et al., 1999; Glass and Wright, 1985) allowed participants to classify their infidelity as both sexual and emotional. Various percentages of both men and women in these two studies identified their involvement as both being a combination of
sexual and emotional, yet those classifying their infidelity as being both sexual and emotional were not included in the meta-analysis.

To obtain a better, more complete understanding of sex differences in the types of infidelity that men and women commit, it is important to look at all three infidelity conditions: sexual only, emotional only, and the combination of sexual and emotional. In doing so, we will be able to determine if men commit sexual infidelity more than women, if women commit emotional infidelity more than men, and if a sex difference exists between men and women committing sexual and emotional infidelity. Therefore, the following research question was asked.

RQ3: Are there sex differences in the type of infidelity (sexual, emotional, and sexual and emotional) that men and women commit?

In addition to studying whether men commit sexual infidelity more than women, some studies have examined whether men commit more extreme levels of sexual infidelity than women. This belief was partially confirmed by Feldman and Cauffman (2000) who examined five infidelity behaviors of college students: kissing, petting, sexual intercourse, dating, and emotional involvement. The only sex difference that emerged was that men reported having engaged in extradyadic sexual intercourse more often than women. Men and women did not differ in dating, emotional involvement, kissing, and petting. Despite the use of similar methods, Wiederman and Hurd (1999) found multiple significant differences between the extradyadic behavior of men and women including kissing and fondling, performing oral sex, receiving oral sex, and sexual intercourse. Men committed each of these acts more than women.

There is also evidence that men commit multiple occurrences of extradyadic sexual acts more often than women (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Significant differences emerged for the extradyadic behaviors of romantic kissing, kissing and fondling, performing oral sex, and sexual intercourse, indicating that men more than women committed these acts of infidelity more than once. Unfortunately, this data does not reveal whether these acts were committed with multiple extradyadic partners, or whether they committed these acts on multiple occasions with the same extradyadic partner.

Wiederman and Hurd (1999) suggest that because men and women are socialized differently about acceptable sexual activity (i.e., having multiple sex partners is often considered more acceptable behavior for men than women) sex differences in infidelity may be a result of underreporting of infidelity behavior by women rather than real sex differences. This explanation however, does not account for the fact that
Feldman and Cauffman (2000) found that men and women only differ on sexual intercourse, and do not differ on any of the other sexual acts of infidelity studied. However, it is possible that women may underreport sexual intercourse while they may not underreport less severe sexual acts such as kissing or petting.

Because there are inconsistent results regarding sex differences in various acts of sexual infidelity and because no one has looked at whether there are sex differences in various acts of emotional infidelity, the following research questions were posed.

RQ4: Are there sex differences in the particular acts of sexual infidelity (kissing, fondling, oral sex, sexual intercourse)?

RQ5: Are there sex differences in the particular acts of emotional infidelity (flirting, dating/spending time together, intimate conversations/sharing intimate secrets, falling in love)?

*Justifications for Infidelity*

Infidelity scholars have attempted to understand why individuals engage in extradyadic behaviors, and have documented various reasons that individuals have given to justify their acts of infidelity. Although men and women agree on many reasons for committing infidelity, studies have shown that there are sex differences in some justifications for committing infidelity.

Roscoe et al. (1988) surveyed undergraduate students asking them to report the reasons that someone in a hypothetical serious dating relationship would give for unfaithful behaviors. There were no sex differences for reasons such as boredom, geographical distance, variety/experimentation, attraction to another, and revenge. However, women reported relationship dissatisfaction more as contributing to infidelity than men; whereas men identified lack of communication/understanding and sexual incompatibility as factors leading to unfaithful behavior more so than women.

Boekhout et al. (1999) asked undergraduates to rate various sexual and emotional reasons that men and women might give for an extrarelational involvement. Results revealed significant sex differences in their hypothetical use of 15 of the 23 reasons. In particular participants perceived that sexual reasons for infidelity (e.g. sexual incompatibility, sexual excitement, boredom, variety/experimentation) would be more likely to be used by men than women, whereas emotional reasons for infidelity (e.g. lack of attention, lack of commitment, falling in love, emotional satisfaction, companionship) would be more likely to be used by women than men. Boekhout et al. (1999) did not examine the reasons that individuals themselves
gave for being unfaithful to a partner. The findings of Boekhout et al. (1999) support the findings of Glass and Wright (1992), whose results revealed that married men were more approving of sexual justifications for hypothetical infidelity than were married women. The results for love as a justification were not significant, although authors reported a trend (p < .07) with women more approving of emotional justifications.

Contrary to the results of the above studies dealing with hypothetical infidelity, Feldman and Cauffman (1999) did not find sex differences in participants’ justifications for actual sexual infidelity. Male and female undergraduates did not differ in the reasons they produced for their own sexual betrayal. The results of this study of actual justifications do not confirm the findings of other studies of reasons for hypothetical infidelity, which indicate that men are more likely to give sexual justifications for infidelity, while women are more likely to give emotional justifications for infidelity.

The sex differences that emerged in the studies of hypothetical infidelity may be due to stereotypical ideas about the reasons men and women commit infidelity, namely, that men seek sex and women seek emotional attachment. The one study focusing on actual experience with infidelity (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999) would be less likely to support simple stereotypical views because people were reporting on their own infidelity rather than the hypothetical infidelity of others, and results reveal that in response to their own infidelity, men and women did not differ in types of justifications.

Little research has been conducted on the reasons or justifications individuals report for committing infidelity, and the results are contradictory. These contradictions warrant further research on justifications for actual infidelity to determine whether men and women differ in they give for their behavior. Thus, the following research question was asked:

RQ6: Do men and women differ in the justifications (sexual dissatisfaction versus emotional dissatisfaction) they produce for committing infidelity?

Approval of Infidelity and Reasons for Infidelity

Research on approval and acceptance of infidelity has shown that infidelity is generally disapproved of. Despite this, many people still commit infidelity. Research suggests that sex differences may exist in approval ratings, with men more approving of infidelity than women, which may account for sex differences in infidelity behavior and why men commit infidelity more than women. In a sample of college students, Hansen (1987) found that although a large proportion of participants had actually engaged
in extradyadic sexual relations, survey results did not reveal any evidence of acceptance of extradyadic relations, and there were no sex differences in acceptance of infidelity.

Contrary to the above study, Feldman and Cauffman (2000) found that men were more approving of hypothetical sexual betrayal than women in nearly all of the 19 circumstances tested (e.g. “Wasn’t sexually satisfied by boyfriend/girlfriend,” “Was certain that no one would ever find out,” and “Fell in love with new person”) despite participants’ low level of approval of sexual betrayal overall. Feldman and Cauffman (2000) found that participants’ actions contradict their attitudes about the acceptability of betrayal. Results showed high incidences of sexual betrayal by participants, suggesting that despite individuals’ disapproval of betrayal within committed, monogamous relationships, many still commit betrayal behaviors.

Similarly, Sheppard et al. (1995) found a significant difference between men’s and women’s general approval rating of hypothetical infidelity. Men were more approving of infidelity occurring in both marriage and committed dating relationships; however, neither sex was highly approving of infidelity in general. The interaction between sex of participant and type of infidelity (sexual versus emotional) was not significant, and the results revealed that the most acceptable type of infidelity for both dating and marital conditions was an emotional only involvement, while the least acceptable condition for both dating and marriage was a sexual only involvement. Despite widespread participant disapproval of infidelity some participants that had been in a serious committed relationship reported that they had engaged in an act of sexual or emotional infidelity. These results confirm those of previous studies, that despite disapproval of infidelity in committed relationships, individuals continue to commit infidelity. Based on these results, we advanced the following research question:

RQ7: Are there sex differences in approval of sexual and emotional infidelity?

Sexual dissatisfaction and relational dissatisfaction as justifications for sexual and emotional infidelity have been the main focus of study by researchers. Dreznick (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of sex differences in approval of sexual and relational dissatisfaction as reasons for committing infidelity. The results of the meta-analysis indicate that men were more approving of sexual dissatisfaction as a reason for committing infidelity, whereas women were more approving of relational dissatisfaction as a reason for committing infidelity ($d = .12$). Although this difference is significant, the effect size is small (Cohen,
1969) and is based on only four studies (Buunk, 1980; Buunk & Bakker, 1997; Prins et al., 1993; Roscoe et al., 1988) and few participants. Based on these results, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: Men are more likely to accept sexual dissatisfaction as a justification for infidelity, whereas women are more likely to accept emotional dissatisfaction as a justification for infidelity.

Method

Participants

796 undergraduate students at an urban Midwestern university participated in this study; however incomplete surveys eliminated 64 participants. Surveys were not considered for analysis when sex was not reported and when participants did not follow instructions. The final sample consisted of 732 participants (45% male, 55% female). The majority of participants were between 20-24 years old (52%), followed by 18-19 (40%), 25-29 (5%), 30-39 (2%), and 40 and up (1%). The sample was overwhelmingly heterosexual (96%), with the remaining participants identifying themselves as bi-sexual (2%), and homosexual (2%).

Procedures

Participants were recruited in introductory communication courses at an urban university. Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous, and all students received extra credit for their involvement. Instructors distributed the survey and an informed consent form to students during class and asked students to complete the survey on their own time and return it to them within two weeks. After completion, participants placed their survey and signed consent in separate envelopes (to assure anonymity) that their instructor returned to the researchers.

Measures

The survey measured participants’ perceptions regarding approval of infidelity, behaviors that constitute infidelity, commission of infidelity, and justifications for infidelity. First, using a 5-point Likert scale (1= not at all acceptable, 5= very acceptable) participants were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their approval of infidelity. The following questions were asked: How acceptable is it for a man to engage in sexual infidelity? How acceptable is it for a woman to engage in sexual infidelity? How acceptable is it for a man to engage in emotional infidelity? How acceptable is it for a woman to engage in emotional infidelity? Four additional questions were asked regarding the acceptability of sexual and emotional dissatisfaction as reasons for engaging in infidelity for both men and women.
Second, participants were presented with several sexual (kissing, fondling, oral sex, sexual intercourse) and emotional (flirting, dating/spending time together, intimate conversations/sharing intimate secrets behaviors, and falling in love) behaviors to measure participant perceptions of the behaviors that constitute infidelity. Participants selected either yes or no to indicate their agreement or disagreement that the behavior constituted infidelity. Next, participants answered questions regarding their commission of infidelity including whether they had ever engaged in infidelity, the type of infidelity (sexual, emotional, sexual and emotional), and the specific sexual and emotional behaviors they engaged in. Sexual infidelity was defined as becoming sexually involved with someone else, emotional infidelity as becoming emotionally involved with someone else, and sexual and emotional infidelity was defined as becoming sexually and emotionally involved with someone else.

Third, participants completed items regarding the reason they committed infidelity (sexual dissatisfaction, emotional dissatisfaction, both sexual and emotional dissatisfaction, or other) that were generated justifications studied in previous studies. Participants were also asked about the circumstances of the last relationship in which infidelity occurred. Finally, demographic information was also gathered regarding gender, age, and sexual orientation.

Results

Overall, 42% of the sample (44% of women, 37% of men) reported committing infidelity at least once. 53% of participants were seriously dating their partner, 46% were casually dating, 1% was engaged, and 1% was married when they committed their most recent infidelity. Additionally, 39% reported committing sexual infidelity, 37% committed both sexual and emotional infidelity, and 23% committed emotional infidelity.

The first research question (RQ1) asks whether sex differences exist in the emotional and sexual behaviors men and women identify as acts of infidelity. Participants were given a list of several sexual (kissing, fondling, oral sex, sexual touching, sexual intercourse) and emotional (flirting, dating/spending time together, intimate conversations/sharing intimate secrets behaviors, falling in love, and phone/cybersex) behaviors and asked to identify the behaviors they perceive as constituting infidelity. Overall, the majority of individuals reported kissing (86%), sexually touching another person (87%), being sexually touched by another person (84%), receiving oral sex (93%), giving oral sex (91%), sexual intercourse (92%), dating/seeing someone else (84%), falling in love (66%), and phone/cybersex as
constituting infidelity. Fewer individuals believed that flirting (20%), spending time with another (12%), and sharing intimate information with another (17%) constituted infidelity.

The findings indicate that men and women view differently several behaviors as acts of infidelity. As indicated in Table 1 significant differences emerged, more women than men believed that kissing (W = 92%, M = 84%), sexually touching someone else (W = 92%, M = 87%), having someone else sexually touch you (W = 91%, M = 82%), receiving oral sex (W = 97%, M = 93%), performing oral sex (W = 97%, M = 92%), and sexual intercourse (W = 97%, M = 93%), dating (W = 91%, M = 83%), falling in love (W = 74%, M = 61%), and phone/cybersex (W = 83%, M = 69%) constituted acts of infidelity. Flirting (M = 24%, W = 16%) was the only behavior tested that men identified as constituting infidelity more than women. Nonsignificant results emerged for spending time together/doing things with another person, and sharing information (self disclosure, secrets) with another person. Similar percentages of men and women viewed these behaviors as acts of infidelity. Thus, it appears that sex differences do exist in the behaviors that men and women identify as constituting infidelity.

Table 1
Emotional and Sexual Behaviors that Constitute Infidelity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Total (% Yes)</th>
<th>Male (% Yes)</th>
<th>Female (% Yes)</th>
<th>X²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romantic Kissing</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>9.675*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Touching (other)</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5.042*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Touching (self)</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>12.758*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receiving Oral Sex</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>5.637*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving Oral Sex</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>10.171*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Intercourse</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>5.741*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flirting</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.251*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating/Seeing someone</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>12.116*</td>
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<td>Spending time with another</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.098</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing intimate information</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling in Love</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>15.321*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone/Cyber Sex</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>20.056*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05
The second research question asks whether there are sex differences in the actual commission of infidelity. Participants were asked whether they had ever been sexually or emotionally unfaithful to a romantic partner. Nonsignificant results indicate that neither sex commits infidelity more than the other, \( \chi^2 (1, N = 689) = 3.489, p > .05 \). 44% of women (N = 379), and 37% of men (N = 310) reported committing infidelity at least once in their lifetime.

The third research question asks whether there are sex differences in the type of infidelity (sexual, emotional, sexual and emotional) that men and women commit. The results indicate that men and women do not differ in the types of infidelity they commit, sexual \( \chi^2 (1, N = 321) = .144, p > .05 \), emotional \( \chi^2 (1, N = 320) = .442, p > .05 \), and sexual and emotional infidelity \( \chi^2 (1, N = 320) = .236, p > .05 \). Nearly one-third of both men (28%) and women (30%) reported committing sexual infidelity at least once; nearly one-third of both men (26%) and women (31%) reported committing emotional infidelity at least once. The percentages of men and women committing sexual and emotional infidelity were not as high with only 18% of men (N = 134), and 21% of women (N = 186) having committed this type of infidelity at least once in their lifetime.

RQ4 and RQ5 examine whether sex differences exist in the sexual and emotional acts of infidelity that men and women commit. Participants were presented with the same list of sexual and emotional behaviors (kissing, fondling, oral sex, sexual touching, sexual intercourse, flirting, dating/spending time together, intimate conversations/sharing intimate secrets behaviors, falling in love, and phone/cybersex) that they evaluated as constituting infidelity, and selected the behaviors that they engaged in with someone other than their partner in a current or past romantic relationship. The results suggest that for most of the behaviors, men and women commit similar sexual and emotional acts of infidelity. As shown in Table 2, significant sex differences emerged for kissing (M = 29%, W = 37%) and receiving oral sex (M = 22%, W = 11%). Nonsignificant findings were observed for sexually touching another person (M = 30%, W = 29%), another person sexually touching you (M = 32%, W = 31%), performing oral sex (M = 14%, W = 12%), sexual intercourse (M = 18%, W = 19%), flirting (M = 38%, W = 42%), dating/seeing someone else (M = 17%, W = 21%), spending time with another (M = 32%, W = 37%), sharing intimate information (M = 28%, W = 31%), falling in love (M = 10%, W = 10%), and phone/cybersex (M = 2%, W = 4%).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts of Infidelity Committed by Participants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


The sixth research question (RQ6) explored sex differences in the justifications given for having committed infidelity. Participants who reported they had been unfaithful in a relationship, past or present, were asked why they were unfaithful to their partner and asked to choose one of the following justifications: sexual dissatisfaction, emotional dissatisfaction, sexual and emotional dissatisfaction, or other. Participants were instructed to respond to this question regarding the most recent time they were unfaithful. The results of the Chi-square test were significant, (χ² (3, N = 293) = 13.183, p < .05). The majority of men selected other (53%), followed by sexual and emotional dissatisfaction (23%), emotional dissatisfaction (15%), and sexual dissatisfaction (9%). Like the men, the majority of women selected other (50%), followed by emotional dissatisfaction (30%), sexual and emotional dissatisfaction (17%), and sexual dissatisfaction (3%). More women (30%) than men (15%) reported emotional dissatisfaction as the justification for infidelity. The results for men and women for sexual dissatisfaction, sexual and emotional dissatisfaction, and other were similar.

The seventh research question asked whether sex differences exist in approval of sexual and emotional infidelity. Participants were asked how acceptable they thought it is for a man or woman to engage in sexual or emotional infidelity on a 5-point scale (1 = not acceptable at all, 5 = very acceptable). This question was asked four separate times alternating sex and type of infidelity (man, sexual; man, emotional; woman, sexual; women, emotional). A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted with gender as the between subjects factor and type of infidelity and sex of the person committing the infidelity as the within-subjects factors. The results revealed a significant effect for sex of participant (F (1, 728) = 53.08, p < .05). Overall men (M = 1.79, SD = .900) rated infidelity as being more acceptable than women (M = 1.45, SD = .70). However, as the means depict neither sex views infidelity as acceptable behavior. There was also a significant main effect for type of infidelity (sexual or emotional) (F (1, 728) = 441.133, p
<.05), in that individuals (both men and women) perceive emotional infidelity \( (M = 1.98, SD = .961) \) as more acceptable than sexual infidelity \( (M = 1.25, SD = .639) \).

The main effect for sex of participant was confounded by several interaction effects. A significant interaction effect was found between sex of participant and sex of the hypothetical person committing infidelity \( F (1, 728) = 18.44, p < .05 \). Both men and women say that it is more acceptable for their own sex to commit infidelity. Men reported that it was more acceptable for a man to commit infidelity \( (M = 1.82, SD = .742) \) than it was for a woman to commit infidelity \( (M = 1.76, SD = .732) \) \( t (325) = 2.26, p < .05 \). Women reported that it was more acceptable for a woman to commit infidelity \( (M = 1.47, SD = .614) \) than it was for a man to commit infidelity \( (M = 1.42, SD = .541) \) \( t (405) = -4.253, p < .05 \).

Sex of participant also interacted with type of infidelity (sexual or emotional) \( F (1, 728) = 12.826, p < .05 \) (See Figure 1). Men report that emotional infidelity is more acceptable relative to sexual infidelity \( (M = 2.22, SD = .972; M = 1.35, SD = .735, \text{respectively}) \) than women report emotional infidelity is acceptable relative to sexual infidelity \( (M = 1.75, SD = .880, M = 1.15, SD = .474) \). In other words the difference between men and women on their acceptance of emotional infidelity is greater than the difference between men and women on sexual infidelity.

Figure 1: Interaction Effect of Sex of Participant and Type of Infidelity
Although this does not confound the main effect of sex of participant, sex of the hypothetical person committing infidelity also interacted with the type of infidelity committed ($F(1, 728) = 4.51, p < .05$). Follow-up tests indicated that a man committing sexual infidelity ($M = 1.26, SD = .66$) was perceived as less acceptable than a man committing emotional infidelity ($M = 1.98, SD = .98$) whereas a woman committing sexual infidelity was perceived as even more unacceptable ($M = 1.23, SD = .66$) relative to woman committing emotional infidelity ($M = 1.98, SD = 1.02$) (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Interaction Effect of Sex of Hypothetical Person Committing Infidelity and Type of Infidelity

H1 predicted that men would be more likely to approve of infidelity that was a result of sexual dissatisfaction, while women are more likely to approve of infidelity that is a result of emotional dissatisfaction. Participants were asked the following questions; how acceptable do you think it is for a man (woman) to engage in sexual infidelity when he (she) is sexually dissatisfied in his relationship? How acceptable do you think it is for a man (woman) to engage in emotional infidelity when he (she) is emotionally dissatisfied in his relationship? These questions were rated on a 5-point scale ($1 = \text{not acceptable at all}, 5 = \text{very acceptable}$).

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted with gender as the between subjects factor and type of dissatisfaction and the sex of the person committing infidelity as the within-subjects factors. The results revealed a significant main effect for sex of participant ($F(1, 727) = 45.79, p < .05$). Overall men ($M = 1.94, SD = 1.06$) rated infidelity as being more acceptable when an individual is dissatisfied with the relationship than women ($M = 1.56, SD = .79$). However, the means indicate that neither sex views infidelity, when a person is dissatisfied with the relationship, as being acceptable. There was also a
significant main effect for type of dissatisfaction (sexual or emotional) \( (F(1, 727) = 369.61, p < .05) \), in that individuals, both men and women, perceive infidelity when a person is emotionally dissatisfied as being more acceptable \( (M = 2.09, SD = 2.05) \) than infidelity when a person is sexually dissatisfied \( (M = 1.41, SD = 1.59) \).

The main effect for sex of participant was confounded by one interaction effect. A significant interaction effect was found between sex of participant and sex of the hypothetical person committing infidelity \( (F(1, 727) = 5.77, p < .05) \). Men reported that it was more acceptable for a man to commit infidelity when dissatisfied \( (M = 1.97, SD = 1.07) \) than it was for a woman \( (M = 1.92, SD = 1.04) \) to commit infidelity when she is dissatisfied. Women reported that it was more acceptable for a woman \( (M = 1.57, SD = .80) \) to commit infidelity when dissatisfied than it was for a man to commit infidelity when dissatisfied \( (M = 1.54, SD = .78) \).

Figure 3: Interaction Effect of Sex of Participant and Sex of Hypothetical Person Committing Infidelity

Sex of participant did not interact with type of dissatisfaction (sexual or emotional) \( (F(1, 728) =3.12, p > .05, NS) \). Men and women view the acceptability of infidelity due to emotional and sexual dissatisfaction similarity. Therefore, H1 which predicted that men would be more likely to accept infidelity that was a result of sexual dissatisfaction, while women are more likely to accept infidelity that is a result of emotional dissatisfaction, was not supported.
Although this does not confound the main effect of sex of participant, sex of the person committing infidelity also interacted with the type of dissatisfaction \( (F(1, 727) = 5.68, p < .05) \) (See Figure 4). Participants, both men and women, perceive female infidelity due to emotional dissatisfaction as more acceptable \( (M = 2.08, SD = 1.04) \) than male infidelity due to emotional dissatisfaction \( (M = 2.09, SD = 1.02) \) but male infidelity due to sexual dissatisfaction \( (M = 1.43, SD = .82) \) as more acceptable than female infidelity due to sexual dissatisfaction \( (M = 1.40, SD = .77) \).

Figure 4: Interaction Effect of Sex of Hypothetical Person Committing Infidelity and Type of Dissatisfaction

![Graph showing interaction effect](image)

**Discussion**

Sex differences have been a major focus of infidelity research. The majority of the research on sex differences in infidelity has addressed jealousy responses to sexual and emotional infidelity. The remainder of the research has addressed several issues such as actual commission of infidelity, justifications for infidelity, and approval of infidelity behavior; however findings among scholars are often inconsistent. In response to these inconsistencies, the current study sought to better understand sex differences (or lack thereof) regarding (a) perceptions of behaviors that constitute infidelity, (b) commission of infidelity, (c) justifications for infidelity, and (d) acceptance of infidelity.

Seven hundred thirty two undergraduate students participated in this study \( (M = 45\%, W = 55\%) \). The majority of participants were between the age of 18 and 24 \( (92\%) \), and overwhelmingly heterosexual.
A four-part questionnaire was distributed to students who completed the questionnaire in private. The first section asked questions regarding approval of infidelity in general (e.g., “How acceptable do you think it is for a man (woman) to engage in emotional (sexual) infidelity?”) and approval of infidelity when a person is dissatisfied with their relationship (e.g., “How acceptable do you think it is for a man (woman) to commit sexual (emotional) infidelity when he(she) is sexually (emotionally) dissatisfied with his(her) relationship?”). Secondly, participants were presented with a list of sexual and emotional behaviors and identified whether or not they perceived those behaviors to constitute infidelity. Next, participants completed items assessing whether they have ever committed infidelity, the behaviors they committed, and why they committed infidelity.

It is important to understand the different behaviors men and women classify as acts of infidelity, however, very little extant research has examined this issue. To date, only one other study (Roscoe et al, 1988) has assessed individuals’ perceptions of the behaviors that constitute infidelity. Similar to the results of Roscoe et al. (1988), the current study found evidence that several sexual and emotional behaviors constitute acts of infidelity. Overall, between 66% and 92% of participants reported that the following behaviors constituted infidelity when committed with someone outside the primary relationship; romantic kissing, sexually touching another person, having another person sexually touch you, receiving oral sex, giving oral sex, sexual intercourse, dating/seeing someone else, falling in love, and phone/cybersex. Between 12% and 20% of participants reported spending time with another, sharing intimate information, and flirting constituted infidelity. The results of the current study provide further evidence that infidelity is both sexual and emotional in nature. However, it appears that there is more agreement that sexual behaviors constitute infidelity than emotional behaviors.

Several sex differences emerged suggesting that men and women’s beliefs about what constitutes infidelity differ. Significant results were found for 10 of the 12 behaviors tested (kissing, sexual touching another person, another person sexually touching you, receiving oral sex, performing oral sex, sexual intercourse, flirting, dating/seeing someone else, falling in love, and having phone/cybersex) revealing that a higher percentage of women view all of these behaviors (except flirting) as acts of infidelity more than men. Thus, in general, women are more likely to view these behaviors as infidelity than men.

More men (24%) than women (16%) believed that flirting constituted infidelity. Interpreting this result is difficult because it is unclear whether participants classify flirting as emotional and/or sexual
infidelity. Assuming that individuals perceive flirting as sexual infidelity, the results could be explained using an evolutionary perspective that argues that men are more affected by acts of sexual infidelity and women are more affected by acts of emotional infidelity. Therefore it would make sense that more men than women perceived flirting as constituting infidelity. However, men did not perceive other sexual behaviors as constituting infidelity more than women. On the other hand, if participants perceive flirting as emotional infidelity then the results contradict evolutionary theory because as this perspective suggests women are more affected by emotional infidelity than are men. Thus, more women should believe that flirting constitutes infidelity more than men however the results do not depict this. A more simplistic explanation for this sex difference is that men may believe that women flirt more than men, thus men may perceive flirting as constituting infidelity more than women, while women may perceive flirting as harmless and fun. However, a definitive explanation cannot be advanced without better understanding whether individuals believe flirting is an act of sexual and/or emotional infidelity.

The results of the current study both replicate and contradict the findings of Roscoe et al. (1988). They found that women identified dating/spending time with another as constituting infidelity more than men. The current study separated the two behaviors, dating and spending time with another, because we believed they constituted two different behaviors and felt they should be assessed separately. As a result, we found that more women than men perceived dating constituted infidelity, but a sex difference did not emerge regarding spending time together. Women were no more likely to view spending time together as infidelity than men. This finding provides evidence that the two behaviors may imply different things, thus requiring separate assessment. We suspect though, that participants in the Roscoe et al. (1988) study may have interpreted dating/spending time together as referring to some form of dating, because they were grouped together as one concept. Assuming this is true, the results of this study confirm the finding that women believe dating is infidelity more than men.

Another inconsistency emerged regarding the classification of sharing intimate information as infidelity. Roscoe and colleagues (1988) reported that women more than men rated this behavior as infidelity, yet the findings of the current study failed to find a sex difference. Overall however, only a small number of participants (17%) agreed that sharing intimate information was infidelity, suggesting that the majority of individuals do not classify it as infidelity, but may classify it as a betrayal of confidence. The final inconsistency that was observed was that the Roscoe et al. study found that men agreed that sexual
interactions (flirting, kissing, petting, and necking) constituted infidelity more than women, however the findings of the current study found the opposite, despite having similar samples. Women rated all of the sexual behaviors tested (kissing, sexual touching, giving and receiving oral sex, and sexual intercourse) as infidelity more than men; however, between 84% and 92% of all individuals surveyed agreed that these behaviors were acts of infidelity when committed outside the primary relationship.

Research on sex differences in the commission of infidelity is rather consistent suggesting that no differences exist, despite stereotypical beliefs that men cheat more than women. Many studies report no sex differences (e.g. Feldman & Caufmann 1999; Prins, et al., 1993; Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Thompson, 1984; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). In the present study, no sex difference emerged; neither sex was more likely to commit infidelity than the other. This result confirms the findings of previous studies, providing further evidence that sex differences do not exist in the actual commission of infidelity.

It is noteworthy however, that 42% of the sample reported having committed infidelity at least once in their lifetime. Considering the negative valence that is associated with infidelity in our society, this statistic could be interpreted as being relatively large. The majority of participants in the study (92%) were between the ages of 18-24, which indicates that individuals are committing infidelity at relatively young ages. Regarding the most recent time participants reported committing infidelity, 97% were either seriously (52%) or casually dating their partner (45%), and only 2% were engaged or married. It is unknown whether these results generalize to marriage, but in studying marital infidelity, Thompson (1984) and Prins et al. (1993) found similar percentages of participants committing infidelity, 44% and 30% respectively.

The lack of sex differences in committing infidelity is interesting in light of the fact that sex differences emerged regarding perceptions of infidelity behavior. One could assume that because fewer men agree that the various emotional and sexual behaviors examined constituted infidelity, that men may be more likely to commit infidelity than women. However, the results reveal no existence of a sex difference in commission of infidelity, thus denying this assumption as well as challenging the commonly held stereotype that men cheat more than women. While men do not believe these behaviors constitute infidelity more than women, men and women are committing these behaviors equally with the exception of kissing (women more) and receiving oral sex (men more).

It may be that men do not cheat more than women, but that men have more sexually than emotionally driven affairs than women. Previous research on whether men and women commit different
types of infidelity (sexual, emotional, and sexual and emotional infidelity) has found some inconsistencies. Several studies (Boekhout et al., 1999; Glass & Wright, 1985; Sheppard et al., 1995; Thompson, 1984) have observed that in general, men are more likely to engage in sexual infidelity than women, and women are more likely to engage in emotional infidelity than men. However, several of these studies also found that men and women commit both sexual and emotional infidelity, rather than one type of infidelity exclusively.

The results of this study revealed that men and women do not differ in the type of infidelity they commit. Sex differences did not emerge regarding any of the three infidelity types suggesting that men and women commit sexual, emotional, and sexual and emotional infidelity similarly. Overall, of the participants reporting having committed infidelity at least once in their lifetime, 67% have engaged in sexual infidelity, 67% emotional infidelity, and 45% in sexual and emotional infidelity. These results reveal that a relatively large number of individuals are committing infidelity that is both sexual and emotional, which provides further evidence that researchers should study the cooccurrence of sexual and emotional infidelity as well infidelity that is only sexual or emotional.

Two studies (Feldman & Cauffman, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999) have examined whether men and women commit different behaviors (kissing, sexual touching, sexual intercourse, flirting, etc.) of infidelity that were also examined in the current study. Only two sex differences emerged regarding acts of sexual infidelity. More women than men engaged in kissing (M = 29%, W = 37%), and more men than women were recipients of oral sex (M = 22%, W = 11%). No sex differences emerged for committing the remaining four sexual acts (sexually touching another person, being sexually touched by another person, giving oral sex, and sexual intercourse). These results challenge the findings of Feldman and Cauffman (2000) who found that men engaged in sexual intercourse more than women, and Wiederman and Hurd (1999) who found that men engaged in kissing and fondling, performing oral sex, receiving oral sex, and sexual intercourse more than women.

Wiederman and Hurd (1999) offered an explanation for these inconsistencies, suggesting that women may underreport infidelity behavior because women are differentially socialized regarding sexuality than men. They suggest that because we are socialized to believe that it is less acceptable for women to be sexually permissive than it is for men, women may be less inclined to admitting to committing infidelity, thus resulting in sex differences due to underreporting of behavior. It is not clear,
however, why women would underreport infidelity in the Wiederman and Hurd (1999) study and not others like the Feldman and Cauffman (1999) study, or the current study. If women underreport infidelity behavior due to socialization processes as Wiederman and Hurd (1999) suggest, we would expect that they would do so in other studies as well, thus resulting men reporting these behaviors more than women. The results of this study do not support their conclusion, thus this does not seem to be a viable explanation for inconsistencies in the results of sex differences in behaviors of infidelity.

Some may hypothesize that women view receiving oral sex as a more intimate sexual act than men, which could account for the fact that more men reported receiving oral sex than women. However, this suggestion is speculative and requires further study to determine whether this is a viable explanation for sex differences in receiving oral sex. Unlike sexual acts of infidelity, no sex differences were found regarding any of the six emotional acts of infidelity studied (flirting, dating/seeing someone else, spending time with another, sharing intimate information, falling in love, having phone/cybersex).

Extant research (Boekhout et al., 1999; Glass & Wright, 1992; Roscoe et al., 1988) has found sex differences in the justifications given for committing infidelity, but the major limitation of these studies is that they do not ask about actual infidelity experience, rather they use hypothetical methods. Some studies asked participants to imagine possible reasons why one would commit infidelity (e.g., Roscoe et al., 1988), while another study asked participants to rate the acceptability of potential reasons for committing infidelity if individuals are emotionally or sexually dissatisfied with their relationship (Glass & Wright, 1992). To date, only one other study (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999) has asked infidels the reason they cheated on their partner. They found that men and women did not differ in the justifications they provided for their behavior. In the current study, of four justifications examined (sexual dissatisfaction, emotional dissatisfaction, emotional and sexual dissatisfaction, and other) for actual infidelity one sex difference emerged in that more women (30%) than men (15%) reported emotional dissatisfaction as the reason they committed infidelity in their relationship. The most revealing finding regarding the participants’ justifications in this study though, is that the majority of both men (53%) and women (50%) selected the other category, indicating that emotional dissatisfaction (M = 15%, W = 30%), sexual dissatisfaction (M = 9%, W = 3%), and the combination of emotional and sexual dissatisfaction (M = 23%, W = 17%) do not adequately cover the range of justifications that individuals may have for committing infidelity. This
finding warrants future research to better understand why individuals commit infidelity in romantic relationships.

Although 42% of the current sample reported committing infidelity, results reveal that participants generally disapprove of infidelity ($M = 1.62$; $1 = \textit{not very acceptable, } 5 = \textit{very acceptable}$) and provide evidence that sexual infidelity ($M = 1.25$, $SD = .639$) was less acceptable than emotional infidelity ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .961$). Despite general disapproval however, a sex difference was observed in that, overall, men ($M = 1.79$, $SD = .900$) rated infidelity as being more acceptable than women ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .70$). Men also reported that emotional infidelity was more acceptable relative to sexual infidelity than women reported emotional infidelity is acceptable relative to sexual infidelity; however both sexes view emotional infidelity as more acceptable than sexual infidelity. This finding contradicts that of Sheppard et al. (1995) who found a nonsignificant interaction between sex of participant and type of infidelity (sexual and emotional). Furthermore, the sex of the person committing infidelity also affected participants’ approval ratings. Both sexes reported that it was more acceptable for their own sex to commit infidelity relative to the other sex. This suggests that a double standard may exist in that what we deem acceptable behavior for ourselves (or our sex) may not be acceptable behavior for our partners.

The final purpose of this study was to examine sex differences in the acceptability of justifications individuals give for infidelity. Dreznick (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of sex differences in approval of sexual and emotional dissatisfaction as reasons for committing infidelity. The results of the meta-analysis indicate that men were more approving of sexual dissatisfaction as a reason for committing infidelity, whereas women were more approving of relational dissatisfaction as a reason for committing infidelity. The results of the current study however are contradictory. Sex of participant did not interact with type of dissatisfaction (sexual or emotional) in this study. Men and women view the acceptability of infidelity due to emotional and sexual dissatisfaction similarly. Men rated infidelity as being more acceptable when an individual is dissatisfied with the relationship than women, but neither sex viewed infidelity as acceptable in any case.

Suggestions for Future Research

As a result of this study we have a better understanding of sex differences and similarities in infidelity, but the study is limited in the sense that little explanation for sex differences or lack thereof has been advanced. In light of the similarities and differences that have been found in this study, further
research is needed to explore possible explanations for sex differences in infidelity behaviors, perceptions, approval, and justifications for infidelity. (i.e., socialization, biology, evolution). Evolutionary psychologists have attempted to provide an explanation for sex differences in jealousy responses to infidelity, but they rarely address sex differences for commission, justifications, or approval of infidelity. Although they provide an explanation for the differences (without considering the many similarities) that exist regarding jealousy responses to infidelity, it is difficult to comprehend that men are biologically programmed to be more susceptible to cheating simply based on their biological sex. This perspective entirely neglects socialization processes that influence gender roles, male and female relations, and the manner in which society approaches issues like sex and monogamy. A socialization explanation takes into consideration the choice that individuals consciously make to commit infidelity, while an evolutionary explanation does not.

We speculate that some combination of biology and socialization influence men and women’s decisions regarding infidelity, but future research is needed to understand their influence and the sex differences and similarities that exist. It is interesting that scholars always focus on sex differences even though they are so few and far between relative to the amount of sex similarities that exist regarding infidelity behavior. Studying the similarities may reveal insights into infidelity behavior that studying the differences may never reveal.

Finally, the results of the current study provide strong evidence that individuals commit infidelity for reasons more than some form of dissatisfaction. The fact that the majority of both men and women selected “other” when asked why they cheated on their partner suggests that researchers should examine other justifications. The nature of the current study did not allow participants to identify the exact reason they cheated on their partner. Future research is needed to address this limitation to fully understand why individuals cheat on their partners.

Conclusion

This study provides insight into sex differences and similarities in infidelity and further clarifies some of the inconsistencies observed in extant research. Results of this study suggest that women perceive various behaviors (kissing, sexually touching someone else, having someone else sexually touch you, receiving oral sex, performing oral sex, and sexual intercourse, dating, falling in love, phone/cybersex) as constituting acts of infidelity more than men. Despite sex differences in perceptions of behaviors
constituting infidelity, which some may argue may guide behavior, no sex differences were found regarding committing infidelity in general, or committing a particular type of infidelity (sexual, emotional, sexual and emotional). Women were just as likely to commit infidelity as men. Although women reported emotional dissatisfaction as a justification for infidelity more than men, the majority of both sexes reported that their infidelity was the result of something other than sexual or emotional dissatisfaction, suggesting that future research is necessary on the reasons infidels give for committing infidelity. Finally, neither sex perceived infidelity as acceptable, nor were there were sex differences in perceptions of infidelity as acceptable, despite 42% of the sample reporting having committed infidelity at least once in their lifetime. Although some sex differences were revealed in this study, the current study did not examine possible explanations for these differences thus warranting future examination. Furthermore, the findings of this study further support the argument of other scholars that infidelity is not just sexual in nature, but emotional, and that the study of sexual and emotional infidelity should be included in infidelity research.

References


