

Sexual anxiety, personality predictors of infidelity, study says

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People with sexual performance anxiety are more likely to cheat on their partners. That's just one of the curious findings of a new study by a University of Guelph professor on the factors that predict infidelity.

Men who are risk-takers or easily sexually aroused are also more likely to wander; for women, relationship issues are stronger predictors of unfaithfulness.

The study, published recently in the journal *Archives of [Sexual Behaviour](#)*, is the first to look at how [demographics](#), interpersonal factors and sexual personality affect infidelity.

For both men and women, [personality characteristics](#) and interpersonal factors are more relevant predictors than are religion, [marital status](#), education or gender.

"Few studies on infidelity have gone beyond exploring demographics," said Robin Milhausen, a professor and [sexuality](#) researcher in Guelph's Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition who conducted the study with Kristen Mark and Erick Janssen of Indiana University.

"This research shows that demographic variables may not influence decision-making as much as previously thought — that personality matters more, especially for men."

The study involved 506 men and 412 women who reported being in

monogamous sexual relationships lasting from three months to 43 years. Participants were asked to report on [demographic variables](#) such as religion, education and income. They also completed scales that measured sexual personality variables and answered questions about their relationships.

The study found little difference in rates of infidelity reported by men and women (23 and 19 per cent, respectively). But different things predicted the behavior for men and women.

For men, significant predictors of infidelity are personality variables, including propensity for sexual excitation (becoming easily aroused by many triggers and situations) and concern about sexual performance failure.

The latter finding might seem counterintuitive, Milhausen said, but other studies have also found this connection. "People might seek out high-risk situations to help them become aroused, or they might choose to have sex with a partner outside of their regular relationship because they feel they have an 'out' if the encounter doesn't go well – they don't have to see them again."

For women, relationship happiness is paramount. Women who are dissatisfied with their relationship are more than twice as likely to cheat; those who feel they are sexually incompatible with their partners are nearly three times as likely.

"All kinds of things predict [infidelity](#)," Milhausen said. "What this study says is that when you put all of those things together, for men, personality characteristics are so strong they bounce everything else out of the model. For women, in the face of all other variables, it's still the relationship that is the most important predictor."

Milhausen cautions against misinterpreting or overemphasizing the study's findings. "Taken at face value, this research might seem to just support sexual stereotypes: Women are just concerned about the relationship, and, for men, once a cheater, always a cheater, regardless of their relationship. But the caveat is that there are a lot of variants and factors that are not explained here that might impact whether someone cheats."

Still, knowing that sexual personality characteristics — and, for [women](#), relationship factors — are strong predictors suggests directions for therapeutic interventions, she said.

Milhausen, who joined U of G in 2006 did her PhD at Indiana University, home of the renowned Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, where co-author Janssen is a researcher. Mark, the study's lead author and a PhD student at Indiana's University Centre for Sexual Health Promotion, is Milhausen's former graduate student.

Provided by University of Guelph

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