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Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 2006; 37; 359
DOI: 10.1177/0022022106288474

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SEX DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSE TO SEXUAL AND EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY AMONG SPANISH AND CHILEAN STUDENTS

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This study evaluates sex differences in response to sexual and emotional infidelity in two Spanish-speaking samples. An extension of previous findings with Anglo, European, and Asian students leads to the prediction that men report being more distressed by sexual than by emotional infidelity, and women report the reverse. Five hundred and eleven students from Spain and Chile respond to a questionnaire consisting of forced-choice-scenarios. Significant sex differences in jealousy as a function of type of infidelity emerges and this is consistent with previous research on jealousy.

Keywords: evolutionary psychology; jealousy; sexual infidelity; emotional infidelity; forced-choice methodology

In the present article, we evaluate the extension of findings from an evolutionary psychological perspective to describe sexual differences regarding the subjective experience of jealousy in two Spanish-speaking samples. In addition, we conducted the research using a combination of several different methodological variations derived from the original forced-choice scenarios developed by Buss, Larsen, Westen, and Semmelroth (1992), obtaining a single measure of the combined situations of distress toward sexual and emotional infidelity that have been developed in this area.

Jealousy has been defined as an emotional reaction to the loss of a valued relationship (Buss et al., 1992). However, according to research in evolutionary psychology, jealousy has been particularly triggered by different kinds of infidelity situations that are sex specific. For women, it is the loss of emotional involvement that would particularly lead to jealousy, whereas for men, jealousy would be experienced by a loss of sexual exclusivity. Buss and Schmitt (1993) indicated that there are distinctive ways in which men and women respond to the demands of mating, which are as predictable as a function of biological sex. Therefore, in the present article, we only address sexual differences in response to jealousy and do not address the possible implications that sexual orientation and/or a gender approach may have in this context.

Previous cross-cultural research and between-country studies found that there are sex differences in response to sexual and emotional infidelity. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1953)
informed that more than 50% of American men and less than 25% of American women reported that sexual infidelity had been the cause of their divorce. Specific hypothesis about the kind of infidelity that would be more distressing for men and women were confirmed by Buss et al. (1992) with an American college sample using paper-and-pencil assessments and physiological responses measuring hypothetical infidelity scenarios. The same results, using a forced-choice self-report technique, are described on other Caucasian American samples (Buss et al., 1999; Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid, & Buss, 1996); African Americans (Abraham, Cramer, Fernández, & Mahler, 2002); and foreign samples from countries such as Germany, the Netherlands (Buunk et al., 1996; Schützwohl, 2004); and Korea, and Japan (Buss et al., 1999).

In Spanish-speaking countries, research on jealousy is scarce. A few studies have been conducted in Spain: one exploring social knowledge of jealousy (Carrera & Garcia, 1996) and another study exploring jealous reactions as a function of rival characteristics (García, Gomez, & Canto, 2001). Similarly, in Argentina, Casullo and Fernández (2003) have investigated jealousy in sexual relationships and the conceptions of love in romantic relationships (Casullo, Fernández, & Cayssuals, 2003).

Research with Spanish-speaking samples seems to support the universal features of sex differences in mating psychology, which are consistent with an evolutionary perspective of jealousy. Thus, women seem to be more concerned about the emotional aspects of mating, and men seem more concerned about the sexual aspects of their mating relationships. Unfortunately, research on jealousy, including Spanish-speaking samples, is limited. Only one preliminary investigation replicated Buss et al.’s (1992) findings, reporting that Chilean students demonstrated that sexual infidelity was a stronger cue to jealousy in men, whereas emotional infidelity was a stronger cue to jealousy in women (Fernández, Olcay, Castro, Escobar, & Fuentes, 2003).

In the present research, we tested the extension of evolutionary predictions on sexual asymmetries in response to different jealousy scenarios in Spanish-speaking samples from Chile and Spain. We used college students as a way to compare our results with previous research in jealousy across countries (Abraham et al., 2002; Buss et al., 1999; Buunk et al., 1996; Schützwohl, 2004). This could be unadvisable if we consider that students are not always representative of the general population. However, previous cross-cultural research has well thought-out some advantages of working with student samples (McCrae, Terracciano, & 78 members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005; Paez & Vergara, 2000), because they tend to be more comparable cross-culturally and across countries (especially if we intend to validate the extension of previous research with English-speaking students) and also because they are similar in age, education, values, and positive disposition to participate in research.

Specifically, we expected to find sexual differences in the amount of distress reported in response to sexual and emotional infidelity in the context of a committed relationship clearly defined by the participant’s sex. Second, we expected to replicate this finding in both Spanish-speaking countries based on the extensions of previous research in this area.

METHOD

Participants were 511 students selected from public and private universities in Chile (129 women and 107 men) and Spain (142 women and 133 men), who answered the questionnaire during regular classes in the winter semester. The mean age for Spanish participants was 22.61 years ($SD = 3.36$), and the mean age for Chilean participants was 21.20 years ($SD = 2.46$).
PROCEDURE

In both countries, the samples were voluntarily drawn, and participation in the study was not rewarded. Participants were recruited collectively by a researcher and asked to complete the questionnaire in a classroom setting. Students received a questionnaire with an informed consent form, stating that they were asked to complete a voluntary and anonymous survey about different relationship situations. They then completed a demographic survey and were asked to answer the questions individually. The instructions asked participants to think of or imagine a committed relationship in which they discovered that their partner became interested in someone else. Then they had to indicate which one of the following scenarios (A or B) was most distressing:

Scenario 1
A. Imagining your partner forming a deep emotional attachment to that person
B. Imagining your partner enjoying a passionate sexual encounter with that person

Scenario 2
A. Imagining your partner trying different sexual positions with that other person
B. Imagining your partner falling in love with that other person (original questions by Buss et al., 1992)

The third and fourth scenarios presented situations that pointed exclusively to one type of infidelity but not the other (“imagining your partner had sex with that person with no chance of forming a deep emotional attachment”; for the reverse, see Buss et al., 1999). In the fifth scenario, the infidelities were mutually exclusive too, but they involved a former partner; and in the sixth scenario the sexual infidelity involved “a one night stand” with no chance of future involvement of any kind, and “a deep emotional attachment” with no chance of sex ever occurring. In the last scenario, participants were told that their partner “had formed a deep emotional attachment and also had sex with someone else.” Then they were asked to indicate “which aspect of the infidelity (A or B) was most distressing:

Scenario 1
A. The fact of having sex with the other person, or
B. The deep emotional attachment to the other person (see Fernández, 2000, for the development of the fifth, sixth, and seventh scenarios)

RESULTS

The stability of participants’ responses across the infidelity scenarios, adding up to a total score of sexual and emotional infidelity distress, showed an acceptable internal consistency of the measure across the sexual infidelity situations (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.830$) and the emotional infidelity situations (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.801$).

A 2 (sex: Men and Women) × 2 (country: Chile and Spain) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on both Infidelity subscales (Sexual and Emotional). A significant effect of participants’ sex on sexual infidelity emerged, $F(1,509) = 50.61, p < .000, \eta^2 = 0.56$. More men ($M = 3.24, SD = 2.40$) than women ($M = 1.84, SD = 2.04$) reported higher distress to sexual than to emotional infidelity. Emotional infidelity was also significantly affected by the sex of the participant, $F(1,509) = 53.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.80$. More women ($M = 5.21, SD = 2.09$) than men ($M = 3.76, SD = 2.40$) reported higher distress to emotional infidelity over sexual infidelity (see Figure 1).
No significant effects of country of origin on infidelity choice emerged ($F$'s < 3.5, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2$s < 0.10). People from Chile ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 2.45$) and Spain ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 2.21$) showed similar patterns of distress to sexual infidelity. Chilean ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 2.45$) and Spanish participants ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 2.26$) had similar emotional infidelity patterns.

**DISCUSSION**

In the present research, previous evidence of sex differences in response to hypothetical sexual and emotional infidelity scenarios were replicated in the context of committed relationships with Spanish-speaking students from Chile and Spain. Respondents’ sex in both countries was related to the amount of distress reported across the infidelity scenarios. Overall, men, more so than women, found that sexual infidelity was more distressing than emotional infidelity situations. Similarly, more women than men reported higher distress to sexual infidelity over emotional infidelity. These results are consistent with an evolutionary approach of jealousy and previous research conducted in European, American, and Asian countries.
Although people from Spain had previously reported more egalitarian mating preferences than other cultures (Buss, 1990), the results of the present study suggest that students from this country are very similar to students from elsewhere in their responses to hypothetical sexual infidelity situations.

Our results are consistent with other studies of Spanish-Speaking samples concerning the sexual fantasies of men and women (Sierra, Ortega, Martín-Ortiz, & Vera-Villarroel, 2004) in which comparable results to American findings with English-speaking samples were extensive to Spain and Chile.

Current research on personality and sexuality among nations has reported universal patterns of personality traits (McCrae et al., 2005), adult romantic attachment (Schmitt & the International Sexuality Description Project, 2004), and sex differences in the desire for sexual variety (Schmitt & the International Sexuality Description Project, 2003) that seem to support the universal perspective proposed by evolutionary psychology to explain sex differences in mating behavior. Nevertheless, some critics of this position have also attributed this pattern of results to artifacts of a forced-choice method or sociocultural variables that influence sexual behavior (DeSteno, Bartlett, Braverman, & Salovey, 2002; DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris, 2004; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996). However, our measure of distress applied to jealousy addressed most of the possible critics from this perspective, and combined different scenarios added up the possible effects of different ways of presenting the infidelity situations.

The results of the present research do not solve most of the theoretical criticisms to an evolutionary approach of jealousy, because this was not intended in the study. Yet the infidelity scenarios that constituted the measure in the present research were developed by Buss et al. (1999) and were extended by Fernández (2000) and Abraham et al. (2002) in response to some of the critics to an evolutionary approach to jealousy. Indeed, our results support the extension of the findings in Anglo, European, and Asian countries to Latin American and European Spanish-speaking samples. Therefore, we provide information in the line of Buss and Schmitt’s (1993) approach to jealousy regarding the response of Spanish and Chilean college students to different jealousy scenarios. And we aggregated in a single measure each infidelity type, which has not been reported elsewhere.

Finally, restrictions to generalization provided by small samples of the student population may be a methodological weakness of the present research and most studies in this line. The need of further investigations, with a larger and more representative sample of the whole population, is addressed for future research in this area.

REFERENCES


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