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Monotony in Monogamy:

A Study of Married Individuals Seeking to Have an Extramarital

Clint Smith, Rebekah Hall and Justin Daigle

McNeese State University

acts238boy@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Extramarital affairs have become a common occurrence in modern society. Many studies have pointed to the lack of variety in a relationship as a contributing factor to divorce and extramarital affairs (McCabe, 2004; Fair, 1978). This study examined the difference in desired life experiences of single individuals and attached (married) individuals who were seeking to have an affair using a dating website. Statistical tests indicate that there was a significant difference between the desired experiences of married and single individuals. After further testing, it was determined that the statistical differences were present in the single and attached (married) women but not the single and married (married) men. A possible explanation of this is that single women have different, greater expectations of a potential mate versus attached women who are seeking to have an affair. Also, the difference in means may be accounted for by the desires the woman feels are being fulfilled in the marriage.

Keywords: affairs, extramarital, marital status, gender, monotony

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INTRODUCTION

Today, extramarital affairs are shown on every television channel and, more often than not, play a role in the solving of every mystery in literature. Besides the fascination with affairs in the media, extramarital affairs have become a commonplace occurrence in modern society. Fair (1978) hypothesized that extramarital affairs occur because of a lack of variety in an individual's life which leads them to seek satisfaction from other lovers besides their spouse. Based on this hypothesis, individuals who desire to engage in an extramarital affair should desire to have more numerous and diverse experiences (sexual or otherwise) than those who are uncommitted (single). This is likely to occur because of the perception of repetition in a committed relationship and the resulting attempts to escape the perceived monotony. In addition, the Internet is playing a major role in modern extramarital affairs by allowing them to occur with greater anonymity and convenience than ever before.

How common are extramarital affairs? In one survey, 27.2% of first time married men and 22.9% of first-time married women were having an extramarital affair at the time of the survey. In another study, 32.9% of first-time married women had at least one affair during their married lives (Fair, 1978). The Internet is serving as a very capable medium for attempts to escape the perceived monotony of a committed relationship (Parker & Wampler, 2003). Cooper (1998) hypothesized that the unique medium of the internet offers an individual seeking an affair three distinct advantages. These advantages are access, affordability, and anonymity. These same "advantages" were adapted to explain the phenomenon of cybersexual addiction (Young, Griffin-Shelley, Cooper, O'Mara, & Buchanan, 2000). Young et al. (2000) calls this model the ACE model

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(anonymity, convenience, and escape). Parker and Wampler (2003) also point out that Internet sites run 24 hours a day and give an individual a perpetual opportunity to explore sexual interests. Married individuals can now meet other married individuals looking to have an affair via the internet with a few clicks of a mouse and without the fear of being caught by their spouse.

Mccabe (2004) hypothesized that unless relationships fulfill basic needs for intimacy and companionship then an individual is more likely to seek to escape or end the relationship. This is especially true for women. This is evidenced by the fact that in many countries the majority of divorces are initiated by women (Mccabe, 2004). Mccabe (2004) also pointed out that because humans are social creatures, they may seek to meet their need for intimacy and community at the expense of ending or escaping a perceived monotonous relationship. A single woman, on the other hand, may be more interested in fulfilling the basic biological responsibility of passing on her genetic code and settle for less experiential value in a mate (Mccabe, 2004).

METHOD

Participants

We examined 504 profiles from the dating website www.ashleymadison.com. These profiles consisted of attached women and men seeking to have an affair and single women and men seeking to meet mates. There were 128 single women and 115 attached (married) women's profiles involved in the study. Also, there were 128 single men and 133 attached (married) men's profiles involved in the study. Participants were all 18 years of age and older.

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Design

The researcher implemented a 2 x 2 (marital status versus gender) between-groups design for this study. Participants either were single women/men seeking mates or attached women/men seeking to have an affair. These constituted the independent (participant) variables for the study. The dependent variable was the amount of desired experiences listed in the “preferences and encounters open to” and “what I am looking for” sections of the individual’s profiles. These “desired experiences” ranged from sexual stimulation to travel and were very diverse in nature. We combined the numeric totals of items from each section to make a single score.

Procedure

First, one of the researchers created a profile on www.ashleymadison.com in order to view the profiles of members of the dating service. Next, the researcher used the search function in order to find attached (married) women who were looking to have an affair. The researcher then counted the number of desired experiences listed in the “preferences and encounters open to” and “what I am looking for” sections of each profile and combined the scores to make a single score. This process was repeated for single women who were looking for men. This procedure was repeated in order to find single and attached (married) men.

RESULTS

In an attempt to see if the mean amount of desired experiences for each group was significantly different, the researcher performed a two-factor, between-subjects ANOVA. We did this in order to determine if there were any significant differences between the

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participants based on marital status or gender. The results of the ANOVA ($F(1,500) = 4.77, p = .02$, partial eta squared = .009) showed that there was a statistical difference between the groups based on marital status and not gender. Next, the researcher performed an independent t -test. (The researcher issued an alpha level of .05 prior to performing any test.) The mean score of the single women was 23.98 ($SD = 12.44$), while the mean score of the attached (married) group was 20.56 ($SD = 10.95$). The difference between the means was 3.41 with single women desiring on average more experiences. The independent t -test produced a value ($t(241) = 2.25, p = .02$) which indicated that the difference between the means was statistically significant. Next, the researcher compared the male groups. The mean score for married men was 22.63 ($SD = 12.39$), while the mean score of single men was 24.07 ($SD = 13.7$). The difference between the means was 1.43 with single men desiring on average more experiences. The independent t -test produced a value ($t(259) = .89, p = .37$) which indicated that the difference between the means was not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The results went against the original working hypothesis of the study but seem to point towards an invisible hierarchy of desired experiences. This knowledge could be tested further and if the same pattern arises, then an inventory like the one used on the website could be useful in counseling to identify individuals who are at risk for having an affair. However, more study is needed on attached individuals and their desired experiences. While attached women may look to diversify and increase the amount of experiences they have, it may be very similar to the vision single women have of an ideal spouse. It could be that both groups are looking to have a variety of experiences. The

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types of desired experiences were similar for both groups. This is probably because of the limited amount of choices for each section. Research could be conducted on the desired experiences of satisfied married women as opposed to married women seeking an affair. The mediating effect of the Internet must also be studied. The Internet may be causing individuals to create an alternate reality where they believe that any type of experience is possible and the items listed as desired experiences may not be what the person truly wants (Parker & Wampler, 2003). It is possible that the difference in the means of the groups is an indirect measurement of the fulfillment that individuals feel in a monotonous relationship with women feeling that only some of their desires are being met while they desire much more.

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