

Men cheat on partner  
for sexual reasons  
psychology essay



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## **Abstract**

According to most of the literature available, men cheat on their partner for sexual reasons (Wilson, Mattingly, Clark, & Weidler, 2011). The aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the reasons that lead men to cheat by taking a men's point of view. The sample consisted of six male participants who are in a committed relationship and who presumably never cheated. The participants were never asked whether they had cheated or not. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, which were audio recorded. This data was then analyzed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Findings showed that men's reasons why other men cheat on their partners are related to emotional justifications rather than sexual one's. Moreover most of the opportunities presented were thought to be found at the workplace, with certain employment positions thought to lead more to unfaithful relationships. Certain social interactions were thought to lead towards infidelity. Furthermore all the participants believe that certain personality types are more likely to get involved in extra-dyadic relationships. Some limitations need to be acknowledged in this study. Findings might have been different if I have not interviewed men who come from similar educational backgrounds, Future research might want to consider the perspective of men who cheated.

Keyword: infidelity, male's perspective, emotional dissatisfaction, opportunities

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the people who supported me throughout this process, especially to my family who always believed in me.

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I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my supervisor Ms. Mary Ann Borg Cunen for her support and guidance in the course of my research.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Infidelity is defined as a severe interpersonal transgression in which one or both of the partners engage in extra dyadic relationship, going against the rules of monogamy and exclusivity (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentillia, 1999). Researchers on infidelity identify two types of betrayal – sexual or emotional. Sexual infidelity refers to the act of sexual activity with someone else other than one's partner, while emotional infidelity involves developing an emotional connection with another person apart from the committed partner (Wilson et al., 2011).

### **Rationale for the study**

Research has been carried out to shed light on the motivations that lead men to extra dyadic relationships. A number of factors have been found, mainly depending on the relationship type and on factors related to the individual (Treas & Giesen, 2000) However, other than the wish for sexual intercourse, I have not found a complete presentation of the reasons that lead men to infidelity.

Given the lack of research about infidelity from a male's point of view, I am interested in conducting this study to understand better a male's perspective on the reasons that lead other men to cheat. Moreover, most of the past research has been carried out quantitatively, while I would like to obtain in-depth perspective through qualitative research.

## **Motivation for the study**

The reason for choosing this research topic stems from a personal interest, as a close friend of mine has been cheated over by her husband. I became curious about the reasons that men give for their infidelity. I used to believe that men cheat mainly to satisfy their sexual desires. Thus, in view of this, I decided to research this topic further in order to understand a man's perspective about infidelity.

## **Background to the study**

Infidelity is one of the most cited reasons for divorce. It is also the most damaging to the individual, since it may cause emotional distress (Wilson et al., 2011). The betrayed person may suffer harmful consequence, these affecting him both on a personal and relationship level (Boekhout, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1999). Brown (1991) states that infidelity has always existed and will continue to exist. Even though the majority of couples disapprove of extramarital relationships, statistics indicate that there is a high percentage of married couples who

engage in unfaithful relationships (20% to 40%) (Peluso & Spina, 2008).

Moreover, according to Brown (1991), “ affairs have little to do with sex. They are about fear and disappointment, anger and emptiness, they are also about the hope for love and acceptance”(p. 13). Past researchers have related infidelity exclusively to extramarital sexual intercourse, but through the research available today other acts of betrayal are being considered, like intimate emotional infidelity, online infidelity and secret relationships (Zola, 2007).



## **Objectives of the Study and Research Question**

I am interested in researching males' ideas and beliefs regarding infidelity, with particular emphasis on the perceived perception of what are the reasons that men give for other men's infidelity.

Using data collected through opportunistic sampling, my study focuses on males' who are in a committed relationship and who presumably have never cheated, even though they were never asked if they ever cheated, and examine the reasons why they think other men cheat. During the interviews an in-depth understanding of men's infidelity and the causes leading to it were explained. The following research question will be addressed: What are the perceived reasons men give for other men's infidelity?

## **Chapters Overview**

The aim of this chapter was to present a brief overview on the literature available on the topic as well as to provide an outline of the rationale for choosing this topic, the objectives and the research question of this study.

Chapter 2 will present the respective literature about infidelity, in particular that concerning male infidelity. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed explanation about the methodology used for this study. Chapter 4 will provide the results of this study, comparing them to the literature from previous research. In the final chapter I will present the study's limitations, its implications and will also make some recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This chapter assesses the theoretical perspectives behind the motivations that lead men towards unfaithful behaviour. It is fundamental to have an appropriate definition of what infidelity means, as it gives a better understanding about the reasons behind infidelity. Infidelity used to be defined as extramarital sexual involvement, but nowadays the meaning is more inclusive. A more appropriate definition of infidelity proposed by Zola (2007) is “(1) an act of an emotional and/or physical betrayal characterized by behaviour that is not sanctioned by the other partner; and (2) that has contributed to considerable, on-going, emotional anguish in the non-offending partner” (p. 26).

### Biological Perspective

Research has been carried out to see whether any correlation between an individual's genetic component and infidelity exists. It was found that men with relatively high levels of testosterone show prolonged interest in sexual activity outside their current committed relationship, also tending to have “ a greater number of sex partners and a higher number of extra-marital affairs” (O'Connor, Daniel, & Feinberg, 2011, p. 65). With respect to women, levels of testosterone during the menstrual cycle indicate an increased possibility in engaging in infidelity (Welling et al., 2007 as cited in O'Connor et al.).

Moreover, Garcia et al. (2010) found that individuals with genetic variation of the dopamine D4, called 7R +, were more prone to infidelity or promiscuity. In their research, 50% of the participants with 7R + reported being unfaithful

when compared with 22% of participants who did not exhibit this genetic variation. Garcia further notes that his findings are not cause-effect related, since people without these genetic variations can also commit infidelity.

In another study conducted by Cherkas, Oelsner, Mak, Valdes & Spector (2004) on female twins about the correlation between genetic influence and infidelity, demonstrated that heritability in sexual infidelity exists (41%). Even though biological factors were proven to be relatively correlative with infidelity, social and culture influences should still not be ignored as they influence attitudes towards infidelity (Cherkas et al.).

## **Evolutionary Perspective**

Evolutionary theorists have argued that infidelity has always existed in one form or another among human couples and research has addressed a growing number of issues surrounding this phenomenon (Fricker, 2006).

For both females and males, reproduction and sexuality are the driving force for mate selection and relationship formation, most of the time acting unconsciously within the person (Hill, 2008). According to Trivers, (1972, as cited in Buss, 1995), females have evolved to be more selective in their choice of mating partners since they are the ones who invest more in their offspring, so they exert greater selection pressure. In fact women are less likely to sleep around (Buss, 1998) while males evolve to be more competitive with same sex members to protect themselves from cuckoldry[1]costs (Kuhle, Smedley & Schmitt, 2009). Women are oriented towards long-term relationships while men prefer short-term relationships, showing less selection strictness (Buss & Schmit, 1993).

This lack of austerity allows men to have a wider range of sexual partners, therefore having higher availability alternatives. In a study conducted by Stone, Shackelford and Buss's (2007), results demonstrated that when there are more females in a society, males lower their standard to further their offspring. In fact, according to evolutionary theory, males are more likely to cheat for reproductive success while woman cheat to find a superior mate. Furthermore, Drigotas and Barta (2001) suggest that if one of the partners does not perceive the relationship as rewarding, they tend to leave the dyad and move elsewhere.

Mating strategies are time consuming, so after successfully attracting a mate, males adopt different retaining strategies (Kuhle et al., 2009). Since males cannot be sure of their paternity (Buss 2000 as cited in Sabini & Silver 2005), they might be afraid to raise a child who is not biologically theirs (Hughes, Harrison & Gallup, 2004) so males might be endowed by genes that make them react to sexual infidelity. Moreover, because maternity is always certain, females do not perceive sexual infidelity as a threat because they are not going to invest in an offspring which is not biologically theirs. It is the emotional engagement with another female which however triggers jealousy in women, as they fear abandonment (Sabini & Silver).

## **Social and Cultural Context**

According to Brown (1991) an increase in affairs has to do with "moral breakdowns in our society" (p. 9). Others blame aspects like opportunity, physical separation (Glass & Wight, 1992), sexual liberalization and the changes that came along with women's emancipation. Human behaviour is shaped through socio-cultural factors, hence to understand better the <https://assignbuster.com/men-cheat-on-partner-for-sexual-reasons-psychology-essay/>

reasons behind infidelity one should also consider outside influences (Brown).

With the economic changes that have taken place in recent decades, families have faced drastic changes in their daily lives. Couples used to work together on farms, but today both work long hours having little time for each other (Brown, 1991). Social context gives more opportunity to engage in infidelity. The workplace gives the possibility to get closer to someone else (Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiggins & Lederer, 1984). Glass states that 46% of unfaithful wives and 62% of unfaithful husbands who visited her clinic had an affair with someone who they met at work (Brown). Moreover jobs that require personal contact put the person more at risk of infidelity (Treas & Giesen).

Biosocial theory is an alternative to the evolutionary theory proposed by Wood and Eagly (2002) to explain infidelity. Women and men engage in different behaviours according to the social roles associated with their gender. These roles are attributed to physical differences. Costs and benefits from choosing a particular mate depend on social roles, and will be socially transmitted between cultures. Since males are unable to reproduce this gives them greater power over women.

According to Charles, (2002 as cited in Agius, 2010), " monogamous relationships are unhealthy because they block the natural instinct of humans" (p. 16). Schmookler & Bursik's (2007) research concluded that males perceive monogamy as a sacrifice, whereas females perceive it as relationship enhancing.

Nowadays a lot of couples are opting for cohabitation instead of marriage, but according to Dolcini et al. (1993 as cited in Treas & Giesen, 2000) the prevalence of infidelity amongst cohabiting couples is higher than in marriages since they invest less in their union and face less costs when having to leave the relationship.

## **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is another study of evolutionary theory to explain emotions children experience when separated from their primary caregiver (Donovan, 2010; Hill, 2008). Bowlby, found that the first few years of a parent-child relationship are decisive in developing emotional attachment, this resulting from a secure and comfort state with their caregivers. Through the emotional attachment formed with their caregivers, children develop what Ainsworth and colleagues (1978, as cited in Hill) called ' internal working models' that will help them to " understand relationships and react to them emotionally throughout life" (p. 285). Furthermore, the attachment style with the caregiver will determine an individual's personality component and will influence also future relationships (Donovan).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) focused on the parent-child relationship and the effect on romantic and sexual relationships during adolescence and adulthood. They found that those who experienced a secure attachment with their parents tend to experience satisfying committed relationships which are stable and durable. On the other hand, those with an anxious-ambivalent personality style enter romantic relationships more quickly but are also prone to ending them quickly. Individuals who experienced an avoidant attachment style are more likely to avoid any involvement in a romantic

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relationship. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991, as cited in Hill 2008) proposed a fourth attachment style, ' dismissing attachment' and this with reference to individuals who prefer to be more independent and not having to rely on others.

According to the adult attachment theory, the type of emotional bond experienced with the caregiver is expected to occur when it comes to emotional bonding between adults (Fricker, 2006).

Bogaert and Sadava's (2002, as cited in Hill, 2008)) study on young adults found that individuals who score higher on anxious attachment are more likely to engage in infidelity (especially for women). Similarly, in Allen et al. (2008) study, men with dismissive attachment styles and women with preoccupied attachment style tend to have a large number of partners outside their primary relationship. Moreover, Blow and Hartnett (2005) found that women who have preoccupied attachment style and men who have a fearful attachment style are more likely to cheat.

## **Parental- investment model**

According to Trivers (1972, as cited in Buss, 1998):

Parental investment can be defined as any time, energy, or, effort expended to aid the survival and reproduction of one offspring at the expense of other forms of investment, such as effort devoted to intrasexual competition. (p. 21)

Since parental investment can be costly, females need to be selective with whom to engage sexually. Sex differences in reproduction leads to different

fitness strategies. For males, mating with different women puts them at a reproduction advantage to safeguard their genes and pass them on to the next generation. On the other hand, women are limited in reproduction, hence they need to protect themselves and their offspring by choosing a mate with high genetic qualities (Hughes et al., 2004). In fact, women are more attracted to males who possess good genes and who are caring and ready to commit resources for their offspring (Hill, 2008). Women also tend to give greater importance to mates who are economically stable and socially dominant. Conversely, men prefer younger, healthy, and more physically attractive women (Yeniceri & Kokdemir, 2006). As a matter of fact, males mostly value the waist-to-hip ratio and the body mass index, as these are associated with 'youthfulness and attractive women, thought to be indicators of health and capacity to reproduce' (Hill, p. 362). In fact women are more intimidated by opponents who are more physically attractive, while men are more threatened by rivals who have strong social status and stability (Hill).

## **Relationship Infidelity and Personality Traits**

In a study carried out amongst fifty-two nations, using the Big Five personality traits, a relationship is evident between different personality traits and relationship infidelity (Schmitt, 2004). Four traits appear to be related to sexual behaviour; extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism. Exhibiting low levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness is associated with infidelity and impulsive sensation-seeking (Orzeck & Lung, 2005; Schmitt).



Barta and Kiene (2005; as cited in Blow & Kelley, 2005; Wilson et al., 2011), found that attitudes toward uncommitted sexual relationships are good predictors of infidelity, such that people who have a favourable attitude towards infidelity are more likely to cheat. Additionally, those who report being unfaithful in romantic relationships tend to be uncooperative and lack trust (i. e. disagreeable), disorganized and unreliable (i. e. unconscientiously) which is likely to lead to infidelity during the first four years of marriage (Orzeck & Lung, 2005; Schmitt, 2004). On the other hand, a Machiavellian personality, psychoticism and psychopathy which are rooted in low agreeableness and low conscientiousness are strong predictors of high sensation seeking (Schmitt).

Eysenck (1976, as cited in Schmitt, 2004) further found that extroverts tend to have multiple partners, are more sexually active and engage in sexual intercourse at a young age. They are more likely to be unfaithful because of high libido or due to the “ need to raise their habitually low levels of cortical arousal to a more comfortable level” (p. 303) in order to overcome boredom (Orzeck & Lung, 2005). Since they are always in need of new stimulation, they lack commitment investment (Drigotas et al., 1999).

According to Buss and Shackelford (1997 as cited in Orzeck & Lung, 2005) couples who have similar personalities are more likely to be satisfied with their relationship, while dissimilar personality characteristics could decrease satisfaction, leading to infidelity.

## **Motivations for Infidelity**

Many researchers have examined the reasons for extra relationship involvements. According to Glass and Wright (1992 as cited in Boekhout et al., 1999), there are four classes of infidelity justifications, these being sexual, emotional, love (which entails falling in love and receiving attention), and extrinsic motivations.

Even though men and women give similar justifications for their betrayal, research has shown that some sex differences do exist. For women, relationship dissatisfaction is a higher contributor to infidelity, while for men factors like sexual incompatibility and lack of communication lead to infidelity (Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988).

## **Dissatisfaction with Primary Relationship**

People in committed relationships expect certain needs to be fulfilled by their partners (Boekhout et al., 1999). When these needs are lacking, they seek them outside the primary relationship. The investment theory (Rusbult, 1983) explains that cheaters perceive themselves as being more pleasing, exploited and taken advantage of, so they would look for appreciation in extra relationship involvement. Conversely, when they feel that their needs are being met they tend to be faithful (Orzech & Lung, 2005).

Research shows that relationship dissatisfaction is a high contributor to infidelity (Blow & Kelley, 2005; Brown, 1991; Glass & Wright, 1985).

Furthermore, dissatisfaction with a primary relationship increases the desire for extramarital relationships, whereas Cuber and Haroff (1965, as cited in

Glass & Wright, 1977) state that affairs are not exclusive to bad marriages but may also occur in good marriages.

Among those that engage in extramarital sex, women tend to be more dissatisfied with their relationship than men (Blow & Kelley, 2005; Brown, 1991). For women, the primary motivator to extramarital sex is emotional dissatisfaction (Glass & Wright, 1985) while for men it is related to sexual dissatisfaction (Brown). Poor communication and unresolved marital problems are also related to infidelity (Brown).

## **Ego Bolstering**

Pittman (1989 as cited in Brown, 1991) assigns “ complete responsibility for an affair to the infidel and views the partner as a victim” (p. 21). Men are likely to commit extramarital sex due to low levels of self-esteem, hence exhibiting feelings of insecurity. In fact, Eaves and Robertson- Smith (2004) found that the lower a man’s self- esteem is, the most likely he will be unfaithful. In a relationship where men perceive their masculinity as being threatened, they tend to engage in an affair (Chircop, 2008).

Moreover anger and revenge could be a motivator leading to unfaithful relationships. In this case, the choice to hurt back a partner would be a conscious one (Cachia, 2007).

## **Education**

Studies in evaluating whether a correlation between education and infidelity exist or not vary. Treas and Giesen (2000) acknowledge that individuals who are highly educated tend to be more permissive towards sexual values and

infidelities (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). In a study conducted by Atkins et al. (2001 as cited in Blow & Hartnett) graduate participants were 1.75 times higher to engage in extramarital relationships than those with a lower education. These researchers also state that this finding is significant amongst individuals who are divorced.

## **Religious Affiliation**

The great influence of Puritan values on American and later on European cultures contributed to less tolerance towards sexual betrayal as it came to be viewed as morally unacceptable (Scheinkman, 2005, as cited in Zola, 2007). Even though some researchers like Blumstein & Schwartz, (1983, as cited in Blow & Hartnett, 2005) state that there is no correlation between attendance at religious services and infidelity, other studies report that attendance at religious services leads to lower rates of infidelity (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Liu (2000) suggests that it might be the case that couples who attend religious services might be exposed more to the condemning messages of extramarital affairs. Moreover, their social network might be tighter, hence allowing them more to adhere to social norms (Blow & Hartnett). In a study conducted by Amato and Previti (2003, as cited in Allen et al., 2008), religiosity played a great role in whether to engage in infidelity or not. In fact "higher religiosity can inhibit infidelity due to mechanisms such as less permissiveness attitudes" (p. 244). In another study, Azzopardi (2011) found that couples who practice religion are more likely to be faithful, while low religiosity is correlated with infidelity.

Amongst the Maltese society, Catholicism is highly viewed and great respect for the doctrine's stance of low-tolerance towards infidelity still exists.  
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However, things have changed since Tabone's study, which dates back to 1987, where the majority of his sample participants declared that they would "not be unfaithful because it is against God's Commandments" (as cited in Cachia, 2007, p. 6). More recently, Abela, (2000) has stated that in today's society, the Christian religion has little influence on affairs. Even though religion might not affect infidelity, still it can prevent infidelity to some extent.

## **Types of Affairs**

Brown (1991) recognizes that different types of affairs exist; in fact she identifies five. The conflict avoidance affair takes place when individuals are afraid of speaking up when they do not agree with their partner because they want to be seen as good persons and fear being abandoned. Others seek an affair because they are afraid of getting intimate with someone. This type of affair is known as the intimacy avoidance affair. Sexual addiction affairs exist among men who indulge themselves in sexual activity to numb inner pain. In the case of the split self affair, both the spouse and the adulterer put the needs of others in front of theirs. Contrary to the sexual addict affair, here it is the marriage that feels empty and not the individual. Usually the affair is passionate, and serious. The last type of affair is the exist affair. Brown, describes these individuals as "conflict avoiders at heart" (p. 41). Both partners are aware that their marriage has finished, but still the adulterer justifies his action to leave the marriage for the affair instead.

## **Gender Differences and Attitudes**

A lot of research has been carried out to identify the incidence rate of affairs between males and females. However a simple conclusion cannot be reached because it depends on age, primary relationship type and the type of extra dyadic relationship (Hill, 2008). Even though the majority of married couples expect a monogamous relationship and condemn extra dyadic relationships (Allen et al., 2008), still between 20% to 40% of all couples at one point in their life, engage in infidelity (Peluso & Spina, 2008).

Several authors have concluded that men engage more in unfaithful relationships and are more permissive about extra-dyadic sex than women (Hill, 2008; Treas & Giesen, 2000). However, Margie Scarf (1987 as cited in Brown 1991) points out that 55% of married men and 45% of married women engage in unfaithful relationships. Due to the increasing number of women who work, opportunity to engage in infidelity is increasing as well (Larson, 1988 as cited by Brown). Besides, Atwater (1982, as cited in Brown) explains that there is a higher rate in affair participation amongst young women than men. Larson (1988 as cited in Brown) still recognizes that there is a gender difference when it comes to affairs because females consider infidelity to be more serious than males.

In a local context, Cachia (2007) carried out a study to highlight both differences and similarities in infidelity amongst males and females. Results revealed that both sexes considered infidelity to be wrong yet still engaged in it. Another study was conducted by Agius (2010) to investigate if there are any sex differences when it comes to infidelity. Even in this study, results

showed no significant difference between genders when it comes to being unfaithful.

Glass and Wright (1977) recognised that there is a relation between attitudes toward infidelity and behaviour, especially for men. More favourable attitudes towards infidelity are associated with greater predictions towards the likelihood of engaging in sexual infidelity (Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wilson et al., 2011). Blow & Hartnett (2005) assert that attitudes toward infidelity may also depend on prior sexual experience. Premarital sexual experiences are correlated with extramarital affairs; in fact, Atwater (1982 as cited in Brown 1991) states that the more experience an individual has the greatest the likelihood of him being unfaithful.

## **Types of Infidelity**

An affair can be sexual, emotional or both (Brown, 1991). Sexual infidelity refers to sexual activity with someone else outside the primary relationship while emotional infidelity refers to the attention and romantic love channelled towards someone else besides the long-term partner (Shackelford, LeBlanc & Drass, 2000).

Men perceive sexual infidelity as being more distressful and unacceptable, whereas women are more upset when it comes to emotional infidelity. This difference is explained by the evolutionary perspective model because it reflects the challenges our ancestors faced in reproduction (Treger & Sprecher, 2011). Buss and his colleagues (1992, as cited in Boekhout et al., 1999) found that 60% of men will be more distressed with sexual infidelity, whereas 83% of women are more distressed with emotional infidelity.

Women believe that men engage in sexual activity without any emotional attachment, so when they fall in love women perceive this type of affair as more distressful. On the other hand, men know that women may fall in love without engaging in sex and that they will have sex only with the one they love, so they perceive sexual infidelity as more distressful (Treger & Sprecher). Men mostly view extra dyadic relationships as having no consequences on committed relationships since they are more like