

A new study suggests that younger women are cheating on their husbands more than previously thought, though research of such taboo topics is difficult to measure.

In a new study, researchers from the University of Washington explored the recent increase in infidelity, and the changing makeup of the participants. A greater number of older men and younger women have reported being unfaithful than in earlier studies. However, historically, gauging responses in scientific studies of sensitive issues such as sexual behavior has proven to be a flawed science.

According to The New York Times, which cites the University of Washington's research, the number of young women who report engaging in extramarital sex is not much lower than that of men. The study reports that 20 percent of men and 15 percent of women under the age of 35 have cheated on their spouses, up from 15 percent and 12 percent respectively.

For respondents over age 60, researchers found that 28 percent of men and 15 percent of women have had affairs, numbers that have also risen since 1991, when they were 20 percent and 5 percent respectively.

The rise in infidelity among older people has been attributed to drugs like Viagra and estrogen, and even hip replacements, which increase peoples' sexual abilities, enabling them to be unfaithful. The ubiquity of pornography has also demonstrably affected individual attitudes about sex.

Perhaps the only thing that has changed about women's faithfulness is researchers' capacity to extract the truth. From an evolutionary perspective, Dr. Helen Fisher, a research professor of anthropology at Rutgers University, explains that there isn't any proof of differences in infidelity rates between the genders in hunter gatherer societies. She believes the perceived disparity today may be culturally induced. Fisher explained, "Men want to think women don't cheat, and women want men to think they don't cheat, and therefore the sexes have been playing a little psychological game with each other."

Others believe the reported increases in rates of infidelity are accurate and may be partly due to women's burgeoning roles outside the home, which include more opportunities to cheat via late nights at work and business trips. New technologies, such as e-mail, Internet chat rooms, and cell phones, also facilitate more intimate conversations. Dr. Frank Pittman, an Atlanta psychiatrist whose specialty is family and marriage, says he's seeing more affairs involving "electronic contact."

British researchers since the 1960s have found discrepancies in the reported number of sexual partners across genders. While British men claimed an average of 13 partners over their lifetimes, British women claimed to have had only nine. According to London Lite, the results suggest that either a large number of men were sleeping with foreign women or that respondents were lying. Although it was thought that men generally overstate their number of sexual partners and women underreport theirs, it seems, in this instance, women are more prone to lie.

In 2003, research gathered by scientists at Ohio University and the University of Maine, published in The Journal of Sex Research, found that women were more likely to lie about the number of sexual partners they'd had. The New Scientist reported that researchers questioned men and women, ages 18 to 25, using three different methods: a survey completed in private, a survey which had to be returned to an assistant, and an in-person interview where respondents were attached to what they were told was a lie detector. On the private survey, women reported an average of 3.4 partners as opposed to 2.6 partners when they had to return surveys to an assistant. When hooked to the alleged polygraph, women reported having 4.4 sexual partners, significantly higher than when they did not fear being

caught in a lie.

The differences in men's responses among the three survey methods were not considered statistically significant. They varied from 3.7 to 4.2. Terri Fisher of Ohio State University told the New Scientist, "We live in a culture that really does expect a different pattern of sexual behavior from women than it does from men."