

Review of studies on infidelity

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Abstract. This paper reviews empirical studies over the past decades from all over the world in order to assess what researchers have done about infidelity issue and identify gaps in the literature where further research is needed. These studies are categorized into eight groups: 1) Different types of infidelity 2) Gender difference in infidelity 3) Education level and infidelity 4) Genetic effect on infidelity 5) Personality and infidelity 6) Reasons of infidelity 7) Consequences of infidelity 8) Infidelity and treatments. The existing body of knowledge relating to these groups of studies will be summarized in this paper.

Key words: Infidelity, Personality, Gender, Education Level, Genetic Effect.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, infidelity is a most important reason of divorces. Based on research reports, 90% of all divorces involve infidelity. The most consistent data on infidelity drives from the General Social Survey which sponsored by the National Science Foundation to track the opinions of Americans about social behaviors since 1972. The survey data shows that in any given year, about 10% of married couples (12% men and 7% of women) have engaged in sex outside their marriage. But detailed analysis of the data from 1991 to 2006 shows surprising shifts. University of Washington researchers have found that the rate of lifetime infidelity for men over 60 increased to 28% in 2006 from 20% in 1991. For women over 60, this rate increased from 5% in 1991 to 15% in 2006 (Barker, 2011). As a consequence, infidelity becomes an important issue in psychology literature which attracts lots of attention of researchers. Also infidelity has been investigated within a variety of perspective in the literature like reasons, types, cues, education level, gender difference, treatment, personality of spouses and so on. The main purpose of this article is to summarize these studies in specific groups and provide the comprehensive and classifying of researches that have done about this topic.

2. Infidelity Definition

Infidelity (colloquially known as **cheating**) most commonly refers to a breach of the expectation of sexual exclusivity. Infidelity can comprise a number of activities including: "Having an affair", "extramarital relationship", "cheating", "sexual intercourse", "oral sex", "kissing", "fondling", "emotional connections that are beyond friendships", "friendships", "internet relationships", "pornography use", and others (Blow and Hartnett, 2005). In most cultures, during intimate relationships, there is usually an express or implied expectation of exclusivity, especially in sexual matters.

Infidelity is defined as unfaithfulness by virtue of being unreliable and the cheating on a relationship partner that takes place despite a commitment to exclusiveness. Sexual infidelity by a marriage partner is commonly called philander, adultery or an affair. What constitutes an act of infidelity varies within cultures and depends on the type of relationship that exists between people. Even within an open relationship,

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infidelity may arise if a partner in the relationship acts outside of the understood boundaries of that relationship.

Different studies have been done on infidelity that they can be divided into eight different groups. Figure1 shows this classification that has been introduced in this article. These groups of studies will be discussed in the following section.

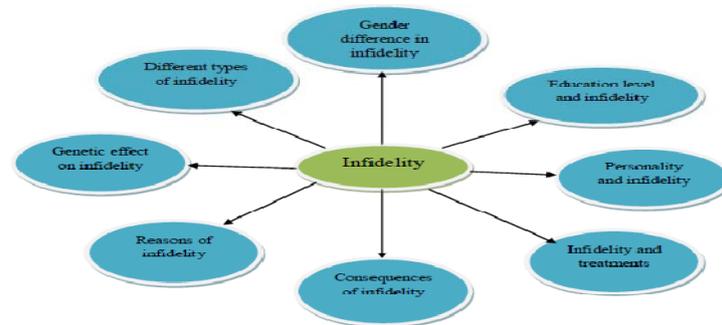


Figure1: Different groups of studies on Infidelity

3. Different Types of Infidelity

One group of studies on infidelity emphasize on different types of infidelity including: one night stands, emotional connections, long-term relationship and philandering, having an affair, extramarital relationship, cheating, sexual intercourse, oral sex, kissing, fondling, friendships, internet relationships and pornography use (Blow and Hartnett, 2005). However, most of the literature divided infidelity to more specific categories including sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, combined sexual and emotional infidelity and internet infidelity (Glass, 1985). Moreover, within each general category there are different subgroups. For example emotional infidelity could consist of a work relationship or a long-distance phone. Sexual infidelity could consist of visiting sex workers, same sex encounters and different types of sexual activities. Beatriz (2007) investigated another type of infidelity; online infidelity which definite as a process whereby individuals involved in a long-term committed relationship seek computer synchronous interactive contact with opposite sex member. Mackenzie (2011) classified infidelity into 3 types: sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity and full investment infidelity. According to Mackenzie (2011), sexual infidelity is a relationship with someone outside of the marriage that is purely or primarily sexual in nature (there is little or no emotional attachment). Actually, sexual infidelity in this study wasn't limited to intercourse and it contains any sexual activity that breaks the trust of sexual exclusivity within a marriage such as sexual kissing and heavy petting. It is also includes activities where there is no physical contact at all, such as telephone or online sex due to this fact that the offender is investing sexuality outside of the marriage.

4. Gender difference in infidelity

This group of studies divided into two parts. The first group of researches focused on sex differences in reaction to a partner's infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 2002; Brackens, 2011). Sex differences in reaction to a partner's emotional and sexual infidelity are well documented and hypothesized adaptive problems (Buss et al. 1992; Buss & Shackelford, 2004). Due to adaptive problem of parental uncertainty, men are more upset than women by a partner's sexual infidelity. Also, adaptive concern with parental investment and resources diversion makes women feel more upset than men by a partner's emotional infidelity (Buss et al. 1992; Buss & Shackelford 1997; Shackelford et al. 2000).

Another part of literature about sex differences and infidelity refers to different rates of men and women involvement in infidelity. Some researchers strongly assert that men are more engage in infidelity than women (Allen & Baucom, 2004, Atkins et al. 2001). They have significantly more sexual partners outside of their primary relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) and they have more permissive attitudes toward sex outside of marriage (Lieberman, 1988; Thompson, 1984) and also have a strong desire to engage in infidelity (Prins 1993) . At the same time, other studies suggest that men and women's rate of infidelity are becoming increasingly similar (Oliver & Hyde, 1993) and they are not differing in terms of behavior (Prins et al. 1993).

5. Education level and infidelity

Different studies report various results about the impact of education level on infidelity. Atkins et al (2001) found that highly educated people are more likely to engage in extramarital sex. They concluded that there is a significant relationship between divorce and education levels and the correlation between education and infidelity is only significant for couples who are divorced (Atkins et al. 2001). In another national study, Forste and Tanfer (1996) concluded that education has a significant correlation with infidelity in married women who are differ in case of degree and their partner's education level. More specifically, they found that if a married woman is more educated than her partner, it is more likely to be unfaithful in her marriage compare with a woman with lower education level than her partner (Forste, 1996). Collectively, the data from previous studies showed that people with highly level education are more probable to engage in infidelity.

6. Genetic effect on infidelity

Contrary to the animals, the effect of genetic on infidelity between humans is unclear. Charkas and Oelsner (2004) demonstrated that infidelity and the number of sexual partners are both influenced by genetic. More specific infidelity (41%) and the number of sexual partners (38%) are inherited. Also they found that the correlation between these two traits is strongly (47%) opposite. Attitudes towards infidelity are determined by shared and unique environmental but not genetic, influences. These researchers in a genome-wide association study could find three implied but not significant linkage areas related to infidelity and number of sexual partners on chromosomes 3, 7 and 20 with a maximum LOD score of 246 (Lynn F. Cherkas 2004). The result of heritability of sexual infidelity and number of sexual partners studied by Cherkas et al (2004) supported evolutionary theory of human sexual behavior. Most discussion about infidelity is theoretical but suggests that genetic influence should be zero (Merila & Sheldon, 1999).

7. Personality and infidelity

There are lots of studies that investigated personality aspects of infidelity. Early studies reported that by the age of 40, 50% of all married men and more than 25% of all married women have engaged in extramarital sexual behavior (Kinsey et al. 1953). After Three decades, almost 50% of men continued to engage in sexual or emotional extramarital relations while 40% of woman engaged in similar relationships (Lawson and Samson 1988a, 1988b). The Five Factors Model (FFM) has been used to describe marital interactions as the interface between two personalities (Buss 1989). How personalities of the married couple might predict various marital infidelities? A meta-analysis of 45 studies examined personality factors underlying sexual risk behavior and found high agreeableness and high conscientiousness reliably correlated with lower sexual risk taking (Holyle et al. 2000). Low agreeableness correlated negatively with greater sexual risk taking including multiple partners for low conscientiousness and correlated positively with unprotected sex. Infidelity is significantly associated with low agreeableness and low conscientiousness. Schmitt and Buss (2000) found that those with high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness were higher in relationship exclusively which means they are less likely to be unfaithful. Recently, Shackelford & Baser (2008) presented a casual model generated based on FFM of personality to predict self-reported likelihood of becoming extramarital involved. They choose 214 individuals comprising 107 married couples that had been legally married for no longer than one year. They found some support for a causal model with particularly disagreeable spouses (i.e. those low on agreeableness) and particularly unreliable spouse (i.e. those low on conscientiousness) who are less estimate a higher probability of becoming extramarital involved in the next year.

8. Reasons of infidelity

Infidelity literature shows the different reasons for being unfaithful such as education level, personality opportunity, attachment style, income level and employment, race, culture, religion and marital satisfaction. Drigotas et al (1999) divided these reasons of infidelity into five categories: sexuality-emotional satisfaction, social context, attitudes-norms and revenge-hostility. Researches related to sexuality issues has focused on need for sexual variety (Johnson, 1972; Roscoe et al. 1988) and on sexual income possibility with one's

partner (Buunk, 1980) as common reasons for engaging in infidelity. The emotional satisfaction studies have focused on marital satisfaction (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Roscoe et al. 1989). Social contextual factors often were related to education level, personality opportunity, attachment style, income level and employment, race and culture. Reviewing literature demonstrate that the research about attitude toward infidelity (partners with liberal sexual attitudes) are more likely to engage in infidelity (Hansen, 1987; Prins et al. 1993). Finally, infidelity as a revenge is traditionally common reason for being unfaithful among married couples (Buss&Shackelford 1997, Johson 1972, Greene, Lee & Lusting 1974).

9. Consequences of infidelity

Some studies showed that only a small percentage of couples who experience infidelity can save their marriage after an affair (Charny & Parnass, 1995; Hansen, 1987) and all marriage with infidelity do not end with divorce (Charny & Parnass, 1995). Most of the studies about consequences of infidelity showed negative outcomes like: rage, lost of trust, decreased personal and sexual confidence, damaged self esteem, fear of abandonment and surge of justification to leave the spouse (Charny & Parnass, 1995). Spanier and Margolis (1983) and Horwitz (2001) concluded that partners who divorce because of their spouse's infidelity experienced less depression than those who end their marriage for other reasons. The unfaithful spouse has initiated the divorce but the faithful spouse is more likely to develop depression. When a person discovers a partner's infidelity, he should decide about forgiving the partner and remain together or end the relationship. Shackelford et al (2000) found that men and women who face different adaptive problems over evolutionary history related to various types of infidelity have different reaction to partner's infidelity. It is more difficult for men to forgive a sexual infidelity than an emotional infidelity and they are more likely to end a current relationship following a partner's sexual infidelity (Shackelford et al, 2002).

10. Infidelity and treatments

One group of studies on infidelity refers to treatments. From a clinical standpoint, Atkins et al (2005) explored it may be helpful for couples to understand betrayal during a process not in one-time event. They found that unfaithful couples show improvement during treatment more than faithful couples. However, they showed couples who had an affair and did not keep this affair as a secret improved more in satisfaction than others. Also, they concluded that the unfaithful spouse is more distressed than the spouse who is not involved and both partners have similar advances in therapy. In contrast, Gordon et al (2004) concluded that the spouse who is not involved in infidelity is more distressed during therapy and also receive more gains in treatment compare to involved spouse. Recent studies on treatments and infidelity designed the case study to find the efficiency of step-by-step, forgiveness-oriented approach to help recovered couples from infidelity. The first step of healing was deal with the influence of the infidelity. The second step covers the meanings and framework of infidelity and third steep helps the couples carry on after infidelity. At the end of treatment, most of the participants had a high level of forgiveness reacting to the infidelity (Gordon et al, 2004).

In another exploratory study, Atkins et al (2005a) tested the treatment of infidelity using Traditional Behavioral Couple Therapy (TBCT) and Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT). Their participants were 19 couples who experienced infidelity. They compared the level of distress and course of treatment in couples who experienced infidelity and in couples seeking therapy for another reasons. They concluded that at pretreatment stage, the couples who involved infidelity suffer more than other couples. At the end of treatment the result of infidelity couples were equal with the couples without affairs. Case (2005) focused on a treatment model of infidelity that is based on a multi-dimensional process of apology and forgiveness in which spouse works toward regain trust through specific tasks. This study concluded that many couples after experiencing infidelity in their relationship work toward balancing the relationship.

11. Conclusions and suggestions for future studies

Infidelity has been investigated within a variety of perspectives in the literature. It seems like other humanistic research subjects, infidelity researches also have some unanswered questions. Due to the importance of this issue to couple therapists and social psychologist, more researches are needed in the future to increase the knowledge about infidelity and collectively to avoid destroying

marriage problems. The unfaithful man's wife may lose some of her investment to another woman. The husband of an unfaithful wife may lose the entire reproductive capacity of his spouse for at least one childbearing cycle. He also risks long-term investment of resources in a rival's offspring. Given the prevalence of infidelity and costs associated with infidelity and with divorce, an important empirical issue is what differentiates couples who divorce from those who stay together following infidelity. Thus, more research on infidelity is needed in social psychology. Overall it is revealed the several gaps identified during review of infidelity literature and clear the opportunity for future studies. Due to the importance role of infidelity in breaking a marriage, more research should explore other areas that related to probability of infidelity. For example further research should be done to investigate the difference between those who unprotected to infidelity and those who do not engage in infidelity which personality characters can lead to infidelity or about predicting infidelity. However more research on this topic is needed to be undertaken before investigating the association between personality traits and predicting infidelity. Cross-national study like how job dissatisfaction may relate to the probability of infidelity is another gap in this literature. A further study with more focus on the cues of infidelity is therefore suggested. How can spouse understand the cues of probability of infidelity in their partners to save their marriage? Also further studies on the different type of infidelity and the way for coping with them such as work infidelity or how emotional infidelity can lead to combined infidelity, it means sexual infidelity adds to emotional type is suggested. Also, further work need to be done to establish whether opportunities to bring unfaithfulness for both sexes are different or not?

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