

# Effect of Communication on Infidelity within Romantic Relationships among College Students

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## Introduction

In 2009, PGA professional golfer, Tiger Woods, made the national headlines when his wife, Elin Nordegren, discovered his extensive record of infidelities (Callahan, 2013). This astonishing news opened society's eyes to the commonality, personal, and emotional effects of cheating on a romantic partner. In this century, romantic infidelity has become a common dispute among romantic partners. With the help of modern technology, cheating has been made easier with social media and text messaging playing a major role in everyday life. Infidelity is defined as involvement that violates the commitment norms or rules of an exclusive romantic relationship. It can be broken into three categories: sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity and combined-type infidelity (Weiser & Weigel, 2014). There is a lack of research about communication and relationship maintenance styles within romantic relationships and the direct correlation to infidelity. Approximately 75% of male and 68% of female college-aged students admitted to participating in some form of infidelity, while nearly all adult Americans

expect monogamy in their romantic or intimate relationships (Gibson, Thompson & O'Sullivan, 2016). We can easily conclude that infidelity is a subject that deserves the extensive amount of attention from scholars due to the alarmingly high rates. Most people have their own unique expectations regarding activities that are or are not acceptable to participate in while in a committed relationship (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). According to Walters and Burger (2013), despite strong social disapproval, infidelity is common within marriages and romantic relationships because of what is understood as "hookup culture"—brief uncommitted sexual encounters among individuals who are not romantic partners or dating each other. Cheating in a relationship can lead to singleparent homes and emotionally uninvolved people. By studying the effects of communication styles on the rates of infidelity, it can have a big impression on society by helping those in a romantic relationship understand how communication with their companions can lead to infidelity, which can lower the rate of single-parent homes, emotionally unhappy people and unhappy marriages. The results of this study

will provide insight into how individuals communicate within romantic relationships in the United States. It could also potentially have major implications in the field of education and relationship counseling. By knowing this, it can help individuals understand the emotional and physical effect of their words upon their loved ones. Specifically, this information will be relevant to those working with college students in various settings such as universities, doctor's offices, and counseling centers. Furthermore, this inquiry will be relevant to college students who are in committed, monogamous romantic relationships that may be put into situations where they find it easy to commit adultery. For example, working with their peers in close intimate settings or spending alone time with friends of their sexual preference can be enticing and lead to someone make bad decisions such as cheating on a partner. The next section will review existing studies on communication styles. Specifically, it will explore its definitions and implications, romantic relationships, and infidelity as a field of research. It will provide insight into the field of human communication within romantic relationships by helping people discover more about their romantic communication styles as young adults.

### **Review of Literature**

*Communication and Romantic Relationships*  
Communication plays a vital role in the maintenance of relationships, especially romantic relationships. The way two people communicate is a large determining factor of relationship satisfaction. Communication is often defined as the act of transferring information from one person or place to another. The field of communication is broken into three main categories: verbal, nonverbal, and written communication. Verbal communication is the use of sound or words to send and receive messages. This can

take place either face to face or over-mediated channels, such as text message, telephone calls or even sign language. Nonverbal communication includes body language, gestures, and fashion. The use of written communication is used in romantic relations for a variety of reasons. From marriage licenses to love letters, written communication is helpful in formalizing and establishing the legitimacy of a relationship. Without communication, we as humans, cannot form and maintain meaningful relationships. Communication is not one-sided, it requires two separate parties to complete the circuit.

### *Infidelity*

To explore the influence of communication on infidelity, we must first understand the complex definition of the topic as well as the lack of universality of this term. The definition of infidelity has been a controversial topic of many scholarly publications for over 20 years. According to Moller & Vossler (2015), the most commonly used definitions can be categorized into three main parts: infidelity as sexual intercourse, infidelity as extradyadic sexual activities and infidelity as an emotional betrayal. The lack of official definition can be potentially problematic. Various research studies about infidelity have used their own definition, making the comparison of data and results difficult. If researcher and participant do not share the same view of infidelity, it can alter the data and give and produce inaccurate results for the study. For example, a study revealed that one-third of college-aged students did not label another person as a sexual partner even though they had performed oral sex on the individual (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). Reviewing this literature leads back to the question: "how does communication variation affect the rates of infidelity among college students?" Analyzing both

communication and relationship satisfaction are essential to furthering the conversation that communication scholars are creating to understand these unique situations. The way people interact, verbally, and nonverbally, may predict, or even cause, the epidemic of cheating in the United States. The purpose of the following study will be to investigate the correlation between different communication patterns and infidelity rates among young adults. Specifically, I will be exploring efficiency, avoidance, dismissiveness, and manipulative communication strategies and its relationship to satisfaction and infidelity or cheating in romantic relationships among college students. It is hypothesized that efficiency and positive communication within romantic partners is a strong predictor of low levels of relationship dissatisfaction which, in return, leads to low rates of infidelity. In parallel, negative forms of communication, such as dismissive, manipulative, and avoidance will show to be a significant factor in relationship satisfaction and effect the rise in infidelity rates. To conduct this study, I will use a quantitative method of research would be most appropriate in formulating an answer to the proposed research hypotheses. The literature on related topics suggests that quantitative methods have previously been effective when studying general relationship satisfaction and assessing communication styles. Quantitative researchers emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a phenomenon (Babbie, 2010). By using a positivist approach, the research will be focused on gaining knowledge using scientific methods of inquiry. The nature of the methods within this approach is structured and analysis of the resultant data is generally achieved using deductive reasoning.

## **Methodology**

### *Sampling Methods*

To begin this study, participants will be recruited using random sampling. This method assures a diverse group of participants as well as leads to the nature of the population being defined and giving all members an equal chance of selection (Marshall, 1996). Participants will be required to be between 18-24 years of age and enrolled in an accredited college or university. Procedure Participants will be recruited from the 14 PASSHE schools (Millersville University, Bloomsburg University, California University of PA, Cheyney University, Clarion University, East Stroudsburg University, Edinboro University, Indiana University of PA, Kutztown University, Lock Haven University, Mansfield University, Shippensburg University, Slippery Rock University, and West Chester University). Upon approval from communication department of these accredited universities, a mass email will be sent out to all full-time and part-time student that includes a link to a two-part online survey that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. The email will explain that the information collected during this survey will aid in conducting a research project to better understand the causes of infidelity in romantic relationships. It will also include a disclaimer that all responses will be kept anonymous and personal information such as name and email will be used to only as an entrance to the raffle. Students who chose to participate in the study will be eligible to enter to win a \$25 gift card. A winner will be selected from each school.

## **Conclusion**

Communication is a fundamental item in the perpetuation of relationships. Not only is communication important, there are also many ways individuals can choose to communicate with one another. In this

century, romantic infidelity has become a common dispute among romantic partners. Romantic infidelity occurs when a person feels love and affection for both their spouse and another person or a person having a low emotional attachment to their current spouse and develop romantic feelings for another person, even while maintaining their marriage or current relationship to make things work (Types of Infidelity, 2015).

Learning more about how individuals communicate within romantic relationships will aid in lowering the rate of divorce in the United States. It could also potentially have major implications in the fields of education and counseling. By knowing this, it can help individuals understand the emotional and physical effect of their words upon their loved ones.

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