

Marital Infidelity: The Experience of Men and Women

Patrícia Scheeren^{1,*}

Orcid.org/0000-0002-9829-278X

Iñigo de Alda Martínez de Apellániz²

Orcid.org/0000-0002-6301-1052

Adriana Wagner¹

Orcid.org/0000-0002-0629-2310

¹Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

²Universidad del País Vasco, San Sebastián, Espanha

Abstract

This article aims to investigate the experience of infidelity in married or cohabiting men and women, considering the frequency, types of behaviors and reasons for infidelity. Participants of the study were 237 subjects, 106 men and 131 women, aged between 21 and 73 years ($M=38$; $SD=11.22$), who reported having been unfaithful to their current partner. Participants answered a sociodemographic and relationship questionnaire, the Infidelity Questionnaire and the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The results show the similarity of the infidelity behaviors between men and women, although men were more frequently involved in sexual behaviors and women more in emotional behaviors. The study identified dissatisfaction with the partner or the relationship as the main reason for infidelity for both men and women. These findings highlight the importance of considering infidelity as a relational phenomenon, which reveals the importance of the relational approach in the treatment of couples who experience infidelity.

Keywords: Infidelity, marriage, infidelity behavior, reasons for infidelity.

Infidelidade Conjugal: A Experiência de Homens e Mulheres

Resumo

Este artigo visa conhecer a vivência da infidelidade em homens e mulheres casados ou em coabitação em termos de frequência, tipos de comportamentos e motivos para ser infiel. Participaram da pesquisa 237 sujeitos, 106 homens e 131 mulheres com idades entre 21 e 73 anos ($M = 38$; $DP = 11,22$) que reportaram terem sido infiéis ao companheiro(a) atual. Os participantes responderam a uma ficha de caracterização sociodemográfica e de dados sobre o relacionamento, o Questionário de Infidelidade e a Escala de Ajustamento Conjugal Revisada. Os resultados revelaram a similaridade dos comportamentos de infidelidade entre homens e mulheres, ainda que os homens refiram mais comportamentos sexuais

* Mailing address: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Psicologia, Sala 126, Rua Ramiro Barcelos, 2600, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil 90035-003. E-mail: pscheeren@gmail.com

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enquanto as mulheres maior envolvimento emocional nestes relacionamentos. O estudo identificou que o principal motivador para a traição em ambos os sexos é a insatisfação com o companheiro(a) ou com a relação. Esses achados evidenciam a importância de se considerar a infidelidade como um fenômeno relacional. Destaca-se a importância deste enfoque relacional no tratamento de casais que vivenciam esse fenômeno.

Palavras-chave: Infidelidade, relações conjugais, comportamentos de infidelidade, motivos de infidelidade.

Infidelidad Conyugal: La Experiencia de Hombres y Mujeres

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo conocer la experiencia de infidelidad en hombres y mujeres casados o que cohabitan en términos de la frecuencia, tipos de comportamientos y motivaciones para ser infiel. Los participantes fueron 237 sujetos, 106 hombres y 131 mujeres con una edad entre 21 y 73 años ($M = 38$; $DE = 11.22$) que reportaron haber sido infiel a su pareja actual. Los participantes respondieron a una hoja de datos sociodemográficos y de caracterización de la relación, el cuestionario de comportamientos de infidelidad y de la Escala de Ajuste Marital revisado. Los resultados revelan la similitud de comportamientos de infidelidad de hombres y mujeres, aunque los hombres refieren más comportamientos sexuales mientras las mujeres refieren involucrarse de manera afectiva en estas relaciones. El estudio identificó que la principal motivación para la traición para ambos sexos es la insatisfacción con su compañero(a) o con la relación. Estos resultados ponen de relieve la importancia de considerar la infidelidad como un fenómeno relacional. Se destaca la importancia de este enfoque relacional en el tratamiento de las parejas que experimentan este fenómeno.

Palabras clave: Infidelidad, relaciones de pareja, comportamiento de infidelidad, motivos de infidelidad.

Infidelity has been discussed by researchers of the area for more than 30 years (Hertlein & Weeks, 2007). Studies have shown that infidelity can have negative effects on the relationship, and may be the most feared and devastating experience of a marriage (Pittman, 1994), which may lead to divorce (Zordan & Strey, 2011). A systematic review of the literature (Scheeren, 2016) suggested a prevalence of infidelity between 1.2% (Beaulieu-Pelletier, Philippe, Lecours, & Couture, 2011) and 89.4% (Zhang, Parish, Huang, & Pan, 2012). In Brazil, the study conducted by Goldenberg (2011), with 1,279 men and women from the urban middle class of Rio de Janeiro, showed that 60% of the men and 47% of the women had been unfaithful.

In the international scenario, infidelity is defined as a sexual and/or emotional act by a person who is in a relationship of commitment, with this act occurring outside the primary relationship and constituting a breach of trust and/or violation

of the rules agreed by the couple, by one or both individuals in an emotionally and/or sexually exclusive relationship (Moller & Vossler, 2015). In addition to the violation of the exclusivity rule, it is common for infidelity to generate secrets between the couple (Pittman, 1994). In the Brazilian context, in an online survey involving 276 internet users who were in heterosexual loving relationships, 23.1% of the participants defined infidelity as breaking the agreement. In addition to this, other aspects, such as having someone else, lying, maintaining physical contact with another person, having desire for another person, being in a relationship without feeling and lack of respect were mentioned (Haack & Falcke, 2013). From this perspective, even those people who are in open relationships also seek “loving monogamy”, which is expressed by certain rules for the involvement with other people. In these cases, even with greater flexibility in these open relationships, there may also be infidelity inso-

far as the established rules are not fulfilled, and for this reason, a rupture of the bond may occur (Goldenberg, 2010).

Although the boundaries are increasingly diffused with regard to the gender roles in conjugality, studies since the 1980s have highlighted differences between men and women in relation to infidelity, with gender differences being one of the major areas of study within the field of infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1985; Greeley, 1994; Kemer, Bulgan, & Çetinkaya Yıldız, 2015). Recent studies have shown that men show a greater need for new sensations and, consequently, are more likely to engage in extra-marital behavior (Lalasz & Weigel, 2011). In addition, studies have also shown differences between the way men and women respond to different types of infidelity. Women tend to present more jealousy related to emotional infidelity and men to sexual infidelity (Guadagno & Sagarin, 2010). Women consider an intense emotional relationship with a person outside the relationship as unfaithful involvement, even if it does not have a physical component. For men, the priority is to have physical contact, typically sexual, to constitute infidelity, without emotional involvement (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011).

The reasons that lead people to become involved with someone outside the relationship are the most varied and complex throughout the life. In the 1990s, Lusterman (1998) pointed out that people are unfaithful for a variety of reasons, which may be related to the family of origin, to beliefs about the opposite sex, or to a sense of vulnerability at some point in the life cycle, such as the birth of a child. The first scientific investigations regarding the reasons for infidelity were performed by Glass and Wright (1992). Concerned with explaining unfaithful behavior, the authors proposed 17 justifications for infidelity derived from the clinical practice and bibliographic research. The analysis of the data indicated four justifications: (a) sexual, related to curiosity, excitement and variety of sexual partners; (b) romantic love, seeking affection and passion; (c) emotional intimacy, seeking sympathetic and respectful company, reflected in an increase in self-esteem; and (d) extrinsic

motivation, a feeling of revenge for the betrayal suffered or seeking career advancement. The results of the study highlighted differences between men and women, with men presenting more sexual justifications while the reasons of the women were related to emotional intimacy.

Other authors have proposed categories from the review of the literature. Drigotas, Safstrom e Gentilia (1999) presented five categories to justify infidelity: (a) sexual satisfaction, where there is a search for sexual variety or due to sexual incompatibility with the partner; (b) emotional satisfaction, in which the focus is emotional satisfaction with a new relationship; (c) social context, including variables such as opportunity or physical separation of the partner; (d) rules and attitudes related to social norms, such as sexual permissiveness; and (e) revenge/hostility associated with the desire to retaliate for betrayal suffered. In 2005, Barta and Kiene published the results of an investigation into the motivations for infidelity in a sample of 451 American university students, finding four justifications: (a) dissatisfaction with the partner; (b) neglect and absence of the partner in the relationship; (c) anger, desire to punish the partner; and (d) sex, interest in variety and greater sexual frequency. Dissatisfaction was the reason most mentioned by the participants as the justification for infidelity, followed by neglect, sex and anger. The results also showed that women were more motivated by emotional issues (dissatisfaction, neglect and anger) while men were motivated by sexual aspects. The findings indicate that women are more susceptible than men to engage in infidelity due to dissatisfaction with the partner in the primary relationship. On the contrary, men are more likely to engage in infidelity motivated by sexual factors, however, such sexual motivation usually does not occur in isolation, but rather in a context of marital dissatisfaction and emotional neglect by the partner. In these cases, infidelity can be a possible response to a situation of dissatisfaction with the relationship.

In order to verify whether the results for students in Turkey resembled the North-American results, Yeniçeri and Kökdemir (2006) investigated the reasons for 404 young university

students of Turkey engaging in infidelity. The analysis of the results indicated six reasons: (a) legitimacy, related to revenge, that is, the partner deserved to be betrayed; (b) seduction, implies seducing or being seduced by a third person; (c) normalization, infidelity was seen as a normal act; (d) sexuality, where some gap in the sexual life of the couple would explain the infidelity; (e) social context, related to acts such as having married early, growing up in a conservative culture; and (f) seeking new sensations, fun, passion and getting out of the routine. The results showed that men tended to give more importance to seduction as a cause of infidelity, while women attributed it to the social context. The results demonstrate that legitimacy was perceived as a reason for infidelity if the unfaithful person was a woman. However, if the unfaithful person was a man, seduction, sexuality and social context were more often cited as the causes of infidelity (Yeniçeri & Kökdemir, 2006).

This aspect was also researched in a Latin context, in a sample of 1,200 Mexicans, with a mean age of 25 years, that were in loving relationships at the time of the data collection (Palencia, Rivera-Aragón, & Díaz-Loving, 2007). Seven reasons for infidelity were revealed: (a) dissatisfaction with the primary relationship, in which infidelity was attributed to problems of communication, attention and interests; (b) sexuality, infidelity motivated by seeking the satisfaction of sexual needs; (c) emotional and social instability, infidelity related to personal problems, mainly emotional; (d) ideology and norms, infidelity justified by the education, values and ethics of the individual; (e) impulsivity, infidelity as a consequence of impulsive behaviors; (f) apathy, infidelity related to lack of love and apathy in the primary relationship; and (g) aggression, infidelity attributed to feelings of revenge faced with infidelity by the partner.

Seeking to investigate the reasons for infidelity in the European context, more recently Martins (2012) evaluated 495 Portuguese people, questioning them about the reasons for infidelity. The most cited motive for men was the opportunity, while for women this was unhappiness in the relationship. In addition, having already been

unfaithful to a partner and less satisfaction with the marital relationship were predictive variables for infidelity. In Brazil, in the online study conducted by Haack and Falcke (2013), with 276 Brazilian internet users, the participants justified their acts of infidelity with reasons such as: curiosity to try other relationships, weariness in the primary relationship, lack of love, lack of commitment, anticipation of possible betrayal of the partner and revenge.

Also with a Brazilian sample, Goldenberg (2011) found differences in the position of men and women regarding the reasons for betrayal. The men justified themselves as having a nature/essence prone to infidelity. The women, however, blamed their partners for committing infidelity. The men said they committed infidelity due to physical attraction, desire, passion, opportunity, being seduced, male nature and instinct. The women mentioned dissatisfaction with the partner, lack of love, increasing self-esteem, revenge, and not feeling desired by the partner.

The reasons for infidelity are extremely varied, however, there is a common point among the studies. For the most part, the studies highlight factors related to dissatisfaction with the marital relationship and/or the partner or seeking romantic love; aspects related to sexuality, such as seeking new sexual experiences or sexual dissatisfaction with the partner; seeking freedom and breaking from the routine; infidelity as a response to betrayal suffered; and the opportunity or a context conducive to betrayal. Although the results of the studies are not conclusive, personal, relational and contextual factors are generally perceived as being involved in the act of infidelity.

Although infidelity is a prevalent phenomenon in relationships and entails high levels of suffering, including culmination in divorce, the efforts to better understand this issue are still evident and need to be examined more deeply and in a more systematic way. From the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), it is understood that infidelity is permeable and related to personal, relational and contextual factors. In this way, this article aims to contribute to the investigation of the experience of infidel-

ity in a Brazilian sample by describing how men and women, cohabiting or married, experience infidelity, with regard to the frequency, types of behaviors and reasons for seeking a relationship outside the primary relationship.

Method

Participants

Participants of the study were 237 people, 131 women (55.3%) and 106 men (44.7%), of heterosexual orientation, married or cohabiting with their partner. The study was disseminated nationwide by online invitation through e-mails to Brazilian Universities. Thus, the survey had participants from all five regions of Brazil, with the majority of the participants from the Southern Region (63.8%). The ages ranged from 21 to 73 years, with the mean age of the participants being 38 years ($SD=11.22$). Only respondents who were aged over 21 years and that had been living with their partner for at least six months were included in the study. All the participants answered the question in the affirmative: "Have you been unfaithful to your current partner?". In this sample, 51.1% were officially married, 26.2% were in stable unions and 22.8% lived together. The mean time the participants had been living with the current partner was 12 years ($SD=10.6$), ranging from less than 1 year to 49 years of cohabitation. Of the respondents, 62% had children and of these, in 74.8% of the cases the children lived with the participants. Regarding the educational level, 62.7% were attending or had already completed a postgraduate course, 33% had higher education and 4.3% high school. Regarding the personal income, 42.5% had personal income of up to five minimum wages, 13.2% between 5 and 7 wages and 44.3% more than 7 minimum wages. Considering religious practice, 36.5% reported not practicing any religion, while 8.2% said they practiced a lot.

Instruments

Sociodemographic and Relationship Data Questionnaire. Developed for this study in order to characterize the sample investigated regarding variables related to personal characteristics (age,

schooling, religion, etc.), marriage (information about infidelity in the current relationship and in previous relationships) and information regarding infidelity (such as, experiencing an open relationship, frequency of infidelity, and characteristics they encountered in the marital relationship and in the extramarital relationship). This questionnaire had an open question to evaluate the reasons for the infidelity: "Describe why you betrayed your partner".

Infidelity Behavior Questionnaire - IBQ (Scheeren, 2016). This instrument evaluates 23 behaviors of infidelity and their incidence in the current relationship, such as "To exchange sexual caresses with the person", "To be in love with the person", "To flirt with the person". The items were encoded in a binary format (0 = did not happen; 1 = happened) and the total was calculated by adding the number of "happened" responses.

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale of Busby, Christensen, Crane and Larson (1995) translated and adapted to Brazilian Portuguese by Hollist et al. (2012). The RDAS-P is an instrument composed of 14 items measured on a Likert type scale of 6 points, which make up three subscales: satisfaction, consensus and cohesion. Satisfaction evaluates the perceived stability in the relationship and how conflicts are dealt with. Consensus measures the degree of agreement regarding couple matters and cohesion assesses the frequency of positive interactions of the couple. Subscales can be summed to form a total score representative of marital satisfaction ranging from 0 to 69, with higher values indicating greater satisfaction. The Cronbach's alphas of the American validation study were 0.85 for satisfaction; 0.81 for consensus and 0.80 for cohesion. In this study, the exploratory factorial analysis maintained the same factorial structure as the original scale, with Cronbach's alphas of 0.83 for satisfaction; 0.70 for consensus and 0.82 for cohesion, showing good indices of internal validity.

Data Collection Procedures

To ensure data confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were invited to participate in the

online survey through the *Qualtrics* database (www.qualtrics.com). The invitation was made through social networks, Twitter and University newsletters and by sending emails to contact lists. In addition, this study used the snowball effect, asking the participants themselves to forward and disseminate the study link. In the invitation, the participants received information about the study objectives and the inclusion criteria. Those who agreed to participate, when accessing the link, read and accepted the Consent Terms.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed based on descriptive analyzes of frequency, means and standard deviation of the variables collected in the study considering the results for men and women. To analyze the relationships and differences between the groups, Spearman's correlations, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi-squared tests were performed. Regarding the qualitative data, content analysis (Olabuena, 2003) was carried out starting from the categories established a posteriori from the reading of the data and the revision of categories published in articles of the area. The units of analysis were evaluated by judges, maintaining the units that presented a Kappa index of over 80% of agreement. The Kappa index was measured from the sum of responses of the category divided by the number of judges and multiplied by 100. In this step, a Doctor of Psychology, two doctoral students in Psychology and one Psychologist participated as judges. The answers that did not obtain this index of agreement were evaluated by a judge with expertise in the area.

Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted following the guidelines for research with human subjects in accordance with Resolution 196/1996 of the National Health Council and Resolution 16/2012 of the Federal Council of Psychology. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* (UFRGS), under registration CAAE 23718014.4.0000.5334.

Results

Infidelity: Incidence and Frequency

To understand how infidelity was experienced in the couples of this sample, Table 1 presents the values for the variables related to infidelity with calculations of the differences for men and women.

According to the results presented in Table 1, the analyzes of variance did not show significant differences in any of the variables that assessed infidelity in the behavior of men and women. The data revealed that the majority of men (50%) and women (45.9%) who were unfaithful talked to their partner about fidelity/infidelity and agreed with their partner on what behaviors were considered betrayals (68.5% of women and 74.5% of men). Around 15% of the women and 20% of the men had an agreement with the partner in which it was possible to be involved with a person outside the relationship. There was no association between having an open relationship (a combination in which it is possible to be emotionally/sexually involved with others) and the loving condition ($X^2=0.14$, $p=.93$). The levels of marital adjustment also did not differ between those who had an open relationship and those who did not [$t(235)=1.63$, $p=.66$]. The mean of the marital adjustment for the women of the sample was 32.30 ($SD=5.75$) and 33.90 ($SD=4.31$) for the men, with the difference between the men and women not being significant [$t(235)=-2.39$, $p=.07$].

Regarding the first infidelity in the current relationship, 29.2% revealed that it occurred in the 1st year of living with the partner; 36.7% between the 2nd and 5th years of living together, 13.7% between the 6th and the 10th years; 9.3% between the 11th and 15th years of cohabiting; and 11.1% after the 15th year. It should be noted that in this sample, the mean length of living with the partner was 12.01 years ($SD=10.6$), observing that the highest indices of infidelity occurred within the first 5 years of the relationship, with a decrease in incidence after 15 years of cohabiting.

The frequency of infidelity behaviors did not show a significant association with the lov-

Table 1*Variables Regarding Infidelity and Analysis of the Difference between the Genders*

Variables		Women <i>n</i> (%)	Men <i>n</i> (%)	Difference between men and women
How much do you talk about the topic of fidelity/infidelity with your partner	1 Never	23 (17.6)	11 (10.4)	$t(235) = -1.53;$ $p = .52$
	2	47 (35.9)	42 (39.6)	
	3	36 (27.5)	25 (23.6)	
	4	13 (9.9)	12 (11.3)	
	5 Always	12 (9.2)	16 (15.1)	
	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	2.57 (1.16)	2.81 (1.23)	
How much do you and your partner agree on what it is to be unfaithful	1 We do not agree	20 (15.4)	14 (13.2)	$t(234) = -1.20;$ $p = .82$
	2	21 (16.2)	13 (12.3)	
	3	29 (22.3)	20 (18.9)	
	4	23 (17.7)	24 (22.6)	
	5 We agree	37 (28.5)	35 (33)	
	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	3.28 (1.42)	3.50 (1.40)	
Do you and your partner have an agreement by which you can engage emotionally/sexually with others?	Yes	20 (15.3)	21 (19.8)	$\chi^2(1, 235) = 0.84;$ $p = .36$
	No	111 (84.7)	85 (80.2)	
	Never	9 (6.9)	9 (8.5)	
Frequency that you are/were unfaithful to your partner	In the last year	92 (70.2)	66 (62.3)	$t(235) = 0.50;$ $p = .33$
	In the last month	14 (10.7)	15 (14.2)	
	In the last week	11 (8.4)	14 (13.2)	
	Every day	5 (3.8)	2 (1.9)	
	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	2.32 (0.87)	2.38 (0.89)	

ing condition ($\chi^2=5.91, p=.66$), age that the partners started lived together [$t(235)=1.06, p=.60$] or time that they had lived together [$t(235)=0.44, p=.28$]. However, the frequency with which people betrayed their partner presented a significant difference in relation to the marital adjustment $F(3, 208)=9.37; p<.001$, and the Bonferroni Post-Hoc test showed a difference in values for the RDAS-P between the groups that had been unfaithful in the previous year ($M=34.67, SD=4.85$) with those that had been unfaithful everyday ($M=30.33, SD=3.86$). That is, people

who were unfaithful more often (every day) presented lower levels of marital satisfaction than those who been unfaithful less frequently (in the previous year).

By grouping people who had committed infidelity by age ranges, the following could be seen regarding the incidence of infidelity: 21 to 30 years (25.7% of the sample), 31 to 40 years (35.4%), 41 to 50 years (22.4%) and over 51 years (15.5%). In this sample, the majority of respondents who committed infidelity were concentrated in the range of 31 to 40 years. The fre-

quency with which the companion was betrayed did not differ according to the age groups analyzed ($X^2=15.08$, $p=.24$), however, a gradual decrease of these episodes was observed with the increase in age group.

Infidelity: Unfaithful Behaviors

With regard to the behaviors of infidelity, the participants indicated, from the list of 23 behaviors measured by the IBQ, those that had occurred in their current relationship. Those that had happened received a score of 1 and those that had not a score of 0. The mean of infidelity behaviors that occurred in this sample was 11.6 ($SD=6$), with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 23. Table 2 shows the means for the men and women.

The most frequent infidelity behaviors for women were “14. Getting dressed up and wearing nice clothes to meet the person” (84.8%), “12. Flirting with the person” (78.8%), “22. Hiding from your partner messages exchanged with the person” (75.8%), “9. Expressing sexual attraction for the person and not for your partner” (69.7%), “1. Exchanging sexual caresses with the person” (68.2%), “2. Being in love with the person” (68.2%) and “20. Kissing the person on the mouth” (68.2%). The women presented a mean of 11.20 ($SD=6$) infidelity behaviors.

For the men, the most frequent behaviors were “1. Exchanging sexual caresses with the person” (100%), “12. Flirting with the person” (92.3%), “20. Kissing the person on the mouth” (92.3%), “22. Hiding from your partner messages exchanged with the person” (92.3%), “18. Having sex with the person” (76.9%), “11. Seeking to carry out activities to spend more time in the presence of the person” (69.2%), “14. Getting dressed up and wearing nice clothes to meet the person” (69.2%) and “19. Erasing messages of sexual content exchanged with the person” (69.2%). The men presented a mean of 13.61 ($SD=5.63$) infidelity behaviors.

When considering the 23 behaviors, a significant difference was found between the men and women for two of the behaviors: “1. Exchanging sexual caresses with the person” $X^2(1,$

79)=5.63; $p=.01$ and “21. Masturbating in the presence of the person on the internet” $X^2(1, 79)=4.16$; $p=.05$, with the mean being higher for the men when compared to the women, for both behaviors.

Infidelity: What do I Look for in Another Relationship?

A list of aspects proposed by Goldenberg (2006), defined by: affection, understanding, attention, companionship, interest/desire, sex, attraction, friendship, romance, money, status/power, material goods, luxury and glamour, comprised part of the Relationship Questionnaire, presented in the Instruments section of this article. The unfaithful subjects were asked to evaluate, from the aspects presented, what they sought in the extramarital relationship and what they recognized having in their relationship.

Among the variables evaluated, those that the women sought most in the extramarital relationship were interest/desire (61.1%) and attraction (53.4%). For the men, the highest index of that sought in the extramarital relationship was sex (81%). Both genders reported that what they found most in the current relationship was companionship (74.5% of the men and 67.9% of the women) and friendship (67% of the men and 64.1% of the women).

When analyzing the differences between the men and women as to what they sought in the extramarital relationship, there was a significant difference in affection $X^2(1, 237)=9.441$; $p=.002$, attention $X^2(1, 237)=20.152$; $p=.01$, interest/desire $X^2(1, 237)=7.349$; $p=.007$, sex $X^2(1, 235)=44.356$; $p=.01$, and romance $X^2(1, 237)=7.574$; $p=.006$, with affection, attention, desire/interest and romance being more sought by the women than by the men. Regarding the characteristics that the men and women found in their relationship, a significant difference was observed regarding attention $X^2(1, 237)=4.281$; $p=.039$, sex $X^2(1, 237)=4.469$; $p=.035$, and attraction $X^2(1, 237)=7.703$; $p=.006$, with the men reporting finding more of the three variables in the relationship when compared to the women.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Infidelity Behaviors and Results of the Difference between Men and Women

Behavior	Men <i>M(SD)</i>	Women <i>M(SD)</i>	Difference between the genders
1. Exchanging sexual caresses with the person	1(0)	0.68(0.47)	$X^2(1, 79) = 5.63^*$
2. Being in love with the person	0.61(0.5)	0.68(0.47)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.22$
3. Exchanging erotic and sensual photos and/or videos with the person you correspond with	0.38(0.5)	0.29(0.46)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.48$
4. Starting to work later to stay longer in the company of a co-worker	0.46(0.5)	0.47(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.01$
5. Stop doing something with your partner to spend more time with the person	0.38(0.5)	0.48(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.44$
6. Using apps or social network sites to find other people	0.46(0.5)	0.26(0.44)	$X^2(1, 79) = 2.19$
7. In moments of leisure with your partner, being occupied talking on the phone or exchanging messages with the person	0.61(0.5)	0.51(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.44$
8. Not revealing being in a serious relationship to another person you have met	0.54(0.51)	0.35(0.48)	$X^2(1, 79) = 1.66$
9. Expressing sexual attraction for the person and not for your partner	0.61(0.5)	0.70(0.46)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.33$
10. Exchanging messages of sexual content with the person over the internet	0.54(0.52)	0.30(0.46)	$X^2(1, 79) = 2.68$
11. Seeking to do activities to spend more time in the presence of the person	0.69(0.48)	0.55(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.95$
12. Flirting with the person	0.92(0.27)	0.79(0.41)	$X^2(1, 79) = 1.30$
13. Walking hand in hand with the person	0.38(0.5)	0.40(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.03$
14. Getting dressed up and wearing nice clothes to meet the person.	0.69(0.48)	0.85(0.36)	$X^2(1, 79) = 1.81$
15. Giving the person presents without your partner knowing	0.61(0.5)	0.35(0.48)	$X^2(1, 79) = 3.25$
16. Performing activities with the person that you previously did only with your partner	0.46(0.52)	0.45(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.01$
17. Going to a strip club without your partner knowing	0.15(0.37)	0.17(0.37)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.01$
18. Having sex with the person	0.77(0.44)	0.57(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 1.70$
19. Deleting messages of sexual content that you have exchanged with the person	0.69(0.48)	0.5(0.5)	$X^2(1, 79) = 1.61$
20. Kissing the person on the mouth	0.92(0.28)	0.68(0.47)	$X^2(1, 79) = 3.15$
21. Masturbating in the presence of the person through the internet	0.46(0.52)	0.20(0.4)	$X^2(1, 79) = 4.16^*$
22. Hiding from your partner the messages you exchanged with the person	0.92(0.28)	0.76(0.43)	$X^2(1, 79) = 1.76$
23. Having virtual sex with the person	0.30(0.48)	0.20(0.4)	$X^2(1, 79) = 0.79$

* $p < .05$.

Infidelity: Reasons that Led to the Infidelity

The subjects were questioned as to why they were unfaithful. A total of 210 responses were analyzed, and these were broken down into 308 units of analysis (177 responses of the women and 131 of the men). The categories were established a posteriori from the reading of the information given by the subjects who answered the questionnaire and the articles published in the area. Based on the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), three axes that make up the conjugal relationship provided the starting point, these being: the individual spouses, the relationship and the context. A lack of reasons for the infidelity was reported by only 7 of the participants.

Axis 1: Personal Reasons

This axis includes responses that relate to the subject involved in a relationship of infidelity. That is, the contents that refer to aspects that the subject recognized in him/herself, individually, independent of the other. This axis of analysis grouped seven categories:

Lack of affection, loneliness and insecurity: in this category, the person attributed the infidelity to feeling needy, lonely or insecure. The participants reported “*lack of love*”; “*lack of affection*”; “*feeling alone*”; “*doubt*”; “*insecurity*”. In this sample, 22 (7.1%) of the participants attributed the characteristics of this category to the infidelity, 14 (7.9%) of the women and 8 (6.1%) of the men.

Personal characteristics: This category includes reasons for infidelity related to certain characteristics of the subject who committed the betrayal, such as immaturity, mental illness, impulsivity. Examples of responses from this category were “*I consider myself to be immature*”, “*I am bipolar, it was in a manic phase. After I started the correct treatment it didn't happen again*”. In this category, 10 (3.2%) participants perceived personal characteristics as a reason for infidelity, 5 (2.8%) women and 5 (3.8%) men.

Sexual need: the responses of this category are related to feeding an indiscriminate need for

sex, to having an impulse to be unfaithful and to feeling passion. Some of the examples of responses in this category were “*The fire of the flesh*”, “*Sexual need*”, “*Passion*”, “*Impulse*”. A total of 18 (5.8%) participants perceived sexual need as a cause of infidelity, 4 (2.3%) women and 14 (10.7%) men.

Desire or physical attraction: including responses related to attraction and desire for a specific person, as well as a need to feel attractive to the other person. Some of the examples in this category are “*Feeling attraction*”, “*Feeling appealing to someone else. To evaluate my power of seduction, attraction and conquest*”. In this study, 34 (11%) participants mentioned this, 18 (10.2%) women and 16 (12.2%) men.

Seeking freedom, adventure and valorization: the people mentioned seeking their own space or feeling valued through another relationship, seeking an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, seeking new experiences and seeking novelty, curiosity and adventure as reasons for infidelity. A response example of this category was: “*To have my private life, also on the sexual side, without my partner being in all places of my life*”, “*To escape in search of valorization*”, “*Desire to have sex with another person without compromising my relationship*”, “*To experience an exciting relationship*”. Of the participants, 21 (10.1%) perceived this as a cause of infidelity, 14 (7.9%) women and 7 (13%) men.

Emotional involvement: the person attributed the infidelity to extramarital emotional involvement, seeking love and affection in this new relationship, in addition to feeling passionate about this other person. Many of the participants referred to emotional involvement as one of the reasons for the infidelity. Examples of responses are: “*I fell in love with someone else, but I'm still in love with my husband*”, “*I fell madly in love with someone else*”, “. . . *I was caught, hooked by another man . . .*”, “*I met a love from the past that was not resolved*”. In this sample, 31 (10.1%) participants perceived emotional involvement as a cause of the infidelity, with 17 (9.6%) women and 14 (5.3%) men.

Beliefs and rules: the person who committed infidelity attributed the act to personal beliefs about polygamy or rules that the couple agreed about extramarital relationships. For example: “*I do not believe in monogamy*”. A total of 7 (2.3%) participants attributed beliefs and rules to the infidelity.

This axis had 47.3% of the responses of the participants. The category “physical desire or attraction” was the reason for infidelity most used as justification by women, followed by “emotional involvement”. For the men, “pursuit of freedom, adventure and valorization” was the greatest cause of infidelity, followed by “physical/emotional desire or attraction”. When comparing the results for men and women, a significant difference was found in the sexual need category $X^2(1, 308)=1.23, p=.002$, being more frequent in the men than in the women.

Axis 2: Reasons Related to the Conjuality

This axis includes contents that refer to aspects of the companion and the marital relationship established.

Revenge, anger, or hostility: the people named anger, hostility, or revenge for infidelity of the partner as reasons for their own infidelity. For example: “*Because he betrayed me first*”, “*Because he cannot stay faithful, I get upset and I get back at him*”, “*anger*”. In this sample, 8 (2.6%) participants, of whom 6 (3.4%) were women and 2 (1.5%) men, highlighted revenge, anger or hostility as a cause of the infidelity.

Dissatisfaction with the partner and/or the relationship: the person attributed the infidelity to dissatisfaction with the marital relationship or partner, perceiving that the relationship was in a crisis, feeling devalued in the relationship or feeling a lack of affection. The presence of violent behavior, rudeness, excesses of jealousy, dissatisfaction with the physical aspects or lack of empathy on the part of the partner are other behaviors that are part of this category, in which infidelity is attributed to the way the companion treats the person who committed infidelity. Among the reasons given by the participants

there were responses such as “*At a time of disbelief/crisis in the relationship*”, “*Weariness of the relationship*”, “*Distancing and disinterest*”, “*Excess of misunderstanding*”, “*Lack of companionship*”, “*His rudeness, lack of dialogue, affection . . .*”, “. . . *certain dissatisfaction with the changes in the body of the companion [pregnancy, variations of weight, etc.]*”, “*Because he hits me and treats me badly . . .*”, “*Partner’s health problems, such as depression and panic syndrome*”. In this category, 72 (23.4%) participants, of whom 53 (29.9%) were women and 19 (14.5%) men, attributed this as a cause of the infidelity.

Sexual dissatisfaction: infidelity related to sexual dissatisfaction with the partner. Some of the responses of the respondents related to this category were: “*Lack of desire/stimulation on his part*”, “*Sexual lack*”, “*Lack of affinity in sexual desire*”, “*Lack of sex*”, “*Sexual disagreements*”, “*Lower frequency of sex than desired. My distinct desires in relation to sexuality, greater than hers*”. A total of 24 participants (7.8%), 9 (5.1%) women and 15 (11.5%) men, cited this factor as a reason for the infidelity.

In this study, the category “dissatisfaction with the partner and/or the relationship” was the most cited by men and women as a justification for infidelity, totaling 33.8% of the total sample. Even though it was the most frequent in both sexes, there were differences in the means of responses of the men and women. For the women, the reason “dissatisfaction with the partner and/or relationship” was more frequent when compared to the men $X^2(1, 308)=10.02, p=.002$. However, the category “sexual dissatisfaction” was indicated as the most frequent reason among the men $X^2(1, 308)=4.25, p=.039$.

Axis 3: Reasons Related to the Context

This axis includes content in which the infidelity is related to a context/environment.

Alcohol use: being drunk or under the influence of alcohol when committing the act of infidelity. For example: “*Because I had drunk a lot*”. A total of 6 (1.9%) participants gave this reason as a cause of the infidelity.

Escape from problems: the people committed infidelity as a way of escaping from everyday problems, such as work-related problems: “*Escape from problems* [mainly financial], *accumulation of stress*”, “*Various external problems*”. Two female participants attributed this factor as a reason for their infidelity.

Opportunity to betray: the people attributed being in a context/environment that allowed the infidelity, such as a party, as a reason for infidelity or the opportunity due to being physically distant from the partner. The respondents mentioned “Opportunity”, “Occasion”. For example: “*The relationship was just starting, it was still unstable. There was a period of physical distance (for professional reasons we lived in different cities for a long time)*”, “*Because he travels a lot for work and I stay home alone*”, “*I travel alone, I went out one night and I had drunk a lot*”. Regarding this reason, 25 (8.1%) participants, of whom 13 were women and 12 men, mentioned it as a reason for the infidelity.

The reasons related to the context were the least cited by the participants as reasons for the infidelity (10.6%) when compared with Axes 1 and 2. In fact, the reason “escape from problems” was only mentioned by two women. In this axis, there was no difference between the men and women in any of the categories.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a change in the experience of infidelity by men and women when compared with studies from the 1980's and 1990's that showed that men were more unfaithful than women and presented more sexual infidelity behaviors while women presented more emotional infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1985; Wiederman, 1997). The results show that in considering all loving relationships, men and women are unfaithful to the same extent, evidencing certain changes in relation to the phenomenon in the present times. Regarding sexual, emotional and virtual behaviors linked to the breach of an exclusivity agreement,

the results also revealed that there were few differences between men and women, except for sexual infidelity behavior and virtual sexual infidelity. In these cases, men showed more behaviors of exchanging sexual caresses and masturbation over the internet when compared to the women. However, in the other 21 sexual, emotional and virtual behaviors, there was no difference between the genders. Thus, if in the past there was talk of higher rates of sexual infidelity in men and emotional infidelity in women, these data show another scenario where men and women presented similar infidelity behaviors.

A closer look at the results of the women reveals that the most frequent infidelity behaviors among women were more subjective and discrete and may sometimes not even have been perceived as infidelity. However, for men, the behaviors were more explicit, there being more protagonism of the subjects, that is, they could more clearly be considered infidelities, such as kissing, exchanging sexual caresses and flirting, while the women showed greater discretion in their infidelity behaviors, such as wearing nice clothing and hiding certain messages from the partner.

Regarding sexual behavior, the men and women did not complain about the lack of sex in their relationship and did not seek sex in the extramarital relationship. On the contrary, both men and women revealed that they sought affection, understanding and attention in the extramarital relationship and reported not finding these feelings in their conjugal relationship. In this way, neither the men and women in this sample had the sexual need or dissatisfaction in their relationship as their main reason for infidelity. Both reported dissatisfaction with the relationship, although the mean of the women for dissatisfaction with the partner or the relationship was higher than that of the men in explaining being unfaithful to the partner. Considering that the boundaries between infidelity behaviors among men and women are increasingly blurred, the common idea that when men do not find sex at home they seek it elsewhere is out of date.

Thus, even if men are satisfied with their sexual life with their partner, they may commit infidelity due to the pursuit of something new, freedom and adventure, and it may even be a way to compensate for affective dissatisfaction in their relationship. Women, in turn, are also motivated by sexual factors such as desire and attraction for the other.

In this sample, both men and women were motivated by factors of dissatisfaction with the relationship and sought affection, understanding and attention, expressing that their partner was not providing satisfactory levels of attention and intimacy. The infidelity began most frequently between the 2nd and 5th years of cohabitation and decreased throughout the relationship. In addition, lower levels of marital adjustment were found in those with higher frequencies of infidelity. These results lead to the association between infidelity and the level of maturity that is expressed in the age and in the length of relationship that can decrease the infidelity behavior. Thus, when couples deepen their level of knowledge, both personal and relational, they may present greater resources to cope with the difficulties of the relationship, which reflects in better levels of marital adjustment. In this way, it can be thought that infidelity can be used by some as a way to address difficulties in the relationship, such as an escape from problems and seeking satisfaction in another relationship, leading to the idea of infidelity as a symptom of low marital adjustment. These data reaffirm the importance of perceiving the phenomenon as relational, which is corroborated by the low representativeness of the contextual factors in this sample, in which 10% of the subjects explained their infidelity due to this context.

It can be seen that the studies of the 1980's and 1990's tended towards a dichotomy between sexual and emotional infidelity and different results for men and women. The current results demonstrate that we are dealing with a phenomenon that encompasses a complexity of behaviors: emotional, virtual and sexual. However, there is a single phenomenon that is difficult to divide into types. Although men and women do

not present identical results, and men stand out for seeking the sexual aspect and reasons related to this, in essence both have motivations linked to dissatisfaction with the relationship and seek both emotional and sexual behaviors. In this way, perhaps what differentiates the genders is more related to what infidelity represents for each of them.

Although the importance of the theme for the marital relationship is perceived, the data indicate that the majority of the people did not talk about the topic with their partner and 44.4% did not agree with the partner about what it is to be unfaithful. Since infidelity refers to a breach of agreement, and as each couple establishes this agreement, there is scope for the subjectivity of each loving relationship. Thus, it is important that couples feel encouraged to communicate their desires and expectations in their relationship, because simply choosing an open relationship does not guarantee higher levels of marital satisfaction, according to the results of this study.

This work aimed to describe infidelity behaviors for a general Brazilian sample. However, the theme is very exciting and it is worth investigating the experience of infidelity in other samples with specific particularities, such as single people, those in the dating phase and those of different sexual orientations, not with the purpose of knowing the differences, but to investigate the hypothesis that the phenomenon of infidelity is not exclusive to a certain type of conjugal configuration.

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