

Research Article

Using the Shadow Script of Fidelity to Treat Infidelity: A Narrative Approach

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ABSTRACT

In this society much attention has been paid to infidelity. Newspapers report on the infidelities of celebrities, politicians, etc. every other day. Researchers explore the question of why people are unfaithful. The present survey examines the opposite situation. Why are people faithful? Given the many opportunities in society to stray, why do people remain faithful to their partner? This paper examines the Shadow Script of Infidelity-Fidelity. A study was performed with 204 participants. The findings indicate that several traits were prevalent in those who remained faithful. These findings are then woven into the stories of couples that experienced affairs. A Narrative therapeutic approach is used which explores the

meanings that incidents, behaviors, and encounters have for couples. These meanings emerge from social interactions. In this paper, therapy involves exploring meaning systems as the therapist uncovers the layers of the clients' stories. First the couple's pre-counseling experience is presented. The self of the therapist is then explored. A five step narrative therapeutic approach was proposed. The shadow script of fidelity was interwoven in the therapeutic options for couples experiencing infidelity.

MeSH Headings/Keywords: Fidelity, Infidelity, Shadow Scripts, Narrative Therapy, Meaning Systems, Social Construction Theory

Introduction

Culture and context shape the expression of sexuality. The first major shift in the broadening ideas about sexuality, narratives, and experiences of women and men was the confluence of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the introduction of the pill, the legalization of abortion, the relaxation of religious proscriptions, easier or no-fault divorce laws, larger numbers of women entering the work force adding to their financial independence, and the lengthening life span. Americans have become more tolerant, comfortable and perhaps even obsessed with public and private expressions of sexuality. This first shift, coupled with the expanding and ingrained use of technology, paved the way for the second current shift with the inclusion and ever-broadening acceptance of sexual orientations, the widespread knowledge and self-identification of gender identities and the social acceptance of non-traditional relationships. The confluence of these two shifts have influenced Americans to become more open-minded toward sexuality in general, inside and outside of marriage.

The intent of the present paper explores infidelity's shadow script--fidelity. Why do individuals choose to remain sexually faithful? What traits, cognitive processes and narratives do people report that contribute or lead them to stay faithful to one partner? Specifically, how do they incorporate the meanings of fidelity and infidelity into their understanding and definition of relationship and how does this narrative impact his or her experiences? This understanding can be useful in many different ways. It might change how we raise our children; it could change pre-marital programs; it could influence our mate selection practices; it could change pre-marital or marital enhancement programs, and it could change how we do therapy when infidelity issues arise. Included in the paper are results from a questionnaire on fidelity. Reasons for fidelity may be

viewed as self-evident or obvious, but a closer and more probing exploration of fidelity was undertaken to seek independent validation of reasons. These results are woven into therapeutic considerations with couples who are unfaithful.

Infidelity can, and often does, devastate each and every family member and generally no one person experiences the event(s) exactly alike. Unexpressed, unstoried and unresolved pain and sadness from broken intimacy bonds can create negative memories for most family members that can last a lifetime, sometimes even seeping into the narratives of future generations.

Incidences of EMS (Extramarital Sex): To what actual extent affairs exist will never be known with today's technology due to the fallible nature of statistics. However, studies that have been done have indicated that infidelity is rampant. It has been reported that 25-50% of men and 10-25% of women have participated in EMS. (A more conservative estimate is reported by Whisman et al. who found that approximately 22-25% of men and 11-15% of women reported that they have engaged in extramarital sex). Although the studies vary in their findings, it appears that the incidences of those who engage in EMS are higher for males than females and appear to have increased over time [1]. Gagnon et al. [2] believe that this occurs because of the gendered nature of sexual scripts or a double standard that judges men's sexual permissiveness less harshly than women's. Thus, although the majority of Americans expect monogamy from their romantic partners [3], infidelity is widespread even though it is still frowned upon in U.S. society [3, 4].

Enter the Internet: Barry is a 34-year old male living with Ester. The couple has been living together for about six years. Barry met a friend, Alice, in a chat room and the two quickly started chatting back and forth. They quickly established a private chat room and proceeded to meet there as often as

possible. Alice lived in California, while Barry lived in New York. About three months after the cyber-affair began, Barry found himself “picking” on Ester and looking forward to chats with Alice. Barry was considering meeting Alice in Colorado for a weekend under the guise of going to a conference. Ester became increasingly suspicious of the amount of time Barry was spending on the computer and one day went into his e-mail. There she found the correspondence with Alice. The couple came to therapy because Ester was threatening to move out and end the relationship.

Today it is estimated that over 60% of individuals in the US are connected to the Internet, with usage increasing about 10% each month [5,6]. This is referred to as the cyber-culture which exists in cyber-space. Cyber space can be considered a psychological extension of an individual’s psychic world. It is a space where text-only communication stimulates the processes of projection, acting out, and transference. It cannot be located in the physical world; it has no street address, and one cannot observe it with their senses. In order for there to be a cyberspace, people have to believe that it exists. In this sense it is a co-created reality.

Just as infidelity is difficult to define in the physical world, it is equally (if not more) as difficult to define the cyber affair. It can be considered as taking energy of any sort (thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) outside the committed relationship in such a way that it damages interactions between the couple and negatively impacts the intimacy in the relationship [5,7]. Internet infidelity is different from other more traditional infidelities in that it appears to be anonymous and relatively safe. It involves engaging in the privacy of one’s home or office. One’s identity can be obscured or misrepresented. It can be pursued any time of day or night with little effort. For purposes of this paper, with the advent of the Internet, opportunities for EMS have increased tremendously. Facebook is a major culprit, providing opportunities to reach out to former high school or college boyfriends or girlfriends.

Olivia and Christopher are a professional couple in their 40’s. Christopher learned that Olivia was on Facebook chatting with her old boyfriend. He confronted her and she said, “It was nothing.” Four months later they entered therapy because Olivia had met her old boyfriend in person and she was now contemplating separating from Christopher.

Ultimately, interactions within the virtual worlds influence life in the real world. Consequently, it can be said that new media technology is also weaving a new social fabric and it is ultimately the couple that must co-create the parameters of their commitment. If one spouse believes that a certain chat-room conversation constitutes cheating, then in his or her constructed reality, it is. His or her spouse may disagree and believe that the chat-room relationships are not adulterous because there is no human contact or physical sex. In these instances, mutual clarification is necessary.

Carol, a professional woman in her 30’s, was married to Steve, a prominent attorney, well known in the community. They had three young children. Carol re-connected with her “bad-boy” boyfriend, Bob, from high school on Facebook. Eventually they met and began a torrid affair. Bob’s wife

found out and called Steve. Steve insisted that the affair end immediately and that Carol enter therapy. In therapy, Carol said, “Why can’t I continue the affair? Steve is boring and Bob is exciting. The sex is great with him. Why can’t I see him once a month? What’s the big deal?”

What variables are related to Extramarital Sex (EMS):

It is intellectually informative and interesting to explore the variables and traits related to EMS, and there appear to be certain strong relationships such as low religiosity and liberal attitudes related to higher incidences of EMS. After examining a multitude of studies on EMS, Atwood [8] states, “...it can be concluded that EMS may be viewed as a cause or a consequence of marital problems or as unrelated to them (p. 59).” As Scharff et al. [9] state, there are as many causes of affairs as there are individuals having them. In other words, it seems that people have affairs because the situation is “right,” and because they feel they can.

What variables are related to sexual fidelity?: As stated earlier, while there are many studies examining EMS, there is a scarcity of research on sexual fidelity. Why are people faithful? Religious teachings almost universally condemn extramarital sex; they are reinforced by the legal system, which restricts sexual behavior to within marriage. The sexual mores and norms in U.S. society also reinforce sexual monogamy. At the same time, extramarital sex is often glorified by the media, which generally portrays sex without regard to the marital status of the participants to promote all sorts of non-erotic items. All these perspectives contribute to contradictory or multi-systemic messages that individual’s receive about sexual behavior. On the one hand, the religious, legal systems, and the social systems are restrictive toward EMS; on the other, the media often encourages it.

The research reported in the present study is grounded in the phenomenological research tradition that seeks to describe, interpret, and understand complex human experiences. It was our goal to understand subtle differences in the personal and psychological states of those who report sexual fidelity. This understanding is constructed through a reciprocal interaction involving respondents, researchers, and ultimately the readers. This study is based on an exploration of sexual fidelity in marriage.

Method

Data collection technique: The data for the present research were collected using an Internet survey hosted by surveymonkey.com, a website that provides survey hosting, data collection, and data analysis. The survey, titled Couples’ Faithfulness Survey, consisted of 84 questions, some multiple-choice and some open-ended short answer. All answers were kept completely confidential. A brief description of the purpose of the study was included at the beginning of the survey for all participants to read before proceeding to the questions. In the description, infidelity was introduced as a topic that has garnered much attention in both the media and research. The description then stated that the purpose of this research was not to study infidelity; but rather, to find the reasons why people remain faithful to their partner. Anonymity and confidentiality were stressed to the potential participants.

The survey was advertised on NYMFT.com, the website for The New York Marriage and Family Therapists. This site includes information about the services provided by the NYMFT team of therapists. A link was placed on the homepage of this website, which directed participants to the questionnaire on surveymonkey.com. The link to NYMFT was obtained by persons who were either seeking therapeutic services or for those interested in the field of marriage and family therapy.

Survey description: The survey, titled Couples Faithfulness Survey, was designed as a tool to gather data on people's attitudes and reasons why they stay faithful in couple or marital relationships. The survey included questions designed to gather identifying information (demographics), personal experience (family history and present relationship status), as well as attitudes and opinions and behavior regarding fidelity in their couple and marriage relationships. The survey began with a series of social background questions regarding age, gender, sexual orientation, race, current relationship status, current relationship length, religion and religiosity, education level, type of occupation, income level, and number of children. The next set of questions addressed the relationship history and status of the participants' parents. Factors such as relationship length, divorce, and fidelity of the participants' parents were questioned. In addition to requesting factual information regarding the relationships of their parents, the survey delved into the thoughts and feelings associated with their parents' relationships (and/or divorce/infidelity, if applicable). Participants were asked to discuss how flexible, open minded, moral, and selfish/selfless they perceived themselves to be and why. The content of the questions then shifted to beliefs and behavior regarding fidelity and infidelity. This line of questioning was tended to explore whether the participants believed that marriages or long-term partnerships should be exclusively monogamous, including why or why not.

Sample: A total of 203 participants started the survey, with a total of 151 (74.4%) fully completing all of the questions. The reported gender breakdown of the participants was as follows: 71 male, 131 female, and 1 unreported. In regard to sexual orientation, the majority of respondents (95.8% of males and 90.0% of females) identified as heterosexual. Additionally, 4.2% of males and 3.1% of females identified as homosexual. No participating males identified as bisexual, while 6.2% of females responded with bisexual. The majority of participants (62.0% of males and 55.4% of females) identified as currently married. Single was the second most common response for males (19.7%) and third for females (11.5%). More females (24.6%) than males (13.4%) identified as being in a committed partnership.

Data analysis: The data were gathered via survey and a conceptual analysis was conducted to determine the findings. The data were then repeatedly reviewed and revised with coding based on emerging patterns and themes pertaining to specific concepts. An objective approach to the analysis was possible because the study was exploratory and there were no expectations regarding the findings.

The data chosen for this part of the study were based on the participants who responded affirmatively to the following questions: Have you been faithful to your partner? and

negatively to Have you ever strayed from your partner? Of the 210 responses, 105 of the responses fit the criteria. Certain themes and patterns emerged based on the continuous use of specific words and language in the participant responses. There tends to be an element of quantitative methodology in a qualitative study as the more frequent responses are essential in determining the findings. In each of the questions that explored the participants' decision to remain faithful and not stray in their relationships, there were common ideas that were more prevalent in the responses.

Limitations: The limitations of the study are several in that there was no control group, so while the sample was not necessarily a clinical sample, the participants were interested in either pursuing therapy services and/or interested in the field of marriage and family therapy. A second problem is that, while participants gave information as to their sex and age, etc., there was no way this could be validated. Additionally, this study was conducted using nonprobability sampling, increasing the likelihood of sampling error. The authors were more interested in the information than generalizing the finding to a particular population.

Results

The majority of male (66.7%) and female (69.4%) respondents said that "yes," marriages and long term partnerships should be exclusively monogamous. Reasons for this answer varied from anything other than monogamy being "too complicated" to monogamy representing trust and respect.

Female, Age 23, "I believe that marriages should be monogamous, I feel that is the whole point of marriage. Marriage is this relationship that you have with one person for the rest of your life. I feel that if you don't agree with that then you shouldn't be in a long-term relationship or marriage. I guess I'm just thinking in terms of settling down with someone, you can't just go around from person to person trying to fulfill all of your needs."

Among those who responded marriages and long-term partnerships should not be exclusively monogamous, 16.67% of the male respondents and 5.8% of the female respondents agreed.

Male, age 58, "I think polygamy is for those for whom it works and monogamy is for those for whom it works. Know what works for you and your partner." Female, age 23, "It depends on the people in that marriage. My husband and I had a period where we were in an open marriage and I was seeing other people. Eventually it died down-the more people I saw, the more I realized I only wanted to be with him. There was something gratifying and exciting about the experience which some people need. Others need the monogamy. More than anything, marriages should be open, honest, and issues like this should be discussed and agreed upon."

Theme 1: Personal values: The participants attributed their decision to maintain fidelity in their relationships based on their own personal character traits. The majority of the responses pertained to a strong will power and a sense of commitment to one's own values and morals regarding that which they define as right and wrong. In the majority of the responses, participants

included language that described their strong convictions regarding keeping promises, being honest, and loyal.

Female, Age 46, "My inner will power is strong; I know this because it has been tested, and I didn't give in to it." Male, age 46, "Very strong. I remove myself from potentially bad situations. Also, it's a decision that I made a long time ago that I would not cheat. I stick with my decisions."

Theme 2: Feelings for others and empathy: The secondary theme that emerged in the questioning was the participants' consideration for their partners. Participants used words and phrases indicating they loved and respected their partners. The prevalent rationale was the participants' belief that their present relationship was more valuable and/or did not want to risk losing what they have in exchange for a brief sexual encounter that offered no assurance of love or a future more beneficial relationship. Participants also demonstrated empathy and reported not wanting to hurt their partners and/or their families.

Male, Age 48, "very strong". The temptation itself helps evoke my feelings for my partner and therefore strengthens rather than weakens my resolve." Male, Age 30, "I think the expression is look don't touch - but specifically, your mind is going to stray every once in a while but my heart is with her and I would never do anything to jeopardize our relationship." Female, Age 25, "I rate my will power quite high. I have been cheated on, and so has my partner. I would never want to hurt him like that."

Theme 3: Karma: The tertiary theme that was expressed in the responses to the questions involved a respect for the principle of treating others as one would like to be treated. Participants shared past experiences with infidelity and how they did not like it and would not subject their partners to that situation. Other participants stated that they would not like it if their partners were unfaithful to them. Participants used the word "guilt" and concerns about the infidelity becoming disclosed to further describe the thoughts of possible retribution as a result of their unfaithfulness.

What kept you from straying?

Male, Age 43, "I don't want to be cheated on so I don't cheat. Female, Age 34, "that it wasn't right, and wouldn't want someone to do that to me." Female, Age 27, "Its wrong morally and I believe in good and bad Karma."

Subthemes: Subthemes based on the use of certain words or ideas within the participants' responses included a belief in God and a willingness to exhibit faith or religious-based values as well as including experiences with family-of-origin from which the participants gathered information about relationships, marriage, and infidelity. How do you rate your inner will power, given you find yourself in a very sexually tempting situation?

Female, Age 28 "I would be very strong- I know God is always watching and I will be questioned for the things I do." Female, Age 28 "I have strong willpower due to my religious beliefs and because of who I am. I would never give in." Female, Age 34 "My relationship with God and my Faith." Female, Age 28

"god-consciousness," Female, Age 60 "My model for my

beliefs in commitment was from my parents. Even though they stayed together, fought there were beautiful times I witnessed in their relationship where I knew that they were committed to one another. The arguments actually seem to bring them closer at times."

There was a relationship found between family history of faithfulness and participants' faithfulness. A higher percentage (36.5%) of participants whose parents had strayed also strayed themselves, as opposed to those with parents who did not stray (24.8%). Of those who were not sure if either of their parents had strayed, 29.4% had affairs themselves.

Female, age 60 "My model for my beliefs in commitment was from my parents. Even though they stayed together and fought, there were beautiful times I witnessed in their relationship where I knew that they were committed to one another. The arguments actually seem to bring them closer at times."

Discussion and therapeutic considerations: In American society, the vast majority of individuals who marry expect to be monogamous [3]. Couple therapists report that the most common issue marital therapists encounter in their practices is probably that of EMS [10,11]. An affair can effectively overshadow intellect, judgment, reason, and self-image as emotionality surfaces. For some, the affair can be debilitating and the ultimate in tragedy leading to feelings of jealousy, revenge, depression, rage, and urges to murder. In fact, it is a mitigating factor for murder in all states if it produces insanity!

The story one tells creates the reality that s/he will experience. To illustrate, Pittman [12] solemnly reported that a Holocaust survivor had told him that the Holocaust, in which she lost every member of her family and barely escaped the ovens herself, was far easier to survive than an infidelity because, what the Nazi's did was not so personal. While this initially struck him as an outrageous comparison, he finally understood it to mean that it was harder for her to be betrayed by her husband than to be a victim of genocide. Likewise, a 40 year old female who repeatedly experienced infidelity within her relationships responded with, "One day I just realized that the pain that I believed came from my partner, was actually, ultimately coming from inside me."

Even though up to 80% of the American and British population consider infidelity morally wrong [13], the numbers of individuals who participate in the activity are staggering. Based on this, it is important for therapists to understand the degree of trauma associated with infidelity and to consider certain therapeutic interventions.

Difficult life experiences in adulthood constitute a challenge to the narrative construction of therapy [14]. It is in the safe container of therapy that we begin to see how the strength of social scripts often disallows perception of scripts other than the dominant scripts. Persons use "selective screening" of experiences scanning the environment and taking in only those aspects that are in agreement with their constructed realities. But in the background, always present, primed to move forward if triggered, are the shadow scripts, the scripts just beyond our view, those scripts within which the seeds of change lie [8]. When we allow ourselves to become aware of the lingering shadows, our present experience calls into question our biases,

affording the opportunity to see through our prejudices. It is these very “therapeutic moments” that one may experience the complexity, intricacy and mutability of experience.

This paper explores the shadow script of infidelity--fidelity. Shadow scripts follow Derrida et al. [15] notion of difference. Difference is the tension between what is said and not said. The purpose of the present research was to explore the shadow script of infidelity—stories given for fidelity, with the ultimate goal of incorporating them into therapy with those who have experienced EMS. In the present study, certain traits and themes were found to be related to sexual fidelity. They were strong personal values, feelings for others, karma, religiosity/morality, honesty, and loyalty. These are the shadow scripts of infidelity. In the following sections, these traits are woven into the therapeutic approach.

It is important to point out that while infidelity appears to be very damaging to the marital relationship, being faithful is not a badge of success or an indication of a happy marriage. The following examples are taken from one of the author’s private practices.

John and Mary (both in their late 40’s) have been faithful to each other for 26 years. However, they are very jealous of one another and constantly fight over wanting to see cell phones or email accounts. They continually “check up” on one another because they think the other is cheating. Bill and Joan, a couple in the 70’s, came to therapy because Bill had an affair early on in their marriage and they were faithful since. They raised their children and were celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary when Joan said she wanted to go to therapy to deal with the affair. Kyle and Cynthia, in their 60’s, came to therapy because Kyle said he was no longer attracted to Cynthia. He loved her but no longer found her sexually appealing. They had been faithful to each other for 35 years but had not had sex in three years. Lisa and Jim, a couple in their late 40s were together 23 years. They were faithful to each other yet argued very frequently about sex or the lack thereof. They had sex once a year, on their anniversary.

Thus, a troubled relationship is troubled regardless of the reason.

The self of the therapist: In narrative therapy, the therapist is part of what s/he is observing; the therapist is part of the system and as such acts in collaboration with the client to co-create new stories, new possibilities, new ways of seeing and being. Therapist connection is characteristic of this view and it involves the therapist’s tone, demeanor, and ability to connect. The therapist must be able to interchange with the client; the bounds that typically separate the two are relaxed and the therapist and client truly understand each other’s humanness. The therapist is a curious observer who takes good care to understand the client. It is not the client who must “get it,” it is the therapist. The therapist asks and re-asks, “Am I understanding you correctly?” and then asks more questions in order to deepen both their views around the issue. Simultaneously, the relationship between the client and the therapist develops and deepens, creating increasing layers and levels of safety and respect so that the couple feel free to explore new ways of being.

An essential practice of a therapist is developing the ability to create an environment of trust, vulnerability, unknowing, and

non-judgmental witnessing—a space that allows all voices to be heard and the potential for connection to arise. It is within the retelling of events that clients become aware of how they and their partner incorporate the layers of meaning hidden in the familiar words “fidelity” and “infidelity.” It is upon examination of these narratives that each has the potential to realize the suffering that can be created by a breach of fidelity while also observing how much association (cultural, familial, social) and how many people (past, present, and future) they are actually bringing into the story.

It would be difficult to find one person in the United States who has not been affected by affairs; all people were affected by the affairs of politicians, celebrities and even the President. Couple Therapists are exposed to relatively the same society as their clients and are not free of biased or “non-systemic” thinking. This is especially true if the therapist has been affected by an affair in his or her own relationships or family.

Westfall [16] states that a therapist must be aware of his or her value system, and if necessary, share it with the couple especially if s/he fundamentally disagrees with the particular couple’s lifestyle choice. When confronted with affairs, Kessler informs the couple that he has a “pro-marriage” bias and that he interprets their presence to indicate that they still desire to reconcile their marriage. The therapist should be aware of his or her own biases and feelings and how they will influence the system. These considerations exist whether there has been an affair or not.

The couple’s pre-counseling experience: Usually the story of EMS begins to unfold with the suspicion phase. The wife or husband has noticed that the spouse is changing his or her behavior in subtle ways—perhaps buying new clothes, working late one night, checking the computer or cell phone more frequently, etc. Suspicions increase and perhaps questioning ensues. “I called the office and you weren’t there.” “Why did you get home so late last night?”

Kim was suspicious of Jack’s relationship with a woman in his office. The woman was his right-hand woman (as he often called her). They traveled together and worked late together. Kim was friendly with the woman and the woman had attended many family functions. Still Kim was never comfortable with the relationship. She questioned Jack, but he denied that there was anything more to their relationship.

If the answers are not satisfactory, the couple enters into the investigative phase. Here, an active investigation ensues in order to find evidence of the affair—computers are checked, passwords discovered, brief cases looked through, bank statements and/or credit cards examined, etc. The suspicious spouse has now become a Class A detective. A non-technologically savvy wife became skilled enough to crack the code on her husband’s cell phone and became privy to all his emails and text messages to his “girlfriend.” Another couple had “family sharing” on their phones and the husband accidentally changed his settings and “the cloud” was sharing his messages from his lover with his wife.

Kim hunted for information about their relationship and one day, hidden in Jack’s night table drawer, found an unfamiliar set of keys.

More questions are asked. Usually at this point, “gas lighting” occurs. The term “gas-lighting” was coined as a metaphor for the “head games” which occurred in the classic movie *Gaslight*, starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman. In gas-lighting there is an attempt to conceal events and to falsify them. This is the phase when the cheating spouse begins to lie about what s/he is doing. Here the accused may attempt to convince his spouse that s/he has imagined many of the incidents and/or misinterpreted the evidence. As a result, the other spouse feels like s/he is going crazy. S/he wants to believe the lying spouse but what s/he is saying simply does not make any sense.

Jack had an apartment in the city that he sometimes stayed overnight if he worked late. Kim thought that maybe the keys were to that apartment.

More serious investigations occur and eventually clear-cut evidence for the affair is discovered.

Jack was leaving for Florida the next day with his “right hand woman.” They had to attend business meetings. Kim called her adult son and asked if he would take her into the city to the apartment. She wanted to see if the keys fit.

Now the couple enters the discovery phase. This discovery phase is devastating for the cheated on spouse. While s/he finally “knows” and believes s/he was not going crazy, which while somewhat of a relief, does not relieve the excruciating pain and sense of betrayal.

Kim went into the city with her son. The keys fit the apartment. In the apartment there were many intimate pictures of the Jack and the woman. There were negligees in the drawers, sexy lingerie and all sorts of sex toys. They even had clothes in the closet. It was their love nest. A week later, as Jack got off the plane from Florida, he was handed divorce papers.

Generally, at this time, the cheated on will confront the cheater and they enter into the confrontational phase. S/he has clear-cut evidence that cannot be denied. In Kim and Jack’s situation, there was no confrontation; the decision was made. Typically though, there is. In this phase, the cheated on spouse confronts the spouse having the affair with the evidence. Here, usually (but not always) the spouse confesses. The couple now is thrown into the crisis phase. Parents and friends are told about the “cheater.” Often, unfortunately, children are pulled into the struggle. Depending on the family structure before the affair, one or more of the children may become triangled in.

Bridget and Bob (a couple in their 60’s) entered therapy because Bridget told her adult daughter that her father was having an affair. The daughter reacted to the father in much the same way the wife reacted—screaming at him, calling the mistress, emailing the mistress, behaving as though she was the betrayed spouse. They are currently trying to repair their marriage.

Richard, a 48 year old husband, was suspicious of the amount of time his wife, a teacher, was suddenly spending at school and her concomitant disinterest in him. Upon investigation, Richard saw affectionate text messages between his wife and another male teacher. He was very distraught and confided in his oldest sons and their opinion toward their stepmother began to become hostile. The more Richard confided in them, the more hostile they became.

At this time of discovery and confrontation, behaviors range from name calling, emailing the other person, and going to his or her home or to consistently calling and confronting him or her. For the injured partner, emotions often alternate between rage toward the partner and internal feelings of shame, depression, powerlessness, and abandonment [17]. An example of how distraught a person can get is Terry, a woman in her 60’s. She would set her alarm for 2AM two days a week and drive to her husband’s house where he was living with his much younger secretary. She would take their garbage. Back home, she would spread it out on a plastic bag and examine it. She said, “I know everything about them—what they ate for dinner, what medicines they take, what bills they paid. Everything!” Another client, a grandmother in her seventies, learned that her husband was having an affair with his much younger employee. She took his rifle and parked her car outside the woman’s house, waiting for her husband to appear. Luckily her son found her and took the rifle and brought her home. Another client, dressed in a witch’s outfit went trick-or-treating with her children to the mistress’s home so she could see what she looked like. These are true cases where the clients’ pain led to extreme behavior.

For some, an affair disclosed can be considered a form of post-traumatic stress. The event can be relived by the cheated on in that s/he may withdraw from the relationships and avoid their spouses; they may experience frequent intrusive, thoughts about their partner’s affair or their discovery of the betrayal [18]. Person’s reliving the event may feel the same fear and horror s/he did when the event took place.

Mitch and Cathy, a couple in their 50’s, are working through Mitch’s affair. Mitch works in the city and missed his train one night. He was talking to his friend and forgot to call home. As soon as Cathy realized that Mitch was late, she was thrown back into the panic she originally experienced when she first learned of the affair. By the time Mitch returned home, Cathy was hysterical crying and ready to go for a divorce.

In therapy, Cathy began to trust Mitch again and they started taking positive steps toward their future together. Unpredictably, every couple months, Cathy would have a memory of some aspects of the affair and be thrown back into a panic with uncontrollable weeping.

Sometimes there is a trigger: a sound or sight that causes him or her to relive the event. Triggers might include: hearing a song on the radio, which can bring back memories of the cheating spouse being with the “other;” seeing a movie where one of the characters is having an affair, etc.

Avoiding situations that remind the spouse of the event is another symptom.

Lisa and Marc were a couple in their 40’s. Marc had an affair with his old girlfriend who he revisited on Facebook. They used to meet in a hotel near Lisa’s mother’s home. When Lisa learned of the affair, every time they visited her mother, she would insist that they drive miles out of their way in order to avoid the hotel.

Another symptom is feeling keyed up. There is an increased emotional arousal. Here, the person may have a difficult time sleeping or concentrating. S/he may pace throughout the house instead of sleeping. S/he may be on guard—watching and

waiting for the spouse to mess up in some way. These are but a few of the behaviors people experience when they are suffering deep hurt and pain. Yes they are extreme, but not all that unusual. Emotions run high; behaviors can be extreme; and battles ensue.

Call in the therapist: It is during the discovery and confrontation phases that the couple generally calls the therapist. When the couple arrives for therapy, they are in emotional turmoil. During this critical point, both partners are confronted with conflicting messages. The person they were committed to has betrayed them and broken their trust. To get a sense of the stress level associated with such a situation, going through the possibility of intimacy dissolution is listed as second only to the death of a spouse or child in terms of stress. If one spouse feels that s/he wants to leave, s/he may fear the unknown. S/he may feel guilty. If there are children involved, s/he may not want to break up the family. At the same time, if s/he reassures his or her partner and stays, then it may be more difficult to leave in a few years so that during an affair it can seem like an opportune time to divorce. The stakes are high, and the pressure is intense. The couple battles; the couple cries. They experience the full range of emotions.

Joining the couple's meaning system: Underlying the beginning of any therapy is the importance of joining the couple's meaning system. Joining is a process whereby an empathic rapport is developed and the therapist creates a safety net for the couple. Here, the therapist listens to the couple's language, learns it, and uses it to create a comfortable environment. The basic assumption is that clients are experts in knowing what is best for them. The role of the therapist is that of a curious observer who is interested in learning about the couple's story.

The spouse who had the affair usually feels very guilty while the other spouse is usually angry and distraught. Many times, the spouse who is hurt is hysterical crying and inconsolable, often stating that s/he is leaving [19]. A therapist at this point can help the situation by helping to calm the couple down. S/he can generalize the affair so that the couple can understand that "many couples" experience what they are experiencing and many couples work through the pain and go on to have an even better marriage. Mirroring the couple and teaching the couple to mirror each other can slow communication down and prevent arguments from escalating. If the couple cannot communicate because the discussion deteriorates, they can text each other. Texting slows down the communication, allows for each partner to "be heard" and forces him or her via the language to put his or her thoughts into a somewhat coherent cognitive format.

The couple now enters the decision phase. The first decision is, do they want to make a commitment to therapy? If they commit to therapy, the affair must end [18, 20]. Marital therapy cannot be effective if the affair continues. The second decision is do, they want to commit to the marriage? They have to decide whether or not to continue the marriage. The aggrieved spouse will often state that s/he does not want to feel like a fool—like s/he is being "walked on—a doormat." Many fear that their family and friends will define them as "weak" if they remain in the relationship. The "cheater" often feels guilty and does not want to be defined as a "bad person."

Important at this point in therapy is the choice between the existing, familiar marriage and the uncertainty of divorce.

Many spouses choose to stay with the marriage for practical, cognitive, logical reasons. The spouse is the parent of their children, and although "boring" or less attractive, may be a good provider, homemaker, partner, friend, and more caring. There is an established social and family network: it may be easier to stay in the marriage. Others decide that "life is too short" and they want to experience some love, joy, and happiness in their lives.

It is helpful to assist the couple in helping them gain perspective on the marriage during these early volatile therapeutic sessions. Some relevant questions could be: "What are the experiences you have shared as a couple during your time together?" "Have you considered them?" "What are some of accomplishments you have achieved together?" "What are some of the hopes and dreams you had for yourselves before the affair?" "If you decide to divorce, have you explored the consequences of that decision?" "for yourselves?" "for your children and for your families?" "What do you think your life will be like if you divorce?" "If you stay together, have you explored the consequences of that decision? for yourselves? for your children/ for your families?"

The level of commitment should be addressed as well as the type of affair. The most difficult affairs to overcome are of the romantic type. Couples find it easier to live with someone who has one-night stands than someone who romantically involved with someone else. Conversely, for another person the opposite may be true. A critical obligation of the therapist is to initiate a discourse from which the couple can determine if they want to stay together. The couple is given the option to commit to weekly therapy for possibly three months, at which point, they can renegotiate the therapy and hopefully by that time decide whether they want to commit to the marriage or not.

Matthew and Jessica were a couple in their early 30's with two young children. Matthew traveled for business and one night in a bar met a very aggressive woman and after a few drinks had a "one night stand." It was the first time he had ever done this. His friend's wife saw what happened and told Matthew that if he did not tell his wife, she would. So, he told his wife, throwing the marriage into a state of crisis. The couple came for therapy deciding that they were committed to the marriage and wanted help in overcoming the pain from the affair and making their marriage better.

Once a commitment to the marriage and a commitment to therapy are made, and the couple's emotionality has decreased, the couple enters the detail phase of therapy. The cheated on spouse wants candid details, especially if the affair was of some duration. "Whom did you have the affair with? How? When? Where? Who knows about this? How often? For how long?" Is she prettier than I am? Is she thinner? What did you do with her or him? "Am I as good? Did s/he make you feel better than me? What sexual things did you do with him or her?" "Was he or she better in bed than I am?" These questions will persist endlessly unless given a time limit. The cheated on spouse is encouraged to give the therapist a time frame for when s/he wants to present these questions to the spouse and then turn the page and move on. The cheated on spouse then makes a list of every question s/he can possibly think of. Before the question session occurs, it is useful to see the couple individually for one session each to help

them prepare. As found in this study, honesty is emphasized throughout, as is the importance of being considerate and kind in terms of hurting the other spouse. The couple understands that once they have worked through all the questions, the page is turned and a new chapter is begun. After this time, they cannot ask any more questions relating to the affair. It is important to note that the couple decides when the page gets turned, not the therapist. The therapist guides the couple at this point, making sure that the page gets turned in a reasonable amount of time. Usually, men like to move on faster than women; they are uncomfortable “beating a dead horse.” Women like to process what happened, especially if she is the cheated on spouse.

Proposing the notion of a couple meaning system:

Constructing a workable reality is useful at this point. This is a process by which the view of the problem is transformed from a paradigm of individual causality to a paradigm of couple interaction. It is suggested that the couple tell each other their stories. The couple can explore the story of their families of origin and how their views about affairs affected them, their story about their relationship, and the story about how they would like to see their future without the affair. Knowledge of each of these three stories helps the therapist to understand the couple’s framing of the problem; the telling of these stories helps the couple learn about their frame of the problem. This will help to foster an understanding of the pain and suffering that occurred on both parts and in this way compassionate feelings for each other and empathy can become stronger.

One of the findings of the present study was that those individuals who had compassion and empathy for their partner were less likely to stray. The individuals can look at each other’s view. Understanding the other’s story can generate feelings of compassion, understanding and caring and can also begin to enhance their interactions. Also relevant at this time is using therapeutic empathy. Here the therapist attempts to describe and express the inner emotional experience of the client. At this point, the client may say, “Yes, that’s it!” Here the therapist is also modeling how to “put oneself in the other’s shoes,” for the couple.

Exploring the couple’s present meaning system: Berger et al. [21] define marriage as a definitional process. Two separate individuals come together with separate identities and begin to construct a life as a couple. The two individuals construct a relationship reality where all conversations serve to validate this coupled identity. To assist in this process, the therapist can ask the couple to describe the beginnings of the couple story, when they were a new couple. “How did they first meet? What did they think of each other when they first met? How did they know “this was it?” How did their relationship evolve? Did they find each other attractive? How did they feel in each other’s presence? How was their first encounter? How do they both “see” the beginning of their couple story—similarly or differently? Where is there agreement? Where does the story differ?” The therapist, facilitating the couple story, at this point focuses in the themes and metaphors that run through the couple’s construction of their meaning system. At this point also, the couple can begin to see the affair as based in the couple’s interaction.

It is guaranteed that when they first met, they had hope and excitement about each other. Even if they are still very angry at

each other, when they explore their thoughts and feelings about when they first met, they sometimes even begin to flirt with each other. They may quickly revert back to anger, but for a second, they were able to remember what they felt for each other and it can generate seeds for new growth. The couple can also bring in their wedding album or pictures for the same reason. It can help them remember when they loved each other and why they married in the first place. Here they are basically describing how they combined their individual meaning systems and behavioral scripts to co-create a couple script—a sense of we-ness.

Asking a couple about what their relationship was like before the affair implies that there was a time when the problem was not there and further implies that perhaps at some future time, it will also not be there. The concept of time is an important part of this model [22,23]. By asking questions such as how long has the problem been around, and when did the affair first start, the therapist introduces the concept of a beginning, a middle and, ideally, an end. These types of questions give couples information about the origins and persistence of the problem and about how the trends developed over time. The problem becomes located in time, rather than in the couple, and its characteristics are then examinable and observable.

Now their discussion focuses around how the affair became scripted into their relationship, both at the individual level and the couple level. Some relevant questions might be, “How do you think of infidelity?” “What meaning(s) does the affair hold for you, for your relationship?” “Do you see any other options?” “Have you tried any other solutions?” When couples learn their story, and hear how their problems affect the relationship, they gather information about how they have inadvertently participated in the perpetuation of the problem [23,24].

Trust is the biggest hurdle the couple faces after an affair and rebuilding trust is most difficult for the couple. If the spouse who cheated is late one night coming home or forgets to call as they planned, the cheated on spouse immediately thinks that something is “going on.” Honesty is a prelude to trust. And trust is a prelude to intimacy. During this trust building phase, the cheated on spouse must have access to passwords to cell phones or computers or any other devices that s/he wants. Transparency must occur. From this trust-building and transparency, eventually forgiveness can grow [25].

Phyllis and Ted, a couple in their 50’s, are in therapy trying to re-build trust in their relationship. Ted had an affair and Phyllis learned about it through seeing hotels listed on the American Express bill. Ted has given her access to all the credit card bills, so she can see that “nothing is going on.” Most of the time, she believes him but, every couple of weeks, she scrutinizes all the bills to make sure.

Sometimes the couple can work as a team to rebuild trust.

Vinny and Maria, a couple in their early 40’s, came to therapy because Maria learned Vinnie was having an affair for over a year. Vinnie stated he was committed to his wife, their marriage, and their family. He stated that nothing or no one else was more important. Vinnie ended the affair and together they developed a plan whereby Vinny would tell Maria every time the mistress called and/or every time he felt weak. Maria would then talk to him and remind him of the good things in their marriage.

Total honesty was necessary and open communication helped this couple through the affair.

As relationships are re-evaluated, and partners are no longer taken for granted. A new chapter of their lives can begin. The couple once again have hope. The important thing is how the affair is handled and whether there is a willingness to explore its meaning and grow from it. Atwood [8] believes this can be accomplished by eliciting meaning systems and constraining beliefs that are compounding pain and negativity, while promoting more positive scripts and perspectives for growth. Snyder [26] Baucom, et al. [27] agree that affairs can result in a new closeness and an increased level of intimacy in the marriage. To facilitate this growth, the therapist can help the couple to listen and hear their partner and to experience each other's pain and resulting growth.

Danny and Tina, a couple in their early 40's, are working on their marriage. They are exploring individual responsibility. For years, Danny has been telling Tina that he wants to do more things with her. He feels she has focused on the children for so long that they are barely a couple. She spends the day cleaning and cooking. Now that the children are older, he has suggested they travel, go to the movies and theatre, go away for the weekend, see a Broadway show, etc. In the past, even though Danny has requested this many times, Tina has basically ignored him. Danny found a woman in his office that had a lot of energy and was willing to do things with him. Now, however, Tina hears what he has been saying all along.

This frequently happens as children are born—the parental system becomes paramount while the couple system shrinks.

Deconstructing the couple's meaning system: In this phase of therapy, the couple start to clearly understand that both partners had a responsibility for the affair; both partners are affected by the affair, and both can explore and examine the meaning of it [18,20,27]. The couple can explore the impact of the affair on their relationship. The goal is to ask the couple to share responsibility for the therapeutic process and to restore constructive communications. Once this occurs, healing can begin. Once the couple accepts that there are many ways of seeing and responding to reality and that their meaning systems are socially constructed through interactions with others and each other, it then becomes possible to deconstruct it. The process of deconstruction involves breaking up, loosening up, taking apart the couples' meaning systems. It is only after the deconstruction of the couples' present meaning system that new, alternative meanings can take hold. Through the process of deconstruction, couples begin to question their entrenched meaning system. The therapist's role at this time is that of balancing: s/he is breaking up the entrenched meaning system while simultaneously planting new seeds for new possibilities—flowing from the shadow script. Change can occur only when the couple begins to question their old definitions of their relationship. At this point also, because a very strong finding in this study and others was that the more religious individuals are, the less likely they are to engage in infidelity, the therapist can suggest to the couple that they might want to revisit their earlier religious experiences. There is no pressure to do this; it is merely a suggestion. Some couples report that this is very comforting for them. Here, the therapist can help partners to

examine their personal beliefs about forgiveness and how these relate to efforts to move on from the affair, whether together or apart [26,27].

When couples learn about their meaning system and connect it to the way they "see" their problems, they gather information about how they inadvertently participated in the perpetuation of the problem. This reflection can lead to restructuring—and the possibility for a new relationship. An example can be used when one partner blames the other for the affair. The blamee could be asked by the therapist to go back one week and recount the blaming episodes. For example, "It was my fault that you had an affair because I would not have sex with you." "It's my fault we don't have sex anymore because it takes me so long to have an orgasm and you get tired of waiting." "It's my fault that you started having conversations with the woman at work because I'm always so exhausted when you come home from work and don't feel like talking to you." Often this list helps the couples to see or be aware of their linear notions of cause and effects and also the redundancy of their interactions.

Word imagery can be used. This is asking the clients to give color, shape, and/or form to their words in order to explore the consequences of the effects of their words. "What do your words do?" "What are the effects of your words?" Clients have verbalized, "Your words make me shrink. I felt inadequate." "They felt like cotton balls, so I didn't pay attention to them." "They made me feel invisible; I felt like no matter what I did, you didn't pay attention to me." "They made me feel soft and warm." "They made me feel like I was hit over the head with a bowling ball." "I felt your words were like sharp little darts coming at me; I felt like I had to protect and defend myself." Therapists can then ask the partners, "How can you use words differently (or different words) to create different effects or different meanings for yourself, for your partner?"

Exploring the effects of the problem: At this point, it is useful for the couple to focus on the effects of the affair, rather than on the content of the affair. In so doing, the problem continues to be located external to the couple. They begin to see themselves not as having a relationship problem; but rather, as the problem having negative effects for the relationship. "How has the affair influenced your relationship?" How has it influenced your relationship with your children? Friends? What was it like before the problem was there? What was different about your relationship when the problem was not there? The therapist uses language that presupposes change. If you were to enjoy your relationship more frequently, what would you notice? What would be different? What would you notice about your wife/husband? Through questions, the couple deepens the experience of a more positive relationship and the therapist is facilitating a new construction, that of a more rewarding relationship. As the therapy progresses, the affair has moved from being internally located in the personality of the one who had the affair to being located external to the couple. The therapy has progressed from focusing on the pain and sadness as a result of the affair to the hope and intimacy that the relationship now holds.

Weingarten [28] believes that people's definitions of intimacy often interfere with their creation of it. She defines intimacy as repeated "single" intimate interactions. If the therapist can locate

single intimate interaction exceptions in a non-intimate couple relationship (as defined by the couple), then these exceptions can be amplified through the use of questions. In so doing, the couple's definition of their relationship as being non-intimate is deconstructed as the new construction of intimacy takes hold.

Future focus and ritual for a fresh start: White et al. [23] discusses how they move persons to a special meeting where, through questioning, they discuss each person's story of their therapy adventure. In so doing, the couple is asked to recount how they became aware of their problem, what steps they took to solve it. They recount how and which resources they mobilized as they generated solutions to their problems. White et al. [23] believe that here the therapist can ask the couple to give an account of their transition from a problematic status to a resolved one. In addition, the therapist can also provide his or her story of the couple's therapy adventure and they can then discuss their collaborative efforts.

Future focus enables the couple to visualize their relationship without the issue. Now the couple feels empowered and confident in their skills so that they can also solve other problems they may encounter. By asking questions about the future, the therapist makes the future more real and stable. After the reciprocating and enhancing experiences have become more or less a practiced way of dealing with each other, couples can have a ritual for a fresh start. At this time, the therapist may inform them that some issues may remain for each and may resurface at some point in the marriage. In other words, there may be some slippage and they can discuss steps to take if this occurs [29]. At the end of therapy, a ritual for a fresh start may be helpful. Couples can choose a new anniversary date when they re-commit to each other. They can rewrite their marital vows and hold a ceremony where they "remarry" each other. They can do this alone or with their children, friends, family attending. Some couples may wish to hold a candle ceremony where they re-state their vows. Some actually re-do them in a church or synagogue. They can purchase new wedding rings. Along with restating their commitment to each other and to the relationship, they can write down their future relationship vision where they discuss the new relationship they want. This becomes their future image, the new template for their relationship. Now they have seen that they can write and rewrite their own future story.

Summary

Through the narrative process, persons experiencing personal growth upon reflecting on the negative events surrounding the affair, can begin to create a new more rewarding story [30]. The stories we create about our lives and relationships arise from our experiences, but they also shape our experiences. So that our life stories are both our creations and our creators. When couples are stuck on an issue in their relationship, their individual and couple stories are narratives of limitation [8,22,26]. With therapy, the couple understands that they have a choice about change and that there are numerous scripts to choose from.

This paper was a simple exploration into its shadow script--fidelity. The findings indicated that loyalty, honesty, morality, and religiosity are variables the participants associated with fidelity. The themes that were present were: strong personal values, will- power, a sense of commitment to one's partner,

caring about the other person, not wanting to hurt them, and karma, or not wanting their spouse to be unfaithful in return. Though the findings in this study seem based on common sense, the research independently validated the reasons for fidelity.

Therapeutic considerations were presented taking into account the shadow scripts of fidelity. An affair can destroy individuals and marriages if the script surrounding the affair defines it so. It can also provide a framework from which to re-assess the relationship. Through a narrative therapy approach, the couple can allow the affair to be a catalyst for deliberate, considered action.

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