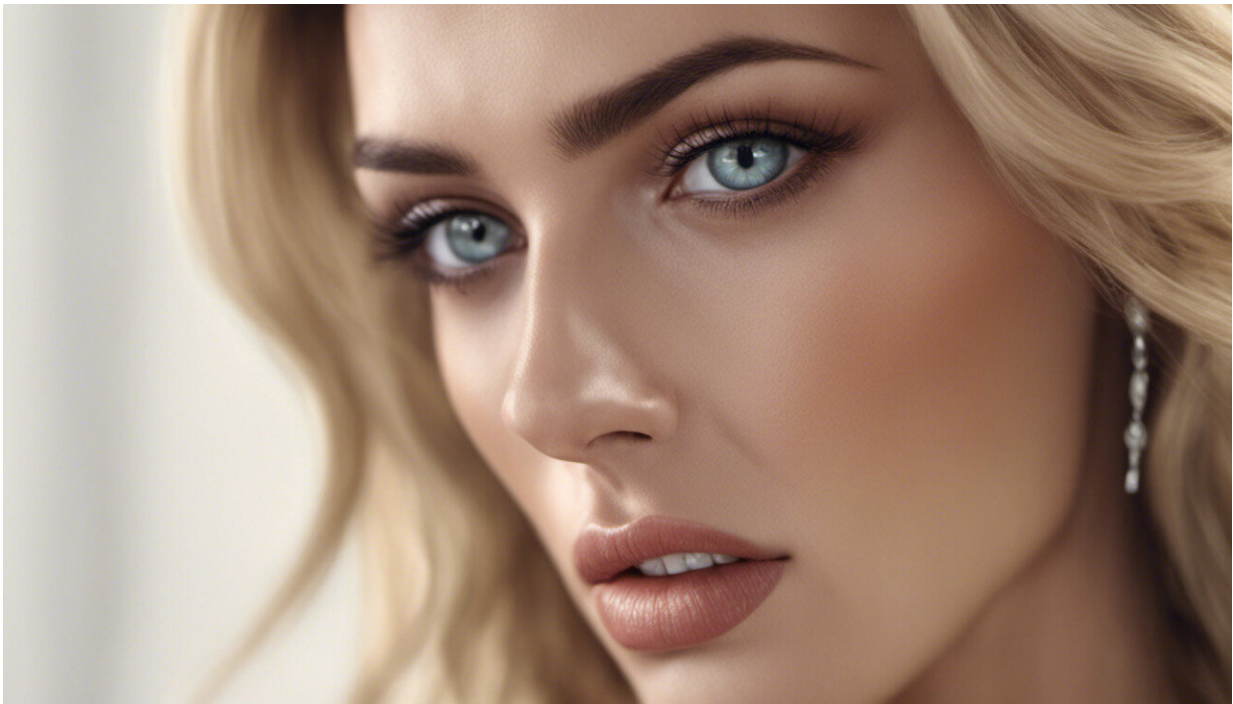


Researchers study effects of infidelity on long-term relationships

October 6 2016, by Ellis Stump



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Both men and women in committed relationships cheat for a number of reasons, despite overwhelmingly condemning the action, according to recent surveys. In a new study, a team of Penn State researchers explored the prevalence of infidelity and its effects on both married and cohabitating couples.

Michelle Frisco, associate professor of sociology and demography, and Derek Kreager, professor of criminology, sociology and demography, both at Penn State, along with Marin Wenger, a Penn State alumnus and current assistant professor of criminology and criminal justice at Florida State University, published their work in the journal *Social Science Research*.

According to Frisco, the project had several goals. "Along with producing nationally representative estimates of how often infidelity occurred among married and cohabiting [young adults](#), we were curious whether those who had sex with another partner and those who reported that their partner had sex with someone else were equally likely to end their relationship. We also wondered whether married and cohabiting young adults would be equally likely to leave."

Frisco and her colleagues analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, which began following a group of adolescents in 1994 into adulthood. They found that a quarter of married and cohabiting young men and women reported that either they, their partner, or both them had sex with someone else. "Consistent with other studies, we also discovered that young men were more likely to report sex with another partner than young women, while women were more likely than men to report that their partner had sex with someone else," said Frisco.

The research team also found that reports of cheating and being cheated on were similar among married and cohabiting men and women, but cohabiting partners were more likely than married partners to report that both they and their partner had sex with someone else.

When the researchers examined how sex with other partners influenced relationship longevity, they found that young adults who reported having sex with someone else didn't leave but those who reported being cheated

on left the relationship.

"Our results suggest that a person's own sexual indiscretions do not lead them to end their relationship, but being the victim of a partner's sexual indiscretion does. This finding was observed for both men and women and cohabiting and married couples," said Wenger.

Kreager added, "Finding similar results for men and women and cohabiters and spouses suggests that young people today have similar expectations for sexual fidelity regardless of their gender or whether they are in formal, legally binding relationships."

Frisco agreed, "Our results suggest that if young adults can get away with cheating, they are not likely to leave their partner. If they discover infidelity in their [partner](#), however, they exercise far less tolerance. People seem to prefer to play the cheater over the cheated on."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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