

How Gender Role Attitudes Impact the Perceptions of Relational Cheating

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In American society, many individuals disapprove of breaking the rules of monogamy and find infidelity to be unforgivable, however, what constitutes infidelity in a relationship varies from person to person (Fincham & May, 2017). Infidelity has a multitude of detrimental effects. Knox, Zusman, Kaluzny, and Sturdivant (2000), found that almost 70% of students reporting they would end a relationship due to infidelity, and 45% reporting they have ended a relationship because of infidelity. Infidelity can have more impacts on those involved than just that of the relationship being dissolved. Infidelity is associated with distress (Norona, Olmstead & Welsh, 2018) and poorer mental health, particularly anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder among partners of the unfaithful individual (Fincham & May, 2017). Due to the extent of infidelity's consequence, it is important to gain a more extensive understanding of how it is influenced.

Gender role attitudes can be described as how one believes he or she should act based on his or her gender, these behavioral expectations can be shaped by politics, religion, and media. An individual's attitudes towards gender roles has the potential to shape other attitudes or experiences (King, Singh & Milner, 2018; Leech, 2009). Gender role attitudes can be defined as conservative or liberal. Currently, there has been a greater push for more gender equality leading to more a of balance in the distribution and fairness in societal roles (Gui, 2019). Additionally, younger individuals have adapted a less traditional attitude toward gender roles (Sweeting, Bhaskar, Benzeval, Popham & Hunt, 2014). Gender roles can impact career choices (Kan, 2007), mental health (King, Singh & Milner, 2018), and sexual infidelity (Leech, 2009). Relationship efficacy can be reliant on similar gender role beliefs (Horne & Johnson, 2018).

Gender role attitudes and relationship satisfaction go hand in hand with one another because they both influence roles within the relationship (Horne & Johnson, 2018). These

attitudes can also impact willingness to have sex; young women who hold traditional beliefs often feel the need to consent to sex in order to fulfill their partner's need (Meston & Buss, 2007). By consenting to unwanted sex, many women reported less relationship satisfaction (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Women who hold traditional beliefs also have a higher prevalence of having multiple partners and sexual relations outside of their committed relationship (Leech, 2009). There is little research investigating how men's gender role attitudes impact perceptions of infidelity in comparison to women. Instead, there is research regarding how men develop their romantic scripts (DeLisle, Walsh, Holtz, Callahan, Neumann, 2019).

There is no universal definition of infidelity, studies regarding this topic and researchers define it in a myriad of ways (Blow & Harnett, 2005). The inconsistency in defining infidelity becomes even more complicated when personal beliefs further dictate what constitutes infidelity to an individual. Gender role attitudes are described as how one believes he or she should act based on his or her gender. Beliefs, specifically gender role attitudes, have the potential to shape how an individual perceives acts of infidelity. Gender role attitudes influence various aspects of a relationship and the likelihood to commit an affair (Horne & Johnson, 2018; Katz & Tyrone, 2009; Leech, 2009; Meston & Buss, 2007). Younger individuals have adapted a less traditional attitude toward gender roles (Sweeting, Bhaskar, Benzeval, Popham & Hunt, 2014). Current literature assesses how each gender responds to infidelity as opposed to how gender role attitudes affect responses to infidelity. The purpose of this study is to assess the perceptions of infidelity amongst emerging adults based on the influence of gender role beliefs.

Methodology

Participants

Sixty students enrolled in at a southwestern university were recruited utilizing the psychology experimental online database (SONA system). The participants' ages ranged from 18-52. The largest group of participants were 18 years of age (33.3%) and 19 years of age (26.7%). The sex of the participants included 39 females and 21 males. Participants fulfilled a course requirement and/or received extra credit in the psychology course/other participating courses in exchange for participating in the study.

Materials

Following a demographics survey assessing age, sex, and ethnicity; four questionnaires examining perceptions of infidelity, jealousy, and gender roles attitudes were given.

Attitudes on Infidelity.

Attitudes towards Infidelity Scale (ATIS; Whatley, 2006) examines what people think and feel about issues associated with infidelity. The Attitudes towards Infidelity Scale (ATIS) was used to measure the attitude and acceptance level of infidelity from the perspective of the individual. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items of infidelity statements. An example statement used is "*Infidelity is morally wrong in all circumstances regardless of the situation.*" Each item was ranked on a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly Agree). The reliability of this scale was found to be .80.

Perceived Infidelity Questionnaire (PIQ; Thornton, 2014) examines sexual, emotional, and fantasy infidelity. The Perceived Infidelity Questionnaire (PIQ) was used to measure individuals' perceptions of infidelity. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items that could potentially be perceived as infidelity. An example item used is "*Having an intimate emotional phone conversation with someone other than your partner.*" Each item was ranked on a 4-point

Likert scale (1=Definitely NOT infidelity, 2=Probably NOT infidelity, 3=Probably infidelity, 4=Definitely infidelity). Five items are specific to sexual infidelity, five items to emotional infidelity, and five items to fantasy infidelity. Research reveals this measure to be internally consistent with reliability of .91 for the perceived sexual infidelity subscale, .78 for the perceived emotional infidelity subscale, and .86 for the perceived fantasy infidelity subscale.

Attitudes on Gender Roles.

The Gender Role Attitude Scale (GRAS; García-Cueto et al, 2015) examines sexist attitudes held by both men and women. This scale consisted of 20 questions with 5 subscales. The subscales include: Family Function Transcendent (FFT); Social Function Transcendent (SFT); Family Function Sexism (FFS); Social Function Sexism (SFS); Employment Function Sexism (EFS). An example question used is *“Girls should be more clean and tidy than boys.”* Each question was measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 (1=Totally Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, 5=Totally Disagree). The test is highly reliable, with a reliability of .99.

Views on Jealousy.

Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS; Pfeiffer, & Wong, 1989) is composed of three subscales, cognition, behavior, and emotion. The purpose of this scale is to measure the parallel interactive model and demonstrate how cognition, behavioral and emotion can occur simultaneously in jealousy. Jealousy in relation to infidelity can have harmful effects on a relationship. The MJS is a 24-item questionnaire. An example item used is *“X comments to you on how great looking a particular member of the opposite sex is.”* Each question was measured using a Likert Scale ranging from 1-7. For the Cognitive subscale, (1=All the time, 7=Never). The emotional subscale, (1=Very pleased, 7=Very upset). The Behavioral subscale, (1=Never,

7=All the time). The test is highly reliable, with a reliability of 0.92 for the cognitive subscale, 0.85 for the emotional subscale, 0.89 for the behavioral subscale.

Procedure

The study allowed 4-5 participants at a time in a laboratory setting with several computers. Participants answered the survey on the computer. Prior to the participants beginning, an informed consent form was given on the computer through *PsychData* and was electronically signed by each of the participants. The demographic information was collected followed by the Attitudes Towards Infidelity Scale, Perceived Infidelity Scale, Gender Role Attitude Scale, and Multidimensional Jealousy Scale. Following the survey, a debriefing form was provided to the participants.

Data Analysis

A correlation matrix was run examining the total score of ATIS, each GRAS subscales, each PIQ subscales and gender. Additionally, any significant correlations were arranged and analyzed utilizing a stepwise regression.

Results

There was a negative correlation between GRAS FFS and ATIS total, $r = -.32, p < .05$. This result indicates that the less accepting of infidelity the more sexist views in family function an individual has. There was a negative correlation between GRAS EFS and ATIS total, $r = -.34, p < .05$. This result indicates that that the less accepting of infidelity that more sexist views in employment function an individual has. There was a negative correlation between PIQ sexual and ATIS total, $r = -.46, p < .01$. This result indicates that the less accepting of infidelity an individual is the more likely the individual is to believe that sexual acts constitute infidelity.

A stepwise regression was run between gender, selected GRAS subscales, and the each PIQ subscales to if these components statistically significantly predicted ATIS total score. Gender statistically significantly predicted ATIS, $F(1,47) = 7.729, p < .01$. GRAS FFS, EFS, and SFS statistically significantly predicted ATIS, $F(1,44) = 3.518, p < .05$. PIQ sexual, emotional, and fantasy statistically significantly predicted ATIS, $F(1,41) = 4.019, p < .01$. The model presented was statically significant in predicting ATIS total score.

Discussion

This study confirms the that the more sexist gender role attitude an individual has, the less accepting of infidelity and the more acts constitutes infidelity to the individual. Additionally, the study indicates that gender, beliefs on gender roles, and perceived infidelity is predictive of an individual's infidelity acceptability.

Limitations

The present study had a low number of participants. The same study with a higher number of participants could warrant more significant findings. Additionally, this study focused on a college-aged population, however, if this studied analyzed a broader age range, the data could have been presented differently.

Implications

The findings from this study can aid in family and marriage counseling by confronting the client's gender attitudes and seeing how it is affecting the client's relationship. Furthermore, the information obtained from this study is important for college students so that the students can form healthy intimate relationships. This study also adds to the limited research regarding men and gender role attitudes.

Future Directions

This study can be extended utilizing a quasi-methods design. While quantitative data is valuable, there are still some gaps that can be addressed. For example, because gender role attitudes have not been studied as greatly in men as compared to females, it would be beneficial to gauge male's perceptions through open ended questions. From these open-ended responses, an additional study can be formulated. This would create a stronger design for the study and allow for more information to be analyzed through the themes found in the data.

Conclusion

The more accepting an individual's attitudes are of traditional gender roles, the more likely he or she is to believe unfaithful acts constitute infidelity and the less accepting he or she is of infidelity. The results from the current study extends the literature by investigating perceptions of infidelity through the influence of gender role attitudes. This study provides insight into the influence of gender role beliefs and its impact on perceptions of infidelity, thus implying that gender role attitudes are impactful beyond roles in society.

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