

MARRIAGE

Sex and Politics: Are Powerful Men Really More Likely to Cheat?

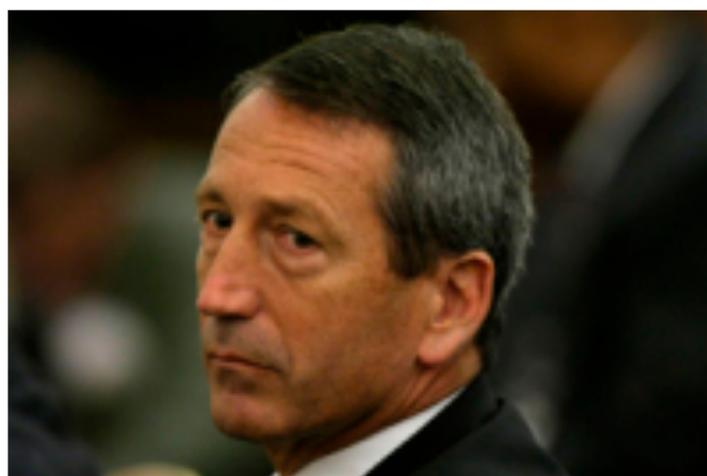
By Maia Szalavitz @maiasz | April 28, 2011

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Bill Clinton. Newt Gingrich. Eliot Spitzer. Mark Sanford. Politicians who've been caught with their pants down tend to have one thing in common and it's not political philosophy or party.

Overwhelmingly, the philanderers are men. But a new study suggests that the reasons they stray may have more to do with the power they wield than with their, um, masculinity.

"The likelihood [of infidelity] increases the more powerful someone is," says study author Joris Lammers, an assistant professor of psychology at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The research was published in *Psychological Science*.



Alex Wong/Getty Images

The study analyzed the results of an Internet survey of 1,561 readers of a Dutch business magazine. Fifty-eight percent of respondents held low-level non-management positions; 22% had some management responsibilities; 14% were middle managers; and 6% were top level executives.

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The higher someone was in the hierarchy, the greater the chance there was that they reported having cheated on their partner or intending to do so in the future — regardless of whether they were male or female.

Moreover, the tendency to cheat was not linked to factors like taking frequent business trips or being a person who inherently tends to take risks. Rather, it was linked to confidence — and the more power men and women had, the more confident they were.

(More on TIME.com: ["Does Men's 'Bond' with Porn Ruin Them for Real-Life Sex?"](#))

"My own research and that of my colleagues has shown that one of strongest effects of power is that it increases feelings of confidence," says Lammers. "The feeling of decreased power leads to more of a focus on threat and danger. But power leads to this disinhibited sense that you can get what you want and should take risks to get it." The corrupting effect of power can be seen not only in infidelity in romantic relationships, but in a greater tendency to cut corners ethically on the job as well.

So why don't we see more high-profile scandals involving female politicians or other powerful women? Lammers argues that it's because there are so few of them. There has yet to be a female president of the United States, and only 17 of our 100 Senators are women. Among the CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies, a measly 25 are women.

(More on Time.com: ["Has Infidelity Gone Legit? It Nabs a Starring Role in The New York Times"](#))

The research doesn't answer the question of whether men seek power in order to get sex, which could also explain the gender difference in sex scandals, as well as their ubiquity.

The study is also limited by its Internet sampling and reliance on self-reported behavior and hierarchical status. Further, it doesn't take into account other sources of power; as Christopher Ryan, a psychologist and author of *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality*, notes, a key contributor to women's sense of power and confidence is physical beauty.

(More on TIME.com: ["Q&A With Chris Ryan About Prehistoric Love and Sex"](#))

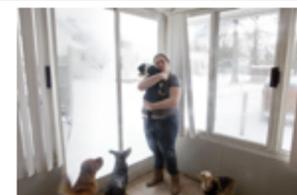
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[Comedian] Chris Rock says that a man is basically as faithful as his options allow. [The researchers] might say that this applies to women as well,” says Ryan.

Still, he cautions that there remain definite gender differences in the way men and women approach infidelity.

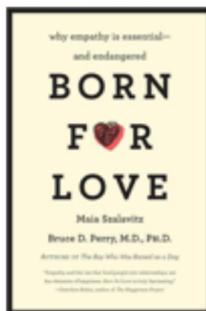
If you’re looking for monogamy, however, top dogs do seem to be harder to [keep on the porch](#).

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Maia Szalavitz is a neuroscience journalist for TIME.com and co-author of *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential — and Endangered*.



Szalavitz's latest book is *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential — and Endangered*. It is co-written with Dr. Bruce Perry, a leading expert in the neuroscience of child trauma and recovery.

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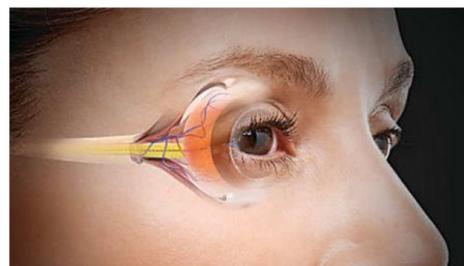
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