

Study: Men more likely to cheat on higher-earning women

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Men who make less money than their female partners are more likely to be unfaithful, according to a new study.

According to Cornell sociology doctoral candidate Christin Munsch, who presented the results of her study at the American Sociological Association's annual meeting in Atlanta Aug. 16, cheating is not about [money](#) but about men's [sexual identity](#).

"Any identity that's important to you, if you feel it's threatened, you're going to engage in behavior that will reinstate your place in that group," she said.

Although almost 7 percent of men cheated at least once during the six-year period studied (with African-American and Hispanic men having higher rates of cheating than white men), compared with about 3 percent of women, the study found that men are more likely to cheat when they are unhappy about their financial standing and their failure to assume the role of breadwinner. These men might seek sexual conquests outside the relationship to shore up their threatened sense of manhood, Munsch said.

"Sexual encounters, particularly with multiple women, are a defining feature of hegemonic [masculinity](#)," Munsch writes in her study, "The Effect of Unemployment and Relative Income Disparity on Infidelity for Men and Women." She cites research showing that nothing makes a man feel like "the man" like a sexual conquest.

The odds of straying are reduced by satisfaction with the relationship and [religious convictions](#), the study reports, but are increased with lower levels of education, for men (but not women).

Men and women who earn much larger salaries than their partner are also more likely to cheat, the study finds, although women are half as likely to cheat.

"For women, economic dependency seems to have the opposite effect: The more dependent women are on their male partners, the less likely they are to engage in infidelity," said Munsch. But "men who make a lot more money than their partners may be in jobs that offer more opportunities for cheating -- like long work hours, travel and higher incomes that make cheating easier to conceal."

The idea of studying the effects of income on infidelity came to Munsch after hearing from a friend who had cheated on his partner. He told Munsch that "she made all the money, she had all the friends ... He felt completely powerless."

Munsch examined data on 1,024 [men](#) and 1,559 [women](#) who were married or living with a partner for at least a year from the 2002 to 2007 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

While making less money than a female partner increases the risk of [infidelity](#), Munsch said, "we're talking about very small numbers." If you're a woman and "you make more money than your partner, your [partner](#) isn't 100 percent likely to cheat," she said.

Munsch plans to submit her results soon to a peer-reviewed journal.

Provided by Cornell University

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