

## **Introduction**

### *Introduction*

In the past, women have been taught to take care of their husbands and remain faithful while men are brought up with the idea that having sexual relations with many women is a form of masculinity. These differences in attitudes shape the feelings and values of both men and women. These differences that men and women possess are likely to have an impact on the growing problem of infidelity in marriages. Since infidelity is a very “personal” subject between couples, it is interesting to find out which gender has stronger opinions of how wrong extramarital sex is. Also, the subject’s current marital status is important to control for because it could have an influence on the subject’s attitudes. For example, divorcees may feel that extramarital sex is always wrong especially if the marriage ended due to infidelity on the spouse’s part, or subjects who are not married and not tied down may feel that infidelity is never wrong. I want to see if there is a relationship between gender and attitudes towards a married man or woman having sexual relations with anyone other than his or her spouse. I will control for current marital status to make sure that the gender differences for opinions of infidelity are not influenced by current marriage or divorce. By researching this data, I will see if these gender biases shape the opinions of males and females when accounting for their opinion of extramarital affairs. This leads me to believe that the relationship between the two variables will show that women are more likely to feel that extramarital sex is wrong than men.

## *Literature Review*

In a thorough literature review, it appears that no studies have been published that test the dependent variable of opinions of extramarital sex, but many test the actual occurrence of infidelity. These articles should be noted because behavior may in fact reflect the attitudes that people hold. In the article *Is Infidelity a Cause or a Consequence of Poor Marital Quality?* (Amato 2004) a study is performed to determine if extramarital sex causes or is a consequence of both marital happiness and divorce proneness. The study seeks to prove what effects infidelity, marital happiness, and divorce proneness have on divorce. The results show that divorce proneness, whether or not a couple has spoken of getting a divorce, predicted whether extramarital sex occurred in a relationship. Marital happiness was not a significant predictor of infidelity within a relationship. Marital happiness in 1980 predicted marital happiness again in 1983. This shows a high level of stability for happiness within a marriage. Extramarital sex seems to be a consequence of divorce proneness. This study shows that the more a couple speaks about getting a divorce, the chances of infidelity increase. This study leads me to question whether or not divorce proneness could influence the way subjects rate their feelings of infidelity as well.

The study in the article *Sexual Infidelity Among Married and Cohabiting Americans* (Giesen 2000), seeks to prove whether or not a greater interest in sex is associated with a greater likelihood of infidelity. The study also asks if having more previous sexual partners is associated with a greater likelihood of infidelity and if cohabitation is associated with a greater likelihood of infidelity. Although the study did

not deal directly with the subjects' opinions, it is necessary to look at sexual behavior because it may influence attitudes. The results include that both married and cohabitating couples held similarly high expectations for sexual exclusivity. Greater interest in sex was positively associated with the likelihood of infidelity. Prior sexual partners, and work-place opportunities were statistically insignificant. The finding that is most important to my study is that being male increased the odds for engaging in extramarital sex by 79%. Since sex had such a large effect on engaging in extramarital affairs, it may be that sex will have the same effect on the opinions of extramarital affairs.

A study entitled *Managing Infidelity: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Buckmaster 2002) asks how do women and men respond to sexual betrayal cross culturally. The study found that in each culture, both women and men were equally concerned with monitoring and managing a mate's sexual affairs. Men and women were equally likely to use self-help tactics, taking the problem over themselves, without regard to culture. There is a positive relationship between social complexity and the frequency in which men and women appeal to higher authority, courts, therapy, etc. In stratified societies, men appeal to a higher authority more than men in egalitarian societies do. However although significantly less than men in both, women appeal to higher authorities more in stratified societies than in egalitarian societies. This study brings to my attention differences in the ways that both males and females view and handle marriage. This study shows how different cultures vary equally. The finding that is most interesting to me is that in all cultures, both sexes were equally concerned with managing the affairs of their spouse. This could make the attitudes very similar; however the gender differences could make attitudes very diverse.

After reviewing each study, I have decided to study the relationship between males and females and attitudes of extramarital sex. Even though each study has proven that women are less likely to engage in extramarital sex than men, males' and females' attitudes have not yet been studied. I will find out if attitudes towards extramarital sex can be predicted by sex. I will test for current marital status, to see if it has a significant impact on the results. Being either currently married or widowed, separated or divorced, or never married could have a significant impact on the original relationship. For example, a low rating such as marital infidelity is never wrong may be high for those who are never married because these people may have the current mentality for not being locked down. Extremely high and extreme low ratings could come from those who are divorced because the person who committed the infidelity may not think it was as wrong as the person who was the victim of infidelity. According to the findings by Amato, if a couple is more likely to have talked about divorce or to be separated, it is more likely that that marriage will contain infidelity. By using the information from this article, if infidelity was committed in a relationship, the subject's attitude about infidelity may be more extreme in either direction depending on if the subject committed the affair or was the victim to it.

## **Methods**

### *Theory, Hypothesis, Variables*

I will see if attitudes of extramarital affairs can reflect the behavior of extramarital affairs. The above studies have proven that females commit less extramarital sex than male. Could this mean that women feel more strongly towards extramarital sex than do men? My theory is gender is related to opinion of extramarital sex. My formal

hypothesis is that women are more likely to feel that extramarital sex is wrong than men. I am going to control for current marital status. Data was collected from the 2000 data of the General Social Survey, a representative sample of the US population. Gender is the independent variable and opinion of extramarital sex is the dependent variable. The test variable is current marital status and it is intervening. These variables will be compared in order to explain the different variations in opinions towards extramarital affairs. I will see if the differences in gender have an effect on the attitudes of both males and females.

### *Conceptualization*

To conceptualize the independent variable, gender, I am measuring if the subject is biologically a male or a female. To conceptualize the opinions of my dependent variable, opinions of extramarital sex, I will measure exactly how strongly the subject feels towards the issue of a male or female having sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse. To conceptualize the test variable, current marital status, I am going to measure if a person is currently married or divorced or has never been married. This relationship will measure the correlation between the two variables and give insight to the growing problem of infidelity. By knowing the degree in which a person feels about this issue, we can tell which sex is more likely to possibly commit, overlook, or become victim to spousal affairs.

### *Operationalization*

To operationalize the variable of gender, respondents were coded either 1 for male or 2 for female. This is listed in the General Social Survey under “sex”. To operationalize the dependent variable, attitudes of extramarital sex, the question was asked “What is your opinion of a married person having sexual relations with someone

other than the marriage partner?" The responses are 1 for "always wrong", 2 for "almost always wrong", a 3 for "sometime wrong", and a 4 for "not wrong at all". This can be found under the listing of "xmarsex" in the GSS. To operationalize the test variable, marital status, the question "What is your current marital status?" was asked. The responses were coded: 1 for "married", 2 for "widowed", 3 for "divorced", 4 for "separated", and 5 for "never married". However, I put the "married" and "widowed" responses together because widowed is very similar to currently married in that the couple was married before the death of the spouse. I also put the "divorced" and the "separated" respondents into the same category because both categories are very similar in state or current turmoil or problems in the marriage. I coded these new groups as 1 for "married/widowed", 2 for "divorced/separated", and 3 for "never married". These groups were put together to show the distinction between the more extreme groups.

## **Analysis**

### *Univariate Statistics*

According to Figure 1, approximately 45% of the respondents were male and 55% were female. Figure 2 shows that almost 80% of the respondents say that extramarital sex is "always wrong", over 10% say that extramarital sex is "almost always wrong", about 7% say that it is "sometimes wrong", and only 3% say it is "not wrong at all". The data in figure 3 shows that 55% of respondents are either married or widowed and 20% of respondents are either separated or divorced. 25% are never married.

### *Bivariate Statistics*

The results in Table 1 support the hypothesis that women are more likely to feel that extramarital sex is wrong than men. The distinction is largest and significant at the

extreme “always wrong” category. About 82% of women say extramarital affairs are “always wrong” as compared to only 76% of men. A lesser difference is at the extreme opposite category. 2% of women say that extramarital sex is “not wrong at all” compared to 3% of men. Both sex’s percentages as well as the category’s percentages are very low indicating that neither sex believes that extramarital sex is “never wrong”. Men also outnumber the women in the less extreme categories of “almost always wrong” and “sometimes wrong”. This is because men do not feel as strongly as women when it comes to extramarital sex and they put themselves in a lesser extreme category.

#### *Trivariate Statistics*

According to the trivariate table, married women are more likely to think that extramarital sex is “always wrong” than married men. 86% of married women think that extramarital sex is “always wrong” compared to 82% of men. 76% of separated/divorced women think that extramarital sex is wrong compared to 75% of men. However, the difference is not significant in both the married/widowed and divorced/separated group. The largest significant difference is between never married men and women. 79% of never married women think that extramarital sex is “always wrong” compared to 66% of men. The “not wrong at all” category actually shows the more variability than every other category. Although this category receives the least amount of responses, it is important to note that 7% of divorced/separated men rank sex to be “not wrong at all” where as only 4% of women rank it the same.

Once I controlled for marital status, the relationship is specified. In Table 1, the differences between both genders are statistically significant with a p value of 0.02. However, in Table 2 only the difference between never married males and females is

significant ( $p=0.03$ ). Both the values for married/widowed ( $p=0.38$ ) and divorced/separated ( $p=0.31$ ) were not significant enough to support the hypothesis within categories of the test variable. This causes the relationship to be split.

## **Conclusion**

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Gender has a significant effect on attitudes of extramarital affairs, however the same does not hold true within categories of marital status. In Table 1, there is a very significant difference between males and females who view extramarital sex as “always wrong”. A reason for this large gap may have to do the different sexual values boy and girls are taught when they are young. Men are respected for having sex with as many girls as possible and women are looked down upon for the same acts. This may influence the ways men and women respond when asked this question. Another reason for this difference could be that women are more likely to be the victims of extramarital sex so they have a greater fear of it. This fear could cause the high responses of “always wrong” compared to the significantly lower responses of men.

In Table 2, the only significant difference was for both sexes who were never married. Men who are never married may be less likely to feel as strongly against extramarital sex for many reasons. One may be that men were brought up with an importance on being promiscuous and sexually active with many girls. Men who have never married in particular may feel an even more strongly with this idea because they may have the current mentality for not being locked down. These men may have never married because of a current “single guy” mentality where they could not see themselves remaining faithful or ever marrying. The also because these men are not married it is

likely that they are not in a situation where loyalty and infidelity could be a serious issue, and therefore mark lower than married/widowed or divorced/separated. Perhaps a reason why the difference of males and females in the other groups, married/widowed and divorced/separated, are too close to call is that marriage brings with it a set of values. These values, such as allegiance, faithfulness, and loyalty, are not as clear to those who have never been in such a bond.

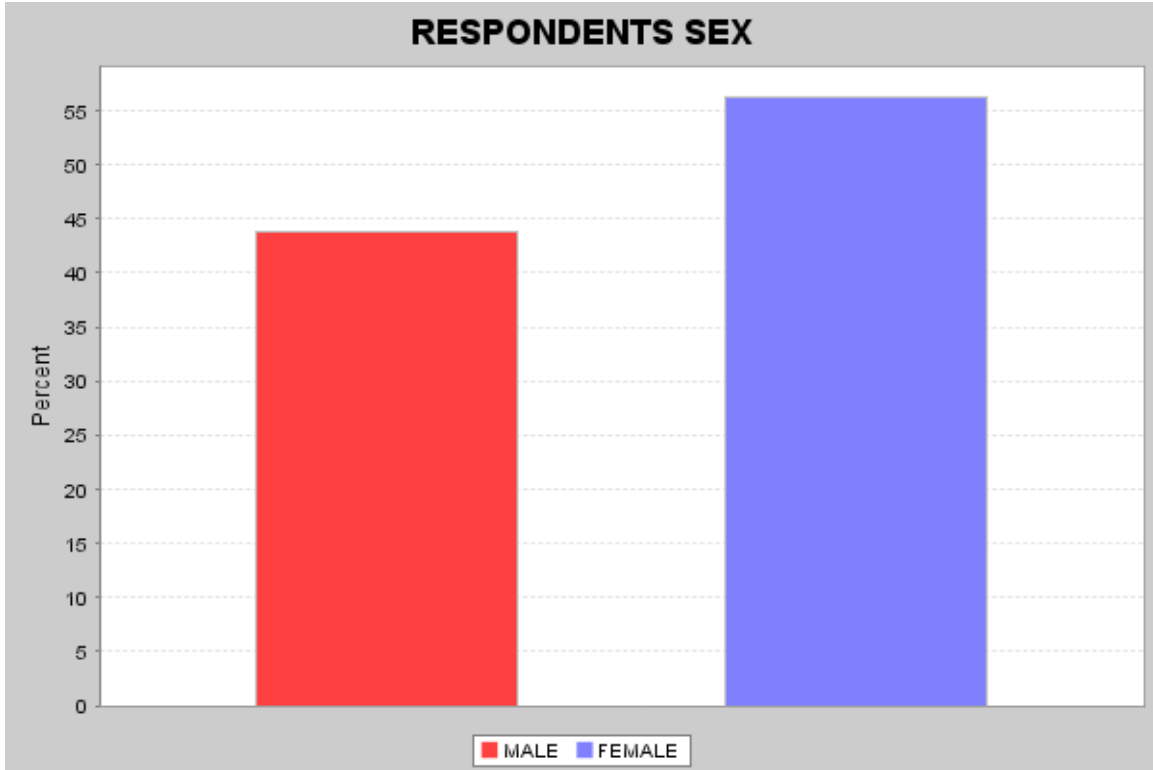
The link between attitudes of extramarital affairs and gender is a very important one. Previous research has proved that gender has an effect on who commits infidelity (Gieson 2000). It is important to know if there is a link between behavior and attitudes. If males are more likely to commit extramarital affairs, than they should also hold the opinion that extramarital affairs are “not always wrong”. This study may have proven that males hold the opinion of extramarital sex being “always wrong” more so than women in the bivariate table, but more research should be done to see if there is a link.

#### *Further Research*

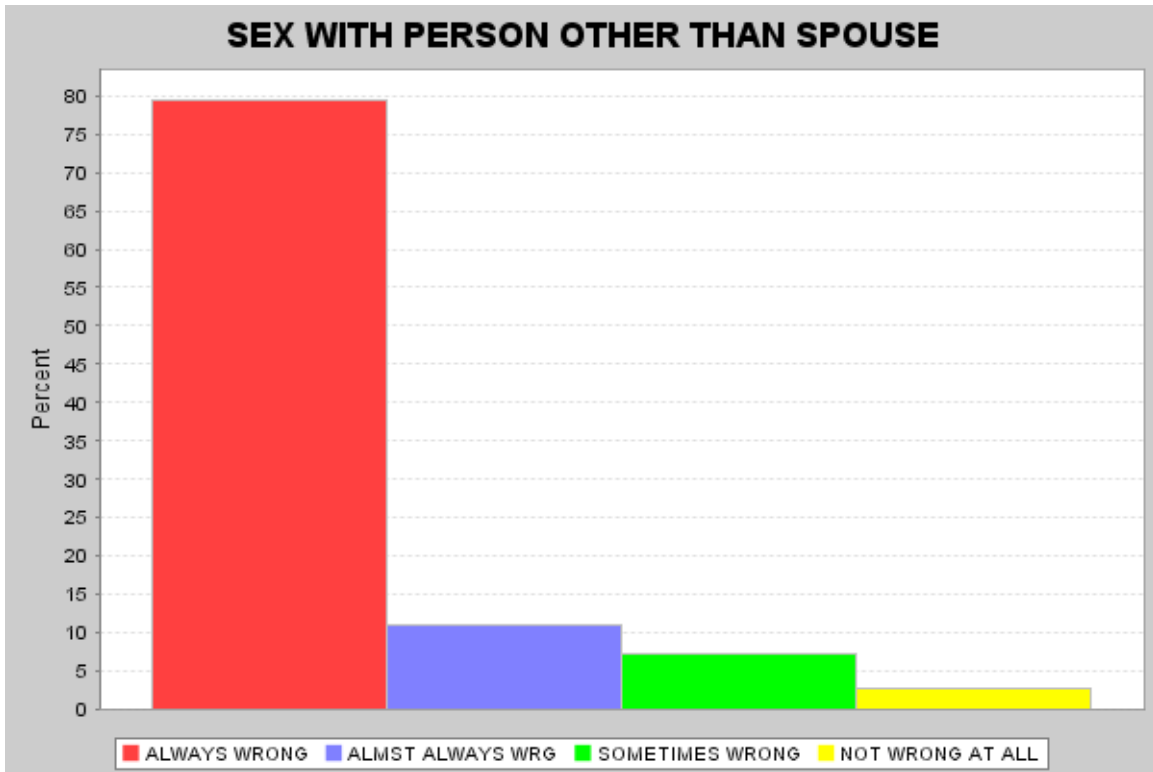
Other research that could further this study would be to see if there are any links that could make a marriage more likely to suffer from infidelity. One relationship that should be tested is the length of courtship. It is important to discover if the amount of time a couple dates for could be related to possibility of infidelity. I would predict that the longer the courtship the less likely the occurrence of infidelity. Another relationship that should be tested for is occurrence of infidelity in courtship compared with marriage. Is the old saying true “once a cheater, always a cheater” or is it possible for people to mature out of, or find love strong enough to eliminate infidelity out of a relationship. It is important to study what leads to infidelity or attitudes of infidelity because of the large

effect it has on both marital happiness and individual happiness of every victim and deceiver.

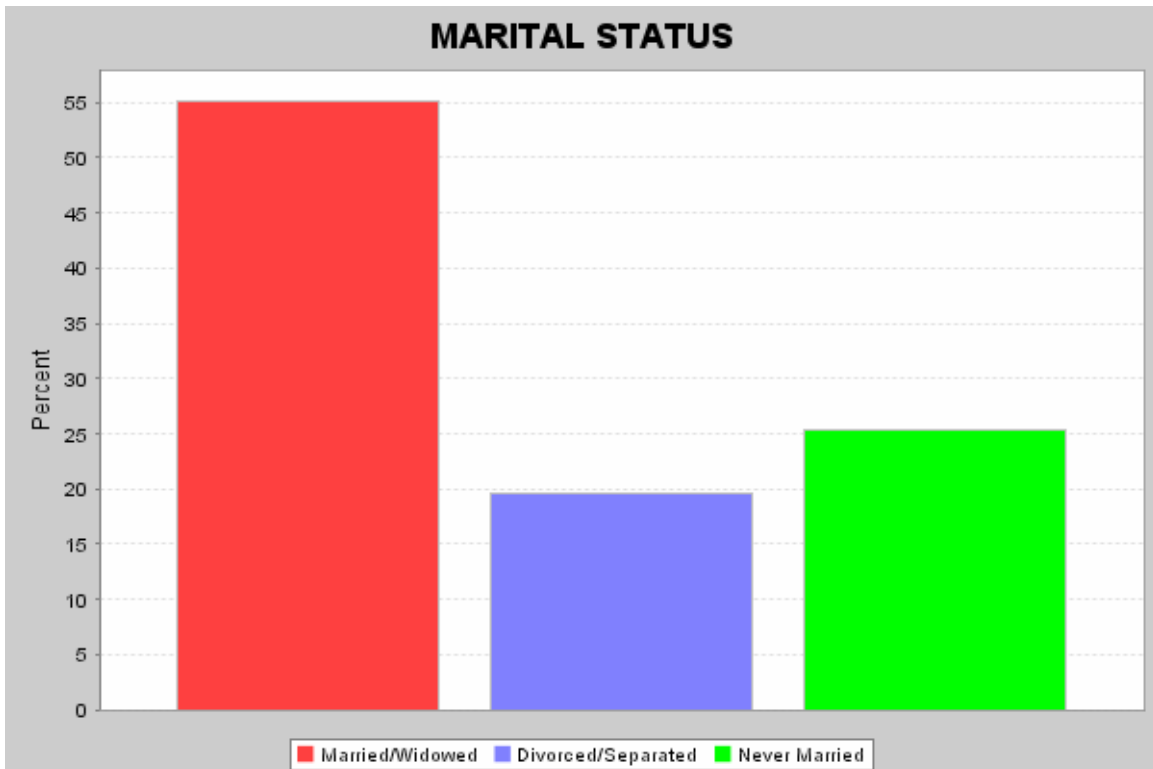
**FIGURE 1**



**FIGURE 2**



**FIGURE 3**



**TABLE 1** Percentage of individuals' attitudes on extramarital affairs by sex

<u>Opinion of Extramarital Affairs</u>	<u>Sex</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Always Wrong	76.1	82.0
Almost Always Wrong	12.2	9.8
Sometimes Wrong	8.7	5.9
Not Wrong At All	3.0	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0
N	805	1,018

$X^2 (P) = 10.10 = p = 0.02$   
*General Social Survey, 2000*

**TABLE 2** Percentage of individuals' attitudes on extramarital affairs by marital status by sex

<u>Opinion of Extramarital Affairs</u>	<u>Sex</u>					
	<u>Male</u>			<u>Female</u>		
	<u>Married/Widowed</u>	<u>Divorced/Separated</u>	<u>Never Married</u>	<u>Married/Widowed</u>	<u>Divorced/Separated</u>	<u>Never Married</u>
Always Wrong	82.2	74.5	66.1	85.8	75.6	78.5
Almost Always Wrong	10.7	8.5	17.4	8.7	12.7	10.0
Sometimes Wrong	5.9	9.8	13.4	4.2	7.7	8.7
Not Wrong At All	1.2	7.2	3.5	1.4	4.1	2.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	421	153	230	578	221	219

Married/Widowed  $X^2 (P) = 3.10 = p = 0.38$   
 Divorced/Separated  $X^2 (P) = 3.56 = p = 0.31$   
 Never Married  $X^2 (P) = 8.95 = p = 0.03$   
*General Social Survey, 2000*

## Reference

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