College Students' Attitudes on the Causes of Infidelity

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Abstract
Infidelity is a problem in today's society associated with instability in relationships and the high divorce rates. The study consisted of 23 male and female students at a Midwestern university. It was hypothesized that males would perceive sexual attraction as a primary cause of infidelity while females would perceive relationship dissatisfaction as a primary cause. Survey data was statistically analyzed using frequencies, cross-tabulations and a reliability analysis. Findings supported the literature and hypothesis in that more males viewed sexual attraction as a primary cause of infidelity and more females viewed relationship dissatisfaction as a primary cause. It is important for practitioners to be aware of the problems infidelity causes in relationships and further researchers could investigate root causes for preventative and proactive actions.

Introduction
Roughly 50% of individuals in married relationships engage in some form of infidelity at some point in their marriage (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). It is no wonder researchers are studying this serious relationship transgression more to better understand the root of the problem. In several studies, more than fifty percent of both men and women in college dating relationships have been involved in some form of infidelity behavior (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006). Infidelity can be portrayed differently in society and between men and women. It causes a great deal of distress, turmoil, and often termination of the relationship. Society's high rate of divorce and infidelity in the relationship indicates the need for this problem to be more widely researched and addressed. In this study infidelity refers to a violation in trust or a breaking of understanding about the sexual monogamy of the relationship (Pittman & Pittman Wagners, 1995). Male and female college students were surveyed on their attitudes on the causes of infidelity in committed relationships.

Literature Review
It was found that there are definite differences and similarities between males and females regarding their attitudes towards causes of infidelity. Predicting infidelity has various components such as composite, physical, and emotional infidelity. It was found that when there is commitment, satisfaction, fewer alternatives, and a strong investment in the relationship, there are considerably fewer infidelity behaviors. Females were found to view emotional infidelity as more upsetting and males found sexual infidelity to be more upsetting. Jealousy is found to be a key result and trigger of infidelity. One study found that the plausible reasoning for causes of infidelity varied among genders. Legitimacy, seduction, sexuality, sensation seeking, normalization, and social background make up the six component model of infidelity, used to measure such behavior in this study. Males were found to view seduction as the major cause

while women were found to view social background as a major cause of betrayal. Cross-cultural research is important in finding similarities and differences. When need-fulfillment and self-expansion were looked into they found that lower levels of each of these pieces led to higher susceptibility for infidelity. Very little research was found on the causes of infidelity according to the views of each gender. All the information found regarding infidelity is supportive in regards to linking gender differences with infidelity (Drigotas et al., 1999; Harris, 2003; Yeneceri & Kokdemir, 2006; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006).

When predicting infidelity behavior, three main types were found: composite infidelity, physical infidelity, and emotional infidelity (Drigotas et al., 1999). Within those three topics, the researchers measured commitment, satisfaction, alternative quality and investment. Those individuals that were studied who were more satisfied and committed, had fewer alternatives, and were invested in their relationships more were less likely to have infidelity behaviors. The findings of this article suggested that women were more likely to engage in such behaviors. Overall, individuals who engaged in infidelity behaviors reported less satisfaction and commitment.

When looking at infidelity in relationships, undoubtedly jealousy comes to mind as an outcome of this behavior. Harris (2003) has taken a closer look at gender differences in jealousy as a result of infidelity. Social-Cognitive Theory was used to look into these differences of male and female variables comparing emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity. A survey was administered to assess college students' attitudes towards actual infidelity, hypothetical infidelity, which type of infidelity would be worse: emotional infidelity or sexual infidelity, as well as the relationship experiences of the participants. The results of the study showed that forced-choice hypothetical infidelity supported the notion that women view emotional infidelity as the worse form of infidelity. Another discovery to the study was that men placed higher importance on sex which was a stronger predictor for sexual jealousy over women. A trigger to jealousy for males was the perception that females sexual act is driven by love. However a woman's trigger was shown to be emotional involvement. More females were found to believe that if a male is either emotionally involved or in love with another, then sex would also be involved. Jealousy is a significant component to infidelity in relationships especially when viewed via a social-cognitive perspective. Jealousy as looked at in this study is a major component of both the causes and results of infidelity. Emotional and sexual infidelities are the two types that decipher between the two genders.

Yeniceri and Kokdemir (2006) conducted a cross–cultural study investigating possible reasons for infidelity behavior, broken into six components. This study concluded that males rated seduction as the primary cause of infidelity more so than females did. Females perceived social background as a major cause more often than men did. Seduction was viewed as the major cause of infidelity when it was the male partaking in the behavior. Conversely, if the female is to blame for infidelity then legitimacy was perceived as a more reasonable cause.

Lewandowski and Ackerman (2006) reported that the lack of need fulfillment and self-expansion were additional predictors of susceptibility of infidelity. A group of college students were surveyed on five types of need-fulfillment (intimacy, companionship, sex, security, and emotional involvement). Three types of self-expansion were assessed such as self-expansion, inclusion of the other in the self, and potential for self-expansion. Susceptibility to infidelity was the last variable in the study to be evaluated connecting with need fulfillment and self-expansion. Their hypothesis predicted that gender, relationship length, need fulfillment, and self expansion will contribute a major increase to the overall variance in susceptibility to infidelity. The results

to their study supported their hypothesis. In fact, lower satisfaction in need fulfillment and lower levels of self-expansion lead to higher susceptibility to infidelity. A significant finding to the research was that gender plays a large role in susceptibility to infidelity. The results showed that males are more susceptible to infidelity than women. This study focused on the prediction of infidelity as well as the beliefs of college students on the sole causes of infidelity.

It has been found across studies that there are definite variables among the two genders regarding the reasons for and views toward infidelity (Yeniceri & Kokdemir, 2006). Research has discovered differences between males and females regarding emotional and sexual infidelity (Harris, 2003). It also has defined some possible reasons for such behaviors. Models have been created to measure infidelity amongst couples and theories have been made regarding the susceptibility (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006). Most of the research that has been conducted addresses many forms of infidelity, predictions for the relationship as well as socialization components (Drigotas et al., 1999). While many studies on infidelity were found, only the study conducted in Turkey pertained directly to our topic. The Social Learning Theory was used as a framework for the causes of infidelity. There is little research that has related this theory to the two genders' views on the causes of betrayal within a relationship; this is the gap in the family social science literature that we hope to fill.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Social Learning Theory indicates that by observing behaviors that are modeled one tends to then imitate or match performances (Mihalic & Elliott, 2005). Humans learn and comprehend attitudes and behaviors as a result of the social interactions they have with other people (Strong, DeVault, Cohen, 2005). Bandura said that human nature is formed by the connections between the individual. Bandura further stressed the importance of learning by observation of others instead of solely from oneself. As applied to our study, this theory would predict that by observing infidelity behavior by one's peers, media, or family, one would deem such actions as acceptable in their dating relationships.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of a group of Midwestern University male and female students' perceptions on the causes of infidelity. The central research question in this study was, "What are the comparable attitudes of a Midwestern state university sample of male and female students regarding the causes of infidelity behavior in committed relationships?" It was hypothesized that the males would rate sexual attraction as the primary cause for infidelity and females would rate relationship dissatisfaction as the primary cause.

Methods

Participants

This study was done at a small Midwestern university. There were 14 female and nine male college student participants. Participants' ages ranged from 18-25. In regards to the academic status of females, two were sophomores, two were juniors, and 10 were of senior status or higher. Of the male participants, there was one freshman, two juniors, five were at senior status or higher, and there was one graduate student. There were 11 females and eight males that had previously been in a committed relationship and of those who were currently in a committed relationship, 12 were females and three were males. Three females and one male had not

previously been in a committed relationship but were currently in one. Two females and six males were single.

Research Design

The design is most appropriately described as the cross-sectional design type. The form of data collection was self-administered surveys. The population was the university student body. The sample consisted of males and females ages 18-25 that were currently in or previously in a committed relationship. The sampling design type used was the nonrandom snowball design type because this type allowed researchers to search within their personal networks to obtain those individuals who were in the types of relationships needed for this research. The primary reason snowball type and nonrandom were used was we were accessing an inaccessible population. In order to ethically protect our human subjects, we completed the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and then were approved by the IRB to begin data collection.

Data Collection Instrument

A survey was designed to collect data about the attitudes of students regarding the causes of infidelity in committed relationships. The survey contained a cover letter and an implied consent form that described what the study entailed. A definition of any terms that would not be universally known, risks and benefits, time commitment, confidentiality, voluntary participation, instructions for completing the survey and contact information of the researchers, as well as the supervisor was also included.

Age, gender, academic status, and relationship status made up the demographic questions. Based on a five point Likert scale, the survey contained nine closed-ended questions regarding what the participants thought was the primary cause of infidelity. The scale ranged from one being strongly disagree, to five being strongly agree. Questions were created from infidelity literature. The survey instrument has both face validity and content validity.

Procedure

Our participants were selected from each of our social networks. This ensured they had had a personal experience with a committed relationship at some point. We contacted participants via phone, email, or in person and worked out a time that worked best for them to take the survey. Since the topic could potentially be uncomfortable for some of our participants, extra care was used to make sure they knew that the survey was voluntary and that they did not have to participate if they did not feel comfortable. We asked them to choose a setting that would best suit them to take the surveys; most of which was at their home or on campus. With each participant we distributed the survey and read the survey verbatum. We instructed them to place their completed surveys in the envelope provided. We stepped out of the room or area in which they took the survey so they would not feel rushed or pressured to answer questions in a way they thought would be socially acceptable. We also made sure they were taking it in separate areas if they were taking the survey simultaneously with another person, such as their significant other. This ensured that there was no pressure to answer the questions in a biased manner. Our survey instruments were kept in a large sealed envelope at one of the researcher's homes in a locked closet.

Data Analysis Plan

Data was first "cleaned" and checked for any missing data. The surveys were then "coded" using acronyms for each of the demographic and dependent variables. The demographic variables were: Academic status (*STAT*), gender (*GEN*), and age (*AGE*), with gender being an independent variable. The other two demographic variables were if they had previously been in a committed relationship (*PCR*) or if they were currently in a committed relationship (*CCR*). To determine which dependent variables the participant felt to be the primary cause of infidelity, they were asked about: lack of personal accountability (*LPA*), relationship dissatisfaction (*RDS*), lack of security in relationships (*SEC*), lack of attention from partner (*ATN*), sexual attraction (*SXA*), sexual dissatisfaction (*SDS*), revenge on partner (*RVG*), being exposed to infidelity in one's group of friends, peers, or media (*EXP*), or alcohol consumption (*ALC*). The level of analysis was the individual. To analyze the data, the data-analyzing computer program called *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (*SPSS*), was used. Given the fact we were comparing groups based on gender, our data analysis included: Frequencies, cross-tabulations, mean-comparisons, and a reliability analysis called Chronbach's Alpha.

Results

A frequency distribution analysis indicated that there was no data missing from our surveys. The Chronbach's Alpha measure of reliability was .780 in this analysis. This indicates that the survey items were a reliable index of our major concept on college students' attitudes on the causes of infidelity.

Table 1

Crosstabs

Gender	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
LPA						
Female	0.0%	21.4%	21.4%	35.7%	21.4%	100.0%
Male	0.0%	11.1%	33.3%	44.4%	11.1%	100.0%
RDS						
Female	0.0%	14.3%	7.1%	50.0%	28.6%	100.0%
Male	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	66.7%	22.2%	100.0%
SEC						
Female	7.1%	0.0%	14.3%	57.1%	21.4%	100.0%
Male	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%	22.2%	100.0%
ATN						
Female	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	57.1%	35.7%	100.0%
Male	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
SXA						
Female	7.1%	7.1%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	100.0%
Male	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	44.4%	22.2%	100.0%

SDS						
Female	0.0%	21.4%	21.4%	21.4%	35.7%	100.0%
Male	11.1%	22.2%	22.2%	44.4%	0.0%	100.0%
RVG						
Female	0.0%	21.4%	28.6%	42.9%	7.1%	100.0%
Male	0.0%	22.2%	22.2%	44.4%	11.1%	100.0%
EXP						
Female	14.3%	21.4%	21.4%	42.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Male	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%	22.2%	11.1%	100.0%
ALC						
Female	0.0%	7.1%	21.4%	35.7%	35.7%	100.0%
Male	11.1%	0.0%	33.3%	44.4%	11.1%	100.0%

Note. (GEN)=Gender of participant; (LPA)=Lack of personal accountability is a primary cause of infidelity; (RDS)= Relationship dissatisfaction is a primary cause of infidelity; (SEC)=Lack of security in relationships is a primary cause of infidelity; (ATN)= Lack of attention from partner is a primary cause of infidelity; (SXA)=Sexual attraction is a primary cause of infidelity; (SDS)=Sexual dissatisfaction is a primary cause of infidelity; (RVG)=Revenge on partner is a primary cause of infidelity; (EXP)=Being exposed to infidelity in one's group of friends, peers, or media has a lot to do with the cause of infidelity; (ALC)=Alcohol consumption has a great deal to do with the cause of infidelity

Discussion

Overall, results supported the hypothesis by demonstrating that the majority of males thought sexual attraction was a primary cause of infidelity. Results also demonstrated that the majority of female participants thought that relationship dissatisfaction was a primary cause of infidelity. In our study, our hypothesis using the Social Learning Theory was supported because both male and female responses were evenly distributed along the Likert scale on the exposure to one's peers, friends, or media being the primary cause of infidelity. This shows that neither males nor females viewed this as a primary cause of infidelity. Lack of attention from one's partner had 100% of males and 92.9% of females agree that this was a primary cause of infidelity. This variable was rated the highest compared to all the others between both genders.

The majority of our results were also supported by our literature. Regarding relationship dissatisfaction, the literature supported the idea that the more dissatisfied you are in your relationships, the more likely you are to have infidelity behaviors (Drigotas et al., 1999). The work done by Harris (2003) supported our hypothesis that females view relationship dissatisfaction as the primary cause of infidelity while men view sexual attraction as the primary cause of infidelity. She found that women view emotional infidelity as a worse form of infidelity while men view sexual infidelity as a worse form. The emotional dimension relates to females' view of relationship dissatisfaction while the sexual dimension relates to males' view of sexual attraction.

Literature that supported our results the strongest was the study done by Yeniceri and Kokdemir (2006). Their six components related closely to the variables in our survey. Their results were similar to ours in saying that they found men to view seduction as a major cause of infidelity as we found the sexual attraction component with males. They also found females to view legitimacy as a major cause of infidelity as we found the relationship dissatisfaction and

lack of security in the relationship components with females. Their study also found that women view social background to be a major cause of infidelity. Our study also found women to view the exposure to infidelity in one's group of friends, peers, or media as a major cause of infidelity. Lewandowski & Ackerman's (2006) found that lower satisfaction in need fulfillment and lower levels of self-expansion lead to higher susceptibility to infidelity. Their results supported our findings that 100% of males and 92.9% of females agreed with the statement that lack of attention from one's partner was a primary cause of infidelity. The variable lack of personal accountability (*LPA*) was also highly rated by both genders. Overall, our literature supported our results and our hypothesis.

The Social Learning Theory assumes that by observing behaviors that are modeled, one tends to then imitate or match performances (Mihalic & Elliott, 2005). This theory relates to the variable statement that exposure to infidelity in one's group of friends, peers, or media can be a cause of infidelity (*EXP*). This supports what we predicted to find through our research; the majority of males were undecided at 44.4% and the majority of females agreed with this statement at 42.9%. Our theory could explain more females agreeing with this statement because of females having a higher awareness of infidelity in their peer groups than males may have. Females may discuss personal issues and also do this in groups more than males, leading to an increased likelihood of these behaviors being imitated. The difference in responses could also be explained due to societal gender role constraints that males may consider infidelity a "rite of manhood" and not think about how another man's infidelity could impact his own behavior.

Limitations

A limitation to our study was that we had a small sample size to compare, contrast, and generalize to a larger population of male and female college students. Time constraints also limited us to the number of participants and the lack of diversity in our sample population. Being at a smaller Midwestern university also limited us to a less diverse population. We used the non-random sample method which limited the study to a certain population chosen by the researchers. This was due to the fact the participants had to previously or currently be in a committed relationship and to do this we had to select the participants ourselves. The fact that the survey participants were selected by the researchers may have limited the diversity and variance among groups of students that were involved in the study.

Implications for Practitioners

Findings can be applied by counselors, especially those at a university working with dating relationships among college students. Family practitioners can best use our findings by applying them to marriages, committed dating relationships, and for their own understanding of this problematic issue. Marriage and family therapists need to have the knowledge of this issue to further help those affected by infidelity. The high divorce rates indicate the need for those working in the field to understand some of the problems within relationships. Students can also apply our research findings for their own knowledge and understanding. It is important to be aware of the information available to benefit one's own relationships.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could use a larger sample population and try to randomize the sampling by having a longer period of time to distribute surveys. A further step that could be taken would be to survey those that have experienced infidelity first-hand. Another way to get first-hand

accounts of infidelity could be to do a qualitative study by interviewing individuals who have been affected by infidelity personally. This would make the study even more plausible by increasing the richness and purity of first-hand account perspectives. Another implication for future research could be to have more variables to the survey related to the Social Learning Theory. This would provide further possible explanations to the findings.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the issue of infidelity will be looked into further and taken into account when dealing with committed relationships. Counselors, family practitioners, marriage and family therapists, and those in relationships themselves need to address this issue with importance and awareness. We want people to recognize that infidelity is a big problem in today's society and to understand how music, TV, movies, and other forms of media play into and normalize this issue. Relating to our theory, we want greater awareness that being around those involved in infidelity behaviors can affect the way one views the issue and behaves in relationships. Infidelity has not been highly researched and the causes have not been looked into thoroughly by other researchers out there in the field. Our study filled some of the gaps concerning the possible causes to this problem in relationships. Infidelity is a problematic issue in relationships that needs to be looked into and recognized when working with couples.

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