

The Impact of Infidelity on the Family System

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Infidelity also known as: adultery, cheating, unfaithfulness, extramarital affair, and marriage betrayal, among others (Barbare, 2012). Perhaps, the many names associated with infidelity imply that it is not a new problem; it is among the biggest and oldest problems that have stressed spouses for many years across many cultures. By itself, infidelity can cause enormous challenges for spouses, and it is the second-most common and difficult issue that marriage counsellors and therapists struggle to help their clients with (Barbare, 2012).

Societal conversations surrounding faithfulness often consider infidelity a morally complicated issue. Infidelity is widespread; an estimated 20% to 40% of North American marriages are affected by infidelity (DePompo & Butsuhara, 2016). According to *Statistics Canada* (2011), there has been a general increase in divorce over the past three decades among married Canadians aged 16 and above. In 2011, approximately one in every five Canadians in their late fifties were either divorced or separated (18.9% of men and 21.6% of women) (Milan, 2013). Data by Statistics Canada detailing reasons for divorce shows that in 2009, there were 71,241 recorded cases of divorce, with infidelity topping the list of reasons for divorce with 2,218 cases or 3.1%. It was followed by mental abuse at 878 cases or 1.2%, while physical cruelty came third with 619 or 0.86% reported cases in the same year (Statistics Canada, n.d.).

In each infidelity incident captured in the above statistics, more than one person is impacted negatively after the initial discovery or disclosure of the affair (DePompo & Butsuhara, 2016). Infidelity has a negative impact on the psychological wellness of those affected. Once the initial discovery or disclosure is made, it is not uncommon for both spouses to experience bouts of depression that include anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and an extreme sense of loss (Fincham & May, 2017). Emotions experienced by the spouse cheated on can start as severe stress that rapidly manifests acute stress disorder symptoms (Fincham & May, 2017).

Fincham and May (2017) added that the cheated-on spouse suffers considerable damage to their personal and sexual confidence. There is also substantial damage to their self-image, and they are likely to feel abandoned, their sense of belonging is hurt, they feel their trust has been betrayed, they develop angry feelings, and hence, they are likely to develop justification to divorce their offending partners (Fincham & May, 2017).

Infidelity can cause a ripple effect between spouses and the entire nuclear family when children are involved. Negash and Morgan (2016) stated that infidelity has a ravaging effect on social systems, but none is more afflicted by infidelity than the nuclear family. Social systems such as the nuclear family can be damaged irreparably by decisions made solely by one individual (Negash & Morgan, 2016). Other social systems can be described as a connected network shared by people with a commonality, for example: relationships, friendships or employment. Due to infidelity being a major reason for disruption, the current research project seeks to understand the long and short-term impact of parental infidelity on the family structure.

Even though family structure can be defined in many ways, most definitions convey different societal and cultural beliefs. Societal beliefs stem from previous examples of expectations and social norms, while cultural beliefs are developed within racial and cultural systems based on historical information (Perry & Perry, 2015). Family as a structural definition can range from a single parent, to divorced parents, married parents, or siblings that are emancipated. There are endless definitions of family and therefore, due to the complex nature of infidelity and the constantly changing definitions of family, this project seeks to focus on a narrow definition of family. Family structure in the present context is defined as “a kinship unit and that even when its members do not share a common household, the unit may exist as a social

reality” (Sharma, 2013, p.2) and which at the very least, should include a husband and wife, living as a couple together with their biological or lawfully adopted children.

In recent years, what constitutes a family has become an important topic of debate across different sectors and disciplines. Sociologists define a family based on how its members relate to one another than a strict formulation of specific roles (Lumen Learning, 2017). The interest of sociologists is drawn to the relationship between the institutions of marriage and family. Throughout history, marriages give birth to a family, and a family is the most fundamental social unit on which society develops (Perry & Perry, 2015). Marriage can occur without family, and a family can occur without marriage. Both marriage and family are the basis of status roles legitimized by society; hence, as Capuzzi and Stauffer (2015) observed, once a marriage is plagued with infidelity, the family is adversely affected.

Marriage in the present context is understood “as a legally recognized social contract between two people, traditionally based on a sexual relationship and implying a permanence of the union” (Chadda et al., 2019, p.160). To use the term family described in this way only encompasses a certain context of people, the intention is to narrow down the social constructs involved in infidelity to not confuse or complicate the meaning of the findings. To execute a study that focuses only on heterosexual couples that are married allows a detailed analysis of a specific subset of the larger population. Readers who are interested on the impact of infidelity within non-heterosexual families can find relevant information in the works by Rokach & Patel (2021), Martell & Prince (2005), and Harris (2012).

Self-Positioning Statement

A self-positioning statement can be referred to as a positionality statement or self-reflexivity statement in a qualitative research project (Holmes, 2020). As a master’s student, the

word positionality can be used to describe two things; first, my world view, and second, the position I adopt concerning the current research project and its social context. Holmes (2020) suggests the following:

to note here that a researcher's positionality not only shapes their own research, but influences their interpretation, understanding and ultimately their belief in 'truthfulness' of other's research that they read or are exposed to. Open and honest disclosure and exposition of positionality should show where and how the researcher believes that they have influenced their research, the reader should then be able to make an informed judgment as to the researcher's influence on the research process and how 'truthful' they feel the research is. (p.3)

Based on the above advice by Holmes (2020), there are two major approaches that I have used to identify and develop my positionality. First, I had to locate myself within the issue under investigation. I had to acknowledge my positions that are likely to influence the research project by identifying any preconceptions that I bring into the project because of my previous personal experiences and pre-research beliefs concerning infidelity. Secondly, I had to place myself within the research context and procedures; I acknowledged that I would certainly influence the research.

With that understanding, it is essential to begin my self-positioning statement by mentioning that my interest in this research project was informed by my background as a master's student in psychology. Pursuing a master's program in psychology has situated me within an environment that has often advocated for objective and unbiased counselling. On many occasions, I have been concerned about whether counsellors' backgrounds, interests, biases, and

affinities can sometimes spill into their practice, especially when dealing with the issue of infidelity.

During my tenure as a practicum student, I had the opportunity to work with different practicing marriage counsellors regularly. During that internship period, particularly in the follow-up visits, I keenly observed how these professional marriage counsellors often proposed interventions and solutions related directly to what appeared to be their interests and identities when dealing with infidelity and its after-effects. For instance, it was not uncommon for a counsellor to offer interventions and solutions built on what they believe is the likely impact of infidelity based on previous parental infidelity cases. In many situations, self-disclosures would occur in instances I found to be inappropriate when trying to relate to the client. Instead, this took away the validity of the client's claim. I then wondered in what other ways do counsellors' identities and lived experiences influence the solutions they offer.

Having read the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017), I have realized that my work as a potential future practicing psychologist should be fair and unbiased against either of the spouses. For example, I should not be influenced by my biases that a man can get over his wife's infidelity faster than it would be in the case of a wife who has been cheated on. I have personal experience with this dynamic due to my father and my mother having infidelity issues early in their marriage. As a child, I always saw my mother emotionally struggling far more than my father, causing me to believe that men can rapidly get over emotional issues while women struggle longer. Therefore, as I embark on the current research project, I must recognize that I am more likely to have preconceived impressions that men are stronger than women and that the impacts of infidelity can be weaker on a man than it would be on a woman. Instead, I must recognize that infidelity can have an

equally overwhelming emotional impact on both the husband and wife, and healing is possible after infidelity regardless of the pain, anger, and resentment experienced by the betrayed spouse.

My skepticism around perceptions of objectivity is crucial to identify within the current research project. Indeed, it has partly inspired the current project, and I consider knowing this to be crucial. Given the purpose of this review and borrowing heavily from previous studies on infidelity, I must be cautious about underestimating the potential validity of those studies on the impact of parental infidelity by erroneously treating the studies' findings as flawed. Essentially, given my background as an individual studying counselling and a child who experienced divorce due to infidelity, I must challenge the notions I currently believe to investigate the findings laid out by the research thoroughly.

Demographically, I am 27 years old and grew up both in Killam, and Calgary, Alberta. I now continue to live in Calgary. Growing up in a small town with a different idea regarding social norms structured my views surrounding the meanings of love and family. My childhood was split between isolated farm life and vast city life. My beliefs were split between very liberal and very conservative views. I spent years on a farm, raised by my grandparents, and spent years raised in the city by a single mother. I had conflicting rules and expectations at a very young age due to the dynamics presented early in my life. As I aged physically, emotionally, and mentally, I felt the impact of conflicting ideologies in many facets of my decision-making process. My mother and father came from very different backgrounds, resulting in very different belief systems that I was torn between aligning with. My father cheated on my mother, forcing her into a particular belief system that infidelity ruined marriages and families. My grandparents were unfaithful to each other for years, and on the farm, that was not unusual. Constructing my views regarding infidelity was challenging; however, after years of seeing and understanding the

impact of the betrayal of trust, I aligned more with my mother, as the trauma she experienced was more impactful to us as a family unit. At 27, I am common law with my fiancé, and we do not have children. We have similar beliefs on the impact of infidelity, and both grew up understanding the impacts of a tumultuous divorce. I believe that recognizing the cycle of infidelity and divorce shaped our views toward believing it is entirely detrimental to a relationship.

My education has focused on the right and wrong of societal norms throughout my undergraduate and graduate career. I completed my undergraduate level of education in Calgary and hold a Bachelor of Arts specializing in Psychology. I am currently pursuing my master's degree in counselling psychology at City University. I believe my decision to focus on psychology was shaped by my ability to navigate both sides of a mental debate. I had a keen interest in how decisions are often made and understood by individuals and the greater society.

I am currently working in sales and often deal with issues regarding couples with differing views and values. My daily experiences involve remaining unbiased as I aid couples through their decision-making processes. I believe that I am becoming stronger in navigating between my views and the views of others. I often strive to be influenced or educated regarding other opinions. I look for concrete evidence and personal experience that can alter my otherwise stubborn mind, but I remain objective when it comes to analyzing all the data before making a choice.

My personal beliefs regarding infidelity are that it cannot be overcome regarding repairing marriages or healthy relationships. Given that I am a master's student, I must remain cautious about interpreting findings from previous studies on parental infidelity versus my interpretation. It is also possible that I may subconsciously review and consult studies that

discuss what I want to hear, mainly because I intend to become a sex and marriage counsellor. Therefore, I have endeavoured to ensure I remain aware of my personal lived experience as reflected throughout the research process. To minimize the impact of my narrative regarding this topic, I have tried to establish my biases by blatantly stating them honestly. I wrote in a log when analyzing the literature to check in with my thoughts regarding each article, and I made a note of content I abhorrently disagree with or ecstatically agree with to identify my bias. I debriefed with my colleagues and discussed my ideas with others to understand my way of thinking. I believe these steps above helped keep me grounded in reciting the findings of the literature objectively.

Literature Review

The following literature review aims to answer multiple questions regarding the impact of infidelity. A secondary purpose of this review is to analyze whether the long- and short-term effects of infidelity between a married couple can be rectified with the aid of a professional clinician. Analyzing previous research regarding this topic is the foundation for creating a concise and logical answer to the research question. This project overviews the existing knowledge, enabling the researcher to identify appropriate theories, approaches, and gaps in the existing literature. To successfully answer the research question and identify relevant sources such as journal/academic articles, government documents, and books, it is essential to understand that the end goal is to provide a clear picture of the current knowledge on the long and short-term impact of parental infidelity.

The review is intentionally structured to contextualize various aspects of parental infidelity and understand its impact on a family. The review begins with defining infidelity, followed by a discussion on the family system, the theoretical perspective of infidelity and family, causes of infidelity, and the consequences/ impact of infidelity on the nuclear family. In

order to ensure each subtopic was addressed, the search strategy contained multiple aspects. Systematically, each topic was searched separately before looking for articles that added information bonding the topics together. For example, infidelity was researched, then family systems, followed by effects of infidelity on the family system. This strategy allowed for easier review of the abundance of information to inform a detailed review.

What is infidelity?

Thornton and Nagurney (2011) acknowledged that there are many definitions of infidelity from research and psychology perspectives. Infidelity is characterized by different activities that are not limited to “having an affair, extramarital relationship, cheating, sexual intercourse, oral sex, kissing, fondling, and emotional connections that are beyond friendships” (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011, p.51). These activities fall under the purview of infidelity, or the act of “involvement in romantic relationships outside of one’s active, committed relationship which result in the sense of relational betrayal” (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011, p.51).

Thornton and Nagurney's (2011) note that infidelity can come in two different forms: sexual and physical intimacy and emotional intimacy. Sexual infidelity is recognized as the act of engaging in sexual intercourse with another person other than one’s spouse (Buss, 2018). In contrast, emotional infidelity is recognized as “falling in love” or sharing a deep emotional relationship with somebody else other than one’s spouse (Buss, 2018). The current review will only focus on physical affairs; however, it is important to define multiple types of affairs. Interested readers can find more information about emotional affairs in Peluso (2018) and Knopp et al. (2017).

Interpersonal relationships inherently shape decision making and boundary setting within their own dynamic. Likely, eventual discussions surrounding intimacy and monogamy will be

present in interpersonal relationships. Other factors involved in decision making or boundary setting can be topics of demographics and culture. Each of the dynamics play a role in discerning what is considered acceptable behavior (Mark et al., 2011).

DePompo and Butsuhara (2016) interviewed people about the impact of infidelity. Due to the nature of its impact, infidelity is colloquially described in different ways. For instance, in casual conversations, it is sometimes compared to a hurricane in the sense that when a hurricane touches down, everything on its course is violently blown in different directions). Likewise, the discovery of infidelity sweeps across the entire family structure, causing havoc; sometimes, the impact is so damaging that it can be impossible to recover. Other people compare infidelity to death because the betrayed spouses grieve the union the moment it is discovered. Others compare infidelity to a house on fire in that once the house is razed down, everyone in the family becomes homeless. Similarly, once a family is plagued by infidelity, there is bound to be an indiscriminate crisis in the nuclear family that can quickly suck in the extended family and even friends. Therefore, experiencing what has universally been considered infidelity within the boundaries of a matrimonial union is, without a doubt, a very traumatic event (DePompo & Butsuhara, 2016).

Gender Differences and Sexual and Emotional Infidelity

Males describe sexual infidelity against them to be more painful to endure than emotional infidelity compared to females. Male participants identified sexual infidelity as the most hurtful 60% of the time, compared to only 17% of the female participants (Buss, 2018). The results for females showed a lower effect regarding sexual intimacy. Female participants identified emotional infidelity as the most hurtful 83% of the time, compared to 40% of the male participants. The study's findings by Thornton and Nagurney (2011) indicated that women are

highly sensitive to infidelity compared to men, especially regarding emotional infidelity, which agrees with Buss's findings (2018). These differences could be attributed to the fact that people can occasionally become emotionally attracted to those they have sex with and sometimes have sex with those they become emotionally attracted to. Buss (2018) quickly points out that this is not always the case. Sexual behaviors and sexual intercourse can occur in the absence of emotional involvement, as is the case in one-night stands, and emotional involvement can occur and fail to lead to sexual involvement. In the end, whether it is sexual or emotional, infidelity could be understood as feelings or behaviours that contravene a spouse's expectations for the monogamy or fidelity of the relationship. This explains why many studies have found that infidelity is one of the most recurring and painful presenting concerns in marriage counselling (Butler et al., 2010; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

What is a Family/Family System?

Because there is a bounty of information providing different definitions of family structure, it is important to understand how existing literature conceptualizes family. Definitions of family slightly differ among cultures and depending on the context in which the word 'family' is used. For example, the Family Service Saskatoon (2015), a non-governmental organization focused on family issues and partly funded by the Canadian government, notes that a family in the Canadian context has many meanings because of the many different cultural heritages. For instance, in First Nations culture, a family incorporates "all my relations" (Whitman, 2009). This broad understanding of a family has seen children being cared for by their biological parents and grandparents, aunts, uncles, or even the community at large. In a heterosexual context, a family refers to a mother, a father, a child or children or the "nuclear family". Within the mainstream Canadian society, "extended family" brings on board other family members such

as aunts, uncles, grandparents, sisters, and brothers. However, often in Canada, the extended family does not have a significant role, as is the case in Africa, Asia, and Central/South American cultures. In summary, Canada's increasingly diverse multicultural population is shifting the definition of how a family is perceived.

According to Garbarino (2017), a family can also be understood as a small group of people who share intimacy, love, and caring for children; besides acting as a social institution, albeit in modern social forms, the single-parent families have challenged the traditional understanding of a family. Despite the changes in the composition of a typical family across many societies, Cash (2013) clarifies that a family is made up of at least two individuals related by marriage, blood, or adoption in the psychology field.

In recent years, what constitutes a family has become an important topic of debate across different sectors and disciplines. Sociologists are more likely to define family based on how its members relate to one another than a strict formulation of specific roles (Lumen Learning, 2017). Throughout history, marriages give birth to a family, and a family is the most fundamental social unit on which society develops (Perry & Perry, 2015). Both marriage and family are the basis of status roles legitimized by society; hence, as Capuzzi and Stauffer (2015) observed, once a marriage is plagued with infidelity, the family is adversely affected.

Having recognized the central role a family plays in marriage, psychiatrist Dr. Murray Bowen developed family systems theory in 1978 (popularly known as Bowen family systems theory or FST) that partly states a family is a system whereby every member of the system has a role to play and rules to observe (Johnson & Ray, 2016). According to the theory, each member of the system is supposed to respond to the other members in a specific way based on their roles, driven by relationship agreements such as a husband and wife in the family agreeing to be

faithful to each other. The theory proposes that it is impossible to understand family members in isolation from each other, but instead as an integral element of their family since a family is an emotional entity (Titelman, 2014). In other words, a family is a system of interconnected and symbiotic individuals, and no member of the system can be understood in seclusion from the system.

To contextualize the theory, when infidelity occurs and is discovered, the impact is not isolated but instead cuts across the entire family. Though there are many definitions of the term family, the current project adopts the definition of family as “a kinship unit and that even when its members do not share a common household, the unit may exist as a social reality” (Sharma, 2013, p.2). The focus of the present review will be on the heterosexual nuclear family or the immediate family which comprises of a father, a mother, and their children. In some cases, extended family (e.g., relatives of the spouses in the nuclear family such as their brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews) may be mentioned within specific contexts.

Theoretical Perspectives and Framework of Infidelity

Several theories have been developed to demystify how different people assess their different relationships, such as marriage. Likewise, researchers and academics have also tried to apply different theories to explain why infidelity occurs. Most notable of these theories include the social exchange theory developed by George Homans in 1958 and equity theory developed by John Stacy Adams in 1963 (Redmond, 2015).

According to the social exchange theory, a person would ordinarily seek a relationship in which they can boost their benefits (Cook et al., 2013). Within social exchange theory, there is an element called comparison level for alternatives (Redmond, 2015). When looked at through the lens of marriage, level for alternatives is a type of comparison approach that a spouse can use

to evaluate the quality of her/his marriage versus other alternative relationships (i.e., engaging in an extramarital affair). Assuming a man's comparison level for infidelity is highest in his marriage, he will most likely respect his marriage. However, if the comparison level for infidelity is lower than that of his marriage, then the man will most likely betray his wife and engage in an extramarital affair or an alternative relationship. Similarly, if the wife is not being given the affection she deserves from her husband and she happens to be in contact with another man she believes can give her that level of affection, she is more likely to cheat on her husband. Based on the social exchange theory, marriages should theoretically survive when both spouses can gain what they expect from their union as husband and wife and equally dedicate themselves to making the marriage last (Hester & Adams, 2014).

Equity theory posits that when people perceive themselves in an unequal relationship, they will undergo tension, positioning them in a state where they feel equality is absent (Redmond, 2015). The equity theory in the context of marriage suggests that it is hypothesized that marriages work best if the costs and rewards are uniformly balanced between both spouses. If one spouse is receiving all the rewards or is constantly having his or her way in the marriage at the other spouse's expense, then the marriage will not survive according to the expectations of both spouses and therefore potentially lead to infidelity and eventually divorce. For instance, if one spouse is sacrificing so much for the marriage in a marriage, a spouse may feel he/she is putting more into the relationship than they get from it, which is likely to result in tensions between the spouses and possible infidelity. However, if faithfulness and respect for the institution of marriage were more uniformly shared between both spouses, then this would more likely reduce the potential for tensions and infidelity since both spouses are equally dedicated to ensuring their marriage remains intact.

While investigating the effect of spousal income on infidelity and its determinants, Munsch (2015) found that breadwinning for men increases the likelihood of infidelity, while women who earn less money than their spouse are less likely to cheat. A power component present in infidelity and economic dependency is related to the prevalence of infidelity for both women and men. Zhang and Tsang (2012) focused on urban Chinese wives and indicated that “wives’ relative income had a negative impact on their marital happiness and a positive impact on marital instability to a small extent” (p. 406). In the context of marriage, a spouse will boost their benefit by choosing to enter a marriage relationship that he/she believes can return the highest level of rewards at a low cost (i.e., social exchange theory). These rewards could be sex, love, family, companionship, and money, while costs can come from sacrificed time, money, and effort. Munsch (2015) found predictions of social exchange theory as showing that the higher the spouse’s relative income, the higher the chances of engaging in infidelity.

Factors Contributing to Infidelity Behavior

The theories mentioned above attempt to make sense of the process and justifications tied to infidelity (Fye & Mims, 2019; Moller & Vossler, 2015). Culture, personality, opportunity, academic level, race, attachment style, income level and employment, religion, and marital happiness have all been identified as reasons for infidelity (Zare, 2011). Highly educated spouses are more likely to cheat on their partners, and explicit associations between the non-cheating spouse’s academic level and infidelity have emerged (Zare, 2011). Married men have reported cheating on their partners due to their work environment, lifestyle, and personality (Tafadzwa & Herbert, 2018). From men’s point of view, cheating often happens because marriages cease to be exciting and they experience higher levels of marital dissatisfaction; that is, men thought their relationships with their wives grew mundane (Tafadzwa & Herbert, 2018). Omarzu et al. (2012)

found that cheating spouses' initial motivations and emotions behind the extramarital relationship were sexual dissatisfaction with their partner, emotional satisfaction from their affair, and falling in love with the person they are cheating with were the primary reasons for cheating on their partners. It was quite notable that both male and female respondents were equally likely to mention sexual or emotional reasons if their marriage was not meeting these factors.

Martins et al. (2016) found that if a man or a woman had a history of infidelity in past relationships, he or she was more likely to engage in physical sex outside of their current marriage. The increased propensity toward infidelity, reduced relationship satisfaction, insufficient commitment, and better quality of alternatives are some of the things highly linked to infidelity regardless of gender.

Jackman (2015) sought to understand what dictates infidelity intentions and found a commonality in people viewing infidelity as a high reward venture as well as believing that no one had ever cheated on them. There was a higher prevalence of infidelity for males who exhibit high confidence levels and do not engage in any religious tendencies. People who have cheated in the past are more likely to engage in infidelity once again, while those who have not been cheated on in the past are more likely to consider infidelity as a problem behaviour (Jackman, 2015).

In general, male participants exhibited a more positive assessment of infidelity than their female counterparts (Jackman, 2015). Men more often suggested infidelity was a common and acceptable decision (Jackman, 2015). The issue of men exhibiting a more positive assessment of infidelity introduces a new angle to whom is more likely to cheat (Jackman, 2015). For example, Wang (2018) cites a 2010-2016 survey carried out by General Social Survey (GSS), a U.S.-based

research institute, whose findings show that 20% of men reported being unfaithful to their wives while still married and 13% of women in the survey reported the same.

Wang (2018) also reports that these findings differ with age. For instance, in the age bracket between 18 and 29, women showed an equal inclination towards infidelity compared to their male counterparts (11% for women vs. 10% for men). For both men and women, infidelity increases in middle age. Surprisingly, women in their 60s become increasingly unfaithful to their spouses, with their infidelity rate standing at 16% (Wang, 2018).

Despite the long-standing notion that men are much more likely to be unfaithful to their spouses than women, it may seem that women could be cheating at the same rate as men. For example, Drexler (2012) reported a smaller gap between cheating men and cheating women in their article (23% for men vs. 19% for women). This study hints at the fading of the gender gap in the propensity to commit adultery. Almost similar findings emerged from a study by Mark et al. (2011), which sought to understand the relative relevance of interpersonal, demographic, and personality factors in explaining causes of sexual infidelity among heterosexuals. Results show that 23.2% of men and 19.2% of women reported “cheating” during their existing relationship while very much aware their acts could threaten or hurt their primary relationships.

There is a connection between family history and propensity to engage in infidelity (Weiser et al., 2017). Participants who were most likely to engage in infidelity reported experiencing parental infidelity (Weiser et al., 2017). Other than the initial trauma, resentment, shame, and anxiety associated with parental infidelity, many children are likely to have issues with honesty and trust (Weiser et al., 2017). Indeed, 55% of adult children who reported cheating on their spouses also reported having an unfaithful parent. Despite disapproving their parent's

unfaithfulness, these participants still found infidelity an acceptable option for themselves” (Nogales, 2010, p.17).

Consequences and Impact of Infidelity

Individual Impacts

Individuals actively pursuing or engaged in infidelity offered results that disclosed experiencing both positive and negative emotions because of their extramarital affairs (Omarzu, 2012). Those experiencing positive emotions were more likely to be individuals engaged in infidelity to confirm their attractiveness. This is because people who considered themselves more attractive than others tended to have an increased sexual desire, which, in turn, translates to increased chances of having multiple sexual partners (Omarzu, 2012). Infidelity is responsible for causing acute levels of psychological distress, depression, and substance abuse, as well as diminished levels of overall health (Arantes et al., 2020). The sheer impact of infidelity as it breaks trust and honest communication with partners causes difficult symptoms regarding psychological wellness. Ironically, these symptoms are not just present for one partner in these trying scenarios; instead, both the cheating spouse and the cheated on can experience bouts of psychological distress.

Impacts on the Spouse and Relationship

The effects of infidelity on the cheating spouse often reflect one side of a two-sided coin. Infidelity to discussions of divorce, progression to eventual divorce, the “last straw” of the marriage, and who should work harder to save a marriage are concepts Scott et al. (2013) address. Of the interviewed 52 divorced persons in their study, everyone indicated infidelity was the second-most contributor to divorce after the lack of commitment. Infidelity topped the list of

the most prominent “last straw” reasons. At least 80% of the respondents blamed the cheating spouse rather than themselves for the dissolution of their marriage.

In reviewing empirical studies on infidelity, Zare (2011) found that just a small portion of spouses who experience infidelity can save their marriage following an extramarital affair, even though not all marriages plagued with infidelity end with divorce. Many studies about the impact of infidelity also emerged that infidelity indicated negative effects such as anger, loss of trust, diminished personal and sexual confidence, injured self-esteem, abandonment phobia, and increased reasons to leave the cheating spouse (Zare, 2011). It became clear that it is not easy for men to let go of instances of their partner engaged in sexual infidelity compared to emotional infidelity, and these men are more likely to divorce their wives in case of sexual infidelity.

Infidelity was primarily the cause of divorce in Zare (2011) study’s findings and divorce is linked to adverse child outcomes such as poor academic performance, diminished psychological well-being, increased depression, and anxiety. It can also be argued that infidelity is a culprit in determining outcomes experiences by the children involved (Scott et al. 2013).

Impacts on the Family

When looked at broadly, infidelity is a marriage problem that devastatingly impacts spouses and their children (Nogales, 2010). The noted feelings and accusations, the withdrawal, the distraction, and the confrontation between the spouses can affect everyone in the family. If it becomes impossible to save the marriage after infidelity, everyone in the family takes a hit.

Loudová et al. (2013) wanted to investigate the threats infidelity poses to a family. It merged that infidelity is among the many factors affecting the stability of a family. The findings further revealed that infidelity directly threatens family members’ mental well-being, worsening

the family atmosphere and consequent unfavourable impact on children. It also emerged that infidelity is a potential source of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV.

Existing research (Israel et al., 2020) indicates that the children's lives are never the same again after the discovery of infidelity in most cases. Once children are faced with a drastic disruption to their normal lives or psyche, it is likely that their perception of love and marriage will be altered (Israel et al., 2020). Children can be resilient if the right tools are in place to aid them with management of trauma. Israel et al. (2020) states that the child's psyche will be changed, however, that does not mean they cannot recover from this type of incident.

In some cases, if the infidelity incident is an isolated one and the spouses can work it out peacefully without the knowledge of the children-often through counselling, there could be a less significant impact on children. However, when infidelity leads to weeks, months, or even years of resentment, betrayed trust, or a contentious divorce, children will most likely not escape the impact, especially if they are not provided with the emotional support or counselling services to assist them to navigate through their emotions (Clark, 2013). In parental infidelity, it is not uncommon for the unfaithful spouse to be portrayed as the ultimate betrayer (Baucom et al., 2011); thus, the marriage is forever changed, generally with lasting side effects. In most cultures, infidelity is not something people are comfortable discussing because there is much shame associated with infidelity (Baucom et al., 2011). When infidelity is discovered, the cheater wears the label of a cheater for years to come among his/her nuclear and even his/her extended families (Nogales, 2010). The shame of parental infidelity and pain can silence children, and because the topic of infidelity is treated as taboo, children are, in most cases, left to suffer in silence (Nogales, 2010). Therefore, when one of their parents is involved in infidelity, a common response for children is resentment and avoidance of the unfaithful parent (Nogales, 2010).

Implications for Counselling Psychology

The impact of infidelity is widespread. The ability for clinicians to be adequately equipped must remain a top priority to aid the affected members of the family system properly. The consequences of the infidelity lead to many psychological issues for all individuals involved in the family unit. Infidelity also contributes largely to the reasons for divorce. Knowing this information can offer insight into the complicated nature of infidelity. A clinician entering in as a third party must understand multiple facets of an individual, child's, couples, grief, trauma, and advanced counselling to provide the proper attention and care to the overwhelming complexity of infidelity. For that reason, the relationship between family and infidelity is an engaging topic for scholars in sociology and psychology. The implications for practicing clinicians are complicated regarding adequately addressing issues of infidelity. Preparing the clinical world for complex emotional traumas such as infidelity must be handled with diligence and proper ethics.

The importance of exploring the implications of counselling techniques for the effects of infidelity is crucial to lead continued research methods in a positive direction. Future measures can be explored to aid counsellors with the tools to address the issues within a marriage adequately. Recommending future practices and techniques to provide clarity in the clinical approach to treating children and both spouses is of the utmost importance. The following sections will help determine the outcomes of clinical implications. Highlighting recommendations for creating new techniques and practices will be presented, and crucial next steps to provide suggestions within the field will also be noted. Infidelity is far-reaching among the family system. Infidelity is also far reaching within the realm of clinical treatment and clinicians must remain objective, prepared and intuitive to handle this issue properly.

Throughout the exploration of the literature, it became clear that there are many subtopics presented within issues of infidelity. Topics of gender, sexuality, family paradigms all presented at one point in the readings. The discourse above discusses many details that argue for the importance of treatment of infidelity based on the impact it has on relationships. Attempting to bridge the gap between the action of infidelity and course of treatment can be complex and underrated. The overview of the literature sets a foundation that contributes to understanding critical elements in counselling psychology, particularly in marriage counselling and how such an understanding is instrumental in helping family members deal with and recover from parental infidelity. Working with spouses where either have been unfaithful to the other can be overwhelming for marriage counsellors and psychologists (Weiser et al., 2017). Understanding the complexity of dealing with spouses struggling with issues of infidelity provides insight on the struggles occurring within the marriage. The feelings of loss and hopelessness can play a role in the couple's ideas about the chance of survival for the marriage.

The following sections are intended to provide clarification on outcomes of infidelity to better inform treatment options for spouses struggling in their marriages. The focus will be on the impact and implications of counselling regarding infidelity as well as the future recommendations that may help create a brighter path for healing for these couples. Due to the changing needs of clientele, the subsequent sections suggest how the research project's findings may be helpful for counselling psychology practice, policy, theory, and practice in the field of parental infidelity and its impact on the family system. The current research findings will help practitioners better understand the long and short-term impact of parental infidelity on the family structure and system.

Defining Infidelity

Infidelity has been defined differently by many authors; this creates room for interpretation when discussing infidelity. It is crucial to define infidelity early in the counselling sessions for both partners. From the first session, it is imperative to agree on what to call infidelity, otherwise no progress can be made (Phillips, 2020). Defining and identifying the issue informs which counselling interventions to adopt. If a clinician lays an inadequate foundation from the start of the therapy, they risk isolating one or both spouses. For example, terming infidelity as an inappropriate behavior risks complicating the understanding of it (Phillips, 2020).

Impact on Children and The Family

Infidelity is generally associated with feelings of shame, inadequacy, and embarrassment because it entails breaking the promise of sexual faithfulness (Tan & Yasin, 2020). If a parent(s) is unfaithful and children are aware of it, there are increased chances that their children will recreate that behavior (Tan & Yasin, 2020). Parents are the first role models for their children which often results in learned behaviors (Nogales, 2010). The children whose parents have brought infidelity into their household can expect their children to react with feelings of anxiety, sadness or confusion due to the dynamics changing between their parental unit (Tan & Yasin, 2020). Children are unique and may act out differently but there are typically core responses that are experienced (Nogales, 2020). The most typical response to infidelity for children is a loss of trust, and the overwhelming fear that someone they love may one day abandon them the same way (Nogales, 2020). There is a concerning factor regarding sexual transgressions in parents that may lead to children believing that this is a normal act of love. Depending on the context of the relationship, this can cause tension between the child and parent if the child has been asked to

keep this secret. The likelihood of developing feelings of guilt is high if a child is placed in a position of choosing sides (Nogales, 2020).

Acting out as a reaction to the disruption in the family cycle may be present when infidelity enters the family space. If there is an overwhelming sense of tension present between the parents, it will likely create tension within the family unit. Tensions arising in the family unit can create feelings of distrust and irritability (Urooj & Anjum, 2015). These types of emotions, if left to resonate, may lead to issues of sexual promiscuity, intimacy problems or even addiction issues as a coping mechanism to family trauma (Nogales, 2010). The focus of most existing studies are focused on the infidelity's impact on specific members of the nuclear family (Beltrán-Morillas et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2016; Tan & Yasin, 2020; Urooj & Anjum, 2015). The existing research specifically investigates the overall impact of parental infidelity on the family structure as an entity, while also attempting to understand who among the family members is impacted the most and who is more likely to cheat between the partners. Therefore, this research fills a specific gap in the existing literature on parental infidelity by adding a new element of the family system in the discourse to enable future studies to have a starting point when investigating infidelity from a holistic perspective. The members of the nuclear family most affected by infidelity are the members who actively live with the trauma daily. When children become involved in a web of lies or dishonesty surrounding their parents, it is more than likely they will have severe consequences (Schmidt et al., 2016). Childhood trauma or predisposition to negative behaviors as a result of infidelity in the family unit must be further researched.

To broaden the understanding of this project's implications, this review had multiple purposes in understanding effects of infidelity at the forefront. One of the main topics being investigated was whether there is a connection between family history and propensity for

infidelity. Key takeaways of the Weiser et al. (2017) findings confirm that the impact of infidelity can be both short and long-term in that it is not restricted to the spouses only. It emerged that those individuals most likely to engage in infidelity " had experienced a parental infidelity " (Weiser et al., 2017, p.2094).

Recovery after Infidelity

Infidelity has been shown to be one of the leading causes of divorce as mentioned in the reviews above by Phillips, 2020, Schmidt et al., 2016 and Gravningen et al. (2017), the likelihood of a divorce due to parental infidelity is higher when compared to a marriage not plagued with infidelity. Even though spouses cite infidelity as among the top causes of divorce, marriage counsellors single it out as among the most complex problems to deal with (Staples, 2012). Until recently, not many studies existed on interventions for spouses and families dealing with infidelity. To date, the only intervention tailored particularly for spouses dealing with matters of infidelity that has so far been empirically investigated and acknowledged as valuable is a consolidative approach developed by Baucom et al. (2011). The reason this treatment approach has been beneficial is due to the mutual understanding regarding the definition of the affair. The open and honest intention of both partners and therapist combine to create a transparent environment where true realizations can occur. The three stage model defines the affair, understands the rationale for the affair and focuses on rectifying the betrayal of the affair (Baucom et al. 2011).

Understanding the topic of infidelity and the way in which intervention was formed stems from existing literature concerning recovery from interpersonal distress and recovery from intimacy harms. According to Snyder et al. (2012), infidelity is a traumatic experience in a marriage and the family that significantly disrupts spouses' expectations about themselves and

their intimacy, resulting in both emotional and behavioral disruption about the perceived loss of control and instability of their future lives and family. Other notable individual reactions to infidelity on the part of the spouses include disturbing and recurrent reflection about the affair, extreme attention to perceived relationship threats and the other spouse's interactions with people from the opposite sex. These tendencies may cause shifts in emotional reactions with impaired capacity to control and contain negative feelings (common in post-traumatic stress) (Dvir et al., 2014). Additional reactions include physiological hyperarousal (also a significant symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD) (Weston, 2014), which is accompanied by sleep disorders or interrupted appetite, lack of concentration, and a spectrum of other symptoms consistent with PTSD (Snyder et al., 2012).

In line with the view that unfaithfulness is an interpersonal trauma, the ideas of a research-based intervention for parental infidelity discussed herein also builds on literature concerning healing from interpersonal harm, together with evolving literature on phases and forgiveness processes. Interpersonal trauma happens within the individual and can only be discussed within the context of the presenting problem. This happens within a couple as they battle through the trauma of infidelity together. As is the case with trauma-based strategies, across diverse views of healing from interpersonal harm, an essential element entails developing a new understanding of why the harm or infidelity occurred and rebuilding a new perspective for the event. Initial evidence about interventions designed to promote recovery or healing from interpersonal harm, have been developed almost specifically from an individual as opposed to partners'-based perspective. Such interventions can create an environment for a more objective assessment of the cheated-on person and the incident, minimize negative effects and attitudes toward the accused, and hasten psychological and physical health (Baucom et al., 2011).

A Proposed Model for Treating Infidelity

After briefly exploring an integrative strategy for aiding recovery after infidelity, the following process suggests an ideal course in a research-based healing process that the family could consider after discovering or disclosing infidelity. The recovery/healing intervention divides into three phases: (a) absorbing the initial trauma and impact, (b) understanding the context of the infidelity event, and (c) how to move on emotionally as a family or separately. All three phases are crucial to understanding the impact of infidelity.

Phase I: Absorbing the Initial Trauma and Impact

The first phase of the intervention is addressing the impact of the affair. The initial objective is to evaluate individual and marital function to single out urgent issues (e.g., suicidal feelings and physical aggression) that shared intervention strategy encompasses detailing each party's responsibilities. Guidelines for spousal interactions are determined in this phase. Questions such as how much time do they need to spend together or privately, whether to share a bed and maintain sexual contact, whether the involved parties need to maintain external contacts and what information to share with other interested parties such as their children, relatives, and friends can be proposed. If some degree of calm can be realized through mutual understanding, the impact of infidelity can then be evaluated. If there is no potential to reach a calmer and more understanding mental place, then it is unlikely spouses can move forward. Spouses are encouraged to promote more effective dialogue concerning the impact of the betrayal in order to achieve calmness. The clinician must always be cognizant that despite initial calmness and emotional control, most spouses (especially the cheated on) attempting to recover from infidelity continues to struggle with occasional "flashbacks" characterized by extreme emotional reactions to the event (Baucom et al., 2011). These flashbacks may last for months or even years after the

initial disclosure or discovery and may culminate in the development of PTSD symptoms (Roos et al., 2019).

Since acute anxiety, sadness, and embarrassment are common reactions to infidelity (Silber, 2020), the involved parties need specific help tailored to physical self-care, social support, and spiritual support if applicable to the spouses (Gurman et al., 2015). Overall, the significant objectives of Phase 1 interventions are to (a) identify boundaries concerning the third person who came in-between the couple, (b) reestablish the primary environment of family interaction, and (c) promote an open recognition of the infidelity's impact on the cheated-on spouse and the marriage. Once these objectives have been satisfied, the treatment can move forward and examine the factors that encouraged the affair.

Phase 2: Understanding the Context of the Infidelity Event

The second phase of the suggested intervention examines factors that played a role in the occurrence of the affair and exploring both their effects and likely response to ongoing intervention. Both individuals present in the issue need to understand the dynamic that each party caused. Likely sources of factors contributing to unfaithfulness can be grouped under spouses, individual, family, and the prevailing social factors (Bashirpour et al., 2020; Snyder et al., 2012), and may include: (a) aspects of the marriage such as emotional neglect; (b) external elements such as work-related stressors; (c) individual characteristics of the spouses such as unrealistic marriage expectations, self-doubts, and personality disorders; and (d) individual characteristics of the cheated-on spouse such as longstanding emotional complications and anxiety about emotional closeness.

In discussing these factors, a careful evaluation of the context under which the cheating-on partner chose to be unfaithful is crucial. It is essential to differentiate between understanding

the affair's context versus laying blames for the affair. During Phase 2 of this intervention, one of the principal objectives is to facilitate a realistic assessment concerning the potential repeat of this painful experience and helps in creating a new perspective of the marriage and family before infidelity discovery and the post-infidelity situation. The second objective is to support the cheating spouse's patience with the cheated-on spouse's persistent emotional bouts and questions on why the affair happened. In most cases, spouses have different timelines for healing, with the cheating spouse desiring to "move on" and put the issue behind them way before the cheated-on spouse feels emotionally ready to do so (Snyder, Balderrama-Durbin, & Fissette, 2012).

The third objective is to evaluate the precipitating factors to encourage initial problem-solving mechanisms and provide the partners with an opportunity to assess their capacity to change for the sake of the long-term survival of their marriage and family. Overall, the fundamental objectives of Phase 2 entail: (a) a close evaluation of a wide array of factors that potentially informs an affair, and (b) identifying things that each spouse need to do to minimize or eradicate these risk factors as well as acknowledging successes in the spouses' efforts to utilize agreed upon strategies (Snyder et al., 2012).

Phase 3: How to Emotionally Move on as a Family or Separately

The last phase of the intervention begins by putting together information acquired in the last two sessions as a preparation for agreeing on a well-thought-out decision on how to "move on" as a family or in separate ways. At this phase, any remaining issues or fears about the marriage are addressed. Once this is complete, an assessment and discussion are encouraged on the marriage's viability, the potential for a new beginning, and the couple's dedication to working toward saving their marriage based on lessons from the sessions and about each other. The inability to understand and respect the need for time and forgiveness may cause a dissolution

of relationship, whereas patience and understanding from both partners may lead to the reparation of the relationship (Van Hook, 2019).

At this point, evaluating personal convictions about forgiveness is critical. Forgiveness ought to be viewed as a process in which the spouses work towards a greater understanding of their inner selves, their partner, and their marriage to release themselves from negative behaviors, feelings, and thoughts (Fife et al., 2013). It is essential to identify that forgiveness in this context is not forgetting that the infidelity took place (Weeks & Fife, 2014). Central to forgiveness is that it does not mean that the offended and the offender must reconcile for forgiveness to happen (Van Hook, 2019). In contrast, forgiveness means that negative feelings cease to take center stage in the couple's lives or ceases to dictate their actions toward each other and that the infidelity issue has been addressed to such a level that the cheated-on spouse ceases to carry with them its adverse effects moving forward. The forgiveness process can create an environment for the potential development of better and more positive attitudes and feelings toward the cheating spouse.

If there is a unanimous decision by the partners to save their marriage during this phase, the attending clinician assists the spouses to identify which areas of their marriage need further help and then recommends strategies to address the issues identified. Alternatively, if the partners choose separation or divorce, further sessions are recommended to help them plan how to move along those routes less painfully to their children and those they care about (Wampler, 2020). After a decision to separate or divorce has been reached, the subsequent sessions should support a process of emotionally moving on and reconstructing good but separate lives. With a model guiding intervention with couples experiencing infidelity, it is important to discuss other specific considerations for practicing clinicians.

Recommendations for Practice

It is important to further investigate the other realms of clinical context in which this information can serve practicing clinicians. Practice recommendations are based on their potential benefits within the realm of psychology. The recommendations support treatment and prevention measures to aid clinicians with research, training, and practice. It is likely that couples undergoing this experience will need effective and appropriate clinical intervention if they choose to repair their relationship. If clinicians do not have the correct tools or common triggers understood for the cause-and-effect cycle of infidelity, the clinician will be inadequately prepared to aid the couple's process.

Obtaining a Comprehensive History of the Couple

A thorough family history of both partners is necessary (Brown, 2013). It is important to have background information concerning the couple's childhood, how each dealt with problems and information about the partners' parents Brown (2013). The objective is for the therapist to not only understand the way in which the couple or individuals reacts and behaves now, but to also understand the coping strategies that each partner used during their childhood. More often in infidelity, the cheating partner also has a coping strategy or defense mechanism that may be rooted in negative reinforcement (Brown, 2013).

Maintaining Unbiased Attitude

Couples and family therapists need to maintain neutrality with the spouses and demonstrate an unbiased attitude toward the spouse who was unfaithful (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2015; Varghese et al., 2020). Therapists should examine their attitudes towards infidelity, and if they realize they have specific biases, they need to address them. The counsellor may not be able to resist projection with the cheated-on spouse, and in that

case must still remove themselves from the situation. The inability to separate personal feelings from client work can cause ethical issues within the counselling environment (Varghese et al., 2020). There is no amount of bias that can be present when dealing with a couple that are operating within their own moral compass. Clinicians must ensure that the information they are providing is rooted in fact and is informative, rather than personally motivated advice. If a therapist determines that they cannot be unbiased toward the cheating spouse, it is advisable to refer the partners to another professional therapist.

Avoiding Secrecy

According to the *Standards of Practice* (2015) produced by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2015), clinicians and psychotherapists must be honest and truthful. If there is secrecy between partners, conspiring with one spouse against the other is not an ethical or fair decision. There should be no reason to withhold information within the counselling environment if the intention is reparations and forgiveness. This model of ideology must be present for each participant in the session. Similar views are expressed by Herbert and Forman (2011). To avoid secrets, clinicians and psychotherapists should conduct therapy sessions in the presence of the two partners rather than separately. However, at any given time when a clinician or a psychotherapist holds sessions with one spouse at a time, they must make it known to the partner present at the time that whatever they will discuss will be revealed when the other partner attends their session.

Avoiding Swaying the Couple Towards a Certain Direction

At all times, a clinician should not sway the partners in a particular direction- going different ways or staying together, that decision must be left to the partners without any influence from other parties, including the clinician. The partners control their individual destinies, and

they should be allowed to make informed decisions on the future of their marriage (Doherty et al., 2016). Provided the partners are comfortable with their decisions after participating in the counselling sessions, their decisions should not be swayed.

Trauma Informed Mentality

The spouses or family unit that is facing the wrath of infidelity can be considered a vulnerable population with a risk of associated traumas (Baucom et al., 2011). Trauma informed intervention is most beneficial when tied with prevention efforts that address all competencies and problems at play (Roos et al., 2019). Future clinicians are encouraged to develop interventions that reduce harm and promote strength. The focus for trauma informed conversation should be rooted in understanding the harm and trauma present in the scenario and reducing risks of further dysfunction (Roos et al., 2019). Trauma informed care can be especially beneficial for children who may not understand the depths of their personal trauma, while the clinician or parental unit may. To accept and open conversation regarding morals and values to individuals who have experienced trauma will likely look different than those who have not. It is imperative that clinicians do not re-traumatize by using poor language, or not simply understanding the importance of compassion.

Fundamental Next Steps for Research

The fundamental next steps for clinical intervention and future research must be focused on not forgetting that infidelity is a known potential risk factor for a series of health and psychosocial complications. The writing above focused on three phases of research-guided intervention towards identifying the ideal course in a research-based healing process that a family should consider after discovering or disclosing infidelity. The first phase revolves around the management and control of the initial emotional distress and impact. The second phase

focuses on understanding the factors that influence an individual's propensity to infidelity, and the third phase looks at strategies for assisting spouses and their families to emotionally move on either as a family or separately. However, after looking at these three phases, it is essential to explore an integrative strategy for aiding recovery after infidelity briefly. It has been noted that there are limited therapeutic interventions to assist couples and families impacted by infidelity. It has also been shown that infidelity is one of the leading causes of divorce and the subsequent consequences on the psychological health of the individuals involved and the whole family unit. Further research into therapeutic interventions for the entire family system that specifically address infidelity is recommended.

One of the fundamental next steps for research would be to investigate the most beneficial methods to aiding couples plagued with infidelity. Research should seek to find an ideal course of action in a research-based healing process that the affected family should take after discovering or disclosing infidelity. The type of research needed to discover effective processes should be qualitative in nature. The focus would be to define and acknowledge the underlying effects of infidelity and the impact on both spouses. Open ended interview style questions can provide information that will surely provide insight on the innerworkings of the couple. The ability to understand the genesis of the problem and the way in which it effects each member of the relationship will help to develop and establish a proper approach to managing the issues at hand. The need for future advances in research pertaining to the demands of clients regarding their issues with infidelity arises because sexual infidelity is prevalent in the general community across many cultures and is identified by professional therapists as one of the most challenging problems to treat among couples (Weston, 2014). The discovery or disclosure of infidelity prompts a wide variety of adverse intimacy and personal consequences, such as a

heightened risk of significant depression and suicidal feelings in either one or both spouses (Masilo, 2019).

More research is required on effective family-based interventions that support recovery from infidelity to address the marriage survival and individual recovery in both spouses and their children, particularly emphasizing factors that place the spouses at increased risk of physically harming themselves or the other partner. Researchers should continue investigating the long and short-term impact of parental infidelity on the family structure and system. It is crucial to determine whether there is a relationship between parental infidelity and the development of unusual behaviors among their children. Subsequently, parents and clinicians involved should note any negative reactions among their children that present as drug use and possible involvement in criminal behavior. Likewise, researchers could in the future carry out follow-up qualitative studies to investigate how divorced spouses, because of infidelity, can cope with the fear or possibility of being cheated on or cheating again in their subsequent marriages. Findings of such studies could then be considered in therapeutic interventions by marriage and family clinicians.

The lens of this paper intentionally focused solely on infidelity within heteronormative and married couples. The reason for this narrowed focus was because there are far too many definitions of family and sexuality. Sexual diversity and diversified family dynamics are areas that need more attention and focus moving forward; however, adding these facets for the purpose of this presentation would have exceeded the available space in this paper. Adding this to future studies and opening the topics for discussion is necessary, as it is a substantial limitation in this review.

Despite infidelity being widely researched, not many studies have focused on parental infidelity and its impact on the entire family structure and system. The common trend researchers have followed in the past is focusing on specific points of infidelity and not further understanding the way in which it affects multiple family members. Existing studies have primarily dealt with the impact of parental infidelity and halted at that. The opportunity to expand research into the further consequences of the parental decision is understudied and should become more prevalent. Schmidt et al. (2016) attempted to investigate the impact parental infidelity had on children in adulthood and their views on relational morals in later intimate relationships with their partners. This type of research boosts the opinion that there is an effect on children faced with infidelity and adds to the necessity to research this problem with a more wholistic approach. Urooj and Anjum (2015) explored the impact of sexual infidelity on the emotional condition of married men and women which undoubtedly explained that there is a substantial impact on the emotional psyche within both genders when discussing infidelity. The ability to look at infidelity as the main topic and understand the magnitude of the subtopics at play will only allow research to grow in identifying further promising techniques to treating the nuances within the trauma.

Part of the study by Beltrán-Morillas et al. (2019) focused on the experience of infidelity through the lenses of the cheating partner, opening the reader's eyes to seeing humanity in both the cheater and the cheated on. Adding another layer to the humanity and humility of the individuals engaging in treatment for their relationship issues can push researchers to understand predispositions and become more predictive and preventative in treating marriage issues. Further research into therapeutic interventions once infidelity has occurred has been suggested, but individuals and families impacted would benefit from additional research studies into infidelity

behaviour, including why it happens and what triggers it. This focus on identifying potential behaviours before they occur would be useful for families and therapists.

Tan and Yasin (2020) explored parenting styles and the role of parents in shaping their children's morality which undoubtedly addressed the psychosocial complications rooted in children's behavior if learned from their parents. The issues raised in this paper would benefit further from research that expands on factors that may influence infidelity or the potential for infidelity from the perspective of family values, parental behaviour, and social and cultural norms and expectations. Again, this would aid families, researchers, and therapists in understanding the root cause of some infidelity behaviour.

The issue of parental infidelity and its impact on the entire family structure and system is inadequately researched, yet it is very crucial. To benefit treatment for individuals experiencing infidelity is to understand that there is no one reason to engage in infidelity. The most important dialogue is understanding cause and effect, predispositions, rationale and justification for behaviors and providing compassionate, educated and rational support for the family unit. More research into the relationship between all of these factors would help broaden our understanding of some of the dilemmas laid out in these pages.

Reflexive Self-statement

Pertaining to my original positioning statement, the literature on infidelity and the effect on the family system adheres to the narrative that this event is harmful to the victim, the perpetrator and the outstanding nuclear family. As apparent as this information is, it does not help in making claims and progress thinking regarding how this situation may affect all individuals. Instead, the literature focuses on maintaining a cause-and-effect loop cycle that does not delve deeply into the complexity of infidelity. It is too simplistic to assume that because a

spouse cheats, the marriage is over. Rather, the focus must be on how to repair the damage done by cheating and make progress in a healing trajectory instead of following societal expectations. I find that my views and biases when reading these articles were grounded in hopes of clarifying my ideologies and setting myself up for success in my future career. My mentality was to further understand how to be better in my future career as well as my own personal life. The ideas presented by many authors reinforced the narrative of how damaging infidelity can be; however, many others created doubt in my mind regarding the inability to overcome it.

I am a white, upper-middle-class, non-disabled female. I find it a good idea to begin by noting that in conducting the current research on infidelity or as a future practicing marriage counsellor, I can be particularly insensitive concerning the issue of neutrality during counselling sessions. For instance, I can be a marriage therapist, and be openly against infidelity which would then likely make me collude with the cheated-on partner during counseling sessions. If that were the case and I was unable to separate my biases, I could not ethically take on these clients. Similarly, as a researcher attempting to understand the long and short-term impact of parental infidelity on the family structure, I may not typically be neutral about this topic. The influence of my social position with respect to infidelity had the potential to affect the way in which I conducted my research. I diligently attempted to manage my social ideals and personal values, ethics, and my training thus far to prevent bias presenting in the response to the literature.

As mentioned before, I was born and raised within a family that struggled to maintain balance due to their conflicting views. Not only did my parents disagree on most unspoken parenting rules, but they also disagreed on the foundations of what marriage meant. I was told to respect Christian morals regarding love and marriage and the sacred nature of commitment, while witnessing behaviors that challenged that belief system. I was asked to respect and

maintain balance and comfort with one side of the family while I witnessed the women in my life struggle to know what to do with a young child alone. My upbringing was swallowed by divorce, separation agreements, mediation, and chaos due to infidelity. I never understood the potential to salvage a marriage damaged by this factor because in my experience, there was no fix.

Years have passed and now my maternal side remains jaded while my paternal family oblivious to the damage caused. My relationships with both of my parents are strained due to the tension built in my younger years. I recognize the value of attempting to maintain or salvage a marriage for the sake of the family system. The expulsion of family values and potentially happy family memories are eradicated the minute infidelity is presented. I carry myself with a high sense of morality when it comes to infidelity due to these reasons, not because I do not understand the urges, or the reasons humankind may stray. I understand the so-called rules of love and the way in which we are to carry ourselves in relationships. I am also understanding of why the dissolution of relationships surface. To be able to understand the why and remain uninterested in engaging in extramarital affairs provided me a great deal of insight when it came to analyzing this topic.

Growing up split between a metropolitan city and a small rural farm town created a duality within me. I can articulate the normalcy in infidelity and the shock of it at the same time. I can return to my small hometown of less than one thousand people and be reminded how fluid love and relationships are, before walking into my properly socialized household now where the rules are clean and strict. My fiancé and I have had negotiations regarding infidelity which has led to personal policy, we have both agreed if either partner engages in infidelity, the relationship is over. We have both come from relationships where our partners were unfaithful and neither of

us found the value in salvaging those relationships. Perhaps, these similarities show our alignment in value, or perhaps we had not yet met people worth fighting for.

As a nearly graduated student who has been researching techniques and studies for advancing counselling practice, I can attest to the complexity of the human condition. The need for constantly changing and adapting techniques is crucial due to the evolving nature of the human mind and behavior. I have spent 8 years in university attempting to understand why people make the choices they do. I have years and years to go. The experience and information gathered through my educational career has provided me the tools to examine an issue even if my own lenses have yet to be adjusted. Targeting issues that evoke curiosity within will always be my subjects of choice and understanding the way individuals show and receive love will be my favorite of the bunch.

As much of the literature suggests, spouses that often seek clinical assistance to aid their failing union may be difficult to clinicians (Waiser et al., 2017), However, there is still positive reviews and thinking patterns that discuss the propensity to find coping mechanisms within sessions to aid the couple if the presenting problem is identified and labelled properly (Dvir et al., 2014). There is no possible way for any married couple with or without children to experience infidelity in the same manner, let alone compare experiences as if the understanding is entirely equal. The existing literature on the effect on the children as well as the family system as a unit is operating and coping is present (Schmidt et al., 2016; Tan & Yasin 2020; Urooj & Anjum, 2015), yet it is still missing the importance of the impact as an entirety and holistic point of view. Within the literature, I see a copious number of ideas that pertain to each subset of these individuals being analyzed, but I was hoping to uncover more details on how we can create a more directly focused point of view that correlates family trauma to infidelity.

I am fortunate enough to have a bachelor's degree in psychology, and to be capable of nearly completing my master's degree in the same discipline. I recognize my privilege in many areas of my life and I choose to analyze information and provide hope to the future of my chosen discipline. Advancing ideas on how to remedy torn relationships will require further research for years to come, however, analyzing the literature presented provides hope for the future direction in this topic.

Conclusion

There is an upwards trend in parental infidelity across multiple cultures. Marriage therapy techniques are needing adjustment and improvement in order to provide proper care for couples struggling with bouts of infidelity. An overarching theme emerged indicating that in any infidelity case, whether sexual or emotional, the cheated-on spouse experiences negative effects such as severe anger, loss of trust, diminished personal and sexual confidence, injured self-esteem, and abandonment phobia. The cheated-on person suffers substantial damage to their self-image, besides facing increased chances of developing infidelity-related PTSD. It also became clear that since both the father and mother are ideally the pillars of the heterosexual nuclear family, the ripple effects of infidelity by one of them affect them as partners and go as far as affecting the entire nuclear family.

Overwhelming evidence indicated that infidelity comprises behaviors that contravene a spouse's expectations for the monogamy or fidelity of the relationship, and the main justifications have been identified as culture, personality opportunities, academic achievements, race, attachment style, income level and employment, religious beliefs, and marital happiness. It also emerged that increased intentions to engage in an extramarital affair are common among people who have a positive assessment of infidelity. Those who consider themselves more

attractive than others having a higher tendency to have an increased sexual desire, which, in turn, translates to increased chances of having multiple sexual partners regardless of their marital status. Evidence indicated that infidelity directly threatens family members' mental well-being, worsening the family atmosphere and consequent unfavorable impact on children. Still, overall indications were that infidelity is among the top reasons for divorce, and divorce has been attributed to additional adverse child outcomes such as poor academic performance, diminished psychological well-being, increased depression, and anxiety. Besides that, for children raised in a family where one or both parents were involved in infidelity when these children were growing up, infidelity becomes a more acceptable behavior to them in their adult lives.

Despite being a highly traumatic experience, not all marriages collapse after the discovery of an affair. In other words, marriages can be saved if the right approach is adopted. However, a potentially redeemable marriage can end if a marriage therapist attending to the couple lays an inadequate foundation from the start of the therapy. In the absence of a good start of therapeutic sessions, the therapist risks isolating one or both spouses. Although the current state of the literature sets a good starting point for further research, infidelity-specific interventions are recommended, which will help the couple decide whether to remain married or go separate ways. Proposing a model with insight and behavior modification at the forefront is recommended for couples dealing with marital issues. As mentioned above, communication is likely a major issue present in a couple struggling with infidelity and providing techniques to address the way in which couples talk to each other will provide an open forum for progress. Discussing the problems openly and honestly will allude to creating a wholistic and honest approach within the session. The intention for truth-seeking and insight will guide the couple to understanding whether or not their relationship is salvageable. This is crucial in determining

whether or not the couple can then proceed to the next step in the process of concretely discussing their options with actionable plans.

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