

Pasley, A. and Natividade, J.C. (2014) Universidade Federal de Rio Grande do Sul

The Brief

- We sought to determine the role of *Relationship Factors* and *Personality Characteristics* in *Infidelity*
- We looked at 392 heterosexual Brazilians in committed relationships – **24%** of whom had committed infidelity in their current relationship
- Significant predictors: *Sociosexual Desire*, *Openness to Experience*, and *Perceived Sexual Attractiveness*
 - No sex differences** were found
 - Relationship Factors* were not significant
- The evolutionary significance of these findings are interpreted using Sexual Strategies Theory and a Social Representations perspective

Methods

- Participants: 392 heterosexual Brazilians in committed relationships
- 24% of the sample had been adulterous in their current relationship
- Scales included: Big 5, Sexy 7, SOI, and demographic questions (age, sex, relationship status, length of relationship, education)
- An independent samples t-test was employed to determine predictor variables for infidelity
- Subsequently, a binary logistic (stepwise) regression was run on the remaining variables
- Results were compared to Sexual Strategies Theory premises
- However, Social Representations Theory was required to fully explain the data

Results

The regression model revealed that *SOI-Desire*, *Openness to Experience*, and *Perceived Sexual Attractiveness* significantly predicted *Infidelity*

Age and length of relationship were significant, but demonstrated a negligible effect size

The other two components of SOI were non-significant, as were sexual and emotional satisfaction in the relationship

Sex differences were found for SOI

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step	sex(1)	,860	,459	3,501	1	,061	2,362	,960	5,812
1 ^a	scholar(1)	-,190	,356	,284	1	,594	,827	,411	1,663
	age	-,102	,031	11,092	1	,001	,903	,850	,959
	Extro	,113	,124	,830	1	,362	1,120	,878	1,429
	Open	,397	,173	5,274	1	,022	1,488	1,060	2,088
	Sexual Attract	,323	,141	5,286	1	,021	1,382	1,049	1,821
	Erotic Disp	,081	,141	,330	1	,566	1,085	,822	1,431
	SOI-Behavior	,322	,189	2,917	1	,088	1,380	,954	1,997
	SOI-Attitudes	,002	,159	,000	1	,992	1,002	,733	1,368
	SOI-Desire	,835	,223	13,960	1	,000	2,304	1,487	3,571
	Sexual Satisfac	-,405	,249	2,648	1	,104	,667	,409	1,086
	Project Satisfac	-,309	,214	2,087	1	,149	,735	,483	1,116
	Length relation	,014	,003	22,038	1	,000	1,014	1,008	1,021
	Constant	-3,932	1,703	5,330	1	,021	,020		

Sexual Strategies Theory

According to SST, SOI should be associated with greater incidence of sexual activity (which in a monogamous relationship would constitute infidelity). This was true of the Desire component of SOI

SST predicts that we should have found sex differences in levels of SOI. Significant sex differences were found for all dimensions of SOI.

From these premises, we would expect to find sex differences in infidelity. However, our results **do not** reflect this.

What We Agree On

Desire appears to have evolved as a **mechanism** that brings people together, similar to attachment, or opioids in breast milk (NB: **not modular**)

Desire **does not necessarily 'turn off'** when engaged in a monogamous relationship, therefore these pressures may lead individuals to have affairs

However, it is necessary to differentiate between the **ultimate explanation** (causing attraction) and the **proximate explanation** (how that attraction is allowed to manifest) of desire

We believe SRT can provide some insight on this

Social Representations Theory

At the ultimate level, desire appears to still serve its function – bringing couples together

At the proximate level, social representations of relationships guide how desire 'ought' to be expressed

This is to say that the cultural evolution of infidelity is where we should be looking for the proximate explanations of this behaviour

This explains why gender differences of infidelity vary considerably across cultures (e.g. Knodel et al., 1997; Solstad & Mucic, 1999)

With the rise of feminism, women have had greater access to environments associated with infidelity, in particular, the workplace.

This is reinforced by Blow and Hartnett's (2005) review of Infidelity, which has demonstrated no sex differences in individuals below the age of 40, suggesting generational shifts in attitudes

Far too often, our cultures provides unequal opportunities based on gender, however, these differences cannot be taken at face value

For example, there is ample evidence that increasing women's access to education lowers birth rates (Martin, 1995) – this demonstrates that even the desire for children is subject to cultural shifts

Conclusions

Our results suggest that infidelity is motivated by personality characteristics – an openness to experiencing infidelity and the belief that one can attract another person facilitate the desire for extra-dyadic relationships

As an evolved mechanism of attraction, desire motivates people regardless of their relationship status

However, whilst desire may be rooted in our biology, the expression of desire is informed by our social representations of what it means to be in a relationship or, in this case, unfaithful

An SST perspective may provide a satisfactory ultimate explanation of desire but, ignoring the influence of cultural factors, only answers half of the question

Furthermore, assuming the stability of gender roles across time is not only historically inaccurate, it is socially irresponsible

Acknowledging the effects of social representations on infidelity allows us to generate better proximate explanations of these behaviours

References

- Blow, A. J., & Hartnett, K. (2005). Infidelity in committed relationships ii: A substantive review
- Knodel, J., Low, B., Saengtienchai, C., & Lucas, R. (1997). An evolutionary perspective on Thai sexual attitudes and behavior.
- Martin, T. C. (1995). Women's education and fertility: results from 26 Demographic and Health Surveys
- Penke, L., & Asendorpf, J. B. (2008). Beyond global sociosexual orientations: a more differentiated look at sociosexuality and its effects on courtship and romantic relationships.
- Solstad, K., & Mucic, D. (1999). Extramarital sexual relationships of middle-aged Danish men: Attitudes and behavior.