Cheating in Relationships: Some Research

The probability of someone cheating during the course of a relationship varies between 40 and 76 percent. These numbers indicate that even if we get married with the best of intentions things don't always turn out the way we plan. The following studies don’t address all the issues but offer suggestions for further research and considerations. What causes people to take the risk of damaging ongoing, committed relationships and their families?

According to psychologists, people with avoidant attachment styles are individuals uncomfortable with intimacy and are therefore more likely to multiply sexual encounters and cheat. But this has never been proved scientifically, which is what Beaulieu-Pelletier attempted to do in a series of four studies.

The first study was conducted on 145 students with an average age of 23. Some 68 percent had thought about cheating and 41 percent had actually cheated. Sexual satisfaction aside, the results indicated a strong correlation between infidelity and people with an avoidant attachment style.

The second study was conducted on 270 adults with an average age of 27. About 54 percent had thought about cheating and 39 percent had actually cheated. But the correlation is the same: people with an avoidant attachment style are more likely to cheat.

Infidelity could be a regulatory emotional strategy used by people with an avoidant attachment style. The act of cheating helps them avoid commitment phobia, distances them from their partner, and helps them keep their space and freedom.

Both these studies were followed up by two other studies that asked about the motives for infidelity. The will to distance themselves from commitment and their partner was the number one reason cited.

The studies revealed no differences between men and women. Just as many men and women had an avoidant attachment style and the correlation with infidelity is just as strong on both sides. Contrary to popular belief, infidelity isn't more prevalent in men.

Another study explored how men and women perceive sexual and emotional infidelity. Results show that men felt sexual infidelity was more upsetting and women felt emotional infidelity was more upsetting. Monica T. Whitty and Laura-Lee Quigley of Queen’s University Belfast surveyed 112 undergraduate students and asked them questions about sexual and emotional infidelity.

When given the choice, men were more upset by sexual infidelity and women were more upset by emotional infidelity. Additionally, “men were more likely to believe that women have sex when in love and that women believe that men have sex even when they are not in love.

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