

**Cheating in Dating: Examining the Nature and Process of
Infidelity in Dating Relationships**

An Executive Summary Submitted

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By

Parvati Varma

Department of Psychology
School of Human Sciences

Under the Supervision of
Dr. Saurabh Maheshwari

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In long-term partnerships, both involved parties have their commitments to keep; sexual and emotional exclusivity is typically anticipated and believed to be a vital feature of the relationship (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006). Yet infidelity is a common occurrence. A study in India reported that about 35.2 percent of respondents admitted to infidelity through online means (Jain, 2018). According to Blow and Hartnett (2005), infidelity is a sexual or emotional act that occurs outside of the committed relationship in a way that breaches sexual and emotional exclusivity expectations. Hertlein et al. (2005) also point out that it is widely acknowledged that infidelity refers to all behaviors that violate an implied or stated agreement between a couple, particularly that of emotional and sexual exclusivity.

According to early researchers (Glass & Wright, 1985), extradyadic relationships were formed as a result of a lack of something in primary relationships because people were not satisfied. However, later research has indicated that situational and individual factors are significant too (Allen et al., 2008; Altgelt et al., 2018; Ciarocco et al., 2012; Schmitt & Shackelford, 2008). Thompson (1983) mentioned that only about twenty-five percent of the variation in infidelity was attributed to the features of primary partnerships, which could imply that apart from reasons related to the primary relationship, other factors could be influencing a person's involvement in infidelity. Omarzu et al. (2012) mentioned that infidelity was a result of one of the following factors: lack of emotional and sexual satisfaction, wanting additional emotional and sexual encounters, falling out of love with the primary partner, falling in love with the other person, wanting revenge, and due to curiosity or sensation seeking. The categories indicated that it is not always a deficit in their primary relationship but the presence of other additional aspects as well that motivated an individual towards forming extradyadic relationships. Thus, given these, reasons for infidelity need to be investigated further.

The dating episode of an individual's life may set the groundwork for many behavioral tendencies that could continue post-marriage and is an important period of adult life. According to numerous studies (e.g., Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Buunk & Bakker, 1995), a person's past of infidelity can predict their willingness or actual involvement in infidelity. As a result, people who have a history of dating infidelity may transfer such behavior over into their marriages in the future. Therefore, infidelity studies specifically focused on dating relationships would be beneficial. However, most of what we know is from the infidelity studies carried out in the West. In contrast to the West, Indian society is more private and subtle in its sexual expressions than the West, and strong emotions like passion are not preferred. The available research on extradyadic involvement in India has been conducted with a primary focus on married individuals and couples (Jain & Sahni, 2017; Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008; Schensul et al., 2006). Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by investigating dating infidelity. It intends to get a complete understanding of infidelity by understanding its reasons, process, and consequences in a dating population. The current research had the following aims:

Research has given a lot of attention on relationship dissatisfaction between partners and suggests that those unhappy in their relationships cheat on their partners. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge this may not always be the case. While unhappy relationships do contribute, there may be additional other factors that are also vital. Accordingly, this study aimed to understand why people commit infidelity and gain a perspective directly from the partakers of infidelity.

It is also surprising that very few studies in the area of infidelity have focused on the question of how infidelity happens. The process of how a phenomenon happens is as important as the "why" and its outcomes. Thus, the study undertaken also sought to understand the process of infidelity.

Gender differences were evident in different aspects of infidelity. However, gender and infidelity association have to be investigated, keeping in view the narrowing differences in expected gender roles and liberal views regarding sexuality. Thus, the study also aims to see the role of gender in different types of infidelity and reasons for infidelity. To fulfill the aims of the study, the research was carried out in two phases- a narrative inquiry and a survey.

The thesis has been divided into six chapters. The first and current chapter, *Introduction*, provides an outline regarding the area of the study, the rationale for the study, and an overview of the chapters to come. The second chapter, *Review of Related Literature*, will include studies that offer insight into infidelity. The chapter consists of literature regarding theories and motivational factors explaining infidelity, types of infidelity, the process of infidelity and the after-effects of infidelity such as the consequences. The third chapter, *Infidelity Involvement: A Narrative Study of Causes and Processes*, has details regarding the first study. The chapter provides details regarding how the qualitative study was carried out and its results with a brief discussion. The fourth chapter, that is *Infidelity Explored: Motivations, Types, and Gender Dynamics*, consists of the details of the quantitative study. The chapter consists of an evaluation of the motivational variables, different infidelity types, outcomes of infidelity as well as gender differences. The fifth chapter *General Discussion*, consists of the findings of the research as a whole i.e., a synthesis of results obtained from both the narrative inquiry and the survey. The last chapter *Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications*, " summarizes the thesis findings.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Infidelity is characterized as a transgression when the individual that they are in a committed relationship with, has acted inappropriately and violated the norms in the relationship by being involved with a person outside their relationship (Drigotas, 1999). This chapter provides an overview of existing literature in the domain of infidelity. It starts with the typologies of infidelity and then provides an examination of the various reasons underpinning an individual's reasons to commit infidelity. The chapter proceeds to examine the nature of infidelity and the role of gender, education, and other socio-demographic variables that are associated with infidelity patterns. It also includes studies that look into the process of infidelity and the consequences of infidelity. Lastly, this chapter will also provide an overview of the present study, the research questions that the study aims to answer and the hypothesis formulated for the study.

Types of Infidelity

The two main types of infidelity are emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity (Berman & Frazier, 2005). Sexual infidelity is the most known type and could be referred to as participating in sexual intercourse and sexual behaviors with any person other than their partner (Buss et al., 1992; Roscoe et al., 1988; Yarab et al., 1998). Since the conventional belief system is that only partners in a committed relationship should have sexually intimate activities in most situations, sexual contact apart from the partner and behaviors such as sexual attraction, fantasies, flirting, petting, and passionately kissing are considered as partaking in infidelity (Boekhout et al., 1999; Roscoe et al., 1988; Yarab et al., 1998).

Emotional infidelity can be understood as a form of non-physical intimacy or emotional connection that could potentially develop into love outside of the primary relationship (Buss et al, 1992). Behaviors such as withholding information or lying to the primary partner and spending a

lot of time communicating, all come under the category of emotional infidelity (Roscoe et al., 1988; Yarab et al., 1998). Thus, it occurs when a couple's ground rules are broken after being emotionally attached to a third person, e.g., confiding and being vulnerable with the other person, falling in love, being devoted towards the other person, and spending money on them (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). In heterosexual relationships, when an individual lets someone of the opposite sex take care of emotional needs that would normally be met by their partner, they are engaging in emotional infidelity (Knapp & Dixon, 2013). This intimacy breeds emotional attachment, which in turn may result in a sexual relationship.

Reasons of Infidelity

The numerous factors that are studied concerning extradyadic involvement may be categorized as personal/ individual or dispositional factors, relational factors and contextual factors.

Individual Factors

Many personal characteristics such as openness, the desire to explore, a lack of self-control, and the dark triads correlate with the propensity for infidelity (March et al., 2023; Schmitt & Shackelford, 2008; Jain & Sahni, 2017; Jones & Weiser, 2014). Personal factors may also exhibit influence through one's attitudes, which may indirectly impact infidelity behavior (Allen et al., 2008; Isma & Turnip, 2019). Research also finds that individuals with low self-control disposition frequently engage in infidelity among other sexual behaviors (Love, 2006). Depleted self-control in individuals affects the ability to restrain themselves sexually (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007). The link between power and infidelity is another interesting association. According to earlier studies, power may influence sexual behavior by triggering sexual objectives and encouraging people to work toward achieving them (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). According to Lammers et al. (2011) having more power increases one's probability of being involved in

infidelity. Powerful people, according to Orbuch (2011), are more prone to engage in adultery because they are more susceptible to temptation.

Relationship Factors

The deficit theory has also attempted to comprehend extradyadic behaviors, with a focus on something lacking in the primary relationship, and supposes that some people actively engage in adultery as a result of growing dissatisfied with their current relationship (Thompson, 1983). The sexual relationship with the primary partner is one such aspect of romantic relationships that is extensively researched as a correlate of infidelity (Allen et al., 2008; Atkins et al., 2005). A literature review carried out by Haseli and colleagues (2019) also revealed that interpersonal incompatibility is linked with infidelity, and compatibility is required to sustain a long-term exclusive romantic connection.

Contextual Factors

An opportunity such as a place to socialize, (Lawson, 1988) or in the form of potential partners and circumstances assuring confidentiality (Greeley, 1991) leads to a likelihood of extradyadic involvement (Buunk, 1980). Urban residence (Treas & Giesen 2000), employment (Glass 2003), and frequent traveling for work (Traeen & Stigum 1998) have all been linked to higher cheating rates. Occasionally, social forces impact individuals without their knowledge. Abbasi et al. (2020) investigated the infidelity of Iranian women and found that the social and cultural variables had a significant role to play in their infidelity. The use of social media presents numerous opportunities for behaviors detrimental to romantic relationships (McDaniel et al., 2017). Additionally, one factor that increases the likelihood of infidelity is the third person's attractiveness (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). Having an active social life, for instance hosting guests, going out, and visiting friends is associated with infidelity in the case of men (Zhang et al, 2012). Another study found that witnessing ingroup members' cheating increased participants'

inclination to cheat themselves, indicating that an individual's tendency to engage in dishonest behaviors is influenced by the perceived social norms represented by others (Gino et al., 2009).

Nature of Infidelity

Carder (2017) categorized affairs based on some very common cheating patterns. While the focus was entirely on married couples, these infidelity instances are also the ones that are seen in dating infidelity. The first category is a one-night stand characterized by a one-time brief sexual encounter devoid of emotional attachment. This is unplanned and typically unfolds suddenly, involving intense and passionate sexual activity. The second category is an entangled affair which develops gradually with time as a result of emotional attachment and vulnerability with the cheating partner. The third category is sexual addiction affairs where people cheat only for sexual gratification without emotional involvement and cheating may be carried out with multiple alternative partners. The fourth category is an add-on affair which is cheating for fulfilling some void that they feel is not being satisfied in their primary relationship. The final category is the reconnection affair where they may cheat with an old partner.

Piemonte et al. (2022) believe that someone who consciously seeks out extradyadic sex or does so regularly is held to a different standard of morality than someone who indulges in extradyadic sex because it is a seductive offer. According to Elliott and Thrash (2002), someone who initiates infidelity is likely different from someone who is passive and tempted and accepts an offer. In addition, the psychological processes behind these actions vary and are probably influenced by circumstances in the environment (Simpson & Winterheld, 2012). As a result, Piemonte et al. (2022) believe that a method to classify cheating would be to differentiate between planned infidelity and infidelity that is not planned. There are several options open to someone who intentionally and consciously wants to cheat. Piemonte et al. (2022) suggest that this is a different type of infidelity than when someone has no intention of cheating but does so as

a result of giving in to their urges. Therefore, the process of how infidelity happens i.e., whether it is planned or spontaneous is to be considered important when studying infidelity.

Process of Infidelity

A study by Atwater (1979) highlighted that the key steps before women choose to engage in infidelity are knowing someone who has been involved in infidelity themselves, speaking with them about it, and considering the possibility of having it for a long time before actually becoming aware of it. Literature also cited that the affair partners are typically acquainted before their infidelity and happen to be friends, acquaintances, or former partners, it is only in a few cases that infidelity happens with a stranger (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). Allen et al. (2005) organized the variables across a temporal dimension to show the consideration that engaging in extramarital involvement is, in fact, a process. Jeanfreau et al. (2014) found that infidelity starts as a friendship, wherein they could disclose and talk about the problems with which they were dealing in their marriage and their relationship was platonic which later turned out to be a full-blown affair. Secondly, support from their friends and family turned out to be very significant in their decision and, the final component was all the attention they were getting from their affair partners which led them to be attracted towards infidelity. Thus, it was the emotional component in their affairs that connected to the sexual component. All of these studies are indicative of the fact that infidelity is not just a simple cause-and-effect phenomenon, instead, it moves about as a process, involving many factors.

Infidelity and Gender

Early research claimed that the frequency of infidelity was more for men than women (Wiederman, 1997; Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Later studies seem to indicate that the gender gap in terms of the occurrence of infidelity is reducing (Barta & Kiene, 2005; Brand et al., 2007; Burdette et al., 2007). Especially now that infidelity is considered to be more than just intercourse

(such as emotional connection, and kissing), women report just as many acts of infidelity as men (Allen et al., 2005; Treas & Giesen, 2000). According to Omarzu et al., (2012), more men than women have stated desiring more sexual encounters as a motivation for having extramarital relationships. The same study also asserted that women cheated (Omarzu et al., 2012), because they yearned for more emotional closeness or connection. Research has provided support for it with the results that men seem to be more frequently engaging in extramarital relationships when compared to women (Allen et al., 2008; Glass & Wright 1992). However, women also partake in infidelity for different reasons such as falling in love or having an emotional attachment with someone other than their married partner (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Women's extramarital sexual activity, according to Reiss et al. (1980), is likely to be motivated by love, whereas men's sexual activity is likely to be motivated by pleasure. Brand et al., (2007) in his study discovered that males reported more infidelity instances than females, as well as more sexual infidelity.

Infidelity and Education

Studies suggest that adultery is more prevalent among those with low education, while others indicate a link between greater educational attainment and a greater chance of infidelity (Atkins et al., 2001; Traeen&Stigum, 1998; Treas & Giesen, 2000). Forste and Tanfer (1996) mentioned that dating and cohabitating women with a college degree were more likely to cheat on their partners as compared to those who had only completed high school. On a similar note, Martins et al. (2016) in his study found that higher-educated women were three times more likely to participate in online sexual infidelity. Habibi et al. (2019) found that people with a greater level of education were more accepting of infidelity. According to Christopher and Sprecher (2000), it is also possible that persons with the greatest and lowest levels of education and income are the most prone to commit infidelity. These impacts may also be caused by factors associated with money and education, such as excessive stress, privilege, and opportunity (Atkins et al.

2001; Treas and Giesen 2000). In contrast, few studies have shown no significant links between education and infidelity (e.g., Shaw et al., 2013; Traeen et al., 2007).

Consequences of Infidelity

According to Toplu-Demirtaş and Fincham (2018), there is a sense of loss of confidence in the relationship or partner as well as a sense of safety being taken away. Infidelity may result in PTSD symptoms at a rather high incidence and may increase the likelihood of worse psychological health, partially through post-traumatic cognitions (Roos et al., 2019). Infidelity is also frequently followed by diminished trust and poor perceptions of others (Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Sauerheber & Dique, 2016). Ending the relationship is another typical outcome (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006). The negative outcomes of infidelity are not limited to just the ones who feel betrayed, in fact following extradyadic behavior, cheaters may experience a variety of emotions and feelings. Perpetrators of cheating may feel highly distressed, shameful, and guilty, have decreased well-being, and have low levels of self-forgiveness (Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2017). Infidelity tends to go against people's desire to be seen favorably, therefore they may also feel disturbed about their actions (Hall & Fincham, 2006).

The Present Study

The phenomenon of infidelity is common between couples in both committed dating relationships and marriage. The reason why individuals in dating couples were utilized for the study is that studies investigating infidelity in the dating population seem to be limited. The financial, legal, and societal consequences of separation like marriage do not constrain individuals in dating relationships. Despite this, individuals cheat on their partners even while dating. Few studies believe that dating relationships carry a much larger risk of infidelity than marriages do (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; McAnulty & Brineman; 2007). Research has noted that if an individual has committed infidelity in a previous relationship, they are very likely to report

infidelity involvement in the next relationship as well, and therefore chances are they may continue with this in their marriage as well (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Drigotas et al., 1999; Knopp et al., 2017). What is known about infidelity is based largely on Western studies, and the studies in the Indian context have been limited to extramarital affairs (Mao & Raguram, 2009). Thus, studies utilizing Indian dating samples may be useful in uncovering information from a different perspective. Considering the adverse outcomes associated with infidelity, it becomes crucial to delve into its examination, and thus infidelity studies carried out in dating relationships are essential to gain a better understanding. Therefore, the study aims to study infidelity utilizing a dating population for the study. This research would seek to understand the factors that relate to an individual's involvement in infidelity. Reasons for infidelity may differ greatly when those participating in infidelity themselves share their experiences. Being dissatisfied and unhappy is at most times assumed to be why people stray (Barta & Kiene, 2005). People in happy and fulfilling relationships, however, may also cheat since the option of leaving their partners while dating is easier if they are dissatisfied. It may thus be that apart from dissatisfaction, several other factors may be vital in choosing to be involved in infidelity. Other than this, the study also aims to gain insights into the intricate process of infidelity. Building upon the findings outlined by Allen et al. (2005) it is presumed that infidelity, akin to other phenomena, follows a systematic progression, characterized by distinct components and phases. In addition to this, gender differences were also evaluated in the study. Studies find that gender is an important variable associated with infidelity (Lalasz & Weigel, 2011; Martins et al., 2016). Therefore, the current study also considered its importance and analyzed if there is a significant difference across different infidelity types based on the participant's gender.

In addition to this, the present study also examined how people's own experience with infidelity would impact their perception and other psychological variables, for instance, relationship satisfaction, need fulfillment, perceived power, and interpersonal trust among others. Therefore, the study also compared the experience of infidelity among perpetrators of infidelity,

victims of infidelity, and those who had never experienced infidelity. Lastly, the outcomes of infidelity and its resolution were also studied for both the perpetrators and victims of infidelity.

The study aims to address the following research questions: -

1. What are the reasons for an individual's involvement in infidelity?
2. How do individuals get into a transition from fidelity to getting involved in an act of infidelity?
3. What are the factors that explain an individual's infidelity, in cases of planned and spontaneous infidelity?
4. What differences are seen when participants are engaging in sexual infidelity versus emotional infidelity?
5. What is the role of gender in various types of infidelity and the process of infidelity?
6. How do individuals resolve it after the infidelity occurs?

A few hypotheses were formulated which have been provided below:

H1: Participants taking part in planned infidelity would have more favorable attitudes and intentions towards infidelity in comparison to participants taking part in spontaneous infidelity.

H2: Relationship satisfaction and need fulfillment would be higher in participants reporting fidelity as compared to participants reporting infidelity.

H3: Relationship satisfaction and need fulfillment would be higher in spontaneous infidelity as compared to planned infidelity.

H4: Experience of guilt would be more prevalent in spontaneous infidelity as compared to planned infidelity.

H5: Emotional infidelity would be higher in females than males, while the prevalence of sexual infidelity would be higher in males as compared to females.

H6: Infidelity perpetrators would score higher on social media use than the fidelity group.

Two sequential studies were utilized for deeper insight and to provide answers to the below-stated research questions. Based on a qualitative methodology, the first study examined the retrospective accounts of persons who had engaged in infidelity and made an effort to address several research questions through this analysis. This study was an investigation that delves into the infidelity experience from the partakers' perspective. Why people cheat and how they do were uncovered through the first study. This was further studied through the second research study using quantitative methods, i.e., a survey of a representative sample. The second study expanded the results of the first study with a few additional variables from the literature. It also intended to cover a few additional investigations that were not covered in study one and aimed to corroborate the results of narrative studies. It compared three groups – perpetrators and victims of infidelity and fidelity group for a better understanding of factors and their relationship between loyal and disloyal groups.

Chapter 3

Infidelity Involvement: A Narrative Study of Causes and Processes

Many factors are at play that motivate a person to engage in infidelity than just the usually believed lack of satisfaction (Ciarocco et al., 2012; Omarzu et al., 2012; Selterman et al., 2019). It is therefore essential that attention be given to these other reasons as well when considering an individual's reasons for infidelity. Studies also suggest that most infidelity scenarios follow a general pattern. For instance, how it initially starts or how they cope with it after, and yet very little is known about the process of infidelity (Allen et al., 2005). With this as the background, the qualitative study seeks to gather an understanding of the different factors that contribute to infidelity from the standpoint of the perpetrators themselves and it also focuses on exploring the process of infidelity. Thus, using the informant's own words, a narrative inquiry was used to explore the recounted experiences of infidelity (McLeod, 2001).

Method

Researchers have argued that a narrative is the best way to understand life events as it draws on people's natural quality of storytelling allowing them to construe and understand eventful incidents. Since the present study explored the reasons that influence an individual to engage in infidelity and the process behind that, therefore, the study made use of narrative inquiry to acquire a deeper familiarity. The perpetrators of infidelity narrated their own experiences of infidelity. They described in detail their reasons for partaking in infidelity, how it started and continued, their relationship with their primary partner, and how they ended it.

Participants

All of the participants hailed from Sikkim and were involved in romantic relationships with the opposite gender. The following criteria had to be met for participants to be included in

the study: a) they were perpetrators of infidelity, b) their committed relationship should have been for a minimum of six months, and c) they should have been dating and not married or divorced. A snowball sampling method was used. For identifying the first participant, a personal contact was used and subsequently, more contacts were contacted through the participants' contacts.

The sample consisted of 40 adults, out of which 21 were males and 19 were females. The participant's average age was 27.15 years with the youngest participant being 18 years and the oldest participant was 36 years.

Interview Questions

To achieve the goals of the current study, a narrative inquiry was conducted through telephone interviews. The focus was on knowing their full infidelity story in detail through the narratives of the participants. Thus, there were a few questions, just to probe and guide the participants. They were asked for instance – Can you tell me about your involvement with the cheating partner and how it started? How was your primary relationship at that time? What happened after you cheated? How did you deal with it? How did cheating affect you or your relationship? etc. Based on their responses, they were further probed, to get more details.

Procedure

Ethical clearance was the first step that was taken by the University's Institutional Review Board at the start of the study. Thereafter, the participants were contacted through a phone call and asked regarding voluntary participation in the study. They were briefed about the purpose of their study and their role in it. Upon showing their willingness, a time and day was fixed for the interview according to their convenience. On the day decided by them and according to the appointment given by them, they were called and a rapport was established to make the participants feel comfortable and develop a sense of trust. For recording the data, a recording app was used on the mobile phone. The interviews were carried out in Nepali, English, and Hindi as

per the participants' fluency and convenience. A few neutral questions that were not related to the analysis were included at the final stage of the interview to help the participants regain their relaxed mood, and lastly, they were thanked for their participation, cooperation, and unrestricted and sincere comments.

Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis software called Quirkos 2.4.1 was utilized to analyze the data. Soon after participant data was gathered, it was transcribed, and for a few of the cases, some sentences were first translated to English and then transcribed. The gathering of data and the transcription of the interviews into document files were done side by side. The transcripts were then input into the program. The data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts of interviews were read several times before codes were identified. Next, the codes were read over and over again and clubbed based on similarities. The codes emerged through the data itself while a few were similar to those from previous literature. While coding, the analysis of every cheating episode was analyzed to understand the reasons, the starting, the developmental progress, and the end of the process. Finally, these codes were brought together under a large theme. To be certain that no codes were overlooked, the data was carefully examined and re-analyzed. The reliability of the codes was then evaluated by a second independent rater. After reaching a saturation threshold, data analysis was concluded.

Results

The results of the study found some themes which were similar to earlier studies and a few were novel. There are typically four reasons given by people for their infidelity: personal, relationship, third-party, and situational reasons, with each of these categories including a variety of motivational reasons. These reasons may occur separately or simultaneously. The results also

portray different processes of individuals' involvement in infidelity- one for cases of spontaneous infidelity and three processes for cases of planned cheating.

Motivational Factors for Infidelity

Personal Factors. These are those factors that are intrinsic to the individual, such as personal attributes, as well as those that have an impact on the main person directly involved in infidelity. The personal factors in the study were found to be the need for exploration, uncertainty about the one, and lack of control. People going through similar relationship circumstances may act differently with one choosing to cheat on their partner, while the other stays faithful and it is possible to attribute this difference to individual characteristics and choices.

Relationship Factors. This refers to factors associated with the primary relationship, and it is a shared aspect of the two partners. Dissatisfaction, sexual discontentment, relationship toxicity, physical distance, neglect, incompatibility, and revenge were the relationship factors identified in this study.

Third-Party Factors. The factors involving a third party that pull an individual towards becoming close to someone outside the committed relationship and committing infidelity are referred to as third-party factors. In this study, love, self-worth validation, bonding, and attraction were the third-party factors contributing to infidelity. The third-party factors tempt the individuals since they usually receive what they were lacking in their primary relationship. Third-party factors were more effective when the primary relationship was less satisfying, but there were numerous instances where they still contributed to infidelity even in situations when the primary relationship was strong.

Situational Factors. This includes the outside-of-the-perpetrator contextual variables about the external environment that cannot be controlled by the perpetrator- life events, triggers, and opportunities were the situational factors found in the study.

Process of Infidelity

The infidelity process that unfolded from the participants' narratives depended on how the infidelity instances took place. Based on the rich narratives provided by the perpetrators themselves, it was found that the process was different for spontaneous infidelity and planned infidelity. Spontaneous infidelity can be categorized as consisting of infidelity scenarios where the participants a) believed the short timeframe available was not enough to consider and think things through and, as a result, were unable to consider the ramifications of their choices. These incidents were cases of infidelity where people acted spontaneously and without planning, for instance, say, infidelity through sexual activity as an act of passion when intoxicated. On the other hand, planned infidelity could be considered as those infidelity scenarios wherein the perpetrators a) believed they could control and direct the situation according to their wishes if they so desired, b) it occurs over a period that gives them enough time to think and act, and c) consequences of their extradyadic behavior could be foreseen.

Planned Infidelity. The process of how infidelity happens is slightly different for planned infidelity scenarios as compared to when infidelity is spontaneous, although in both cases, the elements are quite similar. The process of infidelity in a planned infidelity scenario begins either with relationship dissatisfaction, personal factors, or the entry of the alternative.

Discussion

The present study was aimed at exploring what are the factors that play a part in involvement in the cheating process of infidelity. The results as found in the present study have been discussed below.

Reasons for Involvement in Infidelity

The results found multiple factors which have been organized into four broader factors – personal, situational, relationship, and third party. In most cases, few of these reasons were together present and some factors on their own were also influential in prompting a person to engage in infidelity.

Past studies have also noted the importance of dispositional factors in understanding infidelity as well as the possibility that these factors might be used to determine their attitude towards infidelity, which in turn can serve as a major guiding force for infidelity (Allen et al., 2008; Isma & Turnip, 2019). Similar to the present findings previous research has also discovered a favourable association between infidelity and traits like openness, the desire to explore, and a lack of self-control (Jain & Sahni, 2017; Schmitt & Shackelford, 2008). An unexpected finding of the current study was that being unsure about the partner and feeling uncertain of their relationship leading to marriage also encouraged people to cheat with a substitute. al relationships by three connected but separate sources, namely the self, the partner, and the relationship, and people are driven to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). The context could be of importance here. Collectivist cultures prefer a pragmatic approach to relationships (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). Dating is frequently seen as a stepping stone before marriage and, there is a misplaced assurance that the person you date will be the one you eventually marry in the Indian context, especially for people in their late twenties and thirties, and a lot of emphasis is placed on security, stability and certainty. Not being able to imagine a future with their partners or in their current relationship, therefore, could drive their attention toward more beneficial and realistic alternatives.

The study also points out that relationship issues are a major contributing element to infidelity as the answer to why people get involved outside of their committed relationships is because they are dissatisfied with their primary partners. Prior research has underlined this by

confirming that people try to fulfill their needs through partnerships, failing which they may seek fulfillment elsewhere (Barta & Kiene, 2005; Jeanfreau et al., 2014; Norona et al., 2018; Omarzu et al., 2012). Feeling neglected by their primary partner is another prevalent factor seen in the study which can also be found in Barta and Keine's (2005) infidelity model. Another element identified in the present study was incompatibility which has been linked to infidelity in previous studies as well (Haseli et al., 2019). Pioneering work in this area by Glass and Wright (1992) also cited love as one of the most important driving factors behind infidelity. Scholars have highlighted the role that neglect plays in infidelity, thus it is likely that those who feel this way may seek out and end up cheating if they obtain attention from other sources. Feeling attracted is one additional factor why some may get involved in extradyadic relationships. Attraction to the other person has often been cited as a reason for infidelity (Feldman and Cauffman, 1999). An interesting finding from the study was people also mentioned events in their lives and being intoxicated accountable for them wanting to cheat. People often feel vulnerable during certain phases of their lives and this may influence their decision. A person's emotional state affects people's tendency to indulge in regretful sexual conduct (Mark et al., 2011). Additionally, the influence of alcohol or drugs on an individual is such that it may reduce their inhibitions and increase risk-taking which could lead to sexual behaviors such as infidelity (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Norona et al., 2018). Finally, having the chance to engage in extradyadic activities also serves as motivation by itself. While, opportunities such as days spent traveling for work to simply being a case of one person working while the other partner is at home could serve further as additional reasons for those who already wish to cheat as well as for those who are already aggravated by their relationship factors (Atkins et al., 2001; Crouch & Dickes, 2016).

Process of Infidelity

The stages in the infidelity process consist of risk factors, entry of alternatives, triggers, bonding, cognizance, disclosure/non-disclosure, post-infidelity reflection, consequences, and

resolution. The sequence differed slightly depending on the form of infidelity. While the processes are similar, the way they start is slightly different. When the infidelity processes it can be made out that the way they start is slightly different. It becomes clear that the existence of triggers was the most notable characteristic of spontaneous infidelity, which is practically missing in planned cheating. It is crucial to note that just because someone commits spontaneous infidelity, it does not always suggest that they are free of relationship issues or other risk factors. It does not, however, cause infidelity at that particular time. It is also clear that as soon as someone commits an act of spontaneous infidelity when they come to their senses and realize what has happened, they immediately suffer the emotional fallout. They were the ones who felt more guilty and shameful as compared to planned infidelity perpetrators. In contrast to impulsive infidelity, participants of planned infidelity were more likely to confess their infidelity. Finally, since infidelity may occur in different ways for different people, therefore it can also be claimed that these processes are not completely rigid and even though the infidelity procedures in these two situations are different, they nonetheless share significant similarities.

Chapter 4

Infidelity Explored: Motivations, Types, and Gender Dynamics

The present chapter attempts to employ the findings from the previous study and use them as a base for further exploration. This chapter consists of the details of the survey study. The survey was carried out through both online and offline modes. In addition to examining some other variables related to infidelity in addition to those already disclosed by the earlier study, it also aims to confirm the findings of the narrative inquiry on a larger sample. The study carried out in this chapter also covers a few issues that could not be adequately addressed by the narrative inquiry, such as determining whether there are gender differences in various forms of infidelity. The research contrasts the viewpoints of people who have committed and suffered from adultery, as well as those who have never engaged in any form of infidelity. The study also investigates if a person's prior instances of infidelity are associated with certain variables. Furthermore, it also examined the effects of infidelity on both people who commit adultery and those who are the targets of it.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 622 participants from Sikkim, aged 18 to 39 years (overall $M_{age} = 24.46$; $SD_{age} = 4.259$). It included 245 males ($M_{age} = 24.91$, $SD_{age} = 4.67$) and 377 females ($M_{age} = 24.17$, $SD_{age} = 3.94$). The sample consisted of self-reported perpetrators ($n = 196$), victims ($n = 200$) of infidelity, and the fidelity group ($n = 226$) i.e., those who had never cheated on their partners or been cheated by others. The participants were included in the study based on the criteria as the first study.

Measures

The survey consisted of several measures, most of which were standardized scales along with a few single-item measures. Three sets of questionnaires were prepared for the three groups – perpetrators, victims, and fidelity group. The survey also consisted of a demographic form. The measures used in the survey are personal sense of power scale by Anderson et al. (2012), Relationship Assessment Scale by Hendrick et al. (1988), Trust in Interpersonal Relationships scale by Larzelere and Huston, (1980), Attitudes Toward Infidelity Scale by Whatley (2008), Intention Towards Infidelity scale developed by Jones et al. (2011), The Brief Self-Control Scale (Tangney, et al., 2004), Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) by McCullough et al. 2006, the decision regret scale (Brehaut et al., 2003), the Breakup Distress scale (Feld et al., 2009), State shame and guilt scale by Marschall et al. (1994), Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS), by Andreassen et al. (2012), The UCLA loneliness scale (Russell et al., 1978). Apart from this a few single items were used.

Procedure

Information regarding the study, in brief, was shared on social media sites, posted in university groups, and spread verbally. The participants were then reached out and briefed about the purpose of the study and the research in brief. A few participants had some queries, which were answered.

Once they were ready to participate, a few questions were asked informally to determine if they fulfilled all the criteria for inclusion in the study. To allow the respondents to answer freely and feel comfortable, they were provided with the option to fill up the questions online through Google Forms or offline using pen and paper questionnaires provided to them.

Data Analysis

For analyzing the data, SPSS software was used. The data from all the participants was entered into SPSS. A few of the scales had reverse items and for those items, reverse coding was done. The items were then summed to derive a total score for each of the scales, excluding the single-item measures. Pearson's correlation was used to examine the relationship between the variables overall and to understand the association between the variables for each of the groups. Thereafter, MANOVA, logistic regression, t-test, and chi-square were carried out to check for significant differences across different groups.

Results

There were significant group differences in the perceptions of the factors that lead to infidelity based on whether they were perpetrators themselves, victims, or had never experienced infidelity i.e., the fidelity group. Results found gender, trust, and situational factors were significant positive predictors of perpetrating infidelity. Need fulfilment, personal and third-party factors on the other hand was a significant negative predictor of perpetrating infidelity. The number of people involved in various infidelity types differed by educational qualification. there are significant group differences between perpetrators of different infidelity types.

Discussion

Results found that perpetrators of infidelity socialized much more during their relationship in comparison to the victims or those who were faithful. Interestingly, it was also seen that those involved in planned infidelity were the ones who socialized more than perpetrators of spontaneous infidelity. Frequently meeting up with friends and reference groups often bring about a certain influence on one's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Megens & Weerman 2012; Ragan 2014). Results in the study found that perpetrators perceived themselves to hold more power in their relationship when they cheated as compared to victims who scored lowest on the perceived sense of power. Feeling powerful evokes a sense of confidence and could result in

sexual overperception (Gonzaga et al., 2008; Kunstman & Maner, 2011; Lammers et al., 2011) and perpetrators may have felt bold and confident enough to cheat on their partners.

The present study findings also depict that those who maintained fidelity in their relationships were the most satisfied and cited having most of their needs met by their partners. Being satisfied and happy with their partners would be one reason why individuals would choose to be loyal (Emmers et al., 2010). Previous studies mention relationship dissatisfaction to be associated with infidelity (Zapfen, 2016). It was however notable that gender was an influential factor. Despite their involvement in infidelity, male perpetrators were more satisfied in their relationship overall as compared to females who cheated. Males hardly partake in infidelity with a desire to end their relationships and start another (Wypler, 2016).

Those who had never experienced infidelity believed relationship factors, personal factors, and third-party factors were all reasons that made an individual more likely to cheat on their partners. The ones who had cheated, however, reported situational factors as the most likely reason that leads to infidelity. In fact, among the three groups, the perpetrators were the ones to believe that personal factors were the least likely to lead to infidelity. This in part could be because individuals are inclined to point their behavior to situational circumstances and credit the actions of others to dispositional features, more so when the actions are negative (Jones & Nisbett, 1987). Another finding is that individuals' role in experiences with infidelity i.e., whether they were cheaters themselves or on the receiving end of infidelity or have been a part of faithful relationships might influence their outlook and behavior in their current and future relationships as well. Results found that perpetrators held the most positive attitudes regarding infidelity, in fact, they also scored highest on perceived behavioral control and intention towards infidelity and had the least amount of self-control specifically towards infidelity behaviors. Those who were engaged in planned infidelity had more favorable attitudes and intentions toward infidelity. In line with cognitive dissonance theory, prior infidelity also predicts more accepting

attitudes about infidelity, which is also what the study results showed (Foster & Misra, 2013; Jackman, 2015; Sharpe et al., 2013; Solstad & Mucic, 1999; Wiederman, 1997).

Another interesting finding was the significant role of gender and education in the type of infidelity. Males were found to be more involved in sexual infidelity whereas females were involved in emotional infidelity and emotional-sexual infidelity. The findings were consistent with prior studies (Glass & Wright, 1985; Mc Alister et al., 2005; Martins et al., 2016). Those with higher education were involved in sexual infidelity, whereas those who had a graduation degree or less were engaged in emotional and emotional-sexual infidelity. (Atkins et al., Treas & Giesen, 2000; Martins et al., 2016)

Results showed there were some differences in the consequences of infidelity as well. Cheating on their partner in the heat of the moment and spontaneously without enough time to think leads to more guilt as compared to planned infidelity. A study that utilized hypothetical situations to study guilt described that more guilt was experienced in cases of unintentional infidelity and vice versa (Mongeau et al., 1994). Female victims as compared to males avoided their cheating partners more after the infidelity incident.

Chapter 5

General Discussion

This study set out to better understand the phenomena of infidelity in a dating relationship. The study finds that people's need for exploration is a reason why many cheat. Those with an inbuilt curiosity to explore more might wish to experiment with various sexual encounters, socialize with strangers, have fantasies, etc. Sensation-seeking was a common factor in people's reason for cheating (Yeniçeri&Kökdemir, 2006). Lack of self-control is another important reason why people cheat. Individuals exhibiting inadequate self-control tendencies often participate in infidelity and other sexual practices (Love, 2006). Individuals often have a concept of how their partner and their perfect relationship should be – “the one” for them and they want to end up with “the one” meant for them. At times, they may also become unsure whether they have a future with their dating partners leading to marriage. This is unique and in contrast with the Western studies where dating is an experience in itself and it may or may not lead to marriage. Collectivistic cultures favor a practical approach to relationships (Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008).

Relational factors also serve as important reasons why people cheat and results obtained from both the studies assert this. The study finds that perpetrators of infidelity reported lower relationship satisfaction and low need fulfillment as compared to the fidelity group. Earlier studies confirm that being dissatisfied with the partner or the relationship as a whole is linked to involvement in infidelity (Mark et al., 2011; Silva et al., 2017). Feeling neglected in the primary relationship and by their committed partners was also cited as a vital reason for involvement in infidelity. Revenge was also influential for people's participation in infidelity since they wanted to get back at their primary partner for cheating on them first. Prior studies also mention this (Barta &Keine, 2005; Jeanfreau et al., 2014). In the present study, it was mostly a reason given

by females involved in sexual infidelity. Revenge as a reason, was more prominent in sexual infidelity.

The findings in this study posit certain important factors are related to the alternative or third-party factors that also serve as reasons for why people cheat. Receiving special treatment and attention from a third party may increase their self-esteem or make them feel confident about themselves, in a way that validates their self-worth and thus helps these individuals rebuild their self and be more inclined towards the cheating person. The study findings also point out the importance of contextual factors in advancing infidelity. One noteworthy discovery from the research was that participants also cited personal experiences and being under the influence of alcohol as reasons for their desire to cheat. Individuals become vulnerable when they go through emotional or stressful changes which may have an impact on the choices they make. People's propensity to engage in regrettable sexual behavior is influenced by their mood, both positively and negatively (Mark et al., 2011). Although mood and emotion are personal traits, they also rely on the situation and might serve as infidelity triggers in some cases. In line with this finding, alcohol and drugs have been found to lower inhibitions and promote risk-taking sexual behaviors such as infidelity (Norona et al., 2018). The study also found that infidelity perpetrators socialized much more frequently as compared to the victims and fidelity groups.

Initially, the study expected to find reports of sexual and emotional infidelity since the demarcation between the two is clear. However, the narrative inquiry found participants involved in sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, and emotional-sexual infidelity. The participants also had a clear understanding with a fixed demarcation for what each of these meant. Therefore, in the second study, we used all three forms of infidelity. An interesting finding of the study is that the type of infidelity people engaged in was a result of certain factors that they perceived played a vital role in their extradyadic involvement. These factors varied across the types of infidelity.

The findings from both the studies in this research showed that the process of infidelity varies depending on the infidelity instance. Instances of infidelity where individuals have time to think about their actions or make a logical decision have been considered planned infidelity and as such the process is slightly different from how infidelity takes place. Certain vital risk factors exist which could be personal factors, relationship-related factors, or both such as being dissatisfied with the sexual participation of the primary partner while having a desire to try out different fantasies. These risk by themselves may be harmless but what happens later provide the way for infidelity. While these four processes were slightly different, however, several aspects were similar. Allen et al. (2005) in his study has organized different domains together to portray the process of infidelity, and a few elements that emerged were similar to what the narratives discovered in the present study.

This research, found guilt and regret to be the two main experiences that individuals went through after cheating on their partners. An interesting finding from the results of the qualitative study was that along with these two experiences, self-justification was done by cheaters, especially in the cases of planned infidelity. According to Walker and Brown's research (2012), faithful people perceive guilt as a very negative emotion that they want to avoid and this also prevents them from having an affair. Cheaters, on the other hand, are able to reduce guilt as well as empathy by downplaying the negative impact of their infidelity behavior and rationalizing their behavior (Olthof et al., 2000).

Chapter 6

Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications

The study aimed to understand the reasons for involvement in infidelity in a dating relationship. The study found personal factors, relationship factors, third-party factors, and situational factors, which usually worked together for people choosing to engage in infidelity. The personal factors that were found vital from the perpetrators' retrospective accounts were the need for exploration, uncertainty about the one, and lack of control. The study reveals a noteworthy finding that individuals tend to engage in cheating when uncertain about their relationship's future. The relationship factors that served as reasons for infidelity were dissatisfaction, sexual discontentment, relationship toxicity, physical distance, neglect, incompatibility, and revenge. The third-party factors related to the alternative that led to infidelity were love, self-worth validation, bonding, and attraction. The identified situational factors were life events, triggers, and opportunities. The study also revealed the infidelity process varies depending on whether the infidelity instances are spontaneous, passionate acts that are carried out in the heat of the moment or whether they are infidelity behaviors that are planned and occur with some thought and in a time frame to make decisions. Spontaneous infidelity scenarios follow a process that have a trigger as the most important element. The guilt and regret are more intense and immediate. In the process of planned infidelity, risk factors that are relationship-related or due to personal aspects are prominent and serve as the starting point. Justification, along with the other consequences is a vital element in the planned infidelity process.

The study made a comparison between three groups – perpetrators of infidelity, victims of infidelity, and the ones who had never experienced infidelity in any form. This sought to assess the group differences for the relationship where infidelity occurred in variables such as socialization, relationship satisfaction, trust, and need fulfillment among various other variables based on their role in the infidelity experience. The study highlights that individuals involved in

infidelity exhibit a significantly higher frequency of socialization compared to those in faithful relationships or those who have experienced infidelity as victims. Those who had been infidelity perpetrators held positive attitudes towards infidelity, higher perceived behavioral control towards infidelity behavior, higher infidelity intention, and more social media usage in their present relationship as compared to those who had been cheated or had never experienced infidelity.

The study further examined gender differences in infidelity. It was found that the participation of men was significantly more in cases of sexual infidelity, while women were more in cases of emotional and emotional-sexual infidelity. It was also noticed that women cited revenge as an important reason for their infidelity which was not the case for men, Additionally, it was also found that in general, the likelihood of cheating was increased for men. Further, the reasons were different with women giving more emotion-based reasons for their cheating while the motivation behind men's infidelity was emotional. In the study, guilt and regret were identified as the main emotions following cheating, with guilt being more prevalent in spontaneous infidelity compared to planned infidelity. Self-justification was common, especially in cases of planned infidelity, for rationalizing their behavior. A few unexpected positive outcomes for perpetrators include a sense of emotional independence and increased confidence, with some relationships also improving post-infidelity.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current work combines two sub-studies for a thorough understanding of infidelity, however, the generalizability of the results and the study itself has certain limitations which have been mentioned here and may be helpful for similar research in the future.

Due to the correlational nature of the current study and since it was conducted at a single point, it was not feasible to ascertain whether any of these variables cause infidelity. Future studies can be carried out using longitudinal studies to gain more insight over a longer period.

Being limited to respondents from Sikkim, the results from the present study may not apply to other parts of India, where cultural scenarios and dating scenarios may not be as open. A comparative study with participants from different states of India may be carried out.

A few variables such as religiosity and morality may affect how one perceives infidelity due to notions of right and wrong. This study did not take into consideration these two, however, it would be useful to incorporate this in future studies.

Implications

The findings of this investigation complemented those of earlier studies. At the same time, this study also strengthens the idea that infidelity, in the dating relationship is not just a result of being unhappy in the primary relationship. Rather, it is the addition of other factors along with relationship satisfaction that led to participating in infidelity. Since people sympathize with the victims and because cheating on a loved one is morally wrong, it can be difficult for the transgressor to share their emotional experiences. This creates a dilemma because they feel so ashamed of their actions. In some, it may also negatively affect their future relationships by creating a repetitive pattern. This study can assist in understanding the consequences that these perpetrators face. Counselors would also be better able to offer assistance and practical solutions to both the perpetrator and victim if they are aware of the factors contributing. This would help them maintain an impartial perspective rather than being influenced by moral judgments.

Understanding the process and reasons behind infidelity can enhance therapy approaches, fostering more effective interventions. It would be of help to identify and provide third-party assistance when individuals are still in the early stages of the infidelity process. The study

findings can be used to develop targeted counseling therapies for planned and spontaneous infidelity aimed at providing help to couples or individuals who seek help. On an individual level, the study would aid in recognizing the factors that contribute to infidelity, allowing individuals to address potential issues early, and fostering stronger bonds.

Conclusion

Most romantic partners are intolerant when it comes to extradyadic relationships and expect their partners to be committed to them completely. Despite this, individuals may engage in infidelity, endangering the relationship as well as sabotaging both personal and partner's wellbeing. The present study looked into the reasons and how it happened. The self-reported reason why people commit infidelity in dating can be broadly categorized into four factors – personal factors, relationship factors, third-party factors, and situational factors. Though the results mostly show similarities between the reasons for infidelity in marriage and dating, however, it is found that few factors are more common and plausible in the case of dating. The analysis also found that there is a difference as to which of these factors leads to emotional infidelity, sexual infidelity, and emotional-sexual infidelity. While, sexual reasons, the desire to explore, and triggers were found to be the most reported causes of sexual infidelity, reasons like relationship toxicity and lack of surety mostly led to instances of emotional infidelity. Finally, emotional-sexual infidelity was carried out due to myriad reasons involving individuals being in love, attraction, and bonding with the third partner and receiving support, dissatisfaction, toxic relationship, distance, neglect, low self-control, and the emotional state during the time.

Results, although, shows a general pattern of how the different process of infidelity unfolds but the major difference in the process arises due to the nature of the infidelity depending on whether it is something that can be categorized as spontaneous or planned. While there is the notion that infidelity has adverse effects on the relationship and may lead to problems between the couples, it was noticed from the present study that existing problems between the couples and

in the relationship may themselves be the first step towards infidelity rather than being just the end product. Individuals after engaging in infidelity might exit or continue the primary relationship but the weight of the decision rests on the state of the relationship, the partner's willingness to forgive them, and the reason why they committed infidelity in the first place.