



Understanding the relationship between gender and extradyadic relations: The mediating role of sensation seeking on intentions to engage in sexual infidelity

Camille B. Lalasz*, Daniel J. Weigel

Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Social Psychology, Department of Sociology/300, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557-0208, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 October 2010
Received in revised form 14 January 2011
Accepted 20 January 2011
Available online 22 February 2011

Keywords:

Sensation seeking
Gender
Extradyadic relations
Sexual infidelity
Mediation

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the well-established finding that males are more likely than females to engage in extradyadic relations by seeking to determine if the personality trait sensation seeking mediates the relationship between gender and sexual extradyadic behaviors. A total of 174 participants, aged 17–36 years, indicated the extent to which they intended to engage in a hypothetical sexual extradyadic behavior (i.e., kiss or casual sex) and completed the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS-4). Multiple linear regressions revealed that initial gender differences in sexual extradyadic intention ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$) no longer accounted for significant variability when sensation seeking was controlled for ($\beta = -.09, p > .10$). Sobel and bootstrapping tests further demonstrated that sensation seeking fully mediated the aforementioned relationship between gender and extradyadic intention. Discussion presents two perspectives that help explain the results and offers suggestions for future research.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The majority of romantic relationships are bound by personal and societal expectations of sexual and emotional exclusivity (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Violations of these mutually agreed upon boundaries can result in negative consequences for a relationship, such as relationship dissolution and psychological distress (Allen & Baucom, 2006; Cano & Leary, 2000; Knox, Zusman, Kalluzny, & Sturdivant, 2000). Despite the strength of these norms and the negative consequences, extradyadic relations are a relatively common occurrence (Shackelford, LeBlanc, & Drass, 2000; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Consequently, identifying factors that can be used to explain what motivates these behaviors and predict future extradyadic liaisons is of great interest to researchers.

Gender has been the most widely studied and consistent predictor of extradyadic relations (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Greeley, 1994). Results typically indicate that, in comparison to women, men are more likely to engage in a variety of sexual behaviors with someone other than their primary relationship partner (Greeley, 1994; Hansen, 1987; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; McAlister, Pachana, & Jackson, 2005; Wiederman, 1997; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). This relationship holds true even when relationship type is taken into account. For instance, when analyzing nationally representative data from the

National Health and Social Life Survey (NHLSL), Waite and Gallagher (2000) found that 4% of married men, 16% of cohabitating men, and 37% of men in dating relationships had sex with someone other than their primary partner in the previous year. In comparison, 1% of married women, 8% of cohabitating women, and 17% of women in dating relationships reported engaging in extradyadic sex.

Although the relationship between gender and the performance of sexual extradyadic behaviors has been well established, less is known about the mechanisms that might account for this relationship. Due to its established relationships with gender and sexually risky behaviors, the personality trait sensation seeking is one such potential mechanism. Specifically, it is possible those high in sensation seeking might be more likely to engage in sexual infidelity. Thus, the present research aims to add to the existing literature on extradyadic relations by investigating the role that sensation seeking might play in mediating the relationship between gender and sexual extradyadic behaviors.

1.1. Sensation seeking

Sensation seeking is a personality trait that is characterized by a need or desire for sensations and experiences that are varied, novel, and intense and is composed of four dimensions: thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility (Arnett, 1994; Zuckerman, 1979). Although it is important to note that pleasure is not found in risk taking itself, sensation seekers do show a willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks to obtain the physical arousal that such experiences often afford (Zuckerman, 1994). Consequently, sensa-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 775 682 5795; fax: +1 775 784 4506.

E-mail addresses: brownc79@unr.edu (C.B. Lalasz), weigeld@unce.unr.edu (D.J. Weigel).

tion seeking has been found to be associated with a variety of risky behaviors such as alcohol and substance use, high risk sports, reckless driving, and gambling (see *Roberti (2004)* for a review).

Four conditions are necessary to determine if sensation seeking mediates the relationship between gender and sexual extradyadic behaviors (*Baron & Kenny, 1986*). In the first condition, the predictor variable (gender) needs to be associated with the criterion variable (extradyadic behaviors). As discussed in Section 1, a substantial amount of research has shown that gender is associated with extradyadic behaviors. More specifically, men are more likely than women to engage in a variety of sexual infidelity behaviors (e.g., *McAlister et al., 2005*).

In the second condition for mediation, the predictor variable (gender) needs to be associated with the mediator (sensation seeking; *Baron & Kenny, 1986*). Providing support for this requirement, gender has been found to be related to sensation seeking, such that men are more likely than women to engage in risk taking behaviors (e.g., *Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978; Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Thornquist, & Kiers, 1991*). Further, males are more likely than females to score higher on overall sensation seeking scales, as well as thrill and adventure seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility subscales (e.g., *Zuckerman, 1974; Zuckerman et al., 1978*).

In the third condition, the mediator (sensation seeking) needs to be associated with the criterion variable (extradyadic behaviors; *Baron & Kenny, 1986*). Providing support for this requirement, sexual sensation seeking, or the tendency to seek out new and varied sexual experiences and take sexual risks, has been found to predict extradyadic sexual involvement in college students (*Wiederman & Hurd, 1999*). Sensation seeking has also been identified as one of six explanations for infidelity by college students (*Yeniçeri & Kökdemir, 2006*). Further, the personality trait sensation seeking has been found to be related to risky sexual behaviors that offer novel or varied stimulation or are impulsive in nature (*Zuckerman, 2007*). For instance, high sensation seekers have been found to have a greater number of sexual partners, a tendency to engage in unprotected sex, and more permissive sexual attitudes (*Arnold, Fletcher, & Farrow, 2002; Zuckerman, 1994; Zuckerman, Tushup, & Finner, 1976*).

Finally, in the fourth condition for mediation, the strength of the association between the predictor (gender) and criterion variables (extradyadic behaviors) should diminish after the potential mediator (sensation seeking) is controlled (*Baron & Kenny, 1986*). Based on the aforementioned relationships with gender and sexually risky behaviors, it is believed that the strength of the relationship between gender and sexual extradyadic behaviors will decrease or reduce completely when sensation seeking is controlled for. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to determine if, and to what degree, the strength of this relationship is moderated by sensation seeking.

1.2. Overview of the current research

The present study sought to determine if sensation seeking mediates the relationship between gender and intention to engage in sexual extradyadic behaviors in a college sample. Intention is investigated in this study because it is believed to be the immediate precursor of behavior (*Ajzen, 1985*). Based on previous research, it is expected that:

- H1. Men will report a greater intention to engage in a hypothetical sexual extradyadic behavior, in comparison to women.
- H2. Men will score higher on a sensation seeking measure, in comparison to women.
- H3. Individuals who score higher on a sensation seeking measure will be more likely to report an intention to engage in a

hypothetical sexual extradyadic behavior, in comparison to those who score lower on the sensation seeking measure.

H4. Sensation seeking will mediate the relationship between gender and intention to engage in a hypothetical sexual extradyadic behavior.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A sample of 174 ($n = 111$ women, $n = 61$ men, and $n = 2$ refused) university students was obtained from various undergraduate sociology courses at a Western university in the United States (median age = 19 years, range = 17–36). Of the total sample, 74 were in a committed relationship (i.e., dating one person exclusively, engaged, or married), while 97 were not (i.e., single or dating multiple people). The most prevalent ethnicity was Caucasian ($n = 113$, 67.3%), followed by Hispanic ($n = 20$, 11.9%), Multi-ethnic ($n = 12$, 7.1%), Asian ($n = 9$, 5.4%), African American ($n = 8$, 4.8%), Pacific Islander ($n = 4$, 2.4%), and American Indian ($n = 2$, 1.2%).

2.2. Procedure

Participants were recruited from classrooms in a manner consistent with the procedures for human subjects: potential participants were given a description of the study, assured of anonymity, and informed that participation was completely voluntary, they were permitted to withdraw from the study at any time, and could skip any questions that they would prefer not to answer. Participants were randomly given a questionnaire that contained one of two relationship scenarios (i.e., kiss or casual sex). After completing the following measures and demographic items, participants were fully debriefed and offered compensation (i.e., extra credit or research participation credit) at their instructor's discretion.

2.3. Materials

2.3.1. Scenario

Each questionnaire contained only one hypothetical scenario. The instructions at the top of the questionnaire directed participants to carefully read and imagine themselves in the presented scenario. For the kiss condition, the scenario stated: "You are in a committed romantic relationship. One night you and a friend go to a party without your significant other. While you are there, you are introduced to someone who you find really attractive. After talking and flirting all night, the attractive individual leans over to kiss you." In comparison, the scenario for the casual sex condition stated: "You are in a committed romantic relationship. One night you and a friend go to a party without your significant other. While you are there, you are introduced to someone who you find really attractive. After talking and flirting all night, the attractive individual asks you to go back to his or her room which you know will undoubtedly lead to casual sex."

2.3.2. Extradyadic intention

After reading the presented scenario, participants were asked to use a 7 point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) to respond to three statements: (1) "I expect to kiss (have casual sex) with the individual," (2) "I want to kiss (have casual sex) with the individual," and (3) "I intend to kiss (have casual sex) with the individual." In accordance with typical measures of behavioral intention (e.g., *Francis et al., 2004*), responses to the three questions were averaged to create an overall infidelity intention score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$).

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات