

Coping After Marital Betrayal: A Narrative Study Exploring the Intimacy Experiences of Men After Their Wives Have Engaged in Infidelity

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Abstract

In this study, the intimacy experiences of men were explored based on and after their experience of their wives engaging in infidelity. The men participated in a semi-structured interview process that provoked reflection and discussion on the topic of intimacy experiences after the occurrence and revelation of infidelity. Men were the chosen subject in an effort to expand the literature regarding the perspectives of men on emotionally driven topics, such as intimacy after infidelity and to increase the expressiveness of men on sensitive topics.

The results demonstrated that, although there were minor differences depending on marital circumstances, the men possessed very similar opinions regarding the definition of marriage, intimacy, and infidelity. Based on the findings, the men illustrated similar reactions toward infidelity; trust before and after infidelity; forgiveness after infidelity; and intimacy before and after infidelity. These factors were highlighted as highly significant regarding how these men experienced intimacy after their wives engaged in infidelity. Furthermore, it was concluded that men are highly capable and willing to express their thoughts and feelings regarding emotionally provoking topics; however, they are more likely to do so, after the healing process of their experience.

This study's findings will be constructive to marriage and family therapists, premarital counselors and pastoral officers, and behavioral/social science educators as they seek to assist couples in therapy with issues of infidelity and teach students the dynamics associated with marital conflicts and conflict resolution. Marriage and family professionals will be able to examine the intimate perspectives and interpretations of men and how they view acts of infidelity in their marriage as it relates to their wives' as the offender. With these observations, therapists can seek theoretical perspectives, techniques, and activities that promote emotional intimacy, physical intimacy, and spousal understanding within the marriage in an effort to prevent the occurrence of infidelity or to rebuild healthy marriages and families after the occurrence of infidelity.

Introduction

Along with other components, intimacy and trust are two important factors to building a strong and healthy marriage. Over the years, marriages have ended due to the lack of these important elements. The major question that one may have as to why most marriages tend to lack intimacy and trust overtime is ever so relevant. The answer to this question may have vast explanations; however, this research project will focus on how intimacy and trust is experienced in marriage after a wife has been unfaithful to her husband.

In the environment amongst a group of married couples, infidelity has been one of the leading woes that weakened or destroyed trust between the couples. Aside from other issues, infidelity appears to be the one unforgivable trespass in their marriages. Although most of the couples have continued their marriage after infidelity, the decrease in intimacy and trust, as well as the inability to truly forgive and move forward, are apparent. It is simple to express that you can move forward and maintain a happy marriage after infidelity; however, the breakdown of the marriage after infidelity illustrates otherwise. It has been assumed that women engage in infidelity to satisfy an emotional need while men engage in infidelity to satisfy a sexual need. Whatever the pleasure or lack thereof, how will the intimacy in marriage continue after the lines of sanctity and fidelity have been crossed?

The interest in this area is based on the curiosity of how married couples cope with the realization that the commitment of their marriage has been tainted by their spouse. There are some couples who appear to cope significantly well under those circumstances, while others slowly, or quickly, reach their demise. However, are the couples who appear to be coping well under the circumstances actually living unhappily and without trust and intimacy?

A journal on treating affair couples suggested that before couples can explore the meaning of an affair for their relationship or reestablish trust and intimacy, they first need assistance in managing the emotional turmoil and destructive exchanges that often characterize initial responses to the disclosure or discovery of an affair (Baucom, Gordon, Synder, Atkins, & Christensen, 2006). It is further suggested that couples explore the factors that placed their relationship at risk for an affair and improve their ability to negotiate basic changes in how they interact and manage daily challenges of their relationship (Baucom, Gordon, Synder, Atkins, & Christensen, 2006). A study was done on the amount of extramarital affairs that occurred during marriages between men and women. The results of the study showed that approximately 22% to 25% of men and 11% to 15% of women participated in extramarital sex on at least one occasion (Lauman, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

A national survey examined the prevalence and correlates of extramarital affairs. The study tested the hypothesis to gather information regarding the likelihood of an individual engaging in extramarital sex and the correlation between gender, race, and age. Furthermore, the study explored viewpoints regarding extramarital sex. The participants consisted of 884 men and 1,288 women. The research method used in this study was a cross-sectional survey design (Wiederman, 1997).

The General Social Survey was given to the participants to investigate those who were ever married and had engaged in extramarital sex. Other methods, such as questionnaires and interviews were also given to the participants. One question, for example, was "Have you ever had sex with someone other than your partner?" The results illustrated that men were more likely than women to engage in extramarital sex; however, there was no significant correlation between men and women (Wiederman, 1997).

As previously mentioned, there are different factors that may play a significant role in marital conflict; however, the research will focus primarily on the experience of intimacy and how it relates to trust after infidelity. In order to discuss intimacy and trust, these terms must be defined clearly. Trust can be defined as "the expectation of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms (Fukuyama, 1995). Furthermore, Fukuyama (1995) suggested that trust can be destroyed more easily than created. Jampolsky (1994) presented the concept that trust is the foundation for peace of mind, while fear implies a lack of trust, during which peace of mind is impossible to attain.

Infidelity

Infidelity is one of the factors that weighs heavily on the stability of marriage. One may listen to the woes of the individuals in marriage and find that the partners have experienced some form of infidelity in their marriage or worry about infidelity occurring in their marriage. It appears to be rare to find married couples that are completely free from the woes of infidelity. What exactly is infidelity? How is infidelity viewed by the couple? In order to discuss the topic of infidelity, the term must be defined for clarity. Infidelity has been defined as the act or state of being unfaithful or not sexually exclusive to a spouse or a partner (Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001). Infidelity is known by the popular terms cheating or affair, as well as adultery when referring to infidelity in a marriage.

Infidelity may occur in different forms, depending on how one perceives the behavior. The different forms can be categorized under two different themes: physical intimacy or emotional intimacy (Atkins, Eldridge & Christensen, 2005). In some cases, both physical and emotional intimacy may occur in the act of infidelity; however, the reasons behind the act of infidelity can become very broad in scope and difficult to address in a single research study.

Brown (1999) discussed the patterns and treatment of infidelity, presenting different categories of affairs. Brown (1999) suggested that conflict avoidance, intimacy avoidance, difference of opinions within the marriage, and sexual addiction all play roles in the pattern of infidelity. In Brown's assumption, sex is the minor issue in the act of infidelity and has more to do with one or both partners feeling angry, disappointed, empty, afraid, unaccepted, and unloved. Brown (1999) discussed the importance of feelings of both partners regardless of who was unfaithful. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the rebuilding process in the marriage will involve being completely truthful with one another because without honesty it is difficult to build and experience healthy intimacy (Brown, 1999).

Lusterman (1998) discussed the factors that play a role after a partner, or partners, reveal or discover the occurrence of infidelity. The idea of partners being able to express their thoughts and feelings in an equal and balanced manner presents the views of respective struggles in the marriage without blaming one another (Lusterman, 1998). The focus presented in the literature is to allow both parties to explore the deeper issues within the marriage that eventually led to infidelity due to these unresolved issues. The notion may be that infidelity causes the issues in the marriage, when actually there was an issue festering for a significant amount of time before infidelity was an option or a factor in the marriage.

Some theorists and therapists view the aftermath of infidelity as trauma (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Trauma is considered a deeply disturbing experience that causes emotional or physical shock that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope (Baucom, et al, 2006). When infidelity occurs, there are very strenuous effects of psychological, physiological, spiritual, and emotional trauma that typically transpires with the betrayed partner (Brown, 2001). Is this to say that the betrayer does not experience these same traumatic effects? Did the betrayer experience trauma effects in the marriage that later resulted in his or her act of infidelity? There may also be feelings of grief and guilt after the infidelity has occurred. These are some questions that can be explored in more depth during the current research study.

Wells (2003) illustrated the common factors of infidelity, which were deception and betrayal; however, it was noted that the urge to be unfaithful stems from the feeling of yearning. According to Wells (2003), yearning is referred to as an emotional connection, novelty, self-discovery, self-assurance, self-confidence or freedom. Additionally, infidelity can be a way of creating fantasies or fulfilling feelings of revenge on one's spouse (Atkins, et al, 2001). The primary motivations of infidelity may seem simple when inspecting the surface, but the underlining motivations are vary considerably and often times are misunderstood or dismissed by others.

In a love driven relationship such as marriage, many are taught that "love" fixes any problem in a marriage (Beck, 1988). As statistics and previous research has shown, loving your partner may not be the only element needed in order to have a marriage without infidelity (Beck, 1988). Kipnis (2003) highlights the notion that there is a social command that couples must constantly work at love. What exactly does that statement insinuate for the bigger picture of marriage? The perspective of humans may tend to suggest that working at something tends to mostly have positive rewards, and may also become very tedious and labor-intense if no rewards are being presented as a motivator to continue in the relationship (Kipnis, 2003). Viewing marriage and love as work may tend to carry a significant amount of pressure that results in feelings of forced intimacy and a lack of free flowing love (Mitchell, 2002). Kipnis (2003) suggested that monogamy should never become labor-driven and does not constitute a "good relationship" (p. 19). In fact, there should be more play and less work to promote healthy love and intimacy in a marriage (Kipnis, 2003).

Intimacy

When discussing marriage and infidelity, Baucom, et al, (2006) highlighted themed factors such as honesty, emotions, trust, and intimacy. It has been suggested to consider whether these factors can exist without the other. For example, if a woman does not trust her husband, can she experience enjoyable intimacy with him? Furthermore, if a husband feels his wife is being dishonest with him, can he trust her? There may be different responses to these questions; however, the curiosity continues as to whether these elements play a part in love, marriage, and intimacy.

As this research explores infidelity in marriage, the main factor that will be examined is intimacy. Intimacy may have many different definitions depending on who you may ask. However, in most of the literature, intimacy can be perceived differently based on gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, socioeconomic status, and religion. (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Webster's dictionary describes intimacy as private and personal or the state of being very close or familiar with someone. It is apparent that this definition may vary depending on the individual experience. Therefore, the question can be considered regarding how intimacy is experienced among particular men who have experienced their wife engaging in infidelity. Wynne and Wynne (1986) suggested that intimacy is a subjective relational experience that happens in verbal and nonverbal ways, and in many different arenas. For example, in marriage a couple may feel connected or intimate by sharing intellectual ideas/goals or raising children, while another couple feels connected or intimate by sharing sexuality or physical experiences.

Intimacy is considered to be an important element of a relationship that allows the two partners to feel a sense of togetherness, while creating a mutual bond with one another (Waring & Reddon, 1983). Intimacy has been suggested to assist with marital satisfaction and strengthens marital commitment (Hatfield, 1982). However, as the two partners seek to fulfill their partner's desires, as well as their own, the question comes to mind whether the two parties are conceptualizing intimacy in the same way. Sustaining a healthy engagement of intimacy is highly valued in marriage and may cause major issues between partners if these individual needs of intimacy are unmet (Hatfield, et al. 1988).

Some further different definitions in the literature that addressed the topic of intimacy are: Sternberg (1987) defined intimacy as those feelings in a relationship that promote closeness and connectedness. Furthermore, Weingarten (1992) theorizes intimacy to be the quality of the interaction between the couple as opposed to the relationship and defines intimate interaction as a couple sharing mutual and meaningful experiences. Additionally, Waring (1988) describes intimacy as continued interpersonal dimensions of marriage that are measured based on degree, quantity, and intensity.

In a marriage, the process of intimacy can be vigorous and exciting (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Intimacy involves the couple attempting to become closer by exploring their desires and highlighting on their similarities and differences based on behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (Hatfield, 1988). Schaefer and Olson (1981) hypothesized that the process of intimacy is based on the revealing and sharing of intimate experiences with one another, in an effort to heighten those experiences as a couple.

Participants

The participants for this study were chosen based on their marital status, as well as whether their wives have committed infidelity. Selecting married couples would possibly provide greater insight into the experiences of intimacy after infidelity; however, this research study attempted to focus primarily on exploring the men's perspectives on the given topic: intimacy after infidelity. Eight men ages 30-50 were participants derived from convenient social settings, such as church, work, social networking, or associates in order to gain access to the population needed to explore intimacy experiences of men after infidelity. The method of snowball sampling was used in an effort to recruit more participants, which was shown to be highly effective.

The sampling strategies used for this study were criterion and convenience. The criterion for selection was to briefly interview prospective men that best fit the criteria of the study. This strategy was one way to heighten the credibility of the study by gaining basic information from the participants to examine if their experiences were applicable.

Measurement

Following the narrative approach, a qualitative study of the intimacy experiences of men after infidelity was proposed, using a semi-structured interview that was audio-taped, coded, and transcribed by the researcher as the primary research approach. The interview included questions, such as the following: "Define your personal definition of intimacy?" "How has intimacy changed?" "How has trust changed?" "What does marriage mean to you?" "What behaviors do you consider to be acts of infidelity?"

There were a total of eight semi-structure interviews that were conducted; one interview with each male promoting open discussion and storytelling by the participant. Follow up interviews were conducted during the research process, as needed. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as a part of the data collection and analysis. Each interview varied in length from 30-90 minutes. The interviews were informal, using primarily open-ended questions to engage in an open discussion format. Observational notes were recorded in conjunction with the interviews, follow-up interviews, participant observation, and informal meetings with the male participants. Observational notes were written while listening to recorded interviews, along with a personal review of notes of observation kept during the interviews. It was expected that data analysis would be ongoing throughout the study, which was gathered by using follow-up interviews, if applicable. Themes that were analyzed included the frequency of infidelity, experiences of distrust, intimate moments, and the feelings of the experience.

Procedures

In an effort to gain access to the participants of the study, they were given a participation letter stating the purpose and process of the study. Furthermore, an informed consent document was signed and dated by the participants, which stated their rights, how confidentiality will be managed, and the researcher's position and responsibility during and after the interview. The confidentiality of the participants will be protected by keeping interviews, observational notes, or any other data materials, locked and stored in a safe place. Only the information relative to the intent and purpose of the study was used for the data analysis. Information that the participants would prefer not to disclose to the public was kept confidential by request of the participants. Anonymity was achieved by using mock names to represent the participants during the interview process. No official names were used in order to protect the identity of participants.

Results

Participant Interpretation of Terms

At the beginning of each interview, the men were asked to subjectively define marriage, intimacy, and infidelity. By defining these three terms, the men provided the researcher with their understanding of marriage, intimacy, and infidelity; and how their perception of these terms influenced their intimate experiences with their wives after infidelity. The interview questions encouraged open discussion and reflection on the narratives regarding how men experience intimacy after their wives engaged in infidelity.

Marriage Defined

The participants were asked to provide their personal meaning of marriage. The themes presented illustrated that marriage is a desired union that emphasizes love, support, commitment, loyalty, and trust. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 4, Participant 5 made reference to the wedding ceremony as the unimportant factor when it comes to building a marriage. Participant 1 said, "*It should be deeper than that*" in reference to the wedding day.

Participant 1, Participant 3, Participant 6, Participant 7 and Participant 8 made religious references to God as Him being an important element to a healthy marriage. Participant 6 presented an interesting thought that was once presented to him during the difficult times of his marriage, "*What if marriage was not just to make you happy, but to make you holy?*" He described his definition of marriage to be a triune that included man, woman, and God. Although all these participants illustrated very similar themes regarding their definition of marriage, each participant expressed that marriage can be a great part of life if handled appropriately and treated respectfully despite their experiences with infidelity. This implication illustrated the progression of the healing process after their experience with sexual marital betrayal.

Intimacy Defined

The participants were asked to discuss their subjective view of intimacy. The themes presented in this section: physical touch, closeness, bonding/connection, and attentiveness with someone special. Each male specified that this type of engagement is not for everyone; only someone special receives intimacy. Furthermore, all of the participants discussed the emotional aspects of intimacy and its importance before discussing sexual intimacy. Participant 3 described intimacy as, “*creating memories*”.

It may be assumed that men would be more prone to discuss the sexual side of intimacy before the emotional side of intimacy; however, the participants provided a more companionate perspective of how men may view intimacy, overall, as opposed to a passionate view of intimacy. Physical touch, which included cuddling, hugging, kissing, and skin touching, was the most profound theme illustrated on the topic of intimacy provided by the men, but the physical aspect did not center on sexual intercourse.

Interestingly enough, Participant 4, Participants 5 and Participant 8 provided a very profound description of his views on intimacy. Participant 4 stated, “*Intimacy is a process of observation and understanding, while being attentive to the likes and dislikes of your spouse, so that you learn how to be more considerate and thoughtful*”. These participants never described any physical forms of intimacy until asked to discuss their views on sexual intercourse as a form of intimacy. Participant 2 expressed his views on intimacy in a very companionate manner as well, “*To me, it is more of a spiritual connection where your souls connect with one another*”.

Consequences of Marital Infidelity

The men provided their thoughts regarding the most profound consequence of infidelity. The themes illustrated in their responses highlighted their emotional distress, sexually transmitted diseases, and factors regarding their children. Each participant discussed all of these factors in their responses. Participant 4 was the only participant who did not discuss children in regards to his marriage, but mentioned that his wife became pregnant by his rival during their marriage. It mentioned during his interview whether he had children with his wife.

Moreover, participants were asked if they engaged in unfaithful acts against their wives during their marriages based on their perspectives on what they considered acts of infidelity earlier in the interview. Six participants claimed that they were never unfaithful in their marriage. Discomfort and hesitation from the participants was observed when this question was asked during the interview; however, these six participants stated they did not engage in any acts of infidelity, while still in their marriage, although they wanted to at times. Four participants revealed acts of infidelity during their marriage. They admitted cheating before their wife or after finding out about their wife’s infidelity.

Forgiveness after Infidelity

The process of forgiveness is highly considered when one has experienced marital infidelity. To forgive or not to forgive, that is the question. The participants were asked to state their opinions regarding the circumstances to which forgiveness is possible after infidelity. It was posited that men may tend to find the forgiveness process difficult when the act of infidelity is revealed by their wives.

Participant 1 provided a very positive perspective on his process of forgiveness after infidelity. He expressed, “*When I look at forgiveness, it is not for the other person it is for me.*” He also provided a spiritual perspective that drove his willingness to forgive, “*I am still harboring hate, anger, toward her then God strikes me straight to hell because I am sitting around hating her and not forgiving her for what she did to me. So then I am in hell for hating her and her cheating behind goes to heaven because she asked for forgiveness*”.

Although Participant 2 similar to Participant 7 stated that he forgave his wife more for himself, so that he could move pass the situation, it was apparent that, different from the other participants, his negative feelings toward her remained the same. It did not appear as though the process of forgiveness was stagnant; however, it appeared as though his conflicts regarding his daughter continue to encourage those negative feelings. He did mentioned his thoughts on those who engage in infidelity, “*Once a cheater, always a cheater*”

Participant 5 and Participant 6 discussed their difficult process of forgiveness. Both participants mentioned that their process of true healing was revealed once they accepted the reality of the situation and was ready to move on with their lives. Participant 6 noted, *"Once I realized that this could actually be better for me the way things were, forgiveness became easier."* Participant 3 expressed a statement that embodied both of their opinions, *"Forgiveness was possible once I stopped playing the blaming game, accepted the situation as reality, and was ready to move on."*

A similarity mentioned by Participant 4 and Participant 8 was their ability to channel their negative energy during their emotional suffering by engaging in positive activities that assisted them in the coping process. These activities included furthering educational goals and forms of art, such as painting and poetry. These coping methods appeared to keep their minds occupied on bettering the self to gain a sense of self-actualization.

Participant 4 appeared to be the most forgiving of all the participants. His process of forgiveness, also, appeared to progress more swiftly than the others based on his perspective of the overall situation. His response *"When you get away from the fantasy thought process and you have some wiggle room for hanging in there when things happen, the forgiveness is a little bit easier, I think. You are trying to overcome the illusion of your perceived reality and to me that is a dangerous thing because we don't operate off of reality we tend to operate off of perception"*. Some participants admitted that they were not perfect in their marriage, so there were occurrence that they wanted forgiveness for by their wives despite the circumstances of her infidelity. Hence, forgiveness became easier when they also wanted to be forgiven for their mistakes made during the marriage.

Trust and Intimacy after Infidelity

Trust and intimacy were two of the main consistent themes that were presented throughout the interviews. Many incidents were expressed by the participants and feelings that followed these incidents created major conflicts in the marriages of these participants. The participants reported that they were unable to sustain their marriages after their wives' infidelity whether it was their decision or their wives' decision to dissolve the marriage. The betrayal of trust had a significant impact on how men experienced intimacy with their wives' after their wives engaged in infidelity. According to the participants, the experience of being the causality of infidelity also impacted their level of trust when endeavoring to engage in new intimate relationships with other women. The participant responses illustrated the damage that can be caused when the act of infidelity has been implemented and exposed in marriages.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the intimacy experiences of men after their wives engaged in infidelity. The themed experiences provided by the participants' responses were identified and describe through narratives based on how intimacy after infidelity was perceived by the men. In this chapter, a discussion on the study's findings are reported and organized based on the order of participant interviews with a primary focus on the research question. As previously mentioned, there were five men who voluntarily participated in this study ranging between the ages of 30-50. Predominate assumptions were made based on the research findings. Additionally reported were limitations of the study, theoretical implications, implications for clinical practice, and recommendations for future research studies on the topic of intimacy after infidelity. In observation and interview with the following participants the series of explanations became evident to the researcher.

There were many relevant reasons provided by the participants that played a role in the occurrence of infidelity in their marriage, based on the findings, which included the selfishness of their wives, unresolved conflicts from their wives' past/childhood, and unrealistic expectations of their marriage financially and emotionally. As it related to these men, time certainly was of the essence when problems of infidelity became more apparent in their marriages.

There seemed to be a patterned of infidelity with each participant that illustrated a significant amount of time spent away from their wives due to one or more time-demanding jobs and/or military duties. This finding is a relevant factor that significantly impacted intimacy in their marriages after infidelity and was determined to be the consistent theme as to the reason infidelity occurred in their marriages. As the spiritual quote articulates, *"An idle mind is the devil's playground"*.

Limitations of the Research

There were limitations presented within the study. The sample size may have limited the responses regarding the experiences of intimacy after infidelity as it relates to men. Additionally, the lack of a more diverse sample may have limited the reactions to intimacy after infidelity as it relates to cultural differences of men. The study presented some diversity of the participants (Caucasian and African American), however, other cultures of men may have presented different views regarding their definitions of marriage, intimacy, and infidelity; and how they experienced intimacy after their wives engaged in infidelity.

Although the men's responses were similar, the results of the study may be limited to divorced men, who no longer engaged intimately with the women after the revelation of infidelity or who ended the marriage shortly thereafter the act of infidelity. This limitation should be considered when making conclusions about the results based on the assumption that men who are still married and coping with their wives' acts of infidelity may experience intimacy differently than men who are divorced from their wives after infidelity. Thus, the biases associated are to be considered when generalizing the findings to all men and their intimacy experiences after their wives' infidelity.

Other methods of data collection should be applied to assess other areas of the marriage, such as overall marital satisfaction and individual opinions on types of intimacy. Furthermore, the lack of including the perspectives of the unfaithful spouse, as it related to the topics of intimacy and infidelity, limited the research to one gender and one perspective of the marital experience regarding intimacy before and after infidelity.

Implications for Practice

This study's findings will be constructive to marriage and family therapists, premarital counselors and pastoral officers, and behavioral/social science educators as they seek to assist couples in therapy with issues of infidelity and teach students the dynamics associated with marital conflicts and conflict resolution. Marriage and family professionals will be able to examine the intimate perspectives and interpretations of married men and how they view acts of infidelity in their marriage as it relates to their wives' as the offender.

The male expressions will illustrate the following: how men define marriage, infidelity, and intimacy in marriage; their reasons for getting married to their wives; their interpretations and feelings toward acts of infidelity; and how they experience intimacy after their wives engaged in infidelity. These illustrations can be used to promote dialogue in a therapy session with a married couple to enhance marital communication skills regarding intimate expectations and feelings toward hurtful occurrences, such as acts of infidelity.

Furthermore, couple therapists will be able to utilize the findings of this study to observe the common themes that are presented when men communicate about matters of marital conflict, such as intimacy after infidelity. With these observations, therapists can seek theoretical perspectives, techniques and activities that promote emotional intimacy, physical intimacy, and spousal understanding within the marriage in an effort to prevent the occurrence of infidelity or to rebuild healthy marriages and families after the occurrence of infidelity.

Theoretical Implications

The theories presented in this study as theoretical frameworks were symbolic interaction theory and cognitive-behavioral theory. These theoretical frameworks supported the narrative responses of the participants based on their experiences of intimacy after infidelity. It was predicted that symbolic interaction theory and cognitive-behavioral theory would provide a theoretical perspective into the investigation of how men experience intimacy after their wives have engaged in infidelity in an effort to interpret the narratives provided by the participants.

As it related to the study, the symbolic interaction theory provided the concept of one member's behavior in a family unit directly influencing the interaction of another member (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). It was determined, based on the findings, that the actions of the participants' wives directly affected their ability to share intimacy with their wives after the occurrence of infidelity. Furthermore, the notion that people create symbols, which are their interpretations of language and behaviors based on social interactions and values that guide the manner in which they respond to the actions of others, supported the participants' interpretations of the reasons infidelity occurred in their marriage.

The key concept that was anticipated, by the researcher, to have a significant impact on the narratives of the participants' experiences with intimacy after infidelity was the conflict of realities between two individuals sharing the same space (husband and wife); and the influence of this concept on how the men viewed their roles as husbands and the roles of their wives.

Additionally, based on the cognitive-behavioral theory, it was predicted that this theoretical framework would explain the thought patterns that were revealed through verbal and nonverbal expressions, which ultimately influenced specific participant responses and behaviors to intimacy after infidelity. The cognitive-behavioral theory postulates the process by which an individual experiences internal reactions that influence their external response.

Based on the responses of the participants, infidelity was commonly viewed as a negative life experience; thus, resulting in a significant decline in their desires to be intimate with their wives. It is important to note that, although a few of the participants remained in the marriage longer than others after their wives' infidelity, there was a major shift in the way the couples' engaged intimately with one another after the occurrence of infidelity as described by the participants.

The results of this study advocates the need to examine other aspects of marital intimacy as it relates to infidelity. Further exploring the dynamics of social interaction, such as infidelity, intimate communication, gender communication, and cultural differences on intimacy would extensively illustrate the effects of these factors on marriage, while utilizing stimulating theories that support human behavior in intimate relationships. The previous literature did not primarily focus on the perspectives of men being the causalities of infidelity and how their experience with infidelity influenced their experience of intimacy.

As the qualitative findings should contribute to the enhancement of marital commitment, support, understanding, communication and satisfaction, other areas of marriage should be investigated in future research. Thus, a longitudinal research design examining the dynamics of a group of married couples, across time, would provide a more comprehensive assessment of changes in intimacy over time and possible contributing factors that may influence the occurrence of marital infidelity. The recommendations provided by the researcher would supplement the findings to current literature on intimacy after infidelity.

The conclusion of this study enhances the knowledge and perspectives on how men view and experience intimacy before and after the infidelity of their wives. One may conclude that men are rarely capable of experiencing or expressing an emotion-driven topic, such as intimacy after infidelity. However, the findings demonstrate that men are greatly capable of expressing their feelings regarding their experiences with painful events when compared to women. Despite their tendency to shy away from discussing painful experiences, there is so much pertinent information hidden behind their bold statures.

The contribution of this study to the area of psychology and counseling provides a unique perspective that is rarely explored among men. The results provide meaningful expressions of men in marriage and illustrate the delicate nature that men possess in emotional situations that challenge their mental and physical abilities of strength, which is often referred to as their "ego". It is concluded, that during their time of distress, they are less willing to discuss their pain; however, when they have found peace and restoration they will have an awesome story to share on their experiences, such as how they experienced intimacy after their wives engaged in infidelity.

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