

Insights into infidelity: Study examines influence of sexual personality characteristics

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New study is first to consider the influence sexual personality characteristics can have on infidelity. Photo by Nic Snell

(Medical Xpress) -- In a new study, men and women were more likely to report infidelity, or cheating -- often a marriage or relationship deal-breaker -- when they also experienced an increased sensitivity for sexual performance problems and a decreased likelihood to lose their sexual arousal in the face of risk or danger.

The study, by researchers at Indiana University's Center for Sexual

Health Promotion, The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, and the University of Guelph, is the first to look at the influence of lovers' sexual [personality traits](#) on [infidelity](#). Their findings, published online this month in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, show that these sexual personality characteristics carry more sway than factors typically studied, namely demographic information such as gender and marital status.

Consistent with previous studies, the IU study found little difference in the rates of infidelity reported by men and [women](#) (23 percent and 19 percent, respectively). However, there were difference between the sexes in reasons related to infidelity. The propensity for sexual excitation, or the ease with which one becomes sexually aroused by all kinds of triggers and situations, played a bigger role for the men compared to the women, for whom lower [relationship happiness](#) and poor compatibility with their spouse or partner in terms of sexual attitudes were more important to the prediction of infidelity.

"With women, they might seek feelings of closeness elsewhere if they aren't happy with their relationship," said Kristen Mark, lead author and researcher at the Center for Sexual Health Promotion, in IU's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

And while the idea that an increased sensitivity to sexual performance failures would make men and women more likely to cheat might sound counter-intuitive, Mark said other Kinsey Institute studies have tied higher levels of inhibition such as this with [risky sexual behavior](#).

"People experiencing this might seek out high-risk situations to overcome arousal problems, or might feel less pressure to impress someone outside of their primary relationship than they do with their partner," Mark said. "A new partner also wouldn't know your history of having performance concerns or other issues."

The study, conducted online, involved 506 men, average age 33, and 412 women, average age 28, who indicated being heterosexual and in a monogamous sexual relationship. They provided demographic information, such as religiosity, education and income, and were asked about their sexual behaviors, relationship quality, and whether they had cheated on their current spouse or partner. The study participants reported monogamous relationships lasting from three months to 43 years. Approximately half reported being married at the time. Infidelity was defined as engaging in sexual interactions with someone other than their partner and that this interaction could jeopardize or hurt their relationship.

More about the study:

- Neither marital status nor how religious study participants were was predictive of having had or not having had sex outside of the relationship.
- For both men and women, another predictor of infidelity was a tendency to engage in regretful sexual behavior when in a negative or positive mood state.
- Study participants completed the Sexual Excitation/Sexual Inhibition Scales (SES/SIS), a questionnaire developed at The Kinsey Institute that considers sexual personality characteristics. It measures propensity for sexual excitation (SES) and for two types of sexual inhibition: Sexual inhibition due to the threat of performance failure (SIS1) and sexual inhibition due to the threat of performance consequences (SIS2). The men and women also completed the Mood and Sexuality Questionnaire. The SES/SIS, which is used by researchers all over the world, is based on the dual control model of sexual response, developed by researchers at The Kinsey Institute. This model proposes that sexual desire, arousal and associated behaviors depend on a balance between sexual excitation and

inhibition, and that people vary in their propensities for these processes.

- Concerning sexual inhibition due to the threat of performance consequences (SIS2), for every one unit increase, with higher scores representing higher inhibition, women were 13 percent less likely to have cheated and men were 7 percent less likely to have cheated.
- Concerning inhibition due to the threat of [sexual performance](#) failure, women were 8 percent more likely to cheat for each one unit increase on the scale that measured this inhibition (higher score means greater inhibition). Men were 6 percent more likely to cheat with each one unit increase on the scale.
- Women reporting low relationship happiness were 2.6 times more likely to report having engaged in infidelity. Women who perceived low compatibility in terms of sexual attitudes and values were 2.9 times more likely to cheat.

Erick Janssen, co-author of the study and senior scientist at The Kinsey Institute, said the study provides "another piece in the puzzle" of why people behave as they do sexually. Mark said the findings could have therapeutic uses. The findings concerning sexual [personality characteristics](#) could help intuitive people navigate relationships in such a way to help them avoid potentially risky situations.

Co-authors of "Infidelity in Heterosexual Couples: Demographic, Interpersonal and Personality-Related Predictors of Extradyadic Sex," are Mark, Janssen and Robin Milhausen, University of Guelph, Canada.

Provided by Indiana University

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