

Social psychology essay sample

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As part of a Social Psychology project, conducted under the supervision of Dr. Rubina Feroz, a research was conducted to understand the factors which motivate adults to cheat. The research investigated several factors which lead to infidelity in pre-marital relationships. A sample of 20 college students (10 male, 10 female) were interviewed in a closed room in SZABIST, without the interference of any outsider. Each interviewee was asked a set of similar questions to understand whether gender, socio-economic background, peer pressure or primary socialization were the cause of infidelity in most unmarried adults. The participants also filled out a short questionnaire, so that their income and educational background could be established.

This data was analyzed, while keeping numerous things in mind. Factors such as the definitions of cheating, as in what constituted cheating, as well as various motivators were identified. Cheating was most often defined as carrying out an intimate relation with someone (physical and non-physical) with someone, while that person was already engaged in a relationship with someone. There was also a distinction in between pre-marital relationships and relationships carried out after marriage, for cheating while married was seen as a more serious breach of trust as opposed to cheating while in a general relationship. Some general motivators that were noted were mostly internal in nature, meaning that they were conceived via internal motivators, as opposed to an external one (except in the case of being pursued or getting sexual advances from a third party).

These included general signs of boredom, lack of communication, hope, a sense of despair, depression, the subjects need for approval, affection love and excitement. Most of these reasons have been attributed to the increase

in media presence, which leads people to expect more from life and raises expectations to an unrealistic level and when those expectations are not met, a person goes through the phases mentioned above, causing the chances of cheating to increase.

The final research findings were completely in accordance to the predicted findings. As predicted, motivations for infidelity within a relationship are significantly positively correlated with levels of trust, loneliness, the need to belong and the need for understanding. In some cases, infidelity was a response to having being cheated on. Individuals who had been cheated upon felt a sense of injustice having being done to them. Hence, they felt that cheating on someone was the only way of coping with their reality. Additionally, it was noted that communication was a very vital ingredient in a successful relationship, the lack of which led to numerous issues stemming from personal shortcomings of all individuals involved. Moreover, a communication barrier between couples often became the reason for new barriers which were nonexistent from an objective point of view and also aggravated existing barriers.

Numerous shortcomings were also noted during the research, mostly related to the control of variables. This included outside interference, validity of the random sampling, biasness of the responses, collection of data and analysis as well as the reliability of the researcher.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was threefold. The study was conducted to examine how different genders perceived infidelity. The idea of the research was to see if gender had any impact on the way people constructed their sexual realities, based on their sexual experiences or not. A sample of 10 SZABIST students, 5 males and 5 females, aged between 20 to 25 years, were asked questions to gauge if gender had any influence on the perception of infidelity. Moreover, the research set out to understand who cheats more – men or women. The third objective of the research was to come up with research that would help increase the awareness of such a sensitive topic amongst family, counselors, therapist, and most importantly amongst people who have had traumatic experiences, in the past. The findings can help many broken hearts or newly found loved ones in understanding what the concept of cheating entails, how others perceive it and the affects it leaves on people.

INTRODUCTION

Classically, committed relationships demand an unspoken or overt vow of faithfulness and individuality. In many relationships, in spite of the acknowledged or implied commitment to individuality, infidelity can seriously challenge constancy. The problem, hence, arouse when one tries to define the term infidelity.

Definitions of Infidelity

Infidelity, also explained as extradyadic actions, is a contravention in a relationship. It does not occur in a vacuum, i. e. it changes according to situational factors. It's ambiguous and idiosyncratic in nature. Culture, religion and personality are just few traits which undermine how individuals, groups or specially couples define infidelity [Spitzberg et al, 2007]. Hence, different researchers have conceptualized the term infidelity in unique ways. In literal terms, the word infidelity means violation of trust. Any action of a partner which may violate an agreement of trust between two partners, in a committed love based relationship, is known as infidelity [Solomon et al, 2006]. It may be claimed that the words unfaithfulness and disloyalty are closely linked to the word infidelity. Merely the phrase, 'breaking of a vow to a significant other', defines the word to perfection [Subotnik et al, 2005]. Drigotas and Barta define infidelity as violation of norms by a partner, either at an emotional or physical level, with an outsider. Infidelity can be either sexual or emotional, or both. Sexual infidelity involves all sorts of sexual contact, i. e., intimate touching, kissing, oral sex, or sexual intercourse. Alternatively, emotional infidelity refers to having an emotional bond or affectionate feelings towards another person, i. e., intimate conversations, falling in love, flirting or dating [Ojediran, n. d] In short, many researchers, to signify betrayal, be it of any sort, have used the term infidelity and the term affairs, interchangeably [Weeks et al, 2003]. Hence, infidelity does not only refer to sexual intercourse outside a relationship but also includes emotional attachments with an outsider [Whisman et al., 2007].

Comparison between Eastern and Western definitions of Infidelity

In Eastern countries, infidelity is usually linked with talking, sharing a close bond, getting physical (hugging, shaking hands etc), talking about sexual topics or generally becoming friends with someone of the opposite sex, whereas extreme cases involve committing an act of sex. Western countries in general have a more lax approach, where only a physical act such as sex is deemed as cheating and people are free to talk about sex with members of both sex. Though a vast difference exists, the act of infidelity, however it may be defined, is mocked at, in all societies.

Parties Involved in the Commitment of Infidelity

Varying from situation to situation, interpersonal, intrapersonal and contextual motives force people into committing infidelity. As per Wang, three key parties are always involved in the process of betraying someone. The victim is the person who is being oppressed, i. e., betrayed. The unfaithful partner or the one who is betraying the other's trust is known as the oppressor. Lastly, the third party can be termed as an affair partner or the extra one. All these terms tend to have positive and negative implications and meanings [Wang, 2006].

Characteristics of Infidelity

In a research conducted in 2006, some unique models of infidelity were noted down [Wang, 2006]. The following are models proposed by different psychologists and psychiatrists: Based on the trauma-based model, psychologists Glass and Staeheli define infidelity using three broad

categories: Sexual relationships, emotional relationships and relationships which are a mixture of the two. Brown proposed one of the first models, to explain infidelity, using the diagnostic approach. He divided infidelity into five fields: Conflict avoidance, evasion from intimacy, sexual dependency, out the door relationships and empty-nest relationships. Cole claimed that infidelity is an outcome of the problems a relationship has. As per him, the reasons for infidelity are rooted in the following six causes - the need to take revenge, less attention, avoidance of some sort, the need to have experimental relationships at all times or as a three-legged stool or a door opener. Pittman claims infidelity to be nothing more than a power play. He argues that infidelity can be presented in the form of the following four kinds: romantic relationships, habitual philandering, accidental encounters and marital arrangement relationships.

Types of Infidelity

Meyers (n. d) has defined infidelity in five broad categories:

Conflicted romantic infidelity occurs when a person cannot resist the temptation of being with more than one partner, at a time, sexually.

Opportunistic infidelity takes place when lust, opportunities allow a partner to succumb to sexual desires, regardless of being in love with the first partner.

Commemorative infidelity occurs when a partner completely loses interest in a relationship but situational factors do not allow him/her to simply step out of the relationship.

Obligatory infidelity is the resultant of fear. Partners are, at times, afraid of being rejected on the basis of sexual advances. The need for approval of their own sexual fantasies leads them to commit infidelity.

Romantic infidelity takes place when a partner starts losing interest in the relationship. This happens during the ‘falling out of love’ period.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 10 students, 5 males and 5 females, from SZABIST participated in the study. Participants were collected and then interviewed during university hours, over a time period of a week, in September. Among these individuals were people from diverse socio-economic, ethnical, educational and religious backgrounds. The sample was chosen randomly from SZABIST on the basis of time and resource availability. Moreover, interviewing unmarried adults was an important aspect of the research. This criterion could be easily applied to university students. Additionally, the age criterion was set keeping in mind the fact that most teenagers tend to be immature in comparison to people in their early twenties.

Procedure

Participants were collected at random, while roaming around the university. Given the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher based on his / her willingness to participate, selected each interviewee. The interviewees were briefed about the research topic and about what was expected of them beforehand. The criterion was outlined in front of them regarding their age.

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Once the criterion was met, the participants were asked to follow the researcher or meet the researcher in an empty room in SZABIST, which had been already booked beforehand for the interview. Once the interviewees showed up, they were made to sign a consent form.

The form entailed details such as the interview time, which was 30 min, the reason for the study, which was to complete a social psychology course and the fact that the interviewees would be recorded and the interviewee could not leave, once the interview started. The interview was semi structured [see appendix] and the order of the questions kept changing according to the participant's responses. The interview basically highlighted some common questions such as what is infidelity, which gender commits infidelity the most, at what age is one more likely to fall for it and if socio-economic or the rural-urban division plays a role in provoking one to cheat on a partner. Once the interview was over, the participants were made to fill a short questionnaire to assess their age, gender, income and their educational qualification.

Findings

The findings were not unexpected but yet were mindboggling at the same time. Since it was a qualitative research based on interviews, the researcher was able to get an idea of the story behind an interviewee's experiences. Focusing on open-ended questions allowed the researcher to probe accordingly for interviewees felt at ease with opening up about their thoughts and experiences. Additionally, in-depth information was discovered

on the topic of infidelity and meaningful data was gathered [See Appendix for details - All interviews attached].

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH

Analysis of the Definition

Various operational definitions have been revealed by literature to understand the term infidelity. Young adults partly understand infidelity through the lens of their own experiences, either by having been the victim or by having been the perpetrator. Social interaction, too, many at times shapes the thought process of adolescents; experiences of peers and their judgments about relationships and infidelity. Interestingly, it is a widespread phenomenon that cheating occurs to a large extent. This general perception arouses suspicion in adults and hence many relationships see their downfall. The table given below seeks to pinpoint the different phrases or words used, by participants, to explain the meaning of infidelity.

Figure One

SPECIFIC WORDS OR PHRASES USED BY PARTICIPANTS		FEMALES		MALES	
Lack of trust	5/5	-	-	Lack of faith	1/5
-	-	-	-	Disloyalty	1/5
-	-	-	-	Dishonesty	1/5
-	-	-	-	Lying to the other partner	1/5
-	-	-	-	Lack of commitment	1/5
-	-	-	-	Lack of communication	1/5
-	-	-	-	Lack of exclusivity	1/5
-	-	-	-	Physical bonding with a third party	2/5

Anderson, Afifi and Guerrero state that men and women react to infidelity in different manners. Men in general are more concerned with sexual infidelity while women are more worried about emotional infidelity. This difference

arises due to biological differences. Men tend to worry about paternal certainty while women are more concerned with holding on to their future support [Samp and Palevitz, 2012]. Furthermore, this idea is backed by the theory of evolutionary theorists. They base their belief on the idea that problems arise when people start thinking of the long run. If committed to a girl, a boy fears that, in the end, she might cheat on him and leave him with a child, which is not his own (sexual jealousy). On the other hand, a girl may fear that if she gets too committed, the boy might leave her when it is time to take responsibility and start a family (emotional jealousy).

Therefore, people find it easier to break off before they reach that stage of insecurity and the best way to remain in control is to commit the act of infidelity [Ahrndt, n. d] The analysis of the definition, on the basis of this study which is based on gender differences, is completely in accordance with the literature. As the table shows, participants used various words or phrases, some being synonyms (i. e. lack of trust, lack of faith, disloyalty, dishonesty, lying to the other partner, lack of commitment), to explain how they defined infidelity. What is interesting to note is that although all females used the phrase ‘ lack of trust’, not a single male used the word ‘ trust’. Additionally no females used the word ‘ physical bonding’ but there were two males who claimed that ‘ physical bonding with a third party, while being in a relationship with another partner’, is what defines infidelity. One very interesting definition that stood out was, “ Cheating is wrong. For me the act itself is wrong, regardless of any circumstantial stimuli attached to it. There has to be a preexisting understanding between both parties. So if two people are together just for *fun*, and neither party has said that they are exclusive

with that person, then if one person goes out with another party, then that won't be cheating as per me.”

This definition, by one of the males, was not purely based on the concept of trust or physical bonding but mainly targeted the idea that exclusivity is what makes a couple successful. As per him, being physical after telling your partner could not be counted as cheating. One of the females on the other hand claimed, “ Cheating in my opinion is all about breaking one's trust. I think it isn't right when one lies to a partner only for the sake of hiding something. Why does one need to lie or hide something when in a relationship? Successful relationships are all about communication. If there is communication there won't be lies and stupid fights which can lead one to find solace in another partner.” As per her, it was the lack of communication that defined cheating. In her opinion, if there was communication, no other factors, regardless of how significant they might be, would affect the relationship.

Impact of Time on the Definition of Infidelity

Social networking has introduced people to known and unknown users largely. Relationships are no longer the same as before in terms of structures, i. e. rules, roles or boundaries; and processes, i. e. the act of being in a relationship with someone. People can now reach out to a larger population if in need of support. Hence, virtual reality automatically hinders the relationship between two people living in real reality [Ruvo, 2012]. The following table shows the response of the participants.

| MANNER OF EVOLUTION | MALES | FEMALES | | Social Networking/
Technology/ More Choices | 5/5 | 4/5 | | Awareness of one's rights |- | 1/5 |

Figure Two

Hertlein and Sendak, [n, d] claim that adults do not know how to define the term any more. We now live in the era of internet infidelity. Intimacy is now an easy gain. Creating a new virtual self allows people to cheat on their partners with ease. Today cheating can no longer be defined in terms of sexual or emotional intimacy only. In truth, the word 'social networking' or 'internet infidelity' also has a huge role in describing the word.

The 'Triple A Engine Model' created by Cooper et al, identifies three characteristics which help differentiate between virtual (internet) and real (traditional) infidelity: Accessibility, affordability and anonymity [Daneback, Cooper, and Mansson, 2004]. Accessibility refers to the amount of access one has to different social networking groups, sites, forums or any other form of media. Affordability is the monetary cost of accessing the different forms of media. Anonymity, the most important characteristic, refers to the ease with which individuals create a fake identity. As the literature indicates and the table shows, social networking is the biggest reason for the way infidelity is now defined. Awareness has increased to such an extent that it is no longer easy to trick a partner into believing lies. New ways of conceiving intimacy are now present all around us due to social networking.

The term is no longer defined using the words emotional and sexual but, in reality, today the word virtual describes the term infidelity to perfection. An interesting answer to note was by a female participant who claimed, 'Not
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technology - we are using the technology in this sense. That is something different.' As per her argument, the word had changed for we humans had allowed it to. It is due to our misuse of technological devices and social networks, that the term can no longer be defined using its original definition. Finally yet importantly, both genders agreed that with time, the definition had changed due to the creation of virtual reality via extensive social networks.

Analysis of some Interesting Stories- Reasons and Effects of Infidelity

Infidelity literature shows the different reasons for being unfaithful can be education level, personality opportunity, attachment style, income level and employment, race, culture, religion and marital satisfaction. Drigotas et al divided these reasons of infidelity into five categories: sexuality-emotional satisfaction, social context, attitudes-norms and revenge-hostility [Zare, 2011]. Some common reasons as per the research are as follows:

- Self- Esteem
- Confirmation of attractiveness - Feeling neglected/ ignored or underappreciated.
- Boredom
- Confusion
- The thrill
- Emotional withdrawals
- Freedom of choice
- Revenge/Payback for wrong doings
- Lack of intimacy
- Lack of fulfillment of sexual desires

Some effects outlined by all participants:

- Distrust
- Depression
- Sense of instability
- Shame
- Resentment and anger
- Damage to self Esteem
- Vulnerability
- Increase in insecurities
- Gloominess

Gender and Commitment of the Act of Infidelity

In past decades, studies have shown that infidelity and gender are quite interlinked. Men tend to have a stronger desire for committing sexual infidelity while women are more prone to commit emotional infidelity. Men are less likely to fall 'in love' with another partner but women might get attached to someone other than their partner in such a case. Moreover, men engage in infidelity regardless of the amount of satisfaction they feel from their primary relationship but women engage in infidelity if they feel that their primary relationship is not satisfactory and up to their mark [Fisher 2012]. Interestingly, men do not hesitate in accepting that they have cheated on a partner whereas women are quite concerned about the judgments of others if they are being unfaithful [Chuick, 2009].