

# What predicts infidelity?

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## Abstract

I am interested in determining what aspects of a relationship predict relationship infidelity. The following research is a combination of two studies; both studies focused on commitment level, attraction towards potential alternative partners, and perception of one's partner's expectations. Participants completed a 28-item questionnaire in the first study and a 32-item questionnaire in the second study. Results of study 1 showed a significant relationship between attraction towards alternative partners and the occurrence of alternative relationships. Results in study 2 showed a significant relationship between satisfaction levels and instances of infidelity. There was not a significant difference in expectations of exclusivity when comparing those who reported cheating and those who did not. Further research is necessary to conclude that these specific factors are predictors of infidelity.

## Introduction

- Research on infidelity seems limited due to studies using different definitions for infidelity making it difficult to study infidelity when there is no consensus on what infidelity is.
- McAnulty and Brineman (2007) introduced two approaches to define infidelity: ask participants what they would consider infidelity to ensure that they remain constant in their definition or allow the researcher to provide the participant with a definition for infidelity.
- Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999) believe that researchers can separate infidelity from other forms of extradyadic behavior because it is a combination of a feeling that one's partner has violated a social norm for relationships and the elicitation of sexual jealousy and rivalry.
- The lack of research may also be because a dating relationship does not enforce the same commitment to remain exclusive as a marriage does (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999).
- Many researchers have used the investment model of relationships to determine predictors of infidelity.
  - To provide more rewards and involve less costs in a relationship, one must feel satisfaction in the relationship (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986).
- The goal of the current study is to build on previous research about the predictive value of commitment, attraction to others, and perceived expectations and to build a better understanding of the predictors of infidelity.

## Study One Materials & Methods

### Participants

- 30 LaGrange College students agreed to participate in fulfillment of a requirement for introductory psychology
  - All but 1 participant completed the questionnaire leaving 29 valid questionnaires
- 6 of the participants were male and 23 were female
- 60% reported being in a relationship or married, 36.7% reported being single, and 3.3% did not report a relationship status

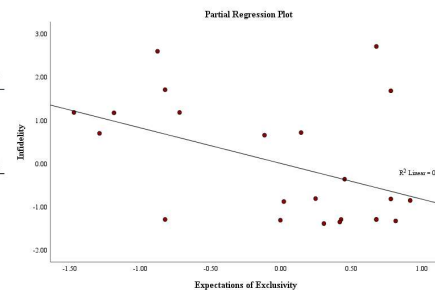
### Materials & Procedure

- Participants completed a 28-item questionnaire that combined two scales. One measured investment model constructs (commitment and satisfaction level in relationship) (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999) and the other measured relationship exclusivity (Gibson, Thompson, & O'Sullivan, 2016).
- For the purposes of this study, I defined romantic exclusivity as "being romantically/emotionally involved with only the partner" and sexual exclusivity as "being sexually involved with the partner only".
- 5 items measured perception of partner's expectations, 8 items measured commitment and satisfaction level, and 10 items measured attraction for any potential alternative partners.
  - The attraction questions asked participants to think about an instance in which they were involved with an alternative partner.

## Study One Results

Correlations Between Variables of Interest					
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Expectations of exclusivity	1				
2. Infidelity	-.319	1			
3. Satisfaction	.176	-.024	1		
4. Alternative relationship	.084	.125	-.297	1	
5. Attractiveness of alternative partner	-.070	-.198	-.255	.533*	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	s	t	p
Expectations of Exclusivity	M	6	4.21	.78		
	F	23	4.04	.88	.418	.679
Infidelity	M	6	2.25	1.78		
	F	23	2.13	1.30	.186	.854
Satisfaction	M	5	4.43	.81		
	F	17	4.29	.52	.448	.659
Alternative Relationship	M	4	2.72	1.41		
	F	17	3.07	1.24	-.503	.621

## Study Two Materials and Methods

### Participants

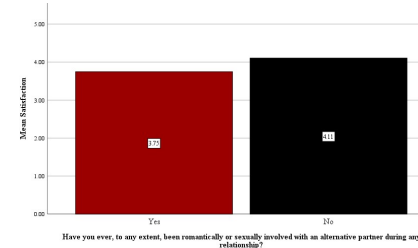
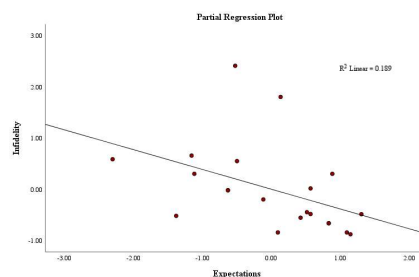
- For the second study, I wanted to focus only on participants who have been in a romantic relationship.
- Participants included 104 LaGrange College students
  - I excluded 34 participants from all analyses, 23 because of experimenter error and 11 because the participants reported they have never been in a romantic relationship.
- After omitting those participants, all data analyses included 70 participants (34 male, 34 female, 2 other).
- 30% (n = 21) reported they were involved with an alternative partner in a previous/current relationship.

### Materials & Procedure

- The questionnaire for study 2 was identical to the one utilized in study 1 except I added questions assessing perceived relationship length and actual relationship length and edited some of the original questions and directions so that the questionnaire was easier to understand.

## Study Two Results

- A reliability analysis was conducted on the 4 expectations items,  $\alpha = 0.910$ , and on the 7 satisfaction items,  $\alpha = 0.719$ .
- There was a significant difference in relationship satisfaction when comparing those who reported infidelity and those who did not,  $t(67) = -2.051, p = 0.044$ .
- There was no significant difference in expectations of exclusivity when comparing individuals who reported cheating and those who did not ( $p = 0.127$ ).



Infidelity	Gender	Frequency	Percent
Yes	Male	11	52.4
	Female	10	47.6
	Other	0	0.0
No	Male	23	46.9
	Female	24	49.0
	Other	2	4.1



## Conclusion

- The results from study 1 showed...
  - A positive correlation between attraction for potential alternative partners and alternative relationships.
  - Expectations of exclusivity significantly predicted infidelity while controlling for satisfaction.
  - This supports previous research that concluded that these two components of the investment model are significant predictors of infidelity (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999).
- The results from study 2 showed...
  - That those who reported cheating also reported lower satisfaction with their relationship.
  - Expectations of exclusivity significantly predicted the extent of infidelity while controlling for satisfaction.
  - There was no significant difference in the rate of infidelity reported by men and women.
    - Previous research has shown that men are less sexually restricted than women and women tend to be more emotionally attached than men supporting the idea that women have higher rates of emotional infidelity and men have higher rates of sexual infidelity (Rodrigues, Lopes, & Pereira, 2017; Atkins, Jacobson, & Baucom, 2001).
    - However, these studies, among others, do not support that idea (Atkins, Jacobson, & Baucom, 2001; Rodrigues, Lopes, & Pereira, 2017)
  - No significant difference in attraction towards alternative partners when comparing those who reported cheated and those who did not, which suggests attraction to other potential partners may not be a factor in cheating.

## Limitations

- Experimenter error that occurred in the middle of the study.
  - Because of this, participants may have been confused by some of the questions and directions.
- Some participants left many of the items blank which resulted in insufficient or false data.
- This study was conducted at a private college in South Georgia. This could cause the results to be ungeneralizable and influenced by regional or religious factors.
- We found correlations for some of the variables but that does not lead to causation.
- More data collection would be needed to conduct a proper linear regression for all variables.

